

**Rural to urban migration and young female domestic workers  
in the 21st century Lima, Peru**

Sanna Alaluusua  
University of Turku, Finland

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## **Abstract**

This paper looks at rural to urban migration among young female domestic workers in the 21st century Lima, Peru. Due to the rapid, capital centred economic growth and urbanization Peru has witnessed during the 21st century, migration from rural areas to Lima is high. One common group among these migration flows is young girls, who tend to leave their rural hometowns and communities already in an early age, searching for better future perspectives for themselves in the urban context. One frequent way to carry out this migration process is to find work as a domestic worker in Lima and start studying alongside work. Drawing on research data collected through ethnographic fieldwork in Lima, this paper explores young girls' motives behind rural to urban migration and investigates their daily life and future in Lima. Align with previous studies, the findings demonstrate that while moving to the capital appears as a mean for young girls to proceed with own life and complete secondary education, working as a domestic worker in an urban context seems to create barriers that limit the girls' options in gaining a higher education and a well-paying job in the future.

## Introduction

This paper looks at rural to urban migration among young female domestic workers in the 21st century Lima, Peru. During the 21st century, Peru has become one of the fastest growing economies and rapidly urbanizing countries in Latin America, whose wealth is vastly concentrated in the capital; Lima. Alongside economic growth, poverty in the country has also seen reductions during the recent years. (Aliaga Linares 2010: 2; Calderón Cockburn et al. 2015: 7–8; Maich 2015: 104) Because of the rapid capital centred economic growth, rural<sup>1</sup> to urban migration inside the country is high (Maich 2015: 104, 106). One common group among these continuing migration flows is young girls, who tend to leave their rural hometowns and -communities already in an early age, searching for better future perspectives for themselves in the urban context. One frequent way to carry out this migration process is to find work as a domestic worker in Lima and start studying alongside work. (Blomster 2004)

Paid domestic work, which in this paper is understood as paid household- and care work realized in third party households, is the largest single source of employment for women in Latin America today (Blofield 2012: 3). According to recent estimates, there are currently around 450 000 domestic workers in Peru, of whom more than 95% are women (Defensoría del Pueblo 2016: 9–10). Majority of them are internal, rural to urban migrants (Brennan 2010: 17) and more than half of them live and work in Lima (Bastidas Aliaga 2014: 33). Furthermore, many domestic workers tend to also arrive in the capital already as young girls (Blomster 2004) and enter the occupation at an early age (Brennan 2010: 8). However, although many previous studies mention rural to urban migration as a common phenomenon among domestic workers in Lima, the existing literature has so far concentrated mainly in exploring internal migrant domestic workers' labour relations in contemporary Lima and analysing domestic workers' labour rights and position as workers in the society (See for example: Bastidas Aliaga 2014; Brennan 2010; Fauvel 2011; Maich 2015; Valdez Carrasco 2014; Viviano Llave 2007; Young 1987). Relatively little has been written about the phenomenon of rural to urban migration in this context. And even fewer studies have explored the process of rural to urban migration specifically in the context of young, rural-born girls, who migrate to Lima at a young age and start working as domestic workers in third party households upon their arrival to the capital. Most of the previous studies that have analysed the topic, are qualitative studies written in the 1980s (For example: Chaney 1985; Smith 1989) or in the 1990s (For example: Loza et al. 1990). Together these earlier studies form a detailed picture about the life of young, internal migrant domestic workers in Lima during that time and describe several different hardships young female domestic workers used to face in the capital due to their migrant background and occupation. These studies also provide information about different patterns of migration in this context and offer information about the background and family context of the migrants back then.

A book written by Blomster in 2004 is to my knowledge the only study that has explored the topic more recently (Blomster 2004). Like the earlier studies, also Blomster provides a thorough ethnographic analysis of young, rural to urban migrant domestic worker's daily life in Lima and offers varied insights about the process that young rural-born girls go through when they move to the capital and become domestic workers. Based on her findings, Blomster has also written her master's thesis in Finnish about the topic in 2009 (Blomster 2009). Nevertheless, taking into consideration that the data of Blomster's study has been collected more than 10 years ago and since then, several societal changes

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the term *rural to urban migration* refers to migration from regions located outside the capital (*Lima Metropolitana*) to the capital. Regions of origin thus include both, smaller communities and larger towns located either in the Andean highlands, in the coastal region in the north or in the Amazonian rainforest region.

and developments have occurred in the country, I argue that it could be assumed that the situation of young, rural to urban migrant domestic workers might have changed in some ways as well. Hence, my aim in this paper is to gain better insight about what drives young, rural-born girls to work as domestic workers in Lima today, what does their daily life look like in the contemporary *Limeño* society and how does their future turn out after living and working in the city for a longer period of time.

The paper is organized as follows: first I will give a brief overview of the phenomenon of rural to urban migration in Peru and explain how this form of migration has been conceptualized in the existing literature. That will be followed by a section in which I present the research data and methods used in this paper. After that I will move on to analysing the research data. The analysis of the research data is divided into three separate sections. Finally, I will end the paper with concluding remarks.

### **Rural to urban migration in Peru**

Rural to urban migration is a multifaceted phenomenon with a long history in Peru. According to previous studies, movement towards cities in the country increased significantly from the 1940s onwards due to societal factors, such as mechanization of the hacienda economy, drop in agricultural exports and industrialization (Ødegaard 2010: 1). And it has been noted that by the 1980s, half of the population of the country's capital for example, lived in *pueblos jóvenes* – informal neighbourhoods established by internal migrants (Crivello 2015: 40). Internal armed conflict that took place in the country between 1980s and 1990s also caused large flows of migration from rural areas towards cities, particularly to Lima (Ødegaard 2010: 1; Crivello 2015: 40). And alongside these societal factors, family structure, violence, gendered norms regarding labour in rural communities, death of a parent and poverty in general have also produced migration inside the country. (Chaney 1985: 38–41; Blomster 2004: 31–33; Radcliffe 1986: 37–40).

Like in Latin America in general (Chant 2003: 234), rural to urban migration in Peru appears also as a gendered phenomenon (Radcliffe 1986; 1990). Women have tended to move mostly to cities because urban areas tend to offer better employment opportunities for women than rural areas. Women have also tended to migrate younger than men. And whereas male migration has been more seasonal and circular, female migration to cities has had a more permanent nature. Though, also younger men have tended to migrate permanently. Moreover, while internal male migration has tended to continue also throughout adulthood, female rural to urban migrants have mostly been younger women. (Radcliffe 1990: 234–236) Furthermore, sending young, rural-born girls to live with better-off urban households through kinship networks has been an important household strategy in Peru as well (Crivello 2011: 397; 2015:41; Leinaweaver 2008: 60).

Although the number of internal migrants in Peru has decreased during the years, rural to urban migration continues to be high still today, especially among youth. Due to the capital centred economic growth in the country, inequality between rural areas and the capital has remained persistent (Calderón Cockburn et al. 2015: 8). This is visible especially in terms of youth education and employment. Youth living in rural areas are still less likely to proceed to higher education than their urban peers and their options in terms of future employment are more limited than options available for youth living cities. In addition, as in some rural communities studying is possible only until the end of primary school, continuing studies in a secondary school might require migration to a city. Thus,

within studies that have theorized rural to urban migration among youth in contemporary Peru, migration towards cities appears often as a livelihood strategy among rural-born youth, who, tend to leave their rural hometowns and –communities to improve their way of life and seek progress for themselves in the urban context. (See for example: Crivello 2011; 2015; Olivera Rodríguez 2009: 16)

## Data and methods

This paper draws on qualitative research data that was collected during a seven month long ethnographic fieldwork period in Lima between the years 2014 and 2016. During this time, I collected data for my still on-going PhD dissertation research. The fieldwork was conducted with the help of *Asociación Grupo de Trabajo Redes (AGTR)*, a Peruvian domestic workers' rights organization established in 1989. The organization is located in Lima, where it runs a free of charge activity centre called *La Casa de Panchita* for domestic workers. The centre provides domestic workers a place to spend their rest days, meet other domestic workers and participate in different courses and workshops, such as English lessons and computer use training. The centre also informs domestic workers about their labour rights and offers them guidance on how to negotiate better terms and conditions of employment for themselves as workers. When needed, domestic workers also receive psychological and legal support from the centre. The employees of the organization are former and current domestic workers, psychologists, sociologists, social workers and art therapists among others. Also, a vast number of national and international volunteer workers collaborate with the organization each year. During the fieldwork period, I collaborated with the organization as a voluntary worker and collected research data for my dissertation alongside voluntary work.

My still on-going PhD dissertation research is a multimethod research and this paper builds upon three types of research data that I have collected for the dissertation. First, it draws on 11 interviews conducted in 2014 with younger, rural-born girls, who had recently moved to Lima and started to work as paid domestic workers in third party households upon their arrival to the capital. 10 of these interviews were conducted as individual interviews and one as a group interview between eight participants. During the time of the interviews the participants were between 16–25 years old. The majority had been born in different Andean highland towns and communities. However, some were also from the Amazonian rainforest region and few participants had been born in towns located in the coastal region in the north of the country. These interviews were carried out in a form of *storytelling*; a data collection method through which each interviewee narrated a fictive, but realistic story about a 16-year-old rural-born girl who had recently moved to Lima and works as a domestic worker in a third-party household in the capital. The participants of the group interview narrated the story together as a group. In order to create the story, all of the interviewees received a list of interview questions beforehand and the stories were created based on these given questions. The interview questions covered issues, such as rural to urban migration, daily life in Lima, work as a domestic worker and future perspectives. As these interviews were conducted in a form of a fictional story, none of the informants was required to talk about the topic directly as themselves nor reveal any real life situations about their own personal lives. The only requirement for the interviewees was that the stories should reflect real life situations as much as possible. In other words, I asked the informants to

narrate the stories in a way that they think things would happen in real life as well.<sup>2</sup> However, while narrating the stories, some of the informants did sometimes describe their personal experiences as a comparison to the story that they were narrating. All of these stories were narrated orally and recorded. The time of these interviews varied approximately between 15 minutes and one hour.

Second, the paper uses information gathered through 18 semi-structured thematic interviews that I conducted with older female domestic workers in 2016. In these interviews the informants talked about their own personal real-life experiences about rural to urban migration and paid domestic work as a form of employment in Lima. Domestic workers who took part in these interviews were between 28–65 years old at the time of the interviews. Like in the case of the younger informants, all of these women had also been born outside the capital, either in the Andean highlands, in the Amazonian rainforest region or in the coastal region in the north. All of them had migrated to Lima at a young age and lived and worked in the capital already for a longer period of time. These interviews were either recorded or written down by hand, depending on the choice of the interviewee. The time of these interviews varied approximately between 20 minutes and one hour and a half.

Third, the paper also draws on participant observation undertaken during 19 conversational workshops held among domestic workers between 18–65 years old at *La Casa de Panchita* in 2016. Although in some workshop sessions some of the participants had been born in Lima, the majority were rural to urban female migrants. And again, most of them were either from the Andean highlands, from the Amazonian rainforest region or from the northern coast. In these workshops, the participants talked about their own personal real-life experiences about rural to urban migration and paid domestic work as a form of employment in Lima. These workshops were part of the weekly activities of *La Casa de Panchita* and each one of them was run by employees of the local organization. My role in these workshops was to facilitate the conversation. While listening to the conversations, I documented them by hand. Each workshop had approximately between three and 15 participants and one session lasted around three hours.

During the fieldwork period, I also held supportive conversations with employees of the local organization. These conversations are used as supportive research data in this paper to give deeper insight into some issues that arise from the interviews and workshop conversations. I conducted all the fieldwork in Spanish under the supervision of *Asociación Grupo de Trabajo Redes (AGTR)*. The majority of the interviews were carried out at *La Casa de Panchita*, however, some interviews were also conducted in two local night schools, where the organization works on a weekly basis with domestic workers. Participation to the research was voluntary and interviews with other activities were done anonymously. The informants were told about the purpose of the research beforehand and informed about how the data collected will be used. In order to protect the identity of the informants, personal information, such as real names of the informants is not included in this paper.

Finally, it needs to be taken into consideration that due to the rather sensitive nature of the research topic and the use of storytelling as a research method, it might be possible that during the conversations some difficult issues might have been left unsaid intentionally. It might also be possible that some informants have narrated some of the stories in a way that some parts of the stories reflect

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<sup>2</sup> Other researchers who have applied storytelling as a data collection method have also conducted ethnographic research among youth (See for example Olthoff (2006), who has applied the method when studying teenage girls in migrant popular neighbourhoods in Lima).

more the informants' own personal *wishes* towards the reality than actual real life situations as such. Furthermore, due to the qualitative nature of the research data and differences in the informants' ages and backgrounds, the information that is presented in this paper cannot be generalized to all young, rural to urban migrant domestic workers in Lima in general. Rather, the data presented in this paper aims to provide examples about young, rural to urban migrant domestic workers' daily life in the contemporary *Limeño* society.

I will now turn to analyse the research data. I will start the analysis with a section that explores young girls' motives behind rural to urban migration. That section also describes the process through which the journey to the capital is made. After that I will move onto exploring how daily life as a young female domestic worker in Lima was pictured. The last part of the analysis will concentrate in problematizing future perspectives of young female domestic workers in Lima.

### **Coming to Lima to move on in own life**

Blomster (2004) and Loza et al. (1990) accentuate that the main reasons that push young, rural-born girls to migrate towards Lima are poverty and lack of educational opportunities in the rural areas (Blomster 2004: 31, 51; Loza et al 1990: 28). Similar kind of phenomenon appears in the stories created by my younger informants. In the study of Blomster (2004) for example, some girls who she interviewed had taken the decision to move by themselves, but among others the decision to move appeared as a household strategy<sup>3</sup> (Blomster 2004: 7). In the case of my informants, moving to Lima was mostly pictured as a decision that the girl would take by herself. One informant mention that the decision to move would be made by the girls' parents, but that the girl would agree with the decision as she would consider life in the capital better than life in her home community.

While some of my younger informants indicated that the girl in the story would move to the capital at the age of 14 or 15, others mentioned that it would happen at the age of 16 or 17. However, one informant mentioned that the girl would arrive to Lima already at the age of 12. In the study of Blomster however, some of the girls who she interviewed had migrated to Lima already at a slightly younger age<sup>4</sup> (Blomster 2004: 13–21). Hence, this might explain the difference in the decision-making process regarding migration. Furthermore, some of my informants specified that the girl might have some doubts about leaving and that she might return home after a while. However, I was also mentioned that in the end the girl would feel determined and remain living in the capital.

One significant motive to move was said to be a desire to become more independent, move on in own life and gain a better future in Lima. And this better future was often associated with better educational- and labour market opportunities available in the capital.

“When she had already grown up a little she told her mother that she wanted to come to the city because she wanted to work and have her own things, right. She didn't want to depend on her brothers anymore.”

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<sup>3</sup> A decision made by the girls' parents and family.

<sup>4</sup> Some girls in the study of Blomster had arrived to Lima already at the age of 11 (Blomster 2004: 13–21).



“She felt happy, right, coming to Lima. To study, to move on in her own life. Because maybe there [in her home community] she did not have these opportunities what she has here. Work, education, right.”

Some of the informants also mentioned economic insecurity of the girl’s own family back home as a reason to leave. One respondent indicated that the girl would suffer problems at home and for that reason she would decide to move to the capital.

“María<sup>5</sup> was a girl born in the provincias, who came to Lima when she was 15 years old. She came alone. And she took the decision to come because she had problems at home. Economic problems. And familiar problems. [...] Because it was her own decision. Because she wanted to move on in her own life [...]”

Another informant specified that if the girl would stay living in her home community, her relatives would want her to get married. And as the girl in her story would not want to get married, the informant narrated the story in a way that the girl would decide to escape that reality by moving to Lima.

“She lived with her grandparents and one day she found out that her grandparents want her to marry a boy that she doesn’t love [...] and so she decides to come here to Lima, escaping her life [in her home community].”

Blomster (2009) separates three patterns through which the journey to the capital is often made. In the first pattern, the girl is sent by her parents to be raised as a foster child in the home of relatives living in the city. In the second pattern the girl arrives to Lima with a relative who helps her to find a place to live and work in the capital. In the third pattern, the girl arrives to Lima alone. (Blomster 2009: 53–61) In the stories created by my informants the two latter patterns were mentioned. One informant stated that the girl would probably move to another city nearby her hometown at first and after living there for a while, she would eventually move to Lima. Some informants stated that the girl would arrive to Lima with a relative, for example a sister, a cousin or an aunt. However, other informants indicated that the girl would travel to the capital alone. Still, by talking with domestic workers and doing voluntary work at the local organization, I became to understand that the actual journey would probably be made possible with logistical help provided by relatives or other familiars. The girl might have a sister, an uncle or an aunt already living in Lima and she would probably receive practical help from these relatives to arrange the journey. I was also indicated that when arriving to Lima, it would be probable that the girl would go and live with those relatives at first.

### **Complex daily life in the capital**

In the stories created by my younger informants, life in Lima was pictured being formed mainly around work and education. The informants mainly indicated that the girl in the story would start working as a domestic worker in a third-party household shortly after having arrived in the capital. One of the informants however, indicated that the girl would arrive to Lima at the age of 15, but that she would not start working until the age of 16. Furthermore, the work that the girl would do was

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<sup>5</sup> The name of the girl in the story is invented.

mostly pictured as live-in domestic work. In other words, the girl would live in the household of the employer.

However, in the stories created by my younger informants, the decision to work in this form of employment was never described as a deliberate choice as such. Rather, starting to work as a live-in domestic worker is often the only available option for rural-born girls that allows them to settle into the urban context and start a new, independent life in the capital. As many young girls move to the capital with lower quality education and often also without previous knowledge about the city, it tends to be difficult for them to compete with youth born in Lima when searching for employment in the capital. Also, as many girls tend to arrive to Lima alone, their only alternative is often to search for work as a live-in domestic worker, as this modality offers them not only employment, but also a place to live in the capital as well. (See here also: Brennan 2010: 8)

The informants specified that the girl in the story would find work through relatives or familiars who would already be living in the city. One informant mentioned that the girl might also find work by asking people advice in the street. Nevertheless, one informant also mentioned that when she herself arrived in the capital, she first started to work in a restaurant. However, after a while, her aunt had eventually found her a job as a domestic worker.

“[...] I went to work with my sister. She took me [to work] to another place. This work was nice but I didn't like it [...] I worked in a restaurant. But I didn't like it. It was a bit [...] they treated me badly [...] I didn't know why. I tolerated it. Maybe it's like this [...] My aunt got me another job and she took me to work there [...] it's cleaning. It's all cleaning [in a house]”

Some of the informants specified that the girl would start working as a domestic worker first with relatives and then, after a while move on to another, third party household to work. Others mentioned that the girl would start working with a third-party household right away. I was told that the work might contain tasks such as cleaning, cooking, shopping for groceries or for example taking care of younger children. A normal working day was pictured starting mainly between 6am and 8am in the morning and ending in the afternoon. I was also indicated that the girl would receive a salary from her job, but that this salary would be rather low.

In the studies of Blomster (2004) and Loza et al. (1990) the relationship between the worker and the employer appears as a relationship that is characterized with inequality and difference. Both studies specify that domestic workers often face problems at work and that these problems appear for example in the form of mistreatment, humiliating manner of speaking and dismissive attitudes (Blomster 2004: 47; Loza et al. 1990: 43–44). Other studies that have explored domestic workers labour relations in Lima tend to state the same (See for example: Fauvel 2011; Maich 2015). Also, when talking with my older informants, a similar pattern appeared. Yet, in the stories created by my younger informants, this topic was often not addressed. If problems at work were mentioned, they were mostly associated with tiredness caused by long working hours. One informant mentioned that the girl in the story would not receive her salary on time and that she would face mistreatment at work. However, it might be possible that due to the sensitiveness of the topic and fictive storytelling as a research method, difficult issues regarding work were left unsaid intentionally.

While in the study of Blomster (2004) starting to study was not always possible for all the girls upon their arrival in the capital (Blomster 2004: 51), among my younger informants it was seen more

common that the girl in the story would start studying after arriving to the city. Blomster indicates that some domestic workers are not allowed to go to school by their employers and some are required to accept reduces in their monthly salaries if wanting to go to school (ibid.). Similar observations appear also in the earlier studies (See for example: Chaney 1985: 57). Among my younger informants though, these kinds of scenarios were hardly mentioned. I was told that studying would most likely take place at a public night school where primary- and secondary studies can be done at night. This option is also presented in the study of Blomster (2004: 52). As classes in these schools start around 6pm in the evening and last until 10pm at night, studying can be arranged alongside work. (Figueroa et al. 2009: 41–42)

However, although going to school was not pictured problematic, many of the informants did indicate that the girl would most likely face disappointments in the capital in terms of education. As work would take most of the girl's time during the day, studying alongside work was pictured demanding. Thus, the most common problem related to education was associated with lack of time to do homework. Some of the informants mentioned that the girl would have only an hour or so to study in a day and that this hour would not be enough. When I asked whether the informants thought the girl would succeed well at school, nearly all of them responded that probably not. And this weak success was often associated with insufficient time to study. One of the informants mentioned that if the girl would not have to work, she would most likely do much better at school.

“She doesn't like when they sometimes give her homework at school. And because she feels tired at home [...] and she can't do them. Because of the work and because she is tired [...] Sometimes she doesn't have time to do her homework. When at her home, at her work there's visitors or they go for a trip. She needs to do everything. And sometimes when there's visitors she needs to do...there's a lot of people...clean, cook a lot. So, it's almost like...she doesn't have time to do her homework [...] Sometimes when there's visitors, there's a dinner or an evening meal that they prepare, they leave all the dishes dirty [...]"

“[...] she only has an hour, no more. It would be something like from 10:30pm until 11pm or 11:30pm when she would do her homework and after that she goes to sleep [...] Well, I think she would be a good student if she would have more time to do her homework and she wouldn't have to work. Because if she works and studies at the same time, she doesn't have enough time to do all her homework. One hour is not enough to do homework. All the things that they give her at school. All the classes at school. I think.”

Then again, school was also described as a kind of a “breathing place” for the girl in the stories. It was described as a place where the girl would meet friends and have the possibility to concentrate on other issues besides work. However, at the same time school was also pictured as a place where the girl would meet other domestic workers and have the opportunity to share experiences regarding work with others in a similar situation.

Yet again, like in the earlier studies (Blomster 2004: 45; Loza et al. 1990: 39–40), lack of social networks and loneliness were also brought up in the stories. Some of the informants described the girl in the story as timid and shy and mentioned that she would feel alone in the capital. I was told that when arriving to the city the girl would have no close relationships around her and due to this, she would feel uncomfortable in the city at first. Others pointed out that the girl might have some relatives, such as a sister, an uncle or an aunt living in the capital and this might ease the process of adaptation. And although some of the informants mentioned that the girl would meet friends at school, others described these friends more as acquaintances and not as real, close friends. I was indicated that the

girl would probably only have one close friend in the capital and that this friend would be an internal migrant domestic worker as well.

“[...] here in Lima she felt like... a little bit uncomfortable because she didn't have anybody. She didn't know Lima. Because it was her first time [in the capital] [...] she has almost no friends. She has only few friends. Because she doesn't like to talk. So it's like they don't pay attention to her and she doesn't get friends. Her friends at school are from *provincias* [provinces] as well. One or two might be from Lima, but the majority are from *provincias*.”

“[...] no, I don't have friends. Real friends, no. People who I know, yes.”

Lack of friends was also associated with lack of free time. In the study of Blomster free time of young domestic workers in Lima is described limited (Blomster 2004: 46). My data demonstrates a similar situation. In the stories created by my informants the girl was mainly described working six days a week, from Monday to Saturday. Sundays were often seen as her days off. One of the informants however, indicated that the girl would work until Sunday evening and Monday would be her weekly rest day. When I asked the informants how the girl would spend her rest days, I was often specified that she would probably use that time to study and run errands that she has no time to run during the week. And as some informants mentioned that the girl would have a sister, an uncle or an aunt living in Lima, in some of the stories the girl was pictured using her rest days to visit these relatives.

“The employers give you (free time) only 24 hours. Only 24 hours. She has only these hours to take advantage of. The things that she needs to do. But some employers give you (free time) from Saturday night to Monday morning [...] But only few.”

“I rest on Mondays. I'm free (those days) but sometimes not, because I need to wash my clothes, and that takes all the time.”

Furthermore, in the study of Blomster, some of her informants had lost communication with their family after moving to the city (Blomster 2004: 55–57). In the case of my informants, the situation appeared slightly different. I was often indicated that the girl would stay in touch with her family after arriving to the capital. Although contact with family would not be frequent, the informants specified that the girl would call her parents from time to time and inform them about her life in the city. I was told that communication would most likely occur through phone calls. As many people in rural areas tend to have cellular phones<sup>6</sup> today, communication is now easier than what it was before. And even if the girls' parents would not have a cellular phone of their own, it is possible to buy one in Lima and send it back home. The phone can also be charged in Lima, which makes communication even easier. Before, when most of the people in rural communities used only public phones, keeping in touch with own family was much more challenging (See for example: Blomster 2004: 55).

One informant also mentioned that the girl might stay in touch with her parents through internet. And another one indicated that the girl would go to visit her family after having saved enough money for the journey from her salary. However, at the same time, I was also pointed out that although the girl would keep in touch with her family, she would probably not talk to them about the hardships she is facing in the capital. In one interview for example, I was told that the girl would not want to cause concern for her parents and for this reason she would not inform them about the difficulties she must deal with while living in the city.

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<sup>6</sup> Mostly prepaid cellular phones.

## Towards a better future?

Despite of all the complexities and hardships faced in the capital, in the stories created by my younger informants the future of the girl was pictured mostly in positive terms. Nearly all the informants saw that the girl would have clear future goals in her life and that with hard work and strong dedication those goals would eventually come true. For many, those goals meant gaining higher education and through that a well-paying, interesting career in the future. For some, this meant working as an entrepreneur. Others saw that the girl would become an actress, a journalist, a lawyer or a secretary. And like in the study of Blomster (2009: 74), working as a domestic worker was seen only as a temporary solution, something, that allows the girl to move on in her life in the urban context and complete her studies in the capital.

“She wants to improve her situation. To move on in her life. Because she doesn’t want to stay behind.”

“I think that she would continue with her mentality thinking that she will move on and *luchar* [fight]. I think that in 10 years she would be an actress, right.”

“I think her life will improve. She will have more...her finances will improve [...] To be from the provinces, or from Lima, who wants to move on in own life, will move on. *Luchar por la vida* [fight for the life] and with time one can become a great professional.”

In the case of my older informants though, the situation appeared somewhat different. Talking with these women during the interviews and listening to their testimonies in the workshops I became to understand that while the majority had managed to complete secondary education in Lima and some had also worked in other forms of employment after finishing their studies, their options to continue to post-secondary education and gain a well-paying job in the future had been quite limited. This was often caused by lack of financial means and lack of time to prepare for entrance exams for universities. And this observation resonates again with observations made by Blomster (2004; 2009). Blomster indicates that as the quality of education in public night schools in Lima is often low, many young domestic workers find it difficult to compete with other students in the entrance exams (Blomster 2004: 52; 2009: 104). Thus, working as a domestic worker seems to limit the girls’ educational opportunities in the future.

As life in the capital is expensive, many of the women who I met at the organization had eventually made a strategic decision to remain working in paid domestic work as it enabled them to save more money than working in other occupations available for them. Particularly, working as a live-in domestic worker was described as a way through which it is possible to reduce expenses, such as daily transportation, rent and food.

“I have experience working as a secretary and in restaurants. But I decided to work as a domestic worker because it allows me to save money [...] I can save more working as a [live-in] domestic worker than working in other occupations.”

“I have worked in a call centre. It was a nice experience. But I work as a domestic worker to save more money. If you want to reach goals, objectives, working as a domestic worker helps you to research them. You can save more money.”

Then again, for some of the older informants though, continuing their studies further had been possible. Yet, for the majority, the only option available had been to apply for less expensive, lower

quality vocational schools instead of proceeding to a university. However, having graduated with vocational studies some of these women had been able to work for example as assistants in hospitals, assistants in primary- or secondary schools or assistants in an office. Others had also been employed in call centres and some of the older informants had worked as independent street vendors. Still, for the majority, working as a domestic worker had eventually appeared as an easier, less stressful and less demanding option compared to the other forms of employment they had experienced. And thus, these women had eventually decided to return to the sector of paid domestic work.

Others also felt that they hold specific skills that make them successful in this form of employment. Some of the women, who I spoke to, had taken courses, for example in cooking or in sanitation. Others had taken lessons in elderly care. And along the way, they had realized that these courses had given them skills that allow them to succeed well in this kind of employment.

“[...] I like this work [elderly care]. The massages, the hygiene, the cleaning. I have taken courses in it and that’s how I have knowledge.”

“12 years I have worked as a domestic worker. I have taken courses in cooking. I have done *todo servicio* [full service], taken care of children. But I like to cook. Because of that I want to search for work in cooking.”

And for others, paid domestic work was a form of employment that they had just gotten used to over time. Some of the informants mentioned that as they had worked as domestic workers almost their entire life, they had gotten familiar with this way of working. Others also stated not having enough energy to start learning something completely new at that point and time in their lives. And some did not simply feel too eager to change the course of their future anymore.

“I work as a domestic worker because I’m used to working like this. I have worked in other jobs as well, but I’m used to working as a domestic worker.”

Yet, although in this light paid domestic work appears with positive associations, recent studies emphasize that it still remains an occupation within which labour relations are often uncertain and negotiating terms and conditions of employment tends to be challenging for the worker (See for example: Bastidas Aliaga 2014; Blofield 2012; Brennan 2010; Fauvel 2011; Maich 2015). As most of this work occurs behind closed doors in private homes, the work itself becomes isolated and invisible and the worker’s labour rights tend to be fulfilled weakly (Ibid.). Furthermore, although Peru passed a labour law in 2003 that protects domestic workers’ labour rights, according to previous studies, this law still places domestic workers in a disadvantaged position as it provides domestic workers with different kind of labour rights than other recognized workers in the country (Bastidas Aliaga 2014: 39; Blofield 2012: 45; Brennan 2010: 18; Maich 2015: 107).

## Conclusions

In this paper, I have explored rural to urban migration among young female domestic workers in the 21st century Lima, Peru. My aim was to gain better insight about what drives young, rural-born girls to work as domestic workers in Lima today, what does their daily life look like in the contemporary *Limeño* society and how does their future turn out after living and working in the city for a longer period of time. In the beginning of the paper I argued that due to societal changes and developments

that have occurred in the country during the recent years, it could be assumed that the situation of young, rural to urban migrant domestic workers might have changed in some ways as well. Yet, what my data reveals is that the situation has actually remained rather similar compared to the earlier studies.

Poverty and lack of educational- and employment opportunities in rural areas continue to push young girls to search for better future perspectives in Lima. And for many, the only option to carry out this migration process continues to be finding work as a domestic worker in the capital and start studying alongside work in a public night school. Working fulltime during the day and studying at night is hard and due to the long working hours, young domestic workers often find it difficult to succeed well at school. And, like in the earlier studies, hardships, such as lack of free time and weak social support networks in the capital were also mentioned quite often.

Furthermore, while many young domestic workers manage to complete secondary education in the capital, proceeding to good quality higher education continues to be complicated. And due to this, gaining a well-paying job in the future still seems to be difficult for domestic workers. Many of my older informants had eventually made a strategic decision to remain working in paid domestic work as it enabled them to save more money than working in other occupations available for them. Also, women, who had been able to work in other forms of employment, had eventually returned back to paid domestic work as it had appeared as an easier, less stressful and less demanding option in the end compared to the other forms of employment these women had been able to experience while living in the capital.

One notable change that appears in my data seems to be a change in communication with own family back home. While in the earlier studies some domestic workers had lost communication with their own families due to the process of migration, my informants however, mentioned that keeping in touch with own family back home does happen. Before, when people in rural communities often only used public phones, keeping in touch with own family was more challenging. Today, as cellular phones are more common, communication with own family back home seems to be easier.

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