



**Brokerage in migrant domestic work in  
Ghana: complex social relations and mixed  
outcomes**

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## **Abstract**

Rural–urban migration from the poorer regions of Ghana to the south is an important part of the livelihood portfolio of poor families. In the urban areas of the south, domestic work – which is typically low-paid and insecure – is an important avenue of employment for women and girls from such backgrounds. Within this social space, recruitment brokers play a central role and are often portrayed in the migration literature as unscrupulous exploiters of domestic workers for their own profit and gain. Drawing on conceptualisations of migrant agency within the brokerage relationship, this paper challenges portrayals of brokerage purely as a ‘migration business’ and takes an approach that shows how migrants use brokers to further their own agendas. The paper employs in-depth interviews conducted in Accra in 2015 with female migrant domestic workers, employers, brokers, relevant government ministries and unionised labour units, to provide insights into the social relations that underpin the recruitment process in Ghana and how aspiring migrants and brokers build trust to lay the foundations for complex and risky journeys.

We argue that, with an increase in labour migration, recruitment agencies and brokers have become important facilitators of migration. Brokers play a range of multiple and often contradictory roles in facilitating and mediating migration for domestic work. These roles, in some cases, could be said to be reinforcing patriarchal ideologies while, in other cases, brokers aid domestic workers to negotiate better terms and conditions of employment and to meet the latter’s aspirations. Thus brokers are an important part of migrants’ strategies to exercise agency in the context of highly unequal power relationships with the employer. These findings indicate the need for a more nuanced understanding of the mediating role of brokers and intermediaries as they traverse the multi-layered space in the recruitment process.

## Executive summary

This paper interrogates the interrelationships between the migration industry in Ghana – comprising recruitment agencies and their web of brokers and sub-agents (both formal and informal) – and migrants’ own social networks. It looks at how this industry facilitates and sustains the migration of young women and girls from poor rural areas to southern urban centres, where domestic work – which is typically low-paid and insecure – is often an important avenue of employment for women and girls from such backgrounds. Within this social space, recruitment brokers play a central role mediating the socially constructed perceptions of female domestic workers as vulnerable and lacking the agency to find employment opportunities on their own.

Despite anecdotal information about a growing ‘migration industry’ comprising brokers, agencies and training centres facilitating migration across a range of occupations and geographical regions (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørensen 2013), very few data exist on the migration industry for internal and regional migration streams, despite the larger numbers of migrants moving within these streams (Anarfi *et al.* 2003). Furthermore, the narrow conceptualisation of actors – within the internal migration industry milieu – as smugglers and traffickers (Salt and Stein 1997) and unscrupulous exploiters of domestic workers (Hernández-León 2008; Kyle 2000), and descriptions of migrants using the facilitative services of brokers and intermediaries as passive and having no agency in setting their own migration agendas (Agunias 2009), constrain analysis of such actors as an important part of migrants’ risk management strategies (de Haas 2007).

This paper therefore seeks to provide insights into the social relations that underpin the recruitment process in Ghana and how aspiring migrant domestic workers and brokers establish trust relationships in order to lay the foundations for complex and risky journeys. This approach provides a more nuanced and differentiated understanding of the role and practices of brokers and intermediaries as they navigate the multifaceted space in the recruitment process for migrant domestic workers. The analysis is informed by Lindquist’s (2012) rich ethnographic research in Indonesia, which highlights the importance of a grounded understanding of brokerage in order to understand how those based in remote rural locations are able to access labour markets in destinations that are well beyond their normal cultural and social spheres of interaction.

The research mainly employs a qualitative research approach, using in-depth and key informant interviews to collect data from 88 respondents. These included 23 formal and informal brokers and intermediaries of various categories, 24 domestic workers selected on the basis of various criteria, 7 employers of domestic workers and 18 government agencies, trade unions, and civil society organisations, 11 kayayei, 2 faith-based organisations, 2 travel agencies and 1 academic. The domestic workers, recruitment agencies and employers were identified through snowballing and steps were taken to mitigate selection bias by using several nodes as entry points to ensure that people from different backgrounds were selected, beyond those in similar networks.

The analysis identifies four typologies of brokers and their recruitment practices. Across them, recruiters differ in terms of their adherence to state regulations and, in particular, registration/licencing stipulations, administrative structures, recruitment processes used, motivations, fees charged and contract arrangements. Activities by brokers facilitate complex social relations but also yield mixed outcomes. On the one hand, brokers provide trust-based functions – including reassuring the families of aspiring domestic workers that their ward will be found a good job – acting as a character witness, serving as an economic guarantor and as a facilitating interface between employee domestic workers and their employers as they navigate the different interfaces. These are achieved by recruiters/brokers serving as a medium for women to increase their bargaining power, acting as mediators for the payment of wages and counselling on financial management, helping women to negotiate multiple social roles and subject positions, mediating and protecting domestic workers’ rights and facilitating the long-term plans of domestic workers.

On the other hand, some brokers are complicit in the production – for employers – of a so-called ‘ideal migrant’ who is docile, subservient, obedient, honest and hardworking. In spite of significant differences in modes of operation, nearly all informal brokers are involved, to varying degrees, in this form of identity ascription and subjectivation (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013). The paper also finds examples of the commoditisation and reinforcement of the neo-liberal ideals of a good migrant who prioritises servitude over their own personal freedom and remits money back for the good of the country in cases of international placements. In addition, in line with Silvey’s (2004) conceptualisation of patriarchal ideologies of domesticity, our study finds that women and girls belonging to certain ethnic groups and possessing certain regional identities are more likely to become domestic workers for the more-privileged and the rich. Moreover, some brokers collude with employers to impose immobility on domestic workers (especially very young girls) in time and space through a range of controlling mechanisms.

Thus while our findings corroborate many other studies that have shown how brokers perpetuate exploitation and produce a docile workforce, we also identify critical areas in which brokers work in the interests of migrants, thereby increasing their bargaining power and allowing them to exercise agency in highly unequal power relations with employers. The paper, therefore, concludes – as noted also by Castle and Diarra (2003) and Whitehead and Hashim (2005) – that the simplistic characterisation and uncritical labelling of recruitment agencies and brokers purely as agents of exploitation and as traffickers, and migrant domestic workers as victims without any agency, as portrayed in the literature, is problematic. Our findings therefore indicate the need for a more nuanced understanding of the mediating role and practices of brokers and intermediaries as they traverse the complex and multi-layered space in the recruitment process for migrant domestic workers.

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## Introduction

Rural–urban migration from the poorer regions of Ghana to the south is an important part of the livelihood portfolio of less well-off families. In the urban areas of the south, domestic work – which is typically low-paid and insecure – is an important avenue of employment for women and girls from such backgrounds. Their migration and entry into domestic work in southern urban centres is often facilitated and sustained by an entire industry centred around recruitment agencies and their chains of brokers and sub-agents, both formal and informal, as well as migrants' own social networks.

Within Ghana's rapidly increasing informal sector, domestic work has emerged in the last few decades as a growing economic sector, as more households are substituting care work previously performed by female household members with external domestic services (ISSER 2012; Osei-Boateng and Ampratwum 2011). The growing demand for domestic work in Ghana has been linked to a number of factors, including greater female labour-market participation, the intensification of work, and the absence of strong social policies that make it conducive for women to combine formal work with reproductive and domestic work (Tsikata 2009). This increasing demand for domestic workers is largely filled by migrant women who move from rural areas in search of decent jobs to support their families (LAWA-Ghana 2003; Tsikata 2009). Although data on domestic workers are almost non-existent for Ghana, domestic workers are believed to be a substantial segment of the workforce. Studies by Apt (2005), and LAWA-Ghana (2003) indicate that, in urban Ghana, there is at least one domestic worker in each house, and large houses could have as many as six; many households, irrespective of their poverty status, are also known to employ domestic workers on a wide range of terms and conditions. Despite this, the 2010 census records 0.6 per cent of the economically active population of Ghana as employed as domestic workers or home helps (GSS 2013), a figure likely to be an underestimation, given the difference in official definitions of domestic work and the undocumented status of domestic workers in Ghana (Awumbila *et al.* 2012; Tsikata 2009).

Despite anecdotal information about a growing 'migration industry' comprising of brokers, agencies and training centres (in the case of international migrants) facilitating migration across a range of occupations and geographical regions (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Nyberg Sørensen 2013), very few data exist on the migration industry for internal and regional migration streams, despite the larger numbers of migrants moving within them (Anarfi *et al.* 2003). The limited literature on the migration industry for internal migrants is often presented within the context of the smuggling and trafficking of persons, thus focusing on the 'illegitimate' end (Salt and Stein 1997). In particular, although brokerage in migrant domestic-worker recruitment is widespread, brokers are often portrayed in a negative light as unscrupulous exploiters of domestic workers for their own profit and gain (Hernández-León 2008; Kyle 2000). Furthermore the migration-industry literature tends to frame migrants using the facilitative services of brokers and intermediaries as passive and having no agency in setting their own migration agendas (Agunias 2009). Yet there is some evidence that the wide array of recruitment agencies, intermediaries and businesses involved in the migration industry can become an important part of migrants' risk management strategies (de Haas 2007).

While there have been studies on brokers in domestic work, these have been mostly in Europe, Asia and Latin America; not much work has been undertaken in Africa outside of South Africa. Additionally, there has been a strong focus on the costs and relatively little empirical research on the social relations that underpin the recruitment process and how aspiring migrants use brokers to navigate often complex and risky journeys. This paper examines the mediating role of employment and recruitment agencies and brokers in facilitating the recruitment of rural migrants from the poorer regions of Ghana into domestic work in Accra and abroad and how they help migrants to access the labour markets in destinations that are well beyond their normal cultural and social spheres of interaction (Lindquist 2012). It therefore fills a critical gap in the understanding of an important yet under-researched phenomenon that is increasingly discussed in the context of workers' rights and exploitation

Employing mainly a qualitative research approach, using both in-depth and key informant interviews, we argue in this paper that, with an increase in labour migration both within and outside Ghana, recruitment agencies and brokers – particularly the majority who operate outside the ambit of state regulations, whom we term informal brokers – have become important facilitators of migration. Brokers play a range of multiple and often contradictory roles in facilitating and mediating migration for domestic work, roles which, in some cases, may be seen to entrench patriarchal values and the subordination of female domestic workers while, in others, aid domestic workers to negotiate better terms and conditions of employment and to meet their aspirations and quests for personal development. Thus brokers are an important part of migrants' strategies to exercise agency in the face of highly unequal power relationships with employers. Through our chosen methodology, the paper moves beyond the largely negative perceptions of brokers in the popular discourse and argues for a more-nuanced, more-differentiated understanding of the role and the practices of brokers and intermediaries as they navigate the multifaceted space in the recruitment process for migrant domestic workers.

### **Conceptualising brokerage and the migration industry**

This paper draws on conceptualisations of agency within relationships between migrants and brokers. Following Spener (2009), we challenge portrayals of brokers and intermediaries purely as a 'migration business' (Salt and Stein 1997) and take an approach that reveals the complexity of social relations between them, showing how migrants use brokers to further their own agendas for economic and social development. We therefore draw on a conceptual approach which frames migrants as playing a participatory role in the migration process and actively seeking out the services of migration 'entrepreneurs' or agents in fulfilling their own migratory agendas (Mahmud 2013; Spener 2009).

Early research on brokerage granted no active role in the migration process to migrants themselves but, rather, portrayed them as 'streams' that are 'managed by a string of intermediate institutions' that stand outside the stream (Salt and Stein 1997: 480). With regard to the 'illegitimate' component of the migration business – trafficking – migrants are objectified as 'commodities' that are transported in order to be traded (although they do concede that migrants sometimes deliberately seek out the services of traffickers (1997:

480). Later research on the migration industry, while recognising the role of institutions and actors which were also involved in facilitating migration, continued to view intermediaries as entrepreneurs providing services in pursuit of financial gain or profit. For example, Hernández-León (2008) argues that the migration industry consists of an 'ensemble of entrepreneurs who, motivated by the pursuit of financial gain, provide a variety of services facilitating human mobility across international borders' (2008: 154). These services include legitimate services as well as some clandestine ones such as smuggling and the dispatching of false documents. He further argues that, even in cases where migration entrepreneurs emerge from the migrant community itself, the fact that they run for-profit businesses structures their relationship to the rest of the community, according to a logic that produces social distance and asymmetry between them and other community members (Hernández-León 2008: 193). Kyle (2000: 67) further emphasises that this key feature of operating for financial gain distinguishes the migration industry from the assistance which migrants and members of their social networks provide for one another and from any assistance which migrants might receive *gratis* from the state and non-governmental organisations.

Our analysis resonates with Spener's (2009) argument that such characterisations of migrants' relationships with brokers are problematic as they fail to seek an adequate account of how migrants and their families actively seek out the services of migration entrepreneurs as a way of fulfilling their own migratory agendas. He also observes that such analyses do not expressly contemplate the social process through which migrants choose whose services to contract or how they negotiate migration 'deals' with the entrepreneurs whose services they contract (Spener 2009: 13).

We are informed by the literature on brokerage, which recognises that these brokers are instrumental in connecting the rural and the urban, the local and the global, the peripheral and the central, and the poor and the rich; sometimes they even provide the connection between expectations and reality (Agunias 2013; Kern and Müller-Bücker 2015; Lindquist 2012). It is therefore important that a more nuanced understanding of the role and practices of brokers are recognised as they navigate this multifaceted space in the recruitment process for migrant domestic workers.

We focus on the relationships of trust and reciprocity between domestic workers, their families and the brokers, recognising that profit-making is but one part of the relationship between migrant domestic workers and recruitment agencies and intermediaries. Our findings underscore the importance of trust-based relationships, especially where formal employment exchanges and insurance are absent. In traditional societies, trust plays a central role in creating and supporting transactions and ensuring honesty – one side enters the transaction in the expectation that the other side will cooperate and not default on the deal (Lyon 2000; Platteau 2014: 91). Reputations are important in gaining trust (Lyon 2000: 665) and social norms dictate what is regarded as acceptable and not acceptable. In the Ghanaian context, this refers to the expectation that the broker will ensure that the employer is decent and reliable, will not cheat on wages and will not treat the migrant badly. The broker, in turn, expects that the migrants will 'behave' and not be lazy or break social rules such as talking excessively to outsiders, flirting with the man of the house or being rude and disobedient to the mistress of the house.

What makes the concept of trust-based relations problematic is when brokers cannot protect the migrant against exploitation and mistreatment. This happens when there are long chains of brokers and the village-level broker cannot ensure accountability and trust throughout the recruitment chain. It can also occur when traditional systems of labour-sharing, such as kinship fosterage for children from poor families, are corrupted, the worker has little control over her own body and exploitation is inherent. Imoh (2012) and Appiah and Afranie (2001) all argue that the strong tradition of kinship fosterage in Ghana can be used to mask exploitation, as it may mean little more than food, shelter and clothing in exchange for labour with no prospects of schooling (Imoh 2012). The child domestic-worker recruitment arrangements observed in our study certainly bore a resemblance to this; while the child and her family may have expectations based on the traditional system of reciprocity and protection, brokers are placing them with unrelated strangers who can, and often do, extract unpaid labour from them.

Our conceptualisation of trust and reciprocity extends existing frameworks on brokerage by highlighting social aspects of the latter which are critical to understanding the relationship between migrants and brokers and why informal brokers continue to be popular both among aspiring migrants and employers.

We also draw on the literature on the role of brokers in identity ascription and subjectivation (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013) and how they perpetuate the production of the 'ideal' migrant domestic worker, with her qualities of deferential femininity, docility and subservience, so that she fits into specific labour-market niches (Gardiner 2008: 1268) – here urban middle-class Ghanaian families and overseas employers in the Middle East. Liang (2011) lists the stages in identity ascription, starting with the upgrading of skills, then the acquiring of a certain attitude and, thirdly, the essential ethics that are considered appropriate by the employers for 'live-in maids'. These latter are trained to work very long days, obeying strict hierarchies, performing docilely and working under high pressure. There are marked similarities between the situation that Liang describes and what we encountered in Ghana.

### **Research methodology**

Given the objective of delving deeper into the nature of the social relations between migrant domestic workers and brokers, the sensitivities surrounding unofficial brokerage and underage workers and the hidden nature of domestic work, it was felt that a qualitative approach would be best way in which to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and behaviours of research participants (Castro *et al.* 2010; Creswell 2009; Winchester 2005). The study was conducted in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. The choice of Accra was based on the fact that it is the dominant migrant destination, and thus provides a very good setting for understanding the experiences of the migrants themselves and of actors in the migration industry.

In-depth interviews were the main method of data collection, which started with an exploratory study enabling the researchers to pre-test and refine their questions and identify key informants. During the main study, trained research assistants and senior researchers used interview guides to collect data from 88 respondents. These included 23

formal and informal brokers and intermediaries of various categories, 24 domestic workers selected on the basis of a number of criteria, 7 employers of domestic workers and 18 government agencies, trade unions and civil society organisations, 11 *kayayei*, 2 faith-based organisations, 2 travel and tour companies and 1 academic (see Table 1). For this paper, however, only 76 interviews were used, excluding those with the *Kayayei* Youth Association of Ghana, as the focus is on domestic workers.

Officials of the relevant state institutions in the migration industry (e.g. the Labour Department, the Ghana Statistical Service, the Ministry of Employment, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Protection and the Accra Metropolitan Assembly) and the relevant members of the Trades Union Congress and civil-society organisations were purposively selected and interviewed as key informants who could provide information on the regulatory framework of the industry. A snowball sampling strategy was used to select brokers, employers and domestic workers in the Accra/Tema area. To deal with the limitations of snowballing, particularly the tendency to select only actors in similar networks (see Bryman 2012), several nodes were used as entry points for selection which, to ensure variety in the categories of respondents, was based on a number of criteria. For instance, the criteria considered in selecting brokers include the mode of registration, the broker's possession of a licence and the socio-demographic characteristics of persons recruited. Employers were selected in such a way in order to ensure that they came from different backgrounds in terms of educational level, occupation, type of intermediary used and type of contract. Similarly, the criteria followed to select domestic workers included socio-demographic characteristics, type of work, mode of recruitment, duration of service, number of employers worked for and contract status (verbal or written). While interviews with key informants were conducted mainly in English, most of the interviews with migrant domestic workers were conducted in the local languages, recorded electronically, transcribed and then translated. The transcripts were manually analysed based on relevant themes.

### **Typology of brokers and recruitment practices**

The study finds a multiplicity of actors involved in the recruitment of domestic workers for internal and external placement. We distinguish four main typologies of brokers and their characteristics, as shown in Table 1 and as follows:

- formal fully registered recruitment agencies (registered and with a licence to operate);
- formal partially registered agencies (registered, but with no licence to operate), or informal agencies;
- individual informal brokers and their sub-agents (neither registered nor have a licence to operate); and
- networks of friends and family.

These typologies of recruiters differ in terms of the agents' adherence to state regulations and, in particular, to registration/licencing stipulations, administrative structures, recruitment processes used, motivations, fees charged and contract arrangements. A key distinguishing feature, however, of all these agencies and their practices, is the level of formality or informality of the structures and processes under which they operate.

Following Keith Hart's (1973) conceptualisation of the term 'informal' – which is associated with unregulated activities, non-compliance with labour regulations and transactions outside the monitoring of the state – and, more recently, Chen's (2006: 76) definition of informality to include not only enterprises but also employment relationships *that are not legally regulated or protected*, we classify brokers as fully formal (Type 1), partially formal (Type 2) and Types 3 and 4, who are mainly unregistered and unregulated as informal brokers (see Table 1). We note that, although the term 'informal' is often equated with 'instability', 'lack of organisation' or 'disorganised' (Geertz 1978; Hart 1973; Lewis 1955) – thus denoting a form of negativity – and that the formal sector equated with a degree of rule-based stability, we use the terms 'formal' and 'informal' loosely here as a framework within which to analyse the activities of brokers and how they adhere to state regulations, rather than as a negative term.

Formal labour-recruitment requirements in Ghana are stringent in terms of the registration and acquisition of a licence to operate. For instance, the Labour Act of 2003 (Act 651, Article 7) and the Legislative Instrument of 2007 (LI 1833) both prohibit agencies from recruiting labour, whether for internal or external placement, without a licence. Despite these legal provisions, a large number of brokers in Ghana are either only registered with the Registrar General's Department – but without having obtained the appropriate licences from the Labour Department to operate – or have neither registration nor licence to operate. These include private individuals who operate as 'freelance' recruiters and brokers without any certification or licence. Some agents tend to commence operations without a licence, to test the viability of the recruitment business prior to acquiring the basic registration certification.

The predominant reason proffered for non-compliance with the registration requirement is the length of time it takes to register a company, the bureaucratic hurdles in the form of absentee officials and the demands for bribes which delay registration. For instance, the Managing Partner of the Better Your Future agency recounts his experience:

It took quite a long time, about two months. You go there and they say 'He's printed the document to sign', 'The man to sign is on leave' or 'They have approved it but the lawyer is yet to read it'. It took almost two months.

In conceptualising the categorisation of recruitment agencies, therefore, the registration status serves as a distinguishing factor among brokers in Ghana. Data from the Labour Department indicates a proliferation of Type 1 recruitment agencies, rising quite sharply from three registered/licenced agencies in the mid-2000s to nearly 200 that recruit domestically and another 19 that recruit for employers abroad as of 2015 (Labour Department 2015). This is attributed to the significant increase in demand for domestic workers both within Ghana – among the wealthy and expatriate communities – and abroad, especially in the Gulf countries.

**Table 1. A typology of brokers for domestic work**

	<b>Type</b>	<b>Recruitment processes used</b>	<b>Relationship with migrant and services offered</b>	<b>Fees charged</b>
1	Fully registered agent, i.e. registered with the Registrar General's Department and licenced by the Labour Department)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Functions like an employment exchange</li> <li>• Sometimes uses sub-agents based in urban and rural areas</li> <li>• Matches workers to employers' requirements of work experience, skills and criminal record</li> <li>• Advertises mainly in newspapers, social media and online platforms and posters</li> <li>• Formal registration process requiring a passport photo, completed form and proof of ID</li> <li>• Formal interview</li> <li>• Supply workers to the Ghanaian middle class, expatriates, companies and overseas placements</li> <li>• Will not recruit new arrivals from rural areas</li> <li>• Prefer high-school educated applicants who are Accra-based and already familiar with urban lifestyles and manners</li> <li>• Deals only with those who are 18 years and over</li> <li>• May/may not provide training in domestic skills such as cooking and cleaning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No personal relationship with potential migrant, guarantor or employer</li> <li>• Advertise themselves as providers of hardworking, humble and respectful maids</li> <li>• Background checks on criminal record, education, experience and employment history</li> <li>• Draws up formal contracts based on the law</li> <li>• Responsibility limited mainly to recruitment/ placement</li> <li>• Written contracts with employers</li> <li>• Written contracts with domestic workers</li> <li>• No written contracts with sub-agents</li> <li>• Conducts inspection of employers' premises</li> <li>• Outsource staff to individual and corporate clients, with ongoing supervision</li> <li>• Job-match staff with clients</li> <li>• Sometimes help negotiate pay rates/conditions of work</li> <li>• Repatriation of workers placed abroad</li> <li>• Mediation and dispute resolution</li> <li>• Replacement of workers who quit or are sacked by employers</li> </ul>	<p><b>Domestic workers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fees charged for registration and for placement (about ₵30)</li> <li>• Employers pay a ₵250 non-refundable fee for a two-year contract</li> <li>• ₵100 as placement fees and ₵50 for each replacement after a three-month period of grace</li> <li>• Workers pay between ₵1,000 and ₵8,000 for employment overseas</li> </ul>
2	Partially registered agent, i.e. no licence from the Labour Department but registered with the Registrar General's Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertises through word of mouth, at places of worship such as mosques and churches</li> <li>• Sometimes uses sub-agents based in rural areas</li> <li>• Supplies workers to the Gulf states and wealthy Ghanaian families</li> <li>• Matches workers to employers' requirements with emphasis on subservient behaviour, honesty and 'decent' character; formal education less important</li> <li>• Insists on guarantor and/or permission of parents to employ, to ensure reliability and character qualities</li> <li>• Will consider under 18s</li> <li>• Conducts an interview and assesses workers for behavioural and character traits</li> <li>• Sometimes hires runaway girls from rural areas</li> <li>• May provide informal training in domestic tasks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No personal relationship with potential migrant but known to employers through social networks/ location</li> <li>• Advertise themselves to employers as providers of reliable, docile and hardworking staff of good character</li> <li>• Performs thorough background checks through guarantors; will try to establish contact with the worker's family through guarantor to check circumstances</li> <li>• Provides assistance with obtaining health and police checks in cases of international placements</li> <li>• Uses a mixture of written and verbal contracts</li> <li>• Negotiates salary, timings and days off for the worker</li> <li>• Offers to intervene if there is a conflict between worker and employer, contacts the guarantor if there is a serious problem such as theft or absconding</li> <li>• Outsource staff to individual clients + ongoing supervision</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workers charged for registration (about ₵30) and for placement but tailored to individual circumstances</li> <li>• Charged extra for health and police checks</li> <li>• Employers pay a ₵200 non-refundable fee, 50% of registration fee or ₵100 for replacements after a three-month period of grace</li> </ul>

3	Individual informal recruiters, i.e. no registration and no licence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertises through word of mouth to network of sub-agents in rural areas in the Northern, Central and Volta regions</li> <li>• Relies on networks built through previous placements</li> <li>• Supplies workers mainly to wealthy Ghanaian families</li> <li>• Matches workers to employers' requirements with an emphasis on subservient behaviour, honesty and 'decent' character – places emphasis on the role of a guarantor but sometimes serves as a guarantor on behalf of workers and vouches for the migrant workers' character, willingness to work hard and reliability</li> <li>• Also matches by religion and ethnicity/region to cater to specific food preparation/language skills</li> <li>• Sources very young 12–16-year-olds for those who prefer 'obedient', 'innocent', 'unspoilt' rural workers</li> <li>• Often first point of call for runaway girls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually a member of extended kinship networks with a personal relationship directly or indirectly with the migrant through chains of recruiters</li> <li>• Relationship based on trust, respect and religious/cultural notions of reciprocity; has a reputation to maintain</li> <li>• Verbally agrees terms and conditions of employment involving members of the community to build trust</li> <li>• Provides support to the migrant, during transit and at destination, with finding accommodation and food</li> <li>• Helps with conflict resolution and placement in other jobs if problems arise</li> <li>• Mediates between younger runaway girls and their parents, assuring parents of girls' safety and a promise of remittances.</li> <li>• Advises migrant on money management and the importance of remitting to manage family expectations</li> <li>• Helps employers to find replacement workers</li> <li>• Intervenes on behalf of the worker if she complains about ill treatment</li> <li>• Assists employers in cases of alleged theft, illicit sexual activity and uninformed departure</li> <li>• Finds replacement worker for employer if conflict resolution not possible</li> <li>• Finds replacement job for worker if dissatisfied or sacked</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workers not charged for placement but culturally sanctioned expectation of rewards in kind or cash at the convenience of the worker</li> <li>• If help with food and clothing provided, then costs recovered later but on a schedule that suits the worker.</li> <li>• Parents charged in the case of very young girls</li> <li>• Employer charged a fee of ₵50–₵100</li> <li>• At times, no fees are charged but there is an expectation of a token amount to cover cost of transportation and communication</li> </ul>
4	Family and friends network recruiters, i.e. no registration and no licence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works with co-ethnic and co-religious families and individuals</li> <li>• Recruits only on demand and matches workers to specific requirements by employers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruiter usually a member of extended kinship networks with direct/indirect personal relationship with the migrant</li> <li>• Relationship based on trust, respect and religious/cultural notions of reciprocity</li> <li>• Verbally agrees terms and conditions of employment involving members of the community to build trust</li> <li>• Acts as a guarantor and vouches for the migrants' character, willingness to work hard and reliability</li> <li>• Worker has long-term cultural debt to recruiter for his/her service that may be called in in the future</li> <li>• Mediation and dispute resolution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workers not charged but parents may pay – amount depends on closeness of relationship and whether repaying a favour or asking for one</li> <li>• Employer not charged but expectation of financial or in-kind reward after placement</li> </ul>

## Recruitment processes and procedures

There are marked differences between the different types of broker in terms of their mode of operation as well as their clients, both migrants and employers, Formal, fully registered agents (Type 1) function like an employment exchange, advertising through formal channels such as adverts in the newspapers, social media and on-line platforms and take potential workers through formal registration processes, including a formal interview. They tend to deal preferably with applicants who have some level of education – often at least junior secondary school – and generally operate within the confines of the law, including adhering to the minimum work age limit of 18 years. Most of them, particularly the large-scale organisations, provide some level of training in domestic skills. Formal fully registered as well as partially registered agents (Types 1 and 2) prefer urbanised workers to rural ones and were often reluctant to engage new arrivals from rural areas – whom they refer to as ‘village people’.

Type 2 agents tend to recruit domestic workers for middle- and higher-income Ghanaian and expatriate families in large urban centres, especially Accra or, for overseas employers, mainly in the Gulf. They often match workers with employers’ requirements, with an emphasis on subservient behaviour, honesty and a decent character. Formal education is less important, although it may be required for specific employers.

The spokesperson for the Leroy Recruitment Agency, a Type 2 agency which recruits mostly for middle- and upper-income families in Accra, indicated that she mostly recruits through recommendations from various domestic workers she had placed in jobs.

Most of the workers came through word of mouth; the staff who got jobs through us also bring in their people as well. Recently, I had a French family looking for a particular person; the person was white so I got a lot of my French recruiters, whom I had placed in jobs, to go out and look for somebody who would fit their requirements. Most of my recruiters I call professional staff. For example, I’ve got a very good cook at East Legon and she has been a cook for so many years. She is a good contact when I’m looking for my cooks. I’ve got a hotel down the road, they’ve got chefs and I know the chef personally; he is my recruiter for top chefs. He’s been in the industry for a long time. He knows what I want, he knows my specifications so I will go there and that’s how I do it; I pay them for the service they provide for me as well.

Broadway Initiative Limited is another kind of Type 2 agency based in Nima, a low-income area in Accra which started as an informal migrant settlement in the 1940s. Nima is home to both newly arrived migrants and to people who had settled there several decades ago. Broadway provides brokering services to potential migrant domestic workers, for both internal and external placement. Nabil Fattah, the accountant at Broadway Initiative Limited, described their business as one set up to help to reduce the high unemployment rate and poverty levels among the youth in Nima, rather than for profit-making reasons.

The bottom line is the rate of unemployment in the country; people want to go out. People are not getting jobs, you understand. So that is what stimulated us to

sit down, strategise, map out a plan and make sure that it is not only the government's responsibility to bring down the unemployment rate. We are all citizens, we have to put our hands on deck and do things together. That is the motive behind it. Not any ulterior motive or something.

For Broadway Initiative, living in a migrant community such as Nima, with limited access to opportunities, provides further impetus to help the youth in the community, as Nabil Fattah again explains:

So as I said, our core responsibility is to alleviate or reduce unemployment. So we are not just satisfying the demand aspect but we know the communities we are in. We know our challenges and what we face in our communities. Ours is not to just to make money but we are looking at social responsibility, to make sure in our community people are working. So it is something we do. It is not as if we are here to just make the money. We look at other social interventions we believe in brightening the corner where we are. We are in Nima. We try to alleviate poverty in Nima.

Despite these noble claims of mainly recruiting women for domestic work in the Middle East as a way of helping the poor in the community, Broadway also plays an active role in the production of a docile workforce for employers in the Gulf, based on requirements communicated to them by brokers in destination countries who have access to this information. Communication technology such as Skype and Whatsapp have made it possible to tailor the 'production' and 'supply' of workers to match the requirements of employers.

Although the agency claims to perform a social service and invokes a moral obligation to their clients, the commodification of workers and the near-absence of a moral sense of responsibility is evident from this statement:

So it is like exchange by barter. We recruit them here, we give them to our colleagues over there and they too finalise their activity by sending them to the families. ....You send them from here, you take them to the office and the office distributes them.

They are clearly involved in the commoditisation and reinforcement of neo-liberal ideals of the good migrant who prioritises servitude over their own personal freedom and remits money back for the good of the country.

Recruitment processes for the informal brokers (Types 3 and 4) are more informal. Advertising through word of mouth, in places of worship (mosques and churches) and via recommendations by previously placed domestic workers, as well as through family and friends, constitutes the major recruitment channels. Sometimes sub-agents are used who scout rural areas for potential applicants. Informal agents recruit from a wider range of applicants, including those under 18 years old (Table 1).

Churches are a major medium of recruitment for informal agencies. First they are used as a medium for advertising; secondly they provide a platform for actual recruitment.

Sometimes pastors and church leaders identify young girls who do not have any source of income and informally link them up with informal brokers. For example, Forster Media observed that:

When the pastors in the church see that the young ones have finished schooling and they are not doing anything, they link them to us because they know us and they know what we can do. We involve their parents when recruiting but they can only have access to our office because we don't allow them to know where the child would be living. It is confidential between us and the clients because some of them complain that when the child's parents know their houses, the demands become too much. So we show them the office in case of any problem and they need to contact us; we also assure them that we won't allow anybody to mistreat their children due to the contract and agreement we make them sign. We make sure our clients abide by the contract signed. So our girls cannot mistreat our clients' kids and they also cannot do the same to our girls.

Hammani is a recruitment agency that has an overtly Christian ethos concerning recruitment as well as expectations of decent behaviour from their workers and employer clients. Hammani was started as a church activity in one of the Pentecostal churches in Accra by a female church member who claims her 'calling' was to help the poor, especially the elderly, orphans and young women who could not make it in life. Being completely unregistered, Hammani is happy to recruit girls who are under the age of 18 and, in fact, prides itself on being able to show the girls a 'decent and honourable' way of making a living. Hammani see it as their responsibility to ensure that the appearance and behaviour of the workers meets the expectations of the employers. They are critical in the transformation of the identity of the worker from their original ethnic identity to an urban working-class girl.

Alex is an individual broker (Type 3) who works as a security guard for an expatriate enclave but who also has a business on the side as a broker for migrants from rural areas. The business grew from occasional requests from his employers to find them a maid and has now become a large, established enterprise. Personal bonds of trust, reciprocity and respect are at the heart of Alex's business, which is built on the relationships that he has established with people he has placed in jobs:

These people I place, in turn call their brother and sisters in the village; the North, Volta, Western, Central Region and also the Ashanti Region, almost all the regions. When I tell them about a resident needing help, they tell me they have brothers and sisters in the village who will be interested. For example, girls from the north, I give them a call and tell them I need someone who is very good; they in turn tell me that maybe they will call their sisters in their hometown to find out. Within two to three days they would have called the sisters to find out and also arranged for that person to come to Accra.

He also relies on personal recommendations from employers who have used his services:

No, I don't use posters at all; all my workers are from people whom I know already, and these Lebanese and Indians also recommend me to their friends so I

do not use posters. They recommend me in their workplaces such as Melcom, Polytank, Azar Paint etc. For example, they can call me and say 'Mr. Xx is my friend and he told me you can get me a home help', so I go to their offices for discussions.

Alex's model of recruitment is to charge the employers to find a suitable match and to ask the workers to give him something, based on goodwill and gratitude. He describes his business as an NGO, meaning an organisation that serves the poor, although he is not registered as such. He emphasises the help that he is giving girls from disadvantaged backgrounds and says he will act as a guarantor for them even if they do not pay him.

When the girls come to me looking for jobs I do not charge them any fee. Initially I used to charge them about GHC 20 (£3.92) to look for a placement for them but I realised they could not afford it; sometimes I have to feed them; as a result I had to stop charging fees and I decided to run it as an NGO. I always tell them that, if they are able to accumulate about two to three months' salary, they can at least support me with GHC 20 (£3.92) but when they get the job that's it. Unless they lose their jobs and then they come back telling all sorts of stories but, in the end, I have pity on them and find them other jobs. Normally it's their employers who already know me; they give me some money for transport in appreciation of my efforts – that is how I also benefit.

Thus although, at face value, these acts suggest a totally selfless approach to recruitment, they are often carried out in anticipation of future payment by workers. The foregoing discussion highlights the adversity in recruitment agencies and practices for international and internal migrant domestic workers in Ghana. Fully registered brokerage agencies work by the book and supply domestic workers where labour laws can be observed and employment is through written contracts which specify working hours, days off and other working conditions. The formal brokers interviewed for this study sought minimal personal involvement with their clients and were reluctant to engage new arrivals from rural areas – whom they refer to as 'village people' and preferred Accra residents instead, who may have been in the city for varying periods of time and transformed themselves into urban residents. Informal brokers, on the other hand, tended to recruit less-educated rural girls and to have a more personal relationship with them based on principles of trust and reciprocity.

However, two striking differences emerge in the functioning of brokerage for international and national migration for domestic work. International brokerage agencies represent state-sanctioned employment policies that commoditise and reinforce neo-liberal ideals of a good migrant who prioritises servitude over their own personal freedom and remits money back for the good of the country. On the other hand, the relationship between informal brokers of internal migration is more personal and dialectical, with brokers balancing the expectations and circumstances of migrants and employers and crafting the best deal for both parties. The exception is the placement of young girls under the age of 18, where brokers collude with parents and employers, controlling most of the earnings and freedom of the migrant.

## Services provided by brokers and relationships with domestic workers

Interviews with brokers, migrants and employers indicate that the former play important multiple, often contradictory, roles before, during and after migration. We discuss below the key areas where brokers work to perpetuate the *status quo* as well as other areas where they work in the interests of migrants.

### *Establishing trust and cultural brokerage*

In a context where employers (foreign and urban), formal institutions in control of emigration and employment and rural societies are separated by insurmountable social and cultural divides, the role of the broker, and particularly those operating within Types 2, 3 and 4 – who can transcend these different worlds – becomes critical. The broker is not only someone who makes the journey materially feasible by assisting with transport and arranging documentation and certification but, as Lindquist (2012) notes, he or she is also a cultural mediator between these different worlds.

The trust-based functions of brokers include, *inter alia*, reassuring the family that their ward will be found a good job and acting as a character witness – to reassure both parties that they will fulfil their moral obligations under the terms of the ‘contract’. They provide a character reference for the employer as being fair and one who pays both promptly and the amount promised. For the prospective worker, they will provide a reference to her being ‘of good character’ (i.e. not stealing or seeking sexual liaisons with the man of the house), clean and hardworking. They also include the broker acting as economic guarantor – s/he will promise the employer that the agency will pay, or arrange for the worker to work to make up the time, in the event that the worker steals or damages any property in the employer’s home. The Hammani Recruitment Agency (Type 2 agent), for instance, holds both employers and domestic workers to terms listed in written contracts:

So our girls cannot mistreat our clients’ kids and they also cannot do the same to our girls. Whatever he/she damages, you, the client, let us know and, if you want her to pay, she will work for it and pay but you cannot mistreat the person because she is your home help. She is not your slave, she is there for you and you are also there for her, so you work together.

For Type 3 and 4 brokers, personal relations with the domestic workers and in-depth knowledge of their family and their religious and cultural backgrounds allow for the initiation of informal verbally agreed ‘contracts’ guided by cultural notions of reciprocity. From the interviews with brokers, it is evident that they possess the skills to act as cultural brokers (cf. Lindquist 2012) in addition to being placement agents. They are able to communicate across different worlds – between the urban and the rural, between middle-class Westernised urban employers and traditional societies. The interviews with domestic workers indicate that their families placed trust in the agents who brought them to the city. Employers also preferred informal brokers to the formal ones both because of the cost and also because they felt they would bring more trustworthy people to them. As one employer noted:

We don't just go in for anybody. We go in for people who are recommended by someone who is well known. That is why you contact someone whom you trust to get you someone whom he or she trusts. You don't just pick them from the street. I know there are agencies that can provide you with a worker but I have not utilised their services before because they actually don't know the background of the domestic workers. These job-seekers just approach them and express their interest in working as domestic workers, so all they do is to train them and give them to a household. The probability that the worker they would give you would not be up to your standards is high so I usually prefer the family recommendations to the agency recruits. Moreover, the agencies also charge too much.

### *Reinforcing patriarchal ideologies of subordination and immobilising domestic workers' bodies*

As observed by Silvey (2004), patriarchal ideologies of domesticity travel transnationally and spatially and can explain the persistence of subordination in domestic work by both gender and race and nationality. Thus women and girls belonging to certain ethnic groups and possessing certain regional identities are more likely to become domestic workers for the more-privileged and rich. Brokers play a key role in reinforcing these ideologies and stereotypes by creating a docile and subservient workforce and repeating and confirming stereotypes related to ethnic identities. As a representative of Leroy Services put it:

People mostly don't trust the Ewes [the third-largest ethnic group in Ghana, mainly from the Volta region] partly because of the fear of *juju* (voodoo). You would be amazed about how many enlightened people will tell you that. Yes, the Ashanti girls are loud and lazy, yeah a lot of people don't like them... People prefer Fantes, Akuapems, yeah. Central and Western regions. Oh, Akuapems are polite, do you know what I mean?

The regulatory environment for domestic work in Ghana is less controlling of domestic workers' bodies than in countries such as Singapore in South-East Asia (Yeoh and Huang 2010). Nevertheless brokers collude with employers to impose immobility on domestic workers in time and space through a range of controlling mechanisms. This is observed particularly in the case of very young girls who are recruited as workers – while the worker herself is often told that her wages are being saved by the employer and will be paid to her at the end of the employment period or that she will be sent to school in exchange for work, in actual fact these promises rarely materialise. The girl's family, the broker and the employer sometimes collude to agree that she will be housed, fed and provided with the essentials but there is no agreement on wages. She is often not aware of this until it is time to leave. For instance, Lucy (a domestic worker) was misled by a broker into believing that her services were in exchange for the opportunity to gain an education:

She (the broker) told me that the man would take me to school. But I never heard the man talking about school issues. Later the man told me personally that he was not going to take me to school. He said he could not take care of me and his children at the same time. I said 'OK' because there was no need to come back to Kwahu since I would still not attend school there. So one day, as I was

there in his house, he just told me to pack off. He had complications in his marriage, so he was not close to his wife. So when I was about to leave the place, she (the broker) gave me Gh¢120 Cedis (£23.53) for me staying there for a year.

Additionally brokers are key conveyors of the socio-cultural view that particular social reproduction tasks carried out in the space of domesticity – such as child care – are the work of older women who are ‘respectable’ and ‘reliable’, whereas younger women and girls are relegated to jobs such as cleaning, washing and looking after pets because of their tendency to be irresponsible and not as respectable. Additionally, domestic workers’ agency is sometimes curtailed by brokers insisting on socially prescribed norms around seeking consent from formers’ parents prior to migration and moralising on ‘acceptable’ behaviour for females, as one individual recruiter explained:

If I ask you a question concerning your parents and I realise you are staying alone outside your village with friends; also when I try to find out why you are not living with your family and you tell me your parents do not want to take care of you, I will not get you the job.

#### *Producing the ideal domestic worker: docile and subservient*

Despite significant differences in modes of operation, nearly all informal brokers are involved, to varying degrees, in identity ascription and subjectivation (Rodriguez and Schwenken 2013) in the production of the “ideal migrant”; in this case docile, subservient, obedient, honest and hardworking domestic workers. The process starts with screening and continues through selection, training and matching where desirable characteristics are emphasised and less desirable ones are downplayed to construct migrants with specific class identities and subjectivities that fit into specific labour market niches (Gardiner Barber, 2008: 1268). Liang (2011) lists the stages in identity ascription starting with upgrading of skills, second is the acquiring of a certain attitude, and third is the needed ethics that are considered appropriate by the employers for ‘live-in maids’. They are trained to work very long days, obeying to strict hierarchies, the performance of docility and working under high pressure.

While the role of brokers in making ideal workers in international migration is well recognised, our interviews indicate that they play a similar role with internal migrants being placed in homes in the city. Brokers play a key role in subjectivation and identity ascription, as they train workers to suppress their ethnic identities and behaviour and to conform to the expectations of middle-class urban employers with regards to politeness and appearance.

The Broadway agency checks credentials, trains and counsels migrants about working norms at destination before departure and prides itself not only on supplying good workers but as being respectable representatives of the country.

Yeah, so for their processing you have to make a passport, have health checks – because each person has to pass a medical exam – obtain a police report, get vaccinated and get a yellow card; then we buy you the ticket. Then you go there

and we contact you through an agent and you finish the rest of the process there. Yes, we do give training. We counsel them. Before they go, we counsel them because they are going to another terrain. We let them know that they are there to work hard and to project a very high image of Ghana. So we tell them 'Don't just go and think, because you are in a white man's country, you can just do what you like. Just work hard and everything will take care of itself. You go to where we send you to. We make you understand that you are going to work. So whether you go to a family that has no children or not, your core responsibility is to go and work'.

Beyond the formal training provided by Type 1 and 2 brokers, Type 3 and 4 brokers adopt an informal system of training which emphasises behavioural aspects of the job. The Hammani Recruitment Agency sees it as their responsibility to ensure that the appearance and behaviour of workers meet the expectations of the employers. These qualities are critical in the transformation of the identity of the worker from their original ethnic identity to an urban working-class girl.

We teach them how to talk. When they come from the villages everything annoys them so we tell them that this is not how we live in the city. In the city, when you see an elderly person or a child, you say 'Please'. We introduce them to three key words that would help them – 'Please', 'I am sorry' and 'Thank you'. 'Whenever you want to talk you use "Please"; when somebody gives you something you say "Thank you Mummy" or "Thank you Daddy" to show appreciation and also if anything goes wrong and you are being questioned you say "I am sorry, I won't do that again"' and it ends it all. We also teach them table manners, how to make beds, folding bed sheets, ironing and other things.

Unlike fully registered agencies that make a point of negotiating a day off for the worker, Hammani actively discourages their workers from asking for days off because they believe that spare time is undesirable for girls. They see themselves not just as providers of employment but also as the makers and custodians of good character among the girls. At the same time, they are key in supplying a docile workforce which downplays its own needs and privileges the demands of the employer.

Holidays are excluded, we don't encourage that because what will you be doing when you are off? For instance, formally a worker here was earning Ghc100 and Ghc150 and we have pushed for it to go up to Ghc200 (£39.22) to Ghc250 (£49.02). The older people and the mothers are taking Ghc250 and the young ones are taking Ghc200 (£39.22). You are being paid well, housed, fed and taking this huge sum as a salary, so why would you ask for days off? You expect your employer to treat you well but you don't want to return that favour – what are you going home to do? If the person says you will be off for two days per month or over the weekend or after three months, you will be taking days off; but you also have to think that this person needed you, that is why he came for you, so why don't you do the person's work first, so he can also think of helping you? When the person sees that you think good about him/her, other things will

follow. It is 'give and take' so don't think of days off. Where are you even going to go?

Leroy Business Solutions, a Type 2 brokerage agency which recruits for high- and middle-income urban families, also promises to deliver honest and hardworking people to its clients in the city and has devised a thorough background check system that includes checking their guarantors – people who will vouch for the character of the worker and for their behaviour. The behavioural qualities that the agency is looking for are clearly patience and subservience, which are critical when selecting a person with the right qualities. Whereas many informal brokers tend to focus on rural girls for such qualities, the Leroy agency is not interested in village people or 'raw' migrants from poorer rural regions because of problems with their integration, poor education and rural habits and attitudes, as the Managing Director asserts:

I'm not so much interested in the village people, I will be honest with you. The class of people I want to work with, unless they say they want somebody 'raw', then I recruit for them. But I try not to do that. They have their own issues and a lot of problems. They come and it's difficult for them to settle if they've not programmed their mind. So I don't want to deal with that. I do so occasionally but not on a large scale...The employer will tell you 'I want somebody who has up to senior-high-school qualifications' and this is another reason why I don't like a lot of the village staff. They've been to senior high or junior high and they don't know anything. That's all. We are trying to help them but they've got their own attitude and so I try not to deal with them if I can help it.

He went on to say, similarly, that if Leroy Business Solutions thinks a worker has as 'attitude', they train them to suppress their original identity and behaviour pattern to become more like the subservient class of domestic workers in urban areas.

I tell them 'Talk to them this way'. If you (the worker) start talking to them (the employer) any way you like, they will also react. And then when we are going to do cleaning jobs, we take some of them in and then we train them. I try and get any two who are employable and then we go in and train them. If I trust you enough I can even bring you to my home to train you. I do that.

Alex, the individual Type 3 broker, also has an informal system of training which emphasises the behavioural aspects of the job including learning how to speak 'respectfully' to their employers, *'how to greet their superiors, desist from stealing and other issues like that'*. Most brokers said that they also have a system enabling them to assess employers and match them to suitable staff. In this regard, employers who are perceived as strict are provided with experienced and skilled workers while those judged to be liberal are assigned workers who might not be as experienced.

#### *Offering informal social protection and risk management*

Informal brokers can help migrants to mitigate the costs and risks of migration through the provision of informal social protection and risk management strategies. Some help migrants

with paying for travel and accommodation at destination. Type 3 informal brokers like Alex help new arrivals in the city by providing them with a place to stay. Having come from a poor background himself, he is aware of the help that new arrivals in the city need and he offers them assistance with settling in. Informal brokers may even provide accommodation when the worker is between jobs. They help newly arrived workers to navigate the challenges of city life and to surmount cultural barriers.

I normally meet the person at the bus station and take them straight home. Most of them do not know their way around Accra and that is why I have to meet them to send them to their various work places. Sometimes they call me asking for my support to travel to the South. For example, a girl travelling from the Volta Region to Accra; I can talk to the GPRTU driver in the Volta Region, informing him that I will be the one to pick the girl up from the station. In that case he brings the girl without pre-payment and I have to pay for the transport immediately she arrives. This happens sometimes but not always.

The administrative assistant from the Hammani recruitment agency (a Type 2 broker) explains how they assist potential migrant domestic workers through an informal system of pre-financing transportation costs:

Sometimes, too, when you see any indication that the person doesn't have the money and she is so desperate to come and work, we send her the money through MTN Mobile Money or any other transaction to pay, so that when they work they can pay us back. We let them know that, in this world, if everything is free, you will not value what you have. Sometimes they are grateful to us for sending them money to enable them to come down to work...Some (domestic workers) do travel home for visits, especially the Northerners. They are being forced into marriages so they call us. The help we can give them is to send them money to escape so they run back to us.

If costs are incurred, these are deducted through payments spread over a few months but it was not clear what the welfare implications were for the migrant of such deductions. Nonetheless, faced with having to manage travel, settling down in the city and looking for jobs on their own, migrants and their families would otherwise find the task almost impossible.

#### *Acting as a guarantor*

One of the most important requirements for finding a job as a domestic workers is to be able to produce a guarantor. For those girls who leave home without the permission of their guardians, brokers such as Alex provide critical support by acting as their guarantors. Alex does this to ensure that employers can report to him in the event that there is a problem.

Yes, I am the guarantor for almost all of them and it is very risky; for most of them it is because I know either their brother or their sister so I am able to guarantee them. There was this guy I knew for a very long time, he had worked with me for a very long time. He once told me his sister was on her way to Accra,

I told him that because I knew him I would consider her for employment. But if, for instance, his sister does something wrong, the burden will be on me. With most of the girls I send to work for expatriates, the least thing that happens, I am the first person to be called, so it is very risky and I always pray that nothing bad happens. So I always ensure I talk to them about staying out of trouble, I always tell them I did not take a penny from anyone when they arrived. Instead, I fed them and payed for their transport so they should stay out of trouble. By the grace of God, nothing bad has happened.

In the case of child migration, brokers not only facilitate the transportation to Accra, but also act as guarantors for the children. This latter role includes providing details about the job and payment terms, the employer, the recruiter's contact details and the address of the employer and an offer to arrange for the parents to visit their wards periodically. Thus they serve as an intermediary between the potential employer and the parents of the child. This role ostensibly serves as a way of reassuring the parents about the wellbeing of their offspring while compelling such recruiters to ensure favourable conditions of service for their workers.

### **Mediating relations between employers and domestic workers**

Our study has found that recruitment agencies play a key role as a facilitating interface between employee domestic workers and their employers as they navigate the different interfaces. This ostensibly positive role in enabling mobility is, however, often missing in the literature. Our study finds that informal brokers often mediate relations between employers and domestic workers in a variety of ways, some of which are discussed below.

#### *Serving as a medium for women to increase their bargaining power*

While brokers can be complicit in urging workers to accept jobs where the conditions and wages are poor, they can also be an important medium for women in vulnerable positions to exercise agency as they mediate discussions on working conditions and wages. Rural – or what are regarded as 'raw' – migrant workers conceptualise the value of wages differently from urban or urbanised domestic workers. Recruiters therefore bridge the gap in expectations by negotiating up low wage quotes while revising down overly ambitious ones. They also help the migrants with one of the most important strategies for improving their working conditions and wages, which is job switching. Examples of some of the issues negotiated between the informal recruitment agencies and brokers and the employer are the level of wages, the number of working hours and days, the work schedules, payment terms if the domestic worker does extra days, hours or chores and the managing of employer–employee expectations.

Phedelis Plus Recruitment Agency provides an example of the importance of recruitment agencies in negotiating and ensuring that the employee receives reasonable wages for their experience, age and the amount of work to be performed:

Let's imagine, for instance, that you want someone around 40 years old to do household chores and take care of your children. At that age, for the person to

be paid 300 Cedis (£58.82) is not fair. Or assuming you wanted someone with 4 years' experience or more, you can't pay that person a meagre salary. So we actually negotiate well to get fair payment for them. If we do not do the negotiation well, sometimes, the workers come back to us complaining that the salary is not good compared to the kind of work they are doing.

This facilitation role for negotiating wages was especially important for domestic workers recruited directly from the rural areas by brokers. Such first-time recruits often asked for lower wages, but were guided by brokers to request higher sums. Several brokers recounted instances where they had negotiated a higher salary than was being demanded by the domestic worker.

Another area where recruitment agencies played a key facilitation role was in working conditions – specifically with the issue of 'days off'. Matching the expectations of the employer with those of the domestic workers was often problematic and recruitment agencies played a key role in mediating these expectations. As Margarete, an individual recruiter, stated:

You send somebody to a place and maybe the agreement was that he/she was supposed to stay at work till Friday and go away on weekends but maybe the employer will say 'I want you to stay Saturday and Sunday'. Then we draw their attention to the fact that, in order for the person to stay on Saturday and Sunday, the employer needs to pay extra to the person. If the person doesn't agree, the employer can't force him or her.

As Margarete Yeboah, a Type 3 individual broker, explains: 'When you (the worker) tell me about your situation, I will negotiate with the employer on your behalf concerning shelter, food, payment and other stuff'.

#### *Acting as a mediator for payment and counselling on financial management*

Acting as an intermediary and manager of the domestic worker's earnings was seen for both internal and international migrants but the reasons varied. Some brokers say they have started doing this to prevent employers from cheating the workers out of their pay.

Some (employers) tell me to come and collect it and that they will pay my transportation. With some too, we have an account they pay into. When we leave it for them to pay into the worker's account, they don't do it. They take advantage of them so we've now asked them to pay it into our account or bring it to the office.

On the other hand, brokers for international placements described their role as protecting workers from over-demanding family members. For instance, a broker for international placements, Rabat Ventures, offers to receive remittances from the migrant workers and send them on to their parents, possibly because the parents do not have access to bank accounts. However, they also advise workers to save money for themselves in preparation

for their future return. It is not clear if there is any financial benefit to Rabat Ventures for their intermediary services rendered.

I tell them they can send money through me so that I can give it to their parents. I make sure that all monies that I receive are delivered to their families. I also tell the workers to save some of the monies because sometimes, when they remit the monies, the families spend everything and when the workers come back, they have nothing to live on. So sometimes I tell them that, when they are called to send home money, they should say that they are not paid. When they are able to save some money for themselves, after the two years, they can get money to come back when they are willing to come back.

More broadly, employment brokers support workers in developing savings and remittance-sending habits in spite of the meagre nature of their earnings. These wide-ranging activities present brokers as the transmitters of life skills and enforcers of culturally constructed notions of reciprocity.

At least every month, we educate them to keep their money and not misuse it because, if they do so, the employer may call us to find out the amount of money the workers have in their accounts. If they see that they [domestic workers] don't have anything, then they will say that then it is of no use for this girl to be in my house because I clothe her, feed her and give her everything, so why is she not able to save? So we tell them 'At least if you don't have cream then you can take Ghc50 (£9.80) or Ghc20 (£3.92) to buy your cream and the rest goes in to their account'.

#### *Helping women to negotiate multiple social roles and subject positions*

For young women and girls who are locked into a traditional trajectory of early marriage, migration may be an important way of transforming their lives by moving to locations where these gender ideologies do not apply (Pickbourn 2011, in Tufour *et al.* 2016). Brokers are an integral part of the strategies of female migrants who must constantly negotiate relationships through juggling the multiple subjectivities of being a daughter, a sister, a mother, a wife and a daughter-in-law. While domestic workers, in their interviews, portrayed their families and domestic spaces in their place of origin as spaces where they were expected to follow traditional practices and life-courses that they did not wish to uphold and therefore left through migration, their own strategies of sending remittances suggest that they do not want to sever ties and that they continue to seek their families' approval.

Interviews with workers show that the broker both reinforces and helps to challenge these structures in ways that have hitherto not been visible. For example, they may help to reassure the family that their daughter is in safe hands in the city and promise them that she will send remittances home. They may also advise the migrant to send remittances to earn herself recognition as a good daughter, while simultaneously being able to fulfil her desire to break away from the confines of rural society. Alex, an individual recruiter, describes how he advises girls from rural areas on managing their expectations.

Because these days everybody is hassling, even when they (workers) want to leave, their parents easily allow them to come. The girls only need to send them some money. I always tell them to send some money to their mothers in the village, which is part of my contract with them. Usually at the interview stage I tell them that, every month, they have to send some money to their mothers and fathers, otherwise I will not help them to find a job. And they always agree and send money to their parents. So these are some of the things I do but, if they refuse I go straight to their masters to report.

### **Mediation and the protection of domestic workers' rights**

Brokers mediate relations between employers and domestic workers in an attempt to protect the latter's rights. Many of the issues raised were around issues of physical and verbal abuse in the case of children and about sexual harassment for adults, with domestic workers often being both the victims and often the accused – as the perpetrators of such acts. Brokers provide emotional support to victims, educate them on their rights and also encourage them to report any abuse to the police. In addition, abusive employers lose their right to any replacement workers if their current ones resign from their jobs as a result of such abuse.

Margarette Yeboah, from Hammani, for example, thought it was their Christian duty to protect their workers from what they regarded as overly harsh working conditions:

If you take a worker, for instance, to your house and treat him or her badly ... not because you are poor, you have enough money, and yet you ask your employee to eat '*gari*'<sup>1</sup> after scrubbing and doing every type of work in the house while you and your family eat well. If we get to know that the first, second and third day, its only '*gari*' you have been feeding the domestic worker, then we would have to come in immediately. If the employer invites me to discuss the issue and complains to me that she has a problem with the worker, then I go and we sit down, we pray and invite the worker to join us. The two of them will explain their side of the story. I can't blame the employer. I advise the workers to be patient and respectful. 'You don't have to complain when the employer scolds or corrects you because, if she should sack you, you have to go back to where you came from and there are no jobs back there'.

Brokers also take pre-emptive steps to prevent disputes from arising in the first instance by telephoning and visiting their clients regularly to receive feedback on their employees.

Alex blacklists employers who mistreat workers that he has placed:

Some of them don't treat the girls well at all; the latter work non-stop and do not even get time to eat. The employers load them with work from morning till evening with no time for rest; this kind of treatment is normally from the wives of these people. Some of these expatriates don't even give their helps food to eat. At times they work and finish late, around 9 pm, and they then have to go out to look for food to buy. How can they find food vendors in residential areas

like Labone, Airport or Dzorwulu? So they starve. If you treat these girls like this and they report to me, I will find a new place for them to work when they leave, however I will not find replacements for them for the employers.

Informal brokers also sometimes protect statutory rights such as maximum working hours and days off from work. These rights are usually captured in written contracts signed by both the employer and the worker in the case of formal recruiters but verbally negotiated by informal recruiters within a loose trust-based environment. An administrative assistant from Jamesson Recruitment Agency explains this:

They (workers) should get a day off a week. That is compulsory. Let's say, if it is a Sunday, she should be off. If she is willing to work, fine, but most at times we insist that she should be given one day off per week. And then for the working day, it shouldn't exceed 12 hours per day.

### **Facilitating the long-term plans of the domestic worker**

Informal employment brokers also negotiate conditions that allow for the realisation of the long-term aspirations of domestic workers. For those who aspire to improve their educational levels or acquire some skills training, some brokers – particularly Types 3 and 4 – mediate working relations between employers and workers to obtain some flexibility that enables workers to earn a wage while pursuing their education. Alex sets it out quite clearly:

Yes, some of them come to look for work with the intention of going back to school. In this case, when the time approaches, I talk to her [domestic worker] madam and explain everything to her. I also tell the madam that, by the time she leaves, I will get someone to replace her. This is a genuine reason; if later on you come back during the vacation I can still help you to get a job. I know a girl like that in Kumasi who is in school,; she called to tell me she will be coming during the vacation to work, and she usually comes every vacation for about two to three months. So by the time she comes this weekend I will make sure I get her a job, she is a very good girl.

Others, such as Alex, may help domestic workers to move up the career ladder through switching jobs.

Most of the girls learn how to prepare Indian or Lebanese dishes now and, as such, when they lose their jobs, I am able to find a new job for them with other residents or companies. They are able to earn high wages because they now know how to prepare Indian and Lebanese dishes which they learnt from previous employers. For instance, some start as cleaners or home helps and are able to learn how to cook. Within two or more years they leave to move to other places; some will actually tell you that they want to work for two years or that number of years. After two years, when they have learnt other things, I recommend them to other places – like in the Indian companies – as cooks and they get higher wages

Furthermore, some recruitment agencies try to put 'good' girls in homes where they are likely to gain assistance in pursuing their careers. The Leroy Agency, for example, placed Delight – who was identified as a 'lovely hardworking Ewe girl' – in the home of a former First Lady of Ghana. The Leroy Agency monitored the domestic worker and advised her on how she could make use of the opportunities being given her to get into the formal sector, where working conditions and wages are better. As Leroy noted:

As a former First Lady, the state pays for her domestic staff and all these things. This would have been a very good break for the girl (Delight) as, with this, she would get all the benefits of workers in the formal sector, such as social security and all the rest.

Over time, the domestic worker may reach a level of competence and confidence where she does not need the broker to negotiate on her behalf. As the Managing Director of Leroy Business Solutions (a Type 2 agent) says of one of her ex-client workers:

She has junior high school qualifications. But she's very enlightened, extremely enlightened and she told me clear-cut 'Madam, I am not interested in any salary under 500Ghs (£98.04)'. And you know that she's got what it takes to do the job. She's got good references. She's got what it takes to do the job. In fact some of the staff call the shots. So they've gotten to know how to go about things. Those who are very comfortable and know what they are doing, they call the shots.

The above discussion thus highlights the multiple and often contradictory roles played by the different categories of brokers, who facilitate both the migration and the placement of migrants into domestic work in Accra. This shows that brokers are an important element in the strategies of female migrants who move to Accra to work in domestic positions. It also indicates a complex plethora of social relations between recruitment agents, domestic workers and their employers, which often have mixed outcomes, sometimes working to entrench the *status quo* and sometimes providing opportunities for domestic workers.

### **Conclusions and policy implications**

This research on the role of brokers in the labour market for migrants seeking domestic work shows the diversity of agencies and individuals involved in terms of their legal status, modes of operation and client base. While formal and fully registered agencies operate by the book and assess workers mainly on criteria such as qualifications and experience, informal agencies and individuals provide diverse services to migrant domestic workers, far beyond a simple transactional service; this can involve help with settling in urban areas, acting as a guarantor, mediating disputes, negotiating better wages and working conditions, counselling the workers on the wise use of earnings and assistance with becoming an urbanite. All these functions contribute to fulfilling the long-term goals of personal development for migrants. However, at the same time, they are an integral part of the system that keeps women and girls from poor rural backgrounds in rural areas in a subordinate position, working in conditions that are far from ideal.

The discussion indicates that brokers play important multiple and often contradictory roles

in the migration industry in Ghana. Although there are clear cases of exploitation, especially with child domestic workers, we also find several areas in which brokers work in the interests of migrants, thereby increasing the latter's bargaining power, enhancing the realisation of their self-development and allowing them to exercise agency in highly unequal power relations with employers, among others. Therefore uncritically labelling recruitment agencies and brokers purely as agents of exploitation, and migrant domestic workers as victims without any agency, does not reflect the entire situation. As observed by Castle and Diarra (2003), and Whitehead and Hashim (2005), a simplistic categorisation of all brokers as traffickers, especially within the West African context, is problematic.

Our research reinforces the view that simple analyses and the demonisation of brokers in domestic work are not a sound basis for formulating policies that would help to minimise the exploitation faced by domestic workers. Given the lack of opportunities for gainful employment faced by women and girls in mainly rural societies in Ghana and the lack of freedom to choose their own destiny, migration for domestic work can represent an important avenue for earning and change. Brokers are an important element in migrants' strategies to exercise agency, which they would probably otherwise struggle with, given the highly unequal power relationships they face at home and also at destination with employers.

As state institutions set up to regulate labour recruitment in Ghana are generally unable to perform their functions effectively nor to offer much protection to domestic workers for a variety of reasons, as our findings show (Awumbila *et al.* 2016) and without the self-organisation of domestic workers, some have argued that employment agencies and brokers are simply institutionalising the informality of domestic work in Ghana (Tsikata 2011). However, our findings also indicate that, in the last few years, some progress has been made towards unionising domestic workers. This includes the formation of the Union of Informal Workers Association (UNIWA) in 2006, facilitated by the TUC, and the Domestic Services Workers Union (DSWU) formed in 2011 but registered in 2014. ILO convention 189 is also in the process of being ratified by Ghana. As efforts to regulate the domestic-work sector and as the agencies and brokers facilitating recruitment into the sector intensify, it is important that the differences highlighted by this study are recognised.

It is appropriate to end with a statement from Lina (a domestic worker), who describes how working as a domestic worker has changed her life and how people treat her.

Yes, my life has improved a lot because, when I was a student, I could not work. Moreover, now I help my parents. I send money to my parents. My personal life has changed. For example, if I go to my home town, people will be surprised to see me. This is not how I was at first so, if I go, they will show some respect to me.

Lina says that she feels that she commands more respect now because she is a migrant in the city. The role of brokers in helping migrants to occupy a different social and economic space must therefore be recognised.

## Note

1. A cheap meal made of cassava.

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## About the Migrating out of Poverty Research Programme Consortium

**Migrating out of Poverty** is a research programme consortium (RPC) funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). It focuses on the relationship between migration and poverty – especially migration within countries and regions - and is located in five regions across Asia and Africa. The main goal of **Migrating out of Poverty** is to provide robust evidence on the drivers and impacts of migration in order to contribute to improving policies affecting the lives and well-being of impoverished migrants, their communities and countries, through a programme of innovative research, capacity building and policy engagement. The RPC will also conduct analysis in order to understand the migration policy process in developing regions and will supplement the world-renowned migration databases at the University of Sussex with data on internal migration.

The **Migrating out of Poverty** consortium is coordinated by the University of Sussex, and led by CEO Professor L. Alan Winters with Dr Priya Deshingkar as the Research Director. Core partners are: the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU) in Bangladesh; the Centre for Migration Studies (CMS) at the University of Ghana; the Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore; the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS) at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa; and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya.

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