

10-25-2018

## Urban Migrants and Their Links With Home: A Case Study From Dagupan City

Lillian Trager

Follow this and additional works at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies>

---

### Recommended Citation

Trager, Lillian (2018) "Urban Migrants and Their Links With Home: A Case Study From Dagupan City," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*: Vol. 29: No. 2, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.13185/2244-1638.4329>

Available at: <https://archium.ateneo.edu/phstudies/vol29/iss2/6>

This Commentary is brought to you for free and open access by the Ateneo Journals at Archium Ateneo. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* by an authorized editor of Archium Ateneo.

# philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

---

## **Urban Migrands and Their Links With Home: A Case Study From Dagupan City**

Lillian Trager

*Philippine Studies* vol. 29, no. 2 (1981) 217–229

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

---

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at [philstudies@admu.edu.ph](mailto:philstudies@admu.edu.ph).

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>  
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

## Notes and Comments

### Urban Migrants and their Links with Home: A Case Study from Dagupan City

LILLIAN TRAGER

In the Philippines today, large numbers of people are moving from one place to another, and particularly from rural to urban areas. The statistical dimensions of this process have been well documented.<sup>1</sup> The statistical studies provide a broad picture of migratory streams and of migration differentials, as well as of the relationship between migration and economic development.<sup>2</sup> Still other research has considered more qualitative aspects of the migration process, focusing on issues such as migration to slum and squatter communities and the adaptation of migrants to the urban environment.<sup>3</sup>

One of the issues occasionally raised, but rarely examined in any detail in migration studies, is the types of ties – if any – that

This research was carried out from August 1978 to May 1979 under a National Institute of Mental Health Grant, a postdoctoral research grant under the supervision of Dr. T.G. McGee. During the research period, the writer was a Visiting Research Associate at the Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University. Research assistance was provided by Josie Gonzalez of Dagupan City.

1. See Ernesto del Mar Pernia, *Urbanization, Population Growth, and Economic Development in the Philippines* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977); UNFPA-NCSO Population Research Project, *Geographical Patterns of Internal Migration in the Philippines 1960-1970* (Manila: National Census and Statistics Office, National Economic and Development Authority, 1976); and UNFPA-NCSO Population Research Project, *Social, Economic and Demographic Factors Relating to Interregional Migration Streams in the Philippines 1960-1970* (Manila: National Census and Statistics Office, National Economic and Development Authority, 1977).

2. See Pernia, *Urbanization, Population Growth, and Economic Development*.

3. For example, Richard Ulack, "Migration to the Slum and Squatter Communities of Cagayan de Oro City, The Philippines," *International Migration Review* 10 (1976): 355-76; Mary R. Hollsteiner, "Metamorphosis: From Tondo Squatter to Tondo Settler," *NEDA Journal of Development* 1-2 (1974-75): 249-60.

urban migrants maintain with family and community in the rural area. Two village-based studies provide some indication of such ties. Hart's study of a Visayan village shows that a number of migrants from the village contributed money to their families at home. In many cases, migrants go to work outside the village "to make barrio life securer, if not more comfortable, not only for themselves but also for their parents and younger siblings."<sup>4</sup> Anderson's study of a Pangasinan village likewise indicates that migrants help to support family members at home; often, only the household head migrates, leaving the rest of the family in the barrio.<sup>5</sup>

Other studies also provide some evidence of rural-urban links between migrants and those at home. For example, Castillo considers data on mutual assistance which shows that a large proportion of people throughout the country have either given or received some sort of help from others; presumably, some of this aid consists of remittances from urban-based individuals to people in the rural areas.<sup>6</sup> More direct evidence comes from studies of barrio youth, which show that children who work away from home send cash contributions to families in the barrio.<sup>7</sup>

There are a number of limitations in these bits of evidence. In Castillo's study, for example, there is no indication of the amount of remittances, of their frequency, or of their importance to the rural family. Nor is there any information on flow in the other direction: does the rural family provide the urban migrant with food, for example? Further, all of these studies place emphasis on material ties; while cash remittances are no doubt important, the social aspects of rural-urban links also need to be investigated.

What is needed is examination of migration and of the activities of migrants from both ends of the process — that is, consideration of both the rural and urban settings, and of the interaction between those living in one place with those in the other.<sup>8</sup> This has

4. D.V. Hart, "Philippine Rural-Urban Migration: A View from Caticugan, a Bisayan Village," *Behaviour Science Notes* 6 (1971): 116.

5. James N. Anderson, "Social Strategies in Population Change: Village Data from Central Luzon," *SEADAG Papers on Problems of Development in Southeast Asia*, 1972.

6. Gelia T. Castillo, *Beyond Manila: Philippine Rural Problems in Perspective* (College, Laguna: University of the Philippines in Los Baños, 1977), pp. 46-47.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 606.

8. Several studies in East Africa have examined these issues; see: Thomas S. Weiner, "One Family, Two Households: Rural-Urban Kin Networks in Nairobi," Paper presented at meeting of the American Anthropological Association, 1970; and G.E. John-

been the focus of my recent research in Dagupan City, Philippines. Rather than studying the individual migrant in the urban environment, the migrant was considered in the context of his or her social networks, both in the city and in the rural areas. This approach enabled examination of the context in which migration takes place and of the ties that continue to link and influence migrant activities after the move to the urban area. The results of the research strongly indicate that migrants are involved in complex networks of interpersonal relations which considerably affect where they are living, the activities they engage in, and the nature of economic interdependence between them and family members at home.

The research combined a case study approach of individual migrants and their families with collection of survey and macro-level data. This essay will discuss a single case, that of one extended family with members living in their hometown, in Dagupan, and in Manila. The relationships, interactions, and mutual support among them will be described, with particular focus on the home ties of those family members who are working at full-time jobs outside the hometown. Some general conclusions will then be drawn, based on this case as well as on others studied.

### THE SETTING

Dagupan City is a regional urban center in the northern part of the Central Luzon plain. While not the provincial capital, it is the largest city (population 90,000 in 1975) and the commercial and educational center of Pangasinan Province. As a province, Pangasinan is an area of net out-migration, as shown through studies of intercensal migration rates.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, there is considerable in-migration to Pangasinan from other provinces, including a signifi-

son and W.E. Whitelaw, "Urban-Rural Income Transfers in Kenya: An Estimated-Remittances Function," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 22 (1973/74):473-79. For a discussion of urban-rural ties in East Africa, see Josef Gugler, "Urban-Rural Ties in West Africa: Extent, Interpretation, Variations, and Implications," Paper presented at the conference *Migration and Rural Development: International Seminar on Migration in Tropical Africa*, 1977. For reviews of the literature on urban-rural remittances, see Henry Rempel and Richard A. Lobdell, "The Role of Urban-to-Rural Remittance in Rural Development," *The Journal of Development Studies* 14 (1978):324-41.

9. UNFPA-NCSO Population Research Project, *Geographical Patterns of Internal Migration*, p. 31.

cant number from the city of Manila, almost equalling the number who migrated from the province to Manila.<sup>10</sup>

From the statistical sources, it is impossible to gauge the status of Dagupan City as a migration center for either intra-provincial or inter-provincial migration. Nevertheless, my own data indicate that the city attracts migrants from both within the province and from a large number of other provinces. A survey of 176 migrants showed that 51.7 percent came from other towns in Pangasinan, and the rest from other parts of the country, including relatively nearby provinces such as Nueva Ecija, Benguet, and Abra, as well as more distant provinces such as Davao.<sup>11</sup>

The three large colleges located in Dagupan provide a major attraction for residents of the province, as well as for some from neighboring provinces such as La Union. Many young people who initially came there to study stay on after graduation, obtaining jobs in the various commercial establishments in the city as sales-girls, clerks, and so on. Others come to Dagupan to look for work, which they find as employes for small shops in and outside of the market or as vendors selling on their own.<sup>12</sup> Dagupan is also a center for a variety of government offices; a proportion of migrants, therefore, consists of civil servants. In addition, Manila companies tend to base sales agents and commercial branches for Northern Luzon in Dagupan.

With a good road network leading to surrounding towns as well as out of the province, and with extensive bus and jeepney services, there is easy access between Dagupan and other places. Migrants travel home on weekends and for special occasions. Some employes, in fact, live at home in nearby municipalities and commute daily into the city.

As a result, the move into the city, especially for those from within the province, does not mean a sharp break from family and friends at home. The migrants form new networks in the city, through school and work activities, but there is no need to cut off

10. *Ibid.*, p. 50; tables 29-17 and 30-17.

11. The survey was taken in April 1979. Other data, such as birth and marriage records, will eventually aid in estimations of the number of migrants now living in Dagupan; these have not yet been analyzed.

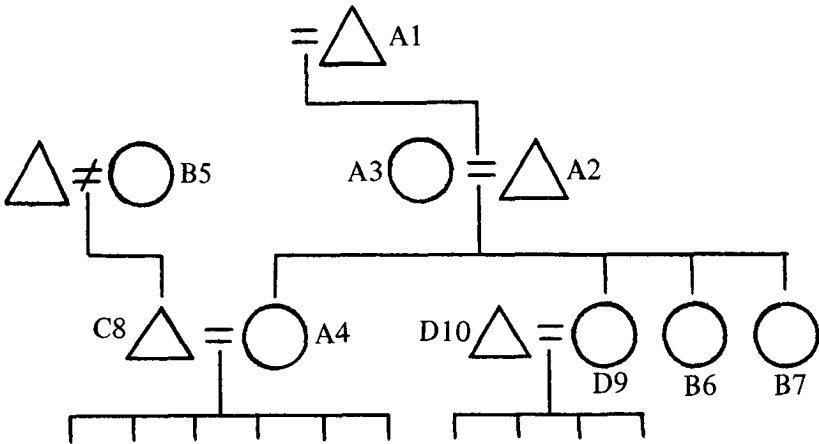
12. For a description of the nature of commercial activity in Dagupan, see Norbert Dannhaeuser, "Distribution and the Structure of Retail Trade in a Philippine Commercial Town Setting," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 25 (1977):471-503.

ties with those in the rural areas. A complex network of interaction results, with movement back and forth not only of the migrant but also of his friends and relatives. The following case provides an example of that interaction.

A CASE STUDY OF MIGRATION

The figure shows the extended family network to be discussed. The home place of most of the family members is a small barrio on Anda, an island just off the coast on the northwest side of

Adult Members of an Extended Family Network



Household	Family Member	Birthplace	Residence	Other places lived	Occupation	Age
A	1	Anda	Anda	---	---	90
	2	Anda	Anda	Zambales	farmer	50+
	3	Anda	Anda	---	buys/sells	50+
	4	Anda	Anda	Dagupan	teacher	30+
B	5	Dagupan	Dagupan	---	landlady	50+
	6	Anda	Dagupan	Manila	salesgirl	25
	7	Anda	Dagupan	---	student	19
C	8	Dagupan	Manila	Anda	factory worker	30+
D	9	Anda	Binmaley	Dagupan	housewife	30+
	10	Binmaley	Binmaley	---	fisherman	30+

Pangasinan Province. It is a farming and fishing barrio, linked to the *poblacion* by dirt roads and *calesas*, and linked to the mainland by motor *bancas* and a landing barge operated by the Philippine Navy.

Of the ten adult members of the extended family network, four are currently living away from their birthplace. Of these four, family member D9 could be considered a migrant because of marriage; after attending college in Dagupan she married a fisherman from Binmaley and settled in his barrio. Family member B7, the youngest daughter in the Anda-based family, is currently attending college in Dagupan; she could be classified as a "student migrant." The remaining two — number C8 and number B6 — are working at permanent jobs in their places of residence. However, both might well claim Anda as their "real" residence: number C8 because his wife and six children live there, although he visits only once or twice a month, and number B6 because her parents are there; she returns there as frequently as possible, and retains important economic links with the household members there.

What can we learn about migration by discussing one extended family like this? How do their activities help us to understand some of the patterns of mobility that can be found in the Philippines today? I will suggest that an understanding of the moves and activities of one such family helps to clarify the context in which migration takes place — the interpersonal nexus which affects the decisions and activities of individual migrants.

#### FAMILY MEMBERS AT HOME

The adult members of the family living in the hometown of Anda include the ninety-year-old grandfather, who was born in Anda and who has never lived elsewhere; the parents, both born in Anda, and one daughter, a school teacher in a local elementary school. All are currently living in the same household, together with the daughter's six young children.

The father (A2) is a farmer, growing one rice crop and vegetables on the one hectare of land which he owns. The rice is sufficient to feed the family for eight or nine months; after it is consumed, they buy rice until the next harvest. Until about ten years ago, the father was also a fisherman, fishing at night and farming during the day. He was able to earn enough to send his three

oldest daughters to college at the University of Pangasinan in Dagupan. He stopped fishing when his eyesight failed and the fish became scarce.

His wife (A3) buys and sells *huri* leaves, used in making mats. She also sells some of the vegetables which they grow. The grandfather, likewise, contributes to the household income in his own way — by weaving baskets, which are sold. The daughter in Anda, an elementary school teacher, has take-home pay of about ₱300 a month; her salary is used to buy food and to pay school fees.

Although these are the only members of the family actually living in Anda, some of those living elsewhere are in some senses still a part of the Anda household.

#### FAMILY MEMBERS AS MIGRANTS

Four members of the extended family can be classified as migrants — three daughters and the husband of the fourth daughter. Here, I will focus on the two who are working elsewhere, to consider the reasons for their present activities, and the ways in which they continue to be part of the Anda household.

The daughter working in Dagupan (B6) has lived away from home for nearly ten years. After graduating from high school, she went to Manila to stay with her mother's cousin. She wanted to work there, but her relative did not want her working for someone else, so paid her a small salary to do housework. After about seven months, she "felt bored" and returned to Anda. At the beginning of the next semester, she enrolled at the University of Pangasinan and moved to Dagupan. Following graduation in 1975, she again returned to Anda, to look for a job. After six months, she was hired to work in the census, but at about the same time, had learned of, and applied for, a job at a store in Dagupan. When she got the job, she moved back to Dagupan, into the same boarding house where she had lived as a student, which is owned by her older sister's mother-in-law. She continues to work as a salesgirl in that store, a variety store located on the main street of the city.

On the surface, her ties with home may not seem very strong. She goes home at most once a month, usually less frequently, i.e., for special occasions — Christmas, the barrio fiesta, in other words, occasions on which many Filipinos try to return to their home

towns. Yet, her visits home do not tell the full story of her ties there. First of all, she also receives visits from family members living in Anda. Her older sister attends classes in the provincial capital of Lingayen on Saturdays and comes to Dagupan afterwards before returning to Anda. Likewise, her mother sometimes sells her buri leaves in the market in Lingayen, and she, too, visits in Dagupan before going home. Secondly, there is economic interdependence between the daughter and family members in Anda. She receives rice from home on a regular basis; if no one is visiting, it is sent on the bus. When someone does visit, they not only bring rice but also whatever vegetables or native cakes may be available. In return, when she visits home she brings groceries from Dagupan — goods such as canned goods which are either unavailable or very expensive in Anda. At Christmas, when she received a bonus from her employers, she spent most of it on gifts for family members in Anda, including ₱100 to buy piglets for her mother. Perhaps her most important contribution is that she regularly pays the college fees of her younger sister, who is also living in Dagupan, in the same boarding house.

Thirdly, there is a sense in which the extended family network extends to include the boarding house in which the daughters stay in Dagupan. The house is owned by the mother-in-law of the oldest sister. The other boarders — all except one are students at the University of Pangasinan — are almost all cousins and friends from Anda. Whenever anyone goes home for a visit, they carry messages back and forth between family members. In other words, there is a regular flow of information and goods, even when the immediate family members may not see each other.

Now in her mid-twenties, the daughter continues to be an important member of the family based in Anda. Still viewing Anda as “home,” she hopes to contribute to the rebuilding of her parents’ house there. She is also considering returning there to live; when she attended a barrio fiesta she took the opportunity to discuss the possibility of a teaching job with a local school principal. After ten years away, she feels ready to return there, and, she adds, her mother would also like her to return.

In contrast, her brother-in-law (C8), a native of Dagupan, has tried living and working in Anda and has decided that he cannot earn a successful living there. When his wife finished college in Dagupan, she got a teaching job in Anda and they both moved

there. He tried farming with her father, but had never farmed before and found the work difficult. He found that he could only raise enough food for about six months of their family's needs. Finally, relatives in Manila helped him to get a factory job there, which enables him to make enough money to buy all of the clothing for the children and to send cash home as well. He stays with his relatives and comes to Anda about once a month; his wife occasionally visits him in Manila.

Before he moved to Manila, he and his wife and their children were living apart from her parents, although he worked with her father on the farm. Now, they are all sharing one house and share their incomes and expenses as well. This is probably not a permanent arrangement, as the parents hope to rebuild their old house, which is presently in a state of disrepair.

#### DISCUSSION

This case exemplifies a number of patterns which are found in other cases, as well as in the survey data collected. The following observations can be made.

1) Decisions about migration are made not by individual migrants acting alone, but by individuals in the context of their family and personal networks. In the moves described – the daughter to Manila and later to Dagupan, and the son-in-law to Manila – family members helped to determine the actions taken by the migrants. When the daughter first went to Manila, she stayed with a relative and was not allowed to work outside the relative's house. In going to school in Dagupan, she not only followed in the path of her older sisters, but also stayed (and continues to stay) in the house of her sister's mother-in-law. In the case of the sister's husband, the personal context and constraints are even more obvious – the failure to provide for his family by living in Anda led to a decision to seek work in Manila.

2) Ties between migrants and other family members continue to be strong and to have considerable content. They are not simply the emotional ties that an individual has with home and family. Rather, through regular visiting and the sending of food and material items *in both directions*, social and economic links are continually renewed. Those migrants who are not working, for example the married daughter and the college student, visit home

frequently, and receive visitors from home. The two who are working send monetary remittances and purchase goods which can be used at home. But the flow is not all one-way; they also receive goods (rice, vegetables) from the family home.

3) In many respects, then, those who are identified as "migrants" continue to be part of the same social and economic unit as those who are at home. This is particularly true for the unmarried daughters and for the son-in-law. (The married daughter living in Binmaley is linked into another personal network there.) The daughter who is working in Dagupan not only sends money and goods home; she also pays the school fees and rent of her sister who is still in college. The fact that she is actually residing in another place is not terribly important, either in her own mind or in the view of her parents. Until she marries, her closest ties are with the members of her own natal family.

This is not to say that she has no personal network outside the family. Such a conclusion would be unwarranted. In Dagupan, she is involved in a network that includes her co-workers, the others in her boarding house, and others from her home-town. But her strongest ties are with the family in Anda.

The son-in-law, likewise, has his own personal network, including relatives in Dagupan and in Manila, co-workers, and so on. But his wife and children reside in Anda, and in many respects, that is his residence as well, even though he is there only a few days each month. Outside of his personal expenses in Manila, all of the money that he earns goes to that household, either as cash or in the form of goods which he buys.

What we find, then, is a social and economic network which is spread out over three locales: Anda, Dagupan, and Manila. While not a household in a residential sense, it is a coherent unit, i.e., a specific set of people who contribute to a common fund and who maintain much of the social interaction that might be found in a household unit. Remittances are important; for example, family members themselves point out the necessity for the husband to work in Manila for the survival and well-being of the family. But remittances and economic aspects should not be overemphasized. The unit is more than an economic one; a variety of interpersonal relationships and constraints are operating, affecting the activities of members of the unit, including the sending of remittances.

4) There is flexibility in the types of activities undertaken by family members, especially when these are viewed over time. The son-in-law tried his hand at farming; when that proved unsuccessful, he found a job in Manila. The daughter now working in Dagupan first tried to find a job in Anda after graduating from college. Such flexibility characterizes family members remaining in Anda as well: when the son-in-law went to Manila, the parents moved into their daughter's house and formed a single income and expense-sharing unit. The present set-up should not be viewed as permanent, either. There will probably be changes in the future as the situation changes. For example, when the daughter still in college finishes studying, her sister will not need to support her anymore. The parents would like to rebuild their old house, which would have the effect of splitting the unit into two separate households again. If the daughter now working in Dagupan returns to Anda to work as a school teacher, she will presumably become a part of her parents' residential unit again.

5) This study started out by discussing the links between urban migrants and family members at home in rural areas. In a sense, the rural/urban contrast is an artificial construct: the individuals involved are not really thinking in terms of the contrasts between "rural" places and "urban" places. Rather, they are operating in a context of a variety of personal and economic constraints, and are responding to particular opportunities and situations. For some, this means a move to an urban place such as Manila or Dagupan. At another time, it may mean a move back to Anda.

6) Finally, individual preferences can play a part in the moves people make. The daughter now working in Dagupan says that she would prefer to live in Anda. It is cooler there, she says, there is more land and open space. If she moves back there, then, that may be determined not only by the fact that she believes she can save more money, or by the fact that her mother wants her to return, but also because she herself would now prefer to live there.

## CONCLUSION

Consideration of both ends of the migration process causes a shift in focus from the individual migrant to the social network of which he is a part. That network encompasses individuals physical-

ly resident in a number of different places. In the case considered here, it includes people in the hometown, in Dagupan, and in Manila. In other cases, it may include people working in other rural areas, and it may even include people working in other countries. In the Philippines, as in other Asian countries such as Pakistan, overseas migration on contract work is an increasingly important means of improving one's economic position.

Migration can be viewed as part of a family or household strategy. In some cases, it may be a strategy for survival, for maintaining the family at a bare subsistence level through the remittances of one or two family members working elsewhere. In other cases, it may be part of a strategy for some degree of upward mobility; by providing for her sister's education, the daughter in the family described above is helping an overall family goal which has already enabled one daughter to become a school teacher.

Remittances from the migrant to family members at home may seem to be the most important evidence of such strategies. For one thing, remittances can be calculated; one can compare their value with the total family income. Family members themselves may stress the importance of remittances; one mother described how she hopes her daughter will not get married for awhile, as the family needs her contribution from her job in Dagupan, which constitutes about one-third to one-half of total family income.

However, remittances must be seen as part of a wider pattern of interaction among those in a rural-urban network. Those in the urban setting also receive things — mainly food — from home. More than that, though, these exchanges of goods and money take place in a context of strong interpersonal ties. A daughter or a husband does not send money home just because the family has sent him or her out to the city to earn money for them, but because that is part of a system of exchanges and obligations that develop in the context of a family and household. As one migrant expressed it, "If your parents have helped you, then you have an obligation to help others in the family, especially if you do not have a family of your own yet." But it should be stressed that such a feeling of obligation applies regardless of where the individual is living, whether in the city as a migrant, or back in the hometown, or elsewhere.

Thus the interpersonal context of migration, the personal networks which influence and determine migrant activities, must be stressed. It is also important to move beyond the personal context, to consider the broader structural context in which migrants and their families are operating. What are the social, economic, political constraints which affect them? What opportunities exist – or do not exist – in the urban areas and the rural areas? In other words, ultimately, we must place the micro-world of individuals and families into its macro-structural context, and examine those situations and conditions which affect the adoption of particular strategies, one of which is migration.