

THE RELATIONAL ETHICS OF CULTURAL SAFETY, RIGHTS, AND DESIRE: REFLECTIONS ON DOING COMMUNITY-ENGAGED RESEARCH WITH MIGRANT FAMILIES IN INDONESIA

LA ÉTICA RELACIONAL DE SEGURIDAD CULTURAL, DERECHOS Y DESEO: REFLEXIONES ACERCA DE LA REALIZACIÓN DE INVESTIGACIÓN CON LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE LA COMUNIDAD EN EL CASO DE FAMILIAS MIGRANTES EN INDONESIA

JESSICA BALL AND HARRIOT BEAZLEY

Abstract: *A study of birth registration decision making by Indonesian parents involved in transnational migration is discussed with reference to the authors' long-standing use of an approach centred on the relational ethics of cultural safety, rights, and desire in community-engaged research. Ethical dilemmas encountered in obtaining informed consent and conducting the research, resulting from social hierarchies, social protocols, and socio-emotional considerations, illustrated limited, often mismatched perspectives on consent, privacy, and protection on the parts of research gatekeepers in minority and majority contexts. The article discusses "in-the-moment" adaptations to planned data collection procedures. These adaptations were guided by relational ethics aimed at ensuring, not only meaningful data, but consent, authenticity, socio-emotional and cultural safety, a legacy of good relations with village leaders, and beneficial outcomes for community members.*

* Full Professor, University of Victoria, School of Child and Youth Care.

** Senior Lecturer, Human Geography, University of the Sunshine Coast.

Keywords: *community engagement; cultural safety; relational ethics; rights-based research; transnational migrants.*

Resumen: *Este artículo trata de un estudio exploratorio sobre el proceso decisorio, a la hora de registrar el nacimiento de hijos, de padres y madres indonesios involucrados en migración transnacional. La discusión se realiza en referencia al esfuerzo continuado de las autoras para aplicar una aproximación centrada en la ética relacional de seguridad cultural, derechos y deseo en investigaciones con participación de la comunidad. Los dilemas éticos hallados durante la investigación para la obtención del consentimiento informado y la realización de la investigación – debidos a jerarquías y protocolos sociales y las consideraciones socio-emocionales presentes en el campo – expusieron perspectivas limitadas, a menudo incompatibles, sobre el consentimiento, la privacidad y la protección por parte de los gatekeepers ('guardianes'), entre investigaciones realizadas en contextos minoritarios y mayoritarios. El artículo considera las adaptaciones "en el momento" de los procedimientos planeados para la colección de datos. Estas adaptaciones se guiaron por la ética relacional con la intención de asegurar no solamente la colección de datos significativos, sino también consentimiento, autenticidad, seguridad socio-emocional y cultural, un legado de buenas relaciones con los líderes de las aldeas y resultados beneficiosos para los miembros de la comunidad.*

Palabras clave: *participación comunitaria; seguridad cultural; ética relacional; investigación basada en derechos; migrantes transnacionales.*

In the minority world (a.k.a. Global North), ethical praxis in social research has been guided by a predominantly legal framework and Eurocentric assumptions about privacy and autonomy. In the majority world (a.k.a. Global South), precedents for formulating, applying, and enforcing ethics guidelines are not as widely available. There is a clear need to animate discussion of ethical research praxis and to provide examples of how ethical dilemmas can be addressed in research involving vulnerable populations, including migrant communities, in the majority world. Several disciplines address ethical praxis with vulnerable populations, including children, marginalized families, and statistically "invisible" populations (e.g., unregistered, undocumented, stateless). However, the experiences, aspirations, and decision making of transnational migrants and

their family members in the majority world are a relatively new focus of inquiry, making deliberations about ethical praxis timely.

In this article, we discuss our recently completed study of birth registration decision making by Indonesian migrant parents (Butt, Ball, and Beazley, 2015). Background to the research context is presented first, explaining the rationale for our study, and identifying ethical tensions that arose from the point of entry into the participating communities. Next, we elaborate three concepts that inform our community-engaged research—cultural safety, rights-based ethical praxis, and desire-centred rather than damage-centred research—and briefly discuss how they informed our relational ethics in this particular study. Relational ethics is a research approach which is informed by human rights. It requires an attitude of humility and respect, as well as responsiveness to local codes of conduct. Having brought these concepts to the fore, we provide a synopsis of the study, its participants, and its procedures, highlighting reciprocity and knowledge sharing. In the article's main section, we expand on the challenges we encountered and our on-the-ground responses. These included having to compromise the ethical principle of ensuring research participants' privacy and confidentiality given the impossibility of arranging private conversations within the adult male gatekeeping hierarchy, the open architecture of the local milieu, and the intrusively protective extended family support systems surrounding children who stay behind while parents migrate. Our concluding section reaffirms the value in community-engaged research of relational ethics intended to ensure, not only meaningful data, but also consent, authenticity, socio-emotional and cultural safety, and a legacy of both good relations with village leaders and beneficial outcomes for community members.

1. TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANT FAMILIES, CHILD STATELESSNESS AND BIRTH REGISTRATION

Indonesia is one of the highest labour-sending countries in the world with an estimated six million Indonesians (2.5 per cent of the population) migrating annually (Hugo, 2008). The International Labour Organization (2013) estimates that between 1.4 and 2.8

million Indonesians annually pursue undocumented migration. Migration is enabled by unlicensed brokers who routinely make illegal arrangements to facilitate migration through unofficial routes using fraudulent documentation (Lindquist, 2010; Lindquist, Xiang and Yeoh, 2012). The process of obtaining formal documentation to migrate overseas to work is expensive, lengthy, and overwhelmingly complicated, especially for people in rural and remote ethnic minority communities with low social capital and lack of proficiency in the language used in civil registry offices. And, while parents travel to and from Indonesia without official identity documents for themselves, they are also likely to put a low priority on obtaining official documentation for their children. Other scholars have found that the more often and longer that Indonesian parents are abroad during their children's births and early years, the less likely the children are to have their births registered and the more their rights are at risk (Hugo and Ukwatta, 2010; van Waas, 2007). People who lack legal proof of their identity that ties them to a nation-state may be seen as falling outside of any nation's obligation to provide protection, basic services, and rights (Ball, Butt, Beazley, and Fox, 2014; UNICEF, 2013; van Waas, 2007).

Our study sought to determine links among migrant parents' meaning making and actions regarding birth registration, the risk of *de facto* statelessness, and a legacy of undocumented, unsafe migration for their children. This was a pilot study in a current program of research intended to explain the uneven distribution of birth registration across the majority world, where rural, poor, and migrant families have lower rates of birth registration. A goal of our research program is to inform strategies by local and nongovernmental organizations such as migrant advocacy groups, international organizations such as UNICEF, and village and provincial governments to improve access to rights and reduce the risk of statelessness for children of economically motivated labour migrants globally.

In the current study, challenges to conducting research included the social politics surrounding recruitment; surveillance by various stakeholders over the informed consent process and interviews; the impossibility of ensuring privacy for interviewees from protective family members and curious neighbours; and the sensitivity of highlighting birth circumstances and registration in a context where many children's births do not follow the dominant cultural norm and

most parents do not subscribe to civil registration procedures. The research team recognized the immediate need to rethink research ethics protocols typically upheld as the gold standard by university-based research ethics boards in the minority world. In rethinking these protocols, we centre our approach on the relational ethics of cultural safety, rights, and desire. Before proceeding to the specifics of how our study transpired within gendered and hierarchical social, cultural, and religious contexts and interpersonal relationships, we elaborate on these three concepts, providing examples to demonstrate how they inform our approach to community-engaged research.

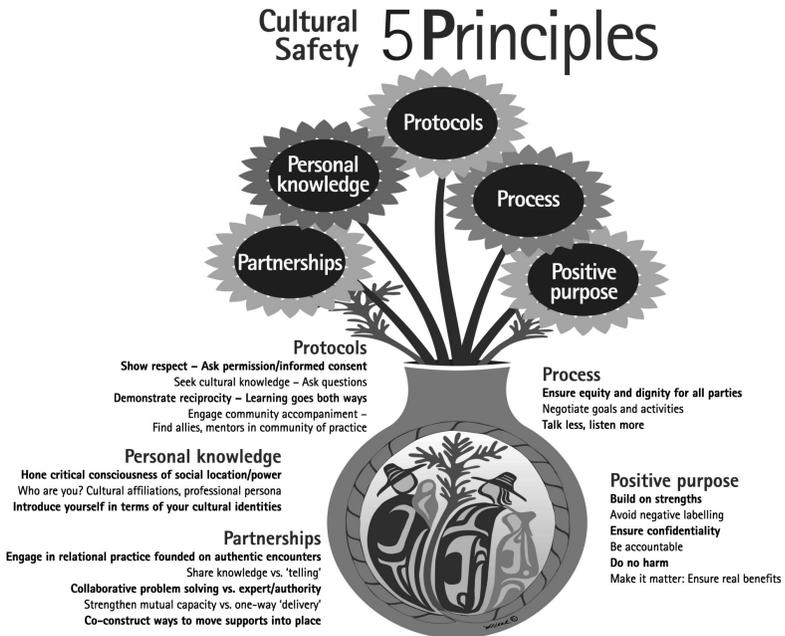
1.1. Cultural Safety

In the first authors' home country of Canada, the concept of cultural safety has been useful for researchers engaged with marginalized populations. In these contexts, participation in research carries risks of feeling denigrated or exposing phenomena that may be psychologically retraumatizing or that may be contrary to state or public strictures and that may be psychologically retraumatizing. Although this concept has been explored largely in the field of health care for Indigenous Peoples (e.g. Ball and Peltier, 2011; Papps and Ramsden, 1996; Smye and Browne, 2002), we argue that it could be useful in migration studies, especially in the majority world where endogenous requirements for ethical praxis are often not codified. The concept shifts our gaze away from *what researchers do* in the field to focus on *what participant's experience* in their encounters with researchers. The concept seeks to heighten awareness that community members may experience safety or lack of safety for themselves and/or their cultural group as a result of the behaviours of often more privileged cultural outsiders. As researchers, we bring our own culturally bound codes of conduct and forms of interaction into communities. We request that community members comply with conditions that we and our gatekeeping research ethics boards see as ethical as well as productive of meaningful data. Unless the community uses its power to insist on actions that are culturally safe—that is, they do not threaten or erode the cultural integrity or well-being of the community and/or the cultural identity or dignity of individuals—the community as whole and individual participants could be harmed during research.

We argue that principles of cultural safety, illustrated in Figure 1, could help researchers to: (1) anticipate potential ethical tensions in engagements with children and families involved in migration; (2) negotiate partnerships; (3) engage in culturally appropriate protocols upon entry into the field; and (4) discern and respond to cultural safety issues as they arise (Ball, 2014).

FIGURE 1

FIVE PRINCIPLES TO ENGENDER CULTURAL SAFETY IN RESEARCH. Source: Jessica Ball (2010)



Practicing these principles may increase the likelihood that research participants feel respected, included, and protected. Research involving migrant communities should have a positive purpose, with community members—ideally the participants themselves—vetting researchers' interpretations of data and plans to translate new knowledge into action, to ensure that the research

does not become, wittingly or unwittingly, yet another instrument for their oppression (Ball, 2005).

In our study, six months after our final visit to community for data gathering, we asked village leaders of participating communities if we could return to share our findings. We were welcomed to spend time informally visiting households in the villages. We were able to meet with many participants to ask about changes and continuities in their birth registration and migration experiences since our previous visit, and to ask whether our summary interpretations of findings captured their personal experiences or were overgeneralized in ways that seemed to exclude them. Describing our interpretations in terms of implications for government policies and civil registration practices, we gathered feedback to refine our proposals for reforms. We then met with civil registry officials, provincial government officers, and nongovernmental and international organizations involved with birth registration or with transnational migration. We presented recommendations for action that had been endorsed by as many of the research participants as we had been able to contact in the field. These measures were intended to ensure the cultural safety of the study participants and their communities.

1.2. Rights-based Research

Emerging out of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), and particularly Article 12, which enshrines children's right to have their views considered in matters affecting them, the concept of the right to be properly researched has been advanced by the second author, inspired by Ennew and her colleagues (Beazley, Bessell, Ennew and Waterson, 2011; Ennew et al., 2009). The concept is intended to promote responsive, mindful praxis that elides slavish adherence to prescriptive guidelines. A special issue of *Children's Geographies* (Beazley, Bessell, Ennew, and Waterson, 2009) explored applications of this concept to research in the majority world, including with children in families involved in labour migration. As contributors to the special issue (e.g. Abebe, 2009) vividly illustrate, even when processes for approval by university human research ethics boards have been followed, ethical dilemmas arise in the field, perhaps especially when the research encompasses children in the Global

South (Abebe and Bessell, 2014; Bessell, 2015). The special issue underscores the diversity and complexity of research contexts and the need for researchers to innovate and adapt methodologies and develop customized, flexible processes to ensure informed consent, social and emotional safety, and processes for self-expression that are meaningful to participants across varied social, cultural, economic, and political contexts. This rights perspective is extended in a special issue of *Early Education and Development* (Swadener and Polakow, 2011).

Our research emphasizes respect for children's autonomy in terms of giving or refusing consent and deciding where, when, and how they will participate. In the current study, children were invited to participate in the research, which included an exploration of their perceptions of transnational migration and its impacts on their lives.

1.3. Desire-centred Rather than Damage-centred Research

Studies of legislation, policies, and practices governing migration experiences and on the personal, family, and social repercussions of parent migration could generally be classified as damage-centred research. There is growing concern about children who stay behind when parents migrate (Graham et al., 2012; Hugo and Ukwatta, 2010), fractured families (Baldassar and Merla, 2013), and the "care drain" (Lutz and Palenga-Mollenbeck, 2012; Williams, 2010). Our research is, in part, underpinned by similar concerns. Research elucidating inequities and harms as a result of social, economic, political, or legal conditions often argues for reparations or resources for migrant communities. Yet, damage-centred research can simultaneously inscribe simplistic constructions of children and families involved in migration as exploited, depleted, damaged, or broken. These constructions can reify hegemonic power structures that manufacture and maintain the social exclusion and vulnerability of members of migrant communities. This dynamic has been particularly conspicuous in studies that construct young people who migrate internationally as trafficked children, reinforcing a widely accepted unidimensional notion of young migrants as victims (Beazley, 2015).

Our research approach has been inspired particularly by Indigenous scholars who have contributed to understanding the

ethics and impacts of damage-centred research, contrasting it to research that centres desire (Tuck and Fine, 2007). Tuck (2009) encourages researchers to frame ethical issues in research with oppressed peoples as questions of power and voice. Within this paradigm, we have found that motivations and outcomes of migration from Indonesia eschew simplistic binaries. Parents' decision making about whether and when to seek employment outside their country, and their reasoned plans for care and protection of children who stay behind are multidimensional (Butt et al., 2015). Our research challenges popular, homogenizing constructions of Indonesian households in the nexus of transnational migration as victims (e.g. of employment brokers and employers), criminals or "illegals" (e.g. particularly in reference to undocumented migration), or heroes (e.g. as the Indonesian government's media campaigns construct female transnational migrants as economic heroes of the nation).

We advocate a shift from damage-centred to desire-centred research in migration studies and uphold the importance of a rights-based approach that addresses children's right to have a role in making decisions about the conduct of research in which they are participants (Bessell et al., 2017). We argue for research practices with migrant communities that respect local cultures, provide psychosocial and cultural safety for participants, and do not disregard, disrupt, or erode connections among family and community members. Such approaches are likely to reduce risks to children, families, and communities and produce meaningful data.

2. THE STUDY

Our study occurred from 2013 to 2015 in four Sasak villages on the island of Lombok in Eastern Indonesia. Lombok is one of the poorest regions and one of the top three sources of transnational labour in Indonesia. Many villagers we talked to described subsisting on leaves from the forest and small rations of low-quality rice, either taken from share-cropped fields or provided by a government rice supplementation program for the impoverished. Most families struggle to sustain a sense of cohesion and emotional connection as adult family members circulate from home to work abroad. The impacts of parents' labour migration on children and families have

been overlooked in government calculations of the costs and benefits of transnational labour migration or efforts to improve conditions for migrants (Bhabha, 2011).

We were motivated to do the study because birth registration is widely seen as a first step toward securing services for children, yet nonregistration is a persistent pattern among rural, poor, and migrating families in Indonesia. With no research to date on parents' reasons for not registering their children's births, government, civil registry, and international child rights and humanitarian agencies have based interventions on the assumption that migrant parents are simply "undersocialized" to the significance and process of birth registration. We began our study with the assumption that parents and older children were likely aware of government campaigns to promote birth registration and would be able to articulate how their decision either to pursue or postpone birth registration figured into their parenting and migration projects and their understandings of the links between birth registration, citizenship, and *de facto* statelessness.

Arrangements for the study built on the second author's formal interinstitutional partnership between her university in Australia and a university in Lombok and her collaborative relationships with local scholars, village leaders, and members of several rural villages where overseas migration by parents and grandparents is almost universal. The second author is proficient in Indonesian and had prior research experience in the region, including studies of circulating children. She had conducted research in the participating villages a decade earlier that had left a legacy of good feelings and tangible benefits. Both authors were familiar with Indonesian social protocols. Prior knowledge of the local Sasak cultural context and preexisting relationships with some of the village leaders and families was essential to entering and remaining as welcomed guests in the villages and to making practical arrangements for data collection.

2.1. Participants

A requirement for inclusion in the study was being part of a family in which at least one parent had migrated overseas at least once in the past 10 years. Birth registration or other documentation was not a criterion for inclusion in the study.

We conducted interviews with 22 family groups mostly consisting of two adult caregivers and one child. All of the families had been involved in transnational labour migration for at least two generations. In most families, mothers and fathers had separately migrated for work, most often to Saudi Arabia or Malaysia, from one to seven periods of time. They were typically away for 18 to 24 months, although some families had not heard from a migrating parent for several years. Among the family groups, over half included a grandmother or aunt who had agreed to watch over one or more children of parents who were away. The children ranged from 7 to 15 years of age. Several older children informed us that they were preparing to migrate overseas in the very near future. None of the migrant family members or those anticipating migration were engaged in authorized (documented) migration or employment. Most were using brokers who made arrangements for their travel and employment for a fee.

We also conducted seven focus groups involving a total of 54 participants, including one group each with adolescent girls; a mix of adolescent girls and boys; a mix of men, women, and girls; teachers in a rural school; women; male village leaders; and a group of young fathers on a break from work overseas. All but two women in the groups had engaged in transnational migration, and all of the adolescents had at least one parent currently working out of the country.

2.2. Procedures

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in Indonesian by one of the authors, with the aid of a Sasak language translator as needed, translated into English, and transcribed. The audio-recorded interviews were one to two hours and focus groups were one hour. Notes were taken by the research team. Participants were asked about (1) perspectives on birth registration and awareness of government efforts to increase access to birth registration; (2) steps taken to secure birth registration for children; (3) impacts of having or not having birth registration in terms of children's access to health services, nutrition supplementation, education, protection, etc.; and (4) experiences of family life and care for children in the context of parents' and grandparents' migration, including strategies

for coping with the absence of migrant family members and benefits accruing to the family from migration.

The interviews allowed greater depth of discussion compared to the focus groups. Each adult interviewee was asked to show us their birth certificate if they had one (3 out of 22 adults showed their birth certificate) and to explain whether and how it mattered to them to have a birth certificate. Parents and grandparents were asked to explain their decisions and actions regarding their children's birth registration, care arrangements while they were working out of the country, and issues of sustenance, belonging, access to children's services, and hopes for their children's futures. Adult interviewees were also asked for demographic and income information, migration experiences and key events, strategies and documentation procedures and outcomes involving marriages, separations, divorces, births, and deaths, and family members' mobility, schooling, and health care.

2.3. Reciprocity and knowledge sharing

We assumed an ethical responsibility to pay community members fair wages for their time to consider, arrange to participate in, and engage in the study. We agreed to return at the end of the project to provide summaries of findings in forms that participating communities could use to advance their own goals for understanding and advocacy. The villagers and head men expressed keen interest in the research, and the knowledge mobilization component of the study may have been a strong motivator of their participation.

3. FINDINGS

Our findings support the hypothesis that the more often and longer parents are out of the country at the time of their child's birth and during their early years, the less likely the child is to have their birth registered, and the more vulnerable they are to having their rights denied and their opportunities to flourish seriously constrained (Butt et al., 2015). Linkages were found among lack of wage-earning opportunities in the home community, low-skill, high-risk and low-

pay transnational migration, and failure of recent government initiatives intended to make birth registration more readily accessible by multiplying civil registry offices and offering free registration during a child's first two months. Migrant parents who are away from the community typically for years at a time identified higher priorities for spending their time, money, and social capital during their brief visits home. As parents on the move, birth registration seems to them like a luxury ("nice but not now") that can be postponed until more basic needs are met, while statelessness seems an unwelcome but not unworkable alternative to registration. The slow and uneven pace of policy reforms and implementation of birth registration initiatives in a decentralized country contributes to a multigenerational legacy of statelessness, undocumented and unsafe migration, and exploitation of migrant workers by recruiters, employers, and sending and receiving countries. The findings reinforce calls by labour migration advocates and child advocates to provide protection and access to rights for children of migrants, including simplified and free birth registration close to home at any age and by proxy caregivers, as well as health care, education, and social inclusion (Australia Indonesia Partnership for Justice, 2014; Lubis, 2014).

Our findings are reported in greater detail elsewhere (Ball, Butt & Beazley, 2017; Butt et al., 2015). For the present purpose, we turn now to ethical tensions we encountered in our study that can be anticipated in other studies involving a statistically invisible, marginalized population within a closely knit, high-surveillance, patriarchal society in the majority world, where there are few precedents to guide ethical praxis that are culturally safe and community fitting.

4. ETHICAL DILEMMAS REGARDING INFORMED CONSENT, PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Decision making in research is determined, not only by investigators and members of the population of interest, but also by other stakeholders, including institution- and community-based research gatekeepers. These gatekeeping bodies often have positive intentions, for example, to protect investigators, participants, and/or community partners. However, university-based gatekeepers

(referred to below as ivory tower gatekeepers) usually have little basis for anticipating realities on the ground or insight into long-range research endeavors, which may including a goal to strengthen relationships with community members as a foundation for future research engagements. Community-based gatekeepers usually have little understanding of the requirements for sound data-gathering procedures. Yet gatekeepers often exert control over interactions surrounding recruitment, consent, data gathering, and dissemination that alter the timeline, cost, quality, and ultimate outcomes of the research. Multiple layers of gatekeeping affected the research process in our study. Below we discuss how ivory tower, local government, and village gatekeepers impacted privacy and confidentiality, recruitment, and consent to participate. We also discuss the pernicious power of paper in a community where few people read and write, and the ways that varying constructions of childhood, community-specific customs regarding privacy and social support, and the use of translators from outside the community impact ethical decision making.

4.1. Ivory Tower Gatekeepers

Our reflections on issues of gatekeeping and consent derive from our experience negotiating the tension between the needs of our respective universities and academic disciplines (psychology, human geography) and the marginalized populations with whom we have previously engaged in research (Ball, 2014; Ball and Janyst, 2008; Beazley, 2003, 2015). During the study reported here, these tensions were amplified by the undocumented status of most community members and the emotional toll that family fragmentation due to migration was taking on children and families. In the first authors' home country of Canada, research is guided by the *Tri-council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (Government of Canada, 2014). Consequently, the requirements for arms-length participant recruitment, seeking written informed consent, and ensuring privacy and confidentiality during data collection complied with these standards, which rely heavily on legalistic conceptualizations of risk and invoke abstract philosophical principles such as nonmaleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and fidelity (Fisher, 2000; Kitchener, 2000). In general, research ethics boards, focused as many seem to be on protecting the institution and its members, have earned the term "ivory tower ethics" (Sippola, 2006) because of their

lack of responsiveness to local situations. Once investigators are in the field, strict adherence to procedures deemed ethical by an academic institution located in a vastly different environment can impede, not only the ability to gather meaningful data, but investigators' sensitivity to local constraints and participants' varied and emerging needs and changing circumstances. In our community-engaged research with marginalized populations, we have found that an approach based on relational ethics with an emphasis on cultural safety and rights offers more promise for respectful, authentic engagements that minimize risk. Such an approach is especially useful in research involving transnational migrant populations who, like other marginalized populations, are vulnerable to being exploited as sources of "exotic" or surveillance data for research that leaves a trail of damage and no tangible benefit (Ball, 2005).

In the current study, the emotional potency of discussing reasons for lack of identity documentation, which centred on parents' mobility, absence, and lack of social capital, was sharply felt by participating children, mothers, and fathers. Therefore, as much as possible, our approach was guided by relational ethics at least as much as the ethics board requirement for privacy and confidentiality. Relational ethics requires an attitude of humility and respect, as well as concern for both the emotional wellness of each participant and the impacts of their interactions with the researchers, including the act of personal disclosure. Relational ethics requires consideration of the setting, the presence of onlookers, the possible need for social support by family or other community members during an 'individual interview', and ensuring participants' understanding of what will be done with any signed paperwork signed or audio-recorded personal information they disclosed. From both a relational ethics and rights perspective, each data-gathering encounter requires negotiation about the nature, scope, mode, and limits to personal disclosure based on each participant's values, needs, and expressed preferences.

4.2. Local Government Gatekeepers

An Indonesian university and a provincial government office granted written permission to conduct our research. As we moved from village to village, each village head man asked to see this letter. This senior level of approval assured them that we were in

compliance with state regimes governing who can collect information from what sources, and that they would not be side-stepping senior government authority if they allowed us to do the study in their villages. Government approval exercised the power of the state over community members' opportunities to communicate their experiences to outsiders and reinforced the gatekeeper role of male leaders in supervising data collection. In all community-engaged research, each procedural decision has implications that can protect or erode political, cultural, and personal safety and autonomy for community members. As well, every group of individuals is likely to contain diversity with respect to needs, goals, and criteria for judging cultural and personal safety. There is no panacea. What is considered normative from the perspective of gatekeepers may diverge from the perspectives of prospective research participants, and may even reinforce entrenched forms of oppression (Gasper, 1996). Considering this, we took every opportunity to engage prospective participants in dialogue about their perceptions of the study and its aims, methods, relevance to themselves, and so on. We sought insight about what a prospective participant might need from us to ensure that their participation was voluntary and the data collection procedures were comfortable and safe.

4.3. Village Gatekeepers

To commence data collection, we were required to seek permission and accompaniment by village head men. A local council of village head men approved the research plan and eagerly offered their help. While accompaniment by community members may be required and can be an asset for successful field research, it can also be a liability. In our study, it helped to have the head men promote the study as a way to raise the visibility of difficult choices migrant parents face about birth registration and arranging alternative care for stay-behind children. At the same time, the head men held significant power over community members and the research team. For example, the village head men informed the research team that they would recruit participants for the focus groups, making it impossible to compose focus groups according to our original study design. "Arm's length" recruiting of prospective participants, valued by research ethics boards in the minority world,

meant yielding to a village leader who could essentially command people's participation. Although head men tacitly agreed to the recruitment criteria we provided, their own criteria for selecting villagers as prospective participants were never entirely clear to us. Their selective recruitment may have been driven by the potential for friends and relatives to receive an honorarium or their desire to highlight certain issues pertaining to birth registration or migration. We had no control over, and no way of verifying, how the village head men explained the study to prospective recruits, if anything was explained at all. Enforcement of social hierarchies, cultural mores, and interpersonal behavioural monitoring, particularly by village head men, made it difficult to know whether participant recruitment was representative, entirely voluntary, or free of repercussions. Ageist and gendered local cultural norms almost certainly made it particularly difficult for women and children to exercise free choice.

In contrast, toward the end of our field visit, when village head men had relaxed their surveillance, we engaged with curious community members directly, describing the study and the option to participate for those who had not already done so. This allowed a more equitable distribution of opportunity to decide whether to participate, informed and voluntary consent, and a more diverse sample of participants. We described the project and requested participation orally, only bringing out paperwork to request signatures on a consent form and a receipt for honorarium. The depth and scope of family members' narrative accounts were significantly greater in these later interviews than in earlier ones. These later family stories included tragic and emotional events but also narratives of hope and of joy about unexpected positive outcomes of family migration. Conversations were relaxed and punctuated by laughter. Some of the families suggested that we could understand their migration motives and family aspirations best if we talked while visiting the concrete homes they were constructing and met their mothers, grandmothers, and siblings who were variously helping with the building or with child care.

4.4. Constructions of Childhood

In Lombok, the end of childhood is typically marked, not by age, but by migration, marriage, or both. Indeed, many rural Indonesians do not know their date of birth, but mark transitions across their

lifespan based on critical events in their life or in the community. In the minority world, birthdates, chronological age, and age-related criteria for sanctioned activities are highly significant. Many research ethics boards require consent by a parent or legal guardian of children 16 to 18 years old in order for them to participate in research. In Eastern Indonesia, most 18-year-olds are married with children of their own, and many have already divorced and migrated at least once for work overseas. In our study, we encountered many young mothers and fathers who, based on their age, would be legally construed as children in the minority world. Their experiences and insights regarding birth registration for their children were considered important for the study without seeking their parents' or guardians' consent. As well, in most of Indonesia, children of migrants typically remain in their community and often do not have a legal or primary guardian available to consent to their participation. Thus, we allowed an older sibling, or another older person who claimed to be related, to second a child's consent to participate.

4.5. The Pernicious Power of Paper

In some rural Indonesian villages, typed paperwork is not frequently seen except for government forms, proclamations, exhortations, and instructions from various authorities. Against this background, the typed paperwork that we introduced to participants (e.g. participant information sheets and consent forms) had an immediate muting effect, triggering a wave of fear. This fear may have been exacerbated in part by Indonesia's political history of state violence, which has increased wariness of outside surveillance, combined with the fact that few community members complied with government requirements for documentation of identity, employment, or migration and were adept at avoiding government surveillance. Thus, cautiously affable interactions became nervous, formal occasions with waiting participants exchanging worried glances. In one instance, an adolescent boy who had sought us out to be interviewed became visibly shaken, his eyes filling with tears, when we unexpectedly passed around typed informed consent papers to be signed.

The paperwork for informed consent was required and approved by the first author's university research ethics board. Translated into

simple Indonesian, the form described the project's purpose and the participants' rights, and used an innovative declaration page asking participants to indicate their understanding of and agreement to each part of the data collection and dissemination plan by circling an emoticon (smiling or frowning face) indicating "yes" or "no" and then signing their name. A similar approach has been described in detail by Ruiz-Casares and Thompson (2016). The research ethics board requirement that participants also sign a receipt for their honorarium meant more fear-inducing paperwork. Although we had been told by government officers that the participating villages had achieved "one hundred per cent literacy," almost no one was able to read our paperwork. Many were unable to sign their names and used various marks to indicate consent. As the potency of paperwork became apparent, the research team shifted to an entirely oral and conversational process for determining informed consent, limiting paperwork to a single signature on a consent form and receipt. Based on this and similar experiences elsewhere, we consider exclusively oral and visual methods to obtaining meaningful informed consent to be a promising option with migrant communities in the majority world. Yet, these methods are strongly contingent on research integrity and are not a guarantee of voluntary and informed consent: they are as open to exploitive manipulation and to being falsely claimed as are more formal, written consent protocols. One solution is to audio-record conversations about consent and/or photograph participants making their mark on a diagrammatic consent form, but these strategies entail consent for the intrusiveness of audio or visual recording.

4.6. Privacy and Social Support

Throughout the study we were challenged to respond to some participants' perceived risks associated with privacy and our own perceptions of risks from failing to provide privacy. Privacy is not a norm in many communities in the majority world, variously as a result of crowding, close interdependency, an ideology of collectivism, social control, or other factors.

Relational ethics entails the possibility of different arrangements for different participants. The original research plan was to interview primary caregivers and at least one child separately to obtain their

potentially differing views of birth registration and experiences of migration. However, in the interviews, most participants, especially children and youth, made it clear they did not wish to be alone with the interviewers. First, it was taboo for older adolescent and adult men to be alone with the all-female research team. Second, with the strong emphasis on social cohesion, mutual helping, and interpersonal monitoring, it was socially incongruous to hold private meetings on matters—like birth registration and care for children during migration—that affect the whole community. Third, most children in the villages were in the care of grandparents or alternative caregivers who closely guarded their wards around strangers. These guardians expressed that their role extended to being present to protect and monitor the child in their care throughout the child's meeting with us.

For example, one adolescent who sought to be interviewed was accompanied by his frail grandmother and two aunts, his older brother, his sister, her husband, their young child, and their baby. Additionally, over 30 villagers crowded into the space between the home where the interview was conducted and the aunt's adjacent home. Ultimately, nine family members joined the conversations, initially focused on the boy's experiences of never living with his migrating mother or father, his acute perception of an emotional hole in the centre of his large family, his longing and loneliness, and his desire to remain in his village forever and to find work close to home when he becomes a father. Family members contributed details about the family's involvement in migration, the lack of reasonable access to birth registration, and the family's four-generation involvement in undocumented migration, indebtedness to brokers, and unauthorized employment. A similar situation transpired in an interview with an adolescent girl, who welcomed her mother, stepfather and her two half-brothers to sit with her during her interview. This lack of privacy did not seem to inhibit the young people from sharing some of their stories, including disclosures about their animosities, hurt feelings, longings, and aspirations, but we cannot know what was withheld. In both of these examples, the informed consent process was oral, with minimal signature requirements, and no translator was present.

In the intricately structured social systems within hamlets and villages in Lombok, social behaviour is vigorously regulated by moral codes identified as Sasak and Muslim, with rigidly gendered rules

for behaviour and high expectations of maintaining the honour or “face” of one’s extended family. The omnipresence of others is expected, especially for women and children. These social principles are enacted by villagers, from grandparents to children, through pervasive oversight of one another and reinforced through social stigma and other negative repercussions for violations of cultural and religious mores. Thus, it was unsurprising when large gatherings of villagers followed the research team, partly because as outsider researchers we were a novelty, but also as a form of surveillance both for us and for those who engaged with us. All the villagers knew who had participated in a focus group or interview and the amount of honorarium they had received. In many cases, they also knew what participants had said in focus groups because they were overheard by village members, often including the head man, his wife and children, grandparents, and curious passersby. In an effort to provide privacy for participants, we requested indoor meeting spaces. However, in rural Lombok, many walls consist only of loosely woven bamboo that is neither soundproof nor opaque. Thus, for example, during a focus group with 12-year-old girls and boys organized by a village head man and hosted inside his home, the novel occasion elicited growing numbers of onlookers clinging to the bamboo and wire screens, leaning in to hear, while we urged onlookers to stay a bit back and keep voices low. Similar challenges are described by Ahsan (2009) during her study, where intergenerational power relations within research settings variously impeded children’s access to the research, voluntary participation, and privacy.

In our study, recruitment and arrangements for focus groups by adult gatekeepers may have reinforced processes of stigmatization for stay-behind children and for families with difficult migration histories. For example, at the beginning of our first focus group, hosted on the raised bamboo sitting hut in the compound of the village head man’s home, the head man introduced each participant, not by name, but as specimens of various categories of families involved in transnational migration: “this one has her husband overseas, this one has both parents overseas, this one has a husband overseas and she is pregnant and husband never calls, never sends money....” The head man constantly interposed with comments. For example, an adolescent girl explained that her mother was working overseas and her father lived in a nearby village and “is a bit stressed.” The head man interjected: “Crazy. Her father is not

normal—a crazy person.” The girl appeared very embarrassed and we were concerned that she had felt shamed by this allegation. We perceived it would be inappropriate to ask the head man to leave, since he had hosted the focus group on his own veranda. Also, his cooperation was needed for all future research arrangements in the area, since he was closely linked with a tightly knit group of head men in neighbouring villages. On other occasions, head men, other male onlookers, and male participants interrupted after women or girls spoke, introjecting what they thought were more correct or complete responses.

The presence of village head men also necessitated constant maneuvering to provide choice for participants regarding privacy and confidentiality and to encourage authentic accounts. The head men’s dismissive responses to young people’s self-reports about the emotional impacts of parents’ migration obstructed authentic, free-flowing interactions. This power imbalance was physically embodied: interactions between participants and research team members took place with everyone seated on the floor, while village head men, dressed in government uniforms, and their male associates stood or sat in chairs near the research gathering. The milieu was reminiscent of Twum-Danso’s (2009) description of her research with children in Ghana, illustrating how society’s inherent social and cultural values regulate adult-child interactions in ways that can limit children’s authentic participation in research.

4.7. Translators

The presence of translators who were strangers to villagers and perhaps even more suspect than foreigners hindered the trust-building process. We needed to emphasize that translators were not working for the government, would not report unauthorized migration or other legal transgressions disclosed by participants, and were bound by ethics of research, including protection of anonymity and confidentiality.

Translators were selected for their proficiency in the local ethnic minority language, Sasak; however, the presence of a college-educated urban person conversant in their language appeared to be uncomfortable for many interviewees. The translators were steeped in a hierarchical social structure within which it is normative to

question the accuracy of reports by less educated, lower status, rural people and to speak for them as if they cannot speak for themselves. The translators needed to be sensitized and exhorted to demonstrate respect and specifically to stop interrupting or answering questions for children before children had a chance to speak for themselves.

5. RELATIONAL ETHICS AND RESPONSIVE PRACTICE

As others have argued (e.g. Hammersley, 2009; Sippola, 2006), unwavering adherence to the legalistic perspective prevailing in minority world research ethics does not necessarily ensure that participants will be treated in a respectful, emotionally and culturally safe way. This seems especially so in majority world contexts where the psychosocial foundations of wellness may be unknown. Abebe and Bessell (2014) argue that “the drive for guidelines and processes to promote ethical research with children has resulted in a multi-layered bureaucratic process, running the risk of creating a formulaic, ‘tick-a-box’ mentality, rather than promoting a carefully considered set of professional values and behaviours” (p. 127). Relational ethics is responsive to local codes of conduct, needs, and goals, informed by human rights, guided by professional competence, supported by the capacity to be a nimble methodologist, and inspired by a commitment to adapt data collection procedures to emergent needs and explicit demands in the field.

We view ethical practice in the context of children, youth, and families involved in migration as aspirational and occurring as an unfolding series of outcomes arising from the negotiated spaces of on-the-ground ethical research praxis. In the study described in this article, ethical practice in situ was constantly reconceptualized through a process of reflection. We reflected inward on our own presuppositions, precommitments, self-knowledge, and capacity for responsive research methods. We also reflected outward on the cultural, socio-historical, political, and geographic contexts, on community members’ limited prior exposure to the idea of research and researchers, and on events that migrant family members reported had shaped their experiences, decisions, and views. Like all developmental and cross-cultural engagements, the process was dynamic and organic.

An example illustrates this dynamic process. Our study could easily have become an exposé of barriers created by government bureaucracies that ignore the challenges faced by migrant families, and by civil registry officers, who are widely known to extort, exploit, and intimidate prospective registrants, particularly those who are already vulnerable. Although some of our questions explored these barriers, we also explored how families involved in migration manage their everyday lives, what they look forward to, and what they would like their local and national leaders to do to promote their well-being. Some of the children offered moving stories about caring for younger siblings, helping their grandparents, playing with peers while collecting water at the river, and doing their best in school. They offered vignettes about successes, such as teaching a sibling a new skill, and about welcomed changes in their village, such as having pipes laid to bring in fresh water. One child offered a song about love and hope. Most of the children expressed their longing for their mother or father to return home so they could know their parent was safe and could feel their parent's love. Others looked forward to talking with parents on the family's mobile phone. One girl expressed her delight at ending up with "two fathers" because her birth father returned from overseas with a new wife, while her mother had found a new husband. She talked about the bounty of having a choice of two households and having a bigger family because of her father's long migration journey. Though longing for more time with their parents, the children also demonstrated their emotional control, psycho-social resilience, realism, and capacity for joy. Far from being hopeless, many children conveyed some image of themselves in the future, as singers, doctors, wives, fathers, and, some said, as migrants. Some children looked forward to becoming a teacher or nurse so they could find work locally and not have to migrate. Most children said that government leaders should create jobs locally so that their parents and they would not have to migrate. Engaging children in these kinds of conversations was our attempt to provide balance in what we were asking them to articulate, rather than only asking questions that might elicit representations of themselves as deficient, damaged, or hopelessly trapped in a multigenerational legacy of "desperate migration" (Stark, 1991). This strategy was part of the depathologizing ethic of desire-based research (Tuck, 2009).

The overriding goal of our relational ethics is to do no harm, to engage in practices that are culturally safe, and to amplify participants'

meaning making, positive reasoning, and aspirations, as well as their challenges. Whereas research ethics boards in the minority world assume the possibility of control over research practices, in community-engaged research, there is significant unpredictability, as in our study with a highly mobile, marginalized population that functions largely outside government-sanctioned frameworks and institutions of privilege. Community-engaged research involves numerous gatekeepers and intermediaries as well as the day-to-day uncertainties of gaining access to individuals who are highly mobile. As described, many circumstances beyond our control impacted the study. We cannot know how many willing community members may have been excluded by local gatekeepers, or how many community members felt compelled to participate for reasons unknown to us.

While there is no single, unified conception of “best” ethical praxis with mobile communities, and outcomes cannot be guaranteed, there are promising practices, and human rights that are not negotiable (Alderson and Morrow, 2011; Bhabha, 2011). Non-oppressive research that seeks to do no harm and yield benefit is performative. It is enmeshed in activism and demands continual interrogation of the research setting, the research process, and outcomes as they unfold (Bushin, 2007; Swadener and Mutua, 2007). Engagements with minority-world research ethics boards, in-country gatekeepers, and children and families in communities will always be marked by alternating periods of disequilibrium as new challenges arise and relative equilibrium as researchers, children, and families build culturally safe relationships and engage in mutual decision making about productive knowledge creation.

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