

# Immigration of a “Child Laborer”

*Anonymous*

I come from a very poor family in a country in Africa. When I was eight years old, I was “adopted” by a very rich family. (Actually, I was not *really* adopted. This family took me in to work as their maid and nanny. But I called them my adopted parents to hide the fact that I was not legally their child.) Going to work for them helped my original family because my adopted family paid my original family money every month for me.

## I didn’t get my parents’ love, which any child needs.

The father in my adopted family was a diplomat, and so we traveled a lot. I didn’t want to leave my family and travel all over with this new adopted family. All my childhood, I’ve been sent away to make money for my original family to help them. So I didn’t get my parents’ love, which any child needs.

When I was 21, my adopted father came home and said we all got visas to go to the USA. So we all came together to this country. When we got to the airport we were so excited. On the way to our new home, we were disappointed because everything did not look exactly like it looks on the TV.

## The next morning, “Papa” took us to McDonalds. We were in love with America!

But when we got to the new home, we were happy again. It was a big house that had big rooms. The next morning, “Papa” took us to McDonalds. We were in love with America! Two months later, the kids were going to school, but not me. Once again, I was “child labor.”

My adopted mom never let me go to school.

She just wanted me home taking care of her kids. I was tired of that life. I wanted to go to school. I asked her if I could go learn at school. She looked at me and said, “No, you can’t, because you are nothing; and there is nothing good out there for you.” So I said to myself, “What can I do? I don’t know how to read, write or anything. My brain is closed! I can’t have a job.” Then my mom said, “Go and braid hair.” I didn’t like that idea at all. But what choice did I have? I wanted to do it because I wanted to be out of the house!

I started taking subway trains and buses. I was happy to see people; it was amazing. First I was scared of the train because it is underground. I was thinking, “If the train gets stuck in there, how am I going to get out?”

I had a friend who took me out to different places

**Number of Child Domestic Workers, by Age and Sex, Worldwide, 2008**

Age group and sex	Children doing domestic work
<b>5-11</b>	<b>3,514,000</b>
Boys	1,430,000
Girls	2,084,000
<b>12-14</b>	<b>2,995,000</b>
Boys	775,000
Girls	2,220,000
<b>15-17</b>	<b>4,048,000</b>
Boys	829,000
Girls	3,219,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	

after work. I started to see the beauty of this country. We can get help. We can find work even if we didn't go to school! I got my social security number in 2002. Now I can work American jobs and pay taxes. I can make money to help my birth

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family since I love them very much. Most importantly, I can go to school. America was a blessing for me. I have learned a lot. I am able to send money to my younger brothers so they can go to school. But the only thing that is bothering me is that some people are here working hard for many years and they don't have Green Cards or working permits. I think that is very bad. I have lived here for eleven years now, and I still don't have a Green Card to permit me to go visit my family. It's hard for me to get health care because I don't have medical insurance.

Thank you America for all the opportunities you have given to me so far.

*Anonymous is a student at Mid-Manhattan Learning Center #5 in New York City. Her goal is to get her GED, go to college, and one day have a family. She continues to support her family back home and has helped her four brothers remain in school.*

### Making Sense of the Story

**What are the major points of transition in this writer's life?**

**Using the information in the chart,** calculate the total number of child domestic workers in 2008.

**After reading “An Ambiguous Relationship,”** explain in your own words how the relationship between the child domestic worker and his/her employer is “blurred.” **What does “care vacuum” mean in this context?**



### An Ambiguous Relationship

*(Note: this is a college-level text. What are some strategies you use to understand difficult texts?)*

The negative social connotations attached to domestic work in many settings compounds the ambiguity of child domestic workers' relationships to the employing family. For example, even though they know that their child will be engaged in domestic work, parents of child domestic workers may place them with a new (employer) family, not as a “worker,” but as a “daughter” or “son.” Broadly speaking, the blurred relationship with the employing family can be characterized thus: the child is working, but is not considered a worker, and; although the child lives in a family setting, she or he is not treated like a family member. The informality of this arrangement suits both the parents and employers, in that it allows continuation of the parental pretense that their child is being cared for in a family environment, while encouraging employers to believe that they are assisting the child and her or his family. However, the familial and legal “care vacuum” created by this situation works against the interests of the child by disguising an arrangement that might entail abusive working conditions and often masking violence and abuse.

Source for the text above and the chart on the previous page: [www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS\\_207656/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ipec/Informationresources/WCMS_207656/lang-en/index.htm).