

Gender Roles, Work, and Women's Mobility in Indonesia: Labour Migration Contexts

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Abstract

Previous studies suggest that women's migration may pose particular difficulties, both for the individuals involved and for their families and communities because it conflicts with the usual expectation that women will fulfil their ascribed gender roles as daughters, mothers, and wives. To understand this conflict, it necessarily involves the examination of the prevalent cultural and social values in the local context of West Kalimantan, and in Indonesia, in particular how gender and power relations influence the bargaining position of women as workers and members of society. My emphasis is on the cultural norms and practices regarding gender roles and gender responsibilities in Malay societies in West Kalimantan, particularly, and in Indonesia, generally. This paper provides a context for discussion of women's migration experiences and mobility, by firstly identifying the relevant literature which discusses issues of gender roles, work, and gender and mobility. The link between gender, mobility, and labour migration is then explored.

Keywords: Migration; Women; Gender Roles; Mobility; Work; Labour

Abstrak

Kajian terdahulu menyatakan bahwa migrasi wanita dapat menyebabkan beberapa permasalahan, baik untuk individu yang terlibat dan bagi keluarga serta masyarakat karena sering berbenturan dengan harapan bahwa wanita akan menjalankan fungsi gendernya, sebagai anak, ibu, dan istri. Untuk memahami benturan tersebut, perlu dilakukan kajian tentang budaya dan nilai sosial yang lazim dalam konteks Kalimantan Barat dan Indonesia, khususnya bagaimana gender dan hubungan kuasa mempengaruhi posisi tawar wanita sebagai pekerja dan bagian dari masyarakat. Penekanan saya adalah pada norma dan implementasi budaya berkaitan dengan peran dan tanggung jawab gender dalam masyarakat Melayu di Kalimantan Barat secara khusus dan Indonesia umumnya. Tulisan ini menyajikan sebuah konteks untuk mendiskusikan pengalaman dan pergerakan migrasi wanita, dengan pertama mengidentifikasi literatur terkait isu peran gender, pekerjaan, dan gender dan perpindahan. Selanjutnya menjelaskan hubungan antara gender, perpindahan, dan migrasi buruh.

Kata kunci: Migrasi, Wanita, Peran Gender, Perpindahan, Pekerjaan, Buruh

INTRODUCTION

The striking aspect of labour migration, especially of short term migration of unskilled and semi-skilled labours, is its feminization. Cheng notes that “female migration for overseas employment shows an almost exclusive concentration in the services sector...with domestic workers accounting for almost two thirds of the total” (1999, p.223). This phenomenon of foreign domestic workers, especially in the Asia-Pacific regions, has garnered extensive attention from various fields of social studies, not only because of its increasing importance, which is apparent in the number of women migrating every year and its economic significance for both the sending and receiving countries, but also because of its complexities and its socio-economic impacts on the countries involved (Agnote, 2005; Erzan, 2008). These quantitative studies indicate that the main drivers that ‘push’ and ‘pull’ millions of women to migrate from developing countries to developed nations are poverty; the gendered cultural and social practices in both the sending and receiving countries; as well as inequalities in the global economy. This research shows that the flows and the employment of these ‘unskilled’ workers are managed through numerous controls imposed by states, employers, labour brokers, and by the expectations of their families and communities of origin. In short, the women themselves may only have a minor determining role in the migration processes, from the recruitment to employment phases, and much less input in negotiating the everyday constraints during their contracts (Young, 2004).

Studies on Indonesian women’s migration also point to economic determinants as fundamental factors in the decision of those who migrate to Malaysia and the Middle East as domestic workers

(Departemen Sosial Republik Indonesia, 2005; Hugo, 2005). The aggregate studies of female migration and gender relations in Indonesia report that lack of education, a product of gender inequality in society, has limited the attractive income earning opportunities for Indonesian women at home and hence led them to migrate (Agung and Bustami, 2004). On the other hand, female migrants’ lack of education is often seen as responsible for women’s inability to negotiate their migration processes and employment terms favourably with the employers, which can lead to various forms of abuses and exploitation (Sampang, 2005; Wawa, 2005).

Previous study indicates that Indonesian culture and gender roles are embedded in and shaped by women’s mobility and labour migration. The discussion of these issues offers the social, political, cultural, economic, and historical contexts of Indonesian women’s decisions to migrate for work. Current studies on women’s migration indicate that women’s labour migration has become a global phenomenon and the vast amount of research on people’s mobility reflects the significance of these movements. These studies not only inform us of the position of Indonesian women’s migration in the global context but also help us to understand the link between political and economic forces at the global level, especially those that are played out in the context of developed countries and the women’s labour migration in Indonesia and other developing countries.

There is a rich existing migration literature and a diversity of approaches within the migration field, across a range of regions and locations, but there has been more limited attention to Indonesian women’s migration experiences and factors affecting their mobility. We do know, however, from existing research

that migration is a powerful force affecting identities in the context of Irish, Italian, Mexican, and Caribbean societies (De Souza, 2006; Gmelch, 2006; Horst, 2006). This literature focuses on cross-cultural, diaspora, and gender studies, that provide theoretical debates on identity in relation to space, and also empirical findings on the impact of migration. An increasing number of more recent works on gender, migration experiences, and post-migration experiences, pay attention to women's identities, perceptions, and subject positions (Abdul Rahman, 2005; Beynon, 2004; Gaetano, 2004).

Migration research employing political and economic frames are still central in work on people's mobility, particularly, women's mobility. Often, neo-classical economics and macro models of different stages of development frame analysis of migration (see Lawson, 1998, p.41). These models are associated with push and pull factors of labour migration across regions, implying that people migrate only for financial benefit. However, recent work on migration issues is illuminating the complex and intersecting range of economic, social, cultural, and personal reasons that shape women's migration decisions and experiences.

RESEARCH METHODS

This paper is library-based research. Library research involves the step-by-step process used to gather information in order to write a paper, create a presentation, or complete a project. As the research progresses from one step to the next, it is commonly necessary to back up, revise, add additional material or even change the topic completely. This will depend on what we discover during our research. There are many reasons for adjusting the plan. For example, we may find that our

topic is too broad and needs to be narrowed, sufficient information resources may not be available, what we learn may not support our thesis, or the size of the project does not fit the requirements.

The research process itself involves identifying and locating relevant information, analyzing what we found, and then developing and expressing our ideas. There are two types of resources for library-based research:

1. Secondary sources are studies by other researchers. They describe, analyze, and/or evaluate information found in primary sources. By repackaging information, secondary sources make information more accessible. A few examples of secondary sources are books, journal and magazine articles, encyclopedias, dictionaries, handbooks, periodical indexes, and reviews, etc.

2. Primary sources are original works. These sources represent original thinking, report on discoveries, or share new information. Usually these represent the first formal appearance of original research. Primary sources include statistical data, manuscripts, surveys, speeches, biographies/autobiographies, diaries, oral histories, interviews, works or art and literature, research reports, government documents, computer programs, original documents (birth certificates, trial transcripts...) etc.

DISCUSSIONS

Gender roles in Indonesia

The Marriage Law 1974 no.1 & 3 clause 31 of Indonesia (Republic of Indonesia, 1974) stipulates that the rights and position of the wife are equal to her husband, both in family and society. However, the same law clearly delineates separate roles for each; the husband is the head of the family; the wife's role is the mother of the household. This means, by law, the husband is the master of the

family while the wife is the manager of the household (Hadiz & Eddyono, 2005). This marriage law is clearly a part of the state's political and legal effort to enforce the widespread gendered belief in most of Indonesian society that sees men, first, as naturally superior to women and, therefore, it is their natural right to be the head of the family; second, women should ideally stay at home and take care of their families; and third, being mothers and wives are women's 'natural' responsibilities and therefore should be placed above everything else in their lives (Hadiz & Eddyono, 2005).

A great deal of scholarly attention has focused on the position of Indonesian women in society and on the changes brought by economic development, particularly during the New Order period under former President Suharto. The national statistics data indicates that for the last two decades from the 1970s to the 1990s Indonesian women have enjoyed more access to the public sphere, with more women enrolling in various level of schooling, the ever-increasing percentage of working women, either in the private or public sectors, and the increasing numbers of women who hold important positions (Oey-Gardiner, 2004; Sundrijo, 2004). These quantitative studies highlight the impact of political, socio-cultural, and economic determinants on women's positions in the labor market and on their roles in the household. They suggest that the increase in Indonesian women's participation in education, economy, and public arena does not automatically translate into a more equal bargaining position within the household as women are still expected by their families to fulfil their domestic roles on top of their financial/economic contributions. However, these studies' emphasis is more on broad trends rather than women's direct experiences.

Qualitative studies conducted in Java draw similar conclusions. This research indicates that within the family, the core and foundation of society, women's status and position remain relatively unchanged. Most married women have to bear a double burden as homemakers and income earners whose sacrifices and hard work is merely attributed to their 'natural' women's duty to 'help' their husbands (Retnowati, 2006). Based on in-depth interviews among married Javanese respondents from various socio-economic and educational backgrounds, Sitepu (2000) concludes that a married woman who, in Indonesia, is often called "the Queen of the Household" bears very little resemblance to a real queen who possesses power and authority to make decisions. In reality, this so-called 'queen' in most cases has to be subordinate to her husband, from financial matters to the choice of contraception. In previous study among Malay women in West Kalimantan, women considered that it was their kodrat (divinely assigned gender role) to obey their husbands and to perform domestic responsibilities (Gaffar, 2004).

Parents, religious practices, and educational institutions, as well as society in general introduce the concept of kodrat to women from an early age. A young woman grows up with the ideas and ideals of being obedient and pure (virginal) women, a dutiful daughter and, eventually, a good and obedient wife to her husband (Utomo and Hatmadji, 2004). Those who rebel, by not marrying at the right age or bearing children out of wedlock receive moral sanctions from society which condemns and ostracises them. Unsurprisingly, young single women and married women with free and adventurous spirit opt to migrate to escape such a restricted life, and ideas and ideals placed upon them by their parents, husbands, and

local community. Women with substantial education, training, and means migrate overseas to work at multinational companies or continue their studies, while those who have less, migrate overseas and work as domestic workers in big cities in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Many return with happy stories, some return with not so happy stories. Regardless of their different experiences, migration has changed their lives for the better or worse.

The demand for women's subordination is not exclusive to Javanese society and can be found in a number of different ethnic groups in Indonesia, in rural communities in Eastern part of Indonesia (Williams, 2007); in Malay communities in West Kalimantan (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1990, 1989); and in rural communities in East Kalimantan (Mulatsih, 1994). In West Kalimantan, a Malay woman is expected to show proper behaviour to her family and society. For example, whenever a woman speaks to her husband, she must use an honorific form of language with a low intonation. It is taboo for a wife to raise her voice towards her husband and if she does so, it is believed that she will receive bad luck. On the other hand, in Malay society a husband is not required to conform to similar values. He may use any intonation he pleases, even though it is preferable if he speaks to his wife politely, this is not an absolute obligation (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1990, 1989). These dated case studies may not be accurate descriptions of gender relations in today's Malay families in West Kalimantan, since they were conducted more than 20 years ago. Yet, as a Malay and local myself, I observe that some of the previous research findings remain as accepted and practiced norms in today's Malay society in West Kalimantan. During meal times, the women of a family are

responsible for preparing and serving the food and they must not start eating before the men. This means that they can only eat whatever food the males leave. This practice can also be found in rural communities in East Kalimantan, where from a very young age, a woman is socialized and pressured by the elders in her family and society to behave 'ladylike' during mealtime; eating slowly, politely, and in small portions (see Mulatsih, 1994, p.58). This custom is arguably responsible for widespread malnutrition cases among women and infants and may even be one of the main causes of the high maternal mortality rate in Indonesia. In ASEAN, Indonesia holds the record as the country with the highest maternal mortality rate, 594 per 100,000 births (see Agustini, 2006, p.90). Lack of nutrition during pregnancy causes several medical conditions such as anaemia. This bleak picture suggests that gendered social and cultural practices among Malay communities in West Kalimantan and rural communities in East Kalimantan which value women less than men, have a direct detrimental effect on women's wellbeing. It also shows the gendered nature of Malay society that in the event of financial difficulty, women's needs, will come second to men's. The persistence of high maternal mortality rate is a clear indicator that the status and bargaining power of women in Indonesian family and society in general, remain low.

As in health, men and boys still have greater educational opportunities. While it is estimated that, in 2000-2001, 97 percent of Indonesian females and males participated in primary school, there are still more men than women in higher education (Noerdin, 2006). Data from the Department of Education shows that while 72.7 percent of women had mid-level education compared to 76.3 percent of men, only 44.7 percent of women

compared to 51.4 percent of men had tertiary education (cited in Noerdin, 2006). These findings suggest that women's ability to access formal education declines gradually the higher the education level. Similar observations were made by Mulatsih in her ethnographic study on women's status and position in rural communities in East Kalimantan. She found that parents prefer to support their sons' education than their daughters' (Mulatsih, 1994). This fact, she argues, relates to gendered cultural norms in rural society in East Kalimantan that believe formal education will not contribute to a significant change in a woman's life, since her natural position is in the domestic domain (Mulatsih, 1994). Therefore, it is often considered a waste if a woman spends her time on formal education.

Other than that, in a society that believes a man is a leader for a woman and a husband is a leader for his wife, having substantial education is often seen as a negative rather than positive attribute in terms of women's future marriage prospects. In West Kalimantan, Malay society considers an educated woman 'unfeminine' for she is usually experienced and knowledgeable and, therefore, less compliant. These traits make her an unfit and less desirable candidate for a good wife. Consequently, parents and men prefer women who possess a lower level of education than men so men may assume a 'natural' role as leader and head of the household. Such a negative attitude toward women's education can be easily found in almost every level of society, regardless of economic, social, or educational background. Despite the encouraging reports on Indonesian women's increased participation in education and labor market, we should be careful in reading these achievements as signs of the increasing gender equality.

Gender and work

In the last three decades, female paid labour force participation in Indonesia has increased significantly from 29.7 percent in 1971 to 46.3 percent in 2003 (Noerdin, 2006), and about 51% in 2013 (Cameron, 2019). However, compared to male workforce participation, which stood at 85.3 percent in 2003, it is clear that women still lag far behind men (see Noerdin, 2006, p.8). This report can be read in two ways; first, there are social, political, and cultural factors that have hindered more women from participating in the workforce and second, the gendered nature of Indonesian politics, culture, and legal systems might have obscured women's actual participation and contribution in the workforce. The Indonesian state, particularly during Suharto's regime, adopted the male-orientated concept of work into its legal system. This concept means only productive labour that receives a fixed/regular monetary reward, done continuously and completed at a certain point of the day, is counted as work. Work tends to be associated only with what a man does outside the house to earn money in order to fulfil his responsibility as a breadwinner. Yet, this concept is inadequate for explaining the reality of much women's work; which is reproductive in nature; unpaid, cyclical, seasonal, and unending.

The Indonesian Marriage Law 1974 no.1 & 3 clause 31 (Republic of Indonesia, 1974) play a significant role in influencing how the state and its apparatus perceive women's productive and reproductive contributions in the families and the society. In the early New Order regime, state officials claimed that only men 'work', although in reality, women have always worked to support their families in multiple capacities, either

through income-generating activities or unpaid reproductive activities. The state constructions that see men as breadwinners and heads of households ignore the reality that in some places in Indonesian where women are often heads of households and the landowners (Blackwood, 2008). This has disadvantaged women in terms of accessing government's assistances and programs. In her ethnographic study of Minangkabau women rice farmers in rural West Sumatra, Blackwood (2008) notes, in the early years of agricultural development, state agricultural officers worked mostly with men farmers as they were assumed to be the landowners, while in fact these men were working at the wives' land or working for their mothers. Male farmers were also the main recipients of government programs aiming to introduce the new farming techniques and technologies (Blackwood, 2008, p.22). In this case, state officials mistakenly assumed that West Sumatra women were merely members of household rather than landowners and heads of households in their own right.

A number of case studies in West Kalimantan indicate that women in rural or urban settings, especially those from underprivileged households, have long been involved in non-domestic activities to support the family's sustenance (Hendarta, 2005). Aside from their domestic duties, women from rural farming households work together with their husbands in almost every level of rice planting. They are also responsible for caring and raising domestic animals, such as ducks, chickens, or pigs, where meat can be sold in local markets (Departement Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1990, 1989; Hendarta, 2005).

The Marriage Law 1974 that constructs the distinct separation between women's and men's roles has been seen as a cause of many problems associated with women and work in Indonesia (Hadiz and

Eddyono, 2005). It has engendered the discriminatory remuneration system that has disadvantaged Indonesian women as it has been applied by governmental and private sectors as a legal justification to pay and provide fewer entitlements to female workers than to male workers (see Noerdin, 2006). Warouw (2008) found in his ethnographic research on women factory workers in Tangerang, Java, that married female workers were deemed 'single' by employers and therefore did not receive the entitlements male workers enjoy. The accommodation allowance, for example, is only available to married male workers as they are assumed to be heads of the family. Similarly, a maternity allowance is only paid to male employees' wives but not to married female workers. Wolf argues that not only does this gender-based discrimination disadvantage female workers, it also reinforces the practices of 'male superiority' within the society which sees men as having heavier economic responsibility than women (1992, p. 118). Although more women participate in paid labour work nowadays, the patriarchal values that predominate in most Indonesian families are generally still reluctant to acknowledge women's contributions to the family economy which means men are still unwilling to share domestic responsibilities (Murniati, 2004). Unsurprisingly, women burdened with household responsibilities – particularly married women with responsibility for child care – who work in informal sectors with limited means are forced to quit their jobs.

Gender discrimination at work is not exclusive to women who work in informal sectors. This is experienced by middle class women working as professionals too. Women working as communication workers in Java face various discriminatory practices in the work place where jobs are generally

assigned based on what the employers thought is appropriate for the employees' genders and their marital status (Nilan and Utari, 2008). Female reporters, for example, are rarely sent by their employers to cover top news stories that may lead to career advancement. Instead, female reporter are assigned tasks that involve using their 'feminine traits', covering feature stories which considered more 'appropriate' for their gender. Once a female employer is married, she would be relegated to a less demanding job with less remuneration (Nilan and Utari, 2008). It is assumed that a married woman will take on less demanding tasks because she is responsible for her family while needing less money as her husband will be financially responsible for her.

Scholars who engaged in the gender and work debate highlight the complicated and nuanced relationship between the state's ideology of an ideal Indonesian woman, women workers, and their perceptions of work and its meaning (Blackwood, 2008; Nilan and Utari, 2008; Warouw, 2008). These qualitative studies of female workers in Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan contribute to the understanding of the gendered state ideology and its negative impacts on the position of female workers, which underscore the contemporary Indonesian labour situation. In short, the state's gender constructions has engendered the partial invisibility of women in the labour force and created structural discriminations, not only among the women who work in the informal sectors (Blackwood, 2008; Warouw, 2008) but also among those who are educated and work as professionals (Nilan and Utari, 2008). While Indonesian women have experienced significant increases in social emancipation, education, and labour participation for the last three decades, it is clear that these developments are

constantly and perpetually challenged by patriarchal ideologies in society and the state.

Gender and mobility

Studies on women's mobility and migration in Indonesia indicate that gender practices which are inseparable from religious beliefs and cultural practices are in part responsible for restrictions on women's mobility (Williams, 2007; Wolf, 1992). Parents in rural Java invoke religious and cultural obligation of filial duties to justify control and surveillance of their daughters' movements (Wolf, 1992). They are aware of the impact of migration on their daughters and the supposedly 'free' and more 'sexually loose' environment in the city or factory so some forbid their daughters to go (Wolf, 1992). Parents fear losing control of their daughter's sexual purity and, therefore, endangering their future marriage prospects (Williams, 2007). Koning (2005) in her ethnographic work on the migration of rural Javanese single women noted that parents generally fear that city life might 'corrupt' their daughters and changed their personalities. Similarly, the Bugis in South Sulawesi are concerned that migration will risk female modesty which will impact on the family honour. This concern is very much a product of Islamic religious beliefs and practices as well as local custom. For Malay women, especially single women, safety was of major concern for their parents. Malay parents' concerns for the safety of young women in particular, may be compounded by the threat of sexual harassment and abuse as well as sexual 'temptations' available in urban areas. Although, the notions of family honour within Malay community is not as strong as it is in the Bugis community, a Malay woman's sexual (virginal) purity is paramount to her family's social standing in the community.

However, despite restrictive gender ideology and cultural constraints imposed by parents on women's mobility, large numbers of single women are able to migrate to cities or overseas in search of work. Recent qualitative studies on rural-urban migration in China conclude that one of the reasons single women are able to do so is because of their kinship position in their rural family (Murphy, 2004). Following the completion of formal schooling and prior to settling down, young rural women are poised between carefree youth and responsible adulthood, which is traditionally assigned to them after marriage. In all but the poorest of rural households, young women's labour is not crucial to the maintenance of the household economy, particularly when compared with potential wage remittances from non-agricultural work (Murphy, 2004).

Although most parents initially object to their daughters' decision to migrate, in the end, many eventually relent to their daughters' wishes. There is some evidence in rural Java (Koning, 2005) and rural South Sulawesi (Idrus, 2008) that prior to migration, young women often complained of being bored as they have "nothing to do at home" and that this also acted a driver in migration decisions. Migration might provide the rural households with additional income and, at the least, it promises diversion and a new experience for their 'bored daughters' (Idrus, 2008; Koning, 2005). It is common for young women in West Kalimantan, especially those from rural areas, not to pursue education beyond junior secondary school. Many, in fact, quit after primary school (Centre of Statistics of West Kalimantan, 2008, p. 56). They are too young to get married and their labour may not be central to the family's work. During the years between school and marriage, therefore, they constitute surplus labour.

More than half of my single respondents admitted that they were mostly 'idle' prior to migrating to Malaysia. It does not mean that these young women did not work at all, but the productive work they did was mostly irregular with minimum payment.

Wolf, speaking about rural Javanese factory workers, has noted two factors that shaped these young women's decisions to leave home and work in the factory; first, their preference for factory employment over farming work, and second, the limited and constrained options of rural employment (1992, p. 134). Wolf asserts, that for these young women, working in the factory has given them an opportunity to gain financial independence or 'buying power' so they could conform to 'modern style' of life offered in urban areas (1992, p.193). For young women, working in the city represents both an aspiration and a future where they can be part of modernity. Working away from home not only gives women their chance for financial independence but also an opportunity to free themselves from the social and cultural control of their families and communities (Koning, 2005; Wolf, 1992).

Qualitative research on women's migration in Indonesia reveals that it is also common for the potential migrants to use their personal networks to migrate (Idrus, 2008; Koning, 2005; Silvey, 2000; Williams, 2007; Wolf, 1992). Koning (2005) and Wolf (1992) noted that, although parents in rural Java are generally reluctant to give permission to their daughters to migrate, young women can leave as long as they have trusted companions. For those who come from devout Islamic communities, for example, the Bugis community in South Sulawesi, different strategies are needed. Idrus describes the strategies employed by Bugis women to negotiate the gender and cultural restrictions on their mobility while trying

to keep their decisions to migrate within the boundaries of local Islamic and cultural practices. These women defend their decisions to migrate to Malaysia by stating that Islam or local customs do not prohibit women from working abroad as long as they can protect their modesty and are accompanied by their muhrim (blood-related male relatives) (2008, p. 158). In reality, Bugis women often migrate and are allowed to migrate to Malaysia with female relatives or other trusted female friends who clearly are not their muhrim. This fact indicates that not only is there room for negotiation within the restrictive Islamic and cultural practices in Bugis society, but women have actively and successfully negotiated and manipulated those boundaries (2008, p 159).

Aside from its economic benefits for themselves and the household, compared to the agricultural or the informal sectors, working away from home is seen by young single women as an opportunity to achieve a certain degree of independence and autonomy. For the first time in their lives, they are free of the parental and rural community's control and supervision. Living in factory dormitories or rented houses, these young women relish their new-found freedom to mingle with friends of the same or opposite sex, to move, to buy goods, in short, to have a 'modern' life. Indeed, a number of field studies conducted in China (Murphy, 2004), Thailand (Brody, 2006), Java (Koning, 2005; Wolf, 1992) and South Sulawesi (Idrus, 2008) indicate that a significant number of young women choose to migrate or to work in factories away from families so they can be "free" from the constricted life they have at home.

CONCLUSION

Labour migration has been a global phenomenon for the last three decades and has brought significant global changes in occupational structures, class, economy, and culture, both in sending and labour receiving countries. However, it is difficult to obtain accurate statistics about this global movement. It is clear that labour migration in Asia will continue to grow in the future and play a significant role in changing the sending and receiving societies. Although this phenomenon greatly varies from one region in Asia to another, there are some notable characteristics shared by all: migration has grown most rapidly since the mid 1980s; the Asian migrant workers are extremely mobile; the flow of migrants is interconnected among countries and regions in Asia; the remittances from overseas workers sustain not only the household economies but also the national economies; and the increasing feminization of migrant labour since the 1980s.

Central to this phenomenon are the movement of young women between the ages of twenty to thirty who constitute roughly 70 to 80 percent of total migrant workforce. In order to be able to migrate, these women have to face numbers of challenges; the biased gender roles in their family, the restriction on their mobility and the lack of appreciation of the work that they do. In short, Indonesian women face many forms of discriminations, culturally and structurally.

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