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Factors Influencing Indonesian Women Becomes Migrant Workers

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Abstrak

Tulisan ini menggambarkan bagaimana wanita Indonesia menjaga kemauan mereka untuk mencoba keberuntungan sebagai tenaga kerja di luar negeri, meski fakta menunjukkan bahwa beberapa tenaga kerja kurang terlindungi oleh Negara secara ekonomi dan politik. Pada hampir seluruh sektor ekonomi, baik formal dan non-formal, banyak tenaga kerja wanita (TKW) Indonesia yang hidup dan berkerja di luar negeri tidak mendapatkan hak mereka secara utuh sebagai pekerja dan terkadang harus kehilangan hak mendasar seperti upah minimum, tidak mendapatkan upah, upah ditahan atau tidak dibayarkan, juga ditolak untuk memiliki paspor mereka kembali. Ada banyak TKW Indonesia mengalami kekerasan fisik ataupun seksual oleh majikan mereka, sementara banyak pekerja wanita menjadi korban hingga dipaksa menjadi pelacur oleh penyalur mereka. Sebagai tambahan, beberapa TKW harus menghadapi masalah perlindungan yang serius. Banyak korban praktik korupsi seperti pengenaan pungutan ilegal oleh Polisi Indonesia dan polisi negara penerima TKW serta pekerja imigrasi; tuntutan pembayaran, pemerasan uang dan penyitaan barang-barang berharga. Tercatat bahwa, meski sengsara, jumlah tenaga kerja terus meningkat, tulisan ini menganalisa mekanisme kausal pada tenaga kerja wanita dari sosail ekonomi dan politik di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: Masalah TKW, Negara, alasan untuk *remittance*

Abstract

This paper describes how the Indonesian women, despite the fact that some migrant workers are economically and politically poorly protected by the state, kept the desire to try their luck as migrant workers abroad. In almost all economic sectors, both formal and non-formal, many of the Indonesian Female Migrant Workers (FMW/TKW) living and working abroad did not receive their full rights as workers and sometimes even lost their basic rights such as that to minimum wage, not having their wages, withheld or not paid at all as well as refusal to have their passports returned. Many of the Indonesian TKWs were even physically and sexually abused by their employers while many female workers were victimized into becoming forced prostitutes by their sponsors. In addition, some of the TKW had to face serious problems of protection; many as victims of corrupt practices such as the imposition of illegal levy by the Indonesian and the receiving country police and immigration staffs; demands for payments, extortion of money and confiscation of valuables. Noting that, despite all the sufferings, the numbers of migrant workers are constantly increasing, this paper analyzes the causal mechanism of female migration from the socioeconomic and political context in Indonesia.

Keywords: TKW problems, the State, reasons to migrate remittance.

INTRODUCTION

Women or female are often constructed from the view point of patriarchal community as opposite of men or male. The differences in biological structures and (sometimes) behavior (feminine / masculine) complete the differences in the way they are treated in every society. Women are considered not equal to

men or worst as lower than men. Women are seen as irrational because they tend to rely on their feelings to deal with problems. Opinion difference led to various discriminations and injustice to women such as marginalization, subordination, harassment and even double burden to women's roles. Those discrimina-

tions and injustice to women happen everywhere and raise problems in almost every country in the world. Instead of escaping from the suffering at home, some women might get entrapped to worst situation when working out of their traditional concept of duty around their family to seek more opportunity as migrant workers abroad.

This paper provides a review of existing studies about how migration alters women's position in the course of social change. First, on the conceptual and methodological issues from the existing literatures that shows the changing gender relations. Second, selective reviews of case studies are outlined illustrating some problems for Indonesian female migrant workers. The objective is to illustrate how the problem starts, in part, at home and how the government addressed it. The concluding discussion summarize, in country-specific major findings, an attempt to distinguish issues that put the reason of increasing numbers of Indonesian female migrant workers.

Indonesia is a quintessential labor-surplus nation. At the end of 2006, an estimated 11 percent of Indonesian workers (11.6 million) were unemployed, and underemployment was over 20 percent (45 million workers). Not surprisingly, the two types of migration that most affect Indonesia involve emigration. First is an increasing level of migration to more developed nations, particularly those belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); here the flow is predominantly permanent and consists mainly of skilled migrants. Second is the better-known, temporary movement of largely unskilled workers to the Middle East and elsewhere in Asia. Many of these migrants are women who work as domestics and are vulnerable to exploitation. Quantifying the scale of the movement, however, is rendered difficult by the limited collection of stock and flow information on movements to and from the nation, and the fact that there are substantial undocumented flows out of Indonesia.

The international migration of labor is an important component of globalization and economic development in many less developed countries

(LDCs). When productions are driven to fulfill the demand to put saving for export, farmers got the least of income with limited means to fulfill their family basic needs. The cycles goes on and on that finally lead to poverty that lead the affected community to try find a better alternative jobs in country and even abroad. The global development model with the emphasis on liberal and capitalistic economy move man and woman out with every possible job available to them. As mention before, different kind of jobs can be obtained for men and woman. The groupings somehow formalize women's position as mere commodity (Wibowo 2005). The number of international migrants, or people residing in a country other than their country of birth, has increased more or less linearly over the past 40 years, from an estimated 76 million in 1965 to 188 million in 2005, as illustrated in Figure 1. International migration raises both hopes and concerns for and is critical to how globalization and economic development are experienced by many LDCs from which international migrants come. About one half of the world's international migrants are women (IOM 2005). However, some international migrant flows are dominated by males, others by females. For example, more Indonesian men migrate to the United States, but more female find place to migrate to Malaysia and the Gulf Countries.

The numbers of migrant workers increase significantly especially the number of female migrant workers. In the period of 20 years (1974-1994), female migrant workers increase by 116 times. More recent data from the ministry of Man Power of Indonesia and World Bank shows that 76% from 480.393 are female and around 94% work as domestic helpers in the Middle East, East Asia and South East Asia.

International migration creates both losses and gains for the LDCs from which international migrants originate. LDCs lose millions of highly educated people where human capital often is already scarce. LDCs also lose significant numbers of relatively low skilled workers whose productivity and wages are far higher abroad than at home. International migrants send substantial amounts of remittances back to their

Figure 1. Upward Trend in Total International Migration, 1965-2005.

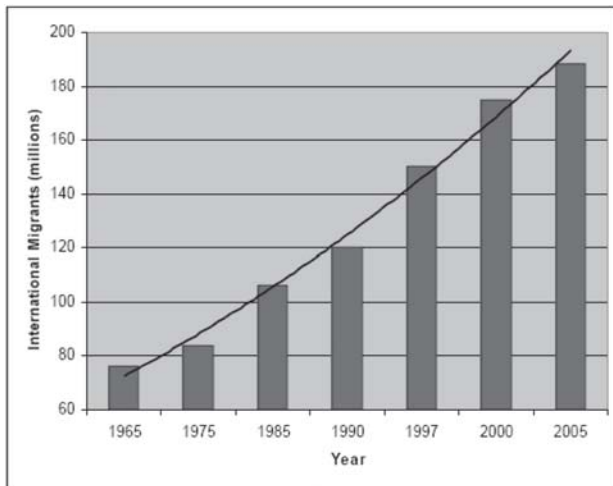
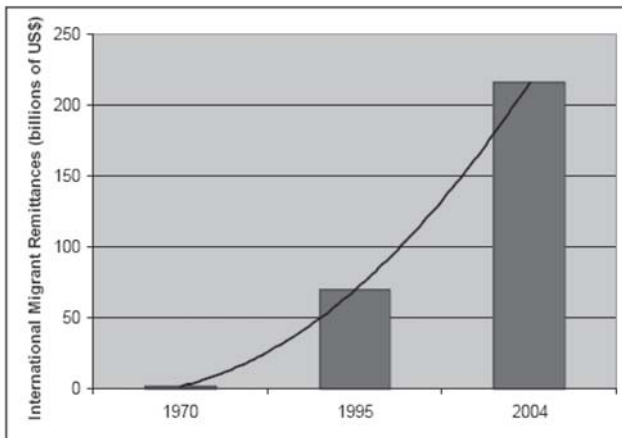


Figure 2. Growth in Total International Migrant Remittances, 1970-2004



countries of origin. The flow of international migrant remittances has increased more rapidly than the number of international migrants, themselves: from an estimated US\$2 billion in 1970 to US\$216 billion in 2004. Part of this sharp increase is probably due to an improved accounting of migrant remittances; however, the actual amount of remittances probably is higher than these numbers indicate. While the growth in international migration has been linear, the growth in remittances has been nonlinear, as one can see in Figure 2.

In other words, on average, each of the world's international migrants is sending home more remit-

tances today than in the past. There is not a single convincing explanation for this phenomenon. Nearly 70% of all remittances go to LDCs. It is likely that remittance figures understate true international remittance flows, which include an unknown amount of cash that does not enter countries through formal banking channels as well as goods that migrants send or carry home. Remittances make people the most important "export" of many LDCs in terms of the foreign exchange that they generate.

THE SCOPE OF RESEARCH

This paper will examine temporary labor migration of women from Indonesia since Indonesia belongs to three major sending countries along with the Philippines and Sri Lanka. This is because temporary migration comprises a significant component of global migration flows due to the "closed-door" policy in many industrialized countries. The focus will be on the migration of "unskilled women" because the majority of Indonesian migrant women fall under this category. The scope of this paper is also limited to available study related to Indonesia Female Migrant Workers (IFMW) since there is not sufficient data available for illegal (irregular, undocumented) migration. The paper will also mainly examine the mechanism of the "sending side" or "emigration side" in this paper because a relatively small number of researches have been done from developing countries' perspectives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question is concerning the patterns and mechanisms of women's migration in Asia. The majority of the flows of female migrant workers originate from three major sending countries (Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia) while men migrate from all developing countries. Why is there such a pattern? What factors drive women in these countries to emigrate? Many case studies have been conducted on female migration in developing countries that mostly attribute international migration of female to poverty. The explanations does not go beyond it to

explain why woman from poor countries do not migrate,

METHODOLOGY

This paper is based on library research about Indonesian female migrant workers in both Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. A major challenge has been reconciling data and information from different sources, which tend to differ significantly due to different methods of collection or calculation. The data presented in this report represents the best estimates based on significant research of all different sources.

This paper is organized under four chapters where theoretical framework being the second chapter after the introduction. Chapter three will outline the discussion on the reasons behind female workers to decide to migrate and leave their nest behind looking for better livelihood using integrative approach. The fourth chapter is the conclusion and recommendations based on network theory found in Nana Oishi work and her elaborate findings about "social legitimacy" (Nana Oishi, 2002).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In her productive writing about migrant workers, Nana Oishi (2002) presented some valuable frameworks to deal with the issues. One alternative, the Network Theory, and her research findings: Integrative Approach to International Female Migration, which can be used to analyzed factors influencing Indonesia women to become migrant workers are presented in this paper.

NETWORK CONCEPT

Network concept attributes migration process to personal, cultural, and/or other social ties. In migrant-sending countries, information about jobs and living standards abroad is most efficiently transmitted through personal networks such as friends and neighbors who emigrated. In receiving countries, immigrant communities often help their fellow men and women to immigrate, find a job, and adjust to a new environment. These networks reduce the costs of migration

for newcomers, further inducing potential migrants to leave their countries.

Network concept is indeed applicable to the case of female migration in Asia. Women tend to rely on their personal networks more than men do. The literature and my own field research also suggest that many migrant women found jobs through their friends and relatives. The density and geographical extent of personal and institutional networks between migrant receiving countries and sending countries would certainly help explain how migration has expanded.

However, social networks cannot explain why and how such networks were developed between one country and another to start with. The web of network does not seem to be evenly spread across countries and regions. The migration system theorists argue that the development of such networks is dependent on historical, geographical, and political ties which existed before large-scale migration started (Kritz et al, 1992). However, there is no convincing evidence indicating the preexistence of such close ties between major migrant-sending and receiving countries in Asia; e.g., the Philippines and Saudi Arabia, or Sri Lanka and Kuwait. Social networks alone cannot explain the patterns of international female (and male) migration either. But, on the story of Indonesia and the Gulf Country, especially Saudi Arabia, and between Indonesia and Malaysia there are strong evident that network theory can be applied.

AN INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL FEMALE MIGRATION

Immigration policies and labor demand/supply do affect the overall volumes and patterns of international female migration. The general assumption is that if there is a large demand for migrant women and if the immigration policy is more open for unskilled female labor, the more migrant women will enter the particular country. Also, there is a process of selectivity among employers. For example, many employers in Southeast Asia and Europe prefer to hire Filipinas as domestic helpers because of their high education level, language (English) ability, and friendliness. In fact, the

wage level of Filipino is higher than that of any other nationalities.

However, the demand level and selectivity on the employers' side cannot entirely explain the patterns of female migration. For instance, Arab households are said to prefer to hire Muslim maids because Christian maids (most Filipino maids are Christian) teach wrong values to children. Statistics shows that many Muslim women from Indonesia fill the vacancies as well as balancing the demand/supply labor scale. In this case, questions arise concerning the influence of immigration policies in Indonesia. Is there any or non existence?

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

FACTORS INFLUENCING INDONESIAN WOMEN BECOMING MIGRANT WORKER

As the largest Muslim populated country, Indonesia has a long history of cooperation and ties with Saudi Arabia. As Hajj Pilgrimage is dutiful for all Muslim that have enough resources to go, the city of Mecca where the Ka'bah located is the final destination for Hajj. Every year thousands of Indonesian Muslim visit Mecca. Some of them stay longer and sometimes end up being illegal workers in any of the Gulf Countries after their Hajj visa expires. Better wages, some expecting to be paid the equivalent of \$800 per month, lured Indonesian migrant worker to endure the working condition in the Gulf Countries. In that way, Saudi Arabia is very attractive to Indonesian Muslim that gives reasons to them to be there. How can we use this fact to explain the ever increasing numbers of female migrant workers to choose Saudi Arabia? The following framework offers some explanations.

TRANSNATIONAL NETWORK

One way of establishing an analytical link between migration and the politicization of migrants concerns through non-governmental institutions is via the concept of governance. Governance issues have in previous studies typically been approached from one level or two levels only - i.e. supra-state or NGO level.

Another strand of social science theorizing has been concerned with networks in a national and transnational setting. The principal categories of social theory employed to capture these different levels, therefore, are networks.

The concept of "network", thus, serves as a link between migration studies and governance. Within migration studies, networks theory have mostly been approached from socio-cultural and/or spatial perspectives, whereby the political sphere has not yet received sufficient attention (Piper, 2006a; as also noted by Faist, 2004). Social movement scholars and political scientists working on advocacy networks, on the other hand, have investigated the transnational sphere of such network activities and the transnational nature of the issues advocated for, as well as the transnational form of such activism, but hardly beyond the context of NGOs neglecting trade unionism and thus collective political action. Migrant worker organizing has, therefore, not been looked at from a transnational nor trans-institutional perspective. There is a great deal of academic writing on the subject of trade union reforms and summarizing these goes beyond the scope of this paper. Trade unions ambivalent stance on migrant labor has also been subject to some analysis (Kahmann, 2002; Briggs, 2001). Theoretically, the most interesting and relevant contributions as far as this chapter is concerned, has been the work by Waterman (2001) on social movement unionism and Johnston (2001) on "labor as citizenship movement". The latter makes direct reference to immigrant labor, documented and undocumented. Johnston highlights the increasingly *transnational* workforce and *transnational* overlapping of societies which requires, according to him, a re-conceptualization of conventional perspectives on citizenship (argued by Piper and Ball, 2002). New approaches and strategies are needed to address critical problems faced by migrant workers in their role as foreigners as well as laborers in certain sectors that are associated with the "three Ds" (dirty, difficult, dangerous), epitomized by construction, agriculture, and domestic work. There is growing realization that "coalitions of organizations" can exert

far more influence than single organizations by themselves.

Waterman (2001, 2003) has developed the notion of “social movement unionism” as a synthesis of trade-union theory with that of “new social movement” theory, arguing that the crisis of trade unionism is rooted in the fact that the labor movement is still understood in organizational/institutional terms when it needs to be understood in networking/communicational ones (as new social movements have done). Both he and Johnston argue that although labor is not the only source for social change, it constitutes an important ally and would achieve its full potential if aligned with other democratic social movements. With traditional workers and unions no longer being the norm of political struggle for social justice, labor movements have to rethink their way of operating. Recent studies on migrant worker NGOs in the Southeast Asian context have argued on a similar line: that regular collaboration with trade unions would enhance NGOs advocacy efforts.

The specific situation of many migrant workers highlights the importance of organizational representation and the formation of alliances as well as networks across space, institutions and issue-specific (human rights, women’s rights, worker’s rights) to address the complexity of migrants’ rights.

Similar story can be drawn for Malaysia where proximity distance and the similarity in cultural backgrounds make it a favorable destination to work abroad. The history of Indonesian working in Malaysia starts in fifteen centuries, but migration was especially significant during colonial times. According to the 2001 Malaysian census, there were 1.38 million foreign born in the country, more than half of them from Indonesia. Although most Asian nations oppose permanent settlement of foreigners, more Indonesians are settling in other Asian countries. Among these Indonesians are the highly skilled and those who marry natives of other Asian countries. In Taiwan, for example, a number of Indonesian women have married Taiwanese men, forming the nucleus of a small, permanent Indonesian community. The largest

numbers are in neighboring Malaysia, which has a similar language, culture, and religion. Permanent settlement of Indonesians dates back. However, the scale of recent permanent settlement of Indonesians in Malaysia is not known. Significant numbers of unskilled labor migrants settle permanently in Malaysia, but many do not become legal residents as permanent settlement of unskilled Indonesians is opposed.

The tendency for migrant workers to become permanent or long-term residents has been particularly marked in East Malaysia. The population of the state of Sabah has soared from 697,000 in 1979 to almost 3 million in 2004, and migration from Indonesia and the Philippines has played a major role in this growth. There are an estimated 100,000 irregular migrants in Sabah and 138,000 in the West Malaysia state of Selangor, the majority of whom are Indonesians. The expense and danger of detection at the border has encouraged some migrant workers from eastern Indonesia to settle permanently, or on a long-term basis, in Sabah rather than regularly return to their nearby Indonesian homes. One consequence has been an increase in the number of “stateless” Indonesians who have no status in Malaysia and whose Indonesian passports have expired. Some 35,000 Indonesian passports were issued to such “paperless” citizens in Malaysia in the first four months of 2006. In Singapore, there is also a tradition of Indonesian immigration and large-scale labor migration. More recently, Singaporean men have brought over Indonesian wives. The number of Indonesian-born residents (excluding contract workers) in Singapore in 2000 was 32,785.

SOCIAL LEGITIMACY

The concept of social legitimacy is also mentioned in Oishi’s work. She proposed the concept to better understand the linkages between policies and individuals relates to each other. The social legitimacy is defined as the embodiment of norms in a given society which endorses particular behavioral patterns. Social legitimacy for international female migration means the set of norms that are conducive to women’s

international migration. Social legitimacy for women's international migration are deeply rooted in many socioeconomic factors such as (1) historical legacy of women's wage employment, (2) the country's integration into global economy, which results in the feminization of the labor force, (3) women's rural urban mobility; and (4) gender equality, particularly in education.

REASONS TO DECIDE ON BECOMING FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

In any endeavor of human life, each person will find their course of action related to their own needs and surroundings. In some woman, their roles as mothers and wives devoted to the maintenance of a stable, nurturing, domestic environment were central to the state's vision of an orderly and morally controlled nation. Yet the state's production of idealized bourgeois femininity as naturally linked to the home and hearth (Robinson, 1991; Shiraishi, 1997; Sen, 1998) was complicated in the state's own promotion of class specific gender ideologies that encouraged low-income women's separation from kin in certain situations (Stivens, 1990; Sunindyo, 1996; Ananta et al., 1998). In order to work as a domestic in Saudi Arabia, most migrants leave their families, including their children in many cases, behind in Indonesia. Thus, the family regimes under the New Order that promoted the domestic workers' departure from kin were considerably more flexible than the state-promulgated ideal of the middle class nuclear family.

HISTORICAL LEGACY OF WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

The historical legacy of women's gainful employment refers to the tradition in which women were engaged in economic activities outside their home, whether in formal or informal sectors. In the Philippines, women had been engaged in commerce and services even before the colonial period. Similarly, Sri Lankan women have been the primary workforce in tea estates since the country was under British rule, and also comprised the majority of handloom workers after the country gained independence. In both

countries, women's wage employment and geographical mobility were not alien to the society. On the other hand, in Bangladesh, the tradition of female seclusion has discouraged women from openly taking part in wage employment. Women have long been "invisible human resources" (Wallace et al, 1987). The story of Indonesia is not far different from those countries. More women than men are working in collective jobs in the tea plantations or rice field. Women also dominate the traditional markets around their immediate community when men travel to do it.

IMPACT OF GLOBAL ECONOMY AND WOMEN'S RURAL-URBAN MOBILITY

A country's integration into the global economy and success in export-oriented industrialization also help develop social acceptance toward female migration. In Indonesia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka, export-oriented industrialization led to a rapid increase in the female labor force and accelerated rural-urban migration of women. Bangladeshi women have also started entering the labor force in manufacturing sectors, but to more limited extent than Filipinas and Sri Lankans. The vast majority of them still remain in the agricultural sector in rural areas. Rural-urban migration is still dominated by men. Women's geographical mobility within the country is still limited in Bangladesh.

WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Women's education level also affects the level of international female migration, albeit in indirect ways. First, the high education level among female population in developing countries attracts the investment of multinational corporations. Foreign investors normally prefer to hire skilled female workers who are also cheap and docile. The export-led manufacturing sectors thus facilitate women's internal mobility because they increase their employment prospects in various urban sectors. Having education also increases women's expectations for better life, and family tends to expect returns from daughter's education as well. While the public shows concerns for internal/interna-

tional migration of illiterate women, it tends to accept the migration of women with some education, believing that they should be able to make wise decisions and can protect themselves in an unfamiliar environment.

Social legitimacy is further enhanced by political backing. In the Philippines, President Marcos's aggressive promotion of overseas employment helped increase the number of migrant workers, and this created an accommodating environment for international migrants, whether men or women. While succeeding administrations have not officially promoted labor migration, they have recognized its economic importance and almost all presidents have praised migrants in public speeches as national heroes or heroines for helping their family and country. The Philippine president even greets returning migrants at the airport in every December. Such recognition that the government attached to migrant workers certainly helped increase the social acceptability of international migration, whether for men or women. In the Philippines, very little stigma is attached to international female migration.

In Bangladesh, by contrast, social legitimacy for female migration even within the country is generally low, let alone for their migration to foreign countries. Social stigma against women migrating abroad is still strong. And this is reflected in the lack of political backing to female migration as well. The policy makers and intellectuals argue that potential migrant women tend to be illiterate, helpless, and vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in a foreign land. All of that related to the traditional culture and social norms that confer power and privilege to men. They believe that the state needs to protect these women by banning their emigration. The lack of such legitimacy or the existence of stigma against female migration within their own country also discourages women from leaving the country. Women are afraid of being ostracized, labeled as promiscuous, and risking their marriage ability or tarnishing family reputations.

CONCLUSIONS

The patterns of international female migration can be explained by three levels of analyses from the "sending side": (1) the state; (2) individuals; and (3) society. At the state level, emigration policies treat men and women differently. Because women are not a value neutral workforce but the symbols of national dignity and pride, the government tends to have protective and restrictive emigration policies for women. Emigration policies for women tend to be value-driven rather than those for men which are economically driven where women put in their traditional status in domestic works wherever they are.

At the individual level, women's autonomy and decision-making power are crucial determinants. Women in so called "major sending countries" (e.g. Indonesia, Philippines and Sri Lanka), have higher autonomy and decision making power within their households than those in "non sending countries."

However, these are not the only determinants, either. Many low-income Bangladeshi women have higher autonomy and yet are not interested in migration indicating that the social stigma about indecency for woman to travel alone is strong enough to discourage the vast majority of lower-middle and middle-class women from leaving the country. Therefore, "social legitimacy" matters.

Social legitimacy, which derives from historical legacy of women's employment, a country's integration into global economy, women's rural-urban mobility, and their education level, is a prerequisite for the large-scale international female migration. A country's export oriented strategy increases foreign investment that leads to the rise in women's labor force participation and their rural-urban mobility. Even in the major "sending countries" such as Philippines and Sri Lanka, it was not socially desirable for women to leave their community on their own to work in cities before export-oriented industrialization started. However, as the country became integrated into the global economy, and as the demand for female labor increased in urban areas, many low-income women responded to the demand by leaving

their communities, moving from rural to urban areas. As a result, social norms were gradually transformed. The increase of women's rural-urban mobility eventually resulted in social acceptability of women leaving their community on their own, whether for cities or foreign countries.

The link between globalization and international migration is not as direct as the conventional migration literature suggested. The globalization process and the resultant export oriented industrialization do not necessarily produce international migrants directly. However, they seem to help bring about changes in social perceptions towards women's employment and their independent departure from their own community. The sudden increase in the demand for female labor gradually transforms traditional norms which used to restrict women's geographical mobility within the traditional community.

The mechanism of international female migration is extremely complex and thus requires an "integrative approach" with the multiple levels of analyses. Similar studies are needed in other "sending country" regions such as Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa to compare the main causal factors. Does the state act in the same manner in all regions? Are there any regional differences in the ways in which globalization processes affect women's migration? Further comparative research will lead us to a better understanding of international female migration.

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Interests to write the topic develop simultaneously by an old friend academic speech (he works for the Ministry of Man Power) at the department, the call for IJS paper and it grow stronger learning the fate of Indonesian female migrant worker, Ruyati, beheaded in Saudi Arabia exactly 50 days ago. This paper, for me, is the first composed about female migrant worker. It is not good or excellent for the details and data mostly derives from others writers work. Research should be done on the topic that I choose to elaborate, the reason why unskilled, inexperienced, low educated women dare to leave their family behind to

work as migrant worker. The writing standards also need to be improved. Suggestions and critics are welcome.

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