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**The Transfer of Care in Global Capitalism :
the Feminization of Migration as Household Survival
Strategy Amongst Foreign Domestic Workers
in Malaysia**

By:

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(Paper presented at the **10th International Interdisciplinary Congress
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Introduction

- **This presentation will focus on how international migration motivated by economic reasons is a phenomenon that affects increasing numbers of families in Indonesia.**
- **It will show how international migration of women for domestic work is a survival strategy for poor households.**
- **The presentation will also analyze how these women manage transnational households from a distance and maintain their families in their countries of origin.**
- **Given that care is a valuable resource the paper will argue that families from the poor countries pay the highest price for this transfer.**
- **Finally, the presentation will conclude with a discussion on how within these social fields of interaction there is a flow of resources and discourses that creates new sense of identity and belonging as an adaptive response to their vulnerable economic position in their country of origin.**

Feminization of Migration

- Malaysia is one of the countries in Asia, with relatively high rates of economic growth and rapid market expansion; resulting in an increasing demand for unskilled and skilled workers from the poorer neighboring countries, like the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Feminization of Migration

- Malaysia is the largest employer of foreign labour in Asia, with an alien workforce, legal and illegal, estimated to be about two million men and women. The vast majority is Indonesian, most are unskilled and most are irregular – that is, they had come without proper documentation or overstayed their visas in violation of Malaysia's immigration laws. The presence of so many immigrants had become a major domestic political issue within Malaysia, a sensitive foreign policy question in Indonesian – Malaysian relations, and a growing human rights concern.

Feminization of Migration

Indonesian workers in Malaysia

Year	FORMAL					INFORMAL (FDW)	Total
	Horticulture	Agriculture	Industry	Construction	Service		
2002	174,869		109,506	103,286	40,277	162,830	590,768
2003	164,340		103,010	204,477	18,300	228,561	718,688
2004	164,195		114,946	186,991	15,809	247,603	729,544
2005	29,404		14,353	12,353	5,786	55,505	117,822
2006	316,832	92,003	213,172	216,898	40,993	294,115	1,174,013

Sources: The function of workers of KBRI- Kuala Lumpur, 2006

- One of the most relevant characteristics of the migratory phenomenon has been the rapidly rising participation of women (see table above – FDW is 100% women and there are also women in the Industry and Services sectors). The current migratory trend of migrant women is different from the past in terms of their economic role. They are migrating on their own as main economic providers and heads of households and not as dependents of their husbands.
- Most of the literature on migration has focused on the family as a cohesive unit where the man is the provider and the woman is the wife or daughter, or in other words the dependent (Jimenez, 1998). The patriarchal conceptualization of the family as a cohesive unit where men are the providers is being challenged by the presence of autonomous women migrants and the economic and social contributions to their families in their country of origin.

- Behind the feminization of international migration is a complex network of political, social and economic experiences taking place globally and affecting both the societies and families of origin and destination. However, I will only focus on its impact in the families left behind in the country of origin which is one of the areas of study in the survey conducted in Malaysia.

The Survey

- This survey is interested in the impact of the employment of a domestic worker on gender relations and on the family institution of both the employers' as well as the employees' respective household. The findings of a section of the survey will be presented here.
- A survey was conducted from August – December 2007. A total of 298 Indonesian Foreign Domestic Workers and 276 Filipina Foreign Domestic Workers were interviewed. A snowballing sampling technique was used. This presentation will only focus on the Indonesian Foreign Domestic workers

International migration of women for domestic work as survival strategy for poor households.

- From the data in table 1 most of the respondents said that the main reason for migration to do domestic work is to make money and support their families (60.1%).

Table 1: Reason for Migration for Domestic Work

Reason	No	Percentage
To make money and support family	179	60.1
To make money and pay up debts in Indonesia	102	34.3
To run way from family problems	17	5.7
Total	298	100.0

- Most of the respondents (91.6%) said that their families allowed them to work in Malaysia. But both they and their families are concerned of the following:

Table 2: Their greastest worry/concern

Concern about	Percentage
Nobody to care for children	46.0
Husbands will remarry	4.0
Fear of Abuse	48.0
Non response	2.0
Total	100.0

Table 3: Hopes and Aspirations for Working in Malaysia

Hopes and Aspiration	No	Percentage
To buy land	20	6.7
To safe money	140	46.98
To buy land and build house	51	17.11
To buy land, build house and safe money	62	20.8
No response	25	8.38
Total	298	100.0

- The living conditions of the most vulnerable population groups especially women and children living in poverty have forced many women to seek employment to support their family. Men's deteriorating role as economic providers, a result of high rates of male unemployment further exacerbates household poverty. This is resulting in women taking responsibility for the maintenance of the family. Migrating for work is the survival strategy adopted by women in this study.

Remittances

- **The transfer of care is a heavy price and cost for the children left behind and this is reflected in terms of their worry and concern while working in Malaysia as shown in table 2.**

Managing transnational households from a distance and maintaining their families in their countries of origin

- **Remittances** represent long-distance social links of solidarity, reciprocity and obligation that connect these women with their relatives across national borders. Most of these women send money home as shown in table 4. Most of the remittances are used for the daily needs of the family and for their children's education. Some of it is used to purchase land or build houses.

Remittances

Table 4: Frequency of sending money back to Indonesia

Frequency of remittances	%
Never sent home any money	18.1
Once a month	16.1
Once every two months	23.5
Once every three months	17.4
Four months and above	24.8
Total	100.0

Communication with Family

Table 5: Communication with Family in Indonesia

Mode of Communication	Percentage
Telephone	62.7
Text Messaging (SMS)	4.0
Letter writing	4.3
Telephone and Text Messaging	21.7
Telephone and letter writing	5.4
All of the above	1.8
Total	100.0

- The person they communicated most with was their mothers followed by their children.
- During their stay in Malaysia 250 (83.9%) of the respondents said that their families have contacted them. Their families contact them for the following reasons:

Table 6: Reasons for Family to Contact Respondents

Reason for contacting	No	Percentage
Ask for money	4	1.6
Want to know how I am doing	62	24.8
To tell me what is happening in the village	17	6.8
Ask for money and want to know how I am doing	12	4.8
Ask for money and tell me what is happening in the village	4	1.6
Want to know how I am doing and tell me what is happening in the village	66	26.4
All of the above	83	33.2
No response	2	0.8
Total	250	100.0

Table 7 Persons caring for respondents children

Persons caring for children	Percentage
Parents	33.1
In-Laws	3.3
Husband	24.3
Parents and In-laws	1.1
Parents and husband	13.3
In-laws and husband	3.9
Others	7.2
No response	13.8
Total	100.0

Conclusion: The lack of resources and discourages that creates the sense of quality and belonging

- Women's remittance contributions to their families are on average more than the amount contributed by the men in these households. Tacoli (1999) explains this dynamic in terms of the influence of normative gender roles in shaping individuals' constraints and opportunities. Even though this reflects "culturally-specific gender asymmetries affecting women's options", she also notes that this does not mean that women migrant workers sacrifice entirely their own self-interests. She argues that they also saw their regular remittances home "as an investment in their own future by securing the support of other family members".

children's welfare and education.

Table 8: Long Distance Monitoring of Childrens Needs

Issues/Factors Monitored	Peratus
Education	53.0
Welfare	10.1
Education and welfare	2.0
Who they are mixing with	32.9
No response	2.0
Total	100.0

Conclusion: The flow of resources and discourses that creates new sense of identity and belonging

- “Migrating for the sake of family” is a commonly encountered reason given to explain the decision to seek employment overseas, men and women alike. However, women are generally more likely to explain that they migrated “for the sake of the family”, in order to improve household income, or to enhance children’s welfare and education.

- Hence by way of “strategic interplay between their normative roles, where maternal altruism, marital obligations and filial duty can be traded off against each other or act as a justification for more selfish desires”, these women “increase their own autonomy without incurring penalization”.

- The theme of “women as transnational mothers/daughters” is a dominant script running through the life stories of female migrant domestic workers. This study shows how Indonesian migrant workers endeavour to maintain her familial linkage through “phone calls, text messaging, letters, prayers and visits. Notable are some observations made on the changing forms of motherhood and family as a consequence of the migration for work of these women. They have redefined their roles and identity as “good mothers” by providing rather than nurturing.

- In addition, spatial separation has led to the dynamics of “long-distance mothers (or daughters)” that endeavour to maintain family ties through letters or phone calls. The contradictory sentiments experienced by these women who endure guilt feelings for leaving behind their children in order to provide a better living for them resemble strikingly those feelings sensed by the middle-class mothers they serve, who rely on waged mothering in exchange for career advancement (Lee 2004:16). Though they differ widely in their social conditions, both are living out re-defined notions of motherhood of their time, and reshaping the family institution of their respective societies.

THANK YOU