

Indonesia Migrant Worker: Modern Representation of Women As Javanese Villagers in East Java, Indonesia

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Abstract— Modernization in various sectors in Indonesia, has made women more flexible and open-minded in doing their activities. For a long time, Indonesian women have often been perceived as being weak and backward, unable to show their quality in the many fields. Addressing this issue, there are many Javanese women who left their villages or small towns of east Java Province to bigger cities of Indonesia to work as domestic worker or employer on manufacture sector. This article points to Javanese women coming from East Java who took part in domestic worker in Hong Kong. This study was conducted among Javanese domestic workers coming from Tulungagung, Malang, Blitar, Madiun and Banyuwangi Regency at East Java province, Indonesia using qualitative perspective. The research was conducted based on non-random sampling using snowball technique. By observing at least 30 Javanese Women followed by in-depth interview, this research was processed. This research concluded that participation of women in the labor market, especially Javanese women who become Indonesian migrant workers, is increasing. They represent modern women by doing transnational migration as Indonesian Migrant workers for social remittances rather than economic remittances.

Keywords— Indonesian Migrant Worker, Modern, Representation, Women, Javanese Villagers

I. INTRODUCTION

Living in recent century is no longer hold people to belong into one society only because people will take their lives in another place in line with globalization. This fact is also true for Indonesian villagers who lives at East Java Province. Villagers nowadays, especially young women prefer living in Hong Kong as domestic workers to living in their hometown as farmers or housewives. They have chosen to become transnational migrants to Hong Kong for many reason such as improving quality of life, satisfaction of life, increasing their investment on jewelry or rice field, and renovating home from the remittance they get while working. Indonesina migrant workers in Hong Kong are mostly mothers who left their husbands and children, or girls who left their siblings and parents, hoping for a better life in their future. In addition, Javanese women nowadays prefer pursuing their high achievement by working abroad rather than working in

agriculture sector as a farmer. These would happened among them because of living standard changes in villages nowadays, influences from surrounding villagers who have gone for being workers out of town and/or abroad for several years, and the stigma of modern women which is less touchable with domestic sector like in village. Mostly women villagers think that living outside their hometown is better now because it will encourage them to be independent, widen their skills, broaden their knowledge in workforce and taskforce which give impact on their financial ability.

The annual report from Indonesian National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Overseas Labour (BNP2TKI) in 2018 [1] shows a fluctuative number of Indonesian Migrant workers in several provinces in Indonesia. The first ranking is East Java which had some 39.801 people in 2016, increased to 59.506 people in 2017 and decreased into 57.544 people in the 2018. The decrease was caused by labour moratorium in several countries, so Indonesian workers have to look other jobs in other countries. In 2018, the report told that the number of workers in Malaysia is 85.146, Hong Kong is 67.200 and Taiwan is 53.681. These three countries are described as the top three best working sojourn for Indonesian migrant workers this time. The previous researches found two different attitudes of migrant workers towards their job. On the one hand, some migrant workers feel pride of their job because they thought that not everyone can have an experience living in another country for a very long time like they do. These workers consider their job as a prestige, especially when they compared themselves with other workers who worked in local areas of Indonesia. On the other hand, some other migrant workers view their work as an obligation and the only choice to meet daily needs. In this case, there has been a change in how people perceive migrant workers. In the past, it used to be considered unsuitable for women, especially the married ones. Now, there are two reasons of working as a migrant worker, namely for prestige and for long-term needs [2][3].

Javanese women have moved from villages and small towns from east Java Province, Indonesia to Hong Kong as domestic workers such as caregivers for elderly, baby and toddler, or as employers in manufacture sector. Intersection between Javanese women in Hong Kong as a

destination country is used in terms of ways in which diverse socially and culturally constructed categories interact at different levels to produce different forms of relations and inequalities. Indonesian women often face discrimination, such as classism, trans phobia, and racism through their mobilities. International migration has many aspects of inequality on migrant workers' life but they are still engaging through these until this time. Furthermore, limited researches have been done to analyse the dynamics of migrant workers, especially Javanese women, who are still in love with doing transnational migration with gender perspective. This research aims to fill this gap.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

In research method, there is a paradigm that refers to basic meta-theoretical perception. This perception influences one's thinking framework, how we use analogy, and how advocates of a social theory use it. In this case, there is a similar view of some advocates who see a certain theory in the same way. When social scientists use certain paradigms, they see the world accordingly in a specific way.

This research used qualitative method. Through social definition paradigm, this research looks to understand social fact as it is. It also seeks to find the nature of meaning through social construct created by migrant workers. The analysis was based on subjective view by directly observing the people involved in the social fact, and not based on third party observer. The approach used was nominalist, anti-positivist and idiographic. The meaning, like other deliberate social action, appears as a result of one's action and consciousness. Therefore, in-depth observation of human consciousness and subjectivity is required to find the meaning of certain social life.

The research took place at some districts in some regencies at East Java, namely Tulungagung, Blitar, Madiun and Banyuwangi Regency. This is a qualitative descriptive research using purposive sampling. In-depth interview and observation of 30 women were carried out from the basic data taken from manpower agency and village stakeholder in each regency at East Java Province. The research setting was the districts with a large number of migrant workers in each selected regency at East Java, whose women at their productive period are working in Hong Kong rather than other countries. To gain more information, some stakeholders from migrant worker families were chosen as research subject.

The data was analyzed using interactive analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman. This model was used in the data collection, data reduction and classification, triangulation until making conclusion. [4].

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Patriarchy System As Javanese Social Construction*

Patriarchal ideology or patriarchy system is considered to be more dominant in the Asian society [5]. However, the Indonesian society is ruled over by familialism that

constructs the notion that women should run the household as a housewife, a good wife and a good mother. According to Abdullah [6], this familialism ideology has even expanded and penetrated into the public or social arena.

In general, Indonesian society still adheres to the patriarchal system. This system places men in superior position compared to women. Also, men are considered to have more power than women, who are often perceived as being weak and helpless. According to Masudi [7], the history of patriarchal society has shaped human civilization from the beginning which considers men stronger (more powerful) than women in various roles in their life (as a person, a family member, a part of community and even as a citizen. For many generations, this patriarchal culture has brought some distinctions in behavior, status and authority between men and women in the society, which later becomes a gender hierarchy [7].

Preview into transnational migration is addressed here as the material and existential condition of being Javanese women at the borderland, in-between, in transit. The sense of belonging, (self) representation, and (dis)identification experienced by migrants is observed and analysed. The creation of spaces for participation, inclusion, and belonging through negotiation processes is described as a way to maintain emotional, relational, and institutional linkages with one's family, group, country, culture, and religion of origin, while also striving to be part of the social and political context of the receiving country. Strategic (dis)identification and (re)interpretation of the context of origin and of arrival are described as processes of identity negotiation [8].

It is noticeable that patriarchal system only allows women to do work based on domestic tasks as their faith at home, such as nurturing children, taking care of home and its surrounds, serving meals for family and going to rice field, a natural part of women's basic routine's for Javanese women. This culture is embedded through generation so they live the life with this identity. Analogously, these are also found on some informants who live with traditional Javanese culture. Vera, a migrant worker informant comes from Banyuwangi told me if she was irritated with this system as mentioned in this quote:

"I was just stressed when working at home for all my life since I was a girl. In life, I'm looking for happiness but the things still away from me. I kept burdened with this life, so I decided to be a migrant worker at Hong Kong again, the point is I am working, and I have got my salary as my right and I can use for shopping."

Women's faith on their mobility is constructed through this system and culture which is very compelling and restricted for Javanese women's activities. Notions of women's or mother's achievement value is very low for Javanese migrant workers in village. It is reinforced by social labelling and punishment due to Javanese norms clearly clarified for gender barrier for Javanese women. As a result, Javanese women working as migrant workers have a same path with other Javanese women because they usually follow the success of migrant workers coming from their family or neighbourhood. They are infrequently break out rules and notion, including their

attitude. These realities were captured in some informants, one of which is Rufti'ah from Madiun:

"Firstly, I just observe my family and neighbourhood. They have been successful as migrant workers. They have an increasing quality of life, can get everything they want until they went back again there (to Hong Kong). At last, I asked them and I followed along their journey. They are just well-grounded into these, I really want alike them, so I do believe on them"

Another Javanese woman, Marida from Tulungagung said about mobility pattern consolidation for migrant workers abroad:

"Leaving Indonesia to Hong Kong for me is new experience, so I decided to go there for a reason. because there was someone who close to me, like close friend or family or neighbour. I do not have much experience in working abroad so my family will disagree if I only belong to an agency. I will not take a risk whether I really want to be a domestic worker. I do feel safe if at Hong Kong, I have someone to accompany me and trained me so well."

Patriarchy system was established for the majority of Javanese at East java province. It is believed that the system is part of tradition and full of useful symbolic-meaning for future faith. Javanese ancestor should be truthful for the younger. In spite of women participation for studying and working in urban areas, migration is further quietly controlled and decided by others rather than women themselves. The patriarch always has a power, legitimate and control over women's ideas for their mobility. Wolf's research findings on Ford [9] showed that conclusion making for daughter in Javanese family suggests that the decision maker in the traditional family occupies a powerful position in a relative hierarchy. There are gender relation problems, in which achieving a high status for women may mean conforming to the female subjection implicated in the experiences of non-autonomous everyday lives [10]. In many ways, Javanese Patriarchal system would create some social constructions depending on those that had been around. Within women mobility or movement, patriarchal system is not only a challenge for Javanese women, but also indirectly an evidence of their capability in public sector that has never been seen clearly.

B. Javanese Social Remittance: A Potential Resource of Modern Representation for Women

Social remittances are the ideas, behaviours, identities, and social capital that migrants export to their home communities, including ideas about democracy, health, and community organization. They differ from global cultural flows in that it is possible to identify the channels through which they are disseminated and the determinants of their impact [11].

There are three forms of social remittances described as the following:

1. Normative structures which consists of some thoughts, norms, and convictions. They are the standard for people actions, thought for family responsibility, rules of neighbourhood and participation in communities, and also social placement aspiration. These structures also

embrace on the identity of class, gender and race among people.

2. Followed by systems of practice which cover all actions shaped by normative structures. These focused on how people operate their household jobs, the types of rituals they engage including their tradition and religion, and intensity of participation in political community.

3. Social capital which is developed from rule of behaviour in social life and values come from people's perception, also denote social remittances. Leaders of social and political communities also can utilize their power and position to increase their authority in the place of origin [11].

In this research, social remittance facilitates migrant workers when they have intensive communication with their family, siblings or relatives in Indonesia through telephone calls, video calls and social media such as Line, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. There are many notions, perceptions, norms and values which are transferred to other people. They are perceived as the new culture or value which is brought by Indonesian migrant workers from Hong Kong to their homeland in Indonesia. Social remittances have been seen as the new ways of new culture spreads beyond Indonesian culture which also migrate into different place instantly. These give impact on migrant workers' relationship, networking and communication in that they give pleasure and convenience which has never been owned before working to Hong Kong.

Social Remittance is promised as a potential resource and value for Javanese migrant workers to show how people who live between two different cultures, (and it might be) a new culture can be shielded and represented as modern lifestyle women. In addition, social remittances have just formed the new brand Javanese women, that is Javanese women villagers, through transnational migration in Hong Kong. They already knew many skills and their knowledge was also developed in return. This phenomenon is proven by Javanese villagers' abilities to operate domestic task by machine with sophisticated technology, kitchen scheduling for cooking, being involved into family decision, organizing women's meeting in village, expanding their network by developing the migrant communities in their residences and many more.

Based on this phenomenon, people cannot underestimate the Javanese workers in Hong Kong because of their job as domestic workers. We should realize that they have ideas, behaviours and identity differ from others, called social capital that someday will be exported when they are home in East Java, Indonesia. Another considerable value bringing Javanese women to go to Hong Kong is the ideas on transnational migration. With their rationalities, women migrant workers already had a glorious goal whether it is for their career and family betterment, encouraging their children to study until higher education, or just for investment and saving their wage into the local currency.

Thus, Javanese villagers as part of Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong have been seen as family heroes or "dutiful daughters, or migrant mothers, engaged in

maternal sacrifice for the well-being of their families” [12]. They were involved into workforce by becoming Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong by considering many importances, whether for the women themselves, their family and their neighbour.

On the recent time, we must realize that Javanese workers working in domestic sector in Hong Kong have considerable values at least for themselves and their family. They left for Hong Kong for their actualization as modern women have a career and promised future. They also develop their knowledge and experiences in the modern world by having migration. They transform from traditional perspectives to open minded perspectives that brings them involved in labour market. Although many of them tried so hard to move out from the system and break the rules by migration as domestic workers, there were formulation to rebuild their social construction. In many ways, Javanese Patriarchal system would create some social construction depending on those who had been around. Within women mobility or women movement, patriarchal system is not only a challenge for Javanese women, but also indirectly an evidence of their capability in public sector which is never seen clearly. Through migration, Javanese women could rebuild the networking in between them. They did what had never been imagined before, working as domestic workers, for pursuing life quality improvement and chasing all their dreams. They are going abroad but always communicating their beautiful-new life to others, inspiring others having a better life by doing migration. Again and again, this would happen for longitudinal period until one of them becomes successful migrant proven by high salary which enables them to make various investments at their homeland, at East Java Province, Indonesia

IV. CONCLUSION

Becoming migrant workers in Hong Kong, Javanese women has broken the rules on patriarchal system which has to be obeyed in every women’s life aspect as a social construction at East Java, Indonesia. Participation of

Javanese women in the labour market, especially those who become migrant workers from East Java Province, Indonesia to Hong Kong is increasing. The women migrant workers represent modern women by doing transnational migration for social remittances rather than economic remittances for their considerable potential value at East Java Province, Indonesia.

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