

International Migration and Risk of Divorce in Families of Female Migrant Workers

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The international migration of migrant workers is still highly demanded by women in rural areas in East Java. However, there are several impacts that have arisen in the family due to the shifting of power relations from husband to wife, within the scope of patriarchal culture. The situation of a husband and wife divorcing by using a lawyer has begun to enter the realm of the family in the agricultural sector. This research was conducted using qualitative methods, and successfully interviewed 15 informants who were selected purposively by name and address through divorce records in the Religious Affairs Office, in three districts in East Java. The results show a shift in gender roles related to the position and role of women in agrarian households in rural areas. The initiative and decision to divorce in a paternalistic agrarian family is no longer dominated by the husband. The control of economic resources by female migrants has become a strong basis in increasing their bargaining position, causing the husband's authority to be able to be "bought" by his wife (purchased local authority). The economic resource base of female migrants and a relatively long separation of husband and wife have triggered the divorce of migrant families in the area of origin.

Keywords: *Divorce, Female migrant workers, Gender, Patriarchal culture, Purchased local authority.*

Introduction

The National Board for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Overseas Workers and the Bank Indonesia recorded the number of Indonesian workers as migrant workers in 2019, as being as many as 3,701 people. Meanwhile, the 2017 World Bank's records reported that

Indonesia's population was 264 million. Data collected by the 2015 Intercensal Population Survey (SUPAS) showed that the number of people from the Indonesian population migrating abroad was 2,767,316. In addition to migrating abroad, Indonesia's population participates in urbanisation. The urbanisation rate of Indonesia's population in the SUPAS 2015 was 52.60 per cent (Adam, 2010). The highest population growth due to urbanisation that is recorded in history was in 2005, in which 43 per cent of Indonesia's population inhabited the city (Tang, 2012).

The rural-urban population mobility is in line with Wilbur Zelinsky's theory of population mobility transition, which states that there is a significant relationship between the type and level of geographical mobility with the modernisation phase of a society (Walii et al., 2012). Population movement is also related to the process of modernisation and industrialisation in urban areas (Basundoro, 2008). Gardner (2004) stated that modernisation is the power of urbanisation, where urbanisation is driven by growth in mobility.

In later developments, the distribution of cities in Indonesia tends to move towards an integrated urban system. The development of cities in Indonesia, especially in Java and Sumatra, tends to form "mega urban" areas. The "mega urban" process extends in terms of the economic growth of urban development which has expanded from the city centre to the periphery (Firman, 2016). The emergence of the Jakarta-Bogor-Depok-Tangerang-Bekasi (Jabodetabek) and Gresik-Bangkalan-Mojokerto-Surabaya-Sidoarjo-Lamongan (Gerbangkertosusila) areas is the impact of the development of cities (Douglass, 2010).

Economic pressure makes many people want a job, even though it may be far from their place of origin. One of the efforts is by migrating as international migrant workers, including female migrant workers (TKW). Ariani's study (2013) showed that many women choose to be migrant workers because of limited employment in the area of origin, and there is a desire to improve the family economy. Previous studies have shown the cause of women becoming migrant workers being because of a husband's insufficient income, in order to meet daily needs, thus they are forced to allow their wife to become a migrant worker (Kumalasari, 2008; Qiu et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2013).

Those women volunteered to separate from their families and children in order to obtain an income to meet family needs (Puspitawati et al., 2011). In addition to the feeling of loneliness when being separated from parents and children, this separation causes anxiety disorders (Maldini et al., 2016; Senaratna et al., 2011; Mazzucato et al., 2011). External factors, such as the success of neighbours or relatives who have migrated as migrant workers, become a benchmark so that they are interested in working as a migrant worker (Santoso, 2010; Wulandari, et al., 2016). The candidate migrant workers do not have the same fate, as some

are successful and earn a lot, but there are also those who are victims of violence by their employers (Dias et al., 2004; Jureidini, 2010).

Most candidate female migrant workers do not know much about the procedures of working abroad. There are candidates who complete the requirements according to the rules, but there are also those who do not know the procedures, so they work as illegal migrant workers (Nailurridha, 2017; Moreno et al., 2004). They only rely on the promise of the Indonesian Labour Services Company, which is frequently a fraud company.

The success of female migrant workers abroad also has an impact on their families in the area of origin. They can build houses, buy new vehicles, and various valuables to support the family's needs. In addition, the success they achieved due to working abroad also brings changes in lifestyle, socio-economic status, and consumptive behaviour (Djuwitaningsih, 2019).

The importance of the issue on the international migration of migrant workers is outlined as follows. Firstly, researchers focussing on the problem of international migration are still relatively new. On the other hand, international migrant workers are mostly uneducated workers (Novianti, 2010). Secondly, research on international migration in Indonesia, especially illegal ones, is still relatively rare by Indonesian researchers. Thirdly, migrations carried out by the Indonesian population are dominated by women, representing 70 per cent of the total number of migrants from Indonesia (Dewi, 2013). Fourthly, more rural women are coming out of the "patriarchal" zone, where women experience a double oppression and find it difficult to enter the public sphere (Asriani et al., 2014). This drives rural women to migrate abroad as workers. Fifth and finally, that the adverse effects of migrant women workers abroad have not been greatly studied, even though they have brought the consequences of divorce in their family.

Based on the facts and reasons, the risk of divorce between a husband and wife as a result of international migration by migrant workers, especially women from rural villages in East Java, was taken up as a study material. This issue is not only interesting to be criticised, but is also important to study due to a shift in the power relations between the roles of husband and wife in agrarian families, in which most still adhere to a patriarchal culture.

Method

To answer the problems raised in this study, this research employed a qualitative method. The study sites were selected in three districts, namely Blitar, Tulungagung, and Malang, which have become areas with the highest sending of international migrant workers in East Java, in the last ten years. The determination of informants was based on data recorded at the

Religious Affairs Office, which records the events of divorce (Moslem) in each location. The total number of informants recorded in the divorce book at the Office in the three locations were 12 cases, but there were five informants who were successfully identified during the study, at the time of the Lebaran homecoming. Thus, the total number of informants interviewed were 15 informants. The data was collected through direct interviews with the informants and it was analysed qualitatively.

Results and Discussion

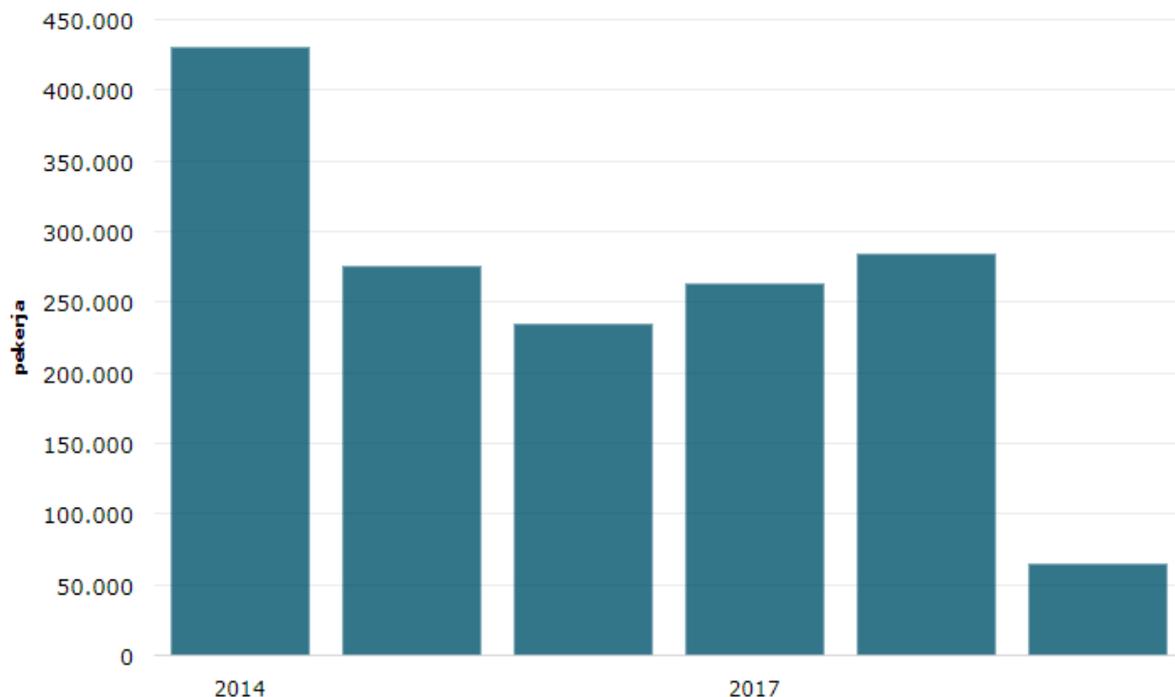
At the family and individual level of international migrant workers, various problems have been identified, including that these migrant workers do not have a strong bargaining position in dealing with wage discrimination, acts of violence, sexual harassment, human rights violations and violations of the law, and even death threats in the destination country. The results of this study have been corroborated by cases experienced by Wiwin Widaningsih (20 years old), who died in Saudi Arabia in 1999, due to lawlessness (Daulay, 2001). There are 15 more Indonesian migrant workers who are the victims of sexual violence, and there are a few of those who work or are employed in the service sectors that can lead to prostitution. In Kuwait, for example, six out of ten migrant workers who "run away" from their employers, work at the night club or "karaoke house" because the salary is far greater than being a domestic servant. Some of them are trapped in the prostitution business (Jawa Pos, March 21, 2004). There are some others who receive a date call, to become a mistress in the destination country. Furthermore, but a few of them are deliberately entered into the sex business with a higher income.

During the New Order era and until the reformation, the Government of Indonesia (Directorate General of Manpower Placement Development and Job Opportunity Extension), as well as worker placement companies (PJTKI) and the Association of Indonesian Labor Services Companies (Apjati), concretely did not provide much protection, either in the form of an MOU or legal provisions on the various problems affecting these female migrant workers in Malaysia (Jawa Pos, February 1, 2002). Although, on the other hand, the foreign exchange contribution made by migrant workers working in Malaysia, for East Java alone in 2001, was no less than USD \$568,000 (Disnaker-East Java, 2001).

From a cultural perspective, there are actually restrictions and there is even a written prohibition for Indonesian female migrant workers to work abroad, known as *fatwa haram*. The Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), at the end of July 2000, stated that: "it is unlawful for female migrant workers to go abroad without being accompanied by their *muhrim*" (Republika, 30 July 2000).

Illegal migrant workers consist more of female workers. Data from the Ministry of Manpower records that 70 per cent of migrant workers consist of women (MoM, 2019). Of this amount, there are around 60 per cent of them who work in the informal sector, namely as domestic helpers or babysitters, and the like. The guaranteed protection for them is almost nothing. Female migrant workers are very vulnerable to the law in the destination country, due to being accused of a crime. One of them is the beheading law, which indicates that protection against migrant workers is very weak.

Figure 1. Placement of Indonesian migrant workers (2014–March 2019)



Source: Ministry of Manpower 2019

Historically, during the New Order era, the Indonesian Government had targeted 1.2 million Indonesian workers to be sent abroad. As of November 2019, the Indonesian Government has sent 21,560 people to become migrant workers. A total of 10,378 people occupies the formal sector, as well as 11,182 people in the informal sector, with the highest number of elementary and junior high school graduates (BNP2TKI, 2019). This shows the great interest of the population to work abroad, even though the risks they have to face are very high. One attraction and impact of international migration (short term) on migrant families is because of the success of "old" migrants in the destination country, which can be seen from the economic criteria (read: remittance) that they send to their home regions.

Another impact, which is classified as having a large influence on changes in the social values in the lives of agrarian societies, is the occurrence of divorce cases instigated by the

wife. In this case, migrant workers who have been successful abroad. Although this divorce is common in the village and quantitatively is not that significant (only 12 cases of divorce are found in this study), the cause that makes this divorce extraordinary, is that the wife used a lawyer in the divorce case. This phenomenon is certainly something new and surprising in the scope of rural areas. The divorce case data sourced from the Blitar Religious District Court Office provides such evidence.

Separated housewifery has constraints on the rarity of meetings and communication. Muawwanah's study (2019) stated that miscommunication causes a great possibility of divorce, meaning, that a wife who has a job as a migrant worker has a higher tendency to file for divorce. Previous studies showed that divorce in migrant workers is caused by women being unable to accept lazy husband behaviour, husbands spending remittances from their wives, and cheating between the two (Silvey, 2006; Khoiriyah, 2016; Sowell et al., 2008,).

One such case is the case of Mujiati (24 years old), a resident of Sawentar Village in the Kanigoro District, Blitar Regency, who went to become a migrant worker in Taiwan through a worker placement company in Malang, in 2001/2002. When she first left, she was married, and her husband worked as an elementary school teacher. Over four years of working in Taiwan, she returned and was able to buy rice fields and build a new house that was quite large and luxurious. After only a few months of gathering with her husband, Mujiati then filed for divorce from her husband, and used the services of a lawyer from Malang. The case was decided by the Blitar Religious District Court on January 22, 2005.

The reason proposed by Mujiati was because the husband never provided material support, especially fulfilling her biological needs. However, the real reason (according to neighbouring gossip), was that she felt it was no longer appropriate to marry a low-income, naive-looking, and shabby villager. Some of Mujiati's neighbours even hinted that she already had another dream man (from Ponorogo), who also worked as a migrant worker in one of the electronics goods assembly industries in Taiwan. On the other hand, Mujiati's mother-in-law felt Mujiati's treatment of her son was unacceptable, who was judged to have a "violated nature" as a wife. Even so, her mother-in-law could not do much in the case of suing for her son's divorce.

The second case is the divorce of Siti Jaiyah (25 years old), a resident of Sawentar in the Kanigoro District, Blitar Regency. Siti's appearance does not reflect a villager, but resembles a celebrity — she looks pretty, is yellow skinned with dyed blonde hair, and looks elegant when talking. Early in 2001, she left for Japan to become a migrant worker, leaving a two-year-old child and working in one of the entertainment clubs in Kyoto City. In this city, she met a native Japanese engineer who was still single. It was not clear what Siti was told about the process, but Siti admitted that she was often annoyed when she was seduced by the man

who eventually became her second husband. She only explained that far from her husband and children, she often felt lonely. However, the "struggle" of the Japanese engineer, according to Siti, was that he was very persistent, sincere, and earnest. Siti became interested in his personality and occupation, and then decided to marry the Japanese man, even though she realised she was married and had a toddler. After three years working in Japan, she returned to Blitar without her second husband.

However, three months after she was home, her husband from Japan followed her to Denpasar in Bali, to a place that she gave to her new "husband". Siti rushed to Surabaya and boarded a flight to Bali to meet her "husband" in Denpasar, Bali. During the course of one-month while this (Japanese) husband was in Bali, Siti often went back and forth to Denpasar, Blitar. Consequently, her first husband began to get suspicious, and this suspicion often developed into violent fights. During her last time in Bali, her first husband followed Siti to Denpasar. As she was caught red-handed, Siti finally confessed, and she filed for divorce from her husband. Her husband, who felt insulted, accepted Siti's suit but on the condition that he asked for a new Panther car, and Rp. 200 million in cash. It turned out that Siti preferred to divorce and fulfill all the demands of her first husband, rather than maintaining her marriage. The Blitar Religious District Court finally decided on the divorce suit for Siti Jaiyah on December 10, 2004.

Related to the central theme of this study, the divorce cases among migrant workers is interesting to discuss because it turns out that in the village — where authority in the agrarian family has been in the hands of men (husbands) — it can readily be bought with money by his wife through an international migration event, as a migrant worker. In cases like this, the concept of "purchased local authority" seems very appropriate to show changes in the values in the agrarian family (farmers).

The third divorce case is the LL divorce case (26 years old) from the Tanggul Turus Village in the Besuki District, Tulungagung Regency. This case is very similar to the 'purchased authority' case above. LL worked in Saudi Arabia, but she does not look like most migrant workers. She has a yellowish skin tone, and is clean and tall, as if she was a bank directors' secretary or a commercial flight attendant with a blazer and a white silk scarf wrapped around her neck (during the interview). When she went to Saudi Arabia to become a migrant worker, she was married and had two toddlers.

In Saudi Arabia, LL worked for a wealthy family (commercial pilot) for three years. Since the first year she worked abroad, LL was often seduced by her employer's younger brother who had just returned from the United States. Initially, she was not interested at all and admitted openly to being a woman who was married. However, sometimes while sleeping at night, she often felt lonely. In the end, LL finally liked her employer's younger brother who

worked as an entrepreneur. During her third year of work, LL returned to Tulungagung, but she was accompanied by her employer's younger brother. The husband's family at first felt flattered by the arrival of an Arab man who was mistaken for being LL's employer. A few weeks later, many parties were suspicious of their relationship. After seeing their behaviour (LL and her employer's younger brother) had begun to go "beyond the limits" of fairness and politeness, LL's in-law's family started to lose respect with both of them. The husband and wife's fighting, and the interference from LL's in-laws could not be avoided. Yet, LL, who felt that she had raised the family economy (including her in-laws), did not accept the attitude and treatment of her husband and in-laws. The peak of family tension occurred when the Arab man asked LL to divorce her husband with certain compensation.

Almost similar with the case of Siti Jaiyah, LL then divorced her husband with compensation of Rp 190 million in cash, plus a plot of rice fields and a new motorcycle. For almost three months, this "new" husband lived in Tulungagung. LL then built a migrant worker placement company on the main road into Desa Tanggul Turus. As her "new" husband did not have a residence permit, and he had a business in Saudi Arabia, the Arabian man returned to Saudi Arabia. For one year, she never heard any news from her new husband, and LL then decided to marry with another man (one of her employees), who was from West Java.

The rural-urban population mobility is actually in line with the theory of population mobility shift from Wilbur Zelinsky, which states that there is a significant relationship between the type and level of geographical mobility with the modernisation phase of a society. In the community at the location of this study, being a migrant worker is one solution to improve their standard of living. The lifestyle of migrant families in the area of origin changes when their family members become migrant workers abroad (Mas'udah, 2019). In addition to lifestyle changes, the separation of family members, including between a husband and wife because one of them works as a migrant worker, carries its own consequences and risks. A study conducted by Anshor (2016) explained that female migrant workers who feel successful from their work abroad have a poor relationship with their husband because the husband does not provide a living, while the wife has freedom.

There are not many cases of tension in the families of migrant workers who are not yet married. However, there are two cases that are caused by a negative impact of the separation of the future wife (who is a migrant worker abroad) from the future husband (who is not a migrant worker). The cases are of Sumiarsih (22 years old), and Fatimah (23 years old) who are both from the Malang Regency.

Sumiarsih was officially asked by her future husband's family, from the Dampit District, before becoming a migrant worker and two years before leaving. After successfully becoming a migrant worker in Korea, she seemed to be the main foundation of her family's

economy. A new and large house, as well as a car, are the new attributes of Sumiarsih. Due to her significant influence in her family (any wishes of his father and mother or younger siblings are always waiting for her approval), in a short time, she has become a "determinant" of almost everything in her family and is very powerful. The condition turned out to have an impact on the relationship between Sumiarsih and her future husband. Sumiarsih's future husband seemed to start to keep his distance because he knew that Sumiarsih was economically more "powerful". He started to feel inferior, seeing Sumiarsih as always being accompanied by a driver in her car, while he was only an ice cube factory employee who rode a bike every day when working or visiting her home.

Different from Sumiarsih, Fatimah (23 years old) reneged on the initial commitment with her future husband, who was still considered as her own relative. The family of her future husband felt displeased with Fatimah's treatment of their son, who positioned him as a household assistant compared to his position as a future husband or member of her own relations. This hurt the parents of her future husband, who chose to cut ties with Fatimah. The marriage plan then failed because her future husband's family felt offended and humiliated, like domestic servants.

The impact of the temporary migration of the wife (or future wife) abroad, in addition to reducing the intensity of husband-wife relations, has led to a shift in authority. This occurs because the wife suddenly has "power" as a logical consequence of a high salary that she earns abroad. Consequently, because she has a lot of money, so she also has "power". Further, because she has power, she suddenly makes every important decision in her family, and even tends to fulfil a dominant role. This is one of the impacts of migration that is interesting enough to be studied more deeply.

It is undeniable that when a woman has her own income, she also has power. In working women, there is a change in the role of the wife and the relationship between the husband and wife, from being initially vertical to becoming more egalitarian (Nurhamida, 2013). Previous studies explained that working women have power in controlling the household, as they have entered the realm of work that is usually done by their husbands and make decisions (Kusumawati, 2012; De Moor et al., 2010; Fernandez, 2007).

Connell (1985), in his theory of gender and power, suggests that the core of the power structure in a patriarchal society is masculinity. A patriarchal culture that is still strongly attached to society influences decision-making in the family. The economic conditions that have changed, especially on the part of women, have resulted in an unbalanced socio-economic status. The conditions in which men, as 'leaders', feel threatened due to an increase in the status of women as an international labour force, makes men agree to divorce or not get married, rather than living under the domination of women. The extended family of the man



also influences the decisions made. They assume it is better not to marry a disobedient woman than letting their male family members be dominated by women.

Conclusion

This divorce story drama, although not that much, has been interesting to study because it has far deeper implications than just an ordinary divorce case. The involvement of lawyer services in cases of family divorce in rural areas also seems unusual, especially when viewed from the lifestyle that is still strongly influenced with agrarian characteristics, and is associated with the impact of the temporary separation (celibacy) of the husband and wife, after the wife works abroad.

There have been shifts in the nature of women towards woman emancipation in gender relations (in the context of cultural values, read: male authority) among migrant workers' families, particularly in making the important decisions of agrarian families in rural areas today. In addition, differences in the rationality that underlies the decision to temporarily migrate abroad (becoming a migrant worker) before leaving and after returning from abroad. In summary, this study has found that the position and role of women in agrarian households in rural areas has begun to shift. Over the past few decades, the role of rural women has been very insignificant, especially as it relates to important family decision-making, including one's own decision to work abroad. The initiatives and decisions to divorce in paternalistic agrarian families are no longer dominated by the husband. The control of economic resources by female migrant workers has become a strong basis in increasing their bargaining position, thus causing the husband's authority to be able to be bought by his wife (purchased local authority). The economic resource base of female migrants, and a relatively long separation of the husband and wife, have triggered the divorce of migrant families.

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