

The Representation of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Contemporary Indonesian Literature

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Abstract

Indonesia has a large number of overseas workers varying from professional workers to the unskilled, legal and illegal who take up work across the globe. In the public consciousness this group is characterized as taking considerable risk but can gain considerable financial reward. This paper will examine the theme of Indonesian migrant workers' risks and rewards and a sense of belonging as represented in contemporary Indonesian short stories from 1992 to 2015. The paper draws upon the theory of narratology to analyze the representation of Indonesian migrant workers in six Indonesian short stories, three from the New Order Period and three from the Reformation era period. The stories themselves have been published in newspapers, magazines and anthologies. The sample has been chosen to represent a range of migrant worker experiences both in Indonesia and abroad, male and female, and skilled and unskilled. The paper finds that the representations of migrant worker's sense of belonging is particular marked by gender and class differences. Women are depicted over the two periods as the victims of a patriarchal ideology and unregulated capitalism which leads to exploitation, abuse and alienation of working-class women. While the representation of migrant worker experiences is largely similar there are changes over the two periods in terms of contesting the ideologies of patriarchy and New Order developmentalism.

Keywords

Indonesia, migrant, workers, Indonesian short stories

1 Introduction

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The Indonesian migrant workers' narrative in the public consciousness can be characterized as risk taking for financial rewards. This public narrative has arguably been shaped by the Indonesian media headlining horrific cases of the abuse in particular, of female domestic workers. At the same time, the narrative contains the aspect of financial reward illustrated by the public appellation of Indonesian migrant workers as "*pahlawan devisa*" ("foreign exchange heroes") because of their remittances sent back home. Academic and official studies also highlight the risks and the rewards but necessarily at a macro-level, in

terms of evolving government policies and adoption of international conventions. A study of Indonesian literature can reveal insights into the complex narratives of Indonesia migrant workers over the course of their journeys. This study focuses on the representation of the migrant narrative in Indonesian short stories including their sense of belonging.

In an historical-sociological study of the migrant worker, focusing on the New Order period and early Reformation era period, Suryakusuma (2014) analyzes the economic forces and policy positions which impact on the migrant worker. The export of labor, which the government commenced in its first five-year plan 1969–1974, was driven by economic considerations (Suryakusuma, 2014, pp. 301-2). The New Order policy sought to integrate the Indonesian economy into the global economy and to use the revenue generated for the export of labor to pay off national debt. While the economic rewards of increased revenues were the driver of the program, migrant worker welfare was not accorded a priority. Suryakusuma (2014, p. 302) notes the failure of the New Order regime to sign the International Labor Organization (ILO) convention to protect labor. As a consequence most of the migrant workers, employed as domestic workers in the informal sector, remained vulnerable to exploitation stemming from unregulated capitalism (with no legal safeguards on conditions of employment). Additionally, female workers faced risks of abuse by male domination, an ideology of patriarchy, in the form of violence and sexual assault.

In the Reformation period, there is both continuity and change from the New Order period concerning migrant worker policies and protections. Suryakusuma (2014) notes that the New Order regime, before its collapse, was planning to reduce the export of labor based on concern about the nation's image as an exporter of domestic workers rather than instituting safeguards for these workers. ILO reporting (2015), citing Indonesian government statistics from the National Body for the Placement and Protection of the Indonesian Workforce (BNP2TKI – *Badan Nasional Penempatan dan Perlindungan Tenaga Kerja Indonesia*),¹ shows there is a continuation of this policy of reducing the number of workers in the informal sector while increasing the numbers in the formal sector. BNP2TKI statistics show the number of workers peaked at 700,000 in 2007 and steadily declined to 429,827 in 2014. From 2010 to 2014, the numbers of workers in the informal sector fell from 73 percent to 47 percent. This policy approach is likely an indication of government concern about the international image being projected as a nation of domestic workers, as noted by Suryakusuma (2014, p. 312).

Reformation era governments, in contrast to the New Order Regime, have been working to improve protections for migrant workers. In 2004, legislation (Law 39/2004) was passed for the protection of workers and the 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (Migrant Workers Convention) was signed. In 2007 BNP2TKI was formed. In 2012, the Indonesian parliament ratified the international convention on migrant workers hence making it legally enforceable. Human Rights Watch (2012) notes a number of other efforts to improve the welfare of migrant workers such as the negotiation of a Memorandum of Understanding with Malaysia on working hours and the right of workers to retain their passports. It also notes high level Indonesian government representations on the physical abuse and killings of workers in Saudi Arabia. The ILO (2014) states the government implemented a moratorium on the sending of domestic workers to selected countries in the Middle East and Malaysia. It has also prioritized the management of migrant worker complaints and monitoring labor contracting organizations.

Given these changes over the New Order and Reformation periods, this paper examines the migrant workers' narratives represented in Indonesian short stories over the same period.² Short stories about the migrant worker have been chosen because it has yet to be analyzed in any detail using a sample taken across a range of settings and time periods. Only one article was found on the representation of the migrant worker in the short story form but the sample is taken from one group of migrant workers, in Hongkong.

¹ BNPT2KI (2014) Migrant worker placement statistics, National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Workers, Jakarta in ILO (2015) available at [http, p. //www.bnp2tki.go.id/statistik/statistik-penempatan/9359-penempatan-tki-2010-2013.html](http://www.bnp2tki.go.id/statistik/statistik-penempatan/9359-penempatan-tki-2010-2013.html)

² The research for this paper forms a part of the research for a doctoral dissertation entitled *Ideological contestations in Indonesian newspaper short stories from 1992 to 2009*. The short stories have been primarily selected from anthologies of selected newspaper stories published by *Kompas* (from 1992 to 2009) and *Republika* (2002 and 2005). For this paper the research for this paper has been supplemented with Reformation era stories drawn from other anthologies. This has been done to make the sample as diverse as possible as well as more contemporary.

(Nirmala, 2011).³ One thesis on the migrant worker experience was found but on the novel form, also in Hongkong.⁴ In this paper three short stories have been chosen from the New Order period and three from the Reformation period⁵. These are 1) "Titin Pulang Dari Saudi" ("Titin Returns from Saudi") by Radhar Panca Dahana (1993); 2) "Separo Jalan" ("Half Way") by Ismet Fanany (1996); 3) "Sepotong Bulan Luka" ("A Slice of the Wounded Moon") by Dorothea Rosa Herliany (1999); 4) "Rabiah" ("Rabiah") by Hasan al Banna. (2005); 5) "Saleha di Tengah Badai Salju" ("Saleha in the Middle of a Blizzard") by Ida Ahdiah (2008); and 6) "Rambu' Solo" ("Funeral Rites") by Sulfiza Ariska (2015).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the representation of different Indonesian migrant workers in Indonesian short stories over the period 1990 to the present. The particular questions it seeks to answer are 1) How is the migrant worker's narrative, including a sense of belonging, represented in the short story form? 2) How do ideological oppositions depicted in Indonesian short stories impact on the migrant worker? 3) Have these representations changed over the two political periods, from the New Order period to the Reformation era?

2 Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on the theory of narratology to identify and analyze the representation of the migrant worker in terms of experiences of ideological oppositions or contests. This can be seen in oppositions between different social groups in the narrative which can be identified by, among others class (economic position), gender, age, and race (Bal, 2017, pp. 175–6). Bal also highlights that ideology can be found in the comments by the narrator about an event or in describing an actor, which may seem factual or natural or general in nature, but when analyzed reveal an opinion with an ideological dimension (naturalized ideology). Ideological oppositions can also be found in the contrasting descriptions of a character which are related to social positions (Bal, 2017, pp. 114–117, 175). As a consequence, all these manifestations of ideology, found in the structure of a narrative, need to be collated, compared and weighed up to understand the ideological oppositions or contests in the narrative text.

The paper applies the aspects of narratology discussed above to answer the research questions posed earlier. The first question of representation of the migrant worker is addressed by briefly describing the event in the fabula then analyzing this data in terms of 1) the position of the migrant worker (social status and competencies) in different societies across the events in the narrative; and 2) help and oppositions in the achievement of the subject's aim(s). The second question on ideological oppositions and its impact is addressed by analyzing the underlying impacts and contests of ideologies. The third question on change over the two political periods is addressed by comparing the key findings in the first part of the paper on representations and ideological oppositions.

³ One academic article (Nirmala, 2011) was found in researching this paper on the short story form and the migrant experience. The author briefly discusses two anthologies of short stories published in 2006 written by three female migrants working as domestic servants in Hong Kong. The focus of the article however, is the sociological dimensions of the act of writing rather than the short stories themselves. The author explores how writing has empowered female migrant writers through the assistance of the Indonesian Muslim writers organization Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP – The Pen Circle Forum). The author lists the abuses suffered in the stories.

⁴ One thesis analyzing a novel about female migrant experiences in Hong Kong was found (Kabul, 2011). The thesis focuses on the inhuman treatment of migrant workers and the factors that led to female workers deciding to work overseas.

⁵ The Reformation era in this paper is taken from the time of the first free elections after the fall of Soeharto which was held on 7 June 1999.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Representations and ideological oppositions

“Titin Pulang dari Saudi” (1993)

In “Titin Pulang Dari Saudi” (“Titin Returns from Saudi”) the story is about Titin who tries to re-establish herself in her home village after four years as a domestic servant in Saudi Arabia.⁶ The sequence of events she experiences are: 1) the journey home, reminiscing and noticing changes; 2) arrival home, a family welcome and noticing changes (the loss of her father); 3) Trying to find her place at home, experiencing the attention as a person of means and noticing the poverty around her; 4) In three weeks, Titin’s savings have been substantially depleted in meeting family member’s requests for consumer goods and house improvements; 5) Titin’s savings are insufficient to start a business after paying for house improvements and continually meeting individual needs; 6) Her savings are substantially depleted and she no longer receives special treatment from her siblings; and 7) Titin decides to return to Saudi perhaps for six years or more. There is an understanding her younger sister will follow Titin to Saudi Arabia.

Titin’s social position has changed over the course of her time as a migrant worker, from married to divorcee. Her considerable accumulated savings set her apart from others and while she has this money, she is treated with greater respect in the village; however, once this money is gone she loses this special status. In contrast, in Saudi Arabia she was a domestic worker with low social status who had no power to stop sexual harassment. The narrative implies it had to be endured. Nevertheless, in Saudi Arabia she has the competence to plan a future, save money and make a budget to realise this plan. In doing so she resists her husband’s demands for money and is able to return home with considerable savings. However, once back in her village she does not have the power to resist her family’s demands on her.

Titin’s aims are to improve her family’s material position at home and also to re-establish herself in her village by starting a business. In Saudi Arabia there was no sense of belonging, endless toil and where she was also subjected to harassment (“gangguan”). Her savings were the means of achieving her aims by making the house more habitable for her family, paying off her father’s debts and starting a small business as a vegetable seller which could then sustain a local lifestyle. She also held a longer term hope of remarrying, another step in achieving a sense of belonging. However, her aim is opposed by other actors in the chain of events described earlier. Her family members oppose her aim by quickly diminishing her limited resources with numerous consumptive demands all deemed important (“kebutuhan penting”) and a desire to be respected by the neighbours (with expensive house improvements). Tradesmen oppose her aim by inflating the costs to refurbish the house. Her mother while a helper who offers suggestions for how she can re-establish herself in the village has no power to stop the demands on Titin’s savings.

A migrant worker’s aim, such as Titin’s, of working in the traditional economy is impeded by a government ideology focused on infrastructure (the construction of a dam). In contrast Titin only needs a small amount of capital to sell vegetables but must work overseas to accumulate this capital. The development ideology has also not created employment opportunities in the village hence has become a factor in a large percentage of young workers seeking employment (and higher wages) abroad. The road improvement she notices in the first event she learns was done for the official opening by the president. The benefits of large scale development has also not trickled down to the village level and houses in the village still lack electricity. At the same time a new consumerism, a symptom of capitalism, has also gripped the village and opposes a desire of the migrant worker group such as Titin to live modestly in the traditional economy. It is the house which has become a symbol of consumerism, a feature of capitalist ideology which links materialism with class and status.

“For appearance you see,” said my Uncle Apit.

Uncle Apit’s comment indeed had almost become the main slogan above everything else in this village. (Dahana, 1993, p. 122)

(“Buat penampilan kan,” kata Mang Apit, pamanku.

Komentar Mang Apit itu memang hampir menjadi slogan utama di atas segalanya di desa ini.

(Dahana, 1993, p. 122)

Male dominance (patriarchy) within the village has placed pressure on female migrant workers such as Titin. Titin states her husband, “Ujang also at the time told me to become a migrant worker.” (“Kang

⁶ The short story “Titin Pulang dari Saudi”, written by Radhar Panca Dahana, was published in the National newspaper *Kompas* on 15 November 1992. It was subsequently selected for publication in an anthology of the best *Kompas* short stories for 1993.

Ujang juga yang dulu menyuruh aku jadi tekawe." (Dahana, 1993, p. 120)). The status of women however, has not improved with the money brought home. While a male neighbour Mang Sanan enjoys the status of the Chair of the Neighbourhood and living in a grander house, his wife has had to return to Saudi to continue to pay for it. Titin herself also is unable to improve her status and when her money runs out she becomes an object of scorn for her neighbours. While men depend on their wife's earnings, there is also a view that the work of a domestic servant is immoral implying that the woman should stay at home. It resonates with patriarchal and religious ideologies (noting the use of the word "haram" (immoral)). Titin rejects this view "It is not immoral work..." ("Bukan pekerjaan haram...").

In this story, the female migrant worker, Titin has experienced a known risk of sexual harassment which she quietly endures, telling herself that others have experienced worse. Clearly, there can be no sense of belonging overseas with ongoing threats to her person. While her financial rewards are realised, returning with considerable savings, her desire to re-establish herself at home is not realised. The long time spent overseas led to the breakup of her marriage, with her husband finding another woman. The chance to re-establish herself by starting a business and remarrying is not realised. She is subject to demands from family members which leads to her losing her capital. The consequence is that she cannot re-establish herself in her village and must become a migrant worker again to accumulate capital once again. Moreover, as her sister reminds her, when she returns she will no longer be considered of marriagable age.

The story presents the female migrant worker and the villagers as victims of a government development ideology focused on infrastructure which has failed to improve the local economy and village infrastructure. The ideology is shown as distorted in the New Order period with for example, road improvement being done for the president's benefit while in contrast the villagers themselves still lack electricity. The lack of local employment opportunities and poverty lead to young people becoming part of an international labor market that offers no safeguards for women workers such as Titin. Participation in the global labor market, another dimension of capitalist ideology, also does not benefit the local economy and the villagers. Accumulated savings are spent on consumer goods. Titin becomes a victim of consumerism and must again place herself at risk in the global labor market.

The story shows an ideology of patriarchy as impacting female migrant workers both in the country of employment (Saudi Arabia) and in her home village (West Java). While overseas, Titin experiences patriarchy in terms of domination and control of her person and is subjected to sexual harassment. At home, an ideology of patriarchy coupled with religious ideology leads to their being viewed as doing work which is immoral ("haram") with the implication women should remain in the household. Yet women are pressured by husbands into taking up this work overseas. For men they enjoy the enhanced status and the money women bring. However, for the female migrant workers themselves, in this ideology of gender power, they do not realise any enhancement to their status. Titin contests these ideologies. She attempts to resist male control and refuses to send remittances home to her unfaithful husband nor does she accept ideologies categorizing her work as immoral and demand she stay at home. She also refuses to accept that age for women is a barrier to marriage and plans to stay overseas for an even longer period.

"Separo Jalan" (1996)

In the story "Separo Jalan" (1996) ("Half Way") by Ismet Fananythe main actor is Rusli, an Indonesian academic on a 12 months teaching contract in Tasmania, Australia who is now half way through his contract and is reflecting on his experiences.⁷ The sequence of events he experiences are: 1) Rusli is driving from Launceston to Hobart; 2) The narrator goes back in time and describes Rusli's conversation with his wife, Ermiami and her anxiety for the future of their relationship; 3) Rusli thinks about the first half of his period of time in Tasmania and becomes uneasy his contact with his family has declined and prayers less frequently; 4) Rusli thoughts then go back to when he was saying goodbye to his children. He spends time talking with his three young children and their expectations; 5) Rusli's thoughts return to a self analysis of his values and is aware he is half way removed from his values; 6) Rusli's thoughts turn to his relationship with a university student, Diana whom he met three weeks ago; 7) Rusli's thoughts return to his last night with his wife before departing for Australia. She warns him to be wary of temptation; 8) Rusli is conflicted and his thoughts are no clearer despite the earlier self-evaluation; and 9) He wants his relationship with Diana to continue but also thinks about his long relationship with his wife and thinks how much he misses his children. The story ends with Rusli meeting Diana at her place to stay overnight.

⁷ This story was first published in the *Kompas* Daily newspaper and was subsequently selected as one of the best short stories for 1995 and published in the Best *Kompas* Short Stories in 1996.

Rusli has high social status and the competencies to achieve his professional aims. His position as a university lecturer in Australia gives him the same respected social status as in Indonesia. He possesses a number of professional competencies, he is a fluent speaker of English, a native speaker of bahasa Indonesia, he has academic teaching qualifications and university teaching experience. To achieve his second aim he also has competencies, in terms of spiritual faith to remain faithful to his wife and family. He also has a competence of fitting in but in the context of living in a different society it leads to a loss of his spiritual power and the ability to achieve the aim of remaining faithful to his wife and family.

The subject's (Rusli) aim at the outset is gain new experience by teaching in a foreign university. In this he gains the support of his faculty. His wife reminds him he needs to fulfill another aim, which is to stay faithful to her and the family while he is away. It is this latter aim which becomes the main focus of the story. His wife does not have the power alone to enable him to achieve this although implicitly this is facilitated by their long relationship and their children. Diana, his Australian girlfriend, does not initially oppose Rusli's aims. Her aim is to continue her Indonesian studies with Rusli, which is compatible with Rusli professional aim. However, their forming an intimate relationship opposes the second aim. The new culture is also presented as opposing his aim which values individual choice and freedoms along with the workplace program which conflicts with prayer times.

For Rusli, he has entered another society where the dominant western ideology of freedom, individualism and secularism conflicts with his own religious beliefs. In the fabula he feels conflicted about being in two relationships, one with his wife and the other with Diana. The erosion of the practice of religious ideology leads to him feeling in an ideological trap, a sense of being between two ideologies.

All the values and the community which so far had been a behavioral control were no longer present. The values in the new place were totally different. There was no one who furrowed their brow if he did something different, despite even conflicting with what had been demanded of him as a member of the community in Padang. It was there perhaps lay the most important test in the behaviour of some one; whether he still embraced and lived a value when the environment which compelled the value was no longer present." (Fanany, 1996, pp. 124-5)

(Semua nilai dan masyarakat yang selama ini menjadi kontrol tingkah lakunya sudah tidak ada. Nilai di tempat baru sama sekali berbeda. Tak ada yang mengerinyitkan dahi pun kalau dia mengerjakan hal-hal yang berbeda, walau bertentangan pun, dengan yang dituntut darinya sebagai masyarakat di Padang. Di situlah barangkali ujian terpenting dalam tingkah laku seseorang, apakah dia masih menganut dan mengamalkan sesuatu nilai waktu lingkungan yang memaksakan nilai itu sudah tiada.) (Fanany, 1996, pp. 124-5)

The story presents a professional, middle class man who has the same status overseas (Australia) and is also respected by his foreign students. He also forms a relationship with a desirous woman while overseas. His new relationship both meets a need for companionship and a physical need. Despite the respect accorded to him in the new culture he still does not feel a sense of belonging. He remains conflicted because he has not stayed faithful to his wife nor to his religious beliefs.

In the story there is a contest between the dominant ideology of individualism expressed in terms of greater freedom of choice where choice is less subject to moral control and his own religious ideology where there is a system of behavioral controls. In the migrant worker's home city (Padang) freedom of choice is subject to religious control by being subject to moral recriminations in the community. Moreover, there is an expectation of being active in the mosque. In the new culture he faces no such pressures nor recriminations for forming an intimate relationship with another woman. The migrant worker finds himself alone in a dominant ideology and without the means to resist the dominant ideology. The story shows a conflicted individual who know he must find the strength to oppose the dominant ideology and re-embrace his religious ideology.

"Sepotong Bulan Luka" (1999)

The short story "Sepotong Bulan Luka" ("A Slice of the Wounded Moon") (1999) by Dorothea Rosa Herliany is narrated by Rin, a housewife who tells of her husband, Munif's long and frustrating search for work both in the city and overseas, and her own struggle to keep her faith in their marriage.⁸ The sequence of events is: 1) Rin receives a letter from her husband, who has been away for four months, saying he has not found work. Rin feels there are no dreams left about their future; 2) After a further year without a letter, a postcard arrives from Munif. He has worked as an illegal migrant in Europe; 3) Rin fights with her parents over their cynical attitude to her husband and decides to leave home; 4) A year later the next post

⁸ This story was first published on 21 March 1999 in Harian *Republika*, a national daily newspaper. It was subsequently republished in an anthology of short stories published by *Republika* in 2002 (Herliany, 1999 in Herfanda, 2002, pp. 59-65.) The stories in the anthology were selected from about 500 stories published in *Republika* over the period 1993 to 2002.

card arrives stating Munif has been working on a cruise ship for the last two years on contract. He offers her a promise of sorts that he will save and buy her a house. She is left in uncertainty again as to their future.

In Indonesia Munif's social status is married but unemployed despite have an academic qualification. Once overseas he becomes an illegal migrant but his status changes after he gains work on a cruise ship. With a well paying contract job, Munif indicates to his wife he has the power to secure his and his wife's future. However, his will to achieve this aim has been eroded by his leading a bachelor life and having a girlfriend. Munif, in a post card to his wife, indicates he regards himself as a bachelor while overseas. He has the power to strengthen his relationship with his wife and improve her economic circumstances as well as change his parents-in-law's attitude toward him but has chosen to pursue his own lifestyle.

The husband's initial aim is to secure a well paying job outside his village so he and his wife can make a future together. His wife, Rin is a helper in this aim and supports him in this aim for many years but reaches crisis point at the end of the story. Rin's uncle is a helper at an early point in Rin and Rusli's marriage and offers them a place for them to set up a food stall. Rin's father and mother are cynical about the aim and doubt Munif can achieve anything. Munif is also opposed by younger and better qualified job seekers in the job market.⁹ While overseas his special friend (girlfriend), it can be assumed, opposes his aim and makes demands on his income. His workfriends oppose his aim to improve his family circumstances and he is treated as a fellow bachelor. Rin now doubts Munif still has the same aim. Munif's aim is ambivalent at the end of the story. His aim has shifted to a enjoying a hedonistic lifestyle while still seeming to want to save for their future.

"Later if my savings mount up, I will buy you a small house. I also want to put together capital for a business...But we all are just like bachelors. The cost of living is expensive...You haven't remarried...Like my friends, I also have a special friend..." (Herliany, 1999, pp. 64-5)

"Nanti kalau tabunganku sudah banyak, aku akan belikan kamu rumah mungil. Aku juga ingin mengumpulkan modal untuk usaha...Tapi kami semua seperti bujangan saja. Biaya hidup jadinya mahal...Belum kawin lagi, kan? Seperti juga teman-teman, di sini aku juga punya teman istimewa." (Herliany, 1999, pp. 64-5)

Munif holds a diploma, is married but unemployed. He views his educational qualification as a means to getting a job he is interested in and with good pay. He rejects the option of establishing a small business in the local economy and seeks opportunities initially in an Indonesian city then in Europe. He spends years away from home to find a job. After he moving to Europe and securing work there are changes in behavior. With a good income he now enjoys a new lifestyle overseas. He has now become casual about his relationship with his wife even telling her of his girlfriend. He makes no commitment to send her money or keep her informed about what is happening.

The story presents a conflict between an ideology of family, with the husband as provider and wife as supporter opposed by the pursuit of an individualistic lifestyle overseas. The husband initially tries to fulfill his role by seeking a job in the city. But the relationship comes under stress when he moves overseas despite finding a well paying job. The work overseas has eroded his commitment to his role as provider and he accedes to an individualistic lifestyle as a "bachelor". Rin has few choices open to her as the supporter while he is away. She remains dependant on her parents and then on her sister during Munif's absence. His failure to fulfill his duties earn him the derision of his parents-in-law.

"Rabiah" (2005)

The story "Rabiah" (2005) by Hasan al Bannais about a female migrant worker who is tricked into coming to Tawao in Sabah, Malaysia where her "employers" try to force her into prostitution.¹⁰ She recounts the events leading to her being tried and sentenced to death for murder.¹¹ The sequence of events in the narrative is: 1) She cites media reporting about her execution; 2) She tells of reason for seeking a job overseas, her concern to provide for her ageing mother; 3) On landing in Tawau, Sabah their documentation is taken and they are transported to a brothel; 4) She tries to escape from the brothel but is caught and

⁹ Although not alluded to in the story, at the time of publication of this story the Indonesian economy was in severe recession with increased unemployment. This would have added to the difficulty of finding appropriate work in Indonesia.

¹⁰ "Rabiah" has been published in the daily newspaper *Waspada* in 2005, the literary magazine *Horison* in 2009 and in an anthology of Hasan al Banna's short stories by entitled *Sampan Zulaiha. Antologi Cerpren* in 2011.

¹¹ Surakusuma (2014, pp. 311) notes the Indonesian media covered the issue of Indonesian migrant women being forced into prostitution in Tawao, Malaysia

beaten by the same thugs who met Rabiah on arrival; 5) A customer then enters wanting sex. Rabiah bites the man when he tries to force himself on her; 6) She is slapped and whipped; 7) The same man re-enters the room to force himself on her again whom she kills; and 8) Following the murder she is tried in a Malaysian court.

In Indonesia Rabiah is a factory worker and her intent is to take up another factory job but at a higher level of pay in Malaysia. The intent is not linked to enhancing her social position in her village but rather to assist her ageing mother with income support, to make her life more comfortable. Rabiah exercises the power to obtain a visa but she does not have the power to detect deceit by criminal gangs. She only knows of the deceit after she lands in Tawao. Once she is trapped in the brothel, she lacks the power to escape as the security is overwhelmed by the security. To avoid losing her self-respect she decides to kill the man who tries rape her. For Rabiah, social position is defined by maintaining self-respect. She quotes her mother as saying, "We are not people of means, Rabiah. But we have self-respect, which needs to be guarded." (*Kita memang bukan orang yang berada, Rabiah. Tapi kita punya harga diri, itu musti dijaga. Hati-hati.*)

Rabiah's aim is to provide for her ageing mother by working in a better paying and 'halal' (religiously acceptable) job in Malaysia. Her mother is initially a helper and gives Rabiah her support to work overseas. Her neighbor Bu Ifah appears to be a helper in order to facilitate her visa through a relative but thwarts her aim by unwittingly placing her in the hands of a relative who is in league with a criminal gang. On arrival in Malaysia, Rabiah's aim is opposed by a brothel keeper and her hired thugs who want to force her to work as a prostitute and take the earnings. Her first customer wants to prostitute Rabiah. The Indonesian consular staff are helpers and provide support for the murder case. The Malaysian legal system's aim is to make a finding on Rabiah in a murder case, the verdict ends her aspirations.

Rabiah shows that despite the attempt to go through legal channels for work there remains risk for women migrant workers to be coopted by people smugglers. Rabiah is placed in the hands of an unscrupulous migrant agent who then passed her onto a people trafficking syndicate. She refuses to submit to prostitution and tries to escape from the brothel. Even after being beaten she still does not submit. When a customer then tries to rape her, she protects herself by biting him. She is then beaten again. When he tries to rape her again she kills him. Her refusal to submit stands in contrast to other women in the brothel, whom it is assumed, have also been forced into prostitution but have adopted the behaviors of prostitutes.

The story shows the dark and immoral side to the unregulated global labor market – criminal gangs profiting from the enslavement and exploitation of migrant women workers to serve as prostitutes. The story describes that market forces are at work with the brothel owner have calculated how much she will earn from each slave. The brothel security and the customer regard the women as slaves who have no rights and is there to make profit for the owners and to serve the customers. These extreme capitalist and patriarchal ideologies are opposed by Rabiah's religious ideology and a feminist ideology of protecting women's honor.

"Saleha di Tengah Badai Salju" (2007)

The story "Saleha di Tengah Badai Salju" (2007) ("Saleha in the Middle of a Blizzard") by Ida Ahdiah is told by a immigrant worker living overseas who was working legally but has now become an illegal worker¹². The sequence of events is: 1) Saleha leaves for work at 10pm in the middle of a fierce snow storm. 2) The bus is late and she fears losing money or even her job. 3) During the wait she thinks about her experiences over the last five months. When first working as a legal migrant worker, her remittances disappeared as a consequence of her husband deserting her. She is now working beyond the expiry of her visa to pay off a debt and support her two children back home. 4) She thinks about the repetitive nature of the work and the international workforce in the factory. 5) Saleha remembers the reasons for working overseas was low pay at home. She was aware of the risks of working overseas. 6) Saleha was had good wages and conditions but learns her remittances have been taken by her former husband who has now remarried. 7) She makes a decision to work illegally 8) The time returns to the present, she boards the bus 9) Shortly after arriving at the factory discovers the police have raided the factory and have arrested the illegal workers.¹³

Saleha has two aims, her short term aim is to earn money in order to acquit a debt and to accumulate capital. Her longer term aim is to return home to start a business. Her aim to accumulate capital was firstly

¹² The story was first published in the newspaper Suara Merdeka in 2007 and republished in 2008 in *20 Cerpen Indonesia Terbaik 2008*.

¹³ Although not stated, the location is likely to be Canada. At the end of the story the writers give the place of writing as "Montreal". Additionally, the thick snow is characteristic of Montreal.

obstructed by her former husband who took her remittances and remarried (on the grounds of not being able to satisfy his “conjugal rights” (“nafkah batin”). Overseas, Saleha has a helper, Tiru from Sri Lanka, who gives her the contact details of an employment agency who facilitate employment for illegal workers. Saleha’s aim is subsequently impeded by the employment agency which takes a significant portion of her salary on what is already a low wages. Her aim is also opposed by the police who can make an arrest at any time and deport her. In terms of a reciprocal relationship Saleha states she cannot make demands on the police for protection because she is an illegal worker.

The regulated labor market capitalism (arguably a socialist ideology of government intervention) allows for the fair treatment of legal workers but illegal workers have no such protection. In contrast unrestrained capitalist ideology leads to firms exploiting illegal workers, paying low rates of pay and offering poor conditions in order to maximise profits. The firms dictate these wages and conditions to the illegal migrant worker (low wages, wages are cut if late, workers can be dismissed at any time and they are only given two short breaks at work). For the workers themselves they perceive there is no choice. Saleha is grateful for employment and does not object to doing night work nor the agent taking a further 25 percent of an already low wage. She accepts the residual wage as it meets her aim of working to both support her family and to save. She feels she is still materially better off than if working in Indonesia. Saleha’s friend Tiru comments wryly in opposition to unrestrained capitalism as to whom is deemed the criminal. “Firms are secretly happy to employ workers like us. The pay is low and they don’t have to pay tax...Here we are working, we are not criminals.” (*Perusahaan diam-diam senang mempekerjakan pekerja seperti kita. Bayarannya murah tak perlu bayar pajak...Di sini kita bekerja, tidak jadi penjahat.*)

“Rambu Solo” (2015)

The story “Rambu Solo” (“Funeral Rites”) by Sulfiza Ariska is narrated by a Toraja woman who describes how the ill fortune of her friend, a female migrant worker, Eppi in Saudi Arabia from the same village affected the narrator’s family as well.¹⁴ The sequence of events is: 1) The narrator’s father enters the house, assaults his wife and children. The mother dies later that morning. 2) The narrator’s older sister Landorundun starts a business. 3) The narrator’s friend Eppi has decided to become a migrant worker because she needs to support her ill parents. Eppi assumes the work of a migrant worker will be very well paid for little work. 4) Landorundun’s business is successful, employing locals. 5) Eppi has sent news of a misfortune. 6) Conflict arises between Landorundun and the narrator because the former refuses to allow money to be spent on themselves. 7) Conflict arises with the son of migrant agent over criticism of Landorundun’s thrift. 8) Landorundun, reveals the truth and says that their money has been used to save Eppi from being executed. Eppi had killed her boss after he raped her.

Eppi aim, as a migrant worker, is to earn sufficient money to support her ill parents. Her aim is opposed by her boss who rapes her and also by the Saudi legal system which sentences her to death. Landorundun is a helper who provides the money to free Eppi from execution. On Eppi’s return it is implied, she will be further helped by taking up employment in Landorundun’s business. Landorundun’s aim is complementary to Eppi’s which is for locals to work in local jobs thus negating the need for villagers to become migrant workers. Her aim of establishing a batik business is supported by the government and she is given a government grant. She is also supported by the local community who take up work in her business; however, she is opposed by Randan a local agent for migrant workers whose business is threatened by Lindarundun’s success.

In the story there is an opposition between women’s rights (feminism) and male violence (patriarchy). Eppi opposes male violence while in Saudi Arabia kills her rapist. Lindorundun’s takes a stand against male violence represented by her father by empowering herself and others by establishing a business. Landorundun fights patriarchy and seeks to empower both women and men in the village by creating local employment, encouraging learning and revitalizing local culture. In contrast Landorundun’s father is disempowering with his violence toward women.

There is also an opposition between efforts to create employment based on traditional industries with government support (socialism) and global capitalism and its agents who seeks migrant workers (without providing any preparation for the worker). Lindonundrum, with her efforts to create local employment reduces the labor pool available for recruitment by global capitalism. The narrator comments cynically on the migrant worker agent who accrues a disproportionate profit without providing any service or benefit to the community. “Equipped with a number of forms, Randan’s father can pull in tens of millions of rupiah

¹⁴ “Rambu Solo” was runner up for the LMCP Obor Award and was subsequently published in *Antologi Cerpun. Indonesia – Malaysia – Singapura (An Anthology of Short Stories. Indonesia – Malaysia – Singapore)*, (2015)

from candidate male and female male migrants in a day." (*Berbekal beberapa lembar formulir, ayah Randan bisa menarik puluhan juta dari calon TKI atau TKW dalam sehari. Jauh berbeda dengan kerja keras yang dilakoni Landorundun.*) (Ariska, 2015 in Sui, Rahamad & Roosseno, 2015, p. 50)

3.2 The migrant worker in two political periods

The migrant workers' social position is linked to gender, class and education. For female workers the power to influence their social position is represented as being more limited than men and can deteriorate while overseas. Married migrant women while overseas discover their husbands choose another partner leading to a loss of savings. While overseas the female migrant worker's social position can also change to an illegal worker who has been forced to continue working as the former husband has misappropriated her savings. As an illegal worker her status is that of a criminal. The migrant may also be deemed a criminal because they have killed their rapist or would be rapist. On return home women's social position can temporarily improve because they have accumulated savings (and resisted sending remittances to their husbands). The power to give material goods gives them a special, undefined position albeit while funds last but then leads to a loss of social position and pressure to return overseas to earn more money. Migrants may also be forced to leave school because of economic circumstances and become domestic servants. However, in the Reformation period women who have gone on to do some higher education such as Lando rundun ("Rambu Solo"). It is an alternative narrative to that of the migrant worker where women are empowered, with government support, to create work opportunities at home.

The social position of the female migrant worker is also depicted as having a moral dimension and affected by the choice of work. Female domestic servants are stigmatized by doing work which is deemed "haram". In "Titin", Titin rejects that her work is "haram" (immoral). What is shown in the story is that the work itself is not immoral but rather the (moral) problem are the male bosses who subject migrant women to sexual harassment and violence. In "Rabiah" the female migrant worker avoids this stigma and seeks "halal" (morally acceptable) work and chooses to work in a plywood factory. A comparison of the two stories implies that the stigma of "haram" still attaches itself to the female migrant choice of work and affects her social position in Indonesian society. In the Reformation period there is a deliberate choice of a halal job, such as factory work, removing the stigma from the social position of the female domestic worker. The social position of the male is less affected by the choice of work overseas.

The reasons for migrant workers working overseas or the aim remains largely economic, to find better paid employment or indeed just employment. For working class migrant workers such as "Titin", her aims are to pay off a family debt and to start a business. In "Rabiah", Rabiah's aim is to assist her ageing mother with income support by getting a better paid job. In "Saleha di Tengah Badai Salju", Saleha seeks to pay off a debt and to accumulate capital to start a business by getting a better paid job. In "Rambu Solo", Eppi seeks to provide income for her two ill parents by earning a considerable salary. For the working-class male migrant worker ("Sepotong Bulan Luka", Munif's aim is also similar, to find employment to support a family. The exception to this is the middle-class professional male ("Separo Jalan" (1996)), Rusli who has the aim of gaining overseas teaching experience in a western country.

The achievement of the aims (the reward) of female migrant workers is represented as being obstructed or being made more difficult to achieve by the behaviors of men. Husbands are presented as having little control over their physical needs and become involved with other women in the home village leading to a loss of the female workers savings. In the country of destination women can be subject to sexual harassment and assault by men or forced into prostitution to serve the sexual needs of men. On return home family members can impede aims to set up a new business by demands for consumptive goods. Male migrant workers' aims in terms of their commitment to their families can be obstructed by a choice to start new relationships while overseas. This can also mean a failure to send money home to their families or the possibility of not returning home.

The migrant worker in these stories are also subject to ideological oppositions in particular in terms of intersecting gender, religious ideologies, and economic and political ideologies. As noted earlier the aims of women migrant workers are frustrated by male behavior in the stories. The structure of the stories reveal that the behaviors are linked to underlying ideological oppositions experienced by the female migrant worker. There are patriarchal and religious opposition to the women working outside of the home; moreover, working overseas as a domestic servant. On the other hand, there are economic rewards to be gained by women working in the global labor market. Indeed, husbands urge women to take on this employment, but another aspect of patriarchy emerges. The desire to control the remittances and reap the benefits of the increased income including an enhanced social position. Once overseas a patriarchal ideology emerges seen in behaviors to dominate women as sexual objects including using enslavement and

violence. Female migrant worker is shown to resist patriarchal ideologies by responding with force, verbally rejecting ideological judgements about the morality of their work or by refusing to send remittances home. The ability to oppose patriarchal forces however, remains limited.

A change can be seen within the economic and political ideological oppositions over the two periods. The New Order ideology of developmentalism is implicitly criticized in its failure to create employment in villages hence a significant percentage of young people choose to become a part of the global labor market. The New Order development ideology is also shown to have a political dimension, with the selection of development projects is shown to be at the whim of senior officials trying to impress the president (“Titin” (1992)). Higher education has also created expectations of gaining better paying jobs. However, these jobs are only in the cities not in rural areas thus creating a tension between city and village (“Sepotong Bulan Luka” (1999)). Global labor market capitalism is also shown to have failed to deliver meaningful development in the villages despite migrant workers returning with considerable savings. What is shown to endure is the traditional economy with its small businesses trading in food and textiles which only requires a small amount of capital to become a trader. In a later Reformation era story (“Rambu Solo”), development and global labor market capitalism are shown to be in opposition to a more socialist approach where the people get a direct benefit through government investment in small traditional industries which employ local people.

Over the two periods the representation of the experience of female migrant workers is the antithesis of belonging, it is largely characterized by alienation and exploitation. It is depicted in experiences which cause stress, fear, disappointment and anger experienced in the events in the narrative. Female migrant workers begin with the aim of improving their economic circumstances as well as their families’ that is to change a condition of economic stress to economic independence. This economic independence is represented by establishing a small business in the local economy. Achieving this aim would provide for a sense of permanency and social position in the community. As a domestic worker their social position is judged as morally tainted, another aspect contributing to a sense of alienation.

4 Conclusions

The representations of migrant worker’s sense of belonging is particular marked by gender and class differences. Underpinning these experiences are ideologies of patriarchy (women are denied equal status) and unregulated capitalism (economic exploitation). Working class migrant women, employed as domestic workers are depicted as facing exploitation, abuse and alienation in the new community abroad. They also face alienation and exploitation at home. While working abroad they are confronted by male behaviors such as sexual harassment and assault. They have little power to oppose these behaviors unless resorting to violence themselves. They also face exploitation by criminals running people trafficking networks. The illegal female migrant is exploited by firms with low pay and poor conditions. In contrast the representation of men is underpinned by conflicting ideologies of individualism versus family and religious ideologies. A sense of belonging overseas is conflicted yet they are aware they have responsibilities to their own family and to religious teachings.

The representation of migrant workers experiences in these short stories across the two political periods is largely similar. However, there are changes in terms of contesting the ideologies of patriarchy and New Order developmentalism. In the Reformation era, women are being depicted as gaining empowerment in the village rather than having to become migrant workers. This empowerment stems from education and also government support for female entrepreneurs creating employment in their own village. This stands in contrast to earlier depictions of New Order developmentalism (large scale and whimsical) which did not benefit villages. There is a change indicated to government investment being directed to traditional industries meaning women are empowered with employment choices. In the Reformation era period overseas worker are also depicted as being supported by the Indonesian foreign service with consular assistance.

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