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Changing Perceptions of "Good" Mothering and Family Roles Among Indonesian Female Domestic Workers

This paper attempts to demonstrate the multi-faceted linkages between female domestic workers (FDWs) and their families in the Asian and Indonesia context. The particularities of the mothering and community values intertwine in a unique process of female migration, where the family takes an important place. This paper focuses on changing perception of "good" mothering, which relates to the role of women in the families. This study finds that a number of traditional mothering situations are shifted by the migration of FDWs. However, these situations are still interpreted ambivalently by their husbands, their community and also themselves. The study is undertaken from a feminist standpoint with a commitment to the identification of the social conditions of women and gender relations—particularly related to FDWs from Indonesia. Although women's culture, history and lives for the most part remain "underground and invisible," this study also involves other voices and experiences from men in their families, communities, and workplace. In this respect, this study is still making women's concrete experiences the "point of entry" while, at the same time, acknowledging the major contributions that women have brought back for their communities, through performing nurturing tasks on a daily basis.

One of the trends that stands out in Indonesian labour migration is that over the past ten years, women (most of them mothers) have become increasingly significant to the economy through their global mobility, where they leave their own country for different countries of Asia and the Middle East in order to provide for their families, especially for their children. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration, 2,369,713 Indonesian female migrant workers have been employed overseas between 2001 and 2009.[1] Within this period, the bulk of these women moved from rural and

relatively poor areas of Indonesia; overseas they are employed in the informal sector, especially in domestic service to provide elderly care, childcare, and/or housecleaning in private homes. Indonesian migrant workers make a huge contribution to the national economy. In 2005 alone, they sent home USD 2,709,534,159 in remittances. The value of these remittances at the national level is second only to mining as a source of foreign exchange.

Despite their large number, wide dispersal and significant contribution, the Indonesian government's response to the migrant workers' issues and needs is inadequate. Migrant workers—especially women—remain extremely vulnerable to abuse since they lack a strong legislative and administrative framework to protect their basic human rights. They are thus powerless in the face of: unpaid wages; sexual harassment; verbal, physical, sexual and psychological abuse by employers; workplace accidents; unfair termination of employment; sickness; not being allowed to communicate; arrest, imprisonment and inhumane punishment by receiving countries; and failure to depart the country of origin for reasons beyond their control, such as bureaucratic problems with the agency or the government. At the same time, they almost universally leave their children behind in Indonesia while they take advantage of the greater labour market opportunities in those countries. As one of the largest sources of transnational female domestic workers, these Indonesian women experience mothering their children from a distance or "transnational mothering." This creates a dislocated chain linking a woman as a mother, another woman as a carer, and their children, in terms of the provision of love, care, and supervision.

This paper examines perceptions of mothering among Indonesian female domestic workers (FDWs) by focusing on the relationship between the women and their families, both the nuclear and the extended. Although "the voice" of women is the centre of the discussion in this study, there is a need to recognize the relationship between the women and other institutions and/or ideologies within their families' culture. In many parts of Indonesia, ideology[2] shapes their culture's thinking about motherhood. For example, patriarchy—as a dominant ideology in Indonesia—to varying degrees depicts motherhood as an inherently gendered role and locks women into inevitable biological reproduction that denies their identities and selfhood outside this role. In this case, this ideology serves as the lens that filters and distorts their experience and understanding of mothering (Glenn). In addition, economic, political and social changes within the family and community of FDWs, could lead to some changes in mothering practices since mothering does not exist in isolation, but is part of a complex system of globalization that is differentially constructed for women of different races, ethnicities and classes. By employing ideas by Evelyn Nakano Glenn and looking at FDWs' perceptions of "good" mothering, this study proposes looking at mothering as socially, historically and culturally varied sets of daily

activities, relationships and management involved in nurturing and caring for people (Arendell; Phoenix and Woolett). As in many parts of the world, motherhood—the way people perform mothering—is constructed in Indonesia through men's and women's actions within specific historical circumstances (Thurer). In this case, similar to gender, "good" mothering should be understood as a social construction and practice rather than a natural, universal or unchanging set of behaviours.

Methodology

The feminist approach and method used in this study was incorporating in all stages of the research process, from the theoretical to the practical, from the formulation of research questions to the write-up of research findings, from 2006 to 2009. As a feminist research, the structures and framework of this study, is guided by feminist theory; reaching across disciplinary boundaries; and attempting to transform gender relations and the societies in which we live (Reinharz 240). I have used qualitative methods, especially in-depth interviews with 38 participants, for three reasons. First, in-depth interviews give voice to those who are marginalized and oppressed in a society: in this case, women, children and the poor (Hesse-Biber). Second, feminist researchers use in-depth interviews to access women's hidden knowledge. Finally, in-depth interviews play a significant role in recent feminist research, since "the fundamental focus for feminist researchers is the validation of women's subjectivity experiences as women and as people" (Minichiello 7).

In this study, in-depth interviews were also conducted with people from different groups around the world: daughters, carers (grandmothers), husbands, community leaders, and religious leaders, in order to collect whole experiences of each woman. All of the interviews were conducted in an open-ended flexible manner, to obtain as comprehensive a picture of the society of each village in Indonesia (one in West Java and another in Central Java) as possible, and in order to facilitate the interviewees to raise issues of concern to them.

"Good" Mothering

This section explores women's ideas about motherhood, drawing on a part of the interview where women (and also their daughters and husbands) were asked: "Would you describe yourself as a 'good' mother?" Having interviewed many FDWs, it is clear that the description of a "good" mother is not simple and straightforward. Given the diversity among FDWs, their cultures, the ideological norms (particularly gender ideology), and their educational level, it is difficult to generalize about the description of a good mother. Furthermore,

descriptions of a good mother tend to come from contemporary Western society since there are ample discussions related to mothering activity there, in contrast to Asia—particularly Indonesia. For instance, in the Australian context, according to Stephanie Brown, Judith Lumley, Rhonda Small, and Jill Astbury the good mother is:

> …required to be loving and caring, to have "never-ending" supplies of patience, to willingly and regularly spend time with her children, and in this time provide her children with the right sort of attention, stimulation and guidance. She is required to remain calm and relaxed at all times, to be a good listener and communicator, and to be understanding and sensitive to children's needs. Among the tasks she must completely perform are the disciplining of her children, teaching appropriate behaviour, and everyday basic care tasks of feeding and keeping children clean. In order to manage all this she must have highly developed skills in juggling competing demands; she must be responsible, consistent, fair, able to handle her children in any situation, never lose her temper—and it would help also if she was energetic, creative and had a sense of humour. (141)

Mothering activity is regarded as tedious and extremely demanding, rewarding yet often exhausting and emotionally draining. It also limits the mother's attempts to enter the public world and find greater self-fulfilment. For many "old style good mother (s)," they are trapped in a belief system which inhibits the mother's attempts to organize alternative child care arrangements, which might relieve the pressures of mothering and allow mothers to achieve some measure of independence (Everingham). The 'old style good mother' discourse stresses the importance of love and security, and what were described as passive qualities—patience, reliability and willingness to spend time. In contrast, the 'new good mother' is more interested in retaining her own independence and individuality, and in providing a stimulating environment for her child's development, rather than the loving presence of a patient mother (Brown et al.).

This study began to challenge dominant idealized models of motherhood that have been projected as common in Indonesia. For the Indonesian, it is recognized that women's roles as *ibu* (mother) and *isteri* (wife) are a central point of household and family (Machali; Rosenberg). Not surprisingly, a "model mother" or *ibu teladan* was the one who is measured in terms of her success in supporting her husband's career and her children's success in education. In this case, women's achievements in her own life were never viewed as consistent with the model role unless balanced by the good career of the husband and the education of the children. It is almost taboo for the wife's role (especially in

public) to be higher than that of the husband. In addition, the representation idealizes a "good" mother as the married woman in a nuclear family with two children, preferably a boy and girl, economically self-sufficient, maintaining a religious environment at home, and never having a career more distinguished than that of her husband.

For many years, this model did little justice to the diverse nature of women and women's social roles in many parts of Indonesia. It did not recognise many aspects of the life of rural women who make up the majority (80 percent) of women in Indonesia (Suryakusuma 2004); nor did it acknowledge the large number of female-headed households, the high rate of divorce and desertion, the migration of women and men, and finally the unemployed husbands. It also did not sufficiently recognise that women need jobs, just as much and perhaps even more than men, since women consistently bear the responsibility for supporting the children.

But it was reinforced nonetheless, not only by state-based organizations like the *Dharma Wanita* (the civil servant wives' organisation), *Dharma Pertiwi* (the military wives' organization), and PKK (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, the Family Welfare Organization); but also by women's religious organizations (Blackwood; Dzuhayatin; Suryakusuma 2004). All these organizations, ideologically, politically, socially and strategically, mould women into the ideal model of staying in the nuclear family, *ikut suami* (following the husband), being domesticated and supporting their husbands through the role of the "good" housewife.

While many mothers stand between the "old style good mother" and "new style good mother" both in Western and Asia, the FDWs in this study have to struggle between mothering and meeting the rising costs of living for the survival of their family. Missing from the Western literature is the inclusion of material concern in motherhood, both as practice and ideology.

> *I think a good mother is a mother who is taking care of her children.… I also had to find some money for my children.* (Tina, a mother of six)

> *Yes, I am a good mother because I love my children and think about their education. But love isn't enough. We had to think about their education when they grew up and their needs. So, we had to find money for them, not just provide love for them.* (Atin, a mother of two)

As Theresa Devasahayam and Brenda Yeoh argue, since there is little change in the social and cultural expectations placed on women's roles in the family context, women have to continue to shoulder home and family responsibilities as their primary concern, while negotiating identities and practices as workers

and mothers in everyday life. As Yeni, a mother of five who worked on two different contracts in Saudi Arabia explains:

> *I am a good mother because I sacrificed for my children, by leaving them behind and surviving all of the situations and problems over there.*

Motherhood in Indonesia has always carried its own meanings, often distinct from those in Western societies. Amongst ordinary Indonesians, an *ibu* (mother) has many roles. For instance, New Order ideology surrounding gender defines *ibu* as (a) appendages and companions to their husbands, (b) procreators of the nation, (c) mothers and educators of children, (d) housekeepers, and (e) members of Indonesian society (Blackburn; Suryakusuma 1996). Not surprisingly, two mothers in this study explain that helping and supporting their husbands can be used as an indicator that they are "good" mothers:

> *I am a good mother.... My children need some stuff and my husband doesn't have enough income. So I have to support my husband's income*. (Lastri)

> *Yes, I am a good mother because I want to help my husband. He needs some more income. I want to build a house. I want to send my children to school.* (Tuti)

In addition, a good relationship with her husband could also become an attribute of a "good" mother, in relation to the trigger of going among the FDWs:

> *I am a good mother because I went overseas not because I had a fight with my husband or any other reasons like that. My dream is for my children's future and to change my destiny. I struggle with that.* (Nur)

In an ideal world, as espoused by gender difference ideology and religion, the household and family are the primary domain of women, because of their *kodrat* ("nature"). However, in practice, mothers do not have a choice about whether they will participate in extra-domestic economic activities. Their material conditions determine that they must help support their families, while they also bear the major responsibility for ensuring that their domestic tasks are done by someone, including caring for their children. Like FDWs in this study, they go beyond the domestic care of husband, children and the household, and include activities outside the country to support the family. In other words, mothers have a right to be active in the public world—so long as it is justified

in the name of the family. Rumi, a mother of one, explains:

> *I feel like I do some things wrong based on my religion, since I left my children and husband behind. But because of economic pressure, desire to change my destiny and family's problems, I feel I do the right thing. I am a good mother because I want my children to go to school and have a better destiny than their parents. I want them to be successful. I feel I fulfilled my responsibilities when I was overseas.*

It seems that Indonesian concepts of motherhood emphasise one strand of the communal gender ideology that allows mothers some flexibility in interpreting how best to perform their private-domestic roles. These often expand their own options (Blackburn; Sullivan). Among some FDWs, it can be seen that mothers possess a significant force and authority that allow them to delegate much of their domestic work to others, spending most of their time away from home, working overseas without negative sanctioning. It is readily accepted that as the mother, they have made a wise decision, are contributing to their family's welfare and will reciprocate when required (Sullivan):

> *I am feeling that I am a good mother for my children, but I don't know what other people think about me.* (Tina)

> *I am a good mother. That's because I want it like that.* (Lastri)

However, similar to mothers in other societies, mothers in this study also discuss the issue of judgement about the "good" mother in relation to guilty feelings, divisive criticism, and elaborate rationales for choices and behaviours to consolidate mothers' selves (Pocock). For example, Hana, a mother of five, mentions that guilt is an aspect of her mothering:

> *I am not a good mother because I left and neglected my children, until one of them passed away. I know it was part of her destiny, but I felt it happened because her mother neglected her.*

Furthermore, some women also have their own views and beliefs about how mothers "should be." In Indonesia generally, women are socialised to believe that they are suited to bring up the children because of the preponderance of the quality of love in them. They are expected to manage their home and to perform as the wife as well as the mother of the household (Arivia; Blackwood). Thus, not surprisingly, Ani, a mother of three who worked in Malaysia for three months, argues:

> *Sometime I feel I am not a good mother since I left my responsibilities by going overseas, especially left my children behind and they felt neglected by their mother. A good mother is a mother who is staying at home and taking care of her children. She can be also working in the house or outside the house but not leaving her children far away. It is because children have a closer relationship to their mother rather then their father, especially in terms of communication.*

In addition, Endah, a mother of one who worked six different contracts in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, defines herself as being unable to be a "good" mother since she is not there on a daily basis to ensure her child learns social rules:

> *I want my child to obey my orders, to obey all aspects. But because I am not taking care of my son, he just receives the money from me, so he againsts me sometimes.*

In her case, she can't provide two forms of care that are expected to ensure the reproduction of her family: (1) moral care, meaning the provision of discipline and socialization to ensure that her dependent is raised to be a good moral citizen and (2) emotional care, meaning the provision of emotional security through the expression of concern and feelings of warmth and affection (Parrenas 2001). However, she works very hard overseas in order to make sure that her only son received material care, especially money, to buy food, clothing and education or skills-training to guarantee his future.

Undoubtedly, expectations of moral, emotional, or material care vary considerably in different societies, cultures and amongst their members. Ideological norms, particularly gender ideologies, and the location of families' members in the political economy, undeniably determine the abilities and expectations of parents toward the family's social reproduction (Parrenas 2001). For example, Diah, a 14-year-old left by her mother for six different contracts, considered material care the most important thing her mother should provide for her:

From the husband's point of view, Ardi considers that a "good" mother is a mother who provides all of the forms of care for her only daughter on a daily basis. However, because of the construction of nurturance, care and mothering already being integral in both family and community as social interactions, identities and institutions, having his wife overseas made him aware of that reality:

> *Yes, yes, my wife is a good mother. I didn't realise that she is a good mother until I had to start taking care of my own children. She is a good mother because she was taking care of my daughter every single day. Now, when*

my wife is not here, I know how to take care of my daughter, but sometimes it's not the same as her mother's care.

Another husband, Setiawan, makes a point that a "good" mother has to be a "good" wife as well. In this case, it shows that mothering has been subject to sex integration resembling "wife-and-mother roles." Such an orientation becomes part of men's (and women's) personality, especially in a married couple: that the identity of a "good" mother attaches to and is identical to that of a "good" wife. This process of formation takes place through continuous activities on a daily basis in their household, in order to keep the "ideal" status of men and women, which is not discussed in the Western literature:

My wife has been a good mother because she supported her husband economically. She never argues with me even though she has her own money. Yes, she is a good mother, although some times she has her own ambition. Since she earns more than me from her work, she challenges me by saying that the house is hers and thinks that I do nothing, just walk around. She doesn't need to worry about looking for food. She also doesn't have to think about her own children. She just has her own work.

Because of varying historical experiences, the communities construct mothering in ways that diverge from the dominant model, especially in relation to the phenomenon of FDWs. On the one hand, the communities still acknowledge the value that bringing up children is held out to be women's greatest achievement. Their values are greatly influenced by the ideological construction that links women as mothers to nurturance. In other words, a "good" mother is a "good" caretaker of her children and a "good" wife for her husband as the father of her children.

On the other hand, the reality of life demonstrates that mothers are a socially and economically impoverished group (Oakley). In this study, due to economic and social pressures, mothers are forced to neglect their own children and families to take care of other women's children. This arrangement is made in order to facilitate middle class men (and women) overseas to keep the illusion of the home as a private haven, while enjoying the services of their wives or their wives' substitutes in maintaining that haven (Glenn). As a result, Atin and Sari, both mothers of two, stand in the midst of uncertainty about being a "good" mother for their children, not only because they left their children behind, but also because of their role in caring for other children:

It is hard to tell. I am not a good mother because I left my children behind. But I am still their mother, so it's hard to tell. I pretend that I am a good

> *mother because I went overseas for my children's future, for their education and also to bring some food on the table for the whole family.* (Atin)

> *Of course I was wrong because I left my children behind and was taking care of someone else's children. The right way is taking care of my own children.* (Sari)

Overall, mothers in this study have to employ complex strategies to balance their roles and their sense of themselves as 'good' mothers, caregivers, workers and even breadwinners. They are forced to confront and negotiate the assumptions and social constructions of "good" mothering in order to be able to accommodate both their mothering role and a sense of self-esteem. Tina and Ria try to reconcile their positive feelings about being workers, with cultural expectations in their communities about what it means to be a "good" mother:

> *… I feel I am a mother and a father in the same time. I still give attention to my children. Even though I was far away from them, I still remember them. When I wrote a letter, I asked them to behave, to go to school, to be honest and not to play too far away from home.* (Tina)

> *Perhaps a good mother is a mother who is able to make her family happy. She is able to live together with her children and grandchildren in a very good situation. It's about feeling.* (Ria)

Breadwinner

The discussion in this section deals with one of the patterns of female migration that is called a worldwide gender revolution by Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, whereby in both destination and origin countries, fewer families can rely solely on a male breadwinner. Women are finding themselves increasingly involved in paid employment, especially since a dual income is necessary for a family to meet the rising costs of living. The earning power of most men decline and many women have to go out either to make up the difference or to become the sole or primary breadwinners, like the FDWs in this study. In relation to their individual background and type of employment overseas, none of the FDWs interviewed, work in order to build careers for themselves as individuals. Here, the waged work is primarily significant for the survival of the family. Although there are some changes in women's aspirations, there is little change in the social and cultural expectations that are placed on women's roles in the family context.

There are three major discourses about breadwinning that emerged from the interviews and from the narratives of the research participants. These are the notions of: (a) "I am both mother and father"; (b) "breadwinning is a man's job"; and (c) "this is just pocket money." The narratives are highly mediated by the social locations of FDWs—their educational background, their marital status, their marital situation at the time they went overseas and their husbands' occupations.

(a) "I am both mother and father"

Tina first left her village to go to Saudi Arabia in 1988 when her youngest child was only four years old and the eldest one was twelve. Having six children at that time and depending on the irregular income of her husband who worked as a towel seller in the market, she decided to carry out her childrearing roles thousands of miles away from Indonesia. She says:

> *I had to find some money by myself. Then I had to send the money back from there to my hometown for my children. When I came home, I had to then become a mother. So, I felt like a father but also a mother. The money has been used as an addition, for my children's future.*

Since the inception of female labour migration in the early 1980s in Tina's village (and many other villages in Indonesia), images of ideal mothers and wives have undergone subtle changes. In particular, the image of the ideal mother that was taught during the New Order period, has stretched to include the component of paid labour overseas. Through justifying their migration, they not only have gone abroad to better their family's economic situation, but also have broadened the spectrum of acceptable ways for women to love their children and care for their families (Gamburd 2005).

For these women, the meaning of motherhood do not involve daily face-to-face caregiving as with many other stay at home mothers in their villages. However, rather than replacing caregiving with breadwinning definitions of motherhood, they appear to be expanding their definitions of motherhood to encompass breadwinning that may require long-term physical separation. For these FDWs, a core belief is that they can best fulfil traditional caregiving responsibilities through income earning overseas while their children remain at home (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila). In order to enable these mothers to redefine mothering to include breadwinning, FDWs have to work very hard to uphold their traditional role and to control the purse strings in their family, which tends to diminish the potential stigma attached to female migration (de Haas; Parrenas 2005) and female financial autonomy.

It is important to note that being the primary breadwinner means having a

continual negotiation with power hierarchies, and older, more traditional patterns of male dominance in their villages. On the one hand, there is an opportunity for these women to increase and improve their power and their status, since they have already brought better conditions for members of their family. On the other hand, FDWs have come to challenge the patriarchal gender norms in their family, with its basic structural framework being the division of labour between fathers (economically sustaining the family) and mothers (reproducing family life). As a result, the lack of provision of economic security on the part of the husbands and fathers, has multiplied the burden that mothers have to carry, as they are expected to follow the gender inscribed duties in the family (Parrenas 2001). In short, the roles for these women are undergoing an expansion, and the roles for their male counterparts, a diminution.

(b) "Breadwinning is a man's job"

> *People say that the husband is the one who has to work, whether it's enough money or not. It has to be the husband.* (Hana, 51 years old and mother of five)

When village women like Hana leave their families to work abroad, their husbands, either unemployed or employed, remain at home and mostly subsist on the money their wives remit. In contrast, like many other families in Indonesia, Hana's husband is traditionally expected to be the breadwinner, the main decision-maker and the head of the family. But in reality, the wives are the primary breadwinners and (theoretically) the decision makers in relation to the distribution of money.

Not surprisingly, some men feel a loss of self-respect and dignity when their wives become the main breadwinners. In some cases, men reluctantly take over the childcare and cooking, others arrange to have female relatives assume these duties instead, in accordance with strong local gender roles. In this situation, the husbands have to struggle to deal with the common local stereotypes and discourses that devalue their competence as breadwinners and highlight their inability to provide for their families.

The notion of becoming the primary breadwinner presents different types of challenges and requires multiple sacrifices from migrant women. While they are overseas, all of them had to make sure that their remittances are sent to their families regularly and used for the intended purposes. They have to spend very little on their personal needs, so that the bulk of the monthly income is available to be sent to (mostly) their husbands. They have to endure not only the long hours of work, but also many other problems. They discipline themselves to avoid being terminated from their jobs and sent home, as these will have

repercussions for the well-being of their families and children.

At the same time, FDWs have to constantly struggle to negotiate—to sometimes accommodate, sometimes resist—the construction of conventional "good" wives and the demands of being the primary breadwinner, with their husband. They have to maintain that being the breadwinner, and exercising the power that comes with it, will not have far-reaching effects on gender and family relations. They have to manage their migration that includes a long absence from home more creatively, in order to have enough money to remit to their families, and also not to disrupt the male gender roles in an uncomfortable or awkward fashion for their husbands' sense of self (Sobritchea).

It is important to note that FDWs often find themselves negotiating the complex space between love and money (Gamburd 2000b). On the one hand, some FDWs attempted to hold their husbands responsible for being a (secondary) breadwinner, a traditionally male obligation, by sending their money directly to them. In doing so, FDWs wanted to demonstrate their respect and love to their husbands, and to give a higher value to their love for their husbands. On the other hand, FDWs tried pragmatically to face new social and economic realities in their families and their villages as well. They wanted to see improvement in their lives, and did not want to continue to live in the same poverty as before they went overseas.

In the series of interviews, FDWs struggle to explain to me (and to themselves) their lack of economic improvement despite several contracts and years of working abroad. They wrestle with the meaning of their continued poverty and with its effect on their relationship with their husbands, children and extended families. As a common response, returned FDWs passively reassume their roles as "good" housewives and try to fulfil more traditional or acceptable ways to be a "wife." They do not appear to understand why their experiment might fail, or how they may ensure it will not fail in the future, so that there is not a cycle of hope followed by disappointment.

(c) "This is just pocket money"

In order to be considered a "good" wife, Sari—37 years old and a mother of two—argues that she went to Saudi Arabia on a two-year contract to help her husband. Her goals are to meet the needs of her husband who is working in construction, with the hope of buying a rice field that is purchased with money that Sari earns overseas: "I was just helping to find some money for the rice field. No more. No less. That was it."

In both West and Central Java, the common reason for wives going to Saudi Arabia is a willingness to help their husbands. They save their money either to maintain or to start a small business. Meanwhile some of them purchase a rice field or a general agricultural field in Central Java, to encourage their husbands

to work on their own land instead of being a farmhand for somebody else. It is clear that most of the returned FDWs in those villages are not interested in starting a business of their own. Generally, their goals are simply to meet the needs of their husbands (Oishi).

For Sari and the other participants, the ideal wife is expected to be a good provider of additional (or supplementary) income, when the husband's income is not enough to support the basic needs of the family. They believe that it is their role to augment the family's resources by engaging in reproductive work overseas, based on their limited skills, knowledge and the culture of female migration and the shared mothering traditions inherent in their villages.

By positioning themselves as the secondary breadwinner, these wives try to accommodate their partners' needs or desires and to fit their lives around their husbands' demands, as their mothers did before them, but in a very different economic environment. The access to earning opportunities and the opening up of horizons through work outside a woman's home, village and even her own country, have seemingly not led to important shifts in the domestic balance of power. Women who took on the breadwinning responsibility do not necessarily escape the male authority of their husbands, and maintain the idea of the traditional male breadwinner role for their husbands in their daily lives. It is simply that modern circumstances are being fitted into a traditional gender and financial structure.

As seen above, ambiguities and contradictions characterise the processes of change among FDWs as breadwinners. At one end of the spectrum, the FDW contribute the main source of income for the household. A woman's involvement in family decisions, both about finances and childrearing, may increase, as well as her social prestige. The admiration that these women inspire when they arrived from abroad—for a visit or for good—laden with gifts, well-dressed and prosperous, means they become models of empowerment for other women in the community. Their success as providers grants them greater control over the use of money and the family's decisions regarding migration, and allows them to enjoy more autonomy in their personal decisions.

At the other end of the spectrum, the moral obligation of sending remittances to their husbands, represent not only a validation of the male role as administrator of the family patrimony, but also frequently channel funds towards male investment that, in the end, allow the husband to reclaim the role of main breadwinner and the wife to return to her domestic role (Garcia and Paiewonsky). Due to the fact that when women migrate, neither men nor women expect the men to modify their roles, the level of empowerment among female labour migrants can vary significantly, depending on the circumstances of their spouses and families. FDWs were simultaneously subjected to reproach

for not fulfilling their maternal role, and blamed for the real or imagined social ills that are caused by migration.

Conclusion

The combination of economic hardship, a dearth of employment opportunities and a migration culture in the villages in West and Central Java, have driven women overseas. I will argue that with one in seven of the adult women in these villages employed abroad, and with a majority of FDWs leaving behind small children, local images of mothers, wives and families undergone subtle yet wide-ranging changes over years. As FDWs take on the formerly masculine role of breadwinner, they fragment the bundle of family responsibilities previously thought of as "mothering," redistributing parts of the role to a number of different people, both male (minority) and female (majority). As the ways for FDWs to love and care for their husbands and children are transformed, the social valuations of the worth and meaning of each option come under negotiation and reconfiguration. The notions of "good mother" contain some elements of the old as well as a reconstitution of new meanings for each FDW. There was a constant struggle to negotiate the construction of the traditional or conventional Indonesian ***ibu*** (mother) and the demands of being the primary breadwinner, both while they were in Indonesia and overseas.

Being the breadwinner and performing long distance mothering means that FDWs struggle between two powerful dynamics: the construction of Indonesian femininity and the demands for work from their employers. In this situation, FDWs have had a lot of difficulties to negotiate, to achieve greater autonomy and to decide their own self-identity. However, the narratives of FDWs are also rich with themes that reflect the ongoing process of resistance and accommodation to traditional or conventional constructions of motherhood. They have explained the evolving roles and behaviours that conflict with existing values, ideals and habits of family life, which both challenge and reinforce more established thinking about motherhood, gender hierarchies, personal identity and women's work.

[1]Data is only collected on those migrant workers who go through official channels.

[2]Based on several studies, I define ideology as bodies of concepts, values and symbols that hang together, influencing the way a group makes sense of and thinks about the world and behaves. But it can also blind us, close our eyes to our own lived reality, experiences and bodies (Glenn; Richards; Rothman; Vincent).

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