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National Belonging and Violent Norms of Gendered Migrant Citizenship : Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers' Appropriation of a National Ritual

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2018

https://doi.org/10.25595/2318

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version
Working Paper

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Dinkelaker, Samia: *National Belonging and Violent Norms of Gendered Migrant Citizenship : Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers' Appropriation of a National Ritual*. Göttingen: Gender(ed) Thoughts - Working Paper Series, 2018. DOI: https://doi.org/10.25595/2318.

Erstmalig hier erschienen / Initial publication here: https://dx.doi.org/10.3249/2509-8179-gtg-5

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New Perspectives in Gender Research

Working Paper Series 2018, Volume 1

Samia Dinkelaker

National Belonging and Violent Norms of Gendered Migrant Citizenship

With a Commentary by Johanna Neuhauser

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New Perspectives in Gender Research
Working Paper Series

(ISSN 2509-8179)

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
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Suggested Citation
Samia Dinkelaker. National Belonging and Violent Norms of Gendered Migrant Citizenship; Gender(ed) Thoughts, Working Paper Series, 2018 Vol. 1, p. 8-23
https://dx.doi.org/10.3249/2509-8179-gtg-5

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gender<ed> thoughts
New Perspectives in Gender Research
Working Paper Series 2018, Volume 1
DOI: 10.3249/2509-8179-gtg-5

National Belonging and Violent Norms of Gendered Migrant Citizenship

Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers' Appropriation of a National Ritual

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Abstract

This article takes into view negotiations over the behaviour of Hong Kong-based Indonesian domestic workers as morally upright and respectable citizens. In collaboration with private agencies, the Indonesian government has actively promoted the temporary outmigration of female workers into low-waged and precarious employment arrangements as a strategy to combat unemployment and generate remittances, foreign exchange and development. The Indonesian labour migration program is, however, faced with the public's anxieties and indignation over migrant domestic workers' experiences of gender-based violence abroad and concerns over national dignity. As pointed out by a number of feminist studies, "labor brokerage states" (Rodriguez 2010) meet the gendered contradictions of their labour migration programmes with appeals to migrant domestic workers' morality. This article makes use of Judith Butler's notion of "normative violence" (Butler 1999, 2004) to frame these appeals as subtle forms of discipline that police and regulate Indonesian migrant domestic workers. It addresses the strong role of female morality in defining which workers deserve protection and which workers can adequately represent the Indonesian nation on the international stage. By taking the case of Hong Kong-based Indonesian domestic workers' self-organised and distinct enactment of a national ritual on Independence Day 2014, I discuss how they appropriate norms of national belonging and how at the same time they challenge the subtle forms of violence inherent in moralising notions of gendered "migrant citizenship" (Rodriguez 2010).

Keywords

Indonesia, gender norms, migrant citizenship, violence, domestic workers

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit den Verhandlungen über das Verhalten indonesischer Hausangestellter in Hongkong als moralisch aufrechte und respektable Bürger_innen. In Zusammenarbeit mit privaten Organisationen hat die indonesische Regierung aktiv die temporäre Abwanderung von Arbeitnehmer_innen in prekäre Beschäftigungsverhältnisse gefördert, um die Arbeitslosigkeit zu bekämpfen und Rücküberweisungen, Devisen und Entwicklung zu generieren. Das indonesische Arbeitsmigrationsprogramm ist jedoch mit den Ängsten und der Empörung der Öffentlichkeit über die geschlechtsspezifischen Gewalterfahrungen der Hausarbeiter_innen im Ausland und Bedenken hin-

sichtlich der nationalen Würde konfrontiert. Wie in einer Reihe von feministischen Studien festgestellt wurde, begegnen „Arbeitsvermittlungsländer“ (Rodriguez 2010) den geschlechtsspezifischen Widersprüchen ihrer Arbeitsmigrationsprogramme mit Appellen an die Moralität von Arbeitsmigrant_innen. Dieser Artikel verwendet Judith Butlers Begriff der „normativen Gewalt“ (Butler 1999, 2004), um diese Appelle als subtile Formen der Disziplinierung darzustellen, die indonesische Hausangestellte überwachen und regulieren. Er bespricht die ausgeprägte Rolle der weiblichen Moral bei der Definition, welche Arbeitnehmer_innen Schutz verdienen und welche Arbeitnehmer_innen die indonesische Nation auf internationaler Ebene angemessen vertreten können. Anhand eines selbstorganisierten und eigens konzeptualisierten Rituals von in Hongkong lebenden indonesischen Hausangestellten am Tag der Unabhängigkeit in 2014, diskutiere ich wie sie sich die Normen der nationalen Zugehörigkeit aneignen und gleichzeitig die subtilen Formen der Gewalt, welchen moralisierende Vorstellungen von geschlechtsspezifischer „migrantischer Staatsbürgerschaft“ (Rodriguez 2010) innewohnen, herausfordern.

Schlagworte

Indonesien, Geschlechternormen, migrantische Staatsbürgerschaft, Gewalt, Hausarbeiter_innen

Introduction

“You know the issue is very, very sensitive. Because of the occurrence of harassment, violence.” With these words, Pak Muchsin,[1] an Indonesian recruitment agent, commented on the Indonesian government’s migration policies. He brokers Indonesian domestic workers to places such as Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong. I met him in 2014, when I was doing research on the state-sanctioned migration scheme for Indonesian domestic workers, which the Indonesian government introduced in the 1980s as a strategy to combat unemployment and generate remittances and foreign exchange (Silvey 2004, 2007; Palmer 2016: 22–30). While contemplating, Pak Muchsin reasoned: *“But this concerns the good name of the nation, right? The image overseas is also whoa, ugly. Indonesia will only be considered to send helpers who are not skilled, right?”*

On the one hand, my interlocutor pointed to the outrage with which the Indonesian public meets the gender-based violence that migrant domestic workers experience abroad due to their employment in jobs that make them particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. On the other hand, he expressed worries of being viewed as a ‘nation of servants’ on the international stage. Considering that the Indonesian government has, in collaboration with private agencies, actively promoted the temporary outmigration of female workers into low-waged and precarious work arrangements as a strategy of development, Pak Muchsin’s recourse to feelings of national shame intimates *“intrinsic contradictions that are critically gendered”* (Rodriguez 2010: 94) and permeates “labor brokerage states” (ibid., x) such as Indonesia or the Philippines.

A large body of academic literature has shown that in countries sending migrants, official and public representations of migrant domestic workers’ experiences of gender-based violence meet these contradictions with assumptions about female workers’ morality (Chan 2014; Killias 2009: 148; Robinson 2000; Rodriguez 2010: 93; Silvey 2004). Previous studies have shown that gendered morality and respectability are crucial to state officials’, recruitment agents’, and the wider public’s ideas of “migrant citizenship”, a term with which Robyn Rodriguez describes the particular relations between labour brokerage states and their national citizens residing abroad as temporary labourers (2010: xix–xxi). Migrant citizenship promises provisions that are supposed to protect migrants from abuse and exploitation, for

[1] I changed the names of the protagonists of my study for reasons of confidentiality. An exception is posed by those protagonists who are depicted in their functions as leaders of migrant workers’ organisations and thus represent public figures.

instance, by introducing labour attachés responsible for the temporary migrant workers in Indonesian diplomatic representations overseas. Moreover, migrant citizenship stimulates migrants to sustain ties to the 'homeland' and expects them to exemplarily represent the nation overseas. In the eyes of state officials and recruitment agents, morally upright female migrants work hard for disproportionately low wages, they adhere to strict and bureaucratised migration procedures, and they carry out their familial responsibility of loyally sending remittances to their places of origin. Essentially, they are supposed to uphold the good name of the nation, thus, rectifying the image that afflicts the low status of domestic work. In official and public discourses, migrant workers who do not meet these expectations are scandalised and accused of lacking moral rectitude (see e.g. Chan 2014; Guevarra 2006; Killias 2010, 2014; Rodriguez 2010: 93–115).

A number of studies have critically stated that, in neoliberal fashion, the moralising representations of migrant domestic workers emphasise migrants' individual responsibility for either success or exploitation and distress (e.g. Chan 2014: 5956; Killias 2009: 163; Robinson 2000: 259). Furthermore, these representations legitimise *"restrictions in the domestic workers' freedom of movement"* (Killias 2010: 901), since they define the use of private placement agencies not only as legally compulsory for domestic workers but also as a moral duty. For the migrants this means having to accept loans for their recruitment, wage deductions for several months, preparation in secluded training camps, and being channelled into *live-in* employment arrangements in places where their "deportability" (De Genova 2002) shapes their particular precarity.

In Hong Kong, the site which this article focuses on, a large proportion of migrants employed in private households are made up of the 150,000 Indonesian domestic workers.[2] A number of regulations set by the Hong Kong government, by the Indonesian government, and by the Indonesian consulate in Hong Kong set the conditions of these workers. Migrant domestic workers have to take out loans for their training and placement through Indonesian and Hong Kong agencies. While they are to pay these off through sizeable deductions from their first monthly salaries,[3] many workers are hesitant to report mistreatment, abuse, and deprivation of their entitlements because they risk terminating their contracts without having earned anything (Rother 2017: 964). Furthermore, a so-called two-week rule requires migrant domestic workers to leave Hong Kong within two weeks after their contract ends or is terminated either by the employer or the worker. This key policy adds complexity to the strains experienced by many Indonesian domestic workers (Constable 2007: 145).

I build on a twelve-month multi-sited ethnography at government briefings for migrant domestic workers in Indonesia and Hong Kong, at a recruitment agency training centre in Java, Indonesia, and among migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong.[4] My observations allow me to juxtapose Hong Kong-based migrant worker organisations' enactment of migrant citizenship with concerns about Hong Kong-based migrant workers' moral behaviour and respectable appearance as they are voiced by government officials, recruitment agents, training instructors,

[2] The approximately 180,000 workers originating from the Philippines form the largest group of migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong. Fewer migrant domestic workers originate from Thailand, Sri Lanka, and other countries in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

[3] At the time of my research, Indonesian domestic workers were to deposit 2,596 HKD – almost two thirds of their monthly salary of 4,010 HKD – during their first six months of employment in order to pay back the loans for their training and other services related to their placement.

[4] I would like to express my deep appreciation to all protagonists and research participants who provided me with precious insights. I acknowledge the Volkswagen Stiftung for funding my research. Furthermore, I am deeply grateful for the cooperation with Sri Budi Eko Wardhani and Anna Margret Lumbangaol, who directed the Centre for Political Studies (Puskapol) at Universitas Indonesia in Depok, Indonesia during my fieldwork. Lastly, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers and editors for their valuable feedback and support.

and other actors involved in shaping Indonesian migrant citizenship. I discuss these gendered and classed anxieties as articulations of normative violence and illustrate fields of tension between migrant domestic workers and the Indonesian migration apparatus, in which norms of national belonging and migrant citizenship are negotiated.

1. Gendered migrant citizenship and normative violence

In this article, I frame the disciplining and policing implications of moralising notions of gendered migrant citizenship as "normative violence", a concept that derives from Judith Butler's (1999: xx; 2004a) reflections on subject formation and ethical responsibility. Norms can be restrictive when *"they tell us what we can and cannot do at the most personal and intimate level of life, and we are not 'allowed' to become what we might be"* (Boesten 2017: 102). Furthermore, norms define *"[t]hose who become beyond and outside existing normative frameworks or understandings of truth"* (ibid.) as illegitimate and illegible.

Through moralising gendered migrant citizenship, for instance, the Indonesian labour brokerage state demands migrants' resilience to emotionally distressful migration and working conditions but disapproves of migrants who follow their aspirations by pursuing migration projects outside the state-sanctioned migration scheme. Olivia Killias has shown that the Indonesian labour brokerage state, therefore, renders its own citizens 'illegal' and morally defective if they do not comply with the strict regulations (2010: 901). Migrants' desires to make use of their labour market mobility in their "quest for more autonomy" (ibid.: 910) are thus silenced.[5]

Normative violence can imply physical violence, however, not inevitably. Thus, the notion of normative violence points to the subtle practices of defining whether subjects are legitimate and whether lives are worth living. Carol Chan's argument on "gendered moral hierarchies" (2014: 6959) is a case relating to this aspect of normative violence. She observes that media representations of "immoral victims" of death row sentences, physical abuse, and distress, depicting migrant domestic workers as *"promiscuous, greedy, or disobey[ing] their elders"* (ibid.: 6962), implicitly contend that there are migrants who deserve less protection and whose precarity remains *"invisible, mundane, or irrelevant to policymakers"* (ibid.: 6963).

Regulatory norms operate through repetition in social practice and through "daily social rituals of bodily life" (Butler 2004b: 48). The *"necessity of the repetition of norms [...] ensures the possibility of social and political transformation, since it renders norms open to misappropriation, to being reiterated and re-enacted differently"* (Mills 2007: 136). Rather than undermining norms as such, disenfranchised subjects do relate to hegemonic norms and normativity – "the regulatory function of norms" (Dhawan et al. 2016: 2). As Nikita Dhawan and her colleagues have argued, distinct norms *"can function as a site of political agency, even as the vulnerability of the subject is closely related to normative regulations"* (ibid.: 6). In distinguishing different manifestations of resistance to hegemonic norms from the perspective of postcolonial critique (ibid.: 10–15), they discuss appropriation as one particular term that illuminates *"the ways in which the colonised have applied the tools of the dominant discourse to displace and, potentially, to challenge its hegemony"* (ibid.: 12).[6]

[5] Killias's argument is based on her reading of the *National Law on the Placement and the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers Overseas*, which was enacted in 2004. In October 2017, a new law titled *Law on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers* was enacted, which contains substantial revisions of the previous law. To what extent this new law impacts migrant workers' realities still remains to be examined.

[6] Dhawan et al. distinguish 'appropriation', 'contestation', and 'transformation' as modes in which normativity is negotiated. Through this distinction, they underline that marginalised subjects reject potentially violent normativity through cultural and discursive practices, as well as through struggle and conflict, and that normativity can be reconfigured and transformed. This article focuses on appropriation as a way of negotiating modes of national belonging; however, it also addresses contestation and implicit possibilities of

This article addresses this openness of norms and illustrates how migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong negotiate and re-signify the norms of migrant citizenship by reiterating norms that define national belonging. Taking up the term of appropriation from Dhawan et al., I apply it to the context of Hong Kong-based migrant domestic workers. I examine their distinct performance of a national ritual on Indonesia's Independence Day in 2014 as an appropriation of norms of national belonging. The article argues that the official flag ceremony conveys hegemonic norms of national belonging and analyses the alternative performance as a form of self-assertion of migrant domestic workers' manifold subjectivities in light of normative violence inherent in appeals to migrant domestic workers' morality. I suggest that with this, the performers challenge the affective underpinnings – national shame and dignity – of moralising gendered migrant citizenship.

Thereby, I complement previous studies discussing migrant domestic workers' agency, which is supported by the freedom to organise and appear in public as they are guaranteed in Hong Kong's labour legislation. These studies address how migrant domestic workers actively negotiate "moral identity" (Chang and Groves 2000: 75), they discuss everyday resistance to daily denigration (e.g. Constable 2007: 166–80) and explore migrant Hong Kong-based migrant workers' manifold forms of (transnational) political activism (e.g. Constable 2007: 159–66, 2009; Lai 2010; Rother 2017; Sim 2007: 122–67). Previous studies have acknowledged female migrants' cultural performances as sites in which migrant workers ludically negotiate official notions of citizenship (Winarnita 2016), as well as the migrant domestic workers' movement as a setting where they build community, perform agency, and visualise diversity (Lai 2010). I underline that for migrant domestic workers performing subjectivities that do not comply with the rigid normative rules of migrant citizenship during the national ritual is a meaningful practice of self-assertion in light of the multiple forms of (normative) gender-based violence migrant domestic workers are exposed to.

In the following sections, I will discuss how, through their embodied practice, Hong Kong-based migrant domestic workers defy some of the hierarchical culture inscribed in the use of national symbols in Indonesia and how they challenge dominant motifs of hegemonic nationalism.

2. Independence Day in Hong Kong: performing the nation

Every 17th August, Indonesia commemorates the declaration of its national independence from 350 years of colonial Dutch, British, and Japanese rule. All over the archipelago, villages, towns, and urban neighbourhoods decorate streets and central places with lampions and pennant chains, all in red and white – the colours of the national flag. Residents engage in playful activities: they run hop sack races, compete in eating crackers hung above their heads, and play tug of war. Apart from the playful gatherings, no Independence Day omits the flag ceremony – a re-enactment of the first raising of the national flag and of the declaration of independence by Indonesia's first president Sukarno and his vice president Mohammad Hatta in 1945. On Independence Day, the best-performing school children are selected to be part of the team to raise the national flag at district or town halls, provincial governments, and even at the State Palace in Jakarta. The ceremony is led by the highest-ranking government officials and follows a strict procedure that was codified after independence.

Indonesian Independence Day is also commemorated in Hong Kong, where the majority of residing Indonesian citizens are domestic workers. It is usually celebrated on the Sunday following 17th August, as this is the day of the week when most domestic workers have their day off. In 2014, a staff member of the consulate uploaded a video of the official flag cere-

transformation in negotiations of norms and normativity.

mony on his YouTube channel (Sahardi 2014), thus sharing the consulate's ritualised mise-en-scène of national identity. The consulate's flag ceremony symbolises some of the aspects of idealised citizenship: in perfect synchronicity, a squad of uniformly dressed female migrants hoist the Indonesian flag, while the consul, elevated on a platform, directs the ceremony. The flag-raising brigade members' knee-long skirts, which resemble the uniforms of Indonesian government officials, can be read as a marker of female state servants' normative femininity. *"Civil servants' uniforms are a powerful symbol of the Indonesian state"* (Moser 2008: 129). As *"example[s] for the rest of society"* (Suryakusuma 1996: 92), female civil servants represent the ideal "national feminine" (Sunindyo 1993).

In dominant government circles, this ideal is influenced by the notion of (working) women's responsibility for the model of a 'happy family' (*keluarga sakinah)*, which imposes a strong moral role on women (Wieringa, Bhaiya, and Katjasungkana 2015: 43).[7] This ideal echoes state ideologies of president Suharto's authoritarian period, during which the *kodrat*, the destiny and duty of middle-class women, was defined as being nurturing mothers and wives, even when waged work was promoted for women (Chan 2014: 6955; Silvey 2004: 252; Sunindyo 1996: 125). In view of the salience of religious discourse and influence of religious organisations, the contemporary 'happy family' model puts strong emphasis on (middle class) women's piousness (Wieringa, Bhaiya, and Katjasungkana 2015: 97; Robinson 2015: 60). In the case of (lower class) female migrant workers, ideal female migrant citizenship has been defined by the expectation to be a compliant[8] worker and a good daughter or mother and wife in the service of her family as well as to contribute to rural and national development (Chan 2014: 6955; Killias 2010, 2014: 890; Silvey 2004: 253).

The elevated position of the ceremony leader, the consul, marks the hierarchical relation between citizens and state institutions. This arrangement evokes the position of female members of the armed forces as "little daughters" (Sunindyo 1993: 14) and of female industrial workers as "factory daughters" (Wolf 1996: 156). As pointed out by feminist scholars of nationalism, such familial iconographies imply appeals to the nation's daughters' dutifulness and restraint (McClintock 1993; Sunindyo 1993: 15; Rodriguez 2010: 100). In the same vein, Daromir Rudnyckyj (2004: 420) highlights that the Indonesian migration apparatus establishes hierarchies between bureaucrats, recruitment agents, and training instructors through forms of address. At the training centre, where I conducted research, for instance, but also in other voluntary sector organisations that I visited during my fieldwork, migrant domestic worker trainees were called 'kids' (*anak-anak*) – although a large portion of them had their own children already – and thus placed in subordinate roles.

I will expand on the ambivalences of normative notions of gendered migrant citizenship below, but first, I will discuss the migrant domestic workers' distinct ceremony organised by migrant domestic workers themselves, since the consulate's ceremony was not the only flag ceremony that took place in Hong Kong on Independence Day. 2014 was the first year a broad coalition of Indonesian migrant workers' self-organisations in Hong Kong staged their own flag ceremony, which in some aspects significantly contrasted with the consulate's ceremony.

3. Migrant domestic workers' alternative flag ceremony

The Hong Kong Network of Indonesian Migrant Workers (JBMI) is well-known for mobilising thousands of workers on the city's streets to claim their rights, demand fairer wages, criti-

[7] Saskia Wieringa (2015: 53) argues that after the end of the Suharto regime, an independent women's movement was successful in mainstreaming its women's rights agenda. Yet, as she claims, *"the emphasis on women's rights seems to have evaporated, replaced by a conservative gender discourse that stresses women's pious obedience to the so-called* keluarga sakinah *('happy family')"*.

[8] According to my own observations, workers are also expected to be committed workers who love their work and take initiative.

cise a lack of protection by the consulate, and condemn exploitative practices of private placement agencies. On Sundays, members of the coalition meet to pursue the activities of their respective organisations: they provide education on labour rights, celebrate religious holidays such as Eid-al-Fitr, rehearse dances or song performances for upcoming competitions among migrant workers' organisations, or carry out discussions on political topics such as the presidential elections.

On those Sundays that preceded Independence Day in 2014, members of the coalition rehearsed and prepared the ceremony on the sports fields in Victoria Park. On one of these Sundays, Sringatin, the coalition's coordinator, explained to me that the coalition invited all domestic workers and Indonesian citizens residing in Hong Kong to this distinct ceremony, because there was no other option for the wider public to perform the ritual, as the consulate's event was only open to a select group of migrant workers and Indonesian expatriates. When I asked her why she found the flag ceremony important, Sringatin explained: *"The ceremony has been planted in the migrants' minds since they were children. Why shouldn't they be able to perform the ritual while they are here?"*[9] On another occasion, she further underlined the importance of the ritual for the workers' feelings of national belonging. Knowing about my intension to discuss the migrant workers' alternative flag ceremony in my academic work, she expressed her hopes that my article would *"explain the meaning of [the performers'] love to [their] homeland and [their] national feelings"*. While Sringatin positively highlighted the norm of enacting national belonging through performing the ritual on Independence Day, as will be discussed in the following paragraph, the performers defied and re-signified a number of the hegemonic norms that define national belonging.

On 17th August 2014, about 450 performers gathered in Kowloon Park to celebrate Independence Day and carry out their own, distinct flag ceremony. With the exception of one expatriate citizen, all performers were migrant domestic workers. The performers' red and white attire matched the russet paving of the piazza and the sparkling glass facades of the skyscrapers that formed the background of the scene. A commander's instructions echoed in long-drawn-out sounds across the square: *"Si-aaaap gerak!"*[10]. The ceremony performers lined up in squads and followed the instructions. A squad of performers in white uniforms and black velvet *pecis*, a type of cap that was worn by president Sukarno and vice president Hatta, marched along the square. Their lockstep produced synchronous clattering sounds. Muthi, coordinator of the League of Indonesian Migrant Workers, Sumber, chairperson of the *Beringin Tetap Maju*-group who won every song contest with their splendid Hip Hop performances, and a third performer formed the trio that led the squad to hoist the flag. They could, however, only imitate the flag-raising because there was no flagpole. A choir made up of performers wearing white blouses and red hijabs or red ribbons sang the national anthem and a song that is part of a canon of national songs recalling the independence fighters. Yima, vice chair of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union in Hong Kong, was part of a group of separately lined up performers waiting to read the preamble of the Indonesian Constitution, the Indonesian state philosophy *Pancasila*, and a prayer out loud. She was wearing a red and white scouts' bandana and red sneakers. Earlier that day she had worn big pilot glasses which resembled the emblematic glasses worn by the first president Sukarno in historical photographs. As coordinator of the ceremony, Sringatin held a speech – a task carried out by the president himself at the Presidential Palace in

[9] It is to be noted that in 2017, representatives of migrant workers organisations were invited to the consulate's ceremony, which I consider a gesture of respect towards migrant workers' self-organisations. This suggests a dynamic relationship between Hong Kong-based migrant workers' organisations and the consulate, which is open to reconfiguration.

[10] This precise instruction is used in military language and means *"Stand in formation!"*.

Jakarta. Speaking into a microphone, Sringatin reminded the audience of colonial oppression. She spoke about the "spirit of resistance" that was evident in the early days of the independence struggle. Her speech made an appeal to learn from the heroes and heroines[11] of that struggle saying: *"We must keep on learning, support migrant workers who are in need, and support the struggle of the Indonesian people for prosperity"*.

I observed the ceremony from the side. There was practically no audience for the ceremony, because everybody was involved in it. An exception were the few journalists – migrant workers who freelanced for Indonesian-speaking newspapers in Hong Kong – documenting the event. Standing next to me was Andi, a *tomboi,* that is, in Indonesian contexts, a female-bodied person who dresses and acts like a man (Blackwood 2010: 25). He[12] could not take part in the marching and saluting due to a leg injury. A crutch supported him and a straw hat protected his head from the sun, while he was filming the 40-minute choreography. Without mercy, Andi lectured the journalists who entered the ceremony field to capture the unique scene with their reflex cameras. He kept commenting: *"Wow, this gives me goose bumps!"*. Other participants shared Andi's feeling: *"I haven't done the flag-raising for 14 years"*, exclaimed Fidah, another performer who had worked in Hong Kong for more than a dozen years. Other participants lamented that the midday sun had made them dizzy. There was no doubt, however, that this morning had been a highlight among the manifold events migrant workers organise almost every Sunday. Photos of the event were shared enthusiastically on social media afterwards.

The successful event sparked the organisers' enthusiasm not least due to a "controversy" among the Indonesian community in Hong Kong, which arose on Facebook, calling into question the lawfulness of the ceremony. An Indonesian expatriate was upset about the call for an alternative independence ceremony. He claimed that performing the flag ceremony was unlawful, because it took place outside the consulate, which is Indonesian territory. He called the organisers "odd (*nyeleneh*)" and "stupid (*bodoh*)" (Nuraini 2014). The organisers felt insulted but, referring to relevant regulations, they could show that the event was fully lawful.

The expatriate's complaint and insult of the performers is evocative of Monika Swasti Winarnita's (2016) study of dance performances by Indonesian female marriage migrants in Australia. Winarnita shows that the self-chosen representatives of the Indonesian culture and nation constantly negotiate their legitimacy and aesthetics, as they are questioned by members of the Indonesian consulate and the Indonesian expatriate community in Perth, the site of her study. It seems that the upset expatriate similarly questioned the flag ceremony in Kowloon Park as a legitimate representation of Indonesia on the international stage. The fact that the ceremony took place in a public space outside Indonesia, virtually in front of an international audience, is crucial to the controversy. In Indonesia, communities perform the ceremony in non-government spaces without being questioned. However, as revealed by Pak Muchsin in the introduction of the article, in the case of (female) migrant workers, the image of the nation is at stake. As Winarnita has argued, non-official representatives of Indonesia evoke fears *"that they will publicly embarrass the nation"* (2016: 133).

Against this background, I will argue, in the following section, that by iterating the national ritual and by referring to norms of enacting national belonging, the ceremony performers in Kowloon Park attached particular meanings to nationalism and challenged the idealised gendered migrant citizenship as promoted by the consulate and other stakeholders involved in Indonesian labour brokerage. I will contrast the

[11] The term *pahlawan* in Indonesian does not have gender-specific forms, but Sringatin also refers to the women involved in the struggle for independence (Wieringa 2002: 52–96).

[12] In Indonesian, personal pronouns are not gendered. Since Andi was addressed as *mas* – a respectful form of address used for men – among fellow migrant workers, I use the English third-person singular form 'he'.

ceremony in Kowloon Park with observations from my fieldwork which reveal the ways in which normative violence operates through statements of government officials, training instructors, and other actors involved in Indonesian labour brokerage, thereby taking into account the *"potentially debilitating injuries effected through language"* (Mills 2007: 137 with reference to Butler 1997). I aim to carve out how the performers negotiate norms that define Indonesian migrant citizenship: particular definitions of female behaviour and imaginations of appropriate representations of the nation overseas.

4. Negotiating norms of female behaviour

The performers' uniforms and identical movements did not bring their diverse gender subjectivities into line: some performers were wearing a hijab, others had integrated accessories such as ribbons into their hair. Some of the performers had unique hairstyles, whether dyed or cut short. Some *tombois* took leading roles, just as in their Hong Kong communities, in which *tombois* often take leading roles of responsibility (Chang and Groves 2000: 82; Sim 2007: 294). This composition of diverse gender subjectivities depicts the lived everyday realities of Hong Kong-based migrant domestic workers. While for the performers, diverse gender subjectivities are compatible with their feeling of national belonging, they challenge official conceptions of gendered migrant citizenship.[13]

During my fieldwork, I repeatedly met bureaucrats, recruitment agents, instructors, villagers, and migrant domestic workers who expressed their unease with Hong Kong-based workers' outward appearances and same-sex intimacies. Among Indonesian migrant domestic workers, the clothing styles of *tombois* are a *"main statement of alternative sexual orientation"* (Sim 2007, 230).[14] At a government pre-departure briefing, for instance, an instructor, who spoke about government regulations on migration issues, opened her speech by expressing her wish that the participants would become "truly dignified, professional, and successful" workers. The instructor, quickly went on to warn about the challenges workers would face abroad: if the workers' faith was not strong, eventually "lemon would drink lemon" – she was referring to a metaphor for same-sex intimacies. During the same pre-departure briefing, a cleric, responsible for spiritual guidance, reminded the prospective workers to be mentally prepared to resist the "infection" of sinful behaviour in Hong Kong, such as "lavishing money", "being intimate on the streets", and "dyeing their hair blonde".

Throughout my research, I met government officials, instructors, recruitment agents, and bankers, as well as migrant workers who voiced their concerns about workers who "become lesbian", "have their hair dyed blonde", and "come back in high heeled shoes" (see also Chan 2017). Often these concerns were voiced in casual comments or informal chats, but they were almost omnipresent during my fieldwork. My interlocutors reiterated the motifs of "becoming lesbian", "dyed hair", and "high heeled shoes" to address what, in their eyes, were deviant and morally reprehensible forms of behaviour and characteristics peculiar to Hong Kong-based migrant domestic workers: "odd behaviour", "thriftlessness", "narcissism", "disrespect towards the workers' families", "contradicting Indonesian culture and values", and "being eerie". I talked to bureaucrats who who praised Hong Kong's regulations for guaranteeing a relatively high degree of protection. They were

[13] The flag ceremonies carried out in the migrants' home towns and villages likewise do not comply with norms of perfect synchronicity and uniformity at official flag ceremonies. The diversity in gender performance would, however, generally not be seen in the migrants' home towns and villages.

[14] Same-sex intimate relationships among Indonesian migrant domestic workers are *"patterned on gender roles and stereotypes found in heterosexual relationships"* (Sim 2007: 217): *"Dress and demeanour distinctly divide lesbian Indonesian women into masculinised and feminised groups"* (ibid.). To some extent, the array of squads at the workers' flag ceremony in Kowloon Park also reproduced dominant gendered notions – no *tomboi* was singing in the feminine-coded voice types of the choir, for instance.

concerned about the flipside of the liberality in Hong Kong, lamenting uncontrolled sexual intercourse, drug use, or the risk of being cheated by fellow workers or foreigners. An instructor for housekeeping at the *Sukses dan Makmur Nusantara* training centre once complained during an informal conversation that, in contrast to other destinations, workers in Hong Kong behave oddly, waste their money, and "are *lesbi*". An article by a Hong Kong-based migrant worker blogger once warned: *"lesbians can destroy their homes in Indonesia"* (Utami 2014). The chief representative of the Hong Kong branch of an Indonesian bank once admitted: *"I am sorry for them. They have worked here for years, but then they have not been able to save up any money. There a lot of workers like that. Their money is all used up for dyeing their hair red and blue!"*.

By defining some migrant domestic workers as 'non-Indonesian' and 'sick', 'rampant' and 'abnormal', their lived subjectivities are denigrated as the deviant *others* who do not meet the gendered norms of migrant citizenship. As the above statements show, the violence of the norms of migrant citizenship does not necessarily consist of openly aggressive statements but is put forward by excluding certain subjectivities from what is defined as 'normal'. The effect of defining migrant domestic workers' non-normative subjectivities as deviant is that their aspirations, experiences, and claims for respect are downplayed. Varieties of hairstyles and high heeled shoes are a common sight in urban, middle class Indonesia; however, in the view of my interlocutors these styles are not suitable for women belonging to the lower class and working abroad. Being *lesbi,* in turn, is largely tabooed and often not lived openly all over the country (Blackwood 2010; Findeisen, Großmann and von Vacano 2015; Thajib 2014). Recently, people identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) have become the target of attacks and were alleged to be a foreign threat (Boellstorff 2016; Hegarty and Thajib 2016). Being in Hong Kong allows the workers to withdraw from strict control of parents, husbands, and parents-in-law and from experiences of gender-based violence (Sim 2007: 174, 181). Hong Kong provides them with a space where they can experiment with diverse lifestyles and cultural activities and visibly live non-normative subjectivities and relationships in public on their days off, when they are not subject to their employers' control over their appearance (ibid., 246).

Nicole Constable's, Lai's and Amy Sim's ethnographies among Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong demonstrate the particular meaning of the *visibility* of diverse subjectivities. *Tombois* who assume male roles, for instance, provide security and defence against "male sexual predation" (Sim 2007: 248; see also Chang and Groves 2000: 82 for the Filipina/o/x community). Furthermore, in the light of *"the quadruple marginality of being migrants, women, a distinct minority and occupiers of low-status jobs"* (Sim 2007: 246), the visibility of diverse subjectivities in public spaces allows migrant workers to demonstrate that they are not reducible to being 'foreign domestic helpers' (Constable 2007: 170; Lai 2010: 505; Sim 2007: 230). Constable's, Lai's, and Sim's studies echo the words of Indah, who I met at an NGO-shelter for migrant domestic workers: *"Within the walls of our employers' flats we are servants, but outside, we are artists!"*

The above-cited instructors, government officials, the blogger, and the banker seem to either silence the migrant domestic workers' claims to respect, or, due to *"'epistemic silences' in [...] socio-political and cultural structures"* (Dhawan 2012: 46), they have not learned to read them as such. In the light of the ethnographic studies mentioned above, the 'othering' of migrant domestic workers' subjectivities can be read as forms of anxiety provoked by their autonomy. The moralising notions of gendered migrant citizenship are, hence, an articulation of tensions triggered by migrant domestic workers' agency. Chan (2017) has shown that migrant domestic workers who returned to their home villages in Central Java and adopted non-normative femininities negotiate acceptance and are able to gain a certain degree of autonomy

due to their economic contributions to their families. Against this backdrop, the denigration of migrant domestic workers' non-normative femininities as rampant and thriftless, described above, can be read as an ambivalent suspicion towards female autonomy. Such lack of restraint deviates from the Javanese ideal of refinement and control of one's passions (Brenner 1998; Winarnita 2016: 24). In her ethnography of Javanese female merchants, Susanne Brenner (1998) has shown that lower class female traders' non-conformity to the norm of female restraint is somewhat more socially accepted than in the upper class. This acceptance is closely tied to the traders' capacity to control money. However, *"an autonomous woman is always somewhat suspect"*, since *"a woman who is not subject to any man's control is potentially threatening to the male-dominated social order"* (ibid.: 162–63). It should be noted that the othering of autonomous, politically active women has a particularly violent iteration in Indonesian history, as members of the communist women's organisation Gerwani were demonised as deviant 'maniacs' under president Suharto (Tiwon 1996).[15]

In light of this history, the self-organised flag ceremony is significant, because by enacting diverse subjectivities, the performers defied the historically charged normative violence, which is articulated in othering migrant domestic workers' non-normative subjectivities. They performed a particular form of national belonging, which, in contrast to the moralising function of cultural norms of restraint and decency in dominant notions of migrant citizenship, accommodates their desires and claims. Reflecting on Indonesian migrant domestic workers' activism, Lai, similarly, characterised the role of cultural performances as *"embodied representations of differences in unity"* (2010: 508), which *"with their expression of individual and collective longings, multivocality and diverse identification and subjectivities [...] weave together a tapestry of an imaginary alternative world for [migrant domestic workers]"* (ibid.: 509). Thus, the flag ceremony in Kowloon Park can be read as an appropriation of the motif "unity in diversity" (*bhinneka tunggal ika*), which, as the official motto of the nation, is crucial to the image of the Indonesian post-colonial nation. During president Suharto's New Order, the national motif of unity in diversity was reduced to depoliticised multiculturalism (Barker 2008: 534; Pemberton 1994). Remarkably, by reiterating this motif, the flag performers re-politicise it, thus, challenging the exclusion of non-normative gender subjectivities from national belonging.

Conclusion

The missing flagpole and the fractures in the performers' uniformity, which contrast with the sublimity of the official flag-raising ceremony and the uniform appearance of its performers, did not give the organisers any reason for embarrassment. The self-confidence of the organisers is noteworthy, given the salience of government officials' and the Indonesian public's concern about the image of the Indonesian nation overseas. The Indonesian consulate encourages migrant domestic workers to represent the Indonesian nation and carry the nation's good name, as flag-raising brigade members or as members of groups practising and rehearsing Indonesian cultural performance at the consulate. Norms in physical appearance and attitude, articulated in the selection process of the flag-raising brigade, regulate whether a migrant domestic worker qualifies as a representative of the nation. In contrast, the performers in Kowloon Park neither hide imperfections in their performance, nor their background as migrant domestic workers who claim legitimacy to per-

[15] The military contrived a powerful myth that the Gerwani members, as part of a failed communist coup, cut off the genitals of a group of kidnapped generals and sexually seduced them. This myth was kept alive to support president Suharto's rule. Under the Suharto regime, the former Gerwani members experienced severe forms of physical, psychological, and social violence (Wieringa 2003). Allegations of lesbianism were one way to defame women's political activism (Wieringa, Bhaiya and Katjasungkana 2015: 43). Gerwani was banned and destroyed under Suharto, while the state introduced its own mass women's organisations, which promoted sub-ordinated roles of women (Wieringa 2003).

form national identity and, thus, negotiate the norms that define who is eligible to represent the nation in the international arena.

This article tries to carve out the subtle forms of policing and regulating migrant domestic workers as compliant worker-citizens, on the one hand, and respectable national citizens, on the other. It takes into account practices and moralising statements by government officials, recruitment agents, and other stakeholders involved in Indonesian labour brokerage, which define normative migrant citizenship and thus contain certain migrants' subjectivities, desires, and aspirations by defining them as illegitimate. I discuss the performance of a national ritual by Indonesian migrant domestic workers as an appropriation of norms of national belonging that publicly challenged the violence inherent in moralising notions of gendered migrant citizenship.

When in 2014, the organisers of the flag ceremony in Kowloon Park convened such an event for the first time, they contested the normative violence affecting the lives of marginalised subjects in Indonesia's current search for national strength and dignity. They (re-)defined and performed national belonging in *their* terms – in a way that opens up the rigid grid of moralising gendered migrant citizenship; asserts their diverse subjectivities, interests and aspirations; and, ultimately, claims respect and equality.

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gender<ed> thoughts
New Perspectives in Gender Research
Working Paper Series 2018, Volume 1
DOI: 10.3249/2509-8179-gtg-4-3

Commentary

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On a symbolic level, women are not members of the nation like men, but instead represent the nation itself, as Ivecovic (2001) points out. In the same vein, Yuval-Davis (2004) writes about the analogy of gender and nation that *"women are often required to carry the 'burden of representation', as they are constructed as the symbolic bearers of the collectivity's identity and honour, both personally and collectively"* (ibidem: 26). In the ethnographic research of Samia Dinkelaker, this theoretical insight becomes empirically visible in the example of the gendered nature of 'migrant citizenship' of Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong.

Dinkelaker reveals that negotiations about the domestic workers' morality as representative of the Indonesian nation bear deeply-rooted gendered and classed anxieties, and must be read as 'normative violence', a term borrowed from Judith Butler. The author illustrates that the "burden of representation" borne by migrant women is not merely symbolic but translates into evaluative practices of determining *"whether subjects are legitimate, and whether lives are worth living"* (see Dinkelaker above). In the case of underprivileged migrants, this takes on special importance, since it differentiates implicitly between migrants who deserve state protection (for example against exploitive labour conditions), and those who do not. However, by means of the flag ceremony celebrated on Indonesia's Independence Day in Hong Kong, Dinkelaker's research also demonstrates that normative frameworks are never hermetic, but that there is always the possibility of agency within them. This echoes Butler's concept of performativity, which operates through the *"reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains"* (Butler 1993: 2). From this perspective, in the repetition necessary to generate the dominant discourse, there always lies the possibility of interruption and change. However, whereas Butler thinks of performativity as starting from discourse, Dinkelaker derives it more strongly from the subjects themselves. The migrant women of Dinkelaker's study counter the normative power of gendered migrant citizenship by performing it in their own terms. For the notion of agency, this means that the power of the socially marginalised lies not only in the (passive) reiteration of hegemonic discourse, but also in the active appropriation and thereby resignification of it.

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