

Female Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers In Hong Kong And Media Activism

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Abstract

Hong Kong is listed as one of the most popular countries for Indonesian domestic migrant workers (IMDWs). Currently, there are more than 150,000 IMDWs in Hong Kong, and more than 95 per cent of them are women. Most of them are working as live-in maids. IMDWs are routinely secluded in the employers' households and may only have one rest day to partake in activities outside their workplace. This research will contribute to a greater understanding of the social and political conditions encountered by Indonesian Women domestic migrant workers in Hong Kong. My work examines literatures that discussed the IMDWs' activities, which are related to media activism. I explore further by using my previous research on how IMDWs in Hong Kong use media and communication technologies to overcome labour problems, human rights violations, and keep the connection with the homeland, despite their remote and secluded condition in the workplace. Also of significance is the formation and roles of IMDW groups and organisations in Hong Kong in supporting migrant activism. This writing correlates in detail about the opportunity for media activism to serve in advocacy movements for the IMDWs, as well as engaging in a sense of community. The remote conditions of IMDWs are not a barrier for them to be actively involved in migrant movements to help improve their living and working conditions.

1. Introduction

Indonesian migrant workers unite, we cannot be beaten! We are workers! We are not slaves! Wage increase now! Now, now, now! (Sumber, personal communication, 16 June 2013).

Such slogans are commonly voiced by IMDWs in Hong Kong when they gather and rally in public places, such as in Victoria Park and in front of the Indonesian Consulate office at Causeway Bay. The slogans encapsulate the angst of their daily situation in the host land. Further, the slogans portray their struggles in resisting the unfortunate conditions of their working environment, such as long hours working in isolation and vulnerability to abuse in the workplace.

IMWs have been sent to several countries to fill the need for labour, especially in the domestic sector. Hong Kong is one of the countries to have received IMDWs since the early 1990s (Constable, 2007, pp. 30-31). Hong Kong is a major receiving country for migrant workers, particularly women from South East Asia who work as domestic assistants or caregivers. Hong Kong's economy, with its better working conditions and attractive salary, are magnets for migrant workers. It offers an opportunity for an improved financial future and for paid work that many women may not be able to obtain in their home country.

In this writing, I identify IMDWs' activities in Hong Kong in relation to labour rights activism and the utilisation of media and communication technology. The context of Hong Kong as a popular destination for migrant workers is also discussed. The review provides a basis for further research into the discourse of IMDWs, their social conditions in Hong Kong, and their involvement in media activism.

2. The Discourse around Indonesian Migrant Workers

As mentioned previously, IMDWs working in Hong Kong are mostly female. Women and labour migration are intensely discussed by scholars. Women's migrant labour, according to Annette Lansink (2009, p. 129), is the result of growing economic and male employment insecurities, which has made households and individuals rely on women for their survival. In line with Lansink, Danah Boyd (2006) considers that migration is exceedingly gendered, and promotes gender inequality. As stated by Susan Martin (2007, p. 1), "gender inequality can be a powerful factor in precipitating migration, particularly when women have economic, political and social expectations that actual opportunities at home do not meet". Martin further explains that traditionally women have migrated to join their husbands or fathers. However, "the feminization of migration across the developing world is one of the entrenched feature of the 21st Century"

(Piper, 2013). Women migrate without their husbands or family for work. Work performed by women is also gendered, as it involves jobs that are associated with female occupations, which are low paid and are in the domestic sphere, such as cleaning or caring for children (p. 3). Martin notes that “domestic service is a common occupation for migrant women ... in almost all parts of the globe” (p. 3). The same applies in Indonesia. In the context of Indonesia, Olivia Killias investigates the background history to female IMW mobility. She identifies Javanese Indonesians as among those early migrants sent abroad during the Dutch administration:

Indonesians, and especially the Javanese, have a long tradition of mobility what has been called the “institutionalisation” of labour exporting started in the 1870s, under Dutch colonial rule. At that time, migrant workers originating from Java were mostly male ‘coolies’ sent to work as indentured labourers on mines and plantations on the Indonesian outer islands. Nowadays, women represent the overwhelming majority of migrant workers departing from Indonesia, and most of them are sent abroad as domestic workers (2009, p. 150).

Female labour export continues to the present day under a system controlled by the Indonesian Government, and recruitment processes are regulated under strict rules. Nevertheless, Killias identifies problems with the migrant worker recruitment process performed by agencies under the Indonesian authorities’ control. She considers the contemporary system of migrant labour in Indonesia, especially in the field of domestic service, as similar to bondage practices (2009). She investigates recruitment processes and the moment of pre-departure, which lasts for months and involves different actors, such as local brokers, local authorities and recruitment agencies. According to Killias, the pre-departure process affects migrant workers’ situations both before and after departure to the destination country, and this process has “eventually given rise to contemporary forms of bondage in transnational domestic service” (2009, p. 152).

The Indonesian Government is aware of these working conditions. In 2012, the government contributed to efforts to provide new and more sustainable protection for IMDWs (Human Rights Watch, 2012). The *1990 International*

Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (the 'Migrant Workers Convention') was adopted by the Indonesian parliament to create more reliable regulations for IMWs. This international treaty guarantees migrants' rights and obliges government protection against employer, agent and public official abuse. The Indonesian Government signed the Migrant Workers Convention in September 2004. However, in practice there has been no significant action taken by the Indonesian government to implement the treaty (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

The Indonesian Government acknowledges migrant labour sending activities through *Law Number 39/2004 Concerning the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers* (hereafter 'Law Number 39/2004'). Besides Law Number 39/2004, there are nine supporting provisions and regulations used by the government to manage Indonesian labour migration. However, Law Number 39/2004 has attracted major attention from Indonesian citizens and organisations that have specific concerns about migrant labour. Since 2010, there have been campaigns by migrant activists to insist that the Indonesian Government revises the legislation, as it is considered to give more attention to the migrant-sending procedure rather than protection itself. The Indonesian Government agreed to amend the law. However, the amendment process is taking a long time and by early 2016 there had been no clear lead from the government to revise the law.

AnisHidayah (2016) writes that the delay in migrant law revision means the government has deliberately left IMWs exposed to human rights violations. She said, it has been twelve years since the application, but "the law is nothing more than a tool to preserve exploitation practices, migrant rights violation, and impunity" (2016). The Indonesian Government's failure to engage with the migrant worker community's call for migrant law revision is strong proof of the government's minimal concern about the issues facing IMWs. In the next section, I examine the reasons that Hong Kong is a popular destination for migrant domestic workers. I will look at Hong Kong's official policies and its treatment of domestic migrant workers.

3. Hong Kong as a Destination Site for Migrant Domestic Workers

Hong Kong is a popular country for migrant workers to find work and make a better living. Hong Kong's attractive salary for domestic jobs, for

example, has become a magnet for workers from developing countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Bangladesh. This section discusses the history of domestic employment in Hong Kong, as an important entry for further discussion of IMWs and their roles in the Hong Kong community. Further, important features of Hong Kong's management of migrant domestic workers are examined.

Several scholars have attempted to explain the conditions of the first arrival of migrant domestic workers to Hong Kong (e.g. Anggraeni, 2008; Constable, 2007; Ignacio & Mejia, 2009; Quizon, 2011). Constable (2007) notes that during the 1970s and 1980s there was a significant shift in Hong Kong's family interactions as a result of the country's economic growth. Working class families in Hong Kong had typically depended on family members such as daughters, mothers-in-law and mothers to assist with housework and childcare. However, with growing industrialisation in Hong Kong, working class women and housewives who used to work in the home taking care of their children had the opportunity to work in factories (Constable, 2007, p. 26).

With women increasingly working outside the home, alternative arrangements had to be made for childcare and housework. More local domestic workers, or amahs, were hired to help Hong Kong residents with domestic jobs (Anggraeni, 2006, p. 6). However, the cost of hiring an amah was rising and there was a shortage in the supply (Constable, 2007, p. 28). In addition, employers were dissatisfied with the performance of many amahs, who were considered as "money-grabbing, unscrupulous and downright difficult, and they had become increasingly particular about the sort of work they were willing to do" (Constable, 2007, p. 28). Amahs' services were gradually avoided by Hong Kong families, and as explained by DewiAnggraeni (2006, p. 5):

the culture of amahs gradually died out. Fewer and fewer women were willing to take up the low-paying and low-status jobs, preferring to work in better-paying or at least better-status sectors. To meet the growing needs in the community, the government had to look elsewhere to fill the jobs of domestic helpers.

Hong Kong's government thus opened the door to foreign workers to fill domestic positions. As a result, the number of migrant domestic workers sent to Hong Kong has risen from year to year.

Emilyzen Ignacio and Yesenia Mejia (2009) and Natalie Quizon (2011) note that the boom of migrant domestic workers began at Hong Kong's handover from Britain to China in 1997. Ignacio and Mejia note that Hong Kong's booming economy resulted in high demand for maids, especially by expatriates. Maids were imported from neighbouring countries such as the Philippines and Thailand. Nevertheless, during the handover of Hong Kong, expatriates moved out due to the uncertainty of Hong Kong's future (Quizon, 2011, p. 20). This caused confusion among migrant domestic workers, as Quizon explains: "Some had to find new employers ... others had gone abroad with their employers' family, and some had chosen to return (to their country) for good" (2011, p. 20). From 2002 to 2007 the number of maids increased, and the number from the Philippines still dominated (Ignacio & Mejia, 2009, p. 12). However, as Ignacio and Mejia note, following the Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s, Filipina dominance was rivalled by the growing numbers of Indonesian domestic workers arriving in Hong Kong (p. 12). For IMDWs, Hong Kong is considered the best place to work.

Hong Kong offers various features that attract migrant workers. Ignacio and Mejia note that Hong Kong offers migrant workers the same statutory labour rights and benefits as local workers (2009, p. 13). In contrast, Constable (2007, 2009) and Philippa Smales (2010) warn about how several rules in Hong Kong can lead to inadequate treatment. Constable expresses concerns regarding the migrant labour situation in Hong Kong, viewing household jobs filled by foreign women workers as leading to inequalities that have become a pattern in Hong Kong. She explains that "if one traces the historical patterns of inequality in Hong Kong, at the root, we find inequality between different classes of local and foreign women. As local women went to work in service and factories, foreign women were hired to do the less desirable household work for lower wages" (2007, p. 30). Such inequalities could support maltreatment suffered by migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong.

Hong Kong's labour system is enforced to meet the standards of both employer and worker needs. Policy requires employers to have standard employment contracts with their migrant maids, including conditions such

as 1) a weekly rest day, 2) paid sick days, 3) maternity leave, 4) 12 statutory holidays per year, 5) annual leave, 6) free passage from the country of origin to Hong Kong, and return to the home country on termination or contract expiration, and 7) payment cannot be offered in lieu (Government of Hong Kong, 2015a; Smales, 2010, p. 28). Hong Kong also offers migrant domestic workers free access to Labour Department services including consultation, employer dispute conciliation services and a 24-hour hotline (Ignacio & Mejia, 2009, p. 13). These provisions have supported migrant workers in their daily practice in Hong Kong.

Despite the support given to migrant domestic workers, the Government of Hong Kong also applies a strict law to protect the employer and domestic labour market. As explained by Ignacio and Mejia (2009, p. 17):

Foreign domestic helpers cannot take up part-time or unauthorized work. In the event that their contract is prematurely terminated (currently the contract is for two years), foreign domestic helpers can only remain in Hong Kong until the limit of their stay or for two weeks (paid or unpaid under the two-week rule), whichever is shorter. Under exceptional circumstances, the Director of Immigration may allow the change of employer to occur before the contract expires and without requiring the domestic helper to return to their home country first.

These rules—no part-time or unauthorised work, and the two-week rule—are designed to protect migrant workers. However, in practice, there are cases where migrant workers are in part-time work or are requested by their employer to perform unauthorised paid or unpaid work in other places (e.g. a relative's house or a shop) (Constable, 2007, p. 157). The problem with the two-week rule is that there are no provisions by the government if the employer refuses to supply the worker with a return airfare or wages they are owed, within the two-week period (Constable, 2007, p. 146). Moreover, Constable suggests that “the two-week rule encourages workers to endure poor working conditions, physical and emotional abuse, maltreatment, and illegal work” (2007, p. 146). Many workers choose not to file complaints to the Labour Department or Immigration Department

because they are afraid they will be forced to return home and disappoint their family, who depend on the income (Constable, 2007, p. 146).

The Government of Hong Kong also gives special attention to migrant workers, especially with respect to their salary rates. According to Constable (2009, p. 150), migrant domestic work is the only profession in Hong Kong with a minimum salary specified in the work contract. Migrant domestic workers' monthly salary or minimum allowable wage (MAW) is managed by the Hong Kong Immigration Department (An, 2012, p. 6). In 2015 the MAW is HKD4,210 (Government of Hong Kong, 2015). Migrant workers also receive a food allowance of HKD995 per month. Domestic labour salaries in Hong Kong are increasing. However, many IMDWs do not receive the wage in full, especially during the first period of employment, due to deductions made for agency fees.

The government gives migrant workers the freedom to unite and organise under the *Employment Ordinance* through its ratification of the *Right to Organise and the Freedom of Association Convention* (Smales, 2010, p. 30). Even though the right to strike is also included in the regulation, Smales warns that "migrant workers are often not protected from termination when they do strike, and collective bargaining is not recognised or encouraged by (Hong Kong) government" (2010, p. 30). This vulnerable situation represents unsafe conditions for migrant workers. In the next section, I discuss women migrant workers and gender issues, and why and how the media and information and communication technology (ICT) are utilised.

4. Female Migrant Identity and the Use of Information Communication Technology

The discussion about female migrant labour and their activities in their host country cannot be separated from issues of gender. As discussed previously, migration is heavily gendered and most Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong are women who need to work hard in the host country without the legal assurance of their citizenship, while maintaining connections and responsibilities to their families back home. Female migrants working as contract domestic workers with a maximum two-year contract are excluded from legal settlement in Hong Kong. They are not allowed to gain Hong Kong citizenship (Constable, 2007, p. 144; Constable,

2014, p. 10; Lai, 2010, p. 503). However, they are able to continually renew their contracts.

Many female migrant domestic workers have renewed their working contracts several times and many have lived in Hong Kong for more than 10 years and spent their time as provisional workers. They have remained in Hong Kong to fulfil both their own financial needs and those of their families back home. During this time, female migrant domestic workers with children must mother from a distance. The practice of 'transnational mothering' (a notion discussed by Bryceson&Vuerola, 2002; Fournon& Glick Schiller, 2001; Lai, 2011; Madianou& Miller, 2012; Parreñas, 2001a and Yeoh& Huang, 2000) maintains their intimate connections with their family in the homeland. This transnational connection through the spirit of mothering is explained further as a clear concept of the gendered identity of being a submissive daughter, caring mother and obedient wife, often sacrificing herself for the sake of the family (Yeoh& Huang, 2000, pp. 418-422). However, for some Indonesian female migrants, working abroad could also be perceived as a way to reduce social, economic, cultural and political pressure from their family back home. SyamsulArdiansyah (2008, p. 143) narrates:

the structure of the labour export phenomenon of Indonesia is very feudal-patriarchal ... Traditionally and culturally, women are directed by family and society to be the "domestic workers" ... They are controlled economically, politically, culturally, even sexually ... Their political and economical rights are often not recognised, their cultural aspiration is still discriminated and their sexual rights are also denied. For some women, working abroad as migrant workers could be assumed as the resistance of the restriction and fundamentalism in the families. For those, working abroad becomes the way to liberate themselves from economic restriction, cultural discrimination, and other 'unwanted' traditional obligation.

However, the sense of self-sacrifice and mothering felt by female migrant workers is central; for migrant women, "continued links with the homeland are vital and necessary—to varying degrees for different groups of women—to a sense of self and negotiation of identities" (Huang &Yeoh,

2000, p. 394). Female migrant workers, in the deepest sense, still need to retain bonds with their families back home.

The recent method employed by migrant workers to retain a connection with their families is the use of communication technologies. Scholars agree that utilisation of ICT by migrant workers has significantly increased their capability to access and share information with fellow migrants and their relatives back home (Bunmak, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2012; Sukesi & Liliana, 2012; Thomas & Lim, 2011). Migrant workers have a range of options mediating their communications access, including the usage of transnational communication tools such as mobile phones (Thomas & Lim, 2011). Many migrant workers use mobile phones to contact their friends and families back home. These tools have succeeded in mediating migrant workers' interactions across national boundaries and time.

In the context of transnational family relationships, Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller emphasise that the use of communication technologies is constantly changing (2012, p. 7). Before the common use of ICTs in the 21st Century, migrant workers sent letters and cassettes with recorded personal messages to communicate with their family. Nowadays this is done via phone calls through mobile phones; text messages, emails, web chats, and social media are also common channels for transnational communications. Progressively, there is a shift towards the use of communication technology as the medium for transnational family relationships. As Madianou and Miller write, "(migrant) relationships, increasingly, do not depend on one particular technology, but on plurality of media which supplement each other and can help overcome the shortcomings of a particular medium" (2012, p. 8).

Further, technological advancements of mobile phones, with their capabilities to access the Internet have broadened migrant workers' capabilities in accessing different types of communication through a single device. Research on migrant workers' communication activities reveals that migrant workers employ a wide range of ICT devices and services (Benitez, 2006; Horst, 2006). In the US, El Salvadorian migrants use mobile phones, prepaid phone cards and videoconferencing to keep in touch with their families at home (Benitez, 2006). Also, in Jamaica, migrants use mobile phones not only to contact their friends and relatives back home, but also to arrange money transfer to their families and receive funds from their relatives in the event of an emergency (Horst, 2006).

Female migrant workers are in difficult positions regarding connections with their homeland. Further, the concept of ‘family’ can always be redeveloped in the context of migration. Georgina Tsolidis is developing insights into the connection between the concept of ‘family’ and the diasporic space, where family operates as a ‘space’ that encapsulates migrants’ journeys, both symbolic and physical (Tsolidis, 2011, pp. 414 & 416). Female domestic workers, who have left their families to work abroad, struggle to develop a sense of ‘family’ in the host country. The distance that separates female domestic workers from their children, husband, parents and other family members initially forces them to regain a sense of family warmth, trust and dependency by building intense friendships with other domestic workers. Tsolidis articulates, “the family mediates identities by negotiating between members, generations and places” (2011, p. 414). Female domestic workers in the host country negotiate their identities as individuals, as workers, or even as members of the Indonesian community abroad, by developing connections with fellow migrant workers and joining migrant organisations.

Female domestic workers are routinely secluded in their employers’ households, and it can be a challenge for them to negotiate their collective identity. Female domestic workers manage their limited days off to join organised activities, channelling their sense of belonging and solidarity, applied in the forms of migrant activism agendas such as mobilisation in street protests, or the weekly migrant domestic worker meetings in Victoria Park. The activist discourse engaged by Indonesian female migrant workers in Hong Kong may be regarded, according to Lai (2011) as a way of “forgetting, resisting, and breaking from sanctioned feminine sacrifices to the well-being of the family back in the homeland” (p. 575). The existence of several organisations in Hong Kong may be a conduit for migrant workers’ self-expression of diasporic identity.

5. Indonesian Media and the Hong Kong Mediascape

This section specifically aims to further discuss the discourse of migrant worker empowerment in Hong Kong through the use of mass media and the Internet’s social media. To gain a better understanding of this issue, we first need to examine the discourse of the Hong Kong mediascape.

Concerns have been raised about the quality of press freedom in Hong Kong. As stated by Heike Holbig (2003, p. 196), Hong Kong's mass media have been monitored intensively by local and international observers, especially since Hong Kong's handover from Britain to China in 1997. During the handover process, "Hong Kong's press continued to play a watchdog role during the years prior to the handover, barking loudly both at the Chinese and British negotiating teams" (2003, p. 196). Similar to Holbig, Judith Clarke (2002, p. 44) says that the press in Hong Kong is critical of the government. However, Clarke notes that "the grounds for concern about loss of this freedom remain, and in some ways are more worrying..." (2002, p. 44). Clarke (p.57) further contends that democratisation in Hong Kong (independent judiciary, fairly elected government and a free press) remains weak. Clarke questions the government's commitment to support the freedom of the press. According to Clarke, "little has been done to confirm the rights of the news media" (2002, p. 57).

Further, Francis Lee (2007) suggests that the Chinese government has tried to control Hong Kong media before and after the handover (p. 136). Lee (p. 136) emphasises that "before the handover, Chinese officials had already stated a 'three nos' policy for the Hong Kong media: no advocacy for Taiwan/Tibet independence, no engagement in subversive activities, and no personal attack on national leaders". After the handover, the Chinese government adopted three strategies to control Hong Kong media: 1) co-opting media owners, 2) political correctness and 3) self-censorship (Lee, p. 137). Lee (p. 139) underlines self-censorship as a major problem in Hong Kong's media. Self-censorship itself typically "refers to a mechanism of anticipatory avoidance of official or social sanctions" (Cheung, 2000, p. 1). Self-censorship often entails the avoidance of reporting issues that may cause political controversy. Although Hong Kong has no formal press restrictions, self-censorship is used to gain favour of the Chinese government and/or to avoid government backlash. An example of this is when which companies under the control from China may withdraw advertising business from a newspaper. "The alleged tactic of pressing companies to withdraw advertisements is an attempt to quiet the newspaper." (Curran & Yung 2014).

Karen Cheung explains that self-censorship in Hong Kong is the result of an ongoing socialisation process in the community, which is affected by the pressure of the ruling regime, or by the pressure of media owners (p. 11).

Lee's survey of Hong Kong journalists in 2006 (2007, p. 139), reveals "26.6% of journalists reported that self-censorship existed and was very serious, while 47.2% reported that self-censorship existed but was not very serious". More recently in 2015 Freedom House claimed there was a five year decline in press freedom in Hong Kong. Political pressure and self-censorship has played a critical role in developing Hong Kong's mediascape.

Concerns about press freedom have also been raised in virtual channels in Hong Kong (see Donald, Kean & Hong, 2002; Rao, 2003). I specifically note Madanmohan Rao's opinion in this matter, that the Internet is the latest, and perhaps most powerful addition to Hong Kong's arsenal of information (2003, p. 292). Nevertheless, "one should not be overly optimistic about the impact of new communication technologies, because the Chinese government has always been able to levy high penalties for 'undesirable' access and utilise sophisticated techniques to block 'harmful' information..." (2003, p. 292). Mass media freedom in Hong Kong remains in a fragile state. Despite the pessimistic views of several scholars about Hong Kong's mediascape, there are some positive trends in terms of access to media, specifically on the matter of migrant worker empowerment through the media.

Koesoemawiria (2008) emphasises that the substantial numbers of IMDWs in Hong Kong has influenced the statutes of several organisations that actively promote migrant worker rights, equality and justice, not only through strikes but also via the media (p. 50). She notes that five Indonesian newspapers operate in Hong Kong and all are designed for IMDWs (p. 50). One of the existing publications for IMDWs is *Suara* (the Voice). *Suara* is exceptional, as this newspaper is specifically targeting IMWs (Koesoemawiria, 2008, p. 52). During my fieldwork in Hong Kong, I learnt that *Suara* is one of four newspapers produced by local enterprises that employ professional Indonesian journalists. These journalists gather news related to IMDW activities in Hong Kong. Some are assisted by IMDWs who act as news contributors. *Suara* is a 28-page newspaper with a print circulation of 35,000 that is distributed free through Indonesian shops and migrant-based organisations in Hong Kong (Hidayat, personal communication, 5 June 2013).

Koesoemawiria explains how *Suara* is empowering the IMDW community by providing educational materials that discuss, analyse and

solve migrant workers' daily problems, such as domestic violence and contract issues (2008, p. 52). *Suara* also encourages IMDWs to write down their stories and opinions, and reserves eight pages in each edition for this purpose (2008, p. 52). IMDWs can also access useful information via the radio. There is a special program for them called *Nongkrongbareng* (hang out together), which broadcasts once a week on local radio and can be accessed through a radio receiver device or via the Internet (2008, p. 52). During my fieldwork, I found the radio program is broadcast by the Digital Broadcasting Cooperation (DBC), a digital radio station accessed through a digital channel called 'DBC 05', which has four Indonesian language programs. *Nongkrongbareng* is one of these programs, and is conducted by Indonesian expatriates. IMDWs manage two other programs: *Selamatmalamsobatmigran* (good evening fellow migrant) and *Kumpulbareng* (congregate together).

The usage of media to communicate and share information among migrant workers is important for a sense of community empowerment. Dandan Liu (2010) specifically discusses the existence of foreign language media in the host land, pointing out that the presence of foreign language media is important to "satisfy the immigrants' need to stay close to their native language and culture, as well as to help them adapt to the environment more easily" (p. 253). As such, for migrant workers media is an important tool to enhance the notion of community as well as being an instrument for migrant rights activism.

6. Media Activism and Migrant Workers

The use of communication technology and the media by IMDWs to communicate and discuss campaigning issues on migrant rights and employment has provided important insights in the study of migrant and media activism. Before continuing the discussion on migrant worker media activism, I will begin with a discussion on the concept of mass media and new media.

Terry Flew (2014, p. 4-5) suggests that convergence should be seen as a way of understanding new media. Convergence refers to interlinking between computing and information technologies, the Internet's media content and digital technologies, and the emerging convergent products, activities and services (p. 19). Moreover, convergence is not only about technological processes; it is also about ongoing social, cultural and

economic change (Nightingale, 2007, p. 20). Virginia Nightingale emphasises that convergence also refers to the use of media in multiple platforms, through “wireless access and continuous connectivity to individually preferred networks of personal and work contacts and leisure and entertainment resources” (p. 20). The variety of media and the personalised use of technologies are arguably the main features of new media that cannot be achieved by conventional media.

Media outlets in recent times are under significant pressure to keep up with the demand for interactive content that the audience can produce themselves through the use of Internet channels. Mainstream conventional media such as newspapers, television and radio are centralised and require high maintenance in the form of resources and investments (Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant, & Kelly, 2003, p. 12), whereas new media such as the Internet can be used both as point-to-point (e.g. social media and weblogs) and point-to-mass (such as news portal websites) message distribution with low investment. Martin Lister and colleagues emphasise that new media through their digital functions and capabilities “offer a significant increase in the opportunity to manipulate and intervene in media ... often referred to as the interactive potential of new media” (2003, p. 19).

Lister et al. consider interactivity as one of the main functions of new media, whereas conventional media can only offer passive consumption of their products (2003, p. 20). The audience of new media is able to directly alter the contents (images and texts), interact with the authors of the contents or simply make comments on the discussion board. The audience can act as a ‘user’ that can play, experiment and explore the contents rather than just be a viewer of visual products, or a reader of literature (pp. 20-21). This is what is practised in social media platforms on the Internet, where users are encouraged to share personal and public information; for example, through social media with interaction via posts and comments.

Social media utilisation through the Internet has raised the acceptance of new media. For Henry Jenkins (2006), the rise of participatory culture cannot be separated from the role of social media, which empowers users to produce their own content. As suggested by Daniel Trottier and Christian Fuchs (2014), we should be careful about theorising social media because as a term, social media is complex. They argue that “all computing systems and therefore all web applications, and also all forms of media can be

considered as social because they store and transmit human knowledge that originates in social relations in society". Facebook, for example, has built-in communication features for its users (comment walls, chat apps, forums). However, not all computing systems and web applications encourage direct communication; for example, Amazon is a tool for information on books and goods (Trottier & Fuchs, 2014, p. 5). Therefore, it is not simple to define social media. The important thing is, as Trottier and Fuchs assert, that social media is used to "support cognition, communication/networking and cooperation (communities, collaborative work, sharing of user generated and other content)" (2014, p. 7).

In his 2014 *Social media: a critical introduction*, Christian Fuchs provides a discussion on social media that builds on Marxist perceptions of economic exploitation and class. Social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Twitter mirror the power structures of capitalist society, which exploit the free data provided by users (Fuchs, 2014, pp. 90-92). Fuchs' critique on social media is important in the development of my research and in further advancing my critical insights on the use of social media by IMDWs in Hong Kong.

Further, Sam Hinton and Larissa Hjorth (2013) in their book *Understanding social media* emphasise social media use is never only about online activities; it contains offline modes of engagement. They emphasise that "the relationships that people have online are always shaping, and shaped by, the offline" (2013, p. 3). How we make friends and behave online, as Hinton and Hjorth suggest, is motivated by our offline lives (2013, p. 3). Hinton and Hjorth also focus on the issue of control and freedom (empowerment) in social media, which is not always empowering and not always controlling (p. 30):

Sometimes social media is empowering, and may work very effectively to increase a user's agency and ability to control and interact with their environment. Other times social media can be controlling, providing significant financial benefits to the social media company but little or no compensation to the user for their time and energy. Most often social media is both controlling and empowering at the same time, in an uneasy relationship where a certain amount of exploitation is negotiated as the price for an uncertain amount of empowerment (2013, p. 30).

Hinton and Hjorth's argument about on online and offline interactions, along with issues on social media's empowerment and control are useful recommendations for my research in dealing with IMDW media activism via the Internet, and further assist me with understanding IMDWs' broader activities with respect to social media.

The popularity of Facebook and Twitter has been developed by its users as tools to publish personal and organisational profiles. Several IMW unions in Hong Kong, including the IMWU and FLP, have also used social media to communicate issues and activism agendas to their members. It is important to note that IMWs in Hong Kong use both conventional and new media as tools for media activism.

Media activism, according to William Carroll and Robert Hackett (2006), is an "organised 'grassroots' efforts directed to creating or influencing media practices and strategies, whether as a primary objective, or as a by-product of other campaigns" (p. 84). Carroll and Hackett also reiterate that media activism needs democratic and progressive movements, and always tries to seek reasonable sharing of economic, political, cultural, social, and informational resources and status (p. 84). Further, James Gillett (2003) points out that media can be used to create spaces for marginalised or stigmatised identities, and that media activism "can be understood as a response to the failure of social institutions, particularly the mass media, to provide a forum for citizens to address problems and issues of common concern" (p. 610). Media activism, in this case, is advocacy for the community in a public sphere.

Contemporary media activism involves ICT. Pickerill points out that ICT is important in the movement of media activism as it provides "new spaces for social interaction free from the hierarchical and bureaucratic pressures of existing society" (2004, p. 172). Jenny Pickerill promotes understanding of ICTs as 'democratic properties' that could facilitate public concern in the political process without concern for the traditional government hierarchy (p. 172). Pickerill also emphasises that the adoption and utilisation of ICT by a group or a network reflects their existing organisational forms and identities. She notes three important constraints to the adoption and utilisation process by media activists: 1) financial difficulties, 2) differing skill attainment and 3) hardware and software problems (p. 172). These

constraints should be handled properly, through planning and detailed organisation to maximise the functioning of media activism.

Regarding the use of ICT in media activism, Pickerill (2004) says that “a well-managed ICT can improve response times, aid the gathering (and the flow) of information” (p. 176) and “to aid networking with other activist groups ... and generate campaigns” (p. 183). A noteworthy example regarding the use of ICT as a tool for media activism is described by Graham Meikle (2002, pp. 16-22). He has examined Huaren, a non-profit organisation, which through its website provides news for overseas Chinese, and more particularly to raise awareness of anti-Chinese discrimination. Huaren have built a campaign “which fully exploits the Internet’s capacity for forming horizontal linkages” (2002, p. 16). An example of their community reach and political awareness campaign was in May 1998, when Huaren relayed its concerns about the major anti-Chinese riots that were occurring in Jakarta, Indonesia (Meikle, 2002, p. 17). They alerted Chinese communities about the atrocities and asked them to send their concerns by sending fax or emails to the Indonesian embassies, UN bodies, and Chinese politicians in Hong Kong, China and Taiwan (Meikle, 2002, p. 17). Meikle notes, in their website Huaren provided updated news coverage related to the Jakarta riots. The site displayed horrendous photographs of alleged Chinese victims, as well as stories from riots survivors, witnesses and media reports (2002, p. 18). The provision of timely material, the collation of information from various sources (both original and established media) and the call for action demonstrates how useful ICTs are for activists.

7. Conclusion

I have described and explained several key theories on the recent conditions of IMDWs. Key points have arisen from the literature review and discussion. Women’s migrant labour is the result of growing economic and male employment insecurities, which force households and individuals to rely to women to survive. Migration is exceedingly gendered, creates the opportunity for gender inequality and is open to exploitation.

Regarding Hong Kong’s condition as a receiving country for migrant workers, Ignacio and Mejia (2009) consider that the country provides equal statutory labour rights, where IMDWs are supported to assemble and create organisations. Nevertheless, IMDWs may face termination by employers if they join strikes (Smales, 2010). Migrant organisation development is

encouraged in Hong Kong. As advised by Briones (2009), migrant worker organisations are positioned as protectors of migrant workers and aim to raise public awareness and influence government policy regarding labour rules.

On the matter of migrant identity, the above discussion gave special attention to the concept of transnational mothering. The sense of self-sacrifice with respect to mothering felt by female migrant domestic workers in the context of diasporic identities is central, because for migrant women, continued links with the homeland are vital and necessary for a sense of self and negotiation of identity. To maintain a connection with their homeland, migrant workers use ICTs.

In interpreting media activism, Cammaerts et al. (2013) emphasise the importance of direct action but do not underestimate the power of passive participation through media technologies. Gillett (2003) points out that mass media can be used to create spaces for marginalised or stigmatised identities. Meanwhile, contemporary media activism involves new media that utilise ICTs. Pickerill (2004) emphasises that ICTs are important in the movement of media activism because they provide spaces for social interaction that are free from the pressures of society.

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