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Title: "The Sponsor Speaks Sweetly": Negotiating Competing Educational Narratives in Indonesia's Migration System

Despite the well-publicized risks, each year millions of Indonesian women travel across the world in search of work that offers wages high enough to support families back home. Although migrant women play an indispensable role in the Indonesian economy, effective mechanisms to protect their rights and guard their safety have yet to be developed. Among the primary barriers to the development of effective protection mechanisms is the fact that the vast majority of Indonesian migrant women work in the largely unregulated domestic sphere, where they are susceptible to the power of individual employers, largely outside the jurisdiction of labor law enforcement, and isolated from other workers. These risks are compounded by inadequate international labor agreements and insufficient pre-departure education. It is in this context that knowledge about rights, working conditions, and migration processes— as well as the empowerment to utilize this knowledge—becomes crucial.

This research, which is based on ten months of ethnographic fieldwork in Central Java, examines the educational processes and messages surrounding women’s transnational labor migration. The central questions that guide this research are as follows: 1) How do women utilize informal, nonformal, and formal education to prepare for international migration?; 2) How do Indonesian NGOs envision their role in the migration education process and help shape the expectations women have of migration and of the rights they should be afforded? I focus in particular on the role of NGOs in providing nonformal education and on how returned migrant women workers themselves offer informal migration education at the community level. By examining education, I aim to unpack the idea that women “just know” about migration from their surroundings. I argue that the assumption that women simply know about migration because their friends, neighbors, and relatives migrate obscures the power dynamics of the migration system.