

## Research article

# No Space at Home: Gender Ideology and Livelihood in Environmental Forced Migration

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**Abstract.**

The lives of women who have decided to become Indonesian migrant workers in several Asia Pacific areas, such as Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and South Korea, provide fascinating research opportunities. This research took as a case study several women from East Java Province who chose to become Indonesian migrant workers due to the loss of agricultural land or plantation fields as their main livelihood. The research analyzed the phenomenon of the migration of women as a result of the environmental crisis, which is a crisis specific to rural areas, as well as the gender ideology that accompanies the phenomenon of feminized labor in Indonesia. This research was conducted with a qualitative paradigm using the snowball technique for recruitment. The research location was in Banyuwangi Regency, East Java Province, Indonesia. The results of the research revealed that in the agricultural sector, which is a source of livelihood, land productivity continues to diminish due to famines, climate change, and land conditions that are not strategic and are progressively narrowed due to industrialization. Instead, land as an agricultural asset can be turned into cost capital for villagers, specifically women, to discover better jobs by migrating as Indonesian migrant workers. In carrying out international migration, the women attempted to alter the gender ideology, transform various negative stereotypes and become empowered and independent female workers.

**Keywords:** environmental, forced migration, gender ideology, livelihood

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## 1. Introduction

Transnational migration or population movement including cross-cultural boundaries is a social phenomenon that is progressively being performed. This phenomenon is also experienced by women in Indonesia who have begun to experience shifts in attitudes and roles in the structure of contemporary society. Indonesian women, who have been constructed with vulnerability and underdevelopment, are able to demonstrate their qualities in various ways such as entering the public sector or actively participating in various aspects, therefore, this strengthens their identity as successful and strong women [1] [2] [3].

The reason behind Indonesian women having this profession is because as they live in Indonesia, Indonesian women are always accustomed to the patriarchal culture and

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play an important role in the domestic sector [4]. Accordingly, when this role in the domestic sector is transformed into a profession that generates money, the world of work seems to be a world that is commonly done by Indonesian women and is not something that requires a special skill. In addition, due to environmental alterations in the changing ecological system order, forced migration must be carried out by a person or group in society and this also affects the population. When people face severe environmental degradation, three options can be performed, namely: (1) survive and adapt to the environment to reduce the social pressures they face, (2) survive, do nothing and accept a lower quality of life or (3) leave the affected area and adapt to the new environment [5][6][7][8].

Migration caused by changes in the natural environment produces various concepts such as environmental migration, which is defined as a migration process caused by environmental degradation or changes related to environmental alienation factors that motivate a population to move residence. In addition to earthquakes, floods, or land changes that occur, there is an indication that environmental migration also affects the social pressures or livelihoods of a population [9][10][11]. The importance of conducting further research on environmental migration is due to the fact that the world has different environmental characteristics and the occurrence of climate change and extreme weather also poses a serious threat to various types of land and livelihoods of people who depend on nature [11]. This is also the case in Indonesia, where most of the population depends on the agricultural sector and must undertake international migration as a way of survival in the future.

In Indonesia, the migration agents are mostly women. This refers to the employment conditions which “promise” that women are more acceptable in the labour market in neighbouring countries such as Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Korea as well as indicate that the domestic sphere is preferred and accepted by the labour market in foreign countries compared to the public sphere carried out by men [7] [12] [13]. The existence of this international migration will alleviate labour shortages in destination countries especially in the care sector and contribute to economic production in labour-supplying countries that are facing unemployment problems as well as financial additions through remittances and human-capital support. This also happens logically as an individual way to improve skills and work opportunities also develop in the global world of work [14]. According to data obtained from BP2MI (Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency) up to May 2021, the professions performed by Indonesian women in East Java Province who decided to become Indonesian Migrant Workers working in the Asia-Pacific region were domestic workers amounted to 11,954 women, caregiver or

nurse for children or the elderly as many as 8,335 women, and housekeepers amounted to 1,105 women. From this, it can be seen that the fluctuating condition of Indonesian migrant workers is still dominated by women.

Furthermore, the emergence of environmental migration has also eroded the patriarchal culture inherent in Indonesia regarding gender roles and the division of labour in society. Related to international migration in Indonesia, it is known that gender ideology indeed influences women's behaviour and social relations between men and women [15]. Through certain mechanisms, the ideology can be dominant in society. In addition, [16] claimed that gender ideology is one of the informal ideologies constructed by the Indonesian state, namely an ideology that defines men and women in roles that are narrow, limited, and based on certain stereotypes. The various values, perceptions, stereotypes, rules, and/or beliefs regarding the relationship between women and men or people's identities on the basis of their gender are called gender ideology. Gender ideology can operate for a long time in society since it is supported by a gender belief system. This leads to a set of beliefs and opinions about men and women as well as about masculinity and femininity. In other words, the gender belief system includes descriptive and prescriptive elements, namely the belief of "how men and women really are" and "how men and women should be" [16] [17].

This was reaffirmed by [18][19] who stated that gender is defined as a social relation between different sexual orientations involving social, political, and cultural constructions. Therefore, gender is not nature but the role displayed by the culture that places women and men to be feminine or masculine. There are various forms of gender ideology that regulate the identities, positions, and behaviour of women and men. Some of these ideologies are dominant, some are not in a certain place and time [17]. Compared to matriarchal ideology, patriarchal ideology is recognized as greatly dominant in Asian society [4]. Meanwhile, Indonesian society is highly influenced by familialism, namely the ideology that constructs women's roles in the household as housewives, good wives, and good mothers. In fact, according to [5], this familialism has expanded and penetrated the public or social arena.

From this phenomenon, it is important to conduct further and in-depth research. The gender ideology shared by women in East Java Province, Indonesia concerning international migration due to the unsupportive natural environment is essential to analyze. The labelling given to women who become Indonesian migrant workers, in fact, comes from the surrounding community as a reaction to women's actions that are regarded to violate the values and norms contained in the patriarchal culture that has been adhered to by the Javanese community. Nonetheless, the women still select to

become Indonesian migrant workers and make “mistakes” that must be accepted by the society which has this patriarchal perception. Even if they are no longer able to help in the agrarian sector, Indonesian women can perform international migration to achieve their right to work, accomplish self-actualization, and gain acceptance. This is done by leaving a family that adheres to a patriarchal culture to build a strong identity.

The previous study and existing research on women who become Indonesian migrant workers have often focused their research on remittances, social changes occurring in society, and correlation studies concerning various factors that underlie women becoming Indonesian migrant workers. Accordingly, studies in other aspects must be conducted to make migration or diaspora studies in women more comprehensive in current developments.

## 2. Method

This research employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach that places subjectivity or non-positivists in its social analysis so that the relationship with the sociology of order is implied [20]. Furthermore, this research wanted to understand social reality as it is, look for the most basic nature of social reality according to a subjective view and find out the awareness of someone who was directly involved in social events, not according to other people who observed [21].

Banyuwangi Regency in East Java Province, Indonesia was the location chosen for this research by taking into account various possibilities such as data saturation of women migrant workers in Indonesia in 2021, data variation, and the depth of data to be obtained from informants. In addition, a preliminary study had been conducted to several places such as PJTKI (Indonesian Migrant Worker Service Providers) spread across Banyuwangi Regency, sub district offices, village halls and/or village offices in Banyuwangi Regency.

The research subjects were selected using the snowball technique. In the field writing, their names were disguised. Determination of the subjects was obtained from key informants, namely officers at PJTKI or community leaders who were considered personally acquainted with women who would become migrant workers in popular destination countries, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Taiwan, and South Korea. To facilitate the research, the stipulation of informants was also conducted with a personal approach to migrant workers, most of whom worked in the informal sector as babysitters or housemaids. Another action performed in data collection from February-May 2021 was to have a meeting via Zoom due to the covid-19 pandemic.

These efforts were made to establish a conducive relationship between the subject and the researcher to obtain maximum information.

In this research, all data processing starting from “data inputting”, “data processing”, and analysis was carried out using transcripts, which then be classified. In this way, it is expected that the researcher will be able to produce accurate descriptions and conclusions based on the findings in the field.

### 3. Result and Discussion

Banyuwangi Regency is one of the regencies in East Java Province which has the largest agricultural land and its female population is the third-largest number in East Java Province who are migrant workers to several Asia-Pacific countries from 2015-2021. Two sub-districts in Banyuwangi Regency are chosen as research locations, namely Tegaldlimo and Pesanggaran Sub-district. Tegaldlimo Sub-district is one of the sub-districts that has the largest area in Banyuwangi with an area of about 1,341.12 km<sup>2</sup>. Tegaldlimo is the southernmost, thus it has plentiful coastal areas and vast savannas. The Tegaldlimo area has a lot of natural tourism potential such as *Alas Purwo* which is famous for its conservative tourism for bull protection. Moreover, there are also several beaches that have the potential to become leading tourist attractions such as Blue Bay, *Triangulasi* Beach, and *Pancur* Beach. In addition to tourism potential, Tegaldlimo has the largest natural resource potential in Banyuwangi in the form of cement and non-mining minerals.

Tegaldlimo Sub-district in 2020 was recorded to have a population of 66,992 people, 33,806 people were male and 33,186 others were female. With an area that occupies number one in Banyuwangi Regency and a population as above, Tegaldlimo Sub-district is the area with the lowest population density. The people in Tegaldlimo Sub-district are also quite diverse; mosques, churches, and temples stand in this area. Farming is the livelihood that is mostly undertaken by the people of the Tegaldlimo Sub-district. In addition to farming, gardening is also one of the activities carried out by its people. Besides, plenty of the residents of the Tegaldlimo Sub-district are Indonesian migrant workers in countries such as Hong Kong, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia [22].

Meanwhile, Pesanggaran Sub-district is one of the most extensive sub-districts in Banyuwangi. Its territory consists of tropical forests in the north and the coast in the south. Pesanggaran Sub-district has numerous medium-altitude mountains such as *Tumpangpitu* Mountain (489 meters), *Lampon* Mountain (180 meters), *Tembakur*

Mountain (458 meters), *Gendong* Mountain (893 meters), *Sumbadadung* Mountain (520 meters), and *Permisian* Mountain (587 meters). Furthermore, countless beaches can be found in the Pesanggaran Sub-district, some of which are tourist attractions visited by local and foreign tourists such as *Hijau* Bay, *Sukamade* Beach, *Rajegwesi* Beach, *Merah* Island, *Pancer* Beach and *Lampon* Beach. Pesanggaran Sub-district is also home to the *Meru Betiri* National Park conservation area, which protects the green turtle and Javanese bull species. Agricultural land in Pesanggaran Sub-district is fairly extensive and is supported by adequate irrigation facilities. This irrigation facility is in the form of canals built on the edge of the village's main road, which empties into the *KaliBaru* River. The agricultural activity is carried out on the land with varying heights. In *Sarongan* Village, farming is done up to the hillside, where the agricultural area is called "*Babatan*". Near this area, a small village called *Kampung Lor Kebon* can be located. In addition, several plantations such as *Sungai Lembu* Plantation, *Sumberjambe* Plantation, and *Sukamade* Plantation can be discovered in Pesanggaran Sub-district [23].

The reality in East Java Province, in general, shows that women are no longer fully dependent on their husbands to fulfil their family's economic needs. At the same time, they also think that their personal income is a form of caring for the survival of their families. Based on the results of observations, the women think that becoming a worker abroad is the right choice to help the economy in the family since it is difficult to find jobs in their own areas. The minimum education and the absence of special skills make it difficult for them to find jobs so that they have to try their luck in the informal sector. They choose to become migrant workers mostly because of the lack of job opportunities. Another factor that becomes the reason for women in Banyuwangi Regency, Indonesia to work abroad is because the majority of the population's livelihood is farming, if the men should be the ones who go abroad, no one can manage their fields. Moreover, depending on the economy in the village is also uncertain, such as being a farmer who does not always earn a fixed income. Committing international migration is the majority choice for women in the hope of helping their family's economy.

Nevertheless, the problem that cannot be separated from Indonesian migrant workers is the relationship between migrant workers and the natural environment in their place of origin. Most of the women in Banyuwangi Regency, Indonesia only work as farm labourers and are not owners of agricultural land. This means that assets owned in agricultural land are also limited. The agricultural sector which is the source of livelihood must be sold by landowners since land productivity continues to decline due to the famine season, climate change, and land conditions that are not strategic and increasingly narrow because of industrialization. Instead, land as an agricultural

asset turned into cost capital for villagers, especially women, to find better jobs by migrating as Indonesian Migrant Workers.

Further, the result of the research also demonstrates that the agricultural and marine sectors in the Banyuwangi Regency are highly dependent on natural conditions. For example, if the natural conditions are severe such as low rainfall, it will result in suboptimal agricultural yields. As for the fisherman, the daily catch of fish and the sales results of the catch are uncertain. This is because most of them can only head seaward during the dry season. Accordingly, they find it very difficult to meet the needs of life in the rainy season. When the rainy season and famine arrive, they can only be unemployed at home; the yields obtained during the dry season are only adequate to meet the family's food needs. These matters make the farmers and fishermen unable to depend entirely on yields that are deemed insufficient to meet their daily needs such as food, children's education, and health. Consequently, people who initially worked as farmers and fishermen, especially women, turned to professions to become Indonesian migrant workers. Based on the results of the interview, at first, the women only wanted to work for one to two contract periods, however, after returning from abroad and feeling confused at home about what to work, they finally decided to go back abroad. As Mrs Sri said:

*“At first, I went to Singapore to pay off debts that I used for my husband's medical treatment. After working there for two years, Alhamdulillah (thank God), my debts have been paid off. Initially, I was just a farm labourer in the neighbouring village, then I kept thinking that if I continued being a farm labourer, let alone the land for farming was also decreasing because the landowner sold it to a housing developer, my debt could not be paid off. Eventually, I tried my luck to join the list to become a migrant worker. After my debt was paid off, I realized that my house was still not in a good condition, so I went to Singapore again. Then I tried to find other information, it turned out that Hong Kong offered a higher wage. After considering that my children in the future also needed education and they had to have a better future than mine, I decided to go to Hong Kong.”*

Humans are created to always meet the needs of life. This may be the reason why numerous women in Banyuwangi are Indonesian migrant workers. Their goals are to fulfil their economic needs and have the good fortune of their neighbours who have gone abroad and managed to earn a lot of money compared to working in the agrarian sector. As stated by Mrs Rosy:

*“In the beginning, I wanted to go to Taiwan because I saw my neighbour succeed after she left abroad. Indeed, who doesn't want to be successful like that neighbour?”*



*She can build a house, buy rice fields, and pay for children's school fees. Most people went to Taiwan or Hong Kong or some had been Arab previously, then when they wanted to go abroad again, they chose to go to Taiwan. This is usually because the Arab and Taiwanese currency exchange rates are different. For example, in Arab you only get 2 items, in Taiwan, you can get 4 items. It's better than having to work decades in the fields where making money takes a very long time, not to mention the challenges and jobs which are tougher than working abroad."*

Further, the research result also revealed that plentiful researchers working in the environmental field claimed that the phenomenon of agricultural land degradation, land drought, flooding, sea-level rise, land productivity derivation, and deforestation are the causes of people switching livelihoods [8] [24] [25] [26]. Nowadays, becoming a migrant worker seems to be a big hope for women to help the family's economic condition to be even better. For them, being a migrant worker can cover all kinds of needs, starting from the daily needs, children education needs, business capital or paying debt needs. These needs cause the migrant workers' savings to run out and then the desire to work abroad arises again.

Moreover, even though natural resources in the agricultural and marine sectors have potential that allows being managed, the human resources are still particularly minimal. Women as part of the community in Banyuwangi Regency, Indonesia still consider that when they rely on nature, their income will not be sufficient to meet their daily needs. This is in line with the occurrence of misconceptions in the Banyuwangi Regency community especially in women, namely the rural population, which is inhabited mostly by poor people, is another factor that causes dependence on agricultural areas or the natural sector to increase and the burden on the agrarian environment is also escalating since it must cover all the needs of the population. Poverty and fulfilling the needs force the community to survive economically. At least, several socio-cultural factors cause environmental degradation to become a burden for population development [8] [10] [23].

Furthermore, the results of research in several countries such as New Zealand, Canada, Bangladesh, and India discovered that the new knowledge gained and innovation as a praxis from local community members will be attached to the natural environment and subsequent implementation and management of natural resources [12] [14]. Besides, environmental degradation in non-industrial economies, which specifically occurs in rural areas, will have implications for natural resource management as a sustainable rural area development [6].



Meanwhile, the management of agrarian and marine environments depending on women is also inseparable from gender identity which still positions Javanese women as *tiyang wingking* or an inferior position. This brings women to the weakening of various aspects of life, which are often detrimental to women. It is strengthened by excerpts from an interview with Endrik, one of the informants who migrated to Hong Kong:

*"I formerly worked in Singapore for 6 years, my employer was very kindhearted. I decided to return home since my employer passed away. At home, it is very difficult for me to re-adapt to be able to return to work in the fields as a farm labourer with arid land conditions due to the extensive famine season. So, I'm going back to work in Hong Kong when the pandemic subsides and the departure of migrant workers is reopened by the Indonesian government. For what purpose have I been at home for a long time? This makes me unproductive. For a junior high school graduate like me, it will be difficult for me to find a job here. Besides, women who work overseas like me are always looked down upon by the surrounding, only as maids."*

Sociologically, gender ideology in society is formed through stereotypes which are interpreted as an assessment of a person only based on perceptions towards the group in which that person can be categorized. Stereotypes that occur in a community can be positive or negative [28]. Psychologically, stereotypes are used to describe unusual relationships between reality and subjective interpretations that appear in communication patterns and conflicts in social groups [24]. Further, stereotypes serve to describe the condition of a group and form an image of the group. Through this stereotype, we can determine the appropriate action towards the group. Accordingly, both parties can obtain a common ground in communicating. Stereotypes are considered a problem if the negative stereotypes against a certain group appear, with a pluralistic society condition [27] [29]. Moreover, stereotypes occurring in women derive from gender stereotypes that emerge in Javanese culture, namely between men and women, the position of men is superior to women. This understanding has been firmly entrenched through the social construction of the people in East Java. As a result, various Javanese terms appear in discourses such as wife as *kanca wingking*, meaning a sidekick, that is a friend in managing household affairs and performing various domestic affairs, especially doing work related to taking care of children, cooking, washing clothes or dishes, and maintaining the house.

This confirms what was written by [13] [15] [16] that the stereotype of women with a "weak" nature is something that is justified in Javanese culture. The stereotype of the phenomenon faced by women in Banyuwangi Regency, Indonesia is the nature of "dependence" on men. This stereotype is attached to a woman. In Javanese culture,

the stereotype of an ideal woman is graceful, obedient, and cannot “exceed” men. In addition, the ideal roles of women are a household manager, a career supporter for the husband, an obedient wife, and a mother who deserves respect. In contrast, the images created for men are “all-knowing”, must be “more” than women, rational, and aggressive. The ideal male roles are the breadwinner of the family, protector, and educator while their ideal status is the head of the family [30], explained that during the New Order era, the motherism was greatly dominant in Indonesia, namely an ideology which is a combination of Dutch petty-bourgeois values and traditional priyayi (nobleman) values that approve of any action taken by a woman for the sake of her family, group, class, company or country without expecting power or prestige in return.

Furthermore, according to [16], the significantly dominant gender ideology in the New Order era in Indonesia was the father-motherism which places the father as the main source of power and the mother as one of the intermediaries of power in society. Meanwhile, in differing Asian countries, various forms of general ideology apply, namely ideologies that emphasize the value of women’s seclusion, exclusion of women from certain fields, and women’s femininity priority. The results of this research showed that when the women in Banyuwangi Regency are faced with the constraints to doing the international migration to the destination countries, they do not surrender and keep moving, as stated by Biyan:

*“Javanese say that women must obey, accept, and then surrender. But for me, this is not the case since the rice fields that I used to work on became residential land. And the fish canning industry where I work provides cheap wages for female workers, so I decide to go home only for a while and will go again to Taiwan to renew the contract. I want to prove that women must also be able to “mejaji” (do more) not only depend on men but take responsibility for themselves and their families. Yes, this is what I will continue to do, going to work. Being here is only a burden, ridiculed by family, friends, and neighbours for not working.”*

Referring to the results of observations and interviews that have been carried out, when women as assets in society choose to leave agricultural land and move to new livelihoods, it is also part of their gender ideology to be empowered and beneficial for the sustainability of quality human development. The gender ideology created by women who become migrant workers is also part of women’s empowerment aimed at increasing women’s potential to be able to reach a better quality of life through self-help activities [6] [24]. Empowering women should always consistently aim to “educate women to be able to educate themselves” or “help women to be able to help themselves”. The goals and motivations that will be achieved through efforts to empower

women are women who are independent, self-reliant, able to adopt innovations and have a rational mindset. In a broader sense, women's empowerment is a process to facilitate and encourage women to be able to position themselves proportionally and become the main actors in utilizing their strategic environment to achieve sustainability in the long term. Women's empowerment has a close relationship with sustainable development where women's empowerment is a major prerequisite and a carriage that will bring society towards a dynamic economic, social, and ecological sustainability. The strategic environment that must be owned by women in developing empowerment includes the production, economic, social, and ecological environment to support independence in the future [2] [31].

Women who become Indonesian Migrant Workers as a result of the unsupportive agrarian environment should continue to be encouraged to have the ability and self-confidence to utilize their resources optimally and to be fully involved in productive-economic activities which eventually can bring independence for themselves and their families [1] [32]. If women are given the opportunity to work and contribute in various fields, numerous sectors of livelihood can be created. Women must be seen as subjects who can think, design life, and produce something, not just as objects in society. Regarding this research, women who decide to become Indonesian Migrant Workers have proven that individually, they are capable of doing self-actualization and getting jobs that are considered decent for themselves with adequate salaries compared to just staying at home.

The emergence of gender ideology will further increase the rationality of women to continue to develop and learn new things. Moreover, the gender ideology created by Indonesian women migrant workers will lead to economic empowerment as a result of affirming the stereotypes that change the labelling of rural women who work through their families and communities into equality and acceptance for women's self-actualization in the informal sector.

## 4. Conclusion

Environmental changes and conversion of agricultural land in Indonesia is one of the causes of women in rural areas becoming Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, and South Korea. The desire to improve the economic standard of living and escape from the restraints of patriarchal culture also strengthens Indonesian women to enhance their fate from working as agricultural labourers to Indonesian migrant workers. The gender ideology possessed by women in Indonesia

is proof that their separation from the agrarian sector has resulted in women's ability to learn new things, let go of stereotypes as *konco wingking* (sidekicks) and become empowered. This is crucial as an effort for gender equality in the future to appreciate the space for movement in the public sphere and opportunities for women to have a better life.

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