Migration, Security and Resilience : Women Migrants in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, East Malaysia

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Abstract:

Migration is an old issue in development, a manifestation of people's mobility as a response to socio-economic and physical changes around them, with the ultimate objective of enhancing the migrants' quality of life. However, this phenomenon is worth examining especially in this age of globalisation which encourages and accentuates human mobility for several reasons. The impact and implication of migration demand a multi-dimensional approach analysis and comprehension. This paper has three objectives. First, it highlights the influx of foreign workers to Sabah, East Malaysia which is discussed within the historical context of why this phenomenon is a never-ending issue. Second, this paper focuses on security issues and gender in relation to the presence of increasing number of immigrants, and in particular, how these issues affect female immigrants.

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Third, this paper discusses survival issues among women immigrants working in various sectors in urban centers — how they culturally adapt, live, sustain and face security aspects in the country of destination.

For decades, even before the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, Kota Kinabalu had been the 'economic magnet' to foreign immigrants, in particular from the Philippines and Indonesia. Security is one of the compelling issues, notably, how the presence of immigrants have an impact on the city's public and human security. The increasing apprehension and discrimination towards foreign immigrants requires the need to understand security at the state/national level, the community level and the individual level. This paper seeks to understand how factors such as the process of adaptation, cultural resilience and local resentment affect women immigrants. This paper also illustrates how the state government, in dealing with security issues, intervened stringently in countering immigrant-related problems in order to make Kota Kinabalu a safe city.

Introduction

The manifestation of extreme responses in urbanization and urban growth come in several physical forms and social facade. One of these is labor migration—an impact of urban growth and ease of travel but which is largely influenced by socio-economic problems in the home country. With globalization, the impact and implication of labor migration culminated in patterns which largely transcends political boundaries and travels beyond the economic and social milieu of a society.

This paper has three objectives. First, it highlights the influx of foreign workers to Sabah, East Malaysia which is discussed within the historical context of why this phenomenon is a never ending issue. Second, it focuses on security issues and gender in relation to the presence of increasing number of immigrants and in particular how this issue affects female immigrants. Third, it attempts to discuss imminent social issues of women immigrants working in various sectors in urban centers—how they culturally adapt, live, sustain and face security aspects in the country of destination. The discussion will highlight gender issues and the plight

of foreign workers in Kota Kinabalu. Issues of security and the implicit cultural resilience of women immigrants will be given attention. This paper will also show how factors such as the process of adaptation and resilience inspite of local resentment affect women immigrants.

Kota Kinabalu, the capital of Sabah, is a relatively new urban center, well-planned and reconstructed after the formation of Malaysia and recently upgraded and beautified to acquire a city status. For decades, even before the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, Kota Kinabalu had become the 'economic magnet' to foreign immigrants in particular from the Philippines and Indonesia. With the influx of immigrant labor, security has become an important issue, notably on its impact on public security. The increasing apprehension and discrimination towards foreign immigrants require the need to understand security at the state/national, community, and individual level. Security issues impelled government policy to intervene stringently in countering immigrant-related problems in order to make Kota Kinabalu a safe city.

Foreign Workers in Sabah : A Historical Overview

Sabah has been host to foreign nationals since its early days as a barter trading point. It is highly possible that many of these traders subsequently established families in Sabah since boundaries and immigration rules only came into force following the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Prior to this, the movement of people in and out of Sabah was at best minimally monitored. Hence it was common to have Filipinos moving freely from Sulu, Southern Mindanao and other places for personal and business reasons. Due to family ties and because barter trading continues to be an important activity today, movement of Filipinos between these areas persists.

The waves of Filipino migration into Sabah can be classified into four periods as explained by Kurus et al. and Sadiq (2005). The first and second periods were largely connected with barter trading, and the colonizer's interest of reaping profits from their colonies. During the pre-colonial era, unrestricted inter-island "hopping" was common among seafaring communities from the regions and archipelago. Migration from the Sulu archipelago in the Philippines to Sabah has a long history. Barter trade existed as early as the ninth century. Today, it is the cornerstone of a regional economic trade forum among Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Brunei called BIMP-EAGA. When Sabah achieved independence through the creation of Malaysia, the free-flow of barter trading between

Philippines and Sabah continued. Traders were not aware of the concept of state-boundary designed by the former colonizers, especially since Sabah was once part of the Sulu Sultanate. Therefore, traders continue to move freely to these two areas, unaware that they are entering illegally (Kurus, Goddos and Koh, 1998).

The third period began when President Ferdinand Marcos declared Martial Law in 1972. Following decades of systemic relocation of the Christians to the southern island of Mindanao, the Muslim majority (popularly known as Moros) took up arms to fight for their homeland. Demanding for an autonomous Islamic state, clashes occurred between the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), Christian groups and the Philippine army. Fighting broke out in other islands off Mindanao such as Jolo, Zamboanga and Lanao. Anxious to escape the chaos around them, thousands of Filipino Muslims fled to Sabah. Being sympathetic to their plight and also being a Muslim country, Malaysia did not turn these Filipinos away. Instead Malaysia granted refugee-status to Filipinos running from chaotic conditions in Southern Philippines (Sadiq, 2005).

The fourth period began with the arrival of economic migrants. Unlike in the 1960s, the economic migrants are the groups of Filipinos that came in the 1980s in significant numbers. As early as the mid 1960s, Sabah began cashing in on its rubber and timber industry. The local population at that time was focused on acquiring higher education leading to better job positions or white collar jobs. Therefore, the state government was faced with the dilemma of increasing its revenue, yet at the same time lacking the manpower to mobilize the economy. The large number of refugees on the other hand provided a solution for the government and contractors. Employing them in these sectors was a way for them to earn their keep, while at the same time development of the state was not compromised due to the shortage of local laborers.

As money began pouring into the state, other sectors like construction were booming. As more men and women began joining the workforce and with the increased standard of living among the locals, more and more families began employing domestic helpers. Consequently, by mid-1980s the economic development in Sabah began attracting not only Filipinos who were still fleeing from political instability, but also those who were looking for greener pastures. Those who came for the latter reason usually were already assured of a job upon arrival, arranged by relatives already in Sabah. One of the other reasons why there is such unregulated flow of illegal immigrants into Sabah shores is because of geographical proximity. Sabah's coastline runs almost 250 miles and its

proximity to several islands in the Philippines waters allows for easy travel across state boundaries.

Due to the prospect of employment opportunities in various sectors such as plantation, logging and constructions, which were booming in the late sixties and early seventies, the influx of Filipino and Indonesian workers to Sabah was unprecedented. In the 1980's and early 1990's, Filipinas, most of them illegal migrants, constituted a substantial number of employees in hotel gyms, beauty salons and massage shops— lucrative industries epitomizing consumer capitalism (Hilsdon, 2007). The diversity of job opportunities made several cities and towns the economic destination of migrants from the two neighbouring countries (Johari and Goddos, 2003). During these decades, illegal immigrants into Sabah largely came from regions in the southern part of the Philippines as well as from Sulawesi and Kalimantan of Indonesia. Malaysia's industrial development during the period generated a huge demand for workers in the industrial and manufacturing sectors which became a pull factor for the illegal immigrants from both countries (Karim, Abdullah and Bakar, 1999).

Based on the regularisation exercise done by the Federal Special Task Force between March and August 1997, it was estimated that there were a total of 413, 832 Indonesian and Filipino migrant workers including dependents in Sabah (see Table 1).

Table 1. Registered Foreigners by Nationality,
Workers and Dependents, 1997

Nationality	Workers	Dependents	Total
Indonesia	170,169 (75.1%)	124,535 (66.5%)	294,704 (71.2%)
Filipino	56,396 (24.9%)	62,732 (33.5%)	119,128 (28.8)
Total	**226, 565**	**187,267**	**413,832**

Source: Johari and Goddos, 2003, p. 55

Sabah's dependence on foreign workers is largely due to shortage of local workers particularly in the agricultural sector, downstream timber and oil-related manufacturing activities (Kurus, et al, 1998). The State demographic figure shows the inclination towards the increasing number of non-Malaysians residing in Sabah. For example, the state population figures in mid-2000 was 2,656,400. Out of this, 78.2 per cent (2,078,200) were Malaysian citizens as compared to 22 per cent

(578,100) non-Malaysians. However, this figure did not include an estimated 150,000 illegal immigrants in Sabah in 2001 (Post, 2001).

Apart from the economic reason, there are several other reasons why Sabah and the Federal Government have accommodated the influx of illegal immigrants. One of the reasons was due to the sympathy for the plight of fellow Muslims oppressed in southern Philippines. The Indonesians were needed mainly for economic purposes to augment the acute shortage of labor in the economic sector. The preference of Sabahans to work in clerical and other types of white-collar occupations further compounded the state's problems in labor supply and requirement patterns.

The concentrations of the Filipino illegal immigrants are mostly centred on Sandakan and the other major towns inclusive of Kota Kinabalu, while the Indonesians are around Tawau. Filipinos are mainly employed in plantations, timber industries and construction sites. Today, it is commonly known among Sabahans that the coastal town of Sandakan (in the eastern part of Sabah) is overwhelmingly Filipino, while Indonesians comprise the majority residents in Tawau, a Sabah town that borders Indonesia. According to illegal immigrants in Sabah, it takes approximately two days to reach Kota Kinabalu from the Philippines by boat (Sadiq, 2005, p. 106). It has been noted that the Philippines is the second largest exporter of labor globally, next to Mexico (Carlos, 2002). Between 1981-1998, for example, the increasing Filipino emigrants were largely land-based and sea-based overseas contract workers (OCWs) and emigrants who chose to live with family members who are citizens of host countries. The latter phenomenon is common in the State of Sabah. The annual Filipino emigration was reaching 800,00 workers by 1998 (Carlos, 2002). Almost a decade later, from April to September 2007, overseas Filipino workers reached at 1.75 million (National Statistics Office, 2008).

Waves of Filipino migrant workers entered Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980's; some legally but most did not have working permits. Malaysian government only began issuing licenses to agencies which recruit both female and male workers from the Philippines after 1985 because of the demand by industrial and service sectors, such as entertainment, hotels, restaurants, security and household services (Somera, 2008).

The details of illegal immigrant workers apprehended and deported from 2001 until April 2005 in Sabah are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Number of Illegal Immigrants
Apprehended and Deported from Sabah

Activities		2001	2002	2003	2004	April 2005
Apprehended	Filipinos	14,737	22,388	11,599	9,507	2,537
	Indonesians	16,090	12,902	7, 135	6,178	1,697
	Others	26	398	287	524	123
	Total	30,853	35,688	19, 021	16,209	4,357
Deported	Filipinos	12,265	19,701	11,246	8,598	1,332
	Indonesians	15,166	11,244	5,542	5,207	875
	Others	326	321	156	317	62
	Total	27,757	31,266	16,944	14,122	2,269

Source: Sabah's Security Divison, 2005 cited in Siew, 2006

The Influx of Foreign Migrants and National Security

The post-Cold war period has been marked by rethinking of national security, of theories of international relations and of the significance of international migration. International migration is increasingly viewed as an important regional and geo-strategic dynamic with potentially crucial effects upon states, societies and their security (Miller, 2004). The increase in international migration has also given rise to paranoia and xenophobia. Migrants everywhere live a tenuous existence – rarely gaining the same rights as non-migrants, their hosts always aloof. Blamed for a range of ills – from unemployment to crime, strained social services to lack of national unity- migrants are aware of just how easily their rights can be swept away (Poku and Graham, 2004).

Not all types of migration are brought to the forefront as security problems. On the contrary, all kinds of organized migration tend to be understood as being under state control, a fact that seems to substantially reduce the notion of threat. Thus, the 'migration threat' almost always refers to involuntary migration, that is of more irregular and unorganized nature. Involuntary migration definitely raises questions of security. Human beings who involuntarily move across internationally recognized borders to escape persecution, war, violence or starvation are indeed experiencing threats to their security both as individuals and a group. The paradox is that when the linkage between security and migration is highlighted, it is rarely with reference to the refugees. On the contrary, it

is the refugees themselves who are presented as threats to presumptive receiving states and their citizens (Abiri, 2004).

Malaysia presently faces serious problems of illegal immigration into the country. The migrants are largely from ASEAN region, i.e., Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines, while a few are from Burma, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India. As the immigrants arrived illegally, it is impossible to determine their number (Kassim, 1987). Hence, the massive number of foreign workers in Malaysia has been one of the central features of the 1980's and 1990's. Stimulated by development disparity between Malaysia and its neighbouring countries, the former has been a magnet for foreign nationals in pursuit of better life. From a stream of illegal inflows which emanated in the late 1970s, the contemporary people movement phenomenon magnified into a tide with the predominantly Indonesian constituent nationality accompanied by Asians, Africans, even Europeans and Latin Americans. Just as in the recessionary years of the mid-1980s, the 1999 slowdown has not brought surreptitious cross border incursions to a halt. Worsening economic and even social conditions at home act as the main stimulus (Aziz, Rahim, Salleh and Sirat, 1999). Many Malaysians are no longer willing to perform jobs they consider as 3-D (dirty, difficult and dangerous), creating demand for migrants in sectors like plantations, construction and some service occupations. The number of documented migrant workers in 2008 is 2.1 million. This means that 25 per cent to 30 per cent of the workforce are comprised of migrants (Robertson, 2008, p. 1).

Among the states in Malaysia, Sabah is reported to have the largest population of immigrants. A very large proportion of them in Sabah are from Indonesia and the Philippines. This is evidenced by their conspicuous presence in town centres and on estates or plantations, and by the number of Indonesian and Filipino illegal immigrants who have been detained by the authorities and deported. With a population of 2.7 million, Sabah, in 2003, was estimated to hold 700,000 foreigners. This figure represents roughly 26 percent of its total population (Peters, 2004). Like many other countries with labor shortages, Malaysia needs workers, but does not want them. Both of these facts are clearly reflected in government policies. There are frequent attempts to get rid of migrant workers, either in response to public concern or because of economic downturn. But with almost every halt to migration, there is a corresponding exception allowing workers to stay or to continue coming (Gurowitz, 2000, p. 863).

The government and citizens of Sabah, and Malaysia as a whole, are represented with a double-edged sword with the presence of a

large number of foreign immigrants. Many have acknowledged that the impressive development of the state is due in large part to the foreign workers' contributions in the construction and plantation sectors. The improved standard of living in Sabah owes much gratitude to foreign workers. Unfortunately, these same people have also been cited as contributing factors to the increase in social problems and are seen as a threat to national security through their involvement in criminal activities in the state. Their links to organized crime has heightened especially after the kidnapping incident off a resort in Sipadan and Pandanan, and also of some abductions in 2003. Growing dissatisfaction and anxiety expressed by the local public towards foreign laborers propelled the government to begin its crackdown.

Numerous operations involving the co-operation of the police, the Federal Task Force, the Immigration Department and the General Operations Forces had been enforced, and in fact continue to be enforced, throughout the country. The amended Immigration Act in August 2002 introduces heavier fines on unauthorised migrants, as well as six strokes of canning. However, despite these punishments, enforcement personnel continue to net illegal migrants as has been reported in the local newspapers.

The exact figures of illegal Filipinos in Sabah are not known. The Philippine Embassy in Kuala Lumpur believes Sabah has an estimated 500,000 illegal immigrants. With the establishment of the Federal Special Task Force (FSTF) in 1989, the presence of foreigners in the state began to be viewed as a threat to national and state security. Having no definite record of precise number of Filipinos in the country, the FSTF was set up specifically to deal with foreigners in Sabah.

According to the Commission of Human Rights of Malaysia (Suhakam, n.d.), countless problems in Sabah have been associated with the presence of a large number of 'refugees', illegal immigrants and stateless persons. From the memoranda and complaints that Suhakam received from 2001 to 2006, it is said the people of Sabah seemed to be fearful of the loss or denial of several rights such as the right to safety and to customary native land, and deprivation of services such as health care and education. The overwhelming number of foreigners with citizenship status, as well as illegal immigrants, had threatened the local population's sense of well being, in particular their safety. A memorandum entitled 'Infringement of Rights of Malaysian Citizens in Sabah by the Presence of Large Numbers of Transient Populations' presented to Suhakam in December 2004, highlighted the claim that the population of illegal immigrants had expanded rapidly over the last 30 years, giving rise to

consequent economic, social and cultural problems while depriving local communities of their rights (The Borneo Post Online, 2007).

While it is unavoidable for migration to occur, particularly given the recent economic prosperity experienced by Malaysia, the situation is especially worrisome in the state of Sabah. The number of foreign workers and illegal immigrants is exceptionally high. This state has a population of 2.7 million in 2004 where 590,274 or 22 per cent are Filipinos. Considering that the largest ethnic group in Sabah, the Kadazan Dusun is only 510,900, it is no wonder locals view them as a threat (Peters, 2004).

Through media reports, Filipinos are singled out as contributors and catalysts to social ills of the state. The increased use of shabu, high levels of prostitution and crime are among the security threats mentioned by locals. According to Misri Barham, the director of the state's Federal Special Task Force (FSTF), in the first four months of 2007, the authorities had detained some 9,558 illegal immigrants in Sabah, mostly Filipinos. From 1990 to 2007, the FSTF have arrested 348, 068 illegal immigrants in the state – 192,653 Filipinos, 151, 924 Indonesians and the rest from other countries. The vast and long coastline makes monitoring and prevention of illegal entry of people into the state difficult (Agence France-Presse, 2007).

Based on the statistics, it is no wonder that the locals in Sabah are becoming uncomfortable with the presence of Filipinos. Locals feel that their personal, economic and social security are not being adequately looked after by the state. As such, many have urged the Philippine consulate in Sabah and the Malaysian government to resolve the problem regarding the Filipino refugees. The large illegal immigrant population in Sabah has also contributed to an increase in tuberculosis cases in 2001 when the state had reported 4,000 out of 15,000 cases nationwide (New Straits Times, 2002).

Sabah's illegal immigrants are also involved in criminal activities. Datuk Mangsor Ismail, Sabah's State Police Commissioner, disclosed during a briefing for the media at the Sabah Police Headquarters that the police have arrested more drug addicts in 2005 with 2,054 (until April 2005) as compared to 1,690 for the whole of 2004. He further added that the illegal immigrants who reside at squatter areas as well as makeshift water villages throughout Sabah were the main culprits behind drug abuse and the numerous criminal activities (Daily Express, 2005). The statistical data provided below show the involvement of illegal immigrants in criminal activities.

Table 3. Criminal Activities Committed by Illegal Immigrants for 2002

Year 2002	Total Crimes	Filipinos	Indonesians	Sabahan
Murder	77 (100%)	32 (41.56%)	21 (27.27%)	24 (31.17%)
Attempted Murder	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.33%)	2 (66.67%)
Groups Robbery (Armed)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Robbery (Armed)	1 (100%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Groups' Robbery (Unarmed)	19 (100%)	13 (68.42%)	1 (5.26%)	5 (26.31%)
Robbery (Unarmed)	233 (100%)	137 (58.80%)	13 (5.58%)	83 (35.62%)
Rape	117 (100%)	8 (6.84%)	11 (9.40%)	98 (83.76%)
Section 324/326	180 (100%)	29 (16.11%)	25 (13.89%)	126 (70.00%)

Source: Unpublished Data from Police Department of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (Cited in Kassim, 2006, p. 61)

Migration, Security and Gender

To continue the discussion on the emerging issues of immigrants in Sabah, this section directs its focus on gender, women and security. Within the scholarship of security studies, migration would be considered as a non-traditional security issue. As such it may not warrant the attention of scholars whose main focus would be on national security, sovereignty, or/and national interest. However, with globalization and the focus on human security, migration and the well being of migrants have moved from the periphery into a more central position. This section elaborates briefly on the broader understanding of security and the linkages between security and gender. It also focuses on the issue of women migrants from the state as well as from the women's perspectives.

If migration is deemed as a soft issue, gender was not accepted as a valid tool of analysis by International Relations scholars until the late 1990s. It was the relentless effort of feminist scholars such as Cynthia Enloe, Christine Sylvester, and J. Ann Ticker who opened the room for serious conversation among International Relations scholars.

> *To look through the world through gender lenses is to focus on gender as a particular kind of power relation (Stean, 1998, p. 5).*

In other words, this is a method to discover ways in which gender is central to the greater understanding of international processes such as migration. When one puts on the gender lenses, one is able to focus on numerous dimensions of gender inequality. These includes inequality between the personnel in the institutionalized forms of discrimination, barriers (formal and informal) to equality of access and opportunity, lack of representation in decision making structures as well as in the structural inequalities exhibited by the global economy.

To reiterate, security is traditionally related to the protection of borders by appropriate state mechanisms. Security is discussed from the realist perspective where the state is regarded as unitary actor focusing on the issues of war and peace. It is argued that one should start an analysis on security from the level of an individual (Ramli, 2007; Daud and Othman, 2005). When linkages are made from the individual to the state, then to the international level, a much richer analysis can be conducted to uncover the dynamics of power relations, including the dynamics occurring within the migration process. More importantly, when the concept of human security became the nomenclature of the UN system in 1994, gender finally managed to take root in the debates between academics and policy makers, especially between scholars of security and development. It is here where migration as a phenomenon acts as a catalyst for the promotion of "development as a peace promoting process" rather than "development as a conflict generating issue". (Martinusen, 1997).

On the one hand, for the sending country, the migration of its citizens can actually help to alleviate conflict or social unrest. This is apparent in such states as the Philippines and Indonesia. In the case of the Philippines, educated people cannot find good employment thus requiring the need to migrate in order to ensure that their children can be provided for from income earned in a foreign land. On the other hand, for the receiving country, the influx of migrants can lead toward the feeling of uneasiness among the citizens due to the need to cater to the additional social and physical infrastructure demanded by the presence of the migrants.

Since 1960, the number of female and male migrants is almost equal. According to the 2003 ILO Report, by 2000, 51 per cent of all migrants in developed countries are female, while they constitute 46 per

cent in developing countries. The migration of women and men, whether on their own or jointly as spouses brought forth the identification of gendered ramifications of migration.

Table 4. Percentage of female migrants among the total number
of international migrants by major areas, 1960-2000

Major Area	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Europe	48.5	48.0	48.5	51.7	52.4
Northern America	49.8	51.1	48.5	51.0	51.0
Southern Asia	46.3	46.7	45.9	44.4	44.4
Eastern and Southeast Asia	**46.1**	**47.6**	**47.0**	**48.5**	**50.1**
Western Asia	45.2	46.6	47.2	47.9	48.3
Caribbean	45.3	46.1	46.5	47.7	48.9
Latin America	45.3	46.9	48.4	50.2	50.5

Source: United Nations, 2002, p. 4

Table 4 shows that since 1980, there has been a steady increase in the percentage of female migrants in the East and Southeast Asian region, i.e. from 47 per cent to 50.1 per cent. Studies have shown that women migrants are main income earners. In the earlier decades, women migrate as spouses, or as part of a family. Within this context alone, one can see that there is a change in the gender role played by women migrants. They assume the role as heads of households, repositioning the accepted patriarchal structure of most societies. Furthermore, women as independent income earners lead toward the empowerment of the women themselves.   The increase of women migrants in Southeast Asia is in line with the global trend, thus requiring a closer examination on the lives of women migrants specifically from a human security perspective. Migration has allowed for the possible reconfiguration of gender relations as well as power inequalities.

> *Migration can provide for new opportunities for women and men to improve their lives, escape oppressive social relations, and support those who are left behind. But it can also expose people to new vulnerabilities as the result of their precarious legal status, abusive working conditions, exposure to certain health risks, etc.* (UNRISD, 2005).

The observation stated in the UNRISD Report is expounded by two global trends in contemporary labor migration. First, the diversification trend

suggests that there is an increase in the sources and destination countries as well as the development of more skills level and varied occupations. Second, the polarization trend related to migration between skilled and unskilled migrants, resulted to ethnic stratification among migrants (Piper, 2005). These two trends have an impact upon state action or inaction in relation to security and women migrants. Furthermore, since the assumption here is that migration is closely linked to the development of a country, it can also be associated with the issue of peace or conflict within a broader framework.

Issues of Migrant Women and Security

What are some of the migrant-related problems that the state needs to address? Generally, the issues can be classified in three categories: labor related problems, legal status, and protection of the border. While it is the responsibility of the state to provide adequate protection to all of its citizens, it may not accord the same treatment to migrants, sometimes classified as aliens. From the perspective of the state, it can be argued that migration (and migrants) can be contextualized as possible conflict generating entity that must be addressed by the state.

a. Cross Border Issue

The state has observed an increasing number of migrants from different source countries. In the case of Malaysia, the new source countries are Vietnam, Nepal, Bangladesh, and some Eastern European countries. Simultaneously, the dominant source countries are Indonesia and the Philippines. In order to maintain sovereignty of the border, there are different visa requirement for migrants coming in as laborers. Visa requirement is a safe guard mechanism for the state to maintain its control on the movement of the migrants. In this case, both men and women migrants go through the process in a similar manner because generally, it is the agents who handle or mishandle the documentation of most migrants.

However, a more pressing matter from the standpoint of the state (usually, state enforcement agencies such as the police) is the need to avoid conflict between migrants and locals, and among the migrants themselves. Reports on crimes committed by migrants are usually greeted

with hostility among locals. In areas largely inhabited by migrants, locals tend to feel uneasy in the presence of migrants. Physical confrontation among migrants tends to be reported at a higher level of frequency as compared to confrontation between migrants and locals. Usually, these are manifestations of inter-ethnic problems among the migrants themselves.

In controlling the border, the issue of illegal migrants must be given due attention. Illegal migrants are those who overstay their allowable time as stated in the visa, or those who enter the country without proper authorization/documents.

More disturbing is the issue of human trafficking where victims tend to be women, girls and children. Malaysia is generally known as a transit country for human trafficking, meaning that victims enter the country and stay for a limited time before being transported to receiving destinations such as South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Fact-finding mission (FFM) organized by the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants (APMM) considered Sabah as a hotbed of abuses against migrant workers. In terms of labor relations, migrant workers remain to be targets of oppression and exploitation. Even migrant workers with legal working permit have been arrested and detained (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants, 2009).

b. Labor Related Problems

There are many actors involved who are either directly or indirectly linked to the labor sector. The main actors are the agents and the employers in the receiving countries. In most cases, the Malaysian state does not have control over the recruitment policies/programs of agents. The recruitment policies, the training programs as well as welfare benefits of migrants especially while in transit (from the point of enrolment until arrival at the employers' place) are within the prerogative of the agent. As such, the level of training received by migrants especially for women working as domestic helpers actually varies between agents. More importantly, recruitment programs in various countries also differ tremendously. In Vietnam, the state supports citizens who would like to work overseas by giving them loans that will enable them to pay their recruitment agency. Furthermore, recruitment for women also differ compared to men. In Indonesia, it is easier for women compared to men to obtain placement with recruitment agencies. The Malaysian state only wants an assurance that all documents are in place upon entry.

c. Legal Citizenship Status of Migrants

The issue arises when a migrant marries a local resident. In the case of Malaysia, the laws tend to favor a female migrant marrying a Malaysian man. Children of such a union are able to obtain Malaysian citizenship. However, if a Malaysian woman were to marry a foreign migrant, there is no assurance that her children will receive Malaysian citizenship. The bias of this law has been questioned by many sectors such as the civil society as well as academicians in Malaysia. Since the submission of Malaysian Country report as compliant to CEDAW, the government, especially through the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development has been lobbying and initiating legislative changes regarding the rights of foreign male spouses and their children. The situation gets even more complicated if the marriage ends with a divorce.

It is also argued that a tremendous increase in the number of migrants can also lead toward political instability. In the case of Sabah, a survey commissioned by the state government in 2004 shows that there were 704,800 (24.62%) migrants (legal and illegal) within the population of 2,862,300. In cities such as Kota Kinabalu, Kudat and Semporna, the ratio of migrants to locals is at least 2:1. Problems of illegal migrants registered as voters by using faked identity cards in the 1999 general election, as well as the loss of over 60,000 MyKads have been reported by various sources (NST, 2006). With the continuous influx and the rise in birth rate among migrants, there is a high possibility that in the future migrants will outnumber the locals and such might lead to political imbalance.

From the state's perspective, migrants are agents of change and they contribute to the development of the country. However, there is a price to pay for such development to take place. The state wants to show that it is able to control the influx of workers, while enforcing the rules and regulations in order to maintain stability. While policy makers encourage the presence of migrants, the state regulatory agencies are concerned with the rise of crime and conflicts associated with the presence of migrants. That migrants now occupy various professions only exacerbates the situation. This poses a challenge since the state will now have to deal with foreigners from diverse countries entering various occupations. This was not the situation when migrants came to Malaysia prior to 1990.

Migrant Women in Kota Kinabalu : Cases of the Marginalized

Migration to other countries is also termed as transnational migration (Sassen, 2006) which involved the professionals, government officials, corporate and business people and even activists. They are categorically called the global social class that provokes all kinds of discourses and debates. However in this paper, the focus of transnational migrants are ordinary women from humble beginnings and social background who either chose to move or were compelled to migrate due to family and economic factors. They move to other countries and cities to start their new work and life. The cases referred to in this paper are based on interviews with a few selected female migrants from southern Philippines and Indonesia who have lived in Kota Kinabalu for more than five years, others for more than 20 years. The women's age range from 20-45 years old. The interviews were conducted continuously over the past two years, in casual, informal and unstructured manner in order to gain the trust and confidence of the respondents. For this paper, only four women (with pseudonyms) will be referrred to. Their accounts highlight the issues discussed in this paper. Rossinah (40 yrs old), Maria (20 yrs old), Asiah (42 yrs old) and Betty (25 yrs old) are women who were able to share their views and feelings, their apprehension and their aspiration to work and live in the city. There are several reasons why they decided to work and live in Kota Kinabalu. These range from family factors and network, choice of job opportunities, availability of places to stay especially with friends or relatives and comfortable 'social zones' a term used by the women in acknowledging the amicable rapport with the local communities. The four women have been working and living in Kota Kinabalu for at least five years, with both Rossinah and Asiah living in the city for thirty years. Rossinah and Asiah were both taken to Sabah from the southern Philippines at a very young age by their families who came to the east coast of Sabah.

Kota Kinabalu, located on the western coast of Sabah, is considered the 'goldmine' for most migrants who would initially arrive on the eastern coasts of Sabah, i.e Tawau, Sandakan, and Kudat. The influx of immigrants predominating few selected areas of the city in this state is clearly, a manifestation of the social microcosm, the dynamics of adapting and resisting social marginalization. All the four women went through similar entry routes, i.e., via the east coast and through family contacts and networking. They came by commercial boats plying the seas of the southern islands of Philippines to the east coast of Sabah.

However, most of these migrants came illegally by private boats hired for such purpose. The arrangement of such illegal trips are usually done by people they trust, i.e., families or close relatives. Thus, this strengthens the theory where chain migration is the most favorite strategy used by earlier migrants who hope to bring in their families and relatives to the land of their chosen destination. Rossinah, for example, was brought to the east coast of Sabah from the Mindanao island by her parents who had come earlier to find jobs at plantations in Tawau, a city on the east coast of Sabah. They were helped by family members who earlier settled in Sandakan in the early 1960's. After settling down, migrants were able to cope with living in a city that deliberately marginalized and socially excluded them from the mainstream. But, it was also a city that incorporated them as employees at eateries, retail shops, handicrafts, petrol stations, domestic homes, entertainment centers, and many more jobs that were neglected by locals who disliked doing menial jobs. What helps the migrant to continue working and living in this city? It is mainly, the close-knit relationships within family and kins who had earlier moved to Sabah in the early 1970's, and the reciprocal attributes of traditional communities largely embedded within the social matrix of the migrants. Until today, families of Rossinah and Asiah still bring their relatives and friends from the southern Philippines to find work in Sabah, despite the stringent immigration counterchecks and enforcements at the border.

Map 1. State of Sabah, East Malaysia

Key: ⟶ Flow of transmigrations to the eastern coast of Sabah

The migrants made Sabah their choice of destination because of historical reasons, kinship affiliation and/or ancestral roots. In addition, religious beliefs, similar cultural identities and certain dialects bond them to Sabah.

The common migration flows and routes are overwhelmingly concentrated on the eastern coast of Sabah. This is depicted on Map 1. The flow of immigrants legal or otherwise, are from southern Philippines, the island of Mindanao in particular, and from Indonesia, especially from Sulawesi, the Flores, Java and Kalimantan. The long coastlines and uninhabited islands scattered off the shores of eastern Sabah become easy entry points for these immigrants, plus the close geographical proximity of islands to Sabah. The lack of enforcement of regulations due to several structural reasons exacerbates the influx of illegal immigrants to the state. Table 5 indicates the general picture of the total population of Sabah in terms of status of citizenship, gender and strata. The statistics augment serious attention by the state and immigration policy in curbing the increasing rate of immigrants.

Table 5. Total of population according to status of citizenship, gender and strata, Sabah, 2000

Status of citizenship/strata	Population		
	Total	Male	Female
Urban : Malaysian	986,012	501,151	484,861
Non-Malaysian	262,699	128,931	133,768
Rural : Malaysian	1,002,649	511,780	490,869
Non-Malaysian	352,125	203,675	148,450
Jumlah	**2,603,485**	**1,345,537**	**1,257,948**
Source: Department of Statistic, Sabah, 2000			

Accessibility to education is very important to the immigrant workers in Kota Kinabalu, and this plays a big role in social mobility, particularly in employment. However this is not the case for Rossinah. Despite her access to education from her early age at the local primary school where she managed to complete and pass her Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia at the age of 17, Rossinah faces discrimination in getting employment at both the government and private sectors. The same experience was faced by Asiah who was able to obtain local education

though she did not complete her secondary level due to the strict entrance regulation and high school fees imposed on immigrant children (i.e RM120 per year for school fees, excluding other fees such as books, uniforms, exercise books, transport fees, etc.).

Maria did not get any of her education in Kota Kinabalu. She came to Sabah through family ties after she dropped out of school in Southern Mindanao at the age of 13 due to poverty. She came to Kota Kinabalu after being supported by her family members and worked as a reflexologist for the past three years earning a modest income of RM600 a month. She lives with her five other friends in a rented flat outside the city. She manages to send home remittances once every three months. But life is not so easy for Maria. At times, she got taunted by the local men for her job in a local massage saloon. She claimed that the prejudice she got is because of her job and also her companionship with other Filipino women who work at entertainment centers. Despite these, Maria persists at work to earn her living and remit some money. She hopes to acquire other skills and move on with her life in Kota Kinabalu which she considers her new home.

Betty, comes from Sulawesi, Indonesia five years ago. She came to Sabah via the traditional route from Tarakan – Tawau and later made her way to Kota Kinabalu to look for a job. Betty is single and works at a restaurant from early morning till noon. She has another job at a local eatery until 10 at night. It is a tedious job but she needs the money to send home to her parents. Betty does not wish to live in Sabah all her life and she wants to go home after accumulating some capital. Sabah is only a transition for her to gain enough capital to start a small business at her own village and build a house for her old parents. Despite the good and steady income in Kota Kinabalu (she takes home an average income of RM 1,000 a month) she still feels she is not welcome by the locals. Job is not difficult to get because locals are not interested to do the work that she does. People are not that unfriendly but she still keeps her distance as she knows her status, i.e., illegal and a foreign worker. She had been able to work her way discretely without any problem to her employer or families and friends. Once in two years, she would go home to spend her Eid'l Fitr with her parents in Sulawesi. Betty claimed that as long as she can earn her living in peace, she would continue to work in Kota Kinabalu. When asked where she desires to go home for good, she says "*I dunno for sure, this depends on Allah rezki* (God's bounty)".

Immigrants face prejudice and discrimination by the law that prevents them from enjoying social rights despite their PR status (Yaakub, et al., 2003). This was the case of Rossinah and Asiah when they were able

to obtain the PR status in the 1980s. Rossinah believed that she has the right to job opportunities and to be able to buy and own a home where she pleases to choose. However, these seem tough and impossible for her. Fortunately, the chain migration strategy practiced by her predecessors provided her the means to adjust and make amendments where possible. Rossinah came to Kota Kinabalu when she was five years old with her parents. Both her parents came to Kota Kinabalu via Sandakan during the early 1960's when immigration law was quite lax. Her parents came to Sandakan because they have several relatives and families living and working there. In fact, they had made Sandakan their new home. With help from their relatives, they were able to start a small retailing business, while at the same time Rossinah's father also took up a part time job as a laborer to supplement the household income. When things got a bit better, Rossinah's parents decided to migrate to Kota Kinabalu as they have families who became successful there. Rossinah begun her education and life was wonderful to her and her siblings, as well as her relatives who were able to gain access to the education and social facilities. Her father finally built a house in a village at the periphery of the city, which today is considered a sub-urban area. The village is predominantly constructed by immigrants of Filipino descent and some Indonesian families. They have no problem with social interaction as they were able to communicate with each other in Malay language. Rossinah had a stable life. The economic means of her family was able to sustain them and even remit to their family in the southern Philippines. But this was cut short when Rossinah's father died in 1996. Her mom and siblings had to make ends meet. When the immigration policy got tightened in the late 1990's, Rossinah's elder brothers decided to return to the Philippines to start a business there and established trade links with their relatives and families in Kota Kinabalu. Rossinah was left to take care of her now ailing mother and other close relatives. She became the focal contact for future immigrants from the Philippines. Life became even tougher when she faced problems in getting a decent job. Luckily for Rossinah, constant contact with her families in the Philippines and with the help from fellow Filipinos and relatives in Sabah, she was able to start bringing in materials and resources such as textiles, cosmetics, handicrafts, beads and pearls from the Philippines. She started to trade with the locals. After a couple of years, she put-up her own small business trading goods and selling products imported from the Philippines and Indonesia. She had businesses in the markets in Kota Kinabalu and other

towns such as Beaufort, Papar and Sipitang. She even took orders from local women retailers from villages throughout the west coast.

The networking that Rossinah acquired through family and relative-ties had developed well. She even employed family members as workers. This is part of the social strategy and cultural resiliency employed by migrants to adapt to local conditions and to be accepted not only by the newly formed immigrant community but also by the local people (Hadi, Julaihi and Junaenah, 2008). In fact, the trust she was able to create with her workers and her retailers strengthened her business. Nevertheless, she still has to face other challenges. She is now the prime earner for her family in Kota Kinabalu and her siblings in the Philippines. With constant orders of goods from the Philippines, she was able to maintain both the economic and family ties. However, with an ailing mother whom she cares for at home, and the frequent harassment from the municipality, Rossinah at this juncture must be very agile and must quickly respond in order to maintain her business. If anything goes wrong with her business, she has to face a heavy burden both for her family in Kota Kinabalu and in the southern Philippines. She said, *'I cannot lose face. My family is depending so much on me'.* Being the only daughter in the family, with the other two brothers in the Philippines, she feels responsible in securing both the economic and filial piety.

Apart from economic adaptation, religion, in particular Islam, plays a big role among the migrants. This is very subjective, however among the migrants. It is the most powerful tool identified with the locals especially the Malays. Islam is deemed as the binding force and a universal identification for Muslim ummah to recognise and accept each other despite each social preoccupation, either as a local citizen, or as immigrant of 'lower social standing'. Also the concept of Muslim brotherhood/sisterhood may also influence the bonding of Muslim immigrants with the locals. Although, this may be only temporary due to the social differences and status between the locals and the immigrants. This religious identification helps to cultivate the immigrant's socialization of being a 'Malay' within the Sabah context, taking into consideration some similarities they share with the local Malays in terms of values, etiquette, dialects and customs. Thus, it provides them the venue to be integrated and accepted by the Sabahan Malays who are predominantly Muslims. Their involvement with the local communities in religious rituals, prayers in the local mosques and sharing similar religious functions and celebration is the social springboard for the immigrants to feel accepted by the locals. This was made known by both Rossinah and Asiah who

frequently participated in the local communities' religious rituals such as marriages, funerals, the ramadan prayers, and quran recitals at the local mosque. Such activities are cordially accepted by the local people. Thus, the social bond is gradually constructed although superficially. Apart from religious activities or gatherings, it is seldom accepted that the immigrants are able to intermix freely with the local Malays. The subtle apprehension is imminent.

Issues of Security from the Migrants Perspective

While the state tends to focus on the issue of immigrant control, the migrants tend to be more concerned with the notion of insecurity. Being aliens in the destination countries, migrants are generally at the mercy of their agents, employers, and state enforcement agencies. From the perspectives of the migrants, their intention for migration is simple. They would like to find employment in order to provide better livelihood for themselves and their families. In order to fulfill these needs and ambition, most migrants make the decision to find employment outside their own countries due to the lack of opportunities and poverty. In the context of the global migration trends, the opportunity for migration has increased due to the additional demand in developing and developed countries for employees especially in the unskilled labor positions. There are more destination countries, more occupations, and more levels of positions of employment. Thus, the services offered by migrants could be viewed as a supply that would fulfill the demand of foreign employers.

It is also important to note that on a number of occasions, migration is actually by choice and not by force. While there is the availability of jobs in the homeland, people chose to migrate because of better opportunities in the destination countries. The increased mode of mobility has allowed for more people to cross-borders. Migrants have stated that they take the opportunity to work outside their countries in order to travel and broaden their horizon. From this standpoint, migration can be seen as a peace promoting mechanism due to the fact that it lessens the internal economic pressure within both the source and the destination countries while allowing for the greater understanding through cultural exchange indirectly occurring between employers and employees, between migrants and locals. Thus, the trend of diversification has actually affected the human security of a migrant at stake. However, in practise, when migrants are in their destination countries, including

Malaysia, they are faced with the issue of polarization. It is the issue of polarization that has led to the increase of insecurity among migrants.

Globally, most women in the unskilled category migrate as domestic or care workers, 'entertainers,' factory-garment workers, and to a lesser extent as workers in the agricultural sector. Within the skilled category, women tend to be associated with the welfare and social professions (education and health sectors). Polarization occurs between the skilled and the unskilled labor sectors. In the first case, the skill of migrants is measured by the paper qualification they may have. Upon arrival in the destination country, their certificate may be evaluated through the process of licensing and re-certification requirements of professionals. Devaluation of educational credentials can be a form of systematic discrimination. This is especially true in cases where professional associations do not recognize foreign degrees as equivalent to those obtained in the destination country (Piper, 2005). Second, the language skill is taken into consideration. With such polarization, it is noticed that Filipino workers tend to be more qualified academically. Their english language ability tends to place them in better occupations within an industry. However, deskilling has occurred even among these groups of workers. There are documented cases of doctors being retrained as nurses because of the availability of nursing positions in a number of destination countries, predominantly in Canada and the US (Piper, 2005). Thus, one can argue that the gender inequalities combined with race/ethnicity, in addition to being an alien in a foreign land can lead toward women migrants being triply disadvantaged. The insecurity of women migrants is an issue of concern and needs further examination.

One of the socio-political issues faced by the Filipina domestic worker is partial citizenship. Partial citizenship occurs when "there is a stunted integration of migrants in receiving nation-states which in the case of women is demonstrated by discriminatory measures that deny them their reproductive rights" (Parreñas, 2001, p. 1130). A case in point is the prohibition of pregnancy for Filipino domestic workers working in some parts of Asia and the Middle East. Alarcón, Kaplan and Maollem (1999) argued that there are contradictory regulatory practices that are detrimental to the well being of the migrants. Examples of such practices are measures against family reunification, restriction to live-in domestic workers, and the imposition of temporary settlement on overseas labor contracts. The impact for migrants in relation to partial citizenship is being manifested through extended separations from families left behind in the Philippines, lack of protection in domestic work and the uncertainty

of being under a guest "worker" status in most destinations of work. At the structural level, it is argued that there has been a three-tier level of the transference of reproductive labor, i.e. the international transfer of caretaking. While class-privileged women purchase the low wage services of migrant Filipina domestic workers, migrant Filipina domestic workers simultaneously hire poorer women in the Philippines to perform the reproductive labor that they do for wealthier women in the receiving states (Parreñas, 2000, p. 561). The implication of this international transfer of caretaking are the consequences on family relations.

As a summary, one can conclude that the recent trends associated with global migration raise a number of issues relating to security and gender. Figure 1 is a depiction of the state and women migrants' perspectives in relation to the trends of diversification and polarization.

Figure 1. State and Women migrants Perspectives vs
Trends of migration

Units of Analysis/ Trends	Diversification (more sources and destination, more levels of skill and occupation)	Polarization (between skilled and unskilled labor)
State's Perspective ↕ Women Migrants' Perspective	Increase in conflict	Increase in conflict
	Decrease in conflict	Increase in conflict

Migration is an integral part of development as it can be a peace promoting mechanism. However, secondary and some primary data show that there is a higher possibility that migration causes conflict.

Conclusion

From the context of the influx of these transient workers, be it men or women, legal or illegal, the presence of immigrants may pose as a security threat in the economic, social and political aspects. As such, the immigrants are unfairly treated and socially marginalized. For the sustenance and survival of their well being in this state, they have to adapt and adjust to the culture themselves in order to resist the continuous

local resentment and prejudices. Thus, it is very important to look into the intricate life of the immigrants—how they are able to survive and sustain their needs amidst the marginalization. At the same time, the implication of the security aspects for both the immigrants and the local people are diverse, i.e., the urban communities of Kota Kinabalu facing countless issues that concern the social safety of their lives, unemployment and security of the state vis-à-vis the increasing number of irregular immigrants entering the shores of Sabah. Despite these social concerns, both communities are actually interdependent with each other.

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