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# LSD

LAW, SOCIETY & DEVELOPMENT

Nama ku Dewi  
asal Sukabumi  
aku terbang hari Sabtu 16 Jan 2010  
sampai di kantor abubabi jam 11 malam minggu  
hari minggu aku gak di ambil ama majikan dari Senin  
aku di ambil ama majikan. I kira 2 hari aku di  
di pulangi ke kantor. Sekarang aku di kantor  
udah 17 hari. entah kapan aku akan dapat majikan lagi  
berapa baruk nya nasib ku ini? hai kenan yang sama  
nasib kalian seperti aku.

## Female Migrant Workers in Global Migration

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LAW, SOCIETY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Department of Law, Society and  
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**E-MAIL**

digest.lsd@gmail.com

**EDITORIAL**

Female Migrant Workers in Global Migration **1**

**MAIN ARTICLES**

Justice and Global Migration:  
The Cases of Indonesian and United  
Arab Emirates **2**



The Polemic of Migrant  
Workers' Employment Agreement **10**



**INSPIRATION**

Feminist Ethnography  
in International Settings **16**



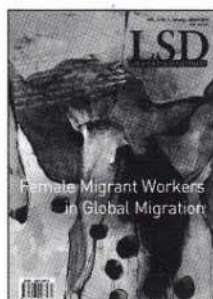
Union for Migrant Workers **25**



**REVIEW**

Akses Keadilan dan Migrasi Global: Kisah  
Perempuan Indonesia Pekerja Domestik  
di Uni Emirat Arab (Access to Justice and  
Global Migration: Stories on Indonesian Women  
Domestic Workers in Union Arab Emirates) **28**

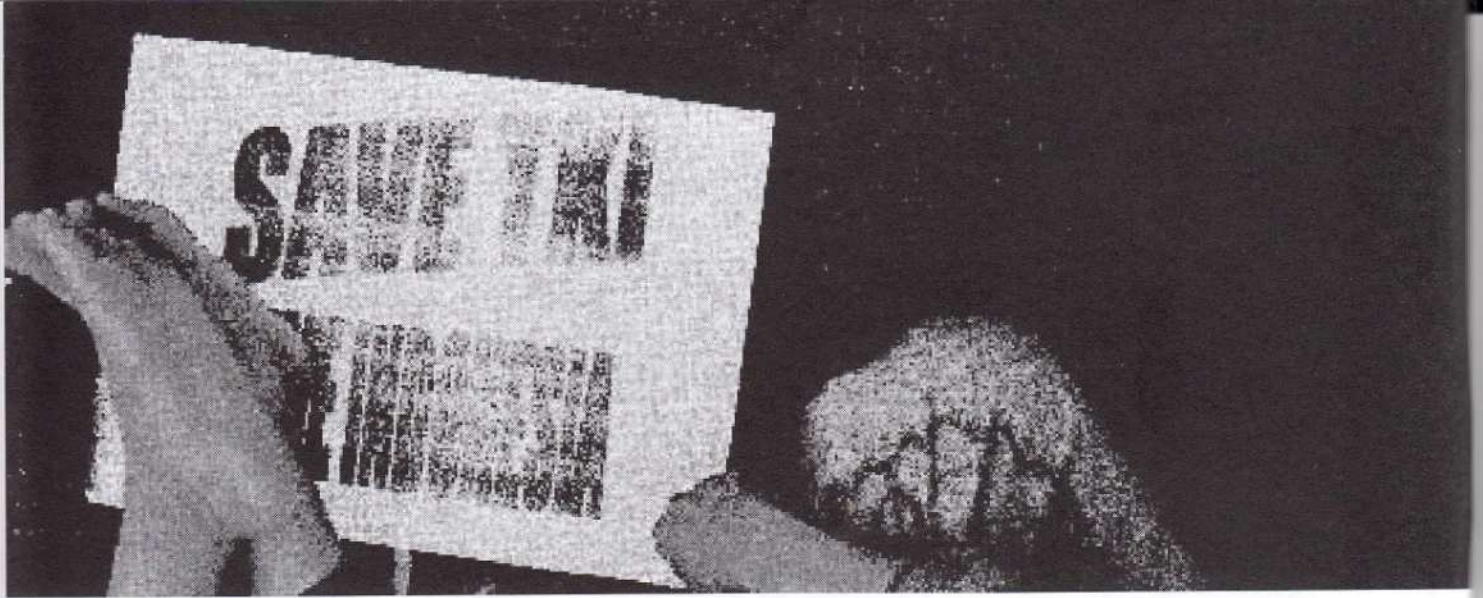
**COVER STORY**



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# FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY IN INTERNATIONAL SETTINGS

By Titiek Kartika Hendrastiti



\* Lecturer in Faculty of Social and Political Science University of Bengkulu. She studies women and gender in politic and public policies. Her latest study is on local women's movement in the context of post-colonial feminism. Beside teaching, she is also involve in local, national and Asia-Pacific women's movements.

## Introduction: Feminist Ethnography to Meet Limited Resources

This article is inspired by author's involvement in international migration study on Indonesian women domestic workers in one of the gulf countries, the United Arab Emirates.<sup>1</sup> In order to identify and analyze socio-legal issues faced by these workers, the main question or "the heart" of the study is the comprehensive overview of issues encountered by these workers in the international migration process. This question guides the flow of information and data collection on: the performance of Indonesian government representatives in the UAE, which UAE government agencies in charge of domestic workers affairs, employment agencies, employers, and what the view of some parts of the society in response to the existence phenomenon of domestic workers in their country.

1 The overall findings of the reseach have been compiled in a book by Sulistyowati Irianto, et. al. (2011) titled *Akses Keadilan dan Migrasi Global: Kisah Perempuan Indonesia Pekerja Domestik di Uni Emirat Arab* [Access to Justice and Global Migration: The Story of Indonesian's Women Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates], published by Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia



Although the reflection of research methodology of the study on access to justice and global migration of women domestic workers has been published, author considers it necessary to publish a paper which specifically dissects the feminist ethnography applied in the study. The urgencies of this paper, among others, are: first, the lack of studies with experience within international settings being disclosed as a part of the methodology. Usually, global migration studies, particularly of female domestic workers, are actually performed by Indonesian researchers domestically. Many studies on domestic workers in the destination country are usually performed by non-Indonesian researchers (foreign researchers). Second, the lack of papers by Indonesian researchers sharing experience within feminist ethnography context. There are several qualitative research books on feminist ethnography, for example Reinharz (2005), Denzin and Lincoln (2009), and Stephens (2009). Several writers of the issues of women in Indonesia also review feminist research, such as: Wieringa (1999), Baso (2005), Blackburn (2010)<sup>2</sup>; however, a paper on feminist ethnography in international settings, particularly the study of migrant domestic workers within the context of global migration, is rarely written. Therefore, this paper aims to fill that gap.

### About Feminist Ethnography

A study by Blackburn (2010) points to an indication of gap between educated women movement with resistance activities of women most at risk of being exploited, such as labors, migrant labors, and farmers. In social science, the studies of the silent community, the fringe groups "without" class, and research of new forms of consciousness that emerged in response to exploits are known as postcolonial studies. The contents of resistance against colonialism theory engender intense critical approach within postcolonial study; of which the research methodology is qualitative in nature. In qualitative methodology, feminist ethnography is one of the evolving and important branches (Stephens, 2009).

2 Blackburn suggested for further research and paper on women's issues based on observation and field study. His concern is the gap of women's study and women's movement of twentieth century. Issues of economic exploitation of women are not advocated in a timely manner due to limitation of reference source. This paper, which is based on feminist ethnographic study, aims to meet some of those gaps.

Reflecting on the basic ideals of feminism committed to end dominant masculinity discourse of oppressive systems and structures, feminist ethnography is a qualitative research approach utilized to explore the stories and experiences from everyday life of women and oppressed groups. Inspired by the view of Hammersley (1999) on ethnography, it can be concluded that feminist ethnography is not merely a set of methods applied to study the phenomenon of oppression, exploitation, and discrimination toward particular social group. It is also a quality and character of research oriented towards a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon. Therefore, it can be said that feminist ethnography is about consciousness research. This is the strength of the mandate of feminist studies, including feminist ethnography. Feminist ethnography provides space for feminist researchers to recommend life improvements for the subjects. Reinharz (2005) believes that conducting a study on everyday oppression suffered by subjects and using their thoughts and experiences as the basis of data are the cores of the path leading to theory construction while simultaneously attempt to change the lives of the subjects, who are predominantly women.

The study of access to justice and global migration in the United Arab Emirates begins with concerns of the issues surrounding the life context of women migrant domestic workers. In line with views of Marshall and Rossman (1989) and Stephens (2009), concerns originating from the issues of migrant domestic workers would then lead author into a systematic study and better understanding of the issues. The application of feminist perspectives in the analysis framework, and participatory methods without hierarchy and/or in favor of the thoughts and experiences of women as subjects are additional justifications for feminist ethnography. As one of the studies on feminist ethnography, these principles are applied in the study of access to justice and global migration. Author realizes that the findings from the study may become one of the many sources of information in efforts to improve and bring changes into the lives of domestic workers. This study also contributes to the advancement of research on women international migration from the cheapest labor sector in rich countries of the Gulf area, such as the United Arab Emirates.



## The Progress of Feminist Ethnography in International Settings

Stephens (2009:25) calls to mind that the international dimension of qualitative research is culture. At least two things are closely related to this cultural dimension: the questions of *what* and *how* in the research process, whether on the researchers or the object of research; these two questions would bring us to the issue of positioning, identity and voice.<sup>3</sup> Comparison is an important point in the discussion of culture.

Culture is an important dimension of qualitative research in an international setting because the research analysis is closely related to the concept of culture and explanation of the meaning of behavior. Culture also reflects many things, including the economy. In ethnographic research, culture often emerges as the foreground (and not just the background) whether in design, process of field study, writing and dissemination of findings. The importance of culture in ethnography is described as "*The whole nature of our research, we will argue, is culture*" (Stephens, 2009: 26).

The importance of cultural context in international settings can be highlighted in the study of access to justice and global migration in the United Arab Emirates.<sup>4</sup> This study has received a reaction from various parties, including those who are connected to this study. The most interesting learning experience during the process of fieldwork is cultural clash. There are some variations in the context of cultural clash, for example: (1) clash between bureaucratic culture and academic culture in the context of research in a foreign country, (2)

clash between original culture of researchers and the local culture, (3) cultural differences based on social class between researchers and domestic workers as well as between researchers with non-Arab parties.

It is author's opinion that conflicts between political interests and academic interests within the context of research in international settings can be included in cultural clash. At the beginning of the field research, the research team conducted a formal entry to the Embassy of Indonesia in Abu Dhabi and the Consul General at the Consulate General in Dubai. As a representation of the Indonesian government authorities in the United Arab Emirates, the bureaucrats warn the research team of "ethics" in the data collection. Investigators are asked not to find data from institutions that may bring about complications for the team – in turn for the embassy and the consulate general – and ultimately disrupt diplomatic relations between the two countries.<sup>5</sup> They recommend that research be conducted in *Rumah Aman* (Safe House), Employment Section, and the embassy staff only.<sup>6</sup> This is of course not in line with academic interests, because if a study is conducted in this manner, feminist ethnography will not be able to depict a holistic overview of positioning, identity, silent voices, as well as of cultural comparison – all of which must be the keys to the problem of conflict between employers and domestic workers.

Field data collection activities – interviews, observations in several places, recording, and taking pictures / portraits – receive a certain response. Pictures-taking is one example of the obvious cultural comparison. Not many Indonesians object about being photographed; many are jovial about it. This culture is what the team bring from the homeland. Portraits function as documentation, social images, and symbols that can paint a thousand words. The local culture, however, has a different concept regarding photography especially for and of local women. One should be cautious about taking pictures particularly of women from

3 Read also Denzin and Lincoln (2009)

4 A book by Denzin and Lincoln (2009), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, and a book by David Stephens (2009), *Qualitative Research in International Settings: A Practical Guide*, are books on research methodology which can be used as reference for qualitative study within international and multi-cultural settings. In their book, Denzin and Lincoln mentioned seven characteristics or momentum affecting a qualitative research which form an important framework for qualitative study in the future: (1) new rationality in assessing human knowledge; (2 and 3) crisis of representation and legitimation. The experience of the subject, not the representation, is the basis of the study; (4) In listening to "the voices" of various perspective, it should transcend gender, race, social class, ethnicity, and the development state of country of origin of the sources; (5) Recognition that a research has two agenda: moral and value-laden; (6) Research conceptualization should also consider ethnicity, vulnerability, and the truth; (7) There are two key aspects in qualitative research: a) new materials, methods, and interpretation, b) "...the centrality of the narrative or story in the telling of research..."

5 This message was conveyed in a manner suggesting that diplomatic relations between the two countries are more important than humanitarian issues, especially the violation of women's rights

6 In the end, the research team could not keep the promise. Snowballing process indicated that the field study consisted of a chain of meetings with people whose experience and line of work deal with domestic workers issues. Similarly, there was an "accidental" element: there are numerous happenstance which led investigators to meeting with invaluable sources of information



family with formal position in government. Even in women-only banquet or meetings – when they are not wearing *abaya* (long black robe) and *shela* – camera may not be used. From this instance investigators learn that taking photograph of women is a culturally sensitive matter, at times even prohibited. Images can be taken within an open-minded community and with permission, for example at university or in communities where the research team has become “insiders”, namely in the “big family” of Wan Abu.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Relations between researchers and subjects in international settings***

The focus of the study of access to justice and global migration is indeed the Indonesian women domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates; and researchers are Indonesians. In other words, the team conducted a study of fellow countrywomen in a foreign country. Therefore, the international settings are in place for both the researchers and the resource persons. The context of domestic workers, for example, is not only those who come from Indonesia. Domestic workers from various countries also form a tight-knit social group at the destination country, which must be observed in order to obtain a comprehensive overview of survival strategies. Other resource persons, such as employers, owners and staff of employment agencies, and even bureaucrats from the embassy are also international in nature because not all of the staff is Indonesian. It can also be said that the research is conducted in transnational settings as investigators also meet with the Labor Section of the Embassy of the Philippines.<sup>8</sup>

Female researchers and research on the issues of feminism are lacking in the United Arab Emirates, in particular on the issues of migrant domestic workers. Investigators discover that almost no research of Indonesian domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates has been conducted by Indonesian researchers. The identity labeling of Indonesian women in the United Arab Emirates is homogenous, i.e. housemaids. Therefore, some locals – with or without experience as employers – have a tendency to be condescending toward

Indonesian women, women from a poor country.<sup>9</sup> Although there are a few local citizens who express empathy for the situation of domestic workers, it is still very much accompanied by prejudice and self-justification.

There is an obvious class hierarchy in the relations between domestic workers and their employers. This is closely related to gender attributes and, subsequently, to the political and legal issues at macro level. The use of “housemaid” concept is a shadow of the old identity construction of “slavery”; the concept of female slavery is, in fact, ingrained in the local society and still exists even until now. Other than class issues, which is the concept of a modern society, the position of domestic workers as foreign employees in informal sectors indicates that these workers are deemed as non-member in this social hierarchy. Their affairs are not dealt by the Ministry of Labor, but by the Ministry of Interior. It means that for the local government, the domestic workers do not fall into the category of employment affairs; they are only *liyan* (“the others” or foreigners).

Although many families in Indonesia still live with housemaids, there are differences in practice between Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. Because the domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates fall into the context of global migration, the setting is of international nature. There is an apparent deep-seated cultural clash which is found as the core of the psychological and physical conflicts that underlie the many problems of migrant domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates. This aspect is not only valid for Indonesian workers, but also for those from other countries. Inevitably, investigators are involved in one of the clash incidences.

The cultural clash penetrates into all cultural facets, including the concept of sexuality. Discovering the root of gender inequality through gender value and sexuality is an interesting experience during the study. The responses of male interviewees to female investigator when discussing

9 Please refer to a paper by Vidhyandika D. Perkasa (2011), “*Perjalanan Berlanjut: Profil, Tataan, dan Struktur Sosial Institusional Uni Emirat Arab*” [The Journey Continues: Profile, Order, and Social Institutional Structure of the United Arab Emirates] in Sulistyowati Irianto, *Akses Keadilan dan Migrasi Global: Kisah Perempuan Indonesia Pekerja Domestik di Uni Emirat Arab* [Access to Justice and Global Migration: The Story of Indonesian’s Women Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates], p. 170-184

7 Wan Abu is a pseudonym

8 A field study to the Labour Section of the Embassy of the Philippines was carried out as a comparison on policies and management of migrant domestic workers



"sexuality", among others, are: surprise because it is uncommon for women asking men about it. The homogeneous identity labeling of Indonesian women as a housemaid also impairs the ability of some of the male interviewees to acknowledge the heterogeneity of Indonesian women, including the investigator. Their experience in communicating with Indonesian is usually with the housemaids. No wonder that some of the male resources persons make such comment: "*This is the first time I hear an Indonesian woman talk/ask about sexuality openly.*"<sup>10</sup>

The local language construction, expression, and behavior impart new knowledge for the investigators. The manifest of dominant masculine discourse in public places raises the awareness on the inferiority of the migrant domestic workers. In an informal conversation among Arab men, author overheard this type of question: "*how many women do you have...?*" This conversation was indeed among colleagues; however, considering the substance, it can be inferred that they are not old friends. Therefore it can be interpreted that such questions are common to be asked in public. For author, this indicates a cultural clash, because such question is not common in Indonesia.

There is always a process of adaptation in an international setting. The adaptation processes include understanding the local culture and accepting it as "different" perspective. The process of acceptance of the local culture<sup>11</sup> is a situational adaptation which reflectively can be interpreted as an awareness of one's transition from being an outsider to an insider. In the study of access to justice and global migration, the investigator's situational adaptation towards the international settings occurs in at least two aspects. *First*, the physical environment: hot and dry desert climate, the distance between data collection points, and the availability of public transportation especially for foreigners. This environment set the tone for Arab culture in social interaction, kinship, solidarity,

and the construction of other social institutions. *Second*, the cultural adaptation of investigators occurs through the process of interpretation and apprehension of Arab cultural settings, whether directly or through a mediator. The mediator could be an Arabic language interpreter or an ordinary person. In feminist ethnography, the existence of apprehension process – of the behavior of individuals or the society of United Arab Emirates – through the interpretation of "the others", who act as mediator, needs to be considered.<sup>12</sup> Although the mediator is an Indonesian, or understands the "culture" of Indonesia, there is always a possibility of distortion that may affect the interpretation of the findings. How close the interpretation is to its reality can be influenced by educational background, socio-political position, psychological factor, and the power of persuasion of the mediator.

Author would like to highlight the concept of *liyan* or the others/outside – **who is the liyan against whom**. Author saw and heard how a wife should not meet with another man and should "be hidden" from male guests. This is in contrast with women domestic workers whose bio details, even photographs without wearing veils, are on displays in folders at employment agencies for prospective

10 Please refer to a paper by Titiek Kartika and Sulistyowati Irianto (2011), "*Meneliti Perempuan Bangsa Sendiri di Negeri Asing: Suatu Refleksi Metodologis*", [Studying Fellow Countrywomen in a Foreign Country: A Methodological Reflection] in Sulistyowati Irianto, *Akses Keadilan dan Migrasi Global: Kisah Perempuan Indonesia Pekerja Domestik di Uni Arab Emirates* [Access to Justice and Global Migration: The Story of Indonesian's Women Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates]. p.

11 As a part of negotiation and adaptation processes, acceptance of the context of local culture and social values begins to emerge

12 "The other" or "mediator" could be a reference to: a) migrant domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates, both Indonesian and non-Indonesian; b) an agency, whether an Indonesian agency who happens to be in the United Arab Emirates during the study, an agency from Indonesia who opens a business in the United Arab Emirates, or a local agency; c) "the other" helping with translation, such as the embassy staff, whose identity are bureaucrats with a certain view/ understanding on domestic workers; d) the locals, such as: members of the Indonesia-Arab community, Indonesia-Arab people who migrated to the United Arab Emirates and/or become a permanent resident; e) Emiratis who understand Indonesian culture such as a staff from the university in Al-Ain who was willing to exchange ideas and enrich this study. Through her the investigators observed how the Bedouins (one of Arabic nomadic tribes) describe their own culture and their perception on Indonesian people and culture; f) employers and their view that Indonesian people is identical to domestic workers. The culture of domestic workers is a representation of Indonesian culture. The locals rarely bother to consider the heterogeneous reality of Indonesians, such as the basic differences in social class and geography which exist and are valid within Indonesian society. Hence, their assessment is simplistic and reductive, discounting the reality of social class and origin of the domestic workers.



employers. Domestic workers are *liyan* for people with higher social class.

Women not wearing *abaya* and *shela* are also viewed as *liyan*. An example is seen in an event in the Great Zayed Mosque, Abu Dhabi, where *sharia* police sternly rebuked women not wearing *abaya* and *shela* from the mosque hall. Many women were expelled from the mall of the magnificent and beautiful mosque just because they did not wear *abaya* after praying inside the mosque although they wore modest clothing and a veil. Why did they meander around in the hallway? They just wanted a shelter from the sweltering heat of about 50 degrees Celcius. The officers even harassed those women over small amount of hair showing out of their veil.

### **Decolonization in Feminist Ethnography: the Study of Insider/ Outsider**

According to positivism approach, the investigators are outsiders because of the required objectivity and neutrality in carrying out a study. On the other hand, indigenous researchers are often subjected to stereotypes and may encounter difficulties due to their position as an insider. This thinking is rooted in the theory of colonialism.

The feminist approach to research and other

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During their time in the shelter room, they are locked from the outside and the key is taken by the agency staff. When they eat and when they could leave the room depends on the agency staff's mercy. Usually they eat once or twice a day with portion size arbitrarily decided by the agency staff. When they are hungry and food is yet to be delivered, they jokingly say that they bang on adjacent/adjoining walls to the agency staff room to hasten the delivery of their food ration...

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critical studies apply the methodology of insider. A critical issue in the study of insider is a constant need for reflexivity (Stephens, 2009: 73). An insider research is actually beneficial, because in an outsider studies, researchers must build a rapport or position themselves as close as possible to the insider sphere. Nevertheless, as an insider, an investigator must employ critical thinking on the social processes that are being examined and on the linkage, quality, and the plenitude of data and analysis. Although critical thinking is also needed for outsiders, the difference is that insiders "*...have to be skilled at defining clear research goals and 'lines of relating' which are specific to the project...insider researchers also need to define closure and have the skill to say 'no' and the skills to say 'continue'...*"

As a study with international settings, the research conducted in the United Arab Emirates obviously places the investigators as outsiders. In the beginning of field study efforts are spent on building relationship. The accommodation provided for the investigators is in the research team's favor; it is right in the business center of domestic labor mobilization. Even the apartment, Mussafa, is also in the same building as the shelter for domestic workers. Therefore, efforts in the subsequent stages of field study are spent in a struggle to be insiders, most notably within the subjects of the study in the Mussafa apartment and Wan Abu agency.

Participatory observation on daily activity of Wan Abu, the owner of a labor mobilization agency, reveals his role as an *Arbab*, a father and patron for those around him, whether his staff, the domestic workers, and business partner from sending countries. His position as the godfather, in which his authority and power over people around him surpasses the business aspect, implies the protection he provides.<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon is one of the insider's assessments on the management style of labor mobilization business: the rules are masculine, familial relationship in business is in effect, and a mixture of traditional and modern management persists.

The closest and easiest learning process in a quest to be an insider within the life experience of migrant domestic workers occurs in the shelter house.

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<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon was also observed in other agencies visited by the research team. The pattern of relationship between staff and director is beyond that of a formal relation between superior – subordinate. It could be very personal and emotional.



### ***Metanarrative: The Strength of Feminist Ethnographic Research***

Metanarrative is a manuscript construction of the findings from observation and interview. Researchers assemble the narrative construction of all setting track activities and results into one set of story, one "finished" product; a product which could explain the basic research question, which is "what." Therefore, metanarrative is a unity of the imagination, the reflexive process over concept, assessment of meanings, and ultimately the skills of researcher in conducting the study.

The narrative power in feminist ethnographic research is its function as an adhesive of the various components of the study so that altogether they give a comprehensive meaning of the phenomenon. Stephen (2009) noted that a narrative written by a researcher is an important source in ethnography. Ethnography relies upon the power of narrative because it contains a series of subject voices and it implies how the study was conducted, how the narrative findings manage to effectively connect the "heart" of the objective and purpose of the study with the situation of the subject.

Feminist ethnographic study in the United Arab Emirates relies upon observation, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). By way of hastening the narrative of the whole observation processes, in-depth interview and FGD pose as the toughest challenges. Investigators are not entirely in control because the observation and interview continue to move in different directions. Interaction framework, weaved together by both the sources and the researchers, is the basic ingredient of the narrative. Therefore, interviews and observations are the result of negotiation and agreement between all parties involves.

The process of writing this field report is very challenging. In addition to replaying and listening to the digital recording device, author must concentrate on the thought and memory over the expression, body language, source's emotional state when interview was conducted, the settings of the interview, and visual situation when observation was underway. The aforementioned points are prerequisite in order to arrive to the descriptive product. As if narrative work is not a handful in itself, there are dozens of interviews and observations that require re-confirmation, verification, and revision. These processes need to be performed to reduce errors in interpretation because narrative is the analysis material of ethnography. Additionally, narratives of daily life experiences of migrant workers in destination country together with the

history of their migration journey to shelters, safe houses and home of their employers are the underlying strengths of feminist ethnography.

A narrative compiled from interviews illustrates various strategies of domestic workers in protecting themselves. A part of the narrative, although very interesting and important, can not be included in this report or other publications. In the realm of feminist ethnographic study, this is a very tough choice to make: presenting accurate and interesting data or presenting incomplete data in order to protect the domestic workers. This is one of the many points that emerge as a reflection on domestic workers as subjects. Feminist ethnographic study is not wholly owned by investigators/researchers; some of the knowledge belong to domestic workers. Researchers can not focus solely on scientific interests and advancement if they must gamble with the safety of the subjects. The 'cocktail' of knowledge of both parties should be used to make changes, improve life, and eliminate discriminatory practices.

### ***Snowballing: In Order to Answer "What" Question***

#### ***a. Friendship from Virtual World***

It began with communication via email with a sociologist from Zayed University, Dubai, followed by a meeting with other lecturers and female students at Zayed University. The first findings on tradition of having housemaids and stereotypes against domestic workers are discovered.

#### ***b. Safe House of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia – meeting Tami, Jamilah, and Sarti.***

Tami is an example of domestic workers who spends almost the entire period of her residency in the United Arab Emirates dwelling between hospitals and safe houses. A single mother who went overseas to support her son, she has been subjected to torture which has caused permanent physical disability, has been neglected in hospital for nine months, was arrested by the police because her employer accused her of escaping, and was imprisoned because she has no identification. The most poignant of the whole experience: "It is worse than physical pain because I was slandered and thrown into jail."

Jamilah is a domestic worker from Nusa Tenggara Timur. She was raped by her employer – she informed author how frequently the





Friends of Migrant Workers at the shelter Embassy in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Doc: UAE Research Team

crime of rape is perpetrated against domestic workers. It is important to note here, that it is difficult to report this type of crime to the police without a witness. "Justice" is sought by domestic workers through their own rationality, which in turn would worsen the severity of their situation.

Sarti, a burnt victim also told her story. Domestic workers in destination countries are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. Sarti was about to pray and her employer's children were playing with matches. While she was in the bathroom, the frightened children banged on the door and told her that there was a fire in the TV room. As it turns out, the room was full of smoke. Luckily she could save the four children although it was not easy to seek help at the apartment complex. It took her employer 30 minutes to come home. Sarti was examined at two police stations and stayed there for several days. She was picked up by the Indonesian embassy staff although she did not know who had contacted the embassy.

c. *The case of Sari: A Brief Meeting With Long-Lasting Impression.*

In feminist ethnographic methodology, the search for knowledge and instinct to protect occur simultaneously. Efforts to defend against discriminatory behavior should not be postponed until the end of the study. The

research on domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates gives a very valuable lesson to author in conducting feminist ethnographic study. There is a momentum of "defensive action" during data collection process. The narrative of meeting with Sari reveals the dispute of many parties: domestic workers together with researchers – agency staff – safe house staff. Sari ran away from the agency office barefooted in the scorching heat of 50 degrees Celcius because she could not stand being beaten by the staff. The safe house staff was inclined on returning Sari to the agency or transferring her to another agency. As she was frightened and anxious over being returned to the agency, researchers took a stand to defend her. Harsh disagreement on the physical abuse, human right principles, and the right against torture ensued.

An intervention can be dangerous. From the "dispute drama" at the safe house, it was decided that Sari still had to go back to the agency office in Al Ain. On one hand, the agency staff learned what it is like to be in a foreign country, oppressed and in despair. On the other hand, it could lead to another horror; Sari might get worse treatment after the "pressure" from Indonesian people to the agency staff at the embassy. Sari's situation may worsen if the agency staff continues the



beating because she had embarrassed them and caused them to lose face and "lose" the argument at the embassy.

d. *From the Interpreter to the Supreme Court:*

One of the snowballing sources is an interpreter from the supreme court in Al Ain. Through her connection, the researchers gained access to the court. She arranged a meeting with the Chairman of the Supreme Court. The researchers finally met and exchanged ideas with one of the first female judge in the United Arab Emirates. Through this snowballing story the researchers obtained data on the system and judicial practice, as well as access to justice in the United Arab Emirates, far more detailed than those that can be obtained from publication materials.

e. *The Diaspora of a Madam Doctor.*

Through Wan Abu, the researchers met with a doctor, an Arab woman who spent her childhood in Indonesia and has an important position within the royal court in the United Arab Emirates. After a long conversation, the doctor finally understood the focus of the research being conducted. She then offered to arrange a meeting between the researchers and the Arab-Indonesia women community. From the meeting the researchers discovered interesting findings on the culture of Arab-Indonesia community, most of whom are also a consumer who employ domestic worker services.

The answer to "what" question is a form of our knowledge of the world, which is sharpened and deepen by personal meeting with resource persons and by theory from literatures.<sup>14</sup> The previous is the so-called tacit knowledge, while the latter is the formal theories. Both shape past experiences and experiences gained during the research process.

### Conclusion: Knowledge Building from Feminist Ethnography

Feminist ethnography has a potential role in knowledge building, especially knowledge of the life experiences of women and oppressed groups. Their experience is not only a description of the voice of subordinates, the voice of different matter

– which is associated with social structure and history; it is also a form of knowledge that evolves through dialectical process. The dialectics include construction and deconstruction which help many people to understand the process in the context of reciprocal between macro and micro settings. This is the potential of feminist ethnography. ■

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14 Read also Denzin and Lincon (2009) and Stephens (2009)