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To cite this article: Leslie Butt, Harriot Beazley & Jessica Ball (2017) Migrant Mothers and the Sedentary Child Bias: Constraints on Child Circulation in Indonesia, *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 18:4, 372-388, DOI: [10.1080/14442213.2017.1346699](https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2017.1346699)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2017.1346699>



Published online: 24 Aug 2017.



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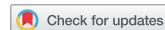
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Migrant Mothers and the Sedentary Child Bias: Constraints on Child Circulation in Indonesia

Leslie Butt, Harriot Beazley and Jessica Ball

Across the Asia-Pacific region, increasing numbers of women are migrating transnationally for low-skill work while their children remain in home communities, fostered by family or neighbours. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in 2014–15 in Lombok, Indonesia, this paper describes a sedentary child bias within Indonesian policies, and how this bias constrains migrant mothers' choices regarding the care and well-being of their children. Vignettes describing the challenges of caregivers in Lombok families illustrate how the absence of social services, local forms of child fostering and limits on transnational adoption and child mobility together significantly curtail migrant mothers' opportunities to arrange optimal support for their children while working abroad. The sedentary child bias in Indonesia raises issues around limits on the circulation of children that are relevant to the wider Asia and Pacific region, where temporary female labour migration and concomitant mother–child separation is on the rise.

Keywords: Mother–Child Separation; Feminisation of Migration; Fostering; Adoption Policies; Child Welfare; Indonesia

Introduction: Migrating Mothers and Non-Circulating Children

The mobility of persons across borders is a defining feature of the modern era. Since the 1970s, low-skill migrant workers have increasingly crossed borders to work, mostly in insecure, poorly paid and transient jobs. Families in which a parent works outside the country where their children reside have been called 'transnational families'

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(Mazzucato 2015). However, geographically, if not socially and psychologically, transnational labour migration tends to produce fragmented, scattered families (Coe 2014; Parreñas 2005). A parent may work overseas while children remain in the care of the sedentary parent, or both parents may migrate, leaving children in the care of relatives, neighbours or friends (in this paper, referred to as 'fostering'). The divided migrant family is part of a growing trend towards parent-child separation: in 2002, the World Bank estimated that ten per cent of children across the globe lived apart from their parents (Ensor & Gozdzik 2010).

Over the past two decades in the Asia-Pacific region, mothers have increasingly been the parent leaving home to work overseas. A feminisation of migrant labour finds women taking up low-skill jobs in agriculture or industrial sectors, or as domestic workers and caregivers within a broader 'care' industry (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2004; Piper 2008). Overseas employers require migrants on temporary work visas to travel alone, without family: children are seen as inimical to adults being effective workers (Glass, Petrzela & Mannon 2011). In consultation with their families, women typically leave their children at home in the care of the husband, grandparents or extended family while they work, and send remittances home to support the family.

This article problematises the normalisation of the concept of a sedentary, stay-behind child who is separated from his or her transnationally mobile working mother. The normalisation of mother-child separation is of pressing concern for the Asia-Pacific region, where international laws addressing the rights of children have gained traction over the past three decades. Promotion of parent migration by regional states may be at odds with child-focused goals found in treaties such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the 1993 Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Inter-country Adoption (Hague), in which geographic proximity of parents, and family stability, are accepted as key to child well-being. Children should not travel with working parents, are entitled to a 'family environment' and should be cared for 'at home' (cf. Introduction, current issue). To achieve coherence, states must grapple with often competing objectives of their commitments to children's rights, alongside national economic strategies that encourage migration. In nations such as Indonesia, neoliberal economic priorities and rationalities promoting the migration of mothers often clash with liberal-democratic values that emphasise family stability and child protection.

In Indonesia, the country's high and rapidly increasing rate of female migration offers the chance to explore how a confluence of policies shape ideas about the potential mobility and circulation of children. By exploring Indonesian policies around motherhood, migration, fostering and adoption, we identify some of the roots of naturalised assumptions about child sedentarism and the role of these assumptions in promoting an idealised, home-based child citizen within a new global landscape. We suggest that values around child sedentarism in Indonesia draw from shifting ideas about women's work, from idealised notions about cultures of fostering and from constraints on the transnational circulation of children. The social construction

of the ideal child as a sedentary person is normalised through dominant discourses and values within institutions, from the family to the nation-state. These values define which kind of child may be allowed to circulate globally, and which kind of child may not.

To elucidate assumptions about sedentary children in Indonesia, we draw on results of fieldwork carried out in 2014–15 on birth registration in transnational families in three high migrant-sending communities in East Lombok, Indonesia. East Lombok is one of the poorest districts in Indonesia, with a multi-generational history of migration and an increasing number of migrating mothers. Our research on family responses to children's needs allowed for close exploration of the impact of policies on experiences and practices of mothers and caregivers in communities where migration offers one of the few opportunities for income generation available to families. The research team hosted knowledge-sharing workshops, interviewed migration experts and advocates, carried out participant observation in communities and conducted in-depth interviews with a total of 42 mothers, fathers and children in 21 migrant families in three separate villages (Ball, Butt & Beazley 2015).

This article focuses on three distinct ways Indonesia's policies regarding migration and the circulation of children normalise and idealise a sedentary child. First, we highlight Indonesia's aggressive promotion of the transnational migration of mothers as low-wage workers alongside a dearth of national social policy aimed at supporting migrant families. Second, we describe the state's reliance on family fostering in local communities. Third, we describe Indonesia's opposition to in-country or international adoption and its implications for the limited movement of at-risk children of transnational mothers. Rather than emphasising the ethnographic contexts of the Lombok locales where children of migrants and caregivers live, we emphasise structural frameworks and how these constrain individual and family choice. We recognise that migrating Indonesian mothers have a capacity to take action around work and child-rearing which is rooted in personal agency (Constable 2014; Khoo et al. 2015) and that mothers' capacities are mediated by important, local sociocultural formations. Notwithstanding, we describe how policies can impact individual lives and subjectivities in multiple ways. We offer vignettes of the experiences of two caregivers in Lombok to illustrate how national policies can impose deep constraints on mothers' and caregivers' capacity for agentive action. We argue that a sedentary child bias limits the choices that mothers from Lombok may wish to make about how to raise their child, who should raise their child and whether or not to raise their child themselves.

Mobile Mothers as an Asia-Pacific Problem

Between the 1950s and 1990s, the world witnessed a large increase in low-skill workers migrating from the global South to the global North, which coincided with the period of accelerated globalisation processes—a gradual and intensified integration of the majority of countries into a single global economy (Piper & Roces 2003). Weakened nation-states within this economic regime have benefited considerably from

remittances sent home by migrants who typically leave family behind to work overseas (World Bank 2013). Since the 1970s, migration has been increasingly shaped by contract labour rather than by family migration. An 'Asia-Pacific migration system' has emerged, where groups of countries develop reciprocity and linkages between migration, labour, capital, goods and information (Goss & Lindquist 2000). Global demands for low-skill female labour in many countries has led to a feminisation of transnational migration in the contemporary Asia-Pacific region. A recent estimate suggests that women comprise more than 50 per cent of low-skill migrants leaving Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam to seek work primarily within Asia and the Middle East (Lam & Yeoh 2016). For women migrants from the Pacific Islands nations of Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa and Tuvalu, the most popular destinations are Australia and New Zealand (Connell 2015).¹ Typically, low-skill jobs are obtained through short-term temporary work visas and offer poor wages, no job security and restrictive accompaniment policies with no possibility of family reunification (ILO 2013).

Transnational labour migration is a livelihood strategy used by many families in the region to improve family circumstances in what Connell (2015, 80) describes as 'a rare and important outlet for the relatively and absolutely poor'. Accurate numbers of mothers and fathers involved in transnational migration are difficult to calculate because a large proportion of migrants are undocumented. Estimates of the numbers of children who stay behind when their mothers migrate are also difficult to tally, but the population is significant and growing. In the Philippines, for example, around three million children live separated from one or both migrating parents (Cortes 2015). In China around 60 million children live separated from one or both parents (Zhou et al. 2015). The impact of mothers' prolonged absences from their children has become the subject of increasing concern, as countries struggle to calculate development opportunities of migration in terms of remittances, but also in terms of the wellness of the youngest generation. Some research has documented positive impacts of migration on children, arguing that emotional well-being is not overly compromised and that remittances help with material needs and improve the quality of family life (for example Mazzucato 2015; McKay 2012, 2007). Other studies have documented ambiguous or negative impacts including on children's health, education, psycho-social well-being and safety (for example Cortes 2015; Hoang et al. 2015; Parreñas 2005; Taufatofua 2011; Wentworth, Agarwal, current issue).

In Indonesia, as many as nine million Indonesian migrants work overseas, and approximately 76 per cent of documented workers are women. The primary destination countries for Indonesian women are Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, and 90 per cent of women migrants are employed as domestic workers (Andrevski & Lyneham 2014; Khoo et al. 2014). Around one million children are estimated to stay behind in Indonesia while one or both parents migrate (SMERU 2014). Scholarship exploring the impact of the feminisation of migration on Indonesian children suggests Indonesian children may not fare as well as children in some

other Southeast Asian nations (Beazley, Butt & Ball *n.d.*; Hoang, Yeoh & Wattie 2012; SMERU 2014). Ethnographic insights gleaned from our close study of family experiences in Lombok, described below, point to some of the implications of a national sedentary child bias on caregivers and on the stay-behind children of migrant mothers from rural villages in East Lombok.

Lombok's Migrating Mothers

Lombok is a small rural island in the Indonesian province of West Nusa Tenggara. Lombok is characterised by high population growth, low wages, low education and employment, food insecurity, falling agricultural productivity, poor communications and poor health including high infant mortality (Ball, Butt & Beazley 2015). One of the highest 'sending areas' of transnational migrants in Indonesia, the district of East Lombok is particularly impoverished, with almost no government investment in job-creating industries. Transnational migration is estimated at 100,000 migrants per year from the island, although an acknowledged high rate of undocumented migration makes it difficult to establish exact figures (ILO 2013).

Stay-behind children in Lombok villages typically live in individual nuclear family households situated either near homes of other relatives, or within larger compounds under a patriarchal compound head. Because marriage is patrilineal and patrilocal, married women usually permanently relocate from their family home to their husband's compound and raise their children there. If a mother leaves for work, responsibility for care of the child is usually negotiated within the father's family first. The father, a paternal or maternal grandmother or other female relative, including an older sibling or aunt, may care for the child.

When mothers consider leaving Lombok, they find they face considerable state, family and personal pressure to go. First, the Indonesian government promotes labour migration as a development strategy because migration encourages an influx of overseas capital through remittance payments, which help address poverty and unemployment (IOM 2010, 10). In recent years women have become the main contributors of international remittances to Indonesia, which totalled seven billion USD in 2013, equalling one per cent of the country's GDP, and second only to mining as a source of foreign monies coming into the country (World Bank 2014). The government has invested in a special airport terminal in the capital to process the large numbers of departing and returning migrants, where a banner calling transnational migrants 'heroes' is on prominent display (Chan 2014).

Indonesia has a long history of valuing a woman who supports her husband's success and her children's development, and motherhood is already valorised in state institutions such as wives' organisations for military and civil servant families. While national values encourage women to prioritise their family's well-being, state authorities have stretched ideals of good mothering to include working overseas, extolling migrant women as 'model mothers', 'exchange rate heroes' and 'heroes of

development' (Chan 2014; Silvey 2004). Chan (2014) describes how the national migration regulation board aggressively recruits women workers during local visits by reminding them of their need for sacrifice, self-discipline and duty to help family. As a result, migrant women and their families increasingly understand what it means to be 'good' and 'successful' in terms of their ability to send remittances to their children. The theme of sacrifice stands out in how mothers articulate their commitments, exemplified by one respondent in a study of the experiences of migrating Indonesian mothers: 'I sacrificed for my children, by leaving them behind and surviving over there' (Dewi 2011, 213).

A second source of significant pressure for women to migrate increasingly comes from the woman's family, as remittances enable families to buy food, pay school fees and build better homes (see Chan 2017). State and family values thus often converge, creating strong pressure for a woman to leave her children at home in order to achieve goals that the state, the family and the woman all want—a prospering family.

For migrant mothers there are 'double shift' expectations around providing domestic services overseas while retaining responsibilities for caring for children at home. While employed as a domestic worker in an overseas household, the migrant mother is often expected to pretend not to have her own children, engaging in a form of stratified reproduction by carrying out the work of mothering the children of her affluent employer, while others care for her own children at home (Parreñas 2005, 2008). Many migrant mothers nonetheless call or text their children, and seek to oversee homework activities and address practical needs to ensure the adequate care of children who stay behind (Dewi 2011; see also McKay 2012).

Third, Indonesian mothers themselves are often eager to migrate. While some women discuss options with family and choose not to go, expectations of compliance with oppressive gender norms can sometimes encourage women to seek work out of country (Beazley 2007; Khoo et al. 2014). More commonly, leaving home may offer women new opportunities, a temporary or permanent escape from difficult family situations, from stringent cultural expectations regarding sexuality and marriage or from difficult or abusive partners (Chan 2017; Graham 2008; Williams 2007).

The pressures facing migrant mothers, however challenging, tell only part of a family's story. For most of the caregivers we observed in our interviews, conditions fall short of an idealised, secure and supportive home base for stay-behind children. On the contrary, conditions for care are precarious and often insecure because the sedentary child bias in policy curtails options. In the following sections we use ethnographic vignettes to describe two struggling grandmother caregivers' experiences in order to show how a forced sedentarism destabilises children's lives and exposes them to significant risk. The first vignette from a village in East Lombok describes the local pressures on a woman to migrate, the place of fostering in migration and the absence of social support for families in need. The vignette encapsulates the experiences of many respondents from our study for whom migration did not work out as

planned, when extended family fostering was the only option for care and when no other systems provided assistance in coping with the challenges of mother–child separation.

Vignette: The Sedentary Fostered Child when there are no Remittances

Anis² left high school after her second year in order to marry her young boyfriend. After having a child shortly after marriage, Anis was permanently abandoned by her husband when their baby was two months old. The family decided she needed to pursue domestic work in Saudi Arabia. Anis was recruited by a local broker who put her through a migration training program and arranged for a contract caring for children in a household in Saudi Arabia. Together the family agreed Anis would leave her eight-month-old daughter in the care of her mother Hussema, a widow. Anis sent remittances home for a time. After falling pregnant as a result of being sexually assaulted by her employer, she was deported back to Indonesia, in accordance with immigration policy in Saudi Arabia forbidding pregnant domestic workers from remaining in the country. Back in Lombok, Anis gave birth to her mixed-ethnicity second child. When this child was six months old, Anis returned to Saudi Arabia as a domestic worker, in part to avoid the shame and stigma within the community around her second child's parentage. Both of her children remained with their grandmother Hussema, who planned to rely on remittances from Anis to feed and care for the two children. Anis did not contact Hussema after she arrived in Saudi Arabia the second time, and according to Hussema, since that time Anis had completely disappeared. She sent no remittances home. When asked if Hussema had contacted a migrant advocacy NGO to help track her daughter, she responded, 'I am too embarrassed. I have asked neighbours to help me contact her employer in Saudi Arabia, but we have heard nothing'. What little money Hussema had saved was spent trying to locate her daughter. Now, three years after her daughter's disappearance and with no income to assist with household finances, Hussema struggles to find funds to send her grandchildren to school. She qualifies for a government rice subsidy and free health care as hers is one of the poorest households in the village, but her only other income comes from manually de-stemming large quantities of chili peppers, for which she earns about 1USD per day.

As the above vignette shows, a grandmother's care options in Lombok are significantly shaped by restrictive accompaniment laws in destination countries such as Saudi Arabia. These laws require childrearing and transnational labour to take place in different locales and to be mutually exclusive. The migration industry within Indonesia reinforces this norm. Official training centres and national migration processing bureaus provide no childcare for trainees during their required three-month pre-departure training. A new legal framework developed in 2014 to ensure children have 'the right to child care' as part of the Indonesian Child Protection Law adopted in 2002 has yet to pass, and there are no clear guidelines for migrant child care (Ball, Butt & Beazley 2015).

For Lombok mothers who leave Indonesia to work overseas, the state provides no programs to support the well-being of their stay-behind children. There are no systems in place for grants, free schooling, after-school care, income-generation assistance or practical support for caregivers who foster stay-behind children.³ There are no systems to support families when remittances never arrive or the migrant never returns. There are also no systems to support children conceived or born overseas while working (Butt, Ball & Beazley 2016). On the contrary, the few social programs in villages like Hussema's favour sedentary children whose parents are present. Prenatal health services and postnatal infant care, for example, are organised by local health units which link health cards to a region (cf. Wentworth, this issue). Important new national initiatives to promote birth registration similarly situate registration processes within sub-district offices whose systems are designed around long-term sedentary household registration (Ball, Butt & Beazley 2015).

These systemic omissions drive home the extent to which family fostering is expected to fill the gap in services within local communities. One of the most important assumptions embedded in national values around the sedentary child is that kin of the migrant mother will care for children in the child's family home. Family fostering is therefore understood as sufficient for the child's emotional and developmental needs.

The assumptions about fostering build on a long-standing, widespread tradition of fosterage in Lombok, as in the rest of Indonesia. Fostering has been widely documented in Sulawesi (Schrauwers 1999) and Java (Newberry 2014, 2010). A 'foundational flexibility' around kinship and parenting is a valued cultural disposition, Newberry (2014, 81) argues, one evident in the high mobility of children between Indonesian households. Some fostering is rooted in Dutch colonialism where, until 1949, families brought children into colonial households to work as servants (Schrauwers 1999). With education increasing in value, Lombok children may circulate through homes of more affluent family members, where they pay for their room, board and school fees by helping with domestic chores such as laundry and housecleaning.⁴

There are many advantages to informal child fostering. Grant and Yeatman (2014) remind us that fostering offers a risk-coping mechanism for households to offset economic or demographic hardships, to take advantage of resources available through extended kin networks and to redistribute the costs and benefits of childbearing across the extended family. Leinaweaver's (2014) transnational survey of informal fostering concludes that fostering can be beneficial when a child remains in a fixed locale, and when large numbers of people provide affective kin support within a single household.

Ideally, the biological mother, the sedentary child and the foster caregiver will interact in what has been described as a 'transnational care triangle', where they communicate and support each other in the project of caring for a child in what is presumed to be a relatively fixed locale (Graham et al. 2012). In our research on the island of Lombok, however, we observed widespread multi-generation fostering. Many of the migrant parents who had arranged fostering for their children with their parents or kin were themselves fostered by others when young. We observed multiple examples of a fragmented, circulating nature of local fostering. We visited several homes where

neighbours or non-kin cared for children, and other homes where a single female caregiver had multiple children of migrating relatives and neighbours in her care. The designated foster parents themselves were also often absent, and temporary stand-in caregivers benefited by having foster children do household chores. The give and take of who looks after whom often changed as a result of family needs or crises, and not in response to the needs of the child. Thus the putatively 'sedentary' child did not necessarily change villages, but often moved between different homes on a regular basis, and there were frequent shifts in terms of who took on responsibility for care, including adolescent children looking after younger children.

Although our research in Lombok found about half of the fostered children in our study were well-cared for and benefited from remittances sent home by their parent(s), we also found most children were vulnerable emotionally, socially and physically. A recurring theme in our study was the emotional toll of mothers' migration on stay-behind children, including emotional lability, behavioural volatility, social alienation and high school absenteeism. One caregiver described allowing children whose parents were overseas to come and eat and sleep in her house. As with many migrant families we interviewed in one village, these children did not attend school and roamed the forest during the day, looking for berries to eat and wood to sell as fuel in the village. The community was challenged to care for children who were not attached to one household in particular and who were viewed as having been 'neglected' by their parents (Beazley, Butt & Ball *n.d.*). These examples show how difficult it can be to foster children adequately in situations of family fragmentation and extreme poverty. There were simply not enough resources within communities to care for all stay-behind children.

In sum, in Lombok national laws and institutions are organised to make it easy for women to work overseas, but with no concessions or supplements to support the caregivers looking after children who stay behind. Many migrant mothers like Anis choose to rely on fostering, in part because no other options are available. Anis's decision to leave her children with her mother Hussema accords with contemporary Indonesian policies to place financial burdens for support of stay-behind children on migrating families. A child who is fostered consistently runs the risk of being placed in a situation that may not be in his or her best interests. Fostering, in short, offers a low-cost way for the Indonesian state to benefit from the remittances women send home, without assuming the social costs of the migrant mother's absence. Despite overt state political symbolism promoting mother-child nurturing, the state exploits the tradition of child fostering by failing to acknowledge risks to the child and family. Remittances from mothers' transnational labour provide a lucrative avenue for international funds to subsidise family social service needs.

Adoption Policy and Migration: A Hidden Sedentary Bias

The previous vignette illustrated how a legacy of child fostering intersects with state policies promoting low-skill migration and an absence of state services, resulting in

conditions in caregiver homes which fall short of an idealised care environment. Alongside accepting restrictive migration policies and an over-reliance on fostering, Indonesia also imposes sedentarism on children through a third avenue: its in-country and intercountry adoption laws. These laws place limits on the formal circulation of children in-country and transnationally. National adoption policies provide insights into the sedentary child bias in Indonesia and the disenfranchisement such policies impose on migrant mothers' relationships with their children.

Adoption is rarely assessed in the context of migration (but see Shachter, current issue). Partly in response to the Hague Convention which brought adoption into the human rights arena, post-1993 adoption patterns have moved away from an aggressive funnelling of children from dependent colonies or postcolonial nations to adopting parents based in coloniser nations. Instead, a new pattern is emerging of countries in economic crisis who send children abroad for adoption (Briggs & Marre 2009). In a polemic essay, Briggs (2010) argued the intersections between adoption and migration illustrate economic interdependencies between countries. Briggs suggests the value of a child crossing international borders in the current neoliberal era is part of a 'privatised welfare system' for the sending country. Adoption is the neoliberalisation of child welfare, she posits, where deeply disenfranchised countries allow impoverished children to be placed in private families in wealthier, adopting nations, rather than provide the services which can support them to remain with their birth families.

The case of Indonesia offers a provocative partial counter-argument to the claim that international adoption provides a way to circumvent the costs of social services for disenfranchised nations. Despite its status as a developing nation, Indonesia has established exceptionally narrow restrictions on international adoption. Indonesia has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but not the Hague Convention. The most recent adoption law, passed in 1994, curtails intercountry adoption of Indonesian children.⁵ Historically and in the present day, Indonesia has had extremely low rates of international adoption. From 1974 to 1984, Indonesia was a source country for Dutch adoptions but overall totals were small (Hoksbergen 1991). Numbers since 1994 have declined steadily. In 1999, for example, only 43 children were formally adopted. Of these 43 children, 33 were adopted within Indonesia, and only ten were placed in families outside the country. This rate of less than two children under the age of five adopted per every million children is one of the lowest per capita adoption rates in the world (UN 2009).⁶ This is not surprising given Indonesia's strict adoption laws. Indonesia requires parents to be married, to be of the same religion of the child, to be aged 30–45 and to have been a permanent resident of Indonesia for a minimum of two years. Adoptions are closed, and the birth mother does not retain any rights.

One factor contributing to Indonesia's tight control over adoption since the 1990s is concern over international adoption as a cover for human trafficking (Komandjaja 2005). On the international stage, Indonesia rejects international adoption, claiming that it has the capacity to care and provide for its own children within the country. These claims falter, however, when viewed within the context of transnational families

where failed migration and failed fostering are known to occur. As previously noted, state services are not developed to support the needs of low-income migrating families. Yet there is also a lack of in-country adoption provision for the children of migrant mothers who die, disappear, abandon their children or who struggle to care for them. There are only seven registered adoption agencies or orphanages in the country (Yayasan Sayap Ibu 2016). In visits to Lombok orphanages where adoptions can be coordinated, we learned not all families are welcome to place children there. One well-established orphanage only allowed legally married couples under difficult circumstances to place a child. Children of migrant parents working overseas were not welcome because the religious conservatism undergirding the orphanage would not accommodate single parents, divorced parents or children who had been abandoned by parents. A second orphanage in Jakarta, set up in 2009 specifically to accept children born to overseas domestic workers, had taken in 60 infants in the seven years they were housed at Jakarta's special migration arrival terminal. However, they struggled to coordinate formal adoption of some of those children through government agencies because the process is onerous and lengthy. Only two children were formally adopted in 2016, and two others in 2015.⁷ In short, policies around formal adoption in-country and internationally are not options for migrant mothers, even where income levels are clearly inadequate for raising fostered children.

As several of our research respondents were migrant mothers without husbands, their position was similar to birth mothers studied in other countries who were able to choose adoption as a childrearing option. Kim's (2010) study of South Korean adoption processes described birth mothers' responses to international recruiters within the context of a patriarchal Korean value set which harshly stigmatised single mothers, and where social programs to support single mothers were absent. Similarly, Roby and Matsumara (2002) found some mothers from the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) accepted the idea of international adoption, imagining better lives for their children. Aggressive recruiters fostered some of the misconceptions that later caused many birth mothers' distress in both South Korea and the RMI. However, equally important was the absence of basic state services which would allow women to make informed choices based on the possibility of local social assistance for single parents. The choice of intercountry adoption was viable for RMI and Korean women because of a dearth of local alternatives. In contexts where social services are undeveloped, intercountry adoption could offer mothers, families and children more opportunities to create a good life for their children.

In interviews with migrant parents and caregivers in East Lombok, adoption or placing children in a nearby orphanage arose in conversations about alternative care for children whose parents could no longer look after them. The option was rejected by most. Families who had resources stated they would ensure their child remained within the family, and in particular within familiar fostering relationships. However, these choices are shaped in part by the absence of alternatives. During fieldwork in Lombok we observed several examples of involuntary childrearing where the caregiver expressed considerable resentment at the lack of options available for the

children in her care. If in-country or intercountry adoption were a viable alternative to fostering, some respondents said they would consider it. The following case study of Itek and her grandchildren illustrates the impact of a lack of choice around adoption for an ageing grandmother.

Vignette: Forced Fostering and a Grandmother's Conundrum

Itek cares for her two grandchildren aged seven and five while her daughter Donna works in Malaysia. Abandoned by her husband after the birth of their second child, Donna borrowed money locally to make the trip to Malaysia. As Donna does not send remittances home, Itek was left without funds to care for her grandchildren. Itek, illiterate and isolated, is the primary caregiver and makes do only by selling firewood gathered in the forest at a street stall. She brings her grandchildren with her to the forest to help gather wood instead of sending them to school. Itek expressed feelings of desperation because she is obliged to care for her two grandchildren in her small, mud-floored rattan wall hut without access to other resources. Donna wanted to arrange for the children to be placed in care in Lombok, but they had heard that conditions in an orphanage were worse than they could provide for the children themselves. Donna also wanted to place the children for adoption internationally, imagining for them a better life in another country. Lacking practical knowledge about dealing with agencies or bureaucrats, both Itek and Donna did not know how to make that happen. As *orang kecil* (literally, little people, that is to say 'unimportant people'), Itek did not feel the children's needs would be given consideration in any case.

Donna met a man in Malaysia, and they made plans to marry. While Itek wanted her daughter to take the children to live with them in Malaysia, Malaysian laws forbid it, the logistics of obtaining passports were overwhelming, the costs were unmanageable, and according to Itek, Donna did not seem to want her children to live with her in Malaysia. Itek remained forced to provide care in a precarious situation where there was no money for school, little money for food and no resources to do anything to transform their situation. Itek displayed a rare flash of fury in a culture that values calmness and the careful management of emotions: "The children are not happy. But my daughter, she in fact is very happy, she is married and living in Malaysia. Meanwhile, I am tired and never ever get to rest!"

This case illustrates the potential that adoption might offer to some families when fostering is not a viable option. In making this argument, we do not necessarily condone international adoption. However, we show that by closing off the option at a national level, and by providing no support for in-country adoption, Indonesia encourages transnational mobility of mothers but provides no options for a similar mobility for children. One reason foster care is hard for so many migrant families is because decisions about the 'best interests of the child' can never look beyond the borders of Indonesia. The sedentary, in-country bias of Indonesia's policies regarding fostering and adoption exacerbates conditions of desperation created by the lack of important social services to support caregivers in migrant families.

Conclusion

The experiences of sedentary children and mobile mothers in Indonesia illustrate the challenges of mother–child separation where a sedentary child bias strongly shapes family practice. The Indonesian case depicts a particular confluence of policy, values and economic imperatives. The state’s enabling of transnational migration combined with strong exhortations around women’s obligations as dutiful mothers creates a compelling narrative that many family members support. Local cultural values, especially around fostering and ideas of a shared responsibility for childrearing, replicate and reinforce the state’s tendency to normalise and take for granted the place of fostering in planning for migration. The forced sedentarism that is embedded in a denial of other forms of child circulation, such as in-country or intercountry adoption as an alternative for families, is sustained because social welfare systems are undeveloped within the country and alternatives to informal fostering are strongly discouraged. This sedentary bias builds on assumptions about the child’s home being a safe and nurturing space, an assumption which the two vignettes and other research findings in East Lombok have problematised. The idealised notion of a ‘care triangle’ comprised of the stay-behind child, the migrant parent and the surrogate caregiver, falters in practice: shortcomings on one side of the triangle can be devastating for all parties.

Indonesia’s sedentary bias towards children of migrant mothers offers a salutary warning for nations and territories within the wider Asia-Pacific region that are currently expanding low-skill migration programs and opportunities. Tightening networks of global capital, increasing inequalities and sustained dependencies on remittances globally as a substitute for social welfare, are interwoven with expectations about the capacities of mothers, families and children to manage life and labour within the parameters explicitly defined or implied by state policies. Because policies and practices surrounding migration tend to be focused on labour issues rather than on social impacts, and in the absence of adequate social policies and programs, informal child fostering is likely to continue to be the only option available to migrant mothers. In a similar way, adoption policies remain focused on international relations rather than on the needs and goals of migrant mothers and their families. Because migrant women are more reliable in sending remittances home than men, and because wage-earning opportunities are not available closer to home in many rural and remote communities, migration by mothers and fostering of stay-behind children is likely to continue and increase.

Changing expectations around women’s work connects mothers to state imperatives in new ways, forcing their mobility in the service of new expectations around the place of remittances in national finances. At the same time, new opportunities and new restrictions make it harder for mothers to decide where their children will live, how their children will be reared and who will do that work. Alternative realities are glimpsed in a study by Constable (2014), who describes migrant Indonesian women in Hong Kong choosing to have children while they are away at work as a deliberate strategy to allow them to be both mobile workers and active parents.

These women thwart state migration policies in order to raise their own children in their own residences outside their home country. In the new transnational social field in which separation of parent and child is increasingly the norm, these mothers take an important step towards the larger project of proclaiming the acceptability of a mother's right to choose if, where and how she raises her children.

Acknowledgements

The authors were sponsored by the University of Mataram, Lombok, Indonesia. The authors thank Dr Untung Waluyo of the University of Mataram, and staff and outreach workers at the NGO ADBMI in East Lombok for their research assistance.

Funding

Research discussed in this article was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Insight Development [grant number 430-2013-001079].

Notes

- [1] Australia set up the Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme in 2008 and New Zealand set up the Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme in 2007.
- [2] All names are pseudonyms.
- [3] Non-profit organisations do offer support for migrant families. However, most funding from international agencies and NGOs prioritises helping families ensure a successful migration experience rather than focusing on the needs of stay-behind children.
- [4] Fostering is also linked to Islam. The religion forbids formal, permanent adoption from one family to another (Beatty 2002).
- [5] The national legislations governing adoption were passed in 1917, 1989, 1993 and 1994 (UN 2009).
- [6] Other countries with very low rates of international adoption are not necessarily countries with successful economies or autonomous political regimes. These countries include: Bangladesh, Myanmar, Tanzania and Niger (UN 2009).
- [7] There was significant concern amongst orphanage staff that a black market thrives within Indonesia for children born out of wedlock due to the combination of intractable policy and personal shame around not having proof of parentage for the child.

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