

Self Identity Construction of Indonesian Migrant Workers in the Destination Country

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Abstract: This study aims to review the construction of self identity for migrant workers in the destination country. The methodology applied is interpretative paradigm with phenomenology approach. The subjects were selected by using purposive sampling technique. Then, the data were collected by using in depth-interview and analyzed by using descriptive qualitative research design. The result of the study showed that the subject who worked in Hong Kong had a good understanding towards the culture, the concept of migrant worker, the communication skill and the problem solving skill of destination country. It was proven by the construction of self identity of migrant workers. Meanwhile, few of Malaysian and Saudi Arabian completely had implemented those concepts. The subjective dialectics in objective reality are more likely to occur to individuals who worked in Hong Kong due to social condition which is more transparent. The working system gives research off for all migrant workers to meet one another. Thus, the meeting among subjects might strengthen the construction of self identity. Therefore, the subjects who actively interpret the experience and environment vis-a-vis personal experience could strongly enforce their social construction.

Key words: Self identity construction, migrant workers, identity, subject, social, experience

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a major sending country of overseas migrant labor despite the various problems this country still encounters with. As a result, Indonesia government has established legislation for labor protection. However, the study conducted by Azmy (2012), indicates inadequacy of the labor protection before and after placement. The failure of protection policy for migrant worker's needs to be reviewed. Therefore, this policy needs a great attention both subjective and objective point of view. Objectively, the protection policy from country has to be clarified as well as subjective aspect. In term of subjective perception both interaction and social behavior of migrant workers in a new place should be mainly considered. For instance, language, norm, social value and cultural differences become serious problem if there is no preventive treat.

Worker migration is a human movement across the region to look for jobs in destination country. Migrant workers give such economic contribution for both receiving and sending country either officially or unofficially. Moreover, they increase the number of research forces in the destination country and assist in establishing infrastructures in their own country. Particularly, migrant worker have social identity before moving to destination country. They need to construct their social identity in the destination country. This

construction must be conducted due to distinct country, social and culture. There are several things to be concerned before constructing self identity, namely regulation understanding, social value adjustment, language proficiency and negotiation competence. Therefore, previous self identity should be slowly abandoned and replaced by new identity in current country. This such identity shift could not be separated from how migrant workers construct new identity in a new place.

This study aims to focus on subjective side of migrant workers regarding self identity construction in social life of current country. Identity is a personal information formed by current period which relates to past and present. According to Fromm by Erikson and Cremers (1989), self identity could be classified but not be separated from social identity in the community context. Human constructs self identity not only based on personal description but also, based on cultural value as well as norm restricting society in the same living place.

Based on the previous study, the emergence of Indonesian migrant worker's problems in the destination country is mostly influenced by subjective and objective factors. This phenomenon happens to Indonesian migrant workers who are mostly inexperienced having low education level and coming from rural areas (Sulistyowati, 2000). Consequently, they slowly learn and adopt social values, norms and cultures in a new place subjectively.

Furthermore, these workers have no self awareness and knowledge related to their job. Otherwise, the objective factors mostly relate to the differences between social culture, economic, politic and law in receiving and sending country. These differences would create internal conflict among migrant workers to experience culture shock in the destination country.

Barnhouse (1983) stated that, cultural factors would influence one's self identity. As a result, self identity is formed through social interaction. Meanwhile, a man who lives alone and dissociates himself from social interaction will not obtain self identity because it will be appeared in social life. Sometimes, the migrant workers who live in the destination country will encounter identity crisis both personal and social life. Thus, subjective affirmation must be conducted. Culture, a social identity tool would give a great influence towards individual development. However, culture is not considered as material aspect but relates to social values and behaviors. A person in a new place, must engage with socialization and internalization process towards social values and behaviors of society. The output of this internalization process would be reflected on daily life. Furthermore, it would create personal and social knowledge together. This context yields internalization, externalization and social objective process (Berger *et al.*, 1990).

Theoretically, personal concept is reflected through interaction in social life. Theory of symbolic interactionism (George, 1968) revealed that personal concept could be developed through interaction between people and performance crucial motives for personal behaviors. Migrant workers ability to adopt cultural values and awareness in a new place is expected to strongly construct and implement self identity in social activities. A person (with self identity) who has commitment of moral values issue will reflect these values into social reality, mentality and reflection (Brinkmann, 2008).

Objectively, this study perceived migrant workers as people who encounter dilemma. On the other hand, migrant workers should adopt new culture while the other one should not be abandoned. Mostly, it will create culture shock for migrant workers. They should discover their self potential in term of conducting negotiation and improvisation. These attempts are associated with migrant workers ability to construct self identity. Frequently, migrant workers come from rural area with traditional culture then move to modern society with different culture characteristic and life style. This condition forces them to survive by looking for any available job available with minimum requirement in the destination country. Sometimes, migrant workers receive unpleasant acts from a new place, either physically, physiologically or sexually.

This study is a sociological literature with micro perspective. It mainly concerns on self-awareness and knowledge of migrant workers to construct self identity in the destination country. These reflections are perceived from the understanding of legislation of right and liability, cultural study, migrant workers concept, communication, adaptation with employer family and problem solving in the destination country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study uses interpretative paradigm that attempts to interpret and comprehend the social acts among social relations to achieve the causal explanation. There are two basic concepts conveyed in this context, they are social act and comprehensive concepts. The concept of social-act is addresses as individual act that has subjective meaning towards oneself and is aimed to other people's act. Interpretative paradigm views fact as a unique content which has both special context and meaning as the 'essence' to comprehend the social understanding. Through this paradigm, the researcher must be able to capture the interpretation process and see everything through the subject's point of view. The researcher explored the subjective aspect of migrant worker's behavior by stepping into conceptual world. The researcher tried to get further into the subject's consciousness and subjectivity to discover meaning that lies behind their social life.

The study approach employed phenomenology in revealing abstract and symbolic data. The main goal of this approach is to comprehend the emerging indication as a unity that has basic concept of complexity on reality or issues caused by the subject's perspectives. Various subjects have distinctive experiences and comprehend similar indication from different perspectives. The study applied qualitative design. Data employed in this study were qualitative which related to the subject's knowledge, perception and belief as well as communication skills occurred.

The main objective of this study is to explore the subject's interpretation, knowledge and understanding. It is expected to become the framework basic of migrant worker's self identity in shaping research behavior and attitude in the destination country. Therefore, the initial stage of the study puts aside public opinion.

Subjects of the study were selected by using purposive sampling under criteria female migrant workers who return to Indonesia for holiday, those who are working in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Hong Kong those are working as housemaid those are living with their employer. The settings of the study were East Java regions where the migrant workers come from, Malang,

Blitar and Tulungagung. Data collection technique used in the study was in-depth interview that conveyed greeting in getting along and letting her describe herself stages. In depth interview was conducted to reveal a number of female worker's interpretative practices in daily life during their social interaction in the destination countries.

Data analysis in this study employed interactive analysis that was done by observing interaction and dialectics patterns between I (migrant workers) and them (social environment) in their destination countries. Categorical development was done inductively to generate relevant themes with empiric data as understood by the subject's perspective. Thus, inductive approach was taken as the main strategy in organizing all data on certain level which later was used as the basis of generating relevant concept and theory toward reviewed reality. The researcher interpreted the data to comprehend the meaning of phenomenon as an attempt to explain and describe the findings.

In a sum, the study analysis stages include data transcription, Bracketing (epoche), reading whole data (description) without preconception that is the researcher's attempt to comprehend collected data without making any presuppositions, essential description integrating themes into narrative descriptive a situation where the researcher conducted narrative descriptive writing by observing group of statement based on theme concept and integrating it into a complete text, hypothetical inference, findings, bridging with the theory.

This study was conducted by implementing of naturalistic research and did not include trinity principle (principle in qualitative research tradition, i.e., validity, reliability and generalization). According by Janesick the trinity principle in qualitative study alienates self experience from "knowing" activity of certain individual. A qualitative study depends on the descriptive presentation of solid data allowing the researcher to deliver a clear understanding towards subject's experiences observed. The description of meaning interpretation of individual cases, places and events experienced by the subjects of the study were taken as the basis of the qualitative study. Besides not employing trinity principle, the data validity conducted by crosschecking toward the findings with subjects and audit stages. In making the narrative report, the researcher employed outside reader to check the field notes and interview transcript.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the subjective aspects of the migrant workers in constructing identity in new social

environment. A person is considered having self identity if he or she has commitment on the issues of moral values from the social environment and representing it in the social and mental realities. Constructing self identity is the act of building awareness and understanding by adopting cultural and moral values and also adapting and negotiating with individuals of new environment. This skill is presented in daily social interaction in its intersubjectivity. The intersubjectivity of the migrant workers in the destination countries is very limited which only comprises employers and the families.

It is crucial for migrant workers to put concern on the employment rules. They gained salary and had to return to their homeland when their research period was over. Theoretically, a person decides to migrate and become migrant workers due to the pull and push factors. One of the main factors is the possibility of improving economic status. Moreover, current situation complicates a person acquiring job with high salary. Meanwhile, one of the pull factors is the high amount of salary, despite the obstacles in language, culture and skills.

The results of the study revealed that the majority of subjects who research in Hong Kong possessed the understanding of local culture, the understanding of their roles as migrant workers were able to communicate in the official language of the destination country were capable to adapt to the employer's family and were subjectively competent in overcoming problems. Therefore, it can be inferred that the majority of subjects who research in Hong Kong are capable to construct self identity. Only few of the subjects who research in Saudi Arabia had good understanding and the ability to adapt to local culture while the rest of them could not speak Arabic had low level of communication skill, tended to use body language, hardly adapted to local culture, tended to avoid the employers were being diffident and were lack of motivation to learn new things and to adapt to new environments. It is concluded that, the cause of the emerging problems in Saudi Arabia is the inability of constructing self identity by the subjects who research there. The majority of subjects who research in Malaysia were lack of understanding and self-awareness. They assumed that the country where they research did not differ from theirs. They had low level of communication and adaptation skill. They tended to avoid the employers and were being diffident. There was no motivation to learn new things. Since, they performed low level of skill of constructing self identity, problems tended to occur.

In understanding the legislation of rights and liabilities, the subjects in all mentioned destination countries subjectively understood their rights of getting paid monthly and their liabilities of obeying the employers. The subjects who research in Hong Kong had better ability in constructing self identity than those in

Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Based on the findings, this is influenced by Hong Kong culture is more democratic and open than Malaysian and Saudi Arabian cultures. The migrant workers in Hong Kong are given day off on every Sunday. This privilege is used by them to get along each other to share stories to discuss the potential issues they might encounter related to daily research and new environments.

In the concept of phenomenology, Schutz (1967) reveals that people who actively interpret their experiences and attempt to understand the environment based on personal experience are those who are capable to construct the important meaning and concept in their inter subjectivities. The ability of the subjects in comprehending Malaysian, Hong Kong and Saudi Arabian cultures and then deploying it as daily basic interaction in their inter subjectivities is an indicator of individuals who are able to construct self identity in social interaction. Subject's experiences are knowledge that only derived from external experiences but also from the internal ones reflected in social acts.

Subjectively, the awareness and comprehension on one's self identity are important in fulfilling daily obligations. They influence the confidence in engaging professionalism. This corresponds to the result of the study conducted by Holly *et al.* entitled "Professional Identity Construction: Using Narrative to Understand the Negotiation of Professional and Stigmatized Cultural Identities" which shows that stigma can influence the development of one's professional identity. Professional identity is defined as an identity that has self concept based on attribute, faith, values, motive and experience. These aspects are used as the basic research guidelines in order to achieve professionalism. It is crucial for the migrant workers to be aware of these aspects to determine self intensity (professionalism) and positive attitude (quality) at research.

Objectively, the migrant workers who are able to discover self potentials should negotiate with other people in new environment and improvise creatively, since, they are the cross-cultural agents. The active negotiation and improvisation will occur in daily social interactions. According to the research conducted by Gronseth (2013) written in a book entitled "Being Human Being Migrant. Sense of self and well being", a migrant worker brings various of interests transcendentially through enigmatic life. This study perceives the migrant workers as people who encounter dilemma where on one side they have to adapt to a new culture while on the other side they are incapable of abandoning their own cultures. To solve such dilemma, they have to deal with creative negotiation and improvisation in their social environment.

A study conducted by Carolyn *et al.* entitled "Immigration status, gender and the construction of identities among Malian Migrants in Paris" shows that the state supervision strategy forms the identity construction of migrant workers in France. In the past 30 years, state policy practice has been able to integrate and accentuate the achievement of nationality goals. This study contradicts the results of this study on construction of identity for the construction of individual identity cannot be established by the state but rather by the ability of individuals in everyday social interaction in the environment. This study challenges the research by Carolyn *et al.* As mentioned before, the intervention and monitoring initiated by state are able to construct the identity of migrant workers in France to achieve the nationality goals by omitting the subjective side of the migrant workers as people who are free and creative in determining their self identity. Self identity is a thing that exists within a person and is dynamically developing. To achieve the nationality goals it necessarily requires not only knowledge and self understanding as a member of a nation but also, the strong intervention and state control.

One's self identity is formed as the consequence of living in the middle of society. Reclusive person will not gain self identity. Culture as a tool of social identity will influence individual's *ansich*. The internalization of culture starts from the dissemination to the phase where an individual is capable of living independently in society. According by Alfred *et al.* conceptually, culture is everything, material and immaterial, created by man in the process of living and comes within the concept of culture. Culture consists of two important aspects, i.e., material culture and immaterial culture. Material culture is any elements of culture in form of human research for example arts. Meanwhile, the immaterial culture is any elements of culture in form of creation and sense of human in the process of life. R. Linton in his book "the cultural background of personality" by Ishomuddin (1997) mentions that culture is the configuration of learned behavior in which all the forming elements are supported and preserved by the members of certain society.

The study on the construction of self identity by the migrant workers in new environment is conducted based on the idea that the social construction of an individual cannot be separated from the understanding, attitude and social act performed by the subjects in their daily interaction in new environment. According by Schutz (1967), the understanding towards someone's act is not only based on the internal influence but also, on external one in social and cultural environment during the lifetime. Consequently, the result of subject's interaction, attitude and act differ in each country. The subjects who research

in an open and democratic country are able to construct self identity easier than those in a conservative one, since, it is not easy to find meaning and understanding of the social reality.

Schutz (1967) also states that, social act is an act regarding the moment when someone starts to reflect the reduced world and figures out that the world is full of meanings and values that are generated intersubjectively. The meaning context emerges on the surface when a person sees, observes and rechecks previous situation which is later employed as the reason of act. Therefore, the act is highly influenced by spacio-temporal conditions.

In the theoretical concept of social construction (Berger *et al.*, 1990), reality is the result of creative human creation through the power of social construction towards the surrounding environment. In the social reality, dialectical relationship between objective and subjective realities occurs. Subjective reality in the form of individual knowledge will turn into objective reality when individual's knowledge becomes common knowledge. The establishment of objective reality and the emergence of ongoing process of "intersubjective consensus" form a shared knowledge in which the individual as an actor with his freedom negotiates mutual knowledge with other individuals. The objective reality of those who reserach in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia upon the legislation of rights and liability is not established. Since, the objective reality upon the culture of destination country is really low, there are many problems occurred in the process of externalization. It proves that the subjects who cannot communicate well in the language of destination countries are incapable of adapting to the employer's family and lack of skill in problem solving. They are hardly accepted by the new environments. As the consequence, the subjects are treated disrespectfully, ignored and physically and mentally abused by people around them.

According by Postmes *et al.* (2006), self identity and social identity exist at the same time in both individual and social spheres. When someone is able to construct self identity in social sphere, he also constructs his social identity. Self identity cannot be formed if a person lives alone. It is established in social environment in which social identity can also be formed. The construction of self identity cannot be established by the legislation system or governmental rules. It is formed naturally upon the migrant workers as they live in their social environment.

CONCLUSION

The migrant workers experienced the change of social identity in the destination countries. This change

influences the construction of self identity. Self identity is constructed by a person in a social environment. The social relationship of individuals in a social environment is determined by self identity in both former and new environment. In a new environment an individual needs to construct self identity in order to establish social relationship with the environment. When an individual is capable of constructing the self identity according to the social demand of new environment, he or she is considered capable of constructing social identity. The demand of constructing self identity in accordance with the social environment is absolute. The incapability of performing such competence leads to difficulties in social interaction.

The finding of this study shows inability of subjects in constructing self identity in new environment, especially, those who reserach in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Subjective cases are often happened among them. The construction of self identity cannot be intervened by the government. It depends on the subjective ability of individuals in knowing, understanding, adopting, negotiating and implementing social values, cultures, norms and languages in new social environments. The interaction process between an individual and his group is crucial in forming the individual's self identity. In terms of social interaction how individuals interact with the members of social group essentially leads into the construction of self identity.

Subjective empowerment on the ability of the subjects in constructing themselves to social environment of the destination countries can be conducted preventively by the government in home country. Dissemination of the internalization process on social and cultural values, the understanding of rights and liabilities and the skills of communication, interpersonal and problem-solving for migrant workers are necessarily conducted. These skills and knowledge will help them to actuate self concept in daily interaction and thus, they will be accepted by the new environment.

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