

Chapter 12

Ethical Issues Concerning International Labor Migration: Indonesian Cases

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ABSTRACT

The concept of applied ethics, or posterior ethics in Ricoeur's term, refers to the application of anterior ethics or deontological ethics to particular fields of human life. The deontological ethics itself is, according to Ricoeur, motivated by a teleological drive, namely, a vital impetus towards a good life, with and for others, in a just society.

With such concept of applied ethics in mind, this particular part of the book "Ethics and Globalization" will try to discuss ethical issues of one aspect of globalization, namely, the globalization of human resources in the form of international labor migration. Although there has not yet been a scheme such as the free movement of goods and people in Asia, the labor migration from Indonesia to some better off Asian countries has become increasingly significant in quantity.

Be that as it may, the labor migration is posing a dilemma for the Indonesian government and for the Indonesian people as well. On the one hand, it is beneficial for the nation mostly due to the financial remittances it brings into Indonesia. On the other hand, it brings into being some ethical issues, such as its negative impacts on family life, violence and harassments experienced by Indonesian labor migrants, who generally come from the lower income, uneducated segment of Indonesian society.

The chapter will try to identify the ethical issues concerning Indonesian labor migrants who work in Asian countries. If possible, it will give some suggestions as to how to handle the ethical issues in question.

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INTRODUCTION

Labor migration from Indonesia to some better off Asian countries, notably Malaysia, Singapore and Saudi Arabia, has become increasingly significant in quantity. The implementation of the free-trade agreement, involving 10 members of ASEAN (The Association of South East Asia Nations) countries plus People's Republic of China, that has just started in January 2010 is expectedly of paramount importance in boosting the flow of such intra-ASEAN labor migration, as well as from ASEAN to other, more developed, regions.

The Indonesian citizens who are willing to work overseas are basically fighting against rampant poverty at home where they are no longer able to find any work that match their not-yet developed skills either. Many of them are married persons who have to leave their spouses, their children, and most probably other dependents as well, behind. Many of them are people who are willing to sacrifice themselves in order for their families to be able to have a better life.

It is true that such exposure to a wider horizon is in fact provides them with many things that are important for individual "self-actualization", such as "open mindedness, new ideas, a broad knowledge, changed attitudes, developed skills" (Adi: 1996). But this is hardly the main motive of Indonesian labor migration. The main motive is hardly egotistical. It might be more proper to call the fact that labor migration has given the migrants more opportunity towards self actualization as an "objective consequence".

Another objective consequence that must be considered is the effect of such labor migration to the Indonesian economy as a whole. In fact, the nearly altruistic motive of Indonesian labor migrants has benefited their home country, small as the contribution might be. Their wholehearted self-sacrifice has helped the nation in solving the unemployment problem at home and at the same time increasing the national income by sending home remittances to their families. Therefore, it

is no wonder that their heroic action has prompted the Indonesian government in calling them "remittance hero" or "foreign exchange hero" (*pahlawan devisa*). Foreigners visiting Jakarta via Soekarno-Hatta International Airport can always see a banner in the arrival gate of the airport that reads: "Welcome, our remittance hero" (*Selamat datang pahlawan devisa*).

Be this as it may, such glorious label of remittance hero frequently sounds ironic. For, under that banner—literally or metaphorically - there are people who are waiting for labor migrants only to extort—officially or unofficially - money from those "remittance hero". The extortions are ranging from manipulations in recruitment, many form of forgeries in the departure preparation; violence, abuse and harassment in host countries; the impact experienced by families and dependents at home; and money extortion during their home coming as it is mentioned above.

This particular chapter aims at identifying and highlighting the ethical issues concerning labor migration as a consequence of the globalization of labor market. It will be carried out firstly by exposing the economic circumstances which prompt the Indonesians to work overseas; secondly, by exposing cases in which labor migrants suffer from extortion in the home country as well as abuses in their host countries; finally by putting forth some ethical considerations concerning international labor migration

THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF LABOR MIGRATION

Alleviating Poverty

The rapid development of transportation and communication technology, as well as of financial industry, has brought about a new brand opportunity of finding jobs overseas for many Indonesian people. Ironically, this opportunity has been being grasped particularly by those who are

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