

Indonesian Newspaper in Hong Kong and Migrant Activism

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Abstract: Hong Kong is listed as one of the most popular countries for Indonesian migrant workers. In 2012, more than 160,000 Indonesian migrant domestic workers (IMDWs) were living in Hong Kong, and 70 per cent of them were women. Hong Kong is the premium destination for IMDWs because of its moderately higher salary, good laws and regulations and its ambience of independence. The IMDWs can also access multiple forms of media, ranging from print media to the internet. This writing specifically discusses the use of print media as the tool of migrant advocacy. There are four existing Indonesian language newspapers in Hong Kong: *Suara, Apa Kabar Plus, Koran Indonesia (KINDO)*, and *Berita Indonesia*. All Indonesian newspapers in Hong Kong depend on advertising to meet their running costs. Each newspaper allocates around half its pages to advertising. The existence of newspapers helps the IMDW community to stay abreast of recent news and information about their community and livelihood in Hong Kong. Newspaper journalists also actively contribute to migrant activities and are influential in the capacity building of IMDWs. Nevertheless, conflicts between the newspaper journalists and migrant organizations have affected the newspapers' credibility. Distrust has been declared by migrant activists about several of the Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong and has been a major driver of IMDWs publishing their own version of print media, namely *Vokal* and *Sinar Migran*. The methodology used was ethnography. Fieldwork was conducted in Hong Kong's Special Administrative Region (SAR) in 2013 and 2014. Participant observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions were conducted in this research.

1 INTRODUCTION

Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers (IMDWs) in Hong Kong are fortunate enough to have access to a range of resources that allow them to stay up to date with the latest information, such as the establishment of Indonesian free newspapers. There are more than 150,000 IMDWs in Hong Kong and their existence encourages commercial and independent publishers to produce free newspapers in Indonesian. These Indonesian free newspapers are produced and printed in Hong Kong, and generally publish news about IMDW-related issues.

The Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong profit from selling advertising space. Several publications are supported by companies that use them as the main media to promote their products. The Indonesian free newspapers allow migrant workers to freely access news written in their own language so they can digest the information easily. This writing aims to examine the Indonesian free newspapers and independent print media produced by

IMDWs in Hong Kong. Furthermore, it focused on print media intentions, influence and significant contributions to IMDW activism in Hong Kong.

Research studies on the topic of the IMDWs' lives in Hong Kong have mostly focused on the relationship between migrant workers and the law, human rights and inequality, gender, protest and activism and so on (see Lai, 2007; Liu, 2010; Ignacio & Mejia, 2009). However, no comprehensive research has intensely discussed the Indonesian female domestic workers' activities in the form of media activism. Furthermore, scholars tend to examine what has happened to IMDWs abroad; IMDW activism, especially in the production of messages through conventional media and the internet, has been only briefly discussed (e.g. Briones, 2009; Killias, 2009). IMDW activism is possible in Hong Kong because the country permits protests (within limits), hence migrant domestic workers have the opportunity to publicly express criticism without fear of "violence or a militaristic police crackdown" like "governments elsewhere" (Constable, 2009, pp. 155-156). This situation is in contrast to that in some

other countries that receive foreign workers, such as the Middle Eastern nations where migrant workers are not as well protected by government guidelines.

Previous publications have concerned the Indonesian media in Hong Kong. The Jakarta Post, for example, published an in-depth story about Suara (voice, in English), an Indonesian free newspaper produced and distributed in Hong Kong (Graham, 2007). Edith Koesoemawiria's *Indonesian Diaspora and Minority Media: Mirroring Me Daily Study* (2008) also discussed the existence of Indonesian print media in Hong Kong. She examined Indonesian newspapers in Hong Kong and compared the situation with what occurred with Chinese diaspora media in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the positions of IMDWs in media activities were not discussed in either context. Significantly, the writing has a strong focus on the conditions of IMDWs in Hong Kong in relation to their participation in media activism. Moreover, ethnography was used to help identify and describe the situation of the IMDWs in relation to the use of print media for activism purposes.

This study has the potential to reveal how the typically exploitative and difficult conditions for migrant workers in their host countries can be addressed if access to the media is not restricted and the freedom of migrant workers to express issues and concerns is guaranteed by the regulating government. More specifically, the writing discusses the role of Indonesian newspapers and the dynamics of the medium within the IMDW community in Hong Kong. The interactions were examined between IMDWs and Indonesian newspaper journalists, both in a professional setting and in their daily social lives. The relationships have been elaborated on between journalists and government officials (in this case, Indonesian Government representatives in Hong Kong). The research focused on four Indonesian language newspapers in Hong Kong that are free and that have regular and huge distribution. It is argued that news published by the Indonesian newspapers have an impact on the experience of living in Hong Kong for IMDWs and in some cases, they have raised the tensions between IMDWs and the press. Magazines and tabloids published independently by IMDWs have also been examined. To focus this analysis, Indonesian newspapers imported from Indonesia will not be included. Although these are sold and distributed in Indonesian stores across Hong Kong, their content is limited to events in Indonesia and they do not employ journalists based in Hong Kong.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

The research applied ethnographic approaches to examine Indonesian print media in Hong Kong as advocacy tools for IMDWs in Hong Kong. The term ethnography may be applied to qualitative research whose aim is to gather an in-depth, specific description of certain cultural and social situations. Clifford Geertz (1973, p. 3) says that ethnography aims to provide a cultural interpretation of a certain condition existing in a society. As described by John Van Maanen (1998, p. 3), ethnography is the "written representation of culture". The fieldwork was conducted in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) in 2013 and 2014. Participant observations, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions were employed in this research.

For this research, the conventional ethnography definition of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983, p. 2) was followed: "the ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issue with which he or she is concerned". Nonetheless, it is realised that undertaking ethnographic research in media studies requires a critical understanding. Ethnography in media studies emphasises the interpretations of the media constructed by the audience in their everyday lives, where "it is true that they (media studies) are not based on extensive fieldwork in distant lands, but they do share some of the same general intentions as anthropological (ethnographic) research." (Moore, 1993, p. 4)

There has been considerable ethnographic research focusing on migrants (e.g. Anggraeni, 2006; Constable, 2007, 2014; Sim, 2002, 2007). However, there are a limited number of ethnographers working on IMDW issues with a focus on media and cultural studies. Ethnographers are attempting to address Indonesian migrant involvement with media in their research, although they provide no further discussion on the topic. Broader discussions on migration and the media have been developed by Andoni Alonso and Pedro Oiarzabal (2010) and Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (2012) with a diverse range of migrant perspectives from around the world. Nevertheless, ethnographic research on the media and Indonesian migrants, especially those living in Hong Kong, has not been undertaken to my knowledge.

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In 2015, there were 54 daily newspapers and 679 periodicals listed by the Government of Hong Kong (Government of Hong Kong website, 2015). This includes four Indonesian newspapers instituted in Hong Kong. In general, these newspapers are bundled in tabloid size, which is around half the size of a broadsheet format. The size suits the profile of a free newspaper.

Free newspapers are one solution to the corporate monopoly of paid newspapers in both readership and circulation (Bakker 2008:427). They provide news for readers and a space for advertisers. A large readership brings in greater advantages to the advertisers, because the advertisements are read by more people (Silva & Resende, 2013). In today's print media industry, a free newspaper is an unorthodox way to enable print media to exist amidst uncertainty around the industry's sustainability: "no one can predict the future of the newspaper industry, but it can be said with confidence that free is a model still relevant to print" (Tennant 2014: p.118).

The existence of Indonesian free newspapers is an interesting discussion topic among IMWs in Hong Kong. However, the writing and research on this topic are limited. However, one relevant article was written by Koesoemawiria (2008), in which she briefly discusses the existence of Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong. She lists nine publications that are issued, but only five of them have a regular publication schedule—*Berita Indonesia* (Indonesia News), *Rose Mawar* (Rose Rose), *Apakabar* (How are You), *Indo Pos* (Indo Post), and *Suara* (Voice) and specifically discusses the last in the list (2008: pp.51-52).

3.1 Free Newspapers

During my fieldwork in 2013, I located four existing newspapers: *Suara*, *Apakabar Plus*, *Koran Indonesia* (KINDO), and *Berita Indonesia*. All Indonesian newspapers in Hong Kong depend on advertising to meet their running costs. Each newspaper allocates around half its pages to advertising. Several newspapers even intentionally operate as the promotional instruments of particular companies. *Suara* and KINDO, for example, were established as

marketing tools for cellular products produced by the companies that manage the publications.

The free newspaper format employed by Indonesian publications in Hong Kong employs simpler criteria for the content than paid newspapers: the news coverage is lighter and they "offer less news than paid papers ... published as tabloids or even smaller formats ... (and) the number of journalists employed is smaller and they are less experienced" (Bakker 2008: p.427). All Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong have similar news production hierarchies. They are commonly run by a chief editor and news gathering is frequently performed by journalists. Professional journalists from Indonesia are recruited to fill positions as editors and news reporters.

The newspapers also interact directly with IMDWs in news production. Newspapers such as KINDO, *Apakabar Plus* and *Berita Indonesia* employ IMDWs as the freelance contributors of stories in each edition. These contributors function to strengthen the news coverage team. IMDWs take on this role in their limited spare time.

Indonesian newspaper news products are well received by IMWs. All Indonesian free newspaper editions are quickly 'sold out'. The newspapers are popular not only because they are free, but because the journalists actively promote their newspapers by getting involved in the social activities of Indonesian migrant communities in Hong Kong. The journalists also have a significant influence over IMDWs by participating in migrant organisation events, developing workshops and courses for IMDWs.

The journalists' perspectives on the events about which they write and their specific roles in the IMDW community are essential to the discourse of migrant advocacy. As professionals working for the press, journalists have the power to gather opinions and raise issues through their publications. There are different expectations of the journalists. Government officials such as those from the Indonesian Consulate expect journalists to represent the government's image in a positive manner. Media owners expect journalists to write news that contributes to the raising of revenue through advertising. IMDWs and activists expect journalists to help publicise issues related to migrant advocacy and the struggle to fulfil their rights as workers. I discovered that these various expectations are frequently intertwined and may put journalists in a difficult position.

Suara was established in 2006 and is published by HK Publications, a company located at North Point, Hong Kong. Besides *Suara*, this company also publishes the Hong Kong News, which is aimed at

Filipino migrants. HK Publications occupies the same floor of a building as Kata, a smartphone producer, and Owtel, a cellular phone distributor. These two business entities are administered from the same office as *Suara* and are under the one managing company. *Suara* is issued biweekly and finances its operations through advertising income. Kata and Owtel are two clients that advertise permanently in *Suara* (Hidayat, 2013).

However, the fact that *Suara* depends on advertising and dedicates only a small proportion of space to news is inconvenient for its reporters. *Suara* journalist, Mega, said that the high advertising allocation in *Suara* is problematic, because there is real news that cannot be published due to the limited amount of space (Mega, 2013). Nevertheless, Mega realises that *Suara* acts as the marketing medium for the company's in-house products, Kata and Owtel. Kata targets IMDWs because their population is high and they have a high demand for communication facilities. According to Hidayat, IMDWs are an attractive target for cellular phone marketing (Hidayat, 2013).

Management has given *Suara* journalists freedom in their writing for the newspaper. However, the company's focus on advertising could harm the sustainability of the newspaper because they give no attention to the news content. As Mega explains, the "management does not understand the content as they cannot read Indonesian. You could even write negative stories about the Indonesian Government, and the company would not know" (Mega, 2013). Mega's statement suggests that there is no control from the company over the newspaper's editorship and the quality of the news, and furthermore, the professionalism of their journalists. This loose editorial control could create the freedom for journalists to write anything based on their own ideology.

KINDO is an abbreviation of Koran Indonesia (in English, Indonesian newspaper). The paper is published and distributed by Field Profit Limited in Hong Kong. Located in the Fair View Commercial building in Sugar Street, Causeway Bay, this company runs a business near to Victoria Park, the centre of IMDW activities in Hong Kong. KINDO is managed by Agus Zunaidi and is published monthly with 24 pages focusing on news related to Indonesian community issues in Hong Kong. For each edition, KINDO prints 30,000 copies.

KINDO, under Zunaidi's management, has an exceptional position in the IMDW community in Hong Kong. As stated by Eni Lestari, KINDO does not empower migrant advocacy and support media

activism: "Zunaidi has his own personal goals in managing KINDO and we do not expect KINDO to be part of the struggle in advocating for migrant rights in Hong Kong" (Lestari 2013). Lestari's statement suggests that it is unfortunate that KINDO is one of the Indonesian print media outlets in Hong Kong to be managed in this way, breaking away from the current media activism movement.

Apakabar Plus is managed by Yuni Tze and Razak. Yuni Tze manages the publication and Razak oversees news gathering. The news is provided by freelance journalists in Indonesia and Hong Kong. *Apakabar Plus* news content is developed and controlled not only by Razak: Yuni Tze also takes part in the news editing and is active in maintaining *Apakabar Plus*'s Facebook page. *Apakabar Plus* is managed by the Apakabar Company, whose majority share is owned by Yuni Tze.

Apakabar Plus offers a different approach to servicing the needs of IMDWs in Hong Kong. The tabloid has Indonesian celebrity news as its headlines and provides updates on celebrity gossip. As critically discussed by Turner, there is a big question mark about whether celebrity articles should be considered news, as it tends to be used as a marketing tool for celebrities to capture the audience's attention (2014: pp.145-146). However, Turner sees that such articles are "probably the key area where we can see consumers accepting gossip or rumours as news" (2014:150). Indeed, IMDWs are consumers who enjoy celebrity news. The strong interest in the lives of celebrities from the IMDWs' home countries has been captured by *Apakabar Plus* and is handled as a distinct product that is positioned differently in the landscape of Indonesian print media in Hong Kong.

The other notable free Indonesian print publication in Hong Kong is *Berita Indonesia*, which was established by *Berita Indonesia* Limited, a company led by an Indonesian entrepreneur, Sam Jauhari. The Indonesian community, especially migrant workers, tend to associate *Berita Indonesia* with Rio Chan, the newspaper's editor in chief. Chan emphasises that as a supplement, "*Peduli* provides inspiration about businesses in Indonesia so then returning IMDWs can picture what business they might become involved in once they are back home. IMDWs are very consumptive. Their drive to shop is high, but now there is a trend for IMDWs to invest their money in entrepreneurial activities" (Chan, 2013).

Berita Indonesia is known as a tabloid that is far from controversial and that provides 'safe' information regarding migrant life in Hong Kong. Unlike *Suara*, *Apakabar Plus* or KINDO, *Berita*

Indonesia tries to satisfy everyone with the content that it publishes. Chan's close connections with migrant organisations, the Indonesian Consulate and several Indonesian institutions in Hong Kong have given him the opportunity to broaden his networks in sourcing information. On the other hand, what *Berita Indonesia* offers via its news product has given a strong sense that Indonesian publications in Hong Kong may have complete editorial control, without government or corporate influence.

3.2 Migrant-made Print Media

The establishment of Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong has promoted dynamic developments in the IMDW community in Hong Kong. The existence of newspapers helps the IMDW community to stay abreast of recent news and information about their community and livelihood in Hong Kong. Newspaper journalists also actively contribute to migrant activities and are influential in the capacity building of IMDWs. Nevertheless, conflicts between several journalists and migrant organisations have damaged the free newspapers' credibility. Distrust declared by migrant activists about several of the Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong has been a major driver of IMDWs publishing their own version of print media.

However, not all print media published independently by IMDWs is the result of disappointment with existing Indonesian newspapers in Hong Kong. Several publications are produced mainly because IMDWs want to channel their creativities in writing. This has resulted in a range of publications with diverse discussion angles being distributed among IMDWs. This section examines known the independent print media managed and produced primarily by female IMDWs in Hong Kong, which consists of two newspapers, *Vokal* (Vocal) and *Sinar Migran* (Migrant Light), and four magazines, *BHSI*, *CahayaQu*, *Iqro* and *Nurmuslimah*. These print media are produced independently by IMDWs and distributed for consumption by their colleagues.

Vokal is produced by ATKI. Even though its publication schedule is not regular, ATKI is trying to provide an alternative to migrant workers regarding news content and information. *Vokal* is printed in a tabloid format with news and stories focusing on the issues and discourses of migrant advocacy and protection.

The title *Vokal* was chosen by the publisher to emphasise that readers should be brave in vocalising their concerns, especially regarding their condition as

migrant workers in Hong Kong (Diristiani, 2013). Each edition of *Vokal* prints 1,000 copies and is distributed among ATKI members and its affiliates (Maysaroh, 2015). *Vokal* is not distributed for free, but the producer does not set a particular price for each copy. Maysaroh said that *Vokal* is distributed on a voluntary basis and that it is an important instrument for organisations, because it "provides balance to information from Indonesian newspapers in Hong Kong, and importantly, it is being used by organisations as a tool for education, information sharing and propaganda" (Maysaroh, 2015).

Propaganda, as explained by Maysaroh, is considered to be more of a mission performed by *Vokal* in an effort to provide relevant information and new perspectives on IMDWs' lives in Hong Kong.

Like *Vokal*, *Sinar Migran* was also developed as a solution to the IMDWs' need to receive balanced news and information relating to their existence in Hong Kong. When the materials delivered by Indonesian free newspapers are considered to be insufficient and misleading, *Sinar Migran* fills the gap by delivering news products that are more straightforward. First released to the public in December 2015, *Sinar Migran* is packaged in tabloid format and distributed not only in Hong Kong, but also in Macau, Taiwan and Indonesia. *Sinar Migran* is produced by JBMI and distributed by the organisation members. It is printed over 16 pages and there are 2,000 copies per edition. *Sinar Migran* sells for HKD5 per copy.

Vokal and *Sinar Migran* are not the only alternative print media dedicated to migrant workers. Using the magazine form, several groups of migrant workers are publishing their creations in diverse areas of interest. The content of the magazine products from migrant workers is usually thematic. One such publication is BHSI, an Indonesian magazine published in Hong Kong with an entrepreneurial and investment approach. The magazine supplies information enabling the migrant workers to invest their money in different business entities while they are still working in Hong Kong. This magazine is published by BHSI, a group of IMDWs active who create events and workshops on investment and entrepreneurship.

Other magazine publications in Hong Kong that attract readers through their religious and spiritual content: *CahayaQu*, *Nurmuslimah* and *Iqro*. Megawati, former Editor in Chief of *Nurmuslimah* magazine, said that religious magazines have significant potential in the Indonesian migrant media

market in Hong Kong (Megawati, 2013). Unlike Indonesian newspapers in Hong Kong that are distributed for free, readers pay ~HKD10 for each edition, published once per month (Megawati, 2013).

Susi Utomo, the Editor in Chief of *CahayaQu* magazine, pointed out that migrant workers are busy every day, “but as humans, we also need spiritual motivation and updates on our religious beliefs” (Utomo 2013). Utomo claimed that these needs are at least facilitated by the Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong: “that is why we make our own publications, to support our fellow migrants’ spiritual needs and by supporting them to remember their creator” (Utomo, 2013). *CahayaQu* was established in 2012 by Muslim IMDWs and is published bimonthly, distributed in Hong Kong and Indonesia.

Megawati considers that these magazines have a different motivation, other than just spiritual. She says it is more about community and subjectivity, and that religious magazines facilitate her religious thoughts through writing: “*Nurmuslimah*’s vision suits me in promoting the identity of Muslim women as knowledgeable, and not katrok (simple-minded). Importantly, *Nurmuslimah* was developed purely by IMDWs and no outsiders can interfere”. *Nurmuslimah* was established in 2011, printed 3,000 copies and has been distributed in Hong Kong and Macau (Megawati, 2013).

Iqro is another religious magazine, and is managed and published by *Dompét Duaafa* (an Indonesian organisation in the charity business). *Dompét Duaafa* has an office in Hong Kong that frequently manages religious events and collects donations from migrant workers. *Iqro* was established in 2009 and is the first religious magazine published not only in Hong Kong but also in Taiwan (Megawati, 2013). Megawati explained that *Iqro* is well-maintained and has stable management because it is supported by an established organisation.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The Indonesian free newspapers in Hong Kong are managed by journalists who have wide networks and a diverse range of relationships within the Indonesian community. The four newspapers discussed have editorial figures that control the news content based on their professional and personal ideologies, which prompts both admiration and criticism from their target readers: IMDWs.

Print media published by IMDWs aims to solve the problems caused by the Indonesian free newspapers. IMDW media such as *Vokal* and *Sinar Migran* have published news that has directly criticised two governmental institutions that would never be challenged by Indonesian free newspapers: The Government of Hong Kong and the Indonesian Consulate in Hong Kong. Magazines produced by IMDWs have also become a balanced source of information, giving IMDWs options to enjoy a different type of news provided for them in the host land. Nevertheless, the business factor has seemingly become a main concern in the existence of Indonesian print media in Hong Kong. Although newspapers sell advertising, magazines sell activities that need contributions from IMDWs, which brings them into the realm of consumerism.

Despite the pros and cons regarding the existence of Indonesian print media in Hong Kong, they have undeniably contributed to the capacity development of IMDWs in Hong Kong. Print media have published a variety of news that is useful for IMDWs, fulfilling their need not only for information, but also for entertainment. Different positions taken by the newspapers provide choices for IMDWs in accessing relevant information for their needs. Activities performed by journalists have also enriched the IMDWs’ experiences and given them access to the knowledge that they need outside their isolated workplaces. The Indonesian print media provides access for IMDWs to seek news about their surroundings. The newspapers and magazines function not only as a bridge of information about what is happening in Hong Kong; they also continually inform the IMDW community, and this provides genuine evidence of how a diasporic community can communicate through various channels and utilise those channels to strengthen bonds among fellow migrants.

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