

Are You Happy Working in Malaysia? Indonesian Migrant Workers 'Experiences in Neighboring Penang Island of the Nusantara Malay Archipelago

Mohammad Reevany Bustami^{1*}, Mas Roro Lilik Ekowanti, MS², Ellisha Nasruddin³ and Adi Fahrudin⁴

¹MALINDO Nusantara Research Center, UNJANI and Centre for Policy Research and International Studies (CenPRIS), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)

²Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Hang Tuah (UHT), Surabaya, Indonesia

³Graduate School of Business, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)

⁴Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta, Indonesia

*reevany@usm.my

*fahradi@umj.ac.id

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Abstract: Indonesia and Malaysia are part of the world of Nusantara Malay Archipelago. The historical facts show that for centuries long, the people of the Archipelago were roaming the seas and the lands in this Southeast Asian region during the pre-colonial period and in the process had helped in enriching it culturally and economically. The human movement continues now but within a different context. At present, many, if not most of them, travel to a so-called foreign country to work as the so-called migrant workers. Yet, does this experience bring them happiness? This is the main inquiry of this research. In this article, as the authors report on the research findings and the analysis, they have also examined the awareness of regulations, the wages and working conditions, the cultural adaptation, the experience with agents as well as the social capital and networks of Indonesian migrant workers (PMIs). The methodology employs an abductive research strategy where the meanings and patterns of experiences are expressed through the insights of the migrant workers as social actors themselves. Three (3) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with a total number of 27 informants who work in factories (local and foreign) as well as in construction, services, micro business and NGOs. The findings show that their happiness is associated with ten different ontological elements. Yet, arguably the highest state of emotion lies with the twin pillars of spiritual gratitude and familial-giving. The migrant workers or perantaus pursue these twin pillars, and happiness ensues.

Keywords: Indonesian migrant workers, happiness, Malaysia, perantau.

1. Introduction

Indonesia and Malaysia are part of the Nusantara Malay Archipelago. History shows that at first the two countries were a region and allied within the Nusantara Archipelago. Its communities have traveled and migrated extensively across the lands and seas in the archipelago. The concept of migrants may not exist then as the European-concocted Westphalian states and border sovereignty have not existed in Nusantara yet. Hence, the tradition of travelling and roaming around in common waters, islands and lands of Nusantara by Nusantara natives is known as perantauan and the travellers are known as perantaus, not migrants. Through these journeys, indirectly, the culture and economy of Nusantara archipelago communities are growing. This is due to various cultural encounters and economic conditions. To make ends meet, people migrate from one region to another. Migration has been carried out since the colonial era between the two countries. Over time, the number of people visiting Malaysia is much more than the opposite. The reason for this is because of economic and political issues, especially for Indonesia, which is to avoid Dutch colonization (Sunarti, 2013).

A long history took place such that the Nusantara Archipelago was divided into several regions and the two countries were separated. Nevertheless, since 1957, the cooperation between the two countries remained intact, with both maintaining their status as equally independent countries. According to Nik Anuar (2000) in Maksum & Bustami (2014), Malaysian independence was very much well welcomed by the Indonesian Government. It was believed to be the starting point of the relationship between Malaysia and Indonesia. Although there were political disagreements between the two countries, the overall relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia was considered harmonious with strong establishment of Government-to-Government (G-to-G) relationship.

The prolonged confrontation was eventually closed after an agreement to make peace in Bangkok on 11 August 1966. Afterwards, both countries supported the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. Its establishment was able to strengthen relations and cooperation between countries, especially Malaysia and Indonesia (Maksum & Bustami, 2014:44). Cooperation between the two countries has also increased, particularly in terms of economic development. One of the many cooperation links between Malaysia and Indonesia is in terms of manpower. In general, Malaysia is a major destination for many Indonesian workers who work abroad. The reasons may be due to many affinities and similarities of language and culture between Indonesia and Malaysia. In 2016 alone, the placement of Indonesian workers in Malaysia totaled 87,263 people, while the following year increased by 1,728 people (Bustami, Ekowanti & Raharja, 2020:170). In addition, Malaysia is also a major destination due to its proximity (Pristika, 2014:32).

As time goes by, the large number of Indonesians who have chosen to migrate and work in Malaysia is apparently not free from manpower problems. In 2017, based on data from BNP2TKI (National Agency for Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers), there were 1,535 complaints in 2016, which then increased to 1,777 in the following year. In fact, based on BNP2TKI data from 2014 to 2016, the number of deceased workers increased from 13 to 137 in 2016 (Ekowanti, Bustami, & Raharja, 2020:170). Compared to other countries, Malaysia has the most complaints related to Indonesian workers. However, in terms of percentage (%), Malaysia has the lowest percentage of complaints, which is less than 0.1%, compared to the other 10 countries with a higher number of complaints (Ekowanti, Bustami, & Raharja, 2020:170). Even with the lowest percentage of complaints and the ties of the archipelago, there needs to be an in-depth understanding of whether Indonesian workers in Malaysia feel happiness while working.

2. Literature Review

In the context of the post-colonial Nusantara, the Malaysian economy has undergone rapid development since the '80s and had become an attraction for foreign workers to come looking for jobs, not except those from Indonesia. The proximity of its geographical location, cultural and language similarities between the two make it easy for them to adapt. The growth of the Malaysian economy opens up employment opportunities in various fields for foreigners, such as factory workers, constructions, plantations, domestic helpers and other types of work. Relatively large wages compared to Indonesia are also an attractive factor for Indonesians to migrate to Malaysia. The presence of Indonesian people in Malaysia is not something new. Historically traced, the presence of Indonesians in Malaysia had emerged long before the independence era of the two countries. Many Indonesians, especially from Sumatera, Java and Sulawesi have long sailed and migrated to neighboring countries. This event continued until after the independence of both countries from colonialism. Even in the early days of independence, Indonesians who entered Malaysia were quietly welcomed to maintain racial balance in the country (Liow, 2003: 46). The success of Malaysia's industrialization in the 1980s further increased the need for labor from Indonesia in various sectors, such as industry, agriculture, plantation and physical development (Sunarti, 2016: xxv).

There have been many studies on Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) by researchers of various disciplinary backgrounds. In some studies, researchers used different terms to refer the workers. Some of them use the term "Indonesian Migrant Workers" or commonly abbreviated by its local term "PMI", and some others use the term "Indonesian Migrant Labors". In its development, there are also those who use the term specifically to refer to female migrant workers with the term "Indonesian Female Migrant Workers" or commonly known by its local abbreviation "TKW". Substantially, all these terms have the same meaning, which refers to Indonesian people who work abroad, including those who work in Malaysia. Wahjono (2007), for example, examines the problems faced and experienced by Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMI). In his research in several locations in Malaysia, he described how the adverse conditions of protecting the rights of PMI in several economic sectors, both formal and informal in Malaysia. In his research, respondents chosen at random consisted of workers who worked in different sectors, such as domestic helpers, factory workers, plantation workers, construction workers and retail trade (shops and restaurants). Wahjono (2007) found that many of the workers in Malaysia were not fully fulfilled and even lost their rights.

In addition, Thamrin (2019) in his study of legal and illegal Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, found that these workers face many problems and needed to protect their rights. The most fundamental of the rights as workers include protecting against low salaries, salaries withheld or even not paid by the employers, physical and sexual abuse, unsuitable workplace conditions, retention of passports by employers or recruitment agents (*tekong*), becoming victims of human trafficking and even worse, being forced to become Commercial Sex Workers (*pekerja seks komersial*) by the very agents who recruited them. Furthermore, as migrant workers in a foreign country, they are also vulnerable to becoming victims of corrupt practices such as extortion by Malaysian police and immigration personnel. It also mentioned that some of the causes of why the rights of PMI as migrant workers are very susceptible to be abused by employers, recruitment agents and corrupt practices by the police and immigration personnel. The causes include a) lack of information on how to obtain travel documents, how to apply for work through the Indonesian Manpower Service Company (PJTKI) and how much the official fees they actually have to pay; b) lack of knowledge and understanding of labor law and the immigration regulation in Malaysia as the destination country and c) data falsification on travel documents (passports) in the recruitment and placement process by recruitment agents that involving immigration officers (Maksum & Suwardono, 2017)

Supporting the study above, in 2010, a research by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) stated that aside from the regular migration of migrant workers from Indonesia, Malaysia remains the largest destination for irregular Indonesian migrant workers. Based on the official data released by the Malaysian government in 2006, there were approximately 700,000 migrant workers of various countries in Malaysia, most of whom (70%) were from Indonesia (Kanapathy, 2004). However, unofficial sources suggested that there might had been twice as many illegals or irregular migrant workers in Malaysia.

Migrant workers often become illegal because of their own conscious choices. This was demonstrated by a study by the Institute for Ecosoc Rights (2007), which identified five main factors that could cause migrant workers

to become illegal migrants. First, because of the complexity, impracticality, cost and length of time needed to migrate through regular migration channels, some Indonesian migrant workers consciously prefer to migrate irregularly. While regular migration channels are generally safer, some workers consider irregular channels are more beneficial, both for themselves and employers, as they are faster, cheaper and therefore more practical. Second, Malaysian migration law dictates that every migrant worker will be placed under certain employers, which means there is no choice of employer/line of work involved from the workers' side. Illegal migrant workers, on the other hand, have greater freedom to choose their employer and the kind of work that they want to do. This situation is facilitated by a large labor market for illegal migrant workers in Malaysia. Also, costs associated with irregular migrations are often lower than official channels. Third, although many of them enter Malaysia as regular migrant workers, exploitative working conditions, physical and psychological abuse, or unpaid wages can leave workers with no choice but to leave their jobs/employers and thus lose their legal status as migrant workers, because their work permit is bound to the employer. Fourth, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Indonesia and Malaysia allows workers' travel documents to be held by employers. Therefore, leaving the employer results in the loss of legal status of immigrants and travel documents. Fifth, prospective workers often have little access to information on migration procedures and working conditions in Malaysia. The lack of information makes them very susceptible to fraud and human trafficking by irresponsible parties, both in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Furthermore, the study by IOM (2010) also revealed that there are two main forms of fraud that may occur to Indonesian migrant workers. First, they can be deceived during the migration process and therefore unconsciously involved in irregular migration. Second, they are deliberately given false information about the type of work and working conditions in Malaysia, promised higher wages or better working conditions, even though the reality is inversely proportional. Interviews with some illegal workers show that many of them become irregular workers not by choice, instead because of conducive conditions that have been created by other parties. Eventually, they consciously choose irregular migration, which usually has more than adequate information about the conditions and social life in Malaysia that can help them. However, those who become irregular due to lack of information and escape exploitation or abuse, are at risk of being used by irresponsible parties in other ways.

In addition to the problems of irregular Indonesian migrant workers, another problem that is highlighted is the problems faced by PMI who work as domestic helpers. For example, in their study on domestic helpers in Malaysia, Ngadiran and Mohd Roslan (2012) found that on average, more than 90% of domestic helpers in Malaysia were Indonesian citizens. The two researchers refer to a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW), mentioning that thousands of Indonesian domestic helpers working in Malaysia face harassment and misery due to government policies in both countries that fail to protect them. Likewise, the HRW report has documented how they usually work 16 to 18 hours a day, 7 days a week and earn less than US \$0.25 per hour. But not less so in some cases where theft and cruelty are committed to their employers for the sake of their trust.

The working conditions of Indonesian migrant workers has even become a hot issue between Indonesia and Malaysia. It even caused tension and created negative sentiments amongst the public within both countries as revealed in a study by Maksum and Bustami (2016) on the conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia (which was caused by media reports about the working conditions of PMIs in Malaysia). Yet, the conflict has prevailed while a social capital network assumes its own growth. Wahyudi (2017) examined the journey of Indonesian migrant workers who do not have official travel documents entering Malaysia. His qualitative research with a grounded theory approach had three main objectives. First, he used fieldwork to explore the illegal journey of undocumented workers, including all the processes and interactions that occurred. Second, identifying the causative factors behind the entry of illegal workers into Malaysia. Third, the study drew on the implications of illegal travels made by the workers to Malaysia. In his study, Wahyudi (2017) found that social capital in their network (undocumented workers) expanded through various channels, especially through friendships, comradeship, environment, communities, and ethnic groupings. Undocumented workers network has also created social relations amongst workers. Their networks have created social classes based on the type of work and specialization, and their ethnic backgrounds.

Undocumented migrant workers attempt to increase ownership of valuable items, such as properties, houses, vehicles, lands, and jewelry. The possession of these valuables is a symbol of welfare for the migrant workers. Having possessions allow migrant workers to assist and accelerate the development of their hometowns (Kolopaking, Wahyono & Fahrudin, 2020). They are even willing to bear a dear cost to obtain the wealth that can be witnessed by those around them (Lefebvre, 2009). Materialistic environmental stimulation encourages PMIs to work together to achieve success and even have to sacrifice anything, and is willing to risk facing the great danger of working in Malaysia illegally. In other situations, migration is mostly viewed as women resilience to counter hegemony as struggling from reconstructing their position for justice of gender (Angga Unita Kiranantika & Kodir, 2020).

3. Methodology

This research used an abductive approach to qualitative data collection and analysis. An abductive research strategy enables the capturing of insights and meanings from the social actors themselves, which in this case are the migrant workers. It opens up a type of theorizing that empowers the social actors to define constructs based on their everyday language, knowledge and experience. The research employs focus group discussions with the participation of 27 respondents at the Centre for Policy Research and International Studies (CenPRIS), Universiti Sains Malaysia. The respondents consisted of regular and irregular workers (some termed the irregular workers as illegal workers or workers without permission). They work in various sectors of the economy including manufacturing sector, both in local and international companies, service sector both formal and informal. Two of them also happened to be representatives of the Indonesian community organization in Penang, Malaysia. It should be noted that the outcome of this research is not to generalize to the whole population of PMIs; but rather to identify various constructs, either existing or emerging ones, based on the social actors' own experiences and subjectivity.

The respondents were divided into three groups. Connecting to the main question of happiness, the probing concepts to initiate the conversation in the FGDs are:

- Manpower regulations in Indonesia and Malaysia
- Wage and salary conditions
- Indonesian-Malaysian cultural adaptation
- Experience with recruitment agents and
- Working conditions

As the conversation and discussion unfolded, the PMIs were free to express their own constructs and interpretations to the probing concepts or introduce their own concepts and these are sometimes (and sometimes not) connected to their experiences and meanings of happiness, or lack of it.

Each group was assisted by a facilitator and a note-taker in discussing the topic to get answers based on their thoughts, meanings and experiences of working in Penang / Malaysia. In order to reduce social desirability effect of answering favorably (or in a biased manner) to a Malaysian, all the facilitators, interviewers and note-takers are of Indonesian nationality and spoke fluent Bahasa Indonesia. The discussion was recorded for 3.5 hours and notes were taken which were used in the eventual data analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

The following are discussions of findings based on the focus group discussion that has been conducted. While each of the headings below represent probing concepts, the themes are from the insights and constructs of the PMIs as social actors to their own experiences who give their own meanings to their everyday life and work.

4.1. Manpower Regulations in Indonesia and Malaysia

Perhaps manpower regulations are among the more obvious contexts of discussion and responses from the PMIs. Seven themes and the related responses are solicited.

Theme 1: Workers aware of regulations

Indonesian migrant workers in Penang, both formal and informal, are aware of some general manpower regulations in Indonesia and Malaysia before they leave for Malaysia, particularly regarding working agreements and working hours. At first, workers did not know well about the regulations in Malaysia. But with time and experiences, they become more aware of the regulations in Malaysia:

“Workers are generally aware of manpower regulations in Indonesia, if they want to work abroad (Malaysia). They know what requirements they have to fulfill before they leave for Malaysia. This information is acquired from migrant worker recruitment agencies in Indonesia.” (Group 2)

“At first we do not know, but later on we learn about the regulations.” (Group 2)

Theme 2: Violation of access to health insurance in the employment agreement/ arrangements

With regards to employment arrangements that have been understood in Indonesia prior to departure, their implementation can often be different from the reality that happened in Malaysia, especially regarding health insurance. Information on the management of health insurance is indeed unclear. When health insurance is needed to be claimed, workers can be confused about the process flow. Most Indonesians people do not want complicated process. This can lead to a situation where seeking information and insurance claiming become convoluted:

“We received information related to the laws and regulations in Malaysia since they were still in Indonesia, that work accidents will be borne by employers in factory/workplace. But what happens is different, workers must pay with our own money in the event of a work accident, workers' salaries were deducted up to RM300 to pay for health services. Even though the employment agreement clearly stated that the factory will pay in case of a work accident, but in fact it is not.” (Group 1)

“Workers stated that there are no Malaysian government regulations that burden workers, but apparently not all regulations are implemented by factories. For instance, regulation related to health insurance. At one of the factories, health insurance is not covered and workers’ salaries are deducted at RM300/year for their health expenses.” (Group 2)

“There are constraints in health insurance provided by the company. There used to be a case of workers who had an accident but the management of his health insurance is still unclear to this day. Even his family cannot claim the right to the insurance. Even if it can be claimed, it will not be full as stated in the insurance. Some died, some were fractured and some even amputated. Mr. Z (one of local Indonesian NGO members) tried to help claim their rights but some parents did not want to and chose to let it go.” (Group 3)

Theme 3: Public holiday regulation

Regarding the public holiday regulation, it is merely an internal affair but also a matter between the companies and government. Some PMIs conveyed that their taking leave is not a straight forward matter:

“Regulations relating to the policy that every company can propose and enforce the length of a public holiday to the government in Malaysia is not well communicated to Indonesian workers, resulting in a misunderstanding.” (Group 1)

“In Malaysia, companies are required to propose a public holiday for its employees at least 8 days per year. Sometimes, they do not understand this policy.” (Group 2)

“Most factories reluctant to give leave to workers, especially Indonesian workers or foreign workers. For instance, when filing leave for a public holiday (Eid Al-Fitr). Everyone has the right to leave and the amount of leave is increasing. By the end of the year, all leave must be used, otherwise forfeited. Some factories actually replace them with money.” (Group 3)

Theme 4: Overtime regulation(OT)

Some participants stated that the Malaysian government’s manpower regulations did not burden them. However, in practice, some factories do not implement these regulations. For example, regulation related to overtime. Overtime work is an option, but sometimes workers are forced by the factories to work overtime:

“Overtime (OT) procedures in some factories are considered burdensome for workers. The provisions for calculating OT time with the salary they received are deemed inappropriate. When workers file a complaint to the factory, they only say to just accept the provisions.” (Group 1)

“A worker had an experience where on national holidays they still have to work, sometimes they find it difficult getting leave as they are forced to work overtime. Even though they have the right to leave and not take overtime.” (Group 2)

Some PMIs felt that if the manpower regulations are properly applied, then they will get more benefits and comfort out of work. Conversely, if the regulations are not obeyed it will only complicate them. In principle, workers are glad to accept if regulations are executed transparently and definitively. They feel safe and protected for they have obtained legal certainty while working in Malaysia.

Theme 5: Salary regulation

Pertaining to salary regulation, since March 2019 factories has followed the government basic salary requirement of RM1200 plus allowance:

“The minimum salary received by each worker is RM1500 per month, but the calculation of allowance is unclear in some factories. So that in some factories, the salaries between old workers and new workers are the same.” (Group 1)

“Regarding salary regulations, we know our basic salary. Based on the provided information, our basic salary is RM1200-1300. The basic salary is not included overtime work. With overtime work, then we will get an extra salary. We will get additional salary in accordance with applicable regulations. Besides, the participants stated that we get accommodation from the factory.” (Group 2)

Theme 6: Safety regulation

As for safety regulation, some respondents stated that the factories pay attention to workers’ safety. However, workers often do not understand the details to the extent of the factory’s obligation to protect workers’ safety. In some construction sector, safety is seen as unsatisfactory:

“Once, there was a decrease in performance in one of the factories. There were 13 machines that only operated by 2 workers and yet the management still demands output and quality. The workers filed a complaint as it is very unlikely for 2 workers to cover all machines because it can endanger the safety of the workers.” (Group 1)

“Concerning safety regulations, I feel the factories are very concerned with their workers’ safety. However, some did not understand in detail the factories’ obligations in protecting workers’ safety. However, they get health insurance if they are sick.” (Group 2)

“Workers who work in buildings or construction sector get unsatisfactory safety facilities.” (Group 3)

Theme 7: Permit regulation

Generally speaking, the Indonesian workers understand permit regulations in Malaysia:

"We are aware and understand these problems; Residence permit, salary rules, and safety regulations including health insurance." (Group 2)

In service or informal sector, the permit is not as easily obtainable:

"As herbal medicine and massage entrepreneur, I have lived in Malaysia for 16 years, but until now have been constrained by permit. Tried to take care of the permit but was deceived. It is hoped that the process of obtaining permits is easy, safe, and with no illegal levies. There used to be a case of illegal levies of RM 3000." (Group 3)

"Getting permits may be difficult. In June, it will be opened again for the processing of permits but it costs around RM 6000. It is very possible for the laws of the Malaysian government to change." (Group 3)

Furthermore, irregular workers or workers without permits face a high degree of risks. Some may not know the regulations or the mechanisms. Some respondents expressed hope that permit can be processed and obtained without going through an agent, but directly from the workplace:

"There may be policies that facilitate the process so it does not need to go through a second or third hand in its process, so it can be processed directly to the consulate. The migrants need not be afraid to deal with the condition of irregular or without permits... That way, the costs should be lower, not to the point that they run out of thousands of ringgits because of being misdirected and misinformed." (Group 3)

The reality can often be detrimental to migrant workers when their permits have exceeded the expiry date:

"Back then, there was someone who surrendered to the consulate because he stayed over the 2 months' limit. To be able to return, the consulate suggested to the immigration office to pay RM3000 not to be sent home immediately, but to be detained first. This is an example of a complicated system. But, don't blame the government, blame yourself too for being negligent. When you go home through a scalper or illegally, it is usually very risky, some even drown. Many like to offer to return home but usually, scalpers ask for additional fees." (Group 3)

4.2. Wage Conditions

Work experience and wage conditions do go hand-in-hand for the PMIs. Two such themes discuss their feelings about this matter.

Theme 1: Appropriate salary

PMIs who work in the formal sector get standard salary in accordance with the wage regulations in Malaysia. Many said that the salary they receive was in accordance with the employment agreement:

"Salary as stipulated by the government is RM1200 for a basic salary. The salary is given according to the kind of work and agreed in the employment agreement. If the work is heavy, then the salary is also higher. With overtime work, workers can get up to RM2500 per month. There will be an increase in salary every year, the increment is adjusted to the policy of each factory. In one of the factories, workers who get a B in the assessment will get a salary increase of RM55 whereas workers who get an A in the assessment will get a raise by RM85. In other factories, the salary increase policy is carried out annually from RM60 to RM140. Workers still get a full salary despite being suspended because of Covid-19. Workers who are on temporary leave due to Covid-19 still get salaries and bonuses every 3 months. Even before the pandemic, workers got a project holiday from their factories by giving them travel tickets." (Group 1)

"The basic salary they received complies with the minimum standards set by the Malaysian government and it will be adjusted (increases as time goes by), based on experience and time, including when we take overtime." (Group 2)

"Regarding the salary, in the factory is indeed not a problem and complies with the agreement. However, wages as contractors or suppliers are often not paid. A police report has been filed and yet there was no response to suppress the company concerned. For example, Mr. Ali [not the real name], his salary has not been paid for 2 years. Even hired a lawyer but unsuccessful because the opponent was a Dato' (the title of honors given by a ruler similar to British title 'Sir'). Working in Malaysia is hard. Working in a factory might be different but working in construction is difficult, hot, rain and heavy, have to lift heavy cement as well." (Group 3)

Theme 2: Problematic/ Unfair salary payment

In one of the factories, the salary is according to the government's regulation. However, there are undue treatments:

"The basic salary is RM1200. If the allowance is added to be the basic salary, I can get RM1500 per month. However, the more overtime works done by me, the less salary I get. The more overtime works are done; the more allowances are cut. If complained, HR would just say "Just follow your pay-slip." (Group 1)

"There are workers who have the experienced of getting different salaries between Indonesian workers and local workers based on skills. With more machine operating skills, Indonesian workers are paid less than local

workers who operate fewer machines. This condition is unfair. Even so, they inevitably have to accept this fact.” (Group 2)

“Any excess of uncompleted contract time is not compensated in cash by the company. For example, the employment contract period is 2 years but after only 1 year and 10 months, the company decided to terminate the employment contract without paying compensation for the remaining 2 months to the worker. (Group 1).”

“In one of the factories, when the contract is terminated, workers will be sent home without being given any allowance at all.” (Group 1)

Similar problems also occur among informal workers in the plantation sector.

“A worker in the plantation sector 2 years has not been paid for 2 full years. Anything is difficult without a national ID (KTP). The passport is also held by the employer. A report has been filed but no action has been taken.” (Group 3)

4.3. Malaysian-Indonesian Cultural Adaptation

Adaptation to the local cultural context is key for the PMIs’ transition into a well-being work environment. Two such themes reveal their feelings on this matter.

Theme 1: Easy to adapt

Based on the PMIs’ responses, adapting to the Malaysian culture is not difficult. In general, there is little or no problem in interacting with locals, either in the workplace and in the residential area:

“We can adjust to the working culture in Malaysia, despite the feeling of being pressured. There are no barriers to communication. Although initially there was a slight difference between Indonesian and Malay. But as time goes by, we can easily adapt.” (Group 1)

“I am able to adapt to the working culture very well. Especially before departing, we have gained information on the working condition in Malaysia’s factories.” (Group 2)

“Adaptation can become a problem when not accustomed to being separated from family, not accustomed to migration, love affairs with foreign citizens, and mentally weak. Not really cultural problem with the Malaysians.” (Group 1)

“Cultural adaptation is very easy; many Malaysians are also willing to learn Indonesian because many consider them to have the same root language. When they first arrived in, when they came to the shop, Malaysians did not understand the way we spoke. But when Malaysians talk, most of us understand them. Over time, both Indonesians and Malaysians can understand each other, language-wise.” (Group 3)

Theme 2: Increase social and cultural capital

As reported by the PMIs, their experiences in cultural differences can enhance their working experiences, social interaction and social circles:

“Yes, I can and based on my friends own admission, they can also communicate in Malay. They can also learn about the discipline of working culture in multinational companies in Malaysia that originate from various countries, such as Japan, the United States and Germany.” (Group 2)

“Factories provide physical convenience while working, we are allowed to sit. If we make a mistake, the supervisor doesn’t scold us directly, the supervisor will ask the group leader to warn the workers. So we do not feel humiliated, but rather feel guided.” (Group 2)

“If Indonesian workers who work here (factory) do good and do not disobey or do not go against the rules, then everything will be easy. From there we can even become friends. They can appreciate Indonesian citizens who work here, especially those who are irregular or don’t have a permit. It’s easy to make money in Malaysia as long as you want to try because the people here are willing to accept us.” (Group 3)

4.4. Experience with Recruitment Agents

Varied responses are discovered with regards to experiences with recruitment agents. Three themes were evident.

Theme 1: Employment information provided

According to the findings, the official recruitment agencies carry out their duties, including providing information regarding working conditions and employment agreements of the workplace in Malaysia. Workers’ experiences in interacting with recruitment agents can be understood by the following comments:

“The official recruitment agents provide good information regarding the workplace and the rules that must be obeyed in Malaysia.” (Group 1)

“We have a good experience with official recruitment agents in Indonesia. Many of us work in multinational factories. Before leaving for Malaysia, workers interact with recruitment agents through vocational schools. Some

workers have direct communication with recruitment agents in their home cities in Indonesia. The official recruitment agencies carry out their duties by providing information regarding working conditions and employment agreements of the workplace in Malaysia.” (Group 2)

Theme 2: Inaccurate information received

The delivery of inaccurate information by recruitment agents (but not official recruitment agencies) is also found among the workers:

“The employment contract states that workers get 14 days off for a month, but in one of the factories, foreign workers only get 8 days off. 14 days off are only given to local workers. Workers are informed that their agent did not take the policy.” (Group 1)

Theme 3: Agents' Professionalism and Misconduct

Based on the experience of some PMIs, they have an official and professional recruitment agent, so that they do not face serious problems:

“Every foreign worker is represented by an agent. Salaries from factories are not paid directly to workers, instead of through agents. It is not serious, so it doesn't matter.” (Group 1)

“The agents representing us are quite helpful in finding a job, as well as in the early days of job placement at the factory.” (Group 2)

“Agencies usually spread information about employment opportunities to schools. When it comes to financial matters, an agent can charge up to RM3000 per person, or some only are paid by donation. Things like these may be done by agents who are looking for workers to work in factories. For those who work in the household, they will be given some pocket money and the administration will be taken care of.” (Group 3)

The agents adhere to regulations that have been formalised by the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia:

“Everything went according to existing regulations. Even so, they also received information from friends outside the factory, that there were recruitment agents who did not fully comply with government regulations.” (Group 2)

However, there are also agents who commit fraud and violate regulations. The emotions run high among the PMIs when talking about these agents:

“There are some agents who deceive people. Those who were supposed to work in a factory were placed in construction. Paid for RM600, the work permit was not issued. Instead, they have to go home and pay another 5 million Rupiah. Irresponsible agents usually come from Indonesia. BNP2TKI should have emphasized these irresponsible agents. Indonesian agents are usually from the police.” (Group 3)

“If possible, don't complicate and oppress the workers. Many agents deceive because when they arrived here (Malaysia), many workers whose names are not registered. Should be deal to deal. At this point, agents are like selling workers to factories. Many cases where workers are placed in a workplace that is different from their expectations. RM15000 per person is very tempting so that many want to become agents. And because there are games with immigration and police. There could be no bribery in the immigration and police. There are games and it's real.” (Group 3)

“Ms. N and Mr. I, arranging a working permit through an agent at RM4000. The number may be not that much here in ringgit, but if converted to rupiah it can become a lot and the difference is big. Administratively, undocumented immigrants are of course wrong, but they have actually tried but only to be stumbled halfway because of unreliable agents.” (Group 3) names are anonymized by researchers.

4.5. Working Conditions and Procedural Matters at Workplace and Indonesian Bureaucracy

There are four themes associated with work conditions, operating procedures, as well as bureaucracy and red-tape.

Theme 1: Ample leave

The working arrangement is supportive vis-à-vis leave and educational pursuits:

“In the factory that I work, the management supports the workers to fill their time off for study or for college, as long as the workers do not take time off at the same time. In a month, there are 16 working days and 14 days off leave for each worker.” (Group 1)

Theme 2: Adequate facilities

The work environment meets the desirable standards of hygiene, safety and security:

“The working conditions at the factory where we work are in line with expectations in terms of hygiene, comfort, and safety. At the factory, there are also facilities for prayer and dining that meet the standard in general. Accommodation is also provided and in good condition.” (Group 1)

“The workplace meets hygiene standards. However, in the event of a workplace accident, the costs are borne by the worker, not the company.” (Group 1)

“Our factories maintain the cleanliness, security and concern for the safety of their workers.” (Group 2)

“The refinery is very concerned about occupational safety; so, we must follow the Standard Operational Procedure (SOP) that has been set, especially those who operate certain machines.” (Group 2)

“Usually, workers here are fulfilled and well-facilitated, especially those who are working in factories.” (Group 3)

Theme 3: Prayers and Accommodation

As reported by the PMIs, for matters related to prayers, the workplace provides opportunities for Muslim workers to perform prayers, but not for Christians:

“Muslims are provided with prayer room (surau). While, there is no place of worship for Christians are provided in the factory, they are given leave on Christmas.” (Group 1)

“We Muslim workers have prayer room (surau) there. For Christian workers, there is no place of worship in the factory. However, in time of religious holidays such as Christmas, they are given time off.” (Group 2)

However, there are still some problems involving construction workers:

“As for construction workers, the facilities are very unsatisfactory. The accommodations are not really livable. Most of them are less decent in terms of hygiene and others. Reports have been submitted to the Consulate General but it seems only a formality. Reports have been filed but can be bribed with some money so there is no action taken.” (Group 3)

Theme 4: Problems of Leave, Contract and Workload

Problems also occur with the issue of leave and contract and the comparative differences of work arrangement policies among employers and companies, as well as departments within the same companies. It is also in this context that the respondents share the experiences, from what they know from other PMIs:

“Information that the employment contract is not going to be renewed was announced last minute. This makes the worker feel uncomfortable. This situation feels as if some of our workers’ employment contract will not be renewed.” (Group 1)

“In some cases at the factory, Indonesian workers must be more willing to convey something to their superiors. Many local workers do not want to work and as a result, Indonesian workers have to work more to compensate for it. There is still also discrimination against migrant workers, especially in the placement of working positions. The highest Indonesian workers can be is a supervisor. Even truck drivers must be locals. Even though sometimes when Malaysians become leaders, it is somewhat disliked. Furthermore, in the case of filing leave, for instance, locals take precedence over foreign workers, including us Indonesians, for various reasons. Although not all of them, usually locals take precedence for holiday leave (Eid Al-Fitr).” (Group 3)

“I hear that sometimes supervisors enforce uncommon rules for taking leave such as not being able to take leave at the beginning or end of the month, despite the fact that taking leave can be done at any given day.” (Group 3)

“Medical leave is sometimes difficult to give as many workers who are not too sick but still taking time off on medical leave.” (Group 3)

“Factories are very difficult to give leave to some workers, especially Indonesian or foreign workers, for example, when applying for taking leave on Eid Al-Fitr. Every worker has the right for taking leave and every year their leave increases. At the end of the year, the leaves must be fully used, otherwise, it will be forfeited. Some factories actually replace them with money willingly.” (Group 3)

“There are workers who experienced discrimination related to working on national holidays. Indonesian workers are paid by normal overtime rate, while locals are paid by national holiday overtime rate, which is higher.” (Group 2)

Policies at one plant may be different from other plants even though it is still in the same company, so the work pressure felt by the workers varies as well.

“At work, workers work under pressure, and sometimes they feel depressed because of it. This is caused by the company's demands related to output, quality and work discipline. The emotions are extraordinary.” (Group 1)

“The employment contract does not describe what kind of work needs to be done. In one of the refinery plants, female workers must lift items weighing 3-5 kg per item, one box can weigh 20 kg. One of the workers was bleeding because the work was too heavy, she had to lift the items to the machine. Afterward, the factory only gives her four days of leave and the factory did not pay for anything (medical care, etc.).” (Group 1)

"I was forced to work for 6 days with 12 hours shift, the remaining 1 day is for time off because I do not want to work overtime. Working schedule like this is done in certain months when the demand and production are high. Normal working days are 4 working days and 2 days for overtime. The reason this is done is because of the shortage of workers. In actuality, they just don't want to recruit more workers. The impact is that workers whose contract will end soon will be sent home early." (Group 1)

"I have the skills to operate the machines better than the locals, but the locals get more salary than me who actually have better skills." (Group 2)

Problems also recur outside the boundaries of employment as they pertain to formal documents such as passport and identity card as well bureaucratic matters in obtaining solutions.

"Many reports of workers who have difficulties in passport making. They must bring National Identity Card (NIC), but those who have lived here for a long time do not have it. I know that more than 20 people who have been helped with their ID-related matters, but 1 person, unfortunately, does not have a family card (KK). If you have been here for a long time, you do not have an NIC. Having a passport but not an NIC certainly can't be done." (Group 3)

"The procedure for reporting Indonesian citizens who died to the Consulate General is also complicated. If there are Indonesian citizens who die and have no money, the Consulate General sometimes likes to complicate things. Usually, there must be a statement letter, then the Ministry of Home Affairs issues a death certificate. If there is a death certificate, there must be a report from the Indonesian Consulate General that a citizen has died, especially the illegal ones. The body can't be left alone for long, but the reporting is made difficult." (Group. 3)

4.6. Social Networking in Overseas

Social networking is one of the sources of capital of PMIs in working overseas, either pre- or post-departure to Malaysia. Respondents explained their experiences of social networking, including in getting a job and the role of community gatherings overseas through five themes below.

Theme 1: Social network to get a job

Overseas social networks are personal or group relations and networks that are used by PMIs to interact, adapt and use to search for jobs and for other activities:

"I have a friend from the same hometown who is in Malaysia." (Group 2)

"We come and work in Penang through agents because we do not know any relatives or friends who have worked in Malaysia." (Group 1)

Theme 2: Lack of help from Friends from same hometown

Experiences of some respondents revealed that friends of the same hometown are unwilling to help them find work in Malaysia:

"Friends of the same hometown did not give any information about the working condition in Malaysia. Information was obtained more from recruitment agent before leaving for Malaysia." (Group 2)

"The similarity of origin does not guarantee fraternity overseas will be strengthened. Based on my experience, there is actually a friend from the same hometown as mine who just keeps her distance. Maybe she was worried that I just arrived (at the time) and that I didn't have enough money would be troublesome and burdensome to her." (Group 2)

Theme 3: Helpfulness from Friends from different hometown

Yet, there are people who are not from the same region but very helpful:

"Friends from different regions who have long worked in Malaysia, without being asked, help and offer money to be used until I get my first salary. The similarity of fate as migrants and the country of origin fosters mutual assistance among us Indonesian migrant workers...In the first month I did not have any money, my housemate who had worked here for a long time volunteered to donate some money to me." (Group 2)

Theme 4: Support of Friends from the same hometown

Unlike the first theme above, in some instances, family and ethnic ties provided social support for migrants from the same clan or ethnic group (as reported by the FDG conversations):

"Unfortunately, there are also those who are all alone or without family. However, some forms of bonding such as ethnic and clan bonds are very helpful. When you know someone by his ethnicity, the relationship will be

better. In fact, when you have the same family name, they are happy to help find a job as well as a place to live, even administrative matters.” (Group 3)

“Some also came because their families have been working in Malaysia for a year. Even happy to assist and to provide a complete and good information related to reliable agents and good workplaces as desired. For example, if you want to work in a place where uniform is the dress code for work, then they will assist you to look for a job where the workers use uniforms.” (Group 3)

“The assistance provide are varies from one family to another. The family from Medan may be happy to help, but the family from Banten will ask for payment or maybe deduct a little salary as a form of a service fee.” (Group 3)

Theme 5: The role of community organizations and gatherings

The following FDG comments depict the role of the Indonesian community organizations and groupings in helping Indonesian migrant workers in northern Malaysia:

“Permai (an Indonesian community organization) assists with the advocacy of Indonesian people who work and experience problems and difficulties, especially in administrative matters. Also, Permai helps provide reliable information related to administrative and policy matters regarding manpower regulation to Indonesian workers in Malaysia. It even often helps manage the needs of some workers who need assistance such as permit arrangement and other administrative matters.” (Group 3)

As noted in their responses, some PMIs are not aware of the existence of Indonesian community organizations around them:

“They did not join nor participate in any program organized by Indonesian community organizations. They were preoccupied with their own work. There was no interaction because the workers were limited to activities in the factories and homes. When invited, they would ask questions about the existence of these organizations. Each organization has its own agenda, IPMI for instance, based in Relau Penang is a fairly large organization that conducts religious studies. Permai Penang with its English Academy and Qur'an Academy programs. So, these organizations are ready to assist if workers want to interact and are allowed to come if there is a problem.” (Group 1)

Some others know about the existence of Indonesian community organizations but not in detail:

“They only found out about this organization when they took part in the activities of reading the Qur'an and English course organized by one of the Indonesian community organization in northern Malaysia.” (Group 2)

“One of my friends had a problem related to matters outside the workplace. Thanks to the help of this Indonesian community organization, the worker could solve the problems well and quickly.” (Group 2)

With the existence of community organizations, PMIs can socialize and meet other fellow citizens from other factories or other lines of work. It is reported by one of the representatives of the Indonesian organization that there nineteen (19) such organizations. With these organizations, they can choose to participate and integrate with fellow countrymen and women while working in Penang.

“At present, there are 19 Indonesian community organizations registered at the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, Penang. They are; (1) Indonesian Students Association - Open University, (2) Indonesian Students Association - University Sains Malaysia, (3) Ikatan Pekerja Muslim Indonesia (IPMI), (4) Forum Komunikasi Muslimah (Fokma), (5) Forum Komunikasi Islam, (6) Perhimpunan Warga Indonesia (Perwira), (7) Armada, (8) Permai Utara Malaysia (Main NGO that covers Indonesian communities in northern Malaysia - Penang, Kedah dan Perlis), (9) Permai Penang and (10) Persatuan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT). They (the PMIs) can join and feel the sense of solidarity with Indonesian friends.” (Group 2)

4.7 Happiness

Workers are happy working and living in Malaysia, despite the homesick feelings that they constantly feel in their hearts and severity of pressure at work. Their happiness is expressed in several forms of statements and expressions as described in ten themes below.

Theme 1: Gratitude and Sense of Gratefulness to God

They are happy because they enjoy and appreciate the fortune they receive. This sense of gratefulness towards God includes many different aspects of their lives. It also covers the salary they get in Malaysia which is better than the salary in Indonesia, for the same kind of work.

“We feel the salary we receive meets the daily necessities. Be grateful and enjoy.” (Group 1)

“Syukur (Thank God), I am grateful. I am from Medan and am grateful to be working in Penang.” (Group 2)

“Thank God. After graduating from a vocational school, I immediately got a job here (Penang). I got a job in a good factory.” (Group 2)

Theme 2: Helping family and Family-giving

Income earned by workers is to support their families' income in addition to meeting the daily basic necessity:

“Surviving to earn money for oneself and family.” (Group 1)

“I've been working here for almost five years. Yes, I am happy. I can support my family financially back in Indonesian. I intend to work abroad after graduating from school and thank God my wish came true. Even though far away from family, I am certainly sad but I also want to help my parents back at home. I am happy to be able to help them.” (Group 2)

“We workers feel the salary they receive meets the life necessities here in Malaysia. We even can still send some money to their families in Indonesia.” (Group 3)

Theme 3: Saving money

Saving for the future when returning to Indonesia is one of the goals of workers going overseas:

“It depends on the needs and lifestyles of the workers. If they live a simple life, then the salary they earn is enough to meet their needs and some of it can be saved.” (Group 2)

“The work is indeed comfortable. Been working for 5 years to achieve the saving target. Until now, I am still working and part of my income is to be saved. Yes, it is comfortable working and living in Malaysia.” (Group 3)

Theme 4: Workers' basic necessities are met

The salary they earned (the basic salary of RM 1200-1300 and additional income from overtime OT work) is sufficient to meet their basic necessities:

“We are already getting free accommodation from the company. Besides, we get an allowance for lunch, reducing our living costs and saving our income.” (Group 1)

“I work in one of the factories. Thankfully syukur, where I work, they also provide accommodation facilities and days off proportionally in addition to the monthly salary. I feel comfortable working here.” (Group 3)

Theme 5: Investment in education

Formal education is one of the goals of some of the workers to improve their knowledge. The incomes they received are used to continue with the undergraduate studies:

“Another positive point that makes us happy is that our work can be used to further education to the undergraduate level.” (Group 1)

Theme 6: Salary Expectations

Workers not only receive salaries in accordance to the employment contract they signed, but also meet their expectations. In some cases, due to the relative difference compared to the salaries in Indonesia, it even exceeds their expectations:

“Yes, I want to stay here because the salary is better than in Indonesia. The pay is decent and the working condition is comfortable.” (Group 1)

“I am happy to be able to get a job in Malaysia easily. The income I make is enough to meet my life's needs. In my experience, as long as there is a will to find, God willing (InsyaAllah) we can work here”. (Group 3)

Theme 7: New experiences

Workers gain new life experiences and expand friendships:

“Happy, because I can make money independently, support my siblings financially, have new experiences, a college with my own money, what I once wanted is now achieved and have lots of friends.” (Group 1)

Theme 8: New social network

The workers feel happy as they have expanded their social networks in the workplace and even outside of work in living environments:

“Alhamdulillah, I am happy. I can work here. I am happy, able to experience and meet some new friends. I can also send some money to my parents back home in Brebes, Central Java.” (Group 2)

“I have new experience and also new friends. Alhamdulillah, I can send some money to the family back at home, even though it is not much. But I am glad syukur to be able to earn money from my own sweat.” (Group 2)

“Interacting with Malaysians is fun because they easily understand Bahasa Indonesian well. I once worked with a family and even considered as their own child and left their inheritance for me. Alhamdulillah (thank Allah / God), I also met my Indonesian spouse when I worked in Malaysia.” (Group 3)

Theme 9: Extension of Employment contract

Workers are happy because they have the opportunity to extend their employment contract:

“I am grateful; I've been working there for more than two years. And now my employment contract has been extended by the company. I enjoy working here.” (Group 2)

“You can keep your contract and can extend it as long as you don't get pregnant.”

Theme 10: Ease of Social Acceptance

There is a sense of positive acceptance by the locals towards the workers:

“Happy, because the conditions for working here are very simple, the important thing is to have high morale, sincerity, willingness to work whatever can be done. If you are not picky you can definitely get a job and you have to be smart to socialize. Even working as a dishwashing laborer can be easier. What's important is for the sake of being able to eat. In terms of work and life, God willing, the tolerance and acceptance is high.” (Group 3)

“Alhamdulillah (thank Allah / God), there are no difficulties. The locals receive us very well, able to adjust with the society around her (boss) and a lot of reliefs / breaks.” (Group 3)

5. Conclusion

This research begins with a general inquiry on whether Indonesian migrant workers are happy working in Malaysia, specifically Penang. As it employs an abductive methodology, the research has uncovered various aspects of their everyday life experiences, defined and explicated by the social actors themselves. Based on the analysis of their very own insights and constructions, there are six main contentions that be made in this research. To reiterate these are qualitative findings that are captured from the social actors (PMIs) themselves; hence, the analysis provides a frame of theorizing into their subjective insights and inner world which are still stemmed from the empirical experience of their everyday life and work experience. It yields a type of (social) actor-centred theorizing. This is the value of qualitative analysis of abductive research. Six contentions are further revealed from the analyses of the above findings:

Contention #1: There are indeed matters that PMIs complaint about. But overall, even with the presence of complaints, there is a general sense of positive description of work and life experiences which come with a degree of happiness.

Contention #2: Yet difficult experiences do exist. They do recall various degrees of hardships that they have undergone. Nevertheless, these experiences and memories, as they stand, do not necessarily translate into unhappiness. This leads to the next contention.

Contention #3: The meanings attached to the work experiences define the happiness of PMIs. In other words, even when an experience takes a toll on them, it can be interpreted as something meaningful or as a worthwhile effort towards a higher purpose or a better state of being. Many times, these memories of difficult experiences are enthusiastically shared as the rewarding parts of their work and life.

Contention #4: Following from contention #3, their existence and experiences in Malaysia is often associated with a higher meaning or a higher purpose. This higher purpose can be found in the twin pillars of spiritual gratitude and family-giving. These twin pillars recur frequently in their responses vis-à-vis happiness.

Contention #5: The totality of experience contributes substantially towards defining their happiness. The work and life experiences of PMI's are subjectively and meaningfully pieced together into a whole which often is greater than the sum of its parts. When ontologically analysed, the emerging themes of positives far outweigh the negatives. Indeed, the PMIs reported more positive experiences than negative ones in the totality of their experience in Penang. It is more positive quantitatively, in terms of references to the number of positively described experiences, as well as qualitatively, in terms of the significance of the type of experience. In addition to the twin pillars of family-giving and spiritual gratitude, the PMIs connect a sense positive meaning to various aspects of their work and life, including new experiences, decent wages/salary, personal financial needs and sense of independence, circle of friends and expanded social network, sense of continuity from school to work and possibility of work contract extension, a sense of self-empowerment through savings/investment and even further education. These different elements of experiences create a totality of their state of being.

Contention #6: At a deeper level of analysis, happiness, or the lack of it, in and of itself, may not be the main emotional state that PMIs seek. Indeed, centring the line of inquiry on happiness may serve to fill a vacuum in the happiness discourse; but it is not sufficient to define what PMIs' experiences are about, or more importantly it does not appear to be the emotional state that PMIs place the most significance on. Based on the findings using this abductive research strategy, what the research captures is that the essences lie with or within the twin pillars. Using

their own social constructs, the two main essences are *syukur* (gratitude) and familial-giving or contribution - ability of giving back to family at home as well as sharing and making them happy, especially parents. It should be noted that the construct of *syukur* is not merely a general sense of gratefulness but it implies a feeling of gratitude towards God or a divine being.

From a critical perspective, hardship and hard labour, justifiable or not, can be exploited, as long as the PMIs own subjective interpretation sustain, tolerate and even accept it. Exploitation in the form of rent-seeking, cheating, discrimination and deception do occur as expressed by PMIs themselves. To what extent should this be the case and how should it be addressed? Albeit rhetorical, there are many answers to this line of question depending who is asking and who is answering. Certainly, there are responsibilities to be shouldered by various parties, be they companies or employers, home or host governments, PMIs themselves and their families as well as NGOs or society in general. These responsibilities can be seen from an ethical, CSR-related (Bustami et al, 2010), legal, communal or even religious perspective. CSR alone should be all-encompassing or at least, should address a large portion of the problems (Elisha et al., 2007). Yet, reality is far from the ideal. Nevertheless, all these should be contextualized to the PMIs themselves and their needs and wants, least of which is their happiness.

This leads back to the central research question, it can be argued that when there is *syukur* (a sense of gratitude to God) and familial-giving, happiness ensues. Debatably, spiritual gratitude (*syukur*) and familial-giving are even better emergent social constructs in describing the goals as well as the inner needs and wants of these PMIs working in Penang than happiness. In this respect, the highest state of social-emotion is not merely or necessarily happiness or self-actualization, but more so, spiritual gratitude and self-transcendence. Spiritual gratitude gives them that sense of being thankful and embracing God's gifts and be connected to the Creator. Self-transcendence vis-à-vis their family at home gives them the sense of fulfilling something greater than oneself or one's needs and to contribute and give back to their family members. They do not necessarily pursue happiness directly, but happiness ensues when there is *syukur* and familial-giving. Experiences and the meanings expressed by them can be seen in this light.

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