

# ORIGINAL RESEARCH: Motivations for migration among *Minangkabau* women in Indonesia

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## Abstract

*Minangkabau* people in Indonesia are widely claimed as the largest matrilineal society in the world. They had always encouraged their males to go on sojourn outside their homeland in search of economic activity and experience. Their kinship system had provided *Minang* women with special rights to take care of their joint household (*rumah gadang*) and their ancestral land. In the second half of the twentieth century, however, increasing number of *Minang* females began to leave their villages and districts to study, work and sojourn in distant areas away from their homeland. We shall discuss this phenomenon among the *Minangkabau* people of Indonesia, seeking the reasons that motivated females to sojourn as well as migrate like their men. To help comprehend the complex processes at work in motivating *Minang* women to sojourn, we rely on narrated reports of female *Minang* migrants in the greater Jakarta region that includes the capital city of Jakarta and the adjoining city of Tangerrang. The study was thus performed through in-depth interviews with *Minang* females in the two cities, and the narratives were used to discover the motivations that provided the impetus to their migration.

**Keywords:** Female migration, Indonesia, Internal migration, *Minangkabau* women, Motivations for migration.

## Introduction

Globalization has triggered mass mobility to capital cities in all countries. The analysis of behaviors of male and female migrants, however, needs different approaches in regard with the types of migration, security, inequalities of treatments and opportunities that female migrants encounter in their destinations. Within Indonesia, Jakarta and many provincial cities are no exception to such phenomena. During Suharto's leadership, the government used the 'Five Year Development Plans' (REPELITA) to develop all sectors within the country. Jakarta and its adjoining areas received both national and international investments for development. The rapid development of Jakarta attracted people to move into Jakarta.

Jakarta and the new satellite city Tangerang have been attractive to migrating women. According to the population census in 2000 in *Daerah Khusus Ibukota*, the official name for Jakarta (DKI Province), the total number of *Minangkabau* people was 264,639. The census data in DKI shows that the number of *Minang* males in rural and urban areas of DKI was 139,490, while the total number of *Minang* females was 125,149 (BPS DKI Jakarta, 2000). The *Minangkabau* population formed the second largest group after *Bataknese* (300,562 people) in the greater Jakarta metropolitan area (BPS DKI Jakarta, 2000). In Tangerang, the total number of *Minang* males in urban and rural areas was 88,367 and the population of *Minang* females was 80,135 (BPS Jawa Barat, 2000). Yet, the difference between the total population of male and female *Minang* migrants in Jakarta and Tangerang was not very significant.

Migration for *Minangkabau* people is called *marantau* or in Indonesian word *merantau* (to migrate). The root of this word is *rantau*. For *Minangkabau* people, *rantau* means any area outside one's *nagari* or district. For a very long time mobility of *Minang* people was not only inter-district and inter-provincial but they had

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also gone to neighboring countries. The tradition of *merantau* was generally prevalent among young men for two reasons of higher education and trade (see Josselin De Jong, 1952; Kato 2005; Naim, 1979; Chadwick, 1991; Asnan, 2007). Graves (1981:19) notes that families with long established traditions of *merantau* could easily locate a kinsman in any major town almost anywhere in West Sumatra (and, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost in any major city in Indonesia).

West Sumatra is widely claimed as home to the world's largest matrilineal society (Korff 2000; Kato 2005). The land is called *Ranah Minang* or *Minangkabau* land and its capital city is Padang. Its people are called *Minangkabau* but are often referred as *Minang* or *Padang*. For people outside West Sumatra, the word *Padang* is often used for people originally from West Sumatra. Generally, *Minangkabau* people refer to themselves by the name of the place of their origin or their clan. The involvement of *Minang* women in migration had been recognized but their movement was not considered as their individual decisions (Murad, 1980; Kato, 2005; Chadwick, 1991; Graves, 1987; Naim, 1979; Reenen, 1996). Generally, they were presumed to have followed *urang gaek* or *urang tuo* (parents) or to join *sanak* (means siblings or those who could be close or distant relatives). This could also mean *ikuik* to accompany one's *mamak* (means mother's brother or a relative), *etek* (means mother's sisters or aunts), and a sister or a brother who have had settled in an area.

The major aim of this research was to explore and elaborate the motivations of *Minang* women to leave their home of origin and sojourn in the greater Jakarta region. This paper first provides a background to *Minangkabau* migration with special reference to the new phenomenon of female migration. It also provides the theoretical aspects that define the orientation of the paper. The fieldwork and data are discussed next. The *Minang* women's perceptions of their migration to Jakarta and Tangerang will be emphasized to show that the educational attainment levels, skills and the economic activities of the women in *rantau* have had bearings on their motivation to migrate. Their ties with their natal villages, especially by way of remitting money to their families in West Sumatra is shown as encouraging them to sojourn than return home.

**Theoretical considerations:** People's movements from rural to urban areas or cities have been increasing in developing countries. Varieties of interpretations and approaches towards migration have been advanced in the last two decades. The demand for labor force is one of the reasons for the increase in migration; however, it is not the only factor that pulls people to migrate from their home of origin. Skeldon (1997: 2) remarks that "migration itself encompasses more than a simple unilinear movement between rural and urban sectors and needs to be conceptualized as a complex system of short term, long term, short distance and long distance movements that can be better subsumed under the term mobility." Another theory is that migration can take place as a result of overpopulation in sending areas (Goldscheider, 1996: 273). Goldscheider (1996: 278) adds that "migration may free individuals from some of the constraints and obligations of traditional rural social structure and from the ascriptive role of place and family of birth". This process may characterize long-term, permanent moves more than seasonal and local migrations.

Lee (1996) discusses the motivation of people's movements and the "development of streams and counter streams and their characteristics". Motivation is described as based on either individual or household decisions. Lee (1996) explains that migration flows are also viewed through the volume of migration, and the characteristics of migrants in relation to positive and negative elements in sending and receiving areas.

Numerous studies have shown that people move out of their home of origin for economic reasons. Their decision may not be made by the individual alone but is a family based decision instead, and helps specify the motivation for migration, and whether the push factors are more dominant than the pull factors. Davin (1999:

76) describes that the family in China's rural households played an important role in the process of migration in 1999. The family decided as to who migrates. Having relatives and friends in the target area can provide them with temporary settlement and information about jobs, and the "do's and the don'ts" in the new environment. Davin's (1999: 74) study shows that chain migration was practiced in some rural areas as the pioneers could help with job information and settlement.

Migration cannot be separated from push and pull factors. It is interesting to examine, however, whether pull factors are more dominant than push factors. People may move only to certain places for their migratory target. Winter (2009:13) points out that people move to certain places where there are people they know who can assist them with a shelter and information. This kind of mobility leads to chain migration (see Haas, 2010). In this type of migration sets of interpersonal ties connect migrants, former migrants and non-migrants in origin and destination areas through bonds of kinship, friendship and shared feelings of belonging to a community. Winter (2009: 13) describes that the chain migration model has two advantages; one is about job information and the other is safety and comfortable support upon arrival.

In addition to the above theories, women's migration may take place as they want to be free from responsibilities as members of their community. Bah et al. (2003) studied six areas on rural-urban linkages in Mali, Nigeria and Tanzania. They show how migration affects people's lives. The study explains the main reason to migrate as being economic, but overlapping with the desire to widen one's experience and for the younger generation to escape from obligations and control from elders (Bah et.al. 2003:19). Moreover, young single women's movements in those areas increase as they can find jobs as domestic workers in urban areas or at international resorts. Bah et al (2003: 20) point out that "women's migration is also increasingly socially acceptable, provided they contribute to their parental household's finances through remittance".

Migration studies on *Minang* people have focused largely on men's movement. We know little about *Minang* women's migration such as their motivations, the processes, the patterns and the consequences of their movements. The limited existing literature on *Minang* female migration suggests that migration is commonly undertaken by males. It is known in *Minang* language as *pai merantau* meaning 'going outside of one's home of origin'. Women's migration has not been a concern for all researchers as it is commonly viewed as related to their husbands or parents. It means that their decisions and motivations were regarded as unimportant in the process of their migration. Neither was their roles elaborated in the receiving areas and their home of origin.

In his study, Kato (2005) noted that the percentage of *Minang* women's migration had significantly increased. Although in the beginning, women migrated to join their husbands, the percentage of women's migration with their children slowly increased. It started from 5 to 6 percent, and then more than doubled to about 13% (Kato, 2005: 151). During the Dutch period, the number of women who migrated alone was 3% but it increased to 12% between 1942 and 1961. Then the number doubled to 26% in 1961 (Kato, 2005: 151). He does not give specific reasons why there were more women on *rantau*. Kato (2005) suggests that single women probably went to pursue higher education and continued to stay in *rantau*; however, older women with divorced status left with their children. He adds that it is very obvious that the migrants preferred to migrate to Jakarta and Pekanbaru.

Given the findings of the studies above, it is clear that culturally men were encouraged to migrate but women were expected to take care of the ancestral land and *rumah gadang*. *Minang* women's movement was confined to their own territory including her home and farm, and her ancestral land. In addition, Graves (1981: 20) describes that a woman was not permitted to leave her mother's home and thus could not accompany her

husband abroad. As mentioned earlier, women who migrated were presumed to follow their *urang gaek* or *urang tuo* (parents) or to join their *sanak* (literally siblings, but also probably close or distant relatives). This could also mean accompanying a *mamak* (mother's brothers or other relatives), an *etek* (mother's sisters or aunts), a sister or brother.

The traditional matrilineal society in West Sumatra has no class system but only status groups. People in traditional *Minangkabau* villages are categorized as nobles and non-nobles. Graves (1981: 5) describes that there is "constant competition among individuals and their families to attain recognition and statuses." Such positions may be conferred as well as being derived from lineage, power and prestige. Therefore, families try to keep and acquire prosperity, power, family prestige and social position for lineage members. In addition, communal land, houses and properties or *harta pusaka tinggi* are inherited by women from the lineage ancestors but protected carefully by the male guardian called *mamak*. The efforts and responsibility of the family increase its base wealth as well as the private family income called *harta pencarian*. Graves (1981) states that wealth gained from lifetime accumulation can develop the power and status within the entire family. This is one of the reasons *Minang* women who go on *merantau* only show the materials that they have gained to show their status transition rather than class change.

However, *Minang* women's migration patterns and decision making process need to be elucidated. This paper investigates the process of *Minang* Women's migration and their motivations. The stories of *Minang* women who migrated to Jakarta and Tangerang are used to understand their motivations.

## Methodology

An extensive field research was conducted to collect data from informants and institutions by direct interviews. Fieldwork was conducted in three periods in late September to late November 2009, from April to May 2010 and February to March 2011. Video recording was used to record the areas of research, jobs and activities of the *Minangkabau* women in Jakarta and Tangerang. During the interviews, notes were taken in order not to cause anxiety among respondents. The criteria for the selection of informants included females from West Sumatra aged 15-70 who were approached with snowball sampling. All of them had lived in *rantau* in the area of Jakarta and Tangerang. Women who regarded Jakarta or Tangerang as their second or third destination after staying for some time in other cities such as Medan, Pekanbaru, Batam and Surabaya were also included in this study. The narratives of 30 informants have been used in this study.

This research focused on *Minang* women who were in Jakarta and Tangerang. As Jakarta became the center of Indonesian development, it also became the destination for all migrants (Hugo, 1979; Romdiati and Noveria, 2006). Tangerang is a new urban city which is the capital of Banten province (became a province in 2000), located on the border of South Jakarta. Since the 1980s, Tangerang has become an industrial city and the second largest city after Jakarta in terms of its migrant numbers (Effendi et al, 2010). Tangerang was the second choice for migration as its new urban area was located next to the capital city, Jakarta, and was the third largest city after Bekasi. Tangerang's fast growth is related to its closeness to Jakarta. It is located about 30 kilometers west of Jakarta. Its infrastructure and facilities are much better as it is a new urban city. Tangerang offers cheaper houses with better quality and less competition. People prefer to commute from Tangerang to Jakarta for work.

## Findings and Discussion

We describe the motivations of *Minang* women to leave West Sumatra to go to the greater Jakarta region. The thirty informants whose narratives are used in this paper shared a collective knowledge about Jakarta and Tangerang. They came from different villages and were of different ages when they decided to migrate. The number of female migrants was higher than men. We have examined women's migration processes through their narratives under the subsections: the networked migration, running away from personal problems and the impact of education and skills.

**The networked migration:** When *Minang* women migrate, most of them face different challenges than men as they have grown up in a society that gives a central role for women due to the matrilineal *adat*. Some of the migrants were aware of the tough competition at Jakarta but the modern and luxurious life in Jakarta masked all the challenges. Others who were not knowledgeable about Jakarta left their villages as they were promised jobs and better incomes. The decision to *merantau* was a personal one as they believed that Jakarta provided better opportunities.

*Minang* women have a vivid picture of *rantau* and what they could do there. Migration for them was to ensure that they would have a better life. They valued their existence in *rantau* and their bond with their families in *rantau* and in home of origin. The sense of sisterhood and togetherness among *Minang* women in *rantau* has reinforced gendered networks and responsibilities among *Minang* women in *rantau*. These networks are more intense among females from the same village.

For *Minang* people, PRRI (*Pemerintah Revolusioner Republik Indonesia* – Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia) is not a happy memory. Some *Minang* people migrated to some place outside West Sumatra to avoid being persecuted by the Indonesian Army as well as by local revolutionaries (Bahar and Tadjoeidin, 2004: 163). The rebellion in West Sumatra caused chaos and made people afraid for their safety. The soldiers from Jakarta occupied some areas in West Sumatra. People were under threat from these soldiers. An informant, named Etek Zarah described, “Girls were hidden by their parents because soldiers could rape them.”

From the narratives of the young *Minang* women, it is clear that their motivation was to look for a job and they followed the migration paths of the pioneers that they knew. Their migration was not primarily for economic reasons. The pull factors obviously were not only the opportunities that were available in Jakarta but also the existence of people they knew and trusted. Their social networks played an important role in their migration. The social networks provided them a place to live and help with other daily needs until they got a job and became independent.

**Running away from personal problems:** Some women moved to Jakarta after they encountered problems in their lives. The problems they faced became the push factors for them to leave. Though it was difficult for their parents and relatives to let them go to *rantau*, they eventually left. The existence of relatives and friends ameliorated the worries of being on *rantau*.

Some were interested to know about new ideas and modern life styles. They got more freedom to experience new lifestyles and ideas. Modern lifestyles such as parties, clubbing and other groups of friends became part of their interests. They gained more freedom by joining non-*Minang* social groups. This feeling was noticed by Blackwood from a woman in Taram. Blackwood (2000: 141) refers to a young woman's statement that in Jakarta she could get more freedom because she could act as a metropolitan woman. By joining the new communities in Jakarta, she could fulfill her interests in obtaining a wider knowledge that

presumably would contradict *Minangkabau* people's *adat* and norms. According to *Minangkabau adat*, the responsibility of the first daughter is to take care of her matrilineal family.

Minang women in this study have provided a different perspective about their lives in *rantau*, particularly those who worked very hard to survive in *rantau*. Marni, for instance, was one of the tough Minang woman and famous for her salon services that were enjoyed by many women in Sonny's housing complex. Marni was a young woman from Silungkang who left her village because she did not like the man that her parents arranged for her to marry. As a result, her parents asked her to leave. She protested the idea of marrying *anak bako* (the son of her father's sister). She explained, "My father did not know that the man liked gambling and often got drunk". It is common in *Minangkabau* culture to arrange marriages among *anak bako* which is called *pulang ke bako* (return to *bako* by marrying the son or the daughter of the father's sister) or marry *anak mamak* (marry the son or daughter of the mother's brother). In Jakarta, she had three kids and a husband who worked as a taxi driver. This made her search for a job that would help improve the financial conditions of her family, and her hard life in *rantau* is reflective of the many other *Minang* women in *rantau*.

***The impact of education and skills:*** The narratives reveal that *Minang* women migrants in *rantau* came to Jakarta with various educational attainments and skills. There was a visible relationship between *Minang* women's educational attainment and the kinds of economic activities that they were involved in.

Economic activity in here is defined broadly. It includes permanent and temporary jobs and any activity that earns cash or reward. Rewards include the receiving of pocket money, housing, food, and other gifts such as clothes, tickets to visit home or kin. The narratives reveal that education generally became the push factor to migrate. Migration obviously is not only for women who wanted to continue their study but also includes those who could not go for higher education and women who had finished their university education. The discussion in this subsection focuses on the activities of women who had received higher education.

For young *Minang* women with college and university qualifications, the dream to come Jakarta is to get a better job and higher salary. It is evident from the narratives with young *Minang* women that *rantau* offers jobs and good salaries. The challenge of living and working in *rantau* enables them to face hard competition and overcome them. They have confidence in their ability to survive and be successful in *rantau*. Some of them had to convince their parents to allow them to go because their parents wanted them to be near home. The research data show, however, that for some women, their economic activities in *rantau* were not related to their educational background.

The narratives showed that none of the *Minang* women ever had planned to be a domestic worker in other households. Among the *Minang* women, none of them worked as a housekeeper or maid. Arif as the head of *Ikatan Keluarga Minang* (Minang Families Affiliation) in Binong housing complex, Tangerang said, "there are about 500 *Minang* households here. Most *Minang* households in this complex are categorized as middle class. Most of the women are traders, teachers and civil servants" When I asked him whether there are any *Minang* females who worked in factories as laborers, Arif answered:

"There were *Minang* men who worked in factories but they did not do the lowest job. In the factory, where I worked before, there were *Minang* men and women who worked as mechanics, administrators, supervisors or sales persons. They had graduated from universities. Yes, there was one young *Minang* woman who lived in this neighborhood for a short time. She worked as a laborer in a towel factory. However, I guess it was an emergency job for her. Then she quit. I do not know where she moved."

This may signify an interesting fact that *Minang* would never stay long as lower paid workers. The interviews at Tanah Abang provided different perspectives about *Minang* migrants living in Jakarta. As a large wholesale market area in Jakarta it had a range of economic activities. Walking along the corridors of shops, one could hear people in the shops talking in *Minangkabau* language to other shopkeepers. Parts of the market became a *Minang* neighborhood, where shoppers used *Minangkabau* language when they bargained. Most of them had shops not very far from people who had come from the same village or were their relatives. Some of them, usually the new family members, got loans from their relatives who had already established their business either in Tanah Abang or Senen.

*Minang* women who had high school education managed to obtain a skill that enabled them to pursue their dreams. They could earn enough money and they could avoid doing low paid jobs. In fact, limited education did not pose difficulties for *Minang* women to get a job in *rantau*. Some women could still earn enough money for living.

Husna's migration experiences show that her first migration to Batam was not successful. Then she moved to Kalimantan. However, she could not make a living in Kalimantan. She decided to return to West Sumatra. Then on the way to West Sumatra, she stayed for a while in Jakarta. In Jakarta, she saw an opportunity to sell traditional food. She started as a street-vendor and walked around the city to sell *Lamang Tapai*. Husna cooked *Lamang Tapai* with her husband at home. The increased income from her small home industry enabled her to buy a motor bike with a mortgage loan. She drove around in the motorbike selling *Lamang Tapai*. The motorbike helped her to expand her business because she could reach distant areas from her house by riding her motorbike. Besides, selling *Lamang Tapai* around Southern Jakarta and Bintaro, she also received large orders for parties. Having a hand phone, moreover, enabled her to receive orders from people beyond her routine routes. Her bad migration experiences in the previous cities became the pebbles for her success.

A common tendency for many *Minang* women who had only high school education was to work for their relatives. In this context, 'helping' or working for relatives in their shops or working for people from their village is common. Besides the salary, they also received lunch and transportation allowances.

Life outcomes of women who had university degrees are significantly better compared to those with only high school education. Women who had university degrees could easily get a job that suited their expectations. The majority of those women felt happy with jobs that paid them well. Moreover, they also advanced to higher positions. Their promotion brought them more prestige and power.

Yanti who went to Jakarta with her friend had dreamt of working in Jakarta from her university days in Padang. Her first job was being a secretary but in 1993, she got a better job in a larger company as a secretary. In that office, she had to do translation that meant she had more responsibilities. Yanti's story shows that her educational achievement helped her to get a better job that was related to her education. In order to develop her skills in translation, she took some courses on legal translation and contract law. This meant she earned more money. Yanti explained, "I had to work harder not only because of my position as a translator but my husband was unemployed. He lost his job when the financial crisis in 1998 hit his office."

It was not easy for her husband to find a job and thus Yanti become the breadwinner of her family. This swift change in gender role became possible because they lived in a metropolitan city. Yanti had to work every day and often came home late. Her husband had to do the housework and go shopping and cook food. Jakarta with its urban and multi ethnic communities enabled him not to feel ashamed of his role.

Another example of the struggle of *Minang* woman in *rantau* is the life story of Parnis. She managed to finish her junior high school. She went to Jakarta after she got married with her *anak mamak* (a son of her uncle). In the beginning, she helped her husband sell bags in Tanah Abang. But it was not his business. Parnis said that she experienced the ups and downs of surviving in *rantau*. She also knew how her relatives in *rantau* worked hard to earn money and became successful.

The hardship in *rantau* turned into a sense of pride and happiness when they returned home with a smart look wearing the latest fashionable clothes. *Minang* women handled their hardships in *rantau* while pursuing their career. From the narratives examined, it became clear that university education contributed to the success of pursuing a career in Jakarta and Tangerang. Once the women felt comfortable with the job, they could decide to live in *rantau* permanently. This was observed for some women in our study.

## Conclusion

*Minang* women left their home of origin as there was lack of jobs in the *nagari* (district) and in West Sumatra. They migrated as Jakarta and Tangerang provided the pull factors. The information and networks of earlier migrants also opened the paths for the women's journey to the capital city. The social capital of the migrants provided safety and also a sense of security to their parents. Effendi et.al (2010: 155) claim that friends and family members who had already migrated to urban areas gave villagers the information they needed to find jobs in the cities and adjust to urban life.

From the narratives it became clear that most *Minang* women in *rantau* were motivated by individual interests. They left the village with the permission of their parents and relatives. However, it is not hardship in the home of origin that underpins *Minang* women's decision to go *rantau* in Jakarta. The political uncertainties and lack of opportunities to get jobs were the driving factors. The range of opportunities that were available in Jakarta and Tangerang were channeled through their social networks. Thus, a move to *rantau* was to seek a better life.

Migration allowed the women to build their confidence and knowledge so that they were able to contribute to the prosperity of their family. Their success in *rantau* helped the welfare of their family as they could help their parents to get health care and support their younger brothers and sisters to obtain higher education or channel information so that they could get better jobs. In addition to that, they also helped their nephews and nieces to have better education if their parents were not able to support them. This outcome may be similar to other migrant women elsewhere as in the case of Filipinas, Sri Lankans and even other Indonesian women migrating out to work as domestic workers. However, in the case of *Minang* women migrating to Jakarta and Tangerang, the help extended to their kin family members by bringing them over to *rantau* for education and skill based occupations, rather than undertaking unskilled jobs. In this process of migration *Minang* women gained higher status and power instead of moving down in their socio-economic status.

The narratives reveal that *Minang* women's migration was generally influenced by their male relatives such as *mamak*, elder brother's migration or their *etek* (aunts). Most of the *Minang* migrant women made a decision of their own to migrate. Evidence shows that the presence of people they knew in *rantau* helped the women to feel secure in seeking temporary settlement. These social networks formed channels of opportunities for them to find a job and housing. The presence of their relatives in *rantau* was one of the pull

factors for *Minang* women to migrate. As Naim (1979: 283) notes “*merantau* has become an institution and part of social life and character of *Minangkabau* people”.

For some *Minang* women who only had friends in *rantau* to provide temporary settlement for them, this became the stepping-stone to survive. The social networks provided them settlement and other useful information. The experiences of the migrants in this study showed that most of them used their relative’s networks.

For migrants who never went to Jakarta, their anxieties about *rantau* could be ameliorated by having social networks. Some obviously migrated to Jakarta and Tangerang because they were attracted to the glamorous lights of the megacity. Like other Indonesians, *Minang* women obviously migrated as they wanted to have a better life. That means they hoped for a better job, salary and enjoying modern life. Although there were women who left to get away from their personal problems, such as love, death of their spouse, arranged marriage, they were supported by their relatives in *rantau*.

It became clear during the fieldwork that *Minang* migrant women did not have complete freedom in *rantau*. The social controls of the village and the community remained strong at certain levels. The stories narrated by respondents illustrated how *Minang* men usually had the role of a *mamak* and were supposed to protect and take care of their nieces and nephews and extend their responsibility to all females even outside their homeland. They felt uncomfortable when there were *Minang* women who broke *Minang* women’s ideal image. Considering the existence of *Minang* people around Jakarta and Tangerang, especially men who continue to play their ‘*mamak*’ roles, it is clear that *Minang* women’s activities in *rantau* were monitored by *Minang* people who ‘cared’ about them. The presence of a ‘protector’ uncle or *mamak* among these migrants enabled them to become guardians of *adat* in *rantau*. This showed that *Minang* women were not culturally free and could not do things that might embarrass their extended family in Jakarta.

Most of the informants expressed the usual responses when they were asked why they left their village, such as, “What am I going to do? It is better to go to *rantau*”; “I was willing to change my life”; “I also wanted to do like others”; or “I also want to be like others”. ‘To be like others’ meant ‘to achieve success’. Success in *rantau* generally refers to the achievement of earning money, having material goods and a higher status. It is interesting to note that material goods for *Minang* people generally attracted the attention of other members in the village. Villagers estimate a migrants’ material success by noting whether their parents’ house in the home of origin has been renovated or enlarged. In addition to that, they take note of the nice clothes, gold ornaments and the car they drive when they visit someone’s house.

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