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# “PLEASE DON’T TREAT ME LIKE A SERVANT. I DO HAVE MY RIGHTS”: INDONESIAN MIGRANT DOMESTIC WORKERS (IMDWS) WROTE BACK IN *FAMILIAR STRANGERS* (2018)

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## ABSTRACT

Facilitated by The Voice of Singapore’s Invisible Hands, a non-profit organization (NPO) that promotes the rights and welfare of migrant workers in Singapore through literary works on Facebook, some Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers (IMDWs) in Singapore such as Seruni, Fadillah, et. al., to name a few, have been able to publish their poems and short stories in an anthology entitled *Familiar Strangers* (2018). To add to the current studies of literary works written by migrant workers that are about home and family as well as migratory experience of exile, loneliness, alienation, and isolation, the present study offers a different perspective of IMDW’s migratory experience working in Singapore that is depicted in the six selected poems through the postcolonial lens. Accordingly, it examines the migrant workers’ salient migratory experience of working in Singapore that, I argue, conveys voices of renegotiation for better IMDWs’ position as domestic workers and thus challenges certain stereotypes about them. The voice of renegotiation is expressed by vocalizing steadfastness and courage where subversion and confrontation against the dehumanization they oftentimes encounter can also be observed. These IMDWs through their poems are seen as a countering narrative about Indonesian domestic workers, and the notion of writing back is then solidly founded.

**Keywords:** *migrant domestic workers, migratory experience, poems, postcolonial reading, Singapore*

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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is recognized as one of the main exporters of migrant workers in Southeast Asia and one of the largest countries of origin for international labor migration (Sukamdi & Brownlee, 2000: 3). Statistics suggests that there has been a great number of Indonesians sent abroad as migrant workers to various countries. However, so far, there has been no official records that inform the exact number of IDMWs working in the private sectors. The only reliable information is about the most common jobs they hold that include housemaid, nanny and caregiver (Dewi & Yazid, 2017). A great number of Indonesian migrant workers have a similar condition to Philippine migrant workers, that is the majority of

them “are contract workers in low-skilled occupation and the contract duration is two years” where “female workers are mainly employed as domestic workers in the private sectors” in the regions such as Southeast Asia and Middle East (Rother, 2017: 7). As a result, domestic workers are often looked down as people with limited skills. This negative perception is the main reason migrant workers experience low self-esteem, have little bargaining power to be fairly and professionally treated, and receive little appreciation in terms of their regular wage, for instance. Consequently, many Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers (henceforth IMDWs) are confronted with complicated problems as part of their migratory

experiences such as exploitation, physical abuse, and maltreatment that are mostly due to their inadequate working skills or even cultural and language barriers. Some of these cases were updated in our news outlet in 2021 (Sekarwati, 2021). This update may imply that IMDWs are still prone to such problematic cases to date.

There are various narratives built to describe the conditions of IMDWs that are invalid and lack of nuance in many cases. They might be biased since they are one-sided, either from the media's side or from the employer's side. For instance, when the story of IMDWs' situation is exposed, these workers are always described as problematic since some of them have to face problems and conflicts at works. General portrayals with lack of nuances tend to construct certain images that are mostly negative and degrading. As a result, the occurring narratives of IMDWs are invariably unfavourable and undignified. In reality, contrary to this negative image, there are some IMDWs who succeed in achieving a better life in their hosting countries because of their capability of working professionally and reaching financial stability. For this reason, balance coverage about IMDWs needs to be carried out more often.

IMDWs write their own literary works to narrate their own stories from their own perspectives and to express what they feel. They feel the need to communicate their first-hand experiences and their existence to the public. IMDWs and their literature are getting more accepted and thus IMDWs are closely associated with their specific literary genre dubbed as the literary writings of IMDWs or the literature of IMDWs. The history of the literature of IMDWs is not yet clearly defined, but the first publication of literary piece written by an IMDW (formerly called *Tenaga Kerja Wanita* or TKW) appeared in 2007 in the form of anthology published by a national publishing agent (Trisnawati, Agustina, & Taufiqurroham, 2013). There are certainly many goals that they want to achieve in writing their narratives, but most of all, they expect that such narratives can be used as a reliable artefact to understand the problems faced by IMDWs and to see the role of IMDWs in more positive light (Insani & Raihan, 2010). This expectation may arguably be the one that motivates them to write in the first place. These earlier narratives are dedicated to spread the reality of being an IMDW and its complexity from the point of view of the 'first-hand informants', the IMDWs.

The current study discusses the poems written by IMDWs working in Singapore that were published in an anthology titled *Familiar Strangers* (2018). The selected poems to be included in the analysis in this article are Deni Apriyani's *Walk through the Marbles*, Melur Seruni's *God is not a Printing Machine, Master*, Siti Mujiati's *Hello*, and three poems written by Eli Nur Fadilah titled *Domestic Workers are Humans, too*, *What if I quit*, and *The Voice of These Invisible Hands* respectively. The publication of this anthology, which features poems and short stories, was facilitated by the Voice of Singapore's Invisible Hands, a non-profit organization (NPO) that, as the editors claimed, promotes the rights and welfare of migrant workers in Singapore through their own literary works on Facebook (Mintarsih, 2019: 67). The anthology is specifically designed to provide "a chance to narrate their own migration experience" and also "to reshape the dominant—negative—discourse on migrant workers, especially Indonesian MDWs" (Mintarsih, 2019: 66). The latter is the idea that specifically supports my argument that the voice of renegotiation is evident in the works under study. Negative images of IMDWs are countered by these IMDWs through their poems in which they vocalize different perspectives about themselves.

By focusing on the voice of renegotiation, the current study intends to fill the gap from the limited number of works that discuss the fact that IMDWs actually have the capability and bravery to make their voice heard and their role recognized. The studies of IMDWs' migrant narratives commonly highlight "the stories about home and family" whose dominant negative discourse of domestic workers has been challenged by the publication of *Familiar Strangers* (Mintarsih, 2019: 79), and the present study aims to elaborate on this issue. In addition, the fact that the anthology has presented IMDWs as authors who "present themselves as a wanderer, mother, and daughter, making them relatable to people in general" (Mintarsih, 2019: 73) supports the transformation of IMDWs in their various images. Their images as bold, brave, and tough people are going to be further explored in this study. Accordingly, relevant information and facts mentioned by the editors of *Familiar Strangers* are taken into account as the supporting evidence in the discussion of the topic in this article.

Grounding on the abovementioned issues,

this study aims at exploring the migrant workers' salient migratory experiences of working in Singapore as domestic workers that are depicted in six selected poems featured in *Familiar Strangers*. They are examined to reveal how IMDWs vocalize their thoughts through their poems as an attempt to renegotiate their social position. The study also intends to explain a different perspective found in the anthology that concurs with the better image of IMDWs. In essence, this particular experience of working in Singapore becomes the turning point that resolve the dominant negative narrative of IMDWs by emphasizing that these domestic workers can strive for their better position and rights at their working places in Singapore. Finally, their poems and this renegotiation are looked at to question what has ascribed them as domestic workers, and the notion of writing back is then solidly found, accordingly.

### **IMDWs Write Back: A Literature Review**

This study employs a postcolonial perspective as theoretical framework to examine IMDWs' migratory experience of working in Singapore depicted in six poems featured in *Familiar Strangers*. The postcolonial perspective refers to the notion of "Empire Writes Back" coined by Bill Ashcroft in his book (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002). The 'empire writes back' is understood as a perspective that responds to the 'center' (dominant narratives) by 'writing back to them'. The notion that IMDWs write their literature to represent their various narratives of being migrant workers can be seen as their intention to write back to them who often frame and construct IMDWs' image in the society invalidly. The issues related to IMDWs and their writing back to the 'center' are raised here as a point of departure to engage postcolonial perspective in the analysis of the poems and to explore in depth their migratory experience of working in Singapore.

The postcolonial theory employed in this study functions as the lens to examine the underlying voice of IMDWs seen here as the colonized who writes to the 'center', i.e. the master that is seen as the colonizer. IMDWs and their image constructed for them, which is their masters' slaves or subordinates who must obey their masters' orders unquestioningly, overwhelm the existing narratives of IMDWs. However, what is distinctively written in *Familiar Strangers* debunks this negative image of IMDWs. The six poems discussed

in this article show IMDWs' attempt to challenge this degrading narrative through their writings. It represents an attempt to write back to their masters, let the masters know their stance, make their voice heard, and in turn re-negotiate their existing images and position.

To address the aspects in which the poems convey the IMDWs' position in relation to their employers, this study also employs Edward Said's concept of Orientalism (Said, 1978). Orientalism also serves as a theoretical framework for this study to look into the binary opposition of IMDWs and their employers. Orientalism is considered a useful approach to explain the abovementioned binary opposition and the subversion that is implied in IMDWs' poems. In Orientalism, the binary opposition of the 'East and West' relation is associated with the problematic relationship between the Occident and the Orient since it suggests a "relationship of power, of dominant, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" and this kind of relationship is apparent in the relationship between domestic workers and their masters (Said, 1978: 5). The use of Orientalism as an approach and concept here can be expected to reveal how IMDWs are put in a marginal position, placed as the Other, and seen as the inferior or colonized subjects that deserve exploitation. Further analysis of the binary opposition with this approach will be carried out to interpret the subverted binary opposition that the IMDWs attempt to vocalize through their poems. The occurrence of such subversion of binary opposition is meaningfully engaged as a bargaining position to emphasize that IMDWs may exercise a particular power within their relationship with their employers. In that case, this subversion, which is reflected in the poems under study, shows evidence that IMDWs showcase their bravery and potential through their poems. This is also in line with the main argument in this article that IMDWs, by means of their poems that describe their migratory experience of working in Singapore, are vocalizing their renegotiation as a response to being falsely defined and portrayed in the dominant narratives.

In addition, the literature of IMDWs is argued to "belong to the diaspora narrative [which] provides [the readers] with the concept such as memories, nostalgia, losing home, identity, family, and friends (Murniati, 2014)." Here, their writings become a means of articulating their personal feelings about

having to be away from their family for a long time, for instance. In a wider scope, the writings of domestic workers are also included as part of post-migratory literature, specifically the so called migrant literature, which has proved to be an important literary subgenre of postcolonial literature (Gamal, 2013). This is due to the fundamental problems that characterize “the condition of migrancy by deconstructing the binarism of home and the world and linking the global to the postcolonial” that is possibly addressed in the writings of domestic workers, including the abovementioned problematic narratives about IMDWs (Gamal, 2013: 3). Thus, it is particularly reasonable to argue that their poems convey different narratives about being domestic workers where they find an opportunity to renegotiate their position as domestic workers and to challenge certain stereotypes about them. Focusing on the messages of encouragement, renegotiation and challenges, the current study intends to build on the discussion of alienation and marginalization that have been presented by Madrah and Praptawati (2021).

Finally, this qualitative study of IMDWs’ literary works published in *Familiar Strangers* (2018) has selected six poems out of 52 poems to examine to focus on the portrayals of migratory experience of working in Singapore as domestic workers. These poems are analyzed using context-oriented approach, particularly in its relation to the postcolonial perspective of Othering. The six poems are Deni Apriyani’s *Walk through the Marbles*, Melur Seruni’s *God is not a Printing Machine*, Master, Siti Mujiati’s *Hello*, and three poems written by Eli Nur Fadilah titled *Domestic Workers are Humans, too*, *What if I quit*, and *The Voice of These Invisible Hands* respectively. Textual evidence from the poems to support the analysis include words and expressions that are relevant to the topic, and they are contextualized within the issue of IMDWs in Singapore. The close reading of the poems and the analysis of the poetic texts are carried out to how renegotiation is depicted in the poems and how it is manifested in the values of steadfastness, bravery, subversion, and confrontation.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The close-reading and critical interpretation of *Familiar Strangers* result in the finding that migratory experience of working in Singapore is depicted in all of the six poems, and the depictions represent

IMDWs’ attempt to renegotiate their position and challenge the existing stereotype of domestic workers. The IMDWs’ renegotiation and their challenge to negative stereotypes of their status are critically examined through the aspects of steadfastness, bravery, subversion and confrontation against acts of dehumanization that are depicted in their poems. These aspects are prevalent when the poets, the IMDWs, talk about their working experiences and the relations between them and their employers. In other words, their migratory experience of working in Singapore is depicted in the poems through the expressions of steadfastness, bravery, subversion, and confrontation. The poems that were written by the IMDWs themselves deliver a powerful meaning since their composition drew on first-hand experience, and thus they authentically vocalize renegotiation and challenge to stereotypes. Accordingly, the discussion of this finding is divided into two sections, i.e. IMDWs’ steadfastness and IMDWs’ courage where the expressions of subversion and confrontation against dehumanization are included. This discussion also includes the investigation of how the poets renegotiate their position and challenge the stereotypes of their status as a domestic worker who are weak, voiceless, and intimidated when dealing with their migratory experience of working in Singapore.

### IMDWs’ Steadfastness

The expression of steadfastness that is later followed by the expression of bravery in the poems conveys the IMDWs’ determination to renegotiate their rights and position as domestic workers in their workplaces, the domestic area of their employers.

Apriyani’s *Walk through the Marbles* starts with a description of a familiar reality of IMDWs’ migratory experience, particularly the fact that they are under constant watch by their employers. The following lines describe the situation where a domestic worker (the speaker of the poem) is closely observed and scrutinized. The speaker expresses that the employer “staring at us with doubts,” and feels judged for what she has done: “you said this is so wrong” (Apriyani, 2018: 3). The depiction of the employer’s scrutiny suggests that the employer is exercising his/her power over his/her workers as if he/she is the owner of these migrant workers. It seems to represent a concern about employers who think that they are the absolute owners of the IMDWs who work for them,

and thus they can treat them as they want. The lines above also suggest that not only that they can judge the domestic workers by their own standard but also doubt IMDWs' skills. Above all, the disconcerting image of these employers' constant watch is made worse by another image evoked by the line "we don't deserve a handshake" (Apriyani, 2018: 3). In this context, "handshake" signifies an appreciation of other people's best effort, including the domestic workers' performance in doing their duties for their employers. This image represents the reality that appreciation for what the domestic workers has done, especially their hard works, is not easily given by the employers.

In essence, the lines described above present the portrayal of a domestic worker who is always perceived as an incompetent worker and therefore never wins her employer's heart. It leads to the social stigma of migrant workers in reality which is associated with their employers' biased perception of them. The employers' reluctance to give their employees a handshake as an expression of appreciation emphasizes their image as lower class workers and their domestic job as a lowly occupation. The implication is IMDWs are people to look down on since they are migrant workers with limited skills or low competence. In other words, the binary opposition of the absolute employers or masters and the domestic workers or slaves is evidently showcased here. Through her depiction of being ill-treated by her employer, the poet hints at the construction of the binary opposition of the master and the slave. Along with along with this master/slave relation, the abovementioned lines present a portrayal of dehumanization of IMWDs. Through this portrayal of dehumanization the poet clearly intends to express her steadfastness as an IMWD who has dedicated her best effort to be professional, and therefore she does not deserve the unfair perception.

Apriyani, who is an IMWD herself, must had contemplated and reflected on what she had been experiencing and coping with during her working days while writing these lines. The construction of the binary opposition does not mean that the IMDW is in the position of giving up or being passive. In this poem, the steadfastness leads to the courage of renegotiating IMDWs' position in general. It is signified in the line "But there we stood still" (Apriyani, 2018: 3). Standing "still" in such situation may suggest that IMDWs are not so easily defeated. They are brave and strong

enough to survive the unfortunate condition they have been dealing with. Although the courage is neither expressed outspokenly nor followed by any direct actions, the poem suggests IMDWs' determination to survive the hardship and challenge the stigma at the same time. They have believed in their heart that they will survive by standing still and facing their tough migratory experience as a domestic worker.

The second poem, Fadilah's *Domestic Workers are Humans, too*, similarly expresses the steadfastness that leads to the courage of renegotiating IMDWs' social status. In fact, the poem's title clearly alludes to this idea to begin with. The title is obviously straightforward in delivering the poem's message that domestic workers deserve equality, fairness, and appreciation like any people in other occupations, and that there is an act of dehumanization happening to IMDWs. This demand of being equally treated that is expressed through this poem exemplifies IMDWs' courage of voicing their opinion. In this poem, there is a portrayal of IMDWs' experience of being perceived as unskilled domestic workers which do not deserve any appreciation recurs, which means this poem is consistent with the previous poem in conveying the dehumanization that happens to IMDWs. The lines "No matter how hard I try my best, I still won't make you impressed" (Fadilah, 2018a: 11) clearly delivers a similar message that being domestic workers are tough and that they are always underestimated, while at the same time these lines emphasize IMDWs' steadfastness. Their hard work is barely appreciated and acknowledged, let alone rewarded. The main point to focus on here is that the poem is written by an IMDW who shows her courage and strong will by expressing her renegotiation of their status despite their employers' indifference. The lines that say "I may be a helper, but that doesn't mean I don't need instruction" [...] "Please don't treat me like a servant. I do have my rights" (Fadilah, 2018a: 11) imply an IMDW's steadfastness and her courage in expressing her objection. Being expressed in clear and straightforward wording and diction, the abovementioned lines provide a powerful message that domestic workers are brave enough to complain and to fight for their rights. Through the poem, the poet also demands that the employer builds a professional relationship with his/her employees in which both parties' rights and responsibilities are equally fulfilled. Domestic workers have the rights

to be treated decently. Consequently, employers should fully understand what they can and cannot do in their relationship with their employees. In other words, they have to provide their domestic workers with a healthy working environment where both sides fully understand their rights and obligations at work. By raising this sensitive issue through her poem forthrightly, the poet, who is a domestic worker herself, shows her courage and her determination to fight for their rights and to prove her professionalism as domestic workers.

Steadfastness and courage in raising awareness of the equal value between employers' and their domestic workers' rights and obligations are also evident in Fadilah's "*What If I Quit*" and Seruni's "*God is not a Printing Machine, Master*" (Fadilah, 2018b, 2018c). The line in the latter that says "You always depend on me but you can't even give me a pack of Maggie" (Fadilah, 2018c: 13) highlights the notorious issue of dehumanization in employers' failure of fulfilling their domestic workers' basic rights in their households. Providing sufficient meal, for instance, is one of the obligations that an employer should do for his domestic worker as a fulfilment of the worker's rights. This line is possibly a response to a particular bad treatment that is commonly experienced by domestic workers, that is, they are not provided with enough food by their employers. Through the poem, the poet dares to make a protest about this denial of domestic workers' basic right. She also draws attention to the irony that although domestic workers have carried out their duties professionally, their basic right is not fulfilled.

In Seruni's *God is*, the representation of steadfastness and courage in relation to the renegotiation of IMDWs' position is evident in the line that says "Through this love letter, I proclaim my disdain over the names which you label me." (Seruni, 2018: 29). This line clearly conveys the poet's disdain of the "slave" stigma of IMDWs, which suggests their low position in their working place (Seruni, 2018: 29). At this point, the binary opposition of IMDWs and their employers is perpetuated and comparable to 'Masters vs. Slaves'. This particular master/slave binary opposition is challenged in this poem. The anger that IMDWs feel for the injustice becomes a source of courage for them, represented by the poet, to express their objection to the low social status constructed for them. The poem that is used as a medium to raise

this issue proves IMDWs' courage in their struggle for equality. Using the poem as a "love letter" that functions as a medium to send their 'loving' message, the poet seems to elegantly soften her tough objection, showing IMDWs' soft side and caring personality. In this context, her choice of words imply a portrayal of IMDWs as human being that can be both tough and forgiving. Also, in essence, the renegotiation of IMDWs' social position can be considered succeeds because they can showcase their positivity as human beings who are able to spread their message with love although frequently marginalized and disrespected in society.

The last poem that contains an IMDW's expression of steadfastness and courage in renegotiating her social position as domestic worker is Mujiati's *Hello*. There is a little difference in the way steadfastness and courage are expressed in this poem compared to that in the previously discussed poems. In *Hello*, it is more related to the well-being of each IMDW. The courage to make a personal decision is encouraged through the poem. Two lines in the poem that say "When a day off comes, go out for some skill honing" and "Choose whatever your hear fancies diving in. Keep on dreaming and hoping" (Mujiati, 2018: 37) signify an encouragement to fellow IMDWs to pluck up the courage to make their own choices and fight for them. The poem seems to emphasize that an IMDW needs to have steadfastness, persistence, and courage to fight for the right to get day off from work and training to acquire new skills. The demand for day off is brought up here because it is part of the issue of dehumanization. Due to the perpetuation of unequal relation between the 'Master' and the 'Slave,' many IMDWs are not entitled to time off in their contracts. For this reason, once again, the courage to fight for it is necessarily encouraged for the benefit of domestic workers as time off can give them an opportunity to join skill enhancement programs. Furthermore, the lines mentioned above, with reference to not only day-offs but also skill enhancement, can arguably be seen as a message that IMDWs have a strong will to keep fighting for their goal and strive to achieve it.

### IMDWs' Courage

The representation of courage is also apparent in the six selected poems from *Familiar Strangers*. This frequent message of the importance of courage in these poems may suggest that IMDWs are fully aware

of the need to act with the notions of subversion, much courage, resistance, and negotiation to cope with their unfortunate situation. Courage and the notion of subversion are based on the slave-master binary opposition that characterizes the relation between IMDWs and their employers. From the perspective of Edward Said's Orientalism, it is a manifestation of the inferior/superior social relation. Such binary opposition is subverted in Fadilah's *Domestic Workers are Humans, too*, Fadilah's *The Voice of These Invisible Hands*, and Seruni's *God is not a Printing Machine, Master*, among others. The subversion consequently depicts the proposed change in the relationship between IMDWs and their employers that is meant to renegotiate IMDWs' social position and to challenge the negative stereotypes that target IMDWs.

A sign of subversion is apparent in Fadilah's "*Domestic Workers*" through which Fadilah bravely attempts to promote a mutual and professional relation between IMDWs and their employers. This attempt can be said as the subversion of the existing stigma of IMDWs since such mutual understanding is not easily practiced. Fadilah boldly vocalizes the notion of subverting the unfair employer/employee binary opposition and renegotiating it through the following lines: "I don't need you to treat me like a queen, just understand me as a human"; I don't need you to treat me like your twin. [...] Please don't treat me like a servant. I do have my rights. Don't harm me like I've done nothing", (Fadilah, 2018a: 11). At this point, the binary is being questioned, objected, re-visited, and transgressed by the poet. The binary is not necessarily debunked, but it is just re-set so that it presents a more equal relation and professionalism between an employer and an employee. IMDWs who are oftentimes unfairly treated are demanding to be more fairly and equally treated to make their relationship with their employers more professional and eventually less problematic. The poem also suggests that the sense of taking and giving is more vocalized and endorsed on the basis of professionalism. The contrast between "queen" and "a human" clearly conveys the reasonable and humble expectation from the IMDWs for their employers that they are able to build a professional working relation. The poem tries its best to subvert the stigma of IMDWs as an inferior and enslaved workforce and propose a change that makes them perceived as professional individuals especially in their migratory experience

of working as domestic workers in Singapore. Such courage that is reflected in the abovementioned lines is arguably a response to the stigmatized image of IMDWs for which they are considered as the Other in the society, that they do not even deserve humane attention.

The notion of courage to subvert the stigma is apparent in two other poems, namely Fadilah's *The Voice of These Invisible Hands* and Seruni's *God is not a Printing Machine, Master*. In these poem, the master/slave binary opposition is differently conveyed. The subversion is powerfully demonstrated when the poet questions the employer's ability to survive without domestic workers in their household. The perception of IMDWs as the 'slave' in one's household is certainly not true because in reality IMDWs are the hero of the household. This idea is depicted in the following lines: "If I was not here, would they survive?" (Fadilah, 2018a: 19), and "Even though, you have workers whom you consider slaves, they are your heroes" (Seruni, 2018: 29). Here, the binary relationship between 'master' and IMDWs is deconstructed, and thus the poem is a proof that the poet has written back to such demeaning narrative. The lines above portray the actual migratory experience of working in Singapore as domestic workers that showcases the significant role of IMDW that make them look like a hero. Being responsible and ready for every single household chore and duty, IMDWs' presence is the key to the smooth-running process of household activities. However, their significance is not yet well-appreciated. Many employers still see them as inferior individuals whose role is as low as a in their household. The lines may also suggest the irony that IMDWs have to go through since their significant role is invisible to their employers' eyes. It is their invisibility that makes their employers fail to give IMDWs proper appreciation. By raising such thoughtful subversion of binary opposition in their poems, the poems become a medium of challenging and renegotiating IMDWs' current social status. Finally, at this point, the expression of subversion of the unequal relation between IMDWs and their employers in the poems can be seen as the channelling of their utmost hope while surviving the condition where they have to deal with their burden and their invisibility.

Finally, I found it interesting how these domestic workers employ the language of rights in their poems. This signifies the courage of intensely voicing their

rights in the poems. IMDWs' current position and status are firstly shown through the demeaning binary opposition and then renegotiated. IMDWs are encouraged to be courageous in their attempt of demanding a better position within their working place, the household of their employers. The courage is shown as a necessity for many purposes ranging from the fight for the equality of right and obligation as domestic workers to the personal matters that each IMDW must also cope with.

To sum up, renegotiating and challenging the demeaning stereotypes of IMDWs are a form of protest against the dehumanization of IMDWs. The expression of protest in the abovementioned poems is presented together with the messages of courage and subversion. The protest is noticeable in the six poems since these poems employ the migrant narratives. In this context, these poems serve as IMDWs' vehicle to criticize, to debunk, and to fight for equality and also a channel for hope for a fairer position in society. Their mission is to confront the negative narratives about them and demand for better fulfilment of their right and improvement of their social position. The fact that the lines in the poems are significant and powerful enough to convey those messages can also be understood as an effective medium to re-shape the current image and the narrative about IMDWs that are both negative and erroneous.

## CONCLUSION

Six poems written by IMDWs and published in *Familiar Strangers* have portrayed the migratory experiences that are significantly different from the existing narratives of migratory experiences. The present study shows how steadfastness and courage have contributed to their migratory experiences in a way that these mental power support their struggle in voicing renegotiation of their status, subverting the stigma, and write back to the negative narratives about them. The renegotiation for and the challenge to the current stereotypes of IMDWs are observed through the presence of steadfastness, courage, subversion and protest/confrontation that are expressed in the six selected poems under study. Each of them is contextualized within the fact that IMDWs have long been the target of social stigma because of their occupation and that they experience a master/slave binary relationship between them and their

employers, which they intend to confront through these poems. Finally, what has been discussed thus far confirms the IMDWs' act of writing back to their employers or masters whose actions are analogous to those of the colonizer in the context of hegemony practice.

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