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Transnational Domestication
State Power and Indonesian Migrant Women
In Saudi Arabia

CLARA Working Paper, No. 17

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**TRANSNATIONAL DOMESTICATION:
STATE POWER AND INDONESIAN MIGRANT WOMEN
IN SAUDI ARABIA**

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Abstract: *This article explores the Indonesian and Saudi states' roles in shaping Indonesian women's migration between the two countries and the challenges to the two states' jurisdictional scopes that have arisen in conjunction with this international labor migration circuit. Specifically, it analyzes the Indonesian and Saudi states' roles in regulating the migration and working conditions of Indonesian domestic servants employed in Saudi Arabia. It examines the states' direct and indirect influences on the feminization of the migrant labor force, the limitations of their policies for protecting overseas migrant women, and the political strategies that activists are employing to broaden the states' spaces and scales of jurisdiction. More broadly, the study illustrates the ways in which a focus on the gender politics associated with international migration can reveal the regulatory limits to the internationalization of the state. It thus helps to clarify the ways in which these gendered subjects are interlinked with the changing geographies of state power.*

Keywords: *transnational migration, gender, the state, domestic labor, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1990s, a host of studies heralded the capacity of transnational migrants to challenge state territorial sovereignty through actions that span the borders of nation-states (see Nagel, 2001a for a review and critique). In response, others argued that greater research emphasis should be placed on the powerful but complex role that territorialized states continue to play in organizing international migration flows (e.g., Mitchell, 1997). At the center of these debates are questions about the specific ways that international migrants figure in the particular transformations of states that have arisen in conjunction with processes of global political and economic restructuring. Some argue that “courtesan” states promote transnational capital accumulation through the active promotion of migration between nations with surplus labor and those facing labor shortages (e.g., Mittelman & Johnston, 1999). Other studies highlight the shift towards transnational governance of international migration, and examine the roles of supra-state institutions such as the EU in regulating cross-border mobility (e.g., Leitner, 1997), or the ways in which zones of graduated sovereignty emerge within national territories in response to economic globalization (Lawson, 2002).¹ This growing body

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¹ These differences in theoretical emphasis are based in part on the specific states under examination (i.e., post-colonial, peripheral states versus core, developed states) and their relative strength in the global political economy (Sassen, 1999).

of literature signals the unequivocal return of the state to the core of migration studies, and marks the politics of immigration as a major contemporary geopolitical concern.

Noticeably absent from most of the literature, however, is attention to the gender dimensions of the interactions between states and international migrants (but for some important exceptions, see Chin, 1997, 1998, 2000; Huang and Yeoh, 1996; Tyner, 2000). This gap is important to address in part because state-led neoliberal economic policies have been associated with a distinct feminization of the wage labor force and the international migrant population (Castles and Miller, 1998), underscoring the gendered implications of state policy. States' liberalization and structural adjustment programs, promoted by international (e.g., the World Bank, IMF) and transnational (e.g., WTO) organizations, have contributed to the growth of gendered employment niches, such as light manufacturing, sex work, and domestic service, each of which is associated with increases in women's migration (Katz, 2002; Sassen, 1998). Further, gender is a key modality through which states aim to construct particular social orders and maintain legitimacy, and states' particular manipulations of 'gender contracts' shift and retrench along with economic internationalization (Glassman, 1999, p. 676).² The analysis of states' efforts to produce particular gendered orders can thus contribute to understanding the gender politics of the state itself, and can thereby enrich the research on international migration that for the most part has tended to conceptualize the state in 'gender neutral', implicitly masculinist terms.³

Extending Glassman's (1999) analysis of the internationalization of the capitalist state, and his argument that "specific factions of capitalist classes can end up sharing concrete interests in specific state policies across national borders" (p. 669), I focus here on the gender dimensions of the changing capitalist state and its relationship to overseas migrant labor. When labor moves beyond national boundaries, the relationship between the sending nation-state and the laboring migrant overseas grows more complex (see Staeheli, 1999), and women migrants, by virtue of their involvement in the transnational labor circuit, are influenced by the gender and labor agendas and silences of both the sending and receiving states. Activists working to promote the rights of women migrants have voiced their opposition to the abuse and exploitation of low-wage overseas migrants, and have sought to pressure states to develop bi-lateral and international protections for domestic workers (Gurowitz, 2000; Jones, 2000; Chin, 1998). Despite the efforts of activists, however, Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Saudi Arabia remain without legal protection, and their case thus speaks to the political and gendered limits of the internationalization of the state's regulatory apparatus. I argue that by examining these limits, it becomes possible to understand the relational nature of the development of "possibilities for accumulation by members of [gendered] transnational hegemonic blocs" (Glassman, 1999, p. 691) and the production of the specific migration and labor experiences of low-wage domestic workers. I examine the ways in which the state's support of hegemonic interests beyond its sovereign territory is underwritten by the informal labor provided by domestic workers, the protection of whose rights remains—not coincidentally, as I will argue—outside the reach of the state.

² A 'gender contract' is a social order organized both implicitly and explicitly around women's and men's particular roles and responsibilities.

³ However, Kofman and Peake (1990) called for feminist engagements with political geography over a decade ago, and more recently Staeheli (2001) has considered possible reasons for the persistently limited engagement between feminist and political geography.

This argument is an elaboration of feminist political geography's contention that the state and the class interests associated with it should not be conceptualized independently of the dynamics of gender and difference, but rather should be understood as mutually constitutive elements of state power and process (cf. Kofman and Peake, 1990; Staeheli and Cope, 1994; Hyndman, 2001).⁴ Feminist scholarship expands and reframes that which counts as political, so that, in this case, the "walls of silence" (Chin, 1997) surrounding the abuse of migrant women in 'private' domestic spaces can be broken down, and the state's 'public' silences can be understood as policy gaps that underwrite broader state interests and act to reproduce existing social hierarchies. Whereas much feminist research has moved along Foucauldian and Gramscian lines to understand the multiple and interacting arenas of formal state power, the manufacture of consent, and diffuse forms of governmentality, here I return feminist analysis to an explicit focus on the state and its linkages to gendered international migration and labor control. By gendering the state in this analysis, my aim is to illustrate the intersections between power over the domestic sphere, the control of women's mobility, and the ways in which the gender politics of these processes both reflect and refract state power (also see Enloe, 1989; Tickner, 1992; Glenn, 1986; Walton-Roberts, this issue).

The examples of the Indonesian New Order (1966-1998) state and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as they have organized and selectively ignored the female migrant labor force in Saudi Arabia, together provide fertile ground from which to develop a gendered analysis of the internationalization of state power and its limits. Between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, both states have put policies in place that have contributed to a rapid increase in the numbers of Indonesian women workers migrating to Saudi Arabia (Hugo, 1995; Spaan, 1999; Tirtosudarmo, 2000). In addition, the practices of the Indonesian state's migration apparatus, and the Saudi state's regulation of women's mobility, as well as both states' lack of regulation of domestic work, have influenced migrants' gender-specific experiences of migration and labor. In recent years, social activists have pressured the Indonesian state to stop sending women migrants to Saudi Arabia until better protections are in place, and they have succeeded in pushing the two states to begin to develop a bi-lateral agreement on the protection of Indonesian workers in Saudi Arabia (Nakertrans, 2003).

The article is divided into five sections following this introduction. The first section reviews the literature on feminist theories of the state, and discusses the relevance of these views for understanding gendered international migration. Second, the paper describes the recent migration and employment patterns of Indonesian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, and traces the New Order state's direct and indirect roles in shaping women overseas migrants' working conditions in Saudi Arabia. Third, it examines the Saudi state's role in producing the demand for these migrant workers, and its complicity in permitting the abuses that migrant domestic workers often face. The large-scale in-migration of Indonesian women to Saudi Arabia has posed challenges to both states' regulatory capacities and led to pressures on the Indonesian state in particular to expand the territorial scope of the contemporary legal-spatial ties of the sovereign nation-state to the household scale. In the context of these challenges, as the

⁴ This is by no means an exhaustive review of feminist political geography, the boundaries of which are difficult to delineate and the growth of which has been rapid in recent years. Of particular note, however, also see the special issue on feminist political geography in *Space and Polity*, Vol 5, No. 3. 2001; Brown and Staeheli, forthcoming; Kofman, Staeheli and Peake, forthcoming. Also, on immigration as geopolitics, see the special issue of *Political Geography*, 21, 2002.

fourth section explores, migrant NGO activists have argued that the Indonesian state must internationalize in order to better protect migrant workers.⁵ Finally, the conclusion argues that by placing gender at the center of the analysis of the internationalization of the state, it is possible to identify the productive effects of the limits of gendered state regulation and jurisdiction.

II. FEMINIST THEORIES OF THE STATE IN RELATION TO INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

Most research on gender and migration--whether concerned with internal, international or transnational mobility--has focused on women migrants' changing roles within the family, the household, and the labor market, without paying a great deal of attention to the roles of states (for an overview, see Willis & Yeoh, 2000). Studies that have focused on gender, immigration, and the state have viewed it primarily as a policy-making set of institutions that generates the legal regulations that structure citizenship, immigration, childcare, and work (cf. Huang & Yeoh, 1996; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Fincher, 1996; Salaff, 1990). Here, I am interested in extending this work to analyze the state in terms of the tensions and contradictions that characterize gender policy and ideology in transnational context, and examining the ways that the dynamic elements of the broader state apparatus influence the gendered discourses and policy exclusions that contribute to shaping migrants' identities and possibilities (also see Ball & Piper, 2002; Chin, 1998, 2000; Tyner, 2000).

This approach to the state parallels key conceptual assumptions put forth by feminist theorists of the state (e.g., Connell, 1990, 1994; DiStefano, 1991; Dore & Molyneux, 2000; MacKinnon, 1989; Peterson, 1992; Rai & Lievesley, 1996). First, there is agreement among these authors, as well as post-structurally inspired feminist political theorists (e.g., Franzway et al., 1989), that the state does not represent a unified or coherent set of interests, and that states are based on processes of negotiation rather than fixed power relations. Thus, even if state power ultimately operates in support of patriarchal privilege, as Marxist feminists (e.g., Eisenstein, 1979) insist, it does so through a series of on-going struggles and bargains in which subordinated groups play active roles. Such a conceptualization of the state also raises a point that is crucial to understanding the gender politics of the geography of domestic labor: The sites, spaces, and scales through which domestic workers are controlled and empowered are not fixed, nor are they shaped solely by the disciplinary power of the state. Rather, this very geography is an arena that is struggled over, entered into by activists, and affected by the political agency of domestic workers and non-state actors.

Second, feminist theorists see gender relations and norms as constitutive of--rather than just coincidental to--states and state policy. In the Indonesian case, and specifically in Java, where the majority of migrants to Saudi Arabia originate, women have historically carried out the majority of both paid and unpaid domestic work (Elmhirst, 1999). This norm has then been reflected in the New Order state's policy decision to promote women's employment in domestic service. However, norms have different implications for the state when they are expected to travel transnationally.

⁵ Except where otherwise noted, research reported in this article is based on the author's interviews with NGO activists and field research carried out in a migrant sending community in West Java in 1998 and 2000.

Indeed, the Indonesian state's ideologies of feminine domesticity and motherhood, state familism, and state paternalism raise different stakes for the state when they are applied to transnational migrants in Saudi Arabia than they do in relation to women still living in Indonesia. Whereas domestic workers' rights were not a widely contested political issue within Indonesia's national boundaries, in the Saudi context, they have emerged as a political flashpoint. The control of gendered spaces was integral to both the New Order and the Saudi states' efforts to produce the social orders within their respective national territorial boundaries, *and* it became a critical arena of political action through which the states could be pressured.

Suharto's New Order was characterized by two additional features that "Third World" feminists emphasize as vital for examining gender specifically in post-colonial contexts (Afshar, 1996). First, as Rai (1996) points out, post-colonial states have actively engineered national social and economic transformation. The New Order state actively promoted particular roles for women in economic development and social change through state institutions such as the women's organization for the wives of civil servants (i.e., *Dharma Wanita*), through gendered health and education campaigns carried out throughout the country (e.g., the PKK, the *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, or Family Welfare Guidance program), and in the gendered principles detailed in the GBHN (*Garis Besar Haluan Negara*, the Broad Outlines of State Policy).⁶ In Gramscian terms, these would be the (gendered) strategies of cultivating the consent on which state hegemony depends. A central goal of the state's education and service campaigns was to socialize and encourage low-income women to play the roles of supportive mothers and wives in families and serve as contributors to economic development through participation in the labor market. In these dual roles, women migrated to Saudi Arabia as "heroes of national development" (Robinson, 2000).

Second, the effects of the reach of the state into women's lives are complicated by widespread corruption within the state bureaucracy.⁷ Corruption figures in the state's effects on women's migration to Saudi Arabia through the illegal operations of state officials and brokerages that recruit, manage and document migrants alongside and sometimes within the state's formal migration apparatus. Unregulated brokers and state officials perpetrate gender-specific abuses of migrants. The lack of state capacity to protect these women is not a coincidence. Rather, it is reflective of class-, nationality-, and gender-specific norms about tolerable crimes and acceptable victims. Specifically, as the literature on migrant domestic work has shown, the state shapes gendered subjects, labor markets, migration patterns, and family formations in ways that lead to the construction of domestic work as a woman's job that garners low wages, provides little security and few benefits, involves high rates of multiple forms of abuse, and offers only slim chances of occupational mobility (cf. Radcliffe, 1990; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001; Huang & Yeoh, 1996; Momsen, 1999; Pratt, 1997, 1999; Parreñas, 2001; Yeoh et al, 1999). The Indonesian and the Saudi states' *lack* of policy regulating the terms and conditions of domestic employment, both within and beyond their national borders, contributes to the continued exploitation and abuse of migrant workers.

⁶ The GBHN is a statement outlining the major principles guiding the governments' five-year economic development plans, the Repelita. It is re-written every five years.

⁷ Whereas Rai's (1996) focus is post-colonial states, this is not to suggest that corruption is any less common in other states.

In sum, these feminist and “Third World” feminist conceptualizations of the state are relevant in two main ways to the analysis of the New Order and Saudi states’ roles in shaping female domestic workers’ international migration. First, investigating the geographic dimensions of contestations over migrants’ rights may contribute to feminist analyses of the state by showing how state power relies on struggles over gendered spaces and scales, and not just gendered subjects and institutions, as is often assumed (see Dore, 2000 for a review). Second, in that the New Order actively encouraged the international migration of women as part of its development agenda, yet failed to provide protection for migrants at either end of the migration chain, it opened itself up to activists able to capitalize on the ambiguous role of the state in transnational context. In the remainder of the article, I explore each of these aspects of state power, state policy, and recent activism directed at the Indonesian state, beginning in the following section with an analysis of the Indonesian New Order state’s role.

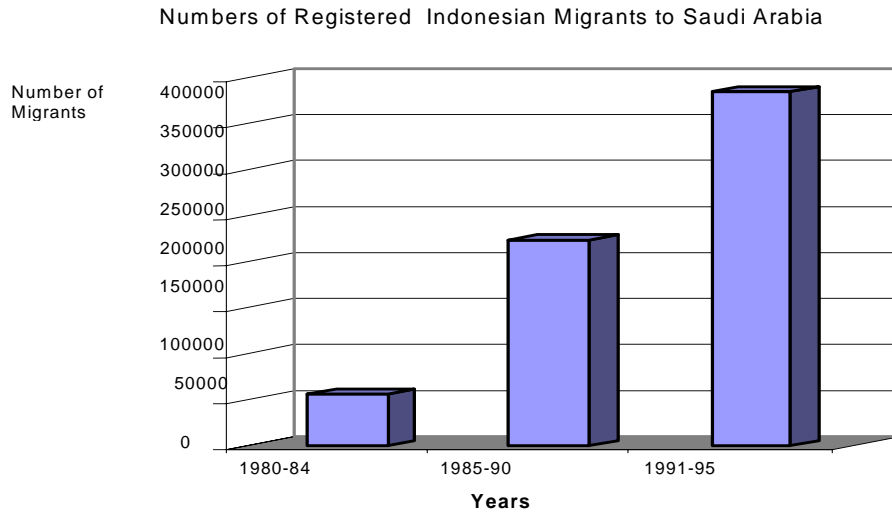
III. THE INDONESIAN STATE MIGRATION APPARATUS AND GENDER IDEOLOGIES

There are a number of direct ways in which the Indonesian New Order state bureaucracy has shaped women’s migration to Saudi Arabia. Beginning in 1983, the Indonesian government began permitting private agents from Middle Eastern countries to recruit Indonesian nationals to work abroad (Robinson, 1991). Indonesia’s ambassador to Saudi Arabia at the time expressed enthusiasm for the prospects of labor export, because, as he saw it, overseas employment meant jobs for unemployed Indonesian nationals as well as crucial foreign exchange that he expected would come in the form of remittances (*ibid.*). In the first year of recruitment, 47,000 fully documented workers left Indonesia for Saudi Arabia, and these numbers continued to climb rapidly, at least until the Indonesian economic crisis began in late 1997 (Ananta et al., 1998)(see Figure 1).⁸ The distinct majority (59 percent) of documented overseas workers from Indonesia between 1989 and 1994 migrated to Saudi Arabia (Hugo, 1995, p. 280); two-thirds of the migrants were women; and the distinct majority of these women worked as domestic servants (Amjad, 1996, p. 346).⁹ Between 1980 and 1984, the Indonesian government recorded 55,976 migrants with work contracts destined for Saudi Arabia (*ibid.*, p. 335). Between 1984 and 1989, the number rose to 223,579, and increased again to 384,822 in the following five year period (*ibid.*).

⁸ It is likely that the numbers of undocumented emigrants increased after the beginning of the Indonesian financial crisis, as growing numbers of people sought income abroad (Jones, 2000). But the numbers of documented emigrants fell during the same period, in part because the cost of documentation and travel became prohibitive for many prospective migrants (Ananta et al., 1998, p.321; also see Spaan, 1999, p.157).

⁹ Shifting between domestic work and sex work is not uncommon (Kempadoo & Doezema, 1998), and it is likely that sex work is more common than official employment figures suggest. Also, as early as the late 1980s, migrants were also destined for sites throughout the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. Indeed, it is likely that higher numbers of undocumented Indonesian migrants went to Malaysia than Saudi Arabia during this period because the borders are easier to cross and the travel cost is substantially lower (Jones, 2000). However, among documented migrants, Saudi Arabia was the primary destination during this period.

Figure 1



Indonesian institutions and programs actively and aggressively promoted this movement of women domestics overseas (Hugo, 1995, p.282). First, the state's Department of Manpower (Depnaker, *Departemen Tenaga Kerja*) made efforts to improve the overseas perceptions of Indonesian labor, setting up programs that were largely oriented towards training women in domestic service skills. Second, in 1984, the state developed a unit within the Department of Manpower, named Pusat AKAN (*Antar Kerja Antar Negara*, Center of Overseas Employment), that was organized to monitor and regulate overseas workers (RDCMD-YTKI, 1986). The stated goals of the Pusat AKAN were: "1. to expand employment opportunities of Indonesian workers; 2. to increase the income of Indonesian workers; 3. [to] increase national income through foreign exchange revenue, and; 4. to foster closer relationships among Indonesia and other countries" (Adi, 1995, p.131, as cited in Spaan, 1999, p.159).¹⁰ Because the training programs targeted women, the efforts to increase employment and income promoted women's labor migration in particular.

Bolstered by the Pusat AKAN, the Department of Manpower aimed to send more workers abroad each year. By the sixth Five-Year Plan (1994-1999), the goal was to send 1,250,000 workers overseas (Spaan, 1999, p.158). In order to facilitate this process, the state's Manpower Department licensed formal recruitment agencies (Perusahaan Jasa Tenaga Kerja Indonesia, PJTKI, or the Indonesian Labor Force Service Businesses), theoretically intended to support migrants as they arranged their overseas employment and completed the application process for overseas contract workers. However, the agencies required that potential migrants fill out numerous documents which were then circulated for approval through several different levels of government, making the process time-consuming and frustrating for potential workers (Hugo, 1995). The many detailed forms that were required were unclear to most appli-

¹⁰ In 1994, the Pusat AKAN's name was changed to Direktorat Jasa Tenaga Kerja Luar Negeri (Directorate of Overseas Manpower Services).

cants (Hugo, 1995), and at this stage of the application process, migrant candidates were vulnerable to the corrupt dealings of officials responsible for processing their applications (Spaan, 1999: 161). Women applicants faced gender-specific forms of exploitation, including sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and rape (Solidaritas Perempuan, 1994). In addition, there existed no legislation intended to protect the rights of housemaids, either in Saudi Arabia or Indonesia (Tirtosudarmo, 2000), leaving them particularly vulnerable to abuse and unfair treatment on the job.

The Manpower Department also imposed age and marital status requirements for overseas migrants, which further differentiated potential migrants' options by sex. Men who applied to work in Saudi Arabia were required to be 18 years old, while women had to "either be married (in which case they need[ed] permission from their husband) or 25 years of age at a minimum" (Spaan 1999, p.158). Women with children under one year of age were not eligible to apply (ibid.), and unmarried women under 25 were only permitted to work abroad if they received parental permission. In these direct ways, the state's migration apparatus discouraged many potential migrants from formal registration, and in so doing created the conditions under which more women than men sought illegal migration channels.

Low-income people's interest in bypassing the formal documentation procedures led to rapid growth in the business of unregistered migration brokers (Spaan, 1999; Tirtosudarmo, 2000). Indeed, brokerages have become widespread in Java's rural areas, growing into a sizeable industry that encourages and in many cases prompts illegal overseas migration (ibid.). The labor recruiters and middle-men or brokers (*taikong* and *calo*), have advantages over the migrants in terms of financial resources, knowledge of the destination area, and relatively complete information about both the migration process as well as the overseas work that is available. All of these advantages serve to perpetuate the existing gender and class privileges of recruiters and the vulnerability of migrants.¹¹ And, some recruiters, like some government officials, sexually harass and demand sexual services from female migrant candidates in particular (Solidaritas Perempuan, 1994).

The direct influence of the state's migration apparatus and the unregulated migration brokers' effects on women's migration are not easily disentangled. Indeed, state officials who work for the Pusat AKAN and the PJTKI often do little to enforce government policies, and some of the state-sanctioned brokerages themselves exploit the vulnerability of migrant candidates. In addition, some highly ranking civil servants own and operate labor brokerage companies, and here too corruption is known to be widespread. In these ways, the Indonesian state can be understood to be implicated—both directly and through its lack of regulatory capacity—in producing the conditions under which overseas domestics migrate and work.

In addition, several New Order (1965-1998) institutions, including *Dharma Wanita* (Women's Duty) and the PKK (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga*, Family Welfare Guidance), that have produced and reinforced ideologies aimed more generally at spatially and socially domesticating women (Brenner, 1998; Shiraishi, 1997). Indeed, women's roles as mothers and wives devoted to the maintenance of a stable, nurturing, domestic environment were central to the state's vision of an orderly and morally controlled nation. Yet the state's production of idealized bourgeois femininity as naturally linked to the home and hearth (Robinson, 1991; Shiraishi, 1997; Sen,

¹¹ Recruiters and middle-men exploit and victimize male migrants as well (Jones, 2000). The focus here, however, is on female migrants.

1998) was complicated in the state's own promotion of class-specific gender ideologies that encouraged low-income women's separation from kin in certain situations (Stivens, 1990; Sunindyo, 1996; Ananta et al., 1998). In order to work as a domestic in Saudi Arabia, most migrants leave their families, including their children in many cases, behind in Indonesia. Thus, the family regimes under the New Order that promoted the domestic workers' departure from kin were considerably more flexible than the state-promulgated ideal of the middle-class nuclear family.

The flexibility in state ideology was predicated on the state's reformulations of ideal womanhood depending on the ways that particular class categories of workers were sought to be incorporated into specific labor market niches. For instance, in the 1970s, the government's "women and development" campaign actively encouraged women to labor in both the wage earning sphere and the domestic sphere, or to play the "dual roles of women" (*peran ganda wanita*) (Sunindyo, 1996, p.125), and to migrate, as long as their mobility did not interfere with their domestic duties. The government's strategy a decade later for promoting labor migration to the Middle East was similar (Hugo, 1995),¹² as the state's dominant vision of idealized femininity was translated into a migratory income-earning woman for the sake of the "national family's" larger goal of economic development, a process of transnational domestication.¹³

By the 1990s, the New Order's gender discourses had begun to change, reflecting the household arrangements and political voices of the growing number of professional women in Indonesia (Sen, 1998). As Sen (*ibid.*, p. 45) points out, a key policy shift, evident in the 1993 GBHN (*Garis Besar Haluan Negara*, the Broad Outlines of State Policy) began "to define gender equity not only as women's access to jobs but also in terms of men's shared responsibility for looking after children." But, she continues, the silences in the 1993 GBHN were perhaps more significant than the principles directly addressed in the document. That is, although the new document emphasized both women's and men's roles in the education and moral guidance of children, it made no mention of domestic work or of physical reproductive labor more generally. The absence of attention to the real labor of childcare and housework was, Sen suggests, a reflection of the domestic division of labor in most middle- and upper-class households within Indonesia, where "physical work is performed largely by domestic servants" (*ibid.*). Low-income women's gender-specific needs and issues, and those of domestic workers in particular, were still not addressed in the state's principles.

The New Order's gender ideologies have shifted to meet the needs of the state in relation to changing constituencies (i.e., the growth of the middle class and the rise of the "femocrats" in the state bureaucracy [Sen, 1998]) and to encourage transnational capital accumulation. In addition to idealizing the woman as wife-and-womb through the programs of a number of state institutions, the state has sought to ideologically incorporate low-income women into the poorly protected transnational mi-

¹² Since the beginning of the national economic crisis in late 1997, many overseas contract workers, particularly in Malaysia, have been sent home, as the economies of the receiving countries have not provided the surplus necessary to continue to pay overseas workers (Ananta et al., 1998).

¹³ It should also be noted that historical records indicate that women in Indonesia have a long history of involvement in wage work, trade, and migration, stretching back at least several centuries (Brenner, 1999). It is the state discourse on gender that has aimed to domesticate women, and thus it is the state's discourse that must stretch in order to contain migratory women within its ideological confines.

grant labor force.¹⁴ By the 1990s, state policy had begun to represent middle-class women's gender equity interests, but the struggles of women who work as domestic servants remained absent from official policy. These silences, along with the direct institutional efforts to prompt low-income women's overseas migration, shaped the conditions of domestic workers labor abroad, as did policies implemented by the Saudi state, explored in the following section.

IV. THE SAUDI STATE'S ROLE

Since the early 1980s, the Saudi state's immigration policies have been explicitly geared towards the "Saudisation" of the labor market, aiming to replace foreign workers with Saudi nationals (Al-Rasheed, 2002, pp. 151-152). However, strict immigration control and widespread repatriations of undocumented workers over the last two decades have nonetheless coincided with a continuing heavy reliance on foreign workers in both highly skilled positions and the service sector (Birks et al., 1988) as well as persistently high levels of in-migration of Indonesian domestic workers (Pujiastuti, 2000).¹⁵ The Saudi state's inclusion of Saudi women in higher education, its selective and partial incorporation of women in the labor force, and its formal restrictions on women's mobility, together fuel the demand for domestic workers and isolate these migrants from one another in the homes of their employers.

At the core of Saudi immigration policy are strict limits on the length of immigrants' stays, with contracts for domestic workers ranging from six months to three years (Shadid et al., 1992; Pujiastuti, 2000). The limits on foreign labor provide the state with labor market flexibility, allowing it to respond to political pressures and structural changes in the economy through deportations or temporary informal permissiveness towards undocumented immigrants (Cordesman, 1997). Given the difficulty and expense of obtaining or renewing a visa, as previously mentioned, many immigrants work in the country without documentation, making them a particularly exploitable segment of the labor force. Even for domestic workers with formal work visas, neither the Saudi nor the Indonesian state provides labor regulation, leaving migrants' work in the domestic sphere beyond either state's jurisdictional scope.¹⁶

In addition to the state's immigration and (lack of) domestic labor policies, several specific Saudi state policies focused on women have underpinned the growing demand for domestic workers. First, since the 1960s, the Saudi state has strongly promoted girls' and women's education. The number of women students in Saudi colleges and universities doubled between 1983 and 1993, and then more than doubled again by the year 2000 (Doumato, 2000, p. 22), marking for the first time a female majority in higher education. These education policies have led to Saudi women's increasing involvement in non-domestic activities, drawing growing numbers of women away from their families' domestic spheres for coursework and other meetings associ-

¹⁴ Middle class "career women" have also been contested symbols linked to the modernizing state's and the popular media's gender ideology (Brenner, 1999).

¹⁵ In addition, the decisions in 1983 by Bangladesh and Pakistan to ban domestic workers' out-migration (Chin, 1998, p.102) limited the supply of female domestics and increased the demand for Indonesian women workers.

¹⁶ Of course both the Indonesian and the Saudi states have implemented numerous policies directed at the domestic sphere within their own territories, redefining it as an arena of 'public' concern when it serves their interests (Brenner, 1998; Doumato, 2000).

ated with their academic pursuits. Saudi women's increasing absence from the home has thus—in conjunction with the on-going construction of domestic work as women's work—increased the dependence on foreign domestic workers. In addition, the Saudi state is itself the largest employer of women (Doumato, 1999, p. 569), subsidizing women's careers in education and health care positions in particular. Women's entry into the public sector in large numbers in the 1970s in particular was also tied to a growing demand for domestic servants.

Since the early 1980s, the dramatic decline in Saudi oil revenues has led to a reduction in the state's provision of public sector employment, decreases in state subsidies for education, and a fall in the per capita GDP from US\$18,800 in 1981 to US\$6,700 in 1995 (Doumato, 1999, p. 570). These pressures have served as incentives for Saudi women to enter private sector employment to supplement their families' falling incomes. The 1990s has witnessed Saudi women increasingly involved in professions previously closed to them, including journalism, advertising, broadcasting, and architecture (*ibid.*, p. 569). While the rate of Saudi women's labor market participation remains low overall (i.e., estimated at between 5.5 and 8% of the indigenous Saudi labor force [*ibid.*, p. 572]), absolute growth in the numbers of working women has nonetheless been linked to the increasing demand for foreign domestic servants (Moghadam, 1998).

In addition to contributing to the creation of the demand for domestic workers, the Saudi state's gender policies have also played a role in structuring the conditions of domestic employment. Most fundamentally, the Saudi state legally requires the segregation of the sexes outside of the home and imposes restrictions on women's mobility. Government policies also forbid women to drive and to board airplanes alone without written permission from a male relative (Doumato, 2000). The morals police (the *mutawaa'in*), who are the patrolmen for the state's Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (*Hai'at al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahia 'an al-munkar*), seek out and discipline women who are alone in cars, women who are dining in restaurants with men to whom they are not married, and women who are not dressed in the hijab (*ibid.*). In addition, the state has created legal impediments to abortion and birth control, encouraging a high fertility rate (i.e., 6.25 children per woman, among the highest in the world) and large families with domestic needs that women are expected to fulfil (Doumato, 1999, p. 580). In these ways, the state is directly involved in controlling unaccompanied women's mobility, defining women's ideal roles within families, and producing a demand for domestic service. Further, these laws isolate domestic workers, making it difficult for them to seek support or develop advocacy organizations.

State policy is strongly influenced by the Council of the Senior 'Ulama' (religious scholars), which is the most powerful religious political force in the country and sets the tone and direction of national debates (Al-Rasheed, 2002). Indeed, the monarchy of the Saudi Kingdom rules in an informal but deeply entrenched partnership with the Council, engaging the 'ulama' in the formation of public policy. The Council offers *fatwas* (religious/legal opinions) that the 'ulama' see as necessary for societal well-being as well as ones to provide religious legitimacy to decisions that the monarchy's rulers have already made. As is the practice of any group of religious leaders, the Council draws selectively upon the scriptures, interpreting the Hadith (Sayings of the Prophet Mohammad) and the Qur'an in ways that reflect their priorities at a given time. The Council's members subscribe to Wahhabism, which specifically rejects re-

formist Islamic teachings and effectively links political loyalty to religious obligation at the national scale.

The Saudi monarchy of today frames its laws in Wahhabi thought, defines itself as an Islamic state and invokes the Qur'an as its constitution (AlMunajjed, 1997). In that the 'ulama' are involved in shaping the state's control of the different spaces available to women and men in Saudi Arabia, they are also key actors influencing the spaces available to Indonesian migrant domestic workers. Further, the political import and specific mobilizations of Islamic teachings are particularly salient for understanding the Indonesian state's lack of interference in Saudi Arabia's national affairs, because the political and religious leadership in Indonesia tends to grant superior, authentic status to Saudi Arabian Islam and to defer to Saudi interpretations of religious texts.¹⁷

While religious interests play an influential role in the Saudi state, they are by no means monolithic nor immutable. Moreover, while *fatwas* and the rules that stem from them may in some cases provide justification for particular state policies, there is a great deal of flexibility in the interpretation and enforcement of specific laws. Indeed, some religious opinions provided by the 'ulama' "serve more as ventilation for conservative frustrations than as restrictions to be taken literally" (Doumato, 1999, p.579). Further, there are active feminist and religious non-state organizations in Saudi Arabia that oppose the dominant state interpretations of Islam (Doumato, 2003).¹⁸ Thus, while Islamist politics are an important dimension of Saudi state power, they also play a role in opposition to the state, and gender ideals and restrictions are represented in a range of various ways within these different interpretations. Moreover, most recently, "[w]omen and girls have taken possession of public spaces that did not exist a generation ago" (Doumato, 2003, p. 239), and they too have invoked reworked religious rationales in support of their mobility and transgressions of dominant norms. These caveats are important in order to counter Western feminist perspectives on gender in the Middle East that inaccurately construct Muslim women as the uniquely religiously subordinated Other and imply a homogeneity within and across majority Muslim populations (Nagel, 2001b). Challenging Orientalizing stereotypes of Muslim women is particularly crucial in light of recent mobilizations of "the Afghan woman problem" for international political gain (Seager, 2003, p. 1).

Overall, then, in recent decades the Saudi state's efforts have invited "experimentation" (Doumato, 1999, p. 578) with the gendered social order, yet also enacted legal provisions beginning in the 1990s "to redraw the boundaries, to reaffirm the lines between women and men" (ibid.). Within this context of contradictory impulses and policy change emanating from the state, Saudi households have increasingly employed Indonesian migrant domestic workers (Pujiastuti, 2000). The middle and high income, urban, educated segments of the Saudi population have continued to reap the rewards of the national material transformation of the 1970s, and many expect a range of services, including domestic service, to be available to them. Indeed, the Saudi state's

¹⁷ The role of religion in the history of the formation of the Saudi state is beyond the scope of this article, but see Al-Rasheed (2000) for a nuanced account. Also see Hefner (2000) on the politics of Islam in contemporary Indonesia. Religion also plays an important role in shaping the migration and labor experiences of Indonesian domestic workers, and these issues are addressed more thoroughly in a separate paper (Silvey, in progress).

¹⁸ Indeed, the most threatening revolt launched in recent years against the Kingdom of Sa'ud (in 1979) based its own message of resistance on strong Islamic rhetoric.

legitimacy rests in part on ensuring the continued availability of such markers of modernity and economic development (Al-Rasheed, 2002). Yet, as the following section explores, migrants have employed a range of means to circumvent state controls on them, and activists have called on the Indonesian states' gendered claims to legitimacy to pressure the New Order to provide greater protection to overseas migrant workers.

V. ENCOUNTERING THE STATE; CIRCUMVENTION AND ACTIVISM

There are a range of ways in which women migrants adapt to, accommodate, or seek to circumvent state policy regarding their mobility and the gender norms that the state produces about them. In addition, a growing number of NGOs have organized actions to pressure the Indonesian state in particular to provide better protection to overseas migrants.¹⁹ When women avoid contact with the state's migration apparatus, they participate, albeit unwittingly, in reaffirming the state's lack of regulatory capacity. When activists pressure the state, they contribute to shaping the issues for which the state is held accountable. Women migrants' circumvention of formal bureaucratic procedures reveals key geographic, ideological, and practical limits to state power, which Indonesian NGOs, buffeted by a strengthening of civil society more generally, demanded that the New Order state address.

First, as mentioned above, many women who migrate to Saudi Arabia do so with the help of informal brokers (Ananta et al., 1998). Migrants are often unaware that the informal brokers' practices, and therefore their own migration, are illegal (Solidaritas Perempuan, 1994). When they enlist for overseas work with an informal broker, their actions are not intentionally aimed at subverting state policy, but they are doing so nonetheless.²⁰ Riani, who had returned from Saudi Arabia, spoke about the reason she allowed an informal sponsor to process her visa documentation for her: "I didn't know how to deal with it. I was glad when it [visa processing] was dealt with [for me], just picked up like that. Yeah, I just waited to be called, and let the sponsor deal with it" (Solidaritas Perempuan, 1994, p.3). In Riani's case, the sponsor's work did not lead to problems overseas, but in other cases the middle-men who fill the vacuum left by the state's inadequate migrant apparatus exacerbate migrant candidates' vulnerability. For instance, a woman named Kodriah who was interviewed after returning from Saudi Arabia, said, "My sponsor and my agent let me know that working in Saudi Arabia was nice, the salary was large, and the work was light, only washing like I usually do every day" (Solidaritas Perempuan, 1994, p. 3). After arriving abroad, however, she discovered that the sponsor and agent had neglected to mention the restrictions on mobility that she would face in Saudi Arabia. The recruiter had been able to hinge his message on the state-sanctioned normalization of low-income women's domestic work, and the limited information provided by the state had shaped the context within which he was able to manipulate Kodriah.

¹⁹ See also Gurowitz, (2000) for an analysis of NGOs working on behalf of migrants' rights in Malaysia.

²⁰ The focus on the state's influence on women's migration is not intended to obscure the effects of the labor market, which is also structured along the lines of gender, nationality, and class, among other axes of social difference. Instead, the aim is to illustrate the ways in which the state is interacting with the labor market to shape migration in this case.

There are also a number of ways that women migrants have endeavored to alter their situations after arriving in Saudi Arabia, effectively moving beyond the reach of the state's immigration apparatus. Specifically, many women break their contracts when they face abuse, overwork, or lack of payment in the homes of their employers (Tirtosudarmo, 2000). The Indonesian embassy in Riyadh reports that between 300 and 500 Indonesian women per day can be found waiting at the embassy for assistance, and that the majority of these women lack formal documentation and have run away from abusive situations in the homes of their employers (ibid.). One recent study found that in response to various abuses, 75% of return migrants had cut short their stays, broken their contracts, and returned home earlier than planned (Pujiastuti, 2000). In addition, many women have acted in self-defense, as evidenced by the numerous reports of women hitting their bosses or forcefully defending themselves against various forms of abuse (Solidaritas Perempuan, 1994). Finally, some who have returned to Java decide never to attempt overseas migration again. As one return migrant, Mariya, said, "I don't want to work overseas again, I've felt enough hellishness. I worked to make money, but what I got was suffering" (Solidaritas Perempuan, 1994, p.6).

In response to information about these abuses, beginning in 1984, a growing number of NGOs (e.g., Solidaritas Perempuan, Kalyanamitra, and later The Center for Indonesian Migrant Women) publicly protested the Indonesian state's inadequate protection of overseas women workers. These NGOs have directed public attention to migrant women's issues through encouraging the media to provide prominent coverage of cases of mistreatment, excessively heavy workloads, sexual harassment, and rape. News magazines have published regular reports on the increasing numbers of women who have mysteriously disappeared, been murdered, sentenced to death, or committed suicide in Saudi Arabia (Ananta et al., 1998). NGOs have circulated graphic depictions of the wounds caused by assaults on migrant women's bodies, leading to widespread public opposition to the treatment these women are receiving. They have pressured the state to protect migrants from abuses such as non-payment of wages, confinement to the place of work, and work overload (Adi, 1995 as cited in Spaan, 1999; Amjad, 1996). Strategically, they have drawn on the Indonesian state's own paternalist discourses of idealized femininity and domestic roles in order to pressure the state to internationalize its accountability.

Within Indonesia, the maltreatment of Indonesian domestics was viewed as a national "embarrassment" (Hugo, 1995, p.289), particularly for the elite (Ananta et al., 1998), who joined NGOs to pressure the state to change their regulatory procedures. In 1996, the Indonesian Ministry of Women's Affairs argued that the government should stop sending housemaids altogether (Republika, 31 October 1997, as cited in Ananta et al., 1998, p.332). In addition, the Minister of Manpower proposed that beginning in 1999, Indonesia would not send any "unskilled" workers abroad, suggesting that such a change in regulation would prevent further abuse of Indonesian domestics (The Jakarta Post, 6 May 1998, cited in Ananta et al., 1998: 332). This proposed 'solution' did not satisfy the activists, who argued that prohibiting women from entering overseas domestic service jobs would not stop their migration, and would serve instead to increase the numbers of unprotected migrants who would continue to seek employment abroad regardless of the regulations. According to the activists, the Indonesian state's efforts to control migration and simultaneously neglect labor regulation in Saudi do-

mestic employment reveals the state's prioritization of particular elite constituents' concerns about national identity above concerns for worker welfare.

The New Order faced pressure to address the situation of overseas domestics as a result of the increase in media attention, the growth of women's NGOs working in support of overseas workers' rights, and the voices of politically influential Indonesian Islamic leaders in opposition to the situation of overseas women workers (Robinson, 2000; Tirtosudarmo, 2000; Hugo, 1995; Ananta et al., 1998).²¹ State officials were urged to confront women migrants' problems, and thus have been pushed to confront the contradictions in the state's gender ideology. In particular, while the New Order's gendered order was linked to an idealized domesticated femininity within its territorial boundaries, it has refused to extend protection to the working women whose domestic labor makes it possible for wealthier women to live this image both within Indonesia and abroad. These class-based contradictions in state gender ideology which had gone relatively unremarked within Indonesia (but see Sen, 1998) became powerful points of contention in the context of transnational migration.

VI. CONCLUSIONS: TRANSNATIONAL SUBJECTS OF STATE POWER

Migrants' particular experiences are shaped in part by the different positions of Saudi Arabia and Indonesia in the global political economy. Saudi Arabia seeks to import low-wage labor in order to maintain labor market flexibility and fill labor shortages,²² whilst Indonesia seeks to export 'surplus' labor and earn much-needed foreign exchange. The oil boom of the 1970s and early 1980s in the Middle East provided state revenues that were used to fund large infrastructural projects and major national development efforts, creating employment niches that migrants from throughout South and Southeast Asia rapidly filled (Arnold and Shah, 1986; Cremer, 1988). By the mid-1980s, as Saudi oil revenues declined, the demand for low-wage foreign labor continued to increase, as did the in-migration of Indonesian domestic workers for a number of reasons detailed below (Chin, 1998). In this context of labor demand, the Indonesian state actively and aggressively promoted the out-migration of women to work as domestics in Saudi Arabia, while the Saudi state for the most part turned a blind eye to the large numbers of undocumented migrant female domestic workers employed within its territory. Yet through the migration of domestic workers, the Saudi and Indonesian gender contracts came into conflict with one another, and many Indonesian female migrants saw the Saudi state's restrictions on them as unacceptable. In the late 1990s, in Indonesia social activists drew on the state's own gendered discourses to pressure the state to protect overseas migrant women workers' rights and safety, and in so doing they challenged the state's gender ideology and sought to expand the territorial and scalar boundaries of its jurisdictional scope.

²¹ The role of Islamist political forces in confronting the abuse of domestic workers is examined in detail by Robinson (2000) and in relation to the migration of Indonesian women to Saudi Arabia by Silvey (in progress).

²² The Saudi state does have a policy of "Saudiization," the process of replacing foreigners with indigenous workers" (Doumato, 1999, p 571) in order to open up employment opportunities for Saudi citizens. In practice, however, and despite large deportations of 'illegal' immigrants, "the number of Saudi nationals in the private sector...actually went down by one percent between 1991 and 1995" (ibid.).

Family ideologies circulated by the early New Order state implied that a mother's sacrifice for her children or a daughter's sacrifice for her parents would support national development and thereby benefit the "national family." But working as a domestic abroad entails spatial separation from family. In the transnational case, women migrants *leave* family and nation to become domestics, and yet they do so under the rubric of self-sacrifice *for* family and nation. In order to rationalize the rupture that domestic workers' transnational departure from kin represented for official early gender ideology, the Indonesian state relied on the construction of overseas domestics as heroes of national development.²³ However, this view of gender roles has failed to contain completely the spatial and ideological contradictions of women's overseas work, and it has provided entry points through which activists have challenged state policy.

When returned domestics and activists from non-governmental organizations have taken to the streets to demonstrate in Indonesia on behalf of the female migrants in Saudi Arabia, they have rallied the state's own paternalism behind their cause, casting the state as the set of actors and institutions that must protect the nation's citizens—and particularly women—abroad, and thereby protect its national status and pride. In effect, activists employ state discourse by calling upon the migrant female body as a vessel and emblem of the nation itself, thus extending and reimagining the territory in which the state is held responsible for its citizens. The activists identify the embodied violence and oppression that migrant women face as representative of the victimization inflicted upon the body of the nation as a whole. By mobilizing the state's own discourses, activists aim to make the state accountable to citizens abroad, and insist that action be taken in the name of protecting a vulnerable national identity in Saudi household spaces.

In hailing the state's paternalist identity, activists have capitalized on a solecism in Indonesian state ideology. While the New Order state sought to shape gender roles and the domestic sphere within its national territory, and promoted the migration of low-income women into the transnational labor market, it simultaneously generally refused to protect the rights of women workers abroad, thus violating the grammar of its own discourse. Because the state framed itself as the *pater familia* of the nation in the context of ideological familism (*azas kekeluargaan*), women and NGOs have been able to call on the state's own gendered claims to legitimacy as a lever to pressure the state to expand its jurisdictional scope. In addition, they, along with Indonesian state officials, have pressured the Saudi state to generate a set of bilateral agreements protecting the rights of Indonesian nationals abroad (Nakertrans, 2003).

Understanding the constitutive role of counter-hegemonic activism moves analyses away from too deterministic a view of the state and its relationship to women migrants. This approach has allowed examination of the roles that migrants and activists play in relation to, and not solely as a result of, state policy and power. Taking these

²³ Also see Robinson (2000) on this point. A small percentage (i.e., approximately 10% according to estimates from Solidaritas Perempuan) of domestics in Saudi Arabia generates substantial earnings to bring home, and this allows these few women to move into social positions of power and prestige historically reserved for men and people of higher socio-economic standing. In this way, these few "success stories" might be understood as posing a challenge even to the flexible gender ideologies of the state. But because their success makes migration more appealing to other potential migrants, they are serving the larger goals of the state. Further, because they have risen in class standing, and tend to stay at home after returning from Saudi Arabia, they can be contained by the state's gender norms for the middle class (Brenner, 1998).

migrants' and activists' practices and voices seriously is part of the broader feminist geographic project of:

starting from these informal spheres in which women and men are marginalized under global capitalism as a strategic way of revealing how informal economies of production and caring subsidize and *constitute*....neo-liberal states (Nagar et al., 2001: 20, emphasis added).

The formations of New Order state power were partly outcomes of their interplay with insurgent voices, which hailed the state by its self-appellations. The New Order came to look the way it did—relieved of particular responsibilities and held accountable for other stakes to legitimacy—in part because of women's responses to particular state practices and ideologies, circumvention of formal channels of documentation, and more recently, their activism directed at changing state policy.

Many studies of contemporary Indonesia have detailed the coercive and repressive features of the New Order state. Massacres led by the military, extra-legal killings and torture, and on-going human rights abuses were all part of the Suharto regime's bloody legacy (Anderson, 2001) as was the sexual victimization, torture and terrorization of women who posed a threat to the state (Sunindyo, 1996). But, as this case study has aimed to show, it has not been direct military intervention or overt state repression that has prompted women to make up the majority of Indonesian migrants working in Saudi Arabia. Nor can women's migration be understood to have resulted solely from gendered push and pull factors in the labor market as distinct from the cultural struggles around gender and state migration policy. In order to see how this gendered migration stream has taken shape, it has been necessary to examine both the direct and the less direct mechanisms of state power, and specifically the state's role in constructing gendered mobility, idealized feminine identities, and transnational domestic labor practices. The Indonesian and Saudi states have not coincidentally neglected the protection of domestic spaces and migrant workers' rights. Rather, the lack of regulation of domestic service, inasmuch as it increases the exploitability of migrant workers, plays a productive part in maintaining and reinforcing the privileges of both the Saudi and the Indonesian elite.

Paradoxically, although the territorialized state promoted Indonesian women's overseas migration, this migration stream and the activism associated with it have called into question the geographic scope of the Indonesian state's responsibility for its nationals. The boundaries of state patronage are at issue in this transnational context, as struggles over migrants' rights have posed challenges to the territorialized state's jurisdictional scope. Bringing gender and difference into the analysis of state power has permitted examination of arenas of political struggle, such as nationalized and racialized gender ideologies and constructions of the domestic sphere—that, while still marginal to most geopolitical analyses of migration—are themselves constitutive of the forms that state power takes. More broadly, then, it helps to clarify the ways in which these gendered subjects and spaces are interlinked with contestations over the geographies of state power.

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