Migration, Mobility, & Displacement

Adriana Rahajeng Mintarsih, 2019. "Facebook, Polymedia, Social Capital, and a Digital Family of Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers: A Case Study of The Voice of Singapore's Invisible Hands" Migration, Mobility, & Displacement 4 (1): 65-83

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Facebook, Polymedia, Social Capital, and a Digital Family of Indonesian Migrant Domestic Workers: A Case Study of The Voice of Singapore's Invisible Hands

Adriana Rahajeng Mintarsih

Abstract

Rarely do female migrant domestic workers (MDWs) get a chance to narrate their own migration experience. Voice of Singapore's Invisible Hands (or The Voice), which started as a literary community on Facebook, aims to reshape the dominant—negative—discourse on migrant workers, especially Indonesian MDWs, by providing access to their literary work. In a transnational migration setting, Facebook has been used as a tool to maintain people's relations with their families and friends back home, as well as for making new friends. Connections gained between individuals become a form of social capital where people build social networks and establish norms of reciprocity and a sense of trustworthiness. In the early establishment of The Voice, Facebook helped its initiator gain social capital. Ultimately, this social capital benefits the community and its members. Over the course of The Voice's development, other social media platforms, namely WhatsApp, Skype, and email, have been used in addition to Facebook because they offer a different set of features and affordances of privacy and frequency. This practice of switching from one media to another is an illustration of polymedia, in which all media operate as an integrated structure and each is defined in relation to other media. This study, which focused on the relation of Facebook, polymedia, and social capital in the context of The Voice, used integrated online and offline qualitative data-gathering methodologies. The study found that Facebook initially helped both the community, which began as a learning space for Indonesian MDWs who wanted to narrate their stories about their home and family, and its members in their efforts to reshape the negative dominant discourse on migrant workers. It was the affordances of polymedia, however, that paved the way for the formation later on of a digital family in which the members provide emotional support for each other, similar to what family and close friends do.

Introduction

Indonesian female migrants working in low-wage sectors in the top four destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers, Malaysia, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore (BNP2TKI 2018), are often perceived as people who have a low level of literacy or skills. For example, among female migrant domestic workers (MDWs) in Taiwan, those from Indonesia are often considered less smart than those from the Philippines, by both

Taiwanese and MDWs (Loveband 2004). Meanwhile, according to Cheng (2001) and Lan (2000), both as cited in Loveband (2004), Indonesian MDWs themselves can sense that Filipino MDWs—who mostly have higher education and better English than they do—look down on them, just as the Taiwanese do. Their perception of themselves is most likely influenced by these stereotypes.

Compared to MDWs from the Philippines and India, Indonesian MDWs more often face a language barrier in terms of English proficiency—a reality relating to differing colonial histories of the region. As suggested by Anne Loveband (2004), this might have led to the stereotype that Indonesian MDWs are not as smart as MDWs from other countries, because English acts as linguistic capital that can affect how MDWs are perceived in English-speaking countries. However, this unfavourable situation does not discourage some MDWs. After working long hours on a daily basis, they make use of different means and platforms to empower themselves and their communities. For example, they write about or share their experiences in the form of journal entries, prose, and poems. Some others form and join communities to develop their skills and/or advocate for their rights. However, very few of these activities are known by the general public, and there has been little discussion on them.

Trisnawati, Taufiqurrohman, and Agustina (n.d.), Murniati (2014), and Sawai (2015) investigated literary work of Indonesian migrant workers and provided critical analysis of short stories written in Bahasa Indonesia by Indonesian migrants or ex-migrant workers in Hong Kong and Singapore. In a case study of a literary community named Forum Lingkar Pena Hong Kong (FLPHK), Shiho Sawai (2015, 1) found that the members of this Islamic literary group "attempt to project desirable senses of Self in their lives that straddles over Indonesia and Hong Kong [and where religion, class, nationality and gender intersect with each other]."

After the development of information and communications technologies (ICTs), some Indonesian migrant workers expanded their activities online. Pratiwi Retnaningdyah (2013) examined how the "blogsphere" used by Indonesian MDWs in Hong Kong to narrate their own stories not only reconstructs their identity but also empowers their community. Facebook has also been used as a grassroots activism platform to advocate for the rights of migrant workers (Allmark and Wahyudi 2016; Wijaya 2016). Civic and political engagement, as shown by the communities in this research, arise from social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust resulting from connections among individuals (Putnam 2000) that people gain online. Some research has shown a positive correlation between online social capital and individuals' civic engagement (Zúñiga, Jung, and Valenzuela 2012; Zúñiga, Barnidge, and Scherman 2016). However, they did not discuss online social capital at the community level. Moreover, communities that are not based on the advocacy of migrant workers and do not explicitly aim at activism and political movements on Facebook are rarely discussed in academic research. These communities, in fact, have the potential to promote their rights through different activities of interest to migrant workers. One example is literary communities. Voice of Singapore's Invisible Hands (or The Voice) was chosen as a case study to shed some light on this potential.

The Voice is a literary community of migrant workers in Singapore founded in late 2017 by Yoga Prasetyo, who is a son of an Indonesian MDW in Singapore. Although The Voice has invited a few MDWs from the Philippines and male migrant workers from Bangladesh who work as construction workers, they do not actively participate in its activities. Thus, this research focuses on Indonesian MDWs who are its active members. When first established, The Voice was not intended to be an online community on Facebook, since its main activity was an in-class prose-writing workshop on Sundays. However, Facebook has played a substantial role in the establishment and development of the community, from inviting volunteers and participants, to promoting the literary work of its members.

The Voice promotes the rights and welfare of migrant workers in Singapore through their self-made literary work. It aims at reshaping negative discourse on migrant workers circulated in Singapore, such as them being uneducated and low-level people. Knowing Yoga as my student at Universitas Indonesia and having him as my Facebook friend, I first noticed The Voice while I was going through my newsfeed on Facebook in August 2016. Posted on its Facebook page and then shared on the initiator's account on August 3, 2016, The Voice's introduction highlights the power of literary work. Through the use of Facebook, its members' literary pieces can "reach the public or be recognized publicly" (Y. Prasetyo, personal interview, January 8, 2016). The Voice gains social capital from using Facebook and, by connecting its members to broader readers, both the community and members gain benefits. Over the course of its development, The Voice has made use of other social media platforms to support its two online programs (English mentoring, which involved some volunteer teachers, and a literary criticism class, which I taught), as well as activities and communication among members, which indicates polymedia. Polymedia refers to the abundance of media resources that are interrelated in everyday conditions (Madianou and Miller 2012).

To investigate the relation of social capital and polymedia in this case study, I collected and interpreted data gathered from (1) The Voice's Facebook page and secret group; (2) an offline focus group discussion with nine members of The Voice; (3) in-depth interviews with The Voice's initiator offline and nine members online; (4) an online questionnaire distributed to its two volunteers; and (5) my personal online observations. This study found a correlation between The Voice's use of Facebook and social capital, on both individual and community levels. Moreover, through the use of polymedia to gain and maintain social capital, The Voice has transformed itself, from a learning space where the dominant discourse on migrant workers is reshaped, into a digital family for its members.

Theorising Facebook, Polymedia, and Social Capital in Migration Studies

The transnational movement of people is inevitable in the globalised world. People have been migrating from their home country to a host country, usually from developing countries to developed ones, for better job opportunities and living standards for themselves and/ or their families. This migration results in family separation (Parreñas 2005); however,

communication at a distance is no longer an issue due to the development of ICTs since the beginning of the 21st century. Landline phones have been replaced by smartphones that integrate different features found in "traditional mobile phones, computers, and the web" (Madianou 2014, 667). Nowadays, smartphones are equipped with social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Skype, Instagram, Twitter, etc., which have allowed migrant workers to stay in touch with family and friends via an economically accessible form of international communication (Madianou and Miller 2012).

The first SNS launched was SixDegrees in 1997. The users could invite their family, friends, and acquaintances to join the site, create profiles, send messages to each other, and post to each other's bulletin board. However, not until the launch of its successors, such as Friendster (2002), MySpace (2003), and Orkut (2003), did large numbers of people worldwide start to recognise SNSs or social media. Unfortunately, these other social media platforms could not compete with Facebook, which was launched in 2004. It is estimated that Facebook's active users have reached more than a billion and a half (The Statistics Portal 2016). Limited to students in its first two years, Facebook was opened to the public in 2006. Initially people could only access it through personal computers or laptops. However, in 2006, "Facebook for mobile devices" was introduced, and more features have been added to the website and application since then (Peckham 2016). Now, there are extensive features, such as status updates, photographs, messaging (similar to emails, accompanied by games, video, and link sharing), pages, groups, events, chat (similar to instant messaging, or IM), as well as individual and group phone and video calls.

The business, cultural, and research landscapes have been influenced, not only by Facebook but also by Friendster, MySpace, and Orkut (boyd and Ellison 2007), but Facebook is still the largest SNS and is the focus of much research on SNSs. In the context of Indonesia, there has been a growing interest in the discussion of Facebook and Indonesian migrant workers. Stevanus Wijaya (2016) argues that Facebook empowers Indonesian migrant workers in Hong Kong and Taiwan through their engagement in online communities on Facebook. According to Wijaya, Indonesian migrant workers gain an understanding of their rights and learn best practices from each other regarding ways to deal with issues that arise with migration. This ultimately strengthens and develops the communities themselves because the members are able to organise more solid collective actions.

Through Facebook and all its integrated applications, people, including migrant workers, can stay in touch with family and friends and meet new people, or in other words, form and maintain social capital (Antheunis, Abeele, and Kanters 2015; Brandtzæg and Nov 2011; Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe 2007; Kavanaugh et al. 2003). Different definitions of social capital have been formulated[1], but this paper adopts Robert Putnam's definition of social capital as "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (2000, 19). Putnam distinguishes two types of social capital—bonding and bridging—which are parallel to Mark Granovetter's (1983) concepts of "strong ties" and "weak ties." Tight-knit families, relatives, and close friends who are emotionally close are examples of the former, while acquaintances or people with loose connections are examples of the latter. Emotional support primarily arises from bonding social capital, while bridging social capital offers new and varied information

and perspectives. While sharing information and perspectives can also be found among bonding networks, the discourse circulated might be limited to topics that are relevant and acceptable within the community. Furthermore, there is a social pressure to conform to or adopt the norms or values held by the community. Meanwhile, among bridging networks, there are more diverse perspectives (Rademacher and Wang 2014).

Although Putnam emphasises face-to-face interactions over online interactions in building social capital, his concepts of bonding and bridging social capital have been used to investigate online interactions mediated by SNSs. Social capital gained through Facebook, for example, has been found to improve quality of life because interactions and relations built and maintained online bring higher self-esteem and life satisfaction to its users (Ellison et al. 2007). In a study of the users of Renren, a Chinese SNS similar to Facebook, Mochen and Xunhua (2013) argued that university students who actively use Renren gain online bridging social capital. Moreover, extraverted users gain more than introverted ones because they "can take advantage of their large offline social networks" (520) who also become their Renren friends.

Among migrants and/or immigrants, there is also a positive correlation between their use of SNSs and social capital. Using a sample of Indian migrants who use both Facebook and an alternative SNS, Orkut, Binder and Sutcliffe (2014) found that migrants make use of the latter as a compensatory strategy for keeping and widening their ties. Meanwhile, Damian and Ingen (2014), studying 749 immigrants in the Netherlands who use Facebook and the well-known Dutch SNS Hyves, found that SNSs have made the acculturation process more successful and enhanced the quality of social relationships.

With the existence of ample SNSs from which people can choose depending on their situations and needs, researchers on transnational migration have started to investigate the interrelationships of these media in the discussion of computer-mediated transnational communication. Madianou and Miller (2012) coined the term polymedia as "an emerging environment of communicative opportunities that functions as an 'integrated structure' within which each individual medium is defined in relational terms in the context of all other media" (170). In the theory of polymedia, people's choice of one media over another is related to how they communicate their emotions and manage their relationships. For example, private and intimate conversations can be facilitated well by voice or video calls and real-time chats on platforms such as Skype, FaceTime, or Messenger because there is simultaneous co-presence that leads to more unconstrained interactions (McKay 2017), while Facebook is considered to be more public than platforms such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, Messenger, and Skype (Baldassar 2016; McKay 2017). Since all of these applications can now be accessed on smartphones, "smartphones [themselves] function as environments of polymedia" (Madianou 2014, 678).

Most literature on polymedia focuses on Filipino migrant workers (Madianou 2014, 2015; McKay 2017), and no research has examined the relationship between polymedia and social capital in migration studies. This study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring (1) the role of Facebook in helping The Voice and its members gain and maintain social capital, which potentially supports the community's goal of reshaping

the negative discourse on Indonesian MDWs through their literary work and (2) how polymedia has strengthened this social capital and opened the possibility of the formation of a digital family.

The current study was limited by the fact that my respondents were only The Voice's active members from the first and second batches of The Voice's offline creative writing workshops and online classes. Six members from The Voice's first batch were introduced to me by Yoga Prasetyo and invited to a focus group discussion with me in Singapore; three members from the second batch who interacted regularly with me during my online class were interviewed separately. Members from the two batches who were not active, as well as new members in the next batch whom I did not interact with, were not included as my research participants. Moreover, I did not gather quantitative data of The Voice's Facebook followers' perceptions of The Voice. Future research to investigate the dynamics of The Voice after its second batch of workshops and to complement my findings with quantitative data would be useful. A longitudinal study of The Voice is needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of this community. However, this study opens the discussion on polymedia-mediated literary communities of migrant workers.

The Voice and Negative Dominant Discourse on Indonesian MDWs

Identifying itself as a nonprofit organisation (NPO)[2] that promotes the rights and welfare of migrant workers in Singapore through literary work on Facebook, The Voice's main beneficiaries are Indonesian MDWs. The Indonesian Embassy in Singapore reported that Indonesian MDWs made up 55% of all MDWs in Singapore (IOM 2010). As of December 2018, there were 1,023 Indonesian migrant workers in Singapore, and these workers were mostly women working as domestic workers[3] (BNP2TKI 2018). Protection of MDWs has been upgraded with the existence of an agreement between the National Agency for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Workers (BNP2TKI) and the Government of Singapore. It includes their working hours, rights to get rest days to access improvement of skills as well as free deployment. Better protections, however, do not lead to the elimination of stereotypes about, and discrimination against, Indonesian MDWs.

MDWs are often seen as a much lower class in Singaporean society. As Beatrice Ti (2016) writes, negative stereotypes "spread online are sometimes reflected in discriminatory behaviours and revulsion towards these workers, as well as ill-treatment or exploitation" (4). As reported by Singapore's newspaper *The Straits Times* (MyPaper 2016), the executive director of the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), Sheena Kanwar, provided an example of the discrimination against MDWs at condominiums on Orchard Road where residents who are MDWs allegedly are not allowed to use the swimming pool. Based on the focus group discussion with my respondents and personal interviews with some of them, there are indeed stereotypes about MDWs from different nationalities. Similar to Loveband's (2004) findings on MDWs in Taiwan, Indonesian MDWs in Singapore are often considered not as smart as MDWs from other countries, such as the Philippines and India, because of their lack of English proficiency.

Negative stereotypes about and discrimination against migrant workers, especially Indonesian MDWs in Singapore, were the driving force behind the establishment of The Voice. The Voice did not choose to provide advocacy or legal support for migrant workers since these have been provided by some activists and NPOs in Singapore, such as HOME and Tim Advokasi Singapore. Instead, it chose to unveil stories from the perspectives of migrant workers in the form of literary work, such as poems and short stories. Although literary works of migrant workers are rarely discussed in migration literature, they have, in fact, always existed.

It is not impossible for migrant workers to publish their literary pieces in Singapore. Bangladeshi migrant workers, for example, have their own literary community called *Bangla Lit*. Moreover, one of its writers, Md Mukul Hossine, has been widely recognised in Singapore for his anthology of poems entitled *Me Migrant*, written in Bengali, translated into English by Singapore poet Cyril Wong, and published in 2016 by Ethos Books, Singapore. Prior to the establishment of The Voice, there were communities that initiated publication of Indonesian MDWs' literary work. However, the works were written in Bahasa Indonesia and circulated mostly among Indonesian MDWs, both in Singapore and Indonesia. For example, communities of Indonesian MDWs in Singapore named BMI Singapura and Membangun Semangat Berkarya/Berkreasi (MSB), which have online as well as offline activities and are not organised based on a certain religion, region, or activity, have helped their members who actively write literary pieces publish anthologies of both poems and short stories. No official records have been kept about the number of these literary pieces, but from the personal records of The Voice's initiator, more than 40 Indonesian MDWs in Singapore have published their poems or short stories, written in Bahasa Indonesia, in the form of anthologies and/or a few individual books.

The existence of regular literary competitions in Singapore also stimulates considerable interest and potential amongst migrant workers. The biggest one is the Migrant Worker Poetry Competition. The competition, which is organised by nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and institutions from inside and outside Singapore, has been held annually since 2014. For Indonesian MDWs, The Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Singapore sometimes holds poetry competitions. Although Indonesian MDWs originate from a variety of regions with their own languages, the need to write in Bahasa Indonesia is rarely a barrier—as it is their national language—when they participate in creative writing competitions organised specifically for them. Language does, however, become a barrier when they participate in competitions of creative writing in English organised for multinational migrants. Translators are usually provided by the competition committees. In the Migrant Worker Poetry Competition 2016, however, my respondents were assigned a Malay translator for their written work in Bahasa Indonesia, and therefore their work was not well translated (Focus group discussion, January 8, 2017).

Having seen the literary potential of migrant workers, The Voice chose literary work as a means to reshape the discourse on migrant workers, including Indonesian MDWs, circulated in Singapore. The Voice's Facebook page (2016) states:

> *The Voice of Singapore's Invisible Hands is a non-profit organisation*

> *aimed at promoting migrant workers' full rights and welfare by way of literary works. The reason why the Voice focuses on writing prose, and in particular, stories inspired by personal experiences, is that many migrant workers don't have any tool (sic) to let the general public know what they experience, what they feel as human beings, how they want to be treated, and how hard it is to work the jobs they do and leave their families behind. Prose, or literature in its broadest sense, will allow people to pour their hearts out to other people and speak directly to them as human beings, which journalistic texts or functional languages can't really do. The stressed point is that we want to reshape the discourses around migrant workers and let them circulate among the Singaporean society.*

Aiming at reshaping the discourse, this literary movement represents what Laachir and Talajooy (2013) refer to as cultural resistance, which "describe[s] the way novels [and other forms of literary work, such as poems and short stories], films, plays, and music are used to resist the dominant social, economic, political, and cultural discourses and structures either consciously or unconsciously" (5). The existence of the internet "has shifted the trend from 'read-only' to read-write literacy" (Retnaningdyah 2013, 25), and Facebook is a case in point. The members of The Voice on Facebook can participate in reshaping the discourse on migrant workers that was previously controlled and/or crafted by other parties, such as the government, agents, brokers, media, and even academics, by actively producing their own narratives coming from their own experience. By doing so they can challenge what people think of them, thus it can influence the way they think of themselves.

At home in Indonesia, media also tends to focus on the negative news about Indonesian MDWs who experience abuse. These stories are important to be publicly shared, and the rights of MDWs have to be defended, but only a little room is left for good news and inspiring stories of Indonesian MDWs. The Indonesian government, unfortunately, does not do anything to tackle the negative stereotypes. Many people, including government officials, still believe and circulate the idea that domestic work is an unappreciated occupation, lower than other occupations providing care work, such as nursing. For example, a former vice-speaker of the House of Representatives (DPR RI), Fahri Hamzah, posted a negative remark about Indonesian MDWs on his Twitter account in January 2017: "*Anak bangsa mengemis menjadi* babu *di negeri orang dan pekerja asing merajalela*" (A child of a nation [a citizen] begs in another country as a *maid*, whereas many foreign workers keep on coming to Indonesia). Political actions and social movements led by human rights activists and NGOs are needed to advocate for MDW's rights, but The Voice chose to advocate for their rights by reshaping the dominant discourse circulated both in Singapore and Indonesia.

Narrating their own stories in the form of literary works on Facebook, The Voice's members show different sides of MDWs that most people are not aware of. Just like any other migrants who are away from their homeland, they miss their home, express love for their loved ones, dream, and struggle, and a few discuss social problems such as discrimination or corruption. The work belongs to a "diaspora narrative [which] provides [the readers]

with the concept such as memories, nostalgia, losing home, identity, family and friends" (Murniati 2014, 2). When interviewed, most of my respondents pointed out that family has been the main, if not only, reason behind their migration.

Behind a migration story, there is always a story of separation with home and between family members. Some of the work of The Voice's members captures these two forms of separation. "Jejak Kenangan Perantau / Memoir of A Wanderer" is a poem written by Melur Seruni about her longing for home. "Perfect Lullaby" is a poem written in English by Nur Hidayati, which represents her hopes and prayers for her son. "Pa" by Dianna Lissty Syukur is a poem about her late father who passed away during her migration (see my creative commentary piece in this issue to read these three poems and find out more about the writers, as well as the inspiration behind each work). Most of my respondents in the focus group discussion stated that they do not want to be solely identified as MDWs, and this, indeed, can be seen from their literary pieces in which they present themselves as a wanderer, mother, and daughter, making them relatable to people in general. In other words, they consciously participate in reshaping the negative discourse on Indonesian MDWs with their literary work, which is the aim of The Voice.

The Voice, Facebook, and Social Capital

As mentioned above, The Voice was founded in 2017 by Yoga Prasetyo, who is a son of an Indonesian MDW in Singapore. The initial stage of the community's establishment benefited from Yoga's being an exchange student at National University Singapore (NUS) for a semester in mid-2016. This geographical proximity enabled him not only to maintain his bonding networks with his mother, but also to form bridging networks with his new friends at NUS. With the help of his mother, who is a member of MSB, a community of Indonesian MDWs in Singapore, Yoga gained access to a small literary world of Indonesian MDWs, saw its complexities, and invited members who are passionate about creative writing to join a series of creative writing workshops, which ran from late August to December 2016. In my personal interviews with community members, three out of six members from the first batch of workshops explained that they had heard about The Voice from MSB.

From one of the MSB members and leaders, Yoga also managed to access the Centre for Domestic Employees, an official NPO that lent the community a classroom for its first workshops. Meanwhile, the bridging social capital that Yoga had formed helped him invite volunteers. A friend agreed to take part, and through word-of-mouth sharing of information and recommendations, a few more people within the social network followed shortly (Y. Prasetyo, personal interview, January 12, 2017). Besides taking advantage of both forms of social capital that Yoga had formed offline, the establishment of the community largely depended on his online social capital.

Since senior high school, Yoga has had a habit of adding to his Facebook friends list those friends of his existing Facebook friends who have an interest in human rights issues,

including migrant worker rights activists whom he has not met in real life (Y. Prasetyo, personal interview, February 12, 2017). As a result, Yoga is able to cultivate bridging social capital that lies dormant on Facebook. Moreover, his connection with his mother on Facebook has enabled him to expand his network within Indonesian MDWs by adding new acquaintances based on this mutual friendship. The first member of the community explained that she had read inspiring stories about him on his mother's Facebook posts before being his Facebook friend (Respondent 1, personal interview, January 19, 2017). Three out of six old members and three new members in the community who became my respondents found out about the community from Facebook, and only three had known each other before. Some knew about it from Yoga's or the community page's posts, as well as from other people sharing the original posts.

Other volunteers[4] and members, including myself, also became interested in participating in The Voice because of the posts on Yoga's personal Facebook account and the community's Facebook page (Y. Prasetyo, personal interview, February 12, 2017). Similar to what Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2007) have described, I have found that The Voice's social capital is formed "when online and offline connections are closely coupled, as with Facebook" (1147). However, offline and online social capital overlap, and it is difficult to ascertain which one precedes the other or which is more beneficial. Bridging social capital that Yoga acquired offline and online has indeed provided the Facebook community that he established with new information and opportunities for increasing membership. Gaining one acquaintance through social media leads to more acquaintances online, and this snowballs in terms of gaining volunteers and members for creative writing workshops.

Besides being used to gain members, Facebook has an important role in expanding the readership of its members' literary pieces. As of February 2019, The Voice's page has 743 likes and 750 followers[5], which includes its active members of the creative writing workshops. These followers are able to read The Voice's posts that can be grouped into four basic categories: (online) promotion, news, publications, and community posts. First, promotion posts consist of The Voice's own posts that promote its creative writing workshops, online literary criticism and English classes, and creative writing competitions and opportunities reposted or shared from other Facebook pages. The number of its own posts is more than that of the reposts. Second, news posts consist of articles or videos from newspapers or other institutions that are shared by The Voice's Facebook page. In line with its vision, The Voice only shares inspiring stories about migrant workers and migrant worker writers, both inside and outside of Singapore. Third, community posts are about or intended for The Voice's members or creative writing teacher. For example, some photos were uploaded after some of the members were invited to a literary event, when the volunteer teacher celebrated her birthday, and after some of the members won a competition. Fourth, publications consist of posts about literary work, mostly poems, written by members and other migrant workers in general. Ten literary pieces, which consist of ten poems and one short story, have been posted on the page. Two of these pieces were written by non-members. Two out of the ten written by members were originally written in English, and the others were written in Indonesian and then translated by the community's translators. Each piece is accompanied by a short biography of its writer, and a short introduction of the themes and inspiration behind the piece is sometimes added.

Through The Voice's Facebook page, its members' literary work, including the three pieces mentioned in the previous part, would be able to be read not only by its 737 followers but also by the friends of these followers with the help of reaction buttons such as *like, love, haha, wow, sad, angry* and the share button. When someone clicks one of these buttons after reading the work, their friends will be able to see it on their Facebook newsfeed. Although the number of reactions and shares given to the publication posts are not as many as the number of followers, some of the posts have gone quite viral. For example, "Morning Rain" received the most responses, with 23 types of different reactions and 41 shares. With this expansion in readership of the members' literary work, the page is working towards its goal of sharing MDWs' stories. The broader the readership, the easier it is for the community to reshape the dominant discourse on Indonesian MDWs in both Singapore and Indonesia.

In relation to its readership, The Voice's followers can be considered as bridging social capital—that is laying dormant and waiting to be activated—because they act as loose connections that can circulate any posts from The Voice to more people—both migrant workers and others—outside of the community. These bridging networks not only ease information exchange, they also accelerate the flow of ideas among diverse groups (Kavanaugh et al. 2007). This form of social capital initially belongs to the community, but then is transferred to its members, because any work written by the members that is posted by The Voice can reach more people through The Voice's followers. However, the degree to which each member takes advantage of this form of social capital is different from one to another.

From the focus group discussion, I found that The Voice's members from its first batch of workshops have higher self-esteem, based on their willingness to share their work written in English with the group. Most members were used to producing literary work in Bahasa Indonesia before joining The Voice. The posts were mostly on their own Facebook accounts, and on a few occasions they sent their work to The Voice's initiator to have it published on The Voice's Facebook page.

One member of The Voice even considers her Facebook account as her journal. Whenever she gets an inspiration for her poems, she writes it on her Facebook status instead of writing it in a notebook or on a piece of paper that easily might be lost. Later, she collects her scattered ideas to produce a complete poem. She keeps doing this, even though there was a complaint through Facebook message from a fellow Indonesian MDW about her literary activities, which this person believes irrelevant to her job as a domestic worker. Retnaningdyah (2013) found a similar response to MDW bloggers in Hong Kong, where there is a stereotype of uneducated MDWs. Another senior member of The Voice did not hesitate to fight an arrogant Indonesian poet through a Facebook message when her work was looked down upon simply because it was written by a domestic worker. My respondents are aware that what they have been doing individually and together with The Voice can help to change people's—including MDWs' themselves—negative perspective about Indonesian MDWs, which is in line with The Voice's goal.

Based on the focus group discussion and my personal observations, I found that although understanding an active production of literary work is needed in reshaping the negative dominant discourse, the members who have less or no prior experience are reluctant to share their work either on their Facebook account or The Voice's page, unlike the experienced ones. In other words, the more experienced members can take more advantage of the transferred social capital than the less experienced ones. These findings are in accordance with Mochen and Xunhua (2013) and Kraut et al. (2002), who suggest that people who benefit the most from SNSs are those who already have strong offline social networks and social skills.

Moreover, borrowing Putnam's book title to explain the decline of social capital in U.S. society, I noticed that The Voice's members were still "bowling alone" instead of together as a team. First, although belonging to a community, the experienced members shared their work on their own Facebook account more often than on The Voice's Facebook page. Second, while The Voice's followers are considered valuable bridging social capital, they have not developed the trust and emotional support with each other that are usually provided by bonding networks. These two types of support are needed by these members while they are away from their families or close friends back home, because they can create a positive atmosphere to achieve the community's goal together. As suggested by Luloff and Bridger (2003), "communities that strike a healthy balance between these types [both types] of social capital should be most likely to undertake successful collective actions" (209)—which, in the case of The Voice, is reshaping the dominant discourse. These two findings show that although The Voice and the members of its first batch of workshops gained social capital from Facebook, neither has made the most of it yet. However, this situation improved in the second batch of workshops.

Polymedia, The Voice, and A Digital Family

The second batch of The Voice's creative writing workshops ran from February to May 2017. Two online programs (a literary criticism class and English mentoring) were added to complement the face-to-face workshops. These online classes allow the members to improve their literary and English skills in their limited free time, as they work until late at night[6] every day, and only some get a day off on Sunday. The Voice's initiator, teachers, English mentors, and members made use of a variety of platforms in the online activities, which supported the offline activities. On most occasions, real-time, or synchronous, conversations such as chats or phone and video calls on Facebook, Skype, and WhatsApp were chosen. On a few occasions, asynchronous conversations such as emails and videos on YouTube were used.

Switching from one platform to another depending on members' needs and situations did not involve any economic considerations, because these platforms were available on members' smartphones. Therefore, a broader discussion of The Voice's social capital in this article should also be situated within polymedia because, in accordance with Madianou and Miller (2012),

> *as the choice of medium acquires communicative intent, navigating the environment of polymedia becomes inextricably linked to the ways in which interpersonal relationships are experienced and managed [among bonding and bridging networks]. Polymedia is ultimately about a new relationship between the social and the technological, rather than merely a shift in the technology itself. (169)*

When choosing a platform, there is a rationale behind it because "choosing one platform over another acquires emotional intent and meaning which becomes constitutive of the relationships in question" (Madianou 2014, 675). In the case of The Voice, I found this is applicable only to some extent.

Facebook, as discussed earlier, was the first platform used, both by The Voice and by each individual involved in this community, such as its initiator, teachers, English mentors, and members. As a platform that has transformed into a one-stop application supporting both synchronous and asynchronous conversations, Facebook itself has become polymedia. Besides The Voice's public Facebook page, the community created a secret group for its creative writing workshops that can only be accessed by the members of the first and second batches of workshops, the initiator, and teachers. In this secret group, members posted more, such as their poems, and in a friendlier manner, such as a short post to greet every group member, than they did on the public page. Although not all group members were active, some with no prior writing experience showed more confidence to share their literary work. Also, more comments, not only reactions, were given by other group members than was the case on the public page. The Voice's creative writing teacher also sometimes uploaded her feedback on the short story drafts the members had previously submitted to her through emails. By comparing the public page and the secret group, I discovered that these two serve a different purpose. In resonance with Baldassar (2016) and McKay (2017), I argue that the public page serves as a "front" channel, while the secret group serves as a "back" channel. The former is intended for public display and is formally controlled by its administrator, who is also its initiator, and the latter sustains the interpersonal communications among group member members because it gives them a more private and supportive space in terms of educational and personal aspects.

The Facebook secret group was not the only back channel used by the community during the second batch of workshops. English mentors and I, as the online teacher, used Skype, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube when delivering our lessons. Among those choosing video calls, Skype was the most preferred platform because it was publicly known as the first and mistakenly known as the only platform to support video calls in groups. I was the only one in the community to utilise Facebook video calls and other platforms such as Google Hangout and Skype interchangeably. In terms of practicality, I came to the conclusion that Facebook, which has become the main SNS used by migrant workers, not only in this community but also in general, offers the easiest form of video calls since it can be accessed on smartphones without any additional application. This helped some of the members who joined my class but did not have a Skype account or application. Although there was a difference in the platform chosen among mentors and teacher, the use of video

calls benefited them in two ways. First, in a learning process, a video call is a medium that resembles a traditional face-to-face class. Second, it avoids confusion of who is speaking in a large group because everyone can see the speaker's face. I found, in contrast to McKay (2017), that a sense of intimacy was not one of the rationales behind the use of video calls in The Voice. However, this difference prevailed, mainly because in this case study I focused on bridging networks instead of bonding networks and left-behind family and friends, as in McKay's research.

Another back channel used by the mentors and teacher was WhatsApp. Mentors who chose WhatsApp considered that this platform would enable members who missed a lesson because of work to access the discussion later when they were not too busy. YouTube was also chosen by one of the mentors to deliver his lessons. Before the online class, he made a video of the material he planned to teach, and after the class, he continued the discussion on WhatsApp or Skype. Like the two previous back channels, this method was chosen due to the creativity of the mentor, and no arguments related to a certain level of intimacy can be made.

Not only does polymedia serve educational purposes, but it also becomes a medium to maintain social capital. What started as a bridging network (that is, the members of the second batch, most of whom started as The Voice's followers and did not know each other before becoming active members) eventually developed a stronger connection than that of the members of the first batch, after having more frequent, regular online interactions[7] in addition to the face-to-face workshops. Some illustrations to show that the members from the second batch have bonded well are outlined below.

The second-batch members exposed themselves to more literary and art events than did the members of the first batch. One of the earliest members[8] from the first batch, who was experienced and well-known in the literary world of migrant workers, often invited the new members to literary and art events in Singapore through WhatsApp. These events enabled them to connect with other migrant workers from different nationalities, some of whom belonged to a nation-based literary community such as *Bangla Lit*. Attending these offline events benefited everyone involved; the earliest member received moral support from the other members when she partook in some of the events, while the others got to know more migrant writers, learned from them, and built a network of migrant writers not based on a particular nationality.

In late 2017, one of the members of the second batch who had no prior writing experience or interest in creative writing competitions before joining The Voice won first place in the Migrant Poetry Competition. The skills and confidence that this new member had gained from the social capital that was transferred by The Voice contributed to her success.

From my online observations, the great interest and support system among the members of the second batch were also displayed or extended online, specifically on Facebook for public consumption. First, compared to the members of the first batch, the members of the second batch posted more on The Voice's secret group. They also gave more comments and reactions, which were all positive. For example, one member suggested some ideas to

improve another member's short story or poem. Second, they have been more supportive of each other by posting information about events in which other members participate. For example, when one of the young members participated in a photography competition, there were posts from other members to support her work. Third, there were more displays of togetherness among the members on Facebook. Following events they attended together, pictures capturing their togetherness were often uploaded to their personal Facebook accounts. In a few Facebook posts, one of the earliest and most senior members even labelled herself as a big sister for the younger active members. These younger members in fact considered her as their sister or sometimes their mom. Another member who was also considered a sister was a Filipino MDW who had a prominent name among migrant worker writers. On Facebook posts, she was often called *ate*, a Tagalog word for sister, by younger members. They also exchanged words of encouragement through Facebook comments as they worked on a project together or participated in different events.

My findings above resonate with what was found by Shriram Venkatraman (2017) among Facebook users in South India. The display of togetherness matters among friends, and "the friendship [as shown by the members of The Voice's second batch] here extends to fictive kinship [that is, they might not be blood related, but they refer one to another as if they were], and the group members relate to each other through these terms [when online and offline]" (130). Moreover, the emotional support and acknowledgement of each other indicates that what were initially bridging networks have become, to some extent, bonding networks with the help of polymedia. The Voice*,* as a small literary community that aims at reshaping the dominant discourse, has unintentionally started to grow into a digital family. However, this formation is still in the early stage, as The Voice's members are building connections with migrant worker writers from different nationalities. They have collaborated in some projects since the second batch of The Voice's workshops ended. While preparing for the projects, offline meetings and online conversations mediated by polymedia once again are coupled. This opens up the possibility of a far larger digital family that may also lead to a future collective action in the form of an enlarged literary movement of migrant workers.

Conclusion

As shown by this case study of The Voice, political movements or advocacy are not the only collective action organised by migrant workers. Instead, collective action can take different forms, such as a literary movement on Facebook. The Voice chose Facebook to be a medium for publishing self-written narrations of migrant workers in the form of literary work. Written on different themes, these works include stories about home and family that most people reading the pieces can relate to. By circulating these literary works online, The Voice aims to reshape the dominant negative stereotypes of Indonesian MDWs.

The Voice has become an enriching learning space for Indonesian MDWs who have an interest in literature, especially creative writing. Its members have benefited from the social capital gained by the community offline and online on Facebook. Among the members of

the first batch of workshops, this social capital initially took the form of bridging social capital. However, in the second batch, it shifted into bonding social capital, creating a foundation of a digital family for members who were away from their real families and close friends. When online and offline social capital are coupled, this learning space can potentially become a big digital family for migrant workers in Singapore, transgressing the boundaries of nationality.

The Voice has combined offline and online programs with the help of polymedia, and I found that polymedia has a positive correlation with social capital. However, unlike most literature on polymedia and transnational communications, my analysis shows that the practice of switching from one social media platform to another is not always related to intimacy or emotional relationships. The educational setting of this community likely influenced this different finding.

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[1] Although the idea of social capital had been somewhat used in 1916 by L. J. Hanifan, a practical reformer of the Progressive Era (Putnam 2000), social capital was formally conceptualised in the 1980s. Pierre Bourdieu and James S. Coleman were some of the first scholars to define and use the term in explaining phenomena in society (Jiang and Carroll 2009). Since then, the term has been used by many other scholars.

[2] The Voice cannot be classified as an official NPO because it has not met legal requirements of NPOs, been registered, or been recognised by the government of Singapore.

[3] Most Indonesian MDWs come to Singapore legally, although my respondents claimed that the age of some of them was falsified in their passports to comply with the government minimum age requirement of 21 years.

[4] In the first batch of workshops, the volunteers included one creative writing teacher and some translators. In the second batch, The Voice gained more volunteers who became its literary criticism teacher and English mentors for its two supplementary online programs.

[5] Once someone clicks like on a Facebook page, they will automatically follow the page. However, they can change this manually by clicking Following and choosing the Unfollow option. On the other hand, if someone clicks Follow, they will not automatically like the page.

[6] Most of them finish their work at 9 p.m. or later.

[7] The most active members of the second batch were also invited by Prasetyo to help The Voice in its side project, a free library for Indonesian migrant workers. There was another volunteer giving them some online sessions on library management; thus, there were more recurrent online interactions through different platforms.

[8] She has both a relatively prominent name among migrant writers in Singapore and a broad network of contacts with other migrant writers from Bangladesh and the Philippines.

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