

## **“Dillema Between Legal and Illegal:” The Life of Bugis Migrant Workers in Malaysia**

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### ***Abstract***

One of the most significant changes related to characteristics of international migrant workers in Southeast Asia in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is the great increase in the scale, complexity, the significance of Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia (Kaur 2005:3). Migration from Indonesia and those from other countries in Asia were actively stimulated by Stamford Raffles—the “founder” of Singapore—as the strategy to promote the development of Singapore. After 1870an, British colonial country continued this policy and there was no boundary towards the flow of migration to Malaya (ibid, p. 5). In the first half of this century, Indonesian was the third biggest group of migrant workers after China and India, and was welcomed as permanent residents, as well as those who were temporary workers. Since 1980an, economic, social and demographic change which are cosistent with the flow of globalisation have significantly influenced Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia. Increasingly more Indonesian workers cross the state borders to earn income in Malaysia as documented/legal or undocumented/illegal migrants.

Since the Immigration Act No. 1154A/2002 was put into effect—which aims to deal with illegal migrant workers—the expression that “no body dares to enter Malaysia without legal document” is often heard in daily conversation among migrant workers, recruiters (*calo*’), and others involve in such business. However, the existence of multiple entry-points, enables entering Malaysia illegally. Anggraini (2006), for example, claims that there are seventy-three entry-points to enter Malaysia. The sheer number of entry points may stretch the custom resources and weaken the ability to police the place which indicates vulnerability of Malaysia towards illegal migrants

This article focuses on Bugis plantation migrant workers in Malaysia. I examine the meaning of Bugis philosophy regarding searching for good fortune (*massappa’ dallé*) and its association with their mobility, recruitment processes, dillema they face in relation to their immigration status. I also explore how their immigration status influences their working condition, and how Indonesian government respons to the problems related to migrant workers in Malaysia. This article is based on my fieldwork in a number of plantations in Tawau (Malaysia) between 2007 and 2008. The data were collected via interviews and observation.