**2024 IGU Thematic Conference**

**15-17 May 2024**

**FLACSO, Ecuador**

Topic 4: Geography of (in)mobilities in the globalized world

**Navigating Precarious Mobilities: Southeast Asian Domestic Workers and Transnational Families in Pandemic Times**

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Temporary labour migration has become an important lifeline for capital-poor Southeast Asian women seeking to improve their economic circumstances. The recent COVID-19 pandemic as well as civil unrest in the region brought back stark reminders of the precarities and uncertainties of such a strategy. Female migrant domestic workers from countries such as Indonesia, Philippines and Myanmar working in Singapore were immobilised by the pandemic and/or conflicts in multiple ways. Travel restrictions and curtailments prevented many of them from either migrating out for work or returning home to visit their families. In-country lockdowns imposed additional restrictions on their already limited mobilities, further confining these live-in domestic workers to their employers’ homes, which are not exactly places of refuge but synonymous with work spaces. The sudden curtailment of mobilities on both the transnational and local scales threatened to upend the sustainability of the women’s temporary labour migration strategy, causing them (and their left-behind families) all sorts of distress affecting their physical, economic and emotional well-being. In this vein, this paper explores how female migrant domestic workers in Singapore navigate (im)mobilities during and after the pandemic to protect their own livelihoods as well as ensure the welfare of their families. Drawing inspiration from Cresswell’s (2010) ‘constellations of mobility’, we first examine the migrant women’s embodied and habitualised *mobility practices*, on both the transnational and local scales, that have developed in pre-pandemic times as a means of securing family social reproduction. With the onset of the pandemic disrupting routinised mobility practices, we next attend to the way migrant women improvise mobility strategies to cope with the precarities they encountered whilst also seizing opportunities to improve their transnational labour migration strategy. Finally, we seek to understand how the pandemic as an unprecedented rupture in *mobility patterns* serve to reshape their attitudes towards and *representation of (im)mobility* in their future livelihood trajectories.

*Keywords*: migrant domestic workers, transnational family, (im)mobility, pandemic, civil unrest

**References**

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