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Circular Migration in Indonesia

Graeme J. Hugo

A substantial and growing body of field evidence points not only to the widespread incidence, but also to the social and economic significance of circulation, seasonal migration, and commuting within Indonesia. The bulk of this mobility, however, goes unrecorded in large-scale demographic surveys and censuses, which routinely adopt the familiar criteria and questions designed to detect predominantly longer distance, more-or-less permanent changes in usual place of residence. The low levels of the latter type of movement revealed by these censuses and surveys appear to confirm the conventional stereotyping of most Indonesians (and in particular the inhabitants of Java) as immobile peasants who are born, live, and die in the same house, scarcely traveling beyond the confines of their natal village. Although the interprovincial, more-or-less permanent migration detected by the census is but one subset of total population mobility in Indonesia, in the absence of more comprehensive national (or even regional) level statistics census-defined migration and population mobility have become synonymous in the literature.¹

This paper reviews the findings of a number of intensive studies carried out in several parts of Indonesia to establish whether nonpermanent population mobility is a phenomenon of social, economic, and demographic significance in Indonesia. Evidence from a large number of surveys demonstrates the widespread occurrence of temporary forms of population mobility in Indonesia and the many forms that mobility takes. The major explanations that have been put forward to explain this mobility are then summarized. Accelerating levels of temporary population mobility have both short- and long-term implications for achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth within Indonesia. A number of these issues are raised in the concluding section of this paper. Several directions in continuing research into nonpermanent mobility are identified in which demographers could make a significant contribution to the understanding of fundamental changes taking place within Indonesian society.

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It is not easy to distinguish between permanent and nonpermanent population mobility. Zelinsky (1971: 225–226) defines conventional migration as “any permanent or semi-permanent change of residence” and circulation as “a great variety of movements usually short term, repetitive or cyclical in nature, but all having in common the lack of any declared intention of a permanent or long lasting change in residence.” A further distinction can be made between commuting, defined as regular travel outside the village (usually for work or education) for from 6 to 24 hours, and circular migration, involving continuous but temporary absences of greater than one day. Some fieldworkers have adopted upper thresholds of continuous absence of 6 months or 12 months to distinguish between circular and permanent migration. However, these workers have also suggested that much essentially circular mobility was defined as permanent by adopting such absolute criteria. Clearly, the difference lies in the intentions of individuals and the nature and level of their commitment to particular places, and such phenomena defy attempts to establish absolute temporal criteria. Despite these problems, the bulk of movements can be readily distinguished as permanent or temporary.

In Indonesia the census and most conventional large-scale surveys are designed to systematically exclude the bulk of nonpermanent movement. This makes it impossible to furnish accurate national or provincial estimates of the extent of commuting and circular migration. Some policymakers and demographers make the availability of such estimates the sine qua non of the significance of a demographic phenomenon. Clearly it is important to obtain these estimates, but the fact that none are available here is more a reflection of the inappropriateness of current data collection methods to Indonesia’s demographic, social, and economic reality than of the insignificance of the phenomenon. Accordingly the aim of the first section is to demonstrate how the bulk of nonpermanent mobility is missed in conventional data collection and to draw upon the scattered case study evidence to establish that, although national estimates of the volume of nonpermanent mobility are not available, it is a phenomenon of demonstrable significance.

**Evidence of widespread nonpermanent mobility**

In the 1971 census some 7.3 million Indonesians, or 6.4 percent of the population, had lived at some time outside their province of present residence and hence were classified as “migrants.” However, as has been demonstrated elsewhere (Hugo, 1978: 10–12) the criteria used to define migrants in that census excluded most short-distance and short-term movers. The extent to which the temporal criteria adopted in the census excluded population movements of significance can be gauged from field survey evidence. A study in 14 West Java villages that attempted to detect all permanent and nonpermanent moves associated with work and formal education found that only one-third of all such moves met the census migration time criteria (Hugo, 1975, 1978). Moreover,
in the survey villages between 76 and 98 percent of the movers who met the census time criteria moved within the province of West Java and hence did not qualify as migrants as far as the census was concerned because they did not cross the boundary of a census migration defining region.

The West Java study concentrated on population movement from villages to the major metropolitan centers of Jakarta and Bandung (see map). Several distinct types of nonpermanent mobility were identified as having major significance. These included commuting over distances of up to 50 km, to participate in full-time urban-based employment or irregularly to engage in work supplementary to village-based jobs. More distinctive is circular migration, whereby movers do not change their usual place of residence in the village but are absent at an urban destination for periods longer than a single day. Again such movement can be associated with permanent full-time employment at the destination, but usually involves nonpermanent work in the informal sector of the urban economy. Circular migrants usually maintain some village-based employment, and the frequency with which they migrate is determined by the distance involved and the costs of traversing it, their earnings at the destination, and the availability of work in the home village. Much, but by no means all, circular mobility is seasonal, occurring during the extended periods of limited job opportunity between planting and harvesting rice during the wet season and during the dry season. There was also significant long-distance circular migration from West Java to the Outer Islands to work on plantations or oil/mineral development projects, often under contract and involving absences of up to two years. Rusli (1978) shows that these same types of nonpermanent movement were of significance in migration between rural areas in West Java. In the 14 study villages three-quarters of the families were at least partly dependent on income sources outside the village, mostly in Jakarta and Bandung.

Community-based studies in Jakarta have pointed clearly to the importance of nonpermanent migrants in that city. In particular Jellinek (1978a,b), in her study of petty traders in Jakarta, has described the pondok system whereby circular migrants (usually from the same region of origin) cluster together in tiny cramped rooming-houses (pondok) owned by a tauke (boss), who also provides them with the credit and equipment needed to set themselves up as mobile traders. She points out that the pondok dwellers "were usually both petty traders and circular migrants . . . who came into the city from the village merely to seek work but saw their permanent home as being in the countryside where their wives, children and few possessions remained" (Jellinek, 1978a: 1). Of the more than 200 mobile traders interviewed by Jellinek, all but one was a circular migrant, and she suggests that if her study is representative of mobile traders in Jakarta then there must be hundreds of thousands of circular migrants engaged in petty trading alone, in addition to those who work as day laborers, pedicab drivers, and the like.

With respect to daily commuting the bulk of evidence relates to movement to metropolitan Jakarta from its immediate hinterland. Koentjaraningrat
(1974, 1975) for example, in his study of villages south of Jakarta, recognized widespread nonpermanent movements to the capital, including daily commuters who are absent only during the day or for two to five days and “temporary non-seasonal” migrants who are forced to leave their families for several weeks or months. As early as 1963 Masri showed the significance of rail commuting to Jakarta from Bogor, some 60 km to the south. The population in Serpong, 45 km west of Jakarta, includes both commuters with permanent jobs in Jakarta and many petty traders who sell local products (fruit, vegetables, and handicrafts) at Jakarta markets (Borkent-Niehof, 1974: 163). The fact that many people are moving into the area surrounding Jakarta in order to commute to the city is evidenced in the preliminary results of the 1980 census, which showed that the three kabupaten (regencies) adjoining Jakarta had annual population growth rates between 1971 and 1980 of 4.6 percent, 4.04 percent, and 3.6 percent compared with the national rate of 2.33 percent (Biro Pusat Statistik, 1981: 3).

Preliminary results of the 1980 census indicated that Jakarta’s population was 6.5 million, representing an annual growth rate of 4 percent. This was somewhat lower than the 4.4 percent during 1961–71 and certainly lower than most commentators predicted. Undoubtedly this growth rate severely underestimates the growth of Jakarta’s functional population: the census criteria referred to earlier would have ensured that most circular migrants and commuters who spend much of their lives and derive much of their income in Jakarta were not actually enumerated in that city but in their village of origin. A widening circulation radius around Jakarta has clearly brought about a reduction in short-distance permanent movers to the city, at the very minimum within the provinces of West and Central Java, and a phenomenon similar to that observed by Hawley and others in the Western world, where the “lengthening commuting radius afforded by the automobile has reduced the amount of migration necessary, at least within local areas” (Boertlein and Long, 1979: 23).

It might be argued that the circumstances obtaining in Jakarta–West Java were highly specific to that region and conducive to nonpermanent mobility—particularly a huge metropolis with a large and expanding informal sector providing many job opportunities with flexible time commitments, with relatively easy entry and linked by a reasonably cheap, efficient transport system to most parts of the province. However, a number of studies in other parts of Indonesia have produced evidence of similar patterns of mobility in quite different contexts.

In the very densely settled Central Java–Yogyakarta region, Mantra’s (1981) intensive study of movement out of two villages identified commuting (much of it by bicycle) as the major form of mobility. He explains that nonpermanent migration is of such significance among the Javanese that they have several distinct concepts of such movement: “nglaju is used for those who travel to a place but return back to their home within the same day, nyinep for people who stay in another place for several days before returning and mondok for those who lodge in a destination community for several months or years.
Merantau refers to those who go to another island for a relatively long period but eventually return back to the origin community. The term pindah is used for residents who migrate to another place.” Mudjiman (1978) has observed circular migration to the city of Surakarta and the operation of a pondok-centered migration system similar to that in Jakarta. Within the province of Central Java there appear to be two main systems of nonpermanent mobility (Zarkasi, in Hugo and Mantra, forthcoming). In the western part the patterns are similar to those described earlier in West Java, with substantial circular migration to Jakarta from such areas as Kedu, Cilacap, Tegal, and Purwakarta. In the east, however, the bulk of the movement is commuting and, to a lesser extent, circular migration to the major cities such as Semarang, Surakarta, and Yogyakarta. Castles (1967: 53), for example, notes that the bulk of the work force employed in kreték (hand-made cigarettes) factories in Kudus and other cities in Central and East Java is made up of women who live in the surrounding rural areas and commute long distances (often on foot). In East Java, perhaps the most mobile group are the Madurese, many of whom have moved, either permanently or temporarily, from their small island northeast of Java to mainland East Java, other parts of Java, Kalimantan, and Sulawesi.

The most mobile of all major ethnic groups in Indonesia are the Minangkabau people, whose homeland is the province of West Sumatra. Although the highly restrictive migrant definition criteria meant that many Minangkabau movers would not have been designated migrants, the 1971 census showed that 11 percent of all persons born in West Sumatra lived outside the province and a further 12 percent of those residing in the province had previously lived in another province. The centrifugal tendencies within this society are embodied in their concept of merantau, which has been defined as “leaving one’s cultural territory voluntarily whether for a short or long time, with the aim of earning a living or seeking further knowledge or experience, normally with the intention of returning home” (Naim, 1976: 150). Maude (1980) in a recent paper has suggested, on the basis of his fieldwork in several West Sumatra villages, that the incidence of Minangkabau migrants settling permanently outside of their homland has increased.

In southern Sumatra circular migration is associated with the coffee, pepper, and spice harvests, with large numbers of seasonal migrants moving in from relatively nearby settlements or from the Banten area of West Java. The Bantenese are one of many groups in Indonesia who engage in seasonal circular migration. As Radial (1965: 34) has explained, “The culture of the Banten people is such that they usually like to go merantau, especially to the Lampung area, to seek other sources of income or extra income during the period before the harvest season begins in Lampung. They go merantau after planting in Banten is complete and return with the onset of the harvest season.” This type of seasonal circular migration is widespread in Java. Franke (1972: 181), for example, described how “literally thousands of landless families criss-cross the Javanese countryside, following the harvest from west to east, and then returning for the next season as the paddy starts to yellow on the fields again.”
In the far north of Sumatra, Abdullah (in Hugo and Mantra, forthcoming) shows a substantial volume of temporary migration among the Acehnese, whose adat (customary law) dictates that movers should not travel too far from their families. Siegel (1969) also shows that many Acehnese men leave the village to engage in trade of one kind or another, or in pepper growing to the east. These men leave their wives and families behind and return at least once a year, usually around the end of the Muslim fasting month. Increasingly this circular migration appears to focus on the major city of Medan in North Sumatra province.

On the island of Kalimantan there has been little research into population mobility, yet it is apparent that again nonpermanent movements are significant. Studies among the dayak people in the isolated Upper Kapuas area of West Kalimantan and the Kenyan people of East Kalimantan (Colfer, 1981) revealed noteworthy outmovement, including the practice of seeking temporary work outside the region in the oilfields of Brunei, the pepper plantations of Sarawak, or in the coastal cities of East and West Kalimantan, Sarawak, and Brunei. The Banjarese people of South Kalimantan have a long history of movement outside their home area. Rambe (1977: 22) has discussed the Banjarese concept of madam, which traditionally has meant to leave one's natal village and cross the sea with the aim of increasing one's wealth within a time period that is not fixed (but is usually longer than one year). Johansyah (in Hugo and Mantra, forthcoming) has indicated that madam is used more broadly in contemporary South Kalimantan, encompassing both permanent and nonpermanent mobility. Rambe's (1977) study of the mobility of the people of Alabio, located some 200 km inland on the Barito River, shows that many residents engage in circular seasonal migration associated with trading, especially downriver to the provincial capital of Banjarmasin.

The island of Sulawesi is the homeland of several of Indonesia's most peripatetic ethnic groups. Abustam (in Hugo and Mantra, forthcoming) has discussed the primary concepts of population mobility held by the three largest ethnic groups in the province of South Sulawesi—the Bugis, Makassarese, and Torajan peoples. The Bugis are the dominant group and have a very distinct pattern of mobility. For several centuries they have been seafarers, "roaming the archipelago in search of trade in accordance with the direction of the prevailing monsoon, returning to Sulawesi only for a few months of each year to refit and repair their praus (sailing boats)" (Lineton, 1975: 174). In the eighteenth century they began establishing colonies in Kalimantan, Southeast Sulawesi, Maluku, East Nustenggara, and more recently in Irian (New Guinea), Jambi (eastern Sumatra), and even in Java (especially Jakarta). While this has involved more-or-less permanent migration of Bugis settlers, the colonies have also served as bases from which to engage in circular migration (Lineton, 1975; Amiroelah et al., 1976; Suhartoko, 1975). There is also substantial Bugis movement within South Sulawesi, including seasonal circular migration between rural areas and large-scale circular migration between villages and the provincial capital city of Ujung Pandang. Much of this rural-urban movement
also has a seasonal rhythm and involves the Makassarese and Torajans as well. The seasonal migrations of Makassarese from their villages in the poorest southern part of the province to engage in such informal sector activities as pedicab driving and small-scale selling have been studied in detail by Forbes (1978). Peasants regularly leave their villages as early as midnight on bicycles piled to gravity-defying heights with agricultural produce or handicrafts, which they sell in city markets during the day before returning home in the late afternoon or evening. The Torajan people from the densely populated northern mountains are also extremely mobile. While they increasingly travel to Kalimantan, Jakarta, and Irian, the bulk of their movement is within the province. Their migration to Ujung Pandang is particularly substantial; much of it is circular and involves movers engaging in informal sector activities. Several studies testify to the significant volume of this movement and its important economic and social impacts upon the villages of origin (Abustam, 1975; Surationtha, 1977; Mangunrai, 1979; and Abustam, in Hugo and Mantra, forthcoming).

In eastern Indonesia, Lucardie (1979, 1981) has described a wide variety of nonpermanent migrations in the area of Halmahera and adjacent islands (especially Makian) in the province of Maluku. These range from mobility associated with sago gathering and other food cultivation to short-term migration associated with wage labor. In Irian Jaya, Rumbiak (1978) found that the migration of the Genyem people to the provincial capital city of Jayapura was essentially circular. Much of Irian has long had significant patterns of circulation associated with shifting cultivation, trade, and exchange of such goods as knives and building materials. However, commuting to urban areas, especially Jayapura, and circular migration both to towns and to areas of raw material exploitation are of growing importance, especially with the spread of the province’s road network and proliferation of public minibuses.

Little is known about population mobility in East and West Nusatenggara, although there are indications of very complex and significant patterns. It would be interesting to know, for example, whether the periods of famine and food shortage that frequently occur in parts of those provinces induce nonpermanent migrations.

The aim of this section has been to review the literature concerning the incidence of nonpermanent migration within Indonesia. Attention has been focused only on population movements to seek or engage in work, and a wide range of somewhat casual, adventitious circular moves to visit relatives, seek entertainment, go shopping, and the like have been ignored. This has been done deliberately to establish the direct significance of nonpermanent mobility for economic development. The patterns of mobility summarized here have resulted in considerable physical separation between place of residence and place of work for many Indonesians. Studies in Western contexts have shown how the availability of comparatively cheap and efficient transport systems have permitted commuting to replace migration over relatively short distances.
The phenomenon of commuting has been considered to be of such economic and social significance that journey-to-work questions are now an accepted part of censuses in most Euro-American countries (Termote, 1975). However, substantial separation of place of usual residence and place of work has been conventionally regarded as peculiar to developed societies with their modern means of transportation, while in traditional society dwellings and places of work were in almost identical locations (Hagerstrand, 1962: 61).

Nevertheless, we have seen not only that commuting has become of immense significance in the developing world but that a proliferation of nonpermanent mobility strategies has made possible a greater physical separation of dwelling and workplace than is possible with conventional commuting. Despite the rapid progress made in transport technology, time and travel costs still severely limit the distance over which mass commuting can take place. However, in Indonesia, as in much of the non-Western world, there is growing evidence of people living beyond (and often a great distance beyond) the conventional commuting limit, yet gaining the benefits enjoyed by commuters by engaging in circular migration between their home area and their place of work.

The studies reviewed above have shown that many Indonesians work in one place but consume, spend, and invest their earnings in another place. Quite apart from the important implications of such patterns of mobility for social change, this significant phenomenon must be taken into account in planning the investment of scarce development resources. Yet what can demographers tell economic and social planners about mobility in Indonesia that will help them in their task? The conventional census and large-scale surveys undertaken in Indonesia allow us to make some helpful statements concerning long-distance, more-or-less permanent migration. However, these sources allow us very little scope to provide detailed, nationally representative data concerning the scale, incidence, causes, and impact of the nonpermanent mobility under discussion here. Serious consideration must be given to including certain types of nonpermanent mobility among the variables about which direct information is sought in national surveys and censuses in Indonesia.

**Explaining nonpermanent migration**

The studies reviewed in the previous section indicate the widespread incidence of nonpermanent population mobility in Indonesia. Moreover, these studies provide ample field-based evidence to reject the argument that the measurement and close study of this mobility should not be a priority in migration research because social change and economic development entail only *permanent* redistribution of population, especially from rural to urban areas. The Indonesian evidence suggests that nonpermanent mobility, especially between village and city, has significant social and economic implications not only for the migrants involved but also for their places of origin and destination. Given
the importance of nonpermanent migration, what are the forces causing such movement? In this section several of the theories advanced to explain the acceleration in the incidence of commuting and circular migration in Indonesia are discussed.

**Sociocultural explanations**

Some writers have suggested that temporary migration has become institutionalized within some ethnic groups in Indonesia, so that it becomes the norm for particular people within that group to spend part of their lives outside their village of birth. This explanation has been invoked especially in the case of the highly peripatetic Minangkabau people of West Sumatra. Naim (1974), who has studied Minangkabau communities throughout Indonesia, suggests that their matrilineal system has made males marginal within the society, and led to *merantau* becoming the norm for young men—with social disapproval incurred if they do not conform to this pattern (Hadi, 1981). Similarly, Abdullah (1971: 6) explains Minangkabau *merantau* as an effect of the matrilineal kinship system: “The custom of going to the *rantau* can be regarded as an institutional outlet for the frustrations of unmarried young men who lack individual responsibility and rights in their own society. To a married man, going to the *rantau* means a temporary release from two families’ conflicting expectations pressed upon him as a husband and a member of the maternal family.” Maude (1979) and Naim (1974: 347) both found that the majority of migrants they interviewed gave economic reasons for moving, but they (together with Murad, 1980: 40) stress the significance of the fact that *merantau* has become institutionalized among some Minangkabau people.

In the matrilocal system of the Acehnese of northern Sumatra, women receive houses and sometimes rice land at marriage, whereas men are usually without resources in the village until their parents die (Siegel, 1969: 145). This peripheral position is a strong encouragement for young men to “go to the East” (*dja' utimo*) or on the *rantau* (leave one’s home area), and many engage in circular migration to seek work in the pepper-growing areas of the major city of Medan or set off to trade in the East. While sociocultural factors clearly are influential here, Siegel (1969: 54) warns that the *rantau* pattern should not be overly romanticized and that if a man could make a satisfactory independent income he would stay at home. Hence, the Acehnese circular migrations do not appear to have the “rite of passage” characteristics that are sometimes ascribed to Minangkabau migration and very definitely to some of the Dayak circular movement in Kalimantan* (Colfer, 1981: 13). Rumbiak (1978), in his study of migration from Genyem to the city of Jayapura, explains that seeking sufficient wealth to meet bride-price payments was a major cause of young men leaving the village temporarily. In some cases outmigration becomes a virtual necessity for certain villagers, especially young men.

The institutionalization of a particular form of mobility, whether nonpermanent or permanent, operates not only on the scale of the ethnic group but also on a regional and local scale (Lucardie, 1981; Vredenbregt, 1964; Hugo,
1980). Particular ethnic groups in Indonesia have long been characterized by what is referred to in the 1930 census (Volkstelling, 1933–1936) as “wanderlust.” It is common to find neighboring villages, similar in their economic and social conditions, one evidencing substantial circulation and the other virtually no mobility to and from the village.

The institutionalization of mobility within a particular group often assumes an element of circularity, in that outmigration and return migration are equally encouraged. But tradition and institutionalization can also encourage stability and lack of mobility. In this latter respect it is interesting to note the argument of Mantra (1981) that the very strong attachment of the Javanese to their natal village makes permanent displacement anathema to them, even in the face of bleak economic circumstances. On the other hand, they have readily adopted commuting and other nonpermanent forms of mobility when the newly developed road transportation systems have made them possible. Lucardie (1981) lays great stress upon the emotional attachment of the Makianese to their home village, a feeling that encourages circularity rather than permanence in their mobility.

As with most population mobility, nonpermanent migration in Indonesia takes place in response to a complex set of interacting forces, the separation of which must inevitably be somewhat artificial. One cannot say that the nonpermanent mobility of particular groups in Indonesia is a response to exclusively sociocultural influences of one type or another, since many other forces are clearly at work. However, some of the sociocultural factors briefly mentioned here are often overlooked. Some may argue that societal mobility norms are merely a reflection of, and determined by, economic necessity and political impositions of one kind or another. Yet such arguments fail to explain interregional and intergroup variations in types and levels of mobility where economic and political conditions appear to be relatively homogenous (Hugo, 1980). Sociocultural elements appear from this writer’s village-level fieldwork experience in Indonesia to be too frequently overlooked as an often important element influencing population mobility patterns. Equally, however, that experience has pointed to the overwhelming dominance of economic considerations not only in shaping the volume and direction of mobility but also in determining whether that movement is permanent or temporary.

In his pioneering work on circular migration to towns, Elkan (1959, 1967) has suggested that the pattern of migration between village and city in East Africa is best explained in terms of economic forces, rather than by social and cultural factors. We now discuss several of the economic-based arguments put forward to explain nonpermanent population mobility in Indonesia.

Economic explanations

**Maximizing family income and utility from consumption** The basic argument here was put forward by Elkan (1959, 1967) in his East African study and by Hugo (1975, 1978) for West Java. One must, however, stress a basic difference between the findings of the African studies and those in much of Indonesia,
especially Java. It is clear that in rural Indonesia, land shortage and pressure on agricultural resources are much greater than in most of Africa. In Java less than half the rural population owns or has direct access to sufficient agricultural land to obtain subsistence: most of the nonpermanent migrant households could not earn sufficient incomes in either the city or the village to support themselves and their dependents. Thus, circular migration or commuting provides a means for families to maximize their incomes by encouraging some members of the household to work in the village at times of peak labor demand and to seek work in the city or elsewhere at slower times while other members of the household remain to cope with limited village-based labor demands. In addition, by leaving dependents in the village home, the migrants (mostly men) effectively reduce the costs of subsistence in the city or other destination because the solitary mover can put up with cheaper and less comfortable conditions than his family would require and thus cut personal costs to a bare minimum. Thus, by earning in the city but spending in the village the migrant maximizes the utility gained from consumption.

The argument for maximizing family income and utility from consumption appears to gain considerable support from several of the fieldwork-based studies reviewed earlier. It is particularly appropriate in Java, where land is very scarce, the demands for labor in the village are highly seasonal, and a complex informal sector in the cities allows relatively easy access to employment (albeit for very low income and often for great investment of time and effort), along with the flexible time commitments demanded by nonpermanent migrants. Elements of this argument have been put to the present writer by migrants during fieldwork in several parts of Indonesia and the Philippines. One is constantly reminded of the hard-headed economic rationality of circular mobility strategies in situations where income-earning opportunities are extremely limited in both rural and urban sectors. There can be no doubt that in many regions traditionally strong family and village ties and the preference for a rural-based way of life exert a strong attraction on the migrant, but it is rare that the choice of nonpermanent over permanent migration is an economically irrational response to the social pull of the home place.

Risk aversion or minimization A second aspect of Elkan’s economic explanation of circular migration is that movers considered urban employment to offer little security in old age or in times of difficulty so that it was imperative to retain contacts with rural society. The West Java study also found this to be an important consideration among movers. A circulation strategy keeps the mover’s options in the village completely open so that the risk of not being able to earn subsistence is reduced by spreading it between village and city income opportunities. Moreover, several village-based support systems can be mobilized in times of economic or emotional need—namely, the nuclear and wider family, the tradition of gotong royong (mutual self-help) among the wider village community, and the traditionally significant bapak/anak buah (patron/client) relations. In most cases, such support is not available in the city, so that
if a migrant maintains a stake in his village he does not cut himself off from what is often the only available support in times of dire need.

Again the risk aversion arguments have considerable applicability in Java. Many of Java's rural dwellers are on the very knife edge of existence and simply do not have sufficient surplus to allow them to take the risks that permanent migration often involves. A mobility strategy that minimizes such risks obviously has more appeal under such circumstances.

Mobility resulting from the uneven impact of capitalism The argument here is founded in political economy but is not a polar opposite to the two largely economic explanations advanced above, although it is sometimes presented as such. Basically, this argument sees population mobility as a response to broader sociostructural changes associated with the uneven penetration of capitalism, which has created substantial sectoral, class, and spatial inequalities. In a seminal work Amin (1974) has argued that labor migration in Africa can be best understood in terms of the effects of uneven capitalist expansion upon those societies. It has been argued that contemporary population mobility in Indonesia cannot be explained without reference to the formative influence of colonialism on the country's political, economic, and social systems (Hugo 1975, Ch. 2; 1980; forthcoming). The argument is that the fundamentally exploitative colonial system designed to control the local population and expedite the extraction of raw materials in the most cost-efficient way shaped the pattern of mobility in very distinctive ways that have yet to be altered. The concentration of investment in areas of exploitative activity (plantations, mines, ports, garrisons) and its diversion from the subsistence and semisubsistence agricultural areas where the bulk of the population lived; the removal of surplus to the mother country, stifling the development of local industrialization and a fully developed urban hierarchy; and the creation of a dependent economy, centralized political system, and distinctive class stratification—all have had a formative and enduring influence on mobility patterns.

Forbes (1980) has shown that Amin's theory can be useful in explaining circulation by examining the movement of a small group of petty commodity producers in Ujung Pandang, South Sulawesi. He argues that there is an important theoretical distinction between migration and circulation and concludes (Forbes, 1980: 21) that circulation is "... a result of the incomplete penetration of capital, and also ... [helps] to slow the rate of change in Indonesia by helping to preserve petty commodity and peasant subsistence production. If the wage labour sector should expand, or if agriculture should become increasingly capitalized, then circulation may well give way to another form of mobility." The latter point concerning increased capitalization of agriculture has some immediacy in contemporary Indonesia because it is clear that many of Indonesia's, and especially Java's, rural areas have in the last decade or so experienced the impact of major "modernizing" and commercializing changes in agricultural technology and practice (White, 1979). The full impact of these
changes on population mobility is not yet apparent. However, it is clear that many of these changes have had labor-displacing effects within agriculture (Hugo, 1978) and could potentially have the effect of increasing outmigration from those areas. Whether such movement is to be permanent, nonpermanent, or both is not clear but there is little evidence of an impending great expansion in urban wage labor that would absorb large numbers of permanent outmigrants displaced from agricultural areas.

Forbes’s argument, then, is that nonpermanent migration is both the result and the cause of inequalities in Indonesian society. It plays a conservative role in preventing the full proletarianization of the population. This same argument was advanced over 60 years earlier by Ranneft (1916), who recognized three phases in the development of Indonesia’s economy, the last being a period of “capitalistic production” dating from around 1860. Ranneft points out the dominance of nonpermanent forms of mobility during this phase in response to the distinctively different (from Europe) nature of capitalist penetration externally imposed upon the population of Java. He explicitly states that this circular migration delays the formation of a proletariat; and instead of the emergence of two social groups—an urban-based non-landowning proletariat and a small farming class—there is an undifferentiated group involving themselves in both the capitalist and peasant modes of production.

The theoretical explanation briefly outlined in this section is sometimes seen as being competitive with the economic explanations discussed earlier, but the present writer sees them more as complementary. The first two economic explanations are based largely on a micro-level approach and arise out of intensive fieldwork and close study of individuals, households, and small communities. The uneven development theory suggests that migration cannot be explained without understanding the macro-structural forces in society and the contextual elements shaping the pattern of mobility. Each of the explanations throws some light on the causes of mobility. Hence an important priority would be to explore and establish linkages between the forces that operate at the individual level and influence whether households or individuals will move or stay and the broader structural forces that constrain the options available to them and ultimately determine the overall pattern of movement. Fieldwork and the studies reviewed here do indicate that there are, as Gerold-Scheepers and Van Binsbergen (1978: 28) suggest, internal factors in addition to the external forces of capitalist penetration that at least partially explain why some groups or some of their members migrate more than others. It is at the micro level that the two approaches can come together. We know little about the micro-structural setting in which population movement occurs or fails to occur. How do the external forces of colonial penetration and the resultant uneven and distinctive pattern of capitalist penetration manifest themselves at the level of the village, family, or individual and impel migration of a particular type or encourage stability? In what ways are these forces perceived? How do they constrain the range of mobility/stability choices open to particular groups within the village? These important questions have yet to be approached in mobility research in Indonesia.
Transport development and temporary population mobility One of the most fundamental distinctions between nonpermanent and permanent forms of population mobility is the relative significance of the journey between place of origin and destination. In most permanent and semipermanent migrations, travel costs, time taken, and distance traversed between origin and destination generally constitute a minor element in a mover's overall calculus in deciding whether or not to migrate and where. Several writers have pointed to the relative unimportance of travel costs in migration (e.g., Herrick, 1965) and to the fact that the costs of the journey usually constitute a one-time outlay and are not a continuing and significant element in the mover's overall budget. This, of course, is not the case with temporary forms of population mobility when the mover is repeatedly circulating between origin and destination. The journey itself clearly occupies a much more central position among the elements influencing movers and nonmovers, and transport costs are a constant and significant item in the mover's budget. Clearly a prerequisite for long and medium distance mass commuting and circular migration of the types that occur in Indonesia is a widespread, cheap, and efficient transportation network.

The last decade has produced a veritable revolution in the availability of public transport over most of rural Indonesia (Hugo, 1981b). There can be no doubt that the extension of roads and the proliferation of vehicles of many types, especially buses and minibuses, into hitherto isolated rural areas have led to greatly increased spatial mobility for a wide spectrum of Indonesia's rural dwellers. The precise nature of the relationship between this striking change in transport availability and migration has been little investigated; however, it is clear that the transport revolution has greatly facilitated the concurrent upswing in circular migration and commuting (Hugo 1975, 1978, 1981b; Naim, 1971; Mantra, 1981). Much earlier, Ranneft (1916: 61) similarly showed that innovation in transport in Indonesia was influential in producing changes in the types and levels of population mobility.

In this section we have summarized some of the major arguments put forward to explain nonpermanent migration in Indonesia. We now have a substantial body of empirical knowledge concerning the causes of nonpermanent migration. As has been suggested in the discussion, there is now a need for research directed not only toward closer investigation of the forces influencing nonpermanent mobility, but also toward the integrating of what we already know concerning the causes of this mobility into a coherent theoretical framework.

Implications of nonpermanent migration

A few of the more important theoretical and policy implications arising out of the previous discussion will be briefly mentioned. One important initial consideration is whether the present high level of nonpermanent mobility is simply a transitional phase that will ultimately be replaced by permanent relocation of many movers to urban areas as social change and economic development pro-
ceed. The general formulations of Skeldon (1977) and Nelson (1978), based predominantly on Latin American experience, would suggest that this is the case, as does some of the African literature (Van Binsbergen and Meilink 1978: 11). The empirical evidence from Indonesia, however, is somewhat mixed in this respect. Maude (1980) suggests that Minangkabau outmigration from West Sumatra is becoming more permanent over time, and Rambe’s (1977) study in South Kalimantan points to a transition from nonpermanent to permanent outmovement among the Banjarese of Alabio. On the other hand, many of the other studies, especially those based in Java, found that the great majority of nonpermanent migrants have no intention of shifting permanently to their urban destinations. It would be premature to infer from this that their migration will remain circular, for most movers have only been engaged in circular migration for a few years. At present it seems that, for many Indonesian nonpermanent movers, their mobility is not perceived as a preliminary stage before an ultimate permanent relocation of themselves and their families. The evidence is that commuting and circular migration are more than simply a means to test the destination environment before settling there. Many temporary movers in Indonesia exhibit a strong and apparently long-term commitment to bilocality, opting for the combination of activities in both rural and urban areas that a nonpermanent migration strategy allows them.

Another important consideration is the implications of increased nonpermanent migration for broader social and economic change in Indonesia. Much of the migration (both permanent and nonpermanent) can be seen as a response to the substantial spatial, sectoral, and class inequalities within Indonesia. There has been a long history of concentration of public and private investment and resource development activity—and hence expansion in employment opportunities—in particular localities (especially Jakarta, a few other urban centers, and regions of resource extraction such as plantations and timber, oil, coal, and mineral areas). Much of the nonpermanent migration described earlier flows from areas in which there has been very little investment and development toward regions that have received investment far out of proportion to their share of the national population. While it is clear that these spatial socioeconomic inequalities are a major causal factor in nonpermanent migration, the critical question remains whether that mobility in turn has an effect on those inequalities and, if so, whether it tends to ameliorate or exacerbate them.

According to one main line of argument, the transfer of income from urban to rural areas, which have been starved of investment, is leading to a reduction in social and economic disparities: “. . . since net rural emigration is concentrated on particular areas, groups and seasons, a small national flow can considerably redistribute resources among and within rural communities and between rural and urban areas. Most neoclassical economists would expect voluntary population movements to reduce both inefficiency and inequality” (Lipton, 1980: 1). Indeed most of the Indonesian studies reviewed in this paper refer to a substantial backflow of money and goods to the place of origin as a result of nonpermanent migration. In the West Java study, for example (Hugo, 1975, 1978), all temporary movers remitted money to their families and 81
percent brought back goods. Among commuter households, an average of 60 percent of their income was derived from remittances, while circular migrants’ remittances accounted for nearly half their households’ total income on average.

Nevertheless, much of the recent literature (Connell, 1980; Lipton, 1980) has suggested that the impact of money flows to the village of origin is small and in many cases even negative when considered in net terms. “The sparse evidence suggests that net remittances are quite small relative to village income, are concentrated on richer village households unlikely to suffer from capital constraints, and tend to be little used to finance investment, except in house-building . . .” (Lipton, 1980: 3). It is noticeable, however, in Lipton’s (1980) review of the remittance literature that strong emphasis is placed on monetary flows generated by more-or-less permanent migrants and very long-term migrants. Yet, as Fan and Stretton (1980: 23) suggest, “From the point of view of the rural sector, remittances represent an important benefit of circular migration. While permanent migrants may also send funds to their village, the amounts are unlikely to be as large or as regular.” The West Java study certainly supports the contention that the net remittance of nonpermanent migrants were substantially greater and more significant than those of permanent migrants. Moreover, the study makes clear that, under current conditions, the flow of remittances is absolutely critical to the well-being of many village households. From the perspective of rural development, however, it should be mentioned that the bulk of these remittances are used to purchase the mundane necessities of life (food, clothing, etc.); and while there is some investment in housing and land, amounts directed toward employment-generating enterprises are relatively small.

A clear understanding of the redistributive impact of nonpermanent migration in Indonesia must await more detailed studies of remittances and the effect of migration on the village. Nevertheless, existing studies in Java and many parts of the Outer Islands indicate that when both nonpermanent and permanent migrants are considered, the net flow of remittances tends to be in favor of the village, that the seasonal or periodic loss of labor from the village rarely results in any loss of overall productivity (e.g., Colfer, 1981), and that many individuals and village communities would suffer dire consequences should their access to income-earning opportunities in cities and other centers of investment be curtailed in any way.

Proponents of the argument supporting the redistributive effects of population mobility also suggest that the movers themselves will be changed by their experiences at their destination, especially if it is an urban area, and that this will lead them to be innovators and developmental leaders when they return to the village. Again there is little evidence from Indonesia to support a judgment either way. It is clear that returning migrants are generally highly respected in the village because of their greater experience and that some have taken leading roles in their villages; yet there is little evidence to suggest that they have challenged the traditional authority structure of the village.

The second main line of argument regarding the relationship between
nonpermanent migration and development in Indonesia is that this form of mobility acts, at best, to preserve the current pattern of wide inequalities and, at worst, to exacerbate those inequalities. This argument suggests that the circular mobility of labor reinforces the existing pattern of spatial concentration of investment in a few privileged areas. The fact that places like Jakarta can now draw labor from a much wider area than has ever been possible, without having to provide all of the workers and their families with permanent housing, schooling, health facilities, utilities, and so on, may in fact be encouraging the concentration of investment in those centers. The destination areas and the local classes with political and economic power gain a double benefit. First, the supply of labor is so plentiful that wages and conditions can be maintained at low levels; and there is some evidence (e.g., Breman, 1979) to suggest that circular migrants drawn from a distant area constitute a more docile workforce. Second, these classes do not have to contribute (via taxation, etc.) to the provision of overheads (permanent housing, etc.) for the families of the circular migrants who remain at home. Moreover, if circular migrants should become ill or otherwise fall upon bad times, they are able to seek out their village-based social and welfare services. In all of these respects, then, the urban-based elites derive benefits while the movers and their families incur costs.

In short, this argument suggests that nonpermanent mobility is not a satisfactory long-term solution to village poverty and maldistribution of wealth. In village Java, circular mobility may act in a similar way to the agricultural involution mechanisms described by Geertz (1963) as another means whereby the poor are provided with opportunities to earn just enough to survive at a bare subsistence level but are given little opportunity for vertical mobility to improve their living conditions. Thus, nonpermanent mobility is really only a stop-gap measure that will maintain current inequalities. Its very success in providing temporary relief may, in fact, be counterproductive in the longer term because it diverts attention from the only strategy that will ultimately assist the poor in rural areas—a fundamental decentralization of investment and capital away from cities and areas of resource concentration toward rural areas and, in particular, the peasant agricultural sector.

Current knowledge of nonpermanent migration in Indonesia lends at least partial support to both lines of argument outlined above. On the one hand, there is no doubt that from a short-term perspective, certain economic benefits usually accrue to the individual movers, their families, and to some extent their villages of origin. On the other hand, nonpermanent migration most likely also preserves and perhaps exacerbates existing inequalities, and the widespread occurrence of this movement may in fact divert attention from the long-term need for a more equitable investment of total resources in rural areas and peasant agriculture.

Both major arguments have significant implications for policy. The implication of the first argument is that policymakers should encourage nonpermanent mobility because of its positive developmental effects—namely, a net flow of wealth and perhaps ideas from city to village and a reduction of rural-urban inequalities.
The second argument has quite different policy implications. If nonpermanent migration in fact consolidates inequalities and prevents the formation of a significant urban-based proletariat, it would appear preferable to encourage permanent migration and discourage nonpermanent migration. Lipton (1980: 3) has summed up the position succinctly: "Even if evidence on the impact of emigration on rural areas leads to gloomy conclusions, this does not mean that . . . migration should be impeded. No; the implications are rather that, since development almost certainly implies steady labour transfers out of agriculture . . . governments should stop allocating investment and incentives in ways that encourage excessive, premature and, therefore, disappointing labour transfer. This means correcting investment and incentive biases against the rural sector."

It is clear that we do not yet know enough about how nonpermanent migration is related to the wider social and economic context in which it is occurring in Indonesia and its impact on income distribution (both spatial and vertical). In the absence of such knowledge it would be premature to make definitive pronouncements on what policy initiatives, if any, should be taken.

In a broader policy context, however, it is absolutely critical that cognizance be taken of the scale, causes, and impact of nonpermanent migration. Regional development planners tend to take account of permanent migration; but, as Fan and Stretton (1980: 21) have pointed out, if a pattern of nonpermanent migration is of significance in a region "then the consequences of migratory flows may be quite different from those generally perceived by researchers and policy makers who tend to treat all migration as permanent." One important consequence is the interdependence between different sectors (especially the urban and rural sectors) created by nonpermanent migration. Policies and programs initiated in the urban sector will often have unanticipated spin-off effects in the rural sector that are transmitted through the migrants (e.g., restrictions on job opportunities open to circular migrants in the city, as has occurred in Jakarta). Similarly, the impact of some policies and programs initiated in rural areas may be felt in cities.

It is apparent that there are several major gaps in our knowledge and understanding of nonpermanent mobility in Indonesia—its scale, causes, consequences, and implications in the broader social and economic context of national and regional development and change. Equally, it is apparent that demographers can play a major role in increasing our understanding. One of the pioneers of the study of circulation, Mitchell (1978: 6–7) has stated sentiments echoed by many who have followed him in the study of the phenomenon: "... the topic has, in my opinion, remained remarkably intractable to thorough going analysis. ... Part of this analytical recalcitrance derives from the great difficulties in collecting suitable data to carry adequate theoretical formulations."

The studies reviewed here can leave no doubt regarding either the substantial scale of impermanent mobility in Indonesia or its economic and social significance. It behooves us to develop a strategy for obtaining sure estimates...
of the volume, location, direction, and structural characteristics of this form of mobility. This inevitably means incorporating appropriate questions in the census and large-scale national sample surveys. A number of possibilities immediately present themselves. The first is during the full census count to ask both a person’s usual place of residence and his place of residence on the night of the census. This de facto/de jure comparison was carried out with some success in the 1930 Indonesian census (Volkstelling, 1933–1936), enabling the colonial census takers to create a special category of “persons temporarily present.” This is a particularly important priority. In addition, it would be highly desirable to include a workplace question in the census. Unfortunately it could not be included in the full count, which is restricted to four or five questions, and would have to be incorporated in the sample census. Sample surveys that adopt cluster-type sampling procedures create difficulties because census-defined movement is not a completely ubiquitous population characteristic and movers tend to be concentrated in particular areas, leading to problems in inflating the sample figures to the total population. The design of the workplace question and the tabulation plan would need extensive research and frequent testing. The question would need to be applied to all occupations held by individuals throughout the year prior to enumeration, to take account of the high incidence of multiple job-holding in Indonesia (especially among circular migrants and commuters) and seasonality in circular movements. Census officials may understandably blanch at the prospect of constructing workplace/usual place of living matrices for such a huge population living in such a complex and disparate country as Indonesia. However, several appropriate collapsing procedures applied to enumeration units in tabulations would greatly reduce the size of the matrices needed.

Many other areas in which research is much needed have been alluded to in this paper. In particular, further investigation is required into the cause and effect relationships between nonpermanent mobility and (1) wider social and economic patterns in Indonesian society, (2) spatial, sectoral, and social inequalities, and (3) development. There is also a need for further testing of the limited theoretical explanations of nonpermanent mobility and for integrating them into a more satisfactory and useful framework. More research should also be directed toward identifying and clarifying the policy implications of this form of mobility.

Notes

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1 The literature is replete with pronouncements on the immobility of Java’s inhabitants, based on census and traditional large-scale

2 The migration-defining regions used were the 26 provinces, which not only are very large in both population and areal terms but also vary widely in their size and shape. Fieldwork suggests that intraprovincial permanent migrants outnumber their interprovincial counterparts detected in the census by at least five to one (Hugo, 1981a).

The census was essentially a de jure count, and to be classified as a migrant, a mover had to have been at his destination for at least six months. For a discussion of the time criteria used in defining migrants and its implications see Hugo (1981a).

3 Personal communication from Dr. Michael Dove, Center for Population Studies, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia.

4 Naim (1976) speaks of some Dayak groups requiring young men to engage in circular migration; on their return they are tattooed to indicate that they have attained manhood.

5 The urban informal sector, in turn, is able to adjust to these seasonal fluctuations in labor availability because of fluctuations in peak labor demand across rural areas due to local variations in irrigation, rainfall, microclimate, and varieties of rice planted.

6 The sampling fraction applied in the second stage of the 1980 census varied between different types of areas, but averaged approximately 5 percent of households.

7 Simple breakdowns of workplaces as being within the same kabupaten, other kabupaten in the province, other kotamadya (municipalities) in the province, other provinces (considered separately or in groups) would suffice.

References


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