

**FORMS OF RESISTANCE AGAINST THE  
CAPITALIST DISCIPLINE:  
FEMALE FACTORY WORKERS IN BATAM**

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## *Summary*

This thesis aims to deconstruct gender and sexuality with regard to female migrant factory workers in Batam by acknowledging the discursive formation of gender, which affects 'doing gender' when dealing with the issue of women and work. The thesis is largely centred on the theme of gendered work and labour control. Firstly, based in a literature review, I summarize and argue that the feminization of labour in Indonesia is facilitated by institutions at three different levels: the state's ideology on labour as well as its discourse on women, gendered recruitment practices at the factory level, as well as supply factors that mobilize women that make them appealing towards employers as ideal workers. In the above analysis, I take on the Foucauldian view that 'discourse' produces its subjects, and also discuss how gendered subjects are constructed relationally through discourse, where male and female workers are produced relationally through a series of binary oppositions. To capture this idea, I will illustrate how the Indonesian discourse on women, via the *kodrat* filters affects the management discourse on recruitment practices. My interviews with various factory managers show that the management themselves have internalized taken-for-granted notions that there are certain innate traits that women possess that make them ideal factory workers - careful, disciplined, docile, diligent and embodying the tasks traditionally carried out by women; as compared to men

who are careless, lazy, and undisciplined. What then are the implications of such stereotypes?

Secondly, I will highlight how these women, despite being stereotyped by their employers as docile, empower themselves by employing various techniques of resistance against the subordinating powers of the capitalist discipline. Such techniques range from decreasing their productivity or declining to perform overtime hours, to mass absenteeism, and lastly being on strike. How then do these techniques relate to the women's autonomy and agency?

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## *Chapter 1: Introduction*

### **Feminization of labour, gendered jobs and social change**

Batam, an island of 415 sq km, is situated in the north-west of Indonesia. Located about 21 km away from Singapore, it is approximately two-thirds the size of its neighbour with a population of only 155,000 people (Royle, 1997). This Singapore-Indonesian border zone became a centre of activity in the early 1990s as both countries strengthened their bilateral ties, with Singapore helping to direct western transnational corporation investments to Batam, especially towards the manufacturing sector, at a time of rapid change in Indonesia as it strove to modernize its economy, moving towards industrialization. In exchange, Singapore retains an important role for its own firms in the provision of management and administrative functions, as it has been moving away from manufacturing towards the service industry.

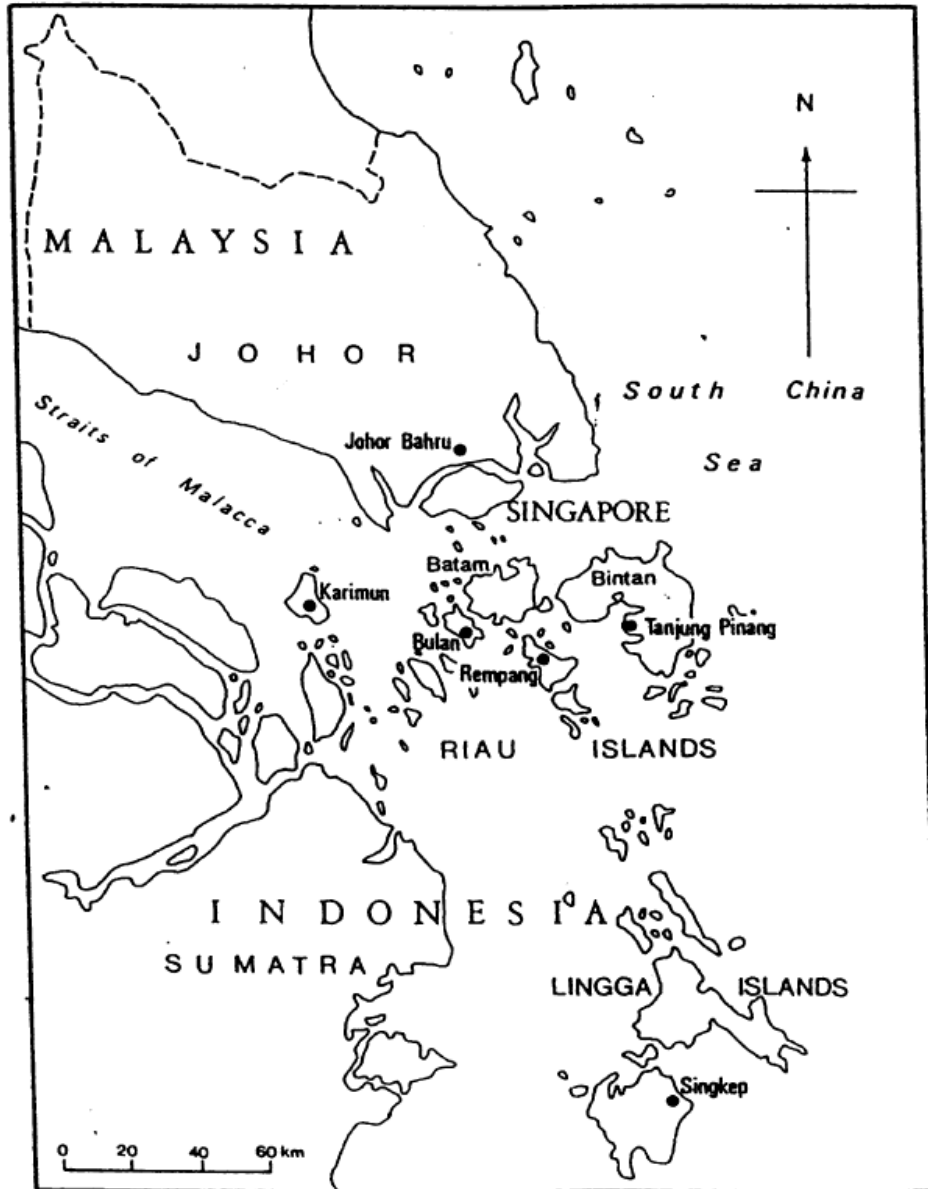


Figure 1.1: Singapore and the Riau Islands (Grundy-Warr et al, 1999)

Batam's designation as a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) or Export Processing Zone (EPZ) attracted TNC investments which created thousands of jobs as they set up their factories in its industrial estates. Mack (2004) argues that in areas legally cordoned off from the host nation, EPZs offer conditions which are amenable to offshore investment and production, such as duty-free import of

parts and export of finished products, to structures that allow companies to avoid restrictive labour legislation. EPZs treat 'labour' as a generic component and in their bid to attract investment, host countries may even restrict the autonomy of workers by employing strict legislation against unionization.

Part of the marketed image of an EPZ rests on its "docile" and "nimble-fingered" female labourers, universally considered to be more desirable employees than men. Generally recruited from rural, agricultural backgrounds, these young (and usually unmarried) women are classified as "unskilled", and thus easily replaceable.

(Mack, 2004: 157)

Why did the manufacturing of labour-intensive consumer goods pass into the hands of developing countries in Asia? Also, how did feminization of labour especially in the manufacturing sector of EPZs occur? The main argument accounting for the proliferation of female factory workers is that they are a source of cheap labour. This rests upon various assumptions: firstly, society is organized upon the patriarchal order where men are seen to be the main breadwinners. When women did enter formal employment, an unequal pay structure was established according to the notion that men's wages must support a family while wage-earning women are partly supported by men or at least have only themselves to support. Secondly, the jobs that the women entered are poorly compensated compared to the jobs that men entered as women are seen to be doing work that is of a lower order, performing tasks such as sewing, that they would have performed while maintaining the household. Since traditionally women's household work was never valued

monetarily, similar work in the formal sector is poorly recompensed (Kaur, 1998). These arguments will be revisited and critiqued in later chapters.

### **The Argument in Brief**

This thesis aims to deconstruct gender and sexuality with regard to female migrant factory workers in Batam by acknowledging the discursive formation of gender, which affects 'doing gender' when dealing with the issue of women and work. The thesis is largely centred on the theme of gendered work and labour control. Firstly, based in a literature review, I summarize and argue that the feminization of labour in Indonesia is facilitated by institutions at three different levels: the state's ideology on labour as well as its discourse on women, gendered recruitment practices at the factory level, as well as supply factors that mobilize women that make them appealing towards employers as ideal workers. In the above analysis, I take on the Foucauldian view that 'discourse' produces its subjects, and also discuss how gendered subjects are constructed relationally through discourse, where male and female workers are produced relationally through a series of binary oppositions. To capture this idea, I will illustrate how the Indonesian discourse on women, via the *kodrat* filters affects the management discourse on recruitment practices. My interviews with various factory managers show that the management themselves have internalized taken-for-granted notions that there are certain innate traits that women possess that make them ideal factory workers - careful, disciplined, docile, diligent and embodying the tasks traditionally

carried out by women; as compared to men who are careless, lazy, and undisciplined. What then are the implications of such stereotypes? Secondly, I will highlight how these women, despite being stereotyped by their employers as docile, empower themselves by employing various techniques of resistance against the subordinating powers of the capitalist discipline. Such techniques range from decreasing their productivity or declining to perform overtime hours, to mass absenteeism, and lastly being on strike. How then do these techniques relate to the women's autonomy and agency?

## **Methodology**

I shall begin with a wide literature review of key works by various authors on themes such as -- feminization of global manufacturing (Saptari, 2000; Kaur, 2004; Caraway, 2007), industrialization in Indonesia (Royle, 1997), gender and migration (Chant & Radcliffe, 1992; Mahler & Pessar, 2006), female migration in Indonesia (Hugo, 1992; Elmhirst, 2002), the construction of feminine subjects in Indonesia (Sears, 1996; Tiwon, 1996; Devasahayam et al, 2004) and also women and factory work in Indonesia (Ong, 1987; Wolf, 1992; Tjandraningsih, 2000; Mack, 2004; Ford & Lyons, 2006; Warouw, 2008; Ford & Parker, 2008).

As part of my fieldwork, I conducted qualitative interviews with five managers of five different factories on Batam, and posed them questions on the development of Batam, the profile of their workers, as well as their hiring

policies, remuneration packages and the working conditions of their workers. Their factories varied in terms of production, ranging from electronic products such as semiconductors and television tuners to garments and also checking finished products for quality control. My informants told me that a high proportion of their workers, almost 80 per cent of their production operators, are females. Managers also revealed that their workers may sometimes show signs of dissatisfaction with the management, mainly due to salary issues. These issues will be further discussed in my paper.

Interviews were also conducted with several female factory workers in the same factory, PT Permata, a Japanese firm which manufactures hard disks for electronic devices, PT Permata and themes centred upon their migratory experience and dormitory life emerged.

### **Theoretical Apparatus**

One of the first issues when considering the topic is to deconstruct gender and gender identity with regards to work and labour control. Mahler & Pessar (2006) offers a very succinct definition of approaching gender as a subject under scrutiny:

Gender is the meaning people give to the biological reality that there are two sexes. It is a human intervention that organizes our behaviour and thought, not as a set of static structures or roles but as an ongoing process. People do “gender work”; through practices and discourses they negotiate relationships and conflicting interests. Conceptualizing gender as a process yields a more praxis-oriented

perspective wherein gender identities, relations, and ideologies are fluid, not fixed.

(Mahler & Passer, 2006: 29)

Therefore, in relation to my research topic, an omnipresent fact of industrial life is the categorization of jobs in factories as “men’s work” and “women’s work”, since men and women seldom do the same jobs. Often, the literature suggests that such profound gender segregation is rooted in the gendered discourse of work. This research is guided by Caraway’s (2007) conception of ‘gendered discourses of work’. Caraway argues that ‘the gendered worker on the shop floor is created in part through the discourses produced by the management about gendered workers’.

From a Foucauldian perspective the issue is not whether the women are patient, disciplined, and diligent but that the subject of the woman worker as patient, disciplined, and diligent worker is produced through discourse.

(Caraway, 2007: 30)

Post-structural feminists have called for special attention to be paid to how gendered subjects are created relationally through discourse: the dichotomous relations between male and female workers. This view is reproduced several times in most of the works that I reviewed on women and factory work. Therefore, this research is very much guided by Caraway’s tool of inquiry, where she adopted a ‘syncretic conceptualization of gendered discourses of work’ combining Foucault’s (1990) conception of discourse and Connell’s (1987) praxis-oriented perspective and poststructuralist feminist approaches.

## Research Findings and Plan of the Thesis

Chapter 2 attunes the reader to the historical emergence of Indonesia's export oriented industrialization strategy and how this has affected labour patterns. Indonesia was described in the 1960s as being one of the least industrialized countries in the world for its size (Hill, 1990) and the manufacturing sector only totalled an estimate of 840,000 workers in 1971. During the 1980s, however, due to trade liberalization and deregulation policies, Indonesia moved from being a negligible exporter of manufactures to a significant supplier. Statistics show that in 1980, manufactures generated less than 3 percent of total exports; however by 1992 they were nearly 50 percent (Hill, 1996:810). This expansion was facilitated by a series of trade reforms, during the New Order years of 1966 to 1997/8. Indonesia moved away from a protectionist strategy of protecting its domestic market and towards an export oriented industrialization (EOI) strategy as the country, which is a major oil exporter, coped with the collapse of the price of oil. This chapter highlights Indonesia's rise as an export manufacturer and the concomitant effects on the changes in labour structure i.e. - the feminization of labour and its resultant effects, such as the patterns of migration and concerns on exploitative nature of female factory work.

This chapter also later highlights how Batam features as part of Indonesia's strategy to attract an inflow of large foreign direct investment



(FDI) as an export processing zone (or also called 'bonded zone' by commentators on the Indonesian economy) in order to leverage on its comparative advantage in export manufacturing. Since this research is largely centred on themes of gendered work and labour control, this chapter also reviews the feminist literature on women's work in export processing zones and highlights the waves of feminization of the manufacturing industry as posited by Caraway (2007).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 turn attention to an in-depth analysis of the case in point, Batam, specifically on, BatamIndo Industrial Park. Chapter 3 outlines the profile of factory workers in the manufacturing sector, who are mostly young, single females, between the ages of 18-22. Based on my in-depth field interviews with the women, they relate to me their migratory experience and the anxieties that they face as well as how they cope with and mitigate these anxieties. I argue that based on the everyday experiences that these women share as a community of migrant workers, it allows them to create and share a 'structure of feeling' where they create their own identity via their own feelings and emotions. Examples of such feelings are *bareng* (togetherness), *kebebasan* (freedom) and *kangen* (homesickness) and these women cope with these anxieties by being each other's social support system.

Chapter 4 demonstrates the importance of bringing gender to the core and not to fall simply into the trap of tokenism when discussing gender by simply inserting sex as a variable. The understanding of the Foucauldian

concept of the gendered discourses of work is introduced to show how this leads to gendered outcomes, as again portrayed by Caraway, as this is pivotal towards the understanding of women and labour in factories. Therefore, before we can see the effects of industrialization on work and labour control, we must firstly explore the very operation of gender and explore how it is articulated with other axes of differentiation in complex ways. I argue that the stereotypical, gendered image of the nimble-fingered, docile female worker is articulated at different levels, Firstly, the ideological level of the state's discourse on gender via the notion of *kodrat wanita* (women's nature). This section will highlight the Indonesian discourse on gender as posited by scholars such as Suryakusuma (1987), Blackwood (1995), Tiwon (1996), Wieringa (2003) and Caraway (2007). The next level where the construction of the ideal female factory worker is articulated is at the level of recruitment practices by the management. Management believes that women possess certain characteristics that make them better workers at certain tasks than men. Therefore, in order to understand employers' preference to employ women as production operators in their factories, we must consider the gendered discourses of work. I take on the view that 'discourse' (Foucault, 1990) produces its subjects, and also discuss how gendered subjects are constructed relationally through discourse, where male and female workers are produced relationally through a series of binary oppositions (Caraway, 2007). To capture this idea, my interviews with various factory managers show that they have internalized as a fact that there are certain innate traits that women possess that make them ideal factory workers - careful,

disciplined, docile and diligent, embodying the tasks traditionally carried out by women; as compared to men who are careless, lazy, and undisciplined. Lastly, the process of feminization in Indonesia finally took off in the 1980s onwards due to the increased supply of labour - the availability of qualified, educated female labour, attributed mostly to the New Order education policies which improved the educational levels of women. All the above factors contributed significantly to the process of feminization in Indonesia between the years 1971 to 1994, the percentage of women involved in manufacturing work increased substantially from 37 per cent to 51 per cent (Caraway, 2007).

Chapter 5 centres the issue of resistance in relation or in tension with the agency of the feminine subject. Here, I conceptualize the definition of resistance, aided by Hollander and Einwohner's typology of resistance. In order for resistance to manifest itself, there must be binary oppositions, and in my research, the struggle between the capitalists (manager) and labour (production operators) is not only a class issue but also has a gendered dimension. I argue that the capitalism, is a 'disciplinary practice' where capitalists assert their repressive power in order to demand compliance from the labouring subject (Sakolsky, 1992). In the factories, the disciplinary practice is asserted via Taylorism, the scientific management of work, which includes the adherence towards standard operating protocol as well as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor productivity. These are employed in order to obtain the maximum surplus-value from the employment of labour. As an extension of obtaining maximum surplus value from the labourer, the

production operators are paid only the minimum wage of 1,080,000rp (US\$106.40). Further, when the work order increases, the factory increases its output by imposing compulsory overtime hours on its staff, since their production operators are single women who do not have a family to return to and hence usually available to perform overtime. Therefore, subjected the capitalist discipline, dissatisfaction amongst the female factory workers arise.

From my interviews with the factory managers and factory workers, they highlight that there are four different forms of female labour resistance that may be enacted in succession: (1) production slowdown, (2) refusal to perform overtime hours, (3) mass absenteeism and lastly (4) labour strike. This chapter illustrates how resistance is translated into practice which argues for the significant agency of the female factory worker by highlighting the inherent contradiction in the logic of the resistance posed by these women. I shall show with evidence from other researchers as well as my own findings from my research site that employers are keen to employ women as production operators because they are believed to be the ideal workforce; docile and disciplined. How then do factory managers account for these displays of overt resistance by the women? What is not discussed in this section is how the workers themselves conceptualise their acts of resistance, since firstly, interviews with the managers were intended to uncover the role of managerial practice in the construction of a gendered workplace, and secondly, I did not have access to informants who were involved in the sites of resistance.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis and ponders on the future directions of research with regard to issues concerning female factory workers in Batam. One of the interesting issues is the rise of labour organizations such as the FSPMI (Indonesian Metal Workers' Union) and Lomenik SPSI (Federation of Metal, Machine and Electronics) in representing the rights of the workers. Directions for future research may involve to noting the development of labour movements in Batam in their campaign against precarious work. What seems to be happening on the ground as a concomitant effect of the feminization of the workforce is the feminization of unions. Questions include, what does the feminization of unions mean and what are its projected future consequences?

## ***Chapter 2: Industrialization in Indonesia***

### **Framing the Global Factory: Indonesia's trajectory towards industrialization and the feminization of labour**

Women's labour force participation has increased dramatically in developing countries like Indonesia over the past several decades. While the proportion of employed women is still lower than in more developed countries, recent estimates indicated that labour force participation rates among women ages 20 to 54 exceed 60 percent in developing countries as a whole. According to information from the International Labour Organization (ILO), women's employment has increased faster than men's employment since 1980 in most regions of the world (Appleyard, 1999). Villareal and Yu (2007) argue that factors such as women's higher educational attainment and lower fertility rate, as well as changing attitudes toward women working outside the home, raise female employment rates by increasing the demand for female workers in the manufacturing sector.

This increase in female labour force participation is especially pronounced in developing countries which embrace export oriented industrialization with a focus on the manufacturing industry, such as the four Asian tigers, Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea and other developing countries like Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Kaur

(2004) attributes the shift of manufacturing labour-intensive consumer goods from the developed to the developing countries to a global restructuring for manufacturing. Increased global competition resulted in the industry in the United States, Europe and Japan 'reassembling' itself to reduce costs while remaining competitive.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, in order to understand globalization and women's employment in developing countries like Indonesia, it is important to attune ourselves to the historical emergence of the export oriented industrialization strategy and how this has affected labour patterns. The political context of its emergence is also important as this elucidates the relationship between the state, labour and civil society.

### **Becoming an exporter of manufactures: the case of Indonesia**

Indonesia was described in the 1960s as being one of the least industrialized countries in the world for its size (Hill, 1990) and the manufacturing sector only totalled an estimate of 840,000 workers in 1971. During the 1980s, however, due to trade liberalization and deregulation policies, Indonesia moved from being a negligible exporter of manufactures to a significant supplier. Statistics show that in 1980, manufactures generated less than 3 percent of total exports; however by 1992 they were nearly 50 percent (Hill, 1996:810). This expansion was facilitated by a series of trade reforms as

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed discussion, refer to Gills & Piper (2002), Kaur (2004) and Caraway (2007).

Indonesia - a major oil exporter - coped with the collapse of the price of oil. This present section highlights Indonesia's rise as an export manufacturer and the concomitant effects on the changes in labour structure i.e. - the feminization of labour and its resultant effects, such as the patterns of migration and concerns on exploitative nature of female factory work.

The 1980s trade reforms have already been very well documented by other writers but it is imperative that a brief introduction is given to provide a background understanding, highlighting industrial change in Indonesia.

Successful economic policy in Indonesia is always traced back to the years of 1966 to 1997/8. During New Order rule, under the presidency of Suharto, the Indonesian economy experienced rapid and sustained growth, which enabled Indonesia to rise up the ranks from one of the poorest countries in the mid-1960s to one of the eight high-performing Asian economies in the early 1990s, along with Japan and the four Asian Tigers-- Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea - as well as Indonesia's neighbours Malaysia and Thailand.

The rapid economic growth during the period 1965 to 1997 was driven mostly by the expansion of three main sectors of the economy--agriculture, manufacturing and services. However, it was the manufacturing sector throughout this period which was growing at double digits, much faster than the other two sectors which were growing at single digits. The average growth



rate during this period, as highlighted in table 2.1 below averaged at about 7.0 percent.

Table 2.1: Economic Growth and Transformation in Indonesia, 1965-97

	Economic Growth and Transformation in Indonesia, 1965-97				
	<i>Average annual growth rate (%)</i>			<i>% of GDP</i>	
	<i>1965-80</i>	<i>1980-90</i>	<i>1990-97</i>	<i>1965</i>	<i>1997</i>
GDPGDP	7.0	6.1	7.7		
AgricultureAgriculture	4.3	3.4	2.8	51	16
Manufacturing	12.0	12.6	10.8	8	26
Services	7.3	7.0	7.2	36	41

Source: Thee, 2006:343

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, Indonesia's rapid industrial growth was fuelled by the liberalization of economic policies which also marked its return to normal economic conditions after the political turmoil and economic chaos of the early 1960s, a remnant of the Sukarno years.

Up to the late 1970s, the growth of the Indonesian economy was based primarily on its exports of crude oil. It was during this oil boom period that the Indonesian economy was able to sustain protectionist import-substituting policies. The de facto Indonesian Minister of Industry, B. J. Habibie, rejected free market solutions and opted for industrialization via import substitution (ISI). ISI is based on production for the local market and involves high levels of protection for domestic producers. As was the case with other South-East Asian countries, ISI did not achieve the results expected, partly due to the fact

that Southeast Asian countries did not have sufficiently large domestic markets to sustain the industries (Kaur, 2004). This raised a concern amongst many Indonesian and foreign economic analysts about this costly and inefficient pattern of import substituting industrialization. Indonesia's strategy of import substitution industrialization (ISI) in the years from 1968 to the 1980s yielded dismal numbers with regard to employment, with the number of workers increasing by only 130,000 between 1971 and 1980 (Caraway, 2007), but the large boom from the oil revenues enabled the Indonesian government to ignore its critics. However, the decline in crude oil prices in the early 1980s, which signalled the end of the oil boom, prompted the government to diversify its exports by promoting manufactured exports via introducing a series of deregulation measures to boost foreign direct investment (FDI). The result of this is shown in table 2.2, from which it can be seen that between 1983 and 1991, both the agricultural and mining sectors declined in importance, while the share of manufacturing in GDP grew, from 12.8 percent to 20.2 percent in 1991. Indonesia's shift from the agricultural sector to the manufacturing sector is evident in the figures for 1991. A precedent was set when manufacturing's contribution to GDP exceeded the contribution of the agricultural sector (Aswicahyono, 1997: 25).

Table 2.2: The Indonesian Economy (%GDP)

<i>Year</i>	<i>1983</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>1987</i>	<i>1989</i>	1991
Agriculture	22.8	22.6	21.3	20.5	18.5
Mining	20.8	18.2	17.3	15.5	15.7
Manufacturing	12.8	15.9	17.2	18.7	20.2
Construction	5.9	5.3	5.1	5.4	6.1
Services	37.7	38.0	39.1	39.9	39.5
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Tan (2001: 245).

At the same time, the share of manufactured exports in total exports rose to 51.7% while that of crude oil and natural gas fell to 37.4 percent. Table 2.3 shows the composition of Indonesia's manufactured exports in 1991.

Table 2.3: Indonesia's Manufactured Exports, 1991

<i>Item</i>	% Total
<b>Labour Intensive</b>	<b>57.7</b>
Clothing	19.1
Fabrics	13.1
Footwear	8.4
Electronics	3.4
Yarns	1.7
<b>Resource Intensive</b>	<b>29.5</b>
Plywood	25.7
<b>Capital Intensive</b>	<b>12.8</b>
Fertilizer	2.5
Paper Products	2.2
<b>Steel Products</b>	<b>2.1</b>

Source: Tan (2001: 246).

Since 1987, the manufacturing sector generated a surge in manufactured exports, particularly low skill labour-intensive exports, where Indonesia clearly had a comparative advantage. Indonesia's manufacturing sector thrived because it was able to leverage on its large labour surplus.

The policy measures adopted in 1986, especially the devaluation and the trade liberalization measures, put Indonesia on the path to rapid export-oriented, labour-intensive growth on a similar trajectory to that which its neighbours like Singapore had adopted earlier. This pattern of growth, characterized as the "East Asian model", had been adopted at least two decades earlier by the newly industrializing economies (NIEs) like Argentina, Brazil, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and at least a decade earlier by Indonesia's ASEAN neighbours, such as Singapore and Malaysia.

In order to leverage on its comparative advantage in export manufacturing, as part of its strategy to attract an inflow of large foreign direct investment (FDI), Indonesia established export processing zones (also called 'bonded zones' by commentators on the Indonesian economy). Export processing zones (EPZs) became an important feature of the industrial landscape of several Asian and Latin American countries. These zones consist of limited areas of land lying in a sense outside the normal customs jurisdictions. Imported goods may be brought into the zones duty-free for processing provided that all output is sold abroad. In practice, not all EPZs conform exactly to this definition, but the emphasis on exporting distinguishes the zones from other types of industrial estates (Grundy-Warr, 1983:28).

The investing firms view the zones as a means of reducing costs by transferring the labour intensive parts of their production processes to low wage countries. Governments in the host countries in turn have leveraged on

the EPZ strategy as a means of generating employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings and technology transfer. Substantial incentives have been offered to attract foreign firms into the zones. In various countries these have included different combinations of duty-free import of manufactured intermediate goods and raw materials, company tax holidays, subsidized provision of factory space and/or utilities, streamlined bureaucratic and administrative procedures to avoid costly red tape, exemptions from industrial regulations applying outside the zones, guarantees on the absence of strikes and guaranteed repatriation of profits (Thee, 2006).

In 1973, an export processing zone was established in Jakarta under the control of a state company P.T. (Persero) - Bonded Warehouses Indonesia (BWI). Warr emphasized that during the time of his writing, in 1983; it was the only EPZ existing in Indonesia and was established as a pilot project under the Ministry of Trade with a view to assessing whether similar zones should be established elsewhere in Indonesia.

### **Peripheral Hub of Indonesian Capitalism: The Batam Development Program (1970-present)**

In the early 1970s, Batam was still a largely uninhabited island of fishing communities with an estimated population of 6000, located in the Riau archipelago (Kelly, 2003). With an intention to developing the island of Batam for economic purposes, the Indonesia government in 1972 set up a

partnership with Pertamina, the state oil company, along with Nissholwai Co. Ltd of Japan and Pacific Bechtel of U.S.A (BIDA, 1980). Pertamina was initially interested to develop Batam as an oil and gas exploration base with downstream processing activities on the island. Following a draft of Batam's Master Plan, industrial areas were designated in Batam in 1973 and in the following year a customs-free bonded zone was officially created on the island along with the establishment of the Batam Industrial Development Authority (BIDA) in order to encourage export-oriented industries.

The creation of the bonded zone<sup>2</sup> was intended to stimulate the development of export-oriented industries and facilitate the importation of materials required by the manufacturing industries located on the island. One of the most important of the concessions granted was the duty-free import of all raw materials and component inputs on the condition that all of it is to be used or processed within the island or is destined for re-export (KPMG, 1993:12-13). The Indonesian government aimed to make the development of Batam a link between the Indonesian domestic economy and the world economy. Currently, Batam's main industries are electronics, manufacturing and ship-building.

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<sup>2</sup> Bonded zones are also referred to as Export Processing Zones (EPZs) by commentators. Grundy-Warr's (1989) article on 'Export Processing Zones: The Economics of Enclave Manufacturing' succinctly describes the nature of EPZs and their characteristics, such as the provision of tax holidays and duty-free imports of raw materials, streamlined administration and having a fenced-in infrastructure which prevents the smuggling of duty-free raw materials into the domestic market.

In order to boost foreign direct investment into Batam, a number of attractive incentives and guarantees were put in place to attract investors. These main incentives as a bonded zone are highlighted in figure 2.1:

Figure 2.1: Main incentives for Batam's Bonded Zone

<b>Taxes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tax free holiday of up to six years for priority projects calculated from the time the enterprise begins production</li><li>• Accelerated depreciation of fixed assets</li></ul>
<b>Exemption from Import Duties</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All fixed assets such as machinery and equipment needed for the operation of the enterprise are exempt from Indonesian import duties.</li></ul>
<b>Freedom to Manage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The investor is given full authority to determine his own management operation and may employ foreign management and technical workers in positions for which qualified Indonesians are not yet available.</li></ul>

Source: BIDA, 1980

As highlighted in the previous section, Indonesia's deregulation and trade liberalization policy during the post-oil crisis of the 1980s led to the focus towards a new industrialization strategy which was to manufacture for export-export oriented industrialization (EOI). This strategy was first adopted by Singapore in the mid-1960s during a time when Singapore was separated from the Malaysian Federation, which therefore meant that adopting the ISI strategy was a less feasible option as their internal market was significantly reduced. EOI proved to be a successful strategy<sup>3</sup> and helped Singapore gain its status in the 1970s as a first tier newly industrialized country (NIC).

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<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Singapore's GDP grew, in real terms, at an average annual rate of 13.6 per cent between 1966 and 1969, and at 8.3 per cent between 1970 and 1979 (Kaur, 2004).

Singapore's successful early adoption of export oriented industrialization (EOI) served as a model for other countries like Indonesia, similarly seeking to grow and industrialize (Kaur, 2004). This prompted Indonesia to begin talks on cooperation with its neighbour Singapore from the early 1980s; however such talks only bore fruit in the late 1980s when Indonesia was willing to grant regulatory concessions to Singapore which relaxed restrictions with respect to foreign investment and ownership.

This cooperation could not have come at a more fortuitous time for Singapore as the state's rapid growth in the manufacturing sector raised alarm for Singapore's economic planners, given that it faced severe limits in its labour and land resources. There was a fear that Singapore's inability to provide for foreign investors in these respects would cause a 'hollowing out' of the economy as industry moved to other parts of Asia. During that period of time, Singapore was faced with the problem of the rising cost of labour and the subsequent movement of multi-national companies moving out of the country into more cost-efficient manufacturing sites in other parts of Asia (Ford & Lyons, 2007:242). A 'regionalisation strategy' due to its proximity to the Riau islands would be beneficial to Singapore, combining Singapore's port and service industries with Batam's ready pool of cheap labour. Singapore linked Batam, Indonesia and Johor, Malaysia in a growth triangle project to assuage any concerns from Malaysia over Singapore's assistance to a new competitor location for foreign investment. The SIJORI (Singapore-Johor-Riau) Growth Triangle was first publicly announced in 1989 by Singapore

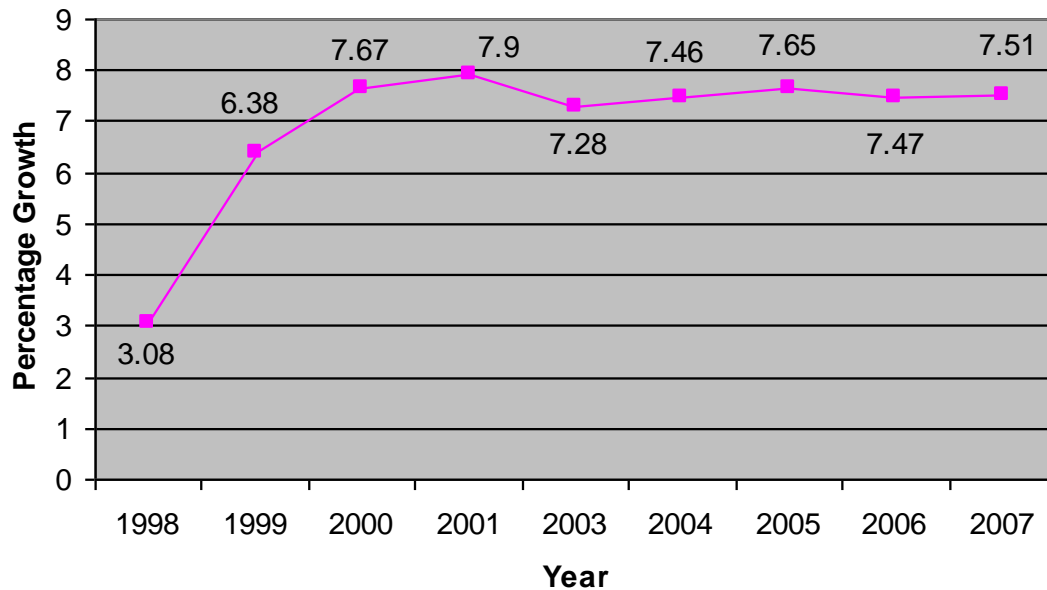


Deputy Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong. As more states from Malaysia and Indonesia joined the grouping, SIJORI was renamed Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore Growth Triangle (IMS-GT). A 1994 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formalized the tripartite IMS framework. It also became apparent that the Indonesia-Singapore link was without doubt the most active (Royle, 1997; Grundy-Warr et al, 1999; Mack, 2004).

The participation that resulted has turned around Batam's investment prospects, especially following the development of Batam Industrial Park with the promise of attracting Singapore-based TNCs to Batam. The largest of these industrial estates is the Indonesia-Singapore joint venture between the Salim Group of Indonesia and the government-linked Singapore Technologies (now known as SembCorp) and Jurong Town Corporation. This industrial estate, BatamIndo Industrial Park is located in the Muka Kuning area, in the heart of the island, and is still the largest and most developed industrial estate on the island. BatamIndo Industrial Park has significant investments from countries such as the USA and those of Western Europe (for instance the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the Netherlands), as well as Asian countries like Japan, Malaysia and Singapore. Sumitomo was the first tenant, established in 1990, and other tenants later included AT&T, Philips, Thomson, Sony and Epson. The environment of the BatamIndo Industrial Park will be further elaborated on and discussed in Chapter 4, since this study is specifically focused on female factory workers working within the compounds of this Park. The park's niche is assembly operations, and it employs young

female labour as the majority of its workforce. In early 1997, out of a total employment of around 55,000, 85% of its workers were females aged 18-22.

Figure 2.2: Batam's Economic Growth %



Source: BIDA, 2009.

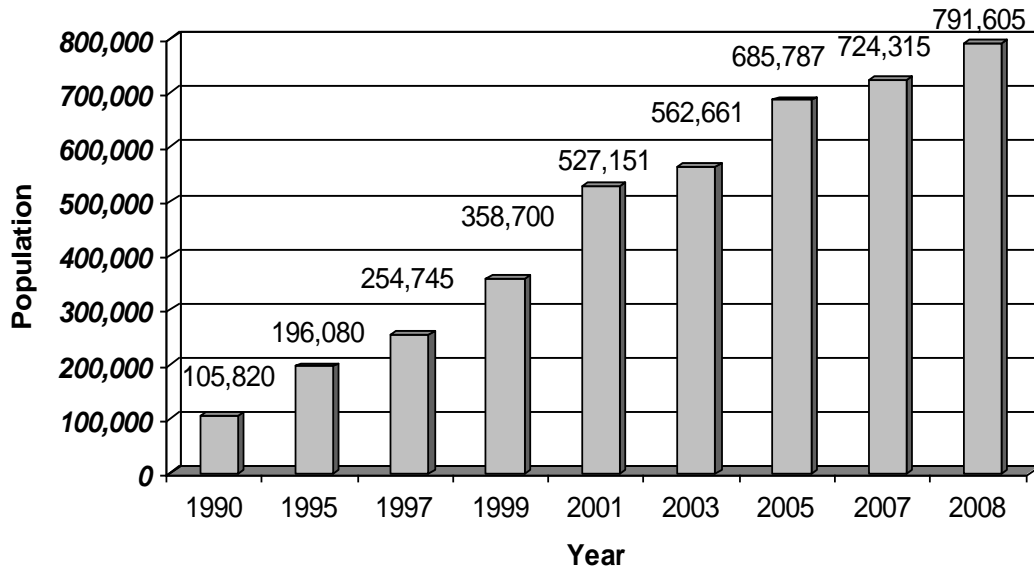
Though the IMS-GT was marred by numerous setbacks which culminated in the Asian financial crisis, the economy seemed to recover (as indicated above in figure 2.2). It grew from 3.08 per cent per year in 1998 to 6.38 per cent in 1999 and peaked in 2001 at 7.9 per cent growth. However, year on year growth fell in 2003 at 7.28 per cent and has since levelled out between 7.46 per cent to 7.51 per cent from 2004 to 2007. However, it is said that the manufacturing sector has not recovered to pre- 1997 levels and the growth triangle is coming to be regarded on all sides as a failure (Sparke et al, 2004, Ford & Lyons, 2007). Others such as Pereira (2004) provide a more balanced viewpoint in that as an entrepreneurial venture, the park has its fair share of

successes and failures. The most positive aspect of the project via the viewpoint of its investors was its effectiveness as a cheap and efficient industrial production site. It also generated jobs for the Indonesian workforce, as an estate, Batamindo employs about 60,000 to 80,000 workers.

### **Human Migration to Batam**

According to Ford & Lyons (2007), historically, early migration to Batam began in 1945 when a number of young people moved there in order to support the Indonesian army after the declaration of Independence, but the population on the island remained small in the 1970s. Once development began, as a consequence of attracting high levels of foreign investment, Batam also began to attract large volumes of migrants within Indonesia seeking work in its industrial parks and tourist resorts (Grundy-Warr et al, 1999; Ford & Lyons, 2007). Due to plans to develop the island industrially under the Batam Master plan, by 1978, when Batam was designated as a tax-free bonded zone for export industries, its population had increased to 31,800 (Ford & Lyons, 2007:241). Over the next ten years, domestic and foreign investors were attracted to Batam and large numbers of construction workers were also brought in to develop Batamindo Industrial Park and its associated infrastructure.

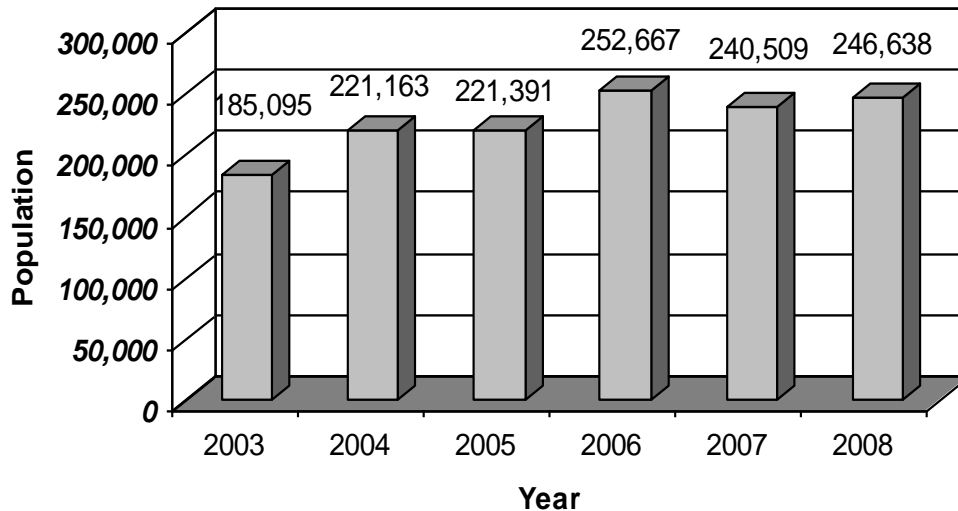
Figure 2.3: Total Population of Batam (1990-2007)



SOURCE: BIDA, 2009

Batam witnessed phenomenal changes in twenty years, between 1970 and 1990, partly due to the formation of the IMS-GT, with the official population growing from 31,800 in 1978 to 105,820 by December 1990. Batam's population growth continued to grow sharply in the boom years. In 1990, as shown in Fig 2.3 above, Batam registered a population of 105,820, with almost a seven-fold increase by 2007, to 724,315. Kelly (2003) noted that there is even reason to believe that the number is a gross underestimation, considering the unrecorded numbers of migrants arriving daily on the island from different parts of the Indonesian archipelago. Senior BIDA officials estimate that figure to be in the range of 500,000 per year, with 1000-2000 migrants disembarking every week.

Figure 2.4: Batam's Workforce Population



SOURCE: BIDA, 2009

However, though Batam experienced high population growth, its workforce only made up about 32 per cent of the total population, suggesting that there is a high unemployment rate on the island. In 2007, the rising unemployment rate in Batam and the Riau islands was reported in the Jakarta Post, which cited the departure of several major foreign companies from the area. According to data cited, unemployment on Batam in 2007 reached 180,000, a 20 per cent increase from the year before (Jakarta Post, October 6 2007). However, the high unemployment rate is not discouraging more job-seekers, mainly new high-school graduates, who flock to the island for job opportunities (Jakarta Post, July 1 2008). The government voiced fears that the soaring unemployment rate could undermine security and public order, as well as cause a strain on Batam's limited resources, which can accommodate

one million people at most. Its current population had already reached more than 790,000 in 2008.

The workforce statistics also show that there is an imbalance towards women, who represent 56% of the total workforce (Kelly, 2003). The greater number of women provides some indication of the gendered division of labour that exists in the industrial estates.

Clearly, given Batam's original low population, the workers were mostly migrant workers from different parts of the Indonesian archipelago. This influx is in line with the government's policy of curbing population growth and encouraging population redistribution. Since they face massive overpopulation in areas such as Java, they have for long encouraged transmigration (BIDA, 1980). Most of the workforce is accounted for in manufacturing (75 percent), construction (10 percent) and the leisure industry (7 percent).

The IMS-GT cooperation was however marred by setbacks and was especially affected by the economic and political uncertainty in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis (1997-98). Many multinational investors began downsizing operations and investments in Batam, but Lyons and Ford point out that the crisis had the opposite effect on internal migration. The island's 'relative prosperity became a magnet for people in other parts of the Indonesian archipelago' (Ford & Lyons, 2007:242). In the three years after the

crisis (1998-2001), Batam's population grew by an incredible 79.5 per cent and by the end of 2004, the population of Batam was 633,944 (Ford & Lyons, 2007:242). They argued that migrants from other parts of Indonesia were attracted to the island by the 'prospects of employment in an economy that had been cushioned from the economic crisis of 1997-98, or because of their relative calm during the violence that erupted across the archipelago from 1998' (Ford & Lyons, 2007: 242).

However, Batam suffered an economic slowdown especially between the years 2000 - 2004 when non-oil exports declined by US\$1.11 billion, shrinking by 20 per cent. Foreign investment in 2005 also fell by 34 per cent (The Straits Times, 15 September 2006). In recent years however, investor confidence in Batam has further dwindled due to the lack of concessions and Indonesia's eroding comparative advantage in labour costs over emerging industrializing countries such as China and Vietnam. This is also further exacerbated by the current economic recession. In order to regain investor confidence, current President Yudhoyono launched the much delayed free trade zone for Batam in 2009 (Jakarta Post, January 20 2009). The government is hoping that with Batam's status as a free-trade zone and the exemption of value-added tax (VAT), import duties and luxury tax, this will spur more foreign businesses to invest on the island and tap its low production costs. However, to date Batam has never really recovered from the 1997-98 financial crisis and this free-trade zone status may be a last ditch effort, which proves too little, too late, to try and invigorate the island's

economy as the global crisis hits hard on the local manufacturing industry in Batam (Jakarta Post, 20 June 2009). The government however still remains optimistic, citing that despite the economic crisis, new industries are still being set up in the Riau islands and are in desperate need of 100,000 skilled workers (The Jakarta Post, 2 July 2009). In the first four months of 2009, the government announced that they have approved 29 foreign investment projects worth US\$23.2 million (Asia Pulse, 4 June 2009).

### **Effects of Industrialization: Batam as a transient migrant space**

Kelly (2003) highlights Batam's unique administrative structure as a distinctive characteristic about the island's industrialization process. Batam's administrative structure has BIDA rather than the local municipal or provincial governments in control of all developmental planning on the island. The chairman of BIDA reports directly to the President and bypasses all levels of intermediate authority. The resultant effect is the focus on economic development on the island. The needs of investors are privileged, with social concerns being accorded secondary importance. This is in order to promote investor confidence by showing Indonesia's strong commitment towards the development of Batam as an EOI.

Rapid development on Batam, under the administration of BIDA, has changed its social and physical landscape drastically. Forests were razed to make way for new commercial centres, residential estates, tourist resorts and



industrial areas. While most migrants brought in on temporary contracts to work in BatamIndo are offered accommodation in dormitories, many more live in squatter settlements on land that has been cleared of forests but remain undeveloped. Due to the transient nature of their work, most migrants see themselves as sojourners with no sense of long-term commitment to the place. Their intent would not usually extend to building a more liveable physical and social environment which is in line with the government's ambivalence towards improving the social space in Batam, especially in terms of proper housing.

However, the administrative structure of Batam has recently changed since the city of Batam has changed to a township status of a municipality (Batam Center, 2009). Currently, Batam's Mayor is responsible for the civic administration as well as social affairs, and works hand in hand with BIDA whose responsibility is to promote economic development by managing the land and infrastructure as well as stimulating investment in the Barelang (Batam, Rempang, Galang) region. Even so, the government has reiterated the view that Batam is just a transit city and that the high volume of Indonesians who arrive in Batam are in transit to other countries such as Malaysia and Singapore (Antara, 26 October 2007).

In fact, the government has no plans to accommodate the settling of migrants in Batam as it seeks to control the city's burgeoning population growth. It is reported that Batam is 'at risk' of experiencing a baby boom within

the next five years due to rapid migration from other provinces. The government reiterated that Batam has very limited resources such as clean water and land and could only accommodate up to one million people; anything above that limit could spark social problems. Their response to addressing the problem is to promote family planning programmes as well as tightening the conditions for the issuance of identity cards in order to curb the population growth.

Further evidence which suggests the government's ambivalence towards social issues in Batam is shown in its slow reaction in tackling health issues such as recognizing Batam's dengue troubles in 2009.<sup>4</sup> The government's reluctance to declare an alert for the spread of the virus was because 'such announcements would have an impact on a number of sectors including tourism and business', which again shows the privileged importance of the economic activities on the island, over-riding the social concerns of the resident population.<sup>5</sup>

Grundy-Warr et al. (1999) further point out that the uncontrolled inflow of migrants from other parts of Indonesia poses an increasing threat to the economy of Batam. Since there is little investment in low-income housing, coupled with uncertain employment, squatter housing has proliferated. Illegal

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<sup>4</sup> During the first six months of 2009, nearly 800 people reportedly contracted dengue fever in Batam, with 10 deaths. Population density as well as a lack of adequate sanitation and the presence of stagnant water in many areas has been blamed for the spread of dengue (Jakarta Post, 16 July 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Issues of Batam being a transient space has been discussed in depth by writers such as Ford & Lyons (2007) which can be referred to for further understanding as it lies outside of the scope of this research.

squatter housing colloquially known as *ruli*, short for *rumah liar* or 'wild housing' is scattered across the island. These squatter areas are seen as a threat to Batam's investment attractiveness to multinational companies.

Concomitantly, Grundy-Warr et al. view the lack of sufficient housing and employment for migrants as leading to other social problems such as crime and prostitution. In fact, the sex industry has become a major activity in Batam, with demand from visitors on short-stay trips, mostly from Singapore. Due to this 'Batam scene', HIV infections have also increased. Batam ranks as a hot spot for infections, contributing to the fact that Riau shows one of the highest provincial rates of HIV/AIDS infection spread through sexual contacts (28 June 2008, Jakarta Post).

Though these issues are beyond the scope of this thesis, this account sheds light on some of the effects of industrialization in Batam as a result of focused development on the economy, coupled with the lack of social development, i.e. provision of housing or proper health policy for the migrant community.

## **The Gendered Effects of Industrialization - Waves of Feminization in Indonesia**

One of the main issues that will be discussed in this thesis is the gendered effects of industrialization. It is therefore important to understand the

emergence of the feminization of labour in Indonesia and understand the political and socio-economic climate of its emergence. As highlighted in the earlier sections, in the 1980's Indonesia's economy experienced rapid change as it strove to modernize its economy, moving away from its traditional role as an agrarian society.

Ford & Lyons (2007) noted that the gender composition of Batam's population has changed considerably after the formation of the IMS-GT. Since the late 1990s when the factories and infrastructure were complete, large numbers of female factory workers replaced the construction workers and male factory workers. This was due to the stereotype that female factory workers were best suited to work in the electronic industries, a contention that will be discussed fully in Chapter 4. Since 1997 women have outnumbered men on Batam, which reflects the increased pressure on women in other parts of Indonesia to migrate for work as a result of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98 (Ford & Lyons, 2007). Therefore, it could be argued that on Batam, the feminization of labour began in the 1990s when investment in the manufacturing sector began, since prior to Batam's development plans, the area was largely uninhabited. However, before then, the cogs were already in motion for the feminization of labour in other parts of Indonesia, such as in the export processing zones in Jakarta (Grundy-Warr, 1983).

Caraway's (2007) review of the feminist literature on women's work in export processing zones showed that the authors pinned the causes of

feminization of labour to the strategy of manufacturing for export and labour intensity. According to these authors (Elson & Pearson, 1981; Joekes, 1987; Lim, 1983) 'export and labour intensity compel factories to reduce labour costs as much as possible in order to compete' (Caraway, 2007:16). Therefore, it is their contention that the feminization of labour is facilitated by the emergence of the EOI strategy. Caraway however refutes that statement and argue that in Indonesia, the feminization of labour preceded years before the EOI strategy was in place.

'Feminization unfolded in a series of waves. Textiles, in particular spinning and weaving, pioneered the first wave of feminization during the ISI years. Plywood and garments led the second wave, which coincided with the transition phase of industrialization. Footwear and electronics, along with the sectors from the second wave, propelled the third wave. Foreign investment did not play a significant role in the first two waves of feminization—which is surprising, given the overwhelming emphasis on the role of multinational corporations in the feminization literature—but they were a key component of the third wave.'

(Caraway, 2007: 87)

Therefore, Caraway argues that contrary to what previous authors have written, the feminization of labour in Indonesia may not necessarily been driven by the EOI strategy, but was facilitated initially by its ISI strategy. By the 1980s, the facilitating pieces were all in place and all that was needed to generate an impressive wave of feminization was a substantial increase in demand for women workers. Expanding on the above, Caraway highlights that the feminization process in Indonesia can be separated into three waves

in tandem with its three stages of industrialization: the ISI period (1968-78), the transition period (1979-86), and EOI (1987-1997).<sup>6</sup>

In the first wave under its ISI strategy, employers in garments and textiles responded to the changes in women's fertility and education by shifting selected jobs to women. However since employment in the labour intensive sectors had not expanded significantly, the degree of this early feminization was modest.

The second wave of feminization began in the transition years between ISI and full-blown export promotion, in the years 1979 to 1986 before the oil-crisis hit. This was facilitated by the demobilization of unions and political parties as well as repression of labour by the New Order state. As Indonesia was also moving away from agriculture, coupled with the economic crisis, this created a larger pool of women workers available for mobilization into the factories. The first major exporting industries during this period were mainly concentrated on the processing of plywood and production of garments.

The third wave proved to be the most significant, driven by foreign investors from East Asia who turned to South East Asian countries like Indonesia due to rising production costs. This was mainly led by the electronics and footwear sector, and there was significant interest in EPZs like Batam which further increased the demand for female labour. Both at home

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<sup>6</sup> A detailed discussion of the three waves of feminization can be found in Caraway's (2007) book, 'Assembling Women: The Feminization of Global Manufacturing', pp.88-97.

and abroad, Asian investors preferred to hire women in electronics, especially in their overseas operations.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter illustrates Indonesia's trajectory towards industrialization via trade reforms in the 1960s and especially with trade liberalization policies in the 1980s when the government moved away from their import substitution policies in support of a more export oriented industry in the post-oil crisis of the 1980s, taking cue from the success of newly industrializing countries (NICs) such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia. Bonded zones or Export Processing Zones (EPZs) were created in Indonesia. This highlights the creation of an EPZ in Batam as the government aimed to develop the island as a link between the Indonesian domestic economy and the world economy by stimulating the development of export-oriented industries. Economic cooperation between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore created the formation of industrial parks in Batam, with the most significant project being BatamIndo Industrial Park, co-owned by Singapore and Indonesia, whose factories largely specialize in assembly operations, which mostly required and hired female labour. Since Batam was still a largely uninhabited island of 6000 people, most of the workforce is made up of migrant workers from different parts of the Indonesian archipelago. However, in recent years, with foreign investors downscaling or closing their operations in Batam due to the economic downturn, this has resulted in a high unemployment rate.

Therefore, as a borderland region, Batam has experienced rapid social and economic transformation by virtue of its proximity to wealthier economies such as Singapore. The growth of manufacturing industries in Batam has created a demand for labour and improved infrastructure which facilitated the movement of people into the islands. However, recently fraught by several economic crises, the island is experiencing a hollowing out of the economy with companies downsizing or moving out, cutting down the number of jobs available in Batam. To further exacerbate the situation, more internal migrants are still flocking to Batam with the prospect of finding employment, leading to the high unemployment rate of 180,000 in 2007.

One of the concomitant effects of Batam's industrialization is the feminization of its workforce. A profile of female factory workers in Batam and the environment and social landscape of Batamindo Industrial Park in Batam is further discussed in Chapter 3.



## *Chapter 3: Female Factory Workers in Batam*

### **Introduction**

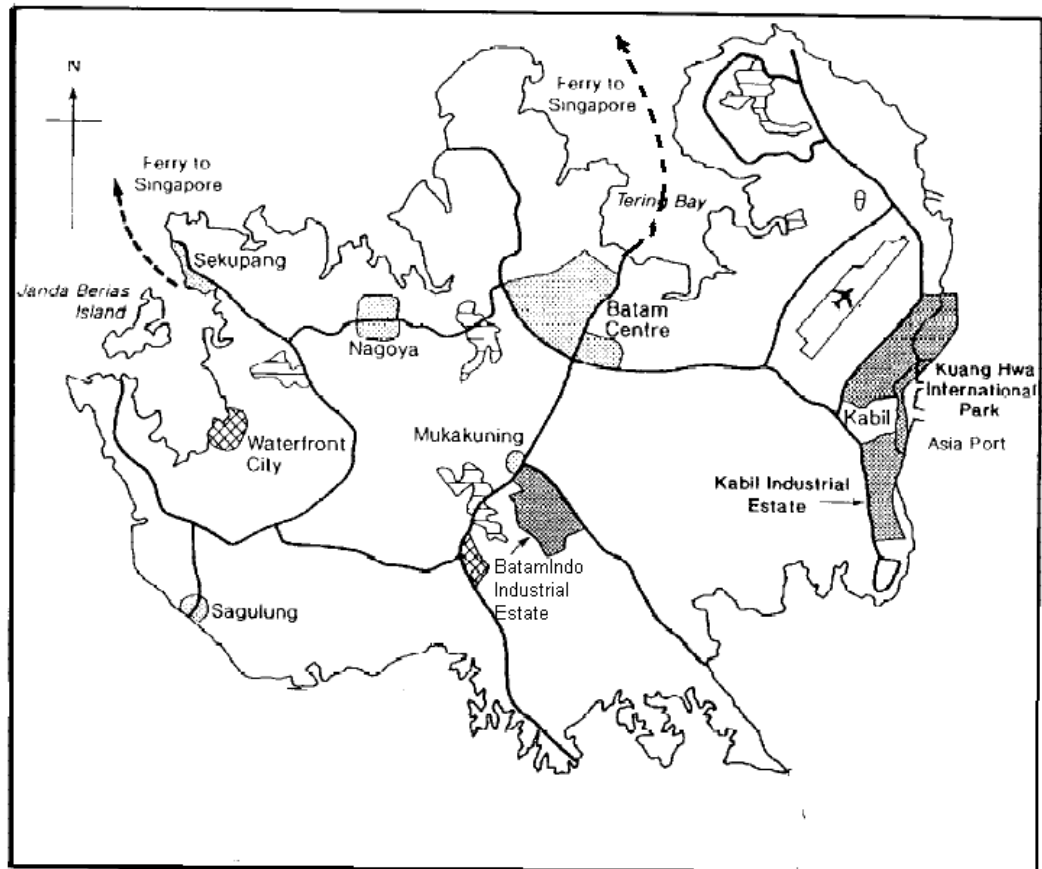
One of the most effects of industrialization, as a result of export oriented industrialization in Indonesia is the rise of a new class of women workers. Improved education levels has resulted in the emergence of women workers who are economically independent and active within the workforce. Statistics from 2007 show that 68 per cent of females are in secondary school and 17 per cent of those at tertiary age are receiving tertiary education (Unesco, 2007). Education has equipped women with the skills and knowledge to remain economically viable as Indonesia experienced a shift from an agrarian mode of production to industrialization, though this means for many, migrating from their villages to industrial cities such as Jakarta and Batam. In this chapter, I explore the lives of the female factory workers in Batam as they relate to me their experience of working and living in Batam as well as the relationships that they form during their sojourn on the island.

Ford & Lyons (2007) point out that the gender composition of Batam's population changed considerably after the formation of the IMS-GT. Since the late 1990s when the factories and infrastructure were complete, large numbers of female factory workers replaced the construction workers and male factory workers. This was due to the stereotype that female factory workers were best suited to work in the electronic industries, a contention that will be discussed fully in Chapter 4 where I highlight the issues on gender and

work and the discursive formation of gender and labour. Ford & Lyons highlight that since 1997, women workers have outnumbered men on Batam which could reflect the increased pressure on women in other parts of Indonesia to migrate for work as a result of the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98.

According to BIDA, there are a total of 26 industrial estates which are situated in Batam, in which most of the female workers are employed in as production operators in the manufacturing industry. These industrial estates are located mostly in areas such as Batu Ampar, Muka Kuning, Batam Centre, Sekupang and Kabil.

Figure 3.1: Location of BatamIndo Industrial Estate



Source: Adapted from Royle, 1997:92.

### BatamIndo Industrial Complex

BatamIndo Industrial Park, currently owned by SembCorp Singapore, was established in 1991 and is the largest industrial estate in Batam, occupying a sprawling 320 hectares across Muka Kuning district. It is a self-sustainable complex which boasts dormitories for workers, food centres, wet markets, shopping malls, recreational sports centre, clinic and places of worships that include two mosques and a church. A short distance away, in order to accommodate the professionals located in BatamIndo, the BatamIndo Executive Village run by SouthLinks Country Club has facilities that include a

golf course, driving range, tennis courts and swimming pool. The complex even has its own dedicated water treatment plant and power station. In fact, the complex is so self-sustainable that its residents would never have to leave the industrial park.

BatamIndo hosts about 80 companies involved in several light industries relating to the production of electronic components and computer industries. These include manufacturers of printed circuit boards (PCBs), computer components and parts, audio and video equipment, and car automotive parts. Some of the internationally recognized electronic companies present are Epson, Ciba, Sanyo, Hyundai, Matsushita, Phillips, Siemens, Sony and McDermott, which represent a lot of foreign investment from countries such as the US, South Korea and Japan. As a whole, the estate employs 60,000 to 80,000 workers. BatamIndo has been very well described by scholars like Mack (2004) and Peter (2008).

‘Behind the storefronts narrow foot paths lead to tin and wooden shanties which house the poorest workers. The massive industrial complex is protected by heavy iron bars with razor wire running along the top. To enter and leave you must pass a guarded security check point and provide identification. Inside the billion dollar complex, corporate buildings of the world’s biggest brand names, complete with polished chrome lettering and tinted glass, loom large amidst the well-paved streets and manicured lawns. Many workers never leave the industrial park. They live in company housing, go to the company shops, visit the company clinic and pray at the company mosque. It is a caged existence.’

(Peter, 2008: 14)

Indeed BatamIndo industrial park is situated far from neighbouring cities. Once past the security, rows and rows of industrial buildings line up along the roads which intersect at 90 degrees, which goes to show the amount of planning which went into the development of the estate. Most of the buildings look similar, distinguished only by their chrome lettering, which distinctly mark the company's name and logo. In fact, it was built on plans which mirror Jurong industrial estate in Singapore where pre-built factory units of various sizes were built, ready to be leased to investors. Driving around the complex, it had a very strong American and Japanese presence with companies like Philips, NuTune, and PerkinElmer, as well as Shikoku Electronics, FujiTec, Sumitomo, Casio and Minamoto. I initially was fooled by the laid-back atmosphere, with only a few people milling about around the compounds, but when it came to shift change in the mornings and evenings, the area is a hive of activity with masses of workers leaving and entering the buildings, and the roads ruled by green TransKIB (Kompleks Industri BatamIndo) vans and *ojeks* (motorcycle taxis).

Most of the workers are housed in dormitories (*asrama*) located at the back of the compound.

“...the BatamIndo Industrial Park has been conceived as a self-sufficient community of both factories and *asrama* (dormitory) residences. Residents are pre-selected, generally as part of the contract negotiated before arrival on Batam. Within the gates of the factory complex, the inhabitants are primarily women; the male dormitories that do exist are confined to special zones. It is a very insular neighbourhood... It is so self-contained, in fact, that it is unclear whether those who live and work in Batamindo

are encouraged to leave it at all. The estate is sited so far from the other cities in Batam that it exists as a kind of fortress with gated entrances.”

(Mack, 2004: 171)

Evidently, in my various interviews with the workers, most of the production operators prefer not to leave the compound as most of what they need can be obtained within the complex. Food centres are located around the estate as well as within their dormitory, but most of the workers would prefer to visit the wet markets to purchase their own food, and cook communally in their shared dormitory kitchen. Daily necessities can also be bought at small stalls located within their dormitory, or they can visit Plaza Batamindo which houses several cafes, a food court, a supermarket and also shops for gifts, clothing, books and such. Though it does seem to be a ‘caged existence’ or a ‘fortress’, the women I interviewed do leave the complex during their free time to places like Panbil Mall which is frequented by many factory workers, or Nagoya town, or they visit Barelang bridge or the beach for leisure.

The factory managers, whom I interviewed, however, do not live on site, but in housing complexes such as Duta Mas, located about a ten-minute drive away in Batam Centre. They seldom hang around within the complex other than going to work or visiting the mosque to perform their prayers. Belonging to the middle-class, they prefer to visit malls such as Batam City Square (BCS) mall or Batam Centre or Vista Hill to admire the view, where more upper class residences are located.

## A typical work day

Ika, aged 25, has worked for PT Permata, a Japanese electronics manufacturing firm, for two years. She lives in a dormitory provided by the company within the complex of Batamindo. She shares the dormitory with 15 other women. They sleep in bunk beds in a room and share common facilities like the kitchen, sitting room and four bathrooms. If she is on the morning shift, Ika gets up at half past six in the morning to get ready for work and puts on her uniform. As a conservative Muslim, Ika puts on a black cotton long-sleeved shirt underneath her short sleeved uniform and wears the jilbab (headscarf). She hustles to put on her shoes to leave before her other dormitory mates, who would usually be on the same shift, because of an understood rule that the last to leave would have to lock up the dormitory. They would then walk together to the dormitory gate which would be a hive of activity with the different modes of transportation waiting to fetch the workers to work. She usually boards a green TransKIB (Transportasi Kompleks Industri Batamindo) van which would take her directly to the factory gates of PT Permata, which costs 1000 rupiah (US\$0.10). It is imperative for Ika and others like her not to be late, or else the van would leave without her, and she would have to take the *ojek* (motorcycle taxi) which would cost double the TransKIB fare. Ironically, Ika only takes the TransKIB van if it is full as it means that the van would leave sooner, compared to a near-empty van which would leave much later as it would have to wait for passengers to fill its seats. The transportation system within the Batamindo complex is highly regulated.

Only TransKIB vans are allowed to ferry workers to work and *ojeks*, run by men, have to be registered and licensed with the BatamIndo administration and their drivers wear numbered, green helmets. The journey, however, doesn't take more than five minutes since the dormitory is located within the self-sufficient BatamIndo complex itself.

Ika arrives outside the factory gates usually no later than half past seven and enters the factory premises ensuring that her staff pass, attached to her uniform pocket, is clearly shown. She enters the factory lobby and punches her timecard and goes to the canteen to meet her friends, some, like her, ready for their morning shift, while others are heading home after their night shift. Ika prefers to arrive early so as not to be tardy but mostly because she enjoys meeting up with her friends before she starts her shift.

'We often greet each other and smile and chit-chat and us being girls, exchange the latest gossip! I feel the most happiest at this time of the day during shift change because I feel so at ease in their company and this lifts my spirits and boosts my motivation to work.'

(Ika, personal communication, 2009)

Ika always wishes that they could chat longer but she has to get ready for work. Since she works in a clean room environment as she is involved in the production of FDB (Fluid Dynamic Bearings) motors required for hard disk drives, Ika has to go to the gowning room and put on the white jumpsuit and booties and a special metal bracelet that helps to de-staticize her body, before entering the highly controlled clean room environment. This robing and disrobing ritual is a little time-consuming but Ika explains that it is very



necessary as pollutants like dust and static may greatly affect the electronic products they are assembling. Ika jokes with her friends that robing makes her feel like a doctor entering an operating room which makes her feel rather 'professional'.

Ika likes her work environment as it is very clean and most importantly air-conditioned. She feels that her job also requires much technical expertise as she is working with machines, as compared to sweatshop textile or footwear factories near her hometown, back in Jakarta. She considers herself a skilled worker as precision and an eye for detail is required in order to produce the finished parts. At half past eight, she is ready to start her workday at her station, which involves bearing assembly. She joins fifty other women workers in her assembly line which is headed by a lead girl who monitors their productivity. If Ika has any issues pertaining to work, such as taking leave, she consults her supervisor, who is usually male. Production operators are entitled to a day's leave for every month's service, which makes it twelve days in a year and also a day's menstrual leave each month. Approval for such matters would then need to go through higher management, the head supervisor and then the manager. The highest position in the factory is the production manager, who is usually an expatriate, sent from the headquarters of the company's home country, in this case, a Japanese manager.

The production operators only have one forty-five minute break for lunch at noon and Ika heads to the staff canteen, which is a welcome reprieve from work. She also manages to perform her afternoon prayer (*sholat zuhur*) before resuming work. The end of her normal shift is at half past five but sometimes, depending on the work order that they have to fulfill, the workers are asked to perform overtime and her shift may stretch till half past eight. At the end of her shift, she usually waits for her other friends to knock off from work and they leave work in a group and enjoy the walk home to their dormitory. They sometimes drop by nearby shops to purchase necessities as she admits that it is too far to shop outside the complex. Furthermore, the complex is very well-integrated with most amenities; hence they can purchase most of what they need at sundry shops located within their dormitories or at Plaza BatamIndo.

Ika enjoys the camaraderie that exists between her and her friends as they perform most of their domestic home activities together, like cooking communally and retrieving their laundry. After dinner, they would usually watch some television while waiting for the call to evening prayer (*sholat maghrib*) and wind down with more television before going to bed. On some evenings, she will meet up with friends from IRMA (Ikatan Remaja Muslim Arema), which is a network of Muslim youths, and visit Nurlis (Nurul Islam) mosque for some religious classes or Qur'an recital (*ngaji kitab*).

Ika recounted to me how she and others like her found jobs here at BatamIndo. In 2007, Ika was recruited by a labour agency, Cipta Karya<sup>7</sup>, via recruitment drives organized by the Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration (Departemen Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi Indonesia or TKI) where she had to go through several medical and psychological tests. She added that such jobs required single women to be between 17 and 22 years of age.

Like most contract workers<sup>8</sup>, she was assigned to a two-year contract with PT Permata, and depending on her work performance, contracts may be extended on a yearly basis. By law, after three years of contracted work, workers should be hired permanently by the employer. The company paid her agency for her cost of travel to Batam as well as lodging costs at the dormitory. Coming from a family of four siblings, Ika comes from Yogyakarta and her family rely on the 500,000rp (US\$50) she sends home each month. She makes the minimum wage of 1,080,000rp (US\$106.40) per month but supplements it by working overtime hours, where wages are double their daily wages, so she makes an average monthly wage of about 1,500,000rp

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<sup>7</sup> Other agencies include Cakra and Tunas Karya.

<sup>8</sup> There are three types of employees hired in Batam's EPZ, namely the outsourced worker, contract worker and permanent worker. The most exploited worker is an outsourced worker. They are hired through a labour agency and usually sign a contract with the agency which holds them liable should they lose their job, sometimes at fees five to ten times their normal wage. These employees are traded like commodities, one step removed from human trafficking. Should they get ill, pregnant or hurt on the job, the company will immediately release them and the labour agency will likely fine the employee for the breach of contract. Contract workers however are generally hired by the principal company or recruited by an intermediary but contracted with the company directly. Contracts range from three months to two years. By law, after three years of contracted work, workers should be hired permanently by the employer. Permanent workers make up a very small minority of workers and this 'privilege' is usually reserved for staff positions at management level. These workers tend to make more money through annual raises and have better pay packages which include benefits (Peter, 2008).

(US\$150). Ika says that though working overtime is tiring, she likes to perform overtime hours as that means she has more disposable income and also more to save for herself, considering that half her wages is sent home. She is considering remitting more as her youngest brother has the opportunity to enter a technical college but her family back home lack the finances to send him to school. The company works two shifts: 8am to 5.30pm and 8:30pm to 5am. Workers are paid an extra 4,000rp (US\$0.40) if they work the night shift and shifts are assigned on a weekly basis. The operators have to work a minimum of 153 hours a month and may need to perform overtime hours depending on the work order given by the company, and workers are paid 1.5 to 4 times the daily wage rate for overtime hours. However, Ika mentions that recently, not much overtime is offered as their factory, like many other factories, is experiencing a slowdown in the demand for their manufactured products due to the global slump, and hence has been receiving fewer work orders.

### **Negotiating Migration and Factory Work**

Most of Batam's EPZ workers are like Ika. Eighty per cent of these workers are young women between the ages of 19-25, who arrive as migrant workers having travelled long distances from their rural homes in areas such as Sumatra and Java, in the hopes of finding work. The five women I interviewed were between the ages of 19-22 and have been working at PT Permata in BatamIndo for between eight months to two years, with this being their first

job, fresh out of high school education (SMA or Sekolah Menengah Atas) or university.

19-year-old Endah, from Palembang, South Sumatra, has only been working at PT Permata for eight months. She explains that she comes from a large family with five siblings in a cramped home in her rural *kampung* (village). Influenced by her seniors in her high school, she and her friend decided to apply for a production operator job with the local TKI, and procured a job via an agency. Based on the advice of other friends who have completed the return migration to Batam, she applied for jobs in companies that were situated in BatamIndo because they mentioned that it was the best working environment with dormitories that were situated within the complex, so she can be sure that the accommodation would be arranged for her. Also, her friends related that the factories located within the complex are large MNCs that placed emphasis on staff welfare. Therefore, her decision to migrate was influenced by the experience of her seniors and friends who had work experience in Batam. As her family home was cramped, Endah, as the eldest daughter would be able to leave home, in search of independence. As such, her parents were also willing to allow Endah to migrate for work, as there were a few girls from the village who had also migrated to Batam for work and returned. Endah also thought that with her wages, she would be able to support herself and hence ease the burden on her parents. In fact, Endah admits that she does not remit money every month since with one mouth less to feed back home, her family had more disposable income. She said that

circumstances were still uncertain in the first year since she arrived and thought it better to save some money for herself first, before considering remitting money home. She is however saving for the airfare home for the upcoming *lebaran* (Aidilfitri) festival, and would also need more money to procure gifts (*oleh-oleh*) as well as some form of monetary contribution for her household. Endah admits that her one-million-odd rupiah salary is not much, and hence lives rather frugally, only spending when necessary, usually on food and toiletries. She is however looking forward to the *lebaran* bonus given out every year to staff which would range anything from 2 weeks' to a month's salary.

**Living in the dormitory: *Surga, bareng, bebas, kangen***

Tenants of Batamindo ideally prefer their workers to stay in the on-site dormitories as the controlled environment is thought to put worker productivity less at risk than when they live outside. For example, given the limited availability of public transport on Batam, workers travelling into the estate from elsewhere on Batam might spend 20-30% of their wages on travel, reducing the budget available for a healthy lifestyle. Proximity also makes the workforce more flexible in terms of their availability for overtime.

(Grundy-Warr et al, 1999:316)

Though Peter (2008) highlighted that dormitory life in Batamindo is a 'caged existence', this expression is used rather figuratively. The women are free to come and go and the 10pm curfew for outside visitors seems to be overlooked by the security guards. Interestingly enough, Ika jokingly describes living in the dormitory as akin to dwellers in heaven (*penduduk surga*), because of the

people who live in it. Most of them are all females who are young and in the prime of their lives, where they are the most productive. There are no babies or children amongst them, nor are there old folk. They never hear news of new births or deaths. They are far removed from the rest of Batam, being located far from town. Their clean rooms and the amenities that they enjoy, they admit are much better than what others get outside of the compound.

In Mack's research on factory women in Batam, she looked at women living in three different types of housing, the dormitory, *ruli* and *kost* (rented accommodation shared by a group) and analyzed the dynamics between their interactions. She employs the use of Williams' concept of 'structure of feeling' to show how these women create their own form of cultural identity using shared feelings and emotions, for example, referring to their housemates as sisters, and create a form of unity amongst themselves that is unique to them, something that they do not share with women from other parts of Indonesia. She described that their 'structure of feeling' "redefined past experiences and rejected an imposed multiculturalism, both corporate and pan-Indonesian" (Mack, 2007:176).

Williams, a theorist on cultural studies, contributed the concept of 'structure of feeling', described as a component of the lived experience of a community that is above and beyond its experience of social institutions and ideology. It refers to the lived experience that resides in the everyday, seemingly mundane personal interactions and relationships. Williams later

redefined the terms as a structure of social experience that lies somewhere between the articulated and the lived experience of the community (Lawrence & Karim, 2007:180).

In my interviews with the women about dormitory life, three main themes emerged most strongly and repeatedly in dealing with the anxieties of their migration experience: *bareng* (togetherness), *kebebasan* (freedom), and *kangen* (homesickness). These shared, everyday personal interactions and relationships give meaning to them in relating their experience as a young migrant worker in Batam.

Firstly, the close bonds and communal spirit that is fostered and shared among them, which can be denoted from the phrase *bareng* which means 'together'. Examples of such would be *masak bareng* which means cooking together or *maem bareng* which means eating together. Ika describes dormitory life in this way:

It's nice to see us leaving work together (*pulang bareng*). When we arrive back at the dormitory, we will cook together (*masak bareng*), eat together (*maem bareng*) do laundry together (*nyuci bareng*), perform our prayers together (*solat bareng*) and bathe... (she pauses) on our own of course!

(Ika, personal communication, 2009)

In fact, Ika admits that she is very close to four of her friends, all of whom I interviewed, and they like to do a lot of activities together. She regards them almost like sisters, and this core network of people has helped her deal with



the unfamiliar loneliness of not having any family or kin in Batam. Though she enjoys the close bonds that she share with these women of varied ethnicities, coming from different villages, she explains that there is a downside from being too close. She always remembers some dear advice dispensed by her supervisor, Pak Wahyudi, from work whom she regards as a fatherly figure, "Having a close relationship with friends is important but do not get too close". At first she did not fully understand what he meant and thought that he was referring to courtship and dating. However she recently understood what he meant when her own close friend, Tuty, went back to her hometown after completing her two year contract with the company.

Ika got very close to Tuty as they entered in the same batch two years ago. They are from different hometowns, Ika from Yogyakarta and Tuty from Sumatra, but despite their differences, both managed to bond as they both are devout Muslims who wear the *jilbab* (headscarf) and enjoy similar activities like going to the mosque for Quran recitals.

I am always together (*selalu bareng*) with Tuty. Wherever Tuty goes, Ika will go. If the company organizes any sort of events, there will be Ika and Tuty. Wherever I want go, Tuty will always accompany me. We are very close, Ika and Tuty.

(Ika, personal communication, 2009)

Though both received a year's extension of their contract, Tuty decided to return home to settle down with her boyfriend back home with whom she has maintained a long-distance relationship. Their separation when Tuty left was

painful for both of them as they bade a tearful goodbye. Ika sighs and likens friendships to the ebb and flow of the waves, they enter and leave our lives, forever changing. Ika describes that it is not easy seeing her friends leave, having been there for more than two years, seeing her seniors leave. She feels that they are always reminded of their temporal and transient existence in Batamindo with the coming and leaving of her dear friends.

This concept of *bareng* is their way of coping, forming a type of sisterhood bond with each other, since most of the women, being migrants who are away from their family, have to depend a lot on each other. Doing the seemingly mundane chores of cooking, doing the laundry, or watching television together is their way of coping with being away from home and their togetherness in these seemingly mundane chores highlights the close, supportive structure that these women provide to each other.

The second theme that emerged when speaking to the women was *kebebasan* or freedom. All the women I interviewed claim that they enjoyed a higher degree of independence and agency as a result of the migration experience, being both financially independent as well as enjoying the freedom to socialize, unlike back home where they would be socially and morally policed by family, kin and community. Imah describes,

Over here, you've got your freedom. Nobody really watches you, you're away from your parents, your family, and you're in the company of people who are about the same age as you, so they understand the concept of space and privacy.

(Imah, personal communication, 2009)

Though there is a security guard at the entrance of the dormitories, the women explain that no visitors are turned away and that even the 10pm curfew for visitors may be overlooked by the guards most of the time. Nobody really takes notice of when these women come and go because of the nature of their shift work, so it is not uncommon for women to be coming back late or leaving in the late evenings. The women are free to partake in any type of activities that interests them. Ika in fact is a soccer fanatic and follows the English Premier League closely. In her free time, she and some friends including Tuty get together at the field at the recreational centre to play women's soccer. Ika explains that back home, she may not have the luxury to take part in sports as she is expected to help with domestic duties at home, and furthermore, to her family, playing soccer is a male pastime, in which female participation is frowned upon. Therefore, Ika sees herself as having more freedom, other than not being policed when she leaves or come home, but also experiences the freedom to pursue her interests, like playing soccer.

However, these women are mindful not to abuse the freedom that they enjoy. They do self-regulate themselves and their behaviour because of the concept of *malu* (shame) or *sungkan* (embarrassment) towards their friends for any outward displays of impropriety.

Even though we have no family or kin to watch over us, it of course matters what our friends think of us because they are the only people we have here and we rely on each other. We feel very *malu* and *sungkan* towards our friends, some may come from the same hometown or villages back home. People here talk, and gossip and nobody wants to be part of the gossip.

(Imah, personal communication, 2009)

Such gossip may be made up of girls having too intimate a relationship with their boyfriends or sometimes leaving the dormitory and not returning for a few days. The women agreed that though *kebebasan* can be viewed positively since the women get to achieve a greater sense of self, too much of it, for example *pergaulan bebas* (freedom to interact and associate), may result in what the women view as social problems such as getting pregnant out of wedlock or being distracted by outside influence so much that they lose interest in performing their jobs well. Though I did not get an opportunity to discuss the concept of *malu* with the women further, this concept of *malu*, shame and embarrassment among the migrants in Batam has been discussed by Lindquist (2009) at length. He emphasizes that ‘*malu* gains particular forms of valence as migrants engage in new forms of social interaction and moral boundaries become ambiguous’ (Lindquist, 2009:13). He elaborates that *malu* can manifest itself in different forms, sexuality, religion or economic failure. *Malu* can also be mitigated by the use of

symbols, such as wearing the *jilbab*, to protect the dangers of social interaction so as not to attract undesirable male attention.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, in order to deal with their homesickness (*kangen*) these women seek familiar symbols that remind them of life back home. Imah, hailing from the hilly regions of Padang Panjang in Sumatra, loves visiting Bengkulu, a hilly area in Batam:

Bengkong, I have been there several times, about three times in the one year that I have been here. I don't know why but every time I go there, it feels like going home. Maybe it's because Bengkulu is located in a high region. The Bengkulu area is similar to Padang Panjang in West Sumatra or Bukit Tinggi, both of which I have to pass before I arrive at my village in Lubuksikaping. *Aku kangen, pengen pulang kampung* (I long, really long to return to my village).

(Ika, personal communication, 2009)

Warouw (2008), in his research on female factory workers in Tangerang, described the significance of rural values in shaping the marginalized urban subjects' perspectives on their existence in the city.

In the factories of Tangerang, rural values and images become the source of tension in workers; adaptation to capitalist disciplines and their encounter with the factory regime becomes a medium through which workers connect with the rural community, using romanticized pictures of the village to manage their alienation.

(Warouw, 2008:109)

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<sup>9</sup> Lindquist's (2009) book entitled, *The Anxieties of Mobility*, provides rich detail and analysis on the emotional economy of *merantau* (migration), especially in Chapter 2 where he uses BatamIndo Industrial Park as a starting point in examining the emotions of *malu* and *liar*.

In the case of Imah, she imagines the countryside, her place of origin, as symbolizing a peace of mind, when life was simpler. This is congruent with Warouw's ideas that these images are invoked when urban migrant workers complain about urban hardship and industrial pressure. Romanticizing the image of the countryside, these become 'portable icons' (Warouw, cited in Maclean et al., 1994:14) that allow the workers to escape from 'urban anomalies'.

## Conclusion

Evidently, the transition from their villages to working in an industrial park in Batam takes some getting used to on the part of the women. The women, at young ages of 19 to 22, have to undergo processes that habituate them to the factory regime - working in shifts, performing overtime, wearing uniforms and adhering to company rules and protocol. Living in a dormitory eased their transition as the women create a support structure that they provide for each other, as shown in doing common activities together (*bareng*). With the freedom (*kebebasan*) that they enjoy in Batam being removed from their families, the women self-regulate their actions and behaviour so as not to be shamed (*malu*) with their friends.

The everyday, long term habituation to the factory regime results in a process of transition which incorporates the worker into the capitalistic mode

of production (Warouw, 2008). However, this incorporation is never complete since these women see their migratory employment in Batam as only temporary, with most of them returning to their villages after the end of their contract, usually after two or three years. Furthermore, throughout their sojourn in Batam, these women always seek to reconnect with their pre-factory existence of life in the village. As shown via my interviews, the women experience homesickness (*kangen*) and ease it by seeking familiar symbols that serve as portable icons to reconnect them back to their home villages.

In the next chapter, it is argued that women make the ideal workforce as they are assumed to be disciplined, nimble-fingered, careful and docile. I will explore how such a stereotype emerged by analysing the Indonesian discourse on women which affects the management's recruitment practices which in turn translates to gendered work practices on the factory floor.

## *Chapter 4 - Towards a Gendered Discourse of Work*

### **Women's Work in Export Processing Zones**

In recent times, the establishment of free trade zones and industrial estates in developing countries in Asia and Latin America has led to scholarly attention that is focused on women's industrial work. With the shift of many Third World countries to export-oriented production for global markets, Saptari (2000) highlights that scholars have focused on issues such as the 'impact of new factories on labour force composition, the nature of the labour market, the gendered division of labour and class consciousness, and the relation within family structures'. These issues arise within the context of multinational corporations, in collaboration with the state, taking advantage of and reinforcing women's structurally subordinated position within the labour market and the family by adopting 'discriminatory hiring practices, paying women lower wages and placing them in repetitive monotonous tasks with no job security or advancement opportunities' (Saptari, 2000:148).

In the 1990s, the gender composition manufacturing industries within FTZs shows a predominance of women. In numerical terms, according to Tjandraningsih (2000), the labour force participation of women is increasing. As explained in the previous chapter, women workers in these industries are mainly young and single in the 19-25 age group. The large-scale entry of women into these global factories brought with it a proliferation of literature



that attempted to explain and document this phenomenon. The salient questions that need to be asked in the context of this labour structure in export processing zones are: (1) why do manufacturing factories in export processing zones prefer to employ women? (2) What then are the concomitant effects of this large scale entry of women into these global factories? In the process of answering these questions, it is my contention that it is not simply a case of women being a source of cheap labour or women as being highly suited to factory work by virtue of being 'nimble-fingered' (Elson & Pearson, 1981) as there are deeper underlying processes, such as the discursive formation of gender and labour, that shape the current situation.

According to Caraway (2007) theorists never fail to highlight two factors as crucial in generating the waves of feminization that swept through much of the developing world after World War II - changes in the new international division of labour (NIDL) and women's low wages.

“In the late 1960's and early 1970s, multinational corporations began to relocate labor intensive assembly operations from developed countries to cheaper production sites overseas. At the same time, export-oriented industrialization (EOI) became the favored development policies in many developing countries. These twin occurrences generated higher demand for cheap and easily exploitable labor to fuel export drives. Since exporters competed in global markets, they were extremely sensitive to labor costs, with immense gendered consequences. Exporters were especially keen to hire women, because their subordination to men meant that they could be paid low wages. (...)EOI and patriarchy thus combined to make women the ideal workforce in countries that relied on exports to propel industrialization drives”

(Caraway, 2007: 16)

In the early 90s, scholars argued that the main factor driving the feminization of labour is due to the fact that women are a ready source of cheap labour. However, the argument that 'women make cheap labour' can be overturned upon the premise that women can in fact incur extra costs that make their labour more expensive compared to men. For example in Indonesia, women received more generous overtime bonuses for night shifts than men, and women were entitled to two days of paid menstruation leave every month and three months of paid maternity leave with wages paid by the employer, rather than the state (Caraway, 2007). Despite the costs associated, employers remained keen to employ women. Hence the wage argument alone is insufficient to account for the preference for employing women for jobs in the manufacturing sector.

One of the reasons why women are seen as 'cheap labour' is that they are often thought to go into manufacturing work that is regarded as 'unskilled' which justifies the lower remuneration. Furthermore, they are also stereotyped as having the innate ability to perform certain tasks in the factory such as sewing since they have already been domestically trained at home. However, this can be refuted because women's work in the manufacturing sector requires a lot of skill that demands training, and most tasks are not characteristics innately found in women or traditionally performed in households. To prove such a point, according to Wolf (1992), the proliferation

of institutes to train workers to sew proves that sewing is not an innately female characteristic. Furthermore, a factory manager of a semiconductor factory whom I interviewed, Yus, informed me that they employ about 80% of women in the factory and they perform tasks such as soldering, a skill that women probably never had to engage in traditionally at home. The women, who work as production operators, would have to undergo extensive training which teaches them skills like soldering and semiconductor assembly before they are able to work on the factory floor. Therefore, since there is a need for such skills, the work that they perform cannot be seen to be of lower skill compared to men. In fact these women were performing skilled work because excluding the factory managers or supervisors who were mostly men, the other men are described by the factory manager as being '*buruh kasar*', performing heavy, more labour-intensive work such as moving bulky items.

One of the earliest arguments proposed by scholars in explaining the factory employers' preference for hiring women was by Elson and Pearson (1981) who argued that women's 'nimble fingers' were the reason for their recruitment. This is further proposed by Chant and McIlwaine (1995) that 'women are thought to be more dexterous than men and capable of finishing work at high speed'. Tjandraningsih, however, offers the explanation that the target-output system of factories may be the underlying reason why women workers are seen as being capable of working faster and being more industrious as well as being more disciplined. In such a system, only by working faster and harder can they obtain more money , and in this context,

the stereotype of women working harder and faster than men is not attributable to their 'natural propensities' but instead is a consequence of the way the work is organized (Tjandraningsih, 2000:262). Yus also describes the shop floor as having boards that track the productivity of the operators and their teams, which are known as 'key performance indicators' or KPIs to encourage the workers to strive to reach the targeted output as dictated by the work order set by the company.

Caraway further unpacks and complicates these arguments stating that though they contain a grain of truth, women's low wages are only a partial explanation why employers in labour-intensive sectors hire women. How then, do we account for the feminization of labour? I borrow from her argument that 'gendered discourses of work—ideas about men and women as distinct types of labour—are necessary to explain the drive towards the feminization of labour. However, before I visit that concept, I find it necessary to highlight why it is important to problematize and give focus to 'gender' when dealing with labour migration studies, a position that was never emphasized until the contribution of ethnographic studies.

In the next part of this chapter, based on my review of the literature, I argue that the feminization of labour in Indonesia is facilitated by institutions at three different levels: the state's ideology with regard to labour as well as its discourse on women; gendered recruitment practices at the factory management level, and lastly supply factors such as improved education

levels. These main factors facilitated the feminization of labour in manufacturing industries in Indonesia, where between the years 1971 to 1994, the percentage of women involved in manufacturing work increased substantially from 37 per cent to 51 per cent (Caraway, 2007).

The state played a major role in facilitating the feminization of labour at two levels. Firstly, the New Order state played an active role in demobilizing independent unions, and emasculating Islamic social and political organizations that opposed the expansion of women into manufacturing work by questioning the morality of the women with respect to their migration and factory work. Such was the case in majority-Muslim Malaysia in the 1960s and 70s when an unprecedented migration of women to industrial towns was a socio-cultural shock for many, resulting in the labelling of factory women as *minah karan* (electric women) associated with loose morals and sexual promiscuity (Daud, 1985; Ong, 1987). However, in contrast to the case of Malaysia, the Islam practised in Indonesia does not place many restrictions on women's labour force activities, and this was a factor which facilitated the feminization of labour in the manufacturing industry in Indonesia.

Further, what contributed to the hiring of women in the manufacturing sector was the production of the stereotypical image of women as ideal workers. I argue that the stereotypical, gendered image of the female factory worker is articulated at two levels. The first level is the state's discourse on gender which is articulated via the notion of *kodrat wanita*. Secondly, the

stereotypical, gendered image of nimble-fingered, docile female worker is articulated at the level of management discourse based on recruitment practices adopted.

Lastly the rapid feminization of labour in Indonesia would not have occurred if not for the growth in the supply of better-educated workers. The New Order policies which promoted education resulted in a better-educated workforce across the board, both men and women. However, it is apparent that the availability of qualified, educated female labour greatly facilitated the feminization process in Indonesia.

### **Bringing Gender to the Core: Recognizing the Sexual Division of Labour**

Mahler and Pessar (2006) argue that gender as a category has not gotten the focus or attention that it so greatly deserves within the study of labour migration studies. Their contention is that some researchers simply incorporated 'gender' by inserting sex as a variable when collecting quantitative data. They maintain however that ethnographic scholarship has made significant contributions towards bringing gender centrally into the field of migration studies.

Gender is the meaning people give to the biological reality that there are two sexes. It is a human intervention that organizes our behaviour and thought, not as a set of static structures or roles but as an ongoing process. People do "gender work"; through practices and discourses they negotiate relationships and conflicting interests.

Conceptualizing gender as a process yields a more praxis-oriented perspective wherein gender identities, relations, and ideologies are fluid, not fixed.

(Mahler & Passer, 2006: 29)

Therefore, gender should not be equated to sex as it is a principal factor that organizes social life, but in everyday discourse, it can be taken-for-granted as it may operate so seemingly “naturally” that it escapes our awareness. Therefore, Mahler and Pessar argue that in order to ‘measure its effects we must first see gender operating’. Furthermore it is important not only to recognize gender and how it operates, but explore or at the very least problematize it, as it cannot be viewed and analyzed in isolation, but rather, gender is dynamic and it ‘articulates with other axes of differentiation in complex ways’ (Mahler & Pessar, 2006).

Elias (2005) in her work on factory women in Malaysia also highlights the importance of applying ‘gender-sensitive lenses’ to show that certain state-level or firm-level policies are rarely gender-neutral, as I will also propose in my discussion of the construction of women’s roles in the Indonesian discourse of gender, as well as the discursive formation of gendered work which segregates the different roles of ‘men’s work’ and ‘women’s work’.

## The New Order State's repression of labour resistance (1965-1998)

Part of the attraction that Indonesia has for international capital is its large, low-wage labour force. Robison (1986:71) points out that export-oriented industrialization require a higher level of state involvement in disciplining labour. While keeping wages low to maintain its comparative advantage, the New Order state sought to control the labour force by demobilizing unions. In an effort to lure foreign investors, the Indonesian government advertised one of the lowest average wage rates in Asia and proclaimed that workers were controlled by the state, which outlawed strikes.

The New Order state played an active role in paralyzing unions and suppressing labour unrest. Following the alleged coup in October 1965 and the counter coup that brought Suharto into power, trade unions were banned and by 1973, Suharto formed the nominal union *Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia* (FBSI)<sup>10</sup>. This newly formed labour union which represented all the remaining labour groups did not represent labour and its interests but rather existed to 'demobilize rather than mobilize labour, on behalf of the state' (Hadiz, 1997: 92).

Wolf (1992) further demonstrated that strikes and lock-outs were strictly forbidden by the government because they were not in harmony with the state philosophy of labour relations as listed in the Pancasila. According to

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<sup>10</sup>All-Indonesia Labour Federation, later renamed SPSI (*Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* or All-Indonesia Worker's Union).



the Pancasila state ideology, strikes were seen as being opposed to national development and irreconcilable to national goals and therefore, unnecessary. This has been much criticized by commentators such as the Asia Watch Committee who argued that Suharto attempted to stifle independent factory-level workers' unions. The main purpose of Pancasila Labour Relations had been to obfuscate the inherent conflict of interest between labour and management and this inevitable dissent was thus condemned as being anti-consensus. Therefore, being anti-Pancasila was tantamount to being subversive. Commentators lament that the climate of fear and intimidation is in itself an abuse of the rights of the workers in Indonesia.

The authoritarian nature of state politics in Indonesia fits closely to the model of the 'exclusionary labour regime' as practised in other East Asia and Southeast Asia countries especially in Singapore and Malaysia. Therefore, by 'depoliticizing' society, the Indonesian state in the 1970s demobilized labour movements by creating a tame union firmly under state control. With the weakness of the national union FBSI, there was hardly any opposition to employers hiring large amounts of female labour in their manufacturing factories. Caraway (2007) therefore argues that the demobilization of unions and political parties in the early 1970s set the political preconditions for feminization. The curbing of labour unions' activities effectively decreased the incidence of labour strikes and a docile labour workforce was an appealing feature for foreign investors. Therefore, the state had effectively designed a

policy to attract foreign investment by limiting the space of labour organization.

Also, since Indonesia was a predominantly Muslim country, religious sanctions about women's proper role in society may affect socio-cultural views of women and curtail their employment in the manufacturing sector. This was especially the case in Malaysia in the 1970s. Such was the case in majority-Muslim Malaysia in the 1960s and 70s when an unprecedented migration of women to industrial towns was a socio-cultural shock for many. Factory girls were known as 'minah karan' (electric women), being associated with loose morals and sexual promiscuity (Daud, 1985; Ong, 1987), as a reaction towards the social change that occurred in that time as a woman's economic role away from home was somewhat unheard of, since there would be no familial paternal figure to morally police these women. Caraway (2007) argues however that the Islam as practiced in Indonesia did not particularly restrict women's role in society and imposed few restrictions on their public activities. Even if religious organizations were to oppose social change, Suharto's active depoliticization of religious groups 'successfully co-opted, neutralized, sidelined, or repressed the main Islamic organizations in the country' (Caraway, 2002: 162).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For a full, detailed discussion on the depoliticization of labour unions and Islamic religious groups, one may refer to Caraway's (2002) dissertation on "Engendering Industrialization: The Feminization of Factory Work in Indonesia".

## Indonesian Discourse on Gender

Though Indonesia is a land of great ethnic and cultural diversity, it is still possible to discuss a gendered discourse which is national in character. Considering this may provide a theoretical grounding which can later be linked to the gendered discourses of work in the factory.

Caraway (2007) discusses Indonesian gendered discourses as 'national' instead of local (e.g., Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese). According to her, though intrinsic cultural gender variations remain, an Indonesian discourse on gender has emerged via the formation of the national state which moulds gender relations via law, public policy and public decrees. She quotes Suryakusuma, who writes:

... (an) all-pervasive state... provides the structure for the development of a specific gender ideology which provides the official definition of how Indonesian women should be.

(Suryakusuma, 1987:6)

Caraway further provides evidence from Blackwood (1995) to bolster the fact that 'gender representations emanating from state policies and programs, in conjunction with modernist Islamic discourse in national publications both create new gendered identities in Indonesia and partially eclipse local gendered practices', not discounting the fact that the Javanese influence is

very strong given Java's predominance in government and its cultural and political hegemony over other regions (Caraway, 2007:106).

Wieringa (2003) writes that a clash of masculinities resulted from the political struggle between the Sukarno's Old Order state (1945-1967) and Suharto's New Order state (1967-1998), with both parties having their own contrasting ideas on the role of women and their ideal families. She writes that:

The PKI had built a hybrid construct called the "Manipol" family, composed of Sukarnoist and socialist rhetoric. The word "Manipol" comes from "Manifesto Politik", Sukarno's 17 August 1959 independence day speech. Women in such ideal families supported their men as revolutionary fighters for a bright socialist future, while struggling along in their own women's organization, Gerwani, which also claimed a role in the national political arena. They combined political, socialist, and nationalist activities with their duties in the household. Suharto's development state consisted of families in which women were loyal wives and educators of children. They were responsible for the strict obedience of the family as a whole to the patriarchal, authoritarian, national ideology Suharto imposed on the nation. For this project, women's sexuality had to be controlled and women's organizations now policed women's obedience.

(Wieringa, 2003)

Other writers like Tiwon (1996) also argue along similar lines that the New Order state adopted a discourse of separate but equal gender roles and emphasized the nurturing and selfless qualities of motherhood over other aspects of women's identities. She narrates this via the case of Kartini, a forward-thinking and revolutionary Javanese princess during the colonial times who epitomized the vision of women's proper place in society. The

Suharto regime however played down her active and independent qualities and instead produced an image of a nurturing and self-sacrificing Kartini that perfectly matched the New Order's discourse on women. The role of women in Indonesian society can be summarized in one term as suggested by Suryakusuma (1987), of 'state Ibuism' which sanctions any selfless action taken by a mother in looking after her family, a group, a class, a company, or the state. Prior to the New Order regime, women were never defined as mothers or housewives, but the regime put in force this particular definition.

A core element underlying the national discourse on women is the term *kodrat wanita* which can be loosely translated as a women's moral code (Wieringa, 2003:70) or divinely assigned female gender role (Nilan & Utari, 2008:137). *Kodrat* comes up repeatedly in discussions about the proper roles of women. The *kodrat* of Indonesian women prescribed that they should be meek, passive, obedient to the male members of the family, sexually shy and modest, self-sacrificing and nurturing. To this end, their main vocation was wifehood and motherhood (Wieringa, 2003: 75).

Hence Caraway argues that the *kodrat* sets a precedent in shaping dichotomous relations between male and female nature, which then gets translated to and is used to justify gendered practices in society, including in this work, the factory. She argues that 'the subterranean foundation of gendered discourses of work in Indonesia is *kodrat*' (108).

## **Discursive formation of Gender and Labour - “Men’s Work” and “Women’s Work”**

Beechey (1988) attempts to analyze the complex set of changes which accompanied the feminization of labour. She considers some of the questions which arise when one attempts to analyse gender at work and to look at the processes of restructuring in gendered terms. She approaches these gender divisions by using a Marxist analysis of deskilling, and dual and segmented labour market theories. These tools of analysis are useful in an examination of manufacturing work rather than service work, which is relevant to my research of the feminization of labour in Indonesia, specifically the export-led manufacturing industry in Batam. She argues that gender relations are ‘embodied’ in the organization of production. Beechey makes several points and highlight several arguments that critique the Marxist analyses of deskilling and the dual and segmented labour market theories. The most important and relevant point that she brings up is that her contemporaries wanted to highlight the issue that the labour market is not a sexually neutral entity and that gender relations are embodied in the very organization of production.

The argument that the labour market is not a sexually-neutral entity is premised on the fact (with underlying Marxian influence) that economic institutions are modelled and articulated with other institutions that sustain gender inequalities in modern capitalist societies, for example the family, the education system and the state. Secondly, gender relations are interwoven

with production relations at the level of the labour process, and thus the division of labour itself embodies gender relations which are manifested in the system of occupational segregation. This fits in well with Caraway's (2007) conception of the feminization of labour and the nature of gendered work which emerges via the discursive formation of gender and labour.

There have been paradigmatic shifts in the changes in the structure of the labour force and the organization of paid work in modern capitalist countries. The forms of restructuring have varied from country to country, but overall the division of labour has become increasingly internationalized, while new technologies have been introduced on a large scale. Indonesia is not removed from this fact. However, while Beechey (1988) talks about the move to de-industrialize and towards service work which is the case for most advanced capitalist countries, countries like Indonesia have yet to reach that stage of deindustrialization now and are still following the export-led industrialization strategy. However it can be seen that the feminization of the labour force is a very important structural change, which happened to the advanced industrialized countries in the 1970s, but which Indonesia only experienced in the 1980's when it began to follow its export-led industrialization strategy. .

When asked why females were the main production workers in the biscuit factory, the manager responded, "After all, who makes the bread at home?" Probably no one, given the rice-based diet of most Javanese.

(Wolf, 1992: 123)

An omnipresent fact of industrial life is the categorization of jobs in a factory as “men’s work” and “women’s work”, since they seldom do the same jobs. Often, the literature suggests that such profound gender segregation is rooted in the gendered discourse of work. Caraway (2007) adopts the concept of ‘gendered discourses of work’ to capture these ideas that employers hold about men and women workers.

Authors usually account for certain tasks being delegated to women either due to widely held stereotypes of women’s abilities or that these women do innately possess certain traits that certain tasks are considered ‘women’s work’. For example, sewing is considered as women’s work as it is a domestic task performed traditionally by women, who are believed to be “nimble-fingered”. Caraway argues that whether the women actually possess these traits is irrelevant, but the crucial point is that the employers believe that they do.

In order to account for this, Caraway argues that ‘the gendered worker on the shop floor is created in part through the discourses produced by the management about gendered workers’.

From a Foucauldian perspective the issue is not whether the women are patient, disciplined, and diligent but that the subject of the woman worker as patient, disciplined, and diligent worker is produced through discourse.

(Caraway, 2007: 30)



Post-structural feminists have called for special attention to be paid to how gendered subjects are created relationally through discourse, giving rise to dichotomous relations between male and female workers. This view is reproduced several times in most of the works that I reviewed on women and factory work. Figure 4.1 below outlines the characteristics of male and female workers which come up repeatedly when discussing the gender segregation of work tasks in factories.

Figure 4.1: Characteristics of male and female workers in binary oppositions

Male workers	Female workers
Careless	Careful
Lazy	Diligent
Undisciplined	Disciplined
Strong	Weak
Heavy	Light

(Caraway, 2007:30)

Wolf (1992) also echoed similar sentiments. In her research site, females were mostly hired in industries such as textiles, spinning, garments and food processing whereas in contrast, males worked in jobs that required more physical exertion such as the bus, furniture and glassware factories. In predominantly female factories, males were assigned to jobs which were considered more mechanical, technical or perceived to be heavier work, while women were involved in menial, repetitive tasks because they are assumed to be disciplined and patient enough to perform these tasks.

While these themes are explored theoretically and proven via each writer's field research, how true is this within my research site? It is important to test whether such gender-segregated task relations exist, via my interviews with the factory managers.

Discourse both structures how and forms a lens through which subjects in the factory view the labor process; discourse is both created and re-created—and possibly changed—by practice on the shop floor.

(Caraway, 2007: 30)

It is not surprising that all five of the factory managers I interviewed echoed similar stances when asked why the factories preferred to hire mostly female factory workers and to explain the type of work that they perform. All five mentioned that for the labour force in their factories, females accounted for 80% of production operators, and males and females were seldom, or almost never, mixed to perform the same tasks.

In the manufacturing factories located in BatamIndo Industrial Park, the female workers are young and single, aged 18-24, and reaching the age of 25 will signal the end of their career. When probed why the factories preferred to hire young females, Yus explains bluntly:

'We hire most women at that age because we prefer to hire single women who wouldn't have familial responsibilities. When they do not have a family to return to, their time after work can be further put into overtime hours. This just makes more sense in terms of workers' productivity.'

(Yus, personal interview, 2008)

In fact, because their basic wage rate is about 1 to 1.2 million rupiah a month, most of the workers supplement their income by putting in overtime hours. Two of the factories work in shifts and there are three, 8-hour-long shifts in total; 8am-4pm, 4pm-12am, and 12am-8am. These are production-intensive factories, producing semiconductors and television tuners, so the high demand means that they continue to operate 24 hours a day. Working overtime is common amongst the workers, especially when there is pressure to meet the production targets and factory workers can expect to earn generous overtime pay of up to double their basic wage rate.

The other factory deals with checking finished goods for quality control. As the work is not so intensive, their working hours are from 8am to 5pm. However, when there is pressure to meet deadlines, workers are expected to perform overtime in this factory as well. As this factory is not so labour intensive, the average age of the women is higher, and Pardjo explains that most of the workers in his factory are older women who have reached the end of their career in other factories. Therefore, almost half of the female workers in his factory are above 25.

When asked why their factories prefer to hire mostly females instead of males, Fardi explains:

Men are more impatient. In order to do a repetitive task, they will not do it properly. Maybe they can do well for the first few TV tuners, but to sit there for 8 hours doing the same strenuous task, they will get

impatient. But for women they will be more focused. The women will ensure that they do the work properly but also do it fast. Women are just better at these tasks that require focus. They are also patient to perform the same task over and over again for a whole shift.

(Fardi, personal interview, 2008)

Yus also argues, along the same line of reasoning, that manual labour is suited to men, whereas mental, repetitive tasks are more suited to women:

We need 3000 people in my company, to do that kind of job. Let's say that if the job is handled by men. The problem would lie in the clash between men and men. Men do not have the patience to perform these tasks and they may get angry or frustrated and they might vent their frustration on each other. In other environments like shipyards, yes, they need men because it is more to hard, manual work. Some jobs are suited for men, some job are suited for women. Female workers are better because they are more focused on doing their task well.

(Yus, personal interview, 2008)

Therefore in summary, whether young, single women are truly docile and nimble-fingered is irrelevant but it is significant that, at least within my research site, the factory managers do possess a stereotypical view of them and actively employ gender segregation techniques when assigning tasks for male and female workers. The argument for doing so is that according to them, there are certain tasks that are suited for males, such as tasks that require hard, physical labour like moving goods or maintaining the machinery, and other tasks that are suited for women, those that require focus and discipline. Therefore, women and men are defined in a series of binary oppositions as I have mentioned, careful/careless, disciplined/undisciplined, performing light work/heavy work, focused/unfocused. Such stereotyping is

justified by these managers as doing so, according to them, enhances productivity levels. Due to the competitive nature of global manufacturing, factories maintain high production levels at the lowest possible cost. Low wages explain part of the argument why they prefer to hire females, but the other argument is also that females are considered more docile, patient, disciplined and nimble-fingered than men and are therefore more productive, which makes “rational” economic sense to these factory managers at the end of the day. Embedded within this stereotype of docility is the belief in the female *kodrat*, according to which women are believed to be meek, passive and obedient to the ‘male members of the family’. In this case, the male members of the family are their factory supervisors who are mostly male. Women are also more self-sacrificing, and are more willing to perform overtime hours to meet targets.

## **Increased female labour force participation rates due to better educational levels**

One of the main factors that facilitated the increased female labour force participation rate in Indonesia in the 1980s and 1990s was the improvement in women's educational levels. Caraway (2007) points out that the New Order regime emphasized and expanded primary and secondary schooling and the educational levels for both men and women rose substantially. This made the labour force appealing to large industrial employers as they preferred to hire employees with at least high school education. Caraway highlights data from 1971 which show that at that time, nationwide, only 9 per cent of women and 13 per cent of men between the ages of 15 and 19 had completed junior high school while 6 per cent of women and 12 per cent of men between the ages of 20 and 24 had completed junior high school. However by 1980, there were large jumps in the percentage of senior high school graduates for both women and men and by 1990, when the export drive began to take off, between 24 to 42 per cent of women in the 15-19 age group had completed junior high school and in the 20-24 age group, between 17 and 41 per cent of women had completed junior high school.

The effect of the expansion of primary and secondary schooling was to create a pool of better educated workers, especially a ready pool of educated female workers. This therefore greatly facilitated the feminization of labour in the 1980s and 1990s when Indonesia shifted towards an export oriented policy.

## Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to summarize the existing literature which accounts for the factors which facilitated the feminization process in the manufacturing industry in Indonesia. The main factors highlighted in this section were namely: the role of the New Order State in depoliticizing labour unions and religious organizations that may curtail female labour force participation rates, and also the fact that the expansion of educational opportunities under the New Order government resulted in increased female labour force participation rates due to women's better educational levels. Furthermore, the state's gendered discourse has shaped and defined the gender role of women. The latter can be said to influence the gendered discourse of work, where the gendered worker on the shop floor is created in part through the discourses produced by the management about gendered workers. This hence created the segregation between 'men's work' and women's work'. I have traced and analyzed this same gendered discourse as it is revealed in my interviews with the factory managers, who reiterated the stereotypes of females being better workers as they are more careful, disciplined and patient, compared to male workers who are careless, undisciplined and impatient.

Therefore the Indonesian discourse on gender greatly affects the discourse on labour in factories. The *kodrat* outlines women as passive and this governs how they are to enact their gender performance in their work,

hence bracketing the limits of possibility defined for them. How then do workers react to factory disciplines, policies and dissatisfaction with their low wages? What happens when these women subvert their roles and employ their various techniques of resistance to revolt against the capitalist discipline? And how does the management account for such instances, when these women are believed to be a docile and disciplined labour force? This will be the subject of my next chapter.



## *Chapter 5: Techniques of Resistance against the Capitalist Discipline*

### **Introduction**

One of the most interesting themes in terms of the sociology of work, especially with regard to academic discussion of factory workers, is the issue of work discipline and the control of the labour force. Here we can witness the dynamics between capitalists (management) and labour (production workers) where the capitalists struggle to discipline and control the labour force, and in this relation of power, the labour force struggles in reaction to factory discipline.

This chapter will deal with acts of resistance against the capitalist discipline. Resistance may manifest itself on different scales, from large macro-resistances to micro-resistances at the level of the everyday. Micro-resistances may be thought of more as instances of 'everyday resistance', an idea initially developed by James Scott:

Everyday forms of resistance makes no headlines. Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own. There is rarely any dramatic confrontation, any moment that is particularly newsworthy.... Their safety lies in their anonymity. It is *also* extremely rare that officials of the state wish to publicise the insubordination.

(Scott, 1986:8)

Scott's work on the everyday forms of peasant resistance in a Malaysian rice-farming village marked a departure in the study of resistance, which usually dealt with more open, direct confrontations that typically dominate the literature. Scott justifies that this technique of resistance is suited for the agrarian class. He argues that the form of resistance that the agrarian class that he studied employed reflected the conditions and constraints in which they are generated. Due to the scarcity of resources and the precariousness of their livelihood, such acts need to be concealed and it is precisely due to the clandestine nature of their acts that go unnoticed that render them successful. Though his work was centred upon peasants and the struggle with class consciousness, his conceptualization of everyday resistance opened up the site of discussion when ruminating about the diversity in the forms of resistance. The idea of everyday resistance can then be applied in the context of the coping mechanisms of the factory workers where these techniques are used as 'ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups' as has been done so by many (Daud, 1985; Ong, 1987; Wolf, 1992; Tjandraningsih, 1995; Andriyani, 1996; Smith and Grijns, 1997).

Numerous studies have detailed women's responses to their experiences of work in factories, including acts of 'everyday resistance', which Ford refers to as 'the women's daily, unorganized responses to the conditions under which they work' (Ford, 2003: 99). Much has been written about the 'everyday resistance' of women factory workers in Indonesia which include production slowdowns, frequent and extended visits to the toilet, absenteeism and episodic visions of ghosts and spirits (Andriyani, 1996; Smith and Grijns, 1997; Tjandraningsih, 1995; Wolf, 1992). These acts of 'everyday resistance' may escalate into the staging of spontaneous strikes or *unjuk rasa* (demonstrations of feelings) via mass absenteeism and stayouts as a form of overt labour strike. As much as these studies offer great insight into the coping, reactive strategies of these women against issues such as factory discipline, policies and low wages, a critique of these studies show that academics do not adequately define the term 'resistance' nor problematize it as a concept. Healey further posits:

Yet without a conscious expression of what constitutes resistance, analysts are often on shaky ground, in danger of foisting their own categories of thought and accompanying anxieties onto others.

(Healey, 1999:50)

Healey's (1999) critique of Ong's (1987) seminal work on electronic factory workers is an example of 'subjective ambivalence' (Ortner, 1995:175) in the conceptualization of resistance. Ong argues that that women's resistance to

their work conditions is manifest in spirit possession and hysterical outbursts. Healey argues however that 'the outbursts are explained in highly individualistic terms' in which Healey perceives the possessed as acting 'unconsciously 'and as a result 'the observer (Ong) knows more than the possessed herself. Herein lies one of the problems of the definition of resistance which raises questions such as: does the act need to be intended as resistance by the actor (workers)?

It is precisely this 'subjective ambivalence' as well as the lack of consensus on the definition of the term 'resistance' that prompted Hollander and Einwohner (2004) to review and synthesize the diverse literatures that invoke the concept of 'resistance'.

### **Conceptualizing resistance**

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) pointedly note that though there is a rapid proliferation of scholarship on resistance, there however exists little consensus on the definition of the term. Despite frequent scholarly usage of the term, many invoke the term resistance but fail to systematically define it. This is a major pitfall, since for the concept to be useful, it is important to define its conceptual parameters. Hollander and Einwohner hence attempt to review and synthesize existing literature on resistance and offer a conceptual definition of the term as well as providing a typology of resistance.

Hollander and Einwohner admit that there is diversity in the definition and manifestation of resistance. Reviewing the literature, resistance may be physical (working slowly, feigning sickness), or material (stealing from one's employer) or via other symbolic behaviour (oral narratives, dance) or even a lack of reaction (silence as a form of resistance). Resistance can also vary in scale, since acts may be individual (absence from work due to feigning illness) or collective (mass absenteeism).

By documenting the diverse phenomena that have been referred to as resistance, Hollander and Einwohner note in particular that there are two recurring issues in the discussions about the definition of resistance: recognition and intent. They use these two issues to develop seven distinct types of resistance in their typology.

Hollander and Einwohner pose the question, 'must oppositional action be readily apparent to others, and must it in fact be recognized as resistance?' They bring the example of Scott's (1985) research on peasant politics by drawing attention to what he calls 'everyday' resistance. Scott argues that by virtue of lacking resources openly to protest against their superordinates, more common "everyday" forms of resistance, for example foot-dragging, pilfering and sabotage, qualifies as a strategy of resistance. These techniques are low-profile and may go unnoticed by the powerful and hence unrecognized by the target as resistance. Hence the question: Does

resistance need to be recognized by the targets or observers in order to qualify as such?

One of the most contentious issues in the scholarly discussion of resistance is the intent behind the acts of resistance: ‘must the actor be aware that she or he is resisting some sort of power—and intending to do so—for an action to qualify as resistance?’ (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:542). This brings us back to the example that I have raised earlier of Ong’s study on spirit possession amongst factory workers. Does it qualify as resistance, even though the possessed may be acting “unconsciously” (which in itself may be a point of contention)?

Therefore utilizing the matrix of intent and recognition by actors, targets and observers, Hollander and Einwohner developed a typology of seven distinct types of resistance, namely: overt resistance, covert resistance, unwitting resistance, target-defined resistance, externally defined resistance, missed resistance, attempted resistance, and not resistance<sup>12</sup>, as summarized in table 5.1:

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<sup>12</sup> For an insightful and more in-depth discussion of the various types of resistance, refer to Hollander & Einwohner’s (2004) work on ‘Conceptualizing resistance’ in *Sociological Forum*, 19(4):533-554.

Table 5.1: Types of resistance

	Is act intended as resistance by actor?	Is act recognized as resistance by	
		target?	observer?
Overt resistance	Yes	Yes	Yes
Covert resistance	Yes	No	Yes
Unwitting resistance	No	Yes	Yes
Target-defined resistance	No	Yes	No
Externally-defined resistance	No	No	Yes
Missed resistance	Yes	Yes	No
Attempted resistance	Yes	No	No
Not resistance	No	No	No

Source: Hollander & Einwohner, 2004:544

Using the above matrix as an analytical tool of enquiry, Scott's (1985) use of 'everyday resistance' can be classified as a type of covert resistance in which acts go unnoticed by the target, though they can be recognized as resistance by other culturally aware observers. Also, in the case of Ong's (1987) research, incidents of spirit possession by the workers may be either classified as externally defined resistance, acts that are neither intended nor recognized by the target but labelled as resistance by third parties, if the spirit possession is deemed an unconscious act or again, covert resistance if indeed their action is consciously intended to be an act of resistance. Other than categorizing the diversity of acts of resistance, the matrix also defines that if a certain act is not intended by the actor as resistance or recognized by the target or observer as resistance, it is definitely not a form of resistance.

Therefore in my research in analyzing the labour relations between capitalists (management) and labour (workers), I collected my data not only by interviewing the factory workers, in order to understand their subjectivities and exercise of agency in the 'intent' of their resistance, I also interviewed factory managers so as to understand what they understood or recognized as acts of resistance by the workers. In doing so, I would be able to take the analysis to a higher level by categorizing the types of resistances occurring and how this affects the power dynamics between labour and capital.

### **The Capitalist Discipline**

In analysing struggles between management and labour, I apply Foucault's theory of disciplinary power to both the labour process as well as the 'body and psyche of the labouring subject' (Sakolsky, 1992:114).

Sakolsky defines Foucault's concept of 'discipline' such that:

Discipline may be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of applications, targets; it is a "physics" or an "anatomy" of power, a technology.

(Foucault, 1979:215 in Sakolsky, 1992:114)

Sakolsky also posits that capitalism can be analyzed in Foucauldian terms as a power/knowledge regime, which employs the use of 'discourses' to



legitimize the labor process and 'disciplinary practices' applied on the body and psyche of the labouring subject in order to control the mode of production.

One of the disciplinary techniques in the early factories was the 'disciplinary gaze' derived from Bentham's Panopticon. Surveillance has since become a mainstay in managerial function in modern factories today. In fact, the modern factory still employs Taylorism as a form of scientific management of its workers, with supervisory surveillance of its workers to ensure productiveness, the prescription of standard operating procedures and ensuring the standard of productivity by employing and disseminating information such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that track the productivity of each worker.

It is also argued that disciplinary practice is a site, not a source of power. Therefore, as much as capitalists are able to assert their repressive power in order to demand compliance from the labouring subject, the power can be productive and conducive, on the part of the workers, to certain forms of dissent. For example, while the capitalists arrange the women in close proximity on assembly lines on the factory floor to effectively monitor their productivity, this proximity also enables them to form solidarity and react against factory policies together, employing techniques such as production slowdowns. As I shall show, female workers, via their everyday practices, find various means to show their dissatisfaction towards the management.

## Indonesia's Industrial Relations System During the New Order

The New Order government was determined to control the trade union movement and minimize labour unrest. Manning (1998) highlighted three developments that affected the industrial relations processes: the destruction of the communist party (PKI) and the ascendancy of the military, the banning of the leftist union (SOBSI) and the removal of its leaders from industrial relations, and a severing of ties between unions and political parties (except ruling GOLKAR party). There was heavy curtailment of labour rights through government controls and a military intervention in industrial relations.

After a period of political consolidation, an ideological framework of *Pancasila* labour relations was agreed upon by 'approved' union leaders, government and employer representatives to guide labour management relations. Underlying this was a rejection of an adversarial approach to conflict resolution between workers and management. Instead, the emphasis was on common goals, cooperation and conciliation based on family principles (*kekeluargaan*). Indonesia followed the international trend towards tripartite and bipartite industrial relations systems and employer and union cooperation.

The Suharto regime opted for a government-controlled, national trade union organization, the All-Indonesia Labour Federation, FBSI (later the SPSI) in 1973. It was modelled on national unions in other countries, such as the

National Trade Unions Congress in Singapore and the Federation of South Korean Trade Unions (Hadiz, 1998). The national body was entrusted with coordination role, determination of policy and support for the establishment of enterprise unions and the completion of collective labour agreements. Since its establishment it has become a large organization, and membership amounted to approximately one million in the early 1990s, and unions were represented in approximately one-third of all larger enterprises. However, only 3-5 per cent of all employees and 5-10 per cent of manufacturing employees were nominal members of a union in the early 1990s, a level of unionization lower than during the Sukarno period (Manning, 1998).

Therefore, promoting the interests of employers and workers depended on the government's willingness to allow the SPSI to develop as an independent body, and resolve disputes on behalf of its members. However, the SPSI emerged rather as a tool for the government control of organized labour, rather than representing the workers' interests in negotiating with employers.

Manning (1998) illustrates that the number of strikes was tiny in the period from the 1950s to the late 1970s, but grew significantly in 1979-1982 in response to a spate of retrenchments and the rising cost of living associated with inflation. Partly in response to actions taken by a new hard-line Minister of Manpower, it declined again to low numbers for the rest of 1980s. However, the labour peace did not last until the 1990s. There was strong criticism

regarding the government's labour record as manufacturing exports took off in the late 1980s. With increased strike activity that followed the economic and political crisis, state officials realized the limitations of a strategy of control based on repression. Therefore, the "carrot approach" of improving labour standards by increasing minimum wages<sup>13</sup> was combined with the stick approach (Hadiz, 1998).

### **Labour Policy and Industrial Relations in the 1990s**

Manning (1998) highlights that there were two important developments in labour policy and industrial relations in the 1990s: firstly, the attempt by the government to implement minimum wage policy and labour unrest. Both were mainly the products of two forces: a larger, concentrated, better-educated and volatile workforce and the stagnation of wages in the 1980s. This was also accompanied by a belief that workers – the heroes and heroines of Indonesia's success -- had been abandoned by the government to the whims of market forces. A brief move towards greater political 'openness' (*keterbukaan*) and tolerance of dissent also encouraged labour action. In the Post-Suharto era, legislation regulating industrial relations underwent significant changes where the Habibie administration ratified International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on workers' basic rights<sup>14</sup>. This was

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<sup>13</sup> With the government's effort to raise minimum wages, by 1997, the minimum wage in terms of the rupiah was three times of that in 1990 though it was still only at about US\$2.50 per day (Hadiz, 1998).

<sup>14</sup>In 1998, Indonesia ratified the ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize (Hadiz, 1998).

seen as a positive step towards creating a fair platform for industrial relation negotiations, which would be internationally more acceptable with regard to protection of workers who form or become members of labour organizations whose main aim is to protect the interest of workers.

In recent years, the legitimacy of Indonesia's industrial relations framework has been challenged by the proliferation of independent organizing groups. With further deregulation, the number of labour organizations in Indonesia has exploded. Rahayu and Sumarto (2003) reports that by 2001, there were 61 national labour union federations, more than 144 labour unions and approximately 11,000 registered enterprise unions, with a total membership of about 11million workers.

### **Labour Unions in Batam**

According to the women and the factory managers that I interviewed, company unions do exist in their factories but they are simply there in form only. Unions are not allowed to educate workers on their rights, and they can intervene only at the workers' request (Wolf, 1992). The unions however, usually organize recreational activities like sports competitions, for example indoor soccer. Unions also organize day trips to places of interest on the island. Ika mentioned that the company previously chartered transportation and brought its employees to SIJORI resort on the west coast of the island for a day of recreational activities. According to Mills (1999), extra-firm gatherings

like these became a way for unions to promote solidarity and foster firm loyalty.

Recently, labour unions such as FSPMI (Federasi Serikat Pekerja Metal Indonesia)<sup>15</sup> and SBSI-Lomenik (Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia - Logam, Mesin, Elektronik)<sup>16</sup> are more active in representing the rights of precarious workers in Batam. FSPMI which started out in 2001 has organized 25,000 workers while Lomenik has organized 24,000 (Peter, 2008). They recruit members by organizing roadshows as well as sending representatives to meet with workers to talk about joining the union. Such labour unions receive support from international federations such as IMF (International Metalworkers Federation) and Swedish IF Metall (Peter, 2008). In December 2008, FSPMI organized tens of thousands of its members by demonstrating in front of Riau's Government office demanding a raise in minimum wages. During the demonstrations, several people were injured and hospitalized as the government mobilized military personnel to stem protests. However, so far no satisfactory agreement has been reached but organizers of FSPMI remain focused on protecting the rights of its precarious workers (Good Electronics, 2009). In light of such a harsh crackdown upon union demonstrations, it is no wonder that women workers are apprehensive about joining the labour unions. All the workers I interviewed said that they have not joined a labour union outside of their company as they are afraid that partaking in union activities may put their employment at risk. Even though they do agree on

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<sup>15</sup> Indonesian Federation of Metalworkers Union

<sup>16</sup> Federation of Metal, Machine and Electronic Workers

issues such as raising the minimum wages of workers, they find their employment to be more important and do not want to lose their jobs.

Therefore, with weak representation from corporate labour unions and their aversion towards joining an external labour union, how do these women workers air their grievances? What types of resistance do these women employ?

### **Subverting Essentialized Feminine Passivity**

Sears borrows Moi's (1985) succinct definition of 'femininity', "that which is marginalized by the patriarchal order". Sears finds this definition useful as she posits that women are situated at the 'margins of symbolic order, the domain of language, beyond which lies chaos'. She posits that the women's agency is sited in their subtle acts of daily resistance:

Resistance is encoded in practices of remembering, and of writing. Agency is then figured in the minute, day-to-day practices and struggles of third world women. [...] If we can speak of agency at all, and we must if we want to hold on to the possibility for the articulation of partial, particular truths, then these day-to-day historical enactments of agency and autonomy must be possible at all times, for all peoples, or no where at all.

(Sears, 1996:28-29)

These concepts of constituting the feminine subject are useful to my current project as I articulate the agency of female migrant factory workers vis-à-vis

their daily rituals and practices, as has also been highlighted by Tiwon (1996). In her chapter 'Models and maniacs' she conjures images of women as they are projected in several old literary traditions to show how they were perceived as dangerous, chaotic and violent. Interestingly, she tells of Ratmi, an independent, strong-minded, outspoken woman, and her friends who work in a factory and live in a dormitory. After confiding in each other and finding that they have been mistreated, they and 800 other women in the *asrama* (dormitory) went on strike, without fear of their supervisors or the police. It is interesting, then, to revisit the ideal concept of a factory worker: factories preferred to hire women because they are presumably docile and easy to control but strikes on the part of these women show that they possess a strong form of agency to resist their mistreatment.

In line with the above, Tjandraningsih (2000) notes that despite the marginalization of women in factories, 'one of the most remarkable changes in the consciousness of women workers is their increasingly militant resistance to factory policies that they feel are "disadvantageous"'. Based on her previous fieldwork in various Indonesian factories, she notes that forms of individual resistance that occur on a daily basis include 'slowing down of work, prolonging toilet visits, and arguing with bosses and calling them names' (Tjandraningsih, 2000:265), an issue that will be largely dealt with further in this chapter. She also notes that since the early 1990s, individual resistance has gathered momentum and has taken on a more collective and manifest



form, such as holding demonstrations in front of government offices on issues such as the demand for the increase in wages.

For Wolf (1992), her experience from her research site in factories in Java shows that there were four different forms of female labour resistance beyond verbal complaints: walkouts, production slowdowns, stayouts, and visions of ghosts and spirits. Like Ong, Wolf also suggests that visions of ghosts and spirits are a subconscious strategy of resistance. Since the factory women were shy, they appropriated forms of resistance that were culturally acceptable in Java, by drawing upon culturally based images to legitimize the expression of some form of protest. The evidence shows that the women do possess a great deal of agency in reacting towards unacceptable factory discipline and policies.

Relating back to my fieldwork, the five factory managers whom I have spoken to described the techniques of resistance employed by factory workers. Yus and Fardi lament that female factory workers are usually easily dissatisfied when it comes to the yearly review of their salaries and will make known their dissatisfaction in actions of various degrees, from the subtle to the overt.

From my interviews with the factory managers, they highlight that there were also four different forms of female labour resistance that may be enacted

in succession: (1) production slowdown, (2) refusal to perform overtime hours, (3) mass absenteeism and lastly (4) labour strike.

Yus is currently a manager in an American-based company that produces semi-conductors and has worked there for a year. Previously, he had worked for four years in a different factory which also produced semi-conductors. He explains that the main issue that workers are dissatisfied about is their salary. He describes the process of the yearly salary reviews:

Usually we will begin discussions on the yearly reviews between the months of September and October. The salary increase will be made known in the months of November or December and will be implemented in January the next year. This salary increase is state-directed and it is mandatory for our companies to review salaries yearly. Which is why much resentment is shown towards the end of the year as this is when they will know how much the increase is.

(Yus, personal interview, 2008)

As a researcher, I was initially confused as to why a salary increase across the board would leave workers dissatisfied. Yus explains:

The dissatisfaction occurs when a worker who has worked there for a few years, realizes that a new worker would be paid the same or even more than her. To them, it is unacceptable because they have worked there longer and are more experienced and should be paid more than newer workers. For example let's say a worker, 4 years ago was paid the minimum wage of 1 million rupiah (S\$130) a

month and let's say she has enjoyed a 5% increase in her pay over 4 years, so she will earn about 1.2 million rupiah (S\$150) now. But sometimes the government will implement a new minimum wage for new workers, let's say that all new workers are to be paid a minimum of 1.2 million rupiah. Now can you see why they are dissatisfied?

(Yus, personal interview, 2008)

Yus has experienced worker unrest rather frequently in his previous company. Over a period of four years with the company he had witnessed 3 worker's strikes.

Fardi has worked in his current company for three years, also as a factory manager. His is an American-based company that produces TV tuners. As recently as late last year, he experienced the biggest organized labour strike that his company has ever faced. This was because his company was due for a merger with another company and the workers expected some form of compensation or bonus out of the collective merger agreement. When the workers realized that they might not receive compensation for the merger and when talks with the management were futile, this culminated in a three-day labour strike. All the factory's workers participated, which included its 3000 female production workers, the male workers who were mainly working as *buruh kasar* (labourers who perform heavy duty work such as shifting goods) and factory supervisors (who were mostly male, with some females) as well. The strike lasted for three days, with the workers turning up for work, but not performing any labour. They just stood or sat around in the open areas of the factory compounds, some holding up placards or posters to voice out

their concerns. Below are images taken by Fardi as evidence of the labour strike.



Illustration 5.1: Workers on strike in an American-based factory in Batam, pictures courtesy of Fardi.

Of course, the women do not simply protest by organizing a labour strike at the outset. The labour strike represents the culmination of their protest when all other avenues have failed. When verbal complaints do not succeed, different means of protest are employed in succession, from decreased productivity, refusal to perform overtime, mass absenteeism and then lastly the labour strike.

Firstly, as a sign of protest, the women would purposely decrease their productivity to affect the targets of the company. However, this technique may only be effective for minor issues, for example some company policies that the women may not agree upon. Ika mentioned that sometimes, it would be difficult to obtain sick leave from the management even though they were so ill that they were not able to perform their work properly. Ika experiences painful menstrual periods and even though the company offers menstrual leave for its workers, obtaining leave may not be easy. Obtaining a referral letter to visit the clinic is a long-drawn-out process as the worker has to pass through the hierarchy, approaching her group head, supervisor and later her administrative officer. She explains that in the beginning when her supervisors were reluctant in giving their approval, she would work slowly to show that her illness is affecting her ability to work. She did notice that subsequently, it got easier for her to obtain sick leave since her supervisor would know of her condition. Even though on one hand, lowered productivity levels due to really being sick can hardly be conceptualized as a technique of resistance, however, her conscious effort to work slowly can be seen as intended resistance on her part. Ika's production slowdown is a micro-resistance that she enacted on her own on the everyday level that may go undetected.

Production slowdowns may be a macro form of resistance. Endah relates that sometimes as a group, her assembly line would purposely decrease their productivity levels when they feel reproached by the fault-finding management who complain that they are not hitting the performance

targets set. Also workers sometimes slow down their production levels when work orders are low so that they will be able to perform overtime hours. Endah relates that with the economic slowdown there is not enough demand for their products and hence overtime hours are not required. However, for most workers overtime pay may make up to 50 per cent of their basic wage, which they find important to supplement their salary.

The second technique that the women employ is resistance by refusing to do overtime by going home promptly when their shift is over. The factories rely greatly on overtime performed by these workers as there is great pressure to meet their production targets. After 8 hours on their shift, most of these factory workers will work another extra 2 to 4 hours of overtime, which earns them double their wage rate. The factory managers feel that it is more cost effective for the company for their production operators to perform overtime instead of hiring more staff. Furthermore, Yus explains that his factory, which has a total of 3000 production operators, has already hired enough employees at its maximum capacity. Therefore, when these women refuse to perform overtime, the production target of the company suffers, and the women hope that the upper management would take notice and start addressing the issues. Yus does not deny that there's a strong sense of camaraderie amongst the women, reminiscent of Tiwon's example of Ratmi, where the women came together to champion their cause. Such an attempt is effective only when the women band together and represent logic in numbers.

When their issues are still not sufficiently addressed even though the women are not performing overtime hours, they may take more drastic measures such as mass absenteeism. Since not coming in for three consecutive days is grounds for dismissal, the workers will come for two days and be absent for the third. This way, they are not liable for dismissal in terms of company rules, yet make their grouses known to the upper management and indicate that they are serious about furthering their cause.

Fardi suggests that oftentimes, it takes some time for the upper management to come to a decision in addressing the issues of these workers as there are various levels of higher management that they would have to go through to make sure that certain policies are cleared for approval. Discussions and meetings may drag out for months. It is usually in this case that workers become impatient and their protests culminate into a workers' strike. As mentioned above, workers will turn up for work but will just stand or sit around the open compounds of the factory and will continue to do so until their demands are met.

There seems to be an inherent contradiction in the logic of the resistance posed by these women. I have shown with evidence from other researchers as well as my own findings from my research site that employers are keen to employ women as production operators because they are believed to be the ideal workforce: docile and disciplined. How then do factory managers account for these forms of protest that the women engage in? This was a

question that I posed to the factory managers, to which I got a very frank response.

Both Fardi and Yus feel that these women wouldn't have been able to organize these forms of protests on their own. They believe that for every protest, the women are acting on orders from their male supervisors. If these workers do not act upon their orders, their jobs may be on the line, so both Fardi and Yus are of the opinion that the women are compelled to act as such:

It's always the men (male supervisors) who '*buat kacau*' (stir up trouble). The key to running a smooth factory is keeping these supervisors happy. But I believe that these women are not acting on their own. There must be a man who is organizing them.

(Yus, personal interview, 2008)

Whether this is true, I admit I am unable to prove since my research still lacks evidence from interviews with factory women who have engaged in labour strikes as well as data on how such collective action were organized. The women I spoke to have never participated in such company level strikes nor even dare to join a labour union outside of their company, signalling fear at some level on their part. However, it seems to me that the factory managers have again internalized the rhetorical patriarchal argument that women are meek and passive and are obedient to males who are of a higher position. Whether it is the case is yet to be proven, but I think this argument should not be used to discount the agency of these women, for they are not automatons,



but individuals who possess the agency to make their own decisions about whether to participate in a protest or not.

Evidence from my interviews show that women workers are able to organize themselves by employing certain techniques of resistance such as production slowdowns. This therefore argues well for the high degree of agency on the part of the women to take action to show their dissatisfaction. Perhaps the women were more willing to talk about more covert forms of resistances that may go undetected by the management as these techniques are more suited to their purposes, being less likely to endanger their already precarious employment.

Of the women I interviewed, perhaps their aversion towards joining labour unions and overt labour action also stems from the militant crackdown on female activists, the most publicized being the case of Marsinah, a young woman who led the strike at her watch factory, PT Catur Putra Surya in East Java, who was brutally kidnapped, sexually assaulted and murdered in 1993. Hadiz (1998) comments that though the perpetrators have never been brought to justice, it is widely believed that she was the victim of actions taken by the local military to quell labour unrest.

More recently, in March 2009, two Indonesian sisters were jailed as a result of their union activities. The sisters have reportedly been fighting to secure ongoing employment for all 152 employees of PT Takita

Manufacturing but it is believed that the firm targeted them with false charges of falsifying medical claims. They were threatened with immediate dismissal and forced to sign statements agreeing with the charges. The forces statements were taken to the police and the sisters were remanded in March 3. Labour organizations such as FSPMI are working to secure the release of the women (Farley, 2009).

Therefore my research shows that, while women workers are stereotyped as a docile workforce, there is evidence that they are able to employ varying degrees of resistance when faced with issues such as strict management and arguing for higher wages. They do possess some small degree of autonomy and agency to redress injustices, but prefer less militant action such as production slowdowns and absenteeism instead of joining unions and engaging in labour strikes which may endanger their jobs.

### **Conclusion:**

...sex is not a prior nature or an inner essence which determines gender as its effect. Quite the reverse: gender identity is performance, a repetitive behaviour within the limits of discursive gender specifications—in this case a performance of univocal sex/gender... Performance, in turn, creates the impression of a given or interior nature... which, like a textualized intention, is thought to be expressed in and by the performance.

(Strozier, 2002: 87 on Butler)

The gendered discourse of work is maintained and reproduced in the everyday practices of the actors who perform their 'ideological' traits. Therefore these discourses, once produced, become embedded in institutions and gain their materiality by becoming part of everyday life and shaping the relations within it. I have shown that the gendered discourse on work in Indonesian factories cannot be divorced from the patriarchal Indonesian discourse on gender, with the notion of *kodrat* governing hegemonic ideas on the ideal role of women in society. However, in the case of my research, normative femininity is challenged when these women subvert their docility and challenge the capitalistic discipline by, in essence, 'performing out of their supposedly scripted performance' via their various forms of protest. The factory managers may try to argue that these women are not inherently subverting but merely acting on orders from their male supervisors, but this should not discount the power and agency that the women possess when they decide to participate in these forms of protest.

## *Chapter 6: Conclusion*

### **Summary of the Dissertation**

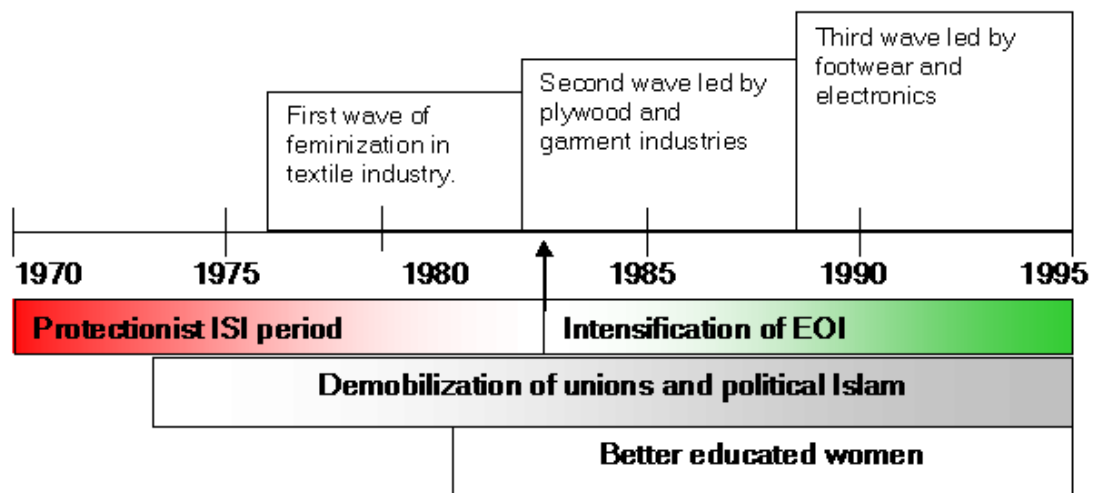
I have outlined how trade reforms during the New Order years set Indonesia on a path of import substitution industrialization (ISI) and later in the 1980s, towards export oriented industrialization (EOI). Factories were compelled to reduce labour costs as much as possible in order to compete and Indonesia appealed to investors as it possessed strong comparative advantages with its large labour surplus and low wages. My review of the feminist literature show that while many argue that this EOI strategy caused the feminization of manufacturing industries, I however, concur with Caraway (2007) who argue that the feminization of labour in Indonesia preceded the EOI strategy. Feminization unfolded in a series of waves, first pioneered by the textile industry during the ISI years and the second wave later by the plywood garment industries. The final, most significant wave was propelled by footwear but more significantly the electronics sector, where investors preferred to hire women in the electronics sector.

In my attempt to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between changing industrial policies and gendered employment patterns, I highlighted that several institutions and factors have facilitated the feminization process of the manufacturing industry in Indonesia. As 'permissive institutions' (Caraway, 2007), the state and the factory management via its discourse on women create the gendered worker.

In terms of supply factors, the New Order state also made the labour force appealing to foreign investors by demobilizing labour independent labour unions and outlawing strikes and demonstrations. Hence, Indonesia was able to maintain its comparative advantage of providing large numbers of workers, especially women workers at low, minimum wages. The state's education policy between the years of 1980 to 1995 accelerated educational gains for women, which contributed to their expanding labour force participation.

All the above can be represented diagrammatically in a timeline below in order to depict the waves of feminization that occurred together with the major factors that facilitated the process.

Figure 6.1: Timeline depicting dynamics of feminization



Connell (1987) posits that the 'globalization of gender' can be understood by analyzing the relationships between the gender regimes of institutions, and the gender orders of local societies. Therefore, the discourse of women as articulated by institutions such as the state and factory management further elucidates our understanding of the feminization process as well as unravelling how the gendered worker on the shop floor is produced. Despite the above institutions' key role in the construction of women as low wage, disciplined and docile workforce, my research shows that female factory workers are able to exercise some form of agency and resistance to the structures of the capitalistic factory discipline.

An interesting point is that following the fall of Suharto in 1998, workers and activists pushed for greater freedom to organize as pressure grew for the unravelling institutional arrangements of state-labour relations during Suharto's rule. Recently in Batam, labour unions such as FSPMI and Lomenik have been active in championing workers rights. The main issue facing workers now is that it takes more than the current minimum wage for a worker to subsist in Batam as these wages are eroded by rising living costs. FSPMI is urging Indonesian government officials to stop exploiting and victimizing Batam workers for the sake of attracting new investors and meet the independent labour union's demands for the increase of minimum wages.

In December 2008, tens of thousands of FSPMI members demonstrated in front of the Riau Governor's office in Batam to demand for

such an increase. The problem with this struggle is the incongruent differences between the main stakeholders on what the minimum wage should be. FSPMI is struggling for a minimum wage of between US\$135 to 150. APINDO (Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia) which represents the Indonesian employers proposed US\$96 a month, while the government suggested US\$100 a month, all suggestions being way below what FSPMI is arguing for. The demonstration was met with militant action by riot police who sought to quell the protests leaving many injured and nine FSPMI members requiring hospitalization (Good Electronics, 2009). Ultimately, the Riau Governor announced only a slight increase of minimum wages from 833,000 rupiah (US\$82) to 1,045,000 rupiah (US\$103), suggesting the weak bargaining power of independent labour unions. The governor justified his meagre proposal by attributing it to the global economic crisis. Evidently, the needs and interests of foreign investors and employers were placed above the socio-economic rights of its workers. Investors have been known to leave the island due to workers wage uncertainties, moving their businesses to other South East Asian countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, where workers are generally paid between US\$60 to 80 a month (Jakarta Post, 2009, October 1). Batam workers are not immune to the forces of globalization and coupled with the existence of the international division of labour; it is hard to imagine their wages increasing exponentially anytime soon with more workers that can be exploited in regions such as China, Vietnam and Thailand.

## From Nimble Fingers to Raised Fists?

Ridwin Monoarfa, Vice President of the Federation of Indonesian Metal Workers' Union (FSPMI) stands before a group of workers at a small hotel outside of Batam city limits. With one hand in the air and the other holding a microphone, he asks the workers to show him their fingers. "One finger cannot do much on its own you see," he says wiggling his fingers, "but when your thumb and your finger work together, WOW, all of a sudden you can do things," he picks up an imaginary pen in front of him. "Let me see everyone's hands," he instructs, "let me see you try to push it up into the air," the workers thrust open hands towards the ceiling, "you don't feel anything do you?" people shake their heads. "Now bring those individual fingers into a fist," he says, "can you start to feel the power?" The crowd shouts enthusiastically, "YES!" He punches the air, and the workers do the same. "Can't you see that? Can't you see that change? If we are united, we are powerful. And if you unite into a union, you will feel that change."

(Peter, 2008:14)

### Illustration 6.1: FSPMI members at the Organizing Roadshow



Source: Peter, 2008: 14

Mills in her research on the labour movement in Thailand highlighted that the most militant and vocal protestors are young, rural migrant women. She



charted the women's subversion of essentialized notions of feminine passivity and compliance, 'from nimble fingers to raised fists' (2005). In Indonesia however, despite the emergence of representation of workers from independent labour unions in Batam, female factory workers I interviewed are apprehensive about joining these organizations for fear of negative repercussions, mostly the fear of losing their jobs.

However Crain (1994) argues that women are just as interested in unionization as men when in fact, the problem lies in the unions' lack of experience with organizing female workers. Crain (1991) elaborates:

'...labour unions can be an effective, central tool in feminist agenda targeting the gendered structure of wage labour. Collective action is the most powerful and expedient route to female empowerment; further, it is the only feasible means of transforming our deeply gendered market and family structure.'  
(Crain, 1991: 1156)

She further posits that 'feminized labour unions' can politicize gender issues and seek the amelioration of female workers via collective bargaining and political lobbying. The innately democratic structure of labour unions should offer women the platform and the voice to lobby their issues. She argues that as a result of the feminization of labour, the feminization of unions has to follow suit. She critiques the traditional male-oriented structure of union organizing as unsuitable for mobilizing women as their strategies do not take into account their gendered marginalization and their aversion towards militant organizing tactics. Labour unions then attribute low female representation as a lack of interest.

Interestingly, labour unions in Batam themselves are recognizing the structural gendered differences in organizing female labour and are embarking on new strategies to mobilize the female working class. In addressing the needs of EPZ workers, FSPMI and Lomenik have independently set out strategies to increase women's participation at all levels of the union. FSPMI decided that in order to recruit more members, they had to involve more women as officers. This has helped them greatly to organize the majority women workers in the EPZs. Referring to a 2006 FSPMI Congress decision, the union's constitution was amended ensuring 30 per cent of women's participation at all levels of the unions.

Lomenik however, highlights their strategy, in the case of their 'Nora', conducting home visits to educate women workers on their rights and dispelling myths about unions:

'At the age of 30, Nora isn't your average EPZ worker. The eldest of four, she graduated from law school at the prestigious University of Andalas where she became interested in women's rights. She joined Lomenik a year ago and began to learn about the rights of workers and in particular the rights of women workers. Training from the union, coupled with her studies at university, led her to become an organizer for the union. "Many of the workers here are women and many of them don't know their rights. There are cases where if they get pregnant they'll get sacked. I wanted to educate other women about their rights. Women were surprised to know they even had rights. I had to teach the women that being in an association is not violating any law, they are afraid they will lose their jobs if they join the union. But after our discussions these women were willing to join the union'

(Peter, 2008:17)

Unions may have taken a leaf from Crain's idealized notion that a feminized union usually focuses on 'building a nurturing community that can withstand and flourish in the face of inevitable employer antiunion pressure' (1991:1213). This style relies on establishing an emotional connection between employees as well as on intellectual commitments on the goals of the union; it requires more traditional strategies that are more personal in nature. Though this process may take longer, a more participatory, democratic structure will ensure that the women workers themselves can control their own unions. She posits that such efforts will produce a stronger coalition of workers.

Analyzing the dynamics of the 'feminization of unions' in EPZs such as Batam would be a possible future direction of research. Salient questions include: What is the organizational structure of these unions? What are the main issues that the organization is championing? Who are these unions representing? What is the ratio of female membership? What are their strategies for recruiting women workers in joining their unions? What types of tactics are employed to advance their objectives for women? Also, what are the reactions of male union members with regards to the feminization of the union? Would this lead to them feeling disenfranchised?

Finally, looking to the future, improvements in labour standards and freedom will play an important part in ameliorating the conditions for workers. The

government should learn a lesson from Suharto's regime that the "stick" approaches of repressing of labour movement and worker activism is futile and the government needs to seriously consider the rights of their workers instead of privileging stakeholders such as foreign investors.

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