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Responses to Changing Labour Relations: The Case of Women's NGOs in Indonesia

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The feminisation of factory work and increases in female labour migration are two widely noted effects of globalisation on the work of women in developing countries in the late twentieth century. While factory labour and domestic service overseas may seem to have little in common, in both cases, women experience a degree of commodification of their labour not found in most other sectors of the economy. In Indonesia, while a majority of women continue to work in subsistence agriculture and the informal sector, the number of women working in the manufacturing sector and as migrant domestic workers overseas has increased significantly in recent decades. Numerous accounts have been written about the parlous living and working conditions of both Indonesian female factory workers and migrant domestic labour.¹ Yet, while it is important to document the hardships faced by women whose patterns of work have been affected by the global economy, it is equally important to focus on those same women's attempts to mediate their work experiences, and the effects of globalisation on those processes of mediation. This chapter argues that the initiatives of local, middle-class non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have had an important effect on the ways in which factory workers and migrant domestic workers formulate their own strategies of resistance.

Changes in Indonesian women's work

Changes in the structure of the labour market, as a result of Indonesia's internationally supported decision to liberalise its economy in the mid-1980s, brought fundamental changes in the realities and perceptions of Indonesian women's work. However, women workers had been affected by international capitalism much earlier when a monetised, Westernised sector of the economy – catering to the international agricultural commodity market – was established by the Dutch in the early nineteenth century.

In the traditional indigenous economy, as in the traditional economies of many other Southeast Asian countries, women had a relatively high level of involvement in remunerative activities through agriculture, cottage industry, and trade. Although there were significant regional variations, it was not unusual for aristocratic and wealthy women and the wives of bureaucrats, as well as peasants, to be involved in a range of economic activities (Rahardjo, 1975: 81-82). The relatively high rate of female participation in non-domestic labour in

colonial Indonesia was reflected in the writings of the period: British observers in the early nineteenth century, for example, were surprised by the ‘special position’ of women in the workforce and in society in general on Java (Boomgaard, 1981: 6-7).

The early period of the Dutch colonial rule in Indonesia had little impact on the indigenous economy of the Indonesian archipelago. In the nineteenth century, however, there began an ‘ever deepening penetration ... [of] Western government and Western economy’, as part of which a cash economy was introduced in conjunction with the establishment of sugar factories employing Indonesian labour (Wertheim, 1959: 90-93). This process accelerated in the late nineteenth century, when Sumatra and Java, in particular, were opened up to foreign investment in large-scale agricultural commodity production and as a market for cheap, mass-produced, imported goods.² As Booth observes, these developments ‘drew many millions of Indonesians into increasing dependence on the world economy for their livelihood, either as employees of foreign estates or as smallholder producers of export products’ (Booth, 1990: 274).

While growing modern sector employment opportunities outside agriculture were not directly linked to the international economic system, they, too, were products of Dutch colonialism, which, in turn, was part of the global phenomenon of imperialism. By the time the 1930 census was taken, almost 14 per cent of the 34.4 per cent of the population ‘gainfully employed’ were involved in industry, the professions or government service (Table 5.1).³

Table 5.1 Number of persons in the Netherlands Indies reporting an occupation, 1930

<i>Occupational Classification</i>	<i>Total</i>		<i>Native Persons</i>	
	<i>Number</i>	<i>% Total</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>% Native</i>
Production of Raw Materials	14,363,846	68.8	14,193,158	70.0
Industry	2,208,851	10.6	2,105,129	10.4
Transportation	316,191	1.5	290,740	1.4
Trade	1,293,316	6.2	1,090,868	5.4
Professions	169,520	0.8	150,227	0.7
Government Service	516,176	2.5	491,911	2.4
Other Occupations	2,003,150	9.6	1,957,609	9.7
Total	20,871,050	100.0	20,279,642	100.0

Source: Statistics from the 1930 Census quoted in Pillai (1947: 171)

It is not clear from statistics collected in the census how many of the 10 per cent involved in industry in 1930 were women, or where those women worked. However, the number of women involved in industrial waged work did increase in the following decade as a result of the government’s push to industrialise (Elliott, 1997a: 158).⁴ In Java, where the colonial presence was strongest, the work of women who remained in the agricultural and informal sectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was also indirectly affected by the

Dutch emphasis on export commodity production. As cash crop production absorbed male labour, women were forced to undertake agricultural tasks traditionally performed by men, while imported products put pressure on traditional cottage industry (Elson, 1997: 180; Boomgaard, 1981: 12-16). In most other parts of Indonesia – with some notable exceptions, such as in North Sumatra – women’s work was affected later, and to a much lesser extent, by the colonial economy.

The most remarkable change in women’s work in the post-independence period has been the rapid shift from the traditional forms of remunerative activity – in agriculture, trade and household industry – to waged work (Rahardjo, 1975; Benjamin, 1996: 81). As in industrialising economies in general, rapid growth in export-oriented light manufacturing has been the main focus of analyses of the effects of globalisation on Indonesian women’s work. The extensive development of light manufacturing industries from the mid-1980s, in particular, brought many rural and urban women into waged work for the first time in Java (which is the traditional centre of manufacturing and the location of most export-oriented industries), in North Sumatra, where export-oriented industries are also in high concentration, and on the tourist island of Bali (Manning, 1998: 254).

On the whole, the urban female labour participation rates in contemporary Indonesia have been lower than those of neighbouring countries (Jones, 1984: 26-27). These low female participation rates are partly explained by Indonesia’s relatively late industrialisation.⁵ In the post-independence period, the development of the manufacturing sector was delayed by the economic chaos of the late Sukarno era, 1957-1965. While manufacturing grew at an average annual rate of 13.9 per cent between 1953 and 1957, industrial output first stagnated then declined in the early to mid 1960s (Booth, 1998: 54-56; 66).⁶ After Suharto seized power in 1966, his New Order regime placed a high priority on economic development in general, and the development of the private sector in particular (Poot et al, 1990: 4-5). In 1966, the entire modern sector (medium-large enterprises and government service) only accounted for 10 per cent of the total workforce of 39 million (Manning, 1998: 55-56).

Light manufacturing continued to be a low priority during the oil boom of the 1970s, during which employment was characterised by slow growth in the agricultural sector and high growth in the urban informal sector. In the economic slow-down of the early to mid-1980s, agricultural employment experienced stronger growth, while the urban economy stagnated (Manning, 1998: 100-101). After the shift to export-oriented industrial policies in the mid to late 1980s, however, the labour-intensive light manufacturing sector began to grow. As a result, the share of manufacturing employment as a percentage of the total workforce increased dramatically. Although the proportion of the overall labour force involved in manufacturing remained small, (the number of workers in the manufacturing sector rose from 4.7 million in 1980 to 11.5 million people (13 per cent of all employed persons) in 1999 (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Employed persons over 15 years of age by main industry, 1999

<i>Main industry</i>	<i>Workers</i>	<i>Percentage of total employed</i>
Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Fishing	38,378,133	43.2
Mining and Quarrying	725,739	0.8
Manufacturing Industry	11,515,955	13.0
Electricity, Gas and Water	188,321	0.2
Construction	3,415,147	3.8
Wholesale Trade, Retail Trade, Restaurants & Hotels	17,529,099	19.7
Transportation, Storage and Communications	4,206,067	4.7
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	633,744	0.7
Community, Social and Personal Services	12,224,654	13.8
Others	–	–
Total Workforce	88,816,859	(99.9)
Total 15+ Population	141,096,417	(62.9)

Source: National Labour Force Survey 1999 (<http://www.bps.go.id/statbysector/employ/>)

An important aspect of factory work has been the relative balance of men and women employed in the manufacturing sector. Of the 8.2 million workers employed in manufacturing in 1990, 3.6 million were women (Hull, 1994: 5). As Hull points out, the female to male ratio in manufacturing is not as unbalanced as the female to male ratio of the total workforce, which, in the same year was 25 million women to 46 million men (Hull, 1994: 5). It is important to remember, however, that the extent of women's participation in non-domestic work in general – and in the industrial sector, in particular – has varied from region to region, both historically and in contemporary Indonesia, according to the structure of local industry and local cultural norms.⁷ Manning has found that many historically poor provinces with a traditionally high level of female labour market participation maintained those levels throughout the New Order period (1966-1998), while the historically low participation rates of Sundanese and Betawi women in non-domestic work at least partly explain the unusually low contemporary female labour participation rates in the Greater Jakarta area, despite the rapid expansion of female-dominated export-oriented industries in that region (Manning, 1998: 240).

Proletarianisation and women as export commodity

Factory work has not been the only sector to absorb large numbers of women over recent decades. Opportunities in traditional agriculture have decreased as a result of new farming

technologies and population pressures, and competition in the informal sector has become increasingly fierce. As a result, many poor, rural women have sought waged employment as domestic servants in the cities, or abroad. The imperatives of global production and consumption systems have also encouraged the expansion of women's work in professional and white-collar service sector occupations, as well as bringing growth in many other types of 'unskilled' waged labour. These include the traditional putting-out sector, where women take work from the factories into their homes, and the growth of waged work in the tourism-related service industries (Crisis et al. 2000).

In contrast to work in the factories or as domestic 'help' abroad, however, home work and waged work in the informal service sector do not require fundamental changes in everyday life or in the identity of the women who perform it. As a result – like women's work in the unwaged, informal sector – these types of 'unskilled' work tend to be unacknowledged because women themselves tend to represent their economic activities as part of their home duties (Djamil, 1996: 232-233). In contrast, the work patterns of both factory workers and overseas migrant domestic workers define their relationships inside and outside the workplace. Consequently, factory and overseas domestic work have been a particular focus of attention in Indonesia.

Proletarianisation?

By 1990, while almost 50 per cent of Indonesian women were still employed in agriculture and close to one-quarter of economically active women were involved in trade, over one-third of waged women workers outside the agricultural sector were employed in manufacturing (Manning, 1998: 242-43). Their participation in non-agricultural, waged work had doubled between 1971 and 1990 (Table 5.3).

The Indonesian literature about women and factory work is concerned primarily with the question whether or not women have benefited from the opportunities for factory work brought by the growth in export-oriented manufacturing. It echoes international debates about the effects of factory employment on women workers in industrialising economies (Horton, 1996; Ong, 1987; Pearson, 1998).⁸ Some authors argue that women workers in Indonesia have been factory-fodder for footloose multinational corporations (Mather, 1983; Hancock, 1998). Others argue that factory work is inherently ambiguous, since women are both oppressed and empowered through their work (Wolf 1992; Andriyani 1996; Saptari; 1995).

Regardless of whether they focus on the negative or positive aspects of female factory labour, the work of the overwhelming majority of scholars and activists writing about women workers in Indonesia is concerned with the paradigm of proletarianisation. While the pace of feminisation of light manufacturing labour has resulted in an important shift in the nature of many women's experiences of work, the extent to which this expansion of the industrial female labour force represents the development of a 'new proletariat' in Indonesia is difficult to determine, because the idea of an Indonesian proletariat itself is problematic. Western concepts of work are not easily transferred to the 'developing' world. For example, in the Philippines, the urban experience of work calls the 'conceptual distinctions frequently made in reference to the labour force in third world cities between the working class and the urban

poor' into question (Pinches, 1987: 103). In Indonesia, too 'the concept of the "working class" applies to people whose work is organised in particular ways...[and] many of the classic definitions are only roughly applicable to contemporary realities.' (Hull, 1994: 2).

Table 5.3 Female employment by major sector and work status, 1971 and 1990

Work Status/Sector	<i>Share of female employment (%)</i>		<i>Sex ratio (male=100)</i>	
	1971	1990	1971	1990
Agriculture	65	49	49	54
Wage workers	14	7	47	47
Non-wage workers	51	42	49	54
Non-agriculture	35	51	52	61
Non-Agriculture/Wage				
Wage workers	6	14	30	47
Rural wage workers	6	10	30	41
Total waged	12	24		
Non-Agriculture/Non-Wage				
Urban non-wage workers	5	10	56	61
Rural non-wage workers	18	17	103	89
Total non-waged	23	27		
Total	100	100	49	56

Source: Adapted from Manning (1998: 243)

Hadiz (1997) argues that the development of export-oriented industries has, by its very nature, encouraged proletarianisation in Indonesia. However, in reality, the causal relationship he posits between the experience of industrial work and the growth of workers' consciousness is far from automatic. Some complicating factors are demographic in nature. As indicated earlier, the industrial sector in Indonesia continues to employ a small minority of Indonesians despite its rapid growth from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. For many of those employed in factories, patterns of circular migration and the often short-term character of their experiences in factory work mean that the development of a self-identifying working class is undermined by other, possibly more meaningful, facets of their identity, such as ethnicity, religion and place of origin. Age and life expectations are particularly important in the way women interpret their factory experiences. Despite the hardships of factory work, many women regard their factory employment as an adventure; an experience of economic and social freedom before marriage (confidential interviews, March 2000).

Other factors affecting the development of an Indonesian proletariat are political. From the mid-1960s until the fall of President Suharto in May 1998, state rhetoric and the structures of industrial relations actively discouraged workers from developing a collective class identity. Suharto's New Order regime promoted organic concepts of the state in which workers and management were seen to share common interests. Its industrial relations system was based on formal, tripartite institutions that were divorced from the workplace, and while most workplaces were not unionised, even workers in workplaces in which the government-sanctioned union had a presence received very little return on their (compulsory) membership dues (Ford, 1999).

While it is difficult to identify a clear process of proletarianisation, the importance of factory work and the widely-publicised experiences of women worker-activists who have led strikes and demonstrations have brought images of the female factory worker into the mainstream of Indonesian perceptions of women's work. The feminisation of the factory-based labour force has not only affected the young women employed, but their families and friends – most often in the villages from which they migrated in order to find work, or in which they continue to live. Factory work is generally well-regarded in the villages because it offers continuity (usually, where there is high labour turnover, workers choose to leave, often to work in another factory), income certainty (compared with work in the informal sector), and 'clean' working conditions (compared with work in the paddy fields). As most female factory workers are the first generation to work in a 'modern' enterprise, their work is very different from that of their parents. Consequently, it carries with it a certain mystique, despite its obvious hardships.

Women as export commodity

There are two faces of international Indonesian female labour migration: the legal export of women's labour through authorised migrant labour programmes and the desperate attempts of women to migrate illegally in order to secure a better economic future. Together they represent a major trend in women's work in Indonesia, which, as Robinson notes, is part of a global trend of increasing international labour migration over the last two decades (Robinson, 2000a: 249).⁹

While there has been some labour migration to neighbouring Peninsular Malaysia and to Saudi Arabia in the past, it is only relatively recently that Indonesia became an important source of migrant workers to the Middle East, East Asia and to wealthier countries within Southeast Asia. Department of Manpower statistics show that labour migration increased thirty eight fold between 1974/79 and 1989/94.¹⁰ Within this overall increase in migration, the ratio of female to male labour migrants grew even more dramatically, with female labour migration increasing 116 fold from 3,817 women in 1974/79 to 442,310 women in 1989/94 (Krisnawaty, 1997: 292). This trend continued in the late 1990s. As illustrated in Table 5.4, the number of legal female migrants was almost double that of males between 1995 and 1998.

In contrast to the range of opinions expressed in analyses based on factory work, accounts of the conditions of Indonesian migrant domestic workers tend to focus predominantly on the

threats and privations facing women working abroad (Bethan, 1993; Robinson, 2000a; Robinson, 2000b). These accounts resonate with local public perceptions of female migrant labour working overseas. In Indonesia, the plight of TKW (*Tenaga Kerja Wanita* – the common term for women migrant workers) has been a subject of public controversy for decades. A large proportion of legal female migrant workers work as domestic servants, a fact reflected in the overall occupational distribution of Indonesian migrant workers (Table 5.5).

Table 5.4 Gender distribution of Indonesian migrant workers by major destination, 1995-1998

<i>Country</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Females/males (ratio)</i>
Saudi Arabia	295,038	24,406	319,444	12.1
Malaysia	187,218	220,993	408,211	0.9
Singapore	65,355	20,853	86,208	3.1
United Arab Emirates	19,044	626	19,630	30.4
	10,513	443	10,956	23.7
Hong Kong	5,205	1,134	6,339	4.6
Brunei Darussalam	4,958	17,598	22,556	0.3
Taiwan	4,012	22,226	26,278	0.2
South Korea				
Total	591,303	308,319	899,442	1.9

Source: Adapted from *Kompas*, 5 January 1998 (cited in Keban, 2000: 223)

Note: This table refers to workers who have gone through legal channels to obtain work abroad.

The risks facing female domestic migrant workers have been extensively documented in the press and elsewhere.¹¹ They include agents' unregulated charging of registration fees; long periods in barracks awaiting placement; employers refusing to pay wages; sexual harassment and abuse, sometimes resulting in pregnancy or death; and even the sale of domestic workers in receiving countries (Ananta, 2000: 38; Krisnawaty, 1997: 293).

The conditions of Indonesian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, where women migrants have exceeded 50 per cent of all labour migration since 1984, have been a particular focus for public concern (Robinson, 2000a: 253-54).¹² According to a press release from *Solidaritas Perempuan*, one of the women's non-governmental organisations discussed later in this chapter, the number of Indonesian migrant domestic workers who reported having experienced violence in Saudi Arabia increased from 59 cases in 1995 to 484 cases in 1999 (*Solidaritas Perempuan* 2000). Yet, when faced by widespread criticism of treatment of domestic workers in Saudi Arabia in the mid-1980s, the Indonesian Manpower Suppliers'

Association accepted no responsibility, while the Minister for Manpower at the time reportedly denied that a problem existed at all (Robinson, 2000a: 258-59).

Table 5.5 Occupational distributions of migrant workers from Indonesia by sector of employment, 1984-1994

<i>Sector</i>	<i>1984-1989 (%)</i>	<i>1989-1994 (%)</i>
Domestic Services	70.2	60.2
Agriculture	11.8	22.3
Transportation	14.2	13.8
Construction	1.5	0.1
Electricity	0.3	1.0
Other	2.0	2.6
Total	100.0	100.0
Number of Migrants	292,262	652,272

Source: Ministry of Manpower statistics quoted in ILO (1998).

When Soeramishono, the head of *Antar Kerja Antar Negara* – the Department of Manpower agency regulating overseas migrant workers – was interviewed in 1993, his responses demonstrated that little had changed in the government’s defensive attitude towards reported abuses of Indonesian migrant women workers. When asked whether women were put at risk by undertaking domestic work abroad, and in the Middle East in particular, he claimed that while it is difficult to regulate the treatment of workers outside the formal sector, respect for women depends less on their position than their personal morality (Bethan, 1993: 121-122).

The issue of female migrant labour is a vexed one. The lack of well-paying jobs for low skilled workers in Indonesia has meant that there is no shortage of women who are willing to work abroad as domestic help. While the risks of migrant work are well publicised, so, too, are its possible rewards. The attraction of opportunities to work abroad is reflected in the number of unofficial migrants, which has increased dramatically since the oil boom of the 1970s and is estimated to outstrip official migration levels. In Malaysia alone, some 146,800 illegal immigrants – 78 per cent of the total arrested between 1992 and 1995 – were from Indonesia.¹³ A further 402,508 illegal migrants from Indonesia during the same period were allowed to register as legal foreign workers (UNESCO-MOST).

Women’s responses and NGO intervention

Given the sharp increases in the numbers of women involved in factory work and overseas domestic service, it is unsurprising that they are the focus of campaigns for improvements in women’s working conditions. Trade unions worldwide have often failed to consider and meet the needs of female workers. In New Order Indonesia, *Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* (SPSI), the only officially sanctioned union after 1985, failed not only to represent women workers, but workers in general.¹⁴ As a result, responses to the different issues faced by female factory workers and migrant domestic workers abroad took place almost exclusively outside the formal, institutional sphere.

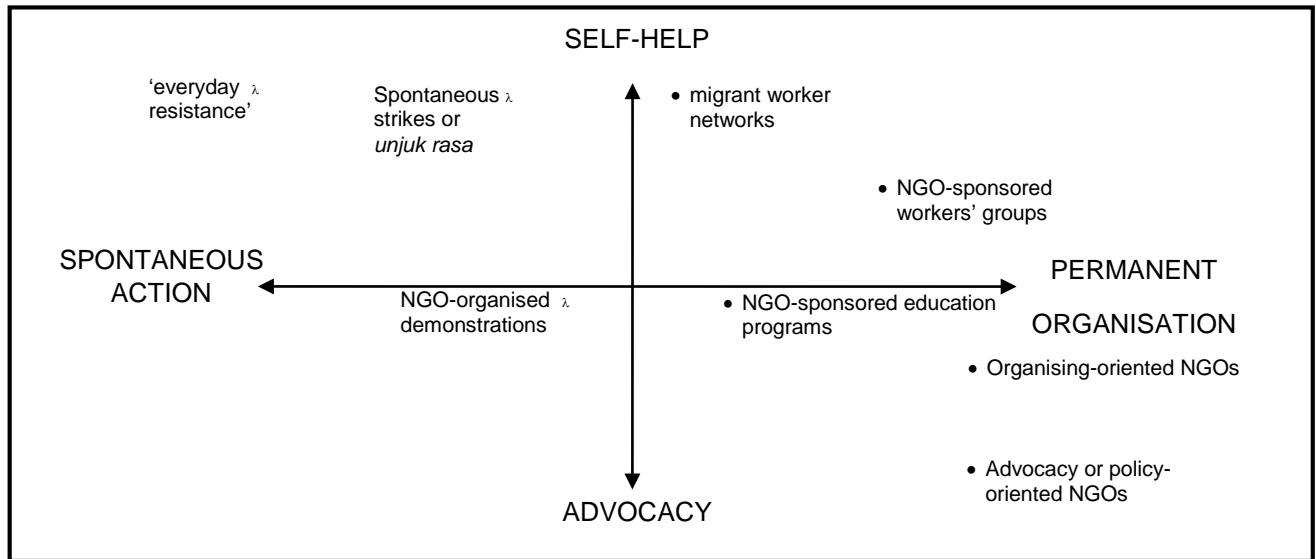


Figure 5.1 Schema of Attempts to Mediate the Commodification of Female Labour

Women's responses to their experiences of work in factories and abroad can be conceptually located on a plane on which a continuum between spontaneous action and the formation of (relatively) permanent organisations can be imagined as intersecting with a continuum between 'self help' (actions by the workers themselves) and advocacy (actions by middle-class activists without the direct involvement of the women affected on their behalf) (see Figure 5.1).

As indicated in Figure 5.1, there are at least four major types of self-help that can be identified as part of women's attempts to mediate the impact of the commodification of their labour in factories and in foreign households. The first – acts of 'everyday resistance' – refers to women's daily, unorganised responses to the conditions under which they work. Much has been written about the 'everyday resistance' of women factory workers in Indonesia, which includes absenteeism, frequent visits to the toilet and product theft or sabotage (Andriyani, 1996; Smyth and Grijns, 1997; Tjandraningsih, 1995; Wolf, 1992). Interviews with women who have worked abroad confirm that, although migrant domestic workers are subject to closer scrutiny and stronger forms of control than factory workers, they employ comparable strategies, such as slow responses to employers' concerns, late returns from holidays and even running away from their place of employment, in an attempt to exert control over their experience of work (confidential interviews March 1999, February-March 2000).

The second form of self-help identified in Figure 5.1 is the staging of spontaneous strikes or *unjuk rasa* (demonstrations of feelings). By its very nature, this form of response is more common to women employed in industrial settings than to migrant domestic workers. The close conceptual relationship between these more organised modes of protest and acts of 'everyday resistance' has been demonstrated by Laine Berman's work on the process through which Indonesian women's individual and collective acts of self-help have produced changes in their discourse of labour relations. Using recorded conversations as evidence for her argument, Berman claims that women develop a vocabulary and mindset that make collective

action conceptually possible through everyday acts, such as complaining about the workplace or participating in in-factory incidental sabotage (Berman, 1998: 135-159).

The most organisationally developed and permanent type of self-help available to women workers in late New Order Indonesia was an NGO-sponsored workers' group. The formation of such groups was generally initiated by middle-class activists, who usually established contact with workers. One instance in which the demand for such a group developed out of acts of everyday resistance and spontaneous strikes, without direct intervention from an NGO in the first instance, is documented in Andriyani's study of women activists in Greater Jakarta (Andriyani, 1996: 106-131).

The final major form of self-help identified in Figure 5.1 is the informal migrant workers' network. Although such networks share some characteristics with the informal groups based around factory workers' communities or workplaces, these networks are generally formed on the initiative of the migrant workers themselves. Research conducted by Noorashikin Abdul Rahman amongst the approximately 50 000 Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore documents the ways in which migrant women workers have created such informal networks as a means to (partially) counteract the isolation they feel in their places of employment (personal communication October 2000). These networks contribute to migrant women workers' ability to mediate the worst features of their workplaces. By meeting and talking about their workplaces, they, too, can develop an alternative vision of what work should be like. Furthermore, they can provide moral and material support should particular difficulties, such as sexual advances by an employer or other forms of physical violence, occur in the workplace.

As indicated in Figure 5.1, women workers' organised responses have been predominantly facilitated by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), a number of which are specifically women's NGOs. Advocacy on questions of women's conditions of work has a considerable history in Indonesia. In the 1950s, some parts of the union movement and some women's groups (such as Kowani) focused specifically on issues such as equal pay and the poor conditions of women workers (Elliott, 1997b: 148). These earlier mass organisations were, however, disbanded or co-opted under the New Order government's policies of single-vehicle interest representation, the 'floating mass' and depoliticisation. Thus, although women's organisations are not a new phenomenon in Indonesia, the current generation of organisations were established within the final two decades of the twentieth century (see Rahayu, 1996; Taylor, 1997).

Indonesian women's NGOs are characteristically involved in advocacy, skills development and organising activities (Nadia, 1997: 279-280). Like other NGOs, dealing with issues ranging from identity and the environment to land and labour rights, this most recent generation of women's NGOs emerged as a mechanism through which affluent, educated, middle-class Indonesians could become involved in political and social activism in the 1980s.¹⁵ At first, these organisations couched their aims and activities in the language of development, as demanded by the political and legal contexts of the time. Following the economic liberalisation of the mid-late 1980s and the ensuing period of *keterbukaan* (political 'openness'), less oppressive conditions at home and connections between international aid,

trade, and human rights, allowed politically-oriented NGO activists to be increasingly direct about their agendas.¹⁶

Reychman's survey of Indonesian women's organisations provides a useful framework for distinguishing different kinds of women's NGOs. In her study, she distinguishes between state-sponsored mass organisations (such as *Dharma Wanita*) and state-sponsored NGOs (such as PKK – the Family Welfare Guidance program) on the one hand and independent feminist NGOs on the other. Her study divides the latter into three categories: Muslim feminist organisations, secular feminist organisations and solidarity feminist organisations (Reychman, 1997: 27-33). While there are different types of women's NGOs involved in labour issues, the remainder of this chapter focuses on two feminist NGOs which have dealt almost exclusively with female labour issues for a number of years. Both these organisations, *Yayasan Annisa Swasti* (YASANTI) and *Solidaritas Perempuan untuk Hak Asasi Manusia* (SP, Women's Solidarity for Human Rights), fall into Reychman's second category of secular feminist organisations, which she describes as 'mostly Moslem, but less orthodox' than Muslim feminist organisations (Reychman, 1997: 30).¹⁷

YASANTI and SP have essentially similar philosophies: both see those they seek to help as women first, then workers; and both see the members of their 'target groups' not only as victims, but as potential activists. They have, however, offered two very different responses to the commodification of Indonesian women's labour. The account of each organisation's aims, philosophy and activities which follows is based mainly from interviews I conducted with activists from YASANTI and SP in 1999 and 2000, and from publications prepared by the NGOs themselves.

YASANTI: 'empowering' women factory workers in Central Java

Yayasan Annisa Swasti (or Independent Women's Foundation) – the first of Indonesia's contemporary feminist NGOs (Rahayu, 1996: 31-32) – was established in 1982. YASANTI began working with rural women in 'traditional' developmental activities such as skills development and the provision of micro-credit. From the late 1980s, YASANTI focused its attention on industrial workers in rural Central Java in response to the increasing involvement of rural women in factory work. YASANTI concentrates on three sub-programs: grassroots organising, publishing and networking (interview, 19 March 1999). At the grassroots level, it seeks to raise awareness of workers' rights, to encourage workers to be critical of their situation, and to establish a pattern of routine meetings amongst small groups of workers. YASANTI's tabloid, entitled *Annisa: Suara Kaum Perempuan* (*Annisa: the Voice of Women*) focuses on issues such as the history of workers' organisations in Indonesia, patriarchy and its effect for women workers, the role of women in unions, women's reactions to *Reformasi*, empowerment of women, and women and human rights.¹⁸ It also publishes volumes that provide extensive details of the living and working conditions of women workers (YASANTI, 1996; Juliantara et al, 1998). Although YASANTI tends to keep a low profile, it has been involved in a number of national co-operative initiatives focusing on women, labour or both women and labour. These initiatives have included two important labour committees: FORSOL Buruh (the committee set up over the issue of military involvement in labour relations after the death of Marsinah, a female factory activist), and KUHAP (a committee set up to review the controversial draft version of Manpower Law No. 25/1997).

While YASANTI is one of the few women's NGOs that have focused primarily on industrial labour, women's organisations are not the only NGOs that have attempted to improve the conditions of female factory workers in Indonesia's export industries. Of some twenty labour-oriented NGOs I visited in 1998-2000, only three were specifically women's organisations, but almost all had 'gender equity' or 'women's issues' as part of their wider labour programs. There is, however, a fundamental difference in focus between women's NGOs which deal with labour issues and labour-oriented NGOs which deal with 'women's issues'. Labour NGOs tend to view women as an important sub-group of the wider category of workers. The women's NGOs that deal with labour issues, as Amin Muftiyanah (the director of YASANTI) has indicated, focus on work as a part of women's overall experience (interview 24 February 2000).¹⁹

Understandings of the word 'work' in a more general sense also differentiate YASANTI from the majority of Indonesian labour-oriented NGOs. While many NGOs have programs in the informal sector, most labour-orientated NGOs have accepted the traditional 'Western' understanding of the division between work in the formal and informal sectors. YASANTI, on the other hand, understands the term 'buruh' (labourer) in a very wide sense to include groups such as shop assistants, petty traders and porters – a definition that is often not accepted by industrial workers or other labour-oriented NGOs. This is reflected in YASANTI's program, which, while it includes initiatives involving shop assistants working in Yogyakarta and other working-class women, concentrates on industrial workers in Ungaran.

Solidaritas Perempuan: advocating the protection of Indonesian women working abroad

Indonesian NGOs dealing with migrant labour issues have concentrated on domestic and international networking, policy advocacy, casework and the organisation of women awaiting placements abroad or returning domestic overseas workers. *Solidaritas Perempuan*, which was officially established in December 1990, is the women's NGO with the highest profile in migrant labour issues. From its inception in 1990 until 1998, it focused exclusively on migrant women workers. The issue of migrant workers was chosen because, in 1990, no organisation was dealing with migrant work – which SP considered to be a significant site for the systematic exploitation of women.

While *Solidaritas Perempuan* diversified its focus in 1998 after the fall of President Suharto, it has continued to seek to strengthen migrant women workers' resistance to oppression. At the base level, this organisation continued to take on individual cases where workers have been abused; to provide training and setting up programmes for migrant workers and their communities; and to run a shelter for women migrant workers who have been subject to violence. *Solidaritas Perempuan* also organised a number of demonstrations by female migrant workers in Jakarta streets, which were well-covered in the print and electronic media.

Unlike YASANTI's low-key grassroots approach to the organising of industrial workers, *Solidaritas Perempuan* has chosen a high profile, advocacy approach at the national and international level. Domestically, it is involved through KOPBUMI (The Consortium for the Defence of Indonesian Migrant Workers) in networking with approximately sixty other

domestic NGOs who deal with migrant workers.²⁰ Internationally, *Solidaritas Perempuan* has been heavily involved in networking through both the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women and the Migrant Forum of Asia. It also has direct links with NGOs in receiving countries, such as *Tenaganita* in Malaysia, and the Asian Migrant Centre in Hong Kong.²¹ Unlike a number of Filipino women's NGOs dealing with migrant labour (Law and Nadeu, 1999), however, *Solidaritas Perempuan* (and most other Indonesian NGOs concerned with migrant workers) have not established offices in recipient countries.

Implications of the Asian crisis

In international terms, the Asian economic crisis of 1997 is now receding into history. The dramatic chain of events it set off in Indonesia, however, has had far-reaching, irrevocable consequences for every aspect of Indonesian society, including women workers and the NGOs which seek to empower them. Evidence from the immediate post-crisis period indicates that the crisis intensified the commodification of female labour as factories further feminised and casualised their workforces and conditions forced more women to seek domestic employment overseas (AKATIGA, 1998).

Factory workers were perhaps the most visible victims of the crisis. The industrial sector shrank by 15.6 per cent in the fiscal year ending March 1999 (Ahmed, 1999), and an estimated 1,333,345 industrial workers were dismissed in 1998 alone (ILO statistics quoted in *Kompas*, 21 September 1998). Those who remained in work had to contend with the drastically reduced purchasing power of their wages and the constant threat of retrenchment. Female factory workers' experiences of the crisis were filtered through its complex effects on the manufacturing sector. While many domestically-oriented manufacturing enterprises were forced to close, not all manufacturing sub-sectors were adversely affected by the crisis. In fact, demand for the products of most large-scale export-oriented factories actually grew (AKATIGA, 1998). According to both AKATIGA and another labour-oriented NGO, *Lembaga Informasi Perburuhan Semarang* (LIPS), the opportunity to restructure that the public acceptance of 'hard times' brought was used not only by companies adversely affected by the crisis, but also by companies that were doing quite well (LIPS, 2000).

AKATIGA's research shows that restructuring affected women in two important ways. First, companies changed the status of many of their employees from permanent to contract workers. Second, they used the opportunity to further feminise their workforces by retrenching male workers and replacing them with young women (AKATIGA, 1998).²² Although women were not perhaps as hard hit as men by retrenchments, many lost their jobs in the textile, garment and footwear, electronics and food-processing industries. In addition, all women factory workers had had to contend with the financial difficulties that the crisis imposed on marginal households.

Quantitative data indicates that the crisis reversed Indonesia's increasing trend towards wage employment (Ahmed, 1999). Qualitative research suggests, however, that the shrinkage of industrial employment opportunities did not lead to a directly proportional shrinkage in the number of people who identified as waged workers. In-depth interviews conducted by AKATIGA indicate that men and women retrenched from this sector were reluctant to become involved in agricultural work or the informal sector (AKATIGA, 1998) because,

although unemployed, they still considered themselves factory workers. As a result, although the absolute number of women employed in this period may have decreased, the pool of women whose labour has been commodified by their experiences of factory work continued to grow, as new women are recruited in factories and women retrenched from the manufacturing sector continued to see themselves as (unemployed) factory workers.

Migrant women workers experienced both positive and negative effects from the crisis. While press coverage on the formation of new industrial labour unions and the activities of labour-oriented NGOs declined considerably in the early post-Suharto period, issues surrounding migrant women workers, and government responses to their concerns, retained a prominent place in the nation's newspapers.²³ This continued exposure in the new atmosphere of political openness could eventually bring about improvements in the conditions of legal migrant workers both before they leave Indonesia and in their receiving countries, as the government responds to public pressure. One such case was the government's highly publicised attempt to implement a new agreement with the Saudi Arabian government promising better protection for Indonesian female domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, which failed because of resistance by the Saudi government (Robinson, 2000b: 152).

On the negative side of the ledger, the number of women seeking work overseas increased as a result of the crisis. According to a report in late 1998, demand for legal female migrant worker placements had jumped 35 per cent since the onset of the financial crisis (*Kompas*, 24 November 1998). Unfortunately, this dramatic increase in numbers of women seeking work overseas worsened the situation for women who attempt to migrate illegally. The impact of the Asian economic crisis in receiving countries also affected migrant workers; large numbers of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, for example, were repatriated as a means of cushioning Malaysian nationals from the effects of the crisis.

In Indonesia, NGOs' increased freedom to act after the political crisis that followed the collapse of the Rupiah, was accompanied by new challenges in the early *Reformasi* period.²⁴ Labour-oriented NGOs in general experienced a crisis of identity. The members of many of their workers' groups lost their jobs and their previously high media profile was eroded, as the dominance of issues of good government and sectarian violence made it more difficult for NGOs to keep labour issues in the public mind (Ford 2000, 2001).

The women's NGOs that focus on labour issues fared better than most other labour-oriented NGOs. Their relatively smooth transition in the post-Suharto era can be at least partly attributed to their primary identity as women's organisations rather than labour organisations. Many of the international organisations which financed Indonesian labour NGOs during the Suharto period redirected their funds after President Habibie reformed government policy on trade unions (Ford, 2000). This did not affect organisations such as SP and YASANTI to the same extent that it affected the NGOs that had concentrated on filling the gap left by trade unions during the New Order period. Yet, although their external funding remained relatively secure, both SP and YASANTI re-evaluated their programs in response to the changes in the political structure and the new problems faced by workers as a result of the economic crisis. They continued, however, to deal with their established constituencies and were confident of

maintaining a role in women's labour advocacy in the medium to long term (interviews February-March 2000).

Conclusion

Globalisation has wide-ranging implications for the work of many women in Indonesia. Although not all women have been directly affected, two major trends associated with the globalisation of production and consumption have led to the increased commodification of women's labour since the mid-1980s. The first of these is the rising number of women working in light manufacturing; the second, the dramatic increase in the number of Indonesian women working as domestic labour in the Middle East and other parts of Asia. Despite the differences between work in medium- and large-sized factories and informal sector employment in the homes of wealthy Arabs or Asians, there are important similarities between the experiences of migrant domestic workers and female factory labour. Unlike women who continue to view waged work as an additional part of their home duties, work has become an integral part of the identity of female factory workers and overseas domestic labour.

Indonesian women working in these sectors face many difficulties, but they are not powerless. They seek to mediate their experiences of work as individuals and in small groups. In addition, their interests are the focus of a number of middle-class, feminist NGOs, which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. These organisations have been shaped by international concepts of feminism and influenced by the funding priorities of international NGOs and aid donors. Although their activities touch only a small proportion of women whose work is affected by the global economy, their efforts have succeeded in raising domestic and international awareness of the conditions in which women work in Indonesia.

The Asian economic crisis of the late 1990s altered Indonesia's political structures and dramatically shifted its citizens' economic expectations. At the micro-level, the negative effects of the crisis on the material conditions of women workers were severe and far-reaching. Although in no way alleviating the distress caused to women by the crisis, changes in Indonesia's political system in the immediate post-crisis period provided a more open context in which women workers and women's NGOs could act. At a structural level, intervention by the International Monetary Fund and bilateral donors in response to the collapse of the Indonesian economy has increased international leverage over Indonesia's domestic policy and furthered Indonesia's integration in the world economy. This trend will encourage the further commodification of Indonesian women's work, but it also increases the efficacy of international pressure for basic labour standards and global NGO networks' access to Indonesia.

The relationships between the increasing commodification of female labour, women's responses to that commodification and the imperatives of the global economy are complex. In Indonesia, women's NGOs have been one small, but important, part of that puzzle since the mid-1980s. Their efforts have both material and symbolic significance. In addition to their practical efforts to assist factory workers and migrant domestic workers in Indonesia, they are part of a global web of women's organisations that attempts to mediate to the dominance of

international capital. As such, they represent an aspect of what Kaur, amongst others, calls the 'international conveyor belt' that often escapes the attention of scholars (Kaur, 2000).

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Notes

¹ There is no doubt that women working in Indonesian factories or abroad are not only poorly rewarded for their work, but are poorly treated in the workplace. See, for example, YASANTI (1996), Bethan (1993), Julianara (1998); Kusyuniati and Kemp (1993), *Solidaritas Perempuan* (2000) and Tjandraningsih (1995; 2000).

² It should be noted that these processes were not uniform across Indonesia. See Booth (1990) for a detailed account of inter-island differences in export commodity production.

³ It is interesting to note in Table 5.1 that (remembering many indigenous people would not be listed as 'employed') the occupational distribution of indigenous persons who identified themselves as 'employed' broadly mirrored the distribution of the wider population.

⁴ Historical records of Indonesian women's work are not good: Elliott cites a number of sources noting a pattern of under-enumeration of women's work in census records (Elliott, 1997a: 157).

⁵ Statistics on female labour participation rates tend to underestimate women's economic participation because women's work is often cross-sectoral, and difficult to categorise according to the occupational labels used on population and industrial censuses. Women's non-domestic work is also socially undervalued. As a result of these factors, female participation in remunerative employment is potentially seriously under-represented in Indonesia's official figures (Benjamin, 1996; Hull, 1994; Manning, 1998).

⁶ Declines in output were mirrored by declines in employment share. According to the 1961 census, the percentage of employed persons working in the industrial sector was only 5.7 per cent (Biro Pusat Statistik, 1963: 4). The largest numbers of female factory workers were employed in the tobacco, clothing, textile and food industries (Elliott, 1997a: 168).

⁷ White argues that we should speak of the 're-industrialisation' of Java in the 1980s-1990s, because by 1990, the level of manufacturing employment as a proportion of all employment had surpassed 1930s levels for the first time (White, 1993: 129). In other parts of Indonesia, however, industrial production is relatively new or non-existent.

⁸ Teri Caraway argues that while there is a strong connection between labour intensity and the employment of women in manufacturing, there is no indication that export-oriented labour-intensive firms have a higher percentage of female employee ratio than labour-intensive firms producing for the domestic market (personal communication, 9 March 2001).

⁹ According to Hugo, historically '[t]here is nothing to compare with the current movement' in Southeast Asia (quoted in *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, 23 May 1996).

¹⁰ Department of Manpower is the official, English-language translation of *Departemen Ketenagakerjaan Republik Indonesia*.

¹¹ See the *Problema* series of labour-related press clippings.

¹² Robinson's micro-study of four hundred case files of new Indonesian labour migrants in 1984-85 revealed that all of the 78 per cent of migrants who were female were working as housemaids (Robinson, 2000a).

¹³ When the financial crisis hit Asia in 1997, one of Malaysia's primary strategies was to expel Indonesians working illegally.

¹⁴ Ironically, perhaps, the women's division of SPSI was considerably more active than its 'mainstream' (industrially-based) departments. See Ford (1999), Ford (2000) and Hadiz (1997) for details of SPSI's failure to represent workers.

¹⁵ There were development NGOs in Indonesia as early as the 1950s, but politically-oriented NGOs only began to emerge in the 1980s.

¹⁶ Internal and external critiques of Indonesian women's NGOs have also echoed criticisms made of NGOs in general. These criticisms include claims that their organisational structures are exclusionary, that they rely on foreign funding (and thus may be influenced by external policy priorities) and that their memberships are seldom representative of the groups whose causes they advocate.

¹⁷ As Reychman notes, the members of these secular feminist organisations commonly have a university degree, and perhaps even postgraduate qualifications from abroad (Reychman, 1997: 30).

¹⁸ See various editions of YASANTI's magazine, *Annisa*. See also Juliantara et al (1998) for a detailed account of the history of YASANTI and its activities with women workers.

¹⁹ Hadiz recognises this difference when classifying labour-oriented NGOs on a continuum between corporatist reformist and radical orientation. Having noted the important work of 'specifically women-oriented organisations' involved with factory workers, Hadiz allowed himself a special caveat because they were 'particularly difficult to categorise' (Hadiz, 1997: 141).

²⁰ KOPBUMI and its member organisations lobby the Department of Manpower to improve regulations dealing with migrant workers through the media and through direct contact.

²¹ It is interesting to note that SP has no links in Saudi Arabia because Saudi Arabia has no NGOs (Interview, 23 March 1999).

²² Research conducted by Teri Caraway in 1998-9 suggests that although there are instances of increased feminisation as a result of crisis, many firms implemented hiring freezes, whilst some textile firms actually masculinised their workforces in the early months of the crisis.

²³ See the *Problema* series of press clippings.

²⁴ The plunging rupiah precipitated a series of protests against the Suharto government. Some participants in a protest staged by wealthy students from one of Jakarta's elite private universities were killed when the security forces intervened in the demonstration. Soon after, under increasing pressure from many parts of society, President Suharto resigned, appointing the then-Vice President Habibie as his successor. Although Indonesia has since held a democratic election, uncertainty has plagued Indonesian politics since Suharto's resignation.