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Beyond the *Femina* fantasy: female industrial and overseas domestic labour in Indonesian discourses of women's work

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In the late 1990s, scholarly attention turned to glossy publications such as *Femina*, the premier Indonesian women's magazine, for insights into what it means to be a woman in Indonesia. When Brenner analysed the visual and verbal images of the 'many incarnations' of the modern Indonesian woman, she found that, in addition to being a 'happy consumer-housewife, devoted follower of Islam ... model citizen of the nation-state and alluring sex symbol', the modern Indonesian woman is a *wanita karier*, working as a business executive, secretary, lawyer or civil servant (Brenner 1999, 17–24). Sen, too, has noted the increasing dominance of images of professional, working women in 'official and commercial texts emanating from metropolitan Jakarta' (Sen 1998, 35). Unlike Brenner, however, who argues that the sum of representations of women in these middle-class texts 'offer[s] a bewildering array of lifestyle possibilities' (Brenner 1999, 17), Sen privileges images of the working woman — asserting not only that 'working woman' has replaced 'housewife' as the 'new paradigmatic female subject in political, cultural and economic discourses in Indonesia', but that the new 'iconic figure' of the 'working woman' is a professional who legitimises Indonesia's position as a modern nation, not a working-class woman labouring on the factory floor (Sen 1998, 35).

Brenner and Sen deal with similar texts and, indeed, similar themes, but they place a different emphasis on the extent to which their conclusions can be extrapolated. In seeking the modern, Brenner makes only modest claims for broader Indonesian society. While the bulk of her discussion is focused on the images of women

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presented in middle-class magazines and their political significance, she also asks 'what visions of modern womanhood ... were *excluded* ... closed off, or deemed unrepresentable by the media', noting that magazines such as *Femina* contain no 'hint that the urban, upper-middle-class standard of living depicted therein has not been reached by the vast majority of Indonesians' (Brenner 1999, 30). Sen is rather less cautious. Like Brenner, she indicates that the texts on which she focuses are significant for their exclusion of 'the proletarian, the rural and the provincial' (Sen 1998, 35–6). Yet having identified a shift from 'mother-woman' to 'working woman' in the advertisements and policy documents she has examined, she makes claims which stretch beyond the (con)texts in which she has documented that shift. In arguing that the evidence she presents belies the 'overwhelming' academic emphasis on Indonesian working women as 'labourer[s] in the multinational factory' and as 'victims of the nation's modernisation and ... [its] rapid incorporation into global capitalism' (Sen 1998, 36), Sen discounts modes of being a working woman which are far more alive in Indonesian discourse than she would have us believe.

It is true that the imperatives of global knowledge, production, and consumption systems have both expanded employment opportunities for middle-class women and encouraged the development of an elite discourse of the female executive in Indonesia. Moreover, the reality of these middle-class women's working lives are undeniably under-represented in the academic literature. But in her endeavour to redress the imbalance in accounts of Indonesian women's work, Sen effectively reverses it. Without seeking to diminish her insights into representations of women in policy documents and middle-class advertisements, this study takes issue with her rather summary dismissal of the proletarianisation literature by demonstrating the importance of images of working-class women in the Indonesian media in the period she examined. The discussion is divided into three parts. The first contains a brief demographic description of the lived experiences of Indonesian working-class women, providing context for the remainder of the study. The second documents academic and activist constructs about

female industrial labour and overseas domestic work. The final section examines the extent to which these constructs characterise the coverage of women's work in the daily press in the four years from 1996 to 1999 and describes a range of examples from popular culture from approximately the same period in which images of female factory workers and overseas domestic labour appear.

Indonesia's working-class women

Who are Indonesia's working-class women and what do they do for a living? Statistical and social definitions of women's labour are problematic in Indonesia as elsewhere; and in Indonesia, this universal difficulty is compounded by the notorious unreliability of data collection, particularly in the far-flung reaches of the archipelago. In this study, labour statistics are included partly in order to give a general picture (but by no means a definitive account of the numbers of women employed in particular sectors or occupations), and partly because they are influential in planning and the formation of public perceptions within Indonesia.

By 1999, according to the World Bank, some forty million members of the Indonesian labour force were women, most of whom, it can be safely assumed, were of the working class (Table 1). Although the majority of these women earn a living through agriculture or petty trade, those working in light manufacturing and overseas as domestic labour make a significant contribution to the Indonesian economy. In 1999, light manufacturing, the sector in which most female factory workers were employed, earned some 173 trillion Rupiah (over US\$ 17 billion), that is 15.6 per cent of total GDP and over 68.6 per cent of non oil and gas manufacturing (preliminary figures, Badan Pusat Statistik 2001). Although a much smaller proportion of the recognised workforce, female migrant

	Population aged 15-64 Millions	Labour force Millions	Females as % of labour force
1980	83	59	35.2%
1999	133	99	40.6%

Source: World Bank 2001, 48-51

Table 1. Indonesian population and labour force composition, 1980 and 1999

workers remitted some 3 trillion Rupiah (about US\$ 300 million) in the same year (Yunianto n.d., 5).

Employment opportunities for women in export-oriented light manufacturing industries, in particular, have accounted for much of the growth in women's participation in paid work in recent years within Indonesia. Many rural and urban women became engaged in waged work for the first time after the shift to economic policies based on export-oriented light manufacturing in the mid-1980s (Manning 1998, 254). By 1990, the percentage of females over ten years of age working in major industrial sectors were as follows: 48.9 per cent of all employed women worked in agriculture, forestry, hunting and fishing; 14.4 per cent in manufacturing (as opposed to 9.8 per cent of men); 19.9 per cent in wholesale and retail trade, restaurants and hotels and 13.7 per cent in social and personal services (United Nations 1998).¹ As the female to male ratio in manufacturing is higher than the female to male ratio of the total workforce (Hull 1994, 5), the rapid growth in the number of workers in the manufacturing sector between 1980 and 1999 from 4.7 million to 11.5 million people, or 13 per cent of all employed persons (Table 2), contributed significantly to the rise in female labour participation rates (Badan Pusat Statistik 1999).

Although many more women work in factories than overseas, women working in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong are a highly visible part of the Indonesian workforce. Officially-sanctioned overseas labour migration as a whole increased dramatically from the five year period between 1969 and 1974, when just 5,624 workers were placed, to the five year period between 1994 and 1999, when 1,461,236 Indonesians were sent overseas under government-approved labour migration schemes (Hugo 2001, 2). The Asian economic crisis saw another significant increase in the number of Indonesians seeking work overseas through official channels. In 1997-8, the year in which the crisis hit Indonesia, 235,275 Indonesians were sent abroad to work.² In the following year, that number had risen to 411,609 (Hugo 2001, 2).

As in manufacturing, the growth in overseas labour migration has been accompanied by a considerable feminisation of

Main Industry	Workers	% of total employed
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 and Hotels	17,529,099	19.7
Transportation, Storage and Communications	4,206,067	4.7
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and 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/>)
 Gender-differentiated statistics were not available on this site.

Table 2. Employed persons over 15 years of age by main industry, 1999

the sector. Although men made up the bulk of government-sanctioned labour migrants in the early years of the program, by the late 1990s, the number of legal female migrants far outstripped that of males. This trend has continued in post-Suharto Indonesia. In 1999, 302,790 women were officially placed in overseas positions compared to 124,864 men (see Table 3).

A significant number of the women who choose to work in Malaysia and Singapore are employed in occupations other than domestic work, primarily in cafes and other service industries, and in factories. The particular focus, however, on overseas domestic work in studies of Indonesian female labour migration in recent years

	Male	Female	Total	% female
Southeast Asia				
Brunei	1620	4857	6477	75%
Malaysia	80124	89053	169177	53%
Singapore	3206	31623	34829	91%
North Asia				
Hong Kong	42	12720	12762	97%
Korea	9278	1800	11078	16%
Taiwan	5822	23550	29372	80%
Middle East				
Kuwait	80	4142	4222	98%
Saudi Arabia	14473	116684	131157	89%
UAE	386	17198	17584	98%
All destinations	124864	302790	427654	71%

Source: initial data from Depnakertrans n.d.

Table 3. Gender distribution of official Indonesian migrant workers by destination, 1999

reflects the dominance of that sector. While the percentage of migrant workers in domestic service as a whole has dropped since 1984–9, an overwhelmingly large proportion of legal female migrant workers still work as domestic servants, a fact which continues to be reflected in the overall occupational distribution of Indonesian migrant workers (Table 4).

Women leaving Indonesia through channels sanctioned by the government — those counted in official statistics — are only one stream of female labour migration. Many other women seek work overseas through alternative means. Undocumented migration increased dramatically after the oil boom of the 1970s, and is estimated to outstrip official migration levels. Malaysia is the primary destination for undocumented workers from Indonesia (Hugo 2001, 6). Seventy-eight per cent of all undocumented immigrants arrested between 1992 and 1995 in Malaysia — some 146,800 people — were from Indonesia. During that same period 402,508 Indonesians found to be working illegally in Malaysia were allowed to register as

Sector	1984-9(%)	1989-94(%)	1994-9(%)
Domestic Service	70.2	59.7	40.4
Plantations	11.8	22.1	10.9
Transportation	14.2	14.2	7.1
Construction	1.5	0.1	7.0
Energy and Water	0.3	0.9	-
Hotel/Catering	0.3	-	0.1
Commerce/Finance	1.8	-	20.9
Mining/Oil	-	0.5 ^a	-
Manufacturing	-	2.1	13.6
Other	-	0.1	-
Total	100.1 ^b	99.7 ^b	100.0
Number of Migrants	292 262	652 272	1 461 236 ^c

a. percentage miscalculation in original table

b. rounding

c. figures in this period were inflated by Malaysia's policy of registering undocumented foreign workers, significant numbers of whom worked in the service sector.

Source: Department of Manpower data cited in Hugo (2001)

Table 4. Occupational distribution of migrant workers from Indonesia by sector of employment 1984-99

legal foreign workers (UNESCO-MOST n.d.), whilst in 1996-7, over 300,000 more undocumented Indonesian workers were regularised (Hugo 2001). Anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers of semi-legal and illegal international labour migrants in Malaysia has increased considerably since 1998, although one of Malaysia's primary strategies in the face of the Asian economic crisis was to expel Indonesians working illegally. In 2001, the Malaysian government responded to a riot by Indonesian workers by declaring that they would end Indonesian labour migration to Malaysia. A year later, some 3,200 Indonesians were deported for working illegally in Malaysia in the lead up to the implementation of the new Malaysian Immigration Act on 1 August 2002 (Satunet, 22/7/2002).

How are female industrial and migrant domestic workers spoken about?

In terms of working-class women's lived experience, then, although agricultural work and petty trade continue to occupy most working-class women, factory labour and work overseas are important options for women seeking formal employment. Given the visibility and economic significance of these types of work, it is not surprising that the experiences of the women who perform them feature heavily in both academic accounts and popular perceptions of the woman worker in Indonesia. Yet although both female factory labour and working-class women employed overseas have a similarly high profile, there are important differences in the degree of diversity within the discourses about them. Female factory workers have come to symbolise different things for different people. As proletarians, women working in manufacturing are factors of production, privileged participants in modernity, victims and empowered activists. In contrast, the debate about Indonesian female labour migration is dominated by a discourse of morals and ethics. The female overseas migrant worker is almost always seen as being passive; a good woman who is a victim of globalisation, at risk of commodification and sexualisation. Unlike the factory daughter, who is both victim and activist, women's motivations for seeking work overseas as domestic workers, and their attempts to organise and to improve their conditions of work, are seldom recognised as agency (see Ford 2001a, Ford 2001b).

Factory daughter as victim and empowered activist

Different discourses of female factory labour can be identified in the factories themselves, in workers' communities and in academic and NGO publications and statements. In the factories, women workers are discursively located within the production process. In Indonesia, it is rare to see men and women working side by side. Although by no means systematic, the sexual division of labour is underpinned by discourses of productivity and manageability, and concepts of *kodrat* (the biologically-based roles of men and women).³ In research

conducted in the early 1980s in Central Java, factory managers told Wolf that women were easier to control, more diligent and less likely to disrupt the production process (Wolf 1996, 150). A decade and a half later, in the late 1990s, managers presented Caraway with a catalogue of binary oppositions which demonstrated that images of 'nimble fingers' were still alive and well on the factory floor. Although managers were more likely to recognise that women were prepared to take strike action than they had been in the early 1980s, they continued to believe women were more careful, more diligent, and more patient — more suited to boring, repetitive work; more willing to follow instructions and less likely to waste time or backchat (Caraway, personal communication, Caraway 2002).⁴

Outside the factory gates, the grassroots discourse of 'factory daughter' is more focused on the interface between work and life. Most women working in medium-large factories in Indonesia are in their late teens or early twenties. As the majority of them are of the first generation to work in a 'modern' enterprise, their work experiences are very different from those of their parents. Consequently, the feminisation of factory work has not only affected the young women employed, but their families and friends, most often in the rural communities from which they migrated in order to find work, or in which they continue to live. Despite its hardships, factory work is relatively prestigious in the villages. It offers more continuity and income certainty than work in the informal sector, and it is cleaner than working in the paddy fields. Nyi, a factory worker interviewed by Mather in the late 1970s, compared factory employment favourably to domestic service, where the hours of work are unlimited, and workers are isolated, with no freedom and almost no money for discretionary spending (Mather 1983, 2). Over a decade and a half later, young Sundanese women told Peter Hancock in 1996–7 that agricultural work was 'too dirty, too hot, and made their skin black', and that factory work was their 'hobby', that it was 'fun, a relief from their tedious life in the villages, and a far better alternative to outside work' (Hancock 2000, 8). Interviews conducted with young factory workers in the Greater Jakarta area confirmed that for many factory employment is something of an

adventure, an experience of economic and social freedom before marriage, when, albeit at the expense of their own nutritional and other health requirements, they can help their families, or save for consumer goods and plan for the future (Interviews 2000).

Readings of the factory daughter as proletarian are also strongly represented in the books and articles of academics and activists, the discursive sites most accessible to outsiders. Most contemporary academic studies of Indonesian women's work have focused on lives and working conditions of women factory workers on Java, as Sen has suggested. These include the work of Wolf (1992) and Saptari (1995), who studied the female workforces of large factories in rural Central and East Java respectively, and of Hancock (1998) and Mather (1983; 1985) who have written on women industrial workers in rural West Java and the industrial areas of Greater Jakarta. In some accounts, including Siagian's work on the marginalisation of women (1993), the factory daughter is firmly located within the frame of 'women as victims of globalisation' identified by Sen. However, in the majority of academic work, women's experiences of factory work are not so easily pigeon-holed. When Sen collapses the tropes of 'factory daughter' and 'woman as victim of globalisation and the new international division of labour' into a single idea, she ignores the subtleties within academic discourses of factory daughter which allow for the possibility that women are both oppressed and empowered by opportunities to work in the factory sector. This fuller version of the factory daughter is called upon strongly in the work of authors such as Wolf (1996) and Berman (1998), while even authors such as Hancock (2000) and Mather (1983), who favour the 'victims of globalisation' interpretation overall, document positive aspects of women's experience of the perils of factory work.

Women working in factories are more uniformly represented as victims in a considerable sub-set of NGO publications and campaigns, which are major source of written information about factory workers' abysmal living and working conditions. Activists' condemnations of women workers' inadequate wages, difficult working conditions and inhumane living conditions

in export-oriented factories focus on the demands of international capital and globalisation as primary explanatory factors. Research on the female-dominated textile, garment, footwear export factories, in particular, including reports written by the Urban Community Mission and YASANTI, are excellent examples of this genre (see for example Juliantara and others 1996). However, the discourses of 'factory daughter as proletarian' and 'factory daughter as victim' were not the only readings of women's factory work popular with NGO activists in Indonesia in the 1990s. Alternative conceptions grew out of the widely-publicised experiences of women worker-activists who have led and participated in strikes and demonstrations, particularly after the torture and death of the worker activist Marsinah.

After participating in strike negotiations with the police, the military and management in May 1993, Marsinah, a young worker activist in East Java, was raped, tortured and murdered. There were strong suggestions of military involvement. Her murder dominated newspaper reporting at the time (see, for example, issues of *DeTik* and *Problema* from 1993 and 1994), and has re-emerged at least twice since as controversies arose about the investigation into her murder and the outcome of trials associated with the case. The link between female labour activism and Marsinah's murder, whilst reinforcing the image of 'factory daughter as victim', fed also into a much more positive discourse amongst politically-aware workers and labour activists in which the factory daughter became also 'empowered activist'. Marsinah's death became a *cause célèbre*, and challenged the widely held perception that women workers were all docile, biddable and obedient. It raised awareness that, while organised labour remained predominantly male, there were many female worker activists in Indonesia. Furthermore, as Andriyani has argued, it helped to problematise stereotypes of the male labour activist by breaking down 'the commonly held idea' that female activists were not subjected to physical violence in the same way men were (Andriyani 1996, 3-4).

In the post-Marsinah labour movement, the apparently competing discourses of 'factory daughter as victim' and 'factory daughter as empowered activist' have become closely intertwined.

Marsinah, the consummate victim, has become an enduring symbol of struggle and resistance, of empowerment for male and female worker activists alike. The strength of 'Marsinah as martyr' was evident in fieldwork interviews conducted in 1999 and 2000 with NGO and worker activists, when a number of respondents cited Marsinah as a potent symbol and source of inspiration for the struggle for better conditions in the factories.⁵ In the words of one worker activist who referred spontaneously to Marsinah, a middle-aged male, 'I was inspired by Marsinah, a women whose fate wasn't so different from other workers ... After reading about that case, I had to act' (Interview, 30/1/2000).

TKW as commodity and good woman at risk of sexualisation

Although they may be oblivious to its significance, travellers passing through the Soekarno-Hatta International Airport in Jakarta witness one of the most public faces of female labour migration. They see the TKW (*Tenaga Kerja Wanita*, literally 'female labour power', the acronym used by officials to describe female overseas migrant workers); these are groups of small women, mostly quite young, sitting together in the airport lounge or queuing at immigration, cheap bags and travel documents in hand. The difference between their stature and that of the other, much wealthier, Indonesians who use the international airport is remarkable. The migrant workers mostly hail from the villages of Java. They are dressed in t-shirts and jeans, long pants or knee-length skirts, the standard garb of working-class Indonesian women, or in the uniform of the company which has arranged their placement. Sometimes the whole group is veiled, indicating that their destination lies in the Middle East. Unless they are return migrants, they will have never travelled by plane before. Travellers who have left Indonesia by boat through Riau may have witnessed a much more confronting face of female labour migration. Sometimes, as Pelni ships from Jakarta pull into Kijang harbour on Bintan, women suspected of planning to cross illegally from Bintan to Singapore or Malaysia in search of work are rounded up by the local police. With terrified faces and crushed dreams, they are forced to squat in the dusty shipyard under armed police guard

before finally being led away. Those who escape detection often spend months in the islands waiting for falsified documents or a place in the crowded boats that dump illegal migrant workers off Malaysia's shores at night.⁶

The risks facing female migrant workers have been extensively documented in the press and elsewhere. Common complaints 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). Yet the issue of female overseas labour remains a vexed one, and the public discourse about it does not fully represent the full complexity of women's decisions to work abroad. Despite its well-publicised risks, the possible rewards of overseas work remain attractive, and the lack of well-paying jobs for 'low skilled' workers in Indonesia has meant that there is no shortage of women willing to take their chances. Most perceive overseas domestic service as a means to establish themselves financially so that they can feed, house and educate their children. Those who have been successful abroad can afford to build houses that are the envy of their neighbours, and establish small businesses. The obvious material benefits of their work encourages other women in their district to consider following in their footsteps. However, while women who seek work abroad clearly place great weight on the potential financial gains of overseas employment, their reasons for working overseas are not always entirely financial. Like any of us anywhere, they choose to work overseas for a complex web of financial and other reasons, such as family pressures or a desire to see the world (Interviews June 2001).

Overall, voices raised in defence of female overseas workers are largely unified in their condemnation of overseas female migrant labour as a form of exploitation. There are strong disagreements, however, amongst groups which mobilise to fight for the rights of women working overseas about whether overseas female labour migration should be stopped altogether. The more than sixty NGOs involved in KOPBUMI (*Konsorsium untuk Pembelaan Buruh Migran*

Indonesia, the Consortium for the Defence of Indonesian Migrant Workers) are divided over whether or not overseas female labour migration should be banned on the grounds that it is a form of trafficking of women (Interview, 15/7/2001).⁷ Some, such as activist Krisnawaty from Solidaritas Perempuan, the best-known of the NGOs dealing with female migrant labour, have argued that such attempts to limit overseas job opportunities in the informal sector actually disadvantage women by closing poor rural women's access to work (1997, 294).⁸ Others, such as LBH APIK, have made repeated calls to end overseas female labour migration altogether. Inherent in both sides of this debate are the tropes of 'TKW as commodity' and 'TKW as good woman', of female overseas labour migrants sacrificing all, only to be exploited by the government, by the labour supply companies who profit from their resolve, and sometimes even by their own families.

NGOs and other critics argue that the New Order government and its successors have dehumanised migrant domestic workers because — in a close parallel to factory-managers' perceptions of workers as 'factors of production' — they have only thought of them in terms of remittances. In a statement characteristic of this position in the mid-1990s, Purba and Herlina pointed to the government's utilitarian approach in using overseas labour migration as a 'safety valve' against the pressures of high unemployment, and highlighted the financial benefits of government-sponsored labour migration (Purba & Herlina 1995). In addition to appealing to the value of remittances, however, the New Order regime co-opted a religio-moral discourse of female overseas labour migration which had much in common with that mobilised by its opponents. Kathy Robinson documents one aspect of the government's recourse to the trope 'TKW as good woman' in an essay about the Islamic frames inherent in the public debate about Indonesians working as domestic labour in Saudi Arabia, where female migrants have exceeded 50 per cent of all labour migration since 1984 (Robinson, 2000a, 253–4) and almost 49 per cent of all legal female labour migrants are sent (Tirtosudarmo 2001, 7).⁹ In a detailed exposé of an exchange between a representative of

Muhammadiyah, one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organisations, and Sudomo, then-Minister for Manpower, in the mid 1980s, Robinson contrasts the moral and pseudo-relational position of domestic workers in Indonesia with their position in households abroad, noting that although Saudi Arabia's status as a strong Muslim society was promoted as protecting women workers' well-being in the mid 1980s, religion provided little protection for foreign domestic labour working there (Robinson 2000a, 255–68). In the 1990s, government spokespeople continued to argue that while the government was doing all it could to prevent the exploitation of TKW, the onus was on migrant women themselves to guard their reputations through appropriate behaviour rather than seek 'excessive' government intervention. This stance is reflected in Soeramishono's response when asked whether it was acceptable that Indonesian women were seen solely as domestic help in the countries that receive TKW, which is worth quoting at length:¹⁰

People often place little value on household help, but it is important to remember that the essence and significance of humankind is not determined by their wealth or poverty, or by the type of work they perform, but rather how far that person can work productively, legally and morally. So it is unrealistic to say that Indonesian women are identified solely as household help. In fact, such claims could be considered tendentious. The image of Indonesian women — wherever they are — is determined by their attitude and behaviour. (Interview with Soeramishono in Bethan 1993, 121).

A third trope, 'TKW as sexual victim', has also been used by both the government and those who oppose the export of women workers. The risk of 'sexualisation', that is of sexual exploitation and forced prostitution, is part of the discourse of female migrant workers, yet there has been a strange silence on women migrants as 'entertainment' workers, despite the fact that there is no doubt, according to KOPBUMI, that significant numbers of Indonesian women earn their living as sex workers abroad, particularly in the neighbouring countries of Southeast Asia (Interview 15/7/2001).¹¹ The role women as sex workers overseas was certainly not acknowledged by the New Order government. In a response to

accusations in the popular Jakarta tabloid *Pos Kota* (8/2/1997) that '[i]t has long been known that Indonesian migrant workers work as prostitutes', for example, then Minister for Manpower, Abdul Latief, replied with a firm statement, headlined as 'No Indonesian female migrant workers become prostitutes' (*Pos Kota* 15/2/1997). Many NGO activists are similarly reluctant to deal with this issue. When questioned on this, Wahyu Susilo, then head of KOPBUMI, acknowledged the strength of these discourses of morality — of 'TKW as good woman' and 'TKW as sexual victim' — in official and public spheres. He suggested that their pervasiveness meant that many NGO activists, like the government and the public, were not prepared to accept or acknowledge this 'other side' of female labour migration (Interview 15/7/2001). The virtual absence of the overseas migrant sex worker in Indonesian public debate contrasts starkly with the accounts of the importance of the prevalence of 'entertainment work' amongst female labour migrants from the Philippines (Law & Nadeau 1999) and with the relatively open discourses of sexuality and prostitution in Indonesia in general and on Java in particular.

Images of working-class women in the press and popular culture

Images of working-class women employed in factories and overseas are to be found not only in academic and NGO accounts. They can also be found in songs, on the screen, in cyberspace and in literature. The diversity of sites in which these images feature is, in itself, an indicator of the strength and reach of discourses of working-class women's work. This final section examines the extent to which the tropes which characterise academic and NGO discourse are evident in media representations of working-class women's work.

Newspaper representations of working women, 1996–9

The most common public source of images of female factory and overseas domestic workers is the daily press. Representations of working-class women can be found not only in the workers' media and the working-class press (papers such as *Pos Kota*), but in

newspapers and magazines read by the middle-class families and, therefore, by the readership of women's magazines such as *Femina*. Reports about overseas migrant workers appear with headlines such as 'The burial of Tasih's dreams' (*Kompas* 21/7/1997), 'Cheaper than a camel' (*Kompas* 19/6/2000) and '6 months straight as a sex slave: couldn't be normal, was forced to have anal' (*Pos Kota*, 20/5/2001). Even in Indonesia's leading daily newspaper, *Kompas*, such reports are sometimes 'enhanced' with graphic illustrations of a battered, and in the case of 'The burial of Tasih's dreams', effectively naked, woman. Accounts of factory work are not often as sensational. Nevertheless, one article in the respected journal *Tempo*, one of the magazines from which Sen draws her pictorial evidence, demonstrates the extent to which women's experiences of factory work can be milked for shock value. *Tempo's* 1991 special report on workers included assertions that two thousand women became lesbians because they were locked up in their factory dormitories at night (8/6/1991). The same special report, however, also included a more typical account of factory work:

Sukesih (not her real name), a machine operator at a yarn factory in Cimanggis, Bogor, fell asleep, and missed a day's work. The result? In the beginning, she was made to sweep the floor from 11:00 p.m. until 7:00 a.m. Then she had to stand near the wall — forbidden to eat or talk — from 11:00 p.m. until 6:30 a.m. Banned from entering the factory proper, she had to wait near the sentry-box from 12:14 a.m. until 7:00 a.m. There, she was struck by the cold and wet through by the rain for almost a month.

Later, she was ordered to face the head of personnel and was verbally abused. After being thrown out, she was told to meet the head of her section. Then she was kicked back to the head of personnel. And, so, it went on. Sukesih became a ping-pong ball. She asked for help from the SPSI representative, but his answer made her heart shrink. Eventually ... she was sacked without due process (*Tempo* 8/6/1991).

To what extent were such images characteristic media coverage of women's work between 1996 and 1999? The analysis that follows does not purport to provide a full answer to this question. Its focus on newspapers clearly brings with it an emphasis

on 'news' of work rather than articles about personal development, or advertisements depicting working women. As the study uses reports included in the labour press-clipping service *Problema*, rather than on an exhaustive examination of the dozen or so newspapers from which the clippings are drawn, there is a further possible content bias towards working-class occupations.¹² *Problema*, which was compiled by Yayasan Buruh Membangun (a local labour NGO) and funded by the German Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, was published monthly in a 60-page A-4 booklet for distribution to worker activists, NGOs and other interested parties throughout the 1990s. Not every labour-related article published in the papers surveyed was included because of space limitations and some papers were relied on more heavily than others. Nevertheless, the 4,682 clippings about work examined (the equivalent of almost 100 clippings per month for the 48 months surveyed) included articles on the full gamut of labour-related subjects, ranging from labour legislation to job interview tips. The occasional article on foreign labour affairs, particularly events in South Korea, was also included. In the first year of the period examined, clippings were arranged into two sections, namely articles and news. In early 1997, they were divided into six sections: labour news; labour legislation; child labour; women's work; demonstrations and strikes; and dismissals. For the remainder of the survey period, some categories were always included, whilst were added, dropped or altered as required. Commonly used headings not used in the January-February 1997 edition included overseas migrant labour; social security; wages; and English language news. The contents of the women's sections of *Problema*, in which many, but by no means all, of the articles about women workers were located, demonstrate that at least some articles about middle-class women's work were clipped, including a cartoon about a career woman and an article about a middle-class woman who runs a successful small business.

Despite these limitations, the data examined provides valuable insights into alternative images of working women in the Indonesian media. The use of a systematic clipping service means that a longer time-frame could be examined than would have been possible if the newspapers had been accessed directly. Furthermore,

as the purpose of this study is to demonstrate that images of working-class women are common in the media in late twentieth-century Indonesia and not, in any way, to hold up an alternative 'paradigmatic' subject to that proposed by Sen, the relevance of its outcomes are not entirely predicated on sample completeness. The sheer number of clippings about working-class women (an average of almost ten for every month examined) suggests that images of working-class women's work were common in the press, even if images of other kinds of working women are under-represented in the sample used in this study.

As in any content analysis, another question which arises is the manner in which the articles were categorised. Clearly, many articles could equally easily be classified as being about women or not being about women, depending on the criteria employed. For the purposes of this exercise, conservative definitions were used, with only articles mostly or completely about women being included in the tally. The articles about women working in occupations other than factory work or overseas (the minority) were almost all unambiguously about women. Those portraying factory workers were only counted if they referred explicitly to women or carried a photograph showing a majority of women. Articles focusing on the difficulties faced by female factory workers without attributing agency to them in any way were classified as portraying these women as victims. Conversely, articles in which women were shown as being involved in strike actions and demonstrations were classified as portraying them as agents. Finally, articles which offered factual or neutral accounts of factory work were placed in a separate category. The articles about overseas migrant labour were dealt with in a similar fashion. Reports in which the gender of the overseas migrant worker was either unclear or male were first eliminated, then the articles about female overseas migrant workers were divided into four categories: articles about female overseas migrant workers employed in other occupations; articles providing factual information (usually about remittances); articles which portrayed female overseas domestic workers as victims; and articles which provided positive coverage of female overseas domestic work.

Towards the end of the period, the previously male-specific term 'TKI' (Indonesian labour power) became more gender-neutral, and was often used with reference to women in 1998–9. Articles using TKI in this sense were counted only if they referred explicitly to women or carried a photograph depicting women.

Press coverage of women's work between 1996 and 1999, so far as it is represented by the articles about women which appeared in *Problema*, overwhelmingly shared the same set of discursive constructs found in academic and activist accounts of the period. 403 articles, or 8.6 per cent of the 4,682 press clippings included in *Problema* in the 48 months surveyed, referred explicitly to women. Of those 403, the vast majority of portrayed women as factory workers or overseas migrant domestic labour. A mere 55 (13.6 per cent of clippings about women) mentioned other occupations, of which only five (1.2 per cent) referred to a *wanita karier*, although another three (less than one per cent) depicted bank workers around the time when the banking industry was restructuring and bank workers were taking to the streets to demand proper retrenchment entitlements. Of the remaining 47, over half (24) were about domestic workers employed in Indonesia. Another six argued about whether women (presumably ex-factory workers) were entitled to take place in government-funded labour intensive programs. The balance was as follows: seven sales assistants (some on strike); four agricultural workers; one woman cleaning public toilets (who had bigger dreams); one woman serving food in a *warung*, a hawker of household goods; a woman who had opened a home show-room of Muslim clothes; a construction worker and a road-side repairer of tyres.

In the 348 clippings in which women were portrayed as factory workers or overseas domestic workers (86.4 per cent of clippings about women and 7.4 per cent of all clippings), 155 were about factory workers and 193 about overseas migrant workers. As could be predicted from the tropes which dominate public discourses of working-class women's work, articles about factory workers were more varied in tone than those describing overseas female domestic workers. Only 57 (36.8 per cent) of the female

factory worker clippings portrayed their subjects as victims. Almost the same number (54, or 34.8 per cent of articles concerning factory work) portrayed them as agents, usually the protagonists in strikes about their poor treatment or inadequate wages and working conditions. The remaining 44 (28.4 per cent) were information-based reports of a relatively neutral nature, such as reports about the dominance of women in industry in Batam and the work of women in a traditional batik factory. In contrast, accounts of female overseas labour migration were dominated by the image of the abused domestic worker. Of the 193 clippings about overseas migrant women as a whole 168 (87.0 per cent of all articles about female overseas migrant workers) showed women as domestic workers who were victims of their employers, their host country, or the companies who sent them abroad. It should be noted that most of 302 additional clippings about overseas migrant labour in general, many of which, of course, referred to women as well, although not explicitly, also portrayed their subjects as victims. Conversely, only 25 (13.0 per cent) of the articles offered an alternative perspective on women's experiences of work abroad. As in academic and NGO accounts, the stories of those overseas domestic workers who save enough to achieve a standard of living unimaginable had they been employed in a similar position in Indonesia, or of women employed in sectors other than domestic work, were seldom related. Of the clippings examined, only three (1.6 per cent) showed women working in occupations other than domestic work. Of these, one was a general article bemoaning the low skills profile of Indonesian overseas migrant workers which focused primarily on women, whilst two (one positive, one negative) referred to women working in factories in Malaysia. A further eight articles (4.1 per cent) were neutral or positive in tone, most of which quoted government sources promoting the economic benefits of labour migration for the individual and/or society as a whole. Six positive articles (3.1 per cent) suggested that overseas work was not all bad, whilst another described Indonesian domestic workers employed in Hong Kong with their mobile phones. Only seven articles (3.6 per cent) portrayed female overseas domestic workers as having agency,

remembering that, in the majority of these cases (like striking factory workers), they were agents in the sense that they were protesting publicly about their working conditions or abuse they have suffered at work. One of the articles was about women who go to Saudi Arabia as domestic workers for religious reasons. A further five were about protests by women who are working, have worked, or will work overseas, two of which were about the Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (The Indonesian Migrant Workers' Union), whilst the final article was about an abused overseas domestic worker who was planning to sue her employer.

Working-class women in popular culture

Representations of working-class women's work in popular culture are by no means confined to depictions of female factory labour and overseas domestic workers. Rendra's poem, 'Nyanyian Angsa' and Riantiarno's play, *Opera Kecoa*, both of which focus on the experiences of prostitutes, and Iwan Fals' song, 'Tarmijah', which tells the tale of a domestic worker in Indonesia, come immediately to mind as examples of texts dealing with working-class women in other occupations. As it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a systematic analysis of formal cultural representations of working-class women, this section provides a small number of examples in order to demonstrate that the images which dominate newspaper accounts of working-class women's work can also be found in film, television and cyberspace.

Much of the dramatic and literary representation of female factory workers is carried out within worker-activist circles, with or without assistance from labour NGOs (see, for example, Bodden 1997; Budianta 1998), but in the last decade or so, the experiences of female factory labour and overseas domestic workers have moved beyond the boundaries of labour activism into Indonesian popular culture and the public imagination. Marsinah's activism and murder have been a particular focus for popular works about female factory labour. Indeed, such was the depth of feeling generated by campaigns surrounding Marsinah's death that her experiences have inspired numerous art exhibitions, dramatic performances and even

songs (Kodama 1999). Marsinah is mentioned in hundreds of internet sites, many of which have little to do with worker activism. She is the subject of prose and poetry, including the cyber-poetry of Wowok Hesti Prabowo:¹³

Di dalam botol sulfat

*Marsinah,
kau hidup di dalam botol asam sulfat
entah siapa telah menuang separo isinya
hingga rintihmu terapung di tengahnya
kau selalu tergelincir ketika hendak mencapai lehernya
saat aku mencoba membuka tutupnya
kudengar rintihmu: pecahkan, pecahkan botol itu*

*Marsinah,
lukamu telah menyatu asam sulfat itu
aku selalu mencoba menumpukannya
tapi orang-orang gagah dengan mulut seragam
tak ingin pecabannya melukainya
tak ingin asam sulfat melumutkannya*

*Marsinah,
di dalam botol asam sulfat itu
dukamu abadi*

Inside a sulphate bottle

Marsinah,
you live in a bottle of sulphuric acid
someone has poured out half its contents
so that your cries float midway
you always stumble when you reach for its neck
when I try to open its lid
I hear your cries: break it, break the bottle

Marsinah,
your wounds have bound to that sulphuric acid
I try and try to pour it out
but the strong with uniform mouths
don't wish to be wounded by its shards
don't wish to be coated in sulphuric acid

Marsinah,
 in that bottle of sulphuric acid
 your suffering is eternal.

The controversy surrounding Ratna Sarumpaet's play, *Marsinah: a song from the Underworld*, which has since been translated into English and performed in the United States, Canada, Austria and Australia (Parker & Conroy 1998), and her monologue 'Marsinah Accuses' has helped cement the wider significance of the Marsinah story in Indonesian culture. Like many Indonesians, the death of Marsinah 'was the first time [Ratna] started learning about the conditions of labor in [her] country' (Ratna Sarumpaet quoted in Kendrick 2000). Yet Ratna, who was jailed for defying bans on the play's performance, 'identified with Marsinah in her brutal silencing, not just as a worker but as a woman' whose suffering 'symbolised the deep trivialising contempt which men, especially powerful men, feel towards women who dare to speak out' (Hatley 1998).

More recently, the world of film also decided to invest in Marsinah. Director Slamet Rahardjo Djarot, who is best known outside Indonesia for his 1990 film, *Langitku Rumahku*, has committed the Marsinah story to celluloid (Bisik 2001). The realist film was largely shot in Yogyakarta, with streetscapes shot in Surabaya and Sidoarjo. Casting emphasised the physical resemblance between actors and the characters they play, (*Bernas* 20/12/2000) but no judgement is passed on 'who was wrong or right' (*Bernas* 01/02/2001). Slamet Rahardjo Djarot has described the film as a 'crazy project' in the context of the post-crisis film industry, which reflects his idealism and the moral importance of Marsinah (*Bernas* 01/02/2001). Marsinah was shown in two versions at the International Film Festival in Rotterdam in February 2001 (Radio Nederland 2001). A later cut was shown at the ten-year anniversary celebrations of Yayasan Arek, a high-profile labour NGO in Surabaya (Depnakertrans 2001). Marsinah's enduring importance as a national, rather than just a workers', symbol was reflected also in her posthumous reception of the 1993 Yap Thian Hien human rights award and in calls for official recognition of her status as a national hero in 2000 (Satunet 2000).

The overseas domestic worker has, albeit to a lesser extent, also made the transition to popular culture, making her debut on the screen in a *sinetron* (soap opera) called *Under the full moon I pray*. In a departure from the norms of Indonesian soap opera production, *Under the full moon I pray* — the original title, *Full moon over Madinah*, was dropped to after complaints from Saudi Arabia — was filmed in-country. Its main character, Suharti, is a female domestic worker, not a wealthy Jakartan. Suharti's employers are just and upright, and she returns safely to Indonesia to a 'better life'. Other characters do not, however, fare so well, experiencing abuse of the kind more commonly associated with the experiences of overseas domestic workers. A link between the public debate about overseas domestic labour and the series was explicitly made by its director Dimas Haring, who was reported as saying that *Under the full moon I pray* was made 'as an attempt to raise the issue of female migrant workers ... in the middle of the debate on the pros and cons of sending Indonesian female migrant workers abroad' (*Kompas* 7/3/1997).

Conclusion

There is no one 'iconic' figure of the modern Indonesian working woman. At the top end of the economic and social scale, women may well be increasingly intent on following their magazine-fed dreams of being a *wanita karier*, but, as has been demonstrated here, the middle-class career woman is just one of a number of influential images in public representations of women's work. Images of working-class women, particularly of those employed in factories and overseas as domestic labour, appear in a range of popular cultural contexts and are strongly represented in the press. The constructs used in these popular representations mirror the tropes favoured in academic and NGO discourses of working-class women's work. The factory daughter is overwhelmingly presented as a proletarian, an overarching construct within which she is recognised both as victim of poor working conditions, sexual harassment and insufficient pay, and as activist, who is often seen on strike, protesting against the injustices of the workplace. The less nuanced academic and activist discourses of the female overseas

migrant labourer are also paralleled in press accounts, in which the TKW is almost always a domestic worker, a victim of her circumstances, who is hardly ever portrayed as having agency. Like Sen's *wanita karier*, these representations of working-class women's work are only partial. They remain, however, an important part of the constellation of images which characterise the public discourses of the working woman in contemporary Indonesia.

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Notes

1. Up-to-date gender-differentiated statistics by industrial sector and sub-sector are surprisingly difficult to access without recourse to the Bureau of Statistic's data tapes.
2. News of the economic crisis' effects on employment began to appear in the newspapers in December 1997 (*Problema* Dec 1997–Jan 1998).
3. In her analysis of her interviews with a wide range of factory managers, Caraway identifies *kodrat* as the major construct in the discourses about factory work that underpin the division of labour in factories.
4. See Caraway's doctoral thesis on the feminisation of factory work in Indonesia (Caraway 2002).
5. Fieldwork interviews were conducted with labour-oriented NGOs, factory workers and overseas domestic workers. Interviewees have not been individually identified because of the personal and/or sensitive nature of some of their responses.
6. See Ford (2001b) for interviews with five women seeking illegal entry to Malaysia.

7. The trafficking discourse became much more dominant in 2002 and 2003 after USAID sponsored a major anti-trafficking project in Indonesia.
8. It should be noted that Solidaritas Perempuan has, at times, also called for moratoria on female labour migration, particularly with regard to Saudi Arabia (See, for example, Solidaritas Perempuan 2000).
9. The high public profile of overseas domestic workers is not particularly well reflected in academic accounts of Indonesian labour. Apart from Robinson's work (Robinson 2000a; Robinson 2000b) and a series of extensive demographic studies (cf. Hugo 2001; Tirtosudarmo 2001), female migrant labour has received relatively little serious scholarly attention.
10. Soeramishono was head of the government body responsible for regulating overseas labour migration at the time of this interview.
11. In interviews with the staff of KOPBUMI in July 2001, it was indicated that a survey of regional newspapers in Riau and on the East Malaysian border in Kalimantan may demonstrate a more realistic attitude to prostitution than the national press.
12. Of the large number of labour clipping services available in the survey period, *Problema* was arguably the most comprehensive.
13. My translation (Prabowo 1999).

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<i>Berita Sumatra</i>	<i>Republika</i>
<i>Jakarta Post</i>	<i>Serambi Indonesia</i>
<i>Kompas</i>	<i>Suara Merdeka</i>
<i>Merdeka</i>	<i>Suara Pembaruan</i>
<i>Harian Terbit</i>	<i>Surya</i>
<i>Media Indonesia</i>	<i>Waspada</i>
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