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## **Introduction: Thinking about Indonesian Women and Work**

Michele Ford and Lyn Parker

*Women and Work in Indonesia* is an edited collection of papers that aims to examine the meaning of work for women in contemporary Indonesia. The chapters interrogate some of the formerly clear-cut divisions that even the rhetoric of advanced capitalism is now questioning: the splits between work and life, work and family, between paid work and housework, paid work and child care, and between production and reproduction. In focusing on women's life experiences, we assume a broad meaning for the word 'work', including not only those activities that bring in income but also home duties, child care, healing and civic work that fulfils obligations for maintaining social and community networks. This in turn impels interrogation of assumptions about economic activity, remunerable activity, divisions of labour, state and other formal definitions of work, and ultimately about the public and private spheres. The book thus seeks to make a significant contribution both to empirical studies of the lived experience and meaning of women's work in Indonesia and to feminist thinking about women's work in the non-Western world.

### **Work as economics**

Dichotomies between paid and unpaid work and between work and other aspects of life are largely unchallenged in the scholarship about women's work in Southeast Asia. In this body of literature, 'work' largely remains the province of economists and political scientists. Neo-classical economics is based on the assumption that rational, economic 'man', *homo economicus*, maximizes his own interest. The question of what constitutes rationality in this model is highly contested: does non-market decision-making - based, for instance, on perceptions of morality or social acceptability - constitute irrational behaviour? The presumption that *homo economicus* makes his decisions based on the urge to maximize individual self-interest reveals not only a utilitarian philosophy but also a secular and particular worldview. Although feminist economics has made great ground in the last 20 years, particularly through critical development studies - by scholars such as Agarwal (1997), Beneria (2001), Jackson and Pearson (1998) and Sen (2001) - and in publications such as the journal *Feminist Economics*, conventional conceptions of work continue to thrive untroubled by the postmodern turn or by profound gender analysis. For instance, neo-classical feminist economists, who concentrate on female participation in the workforce, the wage gap and occupational segregation, leave unexamined the assumption that participation in the paid workforce is the route to emancipation and empowerment for women (Barker 2005: 2192). Their attention to the otherwise invisible women in the workforce; the recognition of women's reproductive labour (such as housework); and discrimination regarding wages and

conditions is well-intentioned and, to an extent, effective. However, it does not interrogate the fundamental assumptions which underpin mainstream economic studies of work.

To anthropologists and others who study non-Western cultures, the economist's world-view seems ethnocentric and, as the basis of a major social theory, to lack explanatory power.<sup>1</sup> Descriptive economics, even gender disaggregated, is of limited use because it leaves the concepts and analytical tools, and therefore the structures and the power relations of our objects of study, intact. As many feminists have noted in relation to the ways language constructs gender, classifications create and naturalize difference. There is very little deconstruction of received categories in economics, almost no discourse analysis and an almost total absence of self-reflexivity. Of all the social sciences, economics seems to have been the most impervious to the postmodern turn of the last quarter-century (Beneria 2001, vol. 1: xiii). Standpoint theory, positionality, attention to muted voices - these are all foreign lands to conventional analyses of work. Even where well-intentioned economists include gender as a variable, the resulting statistics usually fail to consider 'how gender is symbolized and produced', contributing to 'the belief that differences between men and women are essential, universal and ahistorical' (Cosgrove 2003: 91). The challenge for feminist scholars is then to acknowledge gender difference yet not to essentialize and eternalize it.<sup>2</sup>

'Rational choice' theory has continued to prevail in political science as well as economics, but anthropologists and other social scientists have tended towards more culturally sensitive frameworks, shifting through the decades from structural functional approaches, through structural analyses and culture theory to post-structural and practice theory. The current paradigm, which stresses attention to the discursive formation of practising subjects, is indeed a long way from mainstream neo-liberal economics. However, while the postmodern approach has contributed much to the study of identity politics, (the inter-relationships between knowledge and power and to intersections of race/ethnicity and gender, It has in many cases deemphasized the material aspects of life. In Indonesia and many developing countries (not to mention pockets within the 'First World'), survival and the provision of basic needs are still the main concern of many women.<sup>3</sup> This is where feminist concern with the experience of female subjects - particularly marginalized or subordinated female subjects - can correct a tendency for neglect. We argue that there is a need to re-examine understandings of work in Indonesia - the work of production, but also the work of domesticity, of social reproduction and care - in light of these kinds of feminist scholarship.

Many feminist ethnographic studies have shown that, in practice, resources are allocated differentially within communities and within households and families according to differentiated obligations and interests. These allocations and strategies are not necessarily 'rational' in the sense of being obviously instrumental in maximizing the well-being of the individual. Sometimes they are communal or collective decisions taken in order to maximize group or social status or to comply with notions of social acceptability. Sometimes they are 'moral' decisions, based on gender ideologies of what makes a good woman or man, on positions within the family and extended family, on world-views associated with large social stratificatory systems such as caste hierarchies, on relationships based on patron-client ties, or on concepts of reciprocity. When we come to study real women working in Indonesia, we come to understand that we are dealing with single women, daughters, mothers and wives who are not free to make market-based decisions about what will provide the most income or best career for them as individuals. Rather, they make choices about work - or sometimes

have their decisions made for them - and in the process they constitute their own identities as full, gendered human beings: as good mothers, capable wives, virtuous daughters or reputable, marriageable young women. We would argue, then, that 'work' decisions always occur within cultural domains, such that economic decisions and work practices are inseparable from other ideological and symbolic systems, the material demands of living and the multiple everyday roles that women play.

### **Feminist analyses of work**

As noted earlier, feminist scholars have made a significant contribution to the documentation of women's work in an effort to make women's work 'count' - and be counted - in countries like Indonesia. Ester Boserup's landmark work, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), was the first to examine how development differently affected women and men, and prompted a wide-ranging and abundant literature, and prolific development/aid practice, known as the women in development (WID) approach. This body of work assumed that women were marginalized by their unequal access to development-derived, new sources of employment and economic growth in the modern sector. Purpose-built, WID-inspired development programmes aimed to help integrate women into the development process and into the labour force, through better education and training. Through the 1980s, the WID approach was largely superseded by the gender and development (GAD) approach, which better recognized that 'woman' was part of the social construction of gender systems. Despite this, to this day the term 'gender' is often taken to mean 'women', such that terms like 'gender studies', 'gender-sensitive' and 'gender mainstreaming' often mean making women the topic, or including women as a category, rather than actually making the relations between men and women, or the complexity of gendered differentials, clear.

Much of the work done under the umbrella of WID and GAD has been on the feminization of the international labour force under policies of export production by multinational corporations. Scholars have concluded that 'female labor has been crucial for labor intensive and export-oriented industries in developing countries and very significant for economic development (at least in many cases)' (Beneria 2001: xvii). However they have disagreed in answering questions about the benefit of the feminization of the labour force for women workers. Some of the most interesting work done on women's work in Indonesia has been a contribution in this field. Scholars such as Robinson and Wolf have shown that variations not only pertain by country but also by segmentation of and within industries (such as mining – see Robinson 1988, also Lahiri-Dutt and Robinson ch. 6 of this volume), and indeed within households (Wolf 1992). Wolf, in her important study of 'factory daughters' in rural Java, is one of a number of feminist fieldworkers who have challenged conventional understandings of the household as a homogeneous unit of production and consumption (see also Blackwood ch. 1 of this volume). Meanwhile, scholars such as Agarwal (1997) and Kabear (1998) have made a real contribution to empirical knowledge of the on-the-ground practice of household economics. In fact, this has been one of the most fruitful areas of feminist intervention in economics. Several chapters in this collection develop this line of research, notably Dawson's analysis of transmigrant households in Riau (ch. 2) and Blackwood's chapter on Minangkabau farmers (ch. 1).

An important contribution from recent feminist scholarship - mainly from postmodern scholarship but also from the GAD literature - is the realization that we must explore the

instability and potentials of 'women' as a category. Some feminists have resisted the insistent call to deconstruct the idea of 'woman', seeing in this move a threat to the classic feminist agenda of opposing patriarchy. In this line of thinking, if there is no single, common or universal cause, what can be the rationale and the agenda for feminism? However, postmodernists have successfully argued that diverse female positions and identities mean that female interests and agendas must also be diverse, and indeed, that women may simultaneously be positioned within several different discourses and social systems (e.g. Mohanty 2003). This theorizing of female diversity precludes the presumption of perpetual female subordination, and of universal and eternal patriarchy. Its anti-essentialism also militates against the automatic feminizing of any subaltern grouping, without denying the probability of female disadvantage within most social systems. For instance, using a postmodern feminist approach it would not be tenable to characterize a wealthy, powerful, minority Chinese Indonesian identity as masculine vis-a-vis the poor, helpless, feminine *pribumi* – 'native' Indonesian - nor vice versa, except in particular cases where the gender of individuals was relevant.

While it is now commonplace to assert that gender intersects with cleavages and interests of class, religion, and race/ethnicity (e.g. Bottomley *et al.* 1991) or with disciplines and other highly abstract notions (e.g. the electronic journal *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*), it seems difficult to get beyond this assertion other than by way of description of particular cases. Sometimes gender interests are internally contradictory, such as when middle-class and wealthy women employ poor women as domestic workers in exploitative conditions (see von der Borch ch. 10 of this volume). Sometimes the powerlessness of female gender reinforces ethnic/race subordination, but wealthy women exploit poor women, acting in class interest against their own gender. What can we say about these intersections, apart from pointing them out in their specificity? Are any patterns discernible? Are comparisons possible? Are there any lessons to be drawn? In Blackwood's chapter, the category of rural Minangkabau 'women' is divided not by ethnicity but by class and kinship. Likewise, it is class and nationality - not simply gender - that determine the experiences of the Indonesian foreign domestic workers in Singapore about whom von der Borch writes in her contribution (ch. 10).

Another feature of feminist scholarship on women's work has been its generally inclusive approach to women's reproductive work. (A possible exception is some early Marxist feminist scholarship which saw that, under capitalism and the capitalist division of labour, women were always identified with the subordinate in the classic dualisms of paid versus unpaid, productive versus reproductive, waged labour versus domestic labour.) In conventional economics, and in much work done in labour studies, women's work in domestic maintenance (for example, housework, cooking and washing, supply of household resources such as firewood and water), family reproduction and caring labour (for example, childbearing, child care, kin maintenance and care of the elderly, disabled and sick), and community development (for example, maintenance of neighbourhood networks and communal labour) has been consistently neglected, if not denigrated. It is almost as if, 'Over time, the household came to be seen as a site of consumption rather than production, and the activities performed in the household, what we now call reproductive labor, were classified as economically unproductive' (Folbre 1991 cited in Barker 2005: 2197). When these tasks become paid work, they remain feminized, and therefore poorly regarded and poorly

recompensed (Barker 2005: 2199). Again we see the feminist challenge: on the one hand, we seek to attend to, if not valorize, this work, and on the other, to change the role that this labour, especially domestic labour, plays in creating and maintaining women's subordinate status. The latter could involve redefining such tasks so that they are not seen as 'women's work' - for instance, having men share responsibility for the cooking and associated shopping, or not automatically assuming that 'mother' will attend to all the family birthdays or community ritual occasions. Another approach is to commodify women's reproductive and care work, in the belief that attaching an economic value to it will raise its status and hence public appreciation.<sup>4</sup>

A feminist analysis of work requires more than the 'add women and stir' recipe, more than just enhancing the visibility of women's work and more than simply the disaggregation of data by gender (although even that is missing in most statistics on Indonesia).<sup>5</sup> We would argue that an adequate feminist understanding of women's work requires a much more holistic approach than that taken by economists or political scientists - one that entails understanding of the nature of the individual, of social relations and of relationships of unequal power in any given cultural and historical context; understanding of intra-household relations and cultural scripts of gender roles and norms; sensitivity to the ways gender intersects with other identities and ideologies; knowledge of nation-state ideologies, media discourses, as well as international discourses of development and globalization; understanding of the ideological construction of the division of labour, of remuneration for labour and of working conditions. More broadly still, we consider that a feminist understanding of women's work involves the deconstruction of many binary analytical tools such as formal and informal employment, production and reproduction, production and consumption, and the public and private domains.

Barker advocates what she calls an 'interpretive approach' to women's work; an approach that aims to illuminate the relationship between the conceptual (ideological and symbolic) aspects of gender and the empirical (matters such as relative access to and control of resources), though these are not necessarily separated in practice. For instance, there is no sense collecting statistical data on female participation in the workforce if women do not count their work as maids or traders as 'work'. (This is particularly relevant in Indonesia, as several of the chapters in this collection point out, e.g. Idrus ch. 8 of this volume.) We contend that work cannot be meaningfully measured if we do not first understand how work is constituted and defined by the people answering the census or survey questions. Barker's interpretive approach is based on the assumption that 'analyses of identity and representation, knowledge and power, and authenticity and culture are crucial to understanding economic and political structures' (2005: 2193). We have adopted this approach in our book, because we believe that 'the material and discursive are not radically separate' (Barker 2005: 2194). Scholars such as Escobar (1994) and Bergeron (2004) have shown that economic and social processes such as 'development' are constituted through discourse. They require not only top-down government policy but also a public discourse that naturalizes and valorizes 'development', makes subjects compliant and induces them to work productively towards development goals. Similarly, an understanding of women's work in the domestic sphere must be cognizant of the subtle constructions of gender that can mean, for instance, that a husband's absence from home can actually decrease a wife's workload (Dawson ch. 2 of this volume). As Alesich observes in her study of labour around birthing (ch. 3 of this volume), hegemonic norms of the gendered

division of labour mean that, while women are expected to substitute for men when men are sick, men are not expected to do women's work when women are incapacitated.

### **Women and work in Southeast Asia**

As well as contributing to the theory and ethnography of women and work in Indonesia, this study has an explicitly feminist objective. It aims to shift the discourse on women and work in Southeast Asia from the study of discursive effects on women to the study of experience and meaning. Many of the studies of women's work in other countries of the region - studies of women as factory workers, domestic workers and sex workers - suggest that women are relegated to the lowest-paid, most exploited and most marginal positions within these rapidly modernizing economies. Our intention in making this shift is to avoid assumptions of victimization that often underlie studies of women as workers, and the silencing of women as human beings that seems to accompany this discourse.

A focus on experience forces the voices of women to be heard - voices that describe the satisfactions and empowerment of 'work' just as often as its frustrations and difficulties. Attention to the meaning of work for women draws attention to the everyday complexity of working in particular cultural environments. For instance, women working in a hotel in Lombok are not gender-neutral workers: their identity as hotel workers is inseparable from a discourse that constructs hotels as places of illicit sexual activity and a gendered double standard that turns a blind eye to extra-marital sex for men while condemning such relationships for women (Bennett ch. 4 of this volume). If women hotel workers want to maintain a respectable self-image they have to devise strategies to dispel that aura of immorality. Thus, attention to the meaning and experience of work forces the researcher to attend to the ways women exert agency. This is evidenced in Ford and Lyon's study (ch. 9 of this volume) of how some sex workers in the Riau Islands succeed in using their commercial interactions with foreign men as a basis not only on which to move out of sex work, but also to alter their class position. These women achieve this by deploying the resources provided by their cultural environment. It is important to note that 'culture produces and enables agency, as well as, in the more conventional mode, constrains agency' (Parker 2005: 218).

At the same time, however, we seek to avoid painting an overly rosy picture of women's experiences of work. There is now a significant body of literature on gender relations, and particularly on the contribution and status of women, in Southeast Asia. Until recently, this literature propounded an image of Southeast Asian women as relatively autonomous beings, certainly less subject to male power than their sisters in South and East Asia. Claims for the relative autonomy and high status of women in Southeast Asia, and especially in Indonesia, have focused on the economic activity of women; their operation in the public sphere; and the absence of the strict gender segregation commonly found in the Muslim countries of the Middle East and South Asia. Historians such as Reid (1988, 1989) and anthropologists such as Firth (1966) traced women's comparatively high status in Southeast Asia to pre-existing local religious and cultural systems - animistic and ancestor worshipping traditions, *adat* (customs, traditions) that valorized cooperation, reciprocity and sharing, bilateral and even matrilineal kinship systems, and systems of social hierarchy based on criteria such as precedence, age and class. In this body of literature, female rulers, female soldiers and female traders were presented as evidence of women's real power and independence in the public

sphere historically, and women's economic activity, dominance of markets and responsibility for household economic management as evidence of their economic autonomy.

Over the last two decades, these claims have been subject to scrutiny and ever more sophisticated analysis. Recent studies have examined the historical and academic conditions behind the production of the image of the autonomous, economically independent Southeast Asian woman (e.g. Stivens 1992 for Malay women; Ong and Peletz 1995 for Southeast Asia generally). For Indonesia, amazingly, these claims have rarely been examined from the point of view of women's work and the meaning of that work, both to the women involved and to their families, communities and nation-state. A few scholars have argued, using Anderson's seminal work on local understandings of power in Java (1972), that precisely because work and 'doing' is low status compared with 'being' and ruling, working women have little status or power (e.g. Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987). The New Order regime of President Soeharto (1966-98) had a particular ideology of gender relations, with women as submissive, docile appendages of their husbands (e.g. see Suryakusuma 1996). This state ideology fits this rather monolithic and static view of Javanese culture like a glove. One could also take the more pessimistic radical feminist view of patriarchy: that if women do the work, automatically the status of the work is low.

More recently, scholars such as Brenner (1998) and Bain (2005) have suggested ways to work 'against the grain' of this earlier work. Following such suggestions, and in order to evaluate these claims, we focus on the meaning and status of women's work for the women themselves, taking the experience of women as the starting-point. The chapters in this collection do not historically deconstruct the image of 'the autonomous Southeast Asian woman', nor do they trace its evolution in academia. We have, however, attempted to elicit studies of a wide range of types of employment over the last three decades in Indonesia - agricultural labour (Blackwood ch.1; Dawson ch. 2) as well as industrial work (Warouw ch. 5; Lahiri-Dutt and Robinson ch. 6) and some of the new forms of work in the tertiary sector such as in the media and tourism (as described in the papers by Nilan and Utari ch. 7 and by Bennett ch. 4), alongside commodified forms of intimacy, household and reproductive labour (Alesich ch. 3, Ford and Lyons ch. 9, Idrus ch. 8, von der Borch ch. 10) in rural and in urban areas, and in different locations throughout Indonesia and beyond - in an effort to examine how capitalism, globalization and local culture together produce gendered patterns of work with particular statuses and identities.

### **Women and work in Indonesia**

When we come to look at the meaning of work for women in Indonesia, we need to examine not only economic structures, but also how gender ideologies of the nation-state, organized religion and the community shape public perceptions of women as workers. Our aim here is to examine how cultural notions of gender-religious sensibilities, *adat* and ethnic identities - inform, constrain and enable women's work. How do state policies and programmes intervene in women's working lives? How does working help Indonesian women construct their selves? How does working define Indonesian women within the family and community? How are the worlds of home and work articulated? Does women's work straddle, separate or conflate the public and private domains, if we can talk of such?

In Indonesia, concepts drawn from Western industrialized contexts converge with state, cultural and religious discourses about gender roles to exclude not only reproductive labour,

but also a significant proportion of economic activity, from official and popular definitions of 'work'. As Indonesia became integrated into the modern global system of capitalism, it absorbed the assumptions about public and private spheres, and about the gap between productive and reproductive work, that have prevailed in the West. Western concepts of work developed at a time when a large proportion of the labour force was employed in formal sector occupations, and where sharp divisions had emerged (at least in theory) between work and leisure and between productive and reproductive tasks. These divisions make little sense in countries like Indonesia, where even after an extended period of rapid industrialization only 30-40 per cent of working men and 20-30 per cent of working women are employed in waged or salaried positions - and over half of all working women and over 40 per cent of working men are in the informal sector. As Pinches (1987) has argued, in relation to the Philippines, they also ignore the fluid boundaries between formal and informal kinds of work, as circular rural-urban migrants and the urban poor slip in and out of formal sector employment.

Yet while many Western societies are now being forced to re-evaluate these distinctions - as patterns of employment change; as the boundaries between work and leisure become blurred; and as reproductive tasks become increasingly commodified - narrow definitions of work continue to dominate discussions about the Indonesian labour market. This failure to recognize the full breadth of economic activity affects both men and women, but leaves women particularly vulnerable because of the way their productive and reproductive labour is framed by the state, organized religion and local cultures. According to official statistics, in 2005 almost half of all employed women continued to work in agriculture, while a quarter were involved in trade. A further 14 per cent were categorized as being employed in services (Depnakertrans 2005). However, of a total working-age female population of over 77 million in 2004, only 43 per cent were considered to be 'employed', while another 39 per cent 'kept house' (*mengurus rumah tangga*) (Depnakertrans 2004).

One of the main reasons women are under-represented in the labour statistics is because women's status as workers is subordinated to their status as housewives. The utterly non-feminist Indonesian state has long acknowledged that women have both productive and reproductive roles to play, as suggested by the term '*peran ganda*', or double role, adopted by the New Order government to prescribe women's proper function in society. This role is described extensively in Blackwood's chapter (ch. 1) in this volume, and alluded to in many of the other contributions. A Department of Information publication entitled 'The Women of Indonesia' explains the New Order's official development ideology as follows:

[D]evelopment requires the maximum participation of men and women in all fields. Therefore women have the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as men to fully participate in all development activities. [But] the role of women does not mitigate their role in fostering a happy family in general and guiding the young generation in particular, in the development of the Indonesian people in all aspects of life.

(Murdiati *et al.* 1987: vii, quoted in Wright 1997: 8)

However, as this statement demonstrates, the New Order saw women's primary duty as being to their husband and children rather than to their (income-earning) work. As a result, women working in a whole range of occupations - from teaching to trading - have focused on their identity as wives and mothers rather than on their status as workers. In particular, economic activities conducted in and around the domestic domain became invisible. This collection



both explores the implications of this construction of female identity and challenges it by showing not only how work feeds into the self-perceptions of women employed in the formal sector, but also its importance for women who may not derive their primary identity from their income-earning activities.

Although the gender discourse of the New Order has been shifted from centre stage since the fall of Suharto, many of the assumptions about women and work that prevailed during that time remain strong. Some of the chapters in this book address the question of the meaning and valuing of women's 'traditional' work, whether that be agricultural labour, domestic work or other kinds of reproductive labour, both during and after the New Order period. These forms of work are often not counted as work in conventional economic studies, and correspond to state constructions of female identity and responsibility. Several chapters in this volume challenge state constructions of women as 'only' mothers and housewives, and demonstrate how women accommodate their 'real' work and externally imposed constructions of ideal women. Meanwhile, Blackwood's chapter on Minangkabau rice fanners in West Sumatra (ch. 1), for example, shows how during the New Order women thought of themselves as farmers and negotiated new definitions of 'housewife'. Their mobilization of kinship and village relations confuses conventional categories such as wage labour and the domestic sphere. One of the themes of these chapters is that the separation of productive and reproductive labour is not meaningful. Where responsibility for maintaining the family and allocating household resources rests with women, a gendered division between the domestic reproductive and public productive spheres is untenable, as argued in Dawson's chapter on women's work in transmigrant communities in Riau (ch. 2).

At the same time that many forms of women's labour became invisible, other forms of work traditionally undertaken by women as part of their familial and community obligations became commodified. These 'new' forms of 'old' work are important sites of contestation between local cultural systems and the market economy, which challenge boundaries between the public and private spheres. The third chapter in this collection juxtaposes new and traditional forms of the work of midwives. The delivery of babies and care of new mothers has traditionally been the preserve of senior mothers, but trained midwives are increasingly employed now in Indonesia, transforming this ancient female domain. Alesich shows how the 'new' and the 'old' have come to recognize their differences in effectiveness and source of authority along the way, such that now in Southeast Sulawesi there are parallel midwifery services. Her chapter argues that the shift in personnel has wrought other dramatic changes in the gendered division of labour in healing and in relationships between the midwife and the community. Another sphere in which 'traditional' women's work associated with housework and cultural values of hospitality and community has been transformed into waged work is tourism. Bennett's chapter addresses the ways tourism impacts upon young women and how young women make use of the opportunities it offers. In her study of young women who work in hotels along the beaches of west Lombok (ch. 4), she contrasts the romantic appeal of working in the international tourism industry with the reality of life for young women as they search for marriage partners, manage child care, and seek to maintain respectability with regard to local cultural and religious norms. In particular, Bennett attends to how women working in such occupations attempt to conform to dominant gender ideals and traditional roles, and negotiate the often difficult terrains of respectability and acceptable social status jeopardized by perceptions of the sexual impropriety of their work.

Although women are still widely represented as 'housewives', over the last four decades there has been a dramatic shift in women's employment in Indonesia towards waged work. This shift has brought very different ways of working for women (Ford 2003; K. Sen 1998). This is nowhere more evident than in the extensive development of light manufacturing industries from the mid-1980s, which brought many rural and urban women into waged employment for the first time (Manning 1998: 254). As demonstrated by Warouw's contribution (ch. 5) about young women from rural areas who work in the factories of Tangerang, near Jakarta, industrial work brings dramatic shifts in the life experience of these young Indonesian women. Warouw argues that young factory women experience the regimentation of factory work as an entry-point to modernity which represents hopes for a better life rather than an end in itself. Factory work provides these young women with the financial certainty to sustain their urban existence and with the self-respect and dignity that enables them to construct a modern, urban identity, and separates them from their rural past.

As Warouw's article also attests, women's readiness to work 'outside the home' is strongly affected by local culture. In Tangerang, local women rarely choose to work in the heavily feminized factories in their neighbourhood, which are instead staffed by rural migrants. This supports Manning's (1998: 240) findings that historically poor provinces with a traditionally high level of female labour market participation maintained those levels throughout the New Order period (1966-98). The historically low participation rates of Sundanese and Betawi women in non-domestic work are reflected in the low contemporary female labour participation rates in the Greater Jakarta area, despite the strong presence of female-dominated export-oriented industries in that region.

Women have also found employment in traditionally male-dominated areas. Chapters 6 and 7, by Lahiri-Dutt and Robinson and Nilan and Utari respectively, show the significance of gender transgression in the workplace to the women who work in coal mining and the media industry respectively. In turn this highlights the underlying structural strength of the gendered division of labour. Chapter 6 focuses on the issue of menstruation leave, an allowance payable to many women workers in Indonesia as a gender right. Through this lens, the authors explore how the differences between the formal and informal sectors feed into constructions of femininity, and the tensions between gender 'equality' and 'difference' in feminist practice. Chapter 7, by Nilan and Utari, deals with another highly masculinized work sphere, the Indonesian media. Despite high numbers of female graduates in media studies, this new and burgeoning industry is dominated by men. The authors find reasons for this male domination, at least partly, in understandings of gender. This chapter focuses on how work is constructed 'male' or 'female', a theme that runs through several other chapters as well. For instance there is a common perception that most kinds of media work are too tough for women. But gender constructions of work include not only the working conditions of those in the industry but also the expectations about division of labour at home: the expectation that media work involves irregular hours, and often night work, conflicts with expectations that women will be at home with their families at night. These chapters raise another issue that is implicit throughout much of this book - the role of organized religion, particularly Islam, in Indonesian constructions of women's work. Nilan and Utari analyse the impact of the Islamic construction of *kodrat wanita*, or biological destiny of women, noting that even professional middle-class women are challenged by the expectations of the media industry. In contrast, Lahiri-Dutt and Robinson contextualize Muslim concerns about

women's health and moral wellbeing in international debates around the protection of women workers.

The final three chapters deal with two forms of women's work that present perhaps the greatest challenge to cultural, religious and state expectations about women's work: sex work and overseas labour migration. Idrus' chapter on Bugis women who seek their fortune in Malaysia (ch. 8) clearly forefronts the importance of religion in shaping women's experiences abroad. Idrus writes about the ways in which women negotiate religious and cultural restrictions in order to maintain their honour while working overseas, specifically by broadening the concept of *muhrim* (close male relatives with whom a Muslim woman may travel) to permit them to leave with female family members or others in the community. She also discusses how women's expectations of finding a marriage partner overseas provide an important measure of their success. Ford and Lyons (ch. 9) describe the very different path to foreign marriage travelled by some sex workers in the Riau Islands, which are located on Indonesia's border with Singapore and Peninsular Malaysia. Their chapter argues that sex work in the transnational space of the borderlands offers some migrant women a chance to develop their social capital and access a lower middle-class lifestyle that has very little in common with their experiences in their home villages. The Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore described by von der Barch (ch. 10) also have very different migration experiences from Idrus' undocumented labour migrants, who leave from Sulawesi to trade or work in Malaysian factories and homes. However, all three chapters tell stories of personal transformation achieved through labour migration. Like Idrus, von der Barch describes the fundamental change in the sense of self of women migrants as a result of their time abroad, which leaves them 'straddling different worlds'. Her chapter, the final contribution in this volume, examines the complex constellation of losses and gains foreign domestic workers experience as they shift between home and the country in which they work, concluding that, overall, women are enriched not only financially, but personally, by their experience.

## **Conclusion**

This book is the first systematic attempt to analyse the claims for the relative autonomy and high status of women in Indonesia in terms of their work and economic activity. While it is premature to make a definitive assessment, there is enough material in this collection to call such claims into question in the contemporary era. The compromises, strategic negotiations and frustrations women experience as they try to satisfy social and religious constructions of ideal womanhood - while feeding their families and finding self-fulfilment in work - show that the idea of women working is still contested in Indonesia. Indeed many of the case studies suggest that status still accrues to those women who do not work in the public sphere or whose work can be constructed as being close to the domestic sphere (e.g. Lahiri-Dutt and Robinson ch. 6; Nilan and Utami ch. 7; Idrus ch. 8). Similarly, following Barker (2005), the chapters show how the ideological and symbolic aspects of gender constitute interpretations, and indeed the definition of 'work'. They show that it is meaningless to count female participation in the workforce if we do not first attend to what kinds of 'work' count.

The idea that there are class inflections in the idea of women working is nothing new. However, the continuing strength of the gender ideologies that place women in the home, as carers of husbands and children, is perhaps surprising. In rural settings, such as the Minangkabau highlands and the transmigration settlements of Riau, women's work remains

disguised by wifely duties. Likewise, the image of the working woman in some modern, formal workplaces, such as those associated with the media industry, is one of radical transgression rather than positive autonomy. Women who move long distances for work are even more suspect: migrant factory workers and domestic workers - and especially sex workers - have little if any place in national imaginings of who women are and the work they should do.

This does not imply, however, that work is not important to Indonesian women. The chapters in this volume suggest that women in Indonesia are generally proud of their achievements in providing for their families and see much meaning and value in their work. Sometimes the content of the work (as in the Tangerang factories) is of little moment to women workers, but symbolically it can be very meaningful- in that case, as a means of providing the wherewithal to 'become modern'. Similarly, those women who work in 'male' jobs seem to derive immense satisfaction not only from the content of the work (driving big machines, travelling all around the country in search of a good story) but also in overcoming the stereotypes of women as weak and 'at home'.

Most importantly, as this collection demonstrates, a meaningful study of women's work cannot be made in isolation. Overwhelmingly the chapters in this volume show how work and family, work and life, are inextricably meshed. Women's working lives - as farmers, traders, journalists, hotel workers, truck drivers, midwives, factory workers, domestic workers and sex workers - are shaped by their everyday lives as members of families and communities. The 'rationality' that underpins their decisions about work is not dictated by economic considerations nor, indeed, by state ideology. It is a product of the entirety of their lived experience, and of their aspirations for themselves and for those close to them.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan and Edwards (1997) provide a useful critique of the assumption of the 'rational economic man'. Their critique is applied in a Western setting to the economic decision-making of lone mothers, suggesting that the charge of ethnocentrism could be extended to nuclear-familism and sexism.

<sup>2</sup> Barker (2005) describes this as a contradiction, but we disagree.

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<sup>3</sup> We acknowledge the many problems associated with terms such as 'the West' and 'First World'. The reduction of large numbers of heterogeneous societies into homogeneous and essentialized masses is indeed problematic, not least because of the eradication of difference, geographical confusion and the encouragement to create static binary oppositions which are too easily stratified into superordinate and subordinate. However, such terms also have their utility as shorthand that can highlight commonalities, such as ideological position, economic disparity and asymmetrical power relations.

<sup>4</sup> For instance, breastfeeding is a significant sex/gender-based activity that marks women's labour as different from men's. Feminist economists have calculated the empirical costs (and benefits) of breastfeeding - not only in terms of labour costs but also in terms of opportunity cost to lactating working women, and the class and race/ethnic dimensions of this (e.g. Galtry 1997).

<sup>5</sup> For example, the main government institution for producing national statistics, Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), has produced a leaflet of macrostatistics for Indonesia in which there is no gender breakdown, but in which national macro-indicators are provided by province. See <http://www.bps.go.id/leaflet/leaflet-sep-05-ind.pdf> (accessed 9 January 2005). The website for BPS includes statistics on employment in which the population is divided by age (under or over 15 years) and educational attainment, but not by gender. See <http://www.bps.go.id/sector/employ/index.html> (accessed 9 January 2005). For more on gender mainstreaming in the statistical representation of women in Indonesia see Surbakti (2002).