EDUCATIONAL WORK WITH FACTORY WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

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SUMMARY

Most women workers' education focuses on women's objective-material situation namely employment conditions and rights as workers. Hence, consciousness-raising on exploitation and the importance of workers unity are the usual agendas. Women's subjectivities, their individual personally lived experiences are rarely taken on board. Even in situations where gender agendas are covered, their unspoken thoughts, repressed feelings and pains, especially the personally felt emotional subordination tend to be overlooked. This thesis explores how silenced experiences of emotional subordination, powerlessness and inferiority can be taken on board in and as educational work with factory women.

Guided by principles of participatory research and feminist research I used multiple methods to review current and past educational work with factory women in Malaysia, to explore a way of approaching and doing educational work that is empowering for factory women and that is based on their lived experiences. Specifically the research (i) undertook a historical and critical review of women workers education in Malaysia and identified the neglected dimensions, (ii) probed the lived gendered experiences of factory women, and (iii) evolved a pedagogy that can evoke and reconstitute silenced experiences of emotional subordination. Storying, as a narrative methodology for negotiating and constructing meaning from experience (and practice) frames the epistemological and methodological approach to this study.

The study established that although emotional suffering is only one dimension of factory women's lived experiences and one dimension of women's subordination, it is however, a critical area to address in educational work concerned with factory women's empowerment, given the pervasiveness of debilitating emotional subjectivities amongst them. Story-telling-sharing in small groups was found to be effective in facilitating the constructive unfolding of differences and commonalities while also fostering an emotionally safe space in which women can rebuild self-esteem and confidence and discover solidarity. Indeed, story-telling-sharing that incorporates processes of reflective talking and making sense is the educational method par excellence. It commences with lived experiences and experienced feelings to reconstitute women's subjectivities. These findings bring significant insights to the pedagogy and content of educational work with women on the global assembly line, and for women and workers' education in general.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION

1. Some of the material in Chapter Two (2.2) has been published in CHAN L.H. (1995) "Women's Empowerment: Addressing Emotional Subordination". **Convergence** 28(3). pp78-85.

2. Some of the material in Chapter Two (2.4) has been published in CHAN L. H. (1997) "Women on the Global Assembly Line", in WALTERS S.(ed) **Globalization, Adult Education and Training**. London: Zed Books. pp79-86.

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5. Some of the material in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight (8.2 - Women's Subjectivities) has been published in CHAN L. H. (1996) "Talking Pain: educational work with factory women in Malaysia", in WALTERS S. and MANICOM L. (eds) **Gender in Popular Education**. London: Zed Books. pp202-228.

6. The Appendix has been published in CHAN L.H. (1998) "Understanding Gender and Experienced Subordination through Popular Education" in JIMENEZ-TAN M. & KHOO A.(eds): **A Resource Book for Training and Organising Work among Asian Women Workers**. Hong Kong: Committee for Asian Women. pp24-33.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAFLI
Asia American Free Labour Institute

ACFOD
Asian Cultural Forum on Development

ASEAN
Association of Southeast Asia Nations

CAW
Committee for Asian Women

COM-SIUM
Selangor Industrial-Urban Mission Committee

CTUC
Commonwealth Trade Union Centre

EIWU
Electrical Industry Workers Union

EPZ
Export Processing Zone

FES
Frederich Ebert Shiftung

FFPAM
Federation of Family Planning Associations, Malaysia

FOW
Friends of Women

FTZ
Free Trade Zone

GAD
Gender-and-Development

ICFTU-APRO
International Confederation of Free Trade Unions-Asia Pacific
Regional Organisation

ILO
International Labour Organisation

ISA
Internal Security Act

ITS
International Trade Secretariats

MTUC
Malaysia Trade Union Congress

NEP
New Economic Policy

NFE
Non-formal education

PJCO
Petaling Jaya Community Organisations

RM
Ringgit Malaysia

TWARO
Textile Workers Asia Region Organisation

UN
United Nations

WAD
Women-and-Development

WEC
Workers Education Centre

WF
Women's Force

WID
Women-in-Development

WOM
Workers Organisation of Malaysia

WWAG
Women Workforce Action Group

YCW
Young Christian Workers

YWCA
Young Women Christian Association

YWCEP
Young Workers Community Education
Project

YWEP
Young Workers Education Project

THE PERSONAL, THE POLITICAL AND THE ACADEMIC: MAKING SENSE OF EDUCATIONAL WORK WITH FACTORY WOMEN

"Telling our own stories can be cathartic and liberating. But it is more than that. We discover as we tell and come closer to wisdom. "

(Noddings & Witherell 1991:280)

1.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter paints me into the research. It is a narrative of self-reflection and reflexive[1] interpretation of my life and praxis. It unfolds a critique of how I understood and practised doing education in relation to my story, values, perceptions, emotions and situated knowledge[2]. Section one charts my location and sojourn into educational work, recapitulating how this journey has been nourished. Part two reflects on this voyage. In particular, it extrapolates my understandings and the way/s I conducted educational work. The insights and questions that emerged are synthesised as research questions for the undertaking of this thesis.

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[1] This is more than reflection in that one is not only self-conscious in thinking about what, why and how of the practice, but also applying those reflections to what is being done and what one brings to the practice (previous experience, knowl edge/understandings, values, beliefs and *a priori* concepts). It shows how the self is constitutive of the process and product (Hall 1996:31).

[2] This is knowledge which is partial and located from my standpoint (Haraway 1988).

1.2 THE PERSONAL, THE POLITICAL AND THE ACADEMIC: MY JOURNEY INTO EDUCATIONAL WORK

I was born number five into a Chinese artisan working-class immigrant family of seven daughters in Penang. I grew up in an 'extended household' of caring womenfolk, where my father and his younger brother were the only males. My family shared living space with some fifty other 'amahs'[3] whom my great-grandmother had assisted in their trans-migration from her clan village in China and had set up home for them in a pre-war house in a small lane where many other immigrants had also settled in. Unfortunately my great-grandmother died before I was born but I seem to grow up with her spirit in the extended female household. I grew in admiration of her through the stories I heard from these womenfolk about her deeds, her capacities for taking charge and protecting this community of women. My mother always lamented that if my great-grandmother was alive she would not have suffered the shame of an unworthy woman 'who cannot bear a son'. Apart from my own lived experiences of discrimination, my awareness and sensitivities to sufferings, and now to women's emotional subordination must have been germinated from this environment.

As a child, I never understood why my grandmother, my father's mother unendingly humiliated and rebuked my mother for not bearing a son. Even though my mother laboured so hard as a domestic help to feed us all, my grandmother constantly berated her for the whole household, the whole street, the whole

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[3] A name given to female Chinese live-in domestic helps to British families in the 1940s to 1960s when the expatriate British community was still dominant in Penang. Most of the women were not married, and if married, had left their husbands and children in China. They had migrated to the Malay Peninsular to seek a better livelihood. In Malaya they set up their own support networks by residing collectively.

neighbourhood to hear and shame her. It was this extended family of womenfolk who gave her solace and support since all her family members are in China. My mother's sufferings and scenes of my grandmother denigrating her became imprinted in me ever since I understood what shaming meant. They became my pain emotionally. The seeds of my personal feminism seem to have been sown there. Though I did not know it at the time, I was experiencing and becoming experienced in, the ways that patriarchal oppression was operative in my very home.

Growing up in poverty, I was constantly subjected to shame and discrimination in school. I was laughed at for the way I walked, trying to hide the holes in my worn-out shoes. I was also ridiculed for wearing faded and patched uniforms. I vividly remember one teacher who always reprimanded me for being talkative when I was merely listening to the enviable tales of a rich classmate. I protested but was punished further. I thought something was inherently wrong with me. I resented the way I was shamed, silenced and wronged.

It must be from these encounters that I learnt to be timid and lost the sense of myself, always fearing and anxious of others' reactions. I internalised inferiority and became self-doubting. This lack of confidence meant I could not believe in my own capacities, which annoyingly procrastinated the completion of this thesis, as I continuously felt the material was not good enough. These feelings and thoughts extended into what I continued to encounter in adulthood and learnt in recent years as intimations of poverty, patriarchy and subjugation.

As I grew older, I became very sensitive to people's sufferings, in particular, the underdogs of society. Encouraged by the moral and religious teachings of my Christian missionary school, I became attracted to caring for the aged, orphaned, and

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started to help out in homes for the aged and orphanages from an early age of thirteen. As a teenager, I aspired to help relieve people from their sufferings, probably from the intensity of wanting to relieve my mother's and my own silent sufferings. The meaning of care and caring, humanity and compassion I experienced from my early days in the old folks home and orphanage crystallised my desire to work for the poor and neglected. At that time my conception of such work was very naive, remedial and welfarish in orientation - working for (not with) the needy (not the exploited and oppressed). In fact, I thought that only missionaries were engaged in such work and wanted to become a nun myself. This initial interest deepened and led me into working with factory women since 1978. Little did I realise that my involvement with and learning from the factory women would become my own awakening and recovery from my own silenced injuries.

My involvement over the past 15 years has been mainly with women workers and activists working with them. My initial involvement with factory women was co-incidental. However, my passionate engagement with them developed as a political decision. From this entry base, the scope of my work expanded to include the nascent women workers' movement in Southeast Asia and other women and grassroots groups in the region. In the recent past, I have also facilitated training workshops for women worker leaders, grassroots women activists and popular educators.

My involvement with factory women started in 1978 when I was employed as Project Manager for the Young Workers' Community Education Project (YWCEP),

in the newly established industrial free trade zone[4] (FTZ) in Penang. This is the first FTZ in Malaysia. (See chapter four for an elaboration of FTZs and factory women workers; and chapter five for the work of YWCEP.) YWCEP was sponsored by the Malaysian Federation of Family Planning Associations as a community education project for young adults. The thrust of YWCEP was family life education for out-of-school youth. These out-of-school youth were largely young female rural migrants who had come to work in the free trade zone as assembly-line operators.

From the YWCEP induction my work with factory women evolved into different forms and varied capacities over the next decade. The accumulated reflexive experience of one phase helped to redefine the next. The different phases of this work are discussed in chapter four.

When YWCEP's funding was exhausted in 1980, I relocated my rice-bowl base elsewhere while finding ways to continue. The best available option was an academic position. While this job contrasted me with the position of the factory women (and brought contradictions and dilemmas), I was persuaded by the opportunity to use a lecturer's privileged position to legitimise continuation of the work. The university's sponsorship was negotiated to endorse further funding for another two years, under the name of Workers Education Project. This arrangement was made possible by constituting it as the 'extension' component of a research project on 'Participatory Urban Services' (see Yeung & McGee 1986), funded by the International Development Research Centre, Canada. Reluctantly I agreed on the

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[4] An FTZ is a "clearly delineated industrial estate which constitutes a free trade enclave in the customs and trade regime of a country .. where foreign manufacturing firms producing mainly for export benefit from a certain number of fiscal and financial incentives" (ILO/UNCTC 1988:4). In many countries even labour laws have been amended to meet the demands of these offshore industries.

gatekeeper's position of chairperson-cum-director, but was effectively assuming the functions of a grassroots organiser with three other staff workers.

In 1984, together with a small core group of women workers we re-directed the Workers Education Project into a self-help collective, known locally as Workers' Education Centre. The aim was to nurture the formation of a grassroots organisation. Without the constraints of funding and sponsor's requirements, the educational work branched into diverse creative forms and possibilities during this period. Multiple facets of the women workers' lives became apparent and were taken on board. It was a period when the educational work became more directly related to the immediate issues of the women's lives and to what was happening in the FTZ. I started to integrate educational and organising work and learnt to be an activist popular educator by combining a variety of educational work with organising against retrenchment (see Wagner 1991 for an elaboration). It was during this phase that the Malaysian economy underwent a major recession. The manufacturing sector in the FTZ was the worst hit with plant relocation and closures resulting in massive retrenchment.

Affiliation with the university was initially ideal as it also served as a placement training for social work students, until the work was deemed 'activist' and not 'academic'. This happened between 1981-1987 when our work became visible and controversial in our education-organising efforts against retrenchment. My university job also became implicated. For two years, I battled on, vacillating between despondency and giving up from the continuous harassment and intimidation. Through this experience of the political becoming personal, I comprehended the meaning and price of engaging in education for social change. I finally understood what Freire (1985:180) meant when he talked about the political nature of education.

In 1987, the Workers' Education Centre closed after much assessment and hesitation. There were multiple reasons. The most severe being the failing stamina and incapacity to confront the intimidation and harassment from the Police Special Branch. As we became more effective in drawing attention to our concern, we also became more vulnerable. After the closure of the Centre, I became more 'free' to be involved in popular education with regional and international non-government organisations. This has taken me into facilitating training workshops for women workers' leaders, grassroots activists and community workers in Malaysia and other parts of Asia. Throughout my involvement I came into contact with people who were involved in adult/popular education, labour and community organising, participatory research, training for transformation, women's issues. They contributed pedagogical, strategic, visionary, inter-disciplinary, feminist and movement perspectives to what I was doing.

I first learnt that what I was doing was non-formal education (nfe), or, alternatively, adult education, from a short course at the Centre for Continuing Education, Australian National University in 1981. However, I could not fully comprehend the theoretical discussions then. Moreover, most of the Asian nfe activities cited were institutionalised extension programs of government agencies that were essentially maintaining the status quo, whereas, my concerns were related to struggles against exploitation, often antithetical to the establishment. I was concerned with conscientising and organising the oppressed to reclaim their dignity and justice as inspired by Freire's work (1972). Nevertheless, the course enabled me to meet groups working for change in diverse ways. This was the first time that I witnessed the creative application of Freire's education philosophy. I was opened to new

possibilities. especially in the use of theatre and other creative methods in workers' education.

Introduction to the Participatory Research Network in Asia and other movement groups helped me situate my work. It kindled a sense of identity and community to my rather isolated invisible effort in Penang. I felt affirmed in my approach and direction as I read about the ideological underpinnings, philosophy and alternative paradigm of participatory research[5] (Kassam & Mustafa (ed) 1982; Hall, Gillette & Tandon (ed) 1982; de Koning & Martin 1996). When I explored further about participatory research it felt like 'homecoming' and I immediately claimed my niche in it. Only later did I discover the similarities in the discourse and practice of participatory research, adult education and social change (Maguire 1987; Tandon 1996).

Participation in a social analysis workshop in 1984 connected me to other grassroots activists in Malaysia. The workshop was significant in that it helped me analyse my work in the context of movement building with a community of comrades. Indeed this feeling of community creates "a sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us" (hooks 1994:40). The bonding generated solidarity and strength to my daunting effort, especially at trying times when the forces of repression were so subtle, yet intense and personally devastating. It fuelled me with clarity and renewed conviction. I realised that a certain kind of "life-force" (Bunch 1987:275) enthusiasm, revitalisation and recharged energies can be generated

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[5] Participatory research is essentially an educational intervention through a collective process of investigation which attempts to assist the deprived and the powerless to articulate and produce knowledge from their own point of view and experiences and formulate these for their own consumption.

from educational spaces. I experienced an "engaged pedagogy" (hooks 1994:14) that inspired new perspectives and energies. Most important, I learnt that the emotively felt solidarity acquired from sharing and strategizing together is critical in sustaining ourselves.

Thenceforth my scope of educational work broadened to structure sharing-learning spaces with a social analysis methodology that can lead into the formulation of strategies of action and evaluation, based on and starting from participants' own agendas. Later I learnt of this as popular education after Myles Horton[6] sent me some books on popular education (Arnold & Burke 1983; Arnold et.al 1985). From here, a more conscious comprehension of popular education (later, about feminist popular education) and its various methods informed further my educational endeavours.

Networking with the Committee for Asian Women (CAW)[7], and other women and people oriented organisations in the region, broadened my scope to unknown possibilities especially in creative methods and approaches. My later involvement with the adult education movement, in particular, the Women's Program of the International Council of Adult Education (ICAE), brought me into contact with Filipino and Latin American feminists who were questioning the androcentric bias of popular education (see Voices Rising April/May 1988). This sharpened my gender and pedagogical awareness. I started to read about feminism and popular education.

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[6] Myles Horton is the founder of Highlander Centre, reputed for its education for social change (see Adams 1986 for a further elaboration of this work). Our Workers Education Centre hosted his visit to Penang in 1986. Listening to people like Myles Horton was another inspiration that deepened my conviction in this work.

[7] CAW is an Asian regional support group for women workers in Asia.

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I was attracted to and became keenly interested in feminism and its implications for educational practice. I found in them the discourse of issues and concerns that I was grappling with.

My friendship with and support from like-minded activists from Hong Kong, Philippines, Korea and later, from Indonesia and Thailand fortified my commitment. Finding out what they were doing, the strategies they used, their problems and how they overcame them, generated ideas for my own context. Questions raised with them also became a reflective mirror for myself. This in turn challenged and sharpened my own practice and perspectives. It was from sharing stories of how we became involved and how our involvement had affected our thinking and personal lives that I was first awakened to the power of story-telling.

Indeed there are many significant others who have nurtured my journey. Amongst them - Zah, Nah, Thanam, Asah, Lian, Pek, Devi from our Workers Education Centre, and many more women whom I have worked with. They taught me far beyond what I can describe. They are the ones who nudged me into feminism: by exploring ways to attend to their feelings, thoughts and lived experiences have led me intuitively into a woman-centred, and later, a feminist approach.

Undertaking this research for a Ph.D is a contradiction that I had to come to terms with. In 1989 when my employer refused me a secondment to the Women's Program of ICAE, they suddenly decided that I should study for a Ph.D. I was never keen on another academic degree as it might bring conflict to what I wanted to continue doing. Antagonistic suspicion between grassroots activists and academia are rife in Malaysia. As I treasure the solidarity support and identity of being a

grassroots activist I envisaged the difficulty, if not impossibility, of a reconciliation of both of these roles, which up to then, I had managed to resolve and sustain with my low-key academic profile.

Throughout this research, I continued to have unresolved attacks of anxiety and depression. I feared that the Ph.D would further position me apart from the factory women. I feared the 'bad-mouthing' that I am making use of workers for my academic career, as I had been accused of in my novice days. I feared the pain, frustrations and trying efforts needed to re-establish my credibility. I still worry about the suspicion and disapproval of activist friends. I still fear losing the friendship of this community. Most difficult of all, I feared the acquisition of a Ph.D. would mean the loss of my identity and credibility as a grassroots activist. Indeed, researching on and writing about what one has been so closely identified with, struggled with so painfully and passionately, brought its own set of dilemmas and contradictions. In the end, I decided to use the Ph.D research to develop new insights to the work that I have been engaged in.

1.3 MAKING SENSE OF EDUCATIONAL WORK AND FACTORY WOMEN'S LIVES

I did not come into educational work knowing what I would do or how to go about it. I began to discover the what, how and why by being immersed in it. Figuring how to go further brought out more questions and the more I did the more I realised how inadequate I was and in what I was doing. Continuous reflexivity and praxis helped me learn to see in new ways, to ask new questions, and to find new answers to old questions. It redefined my knowledge base and educational practice. This continuous reflexivity starts with a recognition of my own positionality and a

realisation of my own inadequacy. It is a cumulative dialogical process of engaging myself with others. Reflexivity here entails reflecting on one's work and the impact of oneself on what one does. It is derived from an interactional, intersubjective (Van Den Bergh 1995) relationship with others. This entails a multi-logue of reflective talking[8] with others, listening to what others are saying and not saying (who these people are), reflecting on these and thereafter 'turning back' these experiences and reflections upon myself, my theoretical understandings and my practice. Significant in this reformulation is the renaming, indicating changes in the perspective, focus, objectives and approach. Concomitant with this was the redefinition and reconstitution of my practice. My knowledge and practice of educational work is therefore theoretically, politically and socially constructed and reconstituted all the time. Over time, my learning was not limited to the practice of education only. I was politicised in respect of the conditions and position of factory women and myself[9]. It sowed the feminist sense in me.

My maiden understanding of education was first constructed by the sponsor and consultants of YWCEP: conducting programs to cater to needs and problems of the target group as determined by the Project. Underlying this was the conception of an education that attempts to enlighten women workers about their problems/needs as defined by the Project. The contradictory experiences in dealing with the demands

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[8] I have written elsewhere (Chan 1991) about reflective talking as a popular education method to evoke reflection through interactive disclosure. In this research I have further systematised this method to enable women to make sense of their experienced subordination.

[9] In fact, it was during the fieldwork of this research, through the repeated stories of emotional subordination faced by the factory women that the emotional subordination of my mother surfaced starkly and painfully for me. This was another dimension of reflexivity in this research which I had to deal with emotionally.

of the Project authorities and from working directly with the factory workers politicised me. I experienced and learnt the politics of developmental work, in particular, power relations between the different levels and categories of actors in a project that is hierarchical and, the contradictions of external funding and grassroots work. Most important of all, I discovered the meaning and potential of working with the women from their side and not merely implementing programs nor managing a project financed for a specific time period and for objectives pertinent to the goals of sponsors.

The community education/organisation model (Lovett et.al 1983:36) of YWCEP proved to be very broad based, without sufficient focused attention on the workers. In the next phase, the Project changed its focus from community to workers' education. The shift was partly influenced by my short course in Australia where I was exposed to various possibilities in workers' education and workers' action. The emphasis became awareness-raising of labour rights, the importance of unionisation and a critique of existing labour laws. The primary goal was unionisation. Indeed this was the belief of those of us working with women workers in the early eighties, given the underrepresented and exploitative position of the women at work and in society (Tan 1982). However, as I became more immersed with the women, I learnt that this was not necessarily their most painful concern.

When responses to our workers' rights and labour law programs were lukewarm, the Project redirected its work to forming interest groups on issues that Project staff felt affected the women directly. Educational work was extended to encouraging individuals to work in small groups to respond to their specific problems and interests. Education became integral to developing confidence and learning from

participation and taking appropriate action, action which the women workers were prepared to undertake and not what others think they ought to do. With this redefined focus and together with a small core group of workers we re-visioned our strategy towards developing a collective self-help effort for and by workers, especially when the funding was again drawing to an end. This vision was very much inspired by my interaction with activists and the peoples' movement from Philippines and Korea, in particular, the women workers' movements in these countries.

I persuaded a few active workers to take on the challenge of continuing some support service for themselves and for other fellow workers. The dream behind this was to inject an experience and perspective of the possibility of their own organisation. The emphasis of the work was directed at building their confidence and capacities, fostering an experience of working together while generating a consciousness of themselves as women and as workers. The intense experience in establishing a self-help collective generated insights about new forms and ways of learning, not conceived as education previously. Building something together, formulating its goals and action plans and reviewing them for further action created a space in which the women were able to articulate their own priorities. Indirectly, it generated opportunities for us to hear their voices. While the aspect of being workers was still very much the central focus, issues of women began to surface. Education became learning that evolves from the doing and learning to do. It was no longer a disparate set of programs. At the same time, we had to attend to the women's fears, inhibitions and problems where the cause was not the women themselves. For example, in many instances the women were as equally frustrated when they expressed that it is not that they do not want to participate but that the fear

of not doing it right or well enough was inhibiting them from coming forward. It is in the course of grappling with these constraints that I learnt about the need of education for participation and the dynamics of participation, agency and internalised incapacity. In responding to these issues, I also found my existing knowledge and skills inadequate in addressing them. Thus, my own quest and keen interest in learning more of what, why and how others are undertaking their educational work.

Another area that helped me make meaning of my educational work was from the experience of facilitating participatory training workshops. These training sessions deepened my awareness of the politicising and organising potential of educational spaces. Workshops of this nature foster learning from telling and hearing what others are doing. The experience of one person becomes inspiration for others. It made me recognise the effectiveness of this methodology that engaged participants into storying[10] their lives and then to use participatory social analysis[11] to address not only personal concerns but also strategic interests and strategies for change. It helps build alliances and foster solidarity action. Indeed coming together to share and analyse can nurture a power base.

From feedback (as part of evaluation) on what was useful in these workshops, I started to note the significance of other dimensions of learning and its relationship to feelings of empowerment as well as the various sources of knowledge. What is taken back from a training workshop is not only the cognitive knowledge, skills and perspectives acquired. I noticed that 'semangat', the revitalised spirit and recharged

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[10] Defined by Cavanagh (1995:14) "as a narrative methodology for negotiating and constructing meaning from experience".

[11] This is a popular education methodology which facilitates participants into analysing their own situations rather than presenting them with an analysis.

enthusiasm is as important. I became more conscious of pedagogical processes and conditions that can generate these 'life-forces'. I also started to tell myself that we need to foster and integrate these experiences into our educational work more systematically. What other elements or ingredients can be built into educational experiences that are empowering? Indeed, what is empowerment? How does it relate to education?

In my early years of practice, I did not have the experience or perspective to undertake educational activities that were not related to the exploitation of women as workers. Neither did I assert a women-only space for their educational activities. I recall vividly the polemic dilemmas between listening to the women's voices and doing what was considered 'politically right'. I was constantly torn between leftist (and my) construction of the women's realities and what was signalled by the women themselves. As a newcomer to this field, I also lacked confidence to aver a different position from the prevalent stance of the unionists. Not only was I already breaking conventions as a young Chinese female graduate, I was a non-trade-unionist, without any political party affiliation working with Malay women workers. In fact working with Malay factory women workers was a pioneer endeavour at that time.

It was only in later years, with accumulated experience, and affirmed by the work in other countries, that I dared to differ. I started to organise experience-based programs that were not necessarily circumscribed by employer-employee issues, and worked with women workers separately (from the men). In fact, I remember feeling guilty as I was accused by veteran male unionists of being divisive to the working class by doing this.

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Intimate interaction with the women taught me how to listen from their subjective standpoints. Their stories of outrage did not only occur at the workplace but also in the communities where they lived, supposedly among their own protective ethnic kindred. Harassment and abuse from boyfriends, landlords and spouses only surfaced later when mutual trust deepened. These stories created roaring waves in me. These emotions became the moving energies and knowledge base which fired my commitment with them. The political became personal.

The stories uncovered that oppression is not only a position of structural subordination. The effects of subjugation can be devastating emotionally, even from those whom you trust and love. I learnt about sexual harassment, about sexism and male control, the self-righteous imposition of men, the various ways the women were being undermined and the ensuing effects of patriarchy. From these observations, I started to realise the need to further understand the women's personally felt experiences and emotions, and even to constitute this as educational work. The stark reality of personal implications of subordination became clearer in the course of this research.

Alongside the women's tales of intimidation were stories of defiance and resistance, of how they had used silence, active avoidance, 'buat tak tahu' (make don't know) and 'buat bodoh' (make stupid - buat is an active verb in Malay, meaning make or do), when they know they cannot win if they fight head on. Because of the pervasive ways society stigmatises and derides them, many of them have also internalised their oppression. In fact, most of them rationalise that since they have to depend on the factory employment of be unemployed, they have to 'sabar' (be patient).

The factory women's narrations deeply challenged the relevance and effectiveness of my educational work. They made me question my practice of conscientisation. It dawned on me that their felt concerns and experienced realities were not what the Project constructed of them. In fact most of our programs did not address their feelings, thoughts and lived experiences adequately. Because of our preoccupation with organising and unionisation we neglected what they encountered more severely at a more personal, subjective, psychological level. The different subjectivities and differences of the women were apparent, sometimes even problematic, yet we did not take them on board sufficiently. Instead, we assumed that by stressing the importance of commonality and solidarity we would achieve them in due course. Yet in the course of organising, be it over retrenchment or in the formation of the self-help workers' centre, we found that pressing personal constraints, interpersonal differences, tensions and conflicts among the women had to be addressed first.

As much as the women story-tell, their silences were equally loud. Over time, I observed and learnt to grapple with their unspoken feelings and inner thoughts. Listening to what they did not say when they talked, what was articulated when they were silent, what were their worries and anxieties, what captivated their attention and interest, what they were fearful of, their pains, became a learning ground about how the women were constantly silenced and hence, became silent. Many of these silences were related to their experience as women, how men treated them, how they felt ashamed of being factory workers, their self-deprecation and denigrated self-

esteem, how certain reactions and perceptions of society made them feel undermined and personally crushed[12].

Yet, many of these women are the ones who narrated their stories passionately when they felt validated. Indeed these contradictory observations create a discursive agenda for the understanding of women's silence and voice in the context of educational practice. How can we as activist popular educators deconstruct and reconstitute women's voice and silence for their meaning making? How do we create methods and spaces to evoke women's voices/silences, so that these can be named and acted on? How can the issues in silences be explored and reconstituted through educational encounters? The quest of pedagogies that evoke the articulation of silences to reconstitute new understandings of one's self and subjectivity/ies became my burning concern.

Through reflecting on these various involvements and experiences, often contradictory, I was eventually awakened to the inadequacies and potential of our educational work. These limitations are related to questions of methodology, goals, contents, and the (mis)conception of what constitutes educational work. The pedagogy that I have used has not taken on board or validated adequately the women's own experiences: their feelings, experiences and ways of knowing-learning-doing. We were gender blind and were preoccupied with resisting economic exploitation. This was the only oppression that was in discourse and allowed to be acknowledged as oppression within the contexts of industrialisation and unionisation in Malaysia in the seventies and eighties. The substantive concerns of my earlier

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[12] As it turned out, the articulation of these silenced experiences became the major focus of this research - see chapter seven.

educational work, I now believe did not take into sufficient account the different dimensions and multi-facets of women's realities, in particular, women's internalised oppression and emotional well-being. I have not helped women make meaning of and challenge their personally experienced subordination. Overall, I feel that our work did not effectively empower the women workers despite our goals and modest achievement of conscientising and organising the women workers to defend their rights as workers. With hindsight, these were our goals as activists rather than the women's own agenda.

My work is now more informed by an understanding of the centrality of the person's well being, in particular, her emotional well-being. I have now started to re-vision and re-position feelings in and as educational work, especially since the findings of this research have been analysed. My understanding of the significance of emotional subordination stem originally from the role of emotions in my own life and experience of the mobilising power of redefining and naming feelings from my own standpoint in my personal life and in organising the women workers. This initial hunch about the transformative potential of emotions, derived from my own practical knowledge, was affirmed by my reading of women's emotional welfare as a concern in feminist social work (Dominelli & McLeod 1989, Dominelli 1990). Confidence in my sense of it strengthened after reading Jaggar's (1992) theorisation of emotion as an epistemological foundation of women's knowledge. Feminist therapy has also given special attention to the 'negative' emotions (Krzowski & Land 1988). I was specially taken in by the role anger can play in problematising the incongruity between lived experience and sanctioned interpretations of that experience (Lyman 1981). Increasingly I have become convinced that it is necessary to take on board

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emotional responses and silences in our educational agenda. This research is a further exploration and systematisation of this investigation.

Introspecting what has been neglected, what (and how) can be possibly done to make our educational endeavours more relevant and meaningful to the lives of the factory women, is part and parcel of my quest in making sense of the educational work with factory women. A continuation of this sense-making is the passionate disengagement from praxis into this research for critical re-commitment. I first learnt of the need for critical distancing in the act of knowing from Freire (1972). He advocates the need to stand back and reflect as an object of knowledge. Likewise, Haraway (1991) stressed, one needs to break out to get a critical view of the different situated knowledges so as to re-enter praxis more effectively. An 'outsider's perspective' (Collins 1986) is required to infuse new questions, new ways of doing things and new possibilities. This is what I hope to accomplish from this research.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The primary concern of this research is to review current and past practices of educational work with factory women in Malaysia so as to develop new questions, new ways (more effective) ways of approaching and doing educational work with factory women that is based on their lived experiences, especially aspects that are not yet addressed. Specifically the research undertakes to propose and systematise an area of educational work (content and pedagogy) that is empowering for factory women in the Malaysian contexts.

The study revolves around four core but inter-related sets of questions about educational work with factory women, as outlined below. The crystallisation of these four sets of research questions occurred in the process of this research.

(1)   What kind of educational work has been undertaken for factory women in Malaysia?

(2)   Do the provisions cater to the lived experiences of factory women? What are the neglected dimensions? How can these neglected dimensions be addressed?

(3)   How can lived experiences that are suppressed and subjectivities[13] be taken on board in and as educational work? Specifically, what method/s can elicit articulation of the various forms of emotional subordination experienced by factory women?

(4)   How can educational work contribute to the empowerment of factory women in Malaysia? What are the analytical categories underpinning education for factory women's empowerment?

The thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter one commences with a reflexive personal-political journey to situate where I am coming from as a researcher and the context of the research questions. Chapters two and three construct the methodological and theoretical framework for approaching this research, respectively. Chapter four describes and analyses the contexts of the research subjects: the factory women and Malaysia. A historical overview of educational work for factory women,

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[13] This concept came into use only after the field data was processed and analysed. In this research I define subjectivity as constituting the individual's sense of self, thoughts, emotions, modes of understanding the world, the sense of individuality, uniqueness, identity and continuity, and the reflexive awareness of these things (Usher 1989). It refers to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world (Weedon 1987).

including the work of the various groups is described in Chapter five. Chapter six presents a critical analysis of the educational practices and highlights the necessity of addressing gendered experiences and subjectivities. Chapter seven examines how participatory research[14] was attempted to find out the lived experiences of factory women and how the silent and silenced dimensions of their lives can be constituted in and as education. Chapter eight provides a concluding synthesis to the thesis by drawing together all the insights that have emerged from this research about educational work for the empowerment of factory women in Malaysia. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the significance of this study.

1.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter unfolds my 'intellectual autobiography' (Stanley & Wise 1993). It sets the stage and tone for the entire research in three ways. Firstly it gives voice to me as the researcher and inserts me into the research. In their book, Women's Ways of Knowing, Belenky et al. (1986) discussed how one must first begin to hear one's own inner voice in order to understand the importance of drawing out the voices of others. Secondly, it situates and weaves my story into the stories of the factory women and connects my life to the women. It shows how myself is constitutive of the process and product of this research. Thirdly, a critical

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[14] This research was not able to fulfil all requirements of the participatory research (PR) methodology though the objectives and part of the process was synonymous to PR. The intention to engage the women in all stages of the research was not realisable. Due to problems of gaining access and the ambivalent attitude of the union the PR component only refers to the research-education sessions (see chapter two).

autobiographical[15] (Griffiths 1995) approach is used to crystallise research questions from practice in contrast to a logico-positivist paradigm of problem formulation. As Malone (1994:13) explained, "by acknowledging and documenting our subjectivity as a social construction of our personal and political history we are identifying the multiple positions we assume in our lives and the influence this has on our research endeavours". Indeed, storying the multi-lectics of the personal and political with the academic can help generate meaningful insights and questions (new knowledge) for further praxis. Narratives and personal stories are practised from the outset as the "passion of experience, the passion of remembrance" (hooks 1994:90) and as powerful modes of narrative knowing (Polkinghorne 1988). This is the epistemological and methodological approach to this thesis.

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[15] defined as autobiography which makes use of individal experience, theory and a process of reflection and re-thinking, and which includes attention to politically situated perspectives.

Chapter Two

THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

"All research is political and ideological: by the choice of the subject and design of methodology, the researcher creates a context for understanding social phenomena."

(Karger 1983:203)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a reflective account of my research journey. It deliberates on what has been constitutive to the direction and focus of this study. My critical autobiography in chapter one sets the context of myself, the researcher, and the context of the research questions. In this chapter, the first part outlines the methodological framework I used to guide this research. This is followed by a description of what has been done in the research, including my predicaments in the formulation of a research topic and a conceptual framework. The final section describes the dialectical processes of abduction[1] in making sense of my 'data' to construct the appropriate analytical concepts.

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[1] Abduction is the process used to produce social scientific accounts of social life by drawing on the concepts and meanings used by social actors, and then to understand them in terms of some existing social theory or perspective (Blaikie 1993:176-177).

2.2 METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Three alternative research paradigms, namely participatory research[2] (PR), feminist research[3] (FR) and the narrative approach guide the methodology and methods of my research. Underpinning these frameworks and in this research is the use of 'storying' as the methodological and epistemological approach to negotiating and constructing meaning from experience. Experience is the critical organising, analytical and epistemic concept underlying this thesis. The key source of 'data' for this research is from a set of multiple experiences: my personal, political and professional experience, the experiences of those involved in women workers' education, the lived experiences of the factory women, and the experience of creating knowledge from this research. Experience, as used in this research is not incorporated as a pristine category, though this has its own values. As experiences are culled from life and practice they are simultaneously reflected on, "arrested, examined, analysed, considered and negated" (Aitchison & Graham 1989:15) and even reconstituted to transform them into knowledge. This is how reflection,

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[2] Participatory research is a systematic approach to radical social transformation grounded in an alternative paradigm worldview. Its ideological foundation is in contrast to the underpinnings of dominant social science research. The main objective of participatory research is the empowerment of oppressed people and ultimately, the transformation of power structures and relationships (Tandon 1981; Kassam & Mustafa 1982; Martin 1997).

[3] Feminist research has evolved through various stages using various approaches, ranging from those operating within the conventional paradigm (Westkott 1979) to those who advocate research as praxis to maximise the research process as change enhancing and mutually educative for the researcher and researched (Lather 1991). However all of them share certain concerns and characteristics (See Maquire 1987 for a list of these). Most important, is the overtly political goal in its purpose and commitment to changing women's lives, to correct the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's oppression and unequal social position and ultimately the creation of a just world for everyone (Duelli-Klein 1983; Mies 1982; Stanley & Wise 1990; Lather 1991).

experiential analysis, learning from experience and reflexivity is practised in this research.

Certain values and convictions I have about what research can and should do determine the choice of these frameworks. Prior practice has taught me that research can be learningful and empowering. The process can engage participants and involve them in learning. Empowering experiences can be generated when people are facilitated to develop a critical understanding of their problems, such as the underlying causes, and the possibilities for overcoming them. By learning through involvement and doing, confidence and abilities are increased. Indeed, the collective processes of PR methodology can help strengthen people's confidence, capacities and agency to be creative actors.

Like many other feminist social workers (for example, Hyde 1994; Donnelly 1986), I chose a topic central to my own work so that the research can be a resource for me personally, politically and intellectually/professionally as well as help advance the field. I did not want to undertake, neither could I be sustained in a detached 'alienated' academic research. I was very determined to practise research as feminist praxis (Stanley 1990), to forge learning from experience (Boud et al. 1993) and to experiment with femininist participatory research (Maguire 1987; Maguire 1996). As an activist, I am not satisfied with a conventional sociological study even if new knowledge can be generated ultimately. I wanted the research process itself to benefit the research subjects. I wanted the research to be able to re-vision educational work with factory women from women's standpoints.

Participatory Research and Feminist Research

As alternative research paradigms, PR and FR have developed separately from each other[4] even though both are concerned about validating people's perceptions of their reality and both also urge that research should help ordinary people understand the relationship between their individual experiences and the broader social, economic and political struggles (Maguire 1987:123). Writings on FR (Roberts 1981; Duelli-Klein 1983; Stanley & Wise 1993) rarely make references to PR literature, while those on PR (Hall et al. 1982; Kassam & Mustafa 1982; Park 1993) rarely draw on feminist theory and research. However, as alternative research paradigms, both share many similar concerns and alternative tenets of social research (see Maguire 1987 for an elaboration). Drawing on the similarities and differences of these two approaches Maguire (1987) pointed out how PR and FR can complement and learn from each other.

PR which aims to transform reality 'with' rather than 'for' oppressed people, provides a comprehensive approach to emancipatory knowledge production. It advocates and defines explicit processes of participants' involvement in the entire research process (see Participatory Research Network 1982; Kassam & Mustafa 1982; Hall 1992 for descriptions on this). However, it does not give attention to androcentricism. Women and gender as a focus of analysis has been either ignored, minimised or marginalised (Maguire 1987; Maguire 1996). Whereas, in FR the 'how' is not as well developed as the 'why' and 'what' (Duelli-Klein 1983). With the exception of a few writers (for example, Mies 1983; Lykes 1989; Lather 1991),

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[4] Indeed the separation reflects the inherent disciplinary divide in social sciences even in women's studies and adult education which are multi-inter-disciplinary.

most writings on FR have not delineated comparable processes of empowering research participants nor advocated the direct involvement or action of feminist researchers. They do not seem to be clear on how to create knowledge in a way that is emancipating and empowering for the participants involved (Maguire 1987) even though the research is intended to improve their lives. They neglect the possibilities of empowering the 'researched' in the research process. This is where feminist researchers can learn from PR. Since the pioneer attempt by Maguire (1987), others have followed suit (Lather 1988; Malone 1994; Martin 1994).

Most of the literature on FR is centred round discussions of qualitative methods (Acker et al. 1983; Reinharz 1992) or/and epistemology (Stanley & Wise 1993). Discussions of feminist research process usually focus on critiques of positivism (Westkott 1979; Stanley & Wise 1993) or reflections of the researcher's research journey which are often not undertaken collectively with the 'researched' (Hyde 1994). Most methods used are still on an individualised basis although they are conducted in a contextualised, interactive non-hierarchical mode between researcher and 'researched' (Acker et al. 1984; Graham 1984; Finch 1984). Nonetheless, the empowering possibilities of bringing women together to share their experiences in a group setting as in the practice of feminist popular education (see Perg 1992) or feminist groupwork (Donnelly 1986; Butler & Wintram 1991) are still largely unexplored. The wider range of innovative and creative methods as used in PR has yet to be adopted in FR.

Feminist Participatory Research

Maguire's work birthed new conceptual ground by bringing feminist and participatory research approaches together to constitute the feminist participatory research (FPR) framework. By combining and drawing on the perspective and strength of each, feminist participatory research redresses the major limitations of both - the andocentrism in PR and the lack of emphasis of an empowering process for research participants in FR. PR develops from a critique of positivism which is not sensitive to its androcentrism. Without addressing its male biases, PR cannot be truly emancipatory for all (men and women) even with its emphasis on a participatory empowering process of involvement. FPR, therefore, eliminates androcentrism from PR while contributing a truly emancipatory approach to knowledge creation by/for both men and women. By combining feminist research's critique of androcentrism with participatory research's critique of positivism, FPR as proposed by Maquire, provides an empowering research process to knowledge creation for social and personal transformation. In her later work Maguire (1994) further advocated that FPR move from exposing andocentrism to embracing possible contributions of feminisms to particpatory research and practice; and explored how a more feminist PR would "increase the congruency between our personal politics and public practice, research and otherwise" (1996:34-35).

Instead of reproducing Maguire's suggested guidelines[5] wholesale, I use the **methodology** of participatory research and the **feminist perspective** of feminist

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[5] Maguire's formulations are useful as a whole except that her points on team planning and evaluation are not applicable to my study which is not research undertaken by a team. The effects of my attempted participatory research intervention are not evaluated except for observations and feedback from the participants.

research to guide the 'how', 'why', and 'what' of my research design and fieldwork. Principles of feminist popular education (see chapter three) which are also similar to FPR are used to frame the research-education sessions of the PR component. These sessions are elaborated in chapter seven.

The methodology of PR was used to frame the part of the research that involved the factory women directly in the research-education sessions. Ideally PR comprises social investigation, education and action whereby the whole process becomes a learning and empowering experience (Tandon 1981; Maquire 1987; Martin 1997). It stresses a close and direct involvement of the researcher with the researched community (Bryceson et al. 1982). I commenced my research with these intentions and pursued them painstakingly (see next section for description of my attempted PR). In fact, I had hoped that a partnership could be developed with one of the unions and to use the research process to form a women's committee and to develop and institutionalise an ongoing education programme with them. However, this dream of mine did not materialise. I was neither able, in the limited time, to be effective in undoing institutionalised and internalised male-domination, nor convince the male-dominated union gatekeepers, the male leadership, to accept my ideas. In fact, some of them even felt threatened and interpreted[6] my proposal as a hidden agenda to agitate their female members.

What was possible in the end was a series of research-education sessions so that the research process could benefit the women, even if this was merely a 'pleasant but brief intervention' as the education programme did not continue after my

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[6] I was actually quizzed by one of them as to whether I have had approval from my employers and the authorities to conduct my research.

fieldwork, even though I had consciously planned and worked towards its continuation. Despite these unavoidable shortcomings, the attempted PR was planned and undertaken jointly with the union. I worked very closely (and became good friends) with the secretary who co-facilitated most of the sessions with me. I shared with her other popular education methods and resource materials. In fact, she herself requested the materials. Having experienced the effectiveness of these methods, she wanted to use them in trade union education.

The research-education sessions were a modification[7] of what we had originally formulated, as the union could not undertake what was planned. This is the result of 'dialogic retrospection' (Keiffer 1981) where an open, active exchange and partnership takes place between the researcher and the researched. The intention of identifying and working with a small group to develop and organise the sessions and then to use the collaboration to form and consolidate an ongoing women workers' group as the organising and action elements of PR was not possible. The principle of empowerment in the PR process prompted me to formulate the sessions as popular education workshops even though they were used as avenues to explore lived experiences. Through the use of creative evocative methods, the women articulated and discussed their suppressed lived experiences as we became mutually engaged to understand women's subordination and subjectivities through reflective talking and making sense (see chapter seven).

A feminist perspective goes beyond adding women to the account of social reality; "it is necessary to look out through women's eyes" (Roberts 1984:196). It

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[7] An important aspect in PR, which has not been much highlighted in previous writing, is the continual adjustment and responding according to changing context.

involves "assuming a perspective in which women's experiences, ideas and needs (different and differing as they may be) are valid in their own right" (Duelli-Klein 1983:89). In this research, women workers' education is analysed from a feminist perspective by 'putting gender on the map' and using factory women's standpoints (voices) as the starting point and lens to examine to what extent the existing educational work addresses or challenges women's subordination.

FR calls for research grounded in women's everyday experiences. The use of women's daily experiences as the source of knowledge creation is paramount (Smith 1974). My starting point in the PR component is the validation and use of women's daily lived experiences as the primary, but not the only data source, including the knowledge (strength and constraints) that the women workers bring along, as well as facilitating them to generate knowledge from their experiences (see chapter seven). Without compromising on the commonalities, due recognition was also given to the diversity and differences of factory women's experiences.

Integral to women's experiences, is the recognition of other modes of knowing and other things to know about (Maguire 1987). Subjective experiences, emotions and intuition are recognised as legitimate knowledge (Jaggar 1989; Weiler 1992; Stanley & Wise 1993). Factory women's (and my) subjectivities, especially suppressed emotions, thoughts and feelings are central concerns in this study. Not only is the personal regarded as political, but the 'political is personal' and the 'personal is researchable' here. With these insights from the literature, I used women's ways of being (knowing, relating, and interacting) in the research-education sessions and carried out interactive interviews with them.

Both FR and PR advocate the development of personal, trusting, reciprocal and egalitarian researcher-researched relationship. While PR emphasises this throughout the research in the form of an empowering methodology and the use of innovative group methods, FR practises it through non-exploitative interactive, contextualised methods of data gathering (Maguire 1987). I paid special attention to both the methodology and methods as delineated by PR and FR.

Stories And Storying

FR uses interactive, contextualised methods to avoid the danger of context-stripping and exploitation (Acker et al. 1983; Graham 1984). Qualitative methods are also used to reformulate existing concepts or derive new concepts that are more reflective of women's lives (Cook 1983). Attempts to eradicate dangers of misrepresentation are addressed by offering as much control as possible to the 'researched' so as to acknowledge the validity of their subjective experiences. Graham (1984) argues that stories are a good means of collecting data in researching women so as to avoid fracturing women's experiences. Borden (1992) has used narratives with persons who have suffered adverse life events. Robinson (1994), Hyden (1994) and Riessman (1994) have also used these methods to study first hand accounts of physical and sexual trauma. They noted that stories allow people to naturally express themselves, locate their own voices within a social and cultural context and construct meanings from their accounts as well as determining the boundaries of their stories. Stories allow for maximum recall about an issue or event as a whole rather than answer isolated questions which to the individual might appear to be inappropriate or inapplicable. Stories provide a vehicle through which

individuals can construct and communicate the complexity of their lives to illuminate the uncertain, dynamic processes of experience.

In FPR, methods which can elicit processes of actual lived relationships are necessary, but not enough. Methods, which enable the oppressed to reclaim the power to name their reality and oppression, are crucial. Narrative approaches have been found to be most apt for naming and recovering voices of suppressed groups. Narrative approaches are powerful not only in terms of the substance of the stories which reveal the processes of on-going struggle and its internalised effects, but the very act of naming is liberating and redefines the position of the narrator. This approach has been central to understanding and changing women's lives from women's standpoints. Storytelling and personal narratives have enabled women to find their own voice and identity, as "that act of speech of 'talking back'" (hooks 1989:9). Such personal narratives help recover women's stories and revise received knowledge about them (Gluck & Patai 1991). They allow us to redefine ourselves and to reconstruct definitions of our situations in everyday interactions.

By creating a verbal climate that fosters dialogue and value Otherness, "narratives are also important as an authentic standpoint for critiquing dominant paradigms of knowledge and authority" (Helle 1991:52). Because of the power of stories to describe the existence and experience of inequality (Graham 1984), the narrative approach is acclaimed not only as an effective method of data-gathering, but it is also "therapeutic in helping people reflect on experiences, assess meaning, and achieve a sense of continuity by forming life experiences into a meaningful pattern" (Kelly 1995:351). It is a powerful tool for grasping the self in relation to the Other. It is a means of making sense of our own and others' experiences (Polkinghorne

1988). In fact the narrative approach is now used in various practice disciplines like education and social work (Witherell & Noddings 1991; Sands & Nuccio 1992: Kelly 1995). Narrative analysis is particularly well suited to understanding the process of making sense of difficult experiences because it lays bare the interpretative work narrators do in collaboration with listeners (Mishler 1986). Questions can be introduced to help assess other ways to view the situation, seek alternative meanings, and put specific events into a broader context. Making sense or making meaning is narrative knowing (Polkinghorne 1988). Stories are also known to teach and heal by encouraging individuals to observe and reflect on the personal self rather than to blindly identify with it. The therapeutic and healing aspects of stories have been recorded by Narayan (1991).

Thus the narrative approach is not only noted for its methodological contributions (Reissman 1994), but also for its epistemological (Polkinghorne 1988), pedagogical (Witherell & Noddings 1991), therapeutic (Kelly 1995) and transformatory (hooks 1989) dimensions. I use the narrative approach and the concept of storying to incorporate these various dimensions in this study. Firstly, through a critical autobiography, I storied my personal-political-academic journey into educational work and to the questions of this research, giving meaning and making transparent the situated knowledge and perspective that I bring to this study. Secondly, the description of the educational work of the various groups as narrations of those who are/were involved. Thirdly, the personal narratives of the factory women constitute the main story of this study. My exploration of women's lived experiences in this research was conducted by narrative and creative popular education methods with the aim of discovery and recovery. They were not

determined by pre-conceived categories though I was specifically interested to learn about women's experiences of subordination. These methods (see chapter seven for further elaboration) enabled the women to speak the unspeakable and describe their lived experiences from their own standpoints in contrast to received messages. Finally, story-telling-sharing was practised as narrative knowing in small groups. It was systematised as a critical education method which constructs meaning from reflected experience through the collective processes of reflective talking, healing and making sense.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity, in the sense of a continual consideration of the ways in which the researcher's own social identity and values affect the research, has been a paramount project within feminism. Feminist researchers have stressed the importance of locating themselves within their research activities (McRobbie 1982; Stanley 1990; Maynard & Purvis 1994; 1994; Roberts 1981) as context in research. Wilkinson (1988) refers to a fully reflexive analysis as one that considers not only how (i) life experiences influence research, but also how (ii) research feeds back into life experiences which she names as personal and functional reflexivity respectively.

In this research, I have tried to practise personal and functional reflexivity in two ways. Firstly, through an "intellectual biography" (Stanley & Wise 1990:23) (see chapter one), I reflected on my own lived experiences from childhood, my educational practice with factory women, and how some of these experiences have impacted on my educational work. These reflexive processes not only located me in this research, but also enabled me to identify a research focus grounded on practice.

My awareness of the role of emotions and the power of story-telling also came from these reflections. This is where and how research as reflexivity shapes the production of this research. Secondly, the reflective narrative in the next section unfolds the conditions and processes of this research.

To summarise, PFR as practised in this research is built on a critique of positivist and androcentric underpinnings. It is based on the tenets of FR which emphasises women's experiences and women's perspectives. It is also grounded on PR principles which stress the direct involvement of researchers and 'researched' in mutually empowering processes where investigation, education, learning and action are integral to the research process. It incorporates the practice of reflexivity and the use of the narrative approach. The FPR framework delineated above was mainly applied to the PR component, while the narrative approach was also extended to individual women workers, women workers' activists, trade union educators and providers of women workers' education.

Apart from FPR, I also used other conventional methods. Different methods of data-gathering were used for different components of the research problem which also involved different sets of people. Specifically, the research design comprises of four different components which cater to different research questions. These are, (i) a historical and contemporary reconstruction of women workers' education undertaken via narrative accounts and interviews, (ii) a questionnaire survey[8] of workers' education by trade unions to delineate the extent of women workers' education undertaken, (iii) intensive interactive conversations/interviews with women workers.

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[8] I have not appendiced the questionnaire here as the data were not used in the end.

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educators and funders, and (iv) the use of various inquiry-learning (popular education) methods in the participatory research-education sessions (a questionnaire survey[9] on the needs and problems of women workers was also undertaken in this component). Existing documents (like project proposals, newsletters, programmes, and reports) of various groups were also scrutinised.

2.3   THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Like any other research, the whole process which spanned over nine years, can be delineated into three stages, namely, (i) preparatory, (ii) the field research, and (ii) data processing, analysis and writing up. I commenced preparations in 1990 and took fifteen months to familiarise myself with various sets of literature from different disciplines (see chapter three for an explication of the disciplines which this study draws from), and to crystalise my research questions from previous practice. The field research lasted fifteen months, from May 1991 to August 1992. I returned to full time teaching in December 1993 and took five years to complete the analysis and writing of this thesis. The extended period undertaken in the analysis and writing meant that some of the literature reviewed in the earlier years of the research, like studies on factory women workers, women and development action and non-formal adult education may not be so up to date. However this does not adversely affect the analysis of this study as I kept up to date with the literature and discourse on feminist popular education, the central focus of my study. I also continued to be actively involved in various popular education foras and training workshops. In fact, the

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[9] I have not appendiced the questionaire here as the data were not used directly in the end.

prolonged period of writing gave me time to evolve appropriate analytical concepts and to discuss my formulations at various conferences (see footnote 1 of chapter eight). A quick survey of the contemporary literature shows that there is still very little attention given to the silenced dimensions of factory women workers' lives, either as a focus in sociological investigation or in addressing them in and as educational work even though subjectivity/ies is a current topic in popular education, feminist literature and post-modern discourse.

My whole research journey was not linear nor were the major activities of each stage confined to and completed in that particular stage. This was particularly the case with the identification of my research questions, data analysis and formulation of the theoretical framework. As mentioned in chapter one, my research focus and research questions became sharper and clearer in the process of the fieldwork. Given the required length of this thesis, there were other dimensions that I had to trim away. The quest for a theoretical framework continued into the writing period. In fact it was only after the final stages of data analysis that I was able to hone in to more appropriate literature in accordance to what has emerged in the field. Throughout the whole research I was actively engaged in conducting training workshops for women and/or women workers. These activities were instrumental in sharpening my conceptualisation and gave me the opportunity to 'pilot' the interview guides and method of 'storying'.

Preparatory

Preparations were centred on the construction of the research problem, literature survey and delineating the methodological framework. I will reflect here

on the process and predicaments I had encountered in formulating a research topic that is grounded on practice.

My commencement as a graduate student in 1990 began with a configuration of dilemmas, contradictions and uncertainties. While these experiences are not uncommon, my purpose in reflecting on them is to examine how these factors affected me - the researcher, in determining the choice of the research topic and design of the research. I became a graduate student by default, not by personal choice. I felt literally as if I was 'being sent to Coventry'. This meant that I had the privilege to be away while others back home were still barely recovering from the backlash of Malaysia's 'Operation Lallang'. This is the name given to the set of internal security arrests in 1987 where some of those who were arrested and detained without trial were women worker's activists. I was constantly feeling guilty about my privileged position compared to the women workers and my activist friends.

Hence I started with very strong resentment against doing the Ph.D. With some soul-searching rationalisation, I decided to use the research as a space and resource to equip myself further with new insights and knowledge for my future work. This was the very reason why I chose to derive my research questions from the lived experience of my practice and why I wanted to use the initial period for evaluation and systematisation of my earlier work before embarking on the research, and even use the reflected learning for this thesis. In the pursuit of these goals, I was greatly disappointed that the Ph.D. programme did not provide the academic structure/forum for such endeavours although adult continuing education as a field validates knowledge gained from practice and teaches adult learning from experience. However my supervisor was very respectful and supportive of my learning goals.

As elucidated in chapter one, this research is grounded in and motivated by questions and concerns from my earlier praxis. However, the decision to focus on this research topic was not as straightforward. Initially, I had quite a number of research possibilities (in fact too many) such as home-workers, FTZ factory workers, worker-oriented organisations and trade unions, workers' education, women's empowerment, community work and social change, gender and popular education, non-government organisations and the state. All of them are related to some of my prior activist, teaching or research interests. Each of them can be developed into a research project, but I wanted to incorporate all into my thesis. Hence the need to find a way to integrate all the elements into a coherent, inter-related and 'researchable' problem using PR. After a frustrating futile period of writing different research proposals, I resorted to my popular education synthesising techniques. I experimented with a written and visual method of unpacking and pulling together so as to inter-relate the various strands of my interests. This process entailed four steps.

Firstly, I formulated my learning needs, values and goals. Next, I elaborated on the various research possibilities and delineated their various strands and themes. All constituent aspects of the different topics were identified and charted like a river with its tributaries and converging streams and connected like a web-chart. What would be required in the research design, especially in using participatory research was also worked out for each topic[10]. The third step identified the overlapping areas and what I wanted as the core themes by colour codes.

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[10] In the course of formulating a research proposal for each topic I realised that PR can be used for all topics as long as a partnership can be nurtured.

With this deconstruction and mapping I was able to clarify my ideas and figure out what was needed, possible and appropriate for each topic. In particular, it was possible for me to figure out which topic could allow me greater possibility to incorporate certain core themes, and to undertake research as reflexivity, and research as praxis. Most important of all, it indicated where I could have a better chance of using PR. Indeed, it was an effective tool to help articulate and systematise my thoughts, and synthesise my interests.

Working through this process it became obvious that the topic on women workers' education was most apt for me to cover the scope of my various interests, research and learning goals as well as allowing me to use PR. With this decision, other anxieties ensued. The major concern was about getting access and collaboration, especially for the PR component. Given the very irregular accessibility of women workers to non-union groups, it is almost inevitable that a partnership has to be nurtured with unions[11] as it will be impossible to gain access through employers, given their history of adversity to researchers. It would be too time consuming for me to personally organise outreach and sustain interest to form a group for the purpose of this research. Neither would this be desirable as I would not be around after the field research to continue with the work. I anticipated problems with some unions, as I have been openly critical of their male domination and sexual harassment of female members. However I do have a very good relationship with the rank and file as well as with some of the intermediate leaders. On the less pessimistic side, the credibility of my past work may also prove to be an advantage.

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[11] In fact I noted in my fieldwork journal that I hoped that my research could help build a woman workers' group for the union as most unions do not have women's committees.

Deep down I still hurt from accusations by certain quarters that my involvement with women workers was to promote my own career. I feared my research would only prove it. With hindsight and sensitised by the discoveries of this research, I think these uncertainties were a reflection of my own lack of confidence resulting from the continual onslaught I experience from doing things which challenge the existing stake-holders. In fact this is how internalised oppression acts on one's psyche and subjectivities (Bartky 1990).

I also consulted with people back in Malaysia about my research so that this study would be relevant to a larger community of practitioners. I consulted two highly respected academics and two activist friends involved with women workers, but I received contradictory advice. One of the academics advised against this topic. There is hardly any women workers' education in Malaysia, so the available material would not be sufficient for a Ph.D. The other felt that given my concerns for social change, it would be more effective to research more current labour issues which have policy implications. In contrast, my activist friends while recognising the difficulties (especially with my PR intention and the fact that this can be another politically sensitive piece of work vis-à-vis the government, industries and my employer), persuaded me to take the challenge as the product and process would be invaluable. I was delighted by the affirmation from activist friends but started to doubt again what (and how) I wanted to research. I could see why the academics were not encouraging with regards to my topic or the methodology that I proposed, which added to my fears and uncertainties.

With hindsight, the different views clearly reflected the different standpoints of academia and activists. Most conventional academic research focuses on post-facto

analyses. Availability of research material is crucial. On the other hand, activists would claim that if there is very little known about a particular phenomenon, the more reason that it should be investigated, and that research is for social change, not only to study social change. I became painfully aware that I was still dependent on an 'authority' to sanction and legitimise my academic work - a disease from which I am still suffering. Perhaps this is why I continually doubted the sufficiency of what I had gathered and discovered from this research.

I used my heart and intuition to concur with my activist friends though I must admit that I did worry that I was biased to have practised selective listening. At this stage, I was still ambivalent about the actual scope and coherence of the different aspects of the proposed research as I figured out different ways to anchor and frame the study. I was not too worried about this, as I was certain that findings emerging from the fieldwork would finally shape the PR.

After deciding on my research focus, I again vacillated about the formulation of a theoretical framework. As background and disciplinary preparation, I read a diverse range of topics like trade union/workers'/women's education, learning, pedagogy, empowerment, women's oppression, which I wanted to pursue in this research. In particular I learnt about feminism, and familiarised myself with the literature on nonformal/adult/popular education. I did not formulate a definite theoretical framework at this stage, though notes and thoughts were culled from the various sets of readings. In fact I intentionally did not decide on a theoretical framework to avoid "conceptual overdeterminism" (Lather 1991:78) before my empirical fieldwork. I did not want to impose my definitions on the inquiry.

Given my own conceptual eclecticism and the nature of the study, I felt it was not appropriate to situate the study in one body of literature. Moreover, the self-imposition of the need to do a thorough piece of work means that the different facets of the research problem need to be addressed. This would require a framework that covered the two core components of the research problem - factory women workers and educational work. I was also very conscious not to adopt a deductive strategy of pre-determining a theoretical framework which may not be relevant to the issues that would emerge from the research, as a central objective of my research was to find out what was neglected in educational work with factory women and then to generate analytical concepts and pedagogical tools which were appropriate. Thus, I did not and was not able to finalise my theoretical framework until after the PR data were analysed. However not doing things in the conventional way always affected my confidence as I attempted to navigate unchartered waters. A week before I left for my field research an academic from the women's studies department, expressed her concern (with good intentions) that I was starting my fieldwork before my theoretical framework is in place.

I commenced fieldwork with a host of anxieties and uncertainties. Apart from the worry about not having ready a theoretical framework, I felt rather daunted by the uncertainty of access to information, acceptance by activist friends, and the difficulty of finding a partner base for the PR. I was aware that most of the information is dependent on oral reconstruction, which in turn is dependent on my ability to track down the relevant persons and to persuade them to tell their stories. I anticipated the reluctance of some people to disclose as the state generally regards

such work as subversive. Out of comraderie respect, I felt I should not probe too much. Thus the constant fear of not having sufficient information.

Even since I started my research, I have been bugged by recurrent anxiety about integrating academic work with grassroots activism. I was anxious whether my activist friends would accept my researcher status and cooperate with me. The underlying fear was grounded on the fact that academic and grassroots activists in Malaysia do not get on too well together, though not openly antagonistic. Grassroots activists are wary and critical of academics whom they regard as only interested in getting information for their own careers. This partly explains my own psychological hesitation/block in academic work.

I also feared that the PR might not materialise. It was very likely that I might not get a base group which would be willing to collaborate because such efforts were totally new in the Malaysia. Though I have been engaged in PR in my activist work, I have not used it for academic purposes before. Underlying all these was a pervailing feeling of diffidence of whether I could really come up with what I have set out to do.

Field Research

I started my field work (in May 1991) with the primary objective of using PR to develop an education module with women workers to increase their gender awareness. Instead. through the course of the research, I became aware of their diverse gendered experiences of subordination and refocused my research onto this. Specifically, I (i) undertook a historical and critical review of women workers' education in Malaysia and identified the neglected dimensions, (ii) probed the lived

gendered experiences of factory women, and (iii) evolved a pedagogy that can evoke and reconstitute silenced experiences of emotional subordination.

The fieldwork lasted fifteen months, from May 1991 to August 1992. Except for interviews with women workers and women workers' groups in Penang, all the fieldwork was conducted in the Klang Valley in Kuala Lumpur. During this period, I continued to read various sets of theoretical literature, empirical studies on women workers; and conducted a number of women workers' education sessions and training workshops.

I took about four months for the first part of the fieldwork to make and re-establish contacts, map the scene and identify key players in women workers' education in Malaysia. During this period, I also participated and observed educational programmes conducted by both trade unions and non-union groups. In the next phase, over a period of six months, I reconstructed the history, types and approaches of educational work that have been undertaken for factory women by interviewing and reflecting with women workers and the organisers/educators. This involved identifying and, sometimes, even tracing some of these individuals who had since left the groups. Interactive conversations and interviews with women workers and a survey of workers' education with trade unions were carried out. This period also saw to the negotiation with several groups, and nurturing the various possiblities of forming partnerships for the participatory research component. By the time a participatory research base was secured, investigation on other aspects of the research topic was almost completed. The final phase of five months was exclusively devoted

to the attempted[12] participatory research component. I will describe in greater details the attempted PR as this is a core component of this study.

.. .. The way in .. ..

Gaining entry and nurturing a partnership for the PR was the most difficult part of the fieldwork. But when this consolidated, it was the most enjoyable and engaging part of the research. I started by contacting and attending various programmes organised by unions and women's NGOs whose constituencies included factory women in the first three months. I kept regular contact over six months with six different organisations who had indicated interest. The nature of each organisation called for a different approach in attracting their interest and negotiating for an entry. These groups were a national union, an in-house union, a worker-oriented NGO, a woman's NGO, the women's wing of a district branch of a political party and the women's section of MTUC. All these groups expressed interest but due to various reasons only one concrete possibility materialised. For instance, I had to abort the possibility of working with an electronics in-house union when the union was terminated and its executive committee was dismissed and the workers went to look for jobs elsewhere. Another instance was my establishment of a relationship with the shoe workers' union which initially resulted in the commencement of some educational work with a pro-tem committee in a particular worksite. However, no concrete partnership materialised because, while the national union recognised the need and was very keen on some educational programmes for the newly appointed

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[12] I use the word attempted because what was intended did not materialise. Only certain modified aspects of the participatory research process could be implemented.

worksite committee, the enthusiasm was not equally shared by the worksite members. In fact a lot of time and energy was invested in this nurturing and negotiating process.

Partnership was eventually secured with an in-house union of a MNC export-oriented manufacturing plant. During my initial contact with the president and secretary of this in-house union, they were actually running educational programmes and study-circle projects on behalf of an international organisation for other unions[13]. Therefore, they were quite receptive to my ideas and suggestion of doing educational work with their own in-house members. Besides, when they knew of my past involvement with factory workers in Penang, especially on the organising work which I did with retrenched workers in the mid-80s recession, they were quite impressed. I believe this must have lent me credibility in negotiating with them. The overall focus and form of the PR evolved according to negotiations with the union officials (mainly the woman secretary when we finally got down to implementation) and the situation of the women in that factory.

.. .. Negotiating the programme .. ..

At the outset, I had wanted to develop a gender-awareness curriculum[14] (contents and methods) based on the women's articulated needs and interests. Then, simultaneously, to use the education intervention to refine and consolidate the module, as well as to use the education sessions to make observations. As the in-house union did not have any idea or rigid requirements about how the programme should be

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[13] I first got to know the President of the union as the consultant for MTUC/ICFTU-APRO/LO-FTF workers' education programme, while he was conducting a 'training of trainers' course at the national trade union centre.

[14] This idea of formulating a curriculum was very much influenced by my exposure to the discourse of modularisation and curriculum development in England.

structured or how to proceed, my proposal to start with a self-administered questionnaire survey to ascertain the needs and interests of the women members to formulate an appropriate programme was accepted. My intention was to use the survey as a way in to initiate participation by enlisting a few women into processing the questionnaires. Despite my persistent persuasion, this idea did not materialise as the union secretary[15] felt that she could not identify anyone who would be interested. Her rationale and experience was that the women would rather spend their time doing overtime. I accepted her recommendation and figured out other ways of trying to form a working group instead[16].

The questionnaire was finalised, piloted, translated[17] and given to the union for distribution. We had agreed to use the first session to discuss the survey findings as a basis to draw up an agenda for the education programme. Meanwhile, the union secretary proposed that she would inform the members and ask them to form their own groups - I was enthused by the democratic approach. I proposed that we work with two or three groups over a period of at least six to nine months so that the groups have time to develop and I could record the observations over a substantial period. I had hoped that this would generate sufficient interest to consolidate into a women's caucus. If this was not achievable, the working group could at least be the reference point and collaborators for the PR. Fostering participation and decision-

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[15] She was the main person I worked with in the union. I did not succeed in getting her to identify a few others to form a group to work with.

[16] Later, when the research-education sessions started we asked for volunteer group leaders and co-leaders for all of the eighteen groups. I was still pursuing the idea of working with an ongoing group. This did not materialise either.

[17] The union undertook the responsibility of translating and printing the questionnaire.

making are important ingredients of PR (Deshler & Ewert 1995), and I was keen to practise these principles. However, this idea fell through because the union wanted a programme for all its members, irrespective of gender. The union was concerned that it should not be construed as favouring a few. The secretary advised that if the programme was not made compulsory for all, the attendance would be very poor. She insisted that the programme had to be official and compulsory or else nobody would take it seriously. She offered to prepare a formal invitation to the sessions from the union.

After days of persistent explanation, mutual sharing and discussion I convinced the secretary of the value of single-sex sessions and to concentrate on women first as they comprised the lowest and largest group (80% of the union's membership) apart from the fact that their problems would be very different from that of male members. Through a process of reflective talking she recognised from her own experiences that if the groups were mixed the women would not feel at ease, hence deterring their participation. By sharing with her my experiences, she recalled her own experience[18] in union programmes whereby, when she talked, she noticed that most of the men were not listening. I also gave further examples from the MTUC-Women's section which I had gathered from my interviews. I agreed that all union members should have access to the programme and assured them of my commitment as long as the union could attend to the logistics. I stressed the point that a one-off session would be ineffective. A regular follow-up was desirable for sustained effect and expressed the hope for regular follow-up sessions at least for some groups. However, this did not turn out to be possible in the end since the union preferred to

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[18] This is part of the methodology of storying.

complete a round of first sessions for all before proceeding with any follow-ups. It was impossible to convince the union of a groupwork approach. The union was more familiar and attuned to the one-off mass education approach.

.. .. Redefining the focus .. ..

According to our negotiated plan for implementation, the survey[19] was to be completed before proceeding with the group sessions. Findings of the survey were to be discussed at the first sessions. This plan was modified when suddenly two weeks after the questionnaires were given for distribution, the secretary informed me that the questionnaires would only be collected back at the first session, and that she and her treasurer as representatives of the union wanted to discuss with me what I would be doing in the first session, and that they would like this to commence the following week.

This sudden request was a blessing for me. I was very pleased that we could finally get down to the sessions as the preparation was dragging on for too long. But more important it made me rethink and reformulate the group sessions. By that time, I had gained new insights from probing the unspoken voices of a number of factory women through individual interactive interviews. The narratives pointed to new dimensions of the factory women's lives and raised questions about educational work. These stories reminded me of my earlier experiences with factory women in Penang in the eighties. which I had not given much attention to. It became clear that developing a curriculum based on their expressed needs and interests would not

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[19] As the sessions progressed, addressing the concerns that had emerged became more important than digressing attention to the questionnaire. Subsequently the questionnaire became irrelevant to the redefined focus of the PR.

necessarily address their suppressed experiences, their unspoken thoughts and feelings which have not been rendered visible or acknowledged for various reasons.

I was able to learn more about the (hidden) multi-dimensions of the women's subjective realities in the preparation of the questionnaire with the union. I discussed the situation of the women workers with the union, the previous woman secretary and a few of the women whom I had got to know. While precise descriptions of their conditions and practical needs in relation to their dual roles as home-makers and workers were clearly articulated, there was little reference to their psychological state and emotional well-being. Reviewing some of the returned questionnaires also confirmed that the very structure of a self-administered questionnaire would not draw out the expression of personal experiences and feelings. Problems of multiple roles, shiftwork and exhaustion were the common responses.

With these insights in mind, and since the union was keen to commence the group sessions I developed them into education-research sessions. As most of the women often felt intimidated about speaking out and were rather shy to talk, I used the sessions to 'elicit talk' as a kind of training for them to speak and also as a way to find out their experienced realities from their own standpoints. I used these sessions as a space for facilitating the women to verbalise and make sense of their unspoken experiences, feelings and perceptions. Indeed, the redefined focus enabled me to make observations on how to commence educational work from lived experiences. Concomitant to this, I experimented on methods of how to evoke talk, how to validate feelings and how to reflect on experienced subordination (see chapter seven for details).

In total, I conducted eighteen small group participatory research-education sessions with two hundred and seventy (270) women. Most of the women were predominantly of malay ethnic (85%) origin, with ages ranging from twenty years to their early fifties. However, most were between the age of thirty five and forty five. Malays were younger whereas the older women were largely chinese. Sixteen of the indian women (6%) participants were also generally older, in their forties. Sixty percent of the women were married and about five percent were single mothers. The highest educational level attained was the Malaysian School Certificate which entail eleven years of formal schooling. All of those below the age of forty have at least a grade three in this formal school certificate. However, those older, in their late forties to early fifties have only the lower certificate of nine or less than nine years of formal schooling. The older chinese were not fluent in the malay language whereas, the younger ones who had the opportunity of benefiting from nine years of compulsory schooling were able to speak malay sufficiently well. The indians were generally more proficient in the spoken malay language.

A few sessions were also organised for the men as requested. But due to time constraints, I was not able to do more. As mentioned earlier, I had planned to have regular follow-up sessions with each group but this did not materialise because of logistic problems faced by the union. However, I had two follow-up workshops with the leaders and co-leaders of the groups. In these workshops I tried out a few ideas on gender sensitisation and used a combination of recall and narration, creative dramatics and sculpturing to evoke and discuss experiences of gender subordination. Later, when I was processing and reflecting on the fieldwork experiences, I developed

a training module for factory women on gender sensitisation and gender subordination (see Appendix).

The success of the participatory research-education sessions was made possible by a very close collaboration with the union secretary whose interest and concern went beyond her call of duty. In the end we became great friends. I also learnt from her later that some male unionists from the national trade union centre had tried to sabotage what I was doing but, because of our close rapport, she did not believe them and was glad that she did not allow herself to be influenced by what was told to her.

Throughout the attempted PR, I worked closely with the union leaders as well as gave them constant feedback. Initially, they were not optimistic about the sessions because they felt that the women would not be interested and would not show up. As it turned out, the women did show up, at first out of curiosity, but when word got around in the factory that the sessions were very interesting and dealt with personal problems, more and more women were asking when would be their turn. At each workshop, participants were reluctant to end the session and they would request for another session to continue the discussion. I found this response very encouraging and was quite disappointed that the follow-ups could not be organised. I even tried to provide support and counselling service to any of the participants by making myself available at certain times of the week, but that did not materialise either, because the union leaders did not respond for they were bogged down with their own issues and priorities. During that same period, the union was negotiating for another collective agreement. In fact, some of the sessions were used to update participants on the latest development in the negotiation process.

The secretary and assistant-secretary played crucial roles in solving problems that arose on the shopfloor from the sessions. For example, the issue of confidentiality became a problem when participants began to repeat to other workers what have been disclosed in the sessions (not so much out of spite but rather to try to persuade their colleagues to attend). Of course, many of the participants (those who have been talked about) got very upset but, fortunately, the union secretary was able to resolve the misunerstandings fast enough.

2.4   EVOLVING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: DATA PROCESSING AND ANALYSIS

Data processing and analysis of the empirical fieldwork, which is usually undertaken at the final stage, actually commenced with my fieldwork and continued into the period of writing. This took the form of categorising fieldnotes, reflecting on them for emergent issues and questions to take up in subsequent interviews. Analyses with the factory women also took place in the education-research sessions by engaging them via problem posing to make sense and talk reflectively about their lived experiences.

All individual interviews and the participatory research-education sessions[20] were audiotaped and transcribed immediately after where possible. Except for interviews with women workers, other interviews with funders and those involved in trade union and women worker's education were not taped. Detailed notes were taken and written up in full immediately after the interview. The ongoing in-field

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[20] Most interviews with women workers and group sessions were conducted in Malay and a few in Chinese. These were simultaneously translated into English as I transcribed the tapes.

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transcriptions allowed me to follow up on matters which needed further elaboration, as well as cumulatively to interrogate the 'data' with specific questions I had for each of the research questions. The two questionnaire surveys (trade unions' education and survey of women workers' situation in the factory where the PR was conducted) were processed as soon as they were done so as to allow for the next stage of fieldwork to proceed. Most of the data from these two surveys were not of much use finally due to the redefined focus of this study. Processing the PR data was the most time-consuming and took a longer time than expected. It entailed meticulous transcriptions, many readings of the detailed processed notes and transcriptions of the women's stories. All the sessions were taped and transcribed during the field research but the conceptualisation of analytical concepts only crystallised after much intensive work which involved moving backward and forward between the data and literature.

The field research yielded six mammoth sets of data and insights[21], comprising over a thousand pages of fieldnotes and transcriptions. These are (i) recordings of observations at educational programmes and interactions with organisations related to workers' or/and women workers' education, (ii) women workers' education programmes undertaken by the different groups, (iii) women workers' narratives, women workers' activists, educators and other related players' (like trade union officials) accounts of their experiences, (iv) two questionnaire

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[21] I would like to stress here that data from the fieldwork were not purely in the form of facts and information collected. Constitutive of the data are insights, experiences, pains, memories, certain words and expressions, visual images and intersubjective feelings that continued to impact on me (positively and not so helpful) as I tried to make sense of the data in an environment totally alien to where the field research had taken place.

surveys - one on trade union education and the other on women workers in the factory where the PR was conducted, and (v) fieldnotes and transcriptions of the research-education sessions.

Observations, narratives and accounts from the various sets of people were integrated into the respective chapters as general description and/or as the actual voices of women workers as in chapters four and seven. Given the limited length of this thesis, most of the narratives cited are not used in full, but extracted in accordance to the requirement of the respective chapters. Except for the extracts used in chapter four, most of the women workers' stories that were collected through interactive individual interviews have not had the opportunity to be used in this thesis.

Analysis of the non-PR components of the research was quite straightforward as the guide questions provided the organisational categories and concepts for analysis. Gender was used as a basic organising principle. This is specially the case for chapters five and six. The feminist perspective provided the lens to appraise and assess all forms of women workers' education by putting 'the social construction of gender' at the centre of my analysis.

Making sense of the women's stories from the education-research sessions was not so difficult as the process of analysis started in the sessions (see chapter seven) when the women explored why they behaved and felt the way they did. The women contributed to the analyses during the sessions as data (their lived experiences) and interpretation became fused in a process of reflective talking and making sense (see chapter seven) through which connections and insights were made as they responded to questions and developed new ways of looking at what they had experienced.

However, the search for analytical concepts to explain the women's experiences was difficult. I wrestled with methodological self-reflections on "how to produce an analysis which goes beyond the experiences of the researched while still granting them full subjectivity". An important question to consider is: "How do we explain the lives of others without violating their reality?" (Acker et al. 1983:429). Unlike the grounded theory approach (Blaikie 1993; Strauss & Corbin 1994) which largely describes the social phenomenon only, I wanted to move beyond descriptions so as to be able to explain and yet not commit the 'researcher's imposition' with pre-determined concepts.

At first, I was guided by the grounded theory approach to tease out patterns and themes (Turner 1981; Dey 1993). After a few readings of the transcriptions, it appeared that most of the narrations described the women's feelings -- an insight which I have already noted in my fieldnotes. At this stage. I could not yet see the gendered nature of the women's experiences. I was still overwhelmed by the particularities of each narration, by the lucidity of the descriptions. I was very much taken by the stories and feelings in each of the stories. I was trying too hard to let the data 'speak for itself' and not impose any of my conceptual categories.

I, then, used a computer software called 'DT-SEARCH'[22] which enabled the computer to pull out a certain number of lines above and below the appearance of an identified word in the text. However, this did not turn out to be very useful either. At most it was a processing instrument, not one that can help to formulate explanations. However I noticed that most of the texts pulled out were about

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[22] I personally do not know much about this program. A friend gave it to me thinking it would help when he heard of my woes with my voluminous data.

narrations of pain and suffering when I used the key word 'feeling'. With this I concluded tentatively that most of the women's narrations described feelings and the feelings were about pain and suffering. I was still not satisfied, as I was only able to describe, not explain.

I returned back to brain-work instead of computer-work and read through many times the transcriptions of all the sessions, along with the reflections I had made in my fieldnotes which helped me recall the analyses by the women. With the use of colour codes, I categorised and compared the narrations according to their different sources: workplace, home/family, peers, etc, and drew out the differences. This only got me deeper into another level of description! It was only when I asked, 'who are the perpetrators?' that the gendered nature of the women's experiences became an obvious commonality. This contributed another piece of the missing jigsaw puzzle, but only to a more colourful description. I knew intuitively that I needed to jump out of these layers of description and examine the 'data' via a different route if I wanted to get to some explanations. In retrospect, I was still too much influenced by the process explicated in grounded theory while trying to derive meanings from reality by consciously not adopting a pre-determined analysis.

I, then, tried Freire's method of problem-posing (Freire 1972) on myself 'what are these pains and sufferings conveying?', 'what kind of pains and sufferings are they?', 'why are the women experiencing them?', 'what did the women say?', 'what were the contexts when they told those stories?'. With these questions in mind, I read again the transcriptions and processed notes of the sessions. As I read those pages of fieldnotes again and again, I felt something was shaping but did not have the name to the concepts. I actually felt the tensions and intensity bursting in my mind

and body - it was like carrying a pregnancy full term and not being able to deliver! At the same time, I returned to the literature for ideas and read further about women's experiences and oppression, especially that of women workers. Readings on grounded theory approach did not illuminate me further as it only delineates a process for describing social phenomena and does not deal with explanations or theorisation from the descriptions. Empirical studies of factory women waylaid me into an elaborate literature survey[23] of industrial women workers. I did not get to use even half of these in this thesis.

With hind sight, it was the synergy of two parallel sets of ongoing interactive activities of grappling with the themes from the women's accounts and the identification of existing perspectives, and concepts that helped to piece together the fragments of meanings which could be gleaned from the accounts. For this to take place, the data cannot be 'raw' and unprocessed. Some meanings/descriptions would have to be constructed from them. In this situation, four sets of feminist literature[24] pertinent to the issues of this research weaved together the descriptions from the field work. Describing it here seems so neat and quick, but in actual fact the whole process was messy, long drawn and took many layers of processing and trial-and-error connections before the conceptualisation and explanation took shape.

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[23] The literature survey pointed out very clearly that most of the studies were 'objective', researchers' accounts of the women's situation as compared to the women's words in my transcriptions.

[24] These are (i) internalised intimations of oppression (Bartky 1990; Steinem 1992), (ii) emotional suffering/welfare (Krzowski & Land 1988; Dominelli & McLeod 1989), (iii) voice, naming, self-definition/redefinition (Collins 1990), and (iv) experience and subjectivities (Weedon 1987; Usher 1989).

Locating the core analytical tools ('emotional welfare' and 'subjectivities') helped me conceptualise the women's descriptions of their pains and sufferings as emotional subordination and prompted me to link their silences, fears and anxieties to internalised intimations of oppression. These concepts crystallised when I made the final connection in the explanation of the women's pains and sufferings (effects of emotional subordination) and the methods I used in the education-research sessions to process these gendered experiences of subordination (reconstructing subjectivities). It is through these concepts that I found the explanation to the lived realities of the factory women and to reframe educational work. This process pulled together for me the conceptual framework of feminist popular education for educational work with factory women: to evoke and address their gendered experiences of emotional subordination - story-telling-sharing as education (see chapter seven).

It also became very evident from gleaning the fieldnotes that the analytical concepts I used to explain merely gave an 'expert' (Blaikie 1993:196) account of social life from the everyday accounts that the women have described minus the academic jargon! In this research it is a disciplinary and feminist perspective rather than an expert account that made the difference.

This process of producing social scientific accounts of social life by drawing on the concepts and meanings used by social actors, and the activities in which they engage is called 'abduction' (Blaikie 1993). It is primarily concerned with explanation (by means of second-order concepts from first order accounts by social actors), and possibly prediction, rather than just description. Blaikie describes this as "a hermeneutic process of trying to grasp the unknown whole from the known

parts". It was also informative for me to learn from Blaikie (1993:194-196) that this is the dominant strategy used in feminism.

2.5   CONCLUSION

This chapter stories the research journey of this study.   It captures the contexts, essences and nuances of the conception and conduct of my research, in particular the interplay of personal, political, emotional, academic, intellectual and circumstantial aspects of feminist participatory research.

From the outset and throughout the study, I was plagued by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, in particular the lack of academic confidence in myself, largely arising from the fact that I chose to do things different from normative ways. I was so steeped in positivist training and the assertions of the expert Others that I worried constantly not doing things right, especially given the fact that I kept asserting in doing things quite differently. While I was clear and determined with the choice of my research and methodology, including the way I have evolved my conceptual framework, I doubted myself, my decision and my capability all the time.

As much as my predicaments and my subjectivities embody this research, this research experience, in particular the women's stories in the research-education sessions have impacted my own subjectivities. Through the women's narrations of their experienced subordination I became painfully aware of my mother's decades of suppressed emotional sufferings, and subsequently my own experienced subordination. This research has brought home the reality and commonality of women's lived experiences of subordination be it the researcher or 'researched', personal, political or academic.

Chapter Three

CONSTRUCTING A LENS

"Subjective experience is the starting point for any validation of theory. Theory which can inform and enhance practice will be useful only if it grows out of practice and makes sense to the lived experience of the practitioners. "

(Thompson 1983:4)

3.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter constructs a lens to examine and guide educational work with factory women. It is important that the theoretical constructs adopted here can unfold the various dimensions of factory women's lives, and guide the discernment of an empowering educational practice. What we understand as factory women's realities and what we constitute as educational work are all fundamental to the scope and focus of our educational practice. As the focus of this research is on 'Educational Work' with 'Factory Women', appropriate concepts for understanding the diverse realities and multiple oppressions faced by factory women will be examined before surveying the discourses and practices in educational work. Next, feminist popular education is explored as the conceptual framework in which this study is located. The chapter ends with the formulation of a conceptual schema from my research findings.

I found that no one discipline by itself adequately provides all the conceptual understandings for my research. However, as I have been indoctrinated by the disciplinary divide of the social sciences it took me a long while before I felt confident intellectually about constructing a conceptual schema that draws from

different disciplines. This difficulty was further compounded by the fact that some of the writings are very new to me.

Thus the theoretical framework used here is composed of a hybrid (but coherent) set of concepts and theories drawn from different bodies of literature, namely; (i) different educational theories and practices pertaining to adult/non-formal/community/popular education and schooling, (ii) women's studies and feminism, (iii) social work and (iv) sociology. Feminist and poststructuralist perspectives help to provide a more incisive set of lenses to educational practice and the understanding of women's diverse and contradictory situations. Insights drawn from reflecting on previous experience and from the fieldwork of this research have also influenced my reconceptualisation of the scope and purposes of educational work with factory women and the understanding of the multiple (especially repressed) dimensions of their situation.

As the key focus of this research is on feminist popular education, this literature has been explored fully to date. However, other sets of literature pertaining to areas in adult, community and workers education, women workers and women in/and development are only drawn selectively as these are peripheral to the main thrust of the study and it is not possible to cover them all equally fully. My intention is not to provide an in-depth coverage of each of these areas, but mainly to highlight the relevance and connections of these areas to the study on educational work with factory women.

3.2 SITUATING AND CONCEPTUALISING FACTORY WOMEN

Factory women refer to female assembly-line operators working in the transnational corporations (Karl 1983; Chan 1997; Pyle 1998). They work in menial, tedious, repetitive tasks as unskilled or semi-skilled shift-workers. They are found at the bottom of the economic hierarchy in female-labour intensive export-oriented industries[1]. These women are affected by the intersection of capitalism and patriarchal forces that shape women's productive and reproductive roles (Ward 1990; Mies 1998). In Malaysia and other developing nations, they are the dextrous, docile, nimble-fingered, mostly young rural migrant workers in free trade zones (Grossman 1979; Fatimah 1985).

Much that has been written on factory women can be traced from two strands of theoretical knowledge. One strand is from theories of development, which analyse the different positioning of factory women vis-à-vis their country's political economy, and the other strand is from sociological studies which look at the economic and social dynamics, especially gender relations at work. In this section, I will survey the literature on these strands to unfold the external and internal dynamics, objective and subjective conditions of factory women's lives. Firstly, I review the literature on factory women based on different development theoretical perspectives. Secondly, I draw upon work in the field of women and development, focusing on the rise of feminist consciousness and its impact on the study of factory women's lives. Finally, I draw insights from post-modern feminism to help me discern concepts for examining lived experiences and the personal implications of women's subordination.

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[1] These industries are electronics, assemblying of electrical goods, textiles and garments, shoes, rubber products, food processing, toy manufacturing, surgical instruments, etc.

Industrial Development and the Emergence of Factory Women

Three theoretical perspectives relating to different development paradigms (Dube 1988; Stein 1997) can be delineated in the positioning of factory women. Modernisation theories (Rostow 1960; Inkeles & Smith 1974) view the emergence of factory women as a sign of economic growth; women are seen as the beneficiaries and product of development. Problems and controversies circumscribing factory women's lives are regarded as transitional or only peripheral compared to the advantages. By contrast, the dependency school (Berstein 1973; Chase-Dunn 1975) stresses commodification of factory women in underdeveloped countries by foreign capital from developed nations. Factory women are exploited as cheap labour in this unequal exchange resulting from dependent capitalist industrialisation. The world-system approach (Wallerstein 1974; Meyer & Hannan 1979) locates factory women within the context of international division of labour in the development of a competitive global economy. Factory women are not only pawns of multinational capital but they are also promoted by their own governments as the nation's comparative advantage in attracting transnational investment. Hence, the super-exploitation of factory women by international capital and the state (Grossman 1979; Grace 1990).

A survey of writings on factory women reveals a tendency to focus on their situation at the work place. Most of the studies are sociological investigations examining the growth of export-oriented industrialisation in Third World countries led by multinationals with the co-operation of the nation-states, and its impact on women in various countries and industries. For example, Snow (1977) and Paglaban (1978) have researched on the export processing zones in the Philippines; Lim (1978)

on women workers in the electronics industry in Malaysia and Singapore; Heyzer (1986) on women workers in the textile industry; and Blake & Moonstan (1982) on women workers in the electronics industry in Thailand.

Since the mid 70s[2] when most of the Asian countries shifted their economic development strategy to export-oriented industrialisation, coinciding with the industrial redeployment of jobs from high-wage industrialised countries to relatively low-wage countries of Asia, massive numbers of women traditionally linked with agriculture joined the ranks of industrial workers on the assembly line of global market factories bringing about a historically unprecedented scale of rural-urban migration of young single women into urban industrial wage employment. The direct implications of this entail two major changes for the women, that is: moving from a flexible-personal work situation to a hierarchical structure of industrial production and a transition from a fairly autonomous work process to one where they are continuously subjugated to oppressive labour discipline.

In most of these countries, host governments set up special export processing zones with their various competitive incentives and infra-structural support, tariff exemptions, and amendments to labour laws to ensure a stable and well-controlled labour force to attract foreign investors (Kassalow 1978). It is in this context that we find the proliferation of women workers in these free trade zones, export processing zones or special economic zones. Worldwide employment in these zones grew from 50,000 in 1970 (Maex 1983) to over 1.3 million in 1986 (ILO & UN Centre on Transnational Corporations 1988), with at least 80 percent of the workforce

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[2] It started with South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore in the early 70s, then Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Indonesia and Sri Lanka in the mid 1970s, and by early 1980s, China, Bangladesh and Pakistan were also involved.

comprising of women[3]. Various reasons have been given for the preferential employment of female labour (Lim 1978; Grossman 1979; UNIDO 1980: Frobel et al. 1980; Elson & Pearson 1980; Eisold 1982). These include physical attributes of women (agile hands, nimble fingers, keen eyesight); social and cultural attitudes and behaviour (their relatively subordinated and repressed character, acceptance of work discipline) and Third World women's position in the labour market (lower wages for women than men in these developing countries can further be justified by the assumption that women have no financial obligations or career aspirations).

Research on export-led industrialisation and factory women has unfolded the highly-interventionist role of host governments in controlling its labour (Bjorkman et al. 1988; Southall 1988; Wong 1989; Grace 1990). Most states impose tight control over the workforce through control on unionisation, prohibition of workers action by law, and the "use of state machinery in deregistration, detention and recognition of only state or enterprise controlled unions" (Bjorkman et al. 1988:71). To attract foreign investors, host governments further build up (or amend) elaborate legal systems to control and depoliticise labour unions, prevent strikes and suppress workers' rights (Gallin 1990; Rosa 1994). In contrast, there is little provision by way of infrastructure support and social welfare services such as affordable housing, transportation and basic amenities (Kamal et al. 1985). Indeed, little attention has been given by the state to the problems and needs of this newly constituted industrial labour force. For the women workers, while gaining employment is a step forward in gaining a measure of autonomy, the lack of corresponding supportive social

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[3] With newcomers like China, Bangladesh and Pakistan, the number of women employed in the new and expanded EPZs have grown tremendously.

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provision and effective legal reforms make working outside their homes a perpetual struggle.

Studies from the various Asian countries (Snow 1978; Blake & Moonstan 1982; Kamal et al. 1985; Dep Weerasinghe 1982; Frobel et al. 1980; Maex 1982; Shoesmith 1986) show very similar social-demographic background and characteristics of these women, their working and living conditions. Most of them are young (aged between 16-25), single, migrants from poor rural (agrarian) households, have little or no industrial work experience and limited access to formal education. They are mostly fresh school-leavers or school dropouts. Inexperienced rural recruits are generally preferred to ensure a malleable, obedient, and stable workforce (Hing 1984).

The deplorable working conditions in the global market factories have been extensively probed (Froebel et al. 1980; Safa 1981; Elson & Pearson 1981; Fuentes & Ehrenreich 1983; ILO/UNCTC 1988; Southall 1988; Matsui 1987). Apart from low wages the different, both overt and latent, ways multinationals exploit the women through its various labour practices of recruitment, production schedule and management, training and lay-off/dismissal have been well documented (Grossman 1979; Tan 1986). While the work has been described as easy and simple, researchers have found instead stressful conditions in which the women have to maintain a fixed posture, focus on minute details, or work at a pace faster than one task/movement per minute. Competition among workers is encouraged by management through its various incentive schemes to induce increasing productivity (Grossman 1979; Lim 1978). Production quotas are continuously increased to points just beyond work capability (Woon 1982). Other dehumanizing labour practices like forced overtime,

invisible mechanisms of control (Tse 1981) and humiliating punitive devices (Dep Weerasinghe 1991) have been

extensively practised.

Irregular shift schedules disrupt sleep, health and social relationships. Apart from the 3-shifts rotating system, which changes every 1-2 weeks, some factories even run a 4-shift whereby the rest-day changes every week. Sunday becomes a regular workday without the double-pay compensation of working on a public rest day as required in the past. For some, there is even an odd hour shift whereby work starts in the evening and finishes in the early hours of the morning (Chan 1987). In many of these countries, workers work long hours, often seven days a week or more with overtime. A daily overtime of 3-4 hours is not uncommon. Intensification of the work process through faster machines and various economic incentives are common tactics to enhance greater productivity (see Heyzer 1986:108 for further elaboration) resulting in more stress and strain on the worker.

Women workers are also subjected to a variety of work-related health and social problems for which their employers are not held responsible. Studies on women workers' occupational health in these manufacturing industries revealed a whole host of job-related illnesses (Lim 1984; Lin 1986). Many of these are related to toxic chemicals exposure, even in the electronics industry which is projected as the safest and cleanest export industry (Gassert 1985). Eyesight deterioration, eye and muscular strain, dizziness and headaches, skin dermatitis, coughs, chest pains and breathing problems are some of the commonly reported ailments (Kamal et al. 1985). In the garment and textile factories, asthma, bronchitis, brown lung, conjunctivitis, chronic back problems, hearing impairment (Chapkis & Enloe 1983), laryngitis and

skin dermatitis (Dep Weerasinghe 1991) have been reported. Gas and radiation leakages have been found to pose hazards to reproductive health. More severe cases of cancer, still births and abortions have been recorded, particularly in the electronics sector. The ever changing shiftwork disrupts eating and sleeping patterns as well as family and social life (Lim 1978; Kamal et al. 1985).

Apart from these physiological disorders, most of them suffer from persisting fatigue, exhaustion and an overall loss of well-being and general deterioration of their physical and psychological health (Heyzer 1978). The extent of mass hysteria outbreaks in Malaysia in the late 70s and early 80s raised much speculation on the relationship between these stress-strains and the epidemic hysteria outbreaks among factory girls (Lee 1984; Ackerman 1985). Ackerman found that hysteria is one of the manifestations of job stress when channels for grievance resolution are lacking. Other researchers suggest that these episodes provide the venting of pent-up emotions. Psychological studies have suggested that the outbreaks occur when there is a build-up of tension and anxiety. Such outbreaks usually occurred in factories which have been found to have intense conflicts associated with interpersonal relations and the violation of cultural rules.

Outside work, a diverse range of problems, such as the contempt with which society views factory women, impinge on the women's safety, psyche and self-esteem. These range from immediate needs of survival adaptation to an alien urban industrial life-style and a hostile, unsafe environment of sexual violence-molestation-harassment of men, in the community. The extent of sexual violence of all possible forms, though seldom documented, is pervasive. Dep Weerasinghe (1991:37) found that the incidence of violence is so frequent in Sri Lanka that it has

become part and parcel of the women's existence. Teasing, derogative abuse and luring offers to be picked up are the most common though other forms of sexual assaults are known to occur. She reported instances of rape and other types of molestation which include organised gangs of male cyclists coming from behind and squeezing the women's breasts, snatching their purses or gold chains or hurling obscene insults. And when the women took up the issue with the villagers, they were told that the men had the right to do as they did! In Malaysia, the women workers are accused of being 'gatai' (seductive), to have aroused and seduced the men.

Society's resentment, hostility and pejorative attitude toward factory girls is another very real dimension which disempowers factory women. The community's negative social perceptions and moralistic expectations generate tension and conflict in the women in terms of their roles, behaviour patterns and inferiority complex. Blake (1977) has recorded the many different forms that this resentment has manifested itself in Penang, Malaysia. Dep Weerasinghe (1991) described the contempt and moral disparagement of the villagers towards the factory women. Derogatory expressions have been used in different countries to poke fun at factory women insinuating that the factory women are loose and easily available sexually, for examples, in Sri Lanka - isthreepura (city of cheap women), vesakalapaya (zone of the prostitutes); Malaysia - jual murah (cheap sale), sexy (Ackerman 1986: 43) or minah karan (Fatimah 1985).

Overall, neither their job nor their work environment allows the women to regenerate their strength or self-esteem nor make allowances for the diminished physical capacities of ageing and burnout. Over the years, management have further fine-tuned their labour control policies packaged in various forms of participative

management and workers' participation schemes, ranging from Joint Consultative Committees, Employee Relations Council of the 1970s to Quality Control Circles of the 1980s to work teams in Total Quality Movement of the 1990s.

The literature reviewed thus far shows the collusion of the state and multinationals in exploiting women in the labour force, focusing on the objective contexts of working conditions and society's reactions to factory women. The following section is an analysis on how women and women's issues are framed in different theoretical perspectives on development. The discourse on Third World women in the development process is first surveyed in relation to the various approaches and forms of intervention vis-à-vis women's situation. This is followed by a discussion on the conceptualisation of women's lived experiences to synthesise a framework for understanding factory women's subjective contexts.

Women and International Development Action

(i) Initial Focus: Women as a vulnerable group

Over the past four decades, international development action has moved from pre-Women-in-Development (WID), WID and through Women-and-Development (WAD) to Gender-and-Development (GAD) perspectives (Rathgeber 1990; Parpart 1993), subsequently shaping local efforts through funding for development programs in Third World countries. At the same time, grassroots and feminist action have galvanised a rethinking of development discourse and practice (Sen & Grown 1987). The conceptual reformulation has also brought about considerable shifts in the practice of development intervention; incorporating different underlying assumptions in relation to women's practical and strategic gender needs (Molyneux 1985; Moser

1989), and the selected beneficiaries. The initial target was rural women, then industrial workers - factory women in export-oriented multinational production, and lately urban informal sector workers (Young 1993).

The welfare approach is the oldest and is pre-WID. It focuses on women entirely in terms of their reproductive roles and as passive recipients. Its goal is to bring women into development (read modernisation) as better mothers by top-down handouts in the form of free goods and services like family planning, feeding schemes, mother-child health programs. The pioneering YWCEP was designed within this framework (see chapter five, 5.3).

Welfare programs are politically 'safe' and non-challenging to the traditionally accepted role of women. The approach is only concerned with meeting practical gender needs relating to women's reproductive role and not to meet strategic gender needs such as the rights of women to have control over their reproduction (Moser 1993). Hence they continue to be widely popular even though they encourage dependency and treat women as objects of welfare. Critique of this approach has resulted in the development of other approaches which place emphasis on issues such as equity, anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment (Moser 1989). As they share common origins and are not mutually exclusive, there is a tendency to categorise them as the WID approach even though there are significant differences.

(ii) WID and WAD: Making Women Visible

WID was coined in the early 1970s as a deliberate strategy to inject new thinking about women's vital role in development and their untapped resource to GNP. Initially women were projected as the neglected dimension of development and

became target beneficiaries of welfare, hence prioritised as recipients of development aid. Then women became a priority for using their under-utilised capacity productively (World Bank 1975). When women's productive roles gained recognition their economic participation had to be enhanced as they were viewed as not yet making sufficient productive contribution to their country's development (World Bank 1980). The development industry found that it needed women. They were regarded as key actors especially in meeting family needs and determining population trends. It argued that integrating women into the development process would raise women's status and assist the total development effort. Hence the accelerated goal to integrate women more productively, that is to increase their economic contribution, and thereby, increasing their status. Proponents of WID ignored the possibility that women's development might require fundamental social change (Maguire 1984). WID is premised on modernisation theories which operate from an acceptance of existing social structures as non-problematic and imitates industrialised countries without restructuring fundamental structures of inequality.

The WAD perspective emerged in the second half of the 1970s. It is influenced by dependency theories and views men and women in the Third World as exploited by international structures based on class and capital within the world capitalist economy (Rathgeber 1990). However, the exploitative experience of both men and women is undifferentiated, with no recognition of gender inequalities. Though WID and WAD perspectives vary in their theoretical assumptions, they basically share similar goals of improving women's status in the development process without challenging the basic social relations of gender. WID stressed the integration of women into development whereas, WAD emphasised the relationship between

women and development processes (Rathgeber 1990). There is hardly any attention given to women's subordination or gender hierachies. The underpinnings of patriarchy and its deleterious effects are not recognised. Women are regarded as a homogenous group (US-AID 1978). Class, ethnicity and other differences are overlooked. Neither are the divisions and relations of exploitation that exist among women recognised.

Intervention strategies and development projects do not differ much under WID or WAD. They are largely concerned with minimising productive disadvantage of women, reducing discrimination against them and increasing their access to education, health, employment and other spheres of society (Wallace & March 1991; Rathgeber 1990). Development projects for women targeted credit facilities, income-generation, employment and non-formal education like nutrition, family-planning and vocational training to assist women in performing their roles better without acknowledging the inherent discrimination in these roles, nor the impact of the social system on their lives. These programs are directed at ensuring women's more equal participation and better integration into the capitalist world economy rather than providing alternative activities which might offer women more economic and personal autonomy (Kandiyoti 1990). The projects ignored the fact that women do not produce what they need but what others can buy (Mies 1986). The basic sexual division of labour, in particular, the international division of labour between developed and developing countries is not questioned. Likewise, basic social relations of gender, sources and nature of women's subordination and oppression are not recognised and therefore not scruntinised.

Evidence that has occurred by the end of the International Decade for the Advancement of Women in 1985, showed that the integration and increased participation of women into development planning has not solved women's survival problems nor given them more money or assets, nor changed the basic patriarchal structure in which they were entrenched. Pre-occupation with economic integration has only integrated women as invisible, unpaid/underpaid secondary producers and homemakers (Mies 1988). In fact the relative position of women in some sectors was found to have declined. For example, in the industrial sector women are relegated to the lowest paying, most monotonous and hazardous health jobs (Lim 1981; Fuentes & Ehrenreich 1982; Lin 1986). Studies on the effects of development showed increase of women's workload, more destruction of women's independent subsistence base, ecological destruction, more violence, more inequality between men and women, more state intervention and control over women's lives (Agarwal 1988). The need to empower women through collective action is overlooked. The goals of integration and equal participation have not given women voice or choice in defining the kinds of society they want (UNAPCWD 1980).

Despite their limitations, WID and WAD action legitimised focus on women. However their conceptualisation and rationale limited their vision and scope of action to economic and social efficacy. These kinds of approaches operate from the dominant structural-functionalist world-view which stresses on liberal-equilibrium approach (Maguire 1984) to problems and solutions. This world-view stresses the maintainance of the status quo, social order and integration. The existing system is assumed to operate in everyone's best interest. Economic and social growth is assumed to upgrade society. Inequality is viewed as inevitable, or even essential for

motivating betterment and efficiency of society. Planned interventions in the form of incremental improvements are reforms to restore equilibrium, to effect efficiency. This can be achieved by technology, credit accessibility, invention, training and innovation.

(iii) GAD: Making Women's Gendered Needs and Interests Visible or Making Women Invisible?

The GAD perspective emerged in tthe 1980s as a critique and alternative to WID and WAD. It questions class and gender disparities in current social, economic and political structures. Under this perspective, women are no longer the focal concern but gender: the social construction of gender relations, gender roles and gender division of labour.

Conceptualisation of gender[4] was mooted over the concern that problems of women were distorted in terms of their biological differences with men (sex), rather than in terms of the social relationship between men and women (gender), a relationship in which women are systematically subordinated. As a relationship, gender is fundamentally structured by power through division of labour and access to resources. The GAD perspective, therefore, focuses on socially constructed gender relations and questions the validity of roles, responsibilities and expectations ascribed to men and women and not on women per se. The gender division of labour is specifically scrutinised.

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[4] Gender is seen as the process by which our biologically ascribed category of male and female become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of culturally defined attributes of masculinity and feminity (Kabeer 1991). This means that the basic social identities as men and as women are socially constructed and not based on fixed biological characteristics.

The GAD approach attempts to change existing structures and gender biases to ensure more equitable development assistance to reach women. It claims to adopt a holistic, integrated approach by recognising the triple roles of women, namely, productive, reproductive and community management in the home, workplace and community (Moser 1989). Women are viewed as agents of change, not passive recipients of development assistance. It looks at the issue of power as it relates to gender and at strategies for empowering women and challenging the status quo. It stresses the need for women to organise themselves for a more effective political voice to transform social and economic inequality (Kabeer 1991; Feldman 1998).

While this approach has had considerable influence on academic development rhetoric and to some extent in research, it is rarely operationalised in development action (Rathgeber 1990) or integrated into development planning (Moser 1989). In fact some feminists (Mies 1986) assert that this discourse of gender amounts to making women invisible. It does not name the character of the gender relations - whether they are violent, exploitative, egalitarian or reciprocal. The proliferation of gender discourse only amounts to verbalism, as there is very little change at the level of structures or power relations.

Refocusing the Lens: Feminist Perspectives

From a feminist perspective, the goal of international development action to improve women's status through increased participation and better integration into development has not benefited women. It does not give women choice or voice in defining their own lives or the kinds of society they want. In fact, the unequal social relations of gender and other forms of inequality remain largely unchallenged. It has

not brought about meaningful redistribution of power, resources and justice. According to Maguire (1984:25), "while exploitative economic relations go unaddressed, the patriarchal oppression of women goes unnamed". What is needed is to increase women's dignity and power and the liberation of men and women from systems of injustice. Feminism advocates liberation through transformation of all forms of oppression, structural and personal. It is within these contexts that activists and feminist groups questioned the meaning of development for women as constructed by the superiority of western values and western development specialists, and demanded women's collective action for empowerment (Maguire 1984; Sen & Grown 1987; Young 1993). More attention has to be paid to unravel the lived realities of women and to hear their silenced voices (Parpart 1993). This will provide new insights into women's lived experiences and knowledge, "particularly the ways society define women's sense of themselves and the limitations of that sensibility for social change and development" (Parpart 1993:456).

A (socialist) feminist perspective positions factory women within the international sexual division of labour where gender is used as a commodity in the economy (Mies 1986). Factory women are exploited not only as cheap labour but are further discriminated and subordinated as women. Women's subordination is reintensified and recomposed through new forms of patriarchal control and sexism (Elson & Pearson 1981; Ward 1990).

Studies have shown that factory women, like other women, have internalised the cultural and ideological values of a patriarchal social system that produced in them a submissive personality (Dep Weerasinghe 1991). In some countries, the public attitude deemed most appropriate for women is 'malu' (shy/reticent) and 'takut'

(afraid) (Mather 1985:168). This refers to the mental attitudes of encouraging women to be shy. embarrassed, to be at a distance, retiring, deferring to superiors. They are encouraged to be reticent, feel afraid of new people and new experiences. Most of the workers are unaware of gender discrimination. In fact, they justify discrimination on socially accepted grounds of male superiority in general and greater efficiency and productivity demonstrated by male workers. A prevalent fear of authority and trouble permeates them. Management generates and takes advantage of this fear thus intimidate them more easily. They have no notion of their rights as workers, as women, and as citizens (Jones 1984). Inexperienced, ignorant of their rights, lacking confidence, embedded in a continuous state of fear, conditioned submissiveness and an inclination towards self-blame, these women are very gullible and easily coerced by threats and pressure, especially that coming from official authority. Management takes advantage of this ignorance and exploits them with skill (Tse 1981). The lack of organisation to protect or represent the factory women makes it a double-edged disadvantage. This is further compounded by governments' restraint on unionisation (Southall 1988).

Other studies have also recorded how changes in the economic participation of women has not really brought about a concomitant change in their traditional gender roles or relations at home, their community or in society at large (Mather 1985). Factory women continue to carry the full responsibility of housework and child care which remain their primary work (despite their full shift at the factory, and the overtime), with little or no social support and services (Kamal et al. 1985; Heyzer 1988). Even for the unmarried women, the little time left is used up for daily

household chores and/or earning a bit of extra income in sideline income-earning activities.

Male control and domination, patriarchal prejudices, strong religious and cultural practices in the home, neighbourhood and community at large continue to subjugate women to experiences of subordination, inferiority and powerlessness. In her study, Mather (1985) found that subordination of factory women in Indonesia exists not only in the case of client-employees, but also in women's roles as young people, as daughters, wives and mothers. This was made possible by the strong alliance of the factory managers with the Islamic patriarchs to further subjugate the workforce. These patriarchs act as paid security agents to detect and eliminate potential trouble from within the villages and workforce.

However, there is very little research that records the factory women's own perceptions of their own lived experiences, especially on how they themselves feel, view and understand their experience of being a worker in the global market factories, and the relationship of this experience with their lives as daughters/daughters-in-law, sisters and sisters-in-law, wives and mothers. At the same time, the diversity and increasing differences amongst factory women has been noted (Chan 1996). Even though there are a lot of commonalities among factory women as an externally defined identity, they no longer remain a homogenous category in terms of age, marital status, ethnicity, length of work, origin, etc. Such differences can influence their experiences, urgent needs, and hence their various responses[5]. These varying factors are often the contentious points of conflict and

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[5] See Lin (1987) for a discussion of how these different responses vary according to the Malay and Chinese ethnic groups in Malaysia, and Mather (1985) for differences between the local and migrant women workers in Indonesia.

disunity among them. Yet these can also be harnessed as resources from amongst themselves to build solidarity and to strengthen their capacities in ways which will nurture experiences of empowerment in the women.

At a personal level women workers are glad to find a job which brings a regular wage and give them some individual freedom, opportunity to develop friendship, independence, especially economic independence to stand on their own feet (Jamilah 1980; Lin 1987). For many, factory work is viewed as 'clean, light work' suitable for girls who have been to school. It is preferred to staying at home and is regarded of higher prestige to other options such as domestic work or rubber tapping (Blake 1979; Ackerman 1986). However, once they have worked they begin to realise that the actual monetary gains are meagre (Jamilah 1981). Yet a certain sense of gratitude prevails that this is better than isolation at home or to be employed in lower paid and lower status jobs (Ackerman 1986). While they detest the factory discipline, especially the strict authoritarian supervisorial system (Tan 1986; Lin 1987), pressure of production targets (Woon 1983), work hours and physical work environment (Lin 1987), they are grateful to have the opportunity to earn their own money under the relatively pleasant conditions of working at a 'clean' indoor job alongside their friends (Ackerman 1986).

The social stigmatisation and denunciation of factory girls by society in general has brought much pain and anguish. Inspite of this, Lin (1987) noted that the experience of industrial work has brought changes to workers' lives, their identity, worldviews, motivations and expectations. The women that she interviewed suggested that they are now more able to solve various problems related to human

relations, and that their ability to articulate their thoughts and feelings is also the direct result of their work experience.

Most of the factory women do not identify themselves as workers, or have a trade union consciousness (Cardosa & Khoo 1978) nor are they aware of the benefits of unionisation (Karim 1985). In fact many of them feel that unions are anti-management and that active involvement in unions would lead to dismissal. Far from developing a feminist or class consciousness, women workers generally feel a sense of gratitude and indebtedness to their employers for providing them a paying job. Their consciousness is conditioned by the broader social-econ-political contexts in which their employment takes place. Participation of women in labour unions even in the more-established women-employing industries is not very high (Rohana 1997). Instead, women workers do not have a well-defined visible militancy or consciousness, nor do they have an existing means to channel their grievances, or express their anger and frustration. Acts of defiance by factory women (Ong 1987) in the form of self-assertion and protest on the factory floor are articulated as possession by the spirits or hysteria.

The relevance of feminism to the whole range of working class women's lives has received relatively little attention (Kenner 1985; Butler & Wintram 1991). This is generally the case with factory women workers also. Women's lived realities are experienced as varied and contradictory. However, the commonality and universality of women's oppression and subordination by men in society is a phenomenon described as patriarchy (Millet 1970; Rich 1976). Patriarchy essentially means " .. power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men - by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs,

etiquette, education, and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male .. " (Rich 1976:57-58).

Patriarchy explains the institutionalised system of male domination and sexism, which bring about women's subordination. It exists at the material and ideological levels, and interacts with other systems of production and domination and penetrates into 'body discipline' (Bartky 1989) and 'dailiness' (Aptheker 1989) of women's lives, ruling their very intimate relationships and minds. Because patriarchy is so well entrenched and legitimised, it leads women to internalise, as well as further perpetuate patriarchal ways of thinking, both in values and behaviour (Bartky 1990). Smith (1987:36) describes this as the "relations of ruling" whereby "ideological practices of our society provide women with forms of thought and knowledge that constrain us to treat ourselves as objects". However, male dominance is not monolithic. It varies historically in different cultural contexts and in different domains, giving rise to various modes of patriarchal control and responses. It is inextricably linked to and operate through other social institutions like religion, family, the state and organisational practices.

However, different feminist theories differ in their explanation of women's oppression as well as in the solutions they propose for individual and societal change, and ultimately for women's empowerment. As a result, there are different ideological position within the spectrum of feminism, and each position defines feminism, women's oppression, male dominance and gender inequalities differently. I will not go into a review of these different types of feminism but rather concentrate on key

concepts and issues that are directly useful to the understanding of subjective dimensions of factory women's lives and women's empowerment.

While work with low-income adult women are concerned with equipping and mobilising them against objective, material conditions of poverty and exploitation, subjective experiences and feelings resulting from subordination and disparagement, especially in relation to their particular situation as women are often overlooked. This is often referred to as psychological empowerment (Dighe 1995; Stromquist 1995) in the literature. The loss of the sense of personal power or powerlessness of most oppressed persons is the result of injurious experiences of domination/subordination, oppression and exploitation. The ways in which many oppressed people think and feel and construct their selves are based on an internalisation of other people's (negative) definition of them. The way we feel, think and relate with ourselves influences the ways we perceive and interact with the world. Feelings and images about ourselves are known to affect our self-esteem and self-agency (Steinem 1992).

Subjectively felt experiences of subordination, derogation and powerlessness are integral to, or rather, antithetical to the experience of women's empowerment. It is these elements that maim the self-esteem of vulnerable and subordinated women. Over time they feel inadequate, stupefied and lose confidence in themselves. These afflictions are translated into a view of themselves and their peers as failures, incapable and inadequate. Subsequently, these derogatory images and stereotypes are internalised. They (are made to) feel inferior, ashamed, apologetic and guilty of the prejudices, stereotypes and abuses inflicted on them. The inferiority complex can be so great that the individual can have great difficulty imagining her recovery from

oppression, hence the need for personal healing, before political transformation. These are important steps which make it possible for people to come out of the embeddedness of subordination.

Derogation affects not only how women feel about their own (personal) power but also ideas about their self-image and capabilities - their entire subjectivity and agency. They negate their sense of themselves, even immobilising their very capacity to act. Their minds become blank and numbed over time. Such perceptions structure their emotions, beliefs and behaviour. They perpetuate a victim's mentality and believe that change is impossible, restraining further their capacities and opportunities. Not only are the effects of subordination disempowering emotionally but ideological subordination ensues and curbs their self-agency.

Emotional suffering, when unprocessed and repressed are disabling. However its potential as a source of oppositional knowledge, and as the revolutionary core of feminist activism has been noted (Lorde 1984). Feminist writings on organising (Dominelli & Mcleod 1989) have likewise, expounded the necessity of attending to emotional welfare for women to reclaim their potential in asserting their individual and collective rights and needs. Emotions have constituted a very powerful resource for liberation in the women's movement. The power of redefining and naming feelings from one's standpoint have been proven to be invaluable in helping to change perceptions and legitimise 'forbidden' emotions as the basis for visionary social change. In particular, (repressed) anger has been used to problematize the incongruity between lived experience and sanctioned interpretations of that experience. As a response to injustice, anger can energise oppressed people to work for social change (Lyman 1981). Feminist educators, particularly women in the early

consciousness-raising groups, have explored feelings as a 'critical way of knowing', or 'inner knowing': the source of true knowledge of the world for women living in a society that denies the value of their perceptions (Weiler 1991).

It is therefore imperative that efforts for women's empowerment must address not only the material-objective conditions but also the subjective-affective dimensions. In particular, silenced experiences of emotional subordination, powerlessness and inferiority have to be taken on board in and as educational work. Educational methodologies and strategies of action that can unfold, challenge and reconstitute women's sufferings of subordination and their subordinated position are vital. Addressing conscious and unconscious thoughts, unexpressed feelings and emotions that make up their sense of themselves, their relation to the world (their inability to act) are an essential agenda (but not the only) in educational work which aims to empower women.

There are diverse conceptions of empowerment, ranging from individual self-reliance to collective strength. Underlying these various definitions is the centrality of the concept of 'power'. Power here is the 'capacity to move or to produce change'. It is NOT 'power over' implying domination, control and subordination of others. Instead, it is 'power with others', 'power from within' and 'power to enable' and the 'social power' of people connected with each other in common cause (Miller 1991).

Batliwala (1996) emphasises three critical features of empowerment. Firstly, empowerment is multi-dimensional, therefore all the sources and structures of power have to be addressed in all facets of women's lives. Secondly, empowerment is a collective process. Thirdly, empowerment is essentially an educational process

whereby changing ingrained attitudes, beliefs; and understanding the structure and nature of institutions and systems in their subordination; and organising for change are all processes of learning. Women's empowerment, therefore, is "a process which transforms the condition and position of women in society, by equipping them to collectively (i) challenge and transform the ideology and practice of women's subordination; (ii) transform the structures and institutions which have upheld and reinforced this discrimination; and (iii) gain access and control over material and knowlege resources" (Medel-Anonuevo 1997:84). Drawing upon poststructuralist and postmodernist critiques of determinism, the politics of empowerment stresses "the salience of power, personal power, and agency as sources of change" (Feldman 1998:27). People act as subjects who constitute their worlds, rather than as objects of structural demands placed upon their time and interests.

The various dimensions of empowerment have been identified as cognitive, psychological, economic and political (Stromquist 1995). Cognitive empowerment refers to knowledge about and understanding of the conditions and causes of subordination. Psychological empowerment is about the development of self-esteem, positive feelings and beliefs in one's ability to act. Economic empowerment is the ability to earn and control resources. And, political empowerment is the ability to analyse one's world, to mobilise and organise for social change.

Empowerment is a process as well as the result of that process. As a goal, it is both a personal and political position, as it challenges the status quo and attempts to change existing power relationships and structures. Empowerment has to occur at the individual, interpersonal and institutional levels, where the person develops a sense of personal power, an ability to affect others, and ability to work with others

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to take action to improve their lives and change social institutions (Gutierrez 1990). Empowerment is therefore a way of feeling, conceiving and relating with oneself and with the world. It is inextricably linked with ideas about agency, relationships and action. It is a process to change the hegemony and distribution of power at the personal level, in interpersonal relations, and in institutions and structures throughout society. It is a socio-political concept that extends beyond awareness and consciousness-raising and formal political representation.

At the individual micro-level it is conceived as the development of personal feelings without efffecting any change in the structural arrangements. The interface and inclusion of these two approaches are now recognised as essential: how individual empowerment can contribute to group empowerment and how increase in a group's power can enhance the functioning of its individual members and their structural location in society. At the same time, individual and group empowerment has to be directed at making a difference in the world around us (Rappaport 1985). The multiple dimensions of empowerment ensure a combination of individual and social change

A feminist perspective on empowerment views women's individual conditions and problems as arising not from personal deficits, but from the failure of society. It entails three critical aspects. In this study, the conceptualisation of women's conditions and women's empowerment focuses on how individual woman and women as a gender and as a group have been affected by ideologies and institutionalised systems of domination/subordination, exploitation and oppression, and how these practices have resulted in specific and profound injuries to women subjectively and collectively. Secondly, the various dimensions of these experiences and action are

dialectically linked. Thirdly, it envisions a strategy of empowering education whereby these effects are named and redefined from women's standpoints, including ways in which they can be challenged while affirming gynocentric attributes, women's situated knowlege and women's ways of being. Thus both the subjective (and intersubjective) including the realm of emotions and psyche, and structural (econ-social-political-ideological) dimensions of women's situation must be taken into account in our educational work.

3.3 DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES IN EDUCATIONAL WORK

Conservative, Liberal and Liberating Education

As a generic category educational work covers what has been variously known as non-formal/adult/community/popular education. They are variously labelled and occur in a variety of settings - education for the disadvantaged, out-of-school education, community development, trade union education, income-generating programs, agricultural extension, women's education, environment education, etc. While some are narrowly educational, many are integral and intrinsic to developmental or transformatory undertakings where educational and social-political processes may not be clearly distinguished. Thus educational work means different things in different contexts, with different objectives, strategies and methods.

Underlying these myriad forms and names, two major approaches can be discerned in the discourse: (1) the spectrum of conservative to liberal education and, (2) radical, liberating or transformatory education (Fletcher 1980; Brookfield 1983; Lovett et al. 1983; Arnold et al. 1991). These two approaches are often juxtaposed as 'education for domestication' vs. 'education for liberation' (Freire 1972).

'education as information' vs. 'education as awareness' (Oakley et al. 1991). Underpinning the differences in discourse and practice between conservative-liberal and liberating education is the issue of the relationship between education and social change. Essentially these two approaches represent the two contrasting theoretical perspectives of structural functionalism and structural conflict in defining the role of education in society.

Conservative and liberal educational work is primarily targeted at individual growth, career development, self-fulfilment (Rogers 1992), the training of technical skills for human capital development, social mobility and corporate organisational development, what Cunningham (1992) terms as 'learning for earning'. Training, rather than education, is the focus. The emphasis is on attitudes and individuals rather than structures or the collectivity, on personal growth rather than political transformation. The importance of life skills, self-directed learning, confidence building are emphasised so that unproductive, self-defeating behaviours can be corrected.

The types of educational undertaking vary. They range from developing functional literacy and numeracy to developing desirable behaviour patterns and attitudes to foster co-operation, modernisation and national development; from making available scientific literacy in agriculture, health and other sectors to developing functional knowledge and technical skills; from training individuals to enter the labour market or improving their job performance to provision of courses in civic participation (Coombs et al. 1973). The underlying objective is therefore to equip and socialise individuals and groups with specific knowledge, skills, attitudes and values so that they can play their roles effectively to strengthen the functioning of the

Methods in conservative-liberal education range from the 'banking' approach where education is an act of depositing, in which students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor (Freire 1972), to more participatory techniques like the use of life experiences, self-directed learning and small group dynamics. Even though participatory methods are used there is hardly any consciousness-raising to foster critical thinking. Where participation is encouraged, people are given a limited voice and are 'educated' to participate in predefined parameters for adjustment and integration into the mainstream of society, rather than question it (Oakley et al. 1991). Hence conservative and even liberal education is viewed as a process of domestication and perpetuation of the status quo. It is critiqued for its avoidance of power relations and emphasis on individualism which "leaves most people in isolation and profoundly powerless relative to the state or dominant institutions" (Zacharakis-Jutz 1988:43).

Wherever and for whatever motive, in the developed or developing world, many of the educational programmes within the conservative- liberal approach have been found to be remedial, compensatory or reformist in nature (Thompson 1980). Many of them have even been designed with a pathological 'blaming the victim' stance (Baron 1989).

The regulatory and status quo maintenance functions of these programmes keep the poor in place as evident in England in the late 1970s when increased opportunities for recurrent education were advocated as a way of helping those who have been unemployed to adapt to and accept their situation (thus legitimating structural unemployment and defusing discontent). At most, liberal education is used

as a social dynamic to press for reforms and educational partnership, but not to challenge the domination of dominant groups (O'Hagan 1987).

The structural functionalist perspective has been heavily criticised by the critical theorists who argue that instead of reducing social inequalities, education is reproducing the social inequalities that exist in society. Education plays a vital role in maintaining the relations of subordination and domination between classes. Education is used by dominant groups to reproduce their ideologies, economic dominance and culture (Giroux 1983). According to Althusser (1971), the school is an ideological apparatus of the state to produce the necessary quiescent labour force. Through the 'hidden curriculum', the school produces a docile labour force for the capitalist economy. Bowles and Gintis (1976), argue that schools are 'gatekeepers' for the capitalist system by allocating people to different jobs in accordance to their educational qualifications, hence reproducing the social division of labour of the capitalist class structure from generation to generation. The correspondence of these functions in nonformal educational work can be similarly observed.

As in school education, liberal nonformal educational work has been similarly critiqued as a mechanism for social reproduction - for the promotion and assimilation of dominant values, culture, and beliefs (Coombs & Ahmed 1974; Thompson 1980), as well as serving as a tool for perpetuating dependency (LaBelle 1975; Bock & Papajianis 1983) and adaptation. Apart from its limited ideology of individualism which is directly linked to the power structure (Keddie 1980; Zackarakis-Jutz 1988) the main critique of this approach lies in its failure to bring about the desired and necessary social restructuring because of its narrow and exclusive educational goals which are geared towards developing the capabilities of individuals rather than

working to solve collective problems. Focusing on the individual is embedded in liberal democratic ideologies, and this in turn privileges individualism which has the consequence of defusing collective action. This approach in education is oriented to helping individuals rather than the real causes of their problems - economic and social structures and unequal power relationships (Rogers 1992). Zacharalis-Jutz (1988) stressed that focusing on individuals leaves most people in isolation and profoundly powerless relative to the state or dominant institutions. At best, liberal education is concerned with improving unjust situations but avoids tackling the root causes of injustice. Differences of class, gender and race are respected but the associated power inequities are not addressed.

The conflict perspective views society as comprising of different classes and status groups who are in constant conflict with one another over wealth, power, and prestige (Marx 1906; Weber 1968). Conflicts and crises are inherent in the system, so too are the mechanisms by which the system is able to reproduce itself. Powerful dominant groups exercise control over the dispossessed in all ways, in particular, via a specific ideological climate which sustains and reproduces the existing status quo. However, critical theories of education maintain that political change for emancipation is possible through human agency, struggle and critique of the existing status quo (Giroux 1983). Radical educators can build on students' resistance to develop an alternative education which questions social inequalities.

Along this line of thinking emerges liberating educational work which is socially and politically committed (Thomas 1982; O'Sullivan 1989) to the poor, oppressed and marginalised sectors. It is about education for personal, social and structural transformation and is part of a movement for individual and collective

liberation. Liberating educational work starts with lived experience but is directed at broader community and organisational needs and unequal power relationships, emphasising both awareness-building and skills training to bring about change, for personal, economic and social well-being as a whole. The content is the situation of oppression and the strategies for social change. The pedagogy is based on Freire's (1972) 'dialogical, problem-posing' approach which promotes active learning for deepening critical consciousness and collective action. Teachers and learners undertake the act of knowing together and are mutually engaged in critical social analysis and action to transforming the oppressive dimensions. Liberating education posits that education can never be neutral. It is grounded on the preferential option for the poor, oppressed and marginalised. This means equipping them with the tools to understand their experiences and history from their own standpoint; educators and learners are thus mutually engaged in critical social analysis and action to transform the situation. It revolves round the critical reflection of learner's realities and experiences as the basis for creation of knowledge for social mobilisation. This approach to education has been variously called. In Africa, the terms 'people's education' and 'education for sel-reliance' are in common usage. In Asia, 'education for mass mobilisation' and 'participatory research' is referred to, while in Latin America the terms 'popular education' and 'conscientisation' are used. In Europe it is regarded as 'cultural animation' work. Whereas, in Canada and the United States 'transformational eduation' has influenced development education, feminist pedagogy, community-based adult literacy programmes, anti-racist education, and union education programmes (Arnold et al. 1991:22)

However, liberating education is not about pedagogic concerns only. It focuses on the interests and existing situation of oppressed people, allowing them to reflect upon their condition, and empowering them to change it. It is about reflected learning that leads to alleviation of conditions of poverty, subjugation and oppression.

In recent years, the term 'popular education' has been increasingly adopted by activist educators and grassroots organisers in other parts of the world (see Institute of Women's Studies 1994; Walters & Manicom 1996), especially by women's groups who have reaffirmed its relevance as education which strives to empower women as they challenge patriarchal oppression to alter ideologies, behaviour, practices and structures (Rosero 1988; Walters 1991). It is within the discourse of the above ideological and theoretical underpinnings that I differentiate conservative and liberal forms of educational work (LaBelle 1975) from radical socially committed adult (Lovett et al. 1983) or popular education (Fink, 1992; Walters & Manicom 1996; Lee 1998) in terms of its approach, point of reference and socio-political implications (Arnold et al. 1991). It is within the latter that I situate the rest of the discussion in this chapter. Specifically, I will hone in on feminist popular education, where my work and research is situated.

3.4 FEMINIST POPULAR EDUCATION

Popular education is an educational-political practice that aims to help bring about greater equality and social justice through consciousness-raising, redefining self-identities, strengthening new attitudes and behaviours, and promoting collective action based on values of democratic participation, solidarity and autonomy to change situations of oppression, subordination and poverty. According to Wagner (1989:7),

"Popular education requires taking the content of people's lives as the heart of the matter: help them look at their own understanding of their situation, critique it, deepen it and figure out how to change it". It promotes dialogical interaction and mutual understanding between educators and learners, questioning power relations in the larger community, as well as in the immediate learning space. It is a process of self-discovery that leads people to discover their own capacity to challenge collectively the forces which oppress them (Marshall 1990), and the recognition of the role that their knowledge can play in both the production of new knowledge, and in the construction of a new society (Lee 1998). The emphasis is on active participation of learners to construct their own meanings and produce new knowledge as they reflect critically on their everyday experience.

Central to the conception and practice of popular education is taking the standpoint of the oppressed, of linking immediate issues with broader social struggles, and of moving from personal experience to political understanding and action. It must have objectives, characteristics, content and methodologies that are coherent to the people's needs and concrete experiences. These aspects are described as 'context', 'content' and method' by the Filipinos (Wagner 1989; Antoja et al. 1994). Gore (1993) talks of social vision and instruction while Fink (1992) refers to the socio-political and pedagogic dimensions that characterise popular education. The social vision is about the commitment to the marginalised sectors, involving them actively to strengthen their identity and empowering them as subjects in educational activities. The instructional arena entails an active learning methodology that is reflective, participatory and egalitarian to develop an understanding of how society functions and a critical social awareness that change can come about. Popular

education seeks to create a new hegemony in the process of empowering the marginalised populace.

Feminists have increasingly been influenced by Gramsci, in particular his formulation of hegemony/counter hegemony and the ways in which powerful groups constantly struggle to control and dominate discourse and set the parameters of political understanding and action (Gramsci 1971). Counterhegemony implies a critical theoretical understanding of society and is expressed in organised and active political opposition (Weiler 1988). As an analytical and educational tool for social transformation, popular education has its roots in Gramsci's analysis of how subordinate classes can overcome the hegemony of dominant classes. Gramsci focused on consciousness as the key ingredient in the process of radical socio-political change. Education is used as a counterhegemonic means to break the bourgeoisie hegemony over workers' minds so that they can think and act autonomously to create their own class hegemony.

Gramsci's theory and counter-hegemonic practice is most evident in his educational-organising work with the Factory Council Movement (Walters 1989). For him the educational function must be connected to relevant social and political movements so that it can take its lead from them, to be part of a broader collective of counter-hegemonic politics. He outlined three sets of strategies which are fundamental to popular education, namely, (i) developing critical consciousness among the oppressed, (ii) developing their leaders - the organic intellectuals, and (iii) building their organisational-power base. Underlying these strategies is his concern with 'making revolution in the mind'. All these are directed towards the creation of a vision of the future which stressed the need for participatory and democratic

functioning and a non-exploitative social order. These understanding and goals of education are central in feminist popular education except that gender specificity refocuses the lens.

Another key figure in the popular education movement is Paulo Freire whose seminal work on 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' has had far-reaching impact. Central to Freire's work is his conception of the power of education as a liberating force through the practice of 'conscientisation' to develop people's critical consciousness of themselves and the oppressive conditions around them, and the conviction to end such oppression. Conscientisation is "the process in which men [sic], not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality" (Freire 1985:93).

Like Gramsci, Freire is committed to the belief in human agency. No matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence', people are capable of acquiring a critical consciousness of their own being in the world and to deal with it critically (Freire 1972). Freire outlines a pedagogy based on dialogue, codification and problematisation that starts from articulation of personal experience to reflection and analysis of those experiences, and then to action in the social and political arena. One of the most important pedagogical tenets that Freire is concerned with is the need for educators to create generative themes and pedagogical conditions in which learners can articulate and reflect on their understanding of the world and of themselves from their own historical, social and cultural conditions that contribute to the ways and forms of knowledge and meaning that students bring with them. In his later work,

Freire (1994:9) even insisted that the progressive educator's task is to "unveil opportunities for hope" for learners, apart from his/her role in conscientisation.

The pedagogy is based on the recognition that teachers are co-learners and co-investigators with the students rather than for the students, as both mutually engage (dialogue) in the task of understanding their own consciousness and the world. Their particular locations in their own histories are the starting point for analysing not only how they actively construct their own experiences within ongoing relations of power, but also how the social construction of such experiences provide them with the opportunity to give meaning and expression to their own needs and voices. As teachers enable students to de-mythologise their attitudes, practices and beliefs, they must be self-reflective of their own. The methodology and techniques regarding the awareness-raising process provide powerfully useful guidance and direction in building a personal as well as social counter-hegemony.

Following the pedagogy of Freire, popular education starts with participants' concrete experiences to make sense of their everyday life and to deepen their critical awareness and understandings, as well as to formulate strategies in order to change their marginalised condition. This includes the affirmation of participants' knowledge and capacities as well as the acquisition of new technical skills and information. Participants take part collectively with popular educators in deciding on the content, investigating the issues and developing the analyses, with inputs from other bodies of knowledge to produce new knowledge. Using these new knowledge and understandings they reflect on what has been done and further their practice and theory.

Conscientisation is based on and leads to reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it, in Freire's term - 'praxis' (Freire 1985). Freire's educational approach emphasised the symbolic relationship between education (awareness) and action. He believes that education has to be rooted in the transformation of the world. This is where the agential, liberating and political character of education resides. In popular education, conscientisation, mobilisation and organising are interlinked and integral to one another.

Feminist re-reading of Freire's pedagogy has further expanded its emancipatory possibilities. In critiquing Freire's exclusive focus on class as the only form of domination and oppression, Weiler (1991) proposed a feminist pedagogy where a more situated theory of oppression and subjectivity and the need to consider the contradictions of universal claims of liberation and social transformation are taken aboard. She identified three areas that are particularly useful for deepening liberatory pedagogies, namely, (i) the role and authority of the teacher; (ii) personal experience as a source of knowledge and truth; and (iii) the question of difference.

My conceptualisation of educational work with factory women draws upon different sets of literature rooted in multidisciplinary feminist scholarship and experience-based theory namely; (i) contradictions and critiques in the androcentric bias of popular education (ISIS 1988); (ii) the contributions of feminism, particularly in the understanding of women's experiences (Smith 1987; Aptheker 1989); (iii) pedagogical and epistemological questions in education (Weiler 1988, 1991; Luke & Gore 1992); (iv) education for women's empowerment (Batliwala 1993; Medel-Anonuevo 1997); (v) related practitioner fields like feminist social work where feminist practice principles are engaged (Dominelli & McLeod 1989; Butler &

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Wintram 1991). In addition. discourses on women and development (Sen & Grown 1987; Moser 1989; Parpart 1993) have also contributed to analyses of women's needs and and women's empowerment (Molyneux 1985; Young 1993; Monkman 1998).

In conventional popular education. class exploitation is usually highlighted but not other forms of oppression. It ignores issues of gender subordination and interiorised sexism (Pineda 1986: Doerge 1992). By focusing on the 'oppressed and exploited', it neglects the specificity of women's oppression, in particular the various forms of subordination experienced by working-class women. Complex experiences of women which derive from their situation as women, and from their roles as mothers or workers are negated. In the words of Pineda, "Sexuality, abandonment, physical mistreatment, rape and authoritarianism in the family are almost always outside the scope of discussion in popular education or are approached with a timidity that comes from considering these problems as belonging to the private world. or as strictly personal" (quoted in PERG, 1992:4).

Traditional popular education, which emphasised a structural analysis of the economic, political and ideological mechanisms of class exploitation had not developed pedagogical tools or a framework for examining the complex realities of women's daily lives, in particular, the place of emotions (Nadeau 1996). In response to this critique, an approach has developed which combines popular education with feminist analysis. By introspecting women's everyday world as problematic (Smith 1987) and asking a different set of questions, feminist analysis provides alternative explanations to women's (subordinated) situation and alternative strategies for changing that. Feminist popular education challenges the gender neutrality of

popular education. It is a creative synthesis of the strengths of feminism and popular education, and related fields of feminist practice (Walters & Manicom 1996).

Feminist practitioners have moved from the critique of female disadvantage and gender discrimination to redefine problems from women's standpoints, acknowledging their subordinate and powerless state as well as their strength and power. It articulates a value-system and praxis that reframes the nature of individual problems away from individual pathology but validating women's subjective feelings and relating them to the specific predicaments they encounter. A feminist perspective highlights an approach that reclaims the value of women's ways of being, relating and living, and commences with as well as emphasises their lived experience as women (Pischedda & Larrain 1988; Doerge 1992), in particular, their emotions (Nadeau 1996) and the use of pedagogical processes that take on board and affirm gynocentric insights in challenging women's subordination (Chan 1996), and other forms of oppression (Dominelli & McLeod 1989). This pedagogical approach requires an ideological transformation, demystifying the perceptions that women are made to have of themselves and their society. It places emphasis on the construction of a new self-defined identity in order to promote women's role as social subjects capable of altering unjust relations of power. Gender is examined as a core site of power relations and oppression in its own standing and as a factor that interacts with class, race, nationality and other forms of domination and exploitation.

Feminist work about schooling has contributed insights about the reproduction of gender inequalities and power (Weiler 1988; Gabriel & Smithson 1990), and the construction of feminist pedagogy (Gore 1993). Gender studies on education have exposed gender discrimination in classroom practices, gender stereotyping in school

curricular, and advocated more balanced gendered classroom and curricula representation (Kenway & Willis 1988: Taylor 1989). The work around the construction of feminist pedagogy has emerged from discontent with the patriarchal relationships found in schooling and pointed to the absence of gender as an analytical category, even amongst progressive and critical pedagogy discourses (Luke & Gore 1992). A pedagogy that would be more inclusive of experiences of girls and women has been highlighted by Culley & Portuges (1985) and Maher (1985). Similar concerns are expressed from Women's Studies (Bunch & Pollack, 1983: Schneidewind & Maher, 1987), though with quite different emphases. As pointed out by Gore (1993), in Women's Studies, feminist pedagogy is addressed as a strategy, technique and methodology which focuses primarily on classroom instructional processes and practices. Whereas, feminist pedagogy as constructed in educational practice is approached more broadly, emphasising how gendered knowledge and experience are produced. Both of these emphases are useful to the formulation of feminist popular education where experience, voice/silence and pedagogical conditions and processes are equally essential for non-formal educational work that is concerned with the production of meaning and knowledge by and for women.

In educational work that is concerned with women's empowerment, learning and conscionsess-raising are integral to the processes of women's empowerment. This educational experience must provide women the means to move from passive acceptance to active self-determination. The philosophy of education for women's empowerment derives from an interaction between feminism and the concept and practice of popular education which draw from Freire's theory of conscientisation and Gramscian emphasis on participatory and democratic functioning for a more equitable

non-exploitative social order (Batliwala 1993). Empowering education seeks to "build a critical consciousness, analytical thinking, and the knowledge and skills to act for change" (Batliwala 1996). This change is directed at challenging gendered relations of power and patriarchal ideology, and transforming behaviours, ideologies and the structures of subordination (Young 1993; Walters 1996). This would entail amongst others, the combination of consciousness-raising and action. Batliwala names this approach as "empowerment through awareness building and organising women" (1993:31). In this approach to women's empowerment, thte goal of changing women's self-perceptions that they are weak, inferior and limited beings is as important as enabling them to develop a new consciousness to gain access and control over material and knowledge resources and strategies of action for change.

In practical terms, Medel-Anonuevo (1997) identified these as three major concerns of empowering education: acccess, pedagogy and content. Not only is democratic access to education vital, but providing an environment and process which facilitate women's learning is also important. This would require minimally, a safe environment that acknowledges women's experiences and women's ways of learning and relating. Not only time, but an emotional space is critical to facilitate women make the connections between their experiences and the programme's content. For education to foster women's empowerment, the content has to be carefully examined as it has been proven that information and knowledge have been used to legitimize gender discrimination and oppression through educational materials and curricula. Furthermore, the various dimensions of women's lives have to be addressed: the subjective-affective dimensions are inter-related to and as important as the objective-material dimensions (Medel-Anonuevo 1997).

Feminists have developed various forms of educational work integrating the personal and political. The emphasis is of making sense and making connections with the various dimensions of the self to a broader understanding of the political, from which women can then construct their own personal meanings and identify the sources of their problems. Women are supported in their attempts to gain more control over their personal lives and at the same time work collectively to transform oppressive gender relations (see for example, Thompson 1981; ISIS 1988: Schild 1994). Such work has ranged from supporting women who are subjected to different forms of isolation, abuse, fear, loneliness, marginalisation, subjugation and oppression to first heal themselves, recover and strengthen their individual sense of self-worth, to make sense of their experiences and develop solidarity with other women, to acquiring intrapersonal, interpersonal and organisational skills and experiences to challenge gender and other forms of subordination and to foster women's empowerment (Gutierrez 1990; Butler & Wintram 1991; PERG 1992). Arising from these diverse experiences are insights on educational agendas and pedagogies which take into account the situated context of women's powerlessness, their subjectivities and the personal-social/political dimension of their different experienced realities.

Embedded in the practice of feminist popular education are principles of feminist intervention grounded on feminist ideological themes of ending patriarchy, empowerment, the importance of process, and the personal is political, unity-diversity, validation of non-rational and consciousness raising/praxis (Bricher-Jenkins & Hooyman 1986), non-oppressive, anti-discriminatory relationships (Wise 1995). Particularly relevant to this study are experiences of feminist groupwork and feminist therapy. Methods in feminist therapy and feminist

groupwork have illustrated how women can be encouraged to get in touch with the hidden and often misrepresented parts of themselves to facilitate their self-expression/definition, personal development and change through processes of group interaction and support (Ernst & Goodison 1981; Butler & Wintram 1991). Feminist groupwork offers insights about ensuring group pedagogical conditions for conscientisation to be effected.

I will now elaborate on what I regard as the two core components in my formulation of feminist popular education that are central to my study, namely: (i) emotional subordination: understanding factory women's repressed experiences of emotional subordination and its effects on the constitution of their subjectivities; and (ii) reconstructing subjectivities: an educational process to evoke, release and reconstruct lived experiences of emotional pain. These are described below as 'effects of emotional subordination' and 'reconstructing subjectivities'. Within these two foci, various issues and themes emerge and are interlinked -- women's emotional subordination, subjectivities, women's knowledge and knowing, ways of being, lived experiences, empowerment, silence-voice-agency.

Emotional Subordination and the Reconstruction of Subjectivities

These two analytical concepts were not formulated prior to my fieldwork. It was only from analysing concrete observations and insights that related themes emerged from the participatory research-education sessions as part and parcel of theorisation from the field. In fact, initially I doubted the validity of my own observations and theorisation. Only on reading the discussion of women's emotional welfare in feminist social work (Dominelli et al. 1989; McLeod 1994) did I begin to

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recognise its significance. Women's emotional welfare is an area on which feminist therapy focuses (Krzowski & Land 1988). Special attention has been given to the 'negative' emotions. In particular, (repressed) anger has been regarded as particularly significant; that it can help problematise the incongruity between lived experience and sanctioned interpretations of that experience. As a response to injustice, anger can energise oppressed people to work for social change (Lyman 1981).

Likewise, emotions have constituted a very powerful resource for liberation in the women's movement. Jaggar (1992) describes emotion as an epistemological foundation of women's knowledge, that women are well situated to use their recognition of emotions in the pursuit of knowledge. The debilitating effects of internalised oppression, commonly depicted as powerlessness and learned helplessness, have been a core concern of the women's movement (Steinem 1992). The problematic potential of lived experiences of subordination as a source of oppositional knowledge, has been the revolutionary core of feminist transformation (Lorde 1984). Feminist practice emphasises the need to address the emotional welfare of women, whether in feminist therapy (Krzowski and Land 1988), in organising (Dominelli and Mcleod 1989), in popular education (PERG 1992), or programmes for women's empowerment (Gutierrez 1990).

Feminist educators, in particular women in the early consciousness-raising groups have explored feelings as 'critical way of knowing', or 'inner knowing' - the source of true knowledge of the world for women living in a society that denied the value of their perceptions (Weiler 1991:463). Lorde (1984) helped me understand the power of our unexpressed or unrecognised feelings as a source of oppositional knowledge. These emotions provide the revolutionary core of feminist activism.

They guide analysis and action, the basis for visionary social change. Fisher (1987) has written on how emotions in feminist education can help explore (feminist) beliefs and values. From these readings I started to re-vision and re-position feelings in and as educational work. Specifically I explored how interactional reflective talking through story-telling-sharing can lead to release and making-sense of experienced subordination and its emotional responses.

Emotional sufferings and their effects, when unprocessed and repressed, can be disabling. In the situation of women on the global assembly line, we have seen how Malaysian women factory workers who have been subjected to constant denigration, internalised the various negative definitions, stereotyping and abuses at great personal emotional cost (see seven). Daily experiences of emotional subordination generate feelings of shame, guilt, inadequacy, self-doubt and inferiority. The cumulative effect of these experiences is to ingrain a deep sense of helplessness, fear, inaptitude and incapacity. Minds can become blank and dulled over time, emotions and reactions become numbed, inhibiting the potential for development. Devaluation is not only dehumanising but demeaning. It disables and erodes confidence and self-esteem. It affects not only how women feel about themselves but also their self-image and sense of capacities -- their subjectivities and agency. Thus, a process which allows the reconstruction of a woman's experience from her own standpoint, in which a new subject position is reconstituted to see anew and make sense of her situation. a situation which makes her the subject rather than the cause of the contradictions and pain she is experiencing, is fundamental to consciousness-raising. to the reconstitution of women's subjectivity/ies.

Subjectivity constitutes the person's sense of self, thoughts, emotions, modes of understanding the world; the sense of individuality, uniqueness, identity and continuity; and the reflexive awareness of these things (Usher, 1989). It refers to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of self, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world (Weedon 1987). I use the concept 'subjectivity' in this thesis as a dynamic analytical category to understand the silenced dimensions of internalised intimations of subordination, and its effects upon the various aspects of the person.

Subjectivity embodies lived experiences and experienced feelings. Thus, experience, feelings and subjectivity are inextricably linked. Experienced realities and their effects construct subjectivity, and at the same time subjectivity structures the person's psyche and sense of agency. As much as subjectivity is being constructed by experiences inflicted by others which impact on the self, it is also self-constructing and open to redefinition. The resultant subjectivity can regulate or constrain the agency and autonomy of the person, as in the case of psychological oppression and the intimations of emotional subordination.

Weedon (1997) explains that subjectivity is not fixed and immutable. Because of its contradictory and continual nature, the concept also provides a framework for change, for reconstitution. Hence, the problematic potential of reconstructing existing subjectivities to transcend the paralysing effects of oppression. Our subjectivities are constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak (Weedon 1987). Thus, they are open to reinforcement or revision and reinterpretation. Usher (1989) noted that subjectivity could be reconstructed through practical and discursive encounters and engagement. Subjects can recreate themselves in discourses which are

oppositional to currently dominant discourses. Thus, subjectivities can be sites for contestation and reconstitution for the recovery of an authentic self-reconstructed subjectivity through self-definition. It is such an understanding that allows the possibility of reconstitution from the devastating effects arising from emotional subordination of the individuals concerned.

Various approaches have been experimented with, to facilitate the healing and recovery from experienced injuries and reconstitute women's subjectivities (Barry 1989; Collins 1990; Davies 1992). Story-telling has been used extensively and effectively as a tool for consciousness-raising and mobilisation in the women's and indigenous movements (Christ 1979; Buker 1987). Consciousness-raising is practised as a healing and recovery process which begins with renaming reality according to personal standpoints and experienced realities. This involves rejecting names and definitions that are not grounded directly in one's own experience, but because they have been adopted, have the effect of containing, controlling and constructing what one is or what one does.

Women's consciousness-raising groups have been a means of overcoming some of these psychological obstacles (Butler and Wintram 1991). Collective discussion of personal problems, often previously assumed to be the result of personal inadequacies, leads to a recognition that what has been experienced as personal failings are socially produced contradictions and inflictions shared by many women in similar situations. The power of redefining and naming feelings and experiences from one's own standpoint has been proven to be empowering in helping to change perceptions and subjectivities. This process of discovery and recovery leads to a

reinterpretation of one's experience and self-definition instead of allowing the self to be constructed by others.

Within feminist discourse, voice and speech are metaphors for women's self-definition (Collins 1990), countervailing the constructions of others. Indeed, moving from silence to voice has been shown to reclaim what has been denied and dismissed. It is to assert opposition to the dominant discourse. It is an act of profound personal and political significance, reinstating the suppressed or submerged knowledge and subject of the marginalised (Daly 1978; Christ 1979; Rich 1975).

In this research, I experimented with story-telling-sharing as women's narative knowing in small groups to evoke repressed voices for reconstructing subjectivities (see Chan 1996 for a published version): the recollection and articulation of feelings and thoughts associated with experienced subordination for the purpose of recovery, self-definition and self-reconstitution. The various uses and power of storytelling have been well-documented (Christ 1979; Buker 1987). As a strategy for social change, popular education has relied on the oppressed telling stories of their daily struggles. By sharing personal experiences, women have been able to identify common problems and see that they were not necessarily the cause of those problems. Continued discussion to understand the problems and formulating action for change have fostered women's confidence and self-esteem. This in turn has empowered women and enabled them to act collectively and speak out publicly to challenge society's definition of their problems and stereotypes about the negativity of women.

Indeed listening to women's voices and silence has been crucial to a reconstruction of their understanding of and relationship with the world. In the Chinese revolution of the 1940s, women were encouraged to speak about their

experience of oppression in 'speaking bitterness' sessions (Dreifus 1973). Buker (19872) encouraged women to tell their stories to articulate their visions of justice. The Personal Narratives Group (1989) has found that women's personal narratives reveal the frameworks of meaning through which individuals locate themselves in the world and make sense of their lives.

Story-telling-sharing here is not individual narrative. It takes place in interaction with the listening, questioning and reflecting of others. Henley et al. (1984) describes this as collaborative story-telling, akin to consciousness-raising in women's groups (Jenkins et al. 1978). One story or comment sparks the memory or reflection for another. It is in this informal conversational mode that connections, meanings and understandings emerge through listening, questioning and reflecting on each other's stories, and it is this process that contributes to the recovery of participants' authentic realities.

Indeed, telling one's story constitutes a vital political act (Rich 1975). Telling one's forbidden and/or repressed story is personally transformational as it takes on an active self-redefinition countervailing the construction of and by others. Feminist scholars (Daly 1978; Christ 1979; Spender 1985) have argued that language and storytelling are critical in shaping a new politics that will include the full citizenship of women and their experiences. The move from silence to voice is an act of reclaiming what had been denied and dismissed. It carries the notion of an opposition to established meaning, to what Foucault terms as suppressed knowledge. It is an act of interactional-intersubjective-agency: self-agency in relation to and crystallised with the support of others. I was amazed by the impact of this kind of story-telling on the perceptions and capacities of participants in the research-education sessions (see

chapter seven), and I became convinced during the course of my research that this is the initial basic educational work required with women whose experience of subordination has been pervasive.

Cautionary notes have been sounded, however. Ellsworth (1989) warns that stories are not always empowering and that collaborative story-telling is a problematic strategy for empowerment, given the diversity and difference among the oppressed and the fact that varied meanings may be constructed in multifarious ways by our multiple subjectivities. Razack (1993) points to the need to pay attention to the context in which we hear and tell stories, in particular to the effects of the different subject positions of teller and listener. Similarly, Spivak (1990:42) calls for "unlearning privilege", meaning that middle-class activists need to become able not only to listen to "that other constituency", but also to speak in such a way that the "subalterns can be heard and taken seriously".

A number of other guidelines emerge from the literature in relation to what Razack (1993) calls 'ground clearing activity' and Fishman(1978) describes as 'interaction work '. Ellsworth (1989) advises facilitators to include opportunities for social interaction in their programs in order to build trust and reduce risk and fear. She warns against the silencing of diversity and argues for the need to take the initiative in learning about others' realities, rather than simply relying on them to inform us. Trinh (1990: 372) notes the need to understand silence as 'a will not to say or a will to unsay and a language of its own'. Narayan (1988) elaborates ground rules for communication in working together across differences, critically examining what we share and do not share. Feminist pedagogy in general stresses that how we hear and speak (process) is as important as what we hear and tell (content).

The usefulness of small groups as vehicles for active, experiential learning is also well established (PRIA 1987). They can facilitate exploration of identity issues (Brodsky 1973); provide a 'free space' (Allen 1970) for uncovering the political, economic and social context of individual experience; and, above all, offer a safe place in which women can make links between their own and others' experiences, thus facilitating both the validation of individual perception and experience, and an understanding of how this is shaped by the broader social context.

Carlock and Marin (1977) and Hagan (1983) note that all-women groups are less competitive than groups comprised of men and women, and deal with issues of intimacy and relationship more quickly. Aries (1976) found that women prefer all-female groups, feeling more restricted in mixed groups, while others note the advantage of the role models provided by women in all-female groups. Flynn et al. (1986) and Davis (1988) comment on the characteristic mutuality and ongoing learning of all-women groups in community work. For my part, I found that participation is maximised in all-women groups and that they help women gain courage to speak and confidence to do things.

These two sets of theoretical constructs ('effects of emotional subordiantion' and 'reconstructing subjectivities') evolved from my fieldwork and 'data' in the course of the research and were subsequently sharpened from further reading of the themes that have emerged. I moved backwards and forwards between 'the data', various sets of literature, my previous experiences and my own interpretations. This was deliberately practised so that the conceptual formulations are grounded, speak from and to what is happening in reality. In fact this approach was necessary, as I was concerned with unfolding dimensions of factory women's lives which have not

yet been part of the current concerns in educational work with factory women and therefore not theorized in women workers' education.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The various constructions of theory shape our thinking. Our conceptualisation can restrict or widen our scope, analysis and practice. However, concepts are not merely analytical tools which help clarify and structure ideas. They are also means for constructing reality and at the same time they are constructed from reality. In this study, the theoretical framework is gleaned from existing literature of various disciplines as well as constructed from the research findings. This was deliberately practised so that the conceptual formulations are grounded, speak from and to what is happening in reality, and can inform and enhance practice. Theorising from the unearthing of suppressed aspects of factory women's realities which have not yet been part of the current concerns of women workers' education, and subsequently the formulation of an educational approach to address these dimensions has evolved analytic categories for women workers' education. This conceptualisation was made possible by existing feminist frameworks which helped to frame the analysis of factory women and educational practice. Thus, 'discovery' and theorisation of women's emotional subordination and the reconstruction of women's subjectivities not only help redefine educational work but has contributed to the evolution of theoretical concepts for guiding the practice and analysis of women workers' education.

Chapter Four

SETTING THE SCENE

"The form and shape of [the] educational practices are influenced by their social purposes and the particular political, social, economic, and cultural contexts within which they are embedded. "

(Walters 1998:443)

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Various factors circumscribe the nature and scope of educational work in Malaysia.   Among these are the country's socio-econ-political conditions, the conditions and position of the women workers, the ideology and organisational practices of providers/educators and their limited comprehension of the various dimensions of factory women workers' lives.   This chapter presents two set of contexts to understand and situate educational work for factory women workers - the country context and the context of factory women.   The first part presents an overview of the socio-econ-political context in Malaysia, followed by a description of the situation of Malaysian factory women workers.   The chapter ends with an insight into factory women's experiences in their own words.

4.2   MALAYSIA

Malaysia is regarded as one of the most rapidly developing nations in Southeast Asia[1], and targeted to become a 'developed country' with a standard of

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[1] Malaysia had an annual economic growth of about 8% for ten consecutive years until the economic crisis hit Southeast Asia in mid 1997.

living equivalent to that of the Western industrialised countries by 2020[2] (Kamarudin & Hazami 1993). Today Malaysia is the nineteenth largest trading nation and is ranked seventeenth in competitiveness in the world (Mohamed 1994). Malaysian society in general is a patriarchal, highly unequal society, stratified along class and ethnic lines with a rigid gender division of labour at home and in the labour market. Inspite of women's impressive gains in education and employment over the past twenty years (Nagaraj 1994), public affairs are still very much a man's domain; the home and family a woman's (Rohana 1998). This is further exacerbated by rising Islamic fundamentalism (Zainah 1987).

Economically, Malaysia has been well entrenched into the world capitalist system[3], through 20 years of an expanded export-oriented, labour-intensive industrial development strategy. Politically, it has been projected to be a very stable Western-styled parliamentary democracy supposedly governed by the principle of 'rule by consultation and consensus' when in fact the state has become more authoritarian than ever before. Malaysia is well known for its draconian laws. A wide range of legal and political controls mainly through various Acts and political regulations (Saravanamuttu et al. 1992), have been put in place to regulate, monitor, contain and if necessary, repress political oppositions that are regarded as disruptive or obstructive towards the state's agendas. A litany of new laws and amendments to existing laws such as the Internal Security Act (ISA), Official Secrets Act, Printing

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[2] Vision 2020 is the Prime Minister's rallying call for Malaysia to achieve the status of a fully industrialised nation by the year 2020 so that Malaysians can present itself to the world as a modern sovereign distinctive nation.

[3] This is the case until 1st. September 1998 when the Malaysian government implemented capital controls to partially delink from the global economy to protect the Malaysian economy from further decline since July 1997.

Act, the Police Act, Broadcasting Act, Trade Unions Ordinance, Employment Act, Societies Act, Industrial Relations Act, the Universities and University Colleges Act have all contributed to a restriction of civil liberties.

The international image that Malaysia promotes of itself is the desirable exemplary of a successful and politically stable multi-racial society that has emerged from a poor, underdeveloped racially segregated post-colonial state since 1957, into a leading Third World melting-pot of racial harmony and economic prosperity. To maintain its international image of a forward-looking, caring, democratic society, the government protects itself with different commissions and policies that profess to cater to the social development of the marginalised sectors. Amongst these is a National Policy on Women (1989) and a National Welfare Policy (1990). However, the Malaysian government only acceded to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1995, and then with reservations on certain articles. It still has not ratified ILO Convention No.87 concerning the freedom of association and protection of the right to organise.

The multi-ethnic and multi-religious population of 22 millions, which comprise Malays, Chinese and Indians, Aboriginal groups, Eurasians, Pakistanis, Ceylonese, etc. is the historical legacy from British colonial rule through its various immigration, land and labour policies. Malaysian society is not only multi-ethnic but its divison of labour and spatial concentration has been distinctively characterised by ethnic divisions and separatism.

Until two decades ago, this multi-ethnic composition also reflected socio-economic differences, in terms of occupation, income and residential location. The Malays were mainly peasant farmers and fishermen in the rural areas or government

servants in the civil bureaucracy and uniform services. The Chinese were predominantly in the urban and semi-urban sectors of the economy in trade, artisanry and commerce, while the Indians provided the main source of labour in the plantations and estates. Beyond the political rhetoric of communal consultation, cooperation and consensus these ethnic divisions continue to be the underlying cause of communal tensions and distrust if not open antagonism across the various sectors and arenas of everyday life as Bumiputeras[4] continue to be granted special privileges under the Constitution, protection of which is the responsibility of the King.

Malaysia's economic development has followed a pattern similar to that of many countries in the South and Southeast Asian region. Its major emphasis in economic development after independence in 1957 was directed at the rural and agricultural sectors, with some initial attention on import substitution industrialisation to diversify the economy from its over-dependence on rubber and tin (Jomo 1986). However this strategy proved inadequate in creating employment at a pace fast enough to absorb its rapidly growing population. Neither was it successful in bringing about income equality between ethnic or income groups (Lim 1975). Rising unemployment, uneven growth and unbalanced distribution of income and resources, spurred by the undercurrents of ethnic hostility, erupted into violent racial riots in 1969 (Jomo 1986). This led to a major revision in its development strategy in 1970, to incorporate growth with income distribution across ethnic lines. These dual socio-economic goals required that the economy expand sufficiently so that the restructuring

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[4] 'Bumiputra' literally means 'son of the soil' and refers exclusively to Malays and indigenous groups. Their special privileges cover recruitment to the civil service, scholarship awards, opportunities for education and training, quota assurance of access to jobs and other socio-economic undertakings like the issuance of licences and permits.

of society could be achieved without creating new racial tensions. To achieve this, the New Economic Policy (NEP)[5] was introduced in 1970 to restructure society, so as to eliminate the identification of race with occupation, and the eradication of poverty regardless of race (Malaysia 1971). Thus the NEP has both economic and racial dimensions, with subsequent gender implications associated with the feminising of its industrial workforce and the emergence of an incipient and expanding class of women workers. With the implementation of the NEP, a radical restructuring of the economy based on the promotion of export-oriented manufacturing industries was undertaken. The immediate impact was the influx and integration of a massive number of young rural migrant Malay women into the multi-national factories in the various industrial zones, especially in the free trade zones(FTZs)[6]. These FTZs account for more than 60 per cent of the new manufacturing employment in Malaysia since they began to be established in 1972 (ILO 1988:56).

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[5] The NEP is a twenty year affirmative action programme which ended in 1990 and is being replaced by the National Development Policy. The institutionalisation of 'Bumiputraism' (which entitles Malays and other indigenious ethnic groups access to priviledged economic opportunities through state sponsorship to address inequities between ethnic groups) under the NEP has alienated non-Malay ethnic communities and is the major factor of ongoing underlying inter-ethnic hostility between the non-Malay and Malay communitites.

[6] These are specially gazetted export processing zones set up to woo foreign investment. They enjoy special tax relief and infrastructural support apart from cheap labour. An EPZ is defined by ILO as "a clearly delineated industrial estate which constitutes a free trade enclave in the customs and trade regime of a country .. where foreign manufacturing firms producing mainly for export benefit from a certain number of fiscal and financial incentives" (ILO/UNCTC 1988:4). The first Malaysian free trade zone was set up in Penang in 1972, employing some 110,000 women in 1995. There are now well over 15 free trade zones in the country where more than 1 million factory women is estimated to be working. Apart from these zones which are the major catchment employer of women there are also other industrial zones and rural industrial estates where young women find employment.

4.3 FACTORY WOMEN IN MALAYSIA

Women have always been an important part of the national work force even though they were not accounted for statistically before the 1970s. Malay women have always been the invisible labour in the agriculture sector. Immigrant Chinese women laboured in construction sites, tin mines, vegetable gardens and as domestic servants. Indian women were casual labourers in the plantations (Amarjit 1989). It was only from the early 1970s, after the introduction of the NEP, that the State's promotion of female labour-intensive export-oriented industrialisation that gave rise to an unprecendented phenomenal visibility of women in industrial work (Jamilah 1980). The continual employment of women in factories is expected to increase with Malaysia's renewed commitment to its strategy of industrial development, as embodied in its Seventh Development Plan for 1996-2000 (Malaysia 1996) and the newly constituted New Development Policy (1991-2000) (Malaysia 1991a). Not only will women continue to be drawn into the transnational factories located in the urban areas, their absorption into factory employment in the less urban areas will continue to expand with further expansion of the rural industrialisation programme. A similar development will ensue in small and medium scale industries as the Government further diversifies and expands its industrial base (Malaysia 1991).

Factory women workers now constitute the single largest category of workers and working women in the country. In the manufacturing industries women formed the majority in the top three sectors as they accounted for 55% in electronics, 56.8% in textiles and 89.5% in clothing (Mosses & Xavier 1998). Advertised as well-educated, docile, cheap, non-unionised and nimble-fingered, well-disciplined, productive and pliable, this is the new generation of women workers which make up

more than 80% of those working in the FTZs and other industrial zones throughout the country. Being non-unionised first-time wage earners, and coming from a rural background where patronage assistance from (hence, obligatory loyalty to) the government has been pervasively the norm, they have been well-tuned to obedience and deference to authorities (Ong 1987). Most of them do not have the information, experience and consciousness of their rights or how to assert them. Socialised into accepting patriarchal values and subjected to strong religious control, these women are required to be respectful and obedient to male authority. Attempted assertion of rights is perceived to be tantamount to defiance and disrespect to elders and authority, thus the absence of organised forms of resistance or dissent. Lacking the representation of any genuine organisational protection, they are often the first to be laid off in the event of recession as has happened in the mid-80s economic recession (Lockhead 1988). Indeed, the overall industrial development paradigm stresses and depends on the integration (absorption) and acquiescence of this female labour force as evident in the state's labour (pro-capital) and investment policies[7] (Grace 1990).

However, the way in which women have been integrated into the global industrial workforce makes them most vulnerable to technological, economic and industrial change (Kamal & Young 1987). They are the first to lose their jobs in times of recession. In 1985 when Mostek (an American multinational company) retrenched 1,500 workers in Penang, the State government told the workers not to be choosy about jobs because "there were people who could not even find a job". They

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[7] In the 1976 investment brochure (FIDA, 1976), *Malaysia: Your Profit Centre in Asia*, the Malaysian government provided legal guarantees for labour quiescence: Adequate legislation in industrial relations ensures the maintainance of industrial peace and harmony, thereby guaranteeing the smooth operation of production without undue disruptions.

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were further told to 'balik kampung' (return to the village) .. 'tanam jagung' (plant corn), even though government officials knew that the women did not have the necessary skills to do this, as they had been working in the factories for many years. At the time, the acting Chief Minister made a public call for workers to be self-reliant. He said, "Those who can write can earn money as free-lance journalists, and those with electrical skills should open small electrical businesses!" (Lochhead 1988).

After well over twenty years of industrial development, factory women workers no longer remain a single homogenous group of inexperienced, young unmarried school leavers coming from the countryside as first time industrial wage earners, as was the case in the early 1970s (Lin 1987). Many of them have now married, but have remained on the global assembly line performing more or less the same set of repetitious tasks as they have for the past twenty to twenty-five years or more. Many others have been made redundant or retrenched (some more than once) and resumed work in other factories. For some, the industry has out-lived them but mysterious deaths of workmates are quietly hushed up by employers. While single young, migrant school leavers are still the majority, the category of factory women is now more diversified and varied. Not only are they no longer transient, but a second generation has emerged. In some instances, mother and daughter can be found in the same factory or industry. There are also older unmarried women, as well as increasing numbers of divorced and single mothers. More Indian women are joining the industrial workforce, as they leave the appalling conditions of the plantations (which have remained unchanged for decades) in search of a better livelihood in the factories. Increasingly, school leavers from the local urban resident community and other towns are also drawn into the factory for lack of other job

opportunities. As more and more join the assembly line, a more educated[8] generation of factory women is being constituted.

On the whole, women workers have come a long way and are being accepted as respectable working daughters and working wives bringing in substantial income for their families. In the early 1970s, (and still to a large extent today) they were either sensationalised or ridiculed with all sorts of derogatory labels such as '*Minah Karan*' (meaning 'hot stuff'), constantly being looked down upon as '*jual murah*' (cheap) and 'loose' with men (Fatimah 1985). The much exaggerated publicity led to this alleged immorality became the focus of public scrutiny, rather than concern for their conditions at work or their problems as new rural migrants, first generation industrial workers to the city (Chan 1987). Most of the host community residents continue to be very suspicious and hostile towards the factory girls. For many factory women, the endurance of this humiliation is one of the most degrading experiences of factory life, a stigma which many of them still recall bitterly[9]. This social injury, brought about by how society was defining them, has been and still remains a factor in causing the feelings of shame and poor self-esteem of the factory worker.

In general, it is often presumed that Malaysian factory girls obtained poor grades in their public examinations and are stigmatised as "stupid girls who failed the

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[8] In the early seventies, most of the factory production operators had only primary school education of six years or less while those who join now would have at least Form 5 and many are also with Form 6 background. State sponsored education since the 1960s has made it possible for women to have access to formal schooling up to nine years and later up to eleven years. This resulted in many women having a school education, when traditionally they had little opportunity of this.

[9] This was one of the issues that was talked about with much release of repressed resentment during the education-research sessions.

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exams" (Ackerman 1986:55). Hence the stereotype of academic failure is associated with factory work. Up to today, many factory women are still ashamed to openly acknowledge that they are production operators[10]. The status of a monthly paid office job of 8 to 5 is still regarded as of higher status, even though the monthly take home pay may be much less. Most of them are ashamed of their factory job[11] and aspire to office jobs. Factory work in the eyes of society, especially for the Malay community has very low prestige, but would rank better than domestic work or rubber tapping. Factory women are presumed to be stupid as well as immoral, sexually loose and easily available.

However, industrial employment exposes the women to new experiences thus developing in them new perspectives and new identities. As a corollary, Malaysian society too is forced to take fresh stock of factory women. Certain perceptions and images are changing as monetary returns from factory work become visible and indispensable in maintaining household consumption. As the phenomenon of working in factories and going to work at night[12] is no longer a violation, but a norm in industrialising Malaysian life, there is greater societal acceptance and hence less derogatory labelling of factory women. Moreover, the legitimisation of night work by the State to ensure the success of its industrial policy soon countered the prevailing hegemony.

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[10] In the factory where I conducted the PR, a supervisor and quality controller told me about receiving telephone calls for some of their operators who had identified themselves as supervisors.

[11] I recall how some of the girls would bring their uniforms to change after work so that they are not recognised as factory girls.

[12] Working at night has traditionally been equated with prostituion.

The significant role of factory women in contributing to and stabilising the growth of the national economy and the country's development is undeniable. Yet while they slog a double and often triple shift (over-time) of productive and reproductive work they are left without any support infrastructure, services or learning opportunities to assist them in the new and varied set of demands expected of them (Kamal et al 1985). Having gone through the occupational sieve to land in a factory job, they are already the more (though not necessarily the most) disadvantaged segment, who have not had much opportunity for exposure or experience[13] outside their immediate family.

Like other global assembly-line operators, they work in tedious, repetitive, menial tasks as non-unionized, unskilled shift-workers (Lim 1978). They are subjected daily to rigid discipline, pressure, verbal abuse and intimidation from supervisors and male co-workers. Their work environments are both hazardous and stressful. In fact, gender relations at work are a common source of subordination and work-related stress for the women. Corporate welfare activities, apart from obstructing and negating the development of gender and worker consciousness, reinforce feminine stereotypes and prejudices (Grossman 1979).

Malaysian women factory workers are also at the bottom rung of the social hierarchy. Not only are they regarded as immoral and sexually promiscuous. They are silent victims of abuse, derogation and sexual harassment. They are made to feel

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[13] A remark made by Rani nine years ago has opened my eyes about the reality of such experiences. I was trying to encourage a few of them to be 'committed' to take leadership in our workers centre. Rani, who came from another state to join the factory as she did not get through her Form 5 exams 'asserted' (in soft frustration), *"Lean, in school we did not even get to join any of the societies. How can we be the ones to be running the centre?"*

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responsible for and shamed by the harassment inflicted on them. Such incidents are usually endured in silence and accompanied by feelings of inferiority because of the shame and blame they bring. For many of the women workers, the endurance of this humilation is one of the most disabling experiences of factory life.

Prevailing experiences of subordination and being put down by men (fathers, husbands, uncles, brothers-in-law, fathers-in-law) in the family, had constantly inculcated in them feelings of not doing things right, inferiority, submissiveness and subordination. Society's looking down on them has reinforced a low self-image and feelings of inadequacy, incapability, powerlessness and helplessness and a deeply ingrained sense of having no confidence.

Unity and solidarity among women workers have not been easy to forge given the underlying ethnic, and other differences (like state of origin) and the effective divisive strategies of management; the increasing differentiation among women working in factories has made it even more difficult. A more discerning 'insider's' understanding of the needs and conditions of each sub-category[14] of factory women is required to reach out effectively and understand their differing circumstances, if relevant empowering experiences are to be located from their experienced concerns and standpoints. Such action is made more difficult by employers' propagandistic promotion of company loyalty and competition in output excellence through various performance schemes between the women workers.

Neither the government, unions or social/community groups have rallied to express concern or listen attentively to the plight of factory women workers. The few

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[14] During the participatory research-education sessions, issues of social divisions among factory women and how this affect their relationship with each other emerged.

existing efforts made are organised from the perspective and agenda of these organisations. rather than from the subjective realities and interests of the women themselves. While support schemes for workers (male or female), are almost non-existent, the Malaysian government is committed to constructing an environment that is conducive to foreign investment and industrial growth (MIDA 1985). It does this by actively attracting foreign investment through numerous incentive schemes[15] and industrial policies: and through civil laws and industrial relations enactments which curb social and labour action. For example, labour legislation is instituted to stabilise the industrial workforce by severely limiting the right to organise and to strike (Dunkley 1982).

The Malaysian state claims to "maintain industrial peace and harmony with justice so as to create a favourable climate for investment, industrial expansion and growth opportunities" (Froebel et al. 1980:363). Protective legislation prohibiting night work for female workers has been removed (Dunkley 1982). The strong bias of Malaysian labour legislation towards employers has been well analysed (Tan 1982: O'Brien 1988). Workers and trade unions are also constrained by other non-democratic laws which allow detention without trial, and prevent freedom of speech, publication or assembly (Mosses & Xavier 1998). In particular, the ISA, which legitimises 'legal' arrest and indefinite detention without trial has been used indiscriminately in the past and currently, to pre-empt the development of any organised dissent.

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[15] This is embodied in the various tax exemptions, pioneer status privileges and establishment of free trade zones and other industrial estates.

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The trade union movement has been a particular target of the government's draconian laws, dating back to pre-independence days when the now defunct militant general labour union was accused of being a communist front (Gamba 1962). Since those days organised labour has been regarded as anti-government and a threat to the ruling regime. Trade union officials who were also active members of the labour party and socialist front were immobilised in the 60s and 70s by long periods of detention without trial under the ISA. Likewise ISA arrests in 1987 (CARPA 1988) paralysed the little grassroot work among women workers and disadvantaged communities in estates, plantations, squatters. Among those detained were trade unionists, women and labour activists. As unions are made docile and ineffective, NGOs have now become the target of government attack. Indeed the Malaysian state, through the efficacy of its Police Special Branch and various state apparatuses, has systematically weakened and repressed participatory grassroots action and democracy (Eldridge 1991).

Although unionisation and protection of workers' right to unionise is officially sanctioned in the Trade Union Act (1959), the state adopts a very active anti-union, anti-organising stance. Active surveillance by employers and the Special Branch ensure the restraint of organised dissent. The system of control is so well-regulated that company-run hostels are effectively extensions of the shopfloor outside the factory. Tactics range from direct harrassment to implementing non-union avoidance schemes. Collaboration between employers and state agencies is very strong. Employers do not hesitate to refer standard industrial relations matters on the shopfloor to the police so as to generate intimidation, fear and embarrassment - this being a very effective form of control which ensures the acquiescence of workers.

Nor will management hesitate to instil fear and embarrassment or guilt on the women. In fact these have proven to be very effective tools to ensure passivity and conformity amongst the women (Chan 1987). The government not only immobilises labour by its pro-capital, anti-labour policies but actively fragments and diffuses it by communal politics and intervention through its various political party structures and pro-government organisations (Grace 1990).

4.4   IN THEIR OWN WORDS: FRAGMENTS OF FACTORY WOMEN'S STORIES

Much has been written about the working conditions of Malaysian women factory workers, but more often than not, these are reported by third parties such as writers researchers and journalists.   Seldom do we hear the women's own views. The rest of this section captures the women's own voices as they talk about their feelings, thoughts and experiences at work. All these narratives were obtained from interactive individual interviews[16] with the women during my fieldwork in 1991 and 1992.   The women talked about their job insecurity, their stressful working conditions, ignorance of their rights, and their experiences with the trade unions as well as their educational experiences.

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[16] These interviews were mostly conducted in English and Malay. Some of the women have completed secondary school and so can speak some English while others who have less schooling spoke mainly in Malay (the national language).   Where Malay was used, it is translated into English, except for some key words. I have tried to retain the text in the women's own words (or translated) as spoken. Hence the grammatical construction may be clumsy. These quotations are extracts from longer transcriptions which cover many other topics.

Shanti who has 20 years of work experience in an electronics factory talked

of how she encountered job insecurity in the early years of her employment when she

was often terminated without compensation.

> *"Finished school in 1972. While waiting for Form 6 results I went
> along with friends to look for a job. We walked in for an interview
> and straight away got a job with Bosch. I worked there and thought
> that if I get good results in the higher school certificate examinations
> I would stop working and go back to study. But I did not go back to
> study, I continued working but in another factory, MMI. MMI closed
> in 1975. It went bankrupt. So we have to look for another job
> elsewhere. Worked in PLAAT for a few years until it closed down in
> 1976. Then went to Motorola in 1977 and worked there for the next
> 15 years.*
>
> *I only worked 1 month in MMI then it closed. At that time no union.
> They release us to find another job in another factory but they should
> have informed us earlier. PLAAT also closed suddenly in 1976 for 1
> month. PLAAT management told us that they are shutting down for 1
> month, but after 1 week I received termination letter. At that time, I
> was still young, don't know much about anything, so just accepted it
> and went for another walk-in interview."*

The frequent closure of companies was quite common during the initial expansion of

the Free Trade Zones which attracted many of the fly-by-night companies that did not

last very long.

Many of the women had migrated from the rural areas to work in the factories

located in the urban areas. **Mei** who had worked 14 years in another electronics

factory talked of her loneliness in the midst of an over-crowded rented room.

> *"I came here to look for a job because I felt that I should not burden
> my father so much. So whatever job that came along, I grabbed it.
> I wanted to be independent. Never think of my family or loneliness ..
> I just want to be independent. Actually it is quite lonely, after work
> I go back .. sometimes it so bad that I sleep early, around 7 or 8 p.m.
> I don't know where to go, I rent a room with five others, so confined
> to a small place. We have barely enough space to lay our sleeping
> mats side by side. Sometimes in the middle of the night I suddenly feel
> a leg across my chest!"*

Many of the factories have shift work, ranging from two to three shifts per day. Nowaday there is even four shifts, meaning everyone on the line will rotate and have a different off-day each week. Each shift is usually 8 hours long unless there is overtime. Here **Aisah** talked about her initial experience with shift work.

"After leaving school I went straight to work. I have never stayed out of home before. At the beginning .. I do not know how to operate the machine .. wanted to cry all the time. Get scolded all the time. The greatest pressure is going into night shift. I did not know what shift was. Morning, afternoon, night. I don't seem to feel what is happening around me. Wake up go to work. When go into night shift, I did not know what to do. Can't even think. Cannot sleep, not used to sleeping in the day time - so noisy with other girls walking in and out. At night fall, I feel sleepy even though we get free coffee. After a long time, then I got used to it. .. I learnt from others to go and get cough mixture from the clinic. I don't know why that helped me sleepy."

San-san who was a supervisor talked about how her girls fall asleep on their job during the night shift.

"For the night shift it is very difficult to cope. The first few nights they are quite ok but after that it's terrible. They just go down the curve. They literally fall asleep on the scope. Sometimes they even ask me 'San-san, kalau I tidur (if i fall asleep), you come and hit my back to wake me up .. you must jerk me and hit me hard ..' So kasian (pitiful), they literally fall asleep with their eye piece glued to their eye without even feeling it. Sometimes the whole hour has no output. When you yourself is under pressure, you really feel like hammering them. If you don't hammer them, you kena (get) hammer yourself .. no choice, so we hammer them, they cry and go and wash their eyes but then they fall asleep again."

Factory operators were not paid very much in the 1980s. **Shanti** recounted how she felt when she was promoted to a quality assistant.

"When I first worked in the factory, I got paid very little, only RM2.30[17] per day. In MMI, I worked as a quality assistant and quality controller and I got slightly higher pay, RM2.80 and RM3.20

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[17] In those days before the depreciation of the Malaysian ringgit, US$1 was equivalent to RM$2.50.

per day respectively .. As an operator, 1 had to build and bond the parts, but as a quality assistant I just do the checking, like a police inspector. The salary difference is only 40 sen per day .. Personally, I did not feel the difference so much as a quality assistant because the pay was only a few ringgit less. The only difference is the status - you don't need to be on the line like everyone."

The working conditions in many of these factories can be very hazardous and deplorable. **Ching** who works in a tobacco factory spoke of her stressful working environment.

"When I think of my work problems .. too much work, exhausted, tired, aircon sometimes not working, very hot, dust, stuffy environment, and noisy. Sometimes when the machine breaks down, all the rejects have to be taken out. When management say big boss is coming then we have to work like a cow to keep the place clean. When no white man come, they don't bother about the dust. When one white man come, we have to work like a cow and they do not even stay for 5 minutes and shout "mana berseh ini, habuklah! siapa buat ini?' (where got clean, dusty lah! who did it?). You think deep inside your heart, no matter how clean we clean it, when the blower starts, the dust will stick on. Only when a big shot comes they want to clean up. We have to stand there for hours to do the job. Not even a proper chair to sit down, and imagine breathing in all the dust. Sometimes it is like snowing, except the snow drops are sticky and not white!"

The factory workers are under constant survelliance by supervisors with very stiff production targets to meet. Here **Rohana** described her encounter with a very strict supervisor whom the workers hated but feared.

"I go to work at 6am and leave at 2pm. Time has to be very precise .. even if we return from break 5 minutes late, we get scolded. Before it was not like this, but with this current supervisor we get scolded all the time. We are not robot. Why treat us like machines. Our target is forever not enough. We cannot sit. We have to stand all the time. Imagine standing for eight hours! We are like a 'bola' (ball), we are being kicked around and we have to follow the production targets as demanded. .. Whenever we think of the supervisor we feel so much hatred. As soon as we enter the factory, only her cruel face comes to my mind, like a 'hantu' (ghost) haunting me."

San-san also described how a male supevisor shouted at the factory girls using foul language.

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"There was even one crazy supervisor, a man who shouted 'pooki loo punya emak, ah ini perempuan semua sundal, lebih baik pergi kerja di kampung jawa. Saya tak maju tengkok muka you semua.' (f -- k your mother, you girls are all prostitutes. You better go and work in the red light district. I don't want to see any of your face again.). He became hysterical because he cannot get the production target and the girls kept on producing rejects."

Besides strict supervision, the factories also use various management tactics to increase productivity and competition among the factory workers. **Aminah** related how her company used emotional tactics to boost production.

"The management tried to build company loyalty. Despite thousands of workers, they come up to you personally and greet you personally with a pat on your shoulder .. wow! you feel so nice .. they make us feel that they are so caring, especially the young ones. If a 'mat salleh' (white man) comes to you and greet you like that it makes you feel that you are someone. Then they give you birthday presents, the managing director will come and visit you and say 'keep it up girl, we are very lucky to have a worker like you'. Imagine when a 'mat salleh' do that to you - 'habis semua' (all finish) .. you will die for the company. That is their tactics. They did that to me before. We, Asians, are like that - a 'mat salleh' is somehting very grand .. I too feel it .. I can see the effect on the others - how great they feel. I can work very fast. They also work very fast so that they can get that pat from the managing director, so there is a strong competition among ourselves. I too feel 'sayang' (love) from the managing director, and I feel I want to get his attention. They try to play with our emotions."

San-san who was a supervisor talked of how she, herself, was being pressured by the management and so in turn she pressured her girls.

"This is how my boss scolds me 'I don't care, I want that target. If you can't meet it you see me tomorrow'. I finish work at 7am but sometimes I have to stay back until 1pm to see him. I dread this very much .. everytime scold, scold until I don't know how to think, I dare not answer back. In electronics, you don't answer-lah. They can sack me within 24 hours. Sometimes, I have to beg with them 'I want to go home. You are spoiling my day, if I don't catch my sleep ..'

Sometimes I wonder why I treat my girls like that, but there again if I don't treat them like that I also will get the treatment. I have to do that for the role is defined for me already as a supervisor. The girls are very scared, even the brave ones. Once they are being called, straight away they know either they produce less or their quality graph

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is low. They are very scared. They cry whenever you scold them. Sometimes when you see them cry, you also lose your mood to scold them. But then if you do not scold them and you try to understand their problems, ie, they cannot help being slow. But who would understand us? The boss will not understand us. He would say 'you work night shift, if you don't produce the output for me, you can stay here until 3.00pm and continue until you meet the target."

Because of the hard pressure and the stressful working conditions, sometimes the factory women burst out into hysteria at the shop floor. Here is **San-san** again describing what happened during such out-bursts.

> *"Hysteria .. the girls .. I even carry them to the nursing room, very common among the Malay girls. Suddenly they will scream .. and they are so strong, kicking here and there .. to go to the clinic will need male supervisors to carry them. The nurse will slap them to wake them up, they will continue to slap them until they wake up .. they will struggle and they are very strong, you don't know what is in them. Sometimes we have to give them a sedative jab. Then we send them to the hospital and they get admitted 1 day for observation, and come back to work. When they come back we talk to them and they said 'tak tahu (don't know), suddenly I felt my whole body is going to explode, 'saya rasa kepala saya mahu pecah' (I felt that my head wants to split), so unbearable. So I scream and let go tension."*

Sometimes they are sexually harassed by their male supervisors or co-workers.

This is what **Aminah** says,

> *"Sexual harassment takes different forms. Once in a while when we go to the supervisor to show him our rejects, he will try to come near and feel your body. I got it twice. A Chinese supervisor .. I was showing him the reject to see whether it is acceptable or not. He came round and put his whole body over me. Nowadays there are fewer male supervisors. They use the soft 'manja' (coaxing) style rather than pressure."*

Most of the women who have been sexually harassed at the work place do not speak out, and **Meena** offered an explanation.

> *"The problem is when you are sexually harassed you dare not speak about it because not only men say you ask for it, even the women will say that .. She asked for it, she must have been a 'gatal' (seductive) woman .. all the women agreed. So how can you dare talk about it, even the women themselves don't support you. It is a sad thing .. we*

dare not talk about it. women cannot talk about it. We only feel shame"

Many of these factories are not unionised, especially the electronics factories.

When the economic recession hit in the mid-80s many of the electronics factories

retrenched their workers without any compensation. So some of the workers took

upon themselves to picket and resisted. **Aminah** was one of the workers retrenched

by Mostek and this was how she and her colleagues picketed.

> *"In Mostek, I fought all the way when the factory closed down in 1985 in the name of restructuring. I was retrenched with 1,700 other workers. It was a real struggle for me. It changed my whole life because electronics workers are not allowed to unionise in Malaysia. Others can unionise but not electronic workers. So either you have to fight or be exploited again. I did go to some unions for help. I went to the electrical union for help but they cannot represent us because they are electrical workers. They are electrical and not electronics so the government won't accept.*
>
> *We were dismissed just like that. We were not given any benefit at that time, and they said... this is international law .. once a worker is terminated, the worker should be given termination letter first. They just told us to take 1 week holidays for they want to reshuffle the factory. We found out that the factory was closed on the fifth day, so we picketed with the help of the Workers Education Centre. We picketed for 32 days.*
>
> *It was a real challenge because most of the women were old employees who have worked for 10-15 years. They have small children, they have taken loans to buy houses. It was terrible. Everyday I saw them crying. They felt frustrated and angry."*

However, some of the other industries do have unions like transport, textile,

electrical, and chemical products industry. **Jamilah** was a member of the textile

union, and here she talked about her initial involvement in the union.

> *"It was quite confusing. I couldn't understand what was going on. At the beginning I felt scared for I don't know much, so I kept quiet. I attended my first seminar with the Textile Workers Asian Region Organisation (TWARO) where most of the participants were exco members. I was not even a committee member. I felt very shy because so 'jauh' (far) from them .. I felt 'malu' because I had never been in*

such a situation before and did not know what to do .. I did not know about anything - the topics were all alien to me. I just kept quiet. I try to listen carefully and with full attention, but I was so lost and felt so stupid. "

Later when she became more experienced with union work, she gained

confidence in herself and was able to speak up against the management.

"Management always blame workers. They call me 'orang kuat union' (strong union supporter), and the supervisors are rather scared of me. Many of the staff here in the factory do not talk to me very much for they view me as opposition. When there is meeting with management I am always called along. The management always blame workers whatever it may be, even production matters where workers have no influence. I always said that management should not immediately blame workers, they must investigate first to see who is negligent - supervisors, technicians, or operators? They always 'salah' (blame) workers. So I 'terus' (straight away) answer back and point out things to them .. I told them they should check out the matters first and gave examples as to what they should check .. this gave them a shock. "

Jamilah valued her experience with the union and she related how her

exposure to union work had conscientised her and helped her personal development.

"In the past I never think about what is right or what is there for me. I just followed what others say .. I don't know how to think. Don't ask me why. I don't know that one can think and can have an opinion for oneself. I was just following, like when small I followed what the teacher told me and at home what my mother told me, the way I followed what the Koran says. Have never spoken, 'tak ambil tahu' before (don't care to know before).

It is from the seminar that I learnt that you have to think and not just follow. I began to open up and I started to see things, 'barulah terbuka dan ternampak banyak yang saya ketepikan' (many things that I have overlooked and did not realise). The way to train others to speak up is like my experience - send them to programmes like these, where there is no one to depend on, let them sink in the deep sea and learn from it. At that time I felt like crying and running away and come back on the first day .. it was my roommate who assured me - not to worry, that what I am going through is a common experience for all, for the first-timers. When the programme ended I had wanted it to continue for a couple more days. "

However, there are other workers who do not have such a high opinion of the union. **Hasmah** was very critical of the union.

"In the union they don't bring up any problems. If they ever want to bring up anything, they would say the union cannot do anything. In the past I had a fight with the union. Last year during 'puasa' (fasting month) we finished work at 7pm, not enough time to 'buka puasa' (break fast). For Muslims, it is important to break fast at the right time. I fought for the workers for the overtime to end at 6.45pm or 7.45pm but the management gave another schedule. When management did not follow, I confronted them and when I try to get the girls to support, they say 'tak apa' (not important), let it be .. the girls are scared when they see the supervisor coming, biarlah (let it be), they are scared the supervisor will blackmark them .. for the supervisor will pick on you for the slightest mistake possible .. What does the union do? 'Susahlah' (very difficult) .. so we also try to forget these minor things. Just focus on the pay, the committee's function is to improve our living standard in ways possible through collective agreement only."

What is more obvious is that union cannot help women workers with their personal problems. **Rosnani**, a former union worker, had this to say,

"I face many personal problems - pressure about life, about marriage .. my husband wanted to split with me and then came back. In the end we split. Then I decided to leave Ipoh. I was facing lots of problems with family, friendship, and in the union. When in such difficulties the union did not provide any help. When I was involved with the union, I was not able to save any money - had to spend all the time, transport and refreshment .. At that time, I decided not to have anything to do with the union because I was very fed up with it.....I was so involved in it but when I had problems nobody from the union came forward to help me."

The limitations of the union were further pointed out by **Meena**, an active worker.

"Before we were pushing just for unions - all the workers need a union. That was what we think is important, and women workers are telling us that 'I am beaten at home' but we tell them that we are not working with domestic problems. So we only see her as a worker and refuse to see her as a wife, as a mother. We realise that if you keep pushing the worker part it does not work .. being the wife part is more of her problem and not as a worker. So if we don't want to answer her being battered problem we will not get her to see her

worker problem. She is already feeling so low as a battered wife, she feels she is nothing already .. "

Besides the unions, there are a few groups which do outreach work with factory women. Here **Meena** shares her experience.

"It is two different things when you discover for yourself and people telling you. When people tell you it is only to a certain extent, it may not hit you but when it comes directly from you yourself you want to do it because it is you who have decided and not someone telling you to do it.

I usually start with the women's experiences and then from there, if the woman is a battered wife, then you talk to her about wife battery and she would listen. From there she would come to a certain level of understanding, then you take her for training (on how to deal with domestic violence) although she may not understand very much but she is interested to go because this is affecting her. "

To **Meena** getting involved is an important step in any educational experience. She related how her involvement has given her the confidence to speak.

"When people tell you, if you have not seen it or experience it you do not know what they are talking about even though it really mean something. Even when they trying to tell you, you cannot understand what it is until you yourself get involved in it. The same thing with other women. That is why when I want to scold them, I thought to myself, 'I was exactly like this before, and if that friend of mine has given up hope on me, today will not be what I am now.' I should do the same for the other woman because I want other women to be like me, otherwise I am a nobody just like one of them.

I never thought that one day I can sit like this and do this kind of work, that is, sit in a seminar and talk. It took me a long time to learn to open my mouth and speak what I want to say, about 3 years. What finally gave me the confidence was when I was in a workshop there are lots of things that I want to say but I didn't say .. every time I came back, I felt very sorry that I wasted the opportunity to speak and share.

When I mix with other women .. I used to go to the university campus and saw those university students .. I was very scared to talk to them, but when I went to their talks I see that they ask the most simple questions .. I say to myself 'my god, you don't even know this'.. that makes me believe that it does not mean that if you have gone to the university, then you know everything. In fact there are lots of things

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they need to learn. When I see all these it makes me feel that I am not very much different only that I don't have as much education, it does not mean I don't understand .. all these little things like that push me to become stronger and pull me up also. "

The dream of an active worker is succintly expressed by Letchemi who is trying to get others in her factory to participate in educational programmes. She said,

"Life is always a struggle and full of challenges. I don't overcome my struggle alone. I hope and believe I will overcome my struggle some day with the help of my fellow workers. I am working towards my dream to make this happen. "

The above are quotes from different factory women talking about their working experiences. These quotes are presented to give an overview of the general situation of factory women as described in their own words.

To end this section, I feature the profile of one particular woman, **Mona**, who had journeyed from the blissful satisfaction of a seamstress in a garment factory to further awakening as an active union supporter, but then proceeded to experience discrimination and discouragement as a woman union president candidate. At the time of interview she has just started to work full time as a woman worker organiser and is now an ardent advocate of women workers' rights and concerns. However, this route was not automatic for Mona. It was marked by a journey of painful events and conscious choices. This interview was conducted in a reflective conversational mode with guide questions which prompted her reflections.

Mona's story demonstrates clearly how education and organising which start from an interest in the activities of the workers themselves can provide an unthreatening introduction into an understanding of unionisation and other forms of collective organisation. Having support for one's personal feelings, to be connected to others as a member of a community of struggle (with similar vision and concerns),

and having access to educational programmes for reflection and a deepening of experience can help to mobilise feelings of disillusionment and inadequacy into stronger commitments and clearer strategies for action.

Mona did not take long to recognise the hidden injustice on the production floor as she could relate her shopfloor experiences with her personal encounters of inequality when she was a child.

> "I have always felt like a fighter even when I was a child. I don't want to see inequality. I was already having this experience in my own family. My mother belongs to an upper middle class family. When she married my father, who was then a policeman, my grandmother did not like her. I saw inequality in the ways my grandmother treated her children. I became angry with her. I was also reminded of my father's situation. He used to work in a plantation as a security guard. Even after 5 years they were not considered regular workers. The things I cannot do in my family, now I have the chance to fight back in the factory .. so I give all my energy to fight inequality in the company."

Despite our persistent commitment and untiring efforts, certain events in our personal lives can make us question our continual involvement or strengthen it. Mona recalled.

> "At one time, I was thinking not to continue my involvement with the union anymore. During the night my mother was dying in the hospital, I was in our hostel reviewing the collective agreement word by word. There were mistakes that had to be corrected before the signing and I did not realise the time. I did not even have the time to visit her. I did not take care of her when she was in the hospital. When she was dying I was busy with the union. I really felt guilty after she died. I was thinking then that after the union attained its first collective agreement I would stop and others can continue. But then some of our members persuaded me to contest as we were the ones doing all the work. It was here that I started to have the consciousness of a woman and felt challenged that as a woman I can do what the men can do when the management interfered to support a pro-management male opponent against me, using the rationale that because I am a woman, I am very weak."

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One of the things that bring fear, inertness and acceptance of the way things are, is the kind of myths what we have been taught as a child and are expected to comply with as a responsible adult.

> "As a child I was taught that if you fight other people, they might not talk to you. That is not good. Now I learn that not only must we fight for our rights. We have to convince others to join in the fight."

In 1976, Mona started working in a garment factory as a seamstress. She told us how she got involved with the union.

> "When I asked permission from my parents to work in the factory, my father was already telling me if you work don't join any organisation. I can still remember how he repeated this 4 times to make sure I heard it clearly. At that time, I did not know what organisation he was telling me. From here negative impressions and some unexplained suspicion about organisations were already formed in my mind.
>
> At the beginning I was happy with my life as a worker to be able to earn something and not ask money from my parents. I was busy with overtime, sometimes for 16 hours continously. I was already very satisfied. I thought that even to be able to earn a little it was ok already.
>
> After working for five and a half months I was invited to a party. I did not know the party was a meeting of people who want to organise a union. At first I felt I was cheated but this was just minor. Because I was already there, I listened to what they say what is this union and what the others want from a union. It was from here that I first know about a union, that union is actually not bad. That forming a union enable us to do lots of things. Before this meeting I did not know anything about union.
>
> After attending one of the basic workers rights seminar I realise that management is not following the law. There is a lack of health and safety, etc. etc. I then became more interested in the union and joined as an active member. I was even appointed as the pro-tem treasurer of our local committee. In the night, after work, I would visit the workers from house to house to explain and convince them to join the union. It is very hard to get people together. If we say it is for a union meeting they will not come. We invite our friends to persuade their friends .. 'come on let's go to Mariam's house - it's her birthday' or 'we're having a picnic this Sunday, would you like to join us?' .. of course when they come they are surprised but they are not angry.

When we explain they begin to understand. When we explain through their own experience, they begin to see ..

At first we had many active leaders but many left as the organising work took many months and there was no definite date for the election and we were already spending all our earnings. I was feeling very discouraged, because of the attitude of the workers. They do not realise their responsibility as members and expect us to do everything for them. Sometimes we feel that we are losing our hope.

Through contact with the Young Christian Workers (YCW)[18] I was able to attend their seminars, meetings and national consultations. This was a great help. From these sessions I came to understand the attitudes and behaviour of workers and not to take the reactions personally. Instead I was further motivated and feel more challenged with my commitment. The YCW was a great support to me, to the union.

By 1982, our union was the strongest in the state. We are enjoying the best demands of all the garment factories in the country. While continuing as the union president I worked as a YCW organiser as well. We set up chapters in the factories. In this way we are able to mobilise all the textile companies to form unions.

I was attracted to the YCW because of its objectives, the methods they use and the way the leaders encourage and train others. Until now we are still very close to one another like in a family. We criticise each other to teach each other to become a good person.

Some of the methods that we have used are very simple but vey effective. For example, to help us to know each other's weakness and strength so that we can work effectively we ask members to choose one photo which describe herself and then share it with the group. There was the case of this member. She selected a photo of 3 mangoes attached to a stalk. She explained that she chose that picture because she could not work independently. She does not have trust in herself .. from here the leader will know how to tackle her situation. Sometimes we also have discussions, especially on things that are happening to us directly. We always relate the discussion with actual experiene and then sum up in the end. This is different from the kind of education that some militant unions were doing where they lecture most of the time. Although what they lecture is right, the opinions only come from the lecturer most of the time. The participants are only observing and listening. It is different when the workers themselves can draw out their experiences and we help to summarise

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[18] See Chapter five (5.2) for a description of YCW's work.

.. It is only now that some of the unions are trying to use popular education methods. "

To empower women workers we must find ways to introspect and reconstitute the meanings of things imposed on us, to rename the definitions from our standpoint and to redefine our own identities for ourselves. We have to deepen our experiences - the how and what we do, feel, know into analysis and action. This is an area where feminist popular education can contribute towards the empowerment of women workers.

4.5   CONCLUSION

This chapter foregrounds the economic, social-cultural and political contexts of Malaysia and the situation of Malaysian women factory workers. It presents the complex interplay of the state, capital, culture (religion and patriachy) which structures a patriachal. pro-industrial capitalist development ethos in the everday lives of women workers. The conditions and situation of Malaysian factory women are dynamic, diverse, complex and contradictory. All these factors set serious constraints to the organisation and conduct of educational work. In Malaysia the industrial development policy and the pervasive legalistic curtailment by the state, the antithetical interests of capital as well as the subjective realities, practical needs, concerns and strategic interests of the factory women are a set of interlocking forces that need to be factored into any meaningful educational work, both in analysis and in practice.

Chapter Five

EDUCATIONAL WORK WITH FACTORY WOMEN IN MALAYSIA: THE VARIOUS GROUPS AND THEIR APPROACHES

"Educational provision can limit or deform as well as develop and liberate. The formal organisation, content and methods of provision are a vital influence on which direction education will take."

(McIlory & Spencer 1989:41)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines WHO, WHAT, and HOW in addressing the needs and interests of factory women, in particular the kind of educational work that is being undertaken from the 1970s. A chronological survey reconstructs the development of the various groups, followed by a more in-depth descriptive analysis of 4 different organisational forms and approaches. Newer groups that emerged after the 1987 ISA arrests were still in their stabilisation-consolidation stage when I conducted my fieldwork in 1991 and 1992.

Most of the data for this chapter are original data on educational work for women workers in Malaysia. Like most fields outside of mainstream professional practice in Malaysia, women workers' education has not been given systematic attention in its documentation or research. In fact I was discouraged from undertaking this research by an establised academic who rationalised that there was hardly any material on this subject (see chapter two). Thus, the prevailing mis-perception that there is hardly any substantial work in this area.

The various educational programmes described in this chapter were mainly reconstructed from conversations and interviews with those who were still involved at the time of my fieldwork, and/or have been involved in the respective organisations, from my own accumulated knowledge as a partisan activist, and retrieved from documents which required a painstaking search. Much of the documents of groups implicated by the Operation Lallang episode of ISA arrests had been destroyed. Participants from the respective groups were also interviewed to get their insights and assessments.

5.2 A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Different groups have emerged and have developed different agendas in response to the diverse and changing needs of women workers. The organisations involved are varied and range from trade unions, non-union worker-oriented, social services to women-centred groups.

The influx of factory women was visibly felt in the mid-seventies when large numbers migrated to the urban-industrial zones as production operators. The focus on factory women in this period was about their adaptation to the urban-industrial milieu. Sensationalised attention was often drawn by the media to what was constructed as their immoral behaviour (Blake 1975; 1977).

The eighties saw a sympathetic shift to viewing factory women as victims of industrial development where their exploited conditions in foreign multinationals were highlighted. This awareness was largely influenced by the UN Decade for Women, and the discourse in international development action to ratify women as victims and non-beneficiaries of development (Young 1993). International lobbying for the

morals, in particular, scandalised reports of unmarried pregnancies and newly-born babies dumped in public toilets. The adverse publicity attracted the attention of religious bodies, welfare agencies, community/social service organisations, government and academic institutions (Blake 1975).

Focused attention on education for women workers only commenced in the late seventies. There were basically two parallel developments in that decade. One was trade union education, particularly in the tertiary sectors. The other was community education by social service groups for a newly emergent category of female production operators employed in world-market factories (Blake 1977).

Educational provision by trade unions was undertaken at various levels, largely through its national centre - the **Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC)**. MTUC started trade union education in 1958 (Mathews 1984). However, it was only in the 1970s that a more systematic, planned programme with clearer objectives was in place (Azizan 1986). MTUC established its Women's Committee in 1968 (MTUC 1968). The main objective of the Women's Committee was to promote women's participation in trade unions. At that time, female membership was largely from the tertiary sector (teachers and civil servants). Even up to now in 1991 at the time of my fieldwork, leadership of the women's section (and the executive council of most unions) are in the hands of women with a higher school education.

The **MTUC Women's Committee** started its education seminars to promote women's participation in trade unions and to create awareness about rights, roles and responsibilities as union members in the late seventies. Much of its educational thrust and focus remain unchanged till today. As the majority of the factory women is not unionised and outreach programmes by trade unions for them has been minimal and

ineffective, factory women workers' access to education by trade unions has been insignificant.

With funding from Asia American Free Labour Institute (AAFLI), MTUC launched its 'organising the unorganised' project in 1978 to establish unions in sectors where they did not exist (MTUC nd-c; interview with trade unionist, October 1991). It is in this context that factory women became their target. Among the targeted industries were those of electronics and garment industry where workers are predominantly women. The primary focus was directed at setting up unions and not education. Informing workers on their rights as workers, the benefits of unionisation and how that can be achieved procedurally was the closet this came to any kind of educational activity. This emphasis on trade union education continued into the eighties and nineties spearheaded by a national and international lobby for the unionisation of the electronics industry.

There were also church based workers-oriented efforts which reached out to workers in their communities and initiated community-based education in the form of credit union, bulk-buying and cultural activities. However, there was no separate or similar attention directed at women. Amongst these groups were the **Selangor Industrial Urban Mission Committee (COM-SIUM)**, the welfare and development arm of the **Catholic Church** and the **Young Christian Workers (YCW)**.

COM-SIUM[2] initiated adult education activites in Selangor and Penang where the industries were predominantly located in the early 1970s (COM-SUIM 1972). To this end, the Petaling Jaya Community Organisation (PJCO) in Selangor and Penang People Organising for Power were set up. These efforts were part of the churches' movement for 'reconciliation, peace, freedom, dignity of man and his rightful share in development' (COM-SUIM File 1). The approach was a combination of cultural activities, adult education provision (namely adult literacy and tuition for school children), and Saul Alinsky's method of community organisation around issues faced by the local community (COM-SUIM File 1). Despite the fact that the PJCO was officially opened by the then Minister of Social Welfare Services who acclaimed that the PJCO should be used as a 'model to co-ordinate voluntary efforts in urban areas', the work was aborted after four years when the government refused formal registration and regarded the work as illegal. In fact some of the staff workers were interrogated by the Police Special Branch and detained under ISA (interview with COM-SIUM ex-staff, January 1992).

The Young Christian Workers (YCW)[3], formed in 1958 internationally, was one of Malaysia's (now defunct) oldest organisations concerned with the problems and lives of workers. Its primary thrust was an education that built awareness and

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[2] Information on this was obtained by tracking down church leaders and ex-staff members who were involved. I also referred to records, especially minutes of COM-SIUM meetings which were kept in the Trinity Theological College in Singapore. Despite knowing one of the ex-staff workers he was not too keen to disclose details because of their political sensitivity. I respected that and did not push too far as there was still a lot of overhanging fear arising from the 1987 Operation Lallang.

[3] YCW is an international movement. Each national YCW is linked to its regional office. Information on the YCW was obtained through conversation with 2 veteran women and 2 veteran men (ex-YCW activists) of the movement. I also talked to 3 women about their experiences from their YCW involvement.

commitment of service through action and reflection on it. It used the method of 'self learning' (ASPAC YCW 1991). Members learned the method of 'review of life' (Clancey & Devos 1978) to discuss their problems and/or happenings at work, home, community and in their personal lives and friendship circles to generate awareness. From here the experiences are analysed in relation to other similar occurrences followed by a discussion of possible action at an individual level and collectively. Leadership formation with analytical abilities was its main strategy for building commitment, for the inculcation of values like justice, dignity, concern, love and service to others and expanding its movement. Apart from regular group meetings there were periodic seminars and workshops on specific topics. Most of the education programmes at the national level were organised around topical campaigns. For example, in the mid-70s a year-long campaign on 'migrant workers' was launched through a combination of different sets of activities to raise awareness about their problems and rights at a time when rural-urban migration of young workers into the industrial zones was still a relatively new phenomenon (interview with ex-YCW women leader, February 1992).

Though belonging to the Catholic Church it worked with workers from all ethnic and religious origins. From the inception of YCW, a Girls' Section was formed to work with seamstresses from the Chinese new villages. These women YCW groups grew from sewing classes organised by the church. The YCW was also active in rubber estates and among women clerical workers in the urban areas in the 1960s. From the early 1970s onwards it started to be involved with factory workers. However, the YCW lost its focus on women at a time when the female industrial workforce was soaring. Due to internal reorganisation and reassertion that 'unity is

strength' its Girls' Section was merged in 1973. This merging "killed women's participation and dissipated the woman focus in its programmes" (interview with veteran ex-YCW female activist, December 1991). The educational work with factory workers was directed at unionisation and focused on raising their awareness of their rights, and taking up responsible trade union leadership positions, without any particular focus on their situation as women. The YCW continued to be very active in the plantations and some industrial areas up to the late 1980s. The movement became dissipated since after 'Operation Lallang 1987'[4] and also due to internal dispute in the church about its focal constituency, a controversy exacerbated by the ISA arrests.

The first organisation to rally public concern specifically for the newly emergent migrant factory women workers was the **Federation of Family Planning Association, Malaysia** (FFPA,M). This coincided with the period when family planning associations were experimenting with the community development approach to family planning and family life education in the 1970s (Chan 1986). Thus, young factory women, viewed as mothers-to-be, were potentially captive clients. The rationale became even stronger when the media constantly sensationalised reports of unmarried pregnancies and newly-born babies dumped in public toilets (Blake 1975).

In 1977, **FFPA,M** initiated a multi-purpose community education project and counselling service under the name of **Young Workers Community Education Project (YWCEP)**. Broad areas of non-formal education were aimed at the "development of young people towards responsible adulthood, for responsible adults make responsible parents" (Myrna 1977:2), with emphasis in the development of

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[4] This is the ISA arrests in 1987 (see CARPA 1988).

skills in planning, decision-making and handling conflicts so as to "manage effectively and responsibly aspects of their lives as individuals, as parents-to-be and as members of a community" (YWCEP 1979). A variety of educational and recreational activities were provided. Later, the educational approach stressed the young workers' direct participation in planning and organising the Project's activities. The next section provides a more detailed description.

Towards the end of the decade more service oriented organisations like the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA) and Malaysian Davidian Association undertook community service projects like providing hostels for girls, and public seminars to address social issues like youth unemployment and the problems of rural-urban migration (NACIWID 1978). They do not engage directly with the factory women to redress their conditions of exploitation or subordination though they advocate for women's participation in development. Most of these women's organisations have links with the government and are cautious not to be associated in anything that is deemed politically sensitive as any form of education with these workers is viewed as potentially opposing the government's industrial development policy.

The Eighties .. factory women as exploited workers, as victims of development

Women workers' education in the eighties was very much influenced by international development action which highlighted the vital role of women in development. In particular, the UN Decade for Women increased attention and funding for women, especially women workers in industries. Hence, much attention was given to the development of women's programmes in non-government

organisations, government agencies and trade unions so as to improve women's status and participation and to integrate them into development (Ng & Yong 1990).

The hive of global publicity about the neglect of women emanating from the International Decade on Women spurred a lot of attention to the needs of women. At the national level, more government mechanisms and programmes were instituted to integrate women into development (See Ng & Yong 1990). It has been found that such programmes have only aimed at domesticating rather than emancipating or empowering women, may they be income generating projects or family development programmes (Ng 1985). In the case of factory women in the free trade zones their integration into a peripheral capitalist type of development has only brought about increased exploitation of poor women's labour as a cheap resource, reinforcing the gender hierarchy and making them more dependent and taken advantage of by men and the international capitalist economy (Mitter 1986).

While most government programmes were not targeted specifically for factory women, one component of the ASEAN Women in Development Project launched by the Ministry of Social Welfare was directed at factory women in the mid-80s. This was the **Big Sister Counselling Program** to "help female migrant workers adjust to city life by counselling on family problems, adjustment to city life and budget management" (Asean WID, nd). Older factory women were selected for training in counselling techniques by the Ministry who were then appointed as 'big sisters' to befriend new workers and be a 'listening ear' to their personal problems. The program was adopted by one factory which implemented it for a couple of years under a scheme called 'Communication Helps to Improve Productivity' which was later used as a union-busting means when unionisation started. Enthusiasm from the

novelty of the scheme faded very soon when its ineffectiveness became obvious. As the flaws of the scheme became open it has since been replaced by the TLC (Tender Loving Care) Program for new girls (interview with Human Resource Manager, October 1991). In two other attempts, the scheme never took off as the issues of workers' problems were about their poor working conditions and low salaries (interview with Welfare Officer, Minsitry of Social Welfare, October 1991).

Foreign funding of women's projects enabled the establishment of women-centred groups which focused specifically on women workers[5]. While generally frowned upon by the traditional left and trade unionists as buffering unionisation, it actually opened up new space and generated innovative approaches. Meanwhile, the unions' 'direct-selling' approach proved ineffective given the new subtle forms of exploitation and workers' co-option by company loyalty promoted through familial and pseudo-participatory management strategies (Tse 1981). Apart from similar educational efforts to integrate women into trade unions through trade union education, women's committees and special women's projects were implemented by trade unions (MTUC 1980 to 1990). However the approach and emphasis remained very much the same.

The establishment of regional support groups like the **Committee for Asian Women (CAW)** and the **Women Workers' Program of Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD)** facilitated learning and education through exchange and regional training workshops. These regional efforts supported the legitimacy and

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[5] Women Education Project (WEP) and Friends of Women (FOW) are two such examples.

strengthened new non-union efforts which were more effective than conventional trade union education in terms of its content and pedagogy.

Meanwhile YWCEP restructured into a **Workers Education Project** (YWEP). This second phase lasted for 2 years before transforming into a self-help group called the Workers Education Centre (WEC) in 1984 and that lasted until 1987 (Chan 1991). Its educational approach shifted to consciousness-raising through collective action and organising. Before the end of the decade, two more informal groups[6] and a registered women's organisation **(Friends of Women - FOW)** has been formed to work with factory women workers in Kuala Lumpur.

FOW is a membership society and continues to function till today. They believe that 'the situation of women workers will change through education, organisation and solidarity links with other organisations of similar objectives'. Their primary concern is 'to cater to the needs of women who are unorganised and in the bottom rungs of society' (FOW brochure, nd). They work with factory women, mainly in the electronics industry through education programmes directed towards the goal of unionisation. Active members talked to their friends about the importance of unions. "We don't immediately push women to fight for unions. We first help them understand things closer to their lives like their pay slips and how to calculate the wages and benefits they're owed. Then we talk about organising and we provide education programmes on trade unions" (CWR 1988: 45). These are conducted through discussion groups, talks, role-plays and drama skits which highlight the different aspects of the workers' problems. Leadership training, mainly in the form of public speaking, is an important strategy in education for unionisation.

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[6] See description for community based informal group in 4.4.

FOW also worked with women in the estates and squatter communities. In squatter areas, pre-school classes are used to galvanise women's participation through the formation of local committees for these classes. Mothers were found to be more motivated to come forward to do something for their children than for themselves (interview with FOW full-time staff, December 1991). Up to 1987, **FOW** functioned without any full time paid staff. Until then, the organisation was nurtured by middle-class activists from the Centre for Development Issues (newsletter. Centre for Development Issues, nd). The work of the organisation was stalled when one of the activists was arrested in the 1987 Operation Lallang.

Operation Lallang was the code name used by the police when they arrested and detained without trial, under the Internal Security Act (ISA), 107 critics and dissidents including civil rights activists, Malay christians, univeristy lecturers. church workers, elected opposition and governemnt MPs, feminist and social reformers (CARPA 1988). 1987 was a critical year for the NGOs for the crisis brought a halt, paralysed and suppressed the work of the non-union women-centred groups.

The Nineties .. the agency of factory women as workers and as women in the global economy

This decade has witnessed a heightened gender awareness in Malaysia. International discourse on women and development influenced not only the NGOs and labour sector but government as well. Indeed, it became fashionable to have women's affairs sections in almost all government agencies (especially after the launch of the ASEAN Women in Development Project in the mid-eighties which is an ASEAN intergovernment project), while non-government efforts also incorporated a women's section if this had not existed before. Yet not much government efforts

have been directed at factory women workers despite rhetoric on the need to support for women in the labour force.

Globalisation also increased networking which brought about the cross-fertilisation of ideas among various NGOs in the region (Yu 1989). Financial support from international NGOs and the formation of regional support groups like CaW and ACFOD fostered grassroots networking and exchange/training programs. Regional networking nurtured and engendered gender consciousness among women workers groups in Asia. Committee for Asian Women (CAW) continues to play a significant role and is, in fact, a common link for the women workers groups in Malaysia although these groups are not in close collaboration with each other.

Compared to the pioneer years of the seventies, there are now more registered women's groups focusing on factory women, apart from the occasional sporadic attention given by trade unions. By 1991, four new groups had been formed to work with factory women, two in Penang and two in the Klang Valley in Selangor. Women's Force and Women Workforce Action Group focused exclusively on women workers. Workers Organisation of Malaysia established a woman's section. The LO-MTUC Study Circle Project for electronics workers operated from the MTUC Service Centre in Penang (interview with Project Staff, September 1991). All of them were foreign funded and non-governmental.

Women Workforce Action Group (WWAG) was registered as a company in 1990 by a retrenched factory woman leader (see also Rosier 1991). WWAG started as a hostel cum activities centre in 1989. However its roots can be traced back to 1986, when after a series of protest actions which lasted for more than a month, efforts were made to support and sustain the retrenched in continuing industrial action

through income earning activities. WWAG worked with factory workers to make them more self-reliant, "educate them for better jobs, train them to organise themselves, provide shelter, counselling, moral training, fight for fair treatment, organise them against oppression, support them in unionisation, encourage participation in women's activities and co-operative business ventures" (WWAG Report, 1992:2). Its regular activities included shampoo-making, counselling, English and typewriting classes. For a while classes on labour laws and a group on cultural and drama activities persisted. These activities were designed to motivate a core group and give them leadership training so as to develop 'self-confidence, organisational ability, administrative skills and management experience' (interview with WWAG Founder, September 1991). Apart from the founder co-ordinator, the number of staff workers had fluctuated depending on the availability of suitable and willing workers. Some of the activities and administrative functions of the centre were handled by paid staff on a part-time basis, though volunteers were generally preferred.

Women's Force (WF) was registered as a limited company in 1991 by a middle-class woman activist who felt that her involvement in a women's group was not reaching out to women workers (interview with WF Founder, February 1992). WF believes that women have a right to live their lives with dignity, free and be able to participate fully in society without discrimination. It has delineated six strategies (education, campaign, networking, publication, income generating projects and training) to achieve its aim of reaching out to bring women together, empowering them and upholding their fundamental rights as workers and as women. Its team of 5 full-time staff worked with estate and industrial women as well as foreign migrant

women workers. For the industrial women, it ran a centre at the periphery of one of the free trade zones where English and handicraft classes were being held. Through English Classes, it hoped to 'foster communication and contact among factory women, increase their knowledge and build their confidence' (interview with WF Founder, February 1992).

Workers Organisation of Malaysia (WOM) was reconstituted from the dormant Workers Party in 1990 as a society to 'help workers improve their livelihood, fight for the right to work and to a just wage'(WOM Brochure). The organisation operated from a very explicit class position. While education and training for women had been identified to include 'consciousness raising, women's and workers' rights, leadership training and promotion of women workers solidarity' (WOM Brochure), the program has yet to be fully implemented at the time of my interview. Its women members, though few, were actively committed and have been politicised in their previous involvement in one of the informal groups. The woman activist who organised this informal group initiated the move into WOM when the group was going through a difficult period of internal dissension. She recognised their limitations as an informal group. The activities of WOM included encouraging women's participation through tuition classes for children in squatter communities and outreach to estate women through social work and adult education such as health and legal literacy (interview with WOM women leader, January 1992). While the active women were factory workers no systematic programme has been formulated for the larger community of factory women workers.

FOW continued into the 1990s though its work also experienced a difficult period of lull and internal review to prioritise its limited resources. Contacts and

continuing involvement with factory women has since slackened. While maintaining its focus on women workers, it no longer emphasised unionisation. Instead, other aspects of women workers' needs were given more attention. The focus shifted to domestic workers and kindergarten classes as an entry point to motivate the participation of working mothers.

Most **trade unions** do not have special programmes for women and expect the MTUC-Women's Section to undertake this role (Rohana & Lochhead 1988). Unfortunately, the MTUC-Women's Section mainly operates in the Klang Valley only and it is not active. There were attempts in the mid-nineties to form a women's committee in Penang which did not last for more than a year[7]. The **LO-MTUC Women Workers Project** ceased after three years of funding by the Norwegian Labour Party Women's Movement. The main area of work of the single project staff was outreach through home-visits and phone calls. The project proposal identified three educational forms, namely study circle methods, seminars on specific subjects and the production of leaflets, pamphlets and other relevant study materials (Project Proposal LO-MTUC Women Workers Project, nd). At the time of my interview (November 1991) which is the second year of the project's implementation, it still had not yet organised any educational programmes of its own. Instead, the staff person had been entrusted the job to bring women participants to the division's education programmes.

The sustainability of ongoing work with factory women and of grassroots groups has always been difficult. Currently, in 1998 only WF and FOW continue to

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[7] I was personally involved in this endeavour.

function. The other two groups no longer exist by the mid-nineties. The next section will elaborate on the work of four different groups.

5.3 CASE EXAMPLES

Four examples are discussed to discern the various organisational forms. pedagogical methodologies and types of educational programmes focused on factory women in Malaysia. The descriptions unfold the perspectives, concerns and constraints that shape the educational practice of each provider.

Sponsored Projects: YWCEP and YWEP

The Young Workers Community Education Project (YWCEP) and the Young Workers Education Project (YWEP) are different phases of a prototype community project initiated by the FFPA,M (YWCEP 1979; YWEP 1981-1983). These projects were supervised by consultants and implemented according to a pre-designed social planning methodology (Chan 1986). YWCEP and YWEP spanned over a decade: from a generic counselling service it developed into a community education project (YWCEP): and later, a workers' education project (YWEP) culminating in the formation of a workers' self-help collective (WEC) (Chan 1986; Chan 1991). The WEC is discussed as a separate case example because of its different organisational structure and focus.

Concomitant to each phase of the project is a reformulation in approach, focus and methodology, brought about by two factors. First, the experience and lessons of the previous phase led to a rethinking and restructuring in the implementation of the following phase. Second, the analysis of factory workers' needs and problems and

how to address them changed according to how sponsors and personalities involved perceived the issues. These differences are reflected in the reconceptualisation of each phase and subsequently, the project's role and the way educational programmes were implemented. However, the underlying educational thrust and overall concern for factory women's welfare and development remained.

YWCEP (1976-79)[x]

YWCEP was based on a study by FFPA,M which analysed the problems of factory women workers as arising from (i) their rural migrant status and (ii) the hostility of their residential communities (Choong 1981). First, most of the problems encountered were seen as related to their rural migrant status and dislocation from their families, hence the need to help them adapt and adjust to the demands of an urban-industrial, working-living environment. Secondly, the local communities where the factory women lived tended to condemn and stigmatise them. The study recommended integration of the migrant workers into their communities and to create an understanding of acceptance by the local residents. Inadequacy of existing facilities, social services and programmes to meet workers' needs were also highlighted. Based on these reasons, FFPA,M established a generic counselling service and a community welfare service centre (i) to help migrant women workers adjust to an urban-industrial technological work environment and (ii) to assist the acceptance and integration of factory women into a hostile receiving community (Blake 1975) in 1976.

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[x] Much of the information presented here is also from my personal involvement in YWCEP as the Project Manager from 1977 to 1979.

FFPA,M tried to rally support and collaboration from relevant organisations (government, factory management, trade unions, community organisations) to establish an elaborate residential general-purpose community service (Blake 1975). However the idea was aborted when it failed to mobilise support or commitment. In fact, much suspicion was generated: factory management was suspicious of the trade unions, while trade unions speculated that the Project's aim was to act as a buffer against unionisation.

YWCEP was marked by two phases in terms of its orientation and implementation methodology: an initial one-year followed by another two years of community education (YWCEP 1979). Funded by the International Planned Parenthood Federation, YWCEP targeted to provide family life education to a thousand workers in the first year (Myrna 1977). The work of this period mainly focused on establishing contacts with workers, local community leaders and other relevant service organisations. Core activities were on personal counselling of individual problems and a family life education programme aimed at young workers (YWCEP 1979).

The second phase aimed to create a permanent structure that would be self-sustaining to provide services to workers through co-ordination with other agencies after its funded period. A community organisation model with a general focus on community education and group activity was the overall approach. Its educational thrust was defined as 'to develop in young workers and other young people the knowledge and skills necessary to manage effectively and responsibly aspects of their lives as individuals, as parents-to-be and as members of a community' (Chan 1979b). Programmes were organised according to work modules in three areas; (i) the wage

earning context, (ii) adjustment to social change, and (iii) the environment. Definite steps for implementation with a specified time frame and the targeted product of a document or report as well as the establishment of a core group of 'communicators' was pre-planned (See Chan 1986 for elaboration). These modular activities were identified to help the young workers function effectively within their work context as well as in the handling of their own financial resources, creative use of resources of time and leisure within the community, and the gaining of knowledge necessary to function effectively as healthy, well-adjusted persons individually and within the family. The third area was concerned with a healthy environment as a whole (Chan 1979a).

The Project functioned as a multi-purpose community service centre with a wide range of activities like English classes, study group on expenditure patterns and budgeting, consumer awareness classes, library service, sports and games. The implementation took the form of modular steps with a pre-determined time schedule. Such a structured approach proved ineffective as it was not responsive to the realities of the workers who were not accustomed to rigid schedules and discipline. Later, a shift to a more informal approach which responded to the rythmn and interests of the workers was adopted and involved them as 'active participants', and not 'passive recipients'. Within this approach, four basic strategies, (i) community outreach especially to the factory women, (ii) mass exposure programmes, (iii) interest group activities, and (iv) organisational collabortion to organise activities for young workers and the community at large (Vengadasalam 1980).

Overall, YWCEP was able to generate workers' participation and awareness, even sustaining their interest for some time but did not educate the workers about the

political link (Kwan & Wong 1980). However, an evaluation of the Project found that the scope and focus of the Project in its attempts to include both workers and the community at large was too broad and diversified (Kwan & Wong 1980). Consequently, the staff's efforts were too diffused and constrained by the project policy and Management Committee's philosophy. Given the high turnover and transitional nature of the workers, the Project was constantly in contact with new workers. Indeed, a Project of this nature has a continual educational and catalytic role to play and cannot hope to be self-sufficient financially or organisationally unless the sponsors take it upon themselves to be the provider. This was all the more necessary in the absence of trade unions and other organisations catering to this growing population. It was established that it was not realistic or practical to expect a local self-sustaining structure to continue the functions of the Project at the end of its two-year duration. It also recommended that if indeed such an organisation were to be developed, it should be an autonomous workers' organisation (Kwan & Wong 1980).

YWEP (1981-83)[9]

After a lapse of two years, the Project resumed with funding from the UN Voluntary Fund for the Decade for Women, but under the sponsorship of the University, and as part of the Particpatory Urban Services Project (Kamal et al. 1987). The goals were directed at catering to the welfare and needs of workers:

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[9] Much of the insights of this case came from my experience and accumulated knowledge as Chairperson of YWEP.

develop their independent capacity to identify and define their problems and to explore ways to continue on a self-reliant basis beyond the funding period.

YWEP redefined its focus on factory workers through labour education[10], and the production of resource materials for the education programmes. It used three elaborate sets of outreach programmes to develop interest in labour education. Firstly, contact was made through home visits to elicit interest and participation in project actitivities. Secondly, one-off, mass exposure programmes like talks, exhibitions, outings aimed at a larger audience. These programmes enabled certain information, knowledge and skills to be shared on a larger scale, with the effect of creating greater interest and awareness. Thirdly, regular working groups which met over a period of time enabled the workers to work together and develop the necessary skills and orientation (YWEP 1981-83).

Labour education was defined as "development of workers' consciousness of their situation, their rights and the means to guarantee these rights" (Chan 1986:179). Two integral strategies were used in labour education: contact work and interest activities with workers to build rapport and learn about their needs, interests and problems were complemented by leadership formation and training to form a core group who could undertake responsibility to continue the role of YWEP (see Chan (1986) for the range of educational programs and methods used).

The overall approach was based on the concept of 'education through participation and involvement' and, 'education for action'. The emphasis was on workers' participation, in particular the involvement of a core group of leaders in the

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[10] Examples of these programmes are self-awareness work camps, labour law workshop, baisc rights of workers work camp, workshop on trade unionism, health and safety.

planning and implementation and evaluation of programmes with the project staff. Funding came to an end after two years just as the Project was stabilising its set of educational programmes and a few workers were starting to identify with the goals of the Project.

Self-help Collective: Workers Education Centre (WEC)[11]

WEC was formed as a grassroots self-help collective. It lasted from 1983 until 1987 without any external funding or staff workers. When YWEP's funding completed, a few active workers were mobilised to take on the challenge of continuing some support service for themselves and for other fellow workers. Through a process of group formation the group consolidated into the Centre's core group to undertake responsibility for establishing and managing the Centre. Members were not fixed but consisted of a regular and active core. The goal of the group was to experiment with the possibility of setting up a drop-in centre. The emphasis of the work was directed at building the capacities of the women, fostering an experience of relating and working together collectively while generating a consciousness of themselves as women and as workers. This was done through the vehicle of setting up a workers' centre. The women named this centre 'Rumah Kita' - Our House (Chan 1991).

The vision, goals and operating strategies of the centre were collectively formulated through a series of participatory formation workshops. The objectives and activities of the Centre were continuously re-visioned through periodic evaluation and

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[11] Much of the information of this is drawn from my personal records and from my reflected experience as Founding Member of WEC.

planning sessions which used the participatory training methodology (Shrivastava 1989). Such an approach was effective in engaging the participation of the workers and making them feel ownership of the Centre. Thus the Centre functioned as an ongoing forum for collective work: the development of skills, evaluation and leadership formation, as well as serving the purpose of a drop-in service centre. There were also interest activities and working groups to cater to the wider group of workers who were coming to the centre as users and to benefit rather than to contribute. Specific thematic/topical and training workshops were also conducted to complement the ongoing activities. Training here was not just on skills-training or specific areas of knowledge but also on values and orientation-formation and building bonds of solidarity with each other so as to deepen the commitment to one another.

All these activities were interrelated building blocks - it was through the contact and participation in these activities that a bond was established amongst the women which further provided the starting basis to build a trust and interactional context for the conscientisation to materialise. Through these involvements, the women learnt to value themselves, that they have ideas and capacities. It was through these activities that members of the core group learnt about leadership and organising. The general practice was to encourage them to be responsible in organising activities, often working in pairs to provide confidence and support to each other. The principle behind this was learning by doing for doing builds confidence, and thereafter reflecting on what has been done. Through participation in these activities and the caring relationship extended to each other, the women's interests grew and they became motivated to be more actively involved.

The centre as a collective endeavour, created a space for members to disclose themselves to one another and work together to construct a more caring concern for one another. Unquestioned practices, stereotyped perceptions and values surfaced. As a group, the core members grappled together for ways of achieving their vision. There was always ample material arising from concrete experiences among peers, at the home, the workplace and at the centre itself to deal with women's relations, ethnic discrimination, the law, etc. They were concerned with both the issues and the ways and processes involved in dealing with them. Such sensitivity helped to evolve creative ways for conscientisation and value formation through a diverse set of activities.

The interactional base of a centre where workers could drop in and feel welcome and be psychologically comfortable enough to unload their problems and anxieties also became the source of information and news. The centre became a place where one could get to feel the pulse and mood in the Free Trade Zone (FTZ), to keep in touch with happenings in the different factories, for workers to learn and respond to their problems, may they be work-related or personal-family problems. However, not all the efforts were successful or effective all the time. Even so, the learning opportunities generated from these efforts were invaluable for the women involved.

Small victories were specially encouraging and particularly empowering to the women affected as they were drawn into doing something about it. Acting on something instead of allowing it to act against oneself was the experience of being empowered. Examples ranged from individuals standing up against arbitrary warning letters, to demands at the workplace like getting the management to alter bus routes,

to collective action at the place of residence, to frighten off sexually perverse exhibitionists. The most visible and public set of actions were in 1985 and 1986 when the centre was instrumental in mobilising and supporting retrenched workers in a sustained struggle of protests against retrenchment and involuntary resignation. The Centre also facilitated existing unions to collaborate and support each other's organising efforts. For example, the workers from a different factory undertook actions, which were considered too risky for the workers of that factory. A practice was also started whereby unionised workers came forward to support non-unionised workers. The Centre undertook very creative forms of educational work and mobilisation which used participatory research and various forms of print media like cartoon pamphlets and songs (see ICAE 1986; Chan 1991).

In 1987 after much assessment and struggle the centre was closed down for a variety of reasons. The most severe reason being the failing stamina and incapacity of the core group to continue fighting with the intimidation and harassment from the Police Special Branch (Chan 1991). As the Centre became more effective, it also became more vulnerable. There were also internal problems. While being consumed by the seemingly more vulnerable external problems, the internal tensions within the core group were not attended to or mediated fast enough. Though this was finally confronted, it brought much disillusionment to all, including myself, who was one of the founding members of the Centre.

Trade Unions[12]

The discussion in this section will not cover all aspects of trade union education but only focus on those aspects related to factory women workers. Educational programmes are undertaken at all levels: at the national level by the Malaysian Trade Union Congress (MTUC) Education Committee and its Youth and Women's Section as well as by the respective international trade secretariats (ITS). Some international secretariats have also set up women's departments or sponsored women-only programmes to train women to take up leadership positions. There are no separate programmes for factory women, except if they are members of their respective unions. However it is important to note here that the majority of factory women ar not unionised, and only less than 10% of the Malaysian labour force is unionised (Rohana 1997). At the time of my fieldwork, the LO-MTUC Women Workers Project in Penang was the only union-sponsored project in Malaysia reaching out to non-unionised factory women.

Each sponsor advocates its own approach and method of education. These approaches and methods come under different labels such as study-circle, active methods, learning by doing in small groups, etc. (MTUC nd-a). In practice, all these approaches emphasise group discussion of pre-determined topics. Apart from role-plays, the most common method is small group discussion, with formulated guidelines

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[12] The information on this case is acquired in the first and second phase of my fieldwork, from May 1991 to February 1992. It is largely drawn from (i) my own observation in various MTUC and EIWU education seminars and training workshops conducted from the period of June 1991 to September 1991, (ii) unpublished records kept in the MTUC library and by the MTUC Education Oficer, and (ii) interviews with the MTUC Education Officer, fifteen trade union officials, two former FES residential representatives to Malaysia, current and ex-officials of MTUC-Women's Section and former participants of MTUC's education programes.

on the tasks required, accompanied by questions to guide the discussion and to elicit participants' views (interview with MTUC Education Oficer, July 1991). The practice of these methods is commonly refered to as participatory and participant centred. An absence of a women's perspective is clearly reflected in all levels of trade union education including those that were organised by the women's sections.

.. .. MTUC-Education Committee .. ..

MTUC, through its Education Committee, is the main provider of education to all its affiliates. The general policy is for the national centre to provide training to national leaders and offer courses on specialised topics like health and safety (interview with MTUC Education Oficer, July 1991). The divisions[13] are supposed to train branch leaders and worksite committee members. Individual member unions are supposed to undertake the responsibility of educating their rank-and-file. Due to concentration and overload on grievance handling, shortage of funds and personnel, most affiliated unions do not and are not in a position to conduct their own education programmes.

Apart from an official policy (since 1978) of reserving 20 percent of places to women with the aim of promoting women's integration into the trade union movement, no other support mechanisms or forms of encouragement are made to enlist women's participation (MTUC 1978). Very often, even this percentage which is by no means a proportional representation in any way, is rarely fulfilled. The education officer told me that this quota was difficult to fill as most unions would only send committee members who were mostly men. One of the women whom I had interviewed told me that she found herself attending practically every course as

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[13] MTUC has five divisions at the regional level.

she was the only woman in the worksite committee willing to attend the courses. On the other hand, some of the men officials complained that she was attending too many courses! Rohana and Lochhead (1988) found that even when women participated it was mainly in the basic courses and it was unlikely that ordinary members would get to attend any courses at all.

Courses that were offered vary in length, content and level and are open to men and women through nominations by their respective unions. Over the years, the courses have been classified as basic, intermediate, advanced, specialised, skills training and seminars/symposiums on current labour issues (MTUC Education File, 1990/1991). The primary objective of these programmes was directed at leadership training, which is practised as equipping elected officials with knowledge and skills in trade unionism. The more common topics were information about the employment ordinance, the various industrial relations Acts and the procedures required in their implementation. Topics pertaining to women's conditions and position are absent, not to mention a woman's perspective to them. At most is the recurring topic on women's low participation in trade unions, which is frequently talked about but not addressed concretely in terms of follow-up action.

Although there is recognition of the use of active participatory methods and a 'hands-on' learning of practical skills to give participants confidence in their role as trade unionists, the most common approach is still the 'talk and talk' (not even chalk and talk) method accompanied by a written handout (Rohana & Lochhead 1988). Use of audiovisual aids like the overhead projector is being encouraged but seldom used. Questions and answers after lectures and small group discussions following a set of guide questions are taken to mean participation, irrespective of how

the individuals in the group take part or do not take part in the discussions. Because of its adherence to an unchanged pattern with no new input irrespective of course structure, content or methods in the past 20 years, trade union education in Malaysia has been criticised as 'stepping on the same ground' by a former FES residential representative in Malaysia in the 1970s (interview, October 1991). There is now a more systematic training on the use of active participatory methods like group discussions, role plays, panel discussions, case studies, mock sessions and group visits and the development of local resource materials through a series of 'train the trainers' programmes, like the collboration with MTUC/ICFTU and APRO LO/FTF.

.. .. Worksite Committees .. ..

Worksite unions seldom undertake education for its rank-and-file independently (discussions with worksite union officals attending MTUC/ICFTU - APRO LO/FTF 'Train the Trainers' Program, May and June 1991). In a random survey of 20 unions[14], 10 unions replied that they organised occasional educational activities for their women members. Contents were on rights and responsibilities of members, functions and roles of unions, labour laws, health and safety. Most of these programmes were study-circles, initiated and funded by their ITS. However, none of them had undertaken any programmes specifically for its women members. The reasons for not doing so ranged from the belief that there was no need to as the issues were the same for men and for women, no awareness of the need, no request and interest from the women.

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[14] This is from my questionnaire survey of workers' education undertaken by trade unions. The sample came from participants of the MTUC-LO-FTF 'Training of Trainers' and the IMF-MC 'Leadership Training Course', over the months of May to August 1991.

.. .. MTUC-Women's Section .. ..

Even though the MTUC Women's Section was established in 1968 (Rohana 1997), it was not until the late-seventies that it started seminars for its members (interview with former FES Represntative to Malaysia, October 1991). However, these programmes were geared towards the middle-class-working women like nurses, teachers and public services clerical staff which constituted the majority of its female membership then. It was only from the 1980s as more manufacturing industries were unionised and with direct financial support from ICFTU-APRO that factory women became participants in its programmes. It is the main provider of training and education programmes for unionised women workers.

While all union education programmes were directed at workers as union members or officials, they are generally not structured or tailored to the situated needs of women workers. Since unions cater largely for members and from a rather narrow trade union perspective of training for functional leadership, most of the programmes are limited in scope, content and coverage. If any of these are directed at women, it is concerned with imparting knowledge and skills relating to unionism and integrating women into trade unions rather than evolving programmes which cater to their needs and interests (Rohana & Lochhead 1988). Because of the overall lack of resources, most of these programmes are targeted at those holding positions rather than the general membership. By virtue of the current low level of women's leadership in Malaysian trade unions, very few women know of or qualify for participation. Thus, even among those unionised, very few women get access to, not to mention the mass of factory women who are predominantly not unionised (interview with former Vice-Chairperson of MTUC Women's Section, January 1992).

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.. .. International Labour Organisations and ITS .. ..

Various international and international labour organisations like FES, CTUC, ICFTU-APRO, ILO and LO-Norway are also sponsoring programmes for women to increase their participation and leadership (Record File on Seminars for Women, nd). From a needs assessment workshop in 1989, CTUC extended a training programme for women trade unionists to produce a reference manual for women educators in unions (interview with Chairperson of MTUC Women's Section, September 1991). Since the mid-80s, the Women and Youth programme of ICFTU-APRO has periodically sponsored training programmes for women educators (see MTUC 1984 to 1990).

As part of a larger MTUC-FES project on 'issues related to the participation of women in trade unions', a training course on 'promoting women's participation in trade unions' using the Electrical Industry Workers Union (EIWU) was conducted in 1988 (Rohana & Lochhead 1988). Unlike previous trade union programmes, the course was not a one-off event but was structured to build on the learning of each workshop over a period of time. The facilitation paid attention to group awareness and development, drawing on the element of personal sharing and relating the respective discussions to the participants individually. A more varied set of experiential methods was used to stimulate the interest and connect the issues to participants' experiences. From the workshop, the idea of a women's committee was established. However the attempt did not even have sufficient time to take the idea beyond its exploratory stage before the union's secretary-general decided that some of the women were 'turning rebellious' and terminated the group (interview with

workshop participant and Secretary-General of EIWU, August 1991). Thus, the beginning and end of an attempt at women's education in trade unions in Malaysia.

The ILO has conducted an education project 'on training the trainers' to promote women's participation in unions in 3 industries -- textiles, electronics and hotel. Malaysia was one of the participating countries. Its approach was to 'train trainers' (men and women) who could conduct similar programmes in their respective unions. Men and women from these industries were guided through participatory planning workshops to develop a training programme, which they would then conduct for another group of participants from their industry. It was hoped that this would create a spin-off effect onto the shopfloor to increase rank-and-file participation (interview with Project Co-ordinator and a Project participant, September 1991).

An increasing number of ITS are funding their Malaysian members to conduct in-house programmes. However these programmes are not gender differentiated, though more of them are sponsoring conferences for women as a result of global gender awareness.

Community-Based Informal Groups[15]

These are small groupings of individual women who are drawn together by a common interest fostered by the organising efforts of women activists. Informal groups are mobilised by individual activists who are involved in grassroots

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[15] Information for this case is drawn from dialogical reflective talking with three women activists and five women workers involved in informal groups. Knowledge of this work was also derived from my past collaboration with some of these groups. It is because of my activist friendship with them that the details were shared. The real identities are changed to retain confidentiality.

community work, usually in and around squatter communities[16] where many of the factory women reside. Though informal and relatively small in size, members of informal groups are encouraged to reach out to women in other localities and factories so that a wider circle of friendship and influence can be generated by each group.

Groups tend to be loosely structured without official identity or anyone taking a formal position. Where their existence is known or has to be legitimised they rationalised their coming together to learn something useful or functional like a literacy class. They operate inconspicuously[17] and are generally very cautious because of the government's vigilance against any form of collective activity which is interpreted as mobilising dissidence and organised protest. While the unofficial status and informal nature of such groups allow for fluid entry and exit as preferred by members without committing them indefinitely (which is a deterrent) they invite a strong suspicion from authorities and posed as a constant threat hanging over the organisers. Such fears also tend to discourage the participation of more women.

Membership is fluid and informal, determined by one's willingness of participation. Membership of the groups rarely remains the same all the time. The changes signify its transition from a group of individual women to the development of a working group. In fact it is the flexibility of such groups to adapt according to the needs and situation of its members that renders it its usefulness and continuation. Each group develops its own objectives and activities separately to conscientise and build the commitment of its members. Values of co-operation, mutual support and

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[16] As illegal occupants these groups do not enjoy basic infrastructure and amenitites.

[17] Groups which are not officially registered or linked to any formal organisations are regarded as subversive and illegal by the state.

concern, service and responsibility to others are some of the qualities consciously inculcated. Some collaboration between groups had occurred, almost always initiated by the activists.

The nature and educational focus of these groups often change with time. Sometimes a "particular group fizzled out to give birth to another group" (interview with Rose, November 1991). For example, one of these informal groups spanned over a couple of years which first started as an English class, then focused onto occupational hazards when some of its members were affected by a chemical exposure at work. It then developed into an action group to form a union and became dissipated when they were retrenched.

The life span of each group depends on how the organiser can sustain interest and members' ability to bring their friends. The organiser's or group's capacity in supporting the needs of members has been found to be crucial in captivating their interest in the group. Most of these groups do not seem to have expanded very much. The scope in terms of area coverage, number of women involved and the number of groups remains relatively small. Yet this is a commendable effort given the extent of resistance by men in the community against women coming out and interacting as a group; and political surveillance against groups which are not directly linked to established organisations.

.. .. The initiators .. ..

Activists come from outside the community. Though they often do not come in as representatives or members of specific organisations, they themselves are personally linked to some organisational base or inspired by certain beliefs and values. They are motivated by a commitment to work for a more just and equal

society, especially for women "to achieve freedom and independence, and for the women workers to be of service to other women who are in similar situations" (interview with Rebecca, November 1991). They are drawn to women workers because of the endemic needs and problems women workers encounter in their families and in the community. Not just workplace issues - these are often considered to be less severely felt by the women compared to the pressing demands upon them as working mothers. Their collective personal experiences of low self-worth, pain and sufferings, in particular their subordinated position in their homes and in the community. Though the groups are usually concerned with immediate practical needs of daily-life problems, the activists are guided by very clear visions of wanting to see a movement who are liberated from their daily bondage "to live in freedom, dignity and independence" (interview with Rose, December 1991). They see their work as providing ongoing leadership on issues affecting their lives be it their family, community or work place. They hope that the women will "become change agents themselves, to facilitate the same process as they have experienced in the group for other women in similar situations".

The activist's identity and roles develop from that of a social worker to a concerned friend, rather than as someone coming in with the aim to educate or organise specifically. She plays a critical facilitating role in bringing and holding the group together as well as steering it into a spiral of collective activity, action and reflection - the fundamental basis of learning, education and organising in these groups.

For the women themselves, motivation is not so clearly formulated. They change and develop over time, depending on how they feel part of and ownership of

the group, and how long they have been involved. They are first attracted by the warmth and friendship of the activist and members of the group which offer them support and recognition. But over time, especially for those who have been involved longer, they also express concern for other women and are inspired to be of service to other women. They then become leaders to other women without being institutionalised as leaders. They continue to play this role at their workplace, in their extended family and in the community where they reside.

.. .. How are the groups formed? .. ..

Informal groups are not necessarily formed exclusively or explicitly for women workers from the outset. They are formed through contacts established in the community. Setting up a women workers' group take a lot of time of patient befriending. nuturance and even a longer period of group building and sustenance is necessary before any group activities can be introduced. At the beginning it is the organiser's keeness to want the women to come together rather than the women themselves who appear to prefer to be left alone.

The group may be formed through organising for a set of community needs in a specific locality. Rebecca recalled how she started an informal group with factory girls in a squatter area where she was establishing a weekly health clinic and later a savings-and-loan scheme. She recalled,

> "The group developed into a women workers group because it was mainly the women who responded and were more committed to each other. They were more prepared to be part of a group. The men - they could get involved in a specific set of activities but they do not have the staying interest to come together as an ongoing group."

Another common entry is collaborating with and working through existing community activities like tuition or kindergarten classes. Where they do not exist,

the establishment of these classes is often used to gain acceptance and legitimacy of the organiser. Pre-school and tuition classes for children are popularly requested by mothers. As mothers, children are their preoccupation and hope. The desire for their children to have a better future is very strong motivation to persuade mothers to come together despite constraints of time and a general sanction against women gathering together. Organisers who want to reach out to working mothers and find it difficult to get response have found it rather effective to go through organising for the needs of their children first. Irrespective of whether mobilising the women to organise and manage the class for their children or through discussing their children's progress, etc., these entry activities have led to and legitimised women to come together to learn something for themselves as well. In many cases this is how programmes for women are started - either as separate group activities or arising from organising for their children's tuition classes.

The following example describes the formation of a literacy class for factory women through tuition classes set up for their children. The tuition class provided a justification for home visits to discuss children's performance. Parents were encouraged to visit the class to see for themselves and were contacted to get feedback of their children's progress. Those who took time to respond were usually mothers. They expressed that they do not know what to make out of their children's report cards except that the red marks means failure (in one situation the mother recounted that for a while she believed and was told by her son that a red mark means outstanding performance and she was very happy that her son was getting records of outstanding performance all the time!). Through these interactions there emerged a common situation wherein mothers expressed they do not have time to supervise their

children nor know how to help their children because they do not know how to read or write themselves. They responded very positively to the suggestion of a literacy class and even added that they were keen to learn how to sign their names. Their children were often ashamed that they could only put a thumbprint to their report cards.

In another situation, the activist was interested to work with women specifically. She was part of a team who uses the approach of community organising (Narciso-Apuan 1988) to mobilise squatters around issues (usually on eviction and amenities) that affect them, and through this process to unite the people to fight for their rights. She identified a woman who was friendly and more receptive to her. She then befriended her sufficiently and got her to introduce other friends through home visiting. Most of them were workmates in the same factory or in neighbouring factories. Most of the contacts were made through her and first-time visits were made with someone who knew the person as a kind of 'guarantor introduction' to reduce suspicion.

This phase of building contact and establishing rapport and generating interest and reason to come together is also a period of "listening to the women, finding out more about them, their friends, to know the women as persons, their families and problems. This is also a period for building friendship and trust. Establishing friendship must take ground first, only then can trust be built to create the foundation for working together", Peng explained. This is estimated to take at least a period of three to six months, and is referred to as "preliminary social investigation". Not only were conditions of the women noted, the contexts of the whole community, especially its power structure and politics has to be understood in order to know how to navigate

the formation of the group. The necessity of home visiting to keep in touch continues right through the life of the group. However, its role and intensity varies at different phases of the group's life.

Through casual conversation during home-visits concerns of the women are identified. For these visits not to be flowing aimlessly the activist has to be very alert and attentive all the time to use what was said by the women as starting points to rally interest to come together as a group. During home-visits talking is the arena where information and awareness can be fostered. The women are being assisted in their problems individually, by doing things with a particular woman as a demonstrated case so that she herself witnessed and learnt from the steps involved. Through this helping process mutual trust is further enhanced. The activist play a very sensitive role as a supportive friend to lend a listening ear, often helping her to solve specific problems and persuading her to come together as a group. Most important of all she must not instill any guilt that they are useless or not doing anything. Indeed the activist has to take on a very positive disposition and to emit a sense of 'possibleness' to the very pervasive attitude of 'no point - nothing will change' amongst the women. This period of one to one home visiting, sometimes bringing along someone to meet someone who has been mentioned in a previous visit helps to connect the women prior to coming together as a group. It helps ease the unfamiliarity and awkwardness of being in a totally new group, and the reluctance of coming to one. Most of the women are generally hesitant to come to a group if they do not know anyone there already.

.. .. What do they do? .. ..

An activity is collectively identified to bond the interest of the group and focus their attention. Often this is undertaken as an English or literacy class. Learning English is an easily acceptable legitimate reason which is not regarded as subversive or overtly threatening to the women or to the men, though barriers to women's own perceptions of the irrelevance and their incapacity to learn has to be overcome first. A more important value from this is the coming together as a group to create a space for the women to talk, relate and interact with each other. The group provides the forum for learning through interaction and undertaking activities and reflecting on them.

Literacy classes are not confined to writing and reading only. "Literacy is used to conscientise the women about themselves and the situations they are in", Rebecca explained. Lots of fun and talking about the contexts of the words in their lives take place in the lessons. The group provides a space for them to talk and open up ideas to each other. This is a new experience to most of them. The organiser explained that they do not go straight into writing but emphasise familiarisation of the alphabet and getting over the awkwardness of not even knowing how to hold a pen comfortably. This is done by first writing with their fingers on the ground (raw sand usually) and with different parts of their body. This would evoke lots of laughter, often laughing away their awkwardness to reduce some of the anxieties about learning, which they always perceive as beyond them, having little formal education and too dense for any studying. The alphabets were then associated with words relevant to their lives. The women are encouraged to talk about their experiences in relation to that particular word before any writing of it. For example, for alphabet

W, the word 'water' was identified. Then discussion about how they got their water[18], the problems and conflicts they encounter around it - like why is there so much hostility and fighting among the women over water. How water from the well has to be boiled before drinking, etc. became the basis for information and knowledge related to daily living. From here not only aspects of functional literacy but the politics implied were also raised and talked about. For example, comparing the reasons why they continue not to have piped water since they have lived there 7 years yet the factories which were built recently in the same vicinity have abundant supply. Sometimes, if the group is ready, the discussion also lead to some action.

In such contexts learning is very much part of a larger process of community organising. Fostering learning among the women has to be preceded and continued by an organising process of bringing them together, generating and sustaining their interest. In fact not only will such a recognition and practice be essential if education for factory women living in squatters is to be feasible but it also demonstrates that education of factory women will have to be integral to their daily lived experiences. Participation in and involvement with the group become a learning process in itself. Education and learning takes place through engaging and reflecting on some concrete activity for those who are involved in the core group.

Learning and conscientisation are grounded on the process of friendship, support and problem solving of members' daily issues of survival and living. Though not necessarily perceived as such, the ways the group operates as a mutual support

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[18] In most squatter areas there is no tap water. They have to use well water or collect water from public standpipes.

group provide a pragmatic approach to learning based on reflection of action undertaken by its participants.

Over time a regular core is 'trained' to provide leadership and energy to the group's continuance, through a 'self-selection' process of interest and willingness to be actively involved and be part of the group. A lot of energies and time of the activist is devoted to encouraging and supporting these women to be active members. Training is through learning to undertake certain responsibilities to do things which the group has agreed on, and discussing and reflecting with the group the outcomes, difficulties, etc. Leadership is practised as the responsibility to make things happen. Through this process of involvement the women develop confidence and self-esteem by doing and seeing that she is capable and/or have effect. Her capabilities and latent potentials are brought out by her active involvement in using her knowledge, skills and common sense rather than through a structured program on leadership skills. She discovers her strength, potential and abilities, her own self-worth in the process. This process leads to her discovering about herself, a redefinition of herself, instead of what others had made out of her. The leadership formation leads to her own self definition of herself. Leadership formation of this nature is therefore an important education strategy for women's empowerment. This process of leadership as in learning to take responsibility to make things happen is not only directed at self development or the individual taking up frontline positions of power and decision making for others but instead reaches out in service to other women.

Over time, two layers of participation and commitment develop in the group. Peng described this as the 'outer and inner circle'. The inner circle is essentially the regular core group, or the class in some situations. It is not a group in itself but aims

to reach out to the outer circle - the larger group of women who are not so active or who do not come to the class. Each member in the inner circle is encouraged to have her own set of activities and/or contacts that she can give support to. As the underlying assumption behind this approach is learning by doing, the activist works with and through the inner circle to organise activities for the outer circle. Through participation in the class/inner circle the women are moved into another level of action and group activity. The types of activities vary, ranging from organising outings to educational forums. Undertaking tasks and responsibilities in these activities is leadership training for members of the inner circle.

An example of such an activity is a half-day programme on child abuse. It was observed that many of the children were frequently beaten by their parents as a way to discipline them. At the inner circle gathering a case where a little boy was cut by a kitchen knife as disciplinary action was recounted: instead of doing some housework as instructed by his mother he went to watch television. Members talked about the problem and informed that this was a very pervasive problem in the community. Most mothers have problems about their children's disobedience but did not dare say they were unable to cope with it. At this point the activist suggested organising a programme for the community. After some discussion and prompting by the organiser they agreed on a talk-cum-dialogue and drama. The inner circle was involved in organising and preparing for the event, from chairing the programme to making refreshments and other arrangements. Children from the tuition class of another squatter area presented a drama on child abuse as they had experienced it at home and in school. A facilitator then used the drama to engage the participants in reviewing the drama in relation to their own lived experiences followed by some of

them re-enacting how they should have reacted as parents. The activist recounted that after this successful event the inner circle became more accepted and legitimate in the eye of the community. Because they were able to do well in their tasks like preparing the food, etc., they were able to take pride in what they did. The usefulness of the group gained recognition. Women in the outer circle became more friendly.

The informal group is not an end in itself. It is an approach in conscientising women in squatter communities and for the women to be involved in organising for their and the community's needs. It generates different planes of learning and action for the different groups of women (sometimes including men also) in the community. Learning takes place through the specific contexts and contents of the class, issues and discussions undertaken in the group, the process of taking individual and group action, and reflecting on these actions together. The women learn by coming together as a group and by doing something for other women.

5.4   CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a detailed overview and account of educational practices in the past three decades. Changes over this period were very much influenced by international development action, especially by activities emanating from the International Decade for Women. By the 1990s, the focus in women workers' education has evolved from welfare concerns and workers's rights to include their problems and needs as working women. The influence of women's perspectives further brought considerable shifts to incorporate the implications of women's practical and strategic needs into educational work among woman-orientated groups.

However, most educational programmes of unions and social groups continue to be formulated from the perspective of sponsors or providers and in terms of a 'deficit model' (Wynne 1988). Assumed ignorance in relation to the women's role as workers and home-makers, and assumed deficiency in terms of loose morals, underlie the practice of education as information, motivation and chastisement among social groups and trade unions. Their aims are largely to equip the women morally and functionally to behave in pre-defined ways, or to impart awareness of their responsibilities and rights as workers, and to convey the benefits of unionisation. The next chapter will undertake a critical analysis to identify the neglected dimensions in factory women's education in Malaysia.

Chapter Six

GAPS IN CURRENT PRACTICE

"Much of the oppression of women takes place 'in private' in areas of life considered 'personal'. The causes of that oppression are social and economic, but these causes can only be revealed and confronted when women challenge the assumptions of their personal life .. "

(Wainwright 1980:13)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter describes the various forms of educational work for/with factory women in Malaysia. It focused on the organisational contexts of provision, delineating how most of the programmes are constructed from and circumscribed by organisational ideologies and practices or the agenda of sponsors. As exemplified in the previous chapter, unions and social groups are the key providers of educational work for factory women. While their aims and approaches may differ, their overall emphases are not very different. Both tend to be concerned with visible material conditions and behavioural traits.

This chapter is a critical review of the kinds of educational work described in chapter five and aims to identify gaps in current practice. The first part reviews unions as providers. The second part analyses the work of social groups. The third part summaries the neglected dimensions in current educational practice. The final part highlights the need to re-frame educational work for women's empowerment.

6.2 UNIONS AS PROVIDERS

Unions operate from their primary goals of unionisation and increasing membership. Their constituencies are members. Thus, the majority of factory women who are not unionised are not within their ambit. The primary objective of education is institution-building of the union and its maintenance as a workers' (read men) organisation. As a traditional and predominantly male organisation the modus operandi is gender-blind. Unions tend to be patriarchal and derogatory of women's conditions and ways, subjecting women to varied forms of devaluation, subordination and control. As described in the MTUC-Women's Section in chapter five, education programmes for women focused on increasing their participation and leadership (meaning, to hold positions as deemed appropriate by male leaders) in unions. Information about rights and leadership formation dominated the curricula. When the problems of working women were recognised, this did not extend beyond the conflicting demands of home and work (Rohana & Lochhead 1988). Acknowledgement of the needs of women were largely restricted to the realm of reproduction and home-making. Even then these are confined to practical gendered needs of child-care and maternity leave, ignoring a wide spectrum of personal implications from these responsibilities and experiences of emotional subordination. Women's emotional sufferings and the psychological effects arising from their position as subjugated persons bear no recognition and are not featured in the education agenda.

Women are treated as target beneficiaries and are seldom consulted about or involved in the design of programmes by trade unions. Even where women's participation is sought like the case of programmes organised by the MTUC-Women's

Section, organisational goals and priorities take precedence in structuring the curricula. Thus, a disjuncture exists between the contents and objectives of educational programmes and participants' personally-felt concerns. In addition, organisational practices and programmes tend to deny participants the space and authority to talk about their experiences. Far from gaining a voice and being allowed to take control of their lives, the women are often silenced or made to feel stupid, with both stereotypes and the reinforcement of the experience of subjugation. This is particularly so in the case of unions which are not only gender-blind but also tend to be patriarchal and derisive of women's ways.

Although many trade union programmes emphasise the importance of participation, they ignore the practical obstacles and internalised intimations of inferiority (Bartky 1990) that make participation difficult. When women workers do not respond as expected they are blamed as "apathetic, unmotivated, unwilling" (interview with trade unionist, February 1992). Current pedagogical practices rarely validate women's subjectivities, their physical exhaustion and the disabling effects of being eternally in subordinate positions. Many women agree that they should and would like to participate actively but feel helpless about their lack of confidence to do so[1] (Chan 1991).

6.3 SOCIAL GROUPS AS PROVIDERS

Social groups whose constituency include factory women workers are of two kinds in Malaysia, welfare organisations and women-identified grassroots groups. As

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[1] Most factory women in Malaysia do not have the experience of relating to or speaking out in groups.

illustrated by the case examples and the historical overview in chapter five, their approaches and agendas differ. Welfare organisations view factory women as deficient, vulnerable, sexually gullible, needy of help and guidance. Programs undertaken by the YWCA, YWCEP and YWEP were usually conducted on the assumption that factory women are ignorant and lacking morals, exposure, skills and knowledge. They focused on behavioural (moral) change and skills development in housekeeping and feminine vocational skills like typing and dressmaking. Gender roles and steoreotypes are reinforced. Instead of breaking myths and derogatory images of factory women, the educational work perpectuate them.

Women-identified groups like the Community-Based Informal Groups and Friends of Women, are more aware of the gendered exploitation and varied facets of factory women's lives. Factory women were regarded as exploited, subordinated and isolated working class women. Their programmes focus on consciousness-raising about class exploitation and gender subordination, their rights and issues affecting them at work and in the community. Educational goals are aimed at women's empowerment. Education is practised as awareness-raising about the exploitation and subordination of women. Education is integrated into organising for daily survival to develop confidence, knowledge, critical consciousness and leadership through 'learning by doing and by being involved'. Learning is assumed to be acquired through interaction, participation, partaking in decision-making and taking responsibility in the various activities (see case study on community-based informal groups in chapter five). The primary objective of education is to enable the women organise for their immediate practical needs and interests. The assumption is that it is only when the women are organised that they will have any power, and that they

will become politicised in the process of mobilising for action.

These groups aim to empower factory women by conscientising, mobilising and supporting them to take charge of their lives in private and public spheres, be it at work, in their own community or at home. Empowerment is about collective problem-solving and organisation to defend and advocate for their rights. This is achieved through a combination of informal education, support and problem-solving activities directed at the formation of an organisation. The struggle here is an external political struggle. Struggle at the individual personal level against feelings of powerlessness and helplessness tend to be neglected. Personal individual processes are subsumed in pursuit of collective organisational goals. It is assumed here that difficulties and powerlessness felt subjectively would be overcome by active involvement (Chan 1991).

Activists in WEC, FOW, WWAG and WF are more conscious about the need to start from the issues, situation and interests of the women themselves. However, only certain aspects of factory women's lives are reckoned in their educational work - their common objective material conditions. Factory women's subjectivities - the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions that make up their sense of themselves, their relation to the world and their ability (and inability) to act in that world are not addressed. Moreover, focusing on interest activities like in the YWCEP and WWAG, to attract and sustain participation have tended to reinforce stereotypes of traditional femininity and roles like in the case of the welfare organisations.

Grassroots groups like the community-based inforaml groups, WEC, FOW and WF have a woman-centred approach. However, this took the form of a women-only

space for dealing with practical, mainly material needs. They rarely recognised the subjectivities of the women, their individual personal encounters and feelings, their differences and diversity. Women workers were treated as a homogeneous category. Personally-felt subordination and its effects were not tackled. Emotional support was rendered when needed (see description in WEC and the community-based informal groups in chapter five). However feelings and emotions were not part of the educational thrust. The psychological and practical constraints on women were noted but not taken on board systematically in the pedagogy. Obstacles to women's learning and participation, how they make sense of their experiences were not discerned as educational work. Women's attributes, their privileged knowledge and ways of being were seldom tapped as pedagogical tools. For example, women's capacity to listen with empathy was hardly drawn upon as a resource. Women's strength and sensibilities were not recognised or mobilised for their own learning and mutual support. Activities and pedagogies aimed at developing a consciousness of the politics of gender are rare.

As to my own work, it had focused predominantly on the objective conditions of women workers up to the late eighties, until I was exposed to writings on popular education and feminism which alerted me to the need to start from women's lived experiences and the incorporation of gynocentric values and practices. Programmes I had conducted in the YWCEP, YWEP and WEC were aimed at fostering awareness about exploitation, rights and the need to be organised collectively. I concentrated on cognitive aspects -- equipping the women with the orientation, confidence, analytical and action-oriented skills essential for committed involvement.

My mistake was to aim at conscientisation for purposes of building a power

or organisational base. I did not take into account sufficiently the women's experiences of powerlessness, inferiority and the disempowering experiences that had disabled them (see Chan 199). Personally lived experiences were ignored in pursuit of collective goals. I overlooked the internalised stereotypes, myths, feelings and beliefs which numb the agency of individual factory women. The learning that could be generated from daily experiences was not invoked to aid in the necessary processes of self-validation and empowerment.

I was aware of reluctance and passivity among the women, aware of the existence of a wealth of unspoken feelings, thoughts and experiences among them, but I did not know what to do about them. This was not an issue of concern among activist colleagues so I did not think it warranted special attention. In fact, I feared that dealing with personal situations might promote individualism and self-centredness. I also feared that I would be labelled 'unprogressive'. I assumed that if the women could be mobilised to be actively involved they would overcome their habits of passivity and silence in due course.

6.4   THE NEGLECTED DIMENSIONS

To sum up, gaps in current educational practice can be problematised from the above analysis. Current practice rarely focuses on or relates to the personally felt pains of factory women in their emotional subordination, even though there has been much concern about their situation of exploitation and oppression. So far, the emphasis is on conscientisation against economic exploitation and recently some attention on gender equality. Economic and social subordination are addressed but not their experienced emotional subordination, yet it is an area of utmost concern

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from the women's standpoints, as is evident from their narratives (see chapter seven). Educational and organisational practices tend to overlook or silence the authoritativeness of factory women's own voices and lived experiences, and to perpetuate their feelings of inadequacy, even with well-intentioned efforts. Most educational efforts are constructed from providers' and sponsors' understanding of the purposes in educational work and what factory women ought to know and should be, rather than catering to the varied multi-dimensions of their experienced realities. The inadequacy of current educational practice can be summarised as (i) the neglect of lived experiences and experienced feelings, especially factory women's subjectivities, (ii) negative, stereotypes and limited conceptions of factory women, and (iii) limited conceptualisation of educational work.

6.5   RE-FRAMING EDUCATIONAL WORK WITH FACTORY WOMEN

In view of what has been said above, re-visioning educational work for women's empowerment, and not just organsing for rights is essential. This reframes the meaning, content and method of education and places factory women's lived experiences centrally on the education agenda.   Such an approach requires an understanding of factory women's experiences, especially their lived experiences which may not be so visible.

What are the various facets and dimensions of factory women's lived experiences?   It is important not to focus on experiences interpreted by others or on their visible objective material conditions only but instead what are their personally lived experiences and experienced feelings from their own standpoints?   In particular experiences that have been repressed, silenced or rendered invisible.   What about

experiences that are different, or even common, yet problematic? How do these realities affect their subjectivities and well-being? How can their subjectivities in terms of self-perceptions, well-being, ways of being (knowing-relating-doing) be understood and incorporated into the educational work? How can educational endeavours uncover and respond to factory women's subjective experiences and subjectivities? How can these experiences and conditions constitute the contents of educational work? These are the questions that framed the attempted participatory research component of this research.

Doing education is usually confined to the micro-dynamics of the process and content between learners and facilitators in a given space and specific time. Educational work is usually taken to refer only to the named and planned event of teaching-learning in the presence of teachers or facilitators. Learning from the experience of involvement and participation not named as educational is usually overlooked. Educational work with factory women in Malaysia does not only entail, and cannot be restricted to what happens within the space and time of the educational event, or only to what is conventionally regarded as education. Before any form of education can take place, outreach and organising sustained follow-up support have to be undertaken to garner interest, as exemplified in the case examples of chapter five. Factory women in Malaysia are diverse and scattered in their residence. They cannot be reached or brought together very easily. They may be located in the factories. but getting access to them and sustaining their interest is not easy. This is even made more difficult by practical constraints of dispersed geographical residence, different work schedules and absence of an organisation or representative body. Political surveillance and management control are also very real deterrents.

Organising this initial reachout is a vital part of doing educational work.

Factory women's objective and subjective contexts have to be considered in the formulation of appropriate empowering education. Who are the factory women? What is known about them? How are their lives structured? How are they organised? What attracts their attention and interest? How do they feel about learning and coming together? What inhibits their participation? What is learning to them? What political, socio-cultural and practical constraints govern their movements? What are the macro economic-socio-political contexts that raise issues and implications for their lives? Given these contexts and impediments what are the essential considerations in the constitution of the educational practice?

Delineating the obstacles and political forces that circumscribe education for social change in Malaysia is therefore fundamental in strategizing education for factory women's empowerment. What are we up against in the conduct of educational work with factory women? What are the hegemonic forces that dictate the mind-set and lives of the women? What is the structural and social position of factory women in Malaysia? What are their needs, interests, conditions and well-being, etc.? How can educational work be opportunities to enable factory women understand themselves, their experiences and feelings from their own standpoints in ways that can enhance their capacities and potential? What educational methodologies and techniques can evoke the expressions of their feelings and silences, engage them into understanding and constructing empowering images of themselves? Likewise the roles, skills and perspectives of facilitators affect the ways educational programmes are conducted. Insights to some of these questions will be explored in chapter eight in relation to findings from this research about education for factory women's

empowerment.

6.6   CONCLUSION

Only certain aspects of factory women's experiences are taken into account in current educational work: their common objective material conditions. The subjective emotional states: the disabling effects of subordination, the myths, stereotypes, internalised intimations of inferiorty and emotional injury, the psychological and practical obstacles to participation and decision-making that numb the agency of individuals are not problematised in educational endeavours. This chapter has set out the rationale for understanding factory women's personally lived experiences and subjectivities and the need to address them in and as educational work. The next chapter explores how this can be done.

Chapter Seven

STORY-TELLING-SHARING AS EDUCATION

".. part of every feminist program must involve a process of feminist education that allows women to develop - some would say, reclaim - a self-integrity and self-worth that will provide each of us with the psychological resources we need to develop full self-realisation. "

(Ferguson 1992:94)

7.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores the undertaking of educational work which commences from the women's lived experiences and subjectivities. It explores how educational work can enable women unpack and break through their numbness through the problematic potential of their lived experiences and experienced feelings. It records the observations of an experiment designed to address personal experiences and feelings in and as educational work. It also documents the factory women's stories and systematises what takes place as the women talk about their pain and try to make sense of their experiences and feelings. In this chapter, the first part explains the background to using personal narratives and small groups as spaces to unearth the factory women's suppressed experiences. The stories of the women which unfolded in the sessions are recorded in the second part. The final part elucidates the processes of the sessions and illustrate how story-telling-sharing in small groups is an educational process.

7.2 PERSONAL NARRATIVES and SMALL GROUPS as EDUCATIONAL SPACES

A series of research-education sessions was undertaken as a participatory research collaboration with the union of a multinational factory fof a period of five months, from March to July 1992. Personal narratives (story-telling-sharing) and popular eduction methods were used in the research-education sessions to evoke reflexivity: recollection, expression, reflection and synthesis. This popular education methodology (see, for example, Arnold et al. 1991; Walters & Manicom 1996) was informed by a feminist perspective which acknowledges the central importance of women's lived experiences and subjectivities.

Altogether 18 all-women small group sessions were conducted, including a follow-up workshop for group leaders/co-leaders; and a one-day leadership training workshop. Except for the one-day training workshop, which was conducted in an outside venue, all sessions were held within the factory compound. Sessions were held immediately after the morning-shift, between 3-7pm. On an average, each session lasted for three and a half-hours with an average of twelve to fifteen women attending each meeting. For practical convenience, groups were formed according to language and employment shift. Whenever possible, the union secretary co-facilitated. When she was not available, another female executive member of the union assisted.

My preparation for the workshops included a number of conversations with a number of factory women about their lives. These conversations entailed a process of interactive story-telling and reflective talking (Chan 1991). This entailed collaborative forms of "interaction work" (Thorne et al. 1985:181) where I helped the speaker to draw out other unspoken aspects of her experience by asking questions and

providing active conversational support. These conversations brought to surface hidden feelings and thoughts which would not have emerged in ordinary interviews.

My previous experience with women workers enabled me to be an involved outsider and gave me insights to raise relevant questions. Sharing my own personally experienced difficulties and shortcomings encouraged undefensive self-disclosure from them. The process of talking and exchange with a 'partisan outsider' who can help draw out, dig deeper and explain or suggest connections was found to be reflective and learningful. From feedback later I learnt that they enjoyed the conversations and found them to be educative and meaningful.

At the beginning I could not make headway in the conversation even though I spent hours listening to their stories. Most accounts described their activities - topics they could talk about easily on their own. My awareness about women's suppressed experiences and their hesitation to talk about them helped me focus on figuring out how to get them verbalise their silence. I learnt how to delve into them through these individual personal narratives.

Guided by a perspective of listening to what is not said, I noticed they hardly spoke spontaneously about their feelings, pains and personal viewpoints. Even when asked directly, an embarrassed chuckle, *"tak tahu nak kata apa"* (do not know what to say) or a subdued blank look were usual answers. Reading the silence as saying something and trying to understand why she did not know what to say or found it difficult to speak evolved as a methodology of listening to restrained voices. These responses were in fact consistent with their experiences of repeated denials to express their subjectively-felt views and feelings. It was telling when Yati spurted in exasperation, *"It is not that I do not want to tell you. I find it difficult to express. I*

do not know what to say. I feel bad talking about it. " (dialogical conversation, August 1991).

The breakthrough came in my second conversation with Meng. She brought along chocolates to sell to me. I commented how times were changing: chocolates were now replacing home-made delicacies for our festivals. I then asked how she spends her Chinese New Year. The question brought a floundering silence followed by an outburst of non-stop talking that this is the saddest part of the year - the time for family re-unions. For two hours she 'talked her heart out' about her relationship with her husband and his family, her feelings about her marriage, her humiliation and the anger she was made to feel as a factory worker. At the end she said she was relieved to have told her story: the first time she was articulating feelings she had been harbouring and not supposed to have.

I realised from these conversations that the difficulty of getting women to talk about their lives did not revolve around any desire of theirs to hold back, or issues of confidentiality or privacy, although such risks and hesitation should not be under-estimated. In fact I found that many of them were so burdened and charged emotionally that it was not that difficult to get them to talk. Rather, the difficulty was one of repression and diffusion of feelings and experiences socially constructed as illegitimate. The challenge was therefore to find ways to trigger and precipitate these forbidden and therefore unspeakable feelings and experiences. From this insight emerged the concept of "eliciting talk". Conceptualising it this way helped me focus on the quest for tools and conditions that can provoke and evoke the submerged. As unspeakable feelings and thoughts they were forbidden, least talk about them. We

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need to find ways to help recognise, legitimatise and verbalise the acquiesced feelings and thoughts.

Also influential in shaping the experiment was my exposure to the knowledge accumulated by others in participatory training (Shrivastava 1989), in social work practice (Butler & Wintram 1991), the consciousness-raising groups of the women's movement, feminist pedagogy and popular education. Of particular importance were insights relating to work in small groups and the use of story-telling.

Small-groups and personal narratives provide a structured space, format and method to enlist the women into storying. The communal setting of small groups make possible the discovery that the personal is not a single isolated, individual incident. Links between the individual personal and collective personal can be made, hence legitimising and collectivising individual personal experiences. In my previous work I found that all women's groups have been conducive to fostering experience of partaking, gaining courage to speak and to feel confident. Through the process of listening with the heart (Fisher 1987), supporting and affirming each other members learn to overcome some of the psychological barriers produced by being in subordinate positions (see chapter two of Bartky 1990 for an explication of this). See Chapter Three (3.4) and Chapter Two (2.2) for a review on the use of small groups and the different uses of personal narratives, stories, and storying.

These insights provided a frame and informed the process of my participatory research-education sessions. All-women small groups were organised as educational spaces for eliciting talk and collaborative story-telling-sharing in small groups. I particularly explored techniques for eliciting stories (unpacking silence) about anguish and pain which the women had been made to believe were illegitimate and had

therefore suppressed. Facilitating talk was necessary not only to evoke repressed thoughts and feelings, but also to help make sense of them. These sessions also provided an "emotional space for each woman to look inside herself, a space notably different from day-to-day social interactions and discussions" (Krzowski et al. 1988:201).

Without adhering rigidly to a standardised format, each session covered 3 main areas: (i) an introduction; (ii) uncovering lived experiences and feelings through photo-language[1] or the recollection of incidents of being undermined; and (iii) focused discussion. The introduction established the purpose of the gathering and clarified my role. Group profiling and energising exercises were also introduced so as to relax participants and create a climate conducive for self-disclosure. Stress reduction exercises were incorporated later, when exhaustion and anxiety featured in the stories women told.

The second part of the workshop focused on participants' stories: either the perceptions, feelings or experiences evoked by a picture each women chose, or an account of specific lived experiences. Participants were encouraged to talk about their own emotional and physical well-being. This was followed by a summary and reflection of the experiences and viewpoints raised. The focussed discussions at the end of each workshop examined various dimensions of the self, the women's sense of themselves and to what extent and how this had been constructed by Others. My agenda was to help them validate their conceptions and recognise their feelings and experienced realities in contrast to the negative stereotypes they had internalised. In

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[1] Photo-language is a technique which uses photographs to evoke memories and feelings in the form of story-telling

addition, the women's understanding of the union and its relationship to their lives as workers was discussed, with particular reference to desired educational programs. Subjects for exploration in future sessions were identified from the themes of their narrations.

The heart of the workshops - the 'elicited talk' - is described below.

7.3   RESTRAINED VOICES

Emotional subordination was the recurrent theme in the women's narratives. They spoke of social stigmas, hardships, oppressive relationships, discrimination in the family, husbands' demands and infidelities, work pressure, sexual abuse, the experiences of belittlement from intimates and strangers alike. They told of their pain, shame, anger and helplessness. The extracts below, excerpted from detailed narrations, are representative samples: each voice resonates with many others. They resonate with the sense of seeking, struggling to name, striving to find language for what was repressed and suppressed over the years. My intermittent observations and interpretations are intended to link and contextualize these voices.

As already discussed, women factory workers in Malaysia are automatically targets for ridicule and sexual harassment. They are made to feel that they are promiscuous by virtue of their role as 'factory women' and deserving disparagement. Attempts to disregard and repress such derogation often deepen their feelings of shame and inferiority while, simultaneously, reactions of defence and defiance underlie their silence.

> *"People look down on us. They see us with only one eye (meaning, do not respect). Society 'pandang serong' (look disparagingly) us. They say factory girls are cheap. They fall for any man in the street. .. All*

these talk makes us feel inferior. Even when they are not saying anything I can feel their belittlement from the way they gawk at us."

"Even my own family feels embarrassed by my factory job. I avoid my neighbour so as not to be asked insinuating questions. One day she asked 'you come back almost midnight yesterday and left again so early this morning. What do you actually do?' All I could say was 'work' .. I felt 'malu' (ashamed), defensive, actually disgusted .. I am not what she is maybe thinking."

"Young men whistle as we alight from the factory bus, 'Minah Karen! Tengok, pagi malam pergi, macam perempuan sundal' (look, they go day and night like prostitutes). How to retaliate? You know what kind of characters they are! All creeps! If we retaliate, they may bring their gang to tackle us. We have to use this road everyday. We just pretend not to hear."

While self-righteously accusing factory girls of promiscuity, men are the very ones hounding and intimidating them at bus stops and in back streets. They even encroach into women's residential privacy in search of opportunities of seduction. The women's stories of sexual harassment show how they are made to feel responsible for and shamed by the harassment inflicted on them. Though pervasive, such incidents are endured in silence because of the shame and blame they bring.

"When I first worked here I was very appreciative of my landlord, whom we fondly call 'pakcik' (uncle). I was naive not to have any suspicions when he started coming to my room for chats .. One night, when his wife was not around and other girls were on night shift, he came in as usual to chat but this time he sat very close. As I was cautioning myself I felt his hand on my breast .. I shouted and ran out the back-door .. I was too shaken .. too 'malu' (ashamed) to tell anyone."

Humiliation is not inflicted only by outsiders. Women are also denied respect at home. *"It is very difficult to tell anyone about hurts from your own family. Outsiders cannot know how it hurts."*

"Five years ago, on my first annual leave, I had a quarrel with my brother. He hit my niece for playing in the sun. I tried to stop him but he only shouted at me: 'Who are you to control me? Is this what the factory has taught you?' My mother, instead of reconciling us,

> *reproached me. Such is the fate of girls in Indian families. This brother is much younger than I am. Yet I have to obey him and get his approval for everything since my father's death. Maybe if I were an office clerk I would have a better say."*

Ridicule and abuse even come from their dearest ones, making it difficult to retaliate or disregard the hurt. The result is an obliteration of their sense of themselves, their capabilities and self-esteem. Unpacking and talking through some of these experiences and feelings revealed that such mistreatment is often the cause of women's apparent apathy and lack of self-confidence.

> *"My husband derides me until I am not worth a cent. Not only does he prevent me from participating in neighbourhood activities, he tells others that I am a stupid useless woman, that anything I do will bring chaos. ... How not to feel mad? But if I retaliate, I am no longer a good wife! More ammunition for him to run me down! Better to ignore him than invite more attacks."*

However, even while they are finding the courage to speak of such abuses, women defend their husbands almost in the same breath, blaming themselves and apologising for 'washing dirty linen in public'. Many believe that a good wife should be tolerant and understanding, not complaining against her husband and doing nothing to provoke his anger.

Religion plays a major role in shoring up this socialised guilt, self-censorship, subservience and obedience. *"When we were picketing the police reproached us, saying as good Muslims we should be at home caring for our husbands and children instead of loitering in the streets like prostitutes!"* One woman's husband forbade her to carry on attending the workshops. *"As a Muslim I have to get approval from my husband for everything. Even though the seminars are useful, I cannot attend any more as my husband feels that I am wasting my time and neglecting my duties."*

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When the needs and desires of these women are contradictory to the expectations and desires of others, they are relinquished and dismissed. Over time they adjust by becoming unaware of wanting anything for themselves. Most of their hopes and wishes are defined in relation to family members. In particular, they learn not to expect anything from their husbands although they yearn for support and affection. As one woman put it, *"Without expectation, there is less disappointment and frustration. I try not to expect, to avoid more hurt."*

> *"I dare not say but of course I yearn to have some help from my husband. If only he can show a little attention. This will make me so happy .. I do not mind how hard I have to work. Instead I have to pretend and say that he is such a great guy."*

When the women felt support and empathy from group members, they were able to air their frustrations about their marriages, in particular about the irresponsibility, unreasonable demands and infidelity of their husbands. One woman remarked with bitterness, *"Marriage is like being in a congested, smelly mini-bus at peak time -don't get into it when others are trying to get out. Being married is like digging one's own grave."*

> *"Even at night I can't get a peaceful rest. My husband often comes back late and he still wants to have sex. It is all right for him. He gets up late. I start the day at five a.m. and don't get to lie down till midnight. Then he comes nudging me as I have just fallen asleep."*

> *"If it were not for my two children I would have divorced long ago. Except for the first four months of our marriage, he has shown no concern or consideration for me. At the slightest thing he raises his voice. Very male ego. He has to exert control over me. There is no talk between us. He does not lift a finger in the house. Comes home late and is glued to the television. At this point I don't care any more if there is another woman. Makes no difference whether he is around or not."*

> *"Just after two years of our marriage, my husband returned to his ex-girlfriend. For three years I was only preoccupied to win him back.*

My children were the ones that kept my sanity and helped me persevere. He seems ok now but it can never feel the same."

"I feel very shy and wrong to say this. God forgive me. My husband is very 'gian' (sex maniac). He cannot leave me alone. He wants sex everyday, even when I am on night shift. If I refuse he wallops me. When I cannot take it anymore, I wear a pad. I can only blame myself. I should have heeded the rumours that he already has two wives. Maybe this is my 'rezeki' (fate)."

Despite these miseries, and although in one workshop session all seven married women said they would prefer to be single, many women said it was necessary to have a husband, even if he was shared. They feared the shame and blame they would attract if their husbands left them for other women, and they dreaded the treatment meted out to single women. As one participant observed, *"I have to stick it out and tolerate his nonsense. I take care of the children and all housekeeping expenses. What to do? As single divorced parents we are not accepted by our community and it's even worse for our children."* Another noted, *"As a widow I feel restricted. Other women are suspicious that I am out to tackle their husbands. I feel out of place, inferior in that I am not like them."*

In addition to such marital problems, women are physically strained and emotionally drained by the demands of daily domestic routine, which saps their creativity, patience and initiative. Although regarded as emotionally weak, they must carry the emotional burden of their families, caring for the young and dependent elders and sometimes carrying the sole responsibility of disabled children. One woman spoke of her difficulties with her four-year-old Down's syndrome son:

"I sometimes forget and become so short-tempered at Rahim, especially when I have to work overtime. I am mad with myself for not being patient with him. I try not to do overtime and spend the time with him instead but then I need the money. Taking him out incur more expenses for taxi fare as he cannot walk the distance."

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As if this was not enough, the load and pressure of monotonous but physically tiring work at home and in the factory is enough to cause derangement. One woman described her life as a 'continuous spin of endless chores.'

> *"If not work at home it's factory work. I work till I am 'floating' (meaning dizzy). The men are lucky. I want to be a man in my next life! After the day's work, when they return home, they do not bother any more. The wife is there to prepare everything even though she has been out working for the whole day."*

> *"I am like an octopus with my hands, legs, eyes and ears working all the time. I have to do everything. As I cook dinner I am supervising the children over their homework. Even now, although my body is in this room my mind is thinking what to cook for dinner."*

For many women, however, it is motherhood that provides meaning, giving them the courage and determination to face their trials and tribulations. When asked about empowering experiences, many referred to their children and mothering as affirmations which warmed them through their

beaten-down numbness. As one woman said: *"Even though it has been a horrible day, the welcoming call of my daughter as she hears me opening the gate is enough to cheer me, despite all the shit I get the whole day."* Another observed, *"My children are the only ones who appreciate me. They are the only people who look up to me and make me feel I am somebody."*

Another major reality for these women is the sheer exhaustion caused by very long hours of work in the factory in addition to the domestic work they must handle alone. *"Sometimes we don't get to see daylight for days, even weeks. When I leave for work the sun has not risen yet. When I return after overtime the moon is out."* Beyond the long hours and the tedium, what makes the work almost intolerable is the rigid discipline, pressure, verbal abuse and intimidation the women must endure.

"We are petrified all the time. You can literally see some jerking, stammering and shivering when shouted at. You can imagine the kind of tension we work in. I do not know any more how to think, only anticipating when I will be shouted at."

"They call it 'masuk hantu' (possessed by spirits). It is the pressures, exhaustion and fear, an overflow of all the bad vibes and sufferings absorbed. I saw what happened to Fatimah before she went hysterical. Everyday she 'kena screw, kena yelling' for not achieving the target. She works very hard, even forgoes her break, is very quiet and timid, always apologising for her slowness and begging for another chance. When we asked her what happened, she did not know, only remembering 'I felt my whole body exploding. My head was bursting. I screamed to let go the steaming turbulence. 'She could not 'make don't know' any more."

For all their hard work, the women are seldom acknowledged or appreciated. Instead they are constantly told that they are not good enough, serving as scapegoats for others' frustration. *"Even the foremen take their frustrations out on us,"* one woman said. *"When the machines break down they shout at us 'Stupid!' They blame us for mishandling the machines. I am very nervous whenever there is a breakdown."*

"My husband always complains that my cooking is not good, that I am a lousy wife. For no reason he shouts at me. His shouting makes me very nervous and confused. No matter what I do, how hard I try and please him it is never good enough. I feel so inadequate. Please tell me how to be a good wife."

"My supervisor likes to shout at me, 'bodoh, bapa, mak tak ajar? Kau keturunan bodoh-kah?.' (stupid, did your parents not teach you? Are you a descendant of the stupid?) If you think you cannot cope, the gate is wide open for you.' I get scolded all the time, scolded until I do not know how to think. I dare not and do not answer - the only way for the scolding to stop. What to do? I need the money."

Given these all-pervading experiences of exploitation and abuse, it is not surprising that the women describe themselves as feeling scared, insulted, reluctant, humiliated, looked down upon and ashamed. Under their 'no mood' perception of themselves as worthless, inferior or emotionally deranged, lie truly terrible hurts, worries, fears and insecurities. a perpetual state of 'troubled heart, troubled mind'.

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As one woman said, *"I am like a thing that does not exist but is being used, a tool that nobody takes notice of."*

Indeed, over time the minds of these exhausted and persecuted women seem to cloud over with blankness and numbness. *"I feel stupid and do not know how to think any more from all the scolding,"* as one put it. Without words or tears, they cry in their hearts. *"The sorrow suffocates me, making me feel so numb and incapable."*

However, existing side by side with their deeply buried emotional suffering, is the seed of resistance. Their stories resonate with both vulnerability and strength, shuttling between distressed anxiety and resilience, submission and subtle defiance, incapacity and resourcefulness. Silence is their defence against multiple hurts, their strategy for avoiding further affliction.

> *"What can I do? I don't want to be shouted at further. This is more than what I can bear already. Better to avoid further attack. They 'bang' you until you cannot stand anymore. The more you speak your mind, the more shouting, retaliation and victimisation will you get. So we learn to keep quiet."*

It is almost a slogan: 'better to play mute and make don't know.' The women 'make don't know' to deflect and dissipate attacks and pressure. Most prefer to adopt a 'not bothered' or 'make don't know', or 'be stupid as they want us' attitude, so as to avoid 'unnecessary trouble' and being shouted at.

Indeed, they are silenced and learnt to be silent. They adopt postures of ignorance, avoidance and passivity as survival strategies. Their silence, seeming lack of interest, apathy, indifference and fatalism are conscious, experienced responses, their lived wisdom.

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"We are so saturated with problems and pressure that we are concerned with our own survival. We have no interest nor time to know what is happening in the world out there. Most important is to get by the day with the least hassle. Least we want to know about are things that bring trouble."

"Yes there is no 'semangat', no unity among us. Nobody wants to come forward to do anything. We are scared. We are always told to mind our own business. I don't want to be scolded as 'tunjuk pandai' (show off). I have more than enough scolding already."

Despite their restrained voices, feelings of emotional subordination and powerlessness they have been subjected to, they strive tenaciously to protect themselves even though they are often quiet, fearful and resentful of what is being done to them. Sometimes the women even rationalised their sufferings as fate so that these pains can be more bearable.

Sometimes workmates are a solace. Complaining to a trusted friend helps to release the tension. Sometimes they joke to laugh away the miseries.

"As soon as we approach the zone Ling starts singing: 'I feel the earth move under my feet ..' One day I asked why was she so happy whenever the bus enters the factory? She explained, 'whenever I reach this place I feel the electrification of a current under my feet. I can feel the earth vibrating'; meaning the supervisor's mouth is already shrieking and 'I already can feel her pressing me for the target. The pressure is really terror. It seeps into our body. I made a joke and asked 'is her chair moving or not' .. we try to overcome the tension by exploding into another rupture of laughter, singing louder,' I feel the earth move under my feet .."

7.4   TALKING PAIN and MAKING SENSE

From the outset of the sessions it was clear that, with the exception of a few articulate individuals, the women were reticent, unable or unwilling to talk spontaneously about their lives. Talk had to be evoked. It is clear from the preceding section that this did occur: when participants had warmed up and broken

their defensive numbness, they participated passionately in the shared disclosure of experiences, thoughts and feelings.

The next stage in the workshops was a process of making sense of these experiences, not as a purely intellectual activity but rather as an affective-cognitive knowing, centred and pursued subjectively, but unfolding through interactive and reflective talking, listening, questioning and introspecting with others. Although the starting point is narrating lived experiences individually, intersubjective connection through each other's stories, mutual empathy and facilitation are instrumental to sense-making. These pedagogical-epistemological dimensions are discussed here in terms of (i) what happened at the affective, physical and cognitive levels in the process of story-telling-sharing in accordance to the various stages observed, and (ii) the role of facilitation.

The overlapping stages in this process of making sense were punctuated by such exclamations as *"Saya nampak sekarang! (Now I see!)"* and *"Baru sekarang saya sedar itu macam! (Only now I am aware it is like that!)"* and *"Saya dapat tahu sekarang (I am getting to know now)."* Each person was first encouraged to connect with herself, to recall, figure out and verbalise her self-perceptions, experiences and feelings. In doing so, she differentiated the core of 'I' from the self-constructed by others.

A redefined 'I' and a sense of being part of a 'we' (relating, linking, comparing, noting similarities, differences and patterns) emerged for each woman as she interacted with others and their stories through listening, validation and supportive questioning. Individual experiences became collectivised as similar themes surfaced in the variety of stories. This movement from the personal to the collective and back

to a reconstituted personal evolved in three phases which are discussed separately below: building bonds, breaking silence; talking stories, talking pain; and making sense.

Building Bonds, Breaking Silence

Eliciting talk about their lived experiences and helping the 'factory women' to make sense of them called for particular conditions, sensitivities, methods and skills. Initially most were hesitant to talk about their personal feelings and experiences in a group. Isolated and deprived of interaction, most viewed their problems in individual, personal terms and habitually censored their stories and blamed themselves, withheld and withdrew at the slightest hint of a negative reaction.

The primary task in the facilitation of this phase was therefore the creation of a safe atmosphere of caring mutuality, trust and empathy in which women could risk active participation and self-disclosure. While facilitation aimed at eliciting talk took place throughout the workshop, breaking the silence right at the start was essential. Likewise, a sense of shared purpose had to be cultivated to promote bonding and collaboration.

The first step was to introduce ourselves to each other and to introduce the workshop process itself. The latter involved clarifying context and objectives, levelling expectations and explaining how the sessions would be conducted. Participants were assured that there was no right or wrong way of participating; that each person's experience, however different from others', was important and valid; and that feeling afraid or uneasy was very normal.

We introduced ourselves to each other by taking it in turns to describe ourselves briefly. Though many were shy and some found it nerve-racking, the experience of speaking out to a group fostered a sense of their own value. Among the comments made during subsequent evaluation were: *"I was heard instead of being reprimanded"*; *"something positive was charged in me"*; and *"I was nervous but the attention made me feel you all were really interested and this encouraged me"*. The exercise gave voice and attention to each. Being listened to has the effect of promoting feelings of self-worth, confidence in one's judgement and a sense of the legitimacy of one's experiences and feelings. A surer, clearer sense of the Self emerges.

Next were two structured exercises: a group profiling activity and a human knot, which reduced tension levels and at the same time drew out information on the background of participants and the characteristics of the group as a whole. The activities helped to break down inhibitions and generated much laughter and fun. Bonds began to be forged as the women giggled away their awkwardness and moved towards a sense of being comfortable in the group and in a mutually created emotionally safe place.

Talking Stories, Talking Pain

The first phase of this 'talking stage' of the workshops was to facilitate an inward focus for each individual, using three evocative techniques: visualisation, photo-language and the recollection of specific incidents of personally experienced subordination. Focused questions aimed at drawing out the multiple aspects and

contexts of recalled incidents, identifying different reactions to them, and validating subjugated voices through challenges to the dominant response.

Visualisation helped the women to recall and re-experience repressed subjectivities. The photo-language exercise was very effective in precipitating memories of relationships and surfacing strongly felt but unarticulated experiences. Recalling and narrating incidents of subordination aroused in participants both 'forbidden, unspeakable' feelings and negative thoughts about themselves.

Subsequent self-disclosure and naming were encouraged by attentive listening, empathy, gentleness, validation/affirmation and the interaction extended by group members and the facilitator. Most of all it was facilitated by a sense of awareness and responsiveness to the subjectivity of each person. With some coaxing and assurance. most embraced the opportunity to break silence, to say the unspeakable. Once participants felt that they were 'allowed' to do this, and to cry, be upset, feel ashamed or express anger, most took the risk of disclosing their vulnerabilities, sharing what they really felt, how they really reacted. They were encouraged by the self-disclosure of others and by the affirming responses of the group.

Listening is crucial to processes of disclosure. The kind of listening encouraged is ''listening with the heart', an attentiveness that includes emotional responsiveness. Elsewhere (Chan, 1991) I have written about emotions as a resource in women and how singing together from the heart generates bonding affections. The same thing happens through talking and listening with attentive compassion, a bonding Janeway (1980) describes as a power of the weak which can be reclaimed through small-group work. We attempted and experienced this in our workshops.

While listeners did not necessarily understand everything they were told, they communicated acceptance, interest and concern. Acceptance was conveyed by not criticising, ridiculing, advising or interjecting their own viewpoints too quickly, and by affirming the normality and legitimacy of the story-teller's feelings. Interest was expressed by the giving of undistracted attention, especially by means of sustained eye contact and thoughtful questions. Concern was communicated by appropriate facial expressions and, whenever necessary, by touching or holding a hand, staying emotionally present with the speaker. Appropriate questions helped the speaker to focus her recollection and to explore her feelings and thoughts more deeply.

As the women told their painful stories, many for the first time in their lives, they experienced a sense of release and relief. *"I am so relieved to be able to talk about my problem which I tried to bury for the past forty years"*, was a typical comment. Many expressed their hurts openly with tears. This evoked tears in other women as they identified with and personally felt the pains and sorrows. Though such an expression may not in itself solve a problem, simply being allowed to verbalise, particularly in an atmosphere of empathy and support, was therapeutic for participants.

The narrative form enabled the naming of suppressed reactions without fear of the criticism usually attendant on the assertion of a different or controversial point of view. The process of reminiscence and 'permitted articulation' helped the women to discharge their hurt and to begin to reclaim a sense of both their own agency and the validity of their own feelings and standpoints. Discharging their hurt, allows re-evaluation of the reality of the situation so that different dimensions of the situation, themselves and other people feature more clearly. It is through acknowledgement of

these feelings and their (silent) reactions that they recognised and reclaimed their own agency.

Talking from their personally experienced positions they reframed what others constructed of them. This entailed introspection, self-disclosure and naming. They came to recognise, value and feel affirmed in their own feelings and views. Their standpoints were validated in opposition to what others had constructed of them. The fact that someone listened, validated her views and feelings and did not ridicule or dismiss them gave value to her experiences and feelings and increase her own sense of Self.

Talking, releasing and naming pains which were repudiated were instrumental in recovering the women's inner core self. Discharging emotions left from hurtful experiences heal the effects of distress and paralysing guilt, especially in situations where they have been unjustly shamed. Discharge then becomes a recovery process that frees the distress and from rigid patterns of behaviour resulting from being hurt.

Making Sense

The third stage of the workshop process involved making connections, reflective talking and reconstituting subjectivity and self-identity in opposition to the negative construction by others. At the interpersonal or collective level, reflective talking built bonds of empathy and fostered understanding, commonality and solidarity. Reactions such as *"I would have been more sympathetic to you if I had known about your situation. I extend my apologies"*, were common.

Hearing each other's divergent views and reactions, in an atmosphere devoid of criticism, defensiveness or debate about who was right or better, facilitated

acceptance of difference and thawed conditioned attitudes of unwillingness to explore alternatives. The process nudged the women into considering new ways of looking at their experiences, integrating the insights of fellow participants in the collaborative development of new perspectives of themselves and the world.

As women recognised their own situations in others' descriptions, they realised that their painful, seemingly personal problems were shared by many of their workmates. Together they explored the issues behind their experiences: why they behaved and felt the way they did. They teased out the who, what, why and how of their encounters and emotions, particularly feelings and perceptions about themselves, to arrive at an understanding of internalised stereotypes and social construction of the Self. Exploring the ways, however small, in which they had contested and defied these constructions, enabled them to recognise the fact of their own agency and a sense that they were not utterly powerless after all.

In other words, the process of articulation and collective reflection, unfolding both sequentially and together, enable a degree of liberation from socially imposed constructions and the emergence of a reclaimed Self. Heard and interpreted together, the women's narratives uncover their experiential knowledge (Rowbotham, 1972; Reinharz, 1983; Donnelly, 1986), or what I term their lived wisdom. The consciousness which unfolds from this realisation of their own capacity, singly and together, to make sense of their lived experiences, become the basis for both self-recovery and social agency. The retrieval and reconstruction of subjugated knowledge enables participants in the process "to create effective and meaningful resistance, to make revolutionary transformations" (hooks 1989:26).

7.5   CONCLUSION

The experiment described in this chapter highlights two important aspects of educational work with factory women. First, it demonstrates how educational work can be reframed to unearth the suppressed layers of women's emotional sufferings. Although emotional suffering is only one dimension of women's subordination, it is an essential area to address in educational work concerned with empowerment. Indeed this is where it must start. Second, collaborative story-telling-sharing is the educational method *par excellence* that commences with lived experiences and experienced feelings to reconstitute women's subjectivities. This educational approach enables women to reclaim their self-definition, self-integrity and self-worth as well as provide them the psychological resources to develop their full potential.

Chapter Eight

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: EDUCATION FOR EMPOWERMENT OF FACTORY WOMEN

"In creating alternatives, we build on our past as we learn from previous experiences."

(Bunch & Pollack 1983:xiv)

8.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as a concluding synthesis for the thesis. It draws together insights from my research about empowerment and what must be constituted in educational work that aims to empower factory women. In particular, I will elucidate 'story-telling-sharing' as education and as a pedagogy that can evoke and facilitate factory women make sense of their silenced, gendered experiences of emotional subordination. Section one outlines and discusses aspects pertaining to education for factory women's empowerment. The second section of this chapter examines the significance of this study.

Insights elucidated in this concluding synthesis have also been consolidated with my participation in various educational fora, in particular, the sharing, validation and analysis of my work with others who are involved in educational work. I have had the opportunity to discuss my research findings at various seminars and conferences[1]. I would like to acknowledge the interconnection, the interactive,

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[1] The issues and findings of this research have been presented in 'Education for Empowerment: Education for Citizenship' Geneva, 1995; 'Adult Education and Training in Reconstruction and Development: Lessons from the South and the North' Cape Town, 1995: 'International Conference on Pedagogy of the Oppressed' Omaha,

intersubjective and co-creative processes of validation and 'reflection-in-action' and 'reflection-on-action' (Schon 1983) with other adult educators, activists, learners and as women at these various fora.

8.2 EDUCATION FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Discourses on education for women's empowerment have focused on content, pedagogy and access (Bhasin 1991; Medel-Anonuevo 1997) as the main areas of concern. I will highlight here dimensions pertaining to these areas that have emerged from my research. I will discuss these aspects under the following headings, (i) education and women's experience of empowerment, (ii) women's subjectivities, (iii) addressing gendered experience of subordination, (iv) issues of access, (v) evocative pedagogy, and (v) story-telling-sharing as women's education, women's narrative knowing.

Education and Women's Experience of Empowerment

Discourse on education pertaining to women's empowerment has generally not paid much attention to women's emotional welfare as an area of concern though the importance of the psychological aspect of empowerment and the cognitive processes occuring at the individual level have been recognised (Dighe 1995; Stromquist 1995; Stein 1997). In the situation of factory women who are constantly being subjugated and made to feel wretched, fearful and inferior, the realities and effects of their emotional distress cannot be ignored.

1996 ; 'Promoting the Empowerment of Women Through Adult Learning' Chiangmai, 1997; 'Fifth International Conference on Adult Education' Hamburg, 1997; 'Towards a Feminist Pedagogy' Manila 1998.

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Factory womens' lives are found to be fraught with disabling feelings which affect not only how they feel but also how they think and relate to others. The subjective experience of emotional suffering arising from the objective reality of subordination, paralyses and diminishes the value that women place on themselves. Internalised effects of emotional subordination disable women's confidence and make them feel 'no mood', inferior and inadequate. The narratives in chapter seven portray the extensive emotional subordination experienced by factory women. Individual interviews with women workers have also indicated the need to deal with these deeply felt pains. Indeed the centrality of emotional well-being for women's empowerment cannot be underscored.

The research shows that empowering experiences can be fostered if educational spaces are created for women to talk about their repressed pains and sufferings. They need to be given support so that they can heal and recover from their hidden injuries. However, I found that these experiences of empowerment are quite different from those of self/psychological empowerment as described in the literature. Through talking about their pains and stories in small groups, the women experienced **healing, recovery and self-definition**. The women experienced a kind of power that is not merely the inner strength and self-determination as portrayed in most psychological literature (e.g. Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1975). It is important to note that the sense of self and efficacy was not achieved individually by one's own belief about one's confidence and competence, but rather it unfolded with the caring support of other women present in the small groups who extended the gift of humanity by listening with their hearts, their respect and compassion. The mutually emphatic support of the group brought forth the **power with others, power in**

connection, that is, 'relational power' (Surrey 1991:163).

To differentiate this experience of empowerment from pyschological or cognitive empowerment, I call it **subjective empowerment**. The term subjective arises from and connects it to women's subjectivities which include the various felt dimensions of women's realities such as their thoughts, feelings, relationships, their ability or lack of ability to act. Underpinning the use of this concept, and most importantly, is how the person as a subject mediates with and is mediated by the structures of society: 'the personal is political' just as 'the political is personal'. This concept stresses the agency of the person as well as the person-in-relation with others. I maintain that 'subjective empowerment' is a more appropriate concept and analytical category for explaining the factory women's experiences of empowerment resulting from my research-education sessions with them (see chapter seven).

Women's Subjectivities

To be engaged in education for factory women's empowerment, one needs, first and foremost to have an understanding of the different dimensions of factory women's lives, especially aspects which are repressed and disempowering. My research uncovered factory women's subjectivities: their silenced sufferings, thoughts and feelings about themselves, and how these affect the ways they relate with others. Many women experienced the crippling effects of emotional subordination which are internalised and further impact on their subjectivities. In determining the content of educational work with factory women, it is not enough just to cover their material conditions, practical needs and strategic interests. We need to investigate the affective-subjective dimensions as well. In fact, I would define emotional-welfare as

a strategic gender interest which ultimately affect women's conditions and position in society. Emotional welfare affects women's overall well-being and agency. The transformatory potential of emotional sufferings should be the core agenda in education for factory women's empowerment.

The educational process also needs to unearth and address issues of women's silences, their differences and commonalities. The need to address differences has been raised by women of colour (hooks 1989: Collins 1990: Aziz 1992), post-modernist theorists (Lather 1991; Usher 1992), Third World feminists (Sen and Grown 1987) and in feminist pedagogy (Weiler 1991). Put differently, there is a growing awareness of the fact of partial perspectives, 'situated knowledges' (Haraway 1991) and the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledge' (Sawicki 1991). However, these differences need not be a source of division or weaknesses among women (Lorde 1984) and, if properly approached, may serve as a 'scientific and political resource' (Jaggar 1992).

In my research, I observed that differences in ethnicity (and language), age and marital status were common sources of animosity and division. Real or suspected racial discrimination and distrust arising from ethnic differences deterred co-operation and interaction on the shopfloor. Cultural norms privilege older, especially married women, so that younger women would talk only when asked, often deferring to and agreeing with their elders so as to avoid giving offence or seeming disrespectful.

Equally, there could be ill feeling between married and unmarried women, the latter struggling with feelings of envy and defensiveness imposed by their socially constructed lower status. This surfaced in one session when a middle-aged unmarried woman talked about her experience of hurt which was shared by other unmarried

peers. She described her dejection and her sense of being sneered at by those who told her she had missed out in life by not marrying. She felt defensive, uneasy and apologetic.

Different feelings and standpoints were heard and misunderstandings clarified. The married women apologized for their insensitivity, explaining that it was not their intention to 'rub salt into wounds'. This process mended misconceptions and negative feelings, facilitating a more relaxed and candid discussion. It became clear that when differences were examined with care, antagonisms resulting from them could be dispelled, even when contradictions and conflicts remain unresolved. Approached with sensitivity and compassion, difference itself can generate bonds of empathy, affection and caring support.

The need for sensitivity cannot be over-emphasized, if dealing with difference is to generate bonds. Some of the PR research-education sessions brought out unconventional views about marriage, family life, women's strength and self-reliance. Different reasons for singlehood were articulated. While some yearn for marriage, some choose to be single. While some fretted over being unmarried, others were enjoying themselves in ways not possible to those with children and husbands. A story about adoption inspired listeners and sparked insights about unspoken alternatives. The case of a single parent with a disabled child evoked compassion and admiration. The narration of her pains transformed the way others perceived her, from one who always looked down-trodden and scared to one with courage, love, strength and determination. The practice of lesbianism was acknowledged, although reactions were controversial. In general, aspects of women's lives which are invisible, rendered insignificant or denigrated were acknowledged and reinterpreted,

along with their hidden and diverse capacities.

Notwithstanding the importance of difference, the notion of a commonality underlying the diversity of women's experience (Eisenstein 1984) remains crucial. It was on the basis of this concept that I came to understand the experience of emotional subordination as the thread linking the individual sufferings of the factory workers. Examining women's experience from a women-centred perspective also unfolded common gynocentric concerns and values such as women's responsiveness and concern for others' welfare, their interpersonal care-taking (Wine 1989). Women's relational needs, capacities and ways of being, defined and devalued as weakness in terms of the dominant patriarchal discourse, have been recognized as desirable values, pro-social skills and sensitivities that enhance human functioning (Gilligan 1982; Belenky et al. 1986; Miller 1986; Jordan et al. 1991).

Existing educational work with factory women has included a focus on commonality in terms of structural oppression; that is, class exploitation and gender subordination. However, the more subjective commonalities of thoughts and feelings tend to be overlooked, as are the gynocentric practices and values which not only enrich social interactions and relationships in general, but also contribute to effective pedagogy.

In the workshops I facilitated. a subjective commonality among the factory women was clear. It was characterized by silence, apathy, anxiety, worry, repressed anger and feelings of inferiority: in short, the low self-esteem and lack of confidence one might expect to result from a continual experience of emotional subordination. Because the women were routinely blamed and made to feel guilty or immoral, they rarely show directly what they genuinely feel. Most of the time, authentic feelings

of anger, hurt or disgust, particularly in relation to husbands, are repressed or brushed aside as illegitimate or immoral, and grouchiness, disinterest, listlessness and indifference were projected instead.

Suppression and denial of feelings of anger and disgust were other commonalities identified during the workshops. Initially, women neither acknowledged nor recognized these feelings. Instead, they blamed themselves for their 'moodiness', lack of perseverance or self-discipline, and 'outbursts' of anger or impatience. In the process of story-telling-sharing, some discovered their anger and also that it was justified.

When first gathered together, women often appear quiet, restless, anxious, withdrawn, distracted and void of opinion. They were described and described themselves as not interested. Indeed, this was the starting scenario in most of the sessions described in the previous chapter. Most of the women began by being apprehensive and withdrawn, even openly reluctant and negative. Some showed displeasure at having to stay on at the factory after eight hours of tiring work. However, over the three hours interest grew. With some encouragement, everyone talked. Many even enjoyed it. Some added that they had never shared so much before. They appreciated the listening and caring extended to them. All groups wanted follow-up sessions. We even identified topics for future sessions.

Thus a pertinent question for educational work from these observations, is: how do we help women to uncover, comprehend and take charge of their authentic feelings? It is imperative therefore, to address subjectivities in the learning process as much as to unearth them. In educational work with women, we need to work with them (not for them) to create safe spaces where they can express and reconstruct their

subjectivities - safe spaces to talk about their unspoken, unspeakable thoughts and feelings, and to make sense of their pains and sufferings. Indeed, women workers can only partake as active subjects and their lived experiences can only be addressed if, and when, their subjectivities are taken on board in the educational agenda.

Addressing Gendered Experiences of Subordination

The factory women's narratives (see chapter seven) also highlighted the source of their experiences of emotional subordination. While social divisions like ethnicity, age and marital status do inflict heartbreaking misunderstandings and miseries, the main source arose largely from gender subordination.

In the past two decades, various modules and manuals on gender sensitisation, gender analysis and gender training have been produced for development workers to help women understand and deal with gender subordination (for eg. Moffat et al. 1991; Mackenzie 1992). While these have proliferated among non-government organisations and development workers, similar work at the grassroots where concepts and explanations are made relevant and comprehensible to the lives of ordinary women is still lacking.

During the fieldwork, I was not fully equipped to address this topic adequately though I developed an experimental module for a one-day workshop and conducted it for group leaders at the end of the participatory research-education sessions as follow-up. From this experiment, I have developed a module on 'Understanding Gendered Experience of Subordination' for factory women[2] which has just been

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[2] Corollary to the effort of designing education programs for women to deal with their experiences of gender subordination, similar programs must be designed to sensitise men about their subordinating actions, behaviour and relationships.

published in Jimenez-Tan & Khoo (1998) (see APPENDIX).

Issues of Access

Access and sustained access are important issues in education of factory women. Discourse on access in women's education is predominantly in terms of gender discrimination and women's lack of access to educational opportunities, especially access to liberating forms of education (Medel-Anonuevro 1997). These issues are no doubt valid. However, in the context of factory women in Malaysia, a more fundamental issue is the flip-side of the coin, that is, getting access to women workers, especially sustained access, so that educational programmes can be undertaken consistently and reinforced by necessary follow-ups. Related to the problem of access to women workers, there is also the problem of legitimacy. The work of NGO groups that cater to factory women have been perceived as illegitimate and/or anti-establishment, hence there is a lot of fear and intimidation encountered by the women participants.

To identify strategies of access, it is necessary to examine the contextual factors of both the factory women (objective and subjective dimensions) and the social, economic, political situation of the country. Equally important is the examination of the interacting, dialectical relationship between these two sets of contexts to figure out what spaces are available and strategically possible given the myriad set of interlocking constraints emanating from the state, capital (employers), patriachial society and the women's own fear and internalised oppression.

In Malaysia, women-centred groups have been effective in the education-organising work but have always faced enormous difficulties of legitimacy and access

to factory women. These groups have also been labelled as subversive and anti-government. Factory management has capitalised on the state's adversity against these groups to create rumours and fear in the women workers so as to disassociate them from these groups. Survival has always been an uphill battle for these groups, as exemplified in the case of the Workers Education Centre and other informal community-based groups (see chapter five). In lieu of these constraints, new strategies of 'mainstreaming' have to be explored to reach out to factory women where they can gather without fear of intimidation. Instead of operating from an outside forum which requires too much energy to build and keep alive, it is useful to explore 'established' spaces for educational intervention through alliances and collaboration with existing organisations whose constituency includes factory women or can secure access to them.

The strategy of 'mainstreaming' involves working from existing organisations, especially those which are deemed legal like existing unions and conventional groups with a women's orientation. Working with and through existing unions is possible though difficult, as illustrated by my fieldwork experience. In fact, this is strategically desirable. In the process, we can gender sensitise and expose the unions to more democratic relationships. However, it may be quite difficult to establish partnerships with unions, sustain their interest and commitment, especially given the kind of patriarchal organisational practices in unions and gender relations amongst union leaders in Malaysia. It is also very likely that gender conflicts and tensions will arise given the patriarchal attitudes and male-dominated practices, as mentioned in the case of a FES sponsored project (Rohana & Lockhead 1988).

During my fieldwork I had to nurture interest with four different unions before

partnership with one finally materialised. With hindsight, this possibility was due very much to the fact that I was given the opportunity to work with a female union official who was also very keen for our proposed programme to take off (see chapter 2, 2.3)[3]. Our close rapport allowed us to mutually disclose and share a lot of personal experiences which helped to bond, build trust and confidence, so much so that she was able to withstand the bad-mouthing and rumours about me from some of the male trade unionists[4] who tried to sabotage me. I want to add some words of caution with regards to collaborating with unions - while such efforts are hypothetically and politically desirable it is not that amenable in practice. In fact one of the women activists I interviewed was adamant that such collaborations are impossible because of fundamental ideological differences. She asserted that the male trade unionists would put a stop to the educational efforts as soon as they show some effect as has happened in her own past experience. These unionists also tend to view women activists as trouble-makers who attempt to weaken the trade union movement.

The idea of working with existing conventional women's organisations emerged in my fieldwork as I desperately tried to find an organisational base for my PR component. I managed to trace a female veteran ex-unionist who had retired, and was deeply involved in the local branch of her political party where she lives. Working with residential-based organisations has the added advantage of access to

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[3] Before I was passed over to work with her I was in close contact with the President for almost two months who demonstrated interest but was not able to give time (maybe interest even) to pursue what we discussed.

[4] This tension dates back to the history of my association with YWCEP which was perceived as a buffer against unionisation (see pp162-165). Some of the male trade unionists were also not happy with my open critical stance against their womanising practices.

factory women residing in those areas. I spent a lot of time cultivating her interest to host some educational sessions for factory women in her neighbourhood. Even though she conceded that the work was consistent with the objectives of her party, after four months we still could not make any headstart for she was too pre-occupied all the time with her party functions.

Despite the unsuccessful attempt above, I believe it is strategically worthwhile to use and work through women's organisations even though it may take a long, long while to work things out. Given the political surveillance against labour activism it may be more effective strategically to enter factory women's education through the concerns of women by taking advantage of the state's National Policy on Women as the legitimate reference. Besides, the PR component of this research has also proven that starting factory women's education from their subjective realities and lived experiences are more engaging and relevant to them. What is important is that providers and educators must have a perspective to find ways to integrate all dimensions of factory women's lives in the educational agenda over time.

Sustained access also requires organising outreach and services with the factory women beyond the education sessions so as to maintain contact, to nurture continuing interest and to provide the necessary support and structure for follow-up action. Education for factory women's empowerment starts with but must go beyond subjective empowerment to integrate collective empowerment. Consciousness-raising must extend into the formulation of analysis, vision and strategy for change. Education for women's empowerment cannot be a series of one-off sessions. It must be designed as ongoing programs which provide support for women's action, be it at a personal or group level. This requires input before, after, and in between the

education sessions to create and sustain interest. This carries implications on the ways factory women's education is being organised and conducted, as well as the committment and involvement of popular educators which goes beyond the facilitation[5] of programmes.

Evocative Pedagogy

A key thrust in empowering education for women is challenging gender subordination. However, not many pedagogical tools have been developed to enable working class women to recover their ability to speak and/or deal with their personally felt afflictions of emotional subordination. In feminist pedagogy metaphors of speaking and hearing which commonly evoke the transformation of women's experiences from silence to voice (hooks 1989) represent an articulation of long-suppressed anger at enforced subordination. Indeed, it has been claimed that talking about one's life, telling one's story, in the company of those doing the same (as in consciousness-raising sessions) is constitutive of feminist method (Mackinnon 1982), and this process of consciousness-raising is part and parcel of feminist education which is a form of emancipatory learning (Hart 1990).

Much has been written about the effectiveness of consciousness-raising as an educational method and process where women meet regularly to talk about their problems and to develop a consciousness of their relationship to other women and to a patriarchal society that oppressses women (Allen 1970; Jenkins & Kramer 1978; MacKinnon 1982; Hart 1990). However, none of these discuss methods to evoke talk. It has been generally assumed that women have no difficulty in talking about

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[5] Other aspects of facilitation is discussed under pedagogy.

their experiences. This was not the case with the factory women I worked with. They did not easily or candidly talk about their deeply buried unspeakable hurts even though they were constantly distressed by them.

From the participatory research-education sessions, as elaborated in chapter seven, I have explored and systematised a pedagogy that can evoke talk, to enable women to recollect and articulate their suppressed feelings and sufferings. In the process of telling and sharing their stories they became aware of the commonality of such experiences (as well as the social divisions) as experienced by other women. They also became aware of what these experiences were doing to them, that is, why they were feeling, thinking and acting, or not acting in certain ways. These sessions also revealed the kind of enabling conditions and facilitation needed to evoke talk, reflective talking and making sense. The kinds of conditions and facilitation which foster women's learning and the processes by which women learn are key concerns in the pedagogy of women's education. I will elaborate on these dimensions from my research.

Evoking talk about lived experiences that are not easily talked about require certain conditions, sensitivities and methods. The facilitation of the facilitator-educator is critical. Group members' affirmation, responsive listening, care-taking and supportive probing are equally instrumental. The genuine self-disclosure of the educator-facilitator is also catalytic in encouraging others not to feel ashamed to talk about their pains.

Facilitation to evoke talk is needed on two counts : (i) to create the context for a common purpose and an emotionally secure interactional space; and (ii) to elicit talk. The educator plays the role of story-evoker to help bring out repressed thoughts

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and feelings by the use of evocative techniques for stories to unfold. As story-evoker, I found that the facilitator-educator must be willing to share her own story. In fact, the cultivation of storying begins by sowing the field with my own story of why I am interested and engaged in educational work with factory women. This also helped set the contexts and mood for others' disclosure.

Group building, providing a safe non-discriminatory environment and an empowering process for learning and hearing have been well documented in women's education (Allen 1970; Women's Self-Help Network 1984; Medel-Anonuevo 1997), adult learning and participatory training for social change (PRIA 1987; Razack 1993). I will not reiterate the points here. The discourse in the literature has guided me in the conduct of the participatory research-education sessions. I will explicate instead, the accompanying cues that I found effective in the application of the evocative techniques I used.

I experimented with 4 techniques, namely (i) photo-language, (ii)recalling concrete incidents of being undermined, (iii) visualisation and (iv) the analogical use of symbols to characterise oneself which trigger and precipitate forbidden, unspeakable thoughts and feelings. These techniques may be used separately or collectively to enable participants to recall and re-experience the thoughts, feelings, reactions generated by concrete incidents that have been suppressed, and then to articulate what their own feelings and thoughts were. By focusing on something definite, such as photos or recalling concrete incidents of being undermined, suppressed images, memories are re-experienced thus rekindling in participants the feelings and thoughts surrounding the events.

However, evoking story-telling-sharing is not just the mechanical application

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of a set of techniques. As mentioned earlier, received messages and continual subordination often result in a negative self-image, feelings of anxieties, insecurities and inadequacies in thought patterns and behaviours. Facilitation skills and methods go beyond forging participation and active learning. Facilitators need to have an understanding of the dynamics between subjectivity, experience and participation, and of the particularities which impact on them in the specific context in which educational work is undertaken. The story-evoker/facilitator needs to be sensitive and take cognisance of women's subjectivitites, thus to anticipate and plan for them in education programmes.

I found that assisting the women to be aware of their subjectivities in the educational process enabled them to participate confidently. The women who attended the research-education sessions came with different levels of anxieties. This affected their concentration, confidence in participation and attention span - their 'presence' in the session. If these were not properly redressed. the women could be misconstrued as disinterested, distracted and withdrawn. Deconstructions. emerging during reflective talking, enabled the women to recognize that (and why) they were in a continual state of anxiety.

Anxiety about impending family demands was a major distraction, impacting negatively on their concentration, mood and level of energy for participation. As one woman puts it: *"Even though my body is here, my mind is thinking the different things I have to do as soon as I reach home."* In addition to such daily domestic anxieties as *"my children may be loitering in the streets"*, or *"my husband will be angry when he returns and I am not in the house"*, or *"I have to wash and feed my bed-ridden mother before cooking dinner for my family"*, women's worries included having *"to*

convince the landlord to let us stay on" and *"where to borrow enough money to pay the doctor".*

The ongoing experience of ridicule and contempt was another source of anxiety, which above all, related to their ability to participate enthusiastically. *"I don't want to be laughed at. I am always conscious that I will make a fool of myself,"* was a typical comment. Many of the women doubted that they have anything sensible to say. They were in the habit of apologising. even before they got started, claiming that what they were going to say was worthless.

It became clear in the course of the sessions that what came across initially as lack of interest was actually anxiety and lack of confidence about having to do something they did not know, since this was an 'education session' which they all associated with the demonstration of one's brain power and ability to articulate. They feared saying the wrong things and getting ridiculed. They also dreaded mixing with people they did not know and operating in unfamiliar situations. They worried about being called to speak unexpectedly and not knowing what is the right thing to say.

Thus silence, a claim to being void-of-opinion, putting themselves down and non-participation became their way of coping. It was of utmost importance that they be re-affirmed each time they speak, and that what they say be taken seriously, without fear of being rejected or ridiculed or evaluated. In eliciting talk, I found that it was necessary to be attentive and to be able to interpret the different types of silences. Likewise, differences. underlying tensions, reluctance and even resistance have to be consciously anticipated and attended to as part of the pedagogy.

Listening to them attentively, reassuringly, accepting and acknowledging them, helped them to relax and loosen up. Simple but genuine gestures of showing interest.

concern and a supportive atmosphere were critical in helping them to open up. At the same time, one must encourage them to participate in the discussions without pressuring them or making them defensive. In short, these women needed coaxing before they felt confident to take part in the discussion.

I also observed that most of the women were not used to having the time to think about their feelings, not to mention having avenues for expressing them. Hence, when given the opportunity to do so, they did not quite know how or whether it was alright to express them. Moreover, most of them have not had the experience of expressing their views in a group. I found that the use of group building activities which can slowly acquaint the women to hear their own voices, and provide them with an opportunity to speak their thoughts was critical right at the beginning of each session, even before the process of eliciting talk begins. Self-introduction activities where each participant gets to say something about herself, with the aid of symbols that represent certain aspects of her, helped to give voice and attention to each in the group. Being listened to has the effect of prompting feelings of self-worth, confidence in one's judgement and a sense of the legitimacy of one's experiences and feelings. Another effective activity which particularly helped to build up the mood and purpose of the session, was naming and acting out the kind of images and accompanying feelings that women always experience which they are prohibited from revealing. These activities helped women laugh away their awkwardness and recognise the legitimacy of their common unspoken feelings. Certain terms in the women's native tongues which are culturally representative of acts of subjugation and derision were also effective in helping to identify experienced subordination. This was particularly useful when I had to conduct some of the sessions in Chinese and I

was not proficient in it[6].

I also observed that the women's own qualities, for example, their capacities to listen with compassion and extend comforting words of support were extremely helpful to nurture emotional bonds and create an intimate trusting atmosphere for eliciting talk. The women's emotional resources were strong and so were their own emotional needs. They were very caring, nurturing and were able to empathise with the pain in the stories shared. Facilitator-educators need to relate emotionally to the women as well. They have to be able to recognise and incorporate the resources that the women themselves bring to the educational process in terms of gynocentric attributes and ways of being for their own learning and mutual support.

In summary, this evocative pedagogy has three core characteristics, namely (i) using narrations of lived experiences as the content, (ii) enabling conditions and facilitation guides, and (ii) the knowledge, subjectivities, capacities of the educator-facilitator. These three components are inter-related, for example, facilitation is dependent on the knowledge, subjectivities, values and qualities of educator-facilitators. The essential pre-requisite is that educator-facilitators must be equipped with the appropriate knowledge base and goals in feminist popular education, in particular, an understanding of the dynamics and interrelationship between self perception, subjectivities, experience, particpation and agency. They need to understand as well as know how to use women's emotions, women's ways of knowing, learning and relating as resources. Equally important, educator-facilitators need to be co-learners, to be critically aware of the various bases of their judgements

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[6] Being educated in English as a Malaysian Chinese, I am more fluent in Malay than Chinese.

and evaluations by undertaking on-going self-reflection.

The following principles can be gleaned to guide the use of this pedagogy.

- Establish an environment which is physically and emotionally safe. Prepare the physical space where the educational work is conducted to make it more cosy and conducive for participation. Provide opportunities for participants to make the learning space their own.

- Clarify the contexts, objectives and methods/techniques to be used.

- Initiate and draw up ground rules from participants. Ensure understanding of importance of confidentiality to be upheld by all. Clarify that there is no right or wrong ways.

- Use mother tongue of participants as medium of communication where possible. Certain terms and proverbs can evoke memories and emotions very quickly.

- Develope an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust, openness and community right from the beginning. Recognise in each a source of knowledge, strength and hope.

- Ensure a safe, non-judgemental, non-discriminatory environment.

- Start with group-building activities and bring attention of the group to each individual's presence and importance in the group.

- Build bonds and help to reinforce the capacity to feel, connect and bond.

- Use interpersonal activities for introductions which incorporate play and bring out the sense of 'ability to do' so that feelings of incapability, anxieties and awkwardness can be reduced. Fun and celebration are essential to the human spirit.

- Be sensitive and conscious of participants' feelings of inadequacy, fear, reluctance, lack of confidence etc., their subjectivities, differences as well as their unexpressed commonalities. Anticipate and plan for them in the education programmes.

- Create activities and spaces for centering and connecting with oneself, with own unexpressesd feelings and with others.

- Initiate and practice genuine self-disclosure as well as the readiness to disclose.

- Be alert to and honour resistance.

- Use evocative methods which enable recall and association with experiences and feelings which are not commonly articulated, unspoken and considered unspeakable. Creative dramatics and terms specific to culture and/or language of the group can help provoke suppressed experiences/feelings of subordination. Encourage use of symbols and images to communicate unpsoken thoughts and feelings.

- Be attentive and responsive to silences. Explore and examine emotional responses during the session.

- Encourage responsive listening, sharing and group validation. Provide active conversational support.

- Use women's sensibilities and strength as resources. Incorporating gynocentric values and practices like mutual caretaking and extending mutual support and understanding

- Acknowledge and validate the pains expressed and extend support beyond the story-telling-sharing in the sessions.

- Provide time and space to deal with the stories.

- Encourage collaborative forms of story-telling-sharing by drawing out others' experiences on the same issue after one story is being shared and encourage mutal sharing of emotions and personal knowledge.

- Validate each story. Emphasise importance of the 'story-tellers', their feelings and experiences behind the stories.
- Synthesise and draw out the issues and topics raised in the stories and relate/interrelate them to women's situation - their commonalities, differences and diversity.

- Provide supportive probing and encourage discussion of the issues raised in the stories as well as move into other dimensions of the stories. One of the purposes of feminist education is to challenge traditional ways of seeing and to encourage new ways of looking at the familiar differently.

Story-telling-sharing as Women's Education, Women's Narrative Knowing

Storying and using stories of lived experiences in women's education is placing life itself at the centre of the learning process: the goal and starting point of women's education - the production of knowledge from and for their everyday living. Placing silenced lived experiences at the centre of learning challenges the

functionalist, remedial, deficiency approach to education. The sharing of one woman's story becomes a catalyst, opening the door to the stories of other women in which the commonality of pain, suffering and struggle is recognised and becomes a collective means of learning from life. Sharing in community challenges received messages and the dominant logic of the Other and everyday relations. It allows other perspectives, unasked or unanswered questions to come in.

Story-telling-sharing as an educational process entails multiple processes of interactive disclosure, sharing, naming, interpreting, healing and reclaiming one's own standpoints. From my research, the practice of story-telling-sharing as education is fostered by three distinctive but overlapping phases of facilitation: 'building bonds and breaking silences', 'evocative talking', and 'reflective talking and making sense'. Talking pain and reflective talking in interactive small groups enabled the reclamation and healing of suppressed pain as lived experiences become reconstructed and self-definiton replaces the derogatory construction by Others. This led to a transformation of meanings when women make sense of their pains and begin to feel and think anew. It is through these very subjective processes of making sense collectively that new meanings are constructed and new knowledge produced which makes story-telling-sharing an educational endeavour.

Group validation of repressed emotions, naming both one's own feelings and the way in which one has been victimised was found to be liberating. As feelings of self-blame and inadequacy diminished, interest, enthusiasm, energy and feelings of 'capacities' were recovered. These recovered psychological resources help to develop a sense of subjective power. the power to define and determine oneself and to act in ways congruent with that definition (Miller 1986). The 'politics of naming' (Scheman

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1980) was a powerful method for the recovery and reinterpretation of submerged feelings and ways of being. The movement from silence to voice does indeed change "discourse politics" (Best and Kellner 1991: 57). The women's tales of struggle and survival uncovered their strength and capacity to act. The image of themselves as passive and powerless victims was transformed into a shared sense of active survivors. The hegemony of the audible voices, and the fact that their silences could perpetuate the muteness of their own unheard voices, became evident.

Women's story-telling-sharing is not just narrations of happenings. They carry the 'transformatory potential' (Young 1993) of articulated pains and sufferings. The very act of vocalisation gives recognition and ownership to one's repressed personally-felt views and feelings, instead of being the victim of Other's constructions. The narrations constitute interpretation of other's reactions and one's own subjective standpoints. When articulated and redefined (interpreted), these narrations are women's 'experience-knowing' (Rowbotham 1972; Reinharz 1983). I term this as women's lived wisdom which was brought about by naming, healing, reflection and making sense in the participatory research-education sessions. These reflected experiences unfold a consciousness that can motivate and inspire women's agency and self-recovery. It also helps "develop an awareness of those forces which exploit and oppress: with efforts to educate for critical consciousness. to create effective and meaningful resistance, to make revolutionary transformation" (hooks, 1989:26), thereby producing a new and different relationship to the world.

While the women's self-concept was being redefined, their subjectivities reconstituted. new meanings are constructed from lived wisdom to create a different kind of knowledge -- knowledge that is drawn from their own lived experiences. This

new knowledge is not just a set of new meanings and information but they are grounded on a new set of feelings and ideas about themselves as women and their relationships with the world. It involved a change in the lens that underlies the way they think about themselves and the world. A new consciousness is being formed through the ways they view themselves, the ways they act and the ways they perceive reality. This concept is similar to but more potent than Freire's (1972) notion of becoming a subject rather than remaining a powerless object. This process of interactive self-realization which enables women to reclaim their self-worth and self-integrity is fundamental to feminist education (Ferguson 1992) and critical for women's empowerment. In essence, it is the epistemology of women's narrative knowing which enables subjugated women as subjects to produce their own (situated) knowledge as they reconstruct their own subjectivities.

This research has shown that educational work can contribute to the empowerment of factory women by taking on board in and as educational work their gendered experiences of emotional subordination, powerlessness and inferiority which are silenced. To achieve this, the study has systematised story-telling-sharing as education and as a pedagogy to evoke and make sense of suppressed lived experiences and emotional sufferings, a process which I theorised as reconstructing subjectivities (see chapter three, 3.4 and chapter seven, 7.4). It is an educational process to elicit talk and reconstruct lived experiences of emotional pain where the women are facilitated to make sense of their repressed experiences of emotional subordination and recognise their effects on the constitution of their subjectivities. 'Reconstructing Subjectivities' has emerged from this study as a core analytical category to re-frame and guide the practice and analysis of educational work with factory women. This

educational process is centred on the women's narratives through the telling and sharing of their unspoken, unspeakable stories of subordination. However, for the stories (read suppressed lived experiences) to be articulated and for new meanings to unfold, conscious, evocative facilitation and enabling conditions are needed. The guiding principles of this pedagogy are listed in the previous section.

8.3   BY WAY OF A CONCLUSION: SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

The last section elucidated the range of insights this research has brought to the understanding and practice of education for women's empowerment. It is within the context of these findings that this study advances the theory and practice of non-formal\adult\popular education. Specifically this study makes significant contributions to the discourse and scope of educational work with factory women and for women's education in general. The most significant discovery of this study is the unearthing of certain lived realities of factory women that have not been highlighted in the literature, and systematising an educational approach to address these dimensions in and as education. The various contributions are explicated according to (i) educational practice, (ii) theory and, (iii) methodology[7].

Educational Practice

The major strength of this thesis lies in its contributions to **women workers' education**, in terms of context, content and method. This research breaks new ground in unravelling the subjective-affective contexts of factory women's realities

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[7] These categories are used to organise my discussion. In actual fact the three areas overlap and have interrelated implications for each other.

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for educational intervention: their unspoken, unspeakable gendered experiences of emotional subordination. Because of the pervasive nature of patriarchal society, factory women experience varied multiple forms of subjugation (from work, society, home and interpersonal relationships) and the disabling effects of being continously subordinated which leave a 'psychic alienation' (Bartky 1990) of crippling effects on their subjectivities.

This research found that most educational work for factory women focus on their material-objective conditions and practical needs but not on their emotional well-being. Even in situations where gender agendas and strategic interests are covered, the women's unspoken thoughts, repressed feelings and pains, especially the personally felt emotional subordination tend to be overlooked. This study advocates that silenced experiences of emotional subordination, feelings of powerlessness and inferiority have to be taken on board in and as educational work. Emotional well-being is central to women's experience of empowerment. Education with the vision of women's empowerment must address the pervasiveness of the debilitating emotional subjectivities among women. Education for women's empowerment must challenge gender subordination and domination from all forms of social division. In particular, internalised injuries and emotional sufferings arising from inflictions of domination that are impacted subjectively have to be addressed. This study demonstrates how educational work can be reframed to unearth these suppressed layers and thus facilitate women reconstruct their subjectivities for collective self-recovery and subjective empowerment. It shows how emotional sufferings can be redefined for transformatory potential and addressed as a core agenda in education for factory women's empowerment.

The discovery of story-telling-sharing as an educational approach to address the emotional subordination of factory women is another significant contribution from this study. Story-telling-sharing as education incorporates pedagogical tools to evoke the articulation and examination of women's unspoken, unspeakable emotional sufferings. Although story-telling-sharing is very much akin to the feminist method of consciousness-raising, not much has been written about the methods of getting women to talk their stories. In the literature on consciousness-raising (Allen 1970; Dreifus 1973; Hart 1990) it seems that women are willing to talk about their experiences when given the opportunity to do so. This may be the case in Western contexts but in the Asian cultural milieu, individuals, especially women, find it very difficult to disclose their personal experiences. Women are usually quite reticent in groups. They hesitate to talk voluntarily for fear that their peers may view them as being too self-centred or attention-seekers. Moreover, the derogatory effects of continual subordination are rife in silencing factory women. Thus it is necessary to develop evocative techniques and an evocative pedagogy to elicit talk. This was achieved in my research. Story-telling-sharing as an educational approach is not only appropriate for women workers's education but also for any oppressed groups as well as in formal school settings. Another related significance from this insight is that despite the different cultural contexts the method of consciousness-raising is pedagogically appropriate for women's liberatory education, but with the additional input of a evocative pedagogy based on the specificities of various local Asian cultures.

Apart from the contributions described above, I have also operationalised the analytical concepts and findings of this research to develop a popular education

module to promote gender consciousness and to facilitate working class women process their gendered experiences of subordination (see APPENDIX). Such an effort addresses the lack of feminist popular education among working class women and the lack of resource material for the grassroots in gender consciousness formation.

Though the research yielded substantial insights, what was uncovered is only as a small window into the larger issue of how to foreground and address women's experienced subordination in ways that are empowering. The focus in this research was mainly on getting the women to talk, express and make meaning from their repressed pain. Consciousness-raising must go further into systematic analysis and formulation of a vision and strategy for change. The time constraints of this field research did not permit that to be nurtured. However, I believe that with sufficient time this goal is achievable.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes substantially to the epistemological base of non-formal\adult\popular education. The study confirms that a practice discipline like non-formal/adult/popular requires a knowledge base that is inter and multi-disciplinary. The eclectic but coherent conceptual framework synthesised three bodies of literature: factory women workers, non-formal/adult/popular education and feminism. The literature review provides an in-depth survey of non-formal educational practice and the situation of factory women. It lends support to the practice in feminist popular education of the paramount importance of understanding the objective and subjective dimensions of learners before any meaningful educational intervention can be constructed. Likewise, the study reinforced the necessity to take

on board the multiple contexts (from the personal level of the learner to the economic-social-political context of the country) within which educational practices are embedded and which shape the kind of spaces and forms of educational work. This study highlights an unexplored dimension of factory women's own voices and subjective experiences from their own personal standpoints - their silenced sufferings, thoughts and feelings to the sociological analyses of researchers which describe the women's material objective conditions.

Another theoretical contribution this study makes to the field of non-formal\adult\popular education, is the reformulation of borrowed conceptual tools (Bright 1985) from feminism to the practice and analysis of women workers' education. The role of borrowing theory from other fields and disciplines has been a contentious issue in adult education (Garrison 1994). Borrowing and reformulating concepts and knowledge from other disciplines into a coherent theoretical framework identifiable to adult education has been advocated by Jensen (1964). However, Welton (1987:58) argues that "borrowing from the disciplines only makes sense if we know our domains". In this research, the use of feminist literature has indeed deepened the understanding of factory women's contexts and subsequently the kind of educational work with them. Formulation of the two key theoretical concepts - 'subjectivities' and 'emotional subordination' from feminist literature has helped to redefine educational work with factory women. These 'borrowed' theoretical constructs help reframe the meaning, practice and analysis of wowen workers' education.

Writings on feminist perspectives in non-formal/adult education are hard to come by except in recent literature on feminist popular education (Voices Rising

1988; Walters & Manicom 1996; Walters 1998). However, the focus on women and adult education (Bruce 1986; Davis 1988; Highet 1991), and feminism in formal education (Culley & Portuges 1985; Weiler 1988) has long being explored theoretically. The application of feminist literature to the discourse of non-formal\adult\popular education, and the linking of women and development action in adult education has seldom been undertaken in the literature. This study makes that bold attempt.

Methodological Contributions

The creative integration, and not just triangulation[8] of three alternative research approaches (participatory research, feminist research and the narrative approach) makes this study intriguing. In recent years, writings on stories and personal narratives have been popular, especially in women's studies. However, stories are used mainly as methods of data gathering. My contribution to this set of literature is on how to use personal narratives and story-telling-sharing both as a research and educational tool. Beyond this, 'storying', used as a narrative methodology for negotiating and constructing meaning, together with its therapeutic, pedagogical and transformatory dimensions frames the methodological and epistemological approach to this study. Such a perspective and approach expands the scope and potential of the narrative approach. This is an invaluable contribution to the increasing recognition of using narrrative approaches beyond research, for practice disciplines like social work and education.

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[8] Triangulation (Mathison 1988:13) is "the use of multiple methods, data sources, and researchers to enhanve the validity of research findings".

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Although intended to be a participatory research endeavour, this study was not able to implement the methodology fully. Despite so, it breaks convention in its attempt to use a modified PR methodology for a Ph.D research. Furthermore, most empirical studies of feminist research have been carried out in the West, including those done by researchers from the South. My research is one of the few studies that is actually conducted in the South. This suggests the fact that principles of feminist research are universal and are applicable across national boundaries, but adapted to local cultural specificities. As one of the few feminist research projects in the South using the FPR framework, this study provides excellent case material to the issues of reflexivity and an empowering research methdology.

Methodologically, this study has demonstrated the efficacy and importance of alternative methodologies. This research shows the importance of using a combination of multiple methods which are appropriate to each aspect of the research problem. It is also one of the few studies that uses the abductive strategy to evolve a conceptual framework. This study makes useful illustrative material in the application of abduction, which is very much lacking in the literature on research methodology. Chapter two has explicated in detail what was entailed in the process and illustrated the significance of such a methodology for advancing feminist epistemology and indigenous theory-building.

Finally, by way of a full circle, this research has great significance for myself. It has deepened my understandings of factory women's realities (and women's realities in general) and my educational work with them. The research has re-visioned my educational work and empowered me subjectively to continue my 'passionate politics and passsionate scholarship'. From now on, my educational work

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will focus not only on factory women but will include the wider community of women (and men). Personally-politically, I have also expanded from a class-oriented perspective and praxis to one which is also gendered and feminist.

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APPENDIX

UNDERSTANDING EXPERIENCES of GENDERED SUBORDINATION THROUGH POPULAR EDUCATION[1]

This workshop can be conducted for any group of women with the appropriate modifications for each respective sector. The primary goal is to enable participants understand the meaning and dynamics of gender from women's standpoints and their lived experiences, especially their experienced subordination. Underlying the construction of this program is the urgency, agency and potential of women themselves challenging gender subordination. The objectives of this module are:

(a)   understand the meaning of gender and how that is related to us personally;

(b)   provide a safe space for women to share and reflect on their lived experiences of gender subordination;

(c)   share and learn ways to confront and challenge gender subordination;

(d)   initiate discussion on how we are addressing gender subordination in our work.

The workshop uses the popular education methodology and its corollary set of creative participatory methods to evoke the recall, articulation and reflection-analysis of suppressed experiences and memories. Through the sharing, drawing out and reflection of old expereinces, new understandings, new knowledge (including new feelings and perceptions) are created as inputs and new ways of looking at old problems

Underlying this workshop are assumptions that training and educational work with women is ultimately concerned with changing the conditions and position of women. This requires changing our subordinated conditions and positions. This is education for social change and education for social change involves organising for social change as well. Hence education and organising of women are closely intertwined. As womens' lives are so multi-faceted, women's education involves taking on board all aspects of women's lives. This means working with the HEAD (thinking, knowing, intellect), HEART (feelings, emotions, intuition) and HANDS (doing, organising-action), with the whole being and spirit of the person.

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[1] In the formulation of this training workshop I have benefited from working with Glecy Atienza and Agnes Matoto of PETA, Philippines and with Shirley Walters of CACE, South Africa as well as from numerous training modules. This module has been published in JIMENEZ-TAN M. & KHOO A.(eds): **A Resource Book for Training and Organising Work among Asian Women Workers.** Hong Kong: Committee for Asian Women. pp24-33.

The training program takes at least 2 days and preferably not more than 25 particpants each time. The appendix here merely lay out the program. It does not instruct how the workshop can or should be conducted. However the prinicples of the evocative pedagaogy as listed in chapter eight (8.2) and the understanding of the practice of feminist popular education as elucidated in chapter three (3.4) apply.

The agenda of the program consists of 3 main modules and is as follows:

AGENDA

A. INTRODUCTION
B. MAKING CONNECTIONS
C. THE MEANING OF GENDER
 . gender is cultural
 . women and structures
D. MAKING SENSE OF OUR EXPERIENCES OF GENDERED
 SUBORDINATION
 . using story-telling-sharing
 . using creative dramatics
 . using sculpturing
E. ANALYSIS AND TAKING IT BACK TO OUR WORK

A. INTRODUCTION

1. ## BREAKING THE ICE, BUILDING BONDS
   (introduction of participants)

   a. Dynamising our bodies and being with each other
      - music and movement (one feeling word that describes your emotion now)
   b. Group introduction (group-profiling)
      - saunter around in certain (name them) moods, shapes and postures with music
      - greetings acccording to .. and in certain nos.
      - group according to ..
         - age
         - factory
         - years of work
         - etc. to add on by participants
         - have attended workshops before - workshops on women .. explain
         - gather in a circle .. some deep breathing and relaxation .. with eyes close and relaxed - my welcome and explanation to the workshop
         - using all senses and faculties of knowing and learning
         - participate fully and let go
         - no right or wrong .. your way, experiences, feelings etc.
         - create cirle of energy and common rythmn
   c. Personal introduction
      - a quality/strength that you see in yourself

2. ## LEVELLING of EXPECTATIONS and workshop introduction
   a. particpatory activity on "What do you expect from this workshop", and linking these with b below.
   b. Why are we here?
      - the focus and purpose of workshop - what, why, how
      - reference to the expectations
      - how we work together as a group
      - your role, my role. our roles
      - no right or wrong things or ways (if you feel uncomfortable do not force yourself but do not refrain or censor yourself from the opportunity of learning-doing, having fun)
      - learning - with our **head** (thinking, intellect, knowing) **heart** (feelings, emotions, intuition), **hands** (doing, action) and our whole being - **spirit**

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B. MAKING CONNECTIONS

1. **DRAWING OUR OWN LIFE JOURNEY** (self activity)
    a. take note of critical events (who, what, why, how)
    b. insert with (pencil) memories/experiences of being a female (can be posititve or negative or neutral) - at home. school, church/temple, society
        . awareness of you being a girl, body
        . forbidden feelings
        . discrimination
        . reprimand
        . comment, remarks
        . praises - affirmations
        . advice, etc
    c. self reflection on
        . how did you come to know that you are a female, and what are those experiences, what does that mean to you when
        . how .. did you become aware of men/male .. what are these experiences - your feelings and reactions

2. **YOUR OWN FEELINGS OF BEING A WOMAN**
    a. fill in the sentence: "I feel .... as a woman (your own feelings and order it)

3. **STORY-TELLING-SHARING of female experiences and awareness of gender differences**

    a. focusing on your experiences of being female - draw out specific adjectives to describe them
    b. how did you come to know that you are a female. and what are those experiences, what does that mean to you
    c. use add on technique, report back to whole group:
        . the range/types of experiences - who, why
        . strengths, weaknesses
        . positive, negative
        . pains and joy
    d. how did you come to know that you are a female, and what are those experiences, what does that mean to you
    e. when .. how .. did you become aware of men/male .. what are these experiences - your feelings and reactions
    f. overall discussion and synthesis - some possible points to note:
        . the past in the present
        . womens's sense of being .. self-esteem .. self-awareness
        . self-definition/perception .. definition and construction by others
        . stereotyping
        . body/sexuality/sensuality
        . power relations .. discrimination (patriachy)

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. roles

. strength and weaknesses

. relationships

. own agency

4. **KNOWING OUR OWN BODY**

a. Draw your own body

b. Body personality awareness exercise

   . stereotyping own body function

   . how mental self-image affects physical functioning

   . how physical state influences emotional self

c. Concentrate and follow me .. a few times .. "this is my .."

d. Now touch the part of the body which

   . you use most .. and then group together accordingly

   . you like most ..

   . always touch ..

   . not allowed to touch as a child

   . seldom touch ..

   . is always in pain ..

   . you do not like .. why

   . the most beautiful part ..

e. Discussion

   . how do you feel when touching and identifying different parts of your body

   . the reasons behind those feelings

   . why those feelings

   . what dictates women's image of their bodies/beauty

f. Synthesis - BODY IMAGE, SENSUALITY, SEXUALITY

   . our feelings

   . our senses

   . our body image

   . knowing oneself better, knowing one's own preferences

C. MAKING SENSE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GENDER SUBORDINATION

1. **ENTANGLEMENT EXERCISE**

2. **INTRODUCE ACTIVITIES AND METHODS**
   a. story-telling (sharing a lived experience), sculpturing, creative dramatics

3. **SHARING STORIES OF SUBORDINATION** (a - d in small groups)
   a. think of a moment when you felt undermined
   b. share it .. in relating the incident describe
      . the situation .. what happened
      . the persons involved - sex, age, race, status, class, etc
      . think of yourself in the same way - your relationship to the different people
   c. what gave the person/s power over you at that moment of subordination
   d. how did you feel, what did you do
   e. in whole group discuss how did you feel sharing the story

4. **SCULPTURING AN EXPEREINCE** (in same small group)
   a. The person whose situation is chosen becomes the sculptor and gives each person the role of one of the people who was involved in the situation, including herself. The sculptor explains the situation, who was involved, what her own role was and the power relationships between the people. The sculptor arranges them in their positions.
   b. freeze the sculpture
   c. each group to show sculpture, when finish shake off roles
      (nb: mention the possible emotional effects on those playing roles of victim and oppressor)
   d. ask questions - those in the sculpture, then those watching
      . how do you feel
      . who is the oppressor
      . what are the relationships within the sculpture
   e. ask person who created sculpture
      . how does it feel to recreate your experience
      . do you see something in the sculpture you did not see before

5. **CREATIVE DRAMATICS - acting it out**
   a. act out what happened - the victim palying her role
   b. re-act with the victim able to react back - break the oppression by doing what she would have wanted to do if it were to happen to her now
   c. discussion

6. **DISCUSSION of whole group**
   a. what gives the oppressor power? why? in what ways do age, able-bodiness, class, race etc.
   b. what gives the oppressor legitimacy?

. who is supporting what? in what ways are we part of supporting oppression?
. are there contradicitons for anyone? in what ways?
. discuss any insights from the sculptures, dramas (in respective groups)

D. ANALYSIS AND TAKING IT BACK TO OUR WORK

1. ENERGISER AND CENTERING OUR ENERGIES

2. RECAP THE EXPERIENCES PORTRAYED

3. DISCUSSION
   a. what beliefs, values, attitudes underlie the behaviour
   b. what are the root causes
   c. use "gender tree" for synthesis
      . meanings of terms - sexism, patriachy, women's oppression, systems of oppression - racism, class
   d. how to counter those behaviour - what must be done, can, should be done
   e. what kind of actions are required

4. APPLYING THESE TO OUR WORK
   a. input and discussion
      In our work with women we have found it useful to be conscious of 3 dimensions. In working with WOMEN to challenge their subordinated position we find it inevitable to work with their
      . **HEART .. .. feelings, pains, emotions (FEEL)**
      . **HEAD .. .. to understand why feeling that pain, why that silence, to rename from their standpoint (KNOW)**
      . **HAND .. .. to act, to do something to change that pain, that situation (DO)**

   In educational work we refer to these as

   . **CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING/CONSCIENTISATION**
   . **POLITICAL UNDERSTANDING/ANALYSIS**
   . **ACTION (individually and collectively)**

5. GROUP DISCUSSION
   a. is your work addressing the 3 aspects
   b. in what ways
   c. what are the effects/impact

6. EVALUATION

PAGE

NUMBERING

AS ORIGINAL

PAGE

NUMBERING

AS ORIGINAL

B. THE MEANING OF GENDER

1. **OUR PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AND MEN**
   a. when someone says the word 'women', 'men' - what do you think of? .. write on pieces of paper and processed together to form a web chart
   b. what are your personal **thoughts and feelings** about 'women's issues' (buzz with neighbour and add on in a round)
   c. what do you understand by the word **gender**?" (open brainstorm)

2. **CHARACTERISTICS of MEN and WOMEN**

   a. In pairs, feet together .. list characteristic, trait, role
   b. Examining charactersitic to see whether apply to men and women vice versa
   c. Discussion
      . what then is the difference between man and woman
      . what then is common to man and woman
      . who reinforce the stereotypes and myths and where do they come from?
      . how do these stereotypes and myths affect our views of ourselves, other women?
      . has this discussion brought about any of your assumptions/stereotypes about women to light?

3. **YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW** (think of the dialogue that goes with it .. what were you thinking/saying while doing it?)
   a. recall certain experiences of childhood and act out individually what you did as a child because you were a girl
   b. act out an activity that you have to do because you are a woman
   c. think of an activity you want to do because you are a woman
   d. discussion - what dictate the respective roles

4. **MASKS and RITUALS** (to show how different people relate to each other in terms of the attitudes they have)
   a. enact and analyse the different tabloids
      . supervisor and woman worker
      . village headman and woman worker
      . woman worker leader and woman worker
      . male unionist and woman worker leader

5. **SUMMARY SYNTHESIS of GENDER**