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# **Assuming Modernity :**

**Migrant Industrial Workers in Tangerang, Indonesia**

**Johannes Nicolaas Warouw**

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
The Australian National University**

**January 2004**

Except as cited in the text,  
this work is the result of research  
carried out by the author.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Johannes Nicolaas Warouw".

Johannes Nicolaas Warouw  
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to Poppy, Astrid, and Amellia,  
whose love, understanding and encouragement are boundless,  
and to the loving memory of my father and my mother

## ABSTRACT

The financial crisis in 1997 that severely hit Indonesian manufacturing made thousands of factory workers redundant. As the impact of the crisis eases several years later, the sector has started to recover and urban manufacturing is now attracting young migrants from rural Indonesia. The recent flow of migrants to the city marks the rise of a new generation of urban factory workers who arrive in the metropolis with distinctive aspirations compared to their pre-crisis predecessors who were associated with labour activism in the early and mid-1990s.

This thesis is an ethnographic account of migrant industrial workers in Tangerang, west Java and their relation to the processes of globalisation and modernisation. It focuses on the increasing integration of rural subjects into modern discourses through the embrace of practices regarded as conferring on them a modern identity. The formation of identity amongst these subjects is inseparable from their efforts to be modern subjects, represented by their aspirations for progress and advancement. The personalities introduced in this thesis demonstrate a variety of expression of what it means to be modern beings; to be urban people; to be differentiated from the ‘unmodern’ rural existence; and to be in conformity with the imagined state of modernity.

The shift to the city is not experienced by these new arrivals as a disjuncture because their childhood experience in the countryside has already been shaped by diverse cultural flows, making modernisation and global discourse familiar in rural society. Indeed, these childhood encounters with the modern have created a phantasmagoric image of modernity which they seek to embrace through migration to the city. Nonetheless, in their new metropolitan setting, the contemporary migrants remain subject to the harsh regime of capitalist production as well as urban marginalisation that menace their attempt to realise their ‘imagined community’ of modernity. Therefore, their urban practices are affected by their efforts to produce a new meaning to and realigning of their pre-existing perceived ‘modernity’ with the actuality of the industrial town. This thesis, based on nearly one year’s fieldwork between 2000-2001 in an urban neighbourhood in Tangerang, focuses on how the rural youth-turned urban migrant workers understand their place in the process of modernisation and material development, which has become the holy grail of the contemporary Indonesian state.

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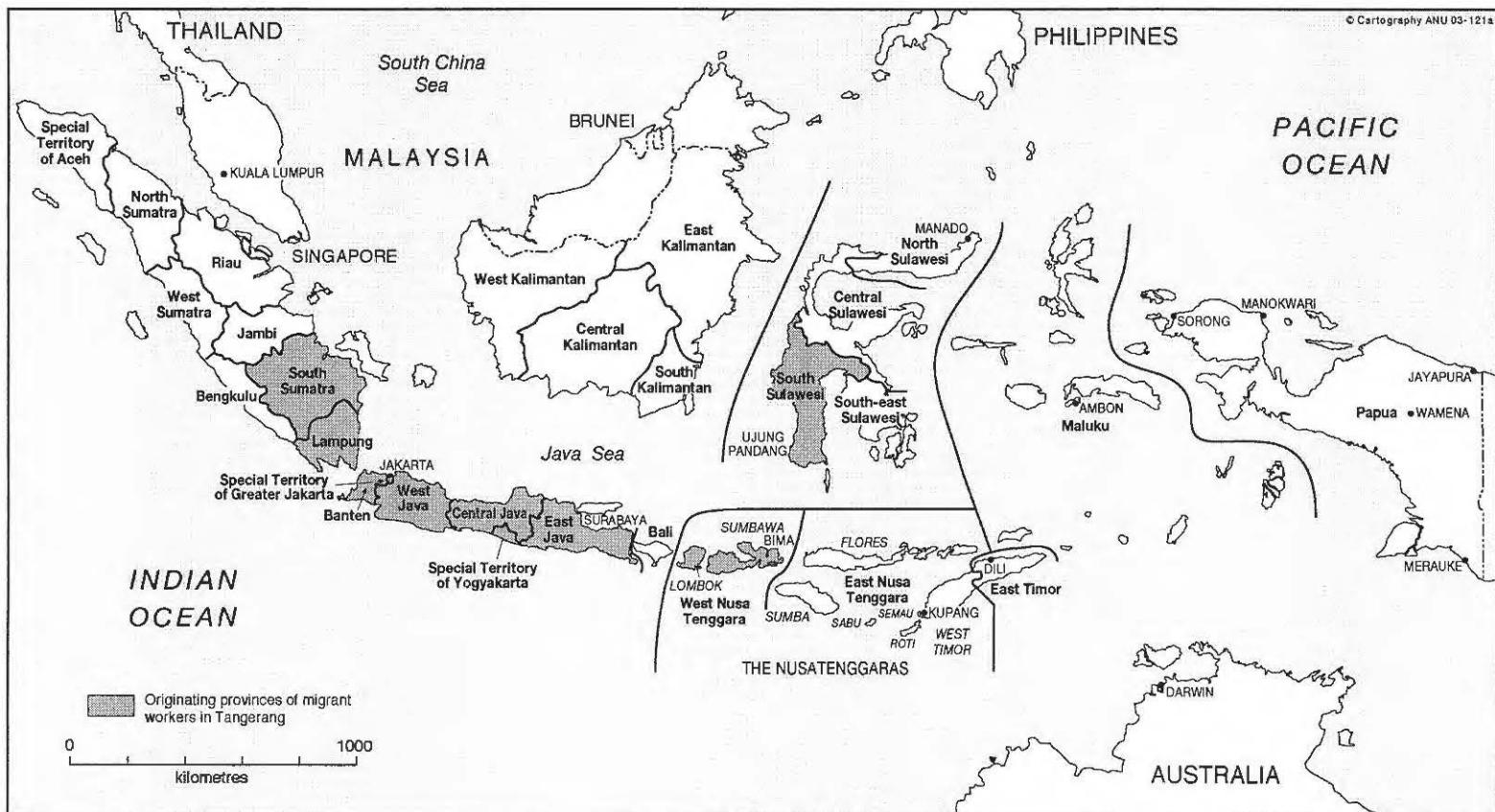
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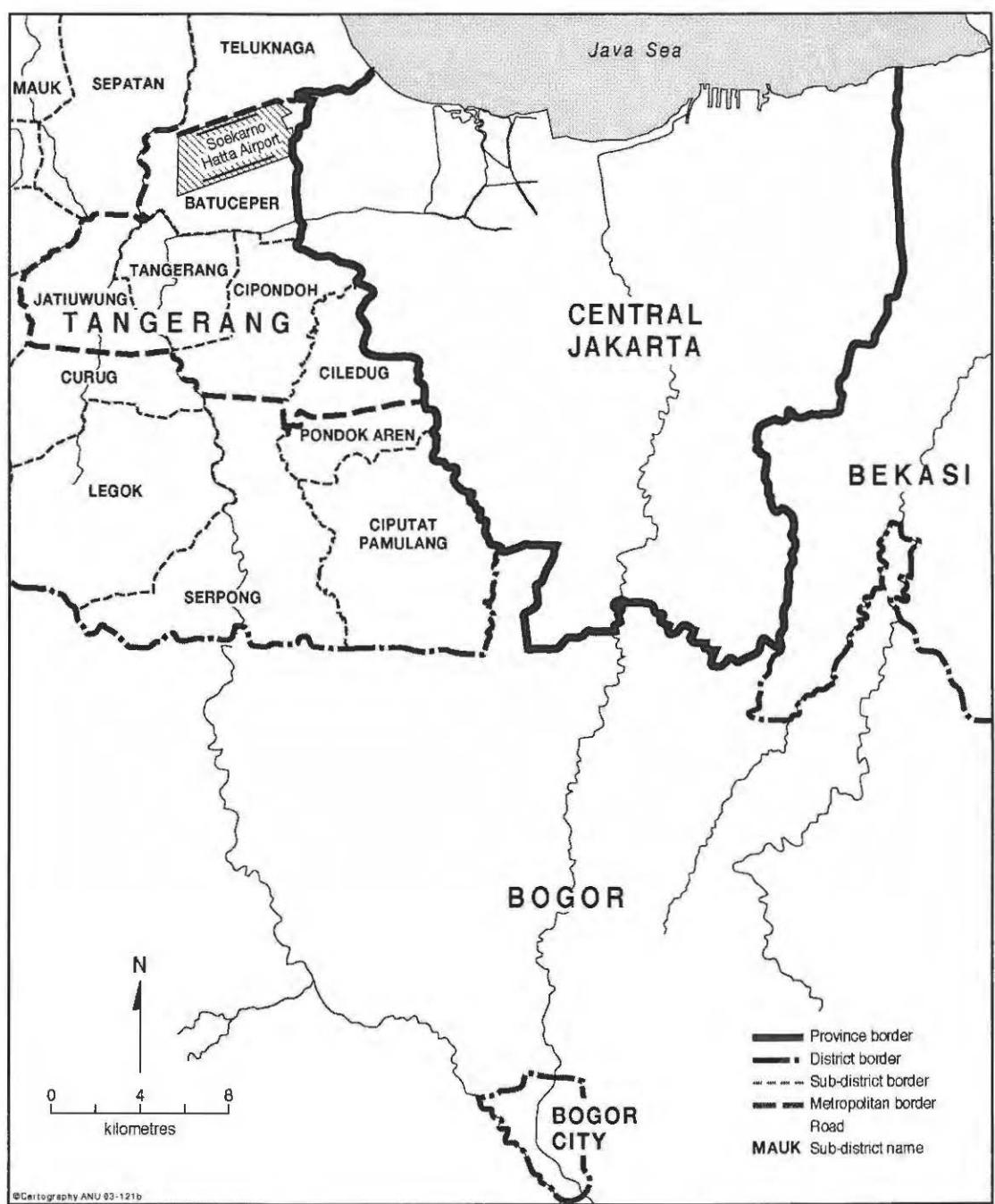
## GLOSSARY

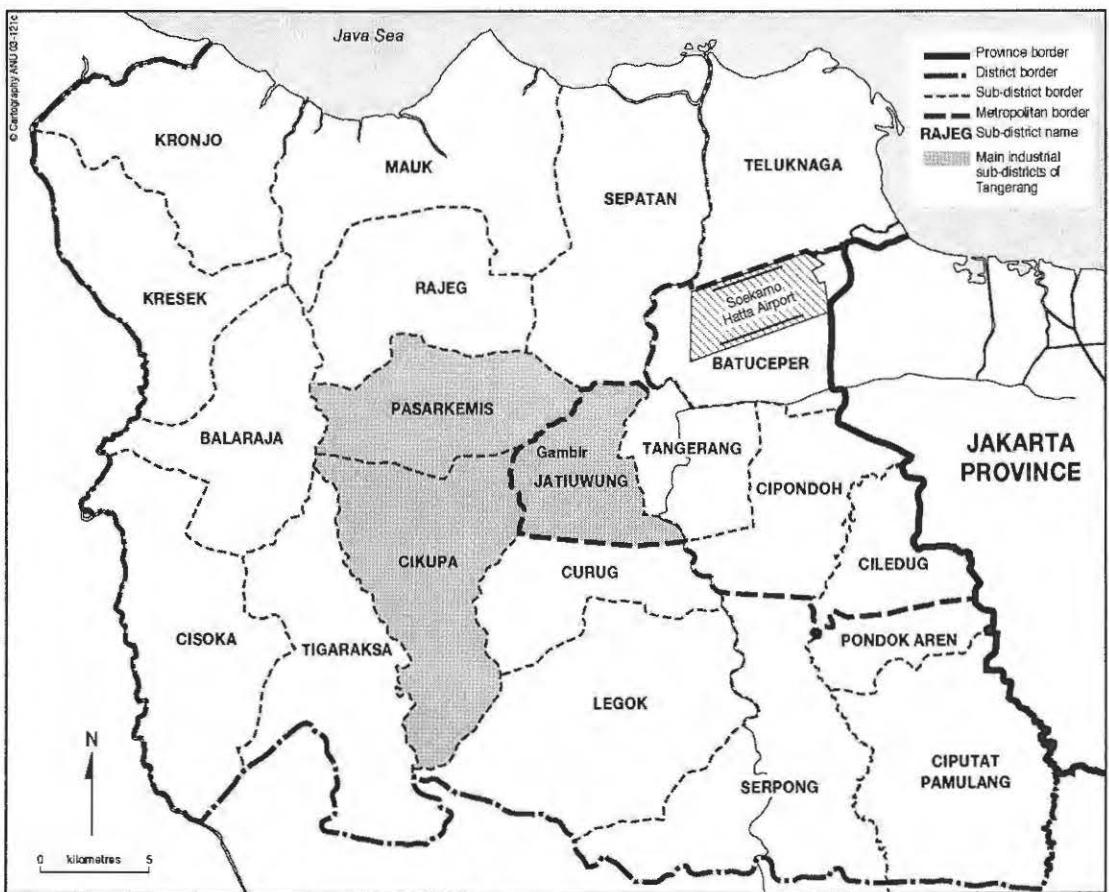
BPN	: <i>Badan Pertanahan Nasional</i> ; National Land Authority.
BPS	: <i>Badan Pusat Statistik</i> ; Indonesia Bureau of Statistics.
Bulog	: <i>Badan Urusan Logistik</i> ; State Logistics Office, a state agency dealing in purchasing and distributing basic needs (e.g. rice, sugar, salt, wheat).
<i>buruh</i>	: workers; became a pejorative term with proletarian character under Soeharto's New Order.
Depnaker	: <i>Departemen Tenaga Kerja</i> ; Department of Manpower, has been renamed <i>Depnakertrans</i> since the administration of, former, President Abdurrahman Wahid in 1999.
Depnakertrans	: <i>Departemen Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi</i> ; Department of Manpower and Transmigration.
EOI	: Export-Oriented Industries.
ET	: <i>Eks-Tahanan Politik</i> ; Ex-Political Prisoner, a code normally written on the <i>KTP</i>
HDG	: <i>Harga Dasar Gabah</i> ; price ceiling of paddy.
HIP	: <i>Hubungan Industrial Pancasila</i> ; Pancasila Industrial Relations, previously known as <i>HPP</i> .
HPP	: <i>Hubungan Perburuhan Pancasila</i> ; Pancasila Labour Relations.
IHK	: <i>Indeks Harga Konsumen</i> ; Consumer Price Index.
Inpres	: <i>Instruksi Presiden</i> ; Presidential Instruction
ISI	: Import Substitution Industries.
Jamsostek	: <i>Jaminan Sosial Tenaga Kerja</i> ; Worker Social Security.
<i>kampung</i>	: urban neighbourhood.
<i>karyawan</i>	: workers; an ameliorative term emphasising on dignified character of workers during Soeharto's New Order.
<i>Keppres</i>	: <i>Keputusan Presiden</i> ; Presidential Ruling.
KFM	: <i>Kebutuhan Fisik Minimum</i> ; Minimum Physical Needs, later modified as <i>KHM</i> .
KHM	: <i>Kebutuhan Hidup Minimum</i> ; Minimum Living Needs.

KKB	: <i>Kesepakatan kerja Bersama</i> ; Joint Work Agreement (between the employer and the employee).
KTP	: <i>Kartu Tanda Penduduk</i> ; Citizen Identity Card.
<i>mukena</i>	: white cloak covering woman's head and body worn at Islamic prayer.
<i>mushalla</i>	: small building or room set aside in a public place for performance of Islamic religious duties.
PKI	: <i>Partai Komunis Indonesia</i> ; Indonesian Communist Party.
PKT	: <i>Pemerintah Kota Tangerang</i> ; Tangerang Municipality Authority.
PT	: <i>Perseroan Terbatas</i> ; joint stock company.
RT	: <i>Rukun Tetangga</i> ; the lowest administration unit at hamlet level.
SD	: <i>Sekolah Dasar</i> ; Primary School.
SKKB	: <i>Surat Keterangan Kelakuan Baik</i> ; A Statement of Good Behaviour, issued by police.
SLTA	: <i>Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Atas</i> ; Senior High School.
SLTP	: <i>Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama</i> ; Junior High School.
SOBSI	: <i>Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia</i> ; All-Indonesian Central Workers' Organisation, linked to PKI
SOKSI	: <i>Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia</i> ; Central Organisation of Socialist Karyawan of Indonesia
SP-TSK	: <i>Serikat Pekerja Tekstil, Sandang, dan Kulit</i> ; Textile, Garment, and Leather Workers Union
UMP	: <i>Upah Minimum Propinsi</i> ; Provincial Minimum Wage, previously known as UMR.
UMR	: <i>Upah Minimum Regional</i> ; Regional Minimum Wage.
yayasan	: employment agency, as locally called by migrant workers; the term literally means 'foundation'.



Map 1: Indonesia and Originating Provinces of Migrant Workers in Tangerang





Map 3: Tangerang Area and border separating Tangerang Municipality and Tangerang Districts

# Chapter 1

## Introduction



*Plate 1.1: Starting the Day, Setting Off to Work (photo: RWJ)*

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

*'Can one write the story of the working classes in our period simply in terms of their class organizations (not necessarily socialist ones) or of that generic class consciousness expressed in the lifestyles and behaviour patterns in the ghetto-world of the proletariat?'*  
*(Hobsbawm, Eric 1994, *The Age of Empire*, p.139)*

*'The ideal of a new society was what gave the working class hope.'*  
*(Hobsbawm, Eric 1994, *The Age of Empire*, p.133)*

I was sitting one evening with a small crowd of female and male factory workers on a wooden bench in a lodging complex in an industrial-residential urban neighbourhood in Tangerang. We were engaged in light and witty conversation, when I saw Amri, a friend of ours, walking rapidly toward us. He grinned as he was approaching us. Amri was a 24 year-old male worker at a Japanese-owned industrial corporation manufacturing foam and plastic products. Normally he was among our evening crowd. One of us enquired where he had been, and he replied with a smile, without answering the query, as if he concealed a secret. Unexpectedly, Amri signalled me to follow him to his lodging, four-five metres away. I followed him.

As we got into his lodging, he put his hand into his jeans pocket and showed me a cellular phone of a well-known brand that he had just bought from a friend. After gazing at his newly-acquired device and aimlessly pressing some buttons, he handed it over to me and asked me how to operate it. I had my own mobile phone, but a different brand from Amri's, so it took me a while to learn the features on his. It took even longer to explain to him how to use his cellular phone or *HP* (hand phone) as it is locally known. After about an hour learning-by-doing, he seemed confident enough with it, sufficient to make a call, send a text-message, and store as well as retrieve phone numbers. He asked my number and gave his number so he could test

whether his *HP* worked properly. I was still sitting with him when he rang my number and we talked for a while over the line. Afterward, upon his request, I rang his number and, again, we spoke over the phone. He was then sure that his *HP* was in working order, but he kept holding and gazing at it, just like me, as I remember, when I had a cellular phone for the first time.

But, the business with Amri and his mobile phone was still far from over. I knew Amri was only a shopfloor worker like any other worker in the neighbourhood and he would not use his cellular phone for work-related communication. I also remembered that he once told me that although telecommunication depots were available in the neighbourhood, it was difficult for him to communicate with his family and relatives in the countryside because they had neither a fixed nor mobile phone. I knew a few other people in the neighbourhood who had cellular phones, but they usually only used their devices for incoming calls as it was less costly than making an outgoing call. Besides, it was more practical to communicate face-to-face in the small neighbourhood where we lived. I always found it easy to meet people I knew there without making an appointment. With this in mind, I was curious as to the practical function of Amri's cellular phone so I asked him directly that evening. He admitted all the doubts I mentioned above. But, then, he explained:

‘*HP* is now common. How could an urban individual (*orang kota*) not know about *HP*? At least I know how to operate the *HP*, so if somebody, especially people from the countryside, come to me and ask me (about operating the *HP*), I can show him (how). At least when I press the buttons, I know what I am doing, not just pressing aimlessly.’

For Amri, a cellular phone was not about affordability or about a practical need to communicate, as the price of this device was less than half of his monthly income. He earned double the government-set minimum wage level for he frequently performed overtime. But, from that time on, upon his request, I had to make a call, at least once a day, to his *HP* or send him a text-message, to which he never replied, to make sure that his device worked well.

\*\*\*\*\*

The inspiration for this study developed from a concern with the escalating labour activism around Indonesia's process of industrialisation, particularly in manufacturing sectors, which reemerged in the late 1980s. Indonesia witnessed

increasing industrial strikes from the early 1990s. Therefore, my initial intent in this research was to seek an alternative, a rather anthropological view on this phenomenon, to complement the political-economic outlooks offered in the literature about post-independence Indonesian workers, especially their radical traditions (e.g. Ford 2001, Hadiz 1997, Kammen 1997). Nonetheless, during fieldwork I developed a different perspective on the industrial workers that appeared to diverge from the stereotypical portrayal of 'radical and militant' subjects. This project focuses on how the rural youth-turned urban migrant workers understand their place in the process of modernisation. The migrant worker subjects of my study strive to be part of modernity by reinterpreting the 'modern' and incorporating its representations which they believe to embody their modern identities, in particular, the ways they seek to incorporate practices considered urban (and hence, 'modern') into their everyday lives.

This thesis is based on 11 months fieldwork undertaken between September 2000 - July 2001 and April 2002 among the migrant workers in one particular neighborhood (*kampung*) in Tangerang, Banten Province (Map 1).<sup>1</sup> Tangerang is an industrial town considered to be one of Indonesia's foremost manufacturing sites (e.g. Hadiz 1997:126), located approximately 35 kilometres to the west of Jakarta, the nation's capital. Tangerang District was divided into two administrative regions, the District (*kabupaten*) of Tangerang and the Municipality (*kotamadya*) of Tangerang in 1993 (Map 2). One reason for the separation was to enable local government to effectively administer a region experiencing rapid population increase. Despite the separation, both the District and the Municipality remain significant in regard to the development of manufacturing industries. The three leading industrial subdistricts, which Kammen (1997:220) called the 'golden triangle', are spread across the District (Cikupa and Pasar Kemis) and the Municipality (Jatiuwung) (Map 2).

Migrants make up the majority of the labour force employed in the factories across the Tangerang region. This is partly because during the 1980s this formerly rural district could not provide a sufficient industrial labour force for the growing number of newly-established manufacturing establishments. The significance of Tangerang as an urban industrial centre can not be isolated from

the issue of population pressure in Jakarta back in the early 1970s (Mather 1985:154). The pressure forced the government to relocate several economic activities to the periphery in a radius of 40 kilometres from the capital (Mather 1983:5), in order to disperse job opportunities and human settlement outside Jakarta (Katjasungkana 1990:41). The policy was reinforced by Presidential Instruction No.13/1976 on the proliferation of Jakarta by incorporating the surrounding regions, including Tangerang, into its development as the Greater Jakarta metropolitan area.

Coming from a rural backgrounds, migrants are experiencing a transformation toward urban life and urban industrialisation. This requires them to habituate to the disciplines and relations within the labor-capital framework. Nonetheless, the shift toward an urban existence is not necessarily experienced as a disjuncture by the migrants, whose childhood experience in the countryside has already been shaped by diverse cultural flows, making modernisation and global discourse known to rural society. In short, urban migration is not about novelty. Rather, it is producing a new meaning to their pre-existing conception of modernity. This thesis is about rural subjects negotiating modernity and realigning (or conforming) their perceived 'modernity' with the actuality of the industrial town.

### **An Overview of Industrialisation in Tangerang**

Indonesia's consolidation of its manufacturing sector began principally after 1966 when the Soeharto New Order government, replacing the leftist-oriented Old Order, adopted 'a more market oriented economy' (Aswicahyono 1997:3).<sup>2</sup> This included the liberalisation of foreign exchange and trade policies (1967), as well the introduction of an export bonus (1967-1968) and a new foreign investment law (1967). Hal Hill (1998:28) says these measures were to bring the nation 'to normal economic conditions' after experiencing 600 percent inflation in the Sukarno period. In the microeconomic field, the industrialisation strategy targeted import substitution production, particularly of consumer goods (Hadiz 1997:63, see also Pangestu 1997:30).<sup>3</sup> The later phase in the 1970s was highlighted by the

intervention of the state in industrialisation and a more restrictive foreign investment policy as a response to the nationalists' criticism of the presence of foreign investment (Aswicahyono 1997:3-4). This inward-looking reversal was also enabled by the 1973-1982's oil boom, when the government was able to channel petroleum revenue to finance their own business enterprises (*ibid.*, see also Hill 1998:44-5, 143-4, Robison 1995:2). The petrodollar similarly encouraged import substitution industrialisation (ISI) in 'capital intensive projects involving steel, petrochemicals, cement, paper and automobiles' (Robison and Hadiz 1993:19). Entering the 1980s, the decline of oil process in 1982-1985 led the government to review its 'ambitious plan' for investment in such projects (Aswicahyono, 1997:5). It also brought a 'protectionist' character to the regulations regarding trade and industry by introducing import quotas (*ibid.*). The decline of the oil sector was a blessing in disguise, marking a shift to the development of non-oil manufacturing industries for export orientation (EOI) involving the private sector (Hadiz 1997:111, see also Hill 1998:29 and Robison 1995:7). By the mid 1980s, the export-oriented non-oil manufacturing industries occupied a significant role in the country's economy and became 'the primary engines of growth' (Hill 1998:23).

A major breakthrough in the manufacturing industry only occurred in the second half of the 1980s. Realising 'the protectionist tendencies' had only led to an economic recession in 1985, the government agreed to initiate 'substantive trade reforms' in 1986 (Aswicahyono 1997:6). Among these reforms was financial reform in October 1988, aimed at increasing competition among banks, allowing the mobilisation of public funds and the allocation of credits to the export-oriented non-oil industries (*ibid.*:6-7). The deregulation of investment policies also enabled 95 percent foreign ownership for export-oriented manufacturing sectors, making the previously closed sector available for foreign investment. These measures resulted in significant development in the manufacturing sectors, which were highly reliant on imported content in their production. The effectiveness of such reforms is pointed out by Hill (1998:29) in the achieved 11 percent per annum growth of the output of non-oil manufacturing industries between 1985-1992. He

added that such development placed Indonesia's economic performance, including rapid economic growth almost equal to its East Asian neighbours (*ibid.*).

The Indonesian government also backed its commitment to manufacturing industry by issuing Presidential Resolution (Keppres) No.53 in 1986, which allowed private enterprise to invest in the development of industrial centres. Due to its proximity to the heavily-populated, metropolis Jakarta, Tangerang was considered ideal given that businesses require a labour force and the provision of supporting infrastructure. Presidential Resolution No.54 released in 1989 even implicitly stated that Tangerang had to allocate at least 3,000 hectares of its land for industrial activities (PKT 2003). By 1992, the number of export-oriented industrial establishments in Tangerang District (before the District and Municipality's split in 1993) had reached 1350, generating jobs for approximately 286,736 workers (Kompas 6/11/1992, cited in Warouw 1996), compared to only 115 factories in 1985 (Nurbaiti, cited in Hadiz 1997:127). The industrial progress continued up to 1997 when around 2,342 plants were spread out across several industrial complexes in the area (Kompas 19/10/1997). In financial terms, the expansion of industries in the area increased the value of non-oil and gas exports from US\$26,455,085.53 in 1989 to US\$ 155,016,217.46 in 1995, an average 35 percent annual growth (Kompas 2/10/1996).

In Tangerang Municipality in 1996, there were 731 manufacturing factories, middle and large, which employed approximately 209,019 workers, compared to 190,800 workers absorbed in 687 plants in 1994 (see Table 1.1).<sup>4</sup> In 1997, 18.08 percent manufacturing corporations were locally owned (*PMDN*), whereas 12.1 percent corporations were by foreign owned (*PMA*) (Figure 1.1). Japanese, South Koreans, and Taiwanese seemed to be the main players in foreign investment in Tangerang. However, the most common pattern of ownership was joint ownership between local and foreign investors, amounting to 69.81 percent of industrial establishments in 1997 (Figure 1.1).<sup>5</sup> Joint ownership also dominated most manufacturing sub-sectors, such as food and beverages, textile, garment and leather,<sup>6</sup> furniture and wooden homeware, chemicals, rubber and plasticware, and metal products (see Figure 1.2).

Table 1.1: Medium and Large Industries  
in Tangerang Municipality  
and Labour Force Employed, 1994-1999

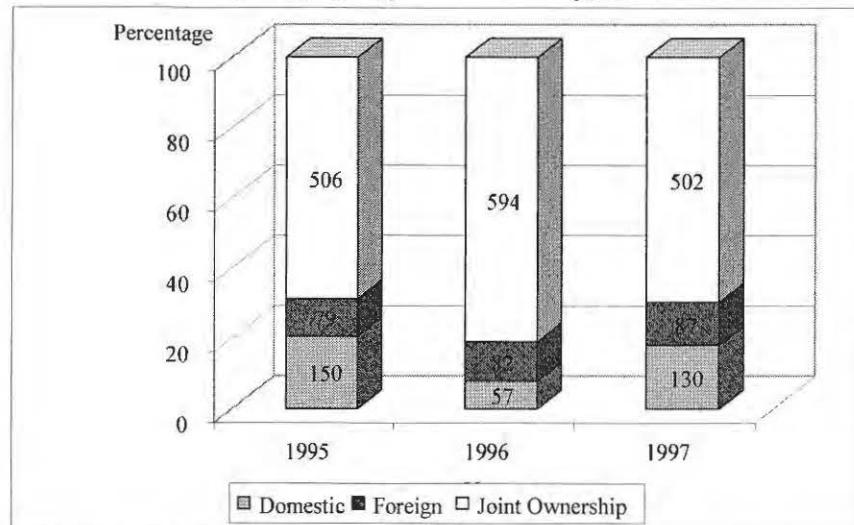
	Industries	Labour Force
1994	687	190,800
1995	756	202,439
1996	731	209,291
1997	717	192,094
1998	699	176,824
1999	658	169,387

*Source:*

BPS Kotamadya Tangerang 1999, p.167;

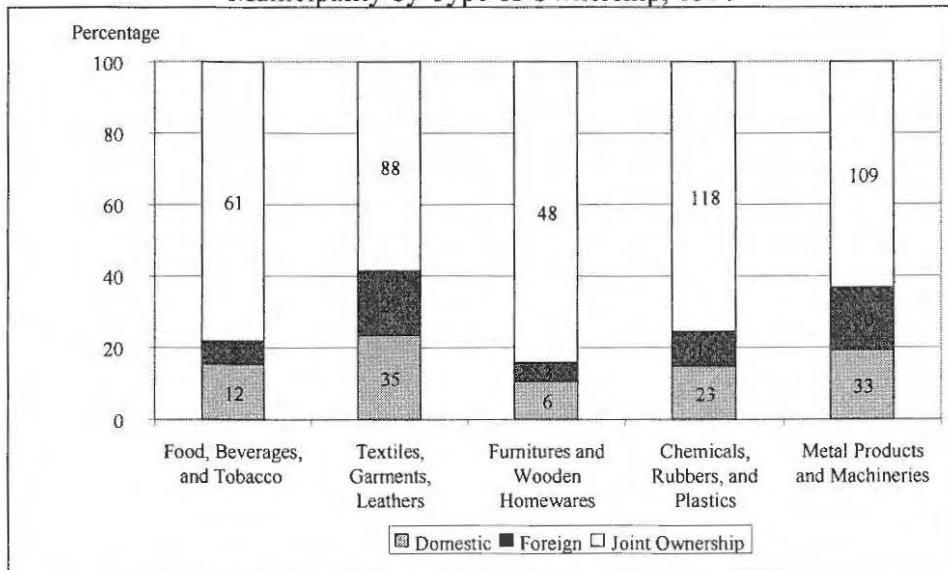
BPS Kota Tangerang 2000, p.175-7.

Figure 1.1: Medium and Large Industries in Tangerang  
Municipality, by Type of Ownership, 1995-1997



*Source:* BPS Kotamadya Tangerang 1999b, p.2.

Figure 1.2: Selected Medium and Large Industries in Tangerang Municipality by Type of Ownership, 1997



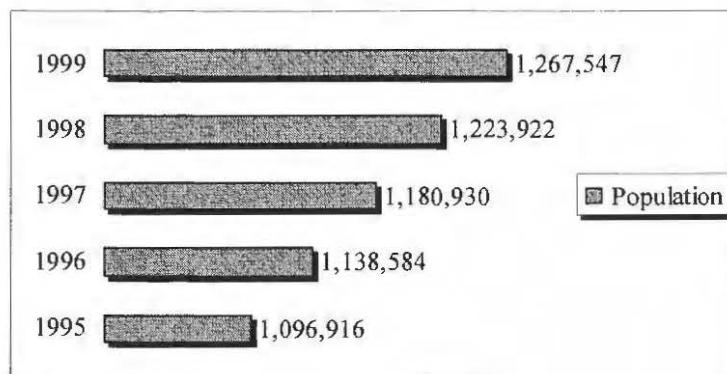
Source: BPS Kotamadya Tangerang 1999b, p.3-11.

The industrial growth in Tangerang is not without limit, however. In 1995 President Suharto closed Tangerang (District and Municipality) for further development of new factories in order to prevent the region from experiencing environmental damage (Kompas 16/2/1995).<sup>7</sup> In addition, a halt to the export-oriented industrial progress was apparent in the wake of the 1997 East Asian financial crisis. The crisis swiftly reached Indonesia, causing a sharp plunge in the value of the *rupiah*, measured against the US dollar. Having seen its long-standing title since the 1970s as 'the next Asian NIEs' (Hill 2000:154),<sup>8</sup> the harsh impact of the crisis on the Indonesian economy was described in the 1998 World Bank annual report as the only 'country in recent history [to] suffer [...] a dramatic reversal of fortune' (cited in Hill 1999:1). The low exchange rate increased the cost of imported raw materials, on which most manufacturers were dependant for their production (Sadli 1999:24). The high interest rate as well as the collapse of the banking system made it more difficult for these export-oriented industries to obtain loans from domestic banks to ensure their working capital (*ibid.*).<sup>9</sup> The crisis, locally known as *krismon*, also had a negative impact on community living standards (Hill 1999:28), affecting the capacity of household consumption to

absorb manufacturing products for the domestic market. As a result, manufacturing operations were threatened, leading a number of companies to close and others to downsize their labour force in order to escape bankruptcy. By March 1998, eight months after the first wave of the crisis in July 1997, at least 22,000 manufacturing workers from throughout Tangerang (Municipality and District) had lost their factory jobs (Kompas 21/3/1998).<sup>10</sup> In Tangerang Municipality, the number of factories declined to 699 in 1998 and to only 658 in 1999 (see Table 1.1). Similarly, the size of the labour force declined to 176,824 in 1998 and 169,387 in 1999 (see Table 1.1).

Nevertheless, the significance of Tangerang as an emerging industrial region did not die out along with those gloomy industrial indicators. The Municipality's population grew steadily from 1,138,584 in 1996 to 1,223,922 in 1998 and 1,267,547 in 1999 (see Figure 1.3). At the national level, Lisa Cameron (2002:149-50) indicates that during the financial crisis, trading and service sectors experienced growth in the size of the labour force employed. This suggests that the decline of employment in the industrial sector did not mean a significant population exodus to other places, but, rather, relocation to the sectors relatively unaffected by the crisis. A national trend can probably be used as a comparison, in which urban non-industrial (services) sectors experienced a rise in their percentage share of the labour force between 1996-1998 (see Figure 1.4). The ability of such sectors to offer employment might have provided the unemployed urban labour force with a safety net during the crisis while waiting for (or expecting) the factories to resume their normal operations. This still-growing population of Tangerang also reflects the steady migration of fresh young migrants from rural areas. They are rural youth-turned migrant workers, who did not experience the worst impact of *krismon* and arrived only after the industrial corporations began to accelerate their post-crisis performance. The main informants for this research are these post-crisis migrants whose motives to shift to the city are not only to seek paid work. These are rural youth who seek out the city as a place where modernity is realised.

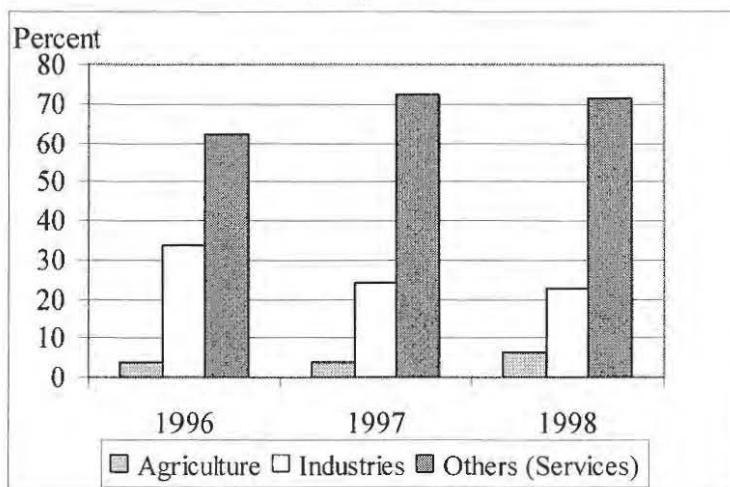
Figure 1.3: Population of Tangerang Municipality, 1995-1999



*Source:*

BPS Kota Tangerang 2000, p.17.

Figure 1.4: Percentage of Urban Employment in Indonesia, 1996-1998



*Source:*

BPS 1998, p.46; BPS 2000, p.60.

### The Global Factories

Having seen the internal conditions that enable industrialisation in Indonesia, let me now turn to Indonesian manufacturing as a part of an international trend, examining the conditions for integration into the global economy. The export-oriented manufacturing industries in most developing countries have been a

consequence of the 1960s and 1970s tendency of manufacturing plants in leading industrial nations (Western Europe, the United States, and Japan) to relocate production activities abroad (Hale 2002). The problem of internal market saturation in developed nations and the weakness of mass production based on a Fordist rigid hierarchical structure of production underpinned this move (see below). The Fordist model of production is named after Henry Ford, who introduced an assembly-line production for the first time in 1908 in his Ford Motor Company. The essence of the model is described by Harry Braverman as follows:

The key element of the new organization of labor was the endless conveyor chain upon which car assemblies were carried past fixed stations where men performed simple operations as they passed (1974:147).

The refined model produced on this conveyor chain, known as Model T, launched in early 1914, was produced in one-tenth of the time previously required to manufacture one car. Fordism bases its concept on the highly regimented division of labour represented in fixed stations along the assembly line. Each station is operated by workers performing a detailed task, which technically requires no special skills but a simple repetitive motion (Braverman 1974:124-152, Chinoy 1982:87-100, Watson 1995:245-47). This deskilling process enables a company to save substantial time and costs previously needed for work-training. The assembly line enables economic and efficient production on a massive scale and, therefore, gives a 'symbolic importance' to 'the growth of a glamorous new industry' (Chinoy 1982:88). Fordist production enables the corporation to reduce losses caused by an inefficient sizeable organisation that has to deal with the 'physical concentration of workers' in charge of several different tasks (Watson 1995:342-3).

However, the Fordist model of production has brought drawbacks to the very essence of capitalism. The inflexibility to respond to market demand, caused by the prolonged chain of command within the corporation, separating planning from execution, has fettered the process of capital mobility and accumulation of capital. The need to enlarge the supervising unit whose task is 'to establish control

over workers' as well as to carry out 'synchronization and co-ordination of the fragmented task' are examples of the inefficiency (Gorz 1999:27-8). The conditions of production, which André Gorz calls 'normality' in production, which characterise the Fordist mass production techniques has confined 'demand' and, therefore, led to internal market 'stagnation'. The problem, he maintained, would only be resolved by contesting this 'sense of normality' by replacing it with a regime of 'volatility, inconstancy, and ephemerality of fashions and desires' in the production of commodities.

Third-world relocation does not simply represent the efforts of giant and multinational corporations to bring production close to raw materials, as indicated in the theory of comparative advantage in international trade. It also reflects the search by giant capitalist enterprises for new markets for their mass products (Gorz 1999:27). Under the flag of market expansion, these corporations are determined to shorten the distribution chain by bringing manufacturing sites closer to markets in developing countries. Therefore, Leslie Sklair (1989) views the shift as 'the new reformation of capitalism', marking 'a new phase in the history of [global] capitalism' in the 1950s. It paved the way for capital mobility.

In addition, as Sklair argues, '[o]ffshore sourcing was largely, though not exclusively, about labour costs' (1989:5), where the third world labour market is able to ensure a supply of cheap and docile workers (see also Frobel et.al. 1980, Ong 1987:145). In the 1960s and 1970s, Asian nations (such as Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea) and Latin American countries (such as Mexico) were destinations in the search for international relocation (Elson and Pearson 1981:89-92, Hale 2002). Later, steady economic performance and improved labour standards, particularly in Asia, led to a further relocation to countries with even less developed economies able to offer low-waged labour, such as in Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Thailand, and more recently Myanmar, Vietnam, Fiji, and China. This further relocation also gave birth to the newly-emerging industrial forces such as Taiwan, South Korea, and Hong Kong to replace the players from the original leading industrial nations in Europe and U.S as sources of investment capital.

In Indonesia, the multinational corporations interplay with domestic forces; the latter often referred as to as 'compradore' class/capitalist in literature on dependency theory (Frank 1972). However, Hill states that in terms of 'equity shares' and 'international comparison', foreign investments are by no means central to Indonesia's industrialisation (1998:44,144). This is in line with Henderson's argument (cited in Watson 1995:337) that the degree of the involvement of multinational partners is not a result of 'a simple submission to the logic of global accumulation'. In Indonesia, this rejection of global capitalism is caused by the legal prerequisite for local partners (particularly between 1974-1992), state investment in the sectors potentially congested by multinational companies, and the protection of selected industrial sectors from foreign investments (Hill 1998:143-4). A restraint imposed on foreign investment, to some extent, has opened an opportunity not only to state-sponsored industries (in oil refining, cement, fertiliser, etc.) but also to domestic private investors, who, in the beginning, 'are generally smaller, less capital-intensive and found more commonly in labour intensive, consumer goods industries' (ibid.:45). In the late-1980s and early-1990s, the emergence of local but strong conglomerates has increased the ability of domestic investors to develop '[t]echnology-intensive industries' previously dominated by the foreign players (ibid.). Nonetheless, this does not mean that the importance of overseas partners can be downplayed. In some cases foreign partners are involved in linking up domestic manufacturers with the global marketing network (ibid.:44).<sup>11</sup>

With the increasingly common international subcontracting system in Third World manufacturing, full ownership is perhaps no longer a central issue for the overseas investors.<sup>12</sup> Susumu Watanabe defines sub-contracting as:

...a business practice whereby the party offering the sub-contract (*parent firm* or company) requests another independent enterprise (*sub-contractor*) to undertake the whole or part of an order it has received instead of doing the work itself, while assuming full responsibility for the work vis-a-vis the customer (1978:3, italics in original).

From the perspective of global corporations, the subcontracting of production gives them the advantage of maintaining their strategic importance in terms of

technology by basing it in the home country. Meanwhile, the factories in developing countries suffer ‘the lack of technology transfer’ that would provide a ‘basis for [domestic] capital accumulation (Elson and Pearson 1981:89). ‘About 95 percent of the world’s Research and Development (R&D) expenditure’, according to Hill, ‘occurs in OECD countries, which are also still the headquarters of most major MNCs [Multi National Company]’ (1998:147). This means that the sweatshop factories performing subcontracting in developing countries are generally less-capital-intensive and often merely an assembly production employing low-cost labour.<sup>13</sup> This is consistent with Fordist production in that the division of labour, no matter whether in one single factory or across national borders, can help the (mother) company to reduce losses and organisational inefficiencies in production.

Subcontracting also marks the shift in the ‘offshore sourcing’: from merely bringing the entire process of production closer to the local markets to considering Third World factories, with their particular comparative advantages, as merely a link in a global production chain to supply the global market. The nature of international subcontracting has integrated the manufacturing corporation in Tangerang into the global economy. Local subcontracting companies are connected into complex international supply chains, though they may also supply the local market. Commodity production is largely oriented towards exports or simply to meet orders from the parent companies abroad. It can take the form of finished manufacturing output or merely the parts required for further assembly elsewhere. Consequently, often production is dependent on the supply of components and raw materials from other subcontracting companies in another country. The parent firms are typically the main players in international trade with global networks both as manufacturers and retailers. Having been released from the technical production routines on the shopfloor, taken over by the subcontractors, they can now concentrate on marketing their products, usually globally-recognised brands, ranging from clothing and footwear brands like Arrow, Kenzo, Nike, Reebok, and Rockport.

The availability of the infrastructure necessary to support the network of international subcontracting has encouraged the spread of global factories (e.g.

Elson and Pearson 1981:89-90, Ong 1987:146). The improved transportation network has enabled the transfer of components and products from one factory to another beyond state borders. New 'information' technology facilitates the fast transmission of production arrangements, including 'orders and designs' from parent firms to the contractors across the globe (Hale 2002). The '*parent company*', Hale maintains, 'can therefore shift production from one location to another whilst maintaining overall control' (2002, emphasis in original).<sup>14</sup> The geographical compression allows the multinational companies to shorten, and to ensure the flexibility of, the manufacturing process in order to bring more innovation to their products and to swiftly anticipate changing trends.<sup>15</sup> This heralds the character of the 'ephemerality of fashions and desires', renouncing the Fordist 'rigidity' and 'normality' of mass production (Gorz 1999:28), to be in line with the paradigm in the regime of flexible accumulation of capital, which generates more profit. In addition to the above advantages, the subcontracting arrangement transfers business risks (e.g. labour unrest as well as political and economy uncertainty in local countries) to the domestic contractors.

### **Labour Conditions**

In order to maintain their international competitiveness in export production, domestic subcontractors, or even local industries without subcontracting arrangements, are creating 'downward pressure' (Hale 2002) on the shopfloor to reduce production costs. As a result, workers are the subjects who experience the most pressure. Subcontractors, for example, normally put pressure on wages by employing pieceworkers (e.g. Saptari 1994). A portrayal by Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson (1981:90) is fairly accurate in looking at some other downward pressures, particularly in South East Asia:

Workers in world market factories have been left exposed by the abrogation of their rights on such matters as minimum wage payments, contributions to insurance funds, limitations on the length of working days and week, security of employment, redundancy conditions and payments, and the right to strike.

Elson and Pearson characterise the export-driven global factories, in which women made up the majority of their labour force, as 'super-exploitation' given that the earnings hardly met their daily subsistence needs (1981:97). In Malaysia, Aihwa Ong (1987:147) reported that the absence of a minimum wage regime enabled the multinational companies to pay low remuneration to the workers. Recruiting young women was a low-cost strategy given their shorter 'employment tenure' (*ibid.*) before entering married life.<sup>16</sup> Ong reported that most electronics companies limited the period of service of their female workers up to the age of 25, after which they were replaced by fresh younger recruits who would be less resistant to the low wages. In order to increase productivity, many companies apply three eight-hour shifts to ensure 24 hours production. Mary Beth Mills (1999:119-20), in her account of Thai manufacturing industries, reported that overtime generated extra cash for workers, but led to a 'constant upheaval in work schedule[s]'. This was particularly caused by the employers' policy to change shift schedules on a weekly basis, making the process of adaptation to the production regime 'difficult' and the 'health complaints'—such as 'disrupted menstruation, headaches and insomnia, intestinal problems and ulcers'—widespread (*ibid.*, also Kim 1997:41-2). Moreover, even manufacturing complexes in the newly-industrialised country of South Korea show these degraded working conditions. In her work on South Korean factories in the 1980s, Seung-kyung Kim (1997:40) reported the experience of the workers in garment and footwear industries, in which 'dust' and 'fumes from glue' polluted their 'miserable' working environment. Many employed in these plants suffered from respiratory illnesses, causing them to be seriously dependant on medication. Long working hours, up to 12 hours a day, resulted in the workers enduring 'swollen legs and feet [and] prolonged sitting in one position caused constipation' (Kim, *ibid.*). Exposure to the hazardous working environment and a failure by employers to provide employees with gear to comply with safety regulations is also reported by Diane Wolf in her research on textile factories in Central Java, Indonesia (1992:120-1). Lack of compliance not only caused health problems among the workers, but 'resulted in injuries and an occasional death' (Wolf, *ibid.*).

The role of the governments of the countries in which the manufacturing industries are (re)located in minimising pressures on the shopfloor and protecting workers' welfare is inadequate. Apart from 'not setting a legal minimum [wage]', the Malaysian government introduced legislation to promote peaceful industrial relations and a conducive business environment for foreign investors (Ong 1987:146-47). By allowing the corporations to take full advantage of the abundant indigenous 'labor reserve to be attracted and discharged according to world market conditions' (Ong 1987:147), workers were denied job security. Similarly, in South Korea, 'a hard working and compliant labor force' is the government's selling point to the transnational corporations (Kim 1997:23). Consequently, the state backed the creation of 'joint labor-management councils' (*nosa hyōbuihoe*), in which the workers' delegates were hand-picked by the company, and, hence, functioned as a rubber-stamp to the decisions made by the company. In Indonesia, though the labour laws give protection to a number of workers' entitlements (e.g. minimum wages and work safety), implementation on the ground is inconsistent. Wolf reported that corrupt government officials in charge of inspecting the companies' compliance with the labour regulations, frequently asked for bribes from the management as payment for 'a positive evaluation' in cases where an employer had violated the legislated workers' rights or evaded taxes (1992:121-2).

Workers have reacted to unfair conditions through unions, including striking to strive for their aspirations for better conditions on the shopfloor.<sup>17</sup> In countries where union activism was curbed, such as Malaysia and South Korea, organising occurred clandestinely: workers' protests were fiercely suppressed, leading to the imprisonment of labour activists (Kim 1997:110-15, Ong 1987:148-9). The isolation of local workers, by 'restrict[ing] contacts' with international labour-concerned groups/institutions accused of sponsoring industrial unrest at local factories, was regulated by the Malaysian government (Ong, 1987:148-9). Even in a country like Thailand, where labour rights are guaranteed and union freedom is allowed, it remained necessary for workers' organisations to safeguard and reinforce workers' basic rights (Mills 1999:122). This is particularly because the state and the industrial capitalists have equated

labour-capital relations with ‘*bun khun* morality’, which justifies labour compliance to the employers. *Bun khun* is a Thai model of patron-client relationship, in which the state and the employers are supposed to have ‘the same moral status as parents’ to which the workers offer their ‘loyalty and obedience’ through their work and submission to the factory regime.

In Soeharto’s Indonesia, the state’s determination to control the workers and curtail union activity was not motivated only by an interest in safeguarding the industrialisation process. It also had ideological significance in the New Order which came to power after overpowering the leftist elements once influential in the nationalist-oriented Old Order, as well as in the biggest trade union (SOBSI<sup>18</sup>) at that time (Hadiz 1997:49-50,83, Manning 1998:209).<sup>19</sup> The New Order espoused an organic model of the state, stifling open political contestation as inconsistent with autochthonous Indonesian values. Labour demands and labour activism were seen by the state as a potential breeding ground for radicalism and subversive actions against the government. This justified the introduction of a ‘security approach’, with which the engagement of the security and military apparatus was increasingly crucial in controlling the workers and preventing industrial unrest from becoming a potential politically-driven activism (Hadiz, 1997:104-9).<sup>20</sup> The excess of such interventions led to frequent harassment, intimidation, arrest, and even imprisonment of labour activists by the coercive apparatus on the grounds that they were disturbing industrial peace and political stability.

At the legal-formal level, the Indonesian government has adopted the international standard of achieving resolution in industrial disputes through tripartite (government, employer, and union) and bipartite (employer and union) mechanisms (Manning 1998:209). Between 1973 and 1998 the government only recognised the All-Indonesia Labour Federation, *FBSI* (later the *SPSI*)<sup>21</sup>, as the legitimate union body to represent the workers in dispute resolution. This body has been conditioned to be merely an instrument of the state to restrain and to ‘demobilise’ (Hadiz 1997:92), labour activism, rather than to elevate the workers’ aspirations (see also Manning 1998:210-1).<sup>22</sup>

The state's restraints on labour mobilisation by way of trade unions had the consequence that workers' aspirations had to be channelled in an alternative way: through labour-concerned NGOs initiated (on the whole) by middle class activists (Hadiz 1997:134-56, also Ford 2001:100-2). This alliance between workers and non-worker activists saw the emergence the independent unions in the early 1990s which, according to Chris Manning (1998:222), became the 'rival' of the state-sanctioned union.<sup>23</sup> The government argued that the proliferation of unions, with the possible tendency to develop radicalism, would only harm both economic and political stability.<sup>24</sup> Repression and coercive measures toward these new forms of labour activism continued as strikes and labour activism became common amongst the discontented workers desperately seeking an avenue to expose their grievances. In addition, the 'challenge' presented by the independent labour groups managed to push forward the labour reform agenda, such as gradual improvements in the minimum wage (Manning 1998:223). The labour movement also attracted sympathy from the international community, which put pressure on the Indonesian government to lighten up in its clampdown on the labour movement. In 1993, for example, the United States government highlighted labour issues as a condition for the renewal of GSP (General System of Preference) rights,<sup>25</sup> to which the Indonesian government responded by initiating labour reforms and wage rises (Manning 1998:221-2).

The labour movement in Indonesian manufacturing industries has made further advancements since the fall of the authoritarian regime in 1998, including the legalisation of unions other than the state-sanctioned one (discussed below). The legislated minimum wage has also been increased significantly to a level, which the early 1990s workers would not have dared to imagine, although the inflation rate following the 1997 crisis has decreased the significance of this rise (see Chapter 5). Nevertheless, all these changes do not mean an end to the deprivation of labour. As I will highlight in Chapter 4, the exploitative labour practices still occur in most Indonesian factory sweatshops. In the post-Soeharto era, the newspaper coverage of sweatshop workers in manufacturing industries remains dominated by labour protests demanding, for example, that employers pay the regulated minimum monthly wage (Koran Tempo 2/4/2002), an

improvement in the employment benefits (*Kompas* 1/6/2002), menstrual leave for female employees (*Kompas* 30/4/2002), and the formation of workplace-based unions (*Kompas* 24/5/2002). The poor living conditions in the workers' urban quarters, where they do not have decent accommodation or essential facilities, add to the misfortune of the industrial labourers in Indonesia (see Chapter 3), but this has not been a focus of media comment.

Although manufacturing factories set the context for the migrant workers in Tangerang, their existence in the urban industrial centre is, nonetheless, not solely shaped by relations evolving around the political-economy of transnational industrialisation. It takes shape around their multiple identities, as urban migrants, as rural subjects, as rural youth (with familial and economic obligations in the countryside), and as fellow workers. This thesis demonstrates how urban migrants' past experiences, mostly obtained in the countryside, are in interplay with their current existence as factory workers in an urban centre. As I will show in the following chapters, the countryside is not only a place associated with 'backwardness' and 'local tradition'. Rather, the children's exposure to modern cultural discourse and global information, which tailors their conceptions of modernity and advancement, constitute the 'past' experiences of urban migrants. They incorporate themselves into a modern urban form of life, which in their view, is the 'authentic' representation of progress. It is in this form of urban 'sophistication' that their future expectations are set and their modern subjectification is constructed. Industrialisation and factory life along with the limited improvement of labour conditions achieved by their immediate predecessors, establish a setting for the realisation of their goals.

### **Considering the Existing Perspective on Labour**

Labour submission to labour-capital relations and workers' marginal economic conditions, according to Marxian concepts, is a necessary prerequisite for the labouring mass to be regarded as working class in opposition to the capital-owning class, the bourgeoisie (Marx 1977:213-5). However, class in this sense is inert as it has nothing to do with liberating workers from the conditions of

marginality; a class in itself. It is only when its members realise their ‘common interest’ and consciously converge ‘in a common thought of resistance’ against its class antagonist that it becomes a ‘class for itself’ (Marx, *ibid.*). This brings the class-conscious workers to a ‘political struggle’ against the bourgeoisie along with its class interest (Marx, *ibid.*). Therefore, the basis of the working class’ wretchedness should be found ‘not in [the] minor grievances, but *in the capitalistic system itself*’ (Engels 1983:442, emphasis in original). In the history of the Industrial Revolution in Western Europe, conscious industrial labour emerged to form resistance against the privileged class responsible for their destitution. E.P Thompson in his classic work *The Making of the English Working Class* (1991) cites the Luddite movement of early-19<sup>th</sup> century England as a ‘quasi-insurrection’ (p.67) of organised workers from small workshops to address their ‘industrial grievances’ (p.529). Though the roots of the uprising were more than just the ‘immediate economic’ issues, the Luddites made ‘industrial objectives’ the subjects of their class-driven anarchic strikes, which included ‘the destruction of power looms (Lancashire), shearing-frames (Yorkshire), and resistance to the break-down of custom in the Midlands framework-knitting industry’ (Thompson 1991:529). Hobsbawm, in his remarkable work *The Age of Empire* (1994), found more organised and systematic working class resistance through trade unions and political parties, throughout 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe (p.112-41). The class interest embraced by the mid-Victorian 1880s trade unions in England was expressed in ‘demand for an Eight Hour Day to be established *by law* and not by collective bargaining’ (Hobsbawm 1994:129, emphasis in original). Class interest also took shape in the form of labour and socialist parties in Ulster, Belgium, Germany, Britain and Russia, standing ‘as the unqualified opposition to the rich’ and as the forces who would lead workers to ‘the inevitable forward march of history towards a better future’ (p.138).

This class-framed struggle became pervasive as European colonialism sponsored the establishment of capitalist enterprises in the colonised territories. John Ingleson, in *In Search of Justice* (1986), asserts that the struggle for a better life and ‘improved living and working conditions’ (p.326) by workers in early-20th century Java contributed to the growing numbers of urban workers

(especially in railway and sugar industries) joining trade unions (p.87-90). He points out that workers' 'perception of the injustice' (p.326) of deteriorating conditions, structural powerlessness, and the uncertainty in the face of structural changes, brought by economic malaise in the 1920s, underscored their radical actions and strikes against their employers (p.62-4, 101-6). Furthermore, the economic malaise had an effect on the political mood in the East Indies. The crisis led to employers, backed by the Dutch Indies administration, 'adopt[ing] a tougher approach to their workers' (p.211). This 'affected workers' experience in the workplaces and shaped their views on colonialism', leading them to take part in the broader nationalist and anti-Dutch movement (p.326).

The historic task of the working class continued in post-independent Indonesia. Working-class action and strikes intensified, particularly in foreign companies in the 1950s (Richardson, cited in Manning 1998:204, see also Hadiz 1997:46-8). The inexperience of state authorities in handling labour affairs and introducing labour reform programs exacerbated the industrial situation, and the number of strikes recorded was an average of 400 per annum up to late 1950s (Manning 1998:203-4). This made post-independent economic consolidation problematic (Manning, *ibid.*). Labour militancy culminated in the nationalisation of foreign enterprises, particularly those owned by the Dutch, after 1957, and workers' subsequent demands for greater control of the companies' management; a demand promptly turned down by the government (Hadiz 1997:53-4, see also Manning 1998:204).<sup>26</sup> Another characteristic of the post-independent Indonesian working-class was their association with political parties through unions. The relationship with the 'party leadership', according to Hadiz (1997:49), was even 'more closely intertwined' than with the union's rank-and-file.<sup>27</sup> Given the growing influence of working-class organisations on the political parties, embracing the union constituency was an electoral strategy to rally support from the workers (Hadiz, *ibid.*). As a result, at the dusk of the Old Order era in the mid 1960s, apart from the mounting 'militancy', the labour movement was left too 'fragmented' (Manning 1998:203) to be able to represent the common interest of the working class because it had become caught up in the fragile process of political contestation.

Seeing the labour movement as a potential source of political and economic instability, the new regime under Soeharto that officially came to power in 1966, began a systematic campaign to restrain the labour movement, using repression if need be. Apart from the legalised intervention of the military in industrial disputes, the measure included the introduction of *HPP* (Pancasila Labour Relations), later known as *HIP* (Pancasila Industrial Relations), in 1974.<sup>28</sup> *HIP* is a model of industrial relations drawn from the relations 'that existed within the family—with the state playing the role of benevolent father to both capital and labour' (Hadiz 1997:65). As it is considered to be characteristically Indonesian, the *HIP* is stated by the government to differ from 'any other forms of industrial relations in other countries where the emphasis is on bargaining power [*adu kekuatan*] or liberalisation, which is not in accord with the nation's culture' (Depnaker RI and CIDES 1994:25, my translation). Strikes, according this conception, are viewed as un-Indonesian, appropriate to Western liberal countries. Strikes would not only halt the country's economic development, but also, as an army general put it, 'disturb national stability' (Sabarno 1994:97, my translation).

This combination of ideological persuasion—through the creation of industrial relations fitting the regime's needs—and coercive force to control labour proved to be effective. The average official number of labour protests was just around 35 annually between the mid 1960s to 1978, despite the size of the labour force in industries being twice than that of the 1950s (Manning 1998:211-2). However, labour actions became a force once again in the 1990s. Manning (cited in Hadiz 1997:113) argues that the 'labour-surplus economy' and, at the same time, 'the tightening of the labour market' contributed to this re-emergence. In addition, despite improvements in wages and allowances systems (which continue to this day), working conditions in the factories remained relatively unchanged and were the focus of labour discontent (see Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Percentage of Causes of Strikes in Indonesia in Selected Years  
(1985,1991,2002)

Causes	1985	1991	2002 <sup>c</sup>
Wages	58	67	16
Annual Bonus (THR) <sup>a</sup>	6	9	10
Collective Labour Agreement	4	2	1
Formation of Union	1	8	2
Social Insurance	-	5	2
Other Working Conditions <sup>b</sup>	30	9	69
Total	100	100	100
N=	78	113	172

Notes:

<sup>a</sup> Tunjangan Hari Raya (*Idul Fitri* Allowance), the annual bonus for most workers; <sup>b</sup> Including dismissals; <sup>c</sup> data up to April 2001

Source:

Manning 1998, p.215 (1985 and 1991 data); Depnakertrans 2003 (2001 data).

Vedi Hadiz' *Workers and the State in New Order Indonesia* (1997) provides a fascinating insight into the re-emergence of a working-class movement under the New Order. Hadiz observes the subjective conditions within the working-class that enabled workers to have a capacity for 'disturbing the peace'. Hadiz argues that 'the new urban proletariat' is marked by their 'culturally and physically urbanised' character and, hence, by the 'view [of] their future to be more linked to the success of their struggle in the cities and factories' (p.132-3). Compared to the previous generations of migrant workers who perceived their urban existence as merely 'temporary', the workers of the present-day are more 'prepared' to take life in the city as their 'aspiration' and 'future' (Hadiz 1997:125-6, see also Hull 1994:5).<sup>29</sup> In addition, the migrants' rate of completion of higher education also implies growing literacy amongst the young urban workers, and their ability to absorb information from the mass media is valuable 'in raising worker [social] awareness' (Hadiz 1997:126). Media coverage of labour issues and industrial strikes connects workers with their counterparts from other factories and localities

they have probably never known, but they feel united as a class in a common experience as industrial workers. The workers' concentration in poor enclaves in urban metropolitan centres also gives rise to 'a sense of injustice' which further shapes their class experience (p.130). These conditions allowed a revitalisation of labour activism in the 1990s, through workers' involvement in the non-state-sanctioned workers organisations (e.g. unions and labour-concerned NGOs) to represent their interests as factory workers (p.133).<sup>30</sup>

Another stimulating work on Indonesian industrial workers is Douglas Kammen's dissertation, entitled *A Time to Strike* (1997). It starts with the author's criticism of the inadequacy of the existing analysis on Indonesian workers around issues such as labour conditions and economic inequality, state repression, the subjective conditions of the workers' class consciousness (p.385-6), and the discourse of labour organisations (p.25) as factors leading to increasing industrial strikes in the 1990s. Kammen also criticises other approaches on Indonesian workers that see :

the prominence of (1) the light manufacturing sector, (2) export-oriented industries, (3) industries owned by foreign capital, and (4) industrial sectors employing a predominantly female labor force (p.385-6),

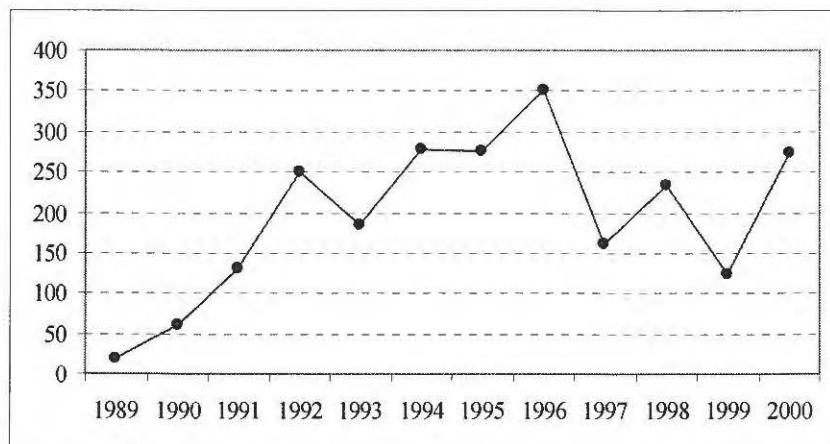
as conditions opportune to the spread of collective action. According to Kammen, such approaches fail to explain why strikes only occur in selected industrial factories, given the above-mentioned situations are relatively common features in Indonesian manufacturing (p.386). To understand 'the larger constellation in which strikes take place' (p.25), one also has to pay attention to the 'division' or 'intra-class conflict' within the industrial capitalist class (p.26).<sup>31</sup> This conflict arises from the friction between the market-protected capital and the market-exposed capital, based on the exposure of the manufactured products to free market forces (p.28). The former is protected by monopoly rights and regulations imposed by the state, as it is predominantly linked with 'the political elite' (the Soeharto clique and his military circle)(p.34). The latter is relatively independent from the nepotism and, at the same time, integrated into the global market and at 'the mercy' of 'market despotism' (Burawoy, cited in Kammen 1997:36). The

latter group finds it difficult to create production efficiency to compete in the global market in the environment where ‘monopolies’ and bureaucratic barriers inefficiently boost the production costs. Such distortions from non-market forces later become the capitalists’ defense against charges of failing to pay their workers decent wages (p.36). Therefore, the change in the production regime from import-substitution (ISI) to export-oriented industries (EOI), which tend to be market-exposed, requires also ‘a corresponding transformation of the political apparatus of industrial regulation and labor control’ (Kammen 1997:36). The transformation includes the abolition of market-distorting privileges, given typically to the businesses and bureaucrats in a protectionist regime (*ibid.*). It is no coincidence that Kammen found that labour strikes were more frequent in the market-exposed industries (p.28). He argues that the ‘changes in the labor process’ (ISI to EOI), on the one hand, and the ‘disjunction between the labor process and political apparatuses’, on the other, are a convergence that facilitates the decline of labour standards (p.31). The degeneration of working conditions, accordingly, sets ‘the basis’ for industrial unrest.

Entering the late 1990s, particularly in the wake of the 1997 financial crisis, labour activism experienced a turning point evidenced in the decline in industrial strikes, particularly from 1996 to 1997 (see Figure 1.5). Hadiz’ (2001:121-2) argument is relevant in assessing this trend. He argues that this was caused by the vulnerability of workers’ organisations to becoming ‘fragmented’ in response to the unexpected economic turbulence. On the other hand, the end of the Soeharto regime, whose power was destabilised by the 1997 crisis (Hill 1998b), has enabled a challenge to the New Order’s ‘rhetorical and policy commitments to a *de facto* single vehicle labour ‘representation’’ (Ford 2000:3, *italics in original*). Although the new regime declared its intention to discard the one-union policy and to adopt the ILO Convention No.87 on the labour right to organise, this was seen as merely a political move to ‘display reformist credentials’ (Hadiz 2001:122) and ‘a gesture of goodwill to international donors’ (Ford 2000:5). The decision has been a landmark for the contemporary labour movement, however. Michele Ford (2001) describes the birth and the revitalisation of numerous unions, working at national or local level, in the post-

authoritarian era (p.109-10). Four political parties, adopting the term *buruh/pekerja* (workers or labour) in their names managed to register to contest the 1999 General Election, although they failed to gain significant support and win any seats (Ford, *ibid.*). Apart from the formal forms of workers' organisations, unions and political parties, Ford highlights the contribution of the semi-formal 'grassroots-oriented labour NGOs' (p.110) to the Indonesian labour movement. During the period of 'late New Order', these groups were not merely 'valuable [in] raising awareness of workers' rights' but also, in fact, 'dominated the labour movement' in general (p.113). In the post-Suharto era, this active participation continues to the extent that they have initiated the formation of unions at local or regional level (p.111). The role of mass-based NGOs, which undertook the function of the union during the repressive New Order period, provides 'alternatives' to the 'traditional' general discourse of the labour movement, based mainly around the trade union (p.113). In the absence of a mature and strong union movement in the contemporary context, labour activism remains possible through these alternative organisations.

Figure 1.5: Strikes in Indonesia, 1989-2000



Source: Depnaker 2003.

Nonetheless, this general trend of the post-1997 revitalisation of labour activism does not reflect the micro-conditions in the subdistrict, and particularly

the neighbourhood concerned in this study. The neighbourhood in which I conducted fieldwork was part of a subdistrict which had the highest number of manufacturing establishments in the Tangerang Municipality (see below). The subdistrict also had a concentration of factory workers, employed in various plants—owned by local or foreign investors (or a combination of the two) as well as for domestic or international markets. In fact, some of the most celebrated cases of labour strikes in 1991 that illustrated ‘the seriousness of labour unrest in the early 1990s’ (Hadiz 1997:211n.42, see also Kammen 1997:4-15), were located in this neighbourhood. During fieldwork, I was struck not only by a low number of strikes, but also by the relative absence of consciousness of union discourse or labour activism. This situation did not correspond with the general trend supporting the notion of the re-emergence of the labour movement. Therefore, this thesis explores what makes this absence of labour activism possible and why workers are becoming more attracted to ‘quality of life and life-style concerns’ (Pichardo 1997:414) amidst the continuing economic inequality and deprived working conditions in industrial sectors. In his review of New Social Movements, Nelson Picardo points out that such ‘concerns’ are typically ones in ‘mature capitalism or postindustrialism’, where workers ‘have moved away from the instrumental issues of industrialism’ (p.412). In the societies in which this character is embedded, questions of ‘identity, participation, and quality of life’ are increasingly central (p.421), overriding the issue of ‘economic redistribution’ (p.414) traditionally attached to the working-class movement and other forms of power-oriented (old) social movements. But, how can the Third World workers in the Tangerang manufacturing sweatshops, still trapped in the destitution of poor working conditions and economic inequality, in a process of industrialisation less than two-decades old, encompass the aspirations of the ‘postmaterial values’ (Pichardo 1997:421) of post-industrial society? Why does the everyday discourse of the contemporary workers appear not to be shaped by struggles based on labour issues at a time when restrictions on labour organisations and repression of labour activism are comparatively lessening?

### **Contesting the Notion of Organised Workers**

Some authors have discussed the phenomenon for lack of industrial protests in earlier periods in Indonesia despite the continuing deprivation in factories. In *Factory Daughters*, Wolf (1992:133-6) argues that the relative absence of organised resistance amongst the Javanese women workers should be seen in the shift the factory daughters have experienced ‘from village production to factory work’. Being previously habituated to ‘long hours at low returns’ in the rural agricultural sector or, as low-remunerated domestic servants, to the ‘constant control’ from the masters, factory work, offering better payment and shorter working hours, remained the ‘preference’ for these daughters. It provided ‘a progressive change’ to the rural daughters, who had few choices in employment and, hence, had ‘a high degree of tolerance’ to the harsh nature of the industrial regime.

The ‘patriarchal’ values, mostly derived from Islamic teachings, discussed by Celia Mather can also become a source of workers’ disinclination for industrial conflict in the factories in West Java (1985:159-72). The submission of women to men and the implementation of traditional norms on social hierarchy based on age, both in family life and society, made young girl recruits preferable to the industrial companies in order to ensure labour obedience and to reinforce corporate domination. The gender-specific characteristics of not being ‘straightforward’, being ‘shy’ (*malu*) and avoiding ‘direct confrontation’ to address the issues of poor labour standards to the managers, usually older and male, were assumed by the companies to minimise industrial outbursts. Moreover, the presumed secondary role of women’s paid work, the reliance of women on men as principal breadwinners in the family economy, also provided legitimacy to the low wages received by the female workers.<sup>32</sup>

Elsewhere, in South Korea’s Masan Free Export Zone, the female workers’ perception of themselves as better-off compared to their colleagues outside the Zone, and their sense of not being at ‘the bottom of the social hierarchy’ created an acceptance of industrial exploitation (Kim 1997:93-6). Better payment meant that they were able to make savings for various purposes, giving them, as Kim puts it, ‘an exaggerated sense of upward economic mobility’.

A future vision of their post-industrial lives, such as entering married life, also generated a belief about the factory life being merely ‘temporary’, allowing them to ‘discount...the grim reality’ of the industrial regime.

Collective action and labour movement give the workers strength and power to claim ‘economic redistribution’ (Pichardo 1997) and avenues to address their ‘sense of injustice’ (Ingleson 1986). Nonetheless, when organised action is absent despite the persistence of deprivation, it does not mean that domination and control over workers is complete and total. This is because labour-capital relations are not the only reality, or setting, that encircles the existence of industrial workers. Migrant workers encounter multiple settings—which are not necessarily part of the factory regime—in which they are able to create counter discourse/s to the power exercised by the dominating authority in the factory setting. Michel Foucault’s (1998) concept of power might be useful in understanding that domination by managers is never total.

Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. And “Power,” insofar as it is permanent, repetitious, inert, and self-reproducing, is simply the over-all effect that emerges from all these mobilities .... [N]o doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure, neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. (Foucault 1998:93)

Modern conditions and exposure to global discourses of modernity engender workers with possibilities and spaces to overturn their condition of powerlessness through reinterpreting their current existence and renegotiating their identities.

Everyday practices, such as careful self-presentation, consumption, and the incorporation of modern material representations, which do not seem to have political significance to the working-class struggle, can be arenas in which workers attempt to exercise power and reinforce their self-autonomy. Outside the factories, worker subjects are engaged in a ‘network’ of discourses and practices with their environment, the past and the present, through which they are able to recover their subjectivities, stolen as the result of the industrial domination and the conditions of marginality. ‘In fact’, Foucault (1991) argues, ‘power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth’ (p.194).

The everyday practices beyond the realities engaged by factory walls, therefore, provide the subjects with the power to actively and consciously create their own realities. With their chosen representations, workers are able to define themselves and construct their identities.

But what are the representations and practices that confer subjectification, the unsubjugated identity, to the worker subjects? Here, I will look at the relevance of the concept of modernity to the construction of subjectification in understanding the practices and discourses experienced by the worker subjects.

‘Modernity’ can not be understood as having only one meaning. Jürgen Habermas’ (1981:9), writing on the conditions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment, for example, sees modernity as a ‘project’ of progress in the fields of ‘objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art’, developed to contribute to what David Harvey calls ‘human emancipation’ (1989:12). Max Weber (1968:24) relates modernity to the implementation of a rational system within managerialised urban production and state institutions. It can also mean market-oriented production, the utilisation of advanced ‘technologies’, and ‘industrial labor discipline’ (Mills 1999:13). Modernity is often linked to modernisation theory in the sociology of development in the 1950s-60s, which attempted to provide a scientific explanation as well as intellectual justification, from a Western perspective, for the process of (economic) development in newly-independent countries. In *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1990), Walt Rostow, for example, suggests a unilinear scheme of economic development that culminates in the model of economy found predominantly in industrialised countries in Western Europe and North America. Nonetheless, despite rationality and all those progressive qualities, modernity inherently embodies regressive properties in the form of ‘alienation’ (Marx 1977b, 1977c), ‘despotism’ (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979), and the ‘iron cage of rationality’ (Weber 1958), which meant the striving for the emancipation of humanity experienced a total failure.

While the above authors deal with the problem of modernity as an amplification of the project of the Enlightenment (Foucault 1991b:39)—thus being historical in nature, and a ‘western phenomenon’ (Kahn 2001:10), my discussion relates to the Charles Baudelaire’s model of modernity as the ‘new

experiences, feelings and thoughts' that emerge as responses to the 'nature of modern urban life' (cited in Swingewood 1998:141). Rather than seeing modernity as an objective and necessary development of civilisation, Baudelaire, according to Swingewood, understands it as:

...a subjective response to the emergence of capital cities during a period of rapid industrialisation, with their 'eternal beauty' and remarkable 'harmony' of life, their crowds and movement constituting 'a phantasmagoria of contemporary life', and an objective assessment of the increasing commercialism of culture itself (ibid.:142).

Modernity, Baudelaire points out, is the representation of 'the new'. It, therefore, does not refer to any specified time, but is always present in all consecutive times in which 'the new' is constantly undergoing metamorphosis. It is not a historical epoch, but, as Foucault argues, an 'attitude' that constitutes 'a mode of relating to contemporary reality' (1991b:39). For Foucault, modernity is also a desire to celebrate, or 'to heroize' (p.40), what lies ahead. Baudelaire's concept of modernity was developed from his analysis of paintings of his generation: he labeled the modern painter as:

...the one who can show the dark frock-coat as "the necessary costume of our time," the one who knows how to make manifest, in the fashion of the day, the essential, permanent, obsessive relation that our age entertains with death.... [The fashions have] their poetic beauty, which is an expression of the public soul.... (cited in Foucault 1991b:40).

Following Baudelaire's analysis of art of the 19th century, Foucault speaks about 'modern man' as one who can envisage 'the high value of the present', the modernity, and metamorphose it 'by grasping it' (ibid.:41). This modern metamorphosis, in addition, is seen by Marshal Berman as an ability 'to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world' (1983:15). To Berman, the process towards 'the modern' is about incorporating one or more realities into the 'universe'. However, there is not a one-way relation between the universe and the subjects, with which the latter is passively subsumed by the former. Rather, as Berman argues, an active role in shaping the universe is also played by the latter,

as the condition of incorporation, with which the subjects are enabled to ‘gain some control over their [own] lives’ (1982:16) or to exercise the ‘omnipresence of power’ in Foucault’s (1998:93) sense. In short, both Foucault and Berman understand modernity as providing a chance to individuals to transform and redefine themselves; this is an active sense, differing from the Enlightenment-connected modernity that merely places a human being as a passive subject of progress. It is, thus, about bringing the present into relevance to life.

So, how does this conception of modernity fit the life of the industrial workers in Tangerang? What constitutes ‘modern’ in the Indonesian context? To answer these questions, one can not detach modernity from the idea of development and economic progress. It is also a concern that underscores modernisation theory in development studies, inspiring the policies in Indonesia which brought about massive transformation in infrastructure and industrialisation. Under the Soeharto era, *pembangunan* (economic development), became an ‘ideology’ with which the whole effort of the government and the nation was directed to ‘the achievement of sustained high rates of economic growth’ at the cost of ‘equitable distribution of the national income’ (Robinson 1986:94).<sup>33</sup> *Pembangunan* also assumed that the present (economic) condition was undesirable and the people were ‘backward’ (*masih bodoh* or *terbelakang*) so that both were ‘in need of uplifting and illumination’ in order to bring the nation to progress (Robinson 1986:268). One observable result of this ‘uplifting’ is the celebration of the image of urban wealth and the fetishisation of commodities that constitute almost every aspect of life in urban centers, particularly the metropolitan. It is through these pictures, evidently promoted by mass media, that ‘being modern’ is acknowledged by the rest of society, including those in the countryside and the marginal population of cities. The images of urban wealth become a model for imitation and create a local conception of what constitutes progress and ‘modernity’.

The tendency of *tidak ketinggalan jaman*, not being left behind by the changing epoch, is linked to the pursuit of modern (new) forms of life, through preference for certain consumer products and an imagined (urban) lifestyle. These modern forms of life represent the ‘universe’ in Berman’s sense, or ‘the high

value of the present' in Foucault's terms, into which migrant workers seek to incorporate their novel existence. It is in this regard that modernity is understood by the industrial workers in Tangerang to locate their existence in contemporary setting. I will use this local, or 'self-appointed' (Kahn 2001:24), definition to refer to the term 'modernity' toward the end of my thesis.

Urban industrial workers in Tangerang have been subjected to the discourse of modernity through the mediation of mass media, education, and rural development, the channels of state-driven modernisation, since they were children in the countryside. Through these channels, an urban imagination has been gradually constructed and rehearsed by rural youth. With this discourse in mind, moving to a city is an inevitable consequence for the youth to bring the fantasies of modernity into a reality. This resembles Mills's (1999) finding amongst the factory workers in Bangkok, Thailand; she sees urban migration as a process induced by rural youth's enthusiasm toward urban modernity. Such enthusiasm comes from an enticement of *khwaam pen thansamay* (being 'up-to-date'), of being involved in 'a powerful field of popular discourse and cultural production', associated with 'progress' (*caroen*) and urbanism (Mills 1999:10-15). This pursuit, thus, creates a drive for urban migration amongst the Thai rural youth. Apart from that, urban migration is also encouraged by the poverty and rural-urban disparity which lead to the city being perceived as the representation of 'dominant narratives of national progress as standards of success' (p.16). Nonetheless, though the rural-urban disparity is also present in Indonesia, the inability of rural employment to offer decent remuneration is not the sole driving force for urban migration. It is not merely about the contrast between the village and the city. The structural transformation in the countryside toward what Kenneth Young (1994) terms 'the urbanisation of the rural' has engendered (urban) modernity as the 'dominant narrative', which has almost become a reality for rural children. The dominance of urban-centred discourse has made the appropriation of modernity amongst the rural youth-turned workers, inevitable.

### **The Who of This Study**

Who are the workers who are the subjects of this study? The shortage of labour from the immediate surrounding regions to enable the rapid development of industrialisation in Tangerang makes the area dependant on migrant workers from distant regions. Unlike Mather's (1985) study on industrialisation in Tangerang in the late 1970s and early 1980s, in which local female residents were employed in the region's industries, the later stage of the development of industrialisation in the area has recorded the importance, if not dominance, of migrant workers (e.g. Hadiz 1997). Since my very first encounter with the region in the early 1990s, I rarely found indigenous Tangerang residents as factory workers in the industrial establishments surrounding their neighbourhood.<sup>34</sup> The pattern remained the same during my later stay in the area for this current research. Therefore, as the term 'workers' in the context of the Tangerang manufacturing factories refers to 'migrant workers', I will employ both terms interchangeably, in addition to 'migrants', 'factory workers', and 'industrial workers', to refer to the same subjects.

As a result of being from distant regions, which makes commuting impractical, if not impossible, migrant workers have to establish a relatively permanent existence under urban circumstances, separated by distance from their home towns in Indonesian rural regions. It is only on some occasions—mostly during religious festivities—that migrants return to their places of origin. As I will indicate in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, the greater exposure to global culture has enabled rural youth to perceive migration to the urban centres more as a lifestyle than a journey to pursue a mere economic gain, as indicated, for example in Lea Jellinek's (1991) work on earlier generation of migrant workers in Jakarta. This engenders a young generation of migrants who envisage urban presence and existence as an aspiration as well as a future (Hadiz 1997:124, Hull 1994:5). This character of migrant workers, settling in marginal enclaves in urban industrial subdistricts, also signifies a spatial proliferation; the city is not merely a domain for work, while the countryside remains a virtual home. Rather, amongst the migrant workers in my study, the city has been transformed into both a 'rice field' and 'home' alike. This is also unlike to the situation described in Wolf's (1992)

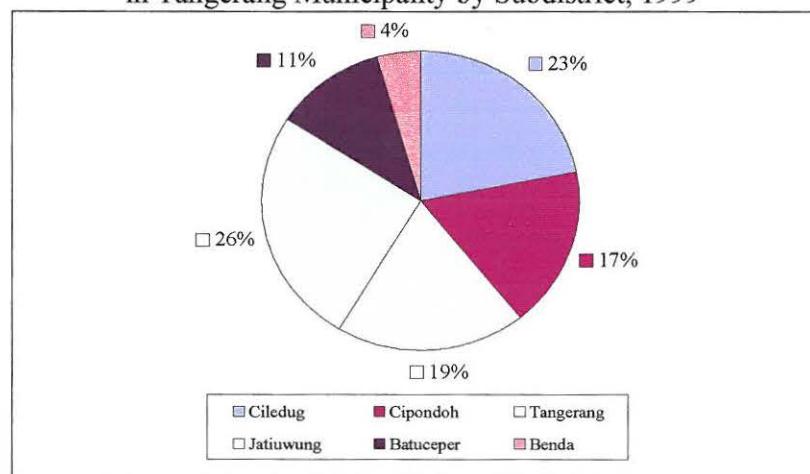
study on rural factories in Java, in which rural ‘factory daughters’—due to the proximity to their workplaces—were able to commute daily to work and, hence, a separate existence from home was unnecessary. As they were still living in the parents’ house, the daughters’ income and expenditure were incorporated into the parents’ economy, which lessened the pressure on the low wages received by the workers. This condition is nearly absent in the case of Tangerang workers, where the economy of the migrant workers is relatively independent from the rural economy. This economic disentanglement from the rural economy is deepened by a conspicuous consumerism for their own use, reducing income remittances to the family economy.

Unless indicated, the majority of workers whose stories and experiences are addressed in this thesis were in their late teens (18-19 years), the normal age of recent high school graduates, to their mid 20s (between 24-26 years). Most were unmarried. Both official statistics, issued by the government office, and my personal observations indicate a high proportion of the workers managed to complete high school, mostly in the countryside. As I will show in Chapter 2, the completion of secondary education seems to have an impact on the youth migrants’ reception to modern discourse, which, in turn, shapes their ‘increasing realisation of their role in the urban and urbane world’ (Hull 1994:5). They come from various rural places of origin in Indonesia, from intra-provincial neighbouring districts such as Lebak, Pandeglang and Serang, as well as from neighbouring provinces in West Java, Central Java, and East Java. Those from the outer island provinces, such as Lampung, South Sumatra, and West Nusa Tenggara, are also represented (Map 3). Migrants, regardless of their places of origin, are concentrated together in the industrial subdistricts where manufacturing establishments share space with residential housing. They live in barrack-like lodgings rented out mostly by the locals, the Bantens. Apart from providing accommodation, the locals also economically benefit from offering a range of support services and small trade to the workers and other parties involved in factories in the area.

The urban neighbourhood (*kampung*) in which my migrant informants live is called Gambir (a pseudonym), situated in Tangerang Municipality’s most

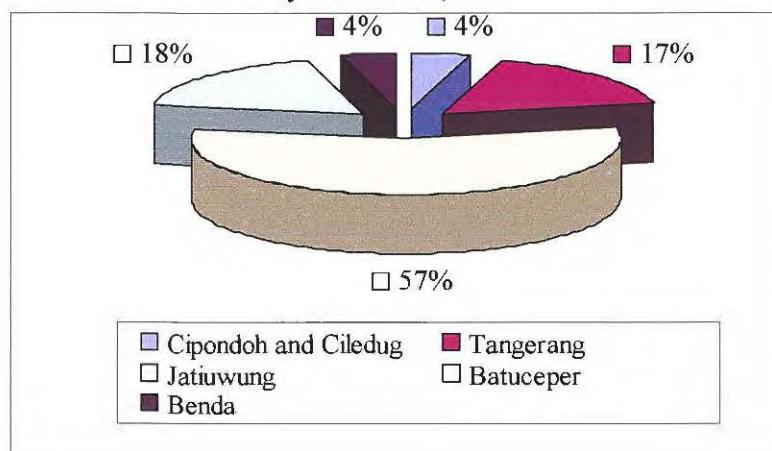
populous subdistrict of Jatiuwung (see Figure 1.6). In 1999, this subdistrict accommodated 57 percent of medium and large manufacturing enterprises in Tangerang, employing 53 percent of the town's industrial labour force (see Figure 1.7 and Figure 1.8). I chose this subdistrict as my fieldsite because of its high representation of industries and workers. This same logic was used in selecting Gambir as my particular location in Jatiuwung, given that workers and industries were heavily represented in this neighbourhood. The figure for the labour force employed in the factories in Jatiuwung, nonetheless, does not reflect the number of workers living in the subdistrict. There are workers who live in the area but work in neighbouring subdistricts and, in contrast, there are also those from the other subdistricts who work in Jatiuwung. However, the majority of workers in Gambir I met during the fieldwork worked in Jatiuwung. They were mostly employed in the manufacturing establishments in the subdistrict, ranging from food and beverages, textiles, garments, leather, wooden product industries, household goods industries to chemical and metal products factories. According to 1998 statistics, the general ratio between female and male workers in Jatiuwung subdistrict was 1:1.3. Nonetheless, textile, garment, and leather factories are normally sub-sectors with a high concentration of female workers accounted (see Chapter 4), while the remaining industries had more male workers.

Figure 1.6: Population Distribution  
in Tangerang Municipality by Subdistrict, 1999



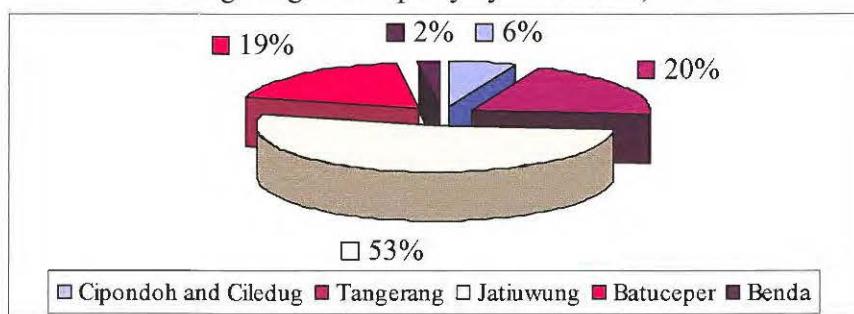
*Source:* BPS Kota Tangerang 2000, p.17

Figure 1.7: Medium and Large Industries  
in Tangerang Municipality  
by Subdistrict, 1999



Source: BPS Kota Tangerang 2000, p.175.

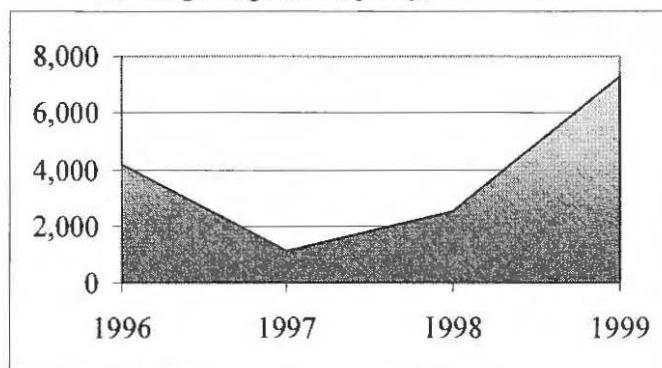
Figure 1.8: Labour Force in Medium and Large Industries  
in Tangerang Municipality by Subdistrict, 1999.



Source: BPS Kota Tangerang 2000, p.177.

The migrant workers I met in Gambir neighbourhood only arrived recently in Tangerang after the 1997 financial crisis. Many had only worked for one or two years, often only a few months at the time of my arrival. This was in line with the process of recovery of the local economy, indicated by the increasing number of the vacant positions in industries after 1997 (see Figure 1.9). The arrival of these more recent migrants marks a relatively newer generation of industrial workers in Gambir neighbourhood, in particular, and in Jatiuwung subdistrict, in general.

Figure 1.9: Positions Vacant Registered  
in Industrial Sectors  
in Tangerang Municipality, 1996-1999



Source: BPS Kota Tangerang 2000, p.28.

The improved education and rural development experienced by migrants has been addressed by Hadiz, who branded the early and mid-1990s workers in urban Tangerang as ‘the new urban proletariat’ (1997:124-32). Nonetheless, a massive rural transformation during the mid-1990s has brought a new expectation of modernity to the contemporary rural youth-turned migrant workers, a more extensive exposure to modern discourse compared to the generation addressed by Hadiz. This is particularly due to the spread of mass media, especially non-state TV stations with their wide-ranging programs rigorously promoting modern and urban lifestyle and presenting a near-real modern experience to the audience in the countryside (see Chapter 2). The 1997 financial crisis created a discontinuation in the further development of Hadiz’ ‘new urban proletariat’, as a large number of its constituents simply lost their jobs and had to find employment elsewhere. Workers from the pre-crisis period are hardly represented in Tangerang, particularly Gambir.

The crisis and the generational divergence generates important implications for the understanding ‘who’ are the contemporary industrial workers. Firstly, these workers are not those who were involved in the re-emergence of the labour activism in the early 1990s as discussed earlier. Nor are they connected through the narratives, experience, and aspirations of their predecessors, who do not have a strong presence in the area.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, they are also situated in a different setting

from the one faced by workers in the early and mid 1990s, which was characterised by the problems of ‘low’ wages—often lower than the minimum living needs indices (see Chapter 5)—and labour repression as well as restrictions on freedom to organise. The significant rise in the minimum wage received by contemporary workers, compared to the amount received by their early 1990s colleagues, plus overtime remuneration which can double the current minimum wage level in the average take-home pay, has made their purchasing power superior to that of their predecessors. Thirdly, despite the rate of inflation, which makes the significant increase in wages seem hollow, the recent increasing availability of cheaper, second-class consumer products, mostly produced in other Third World countries’ sweatshops, has provided workers more ‘power’ to imagine their inclusion into modernity (see Chapter 5). A completely different struggle was faced by their predecessors, whose low income failed to ensure a decent provision of basic necessities, let alone the ‘luxuries’ of symbolic goods. As a result, the post-1997 migrant workers are those whose subjective preparedness for a future urban existence is made easier and, in fact, is supported by the development of objective conditions. This combination of subjective and objective conditions underscores their concern for lifestyle and modern imagination. Such concerns make the discourse of collective action and labour activism appear to be secondary, though it does not mean that the classic issues of working conditions have vanished from the Tangerang industrial shopfloors.

### **How They are (Ethnographically) Approached**

My past involvement as a student activist, working among factory workers in Sukoharjo (Central Java) and Tangerang between 1994-1996, participating in a series of meetings to organise labour strikes underscored the way I understood capital-labour-state relations. It was this objective and subjective circumstance that created the impetus to start my doctorate research when I arrived in late 2001 in Gambir urban neighbourhood, Tangerang.

Considering that my study was of a politically-sensitive issue, and worrying that any critical and aggravating labour conflict could cut short my

fieldwork, if not jeopardise my position in relation with the state apparatus, I notified my presence and intentions in the area to various levels of state authority, including the police and the military (although it is normally not necessary for an Indonesian citizen wanting to undertake research in any part of the country). Because of this concern, I never disclosed my past association with student and labour activism, even to my worker informants. As a result, my encounter with Tangerang at that time really presented me with a different situation from the one I had experienced during the mid-1990s. The difference was brought about by my decision to establish completely new contacts with workers, whom I had not known during my previous activities. My earlier encounters in the mid 1990s had been mediated by labour-concerned organisations who deployed me to already specified locations and contacts, so my intensive exposure was mostly to organised and politically-conscious labourers. In my second encounter in 2001, I had to find workers completely on a random basis and decide for myself one location among a number of alternatives.<sup>36</sup> This unmediated way of locating informants and location presented me with different types of workers from the images I had had of them.

Nevertheless, I only realised the impact of this random selection after staying in Gambir for a few months. For the first few months I remained determined that attending labour meetings to organise labour protests and participating in discussions on labour issues would frequently be on my agenda. At least, I thought that conversations on working conditions, wages, unions, and like-minded issues would be the everyday discourse amongst the industrial labourers. I became pessimistic about the potential of my project once I realised that such discourses were atypical in the everyday lives of migrant workers. Or, to the extent they occurred, they were insufficient to substantiate the claim that Tangerang was the most-celebrated case of labour resistance. While conversations about working conditions did occur in informal encounters, they simply did not lead to a methodical solution, let alone collective action.

It was at this point I was drawn into the question of modernity and identity, through the workers' celebration and expression of their urban existence. The term 'modernity' itself is problematic given its variety of usage as previously discussed. In relation to my study, to come to a specified conception of modernity, I treat the

workers' expression, practices, and stories the way Clifford Geertz (influenced by Weber) does 'culture'. In *Thick Description* (1973), Geertz argues that culture comprises the 'webs of significance' that can only be comprehended through an 'interpretive [approach] in search of meaning' (p.5). Therefore, in order not to be ensnared by 'imaginative abstraction' and 'logical dreams' (Geertz 1973:24), I incorporated myself into the everyday of the workers: morning queues at the wells, walking to the workplace, having lunch at the food stalls, shopping at the malls or the market, self-entertaining through TV, VCD, or karaoke, gossiping, talking about their past and future, and waking up at dawn to dine during the fasting month. It was not merely these activities that informed my understanding of migrant workers. It was the verbal exchanges that occurred amidst such bustle that created an entrance for me to 'the conceptual world' (Geertz, *ibid.*) in which the subjects in my research are situated. There are two domains of life of the subjects in which I did not have physical presence: the factory<sup>37</sup> and the past, the countryside from which the migrants workers come.<sup>38</sup> These domains, nevertheless, remained accessible to me through the narratives and life stories made available by migrant workers, as revealed in Chapter 2, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4.

George Marcus (1991) points out that the determination of multiple settings to the creation of identity constitutes 'the framework of modernity' (p.62) in writing ethnography. This modernist approach assumes that in the globalised and changing world of the late-20th century, the 'solidity and homogeneity' (p.62) in the concept of community and tradition, locked in one specified locality and thus the 'privileged sources of perspective' (p.66), is inadequate to speak about identity, cultural practices, and those who practice them. Rather, he said :

The identity of anyone or any group is produced simultaneously in many different locales of activity by many different agents for many different purposes....Cultural difference or diversity arises here not from some local struggle for identity, but as a function of a complex process among all the sites in which the identity of someone or a group anywhere is defined simultaneity. It is the burden of the modernist ethnography to capture distinctive identity formations in all their migrations and dispersions. (p.62-3).

It is in Marcus's sense of ethnography that I look to multi-sited contexts to understand the migrant industrial workers in Tangerang. There are, in fact, only two vicinities in terms of actual spatial locality, that is, rural and urban. Nonetheless, there is more than one setting in each vicinity, and each setting produces a different translation of what constitutes modern and how the imagined existence is expressed. Countryside, for example, is not merely about tradition and rural conservatism. It also includes modern domains affected by the introduction of rural modernisation, with which rural subjects learn about the realities beyond their village boundaries. Similarly, the metropolis for the migrant workers is not merely about their workplace in manufacturing factories. It also includes their experience beyond the factory settings and how the non-work settings become the important domains to reinforce their modern identity. In this thesis, I try to look at the migrant workers in Gambir in these multiple settings.

### **Chapter Overview**

In Chapter 2, migrant workers are situated in their place of origins, the rural settings. I point out in this chapter that some conditions that enable the development of the modern and urban consciousness amongst them have actually emerged in the domains considered to be 'traditional' and 'un-modern'. The growing exposure to modern discourse through cultural flows brought by mass media and education, as a result of the rural modernisation, has laid the basis and promise of modernity for the rural children's shift to urban centres. Migration is not just a consequence of rural-urban disparities in material infrastructure. Encounters with the city-centred cultural flows brings rural youth in contact with their imagined (urban) community, from which they are prepared to stretch out their traditional spatial boundaries to include urban space as home too.

Chapter 3 explores the social setting of the metropolis that constitutes the reality of urban migration. In here, I situate migrant workers in the urban setting in their marginal residential neighbourhood. A direct encounter with the metropolis through the conditions of marginality as they experience in their urban quarters has made the migrants aware of the contradiction between the promise

and the reality of modernity. Such incongruity has given rise to a feeling amongst the migrants about their ‘failed’ migration, threatening their track toward their inclusion into modernisation and modernity. Therefore, adoption of practices associated with urbanism, as will be shown in rituals like birthday-like anniversary celebrations in the modern fashion, generates a way to reclaim this threatened modern identity.

Chapter 4 portrays migrant industrial workers in their ‘traditional’ setting, the workplace and the response to those conditions generated in that setting. The engagement of women in the manufacturing industries is also addressed in this chapter. Discipline within the manufacturing factories and exposure to the conditions of work, are also an experience of modernity for rural youth. They are confirmation of the discourse of modernisation and industrialisation encountered in the classroom narratives in the countryside. They also habituate rural children to the capitalist industrial production. However, the meticulous control imposed in the factory regime does not place workers under total subjugation. The chapter argues that the industrial shopfloor is also an interpretive arena where defiance (Scott 1986) is possible and subjectification (Foucault 1998) occurs. The challenge posed by the workers to factory authority is mainly intended to ease the physical and emotional tensions that occur on the assembly line.

Chapter 5 examines the urban home setting as a domain in which the subjects enact their modern identity through the practices of consumption. The conspicuous consumption amongst the urban migrants and the way they make sense of the practices reveal a contradictory reality to the notion of an economically marginalised working class. This chapter shows that the improvement in wages and the considerable additional cash promised by overtime has allowed the spread of consumerism, especially in regard to products from which the imagination of modernity can be projected, amongst the subjects still living in a less-privileged urban neighbourhood. To some extent, the strengthening of workers’ purchasing power has also been triggered by the availability of, and greater access to, cheaper luxuries, mainly imported from other Third World countries, in local markets.

Chapter 6 explores the way the workers' modern identity is constituted through the discursive interplay between dual settings, work and home. I take an example of the importance of the factory's attributes to the construction of this identity. Work uniforms and personal grooming prior to work offers workers a sense of 'officiality' acknowledging their incorporation into the formal sector of industry, an eminent icon of modernisation. It is with this sense of officiality, along with the images of celebrated modernisation/industrialisation, that workers define themselves more as *karyawan* than *buruh*. Both, in fact, denote roughly the same idea of worker, the latter being seen as a derogatory term which emphasises a proletarian connotation. The former term—with a less class antagonistic nuance—was introduced by the anti-leftist New Order as part of the politics of identity to remove the radical character of worker and labour movement.

The Conclusion returns to the understanding of the workers experience as an embrace of modernity and the question of the difference between this current generation of workers and the pre-economic crisis predecessors.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The region now known as Banten Province was previously under the administration of the Provincial Government of West Java before districts in the western part decided to form a separate provincial government in the year 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Hal Hill describes the Old Order as a nationalist regime that tended to present a 'hostile attitude towards foreign capital' (Hill 1997:143).

<sup>3</sup> Mather (1985:156) reported that during the 1970s, most industrial plants in Tangerang were import-substitution industries, 'producing consumer goods for the domestic market', such as 'tyres, plastic goods, pharmaceuticals, air-conditioning units, electrical cables, steel rods, motorbike parts, confectionery and biscuits, and textiles and garments.'

<sup>4</sup> According to the definition applied by the Tangerang office of statistics (BPS Kotamadya Tangerang 1999:xxii), an industry with 20-99 labour force is classified as middle-sized (*sedang*), whereas one with over 100 workers is considered large (*besar*), regardless of its level of mechanisation and the extent of capital investment.

<sup>5</sup> In an article on the political-economy of industrialisation in Southeast Asia, Robison states that in Indonesia, medium-sized enterprises are mostly owned by Indonesian or Chinese origin (1995:8). They often establish joint ventures with global business actors from South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and the more-industrialised Japan (*ibid.*, also Mackie and Sjahrir, cited in Wolf 1992:40).

<sup>6</sup> See Tjandraningsih (2000:259) about the 'export boom' in garment and footwear manufacturing as a result of the relocation of industries from the newly-industrialising East Asian countries, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan since the late 1980s.

<sup>7</sup> The policy seems to only apply to new investors wanting to start new manufacturing businesses. The 'old players' in the area were allowed to expand their business, including establishing new factories in different sub-sectors. Therefore, in order to be able to operate in the region, new investors often have to establish joint ventures with existing players. This explains why in Tangerang Municipality there was still an increase in the number of manufacturing factories from 687 in 1994 to 731 in 1996 (see Table 1.1).

<sup>8</sup> NIE, New Industrialised Economy. See Hill (1999) for a succinct explanation of the impact of the crisis on various Indonesian economic sectors.

<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, the plummet of the *rupiah* proved a blessing in disguise to exports in the agricultural sector. This was particularly true for the export-oriented cash crop sector. In 1998, especially in the outer islands, the sector demonstrated strong performance and 'positive growth' given its lesser connection with 'the modern financial system' (Hill 1999:7,26, see also Sadli, 1999:24).

<sup>10</sup> According to AKATIGA (cited in Tjandraningsih 2000:266), by early 1998 'the majority' of workers laid-off as a result of the crisis came from textile and garment factories.

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<sup>11</sup> According to 1985 official figures (BPS, cited in Hill 1998:154), foreign investment was dominant only in industries such as footwear (40.7 percent), plastics (56.5 percent), glass products (81 percent), and electrical equipment (39.8 percent). In other areas (food products, textiles, garments, metal products, etc.), foreign investment's presence consisted of no more than 30 percent.

<sup>12</sup> Although, in the Indonesian context, the government since the late 1980s has lessened the requirement for 'local equity' and introduced 'trade reform' to pursue 'low cost inputs' (Robison 1995:7-8) as incentives for further participation of transnational corporations.

<sup>13</sup> Besides, in the Indonesian case, where political instability, corruption, and legal certainty are an annoyance (Hill 2000:262,280-1) and, therefore, constitute a disincentive for foreign investors, an indirect engagement through subcontracting or a joint venture with local investors is perhaps the safest form of doing business.

<sup>14</sup> Control derived from segmenting the work process across national borders is analogous to Braverman's criticism of Taylor's reduction of 'skill requirement' as a result of the introduction of assembly lines, leaving workers to lose their control and initiative over the whole production process (Braverman 1974:113-21, 124-37, also Gorz 1999:29). I will discuss further the issue of work segmentation and control in Chapter 4.

<sup>15</sup> In fashion, Hale (2002) described the 'two-season cycle' as no longer favourable and profitable for the manufacturers, as recurrent modifications of 'design, fabric and colour' are more and more possible and, importantly, lucrative under the subcontracting practice.

<sup>16</sup> Further discussion on the preference of employing women in the factories can be seen, for example, in Elson and Pearson's (1981) argument about 'nimble fingers', which I will highlight in Chapter 4.

<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, unions can contribute to the deteriorating working conditions of, particularly, female workers. Susan Joekes, speaking on Moroccan conditions, reported about the male-dominated unions functioning as instruments to safeguard male workers' interests (e.g. job allocation, wage rate) over their female counterparts in clothing and textiles industries (1985:202-4).

<sup>18</sup> SOBSI, *Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia* (All Indonesia Central Workers' Organisation).

<sup>19</sup> According to Hawkins (cited in Hadiz 1997:50), the membership of SOBSI in 1958 was 2,733,000, while its closest contender was nationalist-oriented KBKI with 1,002,000.

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<sup>20</sup> In the mid 1980s, Soeharto appointed Sudomo, a navy admiral and a former chief of Command for Restoration of Order and Security (*KOPKAMTIB*), as the minister of Manpower. The Command was an extra-legal security body with military-like structure, established in the initial years of Soeharto's rule, whose task was predominantly to maintain political stability and internal security (Hadiz 1997:203n.5). Sudomo's experience, while in *KOPKAMTIB*, in dealing with the elimination of leftist elements, including in trade unions, was the reason for that appointment (Rudiono 1992:64). It was during his tenure in Department of Manpower that the extent of military involvement in labour conflict was formalised through the 1986 Ministerial Decree No.342 (Manning 1998:211). This included a validation of local military command at sub-district level (*KORAMIL*) as a party involved, at a company's request, in labour disputes.

<sup>21</sup> *FBSI* stands for *Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*; *SPSI* stands for *Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia* (All-Indonesian Workers' Union).

<sup>22</sup> As Hadiz (1997:81) argued, the 'conscious attempt' that underscored the creation of the *FBSI* was to impede the revival of radical traditions mostly embedded in old unions and to isolate workers/unions from affiliations to political parties as had happened under the Old Order. Nonetheless, Hadiz continued, in reality, the government played an assertive role in allocating 'resources' and giving 'direction' at a practical level to the *FBSI*. Its officials, in addition, were increasingly associated to the GOLKAR, a military-initiated electoral vehicle of Soeharto during New Order.

<sup>23</sup> Among them, as Hadiz (1997:135-6) described, were *SBM* (the Solidarity Free Trade Union) sponsored by a human rights lawyer, H.J Princen, the *SBSI* (the Indonesian Prosperous Workers' Union) led by a lawyer, Muchtar Pakpahan, and the *PPBI* (Centre for Indonesian Working Class Struggle) backboned by leftist student activists. Apart from the union discourse, NGOs with 'humanist sentiments' and 'charitable intentions' such as *YPM* (*Yayasan Perempuan Mardhika*) and *YASANTI* (*Yayasan Anisa Swasti*) were similarly active in organising women workers by providing education on labour rights and on negotiation skills (*ibid.*:141-2). The difference between the first and the second category, in my view, lay in their position on mass action and labour movements. Having seen the conditions of labour repression by the state, the latter tended to see that open conflict with the authority or the employer would only place workers in an even more repressive situation.

<sup>24</sup> Such an argument, according to Manning (1998:223) citing Standing's 1992 study, seems indefensible given that 'economic success' could also be achieved in a country where 'greater union freedoms' existed at the same time, such as in Malaysia. Manning further argued that, in Indonesia, even during the Soekarno era, the number of cases in which economic instability was triggered by union activity was not significant.

<sup>25</sup> GSP is a special access facility to a number of products imported from other countries for the US market.

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<sup>26</sup> Instead, the government allowed military officials to take charge of the management of the nationalised companies. This deepened the tension between the military and the leftist-influenced unions, particularly the *SOBSI*, who initiated and executed the takeover (Hadiz 1997:53-4). According to Robison (1990:83-7), the involvement of the military in securing the nationalist economic policies of Sukarno set up the foundation for the military's activities in corporate business to the present day. In addition, Hadiz (*ibid.*) asserts, the takeover itself was actually triggered as a reaction to the Dutch's reluctance to handover West Irian to Indonesian authority.

<sup>27</sup> The 'organic links' between political parties and unions was found in the number of personnel with dual membership and leading posts in both structures, as in the case of Nyono, who was the chairman of the *SOBSI* as well as a member of the Central Committee of the Indonesian Communist party (*PKI*) (Hadiz 1997:49). Another form of link was, as in the case of the *PKI*, that around 20 percent of the party's elected members for national parliament in the 1955 election were the leading members of the *SOBSI* (Hasibuan, cited in Hadiz 1997:49).

<sup>28</sup> Pancasila is a state ideology, whose principles embrace the idea of spirituality, humanity, unity, democracy, and social justice. *HPP* stands for *Hubungan Perburuhan Pancasila* (Pancasila Labour Relations). As the word *perburuhan* is derived from the word *buruh* (workers) and the word was ideologically considered to have a derogatory meaning (see Chapter 6), *HPP* was later renamed *HIP* (*Hubungan Industrial Pancasila*, Pancasila Industrial Relations).

<sup>29</sup> Borrowing Young's (1994) argument of 'the urbanisation of the rural', Hadiz sees that the migrant workers' preparedness for a more permanent urban existence is enabled by their greater exposure to the urban features ('education, transport and communications') brought by the process of rural development (p.125). See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the impacts of rural progress on the aspirations of the youth in the countryside.

<sup>30</sup> The lack of 'revolutionary outlook' in the labour organisations outside the state discourse in the above-mentioned period, according to Hadiz (1997:133), was not a major concern to the workers. For the workers, the mushrooming of such organisations simply provided them the 'opportunities to organise' in a situation in which channels for their aspirations were restrained by the state.

<sup>31</sup> By juxtaposing the conditions for industrial strikes with the ones for 'revolution', Kammen departs from Rude's (cited in Kammen 1997:26) remark, speaking on the French Revolution, that 'every great revolution is attended by deep divisions and crises within the governing class.'

<sup>32</sup> Mather's approach is, however, challenged by Hadiz (1997:121), who argues that the patriarchal values and Islamic norms are not found only in the society in Mather's field site, as many other industrial localities in West Java, in which labour protests are frequent, are also under the influence of the same values.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, Hill (2000) for details on economic development in Indonesia under Soeharto.

<sup>34</sup> In Chapter 3, I briefly discuss the reasons for the lack of direct involvement of the locals in the industries.

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<sup>35</sup> There were actually quite a number of workers from the biggest Gambir-based manufacturing conglomeration in Tangerang who endured the 1997 crisis. Nonetheless, except for the historic strike outburst in 1991 (Hadiz 1997, Kammen 1997), there was no subsequent significant labour activism. This may have been due to a number of reforms the management introduced which improved the working conditions in its production site, as admitted by workers, relatively to the situations in other companies. In fact, my observations also indicated that many of the post-1997 arrivals were also employed here.

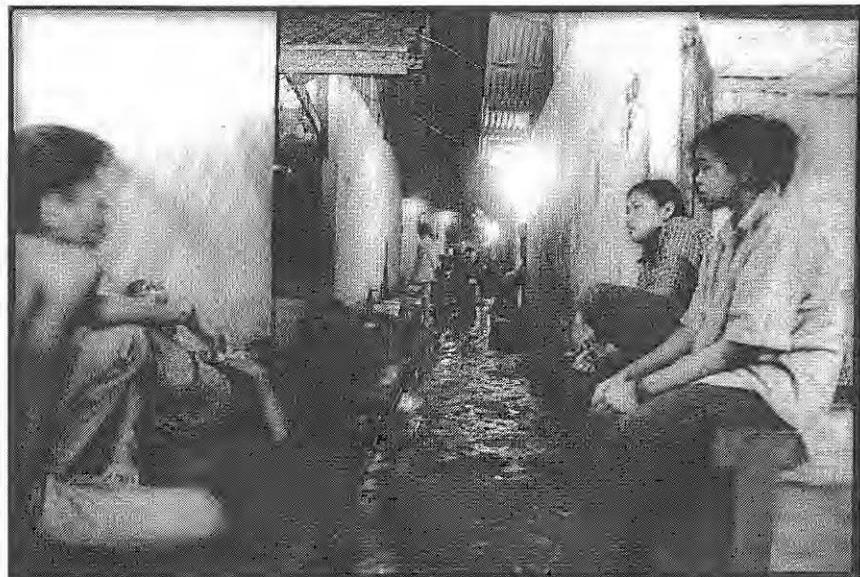
<sup>36</sup> A colleague was involved at this stage. She accompanied me to wander around, mostly by walking, from one neighbourhood to another, from one subdistrict to another, so I would not look like a lost person in the area. However, though she was quite familiar with the town, she was also foreign to the industrial-residential neighbourhood, mostly concentrated on the west of Tangerang.

<sup>37</sup> Up to the end of my fieldwork, I had not received responses from the management of a number of companies to my requests to undertake observation inside the workplace, although the local administrative authority and local police had provided a written clearance (I had to show them my research proposal), stating that my research was purely for academic purpose, not political.

<sup>38</sup> I managed to visit two places of origin of my informants, however, the visit was too short for me even to undertake observation. In addition, migrants' infrequent home returns, the short duration of the visit, and the timing often made it difficult for me to set up a schedule. Except for the annual return during Islamic *Idul Fitri* festivity, home returns were usually unplanned, mostly for emergency reasons, with me being notified only few hours before the departure.

## Chapter 2

# Home and Its Imaginings



*Plate 2.1: Imagining the Rural from an Urban Home (photo: RWJ)*

## Chapter 2

### Home and Its Imaginings: Countryside for Urban Migrants

*'Behind this fantasy there was a real place. But it hardly resembled the unbroken summery-sylvan idyll of greenwood.'*  
(Schama 1995, *Landscape and Memory*, p.142)

*'The greenwood was a useful fantasy....'*  
(Schama 1995, *Landscape and Memory*, p.153)

The quotes above are Simon Schama's portrayal of how early medieval England is imagined in English literature. The dense forest and untouched natural landscape is how the past is desirably imagined. They stay in popular memory, he claimed, despite the fact that at the coming of William the Conqueror on the Sussex coast, the wooded scenery of England comprised 'no more than 15 percent' (Schama 1995:142). The same also applies to the popular mind of urban migrants in Tangerang in early 21<sup>st</sup> century about the countryside—their place of origin—that remains unwaveringly celebrated for its natural purity. The vast green landscape of rice fields (*sawah*), clean rivers, and nature-generated peace of mind are how urban migrants remember their rural homes. The idea of virgin countryside is essential in the construction of identity of urban migrants: amidst their active search for modern advancement in the city, they need a local connection to continually look back at and revisit. It remains alive despite the fact that rural development has diminished the rural children's experience of nature, replaced by modernisation with its urban-centred themes. However, it becomes what Helsinger terms—speaking of early-19th century Britain—'portable icons' for them to be able to escape from urban anomalies (cited in Maclean, Landry and Ward 1999:14).<sup>1</sup>

The countryside is the place where the majority of urban migrants employed in Tangerang industries set their original existence. They are the first generation in their families to become urban industrial workers, quite the opposite of their parents who were mostly involved in agriculture-related activities and other rural activities. Their existence in the countryside as rural youth makes a crucial contribution to situating their move to industrial life in the metropolitan city. Their imagination of urban lifestyle and industrialisation ripens as a result of their encounters with modern discourse. It is not the virgin landscape, creating an outlook of having fallen behind, that establishes a modern desire in their urban escapade.

This chapter attempts to provide an understanding of the countryside that originates urban migrants, in which 'greenwood', similar to Schama's picture, is more in imagination rather than in reality. It looks at how mass media and education have modernised regional Indonesia, creating an exposure to translocal realism, and generated the basis for the rural dwellers' shift to the city. Such encounters bring rural youth in contact with their 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983), from which they are prepared to stretch out their traditional spatial boundaries to include urban space as home too. I will also point out that the structural transformation of employment in rural areas has furthered the distance between the younger generation and rural agriculture and, on the contrary, placed them closer to aspirations of urbanism. At the same time, the countryside remains in the imagination of the migrants as an exotic place embodying characteristics that no longer accurately represent the rural. A romanticised idea about rural beauty persists; so does a connection with the rural during urban migrant workers' occasional retreats. The urban migrant workers' connection with their place of origin is constantly reproduced, not only during important celebrations, but similarly, as a sanctuary during times of hardship that impinge on their sojourn in the city. This makes a clear cut rural-urban transformation non-existent. This back and forth mobility between domains is, in fact, an indication of the proliferation of 'home' in multiple settings.

In short, this chapter is about the tension between the reality of the countryside with the way its departing members would like to imagine it. It looks at how the rural is a domain where hate and love (of the country) collide.

### The Facade of Countryside: Urban Migration Reproduced

The minute the bell sounded to indicate the end of working hours, in the manufacturing compound of the garment industry in Jatiuwung subdistrict, Ning, a female worker at a garment factory, left the production floor and hurriedly walked to her lodging in Gambir neighbourhood. That day, workers of the company worked only for half a day, from 7.30am to 12 noon (the morning shift usually runs until 3pm). It was 21 December 2000, the working day before the plant was closed for 10 days for the Islamic *Idul Fitri* holiday. In this period most industrial workers in Tangerang could take their annual leave. In the year 2000, *Idul Fitri* fell on 27 December, in between Christmas and New Year, so that workers had a longer annual break than usual. Most companies resumed their operation on 2 January 2001. Workers who failed to turn up at the plants that day were reprimanded and penalised.

Early dismissal from work gave Ning a chance to prepare for a trip back home to a village in Temanggung, Central Java, to the east of Tangerang (see Map 3), normally about 12 hours travel by bus. In the peak season, the journey could take even longer as the road network was jammed with motorised vehicles, large and small, transporting countless urban residents to their rural home towns, to visit family and kin. Ning said that she would be lucky if the distance could be covered in 16 to 18 hours. Ning was not alone. She had made an arrangement with other migrant workers from the same region to travel back home together. Other workers too, who intended to depart to several different destinations, had also made their preparations. They all looked excited, not only because they were about to meet their kin and relatives they had not seen since at least the last *Idul Fitri*. The longer holiday meant they were able to get away and take a day-off from the routines of factory work.

A few days earlier, Ning had already received her monthly wage and holiday allowance (*THR, tunjangan hari raya*).<sup>2</sup> With this payment and some savings she had made over the past months, Ning purchased clothing, mostly colourful t-shirts with various words written on them and blue jeans, from department stores catering to the lower middle class in downtown Tangerang. As most prices in those stores were too expensive for her level of income, she selected

discounted items. She did not purchase this clothing only for herself. The consumption pattern of most workers prior to their return home for *Idul Fitri* festivities is to purchase brand new things to give as gifts (*oleh-oleh*) to parents, friends, and relatives back home. Ning bought 2-3 items of brand new clothing for herself to wear on special occasions, particularly on *Idul Fitri* day, but the bulk of her shopping was intended for gifts.

Another migrant worker, Lamiri, was no different. Clothing was on his shopping list for gifts. In addition, he purchased a pair of sports shoes and a backpack for himself that he only started wearing on the day of his departure to Lampung in southern Sumatra (see Map 3). The trip to Lampung combined both bus for the land journey and ferry to cross the Sunda Strait. He wanted those items to still look new when he arrived at his hometown. In anticipation of the increased shopping budget for the holiday, for the past one month he had voluntarily undertaken overtime for extra cash in the rubber and plastic company where he had been working for eight months. With overtime he could earn income additional to the base salary. He also had savings worth nearly four times the regulated minimum wage, accumulated since his first company pay packet.

Not all their income and saving from factory work were spent on consumption. Lamiri left his savings untouched after a few hours window-shopping at the department stores. He needed his savings since he felt that he had an obligation not to come back to his hometown empty-handed. He said:

I have nieces and nephews. [Because] going back to one's hometown (*pulang kampung*) is a custom, it is improper if we just come without bringing something, cash or articles, from afar. I don't feel comfortable [coming home empty-handed].

Lamiri admitted that his parents had never insisted he assist the family with money. He rarely remitted any part of his monthly income to his parents at home on a regular basis, apart from once a year during the holiday retreat. He added: 'I just feel that I have to help my parents, particularly because they have already helped [to raise] me. Now I have a job and have income of my own.'

What these migrants bring to their home towns illustrates how much they have sweated during the past year in the factory or how much saving they have accumulated despite their struggle to juggle income and daily subsistence costs in the city. The fancy clothes and cosmetics bought from department stores as gifts or the money they take home symbolise a respectable job and hardworking

migrant status. Nowadays, electronic goods such as a TV set, tape recorder, or VCD player are added to the list of gifts to be presented to the family at home in the village. The intercity buses taking migrants to their home towns are not just crammed with men and women and their bags. Boxes of electronic appliances, including items such as TV antennas and electric fans are all crowded together in the bus cabin. I heard almost no complaint about any inconvenience from travelling for such a long distance with such oversized luggage. They also don't mind staying awake during the journey just to watch over their belongings in order to prevent stealing by thieves who frequent public transport during that season. The annual return for the *Idul Fitri* festivity is one way for urban migrant workers to demonstrate the success of their livelihood in the new (urban) place to the people in their rural homes. It is no coincidence that the benefits of a year's work at the factory will be used up to meet this obligation. It is quite usual for savings to be almost completely exhausted once the festivity is over.

The home town retreat for the *Idul Fitri* festivity has been a custom in Indonesian society for many years (see for example Antlov 1999:204, Pemberton 1994:237). People visit their kin and relatives to ask for forgiveness for past mistakes. Parents bless all members of the family and express good wishes for their destinies in future years. Ning, Lamiri and many others are among those who retain this tradition. Seeking blessing from the elders has been internalised by them as a part of *Idul Fitri* since their childhood when they were still living in a village. So has the retreat itself, which has been learnt by rural children from the older generation of urban migrants returning to their home towns. The improvement in transportation infrastructure has compressed the distance between places (Hadiz 1997, Hardjono 1993), enabling the transmission of experience about migration and the city from experienced migrants to rural youth on a more frequent basis.

Lamiri described how migrants visiting his home village had become a source of admiration for the youth and children. When he was only an adolescent in a rural subdistrict town, he used to consider migrants as 'distinct individuals' (*lain*) because of their special qualities. It was not only in terms of the generosity of the returned migrants, who treated friends to snacks, cigarettes, and, sometimes

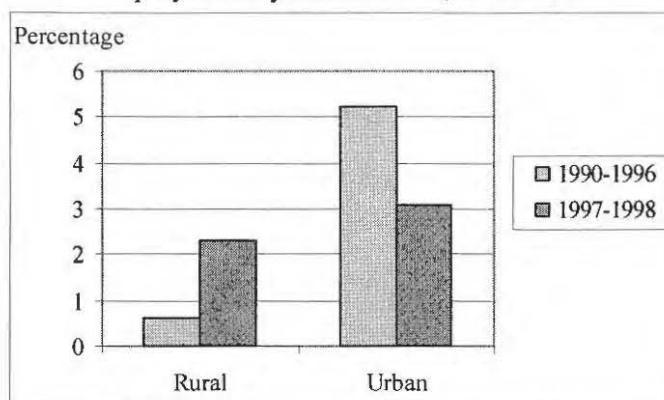
alcoholic drinks. Offering gifts, such as shoes, t-shirts, jeans, or records from the city added to this 'distinct' quality. More importantly, experienced migrants, the successful ones, marked by their generosity and material possessions, were respected by rural youth as people who had a wide experience of the world beyond the rural boundaries. Mulani, another Tangerang migrant worker from Pandeglang, Banten, even stated that one's experience is incomplete (*belum ada apa-apanya*) if a youth does not go to the city to work. Hans Antlov (1999), speaking on urban migrants returning temporarily to their villages in West Java, indicates that the holiday retreat is a means of maintaining 'affinity with their home village' (p.204). However, having seen the migrants' behaviour in regard to the striking display of their consumption, Antlov also suggests that the rural retreat is by no means simply an annual holy pilgrimage for them to mark their adherence to rural kin and family. It signifies an attempt to gain respectful recognition from fellow countrymen and women in order to counteract any 'incomplete' marker of success. By the time young Lamiri, Ning, or Mulani eventually got their chance to undertake migration to the city and earn urban income, the pattern of annual retreats had become a repetition of the pattern established by the migrants from the previous generation who these adolescents had longed to be. Generosity is a way they present their selves to rural people as successful (*berhasil, jadi*) migrants, so that villagers, in turn, would acknowledge their 'status and prestige' (Antlov 1999:204).

### **The Rural: Past and Present**

The declining employment in agricultural sectors in the countryside has long been blamed for the increasing number of rural youth attracted to urban centres. However, assumption about the 'structural failure' of agrarian development and the incapacity of rural employment to absorb new workers (Booth 1999:137) seem to have been contradicted by the financial crisis in 1997. It was a crisis that sent most migrants from the urban sectors, particularly manufacturing industries, back to their home towns to seek refuge from the harsh impact of the contraction within the urban economy. It was during that period, at least up until 1998, that

rural employment showed its flexibility, not only in the agricultural sector but also in its capacity to absorb the consignment of freshly-unemployed migrants from industrial urban centres (see Figure 2.1). Yet, the return appeared to be temporary, as these rural youth prepared to leave for urban destinations once the economic sector in the city started to recover. Later, I will point out the importance of the economic development and changes in rural employment to the understanding of the lessening appeal of the countryside, leading to the local boundary-crossing mobility of rural youth. This has been brought about by the accomplishment of *pembangunan*, material and economic development, a key discourse in the New Order politics under Soeharto (Robinson 1986), and has changed the features of the countryside over the past 30 years.

Figure 2.1: Percentage of Annual Growth of Employment by Rural-Urban, 1990-1998



Source: Feridhanusetyawan 1999:31

Although the centralised development policies of post-independent Indonesia created noticeable discrepancies, particularly in regard to infrastructure development, between rural areas and urban centres, the features of the countryside have also changed enormously over the past decades (White 1991, Young 1994). In the late 1950s, Anne Willner used the phrase 'quiet village' to contrast rural areas with the alienating image of industrialised centres with 'higher and vaster [buildings] than any in which...[a villager]...has been before' (cited in

Wolf 1992:110-111). A few decades later, in her account of the industrialising process in rural Java in the 1980s, Diane Wolf describes:

Most Javanese factory workers come from homes with dirt floors, no running water, and no electricity, homes where most technology is powered by humans or water buffalo. The only pieces of "modern technology" in their villages are treadle sewing machines, battery-powered radios and perhaps a few televisions that run on car batteries (1992:110).

Yet, despite these 'backward' features, Wolf (1992) noted that rural Java also had seen modern manufacturing plants as its latest development. Furthermore, during the following decades, the countryside has undergone what Kenneth Young (1994) terms 'the urbanisation of the rural', where rural areas are experiencing major changes by adopting features previously regarded as urban-specific. In terms of material development, the 'backward' image of the countryside has been replaced by the establishment of public and social infrastructure. Masri Singarimbun, as early as the 1970s, recorded progress in rural infrastructure development in the form of 'asphalted' roads enabling 'motorised' transport to link villagers with urban centres in the area of Yogyakarta, Central Java. He notes that the improved road networks in the countryside have opened rural isolation and dispelled 'the atmosphere of remoteness' of rural areas (Singarimbun 1993:262-3).

Moreover, looking through the photo albums of urban migrants portraying parents, relatives, and their rural homes, has made me aware that rural development is not merely about public facilities. Comparative affluence was striking in the quality of the houses of the migrants' families. In a picture taken from the year 2000 *Idul Fitri*, Ery, a female worker, was photographed with her parents and three siblings in the family house in a sub-district town in Central Java. The house was brick-walled and had a plaster floor. According to Ery, the house was renovated in the second half of the 1990s. It used to be a wooden structure with a dirt floor. Her father had about a hectare of land planted with cloves, an agricultural commodity whose market price has been recently improving following the collapse of the monopolistic mechanism of the country's sole clove distributing and buying agency associated with Soeharto's youngest

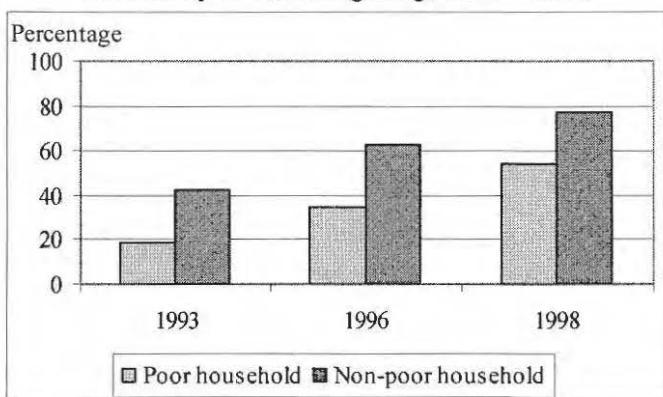
son.<sup>3</sup> The improvement in price has also been increased by the financial crisis. As the cash crops are mostly export commodities traded in US dollars, the financial crisis (see Chapter 1) has proved to be a blessing in disguise for the local farmers who benefited from the increase in *rupiah* prices of their agricultural outputs (Booth 1999:137, Hill 1999:25). Ery added that rural families whose economic livelihoods do not rely on the agricultural sector could, nowadays, also enjoy improvements in living from remittances sent by children working overseas as domestic servants or drivers (Saudi Arabia and Taiwan), plantation or construction workers (Malaysia), and manufacturing workers (South Korea and Taiwan).

Another worker, Arief, employed in a tyre industry, had parents who managed to have their house renovated, including upgrading the plastered floor with a white tiled-floor so that, according to Arief, it was easy to clean and would not look as somber. Though his father was a low-income principal of a state elementary school in his hometown, his mother made a significant contribution to the family economy through her involvement in small trading in the local traditional market (*pasar*). Alexander and Alexander (2001) argue that the engagement of women in Javanese commerce and women's ability to contribute to the household economy from this sector is often underestimated. This is not merely because the rural economy is typically associated with farm work (Alexander and Alexander 2001:48), but also because women's economic role is perceived as secondary to male, no matter whether they are proficient (p.59-61) and able to make 'substantial businesses' out of it (p.62-6). Nevertheless, as farm work is no longer central to Arief's parents' household, and to many rural households given the decline in the agricultural sector, the rural economy might expect an increase in significance of the trading sector, particularly petty trade, perceived in Javanese society as the 'domain for women' (Alexander and Alexander 2001:65). This will subsequently have an inevitable impact on the importance of women, both to the household and the rural economy.

Access to electricity has also changed rural society. Despite the program of rural electrification (*listrik masuk desa*) introduced by the government since the 1980s, the spread of electricity has been uneven throughout the country.

Ning's village, for example, was reached by the program only in the early 1990s. During a compulsory university-sponsored community service program (*KKN, Kuliah Kerja Nyata*) in 1995, the village where I lived in the subdistrict of Kutowinangun in Central Java was still not electrified despite the fact that neighbouring villages had already enjoyed electricity for two years. However, there is no doubt that more and more villages have become affected by rural electrification; people from an unelectrified village sometimes amateurishly and unsafely stretch a lengthy cable just to get a connection from a neighbouring electrified village. An official source revealed that the rate of rural electrification provided by the state electricity enterprise (*PLN, Perusahaan Listrik Negara*), for poor households, rose significantly from 18.95% in 1993 to 54.27% in 1998, the year in which the country was badly struck by the Asian economic downturn (see Figure 2.2). Surprisingly, the trend of rural electrification in the poor and non-poor household categories for the same period appeared to be similar.

**Figure 2.2: Percentage of Rural Households Using Electricity as Main Lighting, 1993 – 1998**



*Source:* BPS-Statistics Indonesia 1999, p.86

#### *The Well-Informed Rural Population*

Rural electrification means greater access to 'modern technology' for most people in the countryside. Not that people in rural areas were completely isolated from such technology before the coming of the electricity provided by the state

enterprise, particularly because 'privately supplied electricity' had been used, although not evenly spread. In the 1970s and 1980s it was commonplace for a village to have a TV set powered by a heavy duty car battery. The TV set, usually donated by the central government, was placed in an open area, such as in the yard of the office of the head of village. To protect it from weather or thieves, the black-and-white TV was housed in a wooden box and locked when turned off. The intensification of rural electrification has brought considerable change to everyday life in the countryside. Electronic goods and appliances have become necessary items, even to households who are still not able to have their houses renovated. In addition, Godwin Chu, Alfian, and Wilbur Schramm (1991:49) in the early 1980s noted that in the remote areas of West Kalimantan, people sold 'jewellery, cows, or borrowed money in order to purchase a television set'.

Until the early 1990s, the national air waves were dominated by TVRI (*Televisi Republik Indonesia*), then the sole television broadcasting station in the country. TVRI has been the state-sponsored media agent responsible for 'promoting [the] development programmes' of the central government in Jakarta (Chu et.al. 1991). In order to ensure the uniformity of information, a regulation was introduced in 1983 requiring that all programs from its regional broadcasting stations for local audiences needed an authorisation from the TVRI headquarters in Jakarta (Sen and Hill 2000:110). Through its centralised broadcasts about state-sponsored development, TVRI also carried the burden of advocating 'national integration' (Sen and Hill 2000:108).<sup>4</sup> The success of TVRI's mission as Jakarta's messenger is evidenced in the study of Chu et.al. about the social impact of satellite television in rural Indonesia between the second half of the 1970s and the early-1980s, indicating that 'about three times as many television viewers as non-viewers learned about key development programmes' (1991:63).<sup>5</sup>

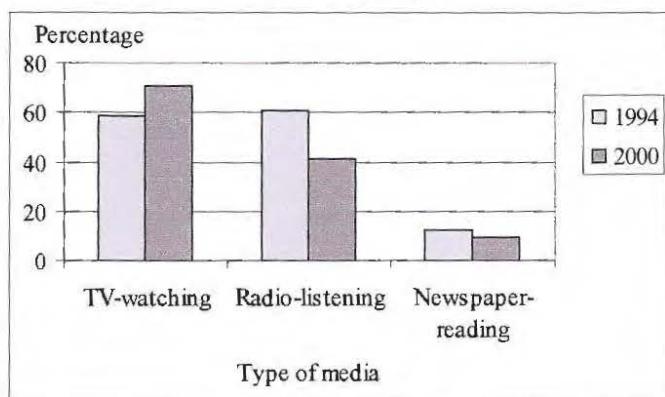
The first close encounter with television for most young migrants in Tangerang industrial area also began during their adolescent years in the countryside. At this time the non-state-run broadcasting stations, firstly introduced in 1989, started capturing wider audiences in rural Indonesia. These privately-owned TV stations are mostly Jakarta-based broadcasting corporations whose relay stations have been established in several provincial capitals to reach

wider coverage. Initially, it was mostly people in urban centres who benefited from the emergence of these new TV corporations.<sup>6</sup> However, even before the relay stations were geographically widespread, a 1993 government regulation allowed the non-state-sponsored broadcasting stations to use the government-owned Palapa satellite, and this enabled people in less urbanised regions and the countryside to enjoy programs from the private channels using household satellite dishes (Kitley 2001:235-8).<sup>7</sup> Later, when these relay stations strengthened their broadcasting capabilities, programs from non-TVRI stations became more accessible, received through a cheaper outdoor television antenna rather than the expensive satellite dish.

Television in households and the presence of non-TVRI broadcasting stations with more diverse programs and longer air time has encouraged more rural people, particularly the younger and more educated generation, to adopt TV-watching as one of their routines (see also Antlov 1999:195). Figure 2.3 demonstrates that the percentage of television viewers rose between 1994 and 2000, compared to the decline in numbers of radio listeners and the steady low numbers of newspaper reader. Figure 2.4 indicates that television-watching is the most common consumption of mass media for both urban and rural populations from a variety of educational backgrounds. Other sources of entertainment in the countryside usually come from radio or traditional performances held on occasions, such as wedding ceremonies and Independence Day on August 17.<sup>8</sup> The diversification of broadcasting stations has given rural people more alternative television shows. The variety of more vibrant programs offered by the private channels, which includes a significant proportion of imported material, has reduced TVRI audiences to below 10 percent of total viewers (Sen and Hill 2000:121-2). Though the figure was based on a mid-1990s survey among young people in urban areas, I believe it also reflects the trend in the countryside. TVRI had never been popular amongst rural children and adolescents, given its limited airtime and the fact that some of its entertainment programs were aired only after evening prime time. A number of young migrants in the Tangerang stated that during their days in the countryside they were quite unfamiliar with TVRI entertainment programs from the early 1990s, let alone in the 1980s. The recent

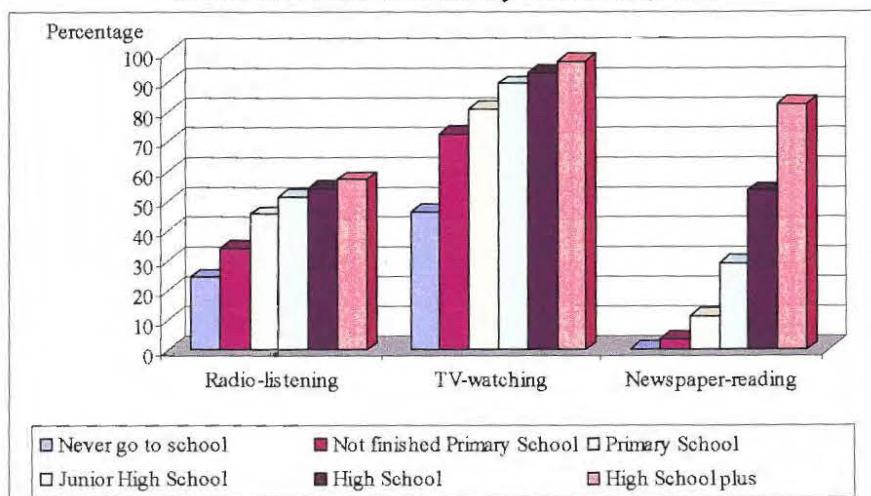
access to electricity is another reason TVRI is less known by rural youth, who were only able to become television viewers in the period when the private stations started contesting the domination of the state-broadcasting station. Their exposure to these more vibrant programs, resisting the didactic tone and content of TVRI, also exposes them to liberal ideas and an open-minded view toward change, as well as foreign programs and themes of modernity, which contribute to their ability to establish their place in the contemporary world.

Figure 2.3: Percentage of Rural Population Above the Age of 10 by Choice of Media, 1994 and 2000



Source: BPS 2000b, p.13

Figure 2.4: Percentage of the Use of Mass Media in Rural and Urban Areas by Education, 2000



Source: BPS 2000b:15

In Ning's home village in Central Java, where electricity only arrived in 1991, her parents had a black and white set only since 1995. It was only upgraded to a 16 inch colour set four years later, after Ning and her younger sister, Dewi, began working in Tangerang and remitted part of their factory income. According to Ning's recollection of the first TV set at her parent's house, after school she and her sister spent much of their time at home watching television before going to bed late in the evening. Despite the private channels being mostly associated with foreign programs,<sup>9</sup> the attraction of the private channels for these teenage girls was locally-made packages such as music, soap operas and entertainment news, the programs they continued watching even after they moved to Tangerang. In addition, foreign programs, such as Hong Kong action series, Indian dramas, and Latin American melodrama (popularly known as *telenovela*), have always been her favourites, particularly because they are dubbed in Indonesian. She explained: 'I still can keep following the programs without having to watch the TV screen all the time. I can do other things while listening to the TV sound.'

The domestication of the television set has painted an urban face on the countryside and, accordingly, created an increasing distance between the rural youth and their agricultural surroundings. More time is being spent in front of the TV set and leisure time in the village is increasing as young people are reluctant to help their parents work in the rice fields (*sawah*). Even pre-adolescent children have become loyal TV audiences through their favourite programs, such as Japanese cartoons, local sitcoms, or local soap operas with themes about adolescent life. Amrih Widodo (2002), in his account of Indonesian television culture, asserts that the popularity of *sinetron*, as soap opera is locally called, amongst the lower class rests on its moral content. The viewers identify with the protagonist who symbolises 'moral value' and material simplicity (Widodo 2002:10). Witnessing their identified character emerging victorious over the adversary, portrayed as a representation of 'glamorous beauty, materialism and consumption', a state the ordinary people can only aspire to, gives the audience 'relief and satisfaction' (*ibid.*). The consumption of *sinetron*, therefore, becomes a

potent source for the lower class viewer to 'strengthen [...] the moral values they adhere to' (*ibid.*). However, despite their defence of the weak and the material simplicity which characterises the reality of the viewers' lives, television programs can also become a medium that connects the simple and ordinary audiences with the contradicting reality of the other. Even if the personalities in *sinetron* are ignored: their bodily attributes and the glamorous settings of the narratives have the potential to be a model from which the audiences make a projection of their own material aspirations. To children and adolescents in the countryside, their perception of TV programs and other forms of mass media have established urban existence, urban lifestyle, and consumerism as their life's obsession and facilitate the creation of their future project of modern identity (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 5). A recent report of the influence of television programs on primary school students discovered that school-aged children in a village in Eastern Java had become young consumers of the merchandise seen on television kids programs (Media Indonesia 13/2/2002) (also Figure 2.4). School bags, t-shirts, shoes, pencil boxes, and posters are items which commonly display popular icons from television programs can be strikingly noticed. The coming of the newer technologies, such as VCD, has had an even greater impact on capturing audiences in front of the TV screen, as VCD movies and karaoke can be played as an alternative to unappealing television programs.



Plate 2.2: At the Lodging:  
Continuing a habit from the countryside (photo:JNW)

#### *Schooling the (Country) Children*

Apart from television viewing, school education occupies a substantial number of hours in the everyday life of the younger generation in the countryside. The increase in formal education has uprooted rural youth from farm work. These days, a substantial portion of daylight hours are spent at school, from the age of seven years old (the minimum age requirement for primary education) to the completion of high school education at around the age of 18. Nine years compulsory education (*wajib belajar sembilan tahun*)<sup>10</sup> has expanded school-aged children's mobility, as they travel on a daily basis to the nearest subdistrict's (*kecamatan*) capital or neighbouring village to attend junior secondary school or even senior high school.

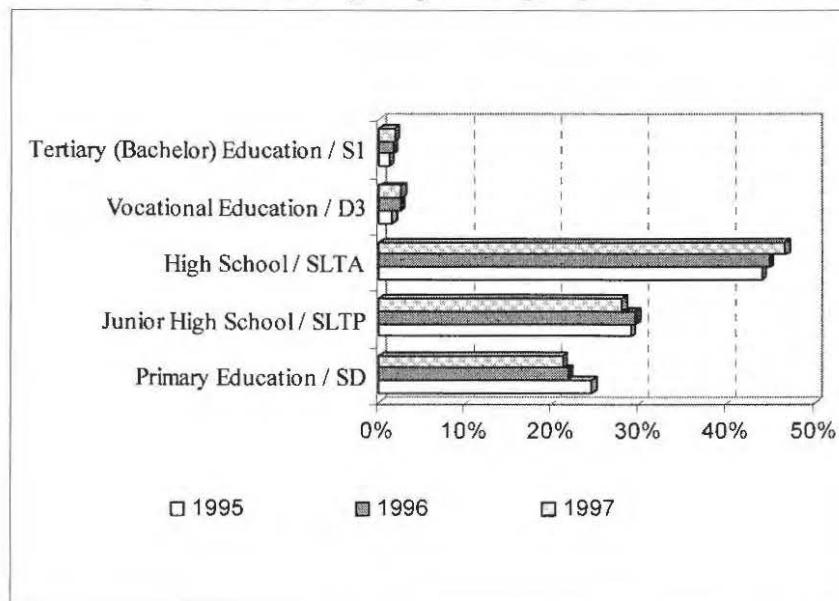
Soeroji, a 19 year-old urban worker at a furniture factory, described his days in a village in a Rangkasbitung subdistrict, Banten, as being mostly occupied by school activities. He completed his junior secondary school (*SLTP*)<sup>11</sup> in 1998. Although school started at seven in the morning, he left home at six a.m as he had to walk about five kilometres through a vast forest. School ended at one o'clock in the afternoon but he only arrived home at about four. On the way home he played

in the forest with friends, picking wild fruit or stopping on the roadside to take respite. Sometimes, he and his school colleagues from the village got home earlier if a pick-up truck or van gave them a lift. Before the electricity came to the village and TV reached his home, he spent long hours in outdoor activities, playing soccer with his peer group in the village. In the evening he went to the mosque, for Qur'an reading (*ngaji*), until about 9 o'clock. Once his parents could afford a colour TV set, he became 'addicted' to the private channel's locally-made soap operas (*sinetron*) depicting the life of youth in metropolitan areas. One of these soap opera was *Tersayang*, a TV drama serial about love and hatred among urban wealthy families. As these serials were broadcast during prime time, Soeroji often sneaked out from the mosque earlier in order not to miss his favourite TV shows. Soeroji's father had about one hectare of rice land, which the family tilled to meet their subsistence needs. However, Soeroji admitted that his involvement in helping his father in the rice field was minimal, apart from during school holidays, and then only upon his father's request. He felt that working in the field and ploughing the farm land needed hard work, which he was never pleased to do. If he unavoidably had to do something for his parents during school holidays, he preferred to help his mother to collect fire wood from the forest for the family's stove.

Rural youth's engagement in the urban industrial sector, therefore, does not signal a clear cut transformation of the rural labour force from 'primary agricultural work' to the 'secondary sectors of manufacturing industries' as the pattern in, for example, the eighteenth century Industrial Revolution in Britain suggests (Habermas 2001:40, see also Thompson 1991). The average age of migrant workers in Tangerang, which is between their late teens and early twenties, indicates that they are direct beneficiaries of the introduction in 1984 of the six years compulsory education program, which is equal to primary education (*SD*). They were also still of school age when the nine years program, was introduced in 1994. This has encouraged more students to complete junior secondary education (*SLTP*). Many even managed to complete their senior high school education (*SLTA*).<sup>12</sup> The effect of this program is evidenced by the increasing numbers of workers with a secondary education background in the

manufacturing industries in Tangerang Municipal area (see Figure 2.5). The high percentage with secondary education suggests that these youth migrants were not engaged primarily in rural agricultural sectors before their arrival in urban centres.

Figure 2.5: Percentage of Workers in Medium and Large Industries by Education, Tangerang Municipality, 1995-1997



Source: BPS Kotamadya Tangerang 1999b, p.13-4

The displacement of rural children from a typically rural experience is extended through their systematic exposure in the classroom to the national language, *bahasa* Indonesia. Soeroji, for example, used mostly Sundanese in his daily conversation before his admission to formal school. Once he entered primary school at the age of six, the nationally-implemented curriculum (GRI 1989:19) stipulating the use of Indonesian language in class obliged him to learn and speak the language.<sup>13</sup> Teachers would reprimand and often send out of the classroom, pupils who spoke in their local language. He even said that he would have remained *orang kampung* (village person) had he not spoken Indonesian. Saya Shiraishi (2001), in her study on Indonesian schools, asserts that the implementation of the national language in the classroom gives students a 'basic

'national experience' in which they are taught and learn of 'becoming Indonesians' (p.197, my translation, see also Leigh 1999:44-5, Parker 1993, Siegel 1986:139). While mass media is a comparatively recent phenomenon, school has been a longer-established instrument to introduce rural children to Indonesian. This is the main language, used also in mass media, through which ideas of modernisation and development are communicated to these youth, whose local vernaculars, nonetheless, remain intact outside their school context.

James Siegel's (1986:138-160) evidence of the use of two levels of speech in a Surakartan classroom indicates that the use of Indonesian by no means cuts off students from their native-speaking skills. Students speak to their teacher in formal Indonesian language in order to be able to participate as well as to be heard in the teaching process and gain 'access' (Siegel 1986:147) to the matter taught in class. In contrast, *Ngoko*, low Javanese, is used amongst students to cover 'almost any topic other than what the teacher is teaching' (*ibid.*:147). Such language is considered to be unofficial, 'unacceptable' and 'wrong' in the teaching process, even if a student can answer the teacher's questions correctly (*ibid.*:144). According to Chapter II, Paragraph 4 of the 1989 Legislation on National Education, the objective of national education is 'to develop the intellectual life (*mencerdaskan*) of the nation' (GRI 1989:7, my translation). The phrase *mencerdaskan*, which literally means 'to make one intelligent', presupposes an unwanted state that is unintelligent, backward, and parochial, so that national education is required to develop one's mind in order to suit the behaviour and mentality required in national development. Education and knowledge taught in the classroom is supposed to bring a 'newness', which is made clear by Siegel as follows: '...the new is taken in and seen to be Indonesia. Thus *Indonesian* becomes the source of the future' (1986:148, emphasis in original, see also Leigh 1993). Rather than integrating knowledge with the everyday reality of the social context of the school, discourse in the classroom constructs understanding and a way of thinking that go beyond the students' present existence, their rural existence. As a consequence, through school, youth in the countryside learn about their imagined community of the modern Indonesia nation; a social projection

which resembles the state's design for material development. It is a condition which is supposed to 'rescue' Soeroji from being a 'village person'.

Language is by no means the only medium for delivering this 'national experience.' Text books provided by the state education authority have similarly introduced ideas of development (*pembangunan*). Barbara Leigh argues that in New Order Indonesia '[t]he act of schooling' is part of human development as it represents 'a necessary rite of passage which integrates the person into the nation-state' (1999:44). Therefore, development is not merely about encouraging people to leave their 'traditional' behaviour in terms of practices in agriculture, education, health, and so forth. It is, more importantly, about order and building infrastructure, without which a village would be categorised as a less-developed village (*desa tertinggal*).<sup>14</sup> The introduction to the ideas of development has, in turn, imposed a burden on rural children in the form of an image of themselves as part of the backwardness of the countryside. It is no coincidence that the discourse of development in many school textbooks captures images of asphalted roads, skyscrapers, a well-arranged city, airplanes, as well as a factory and its smokestack, symbolising industrialisation. This portrayal of material infrastructure, intended to deliver a vivid picture of progress to the students, implies a well-orchestrated effort from the state to bring the ideas of development down-to-earth. This leads students to learn that conformity to the discourse of development is crucial for one to become modern.

Even if these images of material development are still intangible for those in the outlying countryside, the representation of the 'ideal' family in school textbooks, for example, entails a penetration of the state into the private domain of rural households.<sup>15</sup> A textbook's classic portrayal of a family's living room in which the father is reading a newspaper, the mother is performing a domestic task, while the children (usually two, as suggested in the family planning program—*Keluarga Berencana*), are playing on a clean and shining floor is the way modernity is translated into the private life of a family.<sup>16</sup> A more recent edition of the textbook has added symbols of material wealth that an ideal family can possibly afford, including fancy furniture, a television, radio, and car or motorbike. These provide an antithesis to rural 'backwardness'; a family

symbolised by the image of many children, bamboo houses with dirt floors and unhealthy surroundings. As the 'process of exchange of ideas' in Indonesian classrooms is minimal, a textbook becomes an essential source to connect students to the knowledge taught by the teacher (Siegel 1986:141-2). Lynette Parker asserts that it is not only the students who have 'great reliance' on the textbooks, but also the teachers (1993:10). This makes textbooks 'the sole source of information' for both the students and the teachers (*ibid.*). The centrality of textbooks in Indonesian schools makes up what Leigh calls '[t]ext as [a]uthority' (1999:45); the truth is to be found in a 'black-and-white approach' (p.35) from which the answer to every question in school exams at all levels of education can be found. As the 'truth' is centralised through the textbook, other versions of truth in exams are not accepted. There is no room for debate. Therefore, the recurring images appearing in the textbooks to which students are exposed at various levels of education at school, mould the perception that progress is associated with order. They promote a particular form of modern life and being modern, which later affects children's perception of their future existence.

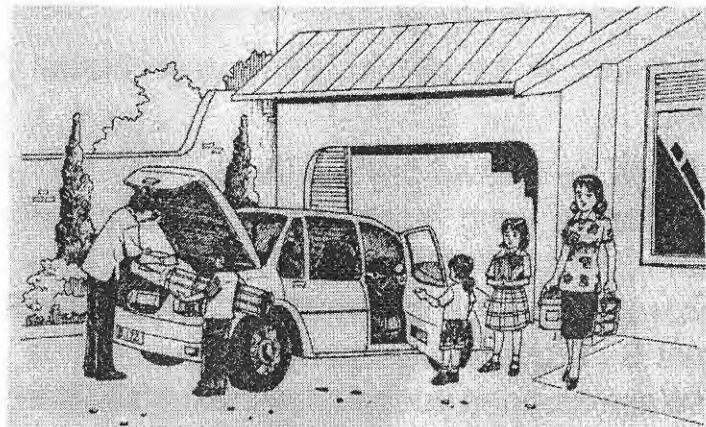


Plate 2.3: School Textbooks 1: A happy urban family<sup>17</sup>

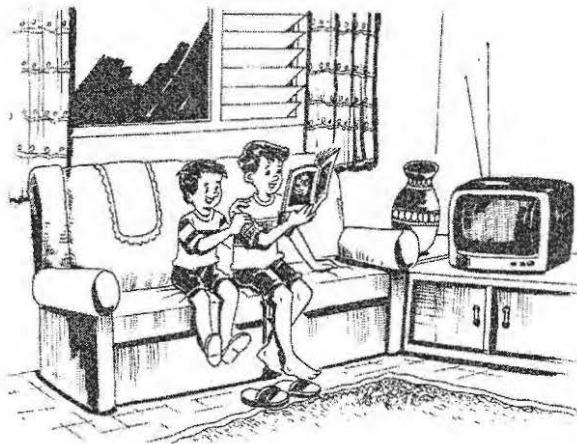


Plate 2.4: School Textbooks 2:  
An urban lounge room with tile-floor, sofa, and TV set<sup>18</sup>

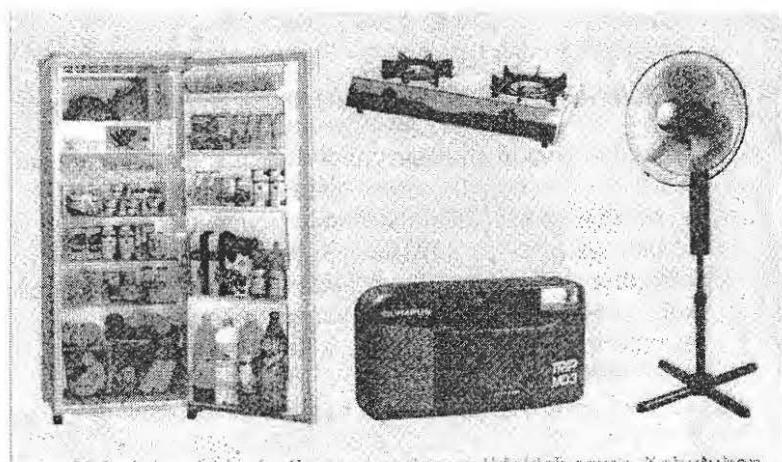


Plate 2.5: School Textbooks 3: A lesson about living needs (*kebutuhan hidup*)<sup>19</sup>

### **Learning Mobility and Encountering the 'Modern'**

While there is a primary school in almost every village, junior high schools serve students from a number of villages, while a senior high schools are located in the sub-district town. Travelling to a nearby rural town for education exposes rural youth to the experience of commuting on a daily basis.<sup>20</sup> Travelling to school endows them with a sense of independence in terms of mobility within a confined rural domain. This localised mobility, in turn, presents the youth with an opportunity to rehearse their future migration to the 'world-out-there' beyond the

local boundaries to the metropolitan centres. As a result, a 'big' migration for non-educational purpose does not appear to be problematic for either parents or children, particularly girls.

A rural town offers villagers access to urban features that break rural isolation and undermines the myth about the backwardness of the countryside. Most subdistrict towns today provide services, such as a telecommunication depot (*wartel*), newsagent, cinema, VCD rental, and even Playstation rental. Komala, a woman worker in the sanitary pad factory in Tangerang, told me that her first pop magazine was bought, using savings from her pocket money given by her parents, when she studied at a senior high school in a subdistrict town in West Java. After school she frequently dropped in at a newsagent to get a particular magazine or tabloid which covered national as well as global pop stars she knew from TV shows. Her favourite magazine was *Aneka*, a Jakarta-published pop magazine which not only covered entertainment news about popular icons, but also contained short stories about the romantic life of urban youth. She also collected posters and stickers in the magazine to display on the wall of her bedroom.

Arief, a male worker at a tyre factory, had also travelled to the subdistrict town in Central Java to attend senior high school. Every weekday he took public transport to the town, about half an hour trip from his village. When the school was dismissed in the afternoon, Arief would visit a home-based in-house rental business where he hired a Playstation and games. There, by paying Rp 1,500 (about 30 cents) per game per hour, Arief normally spent an hour or two, playing his favourite game, at which he became skilful. He sometimes dropped in at another rental business hiring out VCD movies to be watched at home. Previously, before 1998, when VCD and Playstations were still rare in the area, at least once every two weeks he went to the town's cinema along with his schoolmates to watch Hollywood or Hong Kong action movies.

Both Komala and Arief continued these practices even after they moved to the urban neighbourhood in Tangerang. Komala frequently buys the magazine from the nearby newsagent and collects posters from it to put on the wall or outside door of her lodging. Pocket money from her parents is no longer necessary as she now earns money from factory work. The same applies to Arief,

who, though infrequently, keeps visiting the Playstation rental establishment in the nearby market. As he said, 'just to maintain my skill in playing with the console.' From the illustration above, it becomes evident that these forms of material culture, which may initially be thought of as urban, have been introduced to rural youth through their encounters with 'modernity' that has penetrated deeply into the Indonesian countryside.

Mills, in her study of Thai migrant workers, found that rural children's obsession with urban 'progress and modernity' as well as 'glamor[ous] urban life and livelihood' has kept the urban labour market flooded with youth (1999:5). This material and hedonistic attraction to the metropolis seems paramount in the minds and perception of rural youth, and generates what Harvey terms a 'fetishistic reading' of urban phenomena (1985:251). To return to my story about Soeroji earlier in this chapter, although his involvement in agricultural work in his father's rice field was occasional, he stated that 'working in the village was hard (*keras*), frustrating (*kesel*), and exhausting (*capek*). At the same time, he said: 'It looks like people in the city don't work as hard as us here in the village.' Villagers from Soeroji's generation began to understand the complexities of modernity, although still only partially, through mediated communication, as I previously indicated. They became more and more captivated with the idea of a successful happy family and the great results a hard worker, but still not working as 'hard' as in a village, can achieve. The idea is learnt from the glamorous images in televised locally-made sitcoms and melodrama, primarily promoting the everyday life of the upper class in an urban setting and other urban-associated symbols. Hence, the media has played a central role in portraying the city, the metropolis, as a centre of modernity, advancement, and global cultural icons.

Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), gives a detailed analysis of the contribution of print media to the formation and dissemination of ideas of the nation in the past centuries. He argues that 'print-capitalism' (p.40) opens up the opportunity for constructing a commonality that contributes to the creation of 'a new form of imagined community' (p.49). Print technology, under present circumstance, can also be extended to the recent technologies which have a similar capacity to mediate between the subjects, the recipients, and their

'imagined community'. Heider, for example, discussing Indonesian cinema and national culture, reworded Anderson's 'print-capitalism' as 'image-capitalism, or commercial movies' (1994:163) to accommodate the share of recent inventions in communication technologies in the discourse of an envisaged model of society. He points out that people from Indonesia's outlying regions, such as Irian Jaya (now, Papua), who speak in their localised mother tongue, but, at the same time, in Indonesian in encounters with government officials or in school, can get connected to the construction of 'national culture' through 'commercial' motion pictures (*ibid.*,163). These movies are mostly produced by Jakarta-based production houses and use Indonesian language (Heider 1994:162-73, see also Sen and Hill 2000:137-60). From Indonesian cinema, he asserts, the local indigenous people are enabled to consume and construct an imagined model about their nation state, a greater existence beyond their traditional settings. The model can be applied to contemporary children when the examples are stretched to include technologies such as TV and VCD; the modern devices whose penetration has reached the everyday life of the vast number of people, both rural and urban, periphery and centre.

The process whereby the nation is imagined by these children, nonetheless, differs from Anderson's construction of the idea of nation which, in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century, paved the way for the spread of nationalism as an antithesis to colonialism. While education and language are salient points in Anderson's account of the formation of national consciousness and 'particular solidarities' (Anderson 1983:122, 104-28), the imagined community of a 'nation' shared by contemporary (rural) youth rests principally on urban-centric images. These images that become available through a range of mass media, from pop magazines to television, are identified by Heider as 'image capitalism' (Heider 1994:163). Even technology such as VCD has enabled movies to be incorporated into everyday practice, relocating them from cinema to home. Even travelling for school to a rural town, which has adopted urban features, provides the rural offspring with images of conurbations. As a result, the imagined community is becoming a near-real experience for the rural children, making the urban shift inexorable. The present-day mass media in Indonesia has reduced Anderson's

'nation', dreamt by the nationalists in the colonised regions during the past centuries, to a limited spatial stretch, namely, Jakarta. It is these near-real images of the capital, celebrating urban lifestyle and urban existence, that spark an imagined community for the youth in the countryside. In short, the metropolitan city turns into a virtual community, where social, cultural and economic existence can be imagined and constructed.

It is no coincidence that Jakarta, the metropolis, is seen as the epitome of a city. It is a place in which signs of modernity are thought by rural children to match the urban phantasmagoria induced by classroom knowledge and media culture. This cultural modernity in contemporary urban life can hardly be understood in isolation from the bigger picture of Indonesia as a developing nation. The economic transformation has changed the nation from deprivation, marked by a remarkable state budget deficit of more than 100 percent in the 1960s (Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, cited in Hill 2000:1), to a respectable status with an average annual growth of at least 5 percent between 1969-1981 and 6-7 percent in the late-1980s and early-1990s (Hill 2000:11). Despite its negative impacts, such as the unfair distribution of wealth and political repression of any critique of the government, to mention just two, economic progress has modified the features of Indonesian cities so that the images of urban wealth and the fetishisation of commodities constitute the everyday reality of the urban metropolis (e.g., Robison 1996). These images have, amongst rural children, evidently established the representation of urban wealth as a model to be aspired to by the rest of society.

Mass media provides Soeroji, Ning, Arief, and many of their colleagues an alternate reality dissimilar to their particular rural locality and their own individual experience. Philip Kitley, in his study of television in Indonesia in the early 1990s, found that the portion of news about Jakarta or events occurring in Jakarta covered in state-run TVRI was over 60 percent of the total content (2001:196). The emergence of private channels has not notably changed this. They are mostly Jakarta-based stations that depend on commercials from corporate sponsors whose potential market is largely urban. The success story of private channels is predominantly marked by programs whose settings are about

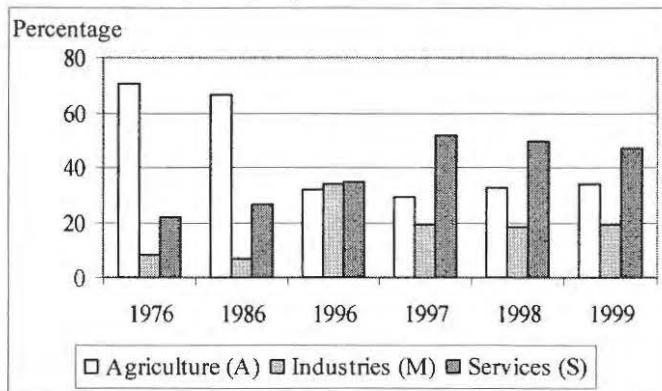
Jakarta, such as *Lenong Rumpi* and *Si Doel*, both drama-comedies characteristically portraying the dynamics of the Betawi ethnic group, natives of Jakarta, and their distinct cultural dialect (Sen and Hill 2000:124). This has also happened with the locally-produced soap operas, increasingly becoming the private channels' most-celebrated programs, with settings and themes that are typically metropolitan (Widodo 2002). The decline of movie production in the 1990s has resulted in televised melodrama and sitcoms copying the imagery so common in Indonesian cinema, described as frequently projecting '[t]he artifacts of upper-class Westernized Jakarta Indonesians, from dining tables to automobiles ...[as well as] present[ing] a model for Western style domestic life' (Heider 1994:170). The wide acceptance and the popularity of such programs has congealed rural youth's understanding about urban existence into a myth, through which a rural teenager like Soeroji absorbs a mythologised version of the easy life in urban centres. As a 'type of speech', Roland Barthes in *Mythologies* (2000) sees myth more as the means with which the 'message' is delivered, rather than 'the object of [the] message' itself (p.109). Therefore, he adds, 'a signifying consciousness' is crucial to the construction of myth, with which a speaker is able to reveal his/her subjective knowledge of the message and at the same time disregard the object, the 'substance', be it a writing or a picture, being mythologised (p.110). With Soeroji, his signifying consciousness is highlighted by material representations of modernisation he learnt as intrinsic qualities of development discourse from the classroom. The *sinetron*, an example of 'substance' in Barthes' sense, fostering themes of domestic conflict, romantic love and adultery in an urban middle-class family setting, could perhaps have nothing to do with Soeroji's classroom discourse. Nonetheless, when the theme is delivered to a particular viewer like Soeroji, the glamorous representation of the metropolis and lifestyles it offers, though merely appearing in the background of the *sinetron*, provides a confirmation of the classroom discourse of (urban) affluence.<sup>21</sup> The myth of metropolitan promises, therefore, is the way he and other rural youth rationalise their connection with urban life, to which their youthful aspiration of modernity is guided. Moreover, just as 'in myth the meaning is distorted by the concept' (Barthes 2000:122), so is the urban reality to Soeroji

misrepresented by the myth of urban simplicity. It is a distortion of the other side of the actual reality of metropolis; its inability to fulfill the expectations of incoming migrants (see Chapter 3).

### **The Changing Pattern of Rural Employment, (Urban) Departure Continues**

Structural changes in the countryside have made agricultural work less available and also caused it to be less attractive to villagers. These changes are by no means a recent phenomenon. Clifford Geertz, in *Agricultural Involution* (1963), describes the declining productivity of agriculture in Java, causing what he calls 'shared poverty', in response to the population pressure in the countryside (see also Singarimbun and Penny 1973). Moreover, the problem of diminution of land holdings was already apparent at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A report by a source in the National Land Authority (*BPN*)<sup>22</sup> indicates that approximately 10,000 hectares of fertile agricultural land in the north coast of Java is converted to non-agricultural purposes each year (Gamma 19/5/2002). This is supported by Wolf's findings in her study of industrialisation in rural Central Java (1992:98). She noted the conversion of farm land for rural industrialisation, highlighting the declining access to agricultural employment (*ibid.*). This conversion involves a massive amount of agricultural land and a structural change in rural employment appears to be inescapable. Though the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a slight decline in agricultural employment in rural and urban Java and Madura, from 73 percent in 1905 to 69 percent in 1961 (White 1991:44), the overall pattern 'seems to have remained stable' given the relatively small decline and that the change took 'more than half a century' (p.45). However, decades later, the figure began to decline more rapidly. In 1986, the sector remained a major employer despite a slight fall to only 66.62 percent, but by 1996, only 31.54 percent of the rural labour force engaged in agricultural work, marking the sector as no longer being a major contributor to rural employment (see Figure 2.6).

Figure 2.6: Percentage of Rural Labour Force by Employment, 1976-1999



*Notes:*

1976-1986 data were under the title ‘The Percentage of Labour Force Absorption’.

*Source:*

BPS 1988:30; BPS 1998:46; BPS 2000:60

State intervention to fix the ceiling price of paddy (*HDG*)<sup>23</sup> bought from farmers is seen as another discouraging factor since it makes agriculture no longer economically viable. It fails to improve the living condition of agricultural producers, particularly the small farmers. Bustanul Arifin, an economist, states that the ultimate price received by farmers from the state logistics authority (*Bulog*)<sup>24</sup> is even lower than the set price (KCM 1/8/01). Therefore, the contribution of farming to the income of a farmer's household, according to Syafa'at, has fallen from 36 percent in the 1980s to 13.7 percent in recent times (Gamma 19/5/2002). This quantitative evidence appears to support the discovery made by Wolf, who was advised by villagers that income from agricultural work was unappealing as returns to labour were several times lower than that from non-agriculture employment (1992:83). In addition, the integration into the World Trade Organisation (WTO)/International Monetary Fund (IMF)-imposed free trade regime has lowered the import tariff on rice by up to 30 percent, resulting in small farmers having to compete with their international counterparts (Wahono 2001).

The notion of deepening poverty might have seemed accurate had the agricultural sector been the only employment available in rural areas. However,

Benjamin White, in his study of poverty and income distribution in rural Java (1978:9), saw that the 'employment patterns' in these area 'characterized by multiple occupations, seasonality and fluctuating hours of work' has lessened the dependence of the population on agricultural activities. C.J Hesselman in his 1914 study (cited in White 1991:47) had already pointed out a tendency in which 'the native' had begun to try to seek an alternative 'livelihood outside agriculture' in the form of 'petty trading activity'. This, he added, was shown by 'the increased numbers of traders, frequency of attendance at *pasar* [traditional market], numbers of *warung* [small shop], goods carts, etc' (*ibid.*, italics in original). The steady increase of labour participation in the service category, which in addition to trade includes transportation and rental services, demonstrates the variety of employment available in the countryside today. The development of the rural manufacturing sector from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present day, has also contributed to the importance of the non-farm sector in the countryside (White 1991, Wolf 1992). In 1996, the industrial and service sectors, respectively made up 34.14 percent and 34.32 percent of rural employment, exceeding the share of agricultural sector (see Figure 2.6). Therefore, as White argued, the changeover is merely 'a reduction' in human resources and the effort previously devoted to farm work is now allocated to other sectors (White 1978:9). This is by no means 'an absolute shift', in which farm sectors are once and for all discarded (*ibid.*). Hence, rather than being trapped in poverty brought about by the constraints in the farm sector, employment diversification provides a 'survival' mechanism for agricultural producers, particularly small ones (White 1991:47). White further explains that such a strategy of 'combin[ing] farm and non-farm income sources' emerges as a result of typical small land ownership amongst the Javanese farmers in order to meet their subsistence needs (*ibid.*:59).

In a village in Lampung province, southern Sumatra, the parents of Ima, a female worker from a leather glove factory in Tangerang, could hardly survive on land cultivation as the sole source of income for the family. In the late-1980s the family tried to diversify their income by encouraging the mother to open a stall in the traditional market (*pasar*) in the subdistrict's town, using their small savings. Previously, Ima's mother performed domestic tasks at home and occasionally lent

a hand in the rice field, for which her husband was fully responsible. In the market, Ima's mother sells vegetables and fruit bought from other small farmers in the neighbouring villages. The stall also provides cooking ingredients, snacks, and home-made fried banana. The father remains toiling on the land to supply the household with rice. The tiny surplus of its production is traded at the family's stall in the market. Though the profit margin from the trading business is slight, Ima admitted that it has helped the family to survive, providing at least enough to send her and her six siblings to school.

The declining participation in farm work is also evident in the main island of Java, whose inhabitants made up over 58.91 percent of the country's total population in 1995, and where the average population density per square kilometres was approximately 900 (BPS 2000c:44-5). Farid's parents are an example of a family in the countryside of Serang district in Banten who no longer rely on agricultural work as the main source of household income. Farid himself is a male worker at a tyre factory in Tangerang, where he migrated in the year 2000. His father is now the principal of a primary school in their home village. Before his appointment as school principal, Farid's father grew vegetables on unirrigated agricultural land (*ladang*) after his teaching hours at school. Currently he is too busy with school affairs, so he leaves his wife or other relatives to occasionally look after the 0.25 hectare of land which now merely serves the family's kitchen. Other villagers often come to purchase some small product surpluses and resell them in the nearby market. Having described his family's means of livelihood in the village, Farid clearly and consciously defines himself as coming from a public servant family, and made no association at all with agricultural economic activities when I first asked him about his family's background. Though he admitted that 'the prosperity (*kesejahteraan*) of being a public servant is lacking (*kurang*),' his parents could afford some 'luxury' items, e.g. electronic goods and a concrete house with a tiled floor. This achievement demonstrates that the family has a modern economic status, adding to the existing well-respected social status as a school principal within a rural community. The economic implication of the status as school principal is that, when purchasing consumer goods or construction materials, the family can receive credit from

shops in the subdistrict town. This is because they know he has a regular income from his salary.

With the social and economic benefit gained from such an occupation, it is reasonable that Farid's father encouraged him to become a public servant, whether a teacher or office clerk; an aspiration also shared by Farid. According to his parents, being a public servant is a life-long assurance as it offers a steady job, monthly rice allowance, health insurance, and a monthly pension fund when one retires. The parents' insistence on him becoming a public servant is also aimed at maintaining the social status the family has gained from the father being a teacher. In a transitional rural society in which the primary agricultural sector is degraded and where centralised state power carries enormous weight in the bureaucracy, the status of public servants demonstrates the community's recognition of their ability to achieve the desired vertical mobility. François Raillon (cited in Antlov 1999:204) argues that 'state support' is a factor that ideologically enables the occupation to gain such respected status. With its inevitable loyalty to the state, the public service sector has gained acceptance from the population as the representation of a hegemonic state.<sup>25</sup> As Farid's father felt that his parental responsibility had been fulfilled once his son completed high school, Farid hoped that by moving to Tangerang he could accumulate savings from an urban factory job to undertake a tertiary education. Given the competition in the labour market for the public service, he felt having a tertiary education would improve his chance to enter the sector.

The changing pattern of employment in the countryside has demonstrated rural elasticity in response to the threat to their level of subsistence caused by the structural shift in the agricultural sector. Of course not all families have an economic privilege like Farid's father. In the case of Ima's parents, diversification only allowed the family to live slightly above the subsistence level. This means, as Ima said, the surplus from the expenditure for basic necessities is used to send the children to school and to buy some basic electronic appliances which are now becoming common for rural households. In general, the diversification of employment has partially released rural youth from the obligation to help their

parents financially. This allows them to explore the possibility of adventurous pleasure and to pursue wealth accumulation based on their urban existence.

The departure of children to urban centres is no longer perceived as a loss to the family's basis of production. Rather, it is a necessary step towards the maturity of children who have undergone education at an unprecedented level in comparison to previous generations. Ima's parents could not persuade her to stay in the village once she finished her junior high school. They insisted she continue on to high school before moving to the city and joining her elder siblings in Tangerang. She said: 'I have no more friends in the village because they have all gone to the city. I can't stand staying in the village anymore' (see also Wolf 1992:174). Before she left the village for Tangerang, her mother told her not to bother to remit her income once she found a job in the city. 'As long as you're happy there, we're happy too here,' said Ima, recollecting her mother's words. Every time she returns home during the *Idul Fitri* festivity, her parents decline to take the money she offers them.

From the cases above, it is obvious that the departure to an urban destination is not always a consequence of familial obligation to contribute to the family economy. This contrasts to the findings of Wolf (1986, 1992) who shows the importance of the contribution of 'factory daughters' to their families purchase of subsistence necessities or paying parents' household debts in industrialising Java. In compensation, she adds, the daughters benefit economically from the parents' provision of free goods, service and cash. The contribution of rural families' 'parental subsidies' (mainly food from families' farm) to partly sustain the subsistence of migrating children is also shown by Rachel Silvey's study of migrant industrial workers in South Sulawesi. This interconnection between traditional agricultural sectors and modern industrial sectors is made possible by the location of industries in rural areas, particularly in Wolf's case. Daughters are able to commute between the factory and (parents') home, where they live and eat at almost no cost.<sup>26</sup> In the case of manufacturing workers in urban Tangerang, however, the significant distance separating countryside and industrial town explains the absence of a daily direct contribution by urban migrants to the family economy and vice versa. The remittance is probably the sole contribution from

Tangerang migrant youth to the rural household economy. Remittance economy is undeniably an important source of revenue in most underdeveloped areas (e.g. Shankman 1976, Sjahrir 1995). In the context of Tangerang workers, the remittance, nevertheless, does not have to be in the form of cash, sent regularly to the family in the countryside. As indicated earlier in this chapter, consumer goods presented as gifts during the *Idul Fitri* retreat are the most widespread form of children's contribution to their rural family. As the pressure on children to see remittances as obligatory in the economic sense lessens, showing their achievements in their urban shift becomes more important, thus explaining the preference for consumer goods as gifts (see also Wolf 1992:184).

Indeed, it is difficult to identify the pressure as it is not always verbally expressed, but parents are generally uneasy (*sungkan*) about demanding money from their working children. This can be viewed as a sign of the parents' self-reliance on their existing means of subsistence. Financially-independent children have certainly freed the parents from the customary obligation to provide for their grown-up children's subsistence and material necessities. In the case of Tangerang urban migrants, the geographic separation from their rural place of origin signifies an economic disconnection from the rural economy. Moreover, the conspicuous consumption amongst migrants marks a distinct mode of life not related to the rural economy, even in the form of remittances (see Chapter 5). The dispensable nature of the female contribution to farm work has also been identified by Ching Lee (1998) as a way of escaping from the 'familial economic strategy' for most female workers in Shenzhen. With their girls earning urban income from factories in faraway cities, rural families are released from the burden of financing daughters at home. In Wolf's case the Javanese factory daughters remained part of their parents' household. Although their contribution of factory wages to the parents was by no means considerable, the 'indirect' form of contribution involved the daughters' using their own income to pay for consumables, such as clothing, jewelry and movies (Wolf 1992:181). This made the factory daughters financially more independent and 'less[ened] financial demands upon the family' (Wolf 1986:371).

The increasing proportion of rural youth completing secondary education indicates parental expectations of a better future for their children (see Figure 2.5). Farid's father wished that the departure of his son to the city to become a factory worker could be a stepping stone before Farid became financially and intellectually prepared to enter the public service. Ima's mother wanted to see her daughter happy in the city as she knew that there was no point for her more educated daughter to stay in a village increasingly deserted by young people. Both parents seemed to be aware that a move to the city is an inevitable consequence of sending their children to school. This is quite contradictory to past practice, when parents were often reluctant to send their children to school, particularly for secondary education. This because sending children to school higher than primary education was considered worthless for sons who would eventually end up working in rice fields and daughters who would enter very early marriages. This contemporary trend is not an isolated occurrence as the pattern seems to resemble the findings of Ong (1987) concerning 'factory women' in Malaysia. There, she learnt that the unattractiveness of primary sector of agriculture was not merely felt by the younger generation but also by the parents. Though the parents were unlikely to be involved in the modern sector and remained in the traditional agricultural sector, they seemed to understand very well, in Ong's phrase, 'schooling for success' (1987:90). This refers, Ong revealed, to the parents' plans for their children and their determination to send children to school, implying an expectation that their children will enter non-farm sectors in the future.

### **A Trail to the City (and Back)**

Despite the mobility to the city and enthusiastic aspirations in urban life, a shift to an urban centre does not cut off migrating youth from their rural origins. The ties between the urban migrants and their rural places of origin remains unbroken despite the urban centre no longer serves as a mere site to earn a living but also a place to live and establish a more permanent existence (see later chapters).

Let me now return to Soeroji, one of my informants I introduced earlier. After completing his junior high school, his father sent him to enrol and live in an Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in a subdistrict town. 'I think it was because my father wanted me to learn about Islam and improve my skills in Qur'an reading,' he said. He stayed there only a year before his mother withdrew him as his father was sick and unable to pay the school fees. He stayed at home for nearly three months, helping his mother in the rice field. Having worked in the field, which he described as demanding hard labour, he sought permission from his parents to find a job in the city. The parents refused.

Frustrated with having to live in the village, he made an attempt to run away from home and headed off to Tangerang. There he found many of his peers from the village. Having arrived in the city, his friends helped him to survive by offering financial support while he was hunting for a job. For a few months he strove hard to find a job at the manufacturing factories around Tangerang, but failed. A friend advised him to go back to the village to seek blessings from his parents, without which he would not be successful in his endeavour to live in the city. Soeroji followed the advice and went to see his parents. The mother cried emotionally when he unexpectedly appeared at the door of the family's house. After the emotional atmosphere eased, he had to answer the parents' questions about his whereabouts. Having listened to Soeroji's story and his unsuccessful attempts at job-hunting, his parents half-heartedly granted him permission to go to the faraway city. They offered him their blessing in his enterprise to start a new life there. The parents gave him a small amount of cash and the following day, he set off for Tangerang. His mother escorted him to the entrance of the village where he took public transport to the nearby town to catch a bus heading to the city of his future dreams. It took only a week in Tangerang before he was recruited in a factory producing wooden furniture. Soeroji believes it was his parents' blessing that delivered him luck so that he could start working in the factory straight away. As a matter of fact, it was probably pure coincidence that the factory began recruitment just after Soeroji arrived in the city for the second time.



Plate 2.6: Soeroji, 18 Year-Old:  
‘Working in the village was hard,  
frustrating, and exhausting.’ (photo:RWJ)

Many urban migrants perceive the countryside as a starting point for their migrating ventures, drawn by centrifugal force to urban centres. However, their young age and the uncertainty in their current employment as factory workers means their future is unclear; whether it will be in the city or otherwise. The annual return during religious festivities, during which the affinity with their place of origin is constantly reinforced, is indicative of the unbroken ties that exist between countryside and its departing children. Returning home and paying respect to the kin and relatives is a pilgrimage in which Soeroji and other *Idul Fitri* returnees seek blessings and good wishes from the elders as spiritual strength to help them gain success in their future enterprises.

Many are aware that the countryside remains a place of refuge from the hurly-burly of the cities and the hardship of urban life. Ali, a migrant worker in Tangerang who spent most of his urban income satisfying his acute gambling

habit, admitted that he had become a bad boy (*anak jahat*) in the city. He explained to me:

I am no longer a good boy (*anak baik*) in Tangerang. In the village I could hear the voice of call for prayer from mosque (*azan*) almost all the time. Early in the morning I could hear people reading Qur'an (*ngaji*). Those practices reminded me not to do sinful things.

In contrast, he continued that: 'Here [in Tangerang], I have never heard the call to prayer any more. It's been replaced by the sound of music and radio.' Meanwhile, others remember the countryside as a quiet place where a peaceful atmosphere prevails, where they can swim in the unpolluted clean river and lay down on the green grass while herding goats and water buffaloes.<sup>27</sup> One afternoon, when the temperature had reached 32°C, Lamiri, who had just come home from his morning shift work, laid down on a bench outside his lodging staring at the sky.

He said to me:

When tired like this and when it's so hot here, I feel like being in the village, lying down in a shack in the midst of a rice field, feeling the gentle blowing of the wind. It's really calm and peaceable, I am sure.

Such ideas, more or less, similarly appeared when I heard two migrant workers commenting on a painting portraying rural scenery: blue river, paddy field with a small hut in the middle, hills, animals, and the cool underbrush. It was a painting hanging on the wall of a small coffee shop in a workers' neighbourhood in Tangerang. Paintings with similar themes of virgin countryside were often peddled by a street hawker walking from one neighbourhood to another offering his art merchandise at affordable prices. Every time I noticed the hawker in the neighbourhood, he was always peddling different paintings, but still with the same theme, the beauty of countryside. This indicated his previous merchandise had been sold and there were those in the neighbourhood interested in these art works. While large hangings were quite rare, inexpensive smaller postcard-size prints were usually common as decorative features in workers' lodgings.

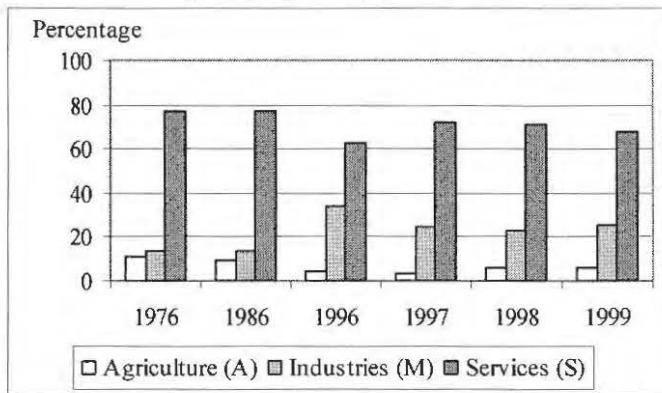
The harsh nature of factory work and the poor condition of migrants' urban existence, revealed in their slum-like residential compounds, make these

people realise their marginal stance within the urban modernity they are trying to embrace (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). For that reason, the 'idea of a happier past' (Williams 1973:35-45), idealised in narratives or art works, as a reaction to such a situation, seems inevitable. The countryside is redefined as a place where everything seems to be attainable in terms of material existence, while the migrants' social location within rural society remains unchanged. Yet, given the increasing exposure of the countryside to the outside world, the accuracy of paintings of rural sceneries almost untouched by modernity seems questionable. Nevertheless, no matter how illusory the portrayal, it provides an ideological source which migrants draw on to contrast their present (urban) existence with the reality of their place of origin.

The rural home, the countryside, is a safe haven believed to be always available to offer departing rural children relentless blessing and strength. Raymond Williams in *The Country and The City* (1973), an analysis of English literary works on the nature of the countryside and urban centres of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain, asserts that the mystification called 'the idea of innocence' often underscores the linkage with the countryside (p.46-54). Taking such mystification to the Tangerang urban workers, the naturalists' portrait of a countryside in which 'nature' (Williams 1973:46) is depicted as harmonious serves as polar opposite to their urban existence of work pressures within an industrial capitalist regime. It offers peace of mind to the factory workers, who in their everyday life in the city are confronted with the difficulties typical of urban marginal groups (see Chapter 3 and 4). The 'nature' of the countryside, as many urban migrants remember their home, is purportedly to always pardon generously its children who repent for forgiveness. The mother of Soeroji, on the one hand, was upset at her son who ran away from home, but, on the other hand, she gave her blessing for her son's adventure in the city, something she had not agreed to in the beginning. The city is portrayed, to borrow Ali's phrase, as 'a place of evil' and danger from whence all wicked deeds emanate and where one's destiny could never be envisaged, so that strength and good wishes from elders at home need to be renewed from time to time.

The generosity of the countryside in providing what Wolf terms a 'cushion' (1986:371) is apparent in periods of crisis in urban centres when it endows urban migrants with a means of alternate subsistence. The monetary crisis that severely hit the modern formal urban sectors in 1997, including manufacturing (Cameron 2002:147) is a major example of the elasticity of the rural economy. During that period, the rural economy was able to absorb the redundant labour force caused by the collapse or the shrinking of modern sectors, mostly based in urban areas. The impact of the financial crisis (*krismon*) on the industrial sector was obvious; employment in urban industries plunged from 33.58 percent in 1996 to 24.20 percent in 1997 and 22.48 percent in 1998 (see Figure 2.7).<sup>28</sup> In contrast, after a continuous decline to 29.41 percent in 1997, the year 1998 was a turning point for the steady drop in rural agricultural employment, since the figure rose to 32.30 percent, followed by 33.87 percent in 1999 (see Figure 2.6). Indeed, agricultural employment was not the sole 'cushion' reducing the crisis' shock as other rural sectors, mainly services, consistently played a significant part. As many returnees were simply not able to 'afford to be unemployed', the informal sector, such as small trading and service enterprises, became an alternative to the problem of employment scarcity in the midst of the crisis (Cameron 2002:149-50).

Figure 2.7: Percentage of Urban Labour Force by Employment, 1976-1999



*Notes:*

1976-1986 data were under the title ‘The Percentage of Labour Force Absorption’.

*Source:*

BPS 1988:30; BPS 1998:46; BPS 2000:60

Under a more stable macro economy, rural areas remain the place to return for urban migrants who are temporarily between jobs. Such temporary unemployment can originate from a voluntary resignation to be able to take a break from factory work before taking up another job elsewhere in the city (see Chapter 4). Although solidarity amongst migrants or rurally-based kinship ties in the city can generally support workers made redundant, the preference is to return to family and relatives in the countryside. Family reunion, the fresh air in the country, distance from urban life, as well as the relatively free support of rural kin present a comfortable shelter for migrants during such intervals.

In most cases, however, the return is no more than a temporary retreat; the majority of sons and daughters will consider leaving the countryside once again as soon as they feel life in the countryside is too monotonous after their experience of vibrant living in the city. The temporary nature of the return seems to be the key to comprehending the reluctance of rural youth to deeply engage in whatever economic activities are available in the countryside while maintaining high expectations to be able to return to the city and re-establish an urban existence. For women, the pressure in domestic work, making ‘their lives more difficult’ (Silvey 2001:42), can also be a factor in them seeing rural retreat as

merely temporary. Rachel Silvey (2000), speaking of rural retreat as a 'safety net' for redundant urban migrant workers affected by the 1997 crisis in South Sulawesi, indicates that the returning women are 'pressured' to ease the domestic tasks (e.g. child-caring, cooking, and washing) in rural families (p.42). At the same time, the Bugis tradition that restricts female to domestic sphere while male more to public space,<sup>29</sup> means the returning men do not feel obliged to assist 'their rural families' (*ibid.*). This occurred even when the rural economy was also influenced by the crisis and an additional family member, bounced back from the urban sectors, could reduce the pressure on the family economy (Silvey 2001:40-2).

### **Imagining Home and Revisiting It**

The multiplicity of living environments in the urban context has reworked the image of countryside from an initial 'idea of settlement', to use Williams' term, to the ultimate 'idea of rural retreat' (1973:290). Nevertheless, as the rural areas increasingly become subject to modernisation and development, the divergence between rural and urban is narrowing. The break up of rural isolation makes the massive influx of migrants to the urban areas, as in the case of Tangerang workers, inexorable. In contrast, the shift to the city also brings a reverse migration, mostly temporary, to the countryside to accommodate, as previously indicated, migrants wanting to maintain their connection with their rural origins or to escape from an urban economic crisis. This, therefore, highlights the shifting importance of the countryside as a 'rural retreat'. This idea is reinforced by the emergence of the newer generation of urban migrants, such as the youth presented in this chapter, who are prepared to consider urban existence as an option for future. They are those who, as a result of their greater exposure to urban modernity, see urbanism as meeting their aspirations.

As a result, mobility to the city is not solely an effort to expand one's livelihood without any intention of settling there in a more permanent fashion. Soeroji, for example, said: 'If I may, I would like to stay in the city forever (*seterusnya*).' Ning said: 'I feel settled (*betah*) here [in the city]. I have lots of

friends. I'll be [staying] here as long as possible.' Many others simply said that they would not consider the countryside in the years to come. However, at the same time, they were unsure whether or not their current occupation was stable enough to sustain their urban existence. 'Let us see later' was a common answer to the question about how they are going to survive in the city. In contrast, 'What am I going to do in the village?' was frequently said when they were asked about why they were not opting for rural existence, indicating a pessimist view of the countryside. From the statements above, it is obvious that home as a site of settlement is no longer a domain that belongs to their place of origin. Instead, the idea of 'home' is undergoing a proliferation. For youth migrants, both rural and urban areas have the capacity to become home and 'rice field' alike.

Nonetheless, the proliferation of homes does not necessarily eliminate the role of their rural place of origin. The countryside remains significant not only in the context of the *Idul Fitri* ritual but also, possibly future retirement. The meaning of the rural home lies in its capability to ensure the provision of capital, or simply the means of subsistence, to the migrants, during uncertain urban episodes. It is a nostalgic site that creates social imaginings for urban migrants to counterbalance the reality of their urban deprivation. In addition, following the spread of urban features throughout the countryside, rural return is unlikely to suggest that urban migrants will retreat to conditions of backwardness. To the urban-modernity-seeking urban migrants, taking temporary refuge in the village, therefore, does not imply an abandonment of the comfort of urban lifestyles. Rather, it is simply an alternation of settings.

The discovery of 'real' modernity at the discursive level in the city by rural youth and their back-and-forth mobility between urban and countryside has lessened the difference between these locations. It is not only the unprecedented intensity of human mobility that enables the 'cultures' between the two regions to be 'less distinct', as MacLean et.al. point out, in their revisiting of Williams' work, in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain (1999:5). Under present Indonesian circumstances, the greater exposure to urban forms of life learnt during the formative years in the countryside indicates that the experience of modernity precedes the physical encounter with urban reality. In addition, the growth of the rural service and

industrial sector has promoted the expansion of the money economy, enabling people in rural areas to have greater freedom in the process of commodity exchange and the consumption of consumer goods. This economic and cultural transformation in rural Indonesia makes the going-home process less disruptive to urban migrants. Hence, the transition from rural to urban and vice versa in no way involves a complicated adjustment for the migrants. This contrasts with other cases. For example, James Ferguson in *Expectations of Modernity* (1999), a study of Zambian Copperbelt urban workers addresses the complexity following such transition. In this case, the mobility between the rural and the urban leads to the deferment of 'lives', where migrants are trapped between the two opposing realms (Ferguson 1999:84). For Zambian urban residents undertaking rural retirement, their 'going home' shift to the countryside entails an identity negotiation as a result of their 'life-long' existence in the city (ibid.:82). Their urban experience leads to concern amongst themselves about being 'too urbanized' (ibid.:84), in their 'dress, styles of speech, attitudes, habits, even body carriage' (p.83), to be able to adjust to the atmosphere in the countryside. The distinct socio-economic disparity, characterising the difference between rural and urban, has also made mobility linking these domains require 'cultural orientations' (ibid.:94), which is termed by Mayer the 'alternation model' (cited in Fergusson 1999:94).

Urban migrant workers in Tangerang probably do not feel the same dilemmas as their Zambian counterparts. It is not only rural electrification, concrete houses, and the increasing use of domestic electronic appliances that makes the countryside look a lot like the urban neighbourhood. Neither does it require a radical change in terms of cultural forms, where fashion, language, and bodily gestures brought from the city might alienate the returned youth from the rest of the rural community. In addition, as their existence in Tangerang has only recently been established, with most having lived in the city for no more than three or four years, the connection between urban migrants and their rural places of origin remains relatively intact. Should they, hypothetically, decide to live permanently in the city, moving back and forth between village and city, be it for *Idul Fitri*, economic crisis or temporary escape, would keep reinstating their sustainable connection with their rural home. While Ferguson argues that the 'era

of decline' in the city has taught the long-time older Copperbelt urban workers to envisage 'rural futures' (1999:82), the future prospects for the younger migrants in Tangerang remain undecided. As their retirement is still many years away, and as the country's shaky economy remains vulnerable to contraction, this circular movement is going to be repeated in the future. This will, eventually, lead to the lessening of cultural shifts. Concern at being 'too urbanised', accordingly, might prove to be unnecessary. Bringing home urban-associated symbols, from lifestyle, fashion, modern appliances as gifts, to urban dialects, is, in fact, part of the 'going home' process itself.

Maintaining urban-generated differences is the way urban migrants reveal their economic achievement and their success in internalising what Ferguson terms 'cosmopolitanism', referring to styles considered to be urban and modern (1999:102). As a style, cosmopolitanism emerges as a result of a life-long process of learning. It is not merely situational, 'easily acquired or effortlessly slipped off when [it] cease[s] to be convenient' (*ibid.*:100). Rather, cosmopolitanism, and its opposite 'localism', 'is *cultivated*, through a complex and only partly conscious activity over time...[which] involves both deliberate self-making and structural determinations' (Ferguson 1999:101, emphasis in original). To the urban migrants in Tangerang, cosmopolitanism is certainly not only fashion or practices they experience as the physical rural-urban boundary is traversed. Rather, it is an affirmation of the discourse of modernisation and modernity they have been accustomed to (or 'cultivated' to use Ferguson's term) since their early ages in the transforming countryside. In short, life practices and patterns of consumption symbolising modernity, are not the sole result of cultural internalisation exclusively acquired under urban modern circumstances.

For migrants returning to their place of origin in the village—as shown by Ning and Lamiri at the beginning of this chapter—cosmopolitanism expressed in their dress and consumption are qualities without which their urban migration would be considered a failure by their rural counterparts. To some extent, cosmopolitanism is therefore a signification of 'impression management' (Goffman 1990), through which migrants elevate their chosen representation in their everyday life to present to the people in the rural social setting. Showing off

the styles, after coming back from the city, is thus meant to indicate their aptitude to conquer the urban hardship and their self-reliance financially to be able to afford the new styles.

Therefore, a shift to localism is probably unnecessary for these (temporarily) returned migrants. Firstly, it is because their imagination of place has always been a translocal experience, even when they were still resident members of the rural community during their childhood. Their thorough exposure to modern cultural flows and the internalisation of ideas of modernisation have reinforced their embrace of non-localised experiences, which displace them from agricultural traditions. Secondly, being a 'localist', to borrow Ferguson's expression, would mean self-denial of their efforts to make themselves resemble over in a modern image. Migrants such as Ning and Lamiri could not return home for the *Idul Fitri* retreat empty-handed, simply using urban economic hardship as an excuse (see Chapter 3). Neither could they say that the splendour of urban life does not match the rural way of life, the simplicity of which, as an expression of localism, is a requirement during their return. Displaying this urban achievement, by being cosmopolitan, therefore, is a necessary condition for them when re-entering their rural community. Cosmopolitan style is a chosen representation without situational conditions, in which shifts in style entail every back-and-forth process between rural and urban as one changes costumes in order to fit different settings. In contrast, regardless of the setting in which it is performed, urban style is, in fact, culturally significant for migrants in their so-called 'capacity' to grasp the full realisation of modernity and to avoid its alienating consequences.

## Conclusion

Massive changes are inevitable consequences of the rural development, that affected all aspects of life in the Indonesian countryside in the decades toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These development-associated changes expose rural children and adolescents to a modern 'ethos'. However, despite this encounter with the modern romantic imagery of the rural as a peaceful and forgiving home remains in the minds of rural youth seeking a decent livelihood in the burgeoning

urban economy. Such romanticism is evident in their annual visit during *Idul Fitri*, rural retreat during the urban crisis, as well as their fondness for beautiful rural paintings. Amidst their urban neighbourhood, migrants dream of the 'happier past' of rural life. Returning to rural homes, they retain urban-associated cultural attributes as proof of their urban achievements and their identification with the urban and longing to return to pursue an urban career. This back-and-forth flow, therefore, indicates that an urban transition by villagers does not represent a clear cut transformation, as in the evolutionary linear course of development or civilization, as mostly argued by modernist theorists (e.g. Marx 1977, Rostow 1971, Todaro 1982). Ferguson, speaking on the Zambian situation, argues that an urban-to-rural transition such as this does not, by design, place migrants in 'two different social types' (1999:102). What appears to be a demarcating spatial circumstance is, in reality, no more than 'contrasting styles' ('cosmopolitanism and localism'), which do not necessarily proliferate migrants' 'social settings'; they, in short, remain part 'of a single society' (*ibid.*). The same also applies to Tangerang workers with their rural-to-urban movement. What seems to be a radical urban transition is actually a changing concept of the centrality of home, which is now no longer singular but multiple. Education, the urban dream, and migration have exposed youth migrants to the option of making the city home, to the same degree as they consider their countryside. What appears to be a dualist conception that dichotomises rural and urban is, in fact, multiple settings in both of which migrants' membership remains intact. Their mobility between city and countryside signifies the expansion of their social domain without displacing their social association from one realm when they leave for the other.

However, to argue that these people are in a grey area and, hence, situated on the boundary of rural and urban consciousness implies a dualist conception which disconnects continuity. Urban (or rural) transition is not a discrete process in which demarcation lines between domains can be clear and distinct. Rather, migration to the city and the adoption of urban-associated styles has been instrumental for rural youth to embody their expanded consciousness of social space. Such expansion of consciousness is imposed on them through their

exposure to the global narratives and the national discourse about urban-centred development. Doreen Massey (1993), in introducing her idea of 'progressive sense of place', argues that the concept of place is by no means 'static' in which 'simple enclosures' are defined merely by 'some long, internalized history' (p.66-68). Rather, she continues, as the idea of place 'is continually reproduced', the construction of its 'specificity' also involves multifaceted dynamics that occurred in the near past (*ibid.*:68). Taking her argument to my study on urban youth migrants, the growing availability of, and accessibility to, mass media is an inevitable dynamic that mediates between rural children and their 'imagined worlds' (Appadurai 1990:9). Media contributes to the construction of 'images of the world' (a process Appadurai terms 'mediascape' (*ibid*)) and aids rural children to incorporate 'the global' into their 'local' consciousness (Massey 1993:66). In addition, formal education provides them, with, a systematic understanding of the modern realities, traditionally defined as un-rural. This makes the city no longer an alienated domain to their psyche, undergoing a new awareness of place and distance. Therefore, as Massey asserts, place is not merely about physical entities with defined frontiers, but also the way the subject conceives of 'networks of social relations and understandings' engendered through modern discourse (*ibid.*,66).

The bond with the urban is, of course, not a recent phenomenon for the countrysiders, as migration to the city has been practised by generations prior to the contemporary rural youth who are the subjects of this study (e.g. Hugo 1981, Murad 1980, Sjahrir 1995). However, the intensity of cultural discourse linked with modernisation transmitted through the modern media of communication and classroom is typical of the present-day urban migrants. Siegel, in *Fetish, Recognition, Revolution* (1997) points out that the translation of world literature into Melayu language introduced people in the region to the rest of the globe, which subsequently became the source of the Indonesian revolution against Dutch colonialism in the 1940s. The communicative determination of language, which Siegel terms 'the fetish of modernity' (*ibid.*:93), thus, produces 'recognition' (*ibid.*:7-9) to the subjects of their incorporation into the modern world. The capacity to acquire modernity (through language), previously thought to be the

exclusive domain of the Dutch, conferred the Indonesians an 'identity' of being equal to the world community (*ibid.*:93). Siegel, therefore, argues that both 'modernity and Indonesian nationalism were almost indistinguishable for most' during that period (*ibid.*:93). Many decades later, the recognition of the inclusion into the modern world is experienced by rural children, later employed in Tangerang industries, through a different medium. The power of the modern means of information dissemination has introduced them to modern identity and enabled them to envisage the multiple settings of home under urban circumstances. This connects rural children to the production of an imagined world, in which images of urban modernity become conspicuous to them before they reach in the city. It is this social imagining of urban modernity that highlights their movement to the urban areas, not as a transformation between two different worlds but more as an expansion of their sense of place. The shift to the city is not about changing rural subjects into modern subjects with modern identity, but as an action to push forward the recognition of their modern identity that pre-existed in their rural existence. It is, therefore, an attempt to incorporate a non-rural environment into their modern consciousness about home, and to perceive rural and urban as mutually dependent and complimentary. Although the images of rural 'idyll' contrast the urban reality (Williams 1973:297), one is not isolated from the other.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Maclean et.al. argue that those imageries appeared because 'the internal travel' to urban centres caused by trade growth and industrialisation was inevitable and becoming massive. This, in turn, generated a counter 'internal travel', called 'tourism', to the countryside by the same travellers seeking the representations of the past, considered to be lacking in urban miseries (1999:14).

<sup>2</sup> Since she had worked for over one year in the company, her holiday allowance was as much as one month's wage. Those with less than one year's work length received from a third to a half of the monthly wage, whereas those with two years experience, received twice their monthly salary and so forth. See Chapter 5 for discussion in wage conditions.

<sup>3</sup> BPPC was introduced in 1992 through presidential instruction (*Inpres* No.1/1992) and presidential decree (*Keppres* No.20/1992) in order to regulate the price and the distribution of cloves. The initiative was initially aimed at protecting the farmers, but later failed to elevate the living conditions of farmers as the price set by the monopolistic agency was too low (Kompas 24/4/1996, 22/6/2001). The monopolistic mechanism also damaged local cigarette industries (Saptari 1994:30).

<sup>4</sup> Having reviewed the content of news programs in December 1991, Kitley comes into the conclusion that news about development occupied about 41 percent of all TVRI's news programs (2001:197). Tobing's study found that 54.7 percent of news programs in 1990 were items about development (cited in Kitley 2001:197). Meanwhile, Atmowiloto states that 68 percent of the station's news programs in 1982 covered the opening ceremonies of development projects (cited in Kitley 2001:197). Even an entertainment package for children such as Si Unyil, a puppet performance, broadcast from 1981 to 1993, was not free from this ideological purpose. For an extensive textual and content analysis of Si Unyil, see Kitley 2001:117-52.

<sup>5</sup> Despite the dissemination of ideas about 'agricultural innovation' (Chu et.al. 1991:64), the state-run TVRI, following a presidential decree dated 1 April 1981, has also stopped broadcasting commercial advertisements to prevent their impact on the 'consumption behaviour' of the villagers and, subsequently, to encourage 'healthy economy in villages' (ibid, p.98, see also Kitley 2001:82-3).

<sup>6</sup> TPI (*Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia*, Indonesian Television of Education), associated with Soeharto's eldest daughter, was the only privately-owned Jakarta-based station that could operate nationally by using the state-owned TVRI facilities during its off-air time in 1990 (Sen and Hill 2000:112). This meant that TPI could be received also in the countryside.

<sup>7</sup> The use of satellite dish also enabled access to receive a broader array of transmission from other countries, mostly Southeast Asia, stations hiring the Indonesian-owned Palapa satellite. However, given the relatively expensive satellite dish, not all households equipped with TV set relying on ordinary outdoor antenna could have access to such variety of transmissions.

<sup>8</sup> *Layar tancap*, an open air movie show in which a cinema-sized screen is set up on an open field, is also one of the popular forms of entertainment for the people in rural areas. As this program is generally sponsored and run by the Ministry of Information, the

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selection of titles, usually slapstick comedy, historical epic, or historical fiction, is also determined by the office. Though *layar tancap* always attracts a large audience, including those from neighbouring villages, the frequency of shows is quite low. During my two-months-long stay in a village of the subdistrict of Kutowinangun in Central Java, the mobile unit from the local district Information Office that operated *layar tancap* came back again to one village only after about two years, as the Office had to serve a wide area.

<sup>9</sup> This was particularly true during these stations' initial years, with one station, RCTI, importing almost 90 percent of its programs, mostly from America (Sen and Hill 2000:120-1).

<sup>10</sup> The policy of nine years compulsory education is highlighted in the 1993 Outlines of the Nation's Direction (*GBHN, Garis-garis Besar Haluan Negara*) (BPPN 1994:4) set up by the MPR (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*, General Assembly). It was later implemented through Presidential Instruction (*Inpres*) No.1 in 1994.

<sup>11</sup> *SLTP* stands for *Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Pertama*.

<sup>12</sup> *SLTA* stands for *Sekolah Lanjutan Tingkat Atas*.

<sup>13</sup> The 1989 Legislation on National Education Chapter XI Paragraph 41 states: 'The language of instruction (*bahasa pengantar*) in national education is Indonesian' (GRI 1989:21, my translation).

<sup>14</sup> In 1994 Soeharto launched a Presidential Instruction for Poverty Alleviation in Less-Developed Villages Program (*Inpres Desa Tertinggal* or IDT). Under this, grants were provided by the national government for the development of villages classified to have been left behind by the development process. Some indicators were set to determine whether or not a village met the less-developed category, such as the absence of a village road, bridge, health centre and so forth.

<sup>15</sup> Entrenching the 'family world' (Shiraishi 1997:336) in children's consciousness is not exclusively aimed at demonstrating to pupils that 'family and its extended network forms a foundation for their own life, and that family relations make up a nation' (Shiraishi 2001:213, my translation).

<sup>16</sup> Boelstroff maintains that the very same image of this 'ideal' portrayal of family in school textbooks has been reproduced, as well as modified, by the gay community in Indonesia as a counter-hegemony to the official discourse about the heterosexual-relationship-based family (my note from a seminar by Tom Boelstroff entitled 'Dubbing Culture', presented at Joint Anthropology seminars, The Australian National University (ANU), Canberra on 5 September 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Source: Tim Bahasa Indonesia SD, Pelajaran Bahasa Indonesia 2B untuk Kelas 2 SD, Jakarta: Yudhistira, pp.105.

<sup>18</sup> Source: Ibid., pp.26.

<sup>19</sup> Source: Muchtar S.P, Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial untuk Kelas 3 SD, Jakarta: Yudhistira, pp.33.

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<sup>20</sup> The other experience the school children learn from their trip to and from school, as argued by Parker, is 'a new space' in which they develop 'social interaction' with peers (Parker 1993:19). This suggests that school is not solely a domain ideologically defined by the state, but also a sphere that remains 'open for negotiation' (*ibid.*) from the students' point of view.

<sup>21</sup> Widodo, undertaking study on TV consumption amongst the housewives of lower class families in a district town in Central Java, found that *sinetron* is praised as a representation of moral values championed by the weak protagonist roles, mostly female, with which the audiences identify themselves, both as women and as marginal people (2002).

<sup>22</sup> *BPN* stands for *Badan Pertanahan Nasional*.

<sup>23</sup> *HDG* stands for *Harga Dasar Gabah*.

<sup>24</sup> *Bulog*, which stands for *Badan Urusan Logistik*, is the only state-sanctioned purchasing agent that deals with local farmers.

<sup>25</sup> However, public acceptance does not necessarily come with the status. Antlov (1999: 188-207) in his study of the new rich in rural Indonesia shows that in a Javanese rural community that applies 'a joint ideology of labour-sharing and intimacy' (p.202), a person who has achieved a certain measure of economic vertical mobility still has to present him/herself as 'a good neighbour and kinsman' (p.202) to the villagers or, otherwise, tension and negative prejudices from the rest of society would ensue.

<sup>26</sup> However, the close distance between the place of origin and the urban destination does not always result in commuting migration. In Silvey's study (2001:39), although the distance (Maros-Ujung Pandang) is not great and would allow daily commuting, migrants tend to establish a separate existence and live in the city. They return to their place of origin only occasionally.

<sup>27</sup> Antlov, in his case of an entrepreneur in rural West Java who was reluctant to migrate to the city, indicates that 'the quietness of small village' is typically a reason for most villagers, particularly the older generation, to remain 'content with the present situation', expecting little more than what has already been achieved (1999:205).

<sup>28</sup> In general, the reliance on imported raw materials makes the industrial sector vulnerable to the appreciation of the US dollar (Cameron 2002:147) so that even rural industries suffered similarly from the crisis as indicated in the drop of employment from 34.14 percent in 1996 to 19.22 percent in 1997 (see Figure 2.6).

<sup>29</sup> See Christian Pelras (1996:160-5) on gender roles in Bugis culture.

## Chapter 3

### Encountered City



*Plate 3.1: A Face of An Urban Neighbourhood (photo RWJ)*

## Chapter 3

### Encountered City:

### Workers' Initial Experience of Urban Place

The rural youth's pursuit of being 'modern' and the way they perceive their rural existence and hence, urban migration are often linked to the local expression *tidak ketinggalan jaman*, not being left behind by the changing epoch. Their exposure to such 'modern' fashion, nonetheless, should not be seen in the context of 'cultural dualism', a term which Ferguson says can be identified in most ethnographic accounts of Southern African cities, in which a pre-'modern' rural life is seen diametrically opposed to the modern metropolitan existence (1999:82-122). Rather, to urban migrants in Tangerang as indicated in previous chapter, modernity has been experienced at the level of imagination, long before physical contact with the urban environment occurs, largely through the mediation of mass media and education. This can also be seen as an explanation for the emergence of a generation of rural youth with permissive behaviour that tends to conform with the more open, liberal, and expressive ideas often associated with urbanism. Thus, migration to the urban centres should be seen as local actors' attempts to bring the pre-existing image about being modern into a real and tangible experience. It is simply an opportunity for rural youth to confirm the imaginative experience about modernity they bring from their villages with the factual reality of urban experience. This resonates with Ferguson's (1999) notion that urban migration in Zambia is a catalyst for villagers to fulfil their expectations about freedom and pleasure. It is also parallels Mills' observation about Bangkok factory workers, that the drive for 'being up-to-date' highlights rural youth's enthusiasm for urban migration and urban cultural practices (Mills 1999:5).

There is a belief amongst the rural children in Indonesia that one's life is not complete without 'going to town'. The search for a 'complete' identity by

'going to town' has inevitably expanded the geographical locality of rural people. This chapter suggests that the corporeal mobility to the city is seen by the rural children as confirmation of their partial modernity, to make it a 'complete' expression. The first part of the chapter points out that urban uncertainty underscores the importance of rural-based networks to the migrant workers' adaptation to the new place. It also attempts to explore the newly-arrived migrants' response to the metropolitan setting that appears to contradict their expectations of modernity, especially when they have to deal with the degradation of their living environment. Rural youth come to the city with dreams of modernity, only to find themselves sentenced to life in a slum and urban social segregation. This experience of urban deprivation leaves them vulnerable in their efforts to gain recognition of their modernity. This chapter argued that urban migration is not solely instigated by a drive to obtain economic gains, but also as an avenue through which rural youth seek to claim the promise of modernisation they have learnt from their exposure to modern discourse through channels described in Chapter 2. Such adaptation involves a process of incorporating the urban landscape into their domain of 'home'—a field once provided only by the rural areas—and duplicating their rural forms of life under the conditions of their urban home. This resembles Harvey's notion of 'the conquest of space' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century European context. Harvey maintains that 'a journey to work' in industrial towns enabled migrants to develop customs and practices (e.g. household labour, family interactions, leisure activities) that previously belonged to the home domain (1985:9).

Later in the chapter I argue that the construction of identity amongst the urban migrants is highlighted by a tension between their conception that rural-urban mobility is an adventurous process of acquiring pleasure and their experience of social and economic deprivation in the city. On the one hand, this gives them, as in Thompson's (1991) terms, a class experience, which sets them apart from other class/es celebrated in the images of modernity. On the other hand, their everyday practices in the city are often shaped by efforts to counter their 'exclusion' from modernity (to borrow the term from Kahn (2001)), which

indicates their identification with the urban privileged class, of which they are not part.

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On normal days, the work hours in a shoe factory, PT MKS, which employed mostly female workers like Sri, started at seven thirty a.m. When overtime is enforced, Sri would usually come home at about 11 p.m. However, on this particular Saturday overtime was not necessary so that she was already back at her lodging in Gambir neighbourhood at around 4 p.m. Sri was actually preparing for a big event later that day.

Shortly after the evening prayer (*isya*), about 20 people gathered in the tiny 3x3.5m one-room lodging of Sri, who shared it with two female colleagues. They were all sitting with legs crossed on the floor around a small and low square table in the centre of the room. Sweet music by Jamrud, an Indonesian hit-making group, was playing through a VCD karaoke player connected to two medium-sized speakers, broadcasting the sound throughout the whole lodging compound. Those present were all factory workers employed in manufacturing industries in the area. After a while, the music was stopped to allow Sari, a room mate of Sri, to start a short speech explaining the reason for the gathering. The speech was supposed to be formal and delivered in proper Indonesian language, being reminiscent of the speeches of state officials often captured on TV or in narratives by class teachers during school days. However, the girl failed to consistently speak in Indonesian throughout her address, and was forced to return to her native tongue, Javanese. Not used to speaking in such formal circumstances with a large audience, Sari, the master of ceremonies of the evening, felt awkward, making her chuckle every time mistaken utterances were made. Often she responded wittily to jokes made by friends in the audience.

The spotlight that night was the table in the middle where there was a round birthday cake with a candle. Once Sari concluded her three-minute long address, the attention soon shifted to the six females, including Sari and Sri, who moved forward to the centre to get closer to the table. One of the girls lit the candles to begin the process that most of us might be familiar with. Every single person in the packed room looked very excited. But the enjoyment was delayed as Sari reminded everyone of the need to pray first. Soon a male from the crowd came forward to perform the task by reciting verses from the Holy Qur'an. The ritual did not take long, and people appeared relieved once the prayer was finished; they smiled again. Interest

soon shifted back to the girls preparing to blow out the candles on the chocolate-covered cake. But, there was another ritual waiting, as these female teenagers began to sing Happy Birthday, the crowd joining in. All were clapping their hands, accompanying the English version of the loudly-chanted song, bringing it to a noisy crescendo. The joy continued when the six girls simultaneously blew out the candles and then hugged each other. Tears fell from their eyes.

The tiny lodging was filled with laughter and music from the karaoke player. Besides the birthday cake, guests were also treated by the six hosts to a range of snacks, and plentiful bottled drinks. As the evening went on, songs from a type of local music with an Indian beat, known as *dangdut*, popular amongst the working people in the area, heated up the mood, prompting a number of people to stand up and dance, some with eyes shut while their bodies swayed. The room appeared smaller as the dancing workers took up more space for their bodily movements, forcing the passive guests to spill out of the lodging's only door.

The gathering did not last until midnight. An aura of lively exhilaration, however, prevailed that night in the workers' residential neighbourhood, even amongst other residents who had not been invited to the party. For the industrial workers whose ordinary days were imbued by physical, often prolonged, hard labour in the factory, unless compulsory overtime over the weekend was required, Saturday night was cathartic. They were able to throw away unpleasant memories as well as physical and mental tiredness from their engagement on the production floor. Other predicaments that may have haunted their minds seemed to be forgotten for the moment on that night.

Let me now return to my narrative about the small party at Sri's shared lodging. The presence of a birthday cake with Happy Birthday written on top, or the echo of the song Happy Birthday might lead us to conclude that a birthday celebration was occurring. The six girls mentioned were probably the birthday people. However, what looks to be ordinary, following the usual pattern of many other similar parties elsewhere, brought something unexpected to my attention. The hustle and bustle of that night was not, in fact, an anniversary of the birth date of somebody in the room. Not at all. Instead, it was the first anniversary of the date on which a group of female teenagers from the rural subdistricts in Klaten district, Central Java, had stepped for the first time in their life into the town of Tangerang.

In the midst of the earsplitting noise, I had an opportunity to ask Sri about the circumstances surrounding her first encounter with the

city. Initially, she seemed reluctant to respond to my curiosity and with a smile gave me a short inconclusive answer: Well as you see (*ya, begitulah*), without any intention of explaining any further. Having seen the joyful atmosphere that night, I then suggested to her that she was pleased with her current circumstance in Tangerang and that her urban existence was a sort of progress over the state in the countryside where she came from. Her response, nonetheless, completely contradicted the spirit of the party. She said:

When I arrived in Tangerang, at this very place, this lodging complex, I felt like crying. I really cried every night in my early days here. I would never have imagined, never at any stage of my days in the village, that the city I was confronted with before my eyes bore no resemblance to the portrayal of the city in my fantasies.

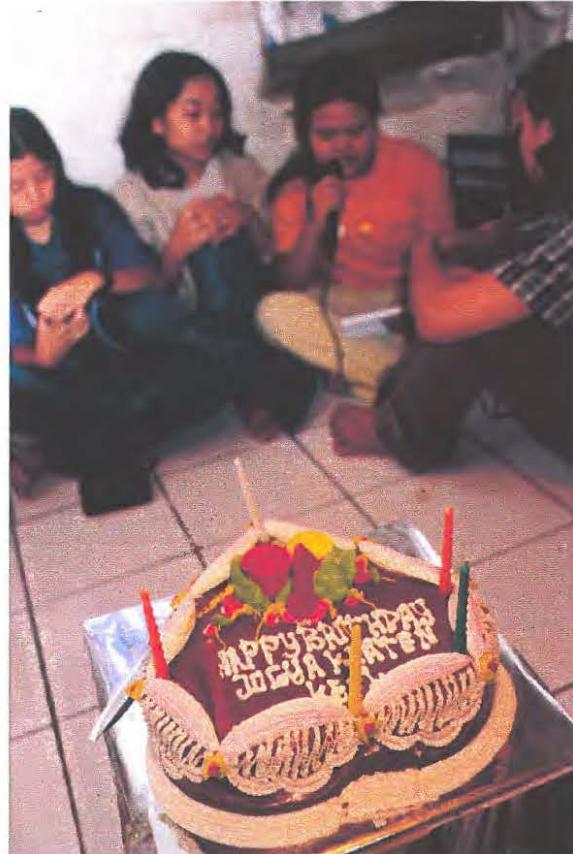


Plate 3.2: Celebrating the Journey 1:  
1<sup>st</sup> Happy Birthday Yogyakarta (photo:RWJ)



Plate 3.3: Celebrating the Journey 2:  
Blowing the candles (photo:RWJ)



Plate 3.4: Celebrating the Journey 3:  
Travelling migrant workers (photo:RWJ)

#### **Mediating Rural-Urban Shift: Recruitment Agency and Rural Connection**

After completing high school in a rural region of Central Java province, Sri certainly could have found a low-skilled job in closer and larger urban areas like

Semarang, Solo, or Yogyakarta. They were unattractive to a teenager whose schoolgirl obsession was to travel to a metropolitan city such as Jakarta to seek experience, however. Her parents also supported the idea of her pursuing a life outside the home village. After all, that was one reason they had sent her to study to high school level.

However, her travel to a nearby rural town for school and her intimate encounters with urbanism and modern discourse in the mass media are by no means sufficient preparation for taking a move to a big town like Tangerang. Despite their enthusiasm for urban modernity, the metropolis remains foreign to many rural migrants like Sri. Therefore, they use a recruitment agency to look after them and smooth the transition of potential migrants from the countryside to the city. While imaginings of progress through means discussed in previous chapter are intermediaries connecting the consciousness of the rural children to the urban representation, the recruitment agency provides practical assistance to introduce the rural migrants into the urban environment and help them to enter and to adjust to the real life of the metropolis.

Sri knew that her high school certificate was a ticket towards getting a respected job in the city. With that paper she was confident of being able to experience a bit of life in the place she had learnt about during her childhood. Nonetheless, at this stage, she had no idea of how to realise her childhood aspiration in the place that still looked new and alien to her. She had no relatives nor colleagues on whom she could rely during her first days there. Hence, it was probably a coincidence that she came across a *yayasan*, as a district-based employment agency is called, actively recruiting rural youth for urban manufacturing jobs in industrial areas adjacent to Jakarta. The agency helped to organise documents required for the job, make arrangements for departure to the city, provide temporary accommodation on arrival, and ensure job placement. For this service package the agency charged a fee of Rp400,000 (A\$80) on the day the contract was signed. Having seen their daughter's determination to go to the city and given their expectation that she would take up urban employment, Sri's parents paid the fee. They mortgaged half of one hectare of rice field to generate

cash for the fee. As many parents in the surroundings entrusted their children to the *yayasan*, her parents had no doubt in the credibility of the agency.

For manufacturing enterprises, particularly the one that employed Sri, the part played by the recruitment agency is crucial, and not merely in terms of its role in supplying an adequate labour force according to the needs of the industry. As most workers employed in Tangerang factories are migrants from outside the area, often from far away rural regions in neighbouring provinces, using a recruitment agency is more efficient than a company's official recruitment representatives. These locally-based agencies have usually established better networking with the people in the countryside as well as with the local bureaucracy. With the absence of a direct connection between urban corporations and prospective youth migrant workers, the use of employment agencies establishes a guarantor mechanism to prevent the industry from employing workers with 'negative' behaviour and the potential to rebel, which might, in the future, harm the company's interest. This is particularly because of the agencies' knowledge of local society, since their people are often members of the rural community itself. 'One of the men from the agency is actually my neighbour, and my parents entrusted (*titip*) me to him,' explained Sri. This face-to-face relationship between the parents and the sponsoring agency can be an effective way to prevent the children from breaking the trust of their sponsor by harming the receiving enterprises. The utilisation of this kinship-based power helps the company taking benefit from recruiting agency to discipline the workers, even before they are formally recruited.

I have written elsewhere (Warouw 1996) that in response to increasing labour strikes in the early 1990s manufacturing enterprises in Tangerang refused to employ workers from particular ethnic groups, particularly the Lampungs and the Palembangs of Sumatra island. They were regarded by most companies in Tangerang as more rebellious and defiant (*suka melawan*).<sup>1</sup> Such discrimination was made possible through the identification of ethnic background based on the examination of the documents provided by job applicants. Those documents are citizen's identity card (*KTP*<sup>2</sup>), indicating the province of origin of the holders, and the school certificate and statement of good behaviour, issued by the local

education authority and local police authority respectively.<sup>3</sup> The identity card (*KTP*) not only indicates the relation between one particular subject and the state, as it gives acknowledgement of one's citizenship. It is also a mode of control applied by the state toward its people. It can become a source of discrimination, through the use of specific codes, with which one might be treated differently from other citizens. The use of the code *ET* (*Eks Tahanan Politik*, ex-political prisoner) is a clear example of the state's politically motivated discrimination against released political prisoners, mostly associated with leftist organisations in the wake of the military coup in mid 1960s. The code enable one's entitlements as citizens might be ignored (Gatra 26/7/2003).<sup>4</sup> A similar control mechanism is seen in other forms of legal documents such as the statement of good behaviour (*SKKB*)<sup>5</sup>. This police-issued statement is not only required to apply for an identity card, but also, for most formal employments. Joshua Barker (1998), discussion the New Order state's control of 'the criminal contagion', maintains that the implementation of the policy has 'closed off' the opportunities of released criminals to access 'the rights of ordinary citizens, condemning them to a life of economic—as well as social—exile' (p.16). The policy, he argues, does not merely imply surveillance of the population. It also embodies the state's attempt to reinforce its 'territorial power' (p.8) as well as to maintain its presence and authority at the micro level of civilian life.<sup>6</sup>

Extending Barker's notion, the imposition of such control mechanisms is a representation of the state at a very local level, giving it power to decide what one should do in terms of employment. An ex-convict or a politically-risky individual, for instance, has fewer options in choosing his/her occupation. Workers like Sri or Sari were certainly too young to have a link with the 1960s leftist organisations stigmatised by the government. In addition, their parents seemed unlikely to be associated with such a political struggle; at least none of my interviews with Tangerang migrant workers indicated any such links.<sup>7</sup> My worker informants were also unlikely to be connected with any crimes: at least the issuance of *SKKB* is indicative that one does not have a criminal records. They, nonetheless, remain subject to this state-sponsored mode of surveillance, reflected in their obligation

to obtain the above-mentioned paperwork. The industrial corporations are simply using the procedure to screen their potential workforce.

The role of recruitment agencies extends the discriminatory policy of preferences based on ethnicity. It is no coincidence that Sri's employer employs a *yayasan* whose area of recruitment is limited exclusively to the region of central Java, where the cultural stereotype of the people is associated with obedience and submissiveness, attributes considered less threatening to the factory's harsh production regime. The location of a recruitment agency in a rural town allows *yayasan* to scrutinise the background of the potential migrants before they are sent off to the city. Sari, who lived in a neighbouring village to Sri's, said:

It seemed that the *yayasan* people knew almost all heads of village in my sub-district. It was easy for them to come to the heads and ask about the 'nuts and bolts' of us; whether we are good or not. Of course, the *yayasan* would not recruit mischievous guys as its credibility is at stake. They (the village heads) probably also receive money from the *yayasan* for providing information and helping us to get the citizen's identity card (*KTP*) and other related documents.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the preferential recruitment of fresh school graduates by the agencies, as requested by the shoe factory employing the two girls mentioned above, is not without reason. With a lack of experience of working on the manufacturing shopfloor, fresh graduates are considered to have little understanding about working conditions. They are therefore unable to draw comparisons between workplaces, which might be a basis for discontent and resistance within the factory. Besides, as most workers stated, the company often considers that new arrivals have more 'motivation purely to work' (*murni buat kerja*) than the experienced workers, who are thought to be more 'demanding' (Javanese, *neko-neko*).

Besides, experienced workers who apply at another factory are often suspected to have been dismissed from a previous workplace. If they do not have bad records before, why bother changing jobs?

explained Sari, trying to understand the reasons behind the company's preference for inexperienced job applicants.

Though the agencies can ensure placement in urban factories, this does not guarantee secure employment. This is because companies require new recruits to undergo three months training. During that period they are considered probationary workers, receiving three quarters of the minimum wage level set by the government. Only those with good performance are promoted to a more established position on the shopfloor. Those who fail the probationary period are normally sent back home at their own cost and without their fee paid to *yayasan* being refunded. One of Sari's colleague at the factory complained about this arrangement:

Well, it is the risk [of using recruitment agencies]. It (being sent home and not getting a refund) is already stated in the contract. But we need work, don't we? Because of that, we have to perform seriously from the beginning [in order to get promoted], otherwise our money will melt away in the hands of *yayasan*. They (the *yayasan*) reap a lot of money from us and, I'm sure, the company also gives a fee for every single person provided. I know this [fee] from a [company's] insider, but [I'm] not sure about the amount. It's company and *yayasan* business. Probably, it is the reason the trainee's wage is less than the one of the ordinary workers: to compensate for the fee paid by the company in case the new recruit is not qualified.

As an alternative to the recruitment agency, in many cases, the company's existing workers can act as intermediaries with industrial employers to recruit and channel potential workers from the countryside. The use of this channel does not require a fee, as is the case with the recruitment agencies. Some expenses, however, are paid to the intermediary employees, especially for transportation. Often, the intermediary's return to the home village to recruit rural youth coincides with the *Idul Fitri* religious festivity, so that the company does not need to pay the transportation cost separate from the holiday bonus embedded in the salary scheme. Only the most trustworthy workers, indicated by their length of service, demonstrable loyalty toward the company's interests, and closeness to the factory's management, will be entrusted to carry out the task of intermediary. Often they do not need to travel far to recruit, as they meet newly-arrived country

youth in their place of urban residence through the friendships and rural networks that emerge in the neighbourhoods.

This mechanism is a common recruitment pattern in manufacturing industries around the Tangerang industrial area. It helps potential workers to evade the chain of bureaucracy within the industrial enterprises so their job applications can be processed and assessed by the company's decision-makers. Lamiri, one of the workers whose employment in his current workplace, a plasticware company, began from this network, said to me:

If I didn't have a connection (*kenalan*) with a factory insider (*orang dalam*) and had to present the application by myself, it would have ended up on the desk in the sentry post of the security officer (*satpam*) at the front gate.

He added:

Even if our documents were forwarded to the human resources section (*bagian personalia*), the low level officers who sorted out the applications there would usually reject our documents as incomplete. Besides, they often favour the applications of their colleagues or relatives.

This practice of discrimination based on favour is common in many areas of employment in Indonesia. Robinson, in her research in a mining town of Soroako (1986), for example, found the term *main suku*, which refers to a discriminatory practice applied on the local Soroakan ethnic group, denying them equal opportunity with immigrants in employment at a mining company. The immigrants, mostly Javanese and Sundanese, in charge of the company's recruitment, Robinson continued, normally 'favour[ed]' people from their own ethnic group and considered the Soroakans 'backward' with a 'lack of worth' (1986:278). The practice, then, became a source of conflict between the immigrants and the indigenous people. In Tangerang, however, this favouritism does not follow ethnic lines. As migrants make up the majority of the industrial labourers, the Tangerang indigenous preferring to work in non-industrial sectors, the bias in factory recruitment follows primordial ties smaller than the ethnic category, namely, village-based connections, familial bonds, or simple friendship alliances.

Lamiri arrived in Tangerang in the year 2000 on the invitation of Hidayat, whom he considered as a nephew, who had worked in the factory for seven years and achieved a good position of group leader. While Lamiri is from Lampung, Hidayat is a Sundanese, and the two are connected through the marriage alliance of each other's relatives. During Hidayat's visit to Lamiri's home village in Lampung, the former convinced the latter to start a new life as a factory worker in Tangerang. The invitation came after Lamiri's parents requested Hidayat take their son to the city to follow his path of success. Before their departure to Tangerang, his 'nephew' repeatedly said that he would help Lamiri to get a job in the factory only if the latter really had a 'serious intention' (*niat*) to work. This also meant that he would never be engaged in 'silly things' against the company; a remark to which Lamiri responded with a promise both in front of his parents and Hidayat. Upon his arrival in Tangerang, it took a few days for Lamiri to prepare his job application for the company, including a declaration of domicile by the local authority as well as a statement of good behaviour issued by the police authority in Tangerang, who acted in response to the documents issued by the authorities in Lampung. Hidayat then personally took the application to the head of the human resources department. Having seen the documents, the officer asked Hidayat to bring the applicant on the following day to undertake a job interview and some tests. This procedure was merely a formality. The tests were mainly basic mathematics and they were, Lamiri said, 'very easy'. The interview was relatively informal; he was asked about his connection to Hidayat and about his educational background. He was not told the result of the process until later that day when Hidayat, coming home from work, informed Lamiri that he could start working at the company the next day.

Despite its differences from the *yayasan*, the essence of this recruitment system using loyal workers as intermediaries is a mechanism that requires a guarantor to ensure the loyalty and subservience of the newly-recruited workers toward the regime of production and the associated rules. The intermediaries are continually responsible for the behaviour and work performance of the person they sponsor. Any failure of the sponsored worker to follow company rules or the suspicion of involvement in industrial dissent is notified to the intermediaries. It is

expected that the sponsor will reprimand the sponsored employee for action against the company's interest. A serious violation, including association with strikes and protests, can affect the integrity of the sponsoring employee in the eyes of company management. This does not only halt the future career of the intermediary; he or she also loses the trust of the management to sponsor more recruitment. This happened to Hidayat, when one man he sponsored, a colleague from his home town,<sup>9</sup> was caught stealing company property and, hence, was reported to the police (see Chapter 4). This caused embarrassment to Hidayat. Other workers in the company, including shopfloor workers, said discourteous things about him sponsoring a 'thief' to become employee. Though a formal sanction was never applied in this case, such humiliation caused by the deeds of an intermediary's sponsored workers is an instrument manufacturing enterprises use to prevent any wrongdoings as well as internal disturbances within the workplace. In the case of the *yayasan*, the client company might make a complaint to the agency. The agency then approaches the misbehaving sponsored employees and reminds them of their initial 'motivation purely to work'. In the worst cases, the company might cancel its contract with the agency.

The rigorous selection process for job seekers invokes the company's imposition of control over its labour force from the very outset of the workers' recruitment; when potential workers are still in negotiation to obtain the trust of potential intermediaries. The use of a third party who has familial connections to the potential employee, or to whom the rural family entrust their children, enables companies to inflict control upon their labour force. The extension of rural or home-town-based relations to the urban industrial situation helps to restrict management encounters with shopfloor workers to the technical matters of production. This allows employers to contain unrest and conflict through a 'non-corporate' means of industrial settlement. It makes workers negotiate among themselves regarding disputes about work-related issues.

### **Urban Living Places: The Imperfection of Modern Imaginings**

Like many young workers in the area, Sri's preference to begin an urban existence in the metropolis, Jakarta, rather than in a provincial city, was prompted by her desire to experience modernity (see Chapter 2). The search for modernity and the pursuit of urbanism represent what Berman portrays as enterprises for 'find[ing] ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world' (1983:15). Going to closer provincial capitals such as Semarang, Surabaya, Palembang, or Yogyakarta did not offer a distinctive experience for the country youth. Sri said: 'I often went to Solo and Yogyakarta (her nearby middle-sized towns in central Java region). Nothing unusual there. They are different (from Jakarta).' Their proximity to her rural place of origin renders these towns too ordinary to a country adolescent who makes such places her school holiday experience. In addition, media representations and the Jakarta-centred discourse of modernisation, celebrating the metropolis as the pinnacle of the nation's advancement, have established a conception that a middle-sized city hardly constitutes a complete realisation of the urban experience. Despite the opportunities for factory employment in the wake of rural industrialisation (Saptari 1994, Tjandraningsih 2000, Wolf 1992), the images of urban modernity available through media and education-driven cultural flows are too well-structured in the consciousness of contemporary rural children like Sri and Sari not to consider Tangerang as a representation of the nation's capital.

The urban imagination of the newly-arrived migrants is not about garment or footwear sweatshops, physically deprived living neighbourhoods with poor infrastructure (Hadiz 1997, Jellinek 1991) or, perhaps, repression when demands for better wages are rejected (Hadiz 1997, Kammen 1997). No one would have dreamed of being stranded on the shop-floor of a factory in the industrial town of Tangerang (see Chapter 4). On the contrary, 'I thought the city would be pretty, much the same as the city I knew from *sinetron* (local soap operas) where everything seemed easy and without many difficulties,' admitted Sri, a view confirmed by other migrant workers. She also mentioned a few *sinetron* serials ostensibly presenting the lifestyles of Jakarta's upper middle class. Therefore, it is

no coincidence that Jakarta, the metropolis, is seen as the epitome of urban experience. It is a place in which, in the minds of the new arrivals, almost every single sign of modernity matches the urban phantasmagoria induced by the mass media. Before their departure to the city, these rural youth were already aware that their urban destination was not Jakarta but Tangerang, which is recognised as *kota* (the city) because its close proximity to the nation's capital. 'All I knew was that Tangerang was no more than a suburb of Jakarta, so that, to my knowledge, Tangerang itself was Jakarta (*Tangerang itu ya Jakarta*)," explained Sri.

Their great expectations of exciting experiences and imagined urban life in the metropolis ended in immense disappointment and total disbelief once they got off the bus that had brought them from the countryside and stepped onto Tangerang ground. Such unexpected responses emerged not from 'culture shock' toward the modern way of life along with its novelties. Rather, conversely, it was distress over the bewildering face of modernity and the harmful excesses of urban industrialisation.

Upon their arrival at Tangerang bus terminal, a representative of the employment agency welcomed the new arrivals and escorted them to accommodation in their new urban 'home', an urban industrial-residential neighbourhood. Gambir was the final destination of Sri and a few other rural youth after their ten hours journey by bus from a district town in Central Java. Along the way to their new 'home', about 20 minutes from bus terminal, Sri tried to relieve her weariness from the long journey by observing the landscape of the city from the windows of the vehicle. She wished that her dream of being in her imagined metropolitan ideal had been realised. Her initial impression, however, as she recalled, was that the city revealed before her eyes was anything but the bright lively picture and the cool splendour of metropolitan life represented in the media and classroom narratives. Instead, high humidity, heavy air pollution from industries and motorised vehicles, disorder in urban development, and chaotic traffic created a gloomy image of the supposed-to-be-a-city to Sri and her colleagues.

The aura of an urban place in disarray remained as the group arrived at the residential neighbourhood. As Sri appeared in her would-be-urban-home, the

poignant expression she used during the party described in the beginning of this chapter seems explicable as the 'reality' of the city was now unfolded. Almost every house in Gambir has lodgings. The local landowners have built the lodgings (*kontrakan*) on almost every piece of empty ground. The ubiquitous barrack-like accommodation is the landmark of the neighbourhood. Some lodgings, built on vast stretches of land, have quite an orderly arrangement with lines of rooms constructed side by side, such as the lodgings where Sri was taken to. It was accommodation rented from an indigenous wealthy man in the neighbourhood by her prospective employer, a subsidiary of a South Korean shoe company. Most lodgings, nonetheless, even those built of concrete and with tiled floors, do not have sufficient water and sanitation facilities to contain the growing numbers of tenants and allow factory workers to live a reasonably comfortable life as human beings. Another example is the accommodation in which I stayed during the fieldwork. The complex comprises eight blocks, each of which has 10 to 12 rooms. Each room, which is 8.75 square metres (2.5m x 3.5m) in size, is normally occupied by two or three individuals, and sometimes more. Before the financial crisis in 1997, there was an average of five dwellers in a room. When I first arrived in November 2000, I found that one block of 12 rooms were unoccupied. A family member of the owner told me that the low occupancy rate at that time was an effect of the crisis, when hundreds or thousands of workers lost their factory jobs (see Table 1.1). Many, whose employers closed down or downsized the work force (see Table 1.1), had to go back to their home villages or to other places where employment was available. However, as the business climate improved and quite a few plants had resumed their regular operation, soon after the *Idul Fitri* festivity at the end of December 2000, there was not a single room left unoccupied.



Plate 3.5: Workers' Lodgings 1:  
Aisle between lines (photo:JNW)

Adding to Sri's frustration, she suddenly realised that the neighbourhood would be her future reality. Not far from Sri's accommodation complex is an open area of land which is used by the landlord as a site to pile up all the rubbish (including dead rats) from the lodging establishments he owns. He has four compounds in the neighbourhood. At her complex, the water supply is provided by two wells using an electric pump and hand pump respectively. They have to be shared by over 175 individuals. As the water is unpurified, though colourless it gives off an odour of mud. Its colour usually turns brownish during the wet season as floods almost cover the area. There are few drains and the existing ones are blocked by rubbish and mud, so flooding after the rain can rise as high as an adult's waist. During the dry season, the colour of the water in the ditches is quite black. Children often urinate and defecate in the trenches, making the physical environment and the general condition of sanitation in the area a critical concern. There are four lavatories and six bathrooms, with no direct access to water supply; one simply has to fetch water in buckets from the wells, which are about 20 metres away, depending on the proximity of one's room to the water source. As obtaining water involves so much effort, no occupant bothers to lift up more than a bucket of water for bathing, a half bucket for defecating, and a water dipper for urinating, leaving the bathrooms and lavatories filthy and stinking all the time.

The condition of the accommodation, known as *kontrakan*, varies from one to another. *Kontrakan* is a local term to refer to the lodging accommodation rented privately by individual workers. Some are developed in a very minimal fashion to cram as many rooms as possible onto a small piece of land. That way the landlord is able to gain the greatest benefit from the migrants desperately in need of shelter. A lodging of about 30 rooms has two unroofed outdoor bathrooms, chaotically built from plywood over a ditch. Not one single lavatory can be found. The landlord seemed reluctant to include such basic facilities in the initial construction of the establishment.<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, barracks are constructed face to face close to each other, so that sunshine never reaches inside the rooms. There is another complex of 48 rooms owned by my landlord, where there is no toilet. Residents have to walk about 60 metres to use the cubicle in a neighbouring compound.

During the wet season, the effect of flooding is infuriating. Once the rain stops, the *kontrakan* occupants have to remove the mud and rubbish carried to their rooms by the flood, clean up and wash the floor before they can reoccupy their lodgings. When heavy rain comes while they are at work, the flood might cause a lot of damage as no one is there to 'rescue' their belongings to a higher location. It leaves workers, who have just got home in the afternoon or in the evening after a long day's work, speechless and helpless. I heard many of them saying, over and over, that they could no longer bear the situation and wanted to find a flood-free area. However, several months passed and none of them had moved to flee from this unbearable situation. At the end of the day, those are the only lodgings that factory workers are able to afford.

Another type of workers' residence is *mess perusahaan*, which is basically accommodation provided free by a particular manufacturing company to its employees. There were only four companies in the neighbourhood that provided accommodation to their employees. *Mess perusahaan*, however, are not actually established and run by the company. They are, in reality, *kontrakan* that are rented out by the landlords to a particular enterprise in the area. The quality standard of *mess*, in terms of facilities, problems of unhealthy environment and flood, is comparable to the average privately-rented lodgings. The company is not involved

in the daily affairs of maintenance and is only responsible for paying the rent on a monthly basis, often a few months in arrears, to the landlord. In addition, there is apparently no company security unit patrolling this so-called company's accommodation, as they do around the companies' industrial installations.



Plate 3.6: Workers' Lodgings 2:  
Built in minimal design (photo:RWJ)

One of the benefits of living in company-rented lodgings is that the accommodation cost is paid by the company. Residents, however, are not able to make decisions on the number of people allowed to stay in one single room. The company has the full right to place new employees, particularly recruited through employment agencies, in the *mess*, at least as temporary accommodation. When a group of newly-recruited workers arrive, the company calls on *ketua mess* (the head of *mess*) to accommodate the new arrivals at the company-rented lodgings. The head, normally a mature and older-looking, not necessarily old, person, who is elected from and by the residents, liaises between the occupants and the company. He (as the position is normally given to a male) is also responsible for maintaining order within the premises. Residents rarely express dissent to the placement of new arrivals at these lodgings. They regard the *mess* as a facility

provided by the company, so that the corporation is able to impose whatever directives it wishes regarding its 'property'. Moreover, as Sari said, 'We should thank the company for providing us, the workers, free lodgings, without which we would have the extra expenses of accommodation.' Besides, nobody would defy the head of *mess*, who is described by Sri as 'our friend who was elected by ourselves', every time he allocated a new resident to one of the already-occupied lodging rooms.



Plate 3.7: Workers' Lodgings 3:  
Next to rubbish dumping spot (photo:RWJ)

Workers with families or those who need more privacy and, hence, are willing to spend more on unshared accommodation, often choose to live in privately-rented lodgings. Those employed in a company providing lodgings to the employees who opt to live off-*mess* receive an accommodation allowance, worth between Rp20-25,000 (A\$4-5) a month, a similar amount to that received by workers from companies without accommodation facilities. The amount hardly covers half of the rental cost, which normally ranges from Rp70-100,000 (A\$12-20) or 14-20 percent of the minimum wage, Rp521,000 (A\$104.20) in 2001. However, apart from the issue of rental cost, the distinction between *mess perusahaan* and *kontrakan* is almost nonexistent. In addition to the lack of basic

facilities, both types of accommodation are situated in the heart of the crowded, filthy and disorderly urban neighbourhood. Having seen the surroundings in which workers live, it is hard to argue that there is a different sort of feeling that separates residents of company-rented lodgings and those of private ones. The former are not better off than the latter as both have to face the typical difficulties of the urban neighbourhood.



Plate 3.8: Workers' Lodgings 4:  
Waiting the flood level to rise (photo:JNW)

#### **The Extension of Rural Connections: Social Relations in Urban *Kampung***

For Sri and Sari, whose job had been secured in a shoe manufacturing company through the recruitment agency, life as wage labourers on the company's shopfloor started the day after their arrival in Tangerang. Accompanied by the head of *mess*,<sup>11</sup> they walked down to the factory to meet the company management and a representative from the agency. Their documents were checked and a short group interview on educational background and personal motivation to work was conducted. Sri reported that she was incredibly nervous during the interview, particularly because of the presence of a South Korean expatriate, the company manager, asking her things in fluently-spoken Indonesian. 'It was the first time in my life I had a conversation with a foreigner,' she said. However, having been

trained by the agency before departing to the city to deal with the job interview, Sri and her colleagues were able to get away from the nerve-racking situation with almost no unexpected questions posed. The interview was no more than a formality; even without it, they had a guarantee from the employment agency that they would be officially recruited into the company as workers having to undergo a term of probation (*masa percobaan*) of three months.

Unlike youth recruited by the employment agency, Lamiri waited for several days after his arrival in Tangerang before he was called in by his current employer. However, as his nephew had a connection with the officials from the company, he did not need to prepare separate applications for different companies. No extra effort was wasted wandering around the large industrial subdistrict to submit his documents to the corporations with job vacancies.<sup>12</sup> Although applying for an unskilled job, he had to obtain a statement of current domicile (*surat keterangan domisili*), a statement of good behaviour, and a statement of good health from the relevant local authorities in Tangerang and attach them to his application. In addition, a curriculum vitae (*daftar riwayat hidup*) and a hand-written cover letter for the job application (*surat lamaran kerja*) were required. To obtain the statement of current domicile, Lamiri had to go through the village-level administrative authorities. He, then, went to the subdistrict police to apply for a statement of good behaviour. The letter was issued only after checking his statement of current domicile and official documents he had brought from his place of origin.

Lamiri started to learn about the everyday life of this neighbourhood the very first day of his arrival. He was staying with his nephew, Hidayat. The latter's lodging was a small room already shared with another relative who was also seeking a job in Tangerang. Hidayat was sponsoring both to join the company where he was employed. Often, the willingness to provide support to relatives and friends can threaten the subsistence level of the host. Just a few metres away from my lodging, there was a male worker in his mid-20s, a factory colleague of Sri, who was hosting three of his relatives from a remote rural area in the outer island of Sumatra. They had not been able to find jobs and had stayed at his place for nearly four months. As he had to take responsibility for the survival of his

dependants, he provided large quantities of cheap-but-tasty instant noodles, which made up the staple diet for all the occupants, including himself. In her study of a poor community of Jakarta, Lea Jellinek argues that the type of residence which provides accommodation to recently-arriving rural friends and relatives constitutes 'an ideal means by which villagers [can] temporarily survive in the city' (1991:32). In the case of urban migrants in Manila, Berner and Korff demonstrate that a rural connection, including 'kinship' networks, are also significant in relation to the provision of 'information' to the new comers about many aspects of the city, particularly in regard to urban employment (cited in Evers and Korff 2000:231, see also Pinches 1987). The preparedness of such rurally-based networks to receive rural youth coming to the city provides an assurance to the families in the countryside and the migrants themselves. The assurance is indicated in the host's reliability and willingness to provide assistance, ranging from meals and guidance to information, before the new arrivals manage to become financially independent.

Sharing accommodation in the neighbourhood with new arrivals is usually temporary. Once the newcomers are able to secure an industrial job and earn their income, they move to lodgings of their own. There, they are able to decide to live individually or, for the sake of savings, share with friends whom they normally know from the workplace.<sup>13</sup> Being able to live on their own, renting their own urban residence, and having no financial dependence on the host who had made it possible for them to come to the city are the desired way of life for migrants in the neighbourhood. Lamiri admitted:

I came here [in Tangerang] in order to become independent (*mandiri*). It is inappropriate if I keep staying with Hidayat (his nephew). He (Hidayat) wouldn't mind if I stayed, but I just don't feel comfortable with it, especially now I have my own income. He helped me a lot once and that's enough. I don't want to make him worry about me (*nyusahin, menyusahkan*) all the time if I stay with him.

The temporary and transitory nature of such shared initial accommodation resembles Jellinek's 'communal lodging-house' or '*pondok*' in which migrants were able to come and go (1991:32-34). This circulatory movement, seen by Jellinek

during the 1970s and 1980s, emerged as migrants, 'leaving their wives and children to tend crops and look after their home in the countryside' (*ibid.*:33), saw the city as merely a place for temporary work. Accordingly, their temporary existence in the city was affected by their economic link with the countryside in the form of the remittance of urban income as well as the need to visit families. Nevertheless, there is an important distinction between the migrants in Jellinek's account and those in Tangerang in regard to their perceptions about the transitory lodgings. Despite its temporary nature, Jellinek saw *pondok* as relatively stable accommodation for migrants during their short stay in the urban centre. Villagers who resided in the communal lodging exclusively came to the metropolitan centre in order to seek additional income as a result of the scarcity of economic resources in rural areas. The urban centre was perceived as no more than another 'rice field'. After the 'harvest' bore income, migrants went back to their village, which remained their ultimate home. Therefore, there was no urgency to find any residence other than the one they occupied from the time they had arrived in Jakarta. By contrast, in Tangerang, migrants show a determination to secure a more stable existence by moving to a place of their own, during their period of residence in the urban centre. While migrants in Jellinek's 1970-80s account only lived in *pondok* for 'a couple of months' (1991:32), which is likely to coincide with the duration of their stay in the city, youth migrants to Tangerang are prepared to stay in the city for a longer period, usually with short interruptions when they return to their places of origin during religious festivities. This preparedness is not solely due to the young age at with which they are quite independent in terms of economic responsibility from the family left in the countryside. Their modern encounters as rural children also contribute to the migrants' construction of urban possibilities being not merely about economic opportunity but also possible future existence in which they can bring their pursuit for modernity to fruition.

As Tangerang is a meeting point for migrants from different backgrounds (see also Hadiz 1997:127), there is almost no accommodation compound exclusive to individuals from a particular place of origin, encouraging new migrants to adjust to the wider social environment. The process of developing

social relations in the neighbourhood flows naturally. Lamiri recalls his first encounter with people in *kontrakan*:

I was fetching water for bathing, when a woman came to me and asked whether I was new here. Of course, as a new resident I was happy to be greeted by others. Out of the blue, she told me how difficult it was to access clean water here. The story even extended to how this place (lodgings) was vulnerable to flooding. I then helped to fetch the water for her. I also asked about many things in the neighbourhood : the cost of transport, the factories around, the price of food. I began to know who was in the compound and where they worked from her. Suddenly I felt so familiar with the environment here.

Lamiri's story was confirmed by Sari when she talked about her experience of being introduced to the neighbourhood environment when the compound's residents took her to the nearby shops, food stalls, and commercial toilets. Though encounters such as these often do not involve introductions and inquiries about name and place of origin, but rather stories about the hardship of living in the compound, the presence of new arrivals is always welcomed by the existing residents. The latter are keen to share experience and information about all aspects of life and work in Tangerang.

The character of the accommodation, which requires residents to develop a sense of commonality when accessing shared facilities within the compound,<sup>14</sup> makes it almost impossible for newly-arrived villagers to hide in their small hovels, built side-by-side in barracks. Activities from fetching water and lining up for bathing, to washing, cooking, and dishwashing are carried on outside, where people are forced to mix and cooperate with others. Accordingly, it is always difficult to avoid contact with others and develop a solitary living style without being branded as arrogant (*sombong*) by the rest of the residents. Sari explained why maintaining social relations in the *kontrakan* (lodging complex) is necessary:

Living like this where we and next door neighbours are only separated by concrete walls, how could we not greet each other? Besides, often we need help from others, borrowing sandals, sugar or coffee, or money. When we are sick, we certainly need somebody to help to buy us food and medicine. Just as in the village, where people are always handy to offer help, any kind of help. Here [in the city], we live away from

parents and family. All in here [in the compound] are just like my family (*saudara*).

She, moreover, added:

It would look funny if we are hanging around in this big accommodation complex without knowing who's who here and talking with them. We would be labeled arrogant (*sombong*). I just do not feel comfortable being gossiped about in that way (of being condescending), especially of ignoring others. Moreover, we live in the same place, we're all working as workers. If we are affluent, we are not living here, are we? We are all the same. So, why are we arrogant to others?

Norma Sullivan, in her account of a marginal urban community in Java, introduces the term 'neighbourship' to describe the condition in which *kampung* residents are socially and culturally compelled to be 'good neighbours' to other residents (cited in Evers and Korff 2000:229, also Guinness 1986:74-5).<sup>15</sup> Sari's statements above simply indicate that being a good neighbour is a strategy of survival in an urban alien situation. Patrick Guinness, in his study of the Yogyakartan neighbourhood of Ledok (1986), maintains that the 'social harmony and co-operation' (p.184), that highlight the 'solidarity' (p.144) amongst the residents, is a necessary condition one can expect from one's relations with the local surroundings. With such relations in place, the residents can have a sense of 'security in a potential hostile city environment' (*ibid.*:184) and in 'an emergency' (*ibid.*:75). In contrast, Antlov, discussing the new rich in rural West Java, argues that conscious reluctance to preserve social ties with the rest of the community often results in the individuals concerned being excluded from rural society (1999:205). Therefore, 'neighbourship' in Sullivan's terms becomes a sort of social code that carries out a 'powerful sanction function' which forces *kampung* residents to behave in accordance with locally-accepted norms (cited in Evers and Korff 2000:229). Coming from closely-knit communities in the countryside, migrants in Tangerang's neighbourhood understand well the meaning of social sanctions and other consequences resulting from deliberate isolation from the rest of rural society.

### **The Social Setting of Neighbourhood: A Contemporary Overview**

From the initial settlement based on relations with their rural network—relatives or mediating recruitment agencies—the social relations of urban migrants expand to become typically urban. However, before I turn to the spreading of networks beyond the rural-based connections, let me first discuss the sociological character of industrialising Tangerang as a condition that enables this social expansion to happen.

By the time of its integration into the Great Jakarta metropolitan area (see Chapter 1), the landscape of Tangerang was described by Roesli as ‘no more than a widely spread network of small villages or *kampung* which dotted an unremarkable, dry, expanse of 423 square kilometres’ (cited in Hadiz 1997:126). Ibu Surti, who had been a migrant worker in Gembor since the early 1980s, had a recollection of the area 20 years ago:

The development of *kampung* today would be unimaginable when I first arrived in 1983. There was only a muddy narrow trail that went across the neighbourhood. I used to slip on that slippery track during the wet season. Almost no one walked on that track as many people and workers do today on the better and wider street, except those who went to the paddy field (*sawah*) around *kampung*. There was no main road connecting neighbourhoods and sub-districts. There was no *mikrolet* (motorised public transport). Back then, a narrow un asphalted street and two-wheeled buggies drawn by horses were all we had. I used to live in the neighbouring sub-district and had to walk to go to work.

Ibu Surti, in her late 50s, was the only first generation industrial worker in Tangerang I could find in the area. She migrated from Jakarta to Gambir to follow the relocation of PT ST, a company that employed her until she retired in 1996. It was in Gambir that she met Pak Sudi, a migrant and widower who later became her husband in 1994. Though herself and her husband, also in his late 50s, had originally come from districts in West Java—Cirebon and Majalengka respectively—the couple decided to stay in the neighbourhood. Their continued close friendships with residents of the neighbourhood and the fact that her husband had been entrusted to be the head of the hamlet's administrative unit (*RT*),<sup>16</sup> were reasons for the couple to make Gambir their urban home.<sup>17</sup> About the

social environment that caused them to like the neighbourhood, Ibu Surti commented:

We feel at home (*betah*) here. We know (*kenal*) almost everybody. We enjoy (*sudah enak*) living here. Everything is easy because help is always handy amongst the residents. Where else can we go?

It therefore appears that the characteristics of 'mutual assistance', 'intimacy with neighbours', 'social harmony' as well as 'family-like solidarity' that Guinness (1986:132-3) reported for a Yogyakarta *kampung* are also present in Gambir. For the couple, having been exposed to the modern realities, both in the factory and urban life, does not necessarily emasculate these values, which are largely associated with rural society and un-modern conditions. Marginality and urban uncertainties appear to produce individuals in the neighbourhood a sense of being 'vulnerable' and 'alien' from the urban hardship, tending to divide the metropolitan community into social and economic categories (see below). Therefore, rather than being incarcerated in the 'iron cage of rationality' (Weber 1958) or the logics of 'Gessellschaft' (Tonnies 1955) of modern (urban) society, these values form a defence mechanism for Ibu Surti, Pak Sudi, the younger migrants, and indigenous residents of Gambir in facing the alienating consequence of modernity (see also Giddens 1990). Its reproduction, with which Ibu Surti and Pak Sudi had managed to endure urban life, accordingly, explains the couple's aspiration to stay in the neighbourhood in their old age, despite the couple, like other migrant workers, still living in lodgings.

The experience of witnessing the area's bustle of industrialisation from its very outset is probably another reason the couple has an emotional attachment to the neighbourhood in which they might spend the rest of their lives. However, as Ibu Surti said, 'Tangerang, back then, was not like I thought before; I thought it (moving to the town) would be like moving to one of Jakarta's suburbs.' The flickering of Jakarta's metropolitan life did not illuminate the town at all, even though it was technically on the capital's doorstep. A young local leader revealed that the major livelihood of the natives, the Bantens, before the coming of industrialisation at that time was *tani/garap tanah* (agriculture-related activities)

as well as small-scale enterprises such as *dagang* (trading) and handicrafts (see also Hadiz 1997:126). From the total land area of 128,222 hectares, according to a report by the University of Indonesia in the 1970s (n.d), over 95 percent (122,051 hectares) was designated for agriculture purposes, ranging from rice fields to plantations. The report, consequently, asserted farm workers formed the majority of the workforce, followed by merchants, labourers, and civil servants.

Given this ‘underdeveloped’ character, no one would have expected that within two or three decades the countryside-like features would be miraculously transformed into an industrialising satellite town of the nation’s capital. A number of changes came about once Tangerang was incorporated into the dynamism of Jakarta. As a result of the urban expansion at the heart of the nation, the town became an ideal site for the export-oriented manufacturing productions that were increasingly important to the country’s economy. Its proximity to Jakarta, the availability of a labour supply and better infrastructure were considered to be the town’s focal points of attraction to domestic and foreign industrialists. The economic deregulation in 1989 that encouraged financial institutions to provide investment credit for sectors with the potential to increase non-oil and gas exports and expand labour opportunities had brought industrial expansion even further (Kompas 19/10/1997) (see Chapter 1). By 1997, around 2,342 plants were spread out across several industrial complexes, occupying 3,000 hectares of land of the district and the municipality of Tangerang (Kompas 19/10/1997).

The spread of manufacturing companies has, consequently, converted the agricultural land that once provided the economic livelihood of the local indigenous population. It places industrial plants side by side with residential neighbourhoods. The presence of industries around neighbourhoods gave rise to the initiative by local indigenous residents to upgrade the *kampung*’s muddy footpath into a wider and hard-surfaced street that would enable four-wheeled motorised vehicles related to the industries to pass. As the road was upgraded,<sup>18</sup> Pak Sudi was the one assigned in the early 1990s by the local community to collect money from vehicles using the street to further improve it into an asphalted construction. In Tangerang, Pak Sudi had also experienced being a *centeng* (a locally-recruited nightwatchman) for the industries.<sup>19</sup> His acquaintance

with local figures helped him to be trusted to hold the task that is normally associated with the indigenous elders, who regularly claimed payment from the companies for this security service.

The productive land which has been replaced by the establishment of factories, therefore, remains a source of livelihood in different ways for the locals of Tangerang. Mather (1983, 1985), in her research on industrialisation in Tangerang in the early 1980s, reported the engagement of the locals, particularly young women, of Kelompok neighbourhood in the newly-established manufacturing factories that increasingly emerged in the area. However, in the neighbourhood where I conducted fieldwork in 2001-2, only two sub-districts to the north from Mather's site, I hardly found any direct involvement of the indigenous people in industrial work. Rather, their contribution to industrialisation was indirect. Apart from renting out lodgings, which has proved to be a lucrative business in response to the constant influx of migrants, they run food stalls, shops and motorbike taxis which have contributed to the provision of basic services to the neighbourhood residents, especially the factory workers. While some indigenous affluent women managed to run small shops, food stalls, and small catering businesses for functions and gatherings at the neighbourhood level, the average mature women of Gambir were housewives responsible for domestic tasks.<sup>20</sup> With more than 50 percent of workers' factory income spent in accommodation, food, and transportation (see Chapter 5), it can be said that the natives of Gambir absorb the bulk of, and are economically nourished by, their guests' everyday expenditures.

A son of my landlord, Yadi, who operated a motorbike taxi, explained: 'I don't have the talent (*bakat*) to do supervised jobs. I prefer doing business of my own. No rules [of others] to follow; I can regulate (*mengatur*) myself.' Though it seems contradictory, as he also had a supervised occupation as an Islamic teacher at a nearby junior secondary school for 3 hours per week,<sup>21</sup> he wanted to make it clear that he was quite different from the migrants undertaking inferior (*bawahan*) jobs in the factories. His father was a local leader and acted as a *centeng* (nightwatchman). His married older brother operated a motorbike taxi and, with his wife, a small shop, selling snacks, soft drink, soap and toothpaste. Running

their own 'business', of which they feel themselves to be the owners (*pemilik*), reinforces the natives' feeling of superiority over their guest migrants.<sup>22</sup> Not being subjugated (as employees) by the industrial corporations and, hence, not having to abide by any corporate control demonstrates that they remain the hosts and owners of the area. This view was frequently expressed by Yadi who proudly said: 'Most of the land around here [on which the factories are established] used to be my grandfather's.' The availability of other work opportunities, as opposed to direct involvement in an employer-employee arrangement in modern companies, has enabled the natives to be incorporated in the industrialising process taking place in their 'land'. They can therefore maintain their 'dignity' from the purging effect of modernisation. As a result, tension between locals and immigrants competing for a narrow economic field, such as found by Robinson (1986:276-8) in Soroako, is virtually absent in Tangerang.

Being a cushion for population pressure in Jakarta, combined with the area's increasing ability to offer employment has altered the demographic figures of Tangerang. According to a 1973 official census (cited in UI n.d), the population of Tangerang District in 1971 was 1,066,695. The figure had rapidly reached 2,191,426 by 1992, marking 100 percent increase in the district's population (KSPJB 1993:15). This remarkable population growth has intensified the demand for land for both housing and industrial purposes. In 1997, Kompas (15/4/1997) reported that Tangerang (both the Municipal and the District) had lost around 14,535 hectares of irrigated rice fields in 10 years. Apart from industrial areas, with 7,500 hectares actually being reserved for the industrial zone (Kompas 17/2/1995), housing development is also a land hungry sector. In the District of Tangerang alone, according to a 1996 source (Kompas 25/8/1996, 2/10/1996), approximately 21,000 hectares of land had been used by 235 real estate developers. Plants and trees that might help to filter polluted air have long been replaced by the roofs of factory buildings and brick-walled houses.

Over 100 housing complexes have been erected throughout the region, mainly in the eastern and southern parts, with their market target: working people and professionals from Jakarta (Kompas 28/12/1997). Complexes, such as Alam Sutera, Lippo Karawaci, Citra Raya, Bumi Serpong Damai (BSD), and Kota

Tigaraksa, are constructed in a modern manner according to the concept of self-supporting town (*kota mandiri*). They offer a variety of types (attached and free-standing) and styles of modern housing and supporting amenities, such as super-malls, sporting clubs, hospitals, and banks for their respective residents.<sup>23</sup> These areas are residences for high income professionals who are willing to commute, usually by car, to their offices in the nation's capital. Houses with European-styled architecture are built in the middle of the beauty of green landscaping, complemented with facilities to support extravagant lifestyles. The residents often have to drive to Jakarta for particular consumer goods which are unavailable in the average shopping malls in Tangerang.

It is, therefore, easy for one to have the impression that Tangerang is part of the metropolis itself. The burgeoning recently-established manufacturing plants, in addition, have established the town as an alternative destination for migrants from rural regions who seek, to borrow Siegel's (1997) term, 'recognition' of their conformity to urban lifestyles and modern discourses. Nonetheless, once migrants arrive in the supposed city of their dreams, their mobility of residences hardly stretches to the modern enclaves in which the grandeur of Jakarta has been transplanted into the exclusive part of the town. Soeroji, a character introduced in the previous chapter, said:

I was dreaming to come to the city to live close to the personages of Dewa (a rock group of which he was a fan). If need be, I don't mind camping near them; doesn't matter for how long. I'd like to do things for them. I just feel happy to be that way. Probably I can learn something, about playing music, from them.

During a conversation with me, after he had lived in Gambir and worked in a furniture factory for over one year, Soeroji was still hoping his adolescent dream would come true. However, at the same time, he realised that, like other ordinary people of Tangerang, including migrant workers, he may never be a resident of these elite complexes, some with skyscrapers,<sup>24</sup> where his pop idols probably live. They, instead, live in salubrious enclaves both in economic sense as well as in living environment.<sup>25</sup>



Plate 3.9: Posing with A Poster of A Pop Idol (photo:RWJ)<sup>26</sup>

Walking along the edge of the main southeast-northwest axis cutting across the residential neighbourhood of Gambir, industrial establishments dominate the landscape. Each industrial plant is surrounded by a combination of walls and steel-grill fences. A small number of factories have even set up fortress-like concrete walls. The forest of concrete walls, almost uniformly painted in white and blue, makes the corporate plants seem detached from their social milieu. This landscape has added a cold and inhospitable image of industrialisation to the architecture of the urban environment. The noise of machines, the sight of a factory's smokestack carrying away thick, dark smoke and the heavy container trucks, all of which symbolise the grandeur of industrialisation, stand out against the surrounding poor infrastructure of human settlements. Solid and liquid industrial waste is often dumped indiscriminately and contaminate the canals in the area (see also Kammen 1997:218).

Another scene unfolds when large numbers of factory workers come out from their plants at lunch time and pour into the street to buy meals from the street hawkers or food stalls that are in rows outside the factory compounds. Long lines of vehicles, big and small, are jammed at some points as the road is plainly overcrowded by workers striving to overcome their hunger. The *mikrolelet* (a small public vehicle) stops at any point, wherever the driver chooses, to pick up

passengers, leaving a long line of vehicles behind. Exhaust fumes from hundreds, perhaps thousands, of motor vehicles mixed with flying dust are inhaled by the town's hard-working residents travelling back and forth. These are the circumstance which street users and the residents of the area accept as their distressing daily routine.

Some parts of the road are badly damaged and full of holes. It is the road all the people in the area very much depend on. Being in a fully-packed non-air-conditioned *mikrolet* passing along the dusty damaged road is surely an unpleasant experience for anybody, particularly with an afternoon outside temperature that might reach as high as 30-33°C at any time of the year. There are two major causes of the poor state of the road. One is the companies' heavy vehicles and long container trucks using a road that has no capacity to carry such a burden. The other is the deterioration of road structure caused by flooding during the wet season as the inland waterways on both sides of the road are blocked by solid waste.

The 'prosperity' and dynamics of the industrial subdistricts has undoubtedly been established largely around the activities associated with industrialisation. Nevertheless, the disorderly arrangement—the poorly maintained road, chaotic traffic, high level of pollution, piles of rubbish at most spots—hardly provide an impression of a town becoming affluent from industrialisation. Instead, it reflects a heightened divergence between industrialisation and the social setting in which it is situated.

### **The (Confined) Expansion of Urban Networks**

Despite the industrial spread across the entire region, the major industries are heavily concentrated in the 'golden triangle' districts of Cikupa, Jatiuwung and Pasar Kemis, where most 'market-exposed industries' are located (Kammen 1997:220). It is also in these districts that migrant workers set up their urban homes. Human clusters found around industrial complexes are, of course, not specific of Tangerang. Writing about immigrants from Southern Europe in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Australian cities, Graeme Hugo argues that the creation of human

residences on this pattern was a typical model of settlement for migrants (1995:16-7, also Scott 1988:221-2). The decision to choose accommodation near the workplace was underscored by a simple calculation to slash transport expenses (Hugo 1995). For the workers in Tangerang, this pattern of residence is not merely a response to low wages. It also facilitates their homecoming after a long day's hard work in the factory sweatshop as the unreliable public transport system often causes unbearable delays, particularly during peak hours, and offers no ease to the weary employees.

Unlike the southern European immigrants who migrated to Australia during the 1950s and 60s and created enclaves in the country's major cities (Hugo 1995:16-7), or eastern European Jews in late-19th century footwear production in the East End of London (Scott 1988:68-70), the concentration of particular ethnic groups in the neighbourhoods of Tangerang is relatively absent. The low-skilled character of industries, also made possible by the use of deskilling assembly lines (see Chapter 4), attracts a wide range of migrants from different cultural backgrounds, particularly from rural regions. Accordingly, the cultural landscape of the neighbourhoods is home to a populace that consists of a fair mixture of individuals from a multiplicity of places of origin.

An example of this variety was found in a lodging complex where I stayed. Established on approximately 1,320m<sup>2</sup> of land, the complex had 16 blocks, each consisting of between five to six lodgings built in barrack-like construction. Nine blocks were, in fact, a company's dormitory (*mess*), rented out by the landlord to a corporation that employed Sri and Sari, who also lived there (see above). The rest are considered to be private lodgings rented out by the same owner to individuals, including myself. Most residents of the dormitory, like Sri and Sari, were Javanese workers recruited by an employment agency from the region of central Java. However, they were not homogeneously from the same place of origin as they were recruited from different districts, subdistricts, and even villages in that region. There were also a few lodgings in the dormitory occupied by workers from some parts of Sumatra island and Western Nusa Tenggara (the islands to the west of Bali).

Meanwhile, the cultural composition of residents in private lodgings was even more varied. My neighbours were a Sundanese (from Cirebon) and a Javanese (from Salatiga, central Java), both male workers in a motorbike tyre company; a Palembang (southern Sumatra) woman and a Javanese woman from Pemalang, central Java, who worked in two different garment factories; and two Bugis women from the island of Sulawesi who shared the same room and worked, respectively, in a paint factory and a mosquito repellent company. In the block opposite mine, there were a Palembang male worker from a car tyre company; two Sundanese males (from Subang but different subdistricts), sharing the same room and working respectively in a cardboard and a furniture company; two Sundanese women (from Subang and Karawang), sharing the same room and working respectively in a garment and a women's sanitary pad factory; two Sundanese females (from Sumedang), who shared a room and worked in the garment industry; and two Javanese male workers (from Madiun, eastern Java) who worked in a motorbike tyre factory.

While a dormitory was generally the first residence for the newly-arrived workers at Sri's shoe company, the private lodgings in the complex were the second, even third, residence for almost all residents after their arrival in the city. Let me continue my earlier story of Lamiri after he arrived in Tangerang and resided temporarily at his relative's lodging. One of the acquaintances Lamiri met during his first days in Tangerang was a next door neighbour who had just started working at a nearby tyre factory. Like Lamiri, Yudi, the neighbour, was staying temporarily at the lodging of his host, a relative, and had been in Tangerang for only a month and a half. As Yudi was, at that time, working nightshift, he was able to accompany Lamiri, the new arrival, during the daytime. Though also new in the area, he was already familiar with local living and able to accompany Lamiri to food stalls and shops.<sup>27</sup> He took Lamiri to the downtown area as the latter wanted to see what a 'big' city was like. As the friendship between the two developed and Lamiri managed to get a job at a factory, when he received his first salary a few weeks after his work commenced, they decided to share accommodation and separate from their respective hosts.

A worker who lived opposite me in my lodging similarly moved into private lodgings after first staying with a friend. Heri, originally from Palembang, arrived in Tangerang after he had worked as a porter at the port in Lampung, work which he described as 'harsh' since it required slave-like physical labor with no adequate respite. That experience led him to cross the Sunda Strait and proceed to Tangerang where he met, and stayed with, his childhood friend who was a manufacturing worker. Once he managed to find a job in a tyre factory, Heri rented a lodging next to his friend's. After a few months, he began feeling uncomfortable with the conditions of the lodging as it was too small, gloomy, and had a cement floor. However, there was no better place available within the short radius of his lodging and, back then, he had no social connections other than his immediate environment. Therefore, it was opportune for him to meet a new colleague, Nawi, who he only knew on the assembly line in his factory. Both were employed in the same group so that they always worked in the same shift, which rotated every five days, with one or two days break between shifts. Nawi (a Javanese from Temanggung, central Java), was, in fact, a very early contact I made when I arrived in Gambir. As soon as I moved in to the complex where I would stay during my fieldwork, I deduced that there were a few vacant rooms there. As Nawi was the only person I knew relatively well in my early days in the area, I visited him almost every evening during that time to chat and to sing with him while he played guitar. One evening I was introduced to Heri who happened to visit Nawi to challenge him to a chess game. Discovering that Heri was seeking accommodation, I informed him about the vacancy in my compound, situated approximately one kilometre from his lodging at that time. It took less than a week after that evening for Heri to move in and become one of my neighbours.

The rural-based network in the city, be it through a recruitment agency or relatives, is vital, particularly in the initial period, to the establishment of a migrant's urban social network. However, the augmentation of such a network to include urban-based multicultural relations is important to migrants, who are seeking not only economic benefit (Jellinek 1991:33) but also a sense of independence a desire for new experiences from their migration to the city.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, as soon as the migrants' network expands, the creation of (later) domains of residence implies a relative severance from the rural-based alliance.

The multiplicity of urban networks of the migrants extends to also incorporate relations with the locals. Encounters with local personalities is mostly found in economic transactions as the locals are predominantly running informal businesses, ranging from shops, food stalls, and motorbike taxis to accommodation. Contacts with those persons are quite intensive, as daily interaction seems inevitable. For Lamiri and Yudi, for example, it was the networks they had established during their early presence in the community, which offered them assistance with information about available lodgings in the area.

Relations with the indigenous residents can also occur in a non-economic context, such as with their landlords. One of the landlords is Pak Mardi, who was also the head of *RT*, the lowest local authority with which migrants have to deal when they obtain the documents I indicated earlier.<sup>29</sup> He was often found hanging around in the coffee shop, watching television in a group, and chatting with the residents of his lodgings on a relatively equal footing. During those occasions, some male tenants, knowing his habit, often offered Pak Mardi cigarettes of his favourite brand to make him stay, so that conversation often lasted until late at night. Light banter about daily life and joking exchanges were the usual topics in such events. This helped to create a relaxing atmosphere in a conversation with a 72 year-old person like Pak Mardi.

At the same time, a 'family' experience can also emerge from such occasions when a fictitious father-child relation appears in the term *Pak* or *Bapak* (father) used by the tenants to address their landlord or local leaders.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, Pak Mardi often said to the migrants residing in his lodgings:

You are all the children of *Bapak* (referring to himself in the third person). We are all family here. I am replacing your parents while you're away from your [actual] family.

It is in this role as a 'father' that he might reprimand tenants or residents under his authority for their misbehaviour, such as creating trouble in the area.<sup>31</sup> As a 'father', he can carry out his official duty as head of *RT* and an extension of the

state to maintain a peaceful environment and stability in the small social units within the neighbourhood. This includes encouraging migrant workers to avoid conflicts with their employers. During an industrial strike in the factory under his administrative jurisdiction and when he was called by the company to help to pacify the strikers, he said:

I just remind them (the strikers) not to engage in violent and destructive protests against the company. Workers have a right to strike. But I don't want trouble in my *kampung*. If the strikers cause trouble in this peaceful neighbourhood, they'd better get out of here and go back to their hometowns. If the companies cease to operate because of aggressive protests by workers, everyone in the neighbourhood, both local inhabitants and migrants, will lose their sources of income.

In delivering such messages to the residents of his lodgings or members of the neighbourhood community in which he was an elder, he was never strict, using a patronising manner towards his 'children'. Rather, his shifting roles—a landlord, a head of *RT*, an elder—made him a father figure who had the authority to advise the 'children'. In this way, the migrant workers' feelings of subordination and of being patronised were minimised.

An example of the recognition of urban place as a 'home' can probably be seen in the actions of Hidayat, who held his wedding ceremony in Gembor rather than in his place of origin in West Java. He and his bride even invited their parents from villages to attend the ceremony. 'I met my wife here and we have many friends here. We are going to stay here. Why bother having a wedding elsewhere?' he said. In organising the event, held at the house of Hidayat's landlord, the couple involved their colleagues, both from work and neighbourhood, as well as indigenous elders and local official leaders. During the ceremony, his landlord delivered a speech, addressing Hidayat as his 'child', of whom he was pleased to become the host. Similarly, when Pak Mardi was asked to address the guests, he acknowledged Hidayat as the 'son' of the neighborhood. Given the attention and support from almost everyone in the area, one would have thought that both the bride and the groom had been settled in the neighbourhood for a longer period.

In general, the circumstances in which interaction with 'new people' in an urban neighbourhood emerges appear to be somewhat informal, inconsequential, and spontaneous. This pattern of communication characterises the everyday existence of migrant workers. This is particularly because their after work hours are mostly dominated by such social encounters. There are numerous anonymous communications in the neighbourhood. Knowing another's name might not be so important here. One can just initiate a simple conversation with somebody else who is not recognised by name, as happened with the newly-arrived Lamiri when fetching water. Such exchanges take place not just at *kontrakan* premises, but also at shops, food stalls, or even on the street. One time, when Heri and I were queuing at the public bathroom, we came across three workers, who we did not know but who we could identify from their uniforms, speaking of their work in the factory. Heri easily mixed with the group and slipped into the topic of conversation intimately as if he was talking with old friends. The three seemed also to treat him as one of them. Another time, as I was sitting in a coffee shop talking with two of my worker informants, a man came in. No one among us three knew anything about the person except that he was a factory worker wearing a work uniform of a company whose owner was allegedly linked to a national-scale corruption case (see Chapter 4). To my surprise, one of my informants asked the man about his opinion of whether or not his boss was guilty. Later, we (my informants, myself, the man, and the coffee shop worker) all drifted into a discussion about the conditions of the man's company and the experience of my two informants in their respective workplaces. Even at the end of the conversations in the public bathroom and the coffee shop, nobody introduced themselves to the others, we simply went our own ways.

In the industrial residential neighbourhood, people are assumed to be sharing a common experience, either as neighbourhood (*kampung*) resident or factory worker. In casual social encounters, a range of topics can be asked not just of a known colleague but also of others—complete strangers—identifiable by their factory uniforms. The varied topics of verbal exchange, such as complaints about the living environment, tales of childhood experiences, or gossip about other residents, represent an acknowledgement of the shared experience and

identity. Exposure to mass media and popular culture can also be a source for such exchanges in which this sense of commonality is embodied. These are the common themes which are reinforced at the social events in both residential and/or neighbourhood domains. Accordingly, these domains have created an alternate centre to the workplace and rural-based relations for migrants in their urban existence.



Plate 3.10 and Plate 3.11: Social Life in the Neighbourhood (photo:JNW)

### **Being Rejected by and Reconstituting Modernity**

Nevertheless, despite the proliferation of migrant networks enabling their mobility in determining residences, migrant workers in Tangerang remain constrained within the socially and economically-determined industrial neighbourhoods. Workers like Sri, Sari, Lamiri, Heri, Soeroji, and others, despite their search for urban modernity, are unlikely to become residents of the well-off urban enclaves where the 'true' representations of the metropolis are found in super malls, skyscrapers, the life of pop idols, and modern real estate. Therefore, as their domain of mobility remains limited in the designated enclaves for the working class, their customary urban trajectories are bounded by these marginal conditions. The fact that the newly shared-accommodation of Lamiri and Yudi was located just a hundred metres away from the lodgings they had previously stayed in, or that Heri's old and new places were in the same neighbourhood indicate the constricted extent of the migrants' domain of mobility.

The limited networks that arise from urban segregation has created a condition in which social relations amongst the residents become more intensive. It is the network that comprises individuals that share the same economic status which Crompton defines as the 'objective' term of class (cited in Hutchison and Brown 2001:3). This class, created as result of their workplace categorisation as wage labourers, who occupy the lower hierarchy within the structure of manufacturing corporations is a class in itself in a Marxist sense (Marx 1977). However, as indicated by Hobsbawm (1984, see also Thompson 1991:212) economic conditions alone do not form working class consciousness. Being a (migrant) worker did not cause a female worker fetching water at a well to conclude that she was sharing the same class as the newly-arrived Lamiri, who was yet to be officially recruited as a factory employee. However, knowing that he was also subjected to the same everyday experiences as herself and the rest of *kampung* residents—having to queue to access water and endure the marginality—the commonality of experience contributed to the recognition of class. *Kampung*, therefore, is also a domain where off-factory, non-production relations and everyday encounters with the urban (home) environment can establish shared experience amongst workers/residents. It is this experience that contributes to the construction of a shared identity amongst them, within which they feel equal. Hence, being arrogant (*sombong*) to others is unacceptable. The socially-performed activities help the neighbourhood's migrant workers to raise their understanding of their current situation and to make sense of it as a common concern. This, in turn, develops into what Hadiz (2001:117) terms 'a sense of solidarity'.<sup>32</sup> Mills, in her research on Bangkok industrial workers, argues that 'symbolic' events that emphasise collective cohesion gain the same weight as the politically-driven actions of the 'conventional labour movement' in cultivating working class solidarity (1999b:187). Those seemingly apolitical incidents present the workers with instruments to 'absorb new understandings of their difficulties not as isolated personal failures, but as collective issues of 'rights', 'justice' and 'dignity' (ibid.). The same applies to workers in Tangerang, whose locally-bounded networks allow them to undertake various activities collectively, during

which they can listen to each other's aspirations and communicate, as Mills says, 'similar concerns as *workers*' (p.187, italics in original).

The partitioning of the city based on economic categories, in which the affluent developed quarters are separated from the deprived underdeveloped ones, is actually typical of the process of modernisation experienced by newly-industrialised cities. Hans-Dieter Evers and Rudiger Korff (2000), discussing Southeast Asian urban centres, argue that '[t]he modernity' of the cities in the region embodies progress and regress alike, which reveals 'slum and the high-rise, subsistence production and global finance' at the same time (p.23). Such dichotomies and contrasting characteristics are even present in less-privileged Tangerang neighbourhoods where the glorious symbols of industrialisation share the same space with the residential quarters. In Gambir, for example, the dynamics of export-oriented industrialisation, reflecting the neighbourhood's incorporation into the world economy, does not eliminate or, at least, moderates the marginal features of the industrial residential neighbourhood. The destitute workers' lodgings, the shortage of basic facilities, and the disordered city, for example, generate a terrifying picture of the dark side of industrialisation. These are the conditions that so startled Sri, as introduced in the beginning of this chapter, when she realised the true nature of the 'city', her would-be urban home. Upon her arrival in Tangerang, she would certainly expect the other side of the city, the modern part, to be her urban reality. Therefore, urban place does not always represent newcomers' ability to 'recognize where their own self-interests lie' (Scott 1988:221, also Giddens 1986). To Sri and her colleagues, the neighbourhood where they make their urban home is by no means a representation of the social status they would like to attain, since its landscape is likely to reveal the low social status of its average residents. The deprived conditions of the *kampung* were certainly a shock to Sri, as revealed by her tears.

For individual migrants, the actuality of their residential quarters in industrial Tangerang is an expression of their 'exclusion' from 'an objective social process', called modernisation (Kahn 2001:16). This experience of exclusion is a result of modernisation's abandonment of a class that has enabled the sector, the manufacturing industries, to be celebrated as the 'primary engines of growth' (Hill

1997:23). Having undergone 'enlightenment' through their exposure to the penetration of facets of the urban into rural regions (see Chapter 2), modernity is viewed by migrants as a predestined privilege. It promises 'prizes' (Kahn 2001:24) for those who have been educated and enlightened by the process of 'the urbanisation of the rural' (Young 1994). The reality of the city revealed to them, however, is certainly far beyond their recognition of modernisation and/or modernity. Therefore, the illustration at the beginning of this chapter of the celebration of a first anniversary of becoming workers and, at the same time, becoming urban residents, should be situated within the context of giving a new meaning to migrants' existence in the city. Their actual experience of the city, which contradicts their preconception of what it will be like, hardly confers a sense of being other, in a discrete realm from their rural home; a quality they expected of modernity. On the contrary, their experience has been demeaning, as implied in their grief and disappointment at the urban reality they face.

The anniversary celebration served as a turning point for these grievances, to counter their exclusion from modernisation and to bring them back to the path of modernity. It was not merely a remembrance of their arrival and a moment for them to reflect on their one-year-long experience in the city. It was also a self-inauguration of the recently-invented identity which they wished to acquire in their migration to the city, regardless of the austerity of their existing neighbourhood. The presence of a birthday cake and candles is not just a ritual that normally accompanies anniversary celebrations. Rather, it indicates the migrants' adoption of 'modern' practices in celebrating a special occasion, which is extremely crucial in marking an important stage in one's life. Despite the Happy Birthday song appearing to be misplaced as no one's birthday was involved, the selection of the English version, rather than its Indonesian-translated version, seems pertinent to describe the rebirth of the new identity; the one/s that is/are urban, modern, and, perhaps, global. All these features embody a symbolic exercise that dissociates migrants from a rural tradition which rarely acknowledges those symbols.

Moreover, this emblematic event demonstrates an altered conception of life cycle amongst the rural-originated urban migrants. Embracing this new-style

of birthday celebration, which in this context symbolises a subject's transition between realms, shows a shift from sacred to secular in the celebration of rites of passage in the life cycle. In Javanese culture, for example, celebrating one's birthday is carried out on a 35 day cycle called *methon* (Jav. *methu*, coming out (from womb))<sup>33</sup>, rather than according to the Gregorian calendar. It is more a remembrance day than a celebration, as during the repeated cycle one is expected to practice asceticism by fasting, followed by a *slametan*, in which an individual and his/her family share the feast with neighbours. The feast comprises *nasi gudhangan*, which is mostly made up of rice complemented with snake beans (*kacang panjang*, lit. translation: long nuts) and bean sprouts, symbolising, respectively long life and the seed of life or fertility in terms of the number of children<sup>34</sup>; the qualities the person concerned wishes to have.<sup>35</sup> Gaining personal spiritual strength is therefore the main objective of this ascetic practice. Adults often combine it with meditation. Hence, *methon* does not only mark the individual as a spiritual being in relation to his/her universe. It further implies the remembrance of one's birth as sacred, through which, for example, one's *hari baik* (appropriate day) to carry out important events in life (i.e. marriage, circumcision, moving/building a house), is determined.

This seems diametrically opposed to the widely-known celebration of one's birthday, which is much more secular and increasingly imbued by somewhat hedonistic and pleasure-seeking activities. There was no *slametan*-like preparation for the feast to conform with the symbolic meanings to describe future expectations or relations between human being and the universe. Rather, the entire feast served that night at Sri and Sari's lodging comprised ready-made items. The birthday cake, the snacks wrapped in plastic bags, the crate of bottled soft drinks, and the mineral water in plastic glasses were all purchased from the nearby market. In addition, the 'feast' was not placed in a covered square basket of plaited bamboo (Jav. *bese*) as in *slametan*, but, rather, on disposable paper plates.

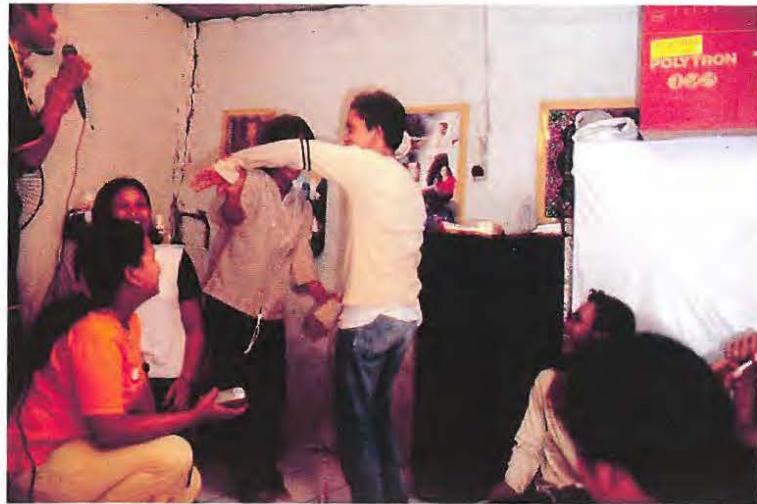


Plate 3.12: Celebrating the Journey 4:  
Exhilarating atmosphere (photo:RWJ)

Although a spiritual aura was certainly present at the girls' lodging, as indicated in the praying ritual prior to the 'party', a glamorous birthday party-like celebration reveals a reality that is more than just a sacred pursuit. The birthday-like celebration indicates an acknowledgment of a new identity that most rural children seek to achieve in entering urban life. The process of rebirthing in this new context and, hence, taking on a new identity requires reinforcement through a critical rite of passage, to mark the transition to the actuality of new 'life-worlds' (Appadurai 1996:193). That night event is a ceremony that might be expected to deliver strength to the celebrants and inaugurate them into a better quality of life in their supposedly mature stage of life. This is particularly because the rural-to-urban transition is considered a major one by most rural youth.

Williams, talking about modern drama (cited in Kruger 1993:56), likened social action to a cultural 'performance' in which 'the structures of feeling' that live in the performing 'society' are represented. It is a manifestation of how the society addresses its collective experiences 'by acting *on* and acting *in* them, in short, by performing them' (*ibid.*, italics in original). Therefore, the celebration performed by migrant workers in Gambir should not be seen as merely about appropriating the 'usual' material symbols (the ritual and its attributes) in order to get recognition of the migrants' conformity to modern or, even, global discourse. It is

also a cultural performance, and, hence, a 'symbolic action' (*ibid.*) with which Sri and her colleagues address their situations; their early exposure to modern cultural discourse, their expectation of modernity, and their contradictory experiences in the city they consider the 'site' of modernity. It symbolises the migrants' attempt to reconcile these contradictions in order to keep them on the track of their modern project, despite their marginal presence in the urban environment. The anniversary celebration is a reinforcement of what Williams describes as a 'subjunctive action', in which the 'marginalized community' discover a domain 'to *stage* their marginalization and to enact alternatives to the hegemonic center' (cited in Kruger 1993:56, italics from original). It is also about presenting a counter-reality to their existing not-so-modern existence. The event epitomises the migrants' active engagement in battling the conditions and seeking to re-incorporate themselves into the stream of modernity as well as to reclaim the promised 'prizes'.

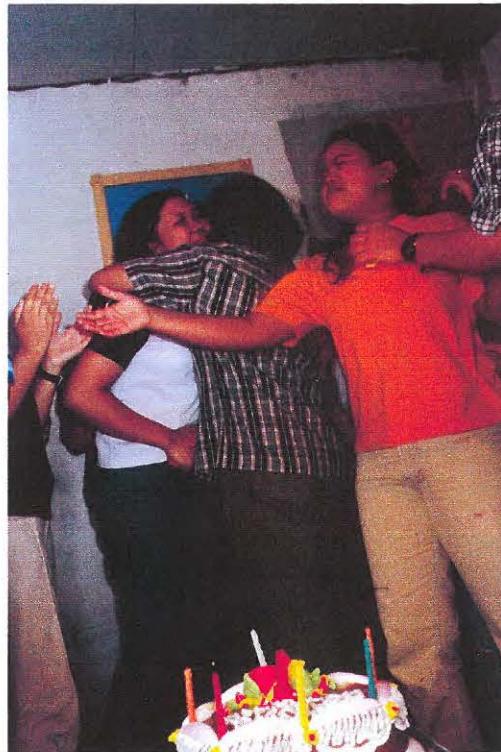


Plate 3.13: Celebrating the Journey 5:  
A moving moment after candle-  
blowing (photo:RWJ)

It is true, however, that such a celebration hardly changes their present-day context which excludes them from modernity and their imaginings of urban life. The minute the party ends, they have to return to their normal *kampung* reality, where the reinforcement of spiritual strength is hardly an adequate remedy for their pursuit of modernity and modern identity. Sri's tears fall as she remembers her arrival in the destitute neighbourhood. Yet, they can also mean she is crying for her future, having to endure her life in the place that is beyond her expectation of a city and knowing that even a novel birthday ritual can not deliver modern identity to her instantaneously. As long as these migrants continue to be the subject of urban segregation that condemns them to this socially and economically ill-fated social category, the urban forms they wish to embrace into their psyche and reality will remain a desired rather than realised identity. Yet, some birthday-like anniversary might be celebrated again in the following years.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have tried to link the urban migrant workers' search for modernity, begun in their rural life, with their contemporary urban existence that is hardly a tangible representation of their previous social imaginings about modernisation and modernity. As their urban reality contradicts such imaginings, a reconciliatory action, as described in the anniversary celebration, is required to curb these paradoxes.

The *kampung* has been the ongoing subject of constant marginality, particularly in terms of living environment and individuals' livelihood. The separation of this neighbourhood from the privileged part of town's middle and upper class symbolises an isolation of migrants from modernisation and the course of modernity they are pursuing in the urban centre. Engagement in the process of industrialisation does not situate them as the privileged beneficiaries of urban economic modernisation. This reality is viewed by migrant workers not only as unfair, but also creates a fear that they will not be able to seize the 'prizes' promised through their encounters since childhood, with the cultural instruments disseminating discourses on development and advancement.

Gambir, where migrant workers live, is not just a spatially-defined geographic neighbourhood. It is also a 'neighborhood' in Appadurai's sense, referring to the 'existing social forms' exercised by 'situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual and their potential for social reproduction' (Appadurai 1996:178-9). Appadurai argues that 'the production of a neighborhood is inherently an exercise of power over some sort of hostile or recalcitrant environment, which may take the form of another neighborhood' (*ibid.*:184). The actuality of migrant workers in the Tangerang urban *kampung* is, first of all, marked by the process of industrialisation which attracts them to the city. It is in the *kampung* that their attraction to the city is confronted by another actuality, namely, a spatial segregation due to the social antagonism typical of a capitalist society. Such social separation does not only designate the migrants socially as a less-privileged class but also geographically in marginalised quarters. There is, nonetheless, a shared feeling amongst migrants about their acceptance of their current deprived conditions : 'Well, what can I do? [Whether you] like it or not, we just have to like it (*dibetah-betahin*).'<sup>36</sup> It, therefore, does not by design make migrants perceive their neighborhood, their urban place, as merely transitional, as Jellinek (1991) found. As a result, there is a willingness to establish a relatively more permanent urban existence.

Making Gambir home is a recognition by migrants that their presence in the city is not short-lived. Even in rather extreme and transitional circumstances, Appadurai points out that the conditions of 'neighborhood' can be found in conflict-torn regions (e.g. Palestine), organised camps run by the United Nations (e.g. Somalia), refugee camps (of Afghans in Pakistan territories), or, even, concentration camps (1996:192). In such cases, he shows that the civilians, the displaced people, or the refugees are still able to perform their normal life and undergo rituals as in more settled circumstances. He said:

...these are places, nonetheless, marriages are contracted and celebrated, lives are begun and ended, social contracts made and honored, careers launched and broken, money made and spent, goods produced and exchanged (Appadurai 1996:192).

Though the Tangerang *kampung* is less transitional in nature in comparison to Appadurai's examples, the economic crisis and employment insecurity (see Chapter 2 and Chapter 4) are urban uncertainties that normally would not encourage one to establish a permanent existence. However, such insecurities do not preclude migrants in Tangerang from developing social forms as gestures to indicate their preparedness to consider the city as their (possible) future permanent home. The hunt for 'better' accommodation and the expansion of networks based on non-rural, newly-invented relations are two examples indicating the migrants' anticipation of urban possibilities. In Chapter 5, I will also demonstrate how the acquisition of consumer goods corroborates the notion of urban home and the city as an alternate centre to the migrants' universe.

Neighborhood is also a spatial location on which individuals base subjectivity and consciousness, termed by Appadurai (1996) as 'the production of locality'. 'Locality', according to Appadurai, is 'a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technology of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts' (1996:178). As locality relates mainly to the 'practices of local subjects in the specific neighborhoods' (*ibid.*:198), 'contexts' are central in this regard. The production of Gambir is inseparable from the aspirations of its migrant residents, obtained during their past existence (see Chapter 2), to realise their modern desires under urban *kampung* circumstances. It, therefore, represents 'a structure of feeling', as Appadurai (1996:182) puts it, in which practices within the neighborhood are constantly influenced by dialectical interweaving between their historicity and their contemporary nature, between aspirations and material conditions, between expectation and reality. The ritual of celebrating the anniversary of one's arrival is a realisation of such 'structure of feeling'. It reveals how migrants in Gambir try to avert their conditions of marginality and seek an opportunity through symbolic action to re-insert themselves into the mainstream of modernity. In short, the condition of social reproduction of the migrants' neighborhood is not merely highlighted by the implementation of practices of normal life. Similarly, it is marked by social sentiments and practices aimed at making urban migrants

relevant, and justifying their urban presence in an environment that is unlikely to resemble their aspirations of modernity.

Having said that, I tend to see the production of 'local subjects' in Gambir as not based on a commonality defined along the lines of pre-existing cultural homogeneity with its exact spatial boundaries. The neighborhood in urban Tangerang is an 'ethnoscape' in Appadurai's sense. Appadurai defines 'ethnoscape' as 'the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world' (1990:7). In addition, he states, the key idea of the concept is 'human motion' in which 'more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move' (*ibid.*). Departing from this conception, Gambir can be seen not merely as a community in which migrants from various places of origin in the rural areas live. Moreover, it is a landscape that does not merely feed the rural children's expectations of a better economic life, which, to some extent, their immediate provincial middle towns can actually provide. The neighborhood of migrant workers in Tangerang is also a place in which they imagine the realisation of their 'imagined world' (Appadurai, *ibid.*), namely modernity and its modern conditions.

Even for 'a place called home' (Massey 1992), the urban neighborhood where young migrants live does not produce the predetermined and rigid identities, a taken-for-granted character, inherently embedded in a place (p.12). The identities of migrant residents of the *kampung* are not a product of a distant past that is already well established throughout the course of historical time. Rather, it is constructed by recent dynamics, in which the shift of rural youth to the city is guided by unsettled imaginings of urban modernity, by, as Appadurai (1996:183) puts it, 'the volatility of images' generated by the cultural flow in the mass media (see Chapter 2). Rural youth who come to the urban centers seek to become modern beings without themselves knowing what a modern identity is like, apart from the embodiment of urban lifestyle and material symbols they assume characterise modernity. Their identity is also constituted by their struggle against urban grievances, by the common realisation of their disappointment in the urban reality which they have to endure. It is similarly produced by the place-based commonality established by the differentiated social relations in the

ethnoscape of the *kampung*. The construction of identities for migrant subjects in an urban industrial neighborhood is, therefore, a constant interpretation of their understanding of modernity, their reflection of their past experience, and, as I will return to in Chapter 4, their place in the juxtaposition between capital and labour.

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> During field research in Tangerang in the mid 1990s for my undergraduate thesis (Warouw 1996), when I worked closely with informants from a group of ten active and organised workers from an aluminium pan (enamelware) factory, I found that such characterisation was no more than stereotyping. The distribution of ethnic groups amongst the group was relatively even. Four men were from Sumatra (Lampung and Palembang), three men from Java (Banyumas, Central Java), and three women, the most active and energetic ones, were Sundanese (from Karawang, West Java). The group was not only engaged in organising work in its own factory, but also in encouraging workers from neighbouring industrial establishments to take an active stance against unfair practices in their workplaces.

<sup>2</sup> KTP stands for *Kartu Tanda Penduduk*.

<sup>3</sup> The impact of ethnically-selected recruitment led to widespread forging of identity documents. Particularly males, from Sumatra island normally borrowed documents from their non-Sumatran counterparts (preferably from Java), photocopied them, replaced the names by whitening out the original ones, and photocopied the manipulated paper work. The loose policy and the lack of control on document submission at that time enabled the use of fake documents in the area to spread, as confirmed by a number of stories I heard in relation to applying for industrial positions. I heard only one story about a Palembang male worker (one in the group mentioned in footnote 1) who was caught using fake documents after working for two years in the company. His file was scrutinised by the company only after he had been actively involved in organising a series of strikes in his company. He was faced with two options, to be referred to the police for forging official documents or to resign, of which he chose the latter. To me, he said that he should not have used the documents of a (Javanese) colleague also employed in the same factory, enabling the company to easily trace and compare the files of its work force.

<sup>4</sup> This coding has barred them from entering employment areas regarded as strategic, such as education, civil service, and media, in which they allegedly have the potential to propagate 'subversive' opinions (against the government) to the public. Military service is another area they are discriminated against. Such restrictions also extend to their offspring. Without an ID card, one's legal identity, for instance, is denied. As a result, even a corpse who has a name and whose identity is known by relatives/colleagues must be buried as 'unidentified', as seen in the case of a homeless adolescent recorded by a Yogyakarta-based NGO on street children (Yayasan Humana 2003).

<sup>5</sup> SKKB stands for *Surat Keterangan Kelakuan Baik*.

<sup>6</sup> Barker's article, however, does not particularly address the issue of legal documents. It mainly discusses the issue of state-organised mysterious killings (*petrus, pembunuhan misterius*) of those alleged to be criminals and the neighbourhood security system (*siskamling, sistem keamanan lingkungan*). Both in fact represent '*the deterritorialization* of local security practices in a manner that was conducive to central state control' (Barker 1998:9, emphasis in original).

<sup>7</sup> At least, the issuance of SKKB by the police authority officially indicates that one is clear from the anti-left stigma. In application form for SKKB, there is a field asking the names of parents and whether or not the parents were once associated with the 'illegal'

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organisations (*organisasi terlarang*), referring to the pre-1965 Indonesian Communist Party (*PKI*) and its affiliated groups.

<sup>8</sup> The role of local administrative apparatus in recruiting country children to the industries more direct is addressed by Ong (1987) in her case of Malaysian factory women. The company in need of labour asked 'local village committees to announce the factory recruitment drives' (p.153). This direct relationship is enabled by the relative proximity of the firms to the villages of origin of the potential workers, a condition simply absent in Tangerang industries.

<sup>9</sup> His colleague is a Betawi (the indigenous people of Jakarta), whose wife comes from the same village as Hidayat.

<sup>10</sup> The shortage of water, bathrooms and lavatories in the neighbourhood has created an opportunity of an owner of a small piece of land to start a business of paid public bathing and toilets, which are also in relatively unhygienic condition. People can also do their washing in that area. Despite the poor quality of water provided, turbid and unpleasantly odorous, the facilities were normally busy prior to and after work hours. The lack of clean water to be boiled for drinking also means the neighbourhood's residents have to spend extra for drinking water sold in gallon containers and bottles.

<sup>11</sup> Apart from dealing with the maintenance, security and social relations in the company-rented lodgings, the head of *mess*, normally an elder appointed by residents, undertakes a mediating role between the company and the workers in relation to such matters. He is also in charge of introducing newly-arrived recruits to the wider community in the neighbourhood as well as giving them guidance about the routines in the factory.

<sup>12</sup> Announcements of job availability, mostly for unskilled positions, are normally indicated in writing at the company's front gate, reading: *ada lowongan kerja* (jobs available).

<sup>13</sup> Sharing with colleagues from the same place of origin is common, though the colleague/s are not necessarily from the same village where they have known each other since childhood. An introduction to those from the same district, province, or even island in the urban or factory environment can similarly lead to the decision to share accommodation.

<sup>14</sup> Hadiz (1997) saw that the conditions in which 'basic amenities' had to be communally shared had been the genesis of the construction of 'a sense of solidarity' (p.128). It is a context in which verbal light encounters can involve 'exchang[ing] gossip, experiences, and information' with others (Hadiz 2001:117). The interaction that comes from such simple encounters is, therefore, quite crucial to understanding the emergence of labour activism and the dissemination of labour rights in a non-political environment.

<sup>15</sup> Antlov also discusses 'good neighbour' in Javanese rural setting (1999:202).

<sup>16</sup> *RT* stands for *Rukun Tetangga*.

<sup>17</sup> Before migrating to Tangerang, Pak Sudi had miscellaneous jobs (*kerja serabutan*) in Jakarta from 1963 to 1985, such as a construction worker and a noodle soup hawker.

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Upon the invitation of his sister, who had a small food stall in Gambir, he moved to Tangerang in 1985 and helped the business.

<sup>18</sup> The corporations in the area, as admitted by a former head of the local administrative unit (*kelurahan*) in charge at that time, also contributed to the realisation of this initiative

<sup>19</sup> *Centeng* is different from the *satpam*, the company's official uniformed security guard. *Satpam* mostly deal with internal affairs within the factory complex. *Centeng* are more like a buffer between the company and the surrounding community and whose task it is to prevent disturbance coming from external parties. They are normally recruited informally—without work contract—from the prominent figures within the surrounding community. Elsewhere, I indicated that the decline of the military role in industrial affairs following the 1998 change of power has increased the utilisation of *centeng* in protecting the company's interest (2003). The fact that most *centeng* are local figures running lodging businesses, thus the workers' landlords, makes *centeng* is often effective to persuade their worker tenants not to participate in collective actions (Warouw 2003, see also Hadiz 1997:129,210n38). The local economy (lodging business, food stall, shops, etc.) is dependent on manufacturing industries, so that any disturbance (strike, labour protest) to the companies will threaten the continuation of the production process, hence the need for stability in the local economy, is the argument that I often heard from the landlord *centeng* to their worker tenants. However, Pak Sudi's 'power' as *centeng* was not because he was a landlord, but more because he had a position as an official (*Ketua RT*, neighbourhood officials) at the local administrative structure.

<sup>20</sup> The affluent were mostly those whose husbands were running lodging business. I rarely found unmarried indigenous women above 20 year-old. Young women were mostly in their school ages (senior high school). I knew few local notables, including my landlord, who sent their daughters to university.

<sup>21</sup> He had an undergraduate degree from an Islamic tertiary education institution

<sup>22</sup> The demarcation between the native 'entrepreneur' and migrant worker in terms of employment, however, is not so rigid. A few successful businesses in Gembor actually involved long-time migrants. A Bataks husband and wife from Karo, northern Sumatra, who had lived in the area for at least ten years, owned and ran the biggest sundries shop. A Javanese family from Banyumas, central Java) family, who had been in the area for nearly thirteen years, opened the most-visited food stall. As the business grew, the family managed to buy a piece of land at the back of the food stall, on which a two-storey barrack-like lodgings was established.

<sup>23</sup> The grandiosity of some amenities are apparent from the names, such as World Trade Centre (WTC) Matahari in BSD and Metropolis Town Square in Kota Modern (Modern City)(Kompas 7/7/2003). Lippo Karawaci has an international standard Siloam Gleneagles Hospital (Kompas 7/7/2003). There are 17 banks in BSD alone (Kompas 28/12/1997).

<sup>24</sup> Lippo Karawaci, developed by the Lippo Group, for example, has a 52 floor apartment building, claimed by one of the group's directors to be the world's highest apartment building outside the United States (Kompas 7/7/2003). Most of the apartment's residents are expatriates working as managers in manufacturing factories in Tangerang. Another is the German Centre in BSD, built by the German Government and claimed by the Centre's

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president to be a high quality building compared to the skyscrapers in Jakarta (Kompas 7/7/2003).

<sup>25</sup> An additional paradox is the location of Soekarno-Hatta international and domestic airport on the north-east side of the city, which is in reality only five to ten kilometres from the deprived neighbourhoods. The sight of commercial aeroplanes flying low during take-off and landing can obviously be spotted at almost any hour by *kampung* residents from the neighbourhoods where migrant workers live.

<sup>26</sup> The subject of the photo actually asked my colleague, a photographer, to take his picture with the poster to show that he had some resemblance with his idol, including a pierce on both right eyebrows.

<sup>27</sup> Yudi himself is originally from Cirebon in western Java. However, since adolescence he had lived in Depok, on the southern outskirts of Jakarta, and had been helping his parents in a small food stall business before he decided to move to Tangerang. It was his relative who invited him to come to Tangerang as, back then, the company he later were recruiting new workers. This experience of having lived on the outskirts of a metropolis made Yudi no longer a complete stranger to a town like Tangerang, which is, in fact, on the western outskirts of Jakarta.

<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, despite the new forms of relationship based on (urban) locality becoming increasingly pivotal, the countryside-originated connection remains unbroken. As described in a previous chapter, a return trip to the workers' home towns on some specified, particularly religious, occasions is normally organised around the rural-based connection in order to minimise costs or to ease insecure feelings when travelling at peak season.

<sup>29</sup> The importance of a head of *RT* in Indonesian society is addressed, for example, by Guinness (1986) in his research on a marginal riverside neighbourhood in Yogyakarta. A head of *RT* is involved in community life in : a) registering new arrivals, 'births and deaths', b) being invited to residents' 'household ceremonies', c) being asked for advice when a household wants to 'build [a] house' or ceremonies (p.152-3).

<sup>30</sup> Guinness also found that the head of *RT* is usually called as *bapak*, assuming that *RT* unit is a 'large family' whose paramount figure is acknowledged as a father (1986:152). During my presence in the area, all heads of *RT* in the neighbourhood were men.

<sup>31</sup> His status as hajj placed him also as a moral guard in the neighbourhood. He once told to a small crowd in a coffee shop about forbidding a tenant to live together with a partner from the opposite sex outside of marriage. However, issues such as this seemed to rise at the level of discourse, as I never found or heard of him directly reprimanding a particular tenant committing the action. I knew a woman worker whose male partner occasionally stayed for several days at her place. Nobody in the complex, however, brought the issue to Pak Mardi. Other residents, though gossiping about it, told me that it was not their business and, more importantly, they did not want to cause the woman, who was, in fact, their own colleague, trouble. It was because of this silence of other residents that Par Mardi, as far as I was concerned, never talked about one particular person violating this 'moral' norm, nor he was aware of such things happening.

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<sup>32</sup> In addition, Hadiz argues that these communal occurrences, with which 'a sense of solidarity' becomes possible, can be the source of the emergence of labour activism and labour mobilisation in the frame of production relations.

<sup>33</sup> I am indebted to Amrih Widodo (conversation on 12/11/02) and Yulia Immajati (15/11/02) for their rich knowledge of Javanese tradition regarding this particular matter.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Terence Hull in *Each Child Brings Its Own Fortune* (1975), who discusses the value of children amongst the Javanese lower and lower middle class families in Maguwoharjo, Yogyakarta (i.e. as additional labour force to the family).

<sup>35</sup> Guinness (1986:72-3), however, reported that *nasi gudhangan* in a Yogyakartan *kampung* is particularly used in *syukuran*, a 'thanks (feast) to God'. Apart from birthdays, *syukuran* is also a 'celebration of an event such as a birth, a circumcision, a child's passing an exam, recovery from a sickness, [and] return from a period away'. Meanwhile, *slametan* is 'to celebrate marriage, the seventh month and the other pregnancy ceremonies, 35 days after birth, circumcision and all the death ceremonies'.

<sup>36</sup> This is a Betawi (the native of Jakarta) expression which literally means making oneself at home. However, it can also refer to a state of submission in which one does not have many options but to accept the one left. Apart from this seeming expression of passivity, Chapter 4 will illustrate the workers' efforts to manipulate the all-out structural control within the industrial regime and reasons that highlight their endurance of the conditions of deprivation. I will also present in Chapter 6 the way the workers bring a new significance to the factory uniform to establish their own dignity.

# Chapter 4

## Experiencing the Work



*Plate 4.1: A Factory and the Wall (embedded with broken glass)*  
*(photo:RWJ)*

## Chapter 4

### Experiencing the Work: Disciplines and Tensions in Global Factories

Factory work provides rural youth-turned urban migrant workers different experience and conditions from the rural setting in which they grew up. A factory shares characteristics of a 'total institution' in Erving Goffman's (1971) sense, in which individuals are detached from the larger society and their previous existence and, subsequently, placed in a circumstance where disciplines and organisation are designed to sustain the regime of industrial production. The incorporation into the industrial institution is marked by symbolic rituals imposed by the corporate agency which strip off the identity and individuality of young workers. For Foucault, this enables the authority to create subordinate individuals as the object of power, as 'docile bodies' whose initiative has been subtracted and replaced by 'new forms of knowledge' (Foucault 1991:155). Therefore, this incorporation is also the way rural children are introduced to the 'new mechanisms of power' (*ibid.*) which regulate their mind and body to conform with the corporate project of commodity production.

The internalisation of such mechanisms is accomplished through habituating the self to capitalist production (Braverman 1974). The significance of habituation is not merely related to the technological transformation, but equally to the conditioning of workers to become an extension of machinery. This includes training the workers to appreciate the precision of task execution measured by the clock in order to ensure progression in the assembly line, as discussed by Thompson (1967) for the Industrial Revolution in England. Thompson argued that the conception of time in industrial production has trained and transformed the agrarian body into a capitalist instrument whose movement is set to synchronise with the rhythm of the shopfloor (*ibid.*). Amongst the Southeast Asian agricultural pre-capitalist societies, the 'sense of time and rhythm' (Wolf

1992:110) has been expressed differently, ranging from time division based on Islamic five daily prayers to time measurement based on duration of smoking cigars (Ong 1987, Robinson 1987, Wolf 1992). Therefore, the transition to capitalist production results in rural subjects organising everyday life in accordance with clock-based time partition. A factory also offers the workers industrial disciplines that meticulously define every single movement of individuals in order to bring maximum utility in achieving the objective of capitalist production. The implementation of these disciplines requires surveillance machinery, which along with time-based organisation and habituation to the routine operation make up what Foucault terms 'the calculated technology of subjection' to replace the 'traditional...violent forms of power' (1991:221). In labour-intensive corporations, the deployment of a surveillance mechanism is imperative to ensure that control from the highest structure remains intact at the bottom level of the hierarchy. As for the rural youth in their adjustment to the industrial regime, such encounters with this supervisory apparatus become their experience in Weberian 'bureaucratic administration' typical in modern rational organisations (Weber 1947:311).

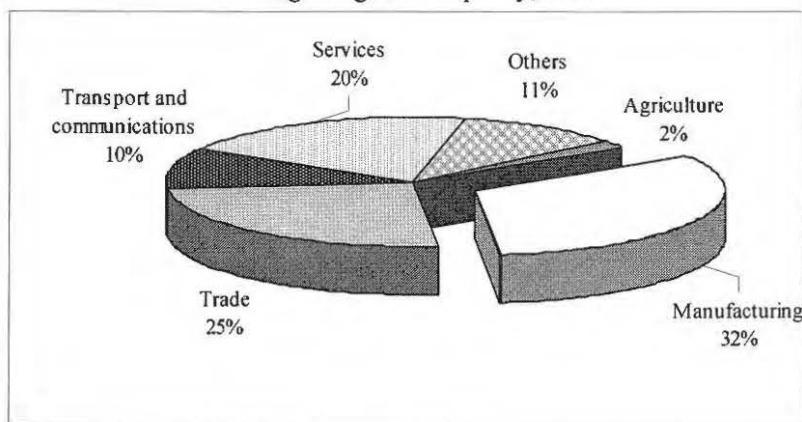
In this chapter, I am seeking to explore the migrant workers' experience in the capitalist manufacturing corporations and the processes that integrate them into the logic of commodity production. The workplace experience exposes the urban migrants to the modern sector of the economy, in which a disciplining process within an industrial regime and a 'modern' system of production are introduced to the workers. However, despite the constant pressure and distress on the shopfloor, and the habituation to the harsh factory regime, I showed that everyday resistance against the workplace's tensions remains possible. Pressure in the workplace is seen by the workers as an attack on their dignity. This justifies their defiant responses to the discipline and set of conduct expected on the factory floor. Later in this chapter, I will discuss a variety of dissent responses as the representation of workers' effort to bring back their 'humanity' (Ong 1987:8) in the domain where their subjection is supposedly complete. I will also indicate that, though factory work provides the migrants with the sense of 'uplifting' from their rural (agricultural) existence, it does not mean that they embody a feeling of

attachment to the job. I found that workers' expectations of a better occupation beyond the factory work leads to the view that factory work is merely transitional, at least in the workers' imaginings. This view often explains workers' acceptance of the harsh industrial experience and their low attachment/loyalty to the company/employer.

### **The Walls: Industrialising Rituals**

It was nearly seven o'clock in the morning when thousands of factory workers streamed into a badly maintained street on their way to an industrial cluster in the south of Gambir neighbourhood. A Korean-owned shoe factory, a subcontracting factory producing Nike shoes, a Chinese under-license motorbike factory, a Caltex-affiliated factory producing oil-drilling components, a Korean-owned leather golf glove factory, amongst others, are packed into this southern complex. It also includes a giant industrial compound of the locally-owned PT GT Group, whose production diversification ranges from tyre industries, a women's sanitary pad factory, a nylon thread factory, and a filament factory. The importance of manufacturing industries to Tangerang Municipality can be seen from its role as the major economic activities in town according to 1999 figure (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1: Percentage of Households by Economic Sectors in Tangerang Municipality, 1999**



*Source:* BPS Kota Tangerang 2000, p.36-7.

The noise of machines, the sight of a factory's smokestack issuing forth thick and dark smoke, the heavy container trucks, or recent model cars (owned by the industries' top executives), all symbolise the grandeur of industrialisation. There is the factory gate (*gerbang pabrik*), through which the workers sign up for one domain and leave the other, and vice versa. Lining up in front of the gate—often with long queues that frequently spill into the street causing a traffic jam—is a morning ritual for all workers before they are allowed to enter the factory premises. They have to put on their identity badge (*peneng*) which is checked by the company's security officials. It is normally attached to the pocket of the work uniform. Failure to abide by the rule will affect the worker's personnel record which will be considered when the 'season of dismissal' comes, particularly if the employer is facing economic difficulty. For a newly-recruited (one who has worked for less than a year, with the status of temporary employee (*buruh harian*), such a mistake will delay any promotion to a more permanent position (*buruh tetap*).

The time consuming preparation for work in their substandard accommodation and the limited public transport put pressure on workers arriving on time. Under such pressure, failing to carry the badge seems to be excusable, but such an excuse simply does not count with the employers. Accordingly, the identity badge, though small in size, has become a vital attribute that can determine the very existence of an individual in an industrial setting, as dismissal and promotion are very much dependent on compliance with such rules. Even those who have no intention of pursuing a future career in the factory still have to comply with the policy as salary is only paid after the company identity badge is presented to the company's cashier.

In his explorations, particularly on mental patients and prison inmates, Goffman (1971) introduced the term 'total institutions' (p.16) to describe the totality of mental hospitals and penitentiaries in detaching subjects from social interaction with their larger habitation outside the institution. He added that the particularity of such institutions is highlighted in the centralising of activities under one 'single authority', the uniformity of treatment upon all subjects under their influence; and the organisation of activities under a supervisory apparatus

executing strict rules (p.17). In order to effect the detachment, symbolic procedures are required. There is a ritual called 'trimming' or 'programming' (p.26), in which the body is adjusted and habituated to 'the administrative machinery' and internal rules of the institution immediately upon admission.

The industrial factory can be seen to have attributes of the total institution. The badge is more than just an identity card for administrative and security reasons. It represents the programming of the worker's behaviour to conform with the industrial mindset as well as the 'trimming' of the body to fit the industrial obligations. The identification badge is a 'summary' of the work agreement (*kontrak kerja*) between the workers and the employers. While a work agreement is usually referred to when a dispute occurs, the badge which has to be worn at all times in the workplace represents the employee's commitment within the factory domain to abide by the workplace regulations. Without it being shown, the workers are unlikely to be considered as the company's responsibility and, therefore, there is a threat that their basic rights as employees will be ignored.

Presenting the identity badge to the security guard is not the sole morning ritual at the factory's front gate. To continue Goffman's argument, the accomplishment of the process of programming is also determined by management efforts to undermine the subject's identity and their 'usual image to others' (ibid. p.30). Within the institution, the principle of uniformity applies to every single subordinate individual and personal image relies on the definition generated by the authority. Stripping attributes that have an association with the subjects' prior existence is necessary. Personal attributes are the representation of 'self-identification' (ibid.26) which can be in contradiction with the purpose of the institutions. This is illustrated in the case of Ery, a female migrant worker employed at PT MKS, a South Korean-owned footwear industry, which put in place a policy of body-searching before workers entered the plant. In this export-oriented company producing semi-casual leather shoes, workers are not allowed to bring food or drink from outside into the factory compound. Only food and drink provided by the company can be consumed in the designated canteen area during the set meal time. A few other articles are also subject to such exclusion. Ery stated that *mukena*, a white cloak covering the body and head for Islamic

prayer, is not permitted on the shop-floor, and is only to be used in the prayer room (*musholla*) within the factory compound. She explained:

We are watched by the security guard from the front gate. The guard examines whether or not we are carrying *mukena*. It is not allowed to be brought in. It has to be left at the security post. When the call for prayer [from the mosque nearby] is heard, we come back to the post to get the *mukena*, take it to the *musholla*, and leave it there afterwards for the next prayer. It takes time to walk such a distance, whereas we have to work out the limited time allocated for prayer. Plenty of running around!

When interviewed, Ery and her colleague, Lely, told me that they had become accustomed to such restrictions and could understand the reasons for them. Having food and drink during work, as they said, might be a distraction to the production process. At the same time, however, they also maintained that it was arduous to keep up their physical well-being when their kind of the work demanded concentration and physical labour with only one break for a meal in an eight-hour-long shift. The scene of employees being scrutinised by the security guard is repeated at the end of a shift or overtime. They have to line up once again, waiting their turn to be searched, including body-searched before they can pass through the gate. At this end-of-shift search, the company's interest is to secure the property of the enterprise against those trying to illegally take things out (see below).

Such body-searching indicates the lack of trust the company has in its employees. It demonstrates that the idea of harmonious industrial relations, as emphasised in Pancasila Industrial Relation (*HIP, Hubungan Industrial Pancasila*) (see Chapter 1), is a delusion. Putting workers under constant daily scrutiny indicates the company's belief that workers are capable of action that might harm the enterprise. Statements about equal status in labour and capital relations actually provide both employers and employees with an ideological argument to minimise industrial conflict. The HIP, however, serves more the interest of the employer, particularly when an industrial dispute takes place and the 'ideal' concept is referred to in order to urge the workers to accept the company's offer. However, the supposedly harmonious approach does not appear

to be reflected in the implementation of a body-searching policy, which is imposed unilaterally by the employer. It is an implicit acknowledgement of the continuing tension and suspicion that overshadows the relations between labour and capital.

### **The Production Floor: Experiencing the Work**

Like many other manufacturing companies in Tangerang, life in a footwear factory, PT MKS, begins when the morning bell rings. At 7.30 sharp, the beginning of the shift, Ery—a worker among about 1,000-strong work-force employed in the plant—has to be sitting on her line in the hand-sewing area. There are ten lines in the division, each operated by 24 workers. Here, shoes are finished by manually stitching a design on the unornamented model. Hand-sewing work is the third step within the overall production process. The company exports its products to the U.S, Japan and South American countries. Several workers explained that the products were domestically marketed in only a few selected outlets, such as in Mal Taman Anggrek, a shopping mall for the middle class in West Jakarta, with a retail price at least Rp 900,000 (A\$180), or nearly twice the government-regulated minimum monthly wage in year 2002, that is Rp 591,266 (A\$118)(see Chapter 5).

The production floor consists of seven divisions. The cutting division is where the production process starts, in which plain leather is incised with a particular pattern by a machine-activated sharp instrument. The incised sheet is then shaped in a mould in the moulding division. The sheet is first softened by soaking it in a chemical solution. Once the sheet has been contoured in the moulding division, it is forwarded to the sewing division, whose task is to construct a plain shoe by sewing patterned pieces of moulded leather together. This work, which is predominantly performed by female workers, is carried out with specifically designed sewing machines. From here, the shoe is passed to Ery's division of hand-sewing that decorates the product. The level of complexity of the task in this division depends on the particular design ordered. The more intricate the design, the more time it takes to put the last touches to a pair of

shoes. As soon as the hand-sewing task is completed, the sole bottoming division glues the decorated shoe upper and the rubber sole together. The finished shoes are now ready to be packed in the packing division before they are transported out for local market or export. In addition to the principal divisions described above, there is a general division (*bagian umum*), whose task is to forward the results from one division to the next processing section within the assembly line.

The normal work hours in this shoe factory are until 3.30 in the afternoon. However, most of the time during my fieldwork, I noticed that workers from the hand-sewing division would not come back home until 10.30-11.00 in the evening. Ery explained that in the peak season, when demand for the products was high, the company forced the shop-floor employees to undertake 'compulsory overtime' (*lembur wajib*) in order to meet production deadlines. The length of compulsory overtime varied from one division to another. During high season, divisions other than hand-sewing would complete their work as early as either 6.00 p.m or 9.00 p.m. According to Ery, the use of machines made the work in other divisions more efficient and allowed shorter work hours. In addition, those divisions mainly dealt with the production of components that required no correction as the accuracy of the machines had reduced the number of mistakes. In the cutting division, for example, once the cutting instrument was set to incise a certain pattern, it would perform the task repetitively at a constant interval with relatively high precision. The same applied to the moulding division, with workers having only to put the sheet of patterned leather into the pre-installed mould that was set according to a particular design, and, subsequently, the result would take a shape following the desired contour.

In contrast, a rather complicated task was required in the hand-sewing division. The manual nature of the work, in which the involvement of mechanical auxiliary tools was almost zero, made the task in the division the hardest of all production stages. Workers were required (*ditarget*) to finalise two pairs per hour for a simple design with one pattern on each side of the shoe, or one pair per hour for a more complex design with more patterns. Several female workers from the division admitted that completing one pair in one hour was almost unattainable during the first three months trial period. Those from other divisions confirmed

the intricate nature of work in the hand-sewing division. They stated that none of the workers from their division could perform the task in the hand-sewing division. In contrast, those from the hand-sewing division could easily perform the tasks from other divisions. As manual labour was not able to assure the precision and perfection of the results in the hand-sewing division, especially when the workers were getting tired and their concentration dropped off, piles of rejected items, mostly loose or detached threads, had to be re-done. This added to the employees' existing stress and the feeling of being 'chased' (*keteter*) when they already had to meet the target of one or more pairs of shoes an hour. Given its degree of complexity, the company employed more workers in this section than any other division in the company—nearly a third of its work force on the production floor.

Though most workers acknowledged that the adjustment to corporate discipline was always difficult given the pressure of work to meet production deadlines, they accepted the company's policy of compulsory overtime. This acceptance was mostly based on pragmatic reasons; overtime was expected to help boost their earnings so that they could be more flexible in spending and were able to allocate expenditure to other needs beyond daily basic necessities (see Chapter 5). However, Ery and her colleague, Lely, were reluctant to have to work up to 10.30 in the evening, spending fifteen uninterrupted hours on the production floor, with only short breaks for mealtimes and prayers. They argued that prolonged work hours gave the workers little chance to do other things, not necessarily in the way of leisure and recreation but more in the sense of domestic tasks at lodgings. Ery said:

I do not mind doing overtime (*lembur*) work, as long as it does not go until 10.30 in the evening. If I work until 10.30, my mind gets fed up (*suntuk*), I get sick of working (*jenuh*), my body gets tired (*capek*). Working until that late means we don't have enough time to take a night rest, because on the following day we have to be in the factory again at 7.30 in the morning. Working until 8.30 in the evening would be quite enough (*paspasan*). When we get home, there would still be time to wash our clothes, do something else, and we can get enough rest.

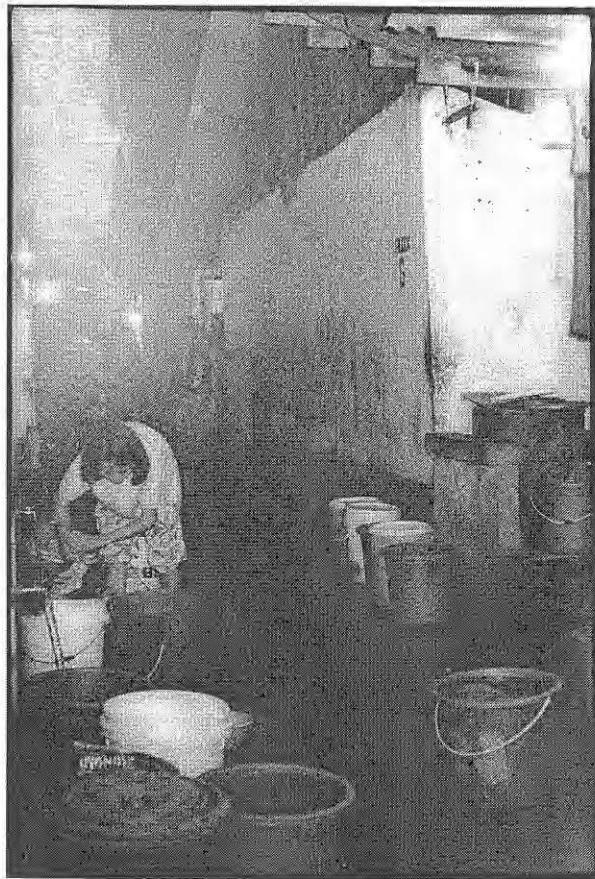


Plate 4.2: Washing the Clothes after Work (before Midnight) (photo:RWJ)

For most workers who had to keep working after normal work hours (*nyambung shift* in local terms) having to stay in the plant until late evening brought a feeling of discomfort. This was not only because the evening was supposed to be a time of peaceful respite: many admitted that it felt strange to have to work hard after dark. This appeared to be an extension of the experience migrants brought from their villages, in which most activities, particularly economic, ceased at dusk or when the air resounded with the early evening (*maghrib*) call for Islamic prayer from the mosque. Mills (1999b:187) (with the 'pre-existing images' about rural society amongst the Thai urban workers) and William Roseberry (1994) (with the 'images of the peasant' amongst the Venezuelan urban proletariat) have seen the significance of rural values in shaping the perspective of the marginalised urban subjects on their existence in the city. Contrasting the problematical conditions of

subsistence in the city with the benevolent countryside, for example, can become 'a moral economy of protest' toward urban scarcity (Roseberry 1994:77). In Tangerang factories, such values and images become the source of tension in workers' adaptation to the capitalist disciplines and, hence, challenge the totality of power of the corporate agencies. Their encounter with the factory regime has become a medium for workers to connect with the rural community by using their romanticised pictures of the village to judge the appropriateness (or otherwise) of urban reality.

Prolonged work hours and pressure to meet deadlines were not the only causing of stress. The workers often complained about being reproached by the fretful (*cerewet*) and fault-finding (*bawel*) head of their group, the immediate supervisor, when the subordinates were working too slowly. Lely stated that the head of group frequently said: 'What kind of sewing are you doing. Don't you feel ashamed (*malu*) in front of your friend who can complete more [output]?' In her conversation with me she could only respond: 'She (the head of line) shouldn't compare me with my colleagues. We are not using machines at work. My hand can only do that much, what can I say?'

Break times were not frequent enough and considered too short for workers to recover after physical hard labour that demanded total concentration during work hours. From morning bell at 7.30, they were only permitted to leave the production premises for one hour at 11.30 am for lunch and afternoon prayer. As food and drink from outside were not allowed, lunch was provided in the canteen by the company, and drinking water was available on the production floor. Tea was provided on the production floor on Tuesday and Friday only. There was no chance to relax during the break as workers from all divisions had to line up to get their meals. Most Moslem workers went to to *mushalla*, located at the back of the complex, for Islamic prayer. Workers had to pick up the prayer attributes at the front gate and then walk about 400 metres to the *mushalla* at the back, before they fulfilled their holy obligation. There might be a few minutes left, inadequate for them to catch their breath, before they resumed working at 12.30 in the afternoon. They did not take a break at 3.30 in the afternoon in the transition between shifts in the case of overtime. The afternoon shift dinner and

prayer break was even shorter, between 6.00 and 6.30. Lining up for one's meal, eating, walking to the *mushalla*, and prayer, all had to be done in half an hour. After dinner, there would be no break until the end of the shift. In addition to the dinner at the canteen, the company offered workers a meal allowance of Rp2,000 (40 cents), and a plastic container of instant noodles to be taken home if overtime went until 10.30 in the evening. Workers often felt hungry a few hours after lunch or dinner, but food of any kind was strictly prohibited on the shop-floor. This caused the workers' concentration and stamina to drop even lower. However, on some occasions, workers managed to smuggle snacks, chocolate bars, or candy in their pockets into the production building and ate them secretly. 'Don't worry, if we are found taking food in, we're just lectured (*diomelin*) by the head of our line,' said Ery with humour. Talking to a colleague on the same line, sitting less than a metre away, was also against the rules, exacerbating fatigue, drowsiness, and boredom.

The conditions in the production building were blisteringly hot, partly because the outside temperature might reach 32°C during the dry season. In addition, many complained that the building's asbestos ceiling caused high temperatures in the poorly-ventilated workplace: 'The asbestos is right over our head, no wonder it is so hot inside.' Several fans installed were unable to cool down the room and to prevent the workers from sweating. The working environment became more unpleasant when the air resounded with the deafening noise that came from the blower machine drying the adhesive used in the assembling division. When asked whether the noise pollution disturbed their physical well-being and concentration, a teenage worker responded: 'I'm already used to that noise, I'm not troubled any more.' Most employees in the company had become accustomed to the repulsive and hazardous nature of the work. They had to be extra careful in treating the particular materials and substances in their area. The dust that came from the leather had the potential to cause skin irritation. Workers in the moulding division were at risk of exposure to the chemical substance used to soak the leather. Hand-sewing workers, particularly when getting weary, were vulnerable to accidents caused by the sizeable and unhygienic

needles that might accidentally wound a finger, leading to swelling that could last for several days.

### **The Superiors: Encountering the System**

The direct superior of most shop-floor workers in PT MKS was the head of the group (*ketua regu*) who supervised a line. The number of lines in each division varied. In the hand-sewing division, for example, there were ten lines. Above the heads of groups was the head of line (*ketua line*), who supervised several lines. There were two heads of line in the division, each of whom supervised five lines. The heads of line were subordinated to a head of division (*ketua bagian*), whose task was to command the workers in his/her area down the hierarchy in order to meet the daily quota of a particular division based on the instructions of the production manager. The production manager, a South Korean national, oversaw the heads of division on the production floor.

While organised to serve the organisation of production as well as provide supervision over the production flow, the hierarchy was equally designed to control the physical mobility of the employees for non-production-related activities within the factory premises. When a worker was ill and wanted to see a doctor at the health clinic, he or she had to complete a referral letter (*surat berobat*), obtainable from the head of group. Only with the written approval of this supervisor was the ill employee able to leave the line. Lely complained that several times when she was dreadfully ill, the head of group, for no obvious reason, would not give her permission to leave work to see the doctor or simply to take a rest at home. She added that, based on her experience, a female head of group was often reluctant to give approval. A female head of group was always fussy and did not readily believe one's request, if the worker was female. Lely stated that she preferred a male supervisor, as they were usually more understanding (*pengertian*). If the letter was issued, workers had to take it to the head of line and get a signature. The head would, once again, approve it or otherwise, depending on their own personal character and the reason provided by the employee. From there, when approved, the letter was to be taken by the

worker to the administration officer, who would further approve it and take a record for administrative purposes. Only after these clearances were obtained and inspected by the security officer at the front gate, was the worker permitted to visit the health clinic outside the company's complex. The clinic was not run by the company but served a number of manufacturing industries in the sub-district. At this clinic, only on production of their union identity and reference letter from their company, could workers receive medical treatment and medicines at the company's expense.

Sari was a female worker at the garment industry, PCA factory. Suffering from typhoid, she forced herself, in a weak condition and looking very pale, to go to the factory to get permission from the company for bed rest. Permission would not be granted upon notification by telephone or through colleagues. After a few hours, after the permission had been granted, she came back to the lodging to take bed rest. Her situation became even worse because, as a new employee with only less than one year's employment, she was only entitled to sick leave renewed on daily basis. As the illness went on for days and each day she had to present herself to the supervisor to ask for further leave, she eventually resigned from the job and went back to her home village.

Contact with the production manager, a South Korean expatriate, occurred on an almost daily basis at PT MKS factory. According to the workers, the production manager was a joint owner of the company, along with a few other South Koreans. He monitored almost every aspect of production at the plant by checking and controlling the performance of the workers on the lines. This took place almost all the time during work hours, except during overtime when he usually had already left the plant. Many said that the presence of the manager at the line often distressed them, although he essentially never commented or gave any opinion of one's work performance. A worker said that when the *mister*—a term used to refer to the expatriate manager—was standing behind her and watching her working: 'I felt like I had just committed a wrongdoing (*serba salah*) and I got so nervous (*grogig*).'<sup>1</sup> Leaving the line for a lunch break had to be acknowledged by the *mister*. First, the worker had to obtain the relevant letter (*surat pengantar istirahat*) from the head of group, and bring it, in turn, to the

head of line, the head of division, the *mister*, and then, last of all, to the administration office for the administrative record. Without the letter, the presence of a worker outside the production building, even still at factory premises, was against the company rules.

Control over the workers was also evident when they were using the lavatory and bathroom. Workers had to hold a card when leaving the line for the lavatory. Each line was allotted one card, which was collected from the head of group, so that no more than one employee could leave the line at any one time. According to the workers, the policy was introduced after the company felt that productivity might be affected by the absence of several workers running off to the lavatory at the same time. Nonetheless, they also said that the strict control over the movements and the behaviour of workers within the workplace during work hours left them little opportunity to take a breath outside the officially designated breaks. A walk to the lavatory was considered an opportunity to meet the need for a short break in the middle of a distressing work session. Waiting outside the toilets, which were inadequate in number for a company with about 1000 employees, was the only way the employees were able to enjoy a little freedom in the workplace by chatting with others, smoking, or eating snacks. Some even tried to take a nap or simply close their eyes a little while in the lavatory. However, the company was still able to impose its control over the workers in this private area through the company's security officers, who regularly checked the lavatory area, sent the crowd back to the line, or noisily knocked on the toilet doors to warn the occupant to hurry. There was even a female security guard assigned to the female area to watch the women workers.

Despite the strict, elaborate discipline and bureaucratic procedures imposed by manufacturing corporations on their shopfloors (a 'stick' approach), a 'carrot' approach was also adopted by most companies in order to ensure workers' loyalty.<sup>1</sup> This aimed to not only lighten the everyday experience of workers on the assembly line, it was also an attempt by the company to demonstrate its generosity toward the employee and to create an image of an attentive employer, through its concern about workers' welfare. These measures range from the provision of sport facilities and praying space, to other entertainment facilities

intended to, as stated in one company's work agreement, 'accommodate the advancement of talent and creativity of the workers' (PT MKS and SP-TSK 2000:54, my translation). Even a large corporation like PT GT Group provided facilities, as stated in its work agreement, such as a film viewing and music room, which were only available twice a week. Even outdoor recreation is guaranteed in most work agreements. PT MKS factory, for example, once a year, helped to organise a one-day trip for its workers to visit places of interest within three to four hours of Tangerang. With transportation and logistics sponsored by the company, the trip was mostly organised by the workplace union, which appeared to get involved only in technical matters (ordering buses, arranging catering) and did not make the event a means to promote the union agenda. While Mills (1999b) in her study of urban industrial migrant workers in Bangkok found that such extra-firm gatherings became a medium for unions to promote 'solidarity' in order to endorse 'class-based unity' as a stratagem to counter urban structural impediments, this was missing during the leisure trips of workers of PT MKS of Tangerang. According to Ery, joy and laughter was certainly present during this short trip, which allowed them to escape the routine of the industrial town. Once at the destination, however, there was no program involving all participants in a focused activity organised by the company or the union. Instead, the participants were free to do things individually or in small groups, except during the lunch break. The event was not used as an opportunity for the company's officials to relax the barrier between the staff and their subordinate workers since they did not join in the trip. As a result, though delighted with this firm-funded initiative, it did not develop in a feeling of obligation to the company in the form of loyalty or emotional attachment.

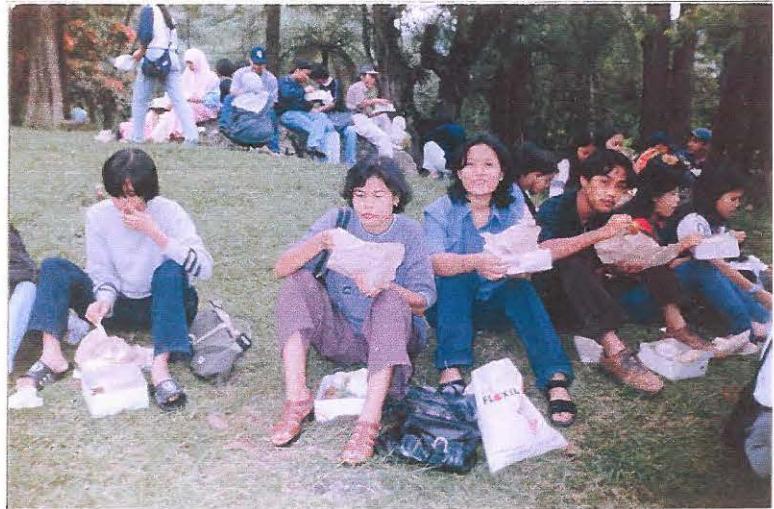


Plate 4.3: A One-Day Day-Off Trip: Lunch time (photo supplied by an informant-Th)

Most companies provide subsidies to assist workers to cover medical and accommodation costs and meals during work hours. For workers, these subsidies help to ease the burden of expenses from their regulated minimum wage, which has been subject to wide criticism for its inadequacy to cover the minimum needs of ordinary workers (Manning 1998, Thamrin 1994, Tjandraningsih 2000). Social assistance such as maternity allowance (*tunjangan kelahiran*), nuptials allowance (*tunjangan pernikahan*) (covering the worker and worker's mature-aged children), and bereavement allowance (*tunjangan kematian*) (covering the worker, their immediate family, and their parents) are also available. Although the amount of these allowances (and social assistance) is typically far below the actual costs, employees are pleased with such benefits. The benefits boost their monthly salary.<sup>2</sup> However, there are times when workers challenge the benefit scheme offered by their employer because it simply does not provide the expected service. At PT ACL factory, a cardboard producer, workers were disappointed by the health service system put in place, which normally allowed them to receive free medical treatment from the nearby government-run health centre (*Puskesmas*) under the state-sponsored Worker's Social Insurance Fund (*Jamsostek, Jaminan Sosial Tenaga Kerja*).<sup>3</sup> The problem emerged, according to Juanda, one of the workers, when the doctor always prescribed the same

medication for different types of illnesses. Juanda complained: 'The medicine for stomach ache (*sakit perut*) is similar to the one for headache (*sakit pusing*).'<sup>4</sup> In addition, those who visited the health centre under the Fund's scheme were normally placed last in the queue. The workers wanted the company to allow them to seek alternative treatment from an outside doctor or health centre and to make the claim procedure less bureaucratic and difficult. The absence of a formal workplace union or labour organisation meant the demands could not be properly channelled, with only few senior workers expected by the rest to approach the company.<sup>4</sup>

### **Experiencing the Global Plants**

As indicated in Chapter 1, Third World factories have adopted the post-Fordist characteristic of outsourcing, market expansion, capital flexibility, and products' 'accelerated obsolescence' (Gorz 1999:27). Despite the light manufacturing production in Tangerang following this trend, it still retains features of Fordism with its rigid division of labour and hierarchical organisation. The rigidity is reflected in the technical division of labour which locks workers into posts along the assembly line which each represent a particular detailed task. This form of work elaborates Taylor's principles of 'scientific management', from which Fordism drew its inspiration. According to these principles the work procedure is broken down 'into component motions and...fragmented tasks [are organised] according to rigorous standards of time and motion study' (cited in Harvey 1989:125, see also Gorz 1999:27-32, Braverman 1974, Friedmann 1955). Workers are only in charge of a specific task in the manufacturing process. The monotonous character of job specialisation, with only a little variation, allows 'maximum repetition' (Watson 1997:45), which has accelerated the pace of work within the workshop. The repetitive detailed motion prevents operators from unnecessary undertakings which would delay production.

In a garment and textile factory such as in PT PB, the production of sports wear involves a number of divisions each of which specialises in a particular part, such as hoods, pockets, buttons, necklines and buttonholes. In this company, the

majority of whose 7,000-strong work force are female, a number of different brands like Calvin Klein Jeans, Nike, Umbro, Diadora, and Reebok are manufactured (Tempo Interaktif 24/5/2002). Yani and Dewi, who work in the button division, are female workers who come from different rural regions in Indonesia but became close friends as a result of their assignment to the same division. From the beginning to the end of work hours, and probably from day one to the end of their 'career' in the manufacturing industry, they are obliged to perform similar, repetitive, and narrowly specialised tasks which require no special qualifications. All this is to increase labour productivity and maximise profit. Specialisation helps to utilise the individual worker's ability to the maximum and prevent 'idleness' on the shopfloor in order to achieve the highest level of productivity.

Global factories have also reinforced job divisions in terms of the separation between mental labour and manual labour, which means the manual labour is likely to be performed by unskilled workers. The overseas parent companies, according to Angela Hale (2002), often become 'manufacturers without factories', as their R&D Divisions have divorced planning tasks, including designing, ordering, production arrangement, and marketing, from the manufacturing tasks on the shopfloor. The division of these two levels of labour is described by Gorz as a way of 'imprisoning' workers 'in a system of constraints which remove...all scope of initiative' in order to extract 'the highest possible output from workers' (Gorz 1999:29). This deskilled manual labour is also intended to minimise 'skill requirements' and 'job-learning time' (Watson 1995:44, see also Elson and Pearson 1981) except what workers receive in a few weeks of compulsory training as new recruits.

Assembly lines help to reduce 'skill requirements' and 'training times' to a minimum (Watson 1995:45). It is no coincidence that this system of work was first introduced in the Ford Motor Company in the US in the early-20th century when the car industry started to enter an era of mass production in order to lower production costs and, hence, slash the selling prices (e.g. Braverman 1974, Chinoy 1982). Nevertheless, a serious implication of the model is the deskilling process which strips off the 'craftsmanship', by taking away 'conceptual and design

functions' from workers (Braverman 1974:131). Deskilling process has simplified the physical movement of manual labour to a level which is fair to say is 'meaningless' once the movement is detached from the whole production process. A worker in the cutting division of a footwear factory, for example, is not only bonded to the shopfloor performing a recurring task of cutting a leather sheet into a particular shape for the rest of his or her life in the factory. The very fragmented nature of this job has also prevented one from grasping the knowledge of the skill of making a shoe. The occupation hardly needs anyone with a high-level of skill or education, despite the fact that most of the younger generation of manufacturing workers (in contrast to the previous one) hold a senior high school or equal diploma (see below). This also highlights the vulnerability of workers when they have to re-enter the labour market. De-skilled jobs require no proficiency, and only offer a simple, repetitive, and monotonous set of motions, leaving these people with little bargaining power over wage levels or working conditions with the new employer.

Meanwhile, the post-Fordist model of changing fashions requires workers to undergo swift adjustment to the product innovation and 'inconstancy', characteristic of this model. The hand-sewing division where Ery works is a unit responsible for most of the work of embellishing shoes with decorative features and patterns that are frequently modified from one order to the next. Every model alteration changes the work speed as well as the way the shoe is treated. This means Ery is never able to improve her skill on a particular model. Every time she starts getting used to one design, the order has changed and, therefore, she has to learn a new model. The failure to meet a targeted hourly output is not merely a factor of the level of complexity of a particular design. Often, it is prompted by the 'learning' factor, in which additional time is required by workers to make an adjustment, even a small one, to the features of the ever-changing models. Once a worker appears not to be able to reach a production target assigned, pressure from the supervisor increases. This leads to verbal abuse or administrative sanctions, creating inconvenience and distress to the individual worker.

Job fragmentation, the highly specialised tasks, and the geographical distance separating the shopfloor from TNC headquarters has created further

inefficiency in the organisation of the manufacturing enterprise, particularly for the contractor. These factors require company management to tightly control the system in order to ensure every single worker performs his/her task with a high degree of accuracy, otherwise the flow of work of the entire assembly line will be halted. The direction of this type of subcontracting of production seems to contradict the ideal objectives of post-Fordist corporations which tend to involve the productive workers in the task of planning as well as controlling. The paradigm of 'the workers are also the thinkers' implies a shrinking organisation, as the corporation no longer needs categorically 'mental labour' staff officers. This, for example, occurred in Motorola's television shopfloor in Chicago when Matsushita acquired the company and liquidated all the supervising posts so that its labour force could be halved (Gorz 1999:29). Nevertheless, it seems that the fusion of mental labour and manual labour might only be possible for high-technology industries which employ skilled workers, even at the shopfloor level. In contrast, the unskilled workers in Tangerang's light manufacturing plants are not viewed as capable of carrying out the planning tasks. Besides, the character of mass production within these enterprises requires a resilient supervisory apparatus to oversee the labour-intensive production.

In a company which implements a highly differentiated division of labour, the relationship between management and workers at the bottom level is mediated by several supervisory positions. These positions are tailored to enhance control and efficiency as well as to ensure orders from the top are being executed properly by those on the production floor. In a factory manufacturing motorbike tyres, for example, it is an obligation for workers to attend a briefing session 10-15 minutes before the official work hours begin. Arif, one of those in the plant which mostly employs male workers, described the session as *apel*, a term used for the weekly flag raising ceremony in Indonesian schools. During *apel* the school principal addresses a range of issues: from school policies and ways to behave properly at school, to announcements, and the inculcation of the state ideology of Pancasila. The ceremony in the factory, without the flag-rising ritual, is a means by which the management reinforces its control of the employees. It is a one-way communication. The production leader evaluates the workers' performance the

previous day, including how much output was rejected (*apkir*). It is also his task to reprimand the whole group for poor performance and to give advice to rectify past mistakes. In order to reach a certain level of output, he dictates a production target for the day as well as indicating if overtime is necessary. In other factories, such as in the garment and footwear industries, instructions from management are normally communicated through the chains of command down to the lowest layer in the company's hierarchy, the shopfloor workers. This hierarchical structure is also used to monitor workers' mobility within the workplace, as previously noted in the PT MKS factory. All these practices are essential in the Taylorian control mechanism to ensure an efficient flow of work in the assembly line and to sustain the intensified production in mass production enterprises. In Chapter 6 I will return to the discussion of control in the workplace through the imposition of Foucauldian self-policing mechanisms.

Such extensive intervention in the subjects' personal affairs has certainly undermined the workers' self-identity. As routines such as beating, shock therapy, and other humiliating practices are common in total institutions, Goffman asserted, the 'self is systematically... mortified' (Goffman 1971:24) by which the 'physical integrity' and 'the image of [the] self' (ibid. p.30) are separated from the body, so that total domination can be put into practice. Such practices are surely too radical in the industrial context. Nevertheless, the condition in which the self is mortified can also be present in the factory where initiatives and individuality are removed from the subject. Intensified production highlights the alienation of workers employed in manufacturing complexes. As workers have sold their labour to the employer, who pays wages as compensation, they have also given up their control over themselves to the company. From that point on, as Braverman puts it, '[t]he labour process has become the responsibility of the capitalist', and the existence of workers in the workplace is to abide by the company's set of rules and disciplines. As outlined by Taylor (cited in Braverman 1974), workers are not given opportunity to make their decisions in relation to a single activity. Even the simplest decision to be absent from work because of illness and how long the absence, or to go to toilet are to be resolved by the management. Taylor argued that a manufacturing organisation would face 'a limited and frustrated

'undertaking' if it only paid attention to 'the general setting of task...with little direct interference' in all aspects of workers as a labour force (Braverman 1974:90). The management's control in the workplace thus involves intervention in the most private domain of workers' lives, such as eating, smoking, and the inability to do the job because of illness.

Loss of productivity is an inherent risk in the subcontracting system, where the whole process is not located at one site, and job fragmentation means a greater interdependence between units in the workshop. A delay in the delivery of raw materials could hamper the whole manufacturing process. The harsh effect of the 1997 financial crisis, during which the cost of imported raw materials soared rapidly due to the depreciation of the national currency, had led to a significant number of redundancies in manufacturing companies. During that period, PT MKS factory, for example, which imports leather and rubber raw material, had to lay-off more than half of its labour force. Although its operation has been back to normal since 1999 and new workers have been recruited, the fluctuation of the Indonesian rupiah against the US dollar often affects the company's manufacturing performance, leading to a reduction of work hours and overtime.

Furthermore, the most frequent form of productivity loss at manufacturing plants appears to be mechanical failures which disrupt the entire process of production. The use of old or second-hand imported machines is the main reason for this. Workers are usually required to fix any problems on the machines they work on. However, as admitted by Arif, a new worker such as himself is still not used to handling breakdowns. He said:

The job training was only about how to operate the machine, and not to fix it in case of malfunction. The long-time workers probably can mend it, but I can't.

When he encounters a machine failure, Arif has to report it to the group leader, who should ask the maintenance division to repair it. Arif is upset because the worker is often blamed for the time lost when mechanical malfunction occurs. He added:

It wasn't my fault if I could not easily find the leader. The workshop building is so huge. But, should I write on the report

sheet that the loss was caused by the time needed to find my leader? That's not the standard way to fill in the report.

Its hybrid Fordist and post-Fordist character has integrated Tangerang manufacturing workers of export-oriented factories into the world market. The global character is not merely determined through their role in supplying manufacturing products for export and the presence of foreign partners in some selected industries. The dynamics of the world economy such as the trend towards third world sourcing, the fluctuation of market demands, as well as the world's political and economic stability, are all factors determining the persistence of the manufacturing industries in the area. However, the intensification of production in most manufacturing complexes has created a further consequence for the working conditions within the workshops. The use of a subcontracting system increases the pressure inside the manufacturing plants. This pressure is not merely a result of the competitive climate in which manufacturing corporations have to maintain their reputation and competitive advantage in order to remain in the business network. The subcontracting system has also enabled large international corporations, for the sake of profit maximisation, to put pressure on contractors to provide low cost products with the highest standard of quality on the scale of mass production.

Moreover, the adjustment of workers to an industrial livelihood in capitalist enterprises generally occurs in a coercive manner through the imposition of control. Friedmann asserts that the adaptation of man to machine in order to present it as 'a tool for his *service*' should be undertaken by bringing 'sensible consideration of the "human factor"' (Friedmann 1955:102-7, emphasis in original). This means instruments and manufacturing practices have to be designed for the worker's comfort, both psychologically and physiologically, to prevent endless fatigue and damage which would risk a worker's well-being. However, the unfriendly conditions in which workers have to adjust their work pace to the speed of a machine, which often leads to fatal injury, and the impossible production targets in most Tangerang manufacturing plants have caused unnecessary fatigue to the workers and created more pressure. At a certain point, this becomes unbearable and counterproductive to work productivity. This

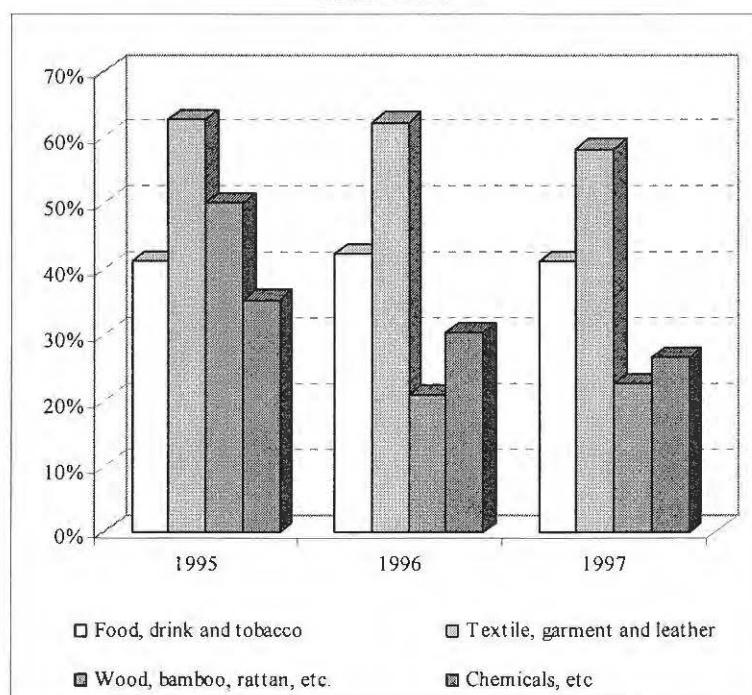
is in line with Friedmann' argument that workers pay too much attention to adapting themselves to work tools (1955:103) and commands from the overseers. Accordingly, the imposition of firm control is to be seen as a maximum effort to reconcile the unsafe worker-unfriendly working conditions—which can lead to declining productivity—with the demand for productivity required in subcontracting for mass production.

### **Working Women on the Shopfloor**

It was no coincidence that the hand-sewing division, to which Ery and Lely were assigned, together with the sewing division, which are central to this shoe industry, had a high proportion of female workers. A number of studies have indicated a greater involvement of females compared to their male counterparts in most manufacturing complexes in developing regions, particularly in light industries (Kim 1997, Mather 1985, Saptari, 1994, Wolf 1992). Indrasari Tjandraningsih (2000), in her late 1980s' study of textile, garment, and footwear industries in Majalaya, West Java, found that female workers were especially dominant in the large-scale export-oriented footwear industries. In these industries, they were engaged in two-thirds of the entire production process. (Tjandraningsih 2000:260). In Tangerang, this is particularly true in the sub-sector of textile, garment, and leather industries where the numbers of female workers employed exceeded their male counterparts by nearly 2:1 (see Figure 4.2). Most female workers from PT MKS factory I spoke with explained that the detailed and intricate character of the work makes this occupation a preserve of women.<sup>5</sup> However, others, such as Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson (1981) have been critical of the reasons put forward which rely on the stereotyping of 'innate capacities and personality traits' of women (p.92). Elson and Pearson argue that the prevalence of women in such industries is instigated by the assumption that sewing is typically part of a daughter's 'training' (1981:93) within the family in domestic work. Such training enables girls to develop the 'manual dexterity and capacity for spatial assessment' (*ibid*) that is particularly functional on the shopfloor. Because it is interwoven with everyday domestic works, sewing is

categorised as unskilled labour. From the industrial employers' point of view, this assumption leads to the employment of women for the sake of efficiency or 'profitability', because women become more productive more quickly in undertaking the task (Elson and Pearson 1981). Also, the companies do not need to throw extra effort into training the newly-recruited workers before the latter are ready to perform the task. Therefore, according to Elson and Pearson, it is not the girls that make themselves 'bearers of inferior labour' (p.94) in the industry, but, on the contrary, it is the industry itself that creates 'inferior bearers of labour' (*ibid*) of the female recruits.

Figure 4.2: Percentage of Woman Workers  
in Selected Industries in Tangerang Municipality,  
1995-1997

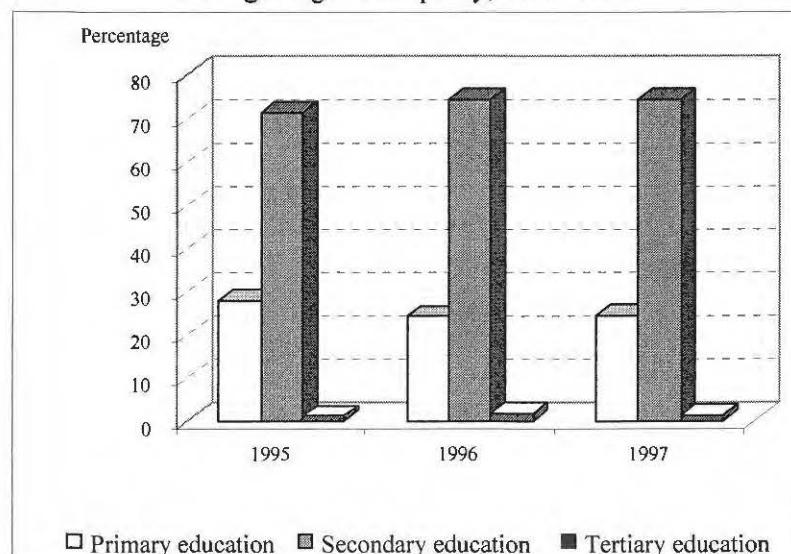


Source: BPS Kotamadya Tangerang 1999b, p.15-20, 23-4.

In Tangerang, the improved educational level of the average worker makes the notion of females being inherently connected to unskilled labour no longer defensible. The increasing proportion of women in the area who managed to complete their secondary education (see Figure 4.3), is an indication that rural

daughters who join the urban industrial workforce are, in fact, more prepared to take up skilled employment. Accounting and typing are two examples of administrative skills these rural youth obtained from high school. In their urban existence, they also seek to develop their proficiency by taking computer courses privately in the neighbourhood.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the declining participation of daughters in domestic work as a result of their school activities as well as their attraction to the mass media (see Chapter 2) has made sewing no longer an innate parcel that comes with daughters entering industrial workforce. The presence of a private sewing course (*kursus menjahit*) in the area, whose participants were all female youth, is an indication that formal training is still required by job-seeking daughters to make them prepared to participate in the industry. With one of its advertised attraction being that it ensures direct employment (*lulus langsung kerja*), the sewing course is usually attended by unemployed migrants who are seeking jobs.

Figure 4.3: Percentage of Woman Workers  
in Textile, Garment and Leather Industries by Education  
in Tangerang Municipality, 1995-1997



*Source:* BPS Kotamadya Tangerang 1999b, p.17-8.

Susan Joekes (1985), writing on the condition of workers in the Moroccan clothing industry, suggested that one argument for the increasing trend of women

to work in industries is often linked to another stereotype, women's 'docility' (p.189, see also Elson and Pearson 1981:95-6). The notion of their 'subordinate role in domestic and public situations', therefore, underscores a female's presumed inability to disrupt industrial operations (Joekes 1985:189-90). Joekes added that their 'meekness, passivity, and obedience' (p.189), combined with 'their youth and lack of experience' (p.190) in the sector, are conditions needed by capitalist production for a less-troubled working environment, for the sake of sustained production, in the workshop. However, she asserts, such a stereotypical view of the subordination of women did not always match reality since the involvement of Moroccan women workers in labour activism had long been well-known. My previous exposure to workers in Tangerang in the mid 1990s, moreover, also indicated that female workers' superiority over their male counterparts in persuasion and communication skills as well as their patience in labour organising work often placed them as leaders or the motivating force in industrial actions. On the contrary, the stereotyping of docile women often prevented them, unlike their male counterparts, from being identified as having a leading role and, hence, shielded them from arrest, physical threats, and intimidation.



Plate 4.4: Woman Workers Going to Work at 6.30 a.m  
(photo:RWJ)

Claims about women's docility and passivity tend to be unfounded and are merely a myth believed by the company or corporate agencies. In a South Korean-owned garment factory, PT PCA, workers are not permitted to take more than one day of sick leave at a time. One of the female workers from the company, Dewi, admitted that even in the case of serious illness, a letter from the doctor could not enable an ill employee to get an extension of sick leave. In many cases, those under such circumstance would, instead, take annual leave. However, annual leave is an entitlement only granted to workers who had worked a minimum of one year. Dewi who had joined the company just eight months before, was not eligible for this entitlement. As she frequently suffered gastric problems that often lasted a few days, she found it difficult to push herself to go to work on the days after one-day sick leave had been given. 'I always feel extremely weak and dizzy,' she said. However, after a few times, she figured out how to deceive the system she claimed to be 'inhuman' (*enggak berperikemanusiaan*). Dewi noticed that the head of division was the only authority on the work floor who recommended sick leave for an ailing worker to the rubber-stamping administration office. Therefore, according to her, once the head of division, a male, was 'gripped' (*kepegang*) then things could be 'negotiated' (*bisa diatur*). 'I flirted with him, talked to him nicely, attracted his attention,' Dewi explained her trick to 'grip' the foreman. After quite some time, the head of division believed that he was intimate enough with Dewi to teasingly ask her to be his girlfriend. Dewi told me:

I never responded to it. How dare he! But I kept being nice to him. I don't care if in the workplace he holds my hand, caresses my back or shoulder. I'll kick him if he does more than that.

It is lucky that some more serious sexual harassment never happened to Dewi, but, more importantly, she managed to 'grip' her foreman, directing him to do favours for her, particularly in relation to obtaining sick leave. After that, Dewi could get enough bed rest when she felt unwell. Even when she just did not feel like going to work, sick leave was easily granted. Moreover, when Dewi eventually resigned from the job and wanted to take a break, the head of division ensured that she could rejoin the company anytime when she was ready to come

back to work again; a privilege that, under normal circumstances, would be denied a worker who had resigned.

The case of Dewi simply reveals that women's obedience to their employers, in reality, is a false construction accepted as true by the company on the basis of a social construction of women's inferiority to men. The power relations established between the employer, in this case the foreman, and the employee proves to be manipulable and can be utilised to serve the interest of the weak in such labour-capital relations. Exploiting her sexual attractiveness is the way Dewi manoeuvred herself to elevate her bargaining power in facing the harsh regime of the industrial workplace. With such manoeuvres, the subordinate subject is able to turn the domain of others, of superior agency, to a 'playable' arena in which the former stages a tug-of-war to drag the playing field, the regulations, down to her level. However, other female workers might not be as skilful as Dewi in this regard. Moreover, as Tjandraningsih (2000) asserted, this relation of power remains susceptible to 'misuse' by the male superior to seduce his female inferior or, even more, to ask for a favour that has 'sexual connotations' (p.264). However, many female workers admitted that a male foreman or manager was typically approachable. When confronted by the stereotyped image of a vulnerable female, they felt obliged to demonstrate their power and authority, in short, their 'gentlemanliness', to 'ease' the inopportune circumstances of their female subordinate. Aside from Tjandraningsih's concern, from the workers' perspective, strict corporate discipline can be a negotiable domain that allows for compromise—without this being realised by the company. Such compromise helps workers to overcome pressures in the workplace. Likewise, to lighten the strain, humorous stories about female workers challenging power on the shopfloor by showing disrespect toward the supervisor were often told. These included saying bad things about the supervisor, breaking the no-chat rule and eating while performing tasks on the assembly line. On most occasions, such defiance occurred only in the absence of the superior.

In general, company regulations on both sick leave and annual leave, are enforced on the shop floor, without regard the sex of the worker, the type of task, or length of employment. However, often such rules particularly affect married

female workers, who also have the domestic role of looking after their offspring. Rusilah was an ethnic Javanese who had been employed in the PT MKS factory for about two years. Her husband, whom she had met in Tangerang, was also a shop floor worker at a chemical factory in a neighbouring sub-district. One time, the couple's seven month-old only son, Reza, had diarrhoea and had been admitted to hospital. On normal days, her 18 year-old younger sister whom she had brought from the village looked after the baby. However, on that day, after the son was discharged from hospital, Rusilah decided to stay at the lodging as she was concerned about Reza's condition. Despite a letter from a doctor stating the circumstance of her son's health, the company did not allow her to take sick leave, which was given only on the grounds of illness suffered by the worker herself, not member of her family including her child. Accordingly, in order to get the company's permission for her absence, she was forced to use four days from her annual leave entitlement, which the couple usually used to visit relatives in their home villages. Unlike Dewi, Rusilah certainly was not good at flirting with her superior to negotiate sick leave, and even if she was, as she said, she did not think an area manager/supervisor would be attracted to a married woman like herself. Accordingly, with a bitter expression while cuddling her baby, she softly told me:

The remaining part in my annual leave won't be enough to return to the countryside. I can [still go], but it's too much hassle to travel with my kid for such short time. This year I will just have to stay in Tangerang then.

She could actually have had split the four days leave she took with her husband so that she did not need to sacrifice half of her annual leave, but she felt that it was her responsibility, as a mother, to look after a sick baby. 'Besides, I do not want my husband (*abang*, old brother) to sacrifice his work [by taking leave],' she explained, although she also knew that her husband earned as much as she did. It was she who had to take the son to the hospital and mind the baby during the recovery process, as well as to seek leave from her workplace. Her double responsibility, both as a worker and a mother (see also Kim 1997, Lee 1998)

accordingly, allowed her little leisure even after her duty in the factory was completed.

In addition, as the medical allowance does not apply to family members, Rusilah had to dig deep in her pocket to cover the cost of Reza's medical treatment and medicines. She said that even without this particular circumstance, she had already faced economic pressure given the cost of raising a child in the city, which included bringing her younger sister to help with the domestic work. Although both parents earned their own income so that the family's financial burden could be eased a little, the issue of everyday survival remained. In general, this was exacerbated by the regime of minimum wage, which, despite reducing wage 'differentiation' along gender lines (Tjandraningsih 2000:263), was still based on living costs of a single individual and remained insensitive to the expenditure associated with child-rearing and family maintenance. Differentiation between male and female workers, however, still occurs in the form of entitlements as found elsewhere in West Java by Tjandraningsih (2000:263). Despite being eligible for menstruation leave, maternal leave, miscarriage leave as well as a menstruation allowance, as ensured in labour legislation, a married female worker like Rusilah was not entitled to receive an accommodation allowance. While the PT MKS factory provides lodgings to its single employees, married workers with a family have to find private dwellings for themselves, for which an accommodation allowance is available. However, based on the assumption that the male is the head of the family (*kepala rumah tangga*), the principal breadwinner, having more financial responsibility than his female spouse, this allowance is an exclusive entitlement of male workers.<sup>7</sup> The argument similarly applies unreasonably to the maternity allowance paid to employees wives, but to which a female worker such Rusilah was not eligible.<sup>8</sup>

Wolf argues that the notion of men's economic duty being more onerous than women's does not only provide a rationalisation for the differentiation in benefits; it also reinforces the practice of 'male superiority' and, at the same time, 'female inferiority' within society at large (1992:118, see also Elson and Pearson 1981:92). Looking at Rusilah's story from this perspective, her self-sacrifice to take the initiative in fully minding the child and using her allotment of annual

leave while letting her spouse work and saving his leave is a lucid illustration of a man being placed as the main wage earner and superior within the family. Despite her own view of her secondary role, her experience reveals that being a female worker amidst the economic pressure in the city does not make her less dependent on income from paid work and, hence, less important in the family economy. The fact that she resumed her factory employment after giving birth, which challenges the view of the brief duration of women's paid employment,<sup>9</sup> suggests that her contribution to the couple's urban survival is as vital as that of her husband.<sup>10</sup>

### **Defying the Factory Regime, Easing the Tension**

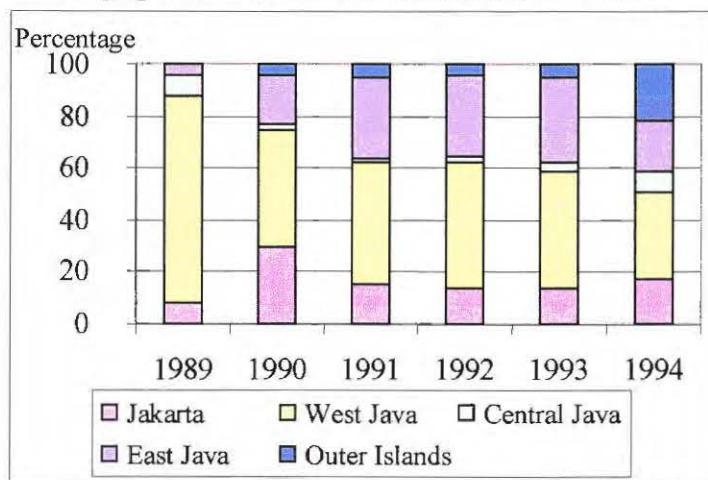
Despite workers have to deal with the constant rhythm of machines, relentless flow of the assembly line, and the stringent supervision of the controlling apparatus, total order and unmitigated obedience from them do not always follow. In this section I will discuss the role of unions or labour organisations in representing the workers and the importance of covert resistance in addressing the workers' discontent toward their conditions of work.

#### *Organised Discourse*

Throughout 1990s, prior to the 1997 crisis, Tangerang had been celebrated as the most militant case of labour activism (see Figure 4.4 and Figure 4.5) (e.g. Hadiz 1997, Kammen 1997). The fall of the authoritarian regime in 1998, moreover, has paved the way for the massive growth in trade unions and labour organisations on a scale that would have been unthinkable during the pre-1998 repressive era (Ford 2000, Hadiz 2001). Supported by a relatively 'pro-labour' government,<sup>11</sup> the union movement since 1998 has managed to increase its bargaining power to a level in which it becomes the 'watchdog for implementation of labour laws' (Manning 2003:10). The strengthening of union movement has contributed as one factor enabling Indonesian labour costs to rise, making some investors, foreign and domestic, to contemplate relocating—some have moved out—their business elsewhere (*ibid.*).<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, this encouraging tendency of the union

empowerment does not appear to be represented in Gambir<sup>13</sup> where during my fieldwork I saw little sign of such activism (industrial strikes and workers' protest).<sup>14</sup> Nor could I sense a significant level of engagement in union or labour-concerned organisations amongst the workers I knew in the area, except their passive due-paying membership of workplace unions to which they were automatically registered once they signed work agreements.

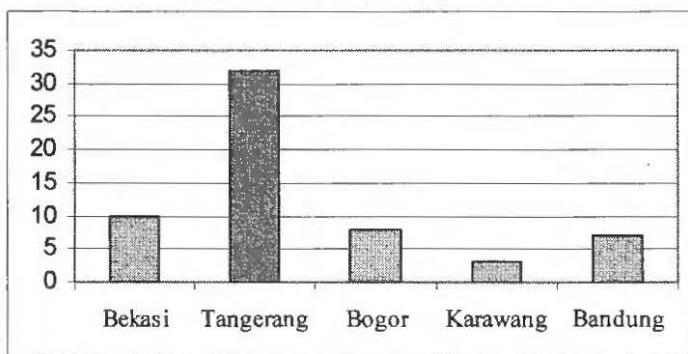
Figure 4.4: Percentage of Industrial Strikes by Geographical Distribution in Indonesia, 1989-1993<sup>1)</sup>



*Notes:* <sup>1)</sup> Up to 2000, Tangerang (the Municipality and the District) was administratively part of West Java Province.

*Source:* Kammen (1997:129)

Figure 4.5: Number of Strikes by District  
in West Java Province, 1999<sup>1)</sup>



*Notes:* 1) Data on Tangerang represents the Municipality and the District. Both areas was administratively part of West Java Province up to 2000 and is currently part of Banten Province.

*Source:* DDPK-DB 1999.

As indicated in Chapter 1, one reason for the lack of continuity of labour activism from the 1990s to the present day in early 21st century is the recent restructuring of the worker population in the area. The majority of contemporary workers in the neighbourhood were those who had only arrived recently in 1999-2000. They replaced the early-1990s generation who left the factories and the neighbourhood during the 1997 crisis.<sup>15</sup> As a result, the contemporary youthful workers have little that can connect them to the experience of their predecessors from the 1990s. Some patchy stories, mostly told by locals about the area being a hotbed of labour radicalisation in the immediate past evoked little interest. This is related to another factor: that is the change of orientation of rural youth in their spatial shift from countryside to urban centres. As argued in Chapter 2, the greater exposure of rural children to mass media and education has contributed to the idea of the city being a place for urban pleasure and adventurous journeys, as much as, or probably even more than just for economic pursuit. The improved minimum wage, to a level unthinkable to their predecessors, has enhanced their purchasing power so they can afford consumer goods imagined in their conception of modernity, despite the persistence of urban economic hardship (see Chapter 5).

Such relatively improved conditions have, therefore, influenced their perception of their situation from the circumstances encountered by those in the 1990s.

The subjective experience in dealing with unions also permeates the disentanglement of workers from labour activism. Juanda, a male worker from a cardboard company, revealed that the insensitivity shown by union leaders in their interaction with workers led to his withdrawal from activism in the workplace. He used to participate in a leftist Jakarta-based union federation that set up its network amongst the workers from his workplace. As his company did not allow the establishment of a union, there were only a few workers linked in a cell network with the above-mentioned union federation.<sup>16</sup> One day he, along with his tens workmates, went to Jakarta to take part in a labour mobilisation organised by the union—to stage a protest and hold an overnight picket at the Ministry of Manpower. However, he was disappointed as, according to him, the union seemed to be little concerned about the fact that the protesting workers were not logically prepared for a 24 hour picket. He said:

We were not told about this overnight protest and we could not leave earlier as the truck (supposedly organised by the union) that took us from Tangerang had already gone. I did not have enough money to take a bus back by myself, let alone to buy a meal. Had I known it would be that way, I would not have come.

This mobilisation was his one-off experience as soon after that he decided not to get involved any more in union-related activities in his workplace. He questioned the commitment of the above-mentioned union who claimed, on the one hand, to be the workers' representatives in dealings with the employers, but, on the other hand, showed no compassion in workers' basic needs during protests. For this union's irresponsibility, he particularly blamed the leaders, which he called 'people from Jakarta' (*orang-orang Jakarta*). 'I already left work for one day [to participate in the protest], but our well-being was not taken care of by them (the union leaders)', he said.

A rather different picture can be found in another factory. Speaking with Mulani on May Day 2001 in his lodging, I learnt about his disappointment in his workplace union for not taking part in a nation-wide mass labour gathering in

Jakarta, organised by a coalition of national trade unions. The union was a branch of a national federation of unions which, during the Soeharto era, was the only union recognised by the state.<sup>17</sup> Mulani complained about his union never doing anything 'real' (*nggak pernah ngapa-ngapain*) and for being a mere rubber stamp organisation initiated from above (company management) to make the impression that the corporation was not impeding workers' freedom of speech. Therefore, he said: 'No matter whether there is a call for a national strike or mobilisation in Jakarta, my colleagues in my factory would just keep working.' Frustrated by the performance of his union, however, he took his own path by behaving passively to industrial issues in relation to workers' welfare. 'I'd rather make money,' he said another time. Throughout the neighbourhood, on that May Day, there was no sign whatsoever of workers preparing to travel to Jakarta. 'Business as usual,' as Mulani said. While workers like Juanda had his appalling experience of such gatherings, others seemed to regard mobilisation like this as having no direct relevance to their everyday life. The presence of posters calling for the workers' participation, and leaflets explaining the history of May Day and its significance to the struggle of the working class, had no appeal to the young Tangerang workers. On the morning of 2001 May Day, streets and ditches in the neighbourhood were covered in leaflets, discarded by workers soon after they had a quick look at them. No one that I knew set out for Jakarta.

Not all workers had the same unpleasant experience with union as Juanda and Mulani. Most factories I knew in Gambir—except the one of Juanda—had workplace-based unions, all of which were affiliated to one of the national level unions. Ery, for example, said that she was quite pleased with her workplace union—the one affiliated to a national union specialising on particular branch of production (textile, garment, and leather)—as it once successfully organised a strike demanding the company grant the workers a longer *Idul Fitri* holiday. Nonetheless, Ery admitted that workers were rarely involved in the process of decision-making in the union.

The plan [to strike] had actually been circulated for some time. But my opinion was never questioned. There was no meeting, except the ones involving the leaders.

The experiences of Ery and Juanda indicate that, for some workers, the union remains an exclusive activity for the leaders, both at the workplace and the Jakarta-based headquarters. None of the workers I observed in Gambir were active members of their workplace unions in terms of the participation in organisational process. Neither were they engaged in informal labour-concerned groups initiated by NGOs, which apparently had no presence in the neighbourhood. These conditions indicate that, despite the lessening of state repression on post-1998 labour activism, the contemporary labour movement—in whatever organisational forms it may take—still fails to consolidate itself by strengthening its organisational capacity at the grass-root level. The problem of insensitivity, incompetence, and elitism characterise workers' attitudes toward the labour instruments that are supposed to be representing them. Some examples discussed above demonstrate that the development of labour activism still does not seem to imply a trajectory toward a more consolidated labour movement. Furthermore, the improvement of waging conditions in late-1990s and early-21<sup>st</sup> century—for which the contribution made by the pre-1998 labour movement can not be underrated—has a potential to distance constituents from workers' organisations.

### *Everyday Resistance*

Shopfloor workers often manage to demonstrate their reservations about, even outright rejection of the working arrangements imposed by the employer through the supervising apparatus. Yudi, a machine operator in the cutting division at a motorbike tyre factory, claimed that he never wanted to work beyond the daily minimum production target, even when there was still substantial time left before the end of shift. This is despite the incentive payment for achievement above the minimum target. He refused to increase productivity once he had reached the minimum level because it was almost certain, he said, that the company would, as a result, increase the minimum level of production. In addition, the supervisor would often ask those who had completed their production obligations to give assistance in another section. Accordingly, during the morning and afternoon

shift, workers tended to slow down their work pace so that the minimum production quota would only be achieved shortly before the bell rang for the end of shift. Meanwhile, during the night shift, where the presence of superiors, except the immediate supervisor, was infrequent, workers were could expedite the completion of their minimum target, before they escaped from further obligations. Instead, they sneaked out to sleep in the storeroom, where they piled up cardboard boxes or arranged finished tyres into a 'nice and comfortable' mattress.

However, as told by Yudi, his immediate supervisor, the group leader, seemed to understand the workers' reluctance to perform beyond the set production target. This is shown by his 'collaboration' in letting the workers take a nap, on the condition of the absence of head of division, the group leader's immediate superior. The group leader often woke up his sleeping subordinates to remind them the shift was nearly over and that they had to clean up the workshop. According to Yudi, this was possible because his group leader used to be an ordinary worker before he was promoted to the position, so that he understood very well the atmosphere on the shopfloor, a quality that a head of division might not have as that position was not normally filled by a person from the rank-and-file.<sup>18</sup>

The circumstance in the cutting division at the tyre factory described above, in which the minimum target seems attainable, does not reflect the general conditions of the manufacturing complexes in Tangerang. Even at the same tyre factory, work is not as easy for every division. The minimum level is often considered unrealistic and, therefore, the incentive payment is merely lip service. Arif, whose assignment was in the building division, where the rubber is developed into raw tyres, complained about being frustrated about not achieving a scheduled level of output. He said:

I stand from morning to late afternoon behind the machine, making tyres, but it's hard to meet the production schedule. I have tried my best but our efforts are not respected and we are blamed for lack of skill and being lazy.

Arif could only remember being able to reach the minimum target three times during his nine months of working at the plant.

The workers in the garment and footwear industries have even more pressure as the minimum production requirements are set to the utmost hourly, instead of per shift, capacity of a worker. This hourly strain means the employees at no time are left idle. In PT MKS factory for example, it often happens that they are still being chased by their group head, their immediate superior, to meet the workgroup quota in the last minutes of a shift. The only 'leisure' they may have is to defy the pressure created by the industrial regime and ask permission to go to the lavatories and wait until the company's security officer scolds them for being there too long (see above). As a worker leaves for the toilet, the rest of the workgroup are responsible for the unfinished task left. No one in the group, interestingly, would complain about a group mate not immediately returning to the line.

Many workers confessed that the abusive labour practices have generated an unbearable feeling (*perasaan enggak betah*) and that they kept their minds occupied with the desire to run away (*kayaknya mau keluar*) from the shop-floor. This is a situation which is described by Paul Willis (1979:192) in his article about shop-floor culture, as 'detached consciousness'. It is a perception that emerges from the separation of time from work in which the endless 'mindless' and 'meaningless' tasks in the factory have made workers dejected and lose their 'intrinsic interest in the job' (*ibid*). Even when they are performing their duty, they remain alert to the opportunities to grab any possible brief respite from the assembly line. This suggests that capitalist production as practiced in these factories with its control technology in many ways proves counter-productive to the notion of maximising the efficiency and productivity of the workers.

Whereas the narratives above are examples of insubordination expressed in isolated circumstances at individual level, defying the factory regime can also be demonstrated quite overtly in the presence of superiors. In PT Band factory, a manufacturing company that produces automotive and industrial power transmission belts, workers often respond to a technical failure that delayed the production process by cheering, screaming, and clapping their hands. To Ali, one of the workers, a machine breakdown meant that they had a justification for temporarily ceasing their activity without getting a warning from a superior. As

long as the trouble remained unfixed, those whose job description depended on the affected machine could evade the company's pressure to work. While the machine was being repaired, workers were normally ordered to carry out non-production tasks, such as sweeping, mopping and wiping equipment. However, Ali often also evaded such tasks by escaping to the restroom area or storeroom, where he could smoke and have a chat with colleagues. He went on to say that when the production automation managed to operate for a sustained period, workers frequently disrupted this by sabotaging the machine. There was no intention to cause serious damage and normally only a small repair was required. However, it was enough to release workers from their routines in the sweatshop and let them have a short time in their work hours without distress even if it was only minutes.

While the forms of defiance described above manage to ease tension in the workplace caused by the control and discipline imposed by the company and reveal the workers' aspirations to improve their working conditions, they do not directly target any particular individual. In Yudi's case, for example, it was inappropriate to blame the head of group, his immediate superior, for working conditions, particularly because he was also taking part in breaking the rules by letting those under his supervision leave the floor to take a sleep. Meanwhile, in the case of Ali's factory, there is certainly no rule or discipline violated by the cheers, screams, and claps of the workers, especially when their state of idleness is caused by an unforced mechanical fault. Therefore, they are not considered to be challenging the company, other than, perhaps, being perceived by their superiors as mischievous workers. Similarly, they are not viewed as expressing aspirations to alter the existing policies. From the workers' point of view, halting the production process is not what they mean to do by such behavior. Their actions are no more than a way of manipulating the regime in order to create a space of their own to restore the humane conditions necessary to maintain their existence amidst of the harsh nature of industrial work.

Nonetheless, there is time when defiance is addressed at a particular agency as a way to retaliate against the inconvenience experienced by a subject worker. Mulani was a male worker in a Japanese-owned plastic and foam industry

who had been a skilled laborer when he joined the company. Previously he worked at a newly-established company in Cikarang, another industrial area to the east of Jakarta, from which he was sent for three months to do work training and an apprenticeship in South Korea in 1995. Upon returning from overseas, he helped the company to assemble and install the newly-arrived machines from South Korea until he left the company once his job contract lapsed, just a few months before the 1997 financial crisis began.<sup>19</sup> Having lost his job, he applied to his current employer in Tangerang. Unfortunately, the company refused to recognise his South Korea-issued certificate on machine engineering. It would not employ him in a higher position with a better salary than ordinary new recruits. Desperately seeking a job, Mulani half-heartedly took the offer that treated him as an unskilled worker without any significant work experience. On the day one of his work at the company, he made a promise to himself to make the company suffer for its unjust treatment of him. He did this by stealing company property. Unlike pilfering, in which mostly only small items, such as glue, sticky tape, stickers, and small wooden or metal pieces were involved, which the offender used for immediate personal purposes, Mulani's action entailed more substantial and relatively expensive articles required in production, and involved two of his work colleagues in the stores division. These items ranged from high-watt light bulbs and large rolls of car upholstery, to tin barrels of greasing oil. With the upholstery, he simply threw it out over the brick-wall fence before he picked it up with a motorbike from the outside.<sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, engine greasing oil was smuggled out by filling up barrels for used oil. He later sold the pristine oil to the man from the recycling agency who came to the factory to pick up the used oil.<sup>21</sup> Once he told me that his company would not go bankrupt through his actions, only lose a little stock as the chance to take these things came only when security in the company was slack. He was, however, quite satisfied as he could hit back at his employer by his actions. He said one time:

It's not about the money. It's about teaching the company a lesson. Well, probably the loss I caused to the company might compensate for my payment had I been considered as an experienced worker.

'Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines' (Scott 1986:8), compared to the strikes organised by a variety of unions and labour organisations. Nonetheless, these are the options open to young workers in Tangerang. On the one hand, they require an avenue to channel their defiance of the industrial regime that makes the workplace a nerve-racking realm. In short, their resistance is more a response to the everyday industrial practices, rather than, for example, to the issues of wage level or living conditions. On the other hand, apart from being disillusioned by the union's insensitivity to the workers' aspirations, as illustrated above, their relative affluence as a result of improved purchasing capacity (see Chapter 5) suggests the feeling that they are better-off, making the need to have union representation less pressing. According to Jim Scott (1986), everyday resistance in the industrial workplace is a translation of the 'hidden transcript' of workers on their suppressed aspirations on the shopfloor. Provided the object of pressure relates to trivial issues regarding individual workers' day-to-day practice in the factory, there is basically no need to elevate their aspirations to a macro scale by challenging the company and its entire system, which mostly requires a co-ordinated organising effort. Small and sporadic actions are practical and more workable when the subordinate subject is faced with a particular situational unfair practice—in contrast with a more systematic one such as the wage regime or work-related benefit scheme—against which a direct reaction is effective in order to obtain immediate gain, or in Scott's words, 'individual self-help' (Scott 1986:6).

### **The Transience of Factory Work: Envisaging the Workers to Come**

Employment in manufacturing industries gives migrant workers a sense of security. It offers them regular income which provides them with the financial certainty to sustain their urban existence. Nonetheless, despite their apparent habituation to the harsh and physical nature of factory jobs, workers still have reservations about working in the industrial plants. The sense of loss of control over themselves and their self-respect indicates some discontent—as admitted by Sana, a male worker in a motorbike tyre industry:

I am not happy with being a factory worker as we are at the lowest layer (*jadi orang bawahan*) and always have to follow orders (*diperintah-perintah*). It's just fine if the order or command is given nicely (*dibilang baik-baik*) by the overseers. But if it is communicated rudely (*kasar*) with scolding (*dibentak-bentak*), I feel like an animal.

With personal initiatives being removed and the workers' contribution being merely instrumental to the entire process of production, the chance for workplace mobility to a higher position is almost nil. Promotion to a better position is usually limited to those who have been working in the factory for over five years, and only a small proportion of this category could enjoy such mobility. 'It is almost the same whether we are hard-working at work or not,' said Sana. With the lack of opportunity for promotion, workers are usually happy enough to be upgraded from the status of provisional workers to that of permanent worker, which is only possible after serving the company for at least two years without serious violation of company rules. With more established status, workers might expect to have a better leave allowance and a redundancy benefit according to their length of service.

Such working environments have shaped the migrant workers' perception of their engagement in industrial activities. Despite its ability to offer esteemed status to migrants with rural background (see Chapter 6) and better income to conform with a certain urban lifestyle (see Chapter 5), a factory job is viewed by these young workers as merely transitional. The harsh nature of the work is considered to offer no advantage apart from daily tiredness. Therefore, the majority of workers I spoke with had already made plans for their future by setting a limit to the period of time they would remain in the sweatshop, usually less than eight years, before quitting. Workers such as Ery even admitted that she would no longer be working in the factory in about two years time. She said in an interview in January 2001:

I am tired of working in the factory and I want to go back to my home village to help my parents, help my mother at home. Perhaps by next year I'll already have left this work.

About a year after this conversation, when I had an opportunity to come back to the area in April 2002 for a short visit, I found that Ery was no longer working in the factory. A few workers explained to me that Ery and three other colleagues from the same footwear factory had resigned from the job three months earlier and had since returned to their villages. 'I just want to take a break from factory [work],' she had said to some friends who were still living and working in the area. I did not meet Ery on this later visit, but was told by her colleague that since she had left the job, Ery had revisited Tangerang once and tried to get a job at another manufacturing factory but failed, so she left again for her rural home. But Lely, Ery's colleague who also resigned, was lucky as she found another factory job in another subdistrict in Tangerang after being at home doing nothing (*nggak ngapa-ngapain*) except helping her mother with domestic tasks (*cuma bantu-bantu ibu*) for about two months.

The decision made by Ery and her colleagues is certainly risky given that the country's economy is still overshadowed by the impact of the 1997 crisis, in which the annual growth of urban employment plunged to 3.1 percent in 1997-1998 compared to pre-crisis figures in 1990-1996, of 5.2 percent (see Chapter 2: Figure 2.1). However, since the city is perceived as not merely having economic significance, but also a site where fantasies of pleasure can be realised, the factory has become part of the migrants' urban experience they are able to discard at any time once it no longer brings 'pleasure' and contentment. It does not mean that factory work will be only a one-off experience as they seem happy to re-enter the sector after a short break. The fact that urban employment was not always available under these difficult macro-economic conditions probably was not a foremost concern for Ery. She could still take advantage of the annual growth of rural employment which, in contrast to urban areas, increased to 2.3 percent in 1997-1998 from the pre-crisis figure of 0.6 percent in 1990-1996 (see Chapter 2: Figure 2.1). As long as the rural economy remains able through its 'cushion' (Wolf 1986:371) mechanism to absorb its children temporarily unemployed from the urban sector, the problem of scarcity in the urban employment would be secondary to migrant workers such as Ery and Lely.

Their future expectations beyond factory work have also enabled young migrants to perceive factory work as temporary, and hence the loyalty and emotional attachment to their employer is low, which is also showed in their everyday resistance against the company. Some basic skills learnt in school contribute to their confidence in their ability to achieve upward mobility in urban areas by imagining public sector or office work as ideal employment once they withdraw from the manufacturing sector. Whether or not such expectations are realistic remains hard to predict. However, even though this upward mobility appears to be unattainable in the foreseeable future, their school training has enabled them to have greater awareness of the possibilities they have in terms of employment, even if it is not any better in terms of income than the factory work.

Such optimism among the migrant workers highlights their view of engagement in the industrial sector as something that is not worth fighting for at any cost if their current employment is threatened. This was evident from the case of workers from industries under the PT GT Group whose owner was facing legal action over his alleged connection in a corruption case involving funds from the country's financial authority.<sup>22</sup> In order to put pressure on the government to dismiss the case, the Group's site manager planned to mobilise the workers, about 15,000-strong from a variety of production units in its integrated plants in Tangerang, to picket the national parliament in Jakarta. The mobilisation was supposed to persuade the government to show compassion to the owner. The management argued that if he was convicted and sentenced, this would affect the operation of the business, possibly leading to closure, placing a massive number of workers in redundancy. The company arranged return transportation for the protesters to the national capital, and guaranteed that workers would not lose a day's pay during the mobilisation. Pardi, one of the workers, even told me that the company might also have given a cash bonus to the protesters. The plan, however, was aborted since the number of workers signing up for the picket was far less than had been expected. I was told by Pardi that workers were reluctant to participate because they did not want to be involved. 'Why bother taking part in a picket supporting a corrupt man? We are just being used to shield a bad man. No way,' he explained. He airily added, 'If the company ceases operation because the

owner is jailed, what am I supposed to do? I just have to find a job elsewhere then.'

Having failed in this plan, a few months later the conglomerate came up with an initiative to organise mass prayers (*istiqotsah*). They invited clerics from five major religions to pray for the safety of the nation still in crisis and for the well-being of all employees and, particularly, the Group whose owner was facing legal charges. Supposedly to prevent the event from failing, the prayers were held in the soccer field within the company's vast industrial complex. It was compulsory for workers to attend, including those from afternoon and night shifts. The gathering did, of course, take place. However, the workers' reaction was far from loyal to their troubled boss. Many I heard complained about having to stay out in the midday sun. One worker, Yudi, expressed his disgruntlement saying: 'It's the big boss who's having trouble. Everybody knows he is blameworthy. But we were dried in the sun.'<sup>23</sup> Another, Ali, admitted that he came just to seek the free event t-shirt. Once there was a chance to sneak out he disappeared. Similarly, many others did not pay attention to the event, but came for the t-shirt. Up to this day, the company remains operational. However, the case above illustrates the workers' everyday resistance toward the company, through their lack of interest in the fate of the paramount figure within the organisation in which they are employed. Consciously knowing that it their fate was also jeopardised had the company been closed down, hence menacing their urban economic existence, such defiance also reveals their lack of attachment to their current employment as factory workers. The workers' response, which, to some extent was also influenced by their moral belief, is a result of their confidence in an imagined future, working other than in an industrial sweatshop.

The condition of the macro-economy which remains overshadowed by the 1997 crisis also highlights the workers' uncertainty about their future engagement in factory work. Although the current young workers arrived in this urban industrial centre only after the difficult years of 1997-1999, they are not at a safe distance from the anxiety experienced by their predecessors prior to the crisis. The unstable business climate has made scores of footwear and textile industries seek alternative overseas sites for their production expansion, particularly in Cambodia

and Vietnam, as the site for their production expansion (Kompas 23/I/2001a, Kompas 23/I/2001b, see also Manning 2003). These industrial entrepreneurs claimed that industrial strikes by workers had reached a level which threatened the continuation of production in their companies. Furthermore, higher taxation and high levels of illegal payments, making it more difficult for manufacturing enterprises to maintain profit, were also considered as factors which made Indonesia no longer competitive. Therefore, relocating their businesses to overseas countries where the level of competitiveness remained viable seemed to be a logical option for manufacturing entrepreneurs. The electronic industries also threatened to follow this move if the Indonesian government failed to indicate willingness to create a business climate favourable to entrepreneurs (Kompas, 23/I/2001a). Although up to this day such moves do not specifically apply, not yet at least, to the companies in Tangerang that employed workers engaged in my research, it creates further anxiety among the workers in relation to their existence in manufacturing industries.

The characteristic of subcontracting that the provision of raw materials for production relies on supply by overseas partners also often adds to the unstable nature of manufacturing industries. In early 2002, when I made a post-fieldwork visit to the area, I discovered that a factory supplying sound-proof components for exploration devices for oil companies had to send home all its production workers. This was due to a delay in the delivery of raw materials essential to production. Opik, a male worker affected, explained to me that workers were still working normally at the plant just a day before they were temporarily laid-off without any notice. They only knew the circumstances the next day when they were about to go to work and found an announcement on a notice posted on the company's front gate. As the arrival of raw material remained uncertain, Opik went to the company every morning just to check if there was a further announcement about resuming production, or, more likely permanent dismissal. However, like many other workers locked in such dubious circumstances, Opik remained firm in his stance to maintain his presence in the city, although he also did not mind seeking temporary sanctuary in his home village, a cushion to absorb his urban misfortune.

## **Conclusion**

In a manner of a total institution, a manufacturing factory has all instruments—from fortress-like walls, badges, body-searches and, power mechanisms, to a control apparatus—to contain workers in a reality different from the one/s outside the factory barrier. It concentrates a large number of men and women in more or less similar activities, geared toward commodity production in the capitalist enterprises. Nonetheless, efforts to habituate the labour force on the shopfloor level to capitalist production and to put them under the subjection of corporate disciplines also produce dissenting reactions from workers. The production conditions on the assembly line and the strict rules which intrude on individual habits are sources of pressure and anxiety for the workers. Such feelings enable an industrial regime of domination to be faced by workers with disobedience aimed at creating a counter-hegemony as well as space to exercise their individuality.

Apart from the relentless work which tests human endurance, values brought from past existence, mostly gained in the countryside, can also become a benchmark for the rural youth to judge to the unjust practices and degrading treatment within the factory regime. A comparison of the length of working hours in the village and in the factory, as well as the perception of the benevolent countryside as a sanctuary for the weary urban workers are potent sources of ideological critique of the degraded working conditions in urban manufacturing firms. Despite offering a steady and increasingly improving income, the factory shopfloor remains an alienating reality for rural youth. This is evident in their detachment from their current occupations, and their belief that their industrial existence is not permanent. This suggests that despite the discipline the total institution is imposing on the workers, the incorporation of rural youth into capitalist production is never complete.

Wolf, speaking of manufacturing workers in rural Java, has noted that the daughters' '*preference* for factory employment' as well as the 'limited and constrained options' for other types of occupation have contributed to their acceptance of industrial control and discipline (Wolf 1992:136, emphasis in

original). Moreover, she asserts, reliance on their parents' household economy also permeates their acceptance of the low payment and deprived working arrangements and, hence, explains the lack of protest amongst these working daughters. Wolf argues that this degree of compliance is linked to the 'nature of transition' from agriculture to industry experienced by these daughters (*ibid*, p.134). A similar acceptance as a result of transition, though with different reasoning, is also present among the workers in Tangerang. Options for occupations beyond the factory work that migrant workers believe they have, as a result of improved school education, contribute to their perception of factory work as being transitional. This leads to a disinclination to fight for improvement of conditions in the occupation.<sup>24</sup> The expectation of post-factory employment can serve as a defence mechanism, their compliance, to respond to the pressure emerging from the regime on the shopfloor. Therefore, in dealing with discomforts brought by the distressing environment in the workplace, petty actions become the alternative, awarding them immediate results rather than relying on the intricate process of seeking a resolution through organised actions. Though this critical response has not, or not yet, exploded in a radical direction, their reaction to the elaborate detailed control of their activities suggests that corporate domination has never been total.

To some extent, the processes the migrant workers have to undergo in their integration into the manufacturing regime evoke Victor Turner's notion of 'liminality' to describe a stage in transition between two different realms, e.g. status, age, or place (Turner 1967:93-111). The notion is based on Arnold Van Gennep's 'rite of passage' which is divided into three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation (cited in Turner 1967:94, also Barnard and Spencer 2002:489). Badges and body-searches are examples of rituals that mark the detachment of workers from their pre-factory existence (separation). Habituation to the factory regime—its work methods, discipline and control—realigns workers' behaviour to the industrial world of work as the destination of the transition (incorporation). Nevertheless, as workers' integration into the industrial institution is never complete, the stage of transition (liminality, threshold) impinges on the entirety of their existence on the shopfloor, from day one to the end of their livelihood as

factory workers. This is because their industrial body, their physical presence on the factory, is constantly overshadowed by their past values as well as their future expectations of a post-factory existence. This makes workers' total incorporation problematical. Liminality, therefore, is not merely a stage that marks the arrival of workers at, and adjustment to, the factory, supposedly a knowable period before industrial inclusion is eventually accomplished. Rather, their difficulty in habituating their selves to the regime, and their lack of enthusiasm to become attached to the work suggests that workers, as long as they are on the factory floor, are continuously in a state of transition. They are caught between both past and future, imagining in their present factory existence. However, at the same time, they do not belong to any of these states, making tension and conflict on the shopfloor inevitable.



Plate 4.5: Woman Workers at Their Lodgings (photo:RWJ)



Plate 4.6: A Married Woman Worker (left) and Her Child  
(photo:RWJ)

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> In South Korean case, Kim (1997:48) pointed out the company's effort to bind their employees by bringing on a view of 'We Are a Happy Family' as the way to obtain workers' 'loyalty' to their employer. A similar occurrence in Thailand is demonstrated by Mills (1999:122), in which employer and labour are bound in a patron-client-like relationship with the former acts as 'parents' with 'moral obligations' (*bun khun*) to ensure the latter's welfare in return for 'loyalty and obedience'.

<sup>2</sup> See also Chapter 5 on waging conditions and workers' consumption.

<sup>3</sup> Every month, the company deduct the workers' wage to pay the Jamsostek monthly fee.

<sup>4</sup> Until I completed my fieldwork, I had not heard anything about a resolution coming out from the dispute. In fact, Juanda's factory was the only company I knew in the area that had no workplace-based union recognised by the employer. A few numbers of workers were apparently linked with a network of a Jakarta-based union federation, but had not been able to form a formal workplace union because of the company's resistance. See below on Juanda's experience with the union.

<sup>5</sup> As the tasks performed by female workers in these industries are vital to the entire process of production, it was mostly women who suffered a lot from the 1997 crisis as many of them had to loose their factory jobs. Meanwhile, male workers who were not mainly engaged in the main production process were retained to undertake maintenance work. Figure 4.2 indicates the decline of women's proportion and the near-closing gap between males and females within the industries' work force in 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Although I knew only a few workers who took the course, my conversation with an owner of this business confirms that more than half of every class of about seven were workers employed in the surrounding industries, whereas the rest were school students. He ran four different classes on word-processing and spreadsheets in a week, each with different participants. There were, at least, two other similar courses within the radius of one kilometre from the workers' neighbourhood where I conducted my fieldwork.

<sup>7</sup> This regulation is found in the Joint Work Agreement of PT MKS Company (PT MKS and SP-TSK 2000), of which Paragraph 36 on Accommodation Allowance, Point 2 states: 'The company provides an accommodation allowance of up to Rp20,000/month [A\$4] to every married male employee who has the status of head of the family on the presentation of marriage certificate to the Division of Human Resource' (p.48, my translation). Such factory regulation clearly contradicts the Guidelines No.SE-04/m/BW/1996 issued by the Minister of Manpower which disallowed discriminatory practices against female workers.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Joint Work Agreement of PT MKS Company (PT MKS and SP-TSK 2000), Paragraph 37 on Maternal Allowance, Point 1, 'The company provides maternity allowance of Rp100,000 [A\$20] to the wife of an employee who gives birth to the first to the third child on the presentation of the relevant documents' (p.49, my translation). The documents required to claim this allowance normally include birth certificate and marriage certificate. However, the condition from one factory to another is not always the same. In the Joint Work Agreement in PT PCA Company (PT PCA 2000), a garment industry, it is stated that maternity allowance is available to both the wife of an employee as well as a female employee (p.69). Yet, only those who have served for at least two

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years are eligible for the benefit and the newborn child has to be from a legitimate (*yang sah*) marital relation.

<sup>9</sup> This early withdrawal from the workforce is identified by Elson and Pearson (1981:93) as 'natural wastage'. See also Joekes (1985) who criticised the notion of the 'shorter working life' (p.188) of female workers, as the basis for wage differentiation between men and women.

<sup>10</sup> Also, I found that all married female workers I spoke with were already employed in industrial work before their marriage. They met their spouses in Tangerang and after having a wedding ceremony in the village, the couples returned to the city and recommenced their factory career. 'I had already got used to work,' was a common explanation I heard from these married women workers. In contrast, wives who were brought from the village by their working husbands generally stayed at home and considered themselves more as housewives to their spouses and children. Being a stranger to city life and restricted by the view of themselves as being brought to town to offer domestic support to husbands are some reasons for their reluctance (or, perhaps, constraints) to be engaged in the workforce.

<sup>11</sup> This is seen through the appointment of a union leader as the Minister of Manpower, carrying the 'pro-labour' agenda 'in negotiations on minimum wages and the labor law' (Manning 2003:6).

<sup>12</sup> See below on other factors that make business in Indonesia no longer viable to investors.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 1: Figure 1.7 and Figure 1.8 for the industrial importance of Jatiuwung subdistrict where Gambir is located.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, the early-1990s ever-biggest strike in Tangerang, mobilised by workers from several companies under one single manufacturing conglomeration (PT GT Group), of which Hadiz (1997) and Kammen (1997) drew their cases, was located in Gambir industrial-residential neighbourhood in Jatiuwung subdistrict.

<sup>15</sup> During my very first encounter with Tangerang migrant workers in the mid-1990s, I knew a small group of about 10 active labour organisers who had solid backgrounds as manufacturing workers. Their involvement in labour activism had not been restricted to their own workplaces as they had similarly contributed to the organising work in neighbouring factories in the area. On my second return to the town for my doctoral fieldwork in year 2000, I only managed to see two of them, one female and one male, both in their 30s, who had married and had one child. From them I discovered that their old colleagues had returned to their home towns or been forced to find work elsewhere following the 1997 crisis. There was another one who had actually remained working in a factory, but was now more occupied with his new 'supposedly-promising' business of multi-level marketing, offering products to workmates. Despite most employers are now allowing the establishment of workplace-based unions, separate from the New Order-associated union federation, the couple were no longer engaged actively in the movement and, instead, were more concerned in taking care of their personal life, raising the child, and saving to purchase consumer goods. The husband, who had been detained twice in army headquarters in the mid-1990s, was now working in a furniture company, still as a shopfloor worker like when I knew him a few years before. Since my first introduction to

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him, he had changed job from one factory to another as many as four times because of his heavy-weight activism. The wife, once an admirably committed labour organiser, was now voluntarily unemployed.

<sup>16</sup> The union's network in Juanda's workplace had just recently-established for less than one year. However, the union itself—now a legal organisation—had been formed since before 1998 when it was still considered an illegal organisation by the government.

<sup>17</sup> The May Day celebration mentioned above was mainly organised by newly-established unions and labour-concerned groups emerging only after the fall of Soeharto in 1998. However, some were those that had been formed during the repressive era, in which their existence during that time were not acknowledged by the state, and hence they had to operate underground.

<sup>18</sup> One time, Yudi's colleague, Pur, was caught sleeping during work hours by the head of division. Instead of waking him up, the head took a picture of Pur while he was asleep. The following day, the photo was placed on the notice board as a warning to the other workers. Pur was embarrassed by it and told to me that he was extremely tired at that time. He was then reprimanded and his promotion to a permanent position was delayed.

<sup>19</sup> The company did not extend his contract because, by doing so, he argued, they would have had to upgrade his salary level as a highly-skilled worker with greater knowledge of machines in the area. As the company had spent a lot on importing new technologies from its mother country, he added, spending more on paying a skilled technician such as Mulani would be inefficient, particularly since the corporation had just started production.

<sup>20</sup> I noticed during my fieldwork that he managed on three occasions to take out the rolls. However, on the fourth attempt, while striving to get three rolls at once, he was caught by company security and, subsequently referred to the police and sacked. After three weeks in police detention and after his wife pleaded with the company not to press any charges against him, Mulani was finally released.

<sup>21</sup> When I interviewed Mulani in early 2001, he admitted that recently, within two days, he had been able to collect Rp400,0000 (\$80) by selling four barrels of used oil to the man. He used half the money obtained for his routine budget, including remitting some to his wife in the village, and the rest for treating colleagues in his lodging compound with snacks and soft drinks for several nights.

<sup>22</sup> In his capacity as the President of Bank Dagang Nasional Indonesia, one of the businesses in his conglomeration, the owner allegedly misused the Liquidity Assistance funds (*BLBI, Bantuan Likuiditas Bank Indonesia*) from the Indonesian Central Bank (Kompas 22/4/2002, Tempo Interaktif 26/3/2002). The funds which were actually aimed at aiding the Banks' liquidity, were then purportedly channelled to finance other businesses in his conglomeration. Despite the case involving Rp7.1 trillion (Kompas 19/3/2003), the suspect managed to escape trial in April 2001 by using his health condition as a reason to seek treatment in Japan, with the permission from the Attorney General. However, since leaving Japan, he has resided in Singapore, claiming that further therapy is required, since August 2001 (Kompas 22/4/2003).

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<sup>23</sup> The same lack of tolerance was also common when workers watched the corrupt politicians on media, particularly TV. One of them commented: 'I am fed up (*bosan*) with them (the politicians on TV), they are just like clowns.'

<sup>24</sup> Speaking about the Indonesian working-class action in 1990s, Hadiz (1994) argue that the workers' greater reliance on urban existence, but, at the same time, their limited social mobility enabled them to 'have a more permanent stake in struggles to improve their work and living conditions in the factories and cities' (p.69).

## Chapter 5

### Contesting the Subjection



*Plate 5.1: Leisure Time in Workers' Neighbourhood (photo: RWJ)*

## **Chapter 5**

### **Contesting the Subjection:**

### **Migrant Workers and Consumption**

The media-created urban imagined lifestyle, taking the model of the urban privileged class, has been an important issue for the rural youth migrating to cities. In Indonesia, the spread of urban middle-class values as fetishism in the everyday life of almost every household cannot be separated from the economic development introduced by Soeharto's New Order since the late-1960s. The success story of the Asian miracle, at least before the 1997 monetary crisis, and the country's integration into the world market (see Chapter 1) has elevated a newly-emerging urban middle class which is not defined merely by its economic status but also through its mode of consumption and material existence (Gerke 2000, Robison 1996). This is the class whose lifestyle displays a global and cosmopolitan orientation, and has become the picture of cultural and economic establishment brought by the development program. The endorsement of 'consumption and leisure as its ultimate values' in mass media has a principal role in the dissemination of ideas as well as images of modernity and, hence, the promotion of a consumption-driven lifestyle (Gerke 2000:145). The ever-increasing broadcast coverage of electronic mass media and the opening up of the countryside has ensured that the discourse of modernity echoes on the muddy paddy fields in outlying villages. Today, the popular acceptance of dominant social values has enabled the penetration of commodity capitalism to rural towns as well as to the marginal urban industrial-residential neighborhoods.

This chapter will discuss the practice of consumption amongst the factory workers. Consumption has allowed workers not only to be engaged in the discourse of cosmopolitan culture, but equally gives them a chance to be the consumers of

globally-produced commodities from which modern culture take its representation. In the theory of 'mass culture', Theodor Adorno (1991) sees that consumption is no more than 'an appendage of the machinery'(p.99), an extension of the production sequence. He argues that the culture industry subjugates consumers to market exploitation and the art of advertisement, inundating individuals' consciousness with cultural commodities stripped of their use value. The spread of consumerism can also be seen, mostly by Marxists, as an ideological medium to rationalise the present system. The spread of capitalist commodity production exemplifies the Marxist notion about the ideas of the ruling class being the society's dominant ideology (Marx 1977d:176). Its acceptance by the masses might indicate what Antonio Gramsci (1971) terms 'hegemony', in which the ruling class' domination of society is carried out not through coercive forces, but 'intellectual and moral leadership' (p.57-8), penetrating the subjects' 'private initiatives and activities' (p.258). John Fiske (1989:2) points out that commodities, such as televisions, records, and clothes, make up the 'resources' for those who hold the economic and ideological authority to maintain the contemporary order and to exert moral values to be embraced by the masses. There is no doubt that the migrant workers' idea of modernity to which they subscribe is inseparable from the state's dominant ideology of development (*pembangunan*) promoting progress and advancement to its populace. The incorporation of urban lifestyle into the idea of modernity suggests the efficacy of the state's ideological apparatus (e.g. media and school) to promote the modern conditions experienced by the urban middle class as the icon of *pembangunan*.

Nevertheless, the engagement of workers in the practice of consumption does not only imply the passive subjugation of the subaltern to the dominant values and profit-oriented motives of the capitalists. The first part of this chapter explores how workers, amidst their urban difficulties and 'sacrifice' over the decent provision of basic needs, can accomplish possession of the commodities believed to symbolise modernity. Strategies such as overtime, saving, and reducing food consumption are deployed so they can afford consumer goods otherwise beyond the workers'

economic capacity. The rest of the chapter will point out workers' experience of consumption and the way they make sense of the practice, involving workers' intellectual capacity to bring practice into their actuality. I will specifically address the practice of consumption to develop the argument in this chapter, that consumption can be also an arena in which the subaltern produces their own discourse different from the hegemonising 'intellectual and moral leadership' of the bourgeoisie and the state about modernization and urban lifestyle. For rural youth-turned urban migrants, the consumption of consumer goods, on the one hand, increases their leverages in order to demonstrate a degree of independence from parents regarding their pursuit of modern identity. It shows that their urban existence is not solely filled by their struggle for subsistence. On the other hand, as factory workers, amidst their urban hardship and experiences on the shopfloor, the possession of luxuries reveals a degree of 'affluence' which is in contradiction with the society's perception of workers' subjection and destitution. Thus, it becomes an expression of resistance against the alienating consequence of industrialisation and modernisation that tends to marginalise subaltern subjects such as industrial labourers.

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One afternoon, a group of manufacturing workers from *bagian kuisi*, the quality control (QC) unit, had just completed their morning shift at a tyre plant. That day was the payday, so that, before leaving the factory complex, they joined a long line of workers queuing to receive payment at another office in the vast compound surrounded by a two and half metre high brick wall. Among them was Farid, a 22 year-old male worker who, like almost all other factory laborers in the area, was an urban migrant. He left the line carrying a monthly wage of Rp 550,000 (\$110) in his pocket. Looking weary after a hard eight hours work and waiting in a long queue for payment, he seemed delighted, despite the fact that he was aware that under today's difficult economic conditions, the amount he had just received would only just cover his basic daily needs. However, on his way to his lodging (*kontrakan*), 15 minutes walk from his workplace, his mind was

completely preoccupied by something other than just a simple calculation of how to juggle his monthly wage to meet his expenses.

Later in the afternoon, Farid was seen carrying a cardboard box containing an electronic appliance. He had just purchased a brand new television set from *Pasar Doyong*, a market near the workers' neighbourhood where he lived. The television set was immediately installed at his lodging, a room of no more than 10 square metres. Soon several other residents in the compound of about 70 lodging rooms were drawn to Farid's room to watch the television. Its picture quality was not good, as an outdoor antenna was yet to be installed, but it was good enough to keep the viewers sitting on the tiled floor until late that night, taking pleasure from the entertainment programs available from several television stations. The next afternoon, after he came back from the morning-shift work, Farid bought a five metre-high bamboo stick from a local carpenter to mount an outdoor antenna. He now seemed satisfied with the picture quality from his TV set, and was happy that he no longer needed to go to his neighbour's lodging in the compound for TV entertainment.

During the following months, Farid added some more items to his personal property, which he obtained with money from his hard work as a factory worker: firstly, a VCD player, secondly, two loudspeakers, and then, a mountain bike; all brand new. A table was assembled from wooden materials he collected from a local recycling depot, so that his entertainment equipment could be housed together. The room was arranged to accommodate more people willing to enjoy TV or VCD entertainment, almost every day and night, by leaving two-thirds of his room empty, creating an open, but narrow, space for the audience. When at work, Farid often left his room key with another resident so others could still be entertained while he was not home.

Leisure time activities—or to be more precise, after-work life—changes in the workers' neighbourhood every time the residents make a new purchase of such electronic appliances, which are still considered luxuries by the average working class person. A crowd of male workers who used to hang around in the compound, playing guitar, singing out of tune, and gossiping, soon moved their domain from an open space outdoors to Farid's lodging to become TV audiences and amateur commentators on sports, celebrities, politics, and other issues. Another group of female workers from a

shoe factory, as well as a group from a ladies' sanitary pad factory, who had often spent their evenings chatting, laughing loudly, and giggling in front of their lodging, could now be found in the room of a colleague who had just purchased a karaoke set equipped with two medium-size loudspeakers. They sang enthusiastically, following the song text on the TV screen.

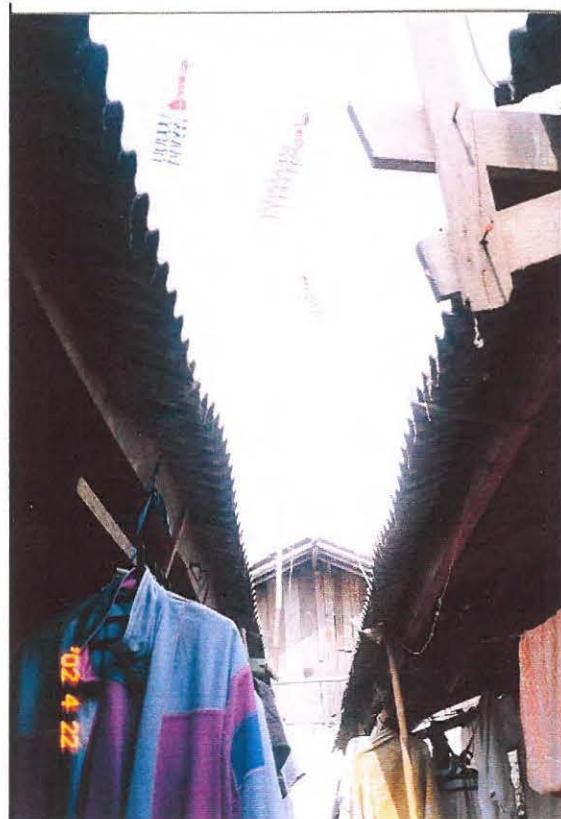


Plate 5.2: Mounting Bamboo Stick  
for Outdoor Antennas (photo:JNW)



Plate 5.3: Connecting with the Global:  
Workers taking pleasure from their luxuries (photo:RWJ)

At first glance, the increasing possession of such cultural symbols of modernity and progress might reflect the final stages in a Rostowian unilinear course of economic development which has to be embraced by most developing nations in order to pursue the Western Europe path (e.g. Todaro 1982). Some keywords from the paradigm, such as industrialisation, high consumption, and leisure time, seem to accord with the snap impression from the narrative above. However, a full realisation of modernity as indicated in the take-off phase, or even in the stage of high mass consumption, might not be a true reflection of the everyday reality on the ground in most worker neighbourhoods in Tangerang. It is ironic that this pattern of consumption of material goods and the embrace of such lifestyles are adopted by the very same migrant workers who are living in an area where, for example, access to clean water is almost a daily struggle and where a typical slum-like *kampung*, with almost no rubbish collection, is their everyday experience. The devastating effect of flooding during monsoons offers no peace of mind to the residents in the area. Moreover, in terms of economic activities, the industrial workers still have to work

long hours for approximately Rp 16,000 (\$3) a day, and more hours of overtime for more payment. The notion of less work for more leisure time, a stage in the Rostow's characterisation of a high mass consumption society, is certainly not the order of the day in Tangerang.

### **Wage System and Overtime**

Juni Thamrin (1998:50) argues that minimum wage regulation is a policy created by the central government to serve as a 'safety net' in order to protect workers from the tendency of employers to arbitrarily set wages, which possibly threatens workers' level of subsistence. Nonetheless, he continued, a minimum wage regime provides a rationale for corporations not to pay their employees above the regulated level, even if their businesses make large profits which should enable them to offer more to workers. Accordingly, it is often viewed by big corporate business as a maximum wage standard, regardless of the company's profit performance (Thamrin 1994:34).<sup>1</sup> The current minimum wage regulation was introduced in Indonesia through legislation in the mid 1970s. Nevertheless, 'the variation in regional labour markets' (Manning 1998:207) has made it difficult to establish a nationally regulated rate. As a result, a mechanism to respond to such variation has been introduced through the implementation of a provincially-regulated minimum wage (*UMP*) which was previously known as a regional minimum wage (*UMR*).<sup>2</sup> *UMP* is endorsed by the Minister of Manpower based on the advice of provincial governments and the National Wages Council (*DPN*)<sup>3</sup>, an official body whose membership is appointed by the President.

In the beginning, however, the policy of minimum wages was merely lip service given the lack of commitment from provincial governments to fully adopt the regulation. Manning indicated that in early-1980, just six out of 27 provincial governments approved the implementation of the policy in their jurisdiction (Manning 1998:208n.21). In addition, provincial authorities have failed to regularly

adjust the minimum wage;<sup>4</sup> there is often up to three years delay before it is increased in line with the inflation rate, leading to the deterioration of workers' purchasing power over some selected basic necessities (Manning 1998:208, Thamrin 1998:58-9).<sup>5</sup> Even since the minimum wage and its annual revision have become compulsory for all provinces since 1993 (Manning 1998:216), there remains an irony in which the living costs constantly rise once the new level of wages is announced, weakening 'the real value of minimum wages' (*ibid.*:208). A report by BPS indicates that payment for workers in the industrial sector increased sharply from an average of Rp 178,286 (A\$35.66) per month in 1996 to Rp 462,429 (A\$92.49) in 2001 (Satunet.com 16/8/01). This means that within just five years there was a 259 percent increase in the nominal value of the minimum wage. However, Thamrin found that the regularly-adjusted minimum wage was always behind the increase in prices of basic necessities, which usually exceeded inflation rate (1994:46, see also Tjandraningsih 2000:263).

Another factor that makes the regime of official minimum wages comparatively irrelevant to the improvement of workers' basic subsistence lies in its lack of correlation with another measure: Minimum Physical Needs (*KFM*).<sup>6</sup> In principle, *KFM* is based on the variable costs of basic needs, such as food, drink, clothing and housing, and calculated on price per item categorised as average (*sedang*) quality and the quantity consumed per month by an average (unmarried) individual worker.<sup>7</sup> Table 5.1 indicates the disparity of the percentage of the minimum wage against the *KFM* (see Table 5.1). Facing the criticism that *KFM* was 'just enough to maintain a worker's physical sustenance' (Thamrin 1994:41n7, my translation), the government applied another measurement, Minimum Living Needs (*KHM*)<sup>8</sup> to accommodate non-physical variables such as the cost of recreation and haircuts. Even so, the problem of the gap between the wage level and the new indicator remained (see Table 5.1). It was only in 2001 and 2002 that the minimum wage in Jakarta, to which the rate in Tangerang has been adjusted recently, made up, respectively, 100.06 and 113.72 percent of the *KHM*, only to plunge again to 84.57

percent in 2003. In addition, the *KHM* is regarded as archaic as it does not include the cost of children's education, medical expenses as well as other costs that are associated with the needs of workers with families (Kompas 22/10/02). These data give a picture of the failure of the contemporary workers' wage to comply with a minimum decent standard of living.

Table 5.1: Minimum Wage as a Percentage of KFM/KHM in Jakarta and West Java, 1982-2003

Year	Jakarta	West Java
1982	60	-
1988	66	31
1990	75	46
1992	75	70
1994	85	83
2000	52.75	65.98
2001	100.06	100.51
2002	113.72	-
2003	84.57	100

*Notes:*

1982-1994 data uses KFM; 2000-2003 data uses KHM; Tangerang was part of West Java up to 2000; the minimum wage and the KHM in Tangerang has been based on the calculation for Jakarta since 2001.

*Source:*

Manning 1998:208; LTDB 2000; DBD 2003a; DBD 2003b; DBDPJ 2003.

By the time I arrived in the field in late-2000, the regulated minimum wage in Tangerang Municipality was Rp 344,250 (A\$68.85) per month. Later, in early-2001, it was revised to Rp 426,500 (A\$85.3) per month. The minimum wage applies to all shopfloor workers (non-staff employees), which is the lowest rank in the hierarchy

within the factories. It applies regardless of type of industry, sex, marital status and the number of dependants. However, despite the standardisation in wage levels, the payment received by workers, normally either on a monthly or fortnightly basis, varies slightly from one factory to another. Variation in payment depends on one's status of employment (probation or permanent worker), length of employment, and overtime conditions. In addition to minimum wage, most workers are eligible for allowances to cover expenses, such as, transport, accommodation, and meals.

Table 5.2: Growth of Minimum Wage  
for Jakarta (and its surroundings),  
1992-2003

Year	Minimum Wage (in Indonesian Rp)
1992	65,000
1994	98,800
1996	122,229
1997	134,986
1998	155,229
1999	231,000
2000	344,250
2001	426,500
2002	591,266
2003	631,554

*Source:*  
Manning 1998:208; Basri  
2002:225; My notes from  
fieldwork; LTDB 2000; DBD  
2003a; DBD 2003b; DBDPJ  
2003.

Having worked in the tyre industry for nearly 11 months, Farid had twice experienced a rise in the minimum wage. When I interviewed him in March 2001, his monthly pay was Rp 550,000 (A\$110), exceeding the minimum wage rate in 2001 (see Table 5.2). In his payment slip, the minimum wage appeared as base salary (*gaji*

*pokok*). The addition to the base salary came from an accommodation allowance, production premium (*premi produksi*), attendance premium (*premi hadir*), and some other allowances (see Table 5.3). The accommodation allowance (Rp 22,500/A\$4.5), however, was considered too low to cover rental costs, ranging between Rp 65,000-150,000 (A\$13-30). Other companies in the area normally provided the same accommodation allowance to their employees. The production premium was paid only if one achieved a certain level of monthly production output. In Farid's company, every single production group along the assembly line had to meet an output quota. When the group managed to produce 150-160 tyres per month, each individual in group was entitled to the full of production premium, worth Rp 80,000 (A\$16). Failure to meet the quota would result in a reduction in the premium. Farid said: 'One hundred and fifty (tyres per month) is already difficult. In my 11 months in the factory, I only managed to meet the quota three times.' As for the attendance premium, it was paid only if a worker did not lose one single work day a month. Overtime, through which workers could often expect extra payments (Andriyani 1990, Mills 1999:119), hardly existed at this company. The massive scale of production at this locally-owned, export-oriented manufacturing corporation enabled the company to constantly maintain a regime of 24 hours production a day, with three regular working shifts. This shift system freed the company from needing overtime, which, according to the regulation, obliges firms to increase the payment for every additional work hour performed by workers.

Some workers claimed that working in a factory that had no overtime was less desirable. Without overtime, the monthly payment was considered low; as workers said: 'We only eat (*makan*) the minimum wage'. A different picture can be seen from those employed in a company where overtime is offered, such as the one that employed Ery. The fluctuation in demand to the shoes produced in her export-oriented factory made it difficult for the firm to maintain a full day-and-night production cycle, with a number of shifts, such as the one in Farid's factory. A one-shift system was put into effect instead, in which one had to work eight hours from

7.30 in the morning, for which the workers were paid Rp 426,500 (A\$85.3) per month, the regulated minimum wage at that time. The only exception was that the payment was made on a fortnightly basis, so that the amount of base salary was simply half of the monthly rate. Nonetheless, during an interview in March 2001, Ery admitted that she could bring home a fortnightly payment of nearly Rp 750,000 (A\$150) when overtime was required. The breakdown in Ery's payment slip was Rp 213,250 (A\$42.65) for base salary, plus allowances, such as attendance premium and menstruation allowance (see Table 5.3). The major part, or nearly 70 percent of the fortnightly amount, came from overtime. Menstruation allowance was paid as compensation when female workers opted to work during the two days menstruation leave to which they are entitled under the labour law. A transportation allowance was normally added when overtime finished late in the evening, when workers had to rely on the more expensive motorbike taxi because the cheaper public transport was rare at that time of night. There was no accommodation allowance, as the company provided its unmarried employees with dormitories (*mess*).<sup>9</sup>

In general, when overtime continued for several week—as I often saw workers from Ery's factory come home almost at midnight—the total monthly income could be as much as Rp 1,500,000 (A\$300); a threefold increase from the minimum wage rate. The amount gave Ery flexibility in spending for basic needs as well as allowing her to save approximately half of her wage. However, when demand for production was low, the amount she received would be no more than the minimum wage. When this happened, the only difference was that those who received fortnightly payments could still cheer themselves up: 'Being paid every two weeks does not distance us from money (*tidak jauh dari uang*) compared to those receiving monthly payment.'

Table 5.3: Monthly Income Received by Selected Workers in Various Companies, 2000-2001<sup>a)</sup>(in Indonesian Rupiah)<sup>b)</sup>

	<i>Farid<sup>c)</sup></i>	<i>Ery<sup>d)</sup></i>	<i>Mulani<sup>e)</sup></i>
<i>Time of interview</i>	<i>March 2001</i>	<i>March 2001</i>	<i>December 2000</i>
Minimum wage	426,500	426,500	344,250
Overtime	-	1,035,500 <sup>f)</sup>	360,000 <sup>g)</sup>
Accommodation allowance	22,500	-	22,000
Production premium	80,000	-	-
Attendance premium	7,000	12,000	7,000
Meal allowance	-	-	15,000
Shift allowance	-	-	7,000
Menstruation allowance	-	8,000	-
Transportation allowance	-	6,000	-
Other Allowances	14,000	-	-
<i>Total monthly income received at the last payday</i>	<i>550,000</i>	<i>1,500,000</i>	<i>755,250</i>

*Notes:*

<sup>a)</sup> The amount revealed was based on subjects' recollection rather than on exact breakdown as indicated in pay slips; <sup>b)</sup> Rp 5,000 = A\$1; <sup>c)</sup> male, unmarried, less than two years service; <sup>d)</sup> female, unmarried, less than two years service, wage payment was made fortnightly; <sup>e)</sup> male, married, less than two years service; <sup>f)</sup> seven hours overtime per day for nearly the whole month (working seven-eight hours during Sunday-offs were regarded as overtime); <sup>g)</sup> eight hours overtime per day for nearly 12 days

### Basic Consumption: An Urban Struggle

The Minister of Manpower once admitted that the rise in the minimum wage is merely a result of adjustment to inflation (Kompas 5/6/02). He added that such increase remained inadequate to make the wage level pertinent to the constant growth, even higher than the inflation rate, of the prices of basic commodities and services. This condition was exacerbated by the 1997 financial crisis, causing the rapidly skyrocketing prices of most commodities, creating a decline in the real value of the minimum wage (Kompas 4/6/02).

I found varying responses to questions about the wage conditions. The severest impact is experienced by married workers as the measurement used to assess minimum basic needs is a standard applied to single workers. Mulani, a male worker at an export-oriented large-scale plastic and foam company, knew very well that the minimum wage was inadequate for a worker with a family. With his wife, Qomariah, and a 15-month old daughter, he lived in a rented lodging. When he first brought his family to Tangerang from the countryside to live with him, his monthly income was just double the minimum rate. By December 2000, he received around Rp 800,000 (A\$160), when the minimum wage was regulated at the level of Rp 344,250 (A\$68.85)(see table 5.2). The additional amount came from 50 hours overtime and a few other allowances. Despite the increase in food prices and the high price of baby needs, the family could just survive on that wage. In the following months, however, there was a decline in demand for commodities supplied by Mulani's factory, leading the company to cease its overtime. This had serious consequences for the family economy; they had to survive on the minimum wage. There was a rise in minimum wage in early 2001 (see Table 5.2), which, however, then prompted an increase in prices of daily necessities. To ease the burden of living costs, Mulani reluctantly sent Qomariah and the daughter back to the countryside. Mulani believed that in the village his wife's parents and extended family could offer his family support, not merely in terms of financial assistance, but also to help his wife to take care of the baby. 'I don't want them to suffer in the city. In the village at least their (his wife and daughter) daily survival is assured,' he explained. Living on his own, Mulani was able to allocate Rp 250,000 (A\$50), or half of his monthly income, including allowances, to send home to his family, and used the other half for himself (see Table 5.4). As his company provided meals during work hours, he only needed to spend an average Rp 2,330 per day for dinner, or approximately Rp 70,000 (A\$14) per month. It is hard to imagine, however, that he spent only that much for his monthly dinner given a simple menu of rice, vegetables, and fried egg at most food stalls in the area cost no less than Rp 90,000 (A\$18) per month. To juggle his budget for food consumption, Mulani

was quite pleased with an even simpler menu: only rice and vegetables. When he felt he was fed up with that menu, he ran up a debt at a food stall for a diet containing meat, chicken, or fish, which he paid next payday, a pattern repeated from month to month.

Table 5.4: Monthly Expenditure by Selected Workers in Various Companies, 2001<sup>a)</sup> (in Indonesian Rupiah)<sup>b)</sup>

	<i>Mulan</i> <sup>c)</sup>	<i>Farid</i> <sup>d)</sup>	<i>Lamiri</i> <sup>e)</sup>	<i>Ery</i> <sup>f)</sup>
<i>Time of interview</i>	<i>March 2001</i>	<i>March 2001</i>	<i>May 2001</i>	<i>March 2001</i>
Accommodation expense	65,000	75,000	40,000	
Meal expenditure	70,000	120,000	150,000	140,000
Return transport to work	26,000		26,000	
Cigarettes	45,000	30,000		
Other food expenditure (e.g. snacks, sugar, coffee, tea)	20,000	200,000	170,000	150,000
Other expenses (e.g. toiletries, clothing)	22,000	30,000	150,000	200,000
Remittance	250,000	35,000		
Saving		10,000	264,000	1,010,000
<i>Payment received at the last payday</i>	<i>500,000<sup>g)</sup></i>	<i>550,000<sup>h)</sup></i>	<i>800,000<sup>i)</sup></i>	<i>1,500,000<sup>j)</sup></i>

*Notes:*

<sup>a)</sup> The amount revealed was based on subjects' recollection rather than on exact breakdown as indicated in pay slips; <sup>b)</sup> Rp 5,000 = A\$1; <sup>c)</sup> male, married; <sup>d)</sup> male, unmarried; <sup>e)</sup> male, married; <sup>f)</sup> female, unmarried, accommodation provided by company (working seven-eight hours during Sunday-offs were regarded overtime); <sup>g)</sup> no overtime involved; <sup>h)</sup> no overtime involved; <sup>i)</sup> with overtime; <sup>j)</sup> with overtime.

Single workers such as Farid who received an amount slightly exceeding the regulated wage rate, spent most of their wages on meals and snacks, accommodation, cigarettes, toiletries, and transport (see Table 5.4). In many companies, workers were provided with a meal, either lunch or dinner, during their shift, so that some savings could be made on food consumption. However, the official minimum wage remained

insufficient for workers with no overtime arrangement to maintain decent living conditions, particularly in relation to the provision of food. With limited expenditure on food, the food intake only comprised carbohydrate and fibre, in rice and vegetables; a cheap simple menu that is inadequate to maintain the well-being of one who regularly has to perform hard physical tasks with high levels of concentration. Extra spending is required to meet the requirements for protein, mainly provided by fish, eggs, chicken or red meat. Some workers prefer to spend more on achieving an adequate balanced diet. 'We have worked hard physically, that is why we need healthier food to replace the energy used up in the workplace,' said one. As no one could survive the basic simple diet for the entire month, menu variations required more spending. At least Rp 120,000 (A\$24) was required to meet a balanced diet. In addition, lack of variation in the lunch menu provided by the company often drove workers seek alternatives. Rather than using meal coupons from the employer at the company canteen, workers, in contrast, preferred to patronise food stalls outside the complex, paying for some variety.

Breakfast, snacks, and soft drinks were all substantial components of food expenses. Many claimed that the expenses for food consumption other than meals were so unpredictable as to make exact calculations of cash of basic needs. Ery once said: 'When I come back from work and feel so weary, I feel like buying a snack and cold drink at the local store.' Another unmarried worker, Lamiri admitted: 'Usually two or three hours after having lunch or dinner, I feel hungry again, so I go to a coffee shop for instant noodles or mung bean porridge, and a glass of milk or a bottle of coke.' Because of this, their total cost for food expenditure would be at least Rp 10,000 (A\$2) per day, or Rp 300,000 (A\$60) per month, roughly 70.3 percent of the 2001 minimum wage (see Table 5.2 and Table 5.4).

Despite these difficulties, it is evident that a growing number of workers manage to save, which mostly come at the expense of food consumption and basic necessities. A married worker such Mulani did not have the luxury of spending on side meals and, rather, had to sacrifice a balanced diet in order to send a regular

remittance to his wife and daughter in the countryside. While saving for Mulani was obligatory to a certain extent because of his responsibility as the breadwinner of the family, unmarried workers did not have such obligations, so that saving is possible. Table 5.4 indicates that, while being able to meet a balanced diet, Farid managed to put aside Rp 45,000 for remittance and saving. In other months, for some more extra cash to purchase electronic luxuries as illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, he reduced his consumption of side-meals or had rice and vegetables for several days; the menu he said he had been used to when in the countryside. From this austere measure, he was able to 'suppress' expenses on essential needs in exchange for approximately Rp 200,000 (A\$40) saving, or nearly half of his monthly income. Savings could similarly be obtained by sharing accommodation with other colleagues; Lamiri saved about Rp 40,000 (A\$8) a month by splitting his lodging expense with another male worker. However, for him, economising on food consumption did not seem necessary as overtime added extra cash to his monthly earning (see Table 5.2 and Table 5.4). This enabled him to save nearly a third of his earning. Ery did not undergo austerity even if her basic expenses might be equal to the minimum wage. This was because overtime payments during peak production season offered her a generous surplus for savings. With her Rp 1,500,000 (A\$300) monthly income, she could save two thirds of her wage.

By and large, workers who can save are expected to contribute some small remittances, to the parents' economy (Silvey 2001, Wolf 1992). Farid, for instance, whose home town was just in the neighbouring district to the west of Tangerang, went home to visit his parents at least once every two months. During the visit, he normally gave his parents Rp 70,000 (A\$14) (see Table 5.4). 'I don't feel comfortable not giving something, at least some money, to my parents, although they have never asked for it,' he said. Lamiri, who was from an outer island in Sumatra and only visited his home town once a year during the *Idul Fitri* festivity, never regularly sent a remittance to the village but had cash ready in hand in case his parents or relatives at home requested help. He admitted he could hardly refuse such requests as he saw it

as a taken-for-granted obligation of a child who earned their own income. One day Lamiri received a letter from his mother asking him to send money home to pay his younger brother's high school tuition fee. Had the letter arrived one week earlier, Lamiri would have had enough money to meet his parent's request. However, having spent substantially on consumer goods—mainly clothing—for himself he had almost no free cash, so he came to me to borrow money equivalent to nearly a third of his minimum wage. He explained:

What would my parents think if their working son did not have money to send home when they are desperately in need. Besides, this is just an occasional request which I can not turn down.

He did not seem to worry about borrowing. He knew that he was able to ask his employer for overtime in the following month in order to repay the debt.

Often, rural obligations could take a form other than direct remittances. A visit of relatives not only oblige migrant to provide accommodation and share his/her tiny rented room with the guest. It similarly requires the host to ensure the provision of food for the guest. Both Farid and Mulani also revealed that they usually give some cash to guests to take back to the village. It was inappropriate not to give money to guests who came to visit from faraway. 'At least they (the relatives) can tell those in the village about us giving them money, so people at home (village) know that we have a good job here and are financially secure,' they said. In other cases, the guests might extend their stay because they are seeking work, which means they rely on their urban network financially until employment is secured.

### **Consumer Goods: Consumption for Self Pleasure**

Nonetheless, many I knew during the fieldwork talked about savings in relation to their own needs and personal use. Remittances, including gifts to parents and relatives during religious festivities, were normally realised only after their necessities to sustain their urban existence were met. 'I will use the saving for my

own future, probably to pursue tertiary education (*kuliah*) or to pay for my wedding,' said Farid. However, Farid spent his savings mostly to purchase consumer goods. Lamiri had big plans for his own future when he might no longer be working in the factory: small trading at a traditional market in his home town was his future dream. It required, as he said, 'significant funds' which he hoped to obtain little by little from savings he made from factory work. One day, however, I discovered that Lamiri ended up spending his savings on a cell phone which he used only to take incoming calls (see Chapter 1). Later, his cell phone was stolen by a drunken friend and, therefore, he bought another, even fancier, one.

Savings to support the workers' existence in the city, including pursuing an urban lifestyle, seems contradictory since industrial workers are described stereotypically as weak, both in economic and political terms (see below). Living in decent conditions is still a struggle for industrial workers and the level of minimum wage is considered inadequate by urban standards. Moreover, the measurement itself is still problematic given, as emphasised earlier, its inability to cover what are considered the 'basic needs' to human beings in specific historical circumstance. It is obvious that the minimum wage regime is simply inadequate to meet the needs, which Marx defines as a component of what is regarded as necessary by people of a particular time and place (1973). To Tangerang workers, the provision of needs, including the contemporary ones like electronic appliances, often involves overtime or austerity measures on basic consumption. In short, the minimum wage regime in Indonesia merely resembles Marx' notion of wage levels being 'for the subsistence of the worker for the duration of his work and...for him to support a family and for the race of labourers not to die out' (1977e:21). Moreover, following Adam Smith, Marx points out that '[t]he ordinary wage...is the lowest compatible with common humanity, that is, with cattle-like existence' (*ibid.*).

It is, therefore, astounding to find that migrant workers managed to maintain a lifestyle which apparently offers them more than 'cattle-like' conditions. The example of Farid and his accumulation of 'wealth' through the ownership of consumer

goods is indicative of a modest trend amongst urban workers today. Before I go on to discuss how the worker subjects define their condition of humanity amidst their deprived urban environment, let me first describe the economic conditions of the early-21<sup>st</sup> century workers in Tangerang.

Compared to the wage levels of industrial workers in the early or even mid-1990s, it is obvious that there has been a significant increase (see Table 5.2). Despite the surrounding controversy mentioned earlier about the decent level of wage, a significant change is occurring in terms of purchasing power and life quality. Such improvement in purchasing power is mainly related to the availability of luxuries whose market prices are today relatively affordable to the workers. The price of a brand new cheap 16-inch Chinese-made colour Crystal or Konka brand TV set was between Rp 600,000-700,000 (A\$120-140) in the early 2000s (see Table 5.5). Though the price remains above the rate of regulated monthly minimum wage received by Farid in 2001 (see Table 5.3), it only took him three-four months to save for a TV set. The saving he made was possible not because he had a real surplus in his monthly income after the cost of his basic necessities had been properly met. Rather, the saving was made at the expense of his basic living conditions: evident in the deteriorating quality of his diet and choosing to stay in poorly-furnished *kampung* dwellings. Rice and vegetables became his main diet for a while. In addition, he also did not mind sleeping on a very thin sheet of plastic mat on a cold tile floor. He ultimately purchased a thin foam mattress after he managed to complete his purchase of luxuries. When asked why he preferred a thin foam mattress to a better one, he replied: 'It (the latter) is too expensive (*kemahalan*)'<sup>10</sup>; a contradictory statement given that the price of the mattress, even a comfortable bed, remains less than a TV set or a VCD player. A worker like Farid, who was solely dependant on the minimum wage, could not have both the luxuries of urban lifestyle and an adequate provision of basic needs at the same time. Therefore, for Farid, being used to the simplicity of a 'rural lifestyle' (e.g. simple meals and a rudimentary dwelling) is a rationalisation for

him to forfeit the comfort of the latter for the luxuries promising his imagined urban lifestyle.

Other workers did not face the same dilemma, particularly if they managed to earn a significant surplus monthly income from overtime. Ery was in this category. She had recently earned almost triple the amount received by Farid. Working from seven thirty in the morning to approximately 11 o'clock in the evening ensured that she had no difficulty affording a television set of a Chinese-made lesser-known brand. Her remaining income was enough that she did not have to sacrifice her everyday basic needs. This condition of flexible income, however, did not mean that she was always in a better financial position because overtime was not always offered.

Today, workers can access a long list of 'luxury' electronic appliances such as VCD players, karaoke sets and stereo systems and massive loudspeakers. Even refrigerators and electric water dispensers are increasingly becoming commonplace in the urban homes of migrant workers in Tangerang. At least one or two of the above items are among the personal belongings of almost every single worker. Once they owned a TV set, a VCD player (and some other luxuries) will usually follow, at a cost of Rp 450,000 (A\$90) for the cheapest Chinese-made brand (e.g. Crystal, Gamma, Vetron). With this combination, workers were able to watch the latest movies, including Hollywood productions which had been released just a few days earlier at top cinemas and whose official VCD/DVD versions were still unavailable. The open trade of pirated VCDs, accessible at almost every corner of town, including at the market close to the industrial-residential neighbourhoods, enables workers to take pleasure from global entertainment. At the same time, they can enjoy a 'modern' existence represented through their ability to afford these technologies. As a result, their future plans for urban existence are affected by the pursuit of consumer goods.

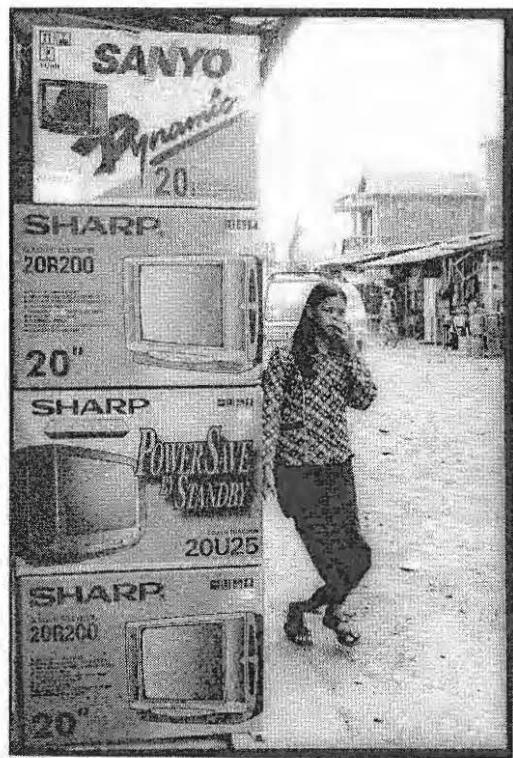


Plate 5.4: A Streetside Display of Electrical Appliances in a Nearby Market (photo:RWJ)

This is different to the situation in the workers' neighbourhood in Tangerang in the early and mid-1990s in which TV sets were rarely found except in the house of the landlord located next to the lodging complex. Very few workers were able to buy a second-hand black and white TV set purchased from the nearby electronic repair shop. At that time, the cheapest domestically-produced 14inch colour TV set (Polytron) was priced at around Rp 500,000-600,000 (A\$100-120).<sup>11</sup> Japanese brands such as Sony and Toshiba were even more expensive (see Table 5.5). At the same time, the regulated minimum wage was less than Rp 150,000 (A\$30)(see Table 5.2). Even overtime that hypothetically double the earning, the wage remained far below the price of the cheapest TV set. I still recall a conversation in 1995 with a Tangerang factory worker who said that she would not dare to dream of having a TV set as her earning only barely covered her basic subsistence. Also at that time, not all lodgings

had electricity, or if it was available, the landlord normally limited its use only from sunset to midnight, even earlier. As VCD technology was also unknown and home karaoke was uncommon at that time, lower-class cinema was an entertainment outlet accessible to the workers, particularly on Saturday night and Sunday afternoon.<sup>12</sup>

Several factors allow contemporary workers greater access to luxuries compared to their predecessors from early and mid-1990s. Firstly, I have already discussed the rise in the nominal value of the regulated minimum wage, which makes possible the ‘dream’ of having such goods. Secondly, the presence of cheaper electrical appliances from other developing countries, mainly China, allows the local market to attract low-income consumers like the factory workers (see Table 5.5). The burgeoning of private TV stations also creates an increasing demand for TV sets. Farid, for instance, said that one reason for him to possess his own TV set was to allow him to freely choose his favorite channel to watch. ‘I have to give up (*mengalah*) my preferred (TV) program when watching TV at a neighbour’s lodging; it’s up to the owner to choose the channel,’ he explained. Such disagreement on what program to watch was unlikely to appear in the early-1990s when the state-run and less-appealing TVRI was the main channel accessible.<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, the flow of cheaper imported electrical products from other developing countries encourages the domestic producers, using either foreign licences (e.g. Sanyo, Sharp, Samsung) or local brands (e.g. National/Panasonic and Polytron), to be more competitive in price (Tempo 19-25/6/2000)(see Table 5.5). The competitiveness of domestic producers is also enabled by the fact that about 70-80 percent of components to manufacture domestic products, such as TV sets and refrigerators, are locally produced (Tempo 19-25/6/2000). This higher percentage of local components not only lessens production costs, but also makes the prices less vulnerable to currency fluctuations when the components are imported. Fourthly, this more accessible products are also augmented by the flow of illegal imported products, which, it has been reported, accounts for 60-70 percent of the domestic electrical goods market in 2003 (Suara Pembaruan 13/10/2003). These illegal products, from the global brands (e.g. Toshiba and Sony)

to the Chinese brands (Kompas 2/11/2001, Kompas 19/11/2002), have led the electronic manufacturers, such as Sony Corp. to relocate production from Indonesia to other countries (Kompas 29/11/2002).

Table 5.5: List of Prices of Selected Electronic Items,  
1990s-2000s (in Indonesian Rupiah)<sup>a)</sup>

<i>Item</i>	<i>Brand</i>	<i>Size (in inches)</i>	<i>Made in</i>	<i>Price in early 1990s</i>	<i>Price in 2000s</i>
Colour TV	Polytron <sup>b)</sup>	14	Indonesia		600,000-700,000
Colour TV	Crystal, Konka	16	China	n/a	600,000-700,000
VCD Player	Crystal, Gamma, Vetron <sup>b)</sup>		China	n/a	450,000
VCD Player	Toshiba <sup>c)</sup>		Japan	n/a	600,000-650,000
Colour TV	Sony <sup>b)</sup>	14	Japan	800,000	1,550,000
Colour TV	Sanyo <sup>d)</sup>	14	Indonesia		925,000
Colour TV	Samsung, Sharp, Sanyo, Aiwa <sup>d)</sup>	14	Malaysia/Indonesia		800,000- 1,025,000
Colour TV <sup>d)</sup>		21	China	n/a	<1,000,000

Notes: <sup>a)</sup> Rp 5,000 = A\$1

Source: <sup>b)</sup> my fieldnote; <sup>c)</sup> Kompas 19/11/2002; <sup>d)</sup> Kompas 4/2/2003

The cheaper luxuries (both legal and illegal) have given the factory workers greater flexibility in consuming ‘modern’ novelties. The brand-conscious workers can have access to the more-established trade names at a relatively affordable price, as in the case of TVs set and refrigerators. Meanwhile, less brand-conscious but model-conscious consumer can enjoy stylish models, such as multi-system, digital TV (or VCD), equipped with remote control and a power-saver standby feature, at a comparatively low cost: more than half of the price of the established brands with similar characteristics. With all these novelties at hand, factory workers living in a slum-like urban neighbourhood can feel themselves part of (modern) reality to the same extent as other urban residents from a more privileged class.

### **Partial Modernity: A Pretext to Consumerism**

In Chapter 2 I indicated the conditions in the countryside that have enhanced the youth's perception of urban discourse as much as they promote urban forms of life into the modern 'social imaginaries'. Modernity, according to rural youth, is often linked with the media's glamorous and celebrated symbols of the city, metropolitan culture, its people, mostly the middle class, and their manner in responding to the complexity of urban existence. Therefore, the 'MTV Generation', for example, is not an exclusive culture of urban youth given that their rural counterparts have the same real-time access to almost any entertainment program on TV. Similarly, education has become an avenue through which rural youngsters' encounter with a more cosmopolitan way of life is made possible. In the classroom, rural children are introduced to the idea of material progress as the central theme in modernisation, a key ideological word in the classroom to cultivate new, modern values, as opposed to traditional ones and backwardness (e.g. Siegel 1986). Such material accomplishments suggest that 'urban discourse' (Young 1994:251) is nowadays shared by rural people.

Dhilip Gaonkar (2002:4) conceptualises 'social imaginaries' as the 'first-person subjectivities that build upon implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices'. Social imaginaries are crucial to the formation of collective 'identities' and to the determination of one's 'place in the world' (*ibid.*, see also Taylor 2002). Modernisation and its impact upon the everyday aspects of rural life is, therefore, one of the key points in understanding how youth perceive modernity and incorporate it into their social imaginaries. The dissemination of the discourse of *pembangunan* (economic development) as the nation's official objective toward a modern nation (Robinson 1986:94) through the above-mentioned channels have allowed urban-associated lifestyle and existence—no matter how obscurely it is represented in the media—to be the first experience of urban culture for villagers. With the greater exposure to the realities outside their rural boundaries, rural youth increasingly believe that the metropolis is where the 'true' meaning of modernity is well represented. Therefore, *pembangunan*—in which modernisations is embodied—

is a salient discourse that forms these social imaginaries, mediating rural youth with the city and the modernity, placing their aspirations in communion with urban metropolitan existence (see also Kahn 2001:11).

The shift to the city has, therefore, become a shared aspiration for this generation and is evidently crucial to comprehend how rural youngsters bring their social imagining of modernity to their corporeal experience. Nonetheless, their engagement with urban modern discourse through the function of intermediaries has only given them partial understanding of the entire discourse, an incomplete picture of the reality of modern forms of life in the urban centre. This partiality highlights a feeling that their participation in the processes of advancement remains excluded. It is like gazing at a glittering object locked in a house of glass that we have never been able to thoroughly observe. Transforming modern urban existence to bodily existence is a matter of unearthing the glittering outlandish object, of bringing the strange creature of modernity to real life out from its cage: the TV box, the pages of pop magazines, or pages of school textbooks. Accordingly, the shift to the city by migrants who have just passed their adolescent years in the tranquil countryside is not merely 'modernisation' in the sense of economic progress which gives rise to industrialism, to which youth is attracted. Instead, as argued by Berman (1983:16), it is the pursuit of modern existence that has been a 'maelstrom', which mesmerises rural subjects to the gleaming urban conurbation.

In addition, as confirmed by almost every single young worker I spoke to, migration is idealised as being able to fulfill their social imaginaries through their encounter with 'partial' modernity. I use the term 'partial modernity' to describe a pseudo-experience felt by those on the periphery which arises as a result of the perception of the city being a centre of cultural advancement. The notion of being 'incomplete' (*belum ada apa-apanya*) if a rural subject does not have urban experience in her/his life indicates the significance of the city in the universe of rural children (see Chapter 2). No matter how rigorous these youth encounter modern cultural flows, during their rural existence, the experience remains 'partial' given that

the construction of a modern identity is incomplete without incorporating the urban adventure into that process. The full realisation of modernity can only find its affirmation through the transformation of the corporeal body of rural subjects in the urban realm. This transforming process is, therefore, crucial in understanding migration in regard to young people's search for the entirety of modernity.

It is these social imaginings that underscore the practices of thousands of youth migrants in their search for an advanced form of living. Consumerism amongst the marginalised urban manufacturing workers should also be understood in this light. Consumer goods are not just indicator of prosperity, but also allows the workers to engage in modernity and urban progress, epitomised in a mere material culture, urban lifestyles and the grandeur of modernisation. Electronic luxuries and urban novelties are viewed as the practices through which the promise of modernity is fulfilled and completed.

Once I asked Lilik, a female worker from a leather golf glove factory, a question: why did she buy a 16 inch colour TV set when she hardly had time to watch it. I observed that Lilik often worked between 10-12 hours a day, including overtime, especially during the high demand season. Every time she returned home tired in the evening, she barely had time to bathe and have dinner, and chat a little with the residents in her lodging compound before she went to bed. She rarely watched TV on her own set except on the weekend. Instead, she preferred to visit a neighbour's lodging where she could chat and gossip with other people. The crowd often sat cross-legged on the floor in front of a TV but paid little attention to it, apparently enjoying each other's company more. Lilik laughingly responded to my curiosity with a mixed Jakartan-Javanese expression: 'Just to make my living place look right.' She also had a drinking water dispenser, which she filled by carrying a gallon of water some 200 metres from the nearest shop (see also Chapter 2: Plate 2.2). The nicely-decorated cover on the top of the water dispenser served as a decorative feature of her shared lodgings with another female worker from the same company. I thought the gallon jar had been empty for some time, as Lilik always served me a glass of boiled

drinking water from a jug when I visited her place. Her remark about these items making a home 'ideal' is not an idea that comes from nowhere. The idea comes from the portrayal in school textbooks which make a harmonious family of four, living in a nice healthy-looking house, equipped with household appliances seem standard for urban, at least, lower middle class families. These images, along with the ones in mass media, are vivid displays of the way rural youth children are being hegemonised by urban modern values. There is a covert agreement, shared by country people as much as by urbanites, that electronic appliances, fashion, taste in music and food, and acceptance of pop culture themes, which represent a culture of consumerism, are the visible shared symbols of these values.

### **A Representation of the Subaltern**

We might arrive at a conclusion that consumerism amongst the manufacturing workers is simply an uncritical and passive acceptance and mimicry of the dominant values. Consumerism can be viewed as inseparable from the effort by powerful agents to impose domination (through market ideology or *pembangunan* ideology) over the subaltern. Nonetheless, John Fiske (1989:2) argues that the effort to propagate 'the dominant ideology' through its cultural instruments constantly 'involves [the subaltern in] the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interest of the subordinate and that are not preferred by the dominant ideology'. Swingewood indicates that studies of media and television programs commonly show the divergence of meaning and interpretation, even amongst the receiving subjects from the 'same social class' (1998:51). Similarly, Raymond Williams argues that hegemony can be contested through the production of 'new meanings and values, practices, relationships...which are substantially alternative or oppositional to the dominant culture (cited in Milner 2002:93). In his work on drama, media, and popular culture, Williams views that 'the modern working class' has the capacity to develop a

counter culture to the one of the bourgeoisie, a ‘structure of feeling’ of the subaltern in criticising the established culture (cited in Milner 2002:92-6).

It is in the light of these critiques to the dominant discourse that I would interpret the consumption pattern of the Tangerang factory workers as an indication of their capacity to produce an alternative interpretation within the framework of ‘the dominant culture’. In the hands of the subaltern, consumption and the others’ lifestyle can create a reversal of the meanings which the cultural producers intend to reinforce. Workers, in regard to consumption, are producing meanings according to their social settings (as factory workers, rural subjects, urban migrants, and so on) as a response to their felt exclusion from the course of modernity and their pursuit to be modern being. In a study of television news-and-feature program, Morley shows the importance of ‘the influences of the discourses and institution in which [the media recipients] are situated’ in determining the response and the meaning of the message conveyed by the media (cited in Swingewood 1998:51). The same situation, I believe, is also applicable in understanding consumption amongst the factory workers, intellectually engaged to read and respond to the messages behind the advertised images, behind the discourse produced by the dominant forces or other classes. By deciphering the message, rather than uncritically consuming it, the subjects demonstrate their capacity to construct different understandings and interpretations according to their experience and their social settings, different from the circumstances in which the (dominant) discourse was originally produced. Thus, consumption is also a means for workers to reinforce their sense of agency in dealing with the signs and values offered by the society’s dominating agencies, such as market forces and the state. This sense is related to independence and resistance, and will be discussed below.

### *Consumerism and the Experience of Independence*

For most rural youth, a shift to an industrial centre is a gamble as no one is able to predict precisely the true nature of his or her existence in the city. Media images promise the bright side of urban modernity. The improved education experienced by younger migrants is equally a promise for social improvement through paid employment. On the other hand, stories of the hardship of living in the city experienced by the not-so-successful migrants have been spread amongst villagers. But countless sad stories do not stop the flow to urban centres (just as negative stories about Indonesian woman workers sent overseas have not deterred them). All these mixed feelings that underlie the process of mobility thus highlight the importance of rural-based networks, supporting new arrivals by helping them adjust to urban circumstances and meet their needs during the initial stage of existence in the city (see Chapter 3).

Accordingly, being able to secure a job at a factory that offers a steady income mitigates the strain of migrants' efforts to realign to the alien urban circumstance. The possession of consumer goods indicates the children's economic capacity to meet the expense of goods that go beyond basic needs. This achievement through consumption lessens reliance on the economy of the parents in the countryside, who remain morally concerned about the subsistence of their children under the hardship of city life. Apart from this moral obligation, parents similarly have a responsibility to maintain the social recognition given by the rural community concerning the achievements of their children. The spread of gossip in a small rural circle about the failure of a particular child in his/her urban existence creates social pressure and embarrassment for parents. Those who fall short in securing 'proper' employment in an urban centre will find that their parents are potentially regarded as having failed in bringing up and 'educating' (*mendidik*) their offspring. Hence, children, in reverse, have a moral obligation not to damage the social repute attributed to their family. Consumption of durable commodities is indispensable attestation for migrants in order to demonstrate their self-reliance (particularly

financially) from parents, who also benefit from their children's material attainment in avoiding social humiliation. Consumer products presented as gifts to the rural family, or simply telling success stories about this attainment, during occasional visits serves as a display for all these achievement: contribution to the family, boosting the parents' pride, and strengthening the migrants' self-autonomy.

Ruth McVey, when analysing Southeast Asian capitalists, argues that with the coming of social and economic modernisation, 'material possession' is increasingly crucial in becoming a 'legitimate sources of power' (cited in Young 1999:60). Though the argument is specifically aimed at the formation of a middle class independent of state patronage, it can equally be applied at a micro-level in which the possession of consumer goods provides the subjects with a sense of independence and autonomy. Robinson (1986), speaking on the condition of peasant families in Soroako, Indonesia, points out that the parents did not have '*automatic call*' on the income raised by their financially self-reliant children (p.168-9, emphasis in original). With this economic capacity, reinforcing their self-autonomy, the children in Soroako managed to make their own decision to buy goods without their parents' interference (*ibid.*, see also Wolf 1992:179-208). The same applies to the migrant workers in Tangerang, who, with their wealth in consumer goods, can have a 'power', a better bargaining position in facing their family and the rural community to independently make their own choices to pursue their own future. The nature of commodities for personal use is a signal of them being 'freed up' from the traditional duty to directly contribute to the family economy in their rural home. As indicated earlier, compared to the conditions in the early 1990s, present wage levels provide workers with more financial flexibility to, at least, cover minimal basic needs, purchase consumption goods for personal use, and, if they want, at the same time, contribute to their rural obligations. Their economic capability ensures workers gain greater autonomy in the sense that they are by no means under an obligation to follow the parents' directives regarding their personal life, including the issue of whom to marry and whether the village or city will be their future. 'How could I not follow my parents' will when they

'still pay my expenses,' said Ery. 'I now have something (job and good income) they can be proud of, and I am more independent in making decisions about myself,' she continued.

Consumerism as an expression of independence can also appear as a result of labour-capital relations in the workplace. The factory shopfloor is a domain in which workers autonomy is normally confined and where work discipline has to be followed (see Chapter 4). Nonetheless, being able to make decisions on how to consume their income is considered by workers as a way of exercising autonomy, which is more or less absent during their long hours on the shopfloor.<sup>14</sup> This freedom is in contrast to conformity with directive of the company that keeps their every single move under control. The average lodgings of workers in Tangerang, in which they are building a 'haven' equipped with durable goods and other representation of their 'literacy' in contemporary urban material culture, gives also an impression of a long-term—rather than temporary—intent to stay in the city.

The lodging of Juanda, a 25 year-old male worker, is probably an example in this regard. There was not much room to move in his lodging for he had some large items which made his 2.5x3.5m place looked small and cramped. The items ranged from a queen-size spring bed, to a tall wooden wardrobe, a CD/VCD player, two loudspeaker boxes, and an electric guitar as well as a ukulele (both bought from a used goods market) hanging on the wall. The bed was covered by a sheet of velvet-like fabric (normally used for furniture upholstery) that he had bought from a colleague from another factory, who smuggled it out and resold it in pieces to other workers (see Chapter 4). Though the fabric was uncomfortable and too warm to lie while the average temperature was between 30-32°C, Juanda liked it very much for it was, as he said, 'soft' and looked more 'luxurious' (*mewah*) and 'impressive' (*keren*) than a linen bed sheet. As his workplace was just next to his residential compound, during a one-hour lunch break he often climbed the factory wall to get to his lodging to take a nap on his bed, which he often said made him feel 'like a royal person' (*seperti raja*). 'Here [in my lodging and on my bed] I can deliberately forget about

the factory life (*lupa kerja*),’ he said. To make the lodging more vibrant, he put posters of rock music groups of which he was a fan, on the wall.<sup>15</sup>

In the evening, outside his lodging, Juanda often played his ukulele, at which he was skilled, accompanying some friends singing. He seldom played the electric guitar, whose function was more for decoration. Inside, he allowed a few female worker colleagues to entertain themselves singing karaoke from his CD/VCD player. The absence of a TV set attached to the karaoke set to screen the lyrics, did not inhibit the girls from performing the songs like professionals. For Juanda, he knew that his feeling ‘like a royal person’ would not last long. As soon as the end-of-break bell rang, which he could hear from his bed, he had to climb the wall again to return to the reality of his factory. For the singing girls, they knew that their acting like professional singers was merely temporary before they returned to the workplace the next morning. Talking amidst taking pleasure from the luxuries and leisure time she had, Lilik commented:

‘I feel that the clock is running fast when we’re having fun and enjoying our happy time. In fact we have sat here [enjoying leisure] for three or four hours. Whereas, I feel that the clock is crawling at a snail’s pace when we’re at work in the factory.’

Migrant workers are making this personal haven as a response to the hardship experienced inside the factory walls. It is a domain in which they might have a relative degree of independence once the bell rings at the end of their shift and brings them out the front gate of the company’s complex. There, in their havens, workers’ double containment, control in the workplace and marginal social setting is rebuffed.



Plate 5.5: A Karaoke Time 1:  
'I feel that the clock is running fast  
when we're having fun.' (photo:RWJ)

The situation in Tangerang can also be analysed in the light of Fiske's (1989) study of beach culture and surfers. Fiske points out that while surfing, the surfers experienced the 'intensity of bodily concentration-pleasure' that gives them 'orgasmic' satisfaction (Fiske 1989:8). This experience and the way they understand their action is, in fact, a strategy to defy the ideologically-designated label and the 'socially constructed identit[y]' imposed upon them (*ibid.*: 8,43-76). The response of the surfers is a manifestation of an 'evasion' (*ibid.*:2) of the meaning produced by the dominant culture. In evasion the subject creates a skilful 'pleasureable' move as an avenue to circumvent dominant forces trying to define their existence (*ibid.*). In one way, the Tangerang workers' pattern of consumption can also be viewed as evasion in Fiske's sense. It demonstrates a tendency toward escapism, but in reality suggests that consumerism, as the main element in the expression of freedom, is a maneuver for workers to evade, rather than challenge, their dual subjugation; they give obedience and self-control on one front in exchange for pleasure and refuge on the other. It is in their 'haven' that the tentacles of the factory regime and industrial

discipline can have no authority to interfere; where they are able to reinforce their sense of self-autonomy and independence.

The possession of consumer goods, particularly luxuries, gives migrant workers the pleasure of engaging in a process of giving meaning to their current circumstance in an urban neighbourhood. This engagement does not only allow them to imagine their incorporation into the course of modernity but also to evade their not-so-modern urban neighbourhood. Lilik, for example, who spent two or three hours of her evening leisure time singing karaoke of contemporary songs could have a snap experience of being like her pop idol on TV. It is no coincidence that songs popular amongst the factory workers are those advertised in the televised MTV-style attractive and colourful music clips, portraying the glamorous life, often juvenile romance, of metropolitan youth.<sup>16</sup> This short karaoke moment creates a connection for her to the modern urban reality that the music clip advertises to be the character of free, vibrant, and young at heart aspirations. It offers her a youthful moment that was missing while she toiled behind the factory walls for prolonged hours. Several times I saw the workers preoccupied with their karaoke, TV, or VCD-played movies inside their lodgings amidst the heavy rain which caused the water level to rise to just one or two centimetres away from flooding inside the lodgings. Even though they knew that their leisure would probably end in evacuation once the flood inundated the floor, they remained seated cross-legging in front of the TV as if there was nothing to be worried about.

Pop ethnic songs, using the language of their place of origin, or cover versions of old Indonesian songs from the 1980s/early 1990s were as popular as the contemporary music. ‘Every time I hear pop songs with Sundanese lyrics, I always remember my village, my parents, and my childhood friends,’ said Juanda, a Sundanese. The same applied to Farid with the old Indonesian songs he had first heard from a battery-powered radio, before electricity arrived, during his childhood in the countryside. Through this music, migrant workers maintain their connection with their rural existence and imagine the lost but peaceful countryside they discarded in

order to pursue the glitter of the metropolis.<sup>17</sup> It gives them a snap experience of getting back to and remembering their place of origin amidst their industrial hardship and struggle in the city for a modern identity. Speaking on the condition of contemporary urban Vietnam, Philip Taylor points out that most of the karaoke soundtracks are produced by overseas Vietnamese, and feature the compositions popular before 1975 (2001:24). The fact that these pieces are popular in Vietnamese society suggests that the sense of ‘loss, separation, and nostalgia’ felt by the Vietnamese diaspora also represent the Ho Chi Minh City population’s longing for the ‘lost’ era before the communists came to power (Taylor 2001:24).



Plate 5.6: A Karaoke Time 2:  
An evening at *kampong* (photo:RWJ)

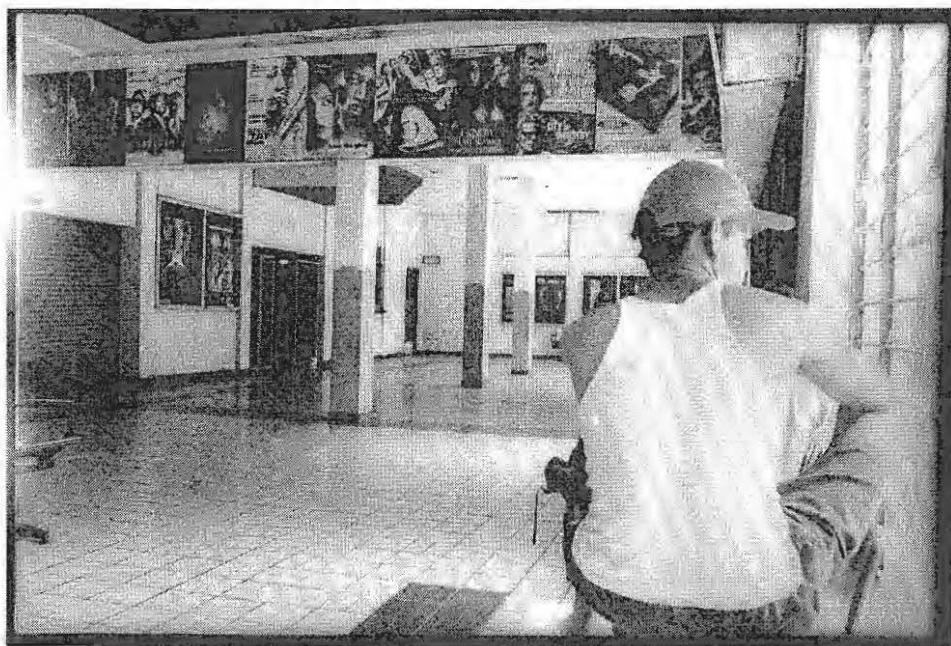


Plate 5.7: A Deserted Cinema 1:  
A previously leisure spot before the spread of home  
entertainment amongst the factory workers (photo:RWJ)

Of all luxuries, a TV set appears at the top of the shopping list of Tangerang workers. Unlike karaoke or VCD movies, television constantly offers the audience a range of alternative programs from a variety of broadcasting stations. Lilik expressed:

'We get easily bored with our limited collection of karaoke soundtracks and we have to spend extra money to rent new VCD movies. Watching TV is different. Its program changes all the time.'

'With TV we can follow the news and the developments occurring in the world out there,' added Farid. It was not easy to follow everyone's preference for programs. Local soap opera (*sinetron*) was certainly popular; everyone had at least one favorite title and could roughly narrate its story. Nevertheless, news programs, imported Discovery-style popular science programs, music clips, and sports are similarly popular.<sup>18</sup> Just as in karaoke, through television, the subject can imagine a reality, different and larger than the scope of the industrial-residential neighbourhood, and

equally envisage that they are part of the global discourse. While watching a live broadcast of F-1 car racing or automotive advertisements, a male worker could tell the various types of tyre his company produced and what tyre fits which car. While watching a TV show on fashion or sporty (urban) youth, a female worker from a shoe or garment factory could proudly say that the commodities she produced were exactly the same as the ones shown on TV. She could also comment on how difficult it was to sew a particular pattern of a specified design of an international brand shoe or garment. The experience of watching certainly gives the worker subjects a sense of engagement, in which they can think of themselves as contributors to the global reality as seen on TV. It fosters their modern role and identity by connecting the small local existence they presently encounter with the world-out-there discourse claimed by them to be the representation of modernity. At the same time, this connection produces a modern conversion for the subjects, transforming them from their conditions of marginality in urban *kampung* to an existence in which they suddenly become global actors.

### *Consumerism, Power, and Resistance*

At times consumption amongst workers can be similarly categorised as resistance, which I will argue as the second reason for the critical reading of consumerism. Earlier I argued that the centripetal force that brings rural offspring to urban centers is accentuated by their drive to seek the cultural adventure of modernity. For migrants, however, there is a major battle to be fought in their existence in the city, that is for economic stability without which their efforts to claim the promise of modernity in the city would be to no avail. Obtaining employment in urban industries provides them with a sense of being part of the modernisation process. A steady income, work uniform, work hierarchy, and workplace are key examples to boost their inclusion into the process toward modern advancement, parting them from the ‘traditional’ rural existence (see Chapter 6). This distinguishes them from, say, rural farm workers

in muddy fields or even other possible urban sectors thought to be ‘degrading’ such as domestic service and small-scale street trading, which, according to them, does not fit their high school qualifications.

Factory work on the shop floor level, however, offers no prestige and venerated eminence for urbanites, which explains why this occupation is usually left for migrants from the countryside. The subordination of industrial workers in regard to labour-capital relations, the state’s denial of their aspirations, and the state’s failure to protect them by ensuring adequate wages as well as urban segregation that designates them in marginal enclaves, basically asserts the subaltern position of the group within the urban socio-economic context. This subalternity is consciously understood by the workers, especially when they are dealing with their underprivileged living environment. One Sunday morning, when most neighbourhood residents were not at work and were in need of water to do domestic work (e.g. washing clothes, cooking, tidying up their own lodging), I heard a group of workers grumbling nearby the well about the electric water pump in their compound breaking down; and that was not the first time. The landlord, as usual, had not immediately responded to the complaint made by the tenants, leaving them to carry buckets of water from neighbouring compounds for nearly a week before the broken pump was repaired. The tenants were aware that even though the landlord had been making money out of the lodgings business, their complaints about the lack of basic facilities would not be treated urgently. That was why when such a problem arose, they normally just waited unreceptively until the problem was finally solved. I often heard them jokingly say:

You live in poor (*kumuh*) kampung. What do you expect? How much do you pay [for the lodging] to expect more and better [facilities]? Don’t think that we live in a wealthy real estate where things (basic facilities) are easy and accessible.

This sense of being inferior is also present when workers realise that they have little power to influence the labour policies regulated by the government. A few times they expressed disappointment when watching the news on TV about the

government's labour regulations that, in their view, did not 'benefit' (*berpihak*) the workers. Nonetheless, despite some anger and disappointment in front of the TV, the discourse was usually closed by an exasperated remark: 'Well, what can we do. We're just small people (*orang kecil*).'<sup>1</sup> For the migrant workers who see their existence in a metropolitan centre as more than a struggle for subsistence, the agony of being subaltern subjects, with the experiences indicated above, can be an interruption or even a threat to their struggle for a complete distinct identity, a modern identity.

In his study on the middle class in Southeast Asia, Young (1999) argues that the practice of consumption is crucial in understanding 'the construction of new identities' (p.68) of the newly emerging privileged class in the region. Material wealth, as Young (1999) puts it, reinforces middle class identity among those who manage to climb up the social ladder to join 'the ranks of the well-off' (p.69). The existence of this group marks the emergence of the Southeast Asian new rich, whose path to success, mainly through private sectors emerging through economic growth, is a divergence from the region's conventional 'paternalistic' (Young 1999:78) pattern that relies mostly on state-centred networks. Gerke (2000) argues that this enthusiasm for consumerism also suggests the social 'identification' of most ordinary Indonesians, particularly the lower middle class, with the bourgeois class, not in terms of political aspirations, but rather through the lifestyle with which modern existence is associated (p.146). As lifestyle becomes a parameter to value others, there is 'social pressure' amongst the Indonesian urbanites in particular, even those who have no financial capacity to afford it, to display their eloquence and 'touch' to the middle class lifestyle (Gerke 2000:137). This pursuit is identified by Gerke as 'lifestyling', which indicates:

...the symbolic dimension of consumption and can be defined as the display of a standard of living that one is in fact unable to afford ...[and] behaviours that rely on the demonstration of a certain lifestyle without the economic basis for real consumption....  
(2000:137)

The consumption pattern amongst the factory workers can of course be seen in the light of the ‘lifestyling’ in Gerke’s sense. This is particularly true when the purchase of luxuries and lifestyle-associated commodities negatively impacts on the provision of basic needs, as I indicated earlier (also Robinson 1986:166). Within the context of contemporary society, the opportunities for people from the underprivileged class to learn this urban middle class practice can come from modern activities such as window-shopping in malls (Chua 1992, Fiske 1989) and grasping the messages or images transmitted through the mass media (Gerke 2000, Kellner 1995).

Nevertheless, I believe that consumerism amongst the factory workers in Tangerang does not entirely mean an unreserved adoption of the values of another class and, hence, replicating its lifestyles. Similarly, it is not just a matter of establishing a ‘leisure haven’ as a private domain within which state and capital are restrained from exercising power. Walking past a row of shops in a modern shopping mall or watching an idol living in a modern and fancy setting of a televised soap opera, does not automatically create a desire to identify one’s life with the reality behind the shop-window or the TV screen; a mere cultural mimicry from the reality of the others. In earlier chapters, I have indicated that a ‘bourgeois’ lifestyle is, in fact, part of the discourse of modernisation which workers learnt during their childhood. It is no coincidence that the rural youth’s imagination of modernity and their social imagining of progress and advancement are profoundly shaped by the images and narratives from these themes in modernisation. Nonetheless, consumption is not exclusively about borrowing the reality or themes of the ‘others’, as it similarly has potential to be semiotically transformed into other meanings that can be a contestation to the dominant discourse.

When talking about subcultures, Dick Hebdige illustrates how the post-war British youth from working class parents used the themes and images available both in electronic and printed media ‘to construct an alternative identity which communicated a perceived difference: an Otherness’ (1993:450). This includes the ‘appropriat[ion]’ and the ‘rearticulat[ion]’ of meaning over the manners, ‘ways of

speaking’, ‘taste in music’, and commercialised commodities learnt by these youth from the mainstream media and institutions (e.g. school, family, work) in order ‘to produce “oppositional” meanings’ (cited in Storey 2001:105, quote in original). In another essay, Hebdige provides the example of how the meaning of the scooter, which at that time was an ‘ultra-respectable means of transport’, was transformed into a symbolisation of group solidarity by the London mods (2002:172). To them, this semiotic resistance and difference was created ‘within a totally different context’ (2002:172) from the conditions when the commodities and meaning were originally produced. It was not merely aimed at distancing them from the ‘dominant culture’, but equally from their ‘parent culture’ and the media stereotyping over the working class ‘puritanism’ (Hebdige 1993:450).

Poverty and labour powerlessness against the state and the industrial capitalists are common themes in media representations in Indonesia of factory workers. In printed media, for example, the coverage on factory workers ranges from reports on the company’s failure or resistance to pay the regulated minimum wage, workers being potentially laid-off, labour strikes demanding additional allowances, to violations of labour law by the industrial corporations (see Table 5.6). Similarly, the workers’ generally deprived conditions, the ongoing exploitation of factory workers, and the government’s commitment to improve labour conditions are frequently questioned in the discussions and editorial notes in printed media (see Table 5.6). From the sympathetic tone of the title lines I use for examples, the mass media seems to be trying to portray factory workers as the victims of the process of industrialisation. Some optimistic headings, mainly announcing a new regulated minimum wage, are evidently present in the media.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, such ‘good’ news is normally countered by other coverage about workers’ strikes demanding a wage rise (see Table 5.6) or claims about the inadequacy of the newly-regulated wage level.<sup>20</sup> As a result, sombre images of the lives of factory workers continue to dominate the media. Through the headlines, the media are likely to remind the

readers that factory workers remain vulnerable and marginalised subjects amidst the process of modernisation.

Table 5.6: Selected Coverage on Factory Workers  
in Printed Media, 2001-2002

<b>Media</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Line Title<sup>a)</sup></b>	<b>Category</b>
Kompas	12/08/2001	Cabinet's Commitment to Workers Questioned	comments by labour and NGO activists
The Jakarta Post	22/08/2001	Minister Nuwa Wea Plans to Improve Labour Conditions	interview with Minister of Manpower and Transmigration
Republika	13/08/2001	Minister Asks Employers to Meet Workers' Rights	report from field
Kompas	31/08/2001	Regulations on Contract Workers Violated	comments by labour activists
Kompas	6/11/2001	Massive Layoffs Threaten Tangerang Workers	report from field
Kompas	7/11/2001	100,000 Workers are Potentially Laid-off	comments by employers
Kompas	10/11/2001	Thousands Workers Strike Demanding Meal Allowance	report from field
Koran Tempo	24/11/2001	Labour Laws Remain Inoperative	comments by labour activists
Media Indonesia	28/11/2001	6,000 Workers Strike Demanding Wage Rise	report from field
Kompas	28/11/2001	5,000 Workers from Nike Factory On Strike	report from field
Koran Tempo	28/11/2001	Workers in Bekasi Demand Wage Rise	report from field
Kompas	3/12/2001	Labour-Employer Tension Needs Solution	discussion article
Kompas	11/12/2001	Workers' Lives Constricted	feature report
Kompas	7/11/2002	Jakarta Governor Forces Employer to Pay 2002 Minimum Wage	report from field and comments by labour specialists
Media Indonesia	11/03/2002	Exploitation of Labour Continues in Indonesia	comments by labour specialists
Kompas	27/03/2002	Workers' Wage Is Paid Half	report from field

Koran Tempo	2/04/2002	Indolim Company Owes Workers Wage, Workers Go On Strike	report from field
Kompas	30/04/2002	Strike Demanding Menstrual Leave, Workers Walk 5Kms	report from field
Kompas	7/05/2002	Decent Lives is a Human Right for Workers	editorial note
Kompas	24/05/2002	Hundreds Workers from Bag-Producing Company On Strike	report from field
Kompas	30/05/2002	Workers' Action in Tangerang and Bekasi	report from field
Bernas	5/06/2002	Workers of Bola Dunia Ceramic On Strike Demanding Wage Rise	report from field
Kompas	10/10/2002	Employers in Jakarta Reject 2003 Minimum Wage Regulation	comments by employers
Koran Tempo	30/11/2001	Workers On Strike, Three Factories Paralysed	report from field
Suara Pembaruan	1/12/2002	The Workers of Sony Are Restless : The Plan of Sony's Relocation Is Linked with Global Restructuring to Maximise Profit	report from field

*Note :* <sup>a)</sup> Except for The Jakarta Post, all headlines are my translation.

*Source:* My compilation

The compilation of newspaper headings presented here comes from newspaper clippings I obtained after I completed fieldwork and are not the same sources I used to look at workers' responses to the news coverage. They, however, illustrate the general discourse on how the factory workers have been represented in mainstream media, mostly newspapers and television. Nonetheless, the supportive media coverage in regard to the plight of industrial labour does not always bring contentment to the workers themselves. Knowing that the conspicuous consumption exemplified earlier in this chapter did not exactly corroborate the media representation of the hard lives experienced by workers, I once asked Amri how he saw the incongruity. He replied:

It is actually my parents that concern me most regarding the media coverage on workers. Maybe my parents in the village do not read newspapers, but they certainly watch TV. Many villagers have TV sets today. What do my parents say if they see [on TV] that

workers' lives are difficult? They would be worried that I have a hard life in the city. When I visit them, they ask me if I often join the workers strikes. Well, to be honest, life is not easy in the city, but it is not that difficult either. At least, I still can enjoy being in the city.

Other workers in Tangerang shared the anxiety felt by Amri. Lilik, for example, said: 'If I suffer in my adventure in the city, my parents or villagers would think: what is the point of coming to the city? Better to stay in the village, isn't it?' For the migrant workers, working in the economic sector that has become a celebrated symbol of modernisation is supposed to be an assurance, promised by the discourse of development and progress, to be an upgrade of their 'outmoded' rural existence (see Chapter 6). Similarly, it is supposed to bring dignity and pride to migrants who come to urban centres to seek modernity and to be included in the mainstream course of modernisation. Nonetheless, the media's stereotyped representation of the factory world has paradoxically exposed the workers' situation, which can lead to humiliation and make the workers' aspirations about urban migration, modernity, and progress seem futile. The workers appear uneasy to be overtly associated with the grim depiction of their situations, despite the fact that the accuracy of media representation can hardly be ignored as the reality of Indonesian industrial workers. The images of labour destitution, poverty, defenselessness, and being neglected are felt by the migrant workers as a threat to the process of their incorporation to modernity.

Therefore, it is in response to these images of, for example, failing to benefit from modernity, that the workers' consumption pattern finds its ground. In contrast to Gerke's proposition of 'lifestyling', the economic capacity of workers to afford luxuries does not necessarily jeopardise their economic well-being. The significant rise of minimum wage levels, despite the surrounding controversy mentioned earlier, has helped the workers to be able to afford more than the basic necessities. Overtime might even compensate workers with higher income, at least double the government-imposed monthly minimum level. Dilemmas linked to the provision of basic needs

and impoverished living environments, which frequently conflict with the drive to consume luxuries, do certainly remain. However, the fact that workers can now make a choice between basics and luxuries indicates that they are in an improved position compared to their predecessors, who could hardly even imagine the latter choice. As pointed out earlier, contemporaries like Farid, Amri, or Lilik might still have to lower their diet quality, but, at the same time, making thorough calculation on income for saving remains possible.

Some companies have cooperatives to facilitate consumer credit, either by ordering the appliance for the employee or lending money to a worker. The repayment is normally carried out by authorising the cooperative to automatically deduct an amount from an employee's monthly wage. Nonetheless, credit through a company's cooperative was not preferred by the workers as they were reluctant to be indebted to the cooperatives. Lilik, for example, said:

I hate seeing my wage slip is reduced [by the cooperative] by a substantial amount. I prefer bringing home my wage money in full so I can see the amount I earn from my work each month.'

In addition, Amri found taking credit from a cooperative less beneficial (*rugi*) as interest, between 3-5 percent from the total loan, was normally applied. An alternative to credit from the company's cooperative was one directly offered by electronic goods retailers (normally the big ones found in shopping centres). These retailers, however, normally applied conditions which were difficult for workers to meet. Apart from a wage slip, a potential consumer was also required to show an electricity bill in his or her name, a condition impossible for most workers who lived in lodgings and paid their rent in cash, including expense for electricity, to their landlord.<sup>21</sup> Small shops did not even offer credit to the workers, as the former consider that the latter do not have *bona fide* conditions to receive the facility. An owner of a small electronic shop in a market nearby Gambir once told me:

[Migrant] workers can easily change addresses and they can even go back to their village at anytime. I will suffer loss if they escape [from repaying the credit]. Besides, working in the factory is also risky: what if their (the workers') employer suddenly goes bankrupt

because the crisis is still haunting. Nothing can guarantee the workers.

Nonetheless, even if the workers can satisfactorily prove they are *bona fide* customers, credit is not the preferred means for workers to buy electronic luxuries. Lilik explained:

I probably have money today [to repay the credit], but you do not know what is going to happen tomorrow, do you? I might become poor tomorrow or sacked from my workplace. Besides, buying in cash is more convenient for me, so that I will have no burden of repaying the credit and the goods are a 100 percent mine after the purchase. The goods will be taken if I can not repay the credit.

Therefore, saving is likely to be the usual means amongst the migrant workers to purchase luxuries, be it electronic goods or other expensive consumer commodities, such as a spring bed. Once the amount of saving is felt to be sufficient, they will take the money to the shops to purchase commodities and pay for them in cash. As most workers accumulate savings in the bank, many make withdrawals through automated teller machines (ATM) before going to electrical shops. Apart from avoiding queuing at the bank to make a withdrawal, the use of ATM today is also becoming widespread as it is considered fancy and modern. The bank users can actually be classified into two categories. First are those whose company pays their wages through the bank. This applies, for example, to permanent workers (those with minimum a five years of service) in PT GT factory, which encourages its employees to open an account at a particular state-owned bank located nearby its manufacturing complex. Second are those who, as a result of overtime, receive a monthly wage above the regulated minimum level, so that a substantial amount of surplus can be saved and put in the bank. In contrast, those receiving only a government-regulated wage with no overtime, normally do not have much surplus for saving. As their expenditure is mainly for daily needs, they find it impractical to use the banking service and prefer to save their money in a ‘traditional’ way: in the cupboard, under the bed, in the wallet, or other secure spots.<sup>22</sup>

Gerke reveals that ‘resource pooling’ in which individuals contribute financially to build up ‘a shared collection’ of image-associated commodities accessible to be used by turn, is a ‘mechanism of *lifestyling*’ amongst Indonesian youth with ‘limited resources’ (students in a particular hostels, peer groups) (Gerke 2000:147-8, emphasises in original). The other form of pooling is through traditional savings associations (*arisan*), in which members contribute to a fund on a monthly basis and take turns to access the monthly fund to be used for consumption. *Arisan* also enable individuals, both in Indonesian rural and urban areas, to gain access to and afford the consumer goods normally too expensive for their average income (Gerke 2000:147, see also Robinson 1986:167). While Gerke (2000:148) argues that ‘resource pooling’ provides individuals collective experience in their lifestyling efforts, the experience of consumption is more individuated amongst the factory workers in Tangerang. The combination of objective conditions (e.g. the improved wages and the spread of cheaper consumer products) and the subjective conditions, in which they can save from their own income, has placed the workers in a relatively better situation than the lower middle class addressed by Gerke (2000). Though austerity in the provision of basic necessities is often involved in order to make saving, as in the case of those with no overtime arrangement, consumption provides a counter reality to the constant media images of factory workers as disadvantaged subjects.

To the factory workers, the luxuries suggest the reward they deserve for the economic struggle they wage in their urban existence. The reward has to be manifested in a concrete and displayable form in order to be the perfect symbolisation of their accomplishment. Luxuries like electronic appliances not only meet the criteria of display in the sense I highlighted above. To workers, gold jewellery, for instance, is no longer seen as fashionable to demonstrate their economic achievement. The stylish consumer products, particularly electronic luxuries, are noticeable at almost all times, placed in a position where others can easily find them once he or she gets into the worker’s lodging. They are a silent witness of one’s exertion and battle

to arrive at a relatively dignified and established status in the face of the aggravated urban hardship. Most workers I spoke with are sensitive to remarks that question their economic capacity to obtain luxuries socially perceived to be not at their level of consumption. ‘Being a worker doesn’t always mean we have to live in misery,’ said one of them. ‘We’re not as poor as ordinary workers,’ added another.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, their responses could be rhetorical, for example: ‘How dare you think that a worker can not buy a TV?’ This was, of course, expressed to me in a polite and relaxed manner, given our close friendship during my presence in the area. However, such a reply would only come from someone who felt uneasy about, and was probably offended by, skepticism over his/her economic capacity to access luxuries that are supposed to be unimaginable to subjects portrayed as underprivileged. Consumerism, likewise, is a practice consciously incorporated by subjects to demonstrate resistance against the ‘stigma’ placed by the society, as represented by the press, of their deprivation and subjugation in the face of the dominant power.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I tried to point out that consumption has never been one-sided, a closely-defined practice serving the interest of the dominant forces (e.g. the state, corporate industries). In contemporary society, consumption is not merely about consuming the use value of a commodity, but, as Jean Baudrillard argues, also about producing signs.

Consumption...is not defined by the food we eat, the clothes we wear, the car we drive, nor by the visual and oral substance of images and messages, but in the organization of all this as signifying substance. Consumption is *the virtual totality of all objects and messages presently constituted in a more or less coherent discourse*. Consumption, in so far as it is meaningful, is *a systematic act of the manipulation of signs*. (Baudrillard 2001:25, italics in original)

In addition, Mike Featherstone, in explaining Baudrillard, indicates that the production of signs as found in media and advertisement allows ‘signs...to float free from objects and [to be] available for use in a multiplicity of associative relations’ (Featherstone 1991:15). This means that even the subaltern subjects can take part in the production and the manipulation of signs based on their surrounding circumstances. These signs however will differ from the ones intended by the commodity producers.

The struggle over definition has been one of the main themes in post-colonial studies that make the case that subjects from former colonies are engaged in a struggle to unleash themselves from, to borrow Derrida’s phrase, ‘the specter’ of their conquerors. Klein (1988), for instance, has seen baseball as the means of resistance of Dominican people against the American hegemony. The fact that the Republic of Dominica is supplying baseball players to US major league teams has been a central point ‘to promote local pride rather than inferiority’ in their appropriation of the Americanised culture of baseball (p.309). Appadurai (1996:89-113) similarly has viewed the process of appropriation, which he calls ‘decolonization’, of British-invented cricket by Indians. The elevation of India to be one of the world’s best cricket teams, demonstrated since its 1983 triumph, has elevated national self-esteem as well as given India as a nation a ‘sense of having hijacked the game from its English habitus’ (p.113). Appadurai further argues that ‘the bodily pleasure’ brought from watching and playing the game and, equally, the fact that the game is increasingly acquiring an Indian character, has developed cricket to the status of ‘the erotics of nationhood’ that merges its states, classes, castes, and other socio-political boundaries in unity (p.111). Furthermore, in the same way, popular culture is undeniably a field of interest in which the discourse of hijacking the meaning designated by dominant forces into the context of the subordinate makes up its defining salient features. One of the studies in this area is carried out by Fiske (1989:95-113) who uncovers the phenomena of Madonna enthusiasts amongst young females as the representation of an ideological struggle against the ‘patriarchal’

designation of ‘female sexuality’ (p.2). He said that for these teenage ‘wanna-bees’, consuming Madonna’s attributes and dressing like their subversive role model establishes ‘[t]he sense of empowerment’ (p.100) in which they are in control over their own body and sexuality.

In understanding resistance, Fiske claims that ‘meanings’ are more central than ‘pleasures’ (1989:2). Accordingly, resistance will only be possible when the subordinate is engaged in the production of meaning controversial and subversive to the dominant values. The illustration above of the media-created ‘stigma’ of workers’ vulnerability proves to be the spectre that haunts the existence of the urban migrants. In relation to the migrants’ search for modern identity, this disempowering stigma is even more crucial than the inequalities generated from the labour-capital and state-labour relations. Many came to urban centres to follow the path to modernity that had already constructed their social imagination (see Chapter 2). Therefore, the mode of life in the new place and enjoyment of urban pleasures are central. The deprivation they experience as a result of labour-capital/state relations, on the contrary, makes vulnerable their efforts to establish modern identities, realised in their celebrated lifestyles. Clammer (1992:195-215), discussing shopping and social being in urban Japan, speaks of the fragility of the self in reconciling local traditions with the drive toward modernity. It is in this context that commodity consumption is perceived in Japanese society as a medium to demonstrate these differing qualities. Aside from the centrality of Japanese(ness), consumerism in Japan, seen as symbolising the contemporary modern identity, is thus a response to the ambiguity between the local and the global, a rejoinder to the accusation that they are not ‘fashionable’(*ibid*, p.211) enough to be consistent with modernity.

In a slightly different tone, the fragility of self applies to the Tangerang industrial workers, whose structurally-designated status in the urban sphere has marginalised this population. The purchase and possession of luxuries not only represents a means of confronting the stigma placed upon the factory workers. Consumption of commodities is an endeavor to bring workers back to the track of

ascertaining modern identity. In addition, consumerism as a contestation of meaning to the formation of identity reveals how power is generated and exercised at the micro level. The possession of luxuries produces a medium for the workers through which a sense of power and control—to experience freedom in consumption, to find their leisure heaven, to boost their role in familial relations—is imagined to be embodied in their own subjectivity, in the sphere impervious to the interplay of power relations at corporate and state level. It compensates the structural subjugation in which workers are treated as mere objects, rather than subjects, in production relations. Practice of consumption amongst the Tangerang factory workers substantiates Foucault's (1979) stance about power never being 'on one side' (p.60) and, thus, inherent to every individual body. It becomes a field in which the subaltern produces their own 'power' by contesting the 'official' (media) definition of being factory workers: the feeble subjects. Consumerism, in this light, is not an 'appropriation' of power from authority, but resembles a process Foucault described as 'subjectification' (cited in Rabinow 1991:11), which in this context is to (re)gain power to control the private domain of the worker subjects. It is an act of reiterating the selfhood of subject under urban modern circumstance.

Showering themselves with all possible luxuries they are able to get is a representation of the workers' resistance to the all-out control imposed by power agencies responsible for the structural inequality. It affirms the workers's capacity to realise a 'standard' of urban existence, which has been traditionally considered to belong to the privileged class, whose lifestyle has become the cultural icon of urbanism. The ability to afford this lifestyle in contradiction to the social branding thrown upon them, constructs an 'empowering fantasy' (Fiske 1989:113) with which they are able to foster a sense of being in control over their own life. This enables them to transfer the surrounding condition of powerless into a state in which they can turn away the structural domination and impose their power to control their very own private domain of leisure. At the same time, consumerism serves as a medium that brings workers even closer to their 'imagined community' (Anderson 1983), a

modern existence generated through their encounter with modern cultural flows as described in Chapter 2. Despite the hyperreal character of this social imagination, which they will never fully realise, consumerism is essential in reinforcing their modern identity and asserting conformity toward the process of modernisation. Having been able to be in accord with, or, at least, to resemble, the lifestyle and values of their imagined modernity, they challenge the power relations that exclude them, through social classification and economic inequality, from taking part in the great global current of modernisation.

The notion of ‘empowering fantasy’ is also important in this regard. This is linked with the fact that the production of meaning in the practice of consumption is not truly an independent process, a clear-cut disentanglement from the signs produced by society’s dominant forces. The idea of modernity itself is a conception that is without doubt connected with the state ideology of *pembangunan* (development). Though *pembangunan* remains an unfinished process, exacerbated by the 1997 financial crisis, it has managed to seal the modernity into the urban-centred images that construct a reality of modern life, supposedly the goal of development, in the minds of the urban migrants. In short, the reality of modernity is actually a ‘hyperrealism’ in Baudrillard’s sense, which he defines as ‘the generation by models of a real without origin or reality’ (2001:169).

The ‘reality’ of modernity is the one that the urban migrants pick up from the images in the media, advertisements, or childhood school textbooks, which do not necessarily represent the actual life of the metropolis. Therefore, the imagination of independence and incorporation into modernity in consumption practice has in turn reinforced the migrant workers’ reliance on the mainstream discourse generated by the state. Moreover, the flexibility to spend their income for luxuries, be it electronic goods made in China, domestically-produced products, or internationally established brands with locally-licensed production, endorses the workers’ adherence to the market forces, profiting the culture industry in Adorno’s sense. Frederic Jameson argues that the spread of consumerism is by no means an indication of the ‘freedom’

offered by market relations, according to which consumers can exercise personal choice over the wide-range of commodities exposed to them through commercial images (1991:260-78). He adds that consumer commodities substantiate the market ideology, which does not, in fact, endow real freedom for the people to make decisions beyond the choices provided by capitalist producers (1991:266,273). As for the factory workers in Tangerang, the inevitability of modern social imagining, crucial to the formation of their modern identity gives them little space to make a choice whether or not to buy consumer goods.



Plate 5.8: A Deserted Cinema 2: For sale now (photo:RWJ)



Plate 5.9: Modern Themes in  
*Kampung*1: MTV logo painted on a door  
(photo:JNW)



Plate 5.10: Modern Themes in *Kampung* 2:  
An image of Britney Spears on a door (photo:RWJ)

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Thamrin (1994:34) reveals that in post-colonial Indonesia, an alternative to the minimum wage regime was once put in place during Soekarno's Old Order era in the 1950s and 60s, during which wage levels were set according to a ratio of the highest to the lowest salary in an enterprise. Citing a source from the Indonesian Entrepreneurs Association (*Apindo, Asosiasi Pengusaha Indonesia*), Thamrin said that during that time, the permissible ratio was 24:1 for state enterprises and 90:1 for private business. However, under the minimum wage regime, Thamrin (1992), in his study at a large-scale export-oriented shoes industry in Tangerang, found that the ratio was 150-220:1.

<sup>2</sup> *UMP* stands for *Upah Minimum Propinsi*, while *UMR* stands for *Upah Minimum Regional*. The renaming followed the introduction of regional autonomy, with which local government at the provincial level has acquired greater authority to set the local level of minimum wage. The autonomy similarly allows local government to monitor the implementation of the policy, through its Manpower Office (Dinas Ketenagakerjaan) (Desiarto 2002).

<sup>3</sup> *DPN* stands for *Dewan Pengupahan Nasional*.

<sup>4</sup> According to the Manpower Minister's regulations (No.05/Men/1989 and No.582/Men/1990), the minimum wage is reviewed at least every two years, and the newly-regulated level has to reflect the contemporary Consumer Price Index (*IHK-Indeks Harga Konsumen*) evaluated annually at provincial level.

<sup>5</sup> Thamrin (1998:59) indicates that a wage of Rp 225 received by a female worker in Jember, East Java, in 1978 could afford 8 kg of rice. In 1993, the wage rate had increased tenfold to Rp 2,250 but there had been a 100 percent decline in purchasing power—the amount could only buy 4.5 kg of rice.

<sup>6</sup> *KFM* stands for *Kebutuhan Fisik Minimum*.

<sup>7</sup> The unit of measurement applied in *KFM* is calories. In *KFM* calculation, an unmarried (male) worker requires 2600 cal. per day or 234 kg of rice per year. Different figures are applied to a married worker and spouse, a couple with one child, two children, and three children (see Thamrin 1994:41n7). The figure is far below the indicator established in 1975 by Sayogyo, an Indonesian agricultural sociologist, who stated that the poverty line in rural areas was equal to 320 kg of rice per capita per year, and 480 kg of rice per capita per year in urban areas (Thamrin 1994).

<sup>8</sup> *KHM* stands for *Kebutuhan Hidup Minimum*.

<sup>9</sup> The accommodation allowance for married workers in this factory has been discussed in Chapter 4—the case of a female married worker, Rusilah.

<sup>10</sup> It is common, however, for workers to sleep on a mattress on the floor. The average thickness of the mattress used by workers was 5-6 inches, priced between Rp80,000-200,000. The thickness of Farid's mattress, priced Rp35,000, was less than one inch. However, I knew a few workers who bought wooden beds or spring beds, valued between Rp250,000-400,000.

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They normally had to break the approximately 12-inch-high brick wall divider at the lower entrance of the lodging, used to prevent flooding, so that the bed could be brought into the room. After the bed was placed inside the lodging, they had to rebuild the divider themselves.

<sup>11</sup> This is according to today's exchange rate A\$1=Rp5,000. Before the 1997 financial crisis that depreciated the national currency, the exchange rate was A\$=Rp 1,000-2,000.

<sup>12</sup> In 1995, I used to go out with my worker colleagues to a non-air-conditioned cinema, King's Theatre, close to Gambir neighbourhood, that was always crowded with factory workers, particularly over the weekend. As the tickets were always sold-out, people did not mind paying to stand or sit on the floor. In 2001, I went to the same cinema only to find no one, except me and a friend of mine, for a Sunday afternoon show. A man in the ticket box told me that only if they had at least five viewers would the movie be shown. As it was no longer profitable due to the lack of viewers, the cinema was advertised for sale by the owner.

<sup>13</sup> See Chapter 2 for a brief discussion on the emergence of private TV stations.

<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 4 for discussion on resistance on the workplace.

<sup>15</sup> Posters were also the most-wanted items amongst the factory workers. Poster sellers often walked around the neighbourhood and offered the items from one residential compound to the other, from one lodging to the other. I often saw one single worker buying more than three or four posters. The theme of the posters varied, from sport idols (soccer players from British, Italian, or Spanish leagues, or world-class tennis players), western boys group idols, to local pop idols (music groups, singers, or figures from televised soap opera/*sinetron*).

<sup>16</sup> As soon as a music clip is released on TV, a pirated VCD version copying the televised clip, supplemented with karaoke, will usually be available in the market, although often the licensed music producer has not released its VCD or karaoke version. In this VCD version, with a simple operation on the VCD player, a listener can opt whether to play the full version of the clip (like on TV), or to turn off the voice of the original singer, leaving the (original) background music for karaoke.

<sup>17</sup> See also Chapter 3 for paintings of natural and rural beauty being used by the urban migrant workers to constantly establish connection with the countryside, despite the paintings often no longer accurately portraying the 'real' countryside as a result of rural modernisation.

<sup>18</sup> These programs, except sports, were liked both by male and female workers. Live sports broadcasts were some of the most awaited programs, particularly among male workers. The masculinising tendency in these programs, mostly showing men's soccer matches from European or Latin American leagues or F-1 car racing as well as motorbike racing, meant they were rarely watched by female workers.

<sup>19</sup> Some examples of the lines, as I translated them, are : 'The Average Rise of Regional Minimum Wage 25 Percent' (Kompas Cyber Media 21/2/2000), 'Bureau of Statistics : Workers' Wages Have Increased Sharply in 5 Past Years' (Satunet.com 16/8/2001),

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'Minimum Wage Rises 38.14 Percent' (Koran Tempo 10/11/2001), and 'Minimum Wage in Central Java Rises 12 Percent' (Suara Pembaruan 21/11/2002).

<sup>20</sup> Among others are: 'The Workers' Real Wage Level Declined Throughout 2001' (Kompas 4/6/2002) and 'The Rise in Workers Wage Only Adjusts to the Inflation Rate' (Kompas 5/6/2001).

<sup>21</sup> Where a purchase is carried out by an individual whose name is not on the electricity bill, one has to produce evidence stating that he or she resides with the person whose name is on the bill. The evidence is known as *Kartu Keluarga* or *KK* (lit. Family Card), which is a document issued by the local authority, containing a list of names of persons, including underage children, living under one roof. Migrant workers are normally not included in this *KK* arrangement unless they decide to permanently stay in their current address and give up their administrative status as residents of their place of origin. The time-consuming process to apply for permanent residency in an urban address is usually the reason migrant workers do not deal with this bureaucratic procedure. Their mobility in terms of residence is also another reason for them not applying for a permanent residency status at one particular address.

<sup>22</sup> Farid, a character introduced in the beginning of this chapter, was in the category of those without much surplus compared to those working overtime. In order to accumulate money to purchase electronic goods, he saved his money in a cigarette pack placed at the bottom of his plastic wardrobe.

<sup>23</sup> In Chapter 6, I will indicate the way factory workers differentiate themselves from other 'ordinary' occupations such as domestic servant, construction worker, porter at the seaport, or agricultural worker.

## Chapter 6

### Assuming the Uniform of Modernity



*Plate 6.1: A Morning Ritual: A woman worker prepared to set to work (photo:RWJ)*

## Chapter 6

### Consuming (Assuming?) the Uniform of Modernity

Chapter 5 has highlighted how the migrant workers have made consumption a mode of evading workplace pressure and defying the popular discourse of the subjection of factory labourers. Similarly, in Chapter 4, I have pointed out workers' covert efforts to resist the industrial regime in their workplace. A question arises: Is the factory seen by migrant workers solely as a place in which they exchange their labour for financial remuneration to meet the demands of subsistence and to afford luxuries? While in the city, provided they remain attached to manufacturing sweatshops, urban migrants internalise a set of practices and rules to realign them to corporate discipline. The uniform is one of the company's instruments to discipline and control its workforce. Speaking of the condition of the British military during the Napoleonic Wars, Scott Myerly proposed that uniform has the function of 'transform[ing] the agrarian body into an industrialized *cog* in the megamachine' (cited in Wills 2000:327, emphasis in original). It is in this megamachine—Lewis Mumford's conception of nation state,—that the agrarian body is recreated as an 'industrial body' (Wills 2000:327). Nadine Wills added that, in uniform, bodies are 'disciplined and produced...with very specific knowledges and experiences'(ibid.). Similarly, the uniform exposes rural subjects-turned factory workers to practices distinctive of modern industrial production and modern society, an experience which is not only negative.

As the existence of migrant workers in Tangerang is marked by their pursuit of urban adventure and their place in the process of industrialisation, identity arising from the workplace is not only derived from the relations and impacts generated on the shopfloor. Their pursuit of a modern existence makes engagement in factory work a marker of their ability to assume a modern identity. The attributes and disciplines

ascribed to the occupation give them a sense of ‘officiality’, distancing them from their pre-modern existence in the countryside. This sense is accompanied by their conscious adoption of the term *karyawan*, a dignified characterisation of worker (more in a white-collar sense) (see shortly). The term, which is the New Order ideological construction to strip off the rebellious and radical character of the working class, has made migrant workers more confident of their contribution to, and their place in, the course of modernisation and economic development. It is in this light that the work uniform is valued as a celebrated representation of imagined officiality, and a material acknowledgment of the state’s definition of a praiseworthy working class.

This chapter explores the difficulty of drawing a clear-cut separation between work domain and home/leisure domain and assumption that each domain generates a specific identity, different from the one produced in the opposite domain. Here, I argue that identity does not constantly change as one moves back-and-forth, to follow Erving Goffman (1990), between ‘backstage’ and ‘frontstage’. At work, individual workers are not only framed by their occupational duties. They can also project their individuality through their uniform, which can portray their independence from traditional obligations (as in the case of woman workers) and their conformity with the urban lifestyle. At the same time, the workplace-based identity can also be present in the non-work environment, where workers can imagine their incorporation into, and meet their pursuit of, modernity by taking company-associated symbols into the ‘leisure haven’.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the workers’ manoeuvres to challenge unfair industrial practices in order to recover their condition of humanity and bring back their dignity. This chapter will address the question: What does it mean to be a factory worker? Before I arrive at the discussion about the workers’ production of meaning of corporate symbols, I will first look at the state’s construction of ‘worker’ and how it is reproduced by the workers.

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One morning, I was on a *mikrolet*, the common public means of transportation in Tangerang, travelling from my field site to the bus station in downtown. A *mikrolet* is a small van, with a maximum normal capacity of nine persons including the driver, which has been modified to tightly pack in as many as 14 passengers for commercial purposes. It can also take two more passengers standing outside its left-side back door, which is left open, the extra passengers traveling with their feet resting on a small metal step, hands firmly holding on to the door frame. It was only 7am but the rush hour made this short trip unpleasant for me, as I believe it did for the other passengers. We were jam-packed like sardines in a tin can. Inside, there was no space to stretch one's legs or straighten one's body. As the vehicle was not air-conditioned, the only ventilation was through the windows which allowed the flow of outside (un)fresh air, blended with pollution from industry smokestacks and the exhaust of container trucks, as well as from uncovered rubbish piled up along the road. The high humidity and the traffic jam made things worse.

The majority of passengers were manufacturing workers from the factories established along the road, the regular route of *mikrolet* number 08, the route that passed through the two most important industrial sub-districts in Tangerang. Every minute or so the vehicle stopped to load or drop off passengers. It was never empty, as soon a number of workers got off, their seats were taken by newly-joining passengers who lived in the residential neighborhood, side-by-side with factories, along the road.

As people got on and off, I was aware that perhaps I was the only one in the *mikrolet* who was distressed and cheerless from this morning drama. I had to struggle to keep from getting car sick by surreptitiously covering my nose with my hand, so I would not look weird to others, and avoiding conversation whenever possible. I saw no distress, only cheery faces from most passengers. One group of female workers was involved in a lively conversation about a soap opera on TV the night before, another woman was gossiping about a colleague, and two workers in the front seats chatted about work. On other days, more politically-conscious conversations could be heard,

depending on the current issues in the media, such as fuel price increases, student or labor protests in Jakarta. It was as if the *mikrolet* was totally theirs, a totally occupied space. They looked so comfortable with the atmosphere they created, ignoring the person sitting next to them, who was probably a complete stranger and might not be interested in their conversation. A low tone of voice was just enough to reach every corner of this small vehicle.

For workers, this was their morning ritual, six days a week. They appeared to be extremely excited and optimistic at the start of their day. Even when they disguised their state of mind and kept the atmosphere inside the *mikrolet* quiet, with no conversation, no flurry of giggles, and without bursts of laughter, their faces, their bodily appearances still could hardly conceal their excitement. These women had make-up on their faces. The polluted air was enveloped by a variety of fragrances imparted from inexpensive anti-perspirant perfume and soap. The scents changed all the time, often mixed with one another, as people got on and off, parading their aroma before they dismounted from the crammed vehicle and disappeared into one of the industrial complexes.

These young women could easily be recognised as industrial workers from the uniforms they were wearing. Each uniform indicated which factory employed the workers. Even if several factories used the same color, a line of embroidered letters spelling out the company's name distinguished one factory uniform from another. I noticed that the work suits worn by the different working passengers were spotless and thoroughly ironed. These people were not only regularly manually washing their uniforms but also making meticulous preparations before setting off each day to work in the factory. The tight work schedule, often with overtime that ended late in the evening, and the weariness brought from work did not disturb their daily routine of washing and ironing amidst their brief leisure time. This ensured that when they set off to work, clean, fresh and neatly-ironed work clothes were ready to be combined with their make up, perfume, and fashionable high-heeled sandals.

I was caused to speculate how much effort these working girls made for their self-presentation in the *mikrolet*, or any other stage of the journey that was the prologue to their mundane performance as wage labourers in industrial factories. Is the

effort worthwhile for a representation that lasted such a short time: once the girls set foot in the sweatshop, the make up and fragrance were instantly melted with sweat, and the well-cared for uniform became creased.

As the morning sun began to shine, Ida, a 22-year-old female worker, prepared to go to work at a garment factory, one which produced sports apparel for top international brands. She had just finished washing, fetching water, and bathing, all of which took her nearly an hour to complete, because she was just one of about a hundred residents queuing to access limited basic facilities: water wells, toilets, and bathrooms. She was not bothered by the little time left before she caught a *mikrolet* that took her to the workplace. Ida placed a folded thin blanket on the floor of her rented room as a base on which to iron her blue factory uniform. The whole process of ironing took approximately ten minutes to complete. It required about two minutes to heat up the electric iron. Later she began carefully ironing the uniform with no hurried gestures. Every part of the shirt was thoroughly taken care of and when the process was finished she placed the neatly ironed uniform on a hanger. Similar meticulous treatment was repeated, when she ironed the long trousers.



Plate 6.2: A Last Polish of Lipstick  
before Entering the Assembly Line  
(photo:RWJ)

#### ***Buruh and Karyawan: State's Definition on Workers***

Ida was just one of the many female manufacturing workers in Tangerang. In 1997, woman workers made up 41.63 percent of the total industrial work force in the area. Like many other workers in the area, Ida was an urban migrant trying to take advantage of the burgeoning sector of the manufacturing industry, of which Tangerang had been an example since the late 1980s when the rural agrarian district on the doorstep of Jakarta was transformed into an industrial town. She arrived in Tangerang from a rural town in Southern Sumatra and was recruited by a subcontracting garment industry in 1999, when the country's economy started heading towards recovery after the 1997 financial crisis.

The importance of self-presentation for female workers such as Ida, at first glance, might indicate the success of the New Order state's politics of language by

introducing the term *karyawan*, instead of *buruh*, to refer in a dignified manner to industrial working people. The controversy had in fact originated long before the New Order came to power in the second half of the 1960s. In a speech on 17 June 1963, Aidit, then the Chairman of the Indonesian Communist Party (*PKI*)<sup>1</sup>, claimed the word *buruh*—which also literally means worker—‘inherited ‘the most militant traditions of [...] national liberation movement’ (Leclerc 1972:77).<sup>2</sup> By definition, *buruh* are those who perform manual labour in the production process in exchange for wages (Hakim, cited in Ford 2003). As a result of this definition, *buruh* reinforces a sociological boundary that serves as ‘the dividing-line between the roles of production and management’ (Aidit, cited in Leclerc, *ibid*). It is in the light of this proletarian definition, along with its historic radicalism, that *buruh* was disliked by the capitalist employers and army officials. These elements became increasingly involved in business enterprises following the nationalisation of foreign companies in the 1950s (Hadiz 1997:53-4, Manning 1998:204, Robison 1990:83-7), and felt threatened by the emergent militancy in working class organisations under the influence of the *PKI*. As a result, the army-initiated *SOKSI* (Central Organisation of Socialist *Karyawan* of Indonesia),<sup>3</sup> established in December 1962, used the term *karyawan* in an attempt to wage ideological battle against the communist-dominated *SOBSI* (All Indonesia Central Workers’ Organisation)<sup>4</sup> (Hadiz 1997:54). The main characteristic of *SOKSI* was its endorsement of the ‘ideology of harmonious relations between workers and employers’ (Boileau, cited in Hadiz 1997:54). Jacques Leclerc (1972:87) stated that *karyawan* was originally associated more with ‘*author*, *creator* with a strong elite and intellectual connotation’ (original emphasis).<sup>5</sup> The use of *karyawan* was aimed to ‘eliminat[e] the role of the proletariat’ (Leclerc 1972:87) within the context of Marxian class struggle. Moreover, as an ideological tool to confront the political adversary of the bourgeoisie and the army, namely the *PKI*, the derogatory connotation of *buruh* and the advancement of *karyawan* was associated with attempts ‘to retard the formation of class consciousness by the workers and to devalue the claims of workers who are already aware’ (Leclerc 1972:90). The New

Order went even further by attempting to eliminate the antagonism between workers and employers and the inauguration of one single term, *karyawan* to replace both.<sup>6</sup>

Later, however, it became common in the workplace to use *karyawan* to refer to white collar (office) workers, dealing more with behind-the-desk tasks, and *pekerja*<sup>7</sup> for blue-collar workers, performing the tasks, particularly at the factory. Despite this bifurcation, both terms remain the two faces of one coin of the euphemism the New Order state used to dissociate working people from radical and leftist representations. During Indonesian Labour Day on 12 March 1996, Soeharto, then President, affirmed the noble character of *pekerja* (Harian Merdeka 15/3/1996, cited in Warouw 1996). The introduction of the term was particularly in response to domestic and international critiques of the poor treatment of Indonesian workers and the (re)emergence of labour activism in the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup> *Pekerja*, Soeharto said, suggests a symmetrical partnership between employees and employers, in which the former has 'spiritual' attachment to the profession. Unlike *buruh*, he maintained, which denotes an insubordinate group and merely an instrument in the production process and in opposition with the employer, *pekerja* implies an opportunity to develop initiative and creativity, allowing an individual employee to climb up higher in the workplace hierarchy.

Despite the fact that the politics of arbitrary definition of workers signifies what Leclerc termed 'deliberate aggression directed against the Indonesian labour movement on the level of *identity*' (1972:80, original emphasis), its efficacy at the practical level often brings about varying responses. Selected newspaper articles, examined by Michele Ford in her thesis (2003:187), demonstrate that the term *pekerja* was used only when quoting from an 'official source', whereas '[t]he remainder generally used *buruh*.' Labour-concerned organisations and non-state-sanctioned unions have similarly countered the state's intervention in defining workers' identity. Up to 1994, the three national-structured unions organised independently from state control adopted *buruh* in their name; they were *Serikat Buruh Merdeka Setiakawan (SBM)*, *Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia (SBSI)*, and

*Pusat Perjuangan Buruh Indonesia (PPBI)*<sup>9</sup> (Hadiz 1997:135-6). It is through encounters with activists from the labour-concerned organisations, operating independently from the state's control, that workers are exposed to the *buruh* and *karyawan/pekerja* dichotomy. In such exposure workers are revealed to the celebrated historic role of the working class during colonial times in the nationalist movement. Hadiz gives an example of individual worker becoming aware of the significance of *buruh* and embrace it as the way to acknowledge themselves.

[A] worker decided to keep the word *buruh* as the description of mode of employment in his identity card. Earlier, he had been determined to exchange *buruh* for *karyawan*, which he thoughts was more prestigious. Apparently, what he subsequently learned about the 'heroics' of past workers' organisations persuaded him to be quite proud of being a *buruh*. (1997:212n13, italics in original)

The re-emergence of labour activism during the 1990s and the awareness of *buruh* identity appears to remind us of the radical tradition of the Indonesian working-class movement during the colonial times. As suggested by Hadiz (1997:124), as moving to the city became an aspiration of the 1990s generation of the more educated migrant factory workers, 'the village no longer represented a viable place of refuge or retreat' and therefore they were more determined 'to stay and fight it out in the cities'. Their greater reliance on industrial employment and the few chances for these workers to find jobs elsewhere are key factors in explaining why today's industrial workers 'have a greater stake in the struggles' (Hadiz, ibid.). This is particularly the case when working conditions in the workplace were tough and wage conditions fail to ensure a decent standard of living.

This preparedness for urban permanence as well as consistency in the labour struggle was, nevertheless, challenged by the 1997 financial crisis, which led to industrial decline, as discussed in previous chapters. The crisis also meant thousands of workers had to give up their factory employment and find jobs elsewhere, including seeking sanctuary in their rural place of origin, making the factory workers had to leave their *buruh* identity. Later, as the impact of the financial crisis lessened,

industrial sectors, once again, started recruiting people from the countryside and regenerating the industrial labour force in Tangerang. As indicated by the average factory workers I met during fieldwork, the post-crisis new arrivals are not those who had previously experienced the pre-crisis factory employment, nor urban existence. As a result, these recently-arrived urban migrants have little connection with their urban migrant predecessors with whom the celebrated re-emergence of labour activism under the authoritarian regime during the early 1990s was mostly associated. As already highlighted in Chapter 1, this regeneration of urban factory workers has disrupted the efforts invested by the activists from the labour-concerned organisations to empower workers and to counter to the state project of deradicalising the labour movement.

### **Redefining the Self**

The generational discontinuity is even greater because of the further advancement in the subjective conditions of the contemporary urban migrants in comparison to their pre-1997 predecessors. Hadiz (1997, 2001) points out that literacy and schooling characterised the early 1990s factory workers. He argues that the 'rising literacy level' enabled them to become familiar with the social reality beyond their everyday existence through the printed media (Hadiz 2001:115). The improved education also provided workers with 'greater aspirations in terms of their future and...inclin[ation] to make greater demands', beneficial in shaping the dynamics of the present-day Indonesian labour movement (*ibid.*). This development in subjective conditions went even further for the contemporary workers. As already discussed in previous chapters, when attending high school became prevalent (see Chapter 1: Figure 5.1), requiring the rural children to expand their mobility to the subdistrict town to attend school and spend a substantial time in the classroom, rural children were pulled from agricultural works. In addition, their exposure to media leads them to consider the city as a place of opportunity. Unlike their pre-1997 predecessors, who were marked

by their struggle for subsistence, the present-day migrant workers desire to enjoy their urban experience through their increasing capacity to afford consumer goods, enabled by the factors discussed in Chapter 5. This recently-acquired purchasing power helps migrant workers to ease their anxiety about whether or not their move to the city is meaningful in the context of their expectation of urban modernity.

Despite the lingering uncertainty of their future permanence, workers see factory jobs producing them with material rewards to fulfil their expectations of modernity, giving them a feeling of security in their urban environment. Employment in the factory is also felt to give them self-respect and dignity on which to construct their urban modern identities, and separate them from their rural identity—perceived to be old-fashioned. At the same time, this newly-acquired identity defines their position in modernity, associated with urban lifestyles, urbanism, and modern existence. As a consequence of their modern pursuits, the material comforts they enjoy from the possession of consumer goods increase migrant workers' confidence about their 'better-off' conditions amidst their urban marginality, which, as I discussed in an earlier chapter, has long been a stigma of the working class.

I remember the day I first met Ida. I asked her what she did for a living. The question was actually rhetorical as it seemed obvious to me that the majority of residents of the lodging establishments in the area were industrial workers. She replied: 'I am working as a *karyawan* in a garment factory.' This answer contradicted my long-standing understanding about *buruh* being a marker of radical identity of the Indonesian working class, particularly those who had gone through the 1990s radical period in response to the repressive New Order regime which opposed grassroots activism and the labour movement.<sup>10</sup> Having heard her remark, spoken as she was weary after her working day, I began to doubt the efficacy of *buruh* discourse among the current generation the factory workers. Throughout my presence in the area, I hardly heard *buruh* used by workers; instead, they commonly applied *karyawan* to themselves. When I asked about their jobs, instead of saying: 'I am a *buruh*', they usually said: 'I am a *karyawan* at the factory A' or '[I] work in the factory'.

I was aware that asking workers directly about their denial of *buruh* status could risk being taken as an insult, degrading the identity they strived to construct. Fortunately I was able to find a way around this by asking their opinion of the usage of the word *buruh* in the name of scores of recently-established unions emerging after the fall of Soeharto in 1998 (e.g. Ford 2000, Hadiz 2001). The opinion given by almost everybody was not always a straight answer. Ida, for example, responded: ‘*Buruh?* How can I say? (*Kalau buruh itu, gimana gitu*). Others even assumed that I already knew the answer, such as: ‘*Buruh?* You know’ (*Kalau buruh itu, ya tau sendiri lah*). It is not easy for me to analyse the meaning of such rhetorical answers. However, the response only became clear to me when it was followed by a facial expression, indicating the speaker’s uncertainty about the answer (or probably reluctance to answer). At the same time it demonstrated a negative attitude and uneasiness toward the subject. After a long pause, knowing that I was still waiting for further clarification, Ida explained that working as a factory worker, receiving *gaji* (salary), was not the type of occupation that fitted the category of *buruh*, where *upah* (wage) was the compensation for the work performed. *Buruh*, according to her conception, applied only to casual and informal employment, such as construction workers (*buruh bangunan*), porters at seaports (*buruh/kuli pelabuhan*), or landless farm labourers (*buruh tani*). Besides, she said, poor payment, lack of workplace discipline, and the absence of a workplace (meaning a building) were characteristics of *buruh* conditions. In contrast, her description of her current employment as *karyawan*, emphasised the nature of the ‘officiality’ embodied in a factory job. Such perceptible reluctance to be pigeonholed in the *buruh* category and, importantly, the way she plausibly depicted the merits of *karyawan*, (by contrasting them with those of *buruh*) therefore, illustrate how participation in the formal industrial economy does not merely provide a migrant worker with a sense of financial security (to support a certain lifestyle). Being a factory worker (*karyawan pabrik*)<sup>11</sup> can also give a sense of doing ‘real’ work. In order to differentiate themselves from clerical employees in, for

example, clerks, workers normally acknowledge the latter as *karyawan kantor* (office *karyawan*).

Accordingly, to Ida and many of her colleagues, the dichotomy between *buruh* and *karyawan* is not simply a clear-cut distinction between blue-collar worker and white-collar worker. By definition, factory workers are in themselves manual labourers, that is blue-collar workers. The term *karyawan* is more related to some above-mentioned material qualities entrenched in industrial activity which, according to migrants, makes this occupation 'real'. Nevertheless, the recognition of their *karyawan-ness* and their espousal of such qualities as a representation of a *bona fide* occupation do not necessarily suggest the workers' submission to the state's ideological discourse, as highlighted earlier, that gave rise to this terminological dichotomy. Rather, their adherence to *karyawan-ness* along with its character of 'officiality' represents the haunting imagination of modernity which urban migrants consider to be the inherent quality of the metropolis. The recurring theme of modernisation in school textbooks, the portrayal of the splendour of industrialisation (a factory building and its smokestack), the promise of workplace discipline as a key to success (as school discipline provides pupils a bridge to adjust to a modern way of life), and income remuneration offering material rewards and imagined lifestyles, have presented migrants with a degree of certainty which singles them out from the reality of *buruh*.

Therefore, my earlier illustration of workers' careful treatment of the work uniform can also be understood as subjects emphasising and displaying the 'officiality' and the 'professional' character of their occupation. In most industrial firms, the provision of a work uniform is the responsibility of the company to its shopfloor employees; an entitlement assured in work contracts. Workers who passed their probationary period were entitled to two sets of uniform per year. Normally the uniform consisted of a collared cotton shirt with buttons and a pocket, to which the employee's identity badge was attached. Pants or skirt were not usually included in the entitlement, so workers were normally allowed to choose their own to combine

with the uniform top.<sup>12</sup> Most companies in the area obliged their female shopfloor employees to wear pants to ensure easy mobility and flexibility at work. The quality and features of the uniform varied from one factory to another. A manufacturing corporation with a larger scale of production and export orientation could usually provide its workers with a uniform consisting of a cotton shirt with the company's name embroidered on the pocket. Another, whose products were predominantly marketed domestically, had only a simple coloured t-shirt with the company's name printed on it; the color and the print often faded after several washes.

The constant display of uniform workdays gives an affirmation to migrant workers of their inclusion into an official institution, different from the 'unofficial' status of *buruh*. As I sat one morning watching the hustle and bustle of residents in the workers lodgings, I heard Ida lectured a female worker who had not taken 'proper' steps to prepare her uniform. Her shirt was hardly ironed, apparently because she woke up late that morning, as she had only finished her overtime just before midnight the night before. In addition, she left the shirt outside her trousers. Speaking sharply, Ida said: 'Tuck in your shirt. Dress neatly. You're going to work, not to a muddy rice field.' Another neighboring colleague, Yayah, mockingly added: 'Why don't you just take off your shoes and roll your pants up to look more appropriate for one working in the rice field.' During my stay in the field site, I often heard such remarks from workers reminding colleagues to mind their dress in order to match their self-perceived image as factory workers. Another time, my neighbor in the lodging compound, a male worker, rebuked his male colleague who was wearing a stained rumpled shirt he apparently had worn the previous day: 'Are you going to be a *becak* (three wheel pedicab) driver, or going to work!' Tilling land and getting caught in a muddy rice field, or becoming a *becak* driver are belittling professions for migrant workers. In the workers' perception, such employment is by no means a job or an occupation, even if they also have to perform similar physical labour for long hours as required in Tangerang.

### **Disciplining the Uniformed Body**

The concern about the dress code demonstrated by Ida suggests that work clothing is a salient cultural artifact. It interweaves industrialisation with the everyday life of migrant workers. It is significant in the construction of identity as a factory worker. However, before considering the implications of work uniforms for the modernity projects of migrant workers, I would first like to look at the experience encountered by them in the 'real' world of work. From the corporate agencies' point of view, work clothing embodies a symbolic instrument which provides the employer with the authority to impose power and control upon its employees. The uniform is one of the disciplining instruments of corporate agencies to regulate their labour forces. As workers' urban existence is split into two primary domains, work and leisure, and there is a tendency for workers to evade workplace control by establishing a 'sanctuary' in their private domain (see Chapter 5), a factory uniform prepares its wearer for the mindset to conform (back) to the corporate discipline in re-entering the factory regime.

While those with clerical tasks are also subject to uniform regulations, the style of shopfloor workers' uniforms is different from those of the clerical workers. While (female) clerical workers, presumably performing behind-the-desk tasks and administrative duties, are restricted to skirts, their sweatshop counterparts have to wear trousers; the same top is customarily required at both levels. Many female workers commented that pants are required in order to allow flexibility and mobility of workers to perform their duties. Nevertheless, given the actual task, in which the worker remains static in one position on the assembly line, the company's instructions about pants/trousers to ensure relatively unbound movement do not seem relevant. As indicated in Chapter 4, the implementation of Taylorian time management in the course of production to maximise labour efficiency (Braverman 1974, Friedmann 1955) is characteristic of most manufacturing firms in Tangerang. So specialised and fragmented are the tasks along the assembly line, that one single

worker is only responsible for repetitively performing one simple and specified undertaking. As in this production regime workers are no longer required to participate in the entire production process,<sup>13</sup> the introduction of trousers or pants to support body flexibility, accordingly, does not seem functionally related to the issue of efficiency, as workers do not normally move from their fixed work station.

Uniform, rather, is an instrument imposed by the employer to assert place of the wearer in the hierarchy of the workplace chain of command. The minimal and practical design of clothing: short-sleeved collared shirt or plain t-shirt with few accessories except the company name/logo combined with casual pants, delivers a message to workers of their functional designation as manual and physical labourers dealing with machines and other instruments employed to produce commodities. This functional designation is particularly apparent when their uniform is compared with those at clerical level, whose clothing is not intended to anticipate physical and hard labour. Female clerks have to wear skirts, while the males must wear long-sleeved collared cotton shirts.<sup>14</sup> The practical model of a uniform is therefore an instrument to internalise a reception in the workers' consciousness of their place and role within the workplace. It similarly communicates a set of rules and discipline which workers must abide by.

Corporate discipline starts even before workers walk into the production premises. The daily life as an industrial worker begins with the habituation of the body to adjust to the rhythm of production in the factory. This habituation includes the morning ritual in which workers wait in a long line for the limited basic sanitary facilities typical of marginal urban neighbourhoods, a strategy to avoid being late for work, a violation subject to sanctions from the company. This habituating process is amplified by the assignment of work uniforms, which persistently re-establish the mental faculty and identity as an industrial worker. Taking occupational clothing as an imperative attribute, corporate employers can make sure that workers, having been occupied with leisure at their urban home, have tuned back in to the corporate discipline and behaviour required on the shopfloor. Appraisal of another's work outfit

as seen by Ida and Yayah's chastisement of a colleague implies a uniform can be seen as a representation of 'willing subjects' (Joseph, in Crane 2000:2) who comply with the ascription and function imagined in being an industrial worker.

Upon arrival at the gate of a factory, the consciousness of being a worker is reinforced with their submission to be body (or bag)-searched to prevent illegal material (sharp objects, drugs, provocative pamphlets) being brought into the production premises. The process is repeated later in the day when leaving the compound in order to make sure that no company property is illegally taken out. Not everyone who enters and leaves the premises is subjected to such procedures. It applies only to shopfloor workers, identifiable by their uniform. Even a guest, who is possibly a complete stranger, could pass through the gate without being body-searched. This account of the procedures and the discrimination based on what one wears was told by the workers themselves, for whom it was a taken-for-granted routine, arising no opposition. Some workers even accept the presumption that a shopfloor worker—and only a shopfloor worker—has the potential to do damage to the company.

The habituation also includes awareness that workers are expected to be on the production lines at a specified time when the bell rings. In a garment factory that employed Ida, for example, workers, mostly women, had to start work by sitting at their designated area to listen to the daily instructions from their superior (a head of line or a head of division). The instruction included a description of the design, specific feature or pattern of a particular model, and the quantity that the workers were required to achieve.<sup>15</sup> Later, once all information was delivered, the workers could commence work. Young female workers diligently sewing is the dominant image of the production floor. If they leave the production line and are somewhere else on company premises, their presence is easily detectable by their superior, by company security, or whoever is responsible for control, as the uniform constantly communicates to others their status and place in the workplace. Among all the ranks employed in the factory, it is only production workers whose 'traffic' to the restroom

is strictly monitored in order not to interrupt the pace of production. Whenever an irregularity occurs on the assembly line, such as the absence of workers beyond the allowable number from a work group or for a sustained time, a controller will start searching the toilet area or the entire factory. Those with shopfloor clothing are, consequently, subject to being ordered to return to where they are supposed to be.

Control does not necessarily have to be in the form of the presence of the management or controller through their hierarchy of supervisory staff. The fixing of hourly output per worker or workgroup is another method of control. Despite the workers' reluctance to increase their productivity more than that set by the management (see Chapter 4) the practice of setting target serves as a company's instrument to develop self-control by workers. Along with incentive payments to stimulate productivity, such efforts are designed by the company not only as a way to achieve a certain level of production but also to give responsibility to workers. They are meant to habituate the workers to the industrial arrangements and to develop their sense of belonging to the workplace. On one occasion, Lamiri, a character introduced in earlier chapters, told me about a colleague whose ear was accidentally cut when operating a pressing machine during a night shift. Lamiri blamed his colleague for not being alert to the motion of the machine. After the accident, the harmful instrument continued to operate as usual and no adjustment was deemed necessary to prevent further injuries. Such adaptation demonstrates how the workers' view of their relation to machinery and work has been habituated to the hazardous conditions of work in the factory, and that adaptation to these is imperative rather than the other way around.

Uniforms are certainly not the only attribute with which urban migrants seek to construct their identity as factory workers; in order to formalise their engagement in an urban modern sector of the economy. The significance of the uniform, however, rests in its capacity to induce workers to self-regulate their psyche to adhere to the code of practice required in their world of work. Once the work attire is attached to the body of a worker, it marks the transition of an individual from his/her private

domain to a public space in the factory which is very much defined by relations of production. Moreover, as the transition is not a one-off rite of passage, but is repeated almost on a daily basis, the pledge to the employer is constantly renewed. Individuals are repeatedly reminded of their role and obligations as factory workers who have to comply with the disciplines of the industrial regime.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1991), Michel Foucault introduced the term 'panopticism' to designate an individual's internal mechanism of self-discipline and self-regulation of behaviour as a result of his/her being an object of close and persistent scrutiny. The panoptic mechanism allows the object of scrutiny to knowingly believe that he/she remains under constant supervision even when the controller is actually absent.<sup>16</sup> Analysing the birth of prisons, Foucault suggests that panopticism is a 'disciplinary technology' to control and discipline inmates by placing them under permanent surveillance, with which 'the automatic functioning of power' can take place (1991:201). Under this arrangement, an inmate in a correction centre is regarded as a 'docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved' (Foucault, cited in Rabinow 1991:17). In a simpler way, David Gauntlett (2002) describes panopticism as a mechanism of self-'polic[ing]' with which 'discipline[.] and surveillance' realign one's 'behaviour' (p.116). Self-policing ensures that the objects are constantly reminded of the presence of a dominating power that sets the rules and disciplines. It is in relation to this self-control mechanism that Bentham (cited in Foucault 1991:201) argues that the reinforcement of 'power' has to have its representation—that is 'panopticon' or the surveillance tower—'visible' to the objects of domination. At the same time, the presence of the overseer is 'unverifiable' so that the objects are not aware of they are being observed but still realise the disciplines and rules they are obliged to follow.

As in prisons, school and asylums, a 'disciplinary mechanism' (Foucault, 1991:197) is also present in the sweatshops of industrial production. It is in this light that I would view work uniforms as the superficial form of surveillance tower, the panopticon, for shopfloor workers. A work uniform mediates the power of the

corporate agents on the shopfloor in every single aspect of workers' existence in their workplace. It regulates how the wearers behave and synchronise details of their actions with the beat of the assembly line and the production quota; determines the spatial location where the wearers should be; and makes the wearers visible. Through this representation of power, workers imagine their sense of duty as well as their bond with the employer. This not only allows industrial capitalists to apply less supervising apparatus (see Chapter 4), but also, in the larger context, appears to be in line with the New Order politics of labour control through workers' 'spiritual' attachment to the work. Once workers swathe their body in factory clothing, their visibility and their recognisability make it difficult for them to sidestep the set of company rules. They even manage to adjust their human nature so as not to exceed the allowable time to use the restroom, or to take turns to temporarily leave the assembly line to ensure that activities in production lines are not interrupted. This disciplinary mechanism, which highlights their visibility as objects, puts workers under apparent persistent surveillance, and makes the manager and corporate body an omnipresent power agency constantly imposing control and discipline upon its object of power.

The work uniform also emphasises the workers inferior position in the workplace hierarchy. Initiative is not something their superior would expect from them. Every single move on the assembly line is the effect of their obedience to orders and to those in charge of reinforcing them, in a hierarchically organised pyramidal structure from lower foremen up to the top level of production manager. Although task fragmentation on the assembly line has ensured a comprehensive division of labour, every single shopfloor worker at any time remains subject to a change of duty if the superior's assessment finds it necessary. Under this circumstance, the worker is not able to decline. Arif, a character introduced in previous chapter, complained that he was often instructed by his superior to carry out tasks beyond his primary responsibility in the cutting division. This was particularly the case when he was idle after his daily output quota had been accomplished or

when another line was under-resourced. He added: 'Once I was suddenly asked by my head of division to sweep the floor.' This sort of arbitrary reassignment is commonplace in factories throughout the industrial town, according to workers reports. It is arbitrary because those giving instructions have full authority to pick anyone wearing a shopfloor uniform under his or her command, regardless of the employee's competence to carry out the reassigned duty.

Nonetheless, it is not the constant presence of the overseers that causes the workers' submission. On the contrary, in line with Foucault's (1991) argument, the omnipotence of power and domination lies in the capacity to arbitrarily demonstrate authority, either through surveillance or directive, to its uniformed objects. The unexpected presence of power thus guarantees total submission in which there is relatively little space for undisciplined actions. Instead, workers have to be alert almost all the time to being objects of scrutiny and subject to order. The manager, accordingly, can make sure that the panopticising uniform indiscriminately confers 'a homogeneous effect of power' (Foucault 1991:202) upon every individual under his or her sphere of influence. Therefore, panopticism is not merely a control mechanism, but 'fictitious relation' (*ibid.*) aimed not only at exhibiting the bond between capital and labour but similarly maintaining workers' 'real subjection' (*ibid.*), reinforcing the dominance of capital over labour.

### **Expressing the Self, Accepting the Corporate's Symbols**

As punitive actions are normally applied if an employee fails to wear the work uniform, one might then argue that the workers' acceptance of the rule does not necessarily reflect their consent to the code of conduct put in place by the manager. The compliance to the uniform rule may be no more than a gesture to avoid sanction. Therefore, workers' obedience to the superior in this view is artificial: it just demonstrates their conformity to management's orders or simply exchanges submission for a pragmatic reason, such as job security or, perhaps, promotion.

Goffman (1990) argued that conformity and submission in the workplace is no more than a 'performance' staged by the workers to impress the manager with the former's eloquence in playing the character of a well-behaved and obedient employee, a role which is unlikely to represent the actual state of the performers offstage. In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990), Goffman claimed that the everyday life of every human being is a stage on which one is constantly staging the character he/she wants to present to others or would like others to see him/her as. Under this condition, which he terms 'impression management', the presentation of self is divided into two (Goffman 1990:129-30). A 'backstage' domain is where informal activities, a more relaxed manner, and straightforwardness are accepted in the code of behaviour. A 'frontstage' is where the qualities found backstage are less tolerated. While backstage is often linked to the presentation of people as they are, hence, natural and the real portrayal of self, frontstage is taken as more artificial and simply a mask to disguise what lies beneath the self.

### *Hybridising the Work Uniform*

A work outfit, nonetheless, offers migrant subjects more than just a (capitalist) industrial character and training of the body. It is similarly central to the migrant workers' reinforcement of identity, socially and historically constructed in their social imagining of modernity. Earlier, I have shown that while most companies provided the uniform top, be it cotton shirt or t-shirt, the choice of colour and fabric of skirt or pants was left to the workers' preference. As there was no specific rule regulating the kind of pants the shopfloor workers should wear, the vast majority preferred to appear casually with denim pants, usually blue jeans. I could not find one worker who never wore this style of pants with their factory uniform, except those in the company that provided a complete uniform (top and pants). The only occasion simple cotton trousers were worn was when the workers' favorite work pants were still hanging wet on the line. Ery was one of my female informants who I never saw without her blue

jeans when going to work, and almost all the time when I met her in the neighbourhood. 'I feel so easy and free to move with this denim fabric,' said Ery one time. She added, 'Besides, [blue] jeans fit any occasion, working, shopping, everywhere, even prayer gatherings (*yasinan*), as long as they don't look worn-out (*belel*), dirty and rumpled (*kusut*).' However, given her favorite style was tight jeans that revealed the shape of her lower body, I could hardly imagine that such a style would fit the need for physical flexibility as she claimed. In addition, considering the conditions of the sweatshop, in which the workers had to battle the lack of fresh air and high humidity, loose pants from a lighter cotton fabric would perhaps be a more sensible option rather than thicker denim fabric tightly wrapped round the sweating legs.

Blue jeans, the tight model, were similarly preferred by female workers wearing *jilbab*, the headscarf in Islamic tradition that exposes the face but not ears, neck or hair. Yayah, a female worker from a garment factory, for instance, would restrict herself with the *jilbab* once she entered public spaces such as the workplace or downtown mall, places outside her immediate locale. 'Just in order not to let people have dirty thoughts about me,' she explained. In everyday practice, in contrast, Yayah was not so strict with the headscarf, particularly in an environment where she knew the people around her very well, like in the lodging complex. Despite her efforts to protect herself and to conform with her religious convictions by covering body parts considered to be sensual with a *jilbab*, she did not mind wearing blue jeans which, in fact, outlined the contours of her body from her waist downwards. Like Ery, Yayah claimed that physical flexibility and comfort were the reasons she preferred the fashion. The need to look casual while working on the shopfloor was also part of her reasoning: 'Yes I do work, real work, in the factory, but I also want to feel relaxed on the [assembly] line and this [outfit] makes me feel comfortable.' For most workers, both female and male, blue jeans have become the unofficial uniform to wear with the official shirt. The image of casualness of denim pants does not necessarily appear to lessen the gravity, the officiality, of the uniform. Those like Ery and Yayah

repeatedly explained their preferred fashion of work clothing to me in terms of : 'As long as we dress up neatly in uniform and it (the way of dress) doesn't go against company rules, we feel comfortable with this [jeans fashion].'

This workers' notion of flexibility and the appropriateness of their jeans pants as work clothing appears to resemble the history of the original Levi's brand of blue jeans when they were firstly produced by Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis in 1873 (Downey 2000a). Lyn Downey, a historian, points out that, using denim fabric to guarantee 'durability and comfort' (2000b), the newly-invented "waist overalls"—as the first jeans were traditionally called—put 'metal rivets at the points of strain, such as on the pocket corner and at the base of the button fly' (2000a). <sup>17</sup> Amidst the American gold rush, the products were initially made in response to the miners' demand for strong work clothing, especially at the side pocket, easily torn by the weight of ore samples (Levi Strauss & Co 2001). Nonetheless, since the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, denim pants have increasingly been less linked with work as the result of the Western movies mystifying the 'American imagination [of a]uthentic cowboys wearing Levi's® jeans', making the outfits 'synonymous with a life of independence and rugged individualism' (Downey 2000b). Moreover, during the 1940s, the clothing was also connected 'with the leisure activities of prosperous post-war America' as a result the American GI soldiers taking their blue jeans overseas and wearing them off-duty (Downey 2000b, Lohmann 2000). Later, in the 1950s, denim was adapted by American teenagers, following the model of TV and movies portraying youth rebels, e.g. James Dean, as a symbol of rebellion against the older generation (Lohmann 2000).

The attractiveness of jeans amongst contemporary migrant factory workers can be seen as a summary of the evolution of the blue jeans as described above, with contextualisation in the local situation. Despite their use value as work wear, denim pants can not be understood apart from the aspirations of migrant workers, whose arrival in the metropolis is highlighted by their pursuit of adventurous pleasure. Migrant youth were probably far too young to be connected with the Western pop

icons of American cowboys such as John Wayne and Gary Cooper, or youth rebel like James Dean and Marlon Brando in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> However, the very same media has presented rural children-turned migrant workers with vibrant local and contemporary vibrant beloved MTV-style pop idols, wearing denim and embodying casualness and sporty youth styles. Such cultural discourse has underlined the reading of blue jeans as an embodiment of modernity and urban culture. Denim pants thus symbolise the spirit of the young at heart and freedom, the modernisation-created qualities that rural youth are striving to achieve in their shift to the city. 'Wearing cotton pants (*celana kain*) is just like an old man,' said a male teenage worker, a remark affirmed by his colleagues by laughter.



Plate 6.3: Woman Workers in Uniform and Denim Pants (photo supplied by an informant—Th)

Although their popularity among workers crosses gender boundaries, blue jeans have a greater significance for females. As mentioned in another chapter, young rural women are less engaged in domestic work as a result of their time spent in school as well as in front of TV. However, as Ery and Yayah said, such a 'privilege' would not last long. As soon as the daughters finish high school, the duty of household maintenance falls to them (see also Silvey 2001). This becomes even more obvious after marriage. Moving to the city for urban pleasure is, therefore, an avenue to avoid the 'displeasure' of household obligations and to delay marriage. Their factory work-generated financial self-reliance gives them further justification to establish whatever life they wish, relatively unfettered by their parents' intervention. 'Parents only know that we are working in the city, not having fun,' Ery spoke wittily.

The removal of young women from domestic tasks and their entrance to work life in factories, nonetheless, does not necessarily reflect a sudden shift toward an adventurous experience under urban conditions. This is partly because the sense of officiality conferred by their engagement on the assembly line is not seen as a full realisation, a complete form, of modern existence in the city. Experience on the shopfloor does indeed contribute to their social imagining of modernity. Similarly, it is an adventurous passage, since industrial work is an encounter previously unknown to these rural youth. Yet, in reality, it is their literacy in urban culture, demonstrated by the possession of luxuries and presentation of self—a modern being in bodily performance—that brings more pleasure and gratification to their urban existence. Despite their newly-acquired freedom as a result of being drawn into the public domain of the industrial sector, the physical hardship of life in the sweatshop becomes irrelevant to the notion of pleasure expected in their venture to the metropolis. After all, what sort of freedom comes from restrained conversations with adjacent colleagues on the assembly line, or from the forced synchronisation of the body to the tempo of unrelenting production?

How does their urban adventurous experience bring pleasure to female workers? The last chapter explored the manner in which workers create a space of

pleasure in their impoverished urban home. McRobbie (1999) points out that the celebration of freedom amongst the 19th century working-class women in Britain was not found in the workplace or at home, but rather in the domain between those two, on their way from home to work and vice versa. She asserts that 'walking about and hanging about on the streets' gave them a degree of independence in venturing across town from which they could experience brief 'pleasure and enjoyment' (McRobbie 1999:37). The conditions in which these women had to travel to work in the early hours of the morning dark and stroll unguarded by husbands or brothers on the city streets are, according to McRobbie, 'a remarkable contribution to the *workforce of modernity*' (1999:37, italics in original). The same experience of pleasure is evidenced in the morning journey to work, described at the beginning of this chapter. However, when extended to the situation of the industrial town of Tangerang at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the premise of modernity cannot exclusively be limited to the freedom of female workers to move to and explore the strange city without the protection of a guardian. It can be expanded to dress fashions with which they express modernity in the workplace. It is in this light that blue jeans, in particular, become significant as the preferred choice to be combined and presented along with the official uniform. This presentation is a stage on which the workers are able to display their aspirations for pleasure and enjoyment in circumstances where the almost all-round control in the factory leaves little space for workers' subjectivity.<sup>19</sup> The desire for 'flexibility' in their jeans fashion is, accordingly, also an expression of celebration of their release from the 'displeasure' and 'inflexibility' of household obligations. Ery, for example, stated: 'Why go to school up to high school if we ultimately end up in the kitchen.' Another colleague, Yayah, maintained: 'Once we get married and give birth, there is no doubt, especially if we remain in the countryside, that we will have to stay at home for the rest of our life.' Nevertheless, their statement does not simply indicate their total rejection to the women's domestication. Both seemed aware that household duties would inevitably be part of their future life. Rather, it was the idea of early marriage or early domestication that

they appeared to resist given their improved education, which they expected would lead to social-economic mobility, and their aspirations for migration and modernity. 'I will get married and have children someday. Once I enter that stage, I will certainly have to look after my husband and my children,' said Ery. Therefore, the sporty-look that the jeans fashion offered, embodies an idea of high mobility, and their preparedness to explore fresh aspirations which, as these young females believe, can not be grasped in the narrow confines of their parents' (or husband's) house with all the attendant household responsibilities. Fashionable jeans can also be perceived as a symbolic counter-action against the social construct that designates women exclusively to domestic or mere clerical activities, with which skirts, rather than pants or blue jeans, are thought to be appropriate fashion. In addition, the casual but official image that comes from the combination of denim pants and cotton uniform shirt draws a clear distinction from these youths' school experience, where school clothing was not negotiable and, hence, restrained youthful aspirations for pleasurable adventure.

In this particular fashion, female workers are able to celebrate their personal liberty, as well as producing a medium through which their chosen staging of modern identity is presented. This hybrid uniform is a representation of the young workers' fluency with urban lifestyle, epitomised in denim fashion, but, at the same time, maintains their sense of officiality. These two qualities are obviously not incongruous as they are, in fact, two distinctive faces of the same coin of modernity to the migrant workers in their search for an idiosyncratic reality in a metropolitan center. This sporty and casual fashion, permeated through the power of media, has come to represent the more celebrated eminence of an urban lifestyle, whose widespread practice crosses class, occupational, and gender boundaries. Through their attachment to this certain fashion, female youth express their subjectivity by imagining their place in cosmopolitan culture—uprooting them from the penitentiary of working class sweatshops—as well as their equal opportunity to participate in the public sphere of factory work. This passion to incorporate the fashion into the presentation

of work uniforms, thus, indicates workers' efforts to negotiate their modernity and urban identity with the disciplined and mechanised industrial regime.

### *Fetishising the Company's Logos*

Because of the distinction between the frontstage and the backstage, one might assume that entering into a domain, either back or frontstage, would mean a sudden shift in performance, at its most extreme renouncing the character and circumstances embodied in the opposite domain. Applying this assumption to the workers in relation to their work, the transition between factory life as frontstage, in which the work uniform is a costume on the podium, to the home and leisure domain as backstage, could similarly suggest an abandonment of impression management efforts on the shopfloor for a leisure haven (Chapter 5). As the work uniform is stripped off the body, the attributes and characteristics of the self adapted to conform with the factory domain is discarded, giving a chance for presumably a more informal and 'genuine' personality.

There are times, nonetheless, when the dividing line between the two domains is vague. Tired after a full day working, Ima, a young female worker employed in a leather sports glove factory, lay down on the cold tiled floor at her lodging. She sighed wearily but with relief, saying: 'Lucky it (the work)'s over for this time. Now I can have a break and enjoy my leisure.' Ima surely had everything, almost all the electronic entertainment equipment she could afford to buy, to accompany her leisure. However, sometimes the audio-visual amusement was too dull. Often, she was reluctant to turn on her TV because she did not have company to watch it. She explained:

I do not enjoy watching TV alone. Nobody to talk with about what we are seeing [on TV] or about anything [while watching TV]. Doing things alone is just like a mad man.'

In Chapter 5, I have indicated that workers' enhanced purchasing power has individuated their experience of consumption. However, taking pleasure from modern

entertainment (TV, VCD, karaoke) is almost always a collective experience to the rural youth-turned urban migrants. Coming from a rural background, urban migrants understand that being solitary is not an acceptable norm in the rural society.<sup>20</sup> In addition, the sense of being part of a big family in a close-knit rural society makes a *gemeinschaft*-like face-to-face interaction almost an everyday experience in the countryside. To Ima, taking pleasure from her urban colleagues's company was not solely an extension of the rural-based big family experience right in the very heart of urban industrial centre. It was also a means of reinforcing solidarity, by sharing stories about work and discourse on the media, in order to neutralise the alienating impact of being an urban subaltern, in order not to be, as Ima said, 'a mad man.'

Therefore, when she did not have anybody with whom to enjoy her own personal luxuries, she could always join a small group of worker colleagues who were always sitting on the benches in the alleys between the lines of barrack-like lodgings. They were always smiling, laughing, making jokes, gossiping, experience-swapping, teasing each other, or singing out of tune. Unhappy faces disappeared, although many had just come back weary from work a short while ago. Having seen this, I was nearly convinced that the workers' home domain in their urban neighbourhood was a reality cut-off from the one on the production floor. However, as I looked around the compound I realised that the shadow of the sweatshop was never out of the workers' sight, even after they were discharged from the shackles of the factory. In almost every lodging room, I noticed that workers placed their respective company stickers on their outside door, probably as a decorative emblem for their living space. As tenants come and go and never remove the mess when moving out, the entrance doors of rooms were typically crowded with company stickers. Apart from these stickers, calendars, sticky tape with the company's name printed on it used for packaging, or the company's logo printed on cardboard were workplace attributes workers often took home to display in any possible spot in their lodging. If a worker was not able to obtain such items, he or she would simply mark

or paint the name or logo of the company on the door or wall large enough to be noticeable from a few metres distance.

Some claimed that this practice was purely for decorative and artistic purposes. Ima, for instance, said that she liked the design of her company's logo. Heri, a male worker in his mid-20s, even stuck tape with the name of his tyre company printed on it on the glass of the jalousie window of his lodgings. He hoped that the 'decoration' would give a fancy-looking (*keren*) appearance to the room. However, such emblems may not merely be ornamental to serve the immediate need to cover the sombre setting of a marginalised neighbourhood. Along with work uniform, such attributes can be seen as a medium of 'social information' (Crane 2000:3) through which the newly-acquired identity as factory workers and, hence, modern being finds its expression and is communicated.



Plate 6.4: Logo of Company on Jalousie Window (photo:RWJ)

Assigning these markers to encircle everyday life is one way workers take care of their existence under urban circumstances. The focus of this careful action is of course not solely centred around the effort of obtaining the items and placing them in such an alluring and glittering fashion. Having these company-associated attributes displayed in this way, and the care of the work uniform are, in fact, the means to constantly reproduce and inculcate in workers' minds an identity and a quality of life which can connect these urban migrants with an imagined modern and urban existence. This appears to adhere to what Foucault (1988:16-49) terms 'technologies of the self'. Foucault states that technologies of the self refer to subjects' conscious and intentional practice

to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (1988:18).

With its embodied disciplining effect as implied by the panoptic mechanism, a work uniform, for example, is a medium of expression of the realignment of workers' behaviour to their contemporary reality under modern economic conditions in industrial factories. At the same time, it symbolises the legitimate acknowledgment that shapes migrants' consciousness of their engagement in a process to which they have just adapted. As a crown has its symbolic significance in a majestic coronation, workers perceive their uniform as the instrument that brings to perfection their realignment to, and incorporation into, industrialisation and, hence, modernisation. This quality of attachment is not merely aimed at convincing themselves of being in a state of existence, previously residing only in their imagination. It similarly presents audiences, the others, of the selves' accomplishment to incorporate and conform to the modern progress.

In their account of everyday Australian culture, Tony Bennett, Michael Emmison and John Frow (1999:115) argue that diet and physical exercise are practical forms to relentlessly train the selves in order to meet 'a set of ideals which gives us a sense of who and what we are, and what we might be'. These ideals are social constructions of masculinity and femininity, of beauty and strength, according to which individuals establish their 'social imaginary of the body' (Bennett et.al. 1999:115) and, hence, realign their body in accordance to such an imaginary. The fashioning of the body in compliance with a social imaginary, however, can also be extended to efforts not exclusively aimed at manipulating the body as a corporeal entity. Work uniforms and company-associated attributes can also be applied to the body and its milieu to project an identity with which workers envisage the archetypal model of modernity to be assigned to their selves. In the context of migrant factory workers, ideals highlighting the archetypal model must be related to the conditions and experiences of modernity and the imaginary of a modern existence.

### **Conclusion**

Though its allure is less appealing than other lifestyle themes (e.g. consumption, see Chapter 5), work clothing is similarly a project of identity in which the subaltern subjects project their selves under modern urban conditions. Lifestyles are not all about leisure. They can similarly be, particularly in modern society, within the sphere of influence of work life. As Giddens argues in *Modernity and Self-Identity* (1991), work is an 'arena of plural choices' (p.82) from which individuals select 'a particular narrative of self-identity' (p.81). It is in order to fit into a particular narrative that lifestyle is becoming crucial in imagining identity. Lifestyle is a 'container of identity' (Gauntlett 2002:103), in which one acts, behaves, and realigns the self in order to conform with the definition of a certain existence he or she aims to achieve. It is no coincidence that factory work has become a lifestyle through which villagers-turned urban migrants display their inclusion in urban life, as already demonstrated in the

first half of this chapter. It is in this regard that work clothing provides a symbolic acknowledgement of migrants' urban conversion.

As in work, a work uniform is also an 'arena of plural choices' which generate contesting meanings to project the identities they embody. On the one hand, dressing in, and the meticulous care of, a work uniform presents migrant workers with an 'official' marker through which they characterise and imagine their professional role as the workforce in a growing sector of the national economy.<sup>21</sup> This social imagining of officiality and professional role also tends to coalesce with the state's ideological agenda to curb the rebellious potential of the working class by promoting connotations for workers. Therefore, the term *karyawan*, with its respectable and professional connotation, for which a worker has to be properly attired in his or her uniform, produces more contentment for young migrants. The term better represents their aspirations of modernity and advancement.

On the other hand, these aspirations lead the young workers to make work life a domain which incorporates the casualness of an urban lifestyle, of which jeans are imagined to be the expression. The hybrid uniform provides the youth with the space to parade their self-discovery in modernity. It equally reveals their liberation from the socially-constructed conditions to which they are stereotypically designated, either as rural daughters (in relation to their household/familial duties) or, as highlighted in Chapter 5, as factory workers (in relation to their marginalisation in industrial arrangement), or as school children. The meaning produced by workers of their industrial existence along with the work-related attributes corroborates Wolf's finding amongst the Javanese woman workers who perceive factory employment as more 'for individual social and economic reasons' (1992:174). Being able to pay their own expenses and distancing themselves from their (poverty-stricken) rural existence, Wolf argues, imbue the young migrant workers with the sense of 'independence and high status', which appears to be more important than helping the economy of their rural family. Nonetheless, since Tangerang urban migrant workers are in a considerable geographical distance from their rural families, their independence is not

merely economic as in Wolf's case. The complete separation from familial duties also allows daughters to escape their domestic obligations or sons to evade the responsibility of working in agricultural fields.

Although the notions of officiality and professionalism seems incompatible and inconsistent with the idea of casualness and pleasure, these contested meanings are, in fact, the translation of workers' childhood experience, their expectations, and their imagined future, into a novel circumstance traditionally subject to the power exercised by corporate agencies. The hybrid work attire displays workers' expectations of the profession as well as their accommodation to a new habitus (to borrow from Bourdieu (1990:52-8)), their pursuit of a modern realignment to the disciplining uniform by which certain conduct and rules are ascribed. To follow McRobbie's (1994) argument on the attractiveness of second-hand clothes to the marginalised class, this interpretation by Tangerang migrant workers is the way they 'transform' (p.137) the uniform from its 'intended meanings' (*ibid*) to ones which best suit their aspirations towards a contemporary urban existence. Accordingly, once the corporate-designated attire is incorporated into the presentation of the workers' selves, the uniform can have a variety of meaning, ranging from control, hierarchy, independence, to self-actualisation. In short, it can also become a means through which choices of identity are constructed.

Angela Carter and Tom Wolfe explicated that 'the structure of the working day, the tyranny of the clock, and the monotony of work' have left the British working class little prospect for articulating 'individuality' in fashion (cited in McRobbie 1994:151). Therefore, dressing up in one's Sunday best to highlight the distinction from the workplace routine is a chance for them to attain this goal and 'to counter the assumption of low status' (McRobbie 1994:138). Whereas, having seen how meanings are generated by Tangerang workers in their specified circumstances, it is evident that the workplace is not evaded as a source of identity, as it similarly shapes the experience of modernity of urban migrants. This is particularly because modernity, as understood by workers in Tangerang, is an omnipresent expression, in

which the partition between the work and non-work environment is blurred. Their uniform is also their Sunday best. While McRobbie's working class made second-hand clothing their exclusive attire, since they had no economic access to fashion from high class boutiques, the Tangerang workers transforms work attire into Sunday best, for similar economic reasons, but also due to the lack of space to stage a modern self. The uniform is an avenue to present their stylish appearance. It is one of the fashionable suits they have through which their individuality can be reinforced, so that meticulous care is required. Work attire combined with jeans is the way workers dress up in order to defy the stigma of the deprived working class. It is a representation of their subjectivity, seeking to catch up with the urban lifestyle and, at the same time, to embody a self-admiring meaning of their current presence in the industrial plants.

As the boundary between work and non-work settings seems to be obscure in relation to the expression of the self, a rigid distinction between frontstage and backstage to understand workers' behavior and their fashion consciousness in the workplace as mere 'performance' (Goffman 1990) is, accordingly, inconsequential. The frontstage—the public space, the factory setting—in which workers are supposed to perform according to the screenplay written by the directing boss, evidently becomes an arena in which they stage their own script of modernity. It changes to an area of pleasure where workers play out their individuality, their own construction of modern existence. In contrast, the backstage, the private home sphere, where subjects are no longer required to play their professional role, can similarly assume a corporate setting as workers deliberately bring home their company symbols, as illustrated earlier with stickers, sticky tape and calendars. Transforming frontstage attributes to the offstage for display purposes exposes the workers' attempts to locate a possible avenue to modernity outside the factory sphere. It is aimed at consistently staging their work-related identity as well as revealing the merging of the selves with the world of work. While the possible audience can range from workers of neighboring companies, neighborhood residents, to visiting relatives, the key

spectator of such a performance remains the concerned subject, the performer, who strives to comprehend and to embed the acquired identity. These overshadowing symbols that stretch out to the private backstage domain of individual workers cannot be viewed strictly as the prolongation of the power from a corporate agency. The preparedness of the subjects to take these workplace-based signs into their everyday existence, as well as to take pleasure from the rituals that emerge from this relation, indicate a conscious effort to transform their selves into the full realisation of their imagined distinctiveness. Notwithstanding the transformation of meaning and the significance of fashion in constructing the self, the fluidity of identity does not always come as one changes one's clothes. In contrast, a change of costume does not necessarily reproduce a shift of identities. As for the Tangerang workers, their identity as official factory workers and the identity that reflects their desire for urban pleasure are well integrated into their multi-faceted modern existence.

Later on in the day, when the work hours in the factory ended, the cheerful faces with which workers began their day are replaced by weary expressions and lusterless eyes. There is no longer any attention paid to the rumpled work suits they are wearing or the odour of sweat from exhausted bodies. After eight hours work in manufacturing sweatshops, many remain at the factory until late evening. Hardly any sign of the morning's time-consuming effort remains. Nevertheless, this hardship in the workplace does not deter Ida and thousands of female migrant workers in Tangerang from staging their 'impression management' (Goffman 1990).



Plate 6.5: Washing Clothes in front of Lodgings (photo:RWJ)

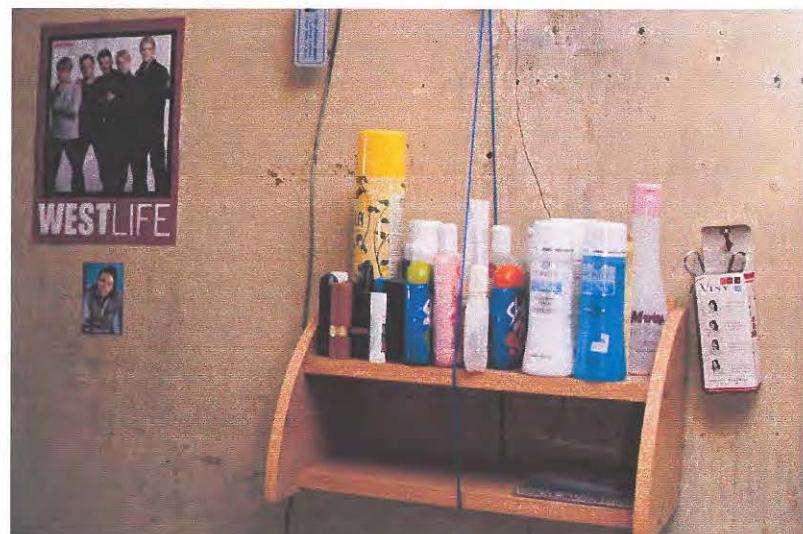


Plate 6.6: A Worker's Cabinet of Cosmetics (photo:RWJ)

## NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> PKI stands for *Partai Komunis Indonesia*.

<sup>2</sup> See Ingleson (1986) for the role of working class organisations and trade unions during colonial times, especially in the beginning of the 20th century, as an important breeding ground for nationalist movement in the Dutch colony of East Indies.

<sup>3</sup> SOKSI stands for *Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia*.

<sup>4</sup> SOBSI stands for *Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia*.

<sup>5</sup> The word *karyawan* is from the root word ‘*karya*’ which in General Dictionary of Indonesian Language is literally defined as: ‘work (*kerja*); work [a noun] (*pekerjaan*); action (*perbuatan*); creation (*buatan*) (particularly art creation)’ (Poerwadarminta 1982:448, my translation).

<sup>6</sup> The concept was declared on 1 June 1971 in Yogyakarta by a leading figure of New Order architects, General Ali Murtopo, who stated: ‘... Workers and employers must go; only one class will remain, that of the *karyawan*, executing or formulating directives....’ (Leclerc 1972:77, italics in original).

<sup>7</sup> It literally means ‘he who does *kerdja* (work)’ (Leclerc 1972:81). However, its lesser specificity means it can be applied to those involved ‘both in an employment relationship as well as outside an employment relationship’ (Imam Soepomo 1976, cited in and translated by Michele Ford (2003)).

<sup>8</sup> An Indonesian army general once stated that the international criticism of Indonesian labour conditions were potentially used by foreign donors to press an agenda of human rights improvement in relation to the economic aid (Sabarno 1994:94). The abduction, torture, and murder of a female labour activist, Marsinah, in East Java and a mass action which turned into riot of around 20,000-30,000 workers in Medan, North Sumatra, both in 1994, were the particular cases that, according to the General, received international attention (*ibid*).

<sup>9</sup> SBM (Solidarity Independent Workers' Union), SBSI (Indonesian Prosperity Trade Union), PPBI (Centre for Indonesian Working Class Struggle).

<sup>10</sup> This belief was partly established as a result of my past association with labour-concerned groups, together with which I had been engaged in some labour organising work in the area.

<sup>11</sup> I even once heard a few workers acknowledge themselves as *karyawan di plant* (*karyawan* in a plant). As some factories had several production installations in one single complex, in order to differentiate one from the other, each building was named Plant A or Plant B or Plant C, etc. As a result, the term ‘plant’, instead of *pabrik* (factory), was often used by the workers to refer to their workplace.

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<sup>12</sup> However, one giant manufacturing corporation, PT GT Group, a domestic conglomeration, which manages a variety of manufacturing productions in a vast complex in Tangerang, provided each of their workers with a complete uniform: shirt, pants/skirt, cap, and jacket. Each production branch chose a different colour for its uniform.

<sup>13</sup> The integration into the global factory, mostly under subcontracting arrangements, with which units of production are geographically split in order to pursue comparative advantages, makes it difficult for workers from one particular factory to claim to have been entirely responsible for manufacturing a specified product (see Chapter 4).

<sup>14</sup> Despite this 'noble' design of clothing, clerical workers are, in fact, no better off than sweatshop labourers, particularly in terms of payment, except the former are usually released from overtime and shift-work, which unfortunately prevents them from receiving extra payment, enjoyed by the latter. Interestingly, clerical work is viewed by shopfloor workers as an admirable accomplishment, as if it has an importance greater than manual labour and is hierarchically superior, although often the education qualification at both levels is the same, which is high school. However, those who have qualification from vocational high school, in which subjects such as accounting and typing are taught, will normally be recruited for administrative jobs.

<sup>15</sup> I have described in an earlier chapter that most manufacturing companies undertaking subcontracting jobs from international manufacturing principals change their product designs all the time. The establishment of this short-lived regime of products is 'not merely a question for business of responding...to the increasingly volatile *demand* of customers' but also to 'supply [...] something surprising and unexpected' in order to stimulate and revitalise the market (Gorz 1999:28, emphasis in original).

<sup>16</sup> Panopticon is a surveillance tower erected in the middle of a prison to enable the guard to watch without exposing himself, as a result of 'the effect of backlighting' (Foucault 1991:200). In contrast, the inmate, who becomes the object of surveillance, is strikingly visible from the tower. 'He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication' (Foucault, ibid). Foucault's description on the panopticon itself is essentially based on Jeremy Bentham's *Postscript to the Panopticon* dated 1791.

<sup>17</sup> Before Levi Strauss and Jacob Davis registered the patent right of their product, denim fabric had actually been used since the 18<sup>th</sup> century by workers in cotton plantations and slave labour in North America because of its strong quality and sturdiness (Downey 2000a, Designboom 2000). Downey indicated that jeans and denim were actually 'two different fabrics in 19<sup>th</sup> century America' (2000b). What we today understand as blue jeans are actually made of denim fabric. See Downey (2000b) for more discussion on how the word 'jeans' became historically acknowledged as pants made out of denim.

<sup>18</sup> Despite their resourceful knowledge of contemporary Western music and movies idol, their awareness of Western 'oldies' movies were mostly limited to the two most-celebrated names of the 1980s, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone.

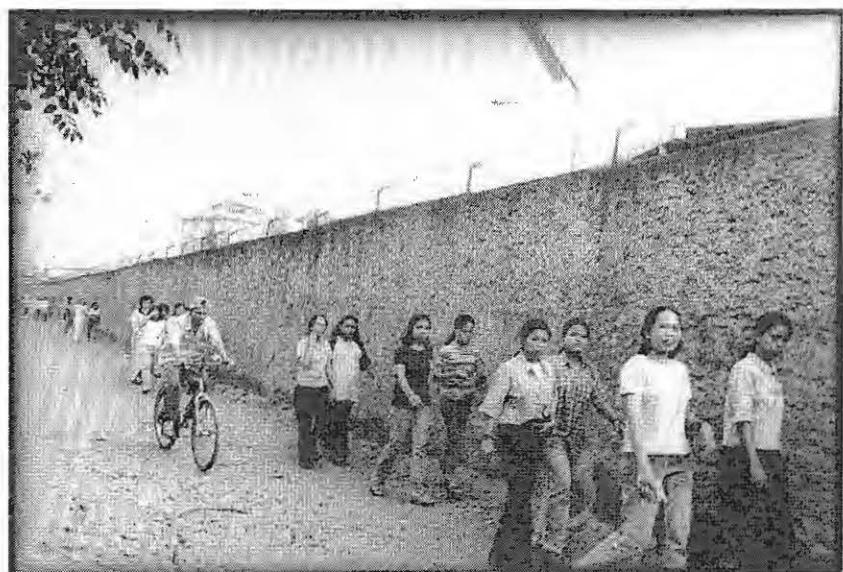
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<sup>19</sup> In Chapter 4, however, I indicated the possibilities shopfloor workers create to challenge the company's authority.

<sup>20</sup> Speaking about the new rich and cultural tensions in rural Indonesian, Antlov points out that rural *OKB* (*orang kaya baru*), the new rich, often demonstrated 'individualism' to protect their 'privacy and wealth' from the non-*OKB*, discarding their 'loyalty' and 'affinity' to the rest of the rural community (1999:200-4). Accordingly, it is because of ignoring the 'community spirit' that the new rich often experience isolation from the rest of the society.

<sup>21</sup> Migrant factory workers have actually been habituated to uniform and a set of disciplines since their schooldays. James Siegel (1986:1451-8), in his account of a classroom in a New Order's Javanese town of Solo, as noted in Chapter 2, reveals that at the public schools, students are introduced to the new way, for example, through the learning of Indonesian language, distancing them from their tradition and their mother tongue. '[W]hatever is new is placed outside Javanese discourse...and seen to be Indonesian' (Siegel 1986:148). Therefore, anything 'Indonesian' promises the (Javanese) school children a hope and 'source of the future'. Taking Siegel's argument about the case of school uniform, the nationally-regulated colour combination in school uniform introduces school children to the Indonesian experience, the future, distancing them from, for example, the typical image of country children with stained clothing, presumably coming from muddy rice fields, in short, the tradition and the old ways. Even if a pupil in the countryside comes to the school barefoot, as the parents cannot afford to buy shoes, he or she has to make sure that the white-dominated school uniform—compulsory, or otherwise sanction is applied—is in good shape, clean and neat.

## Chapter 7 Conclusion



*Plate 7.1: Heading Home from Work, No Uniform on Saturday  
(photo: RWJ)*

## Chapter 7

### Conclusion:

### **Making Sense of (Workers') Modernity**

This thesis is based on an ethnographic account of migrant factory workers in Tangerang in their relations to the process of globalisation and modernisation, as well as the increasing integration of rural subjects, the subaltern, into modern discourses through the embrace of image-centred urban novelties. The thesis is not merely about the response of the local subject to global discourse, but, borrowing Marcus's phrase, it is also about how 'the global articulates with the local' (1991:70). This relation is dialectical and, rather than being governed, the local is also enriched and empowered by its exposure to the global. Each chapter describes how these relations are represented in different settings, resulting from the multiplication of possibilities getContexts under modern conditions. The chapters equally demonstrate how the production of identity in one specified setting is constantly shaped by the process occurring in the other/s, leading to what Marcus characterises as 'multiple overlapping fragments of identity' (1991:63).

The formation of identity amongst the industrial workers in Tangerang is inseparable from their efforts to be modern subjects, represented by their aspiration for progress. The personalities introduced in this thesis have demonstrated a variety of expression of what it means to be modern beings, to be urban people, to be differentiated from the 'un-modern' rural existence, and to be regarded as in conformity with modernity. For the rural youth-turned urban factory workers, urban migration, adoption of urban-associated practices, consumption, and imbuing their existing occupation in manufacturing plants with a sense of 'officiality', are examples of their expressions of what Joel Kahn defines as 'modernism', 'a special way of

interrogating modernity' (2001:17). As modernism develops in accord with the specificity of places or sites, there may be different forms of modernism (Kahn 2001b:657,659) and we find one particular expression among the young migrant industrial workers in Tangerang.

### **The Established and Modernity**

Modernism that highlights the modernity within the social context of Tangerang workers is not a set of practices independently established from the state's conditions of modernity. Modernisation, locally constructed in an ideological discourse of *pembangunan* (economic development) (e.g. Robinson 1986), is an objective condition in which Indonesian citizens learn, and they realign their minds and actions with, the state's definition of what it means to be modern subjects. The state practices associated with this inculcation into the state project of modernisation are officially termed '*sosialisasi*' (socialisation). Rural development has altered the face of the Indonesian countryside, through which the adoption of urban features within rural settings having become increasingly widespread (see Chapter 2). Industrialisation, for example, is not a reality that the urban migrants encounter only as they are transformed into industrial labourers. Rather, along with images of factories and the figures of economic growth, it is a common theme in school textbooks, and hence the rural childhood experience of these youth migrants. In addition, urban lifestyle and its novelty are not only learnt as rural children migrate to the metropolis. Rather, they are cultural discourses that have penetrated into the consciousness of villagers in the countryside following the rural modernisation and the availability of mass media to rural dwellers. These are made possible as a result of the centralisation of modernisation discourse around urban themes, making the images of the urban privileged class *the* success model of *pembangunan*—rather than a plural, decentered set of themes that correspond to the immediate experiences of local subjects.

The adherence to modernity also demonstrates the acquiescence of the subjects to dominating forces. Migration to the urban centres proves to be beneficial to industrial capitalism, absorbing the surplus rural labour in the burgeoning manufacturing sectors. The consumption of commodities brings a new dimension to the relationship between labour and capital, in which the domination of corporate capitalism on the shopfloor is extended to the domain of the non-productive everyday life of industrial workers. It establishes 'a widened field of exploitation', from the workplace to the residential neighbourhood, where workers' leisure pursuits (and income) are integrated into the web of profit-oriented commodity capitalism (Willis 1990:18) (see also Chapter 5). Meanwhile, the sense of officiality and regularity embodied in factory work, including the incorporation of the term *karyawan* to the worker's subjectivity (see Chapter 6), shows a degree of conformity to the state's construction of the importance of modern industries as well as the image of 'dignified' industrial labourers. Factory work, regarded also as a modern experience, is an experience in which workers are disciplined by the industrial regime and forced to surrender their obedience to their employers in exchange for remuneration to sustain their urban existence (see Chapter 4).

This modernisation, largely induced from above, is certainly not without excess. Speaking on the conditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrialisation, Marx (1977b, 1977c) argues that modernity failed to emancipate human beings as a result of the proletarianisation in industries. This failure resulted in industrial working people experiencing a condition he calls 'alienation'. A century later, the problems of industrialisation (e.g. poor working conditions, low wages, deskilling, and impoverishment) that underscored Marx's concern remain a spectre that haunts the factory workers in most developing countries. In Indonesia, the existence of the factory workers has been mostly highlighted in the light of this problem of alienation and the tension within the manufacturing production. This is particularly evident in the studies of contemporary industrial workers in Indonesia, who are typically placed in labour-capital-state relations (e.g. Hadiz 1997, Kammern 1997, Saptari 1994,

Tjandraningsih 2000). As a result, as the workers' 'universe' is restricted within the factory walls, collective action and involvement in union activities or labour movement (e.g. Ford 2000, Hadiz 1997, Kammen 1997) are likely avenues through which the industrial subaltern demonstrate their sense of agency. Although, as indicated in Chapter 4, covert resistance against workplace pressures is also apparent as a 'liberating' process in which workers display their subjectivity by defining for themselves what it means to be a factory worker.

### **Modern Identity and the Subaltern' Self-Assertion**

Nonetheless, the practices of modernism demonstrated by the Tangerang workers indicate their efforts to circumvent the alienating consequence of industrialisation. The problem of alienation that the workers seek to address in their expression of modernity is not solely linked with their existence on the production line. Kahn (2001b), discussing the incorporation of Malaysian rural peasants into factory life, seen as a 'modern lifestyle' (p.653), argues:

That they have become enmeshed in processes of commodification and rationalization does not mean that they will lose any ability to construct creative responses to modern life. Can we not instead expect that they will come up with solutions to some of the worst dilemmas posed by modernization—violence, extreme inequalities, environmental destruction, deprivation, racial exclusion? (1991b:664)

To the migrant workers in Tangerang, the 'creative responses to modern life' are apparent when their 'universe' is expanded from the industrial reality, to the non-work settings. It is in these settings that the subjects' modernism is not merely a criticism of industrialisation, but also of inequality in the society at large. These are the arenas in which modernity can also be a discourse through which individual subjects assert themselves, define themselves as, separate from the sphere of influence of the dominating forces.

The move to an urban centre for rural youth is not merely about migration *per se*, that is, it is not just about colonising urban space in order to claim their economic rights. Urban migration is seen by rural youth as a practice by which they achieve modern emancipation, moving from a rural existence that does not seem to represent qualities promised by that the (urban-centred) modernisation. '[S]pace', as Foucault said, 'is fundamental in any exercise of power' (1991c:252). Speaking about architecture, Foucault argues that the manner in which a city or a space is organised (e.g. how the society should be; how to avoid epidemics and revolts) signifies 'the techniques of government' or 'a program of government rationality' to reinforce its power, by 'assur[ing] the tranquillity of a city' (*ibid.*:239-42). This means that, despite the bodily presence of the subjects, until a set of rules is put in place, a space remains a no man's land without any enforced power. Such an analogy is probably useful in looking at the connection between urban space and modernity. Urban migration does not necessarily mean an imposition of control by the migrants over an urban space, especially when it is only linked with economic pursuits, in which their subjectivity is, in fact, subordinated under a production regime. The embrace of modern and urban practices engender possibilities, in which a set of rules, 'a program of workers' rationality', to adapt Foucault, is imposed to reinforce their subjectification, to confer their own power. Thus, the conquest of urban space is carried out through the production of their own meaning of their existence in the city.

Therefore, to argue that being a worker is the only option left to a migrant subject, so that a struggle in the frame of labour-capital (and state) relations is like a sink-and-swim alternative, is inaccurate. The fact that most migrant workers expressed the view that factory work was not a career path for them, in view of their improved education (see Chapter 4), indicates that industrial employment is not the sole goal for them, but merely a way to mediate their connection with modernity. This is in line with Wolf's rural Javanese factory daughters who, despite the subsistence assurance from the family economy, saw factory work as a way to increase their 'buying power' (for 'make-up, nail polish, and...long pants') to make

them conform with the ‘modern style’ (1992:193). At the same time, this agenda of modernity also provides them with a defence mechanism to endure the pressures of industrial work.

Consumption does not only reveal that migrant workers have accomplished a distinctive existence in their urban shift, distinguishing them from the rural ‘un-modernity’. It is an expression of class in which urban migrants seek to challenge the demeaning marker of industrial workers, condemned in their urban slums and urban social segregation, different from the lavish enclaves of the urban middle class. The material qualities the migrant workers enjoy in their urban existence, indicate the subaltern’s efforts to place themselves as equals to the other urban classes benefiting from the nation’s material development (*pembangunan*). Consumption is also a domain in which the industrial subaltern seeks to evade the pressure and inconvenience of their experience on the factory floor. At the same time, it also reveals their future project in relation to their preparedness to seek permanent urban residence as marked by the tendency of the ‘accumulation’ of consumer products for personal use in their urban homes. Modernism as perceived by these industrial workers characterises the urban everyday reality in which they can claim their appropriation of modern lifestyle and urban modernity. No matter how many work hours and how much sweat they are worth, their consumption represents a rejection of the taken-for-granted perception in society that being a *buruh pabrik*, a factory worker, is identical to poverty and propertylessness.

The experience of modernity and pursuit of pleasure can also be a cultural expression that lays the basis for the constitution of a certain kind of refusal of the self-identity as *buruh*, wage labourer, an Indonesian term for worker that has become pejorative with associations of poverty and indignity (see Chapter 6). The official presentation of the self to be in accord with the *karyawan*-ness substantiates the workers’ incorporation of their modern identity and images they would like themselves to be acknowledged as—not as agricultural laborer, seaport porter, domestic servant, or construction worker. This newly-formulated identity is, however,

not exclusively linked to the migrant workers' location in the world of work, rather it indicates that the divide between home and work cannot be solely viewed as a partition between backstage (genuine) and frontstage (artificial) as Goffman (1990) said. Using company-associated attributes in a non-work circumstance is a means for workers to reproduce and to display—both to themselves and the other—recognition of their connection with the modernisation process in the industrial sector. The hybrid uniform—where official uniform meets casual denim pants—worn in work circumstances is the way they imagine their place in cosmopolitan culture and challenge the 'disciplinary technology' (Foucault 1991) imposed by the company. Using the factory setting and company's attributes to impose their construction of being modern being reveals the workers' authority to define their subjectification in the domain conventionally considered to be not theirs. It, therefore, mirrors their future expectation of their being within the framework of modern, perhaps global, progress.

### **Modernity: Mimicry or A Struggle for Inclusion?**

These modernism and claim about modernity, certainly, establishes an assertion by the workers that they deserve commensurate status with the urban privileged, to which the imagined modern urban lifestyle is indebted. To some, however, it is perhaps ironic that this seemingly 'own class self-denial' in order to claim subjectification, dignity, and modern identity is merely a type of imitation, or a 'mimetic effect' in Homi Bhabha's (1995:34) words.

There are two thrusts to clarify this conundrum about mimicry. Firstly, modern discourse and practices are not something that has only recently penetrated the existence of the rural children or migrant workers. One can not assume that before this penetration they had endured a completely different mode of life, say, 'rural traditionalism', which might be the case to their predecessors, even those from early 1990s generation. As explored in Chapter 2, the recent spread of modernisation and

development to rural outposts has made the discourse of modernity available to contemporary rural youth from an early age. They have grown up with it, at the same time as they experienced the local traditions. As a result, this discourse of progress and advancement has already been entrenched in their rural identity, a partially modern identity, awaiting a full realisation in their shift to the city. In view of this, can the discourse of modernity still be assigned as the property of others? Secondly, even if the discourse of modernity is something that comes from without for the workers, the appropriation of the dominant discourse by the subaltern can still be seen as an active and critical response to inequality within society. This is particularly true when workers, as seen in Chapter 5, consciously admit that their embrace of modern practices suggests a symbolic criticism of the stigmatisation of the working class, at the bottom of the power relations and hierarchy in relation to the market forces and the state. Foucault indicates that '[w]here there is power, there is resistance' and 'this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (1998:95). The source of critique can originate also from the dominant discourse, from the power relations in question. Speaking on colonial literature, Bhabha points out that resistance:

...is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power.... (1995:33)

Thus, mimicry does not merely represent a blind imitation of 'the rules of recognition'. As it is adapted to the local condition—in Bhabha's context, a colonised society—, mimetic procedure is a domain in which the subaltern is able to deploy 'intervention' and a 'dislocatory presence' that potentially imperils, or symbolically assaults, the established structure. The same applies to the workers' mimicry of others' practices. It is a process of overtaking the discourse related to the imagined lifestyle of modern urban life and reinterpreting its meaning in their own fashion according to their experience of everyday life. Thus, consumption, for example, is not solely a process of buying and consuming things, but equally a process of 'giv[ing]

meaning' through which the commodified products are 'incorporat[ed]' into the reality of the subjects (Jackson 1993:208-9).

While arguing that the process of 'exclusion' is inevitable in modernity, Kahn points out that the 'processes of modernisation' create a determination in the local actors 'to be recognised as moderns and striving against their histories of exclusion from the prizes offered by modernity itself' (2001:24). Speaking of 'ethnic particularities' and ethnically-based sentiments as well as nationalism as the conditions of exclusion in Britain, America, and Malaysia, Kahn shows that the locally-defined modernity and the objective process of modernisation managed to transform these nations into inclusive societies which accommodate those formerly discriminated against (p.150).<sup>1</sup> To contextualise this argument in the topic of this thesis, the marginalisation under urban circumstances and the inequality in general have formed an anomalous development of modernisation and industrialisation for the worker subjects, enabling them to face exclusion from modernity. Nonetheless, inclusion, at the same time, is inevitable. The incorporation into modernisation and the discourse of modernity, which made up the childhood experience of worker subjects, has made urban migration, modern practices/artefacts, and engagement in industrialisation an entitlement promised by this inclusion. Therefore, what the workers demonstrate in their urban novelty simply reveals their efforts to claim the promise. Moreover, the incorporation of the symbols of urban modernity and the workers' challenge to the exclusiveness of modernity by bringing modern practices into their contemporary not-so-modern situation in the slum-like urban neighbourhood, are gestures toward inclusion.

The active and conscious action to embrace modernity provides the workers with sources of symbolic critiques of the current arrangement that structurally, socially, and economically denies their conditions of humanity, as seen in their on-the-breadline situations both as factory workers and urban residents. This arrangement implies workers are second-rate and a less privileged class. Hence, in Chapter 4, I showed that their defiant practices in the workplace are not exclusively

aimed at undermining capitalism in the spirit of class struggle in order to obtain economic or political gains. Rather, it is more a struggle to recover their conditions of humanity and to reinforce their dignity as well as ‘sense of justice’ (adapting from Ingleson 1986). The factory shopfloor, accordingly, is not seen entirely by the migrant workers as a sphere in which their individuality is completely surrendered to their employers. It remains a space where the subaltern can demonstrate defiance against the industrial regime through covert disobedience. In the context of the discussion of Tangerang workers, this means a recognition of their imagined inclusion into the mainstream discourse of (self-defined) modernity and modernisation. This representation and pursuit for recognition may perhaps have nothing to do with seeking a change in, or undermining, the capitalist system of production and the state policies on labour. However, they still can be seen as ‘the everyday forms of resistance’ in James Scott’s (2002) formulation, in which the subaltern as ‘historical actor’ seeks ‘justice’ from the dominating power in a constant but less-organised manner. This recuperation of the condition of humanity is crucial as it embodies the dimension of self-respect. To the workers, their everyday expression of their conception of being modern and of modernity is, thus, a response to the general problem of inequality, inhumanity, and marginalisation. With that expression, they do not necessarily have to point to any particular agents responsible for their structural and cultural domination. As indicated in Chapter 1, this connects the workers’ struggle for modern identity more with the questions posed in post-industrial societies about the ‘quality of life and life-style concerns’ (Pichardo 1997:414, also Castells 1997, Melucci 1996).

### **Modernity: An End to the Working-Class Politics?**

The question remains, however: does the notion of working class remain relevant? The persistence of capitalist production relations (base), supported by the political and ideological apparatus (superstructure) (Marx 1977d), seen in the engagement of

the state in labour-capital relations at a variety of levels, indicates that class (-in-itself) is an objective condition for the factory workers in Tangerang. This objective condition, however, does not necessarily lead to class consciousness (Hobsbawm 1984, Thompson 1991), hence, the conception of class-for-itself. Moreover, as some political scientists argue, classes are only possible with the ‘existence’ of ‘class struggle’ (Poulantzas 1973:27), situated in ‘objectively contradictory locations within class relations’ (Wright 1979:61). Being located in a marginal urban neighbourhood as well as having the opportunity to collectively take pleasure from modern luxuries have certainly provided migrant workers with class experience as well as class solidarity. These have created in them a sense of separation from the more-privileged urban class (e.g. Thompson 1991:9), living at the other (splendid) side of the town, as discussed in Chapter 3.

Nonetheless, having seen the migrant workers’ expectation of modernity and their forms of modernism, predominantly influenced by urban propertied middle-class-centred lifestyle and social imaginations, it appears that the antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the working class can no longer be based on the ‘classic’ lines of class struggle mentioned above. In addition, the consciously-espoused *karyawan*-ness, emphasising a white-collar-like imagining which ignores their manual labour existence, implies that, to borrow Jacquelyn Southern, the ‘exoticized view of workers’, as ‘a relatively simple, proletarianized mass’ (2000:215), needs reviewing. Southern, deconstructing ‘the collar line’ (2000:196) in post-industrial societies, argues that factors such as ‘affluence, consumerism, and productivism’ have created conditions in which the blue-collar worker, emasculate their ‘proletarian stature’ and ‘moral leadership’ within the class struggle against their antagonists (p.222). Apart from those factors, the modern imagination, as indicated throughout the thesis, is also essential in transcending the boundaries of the now-and-here existence of the workers in Tangerang into (imagined) spheres, typically defined as the reality of the non-working-class. It has usurped their traditional domains (e.g. shopfloor, deprived

quarters) and shifted the conflicts to any possible spaces that modern society can imagine.

'The world we live in today is characterised by a new role for the imagination in social life' (Appadurai 1990:4). Benedict Anderson has pointed out the power of the imagination for the early-20<sup>th</sup> century's indigenous nationalists in their struggle against the colonial masters to realise their 'imagined communities', equal to other sovereign nations (1983). It provides a benchmark for one to imagine his/her location in the current actuality and whether he/she would like to see it transformed into a different imagined existence. Therefore, modernity is 'inseparable from modern imaginaries' (Kahn 2001:11), which provide people with multiple 'possibilities' (Mills 1999:15-6). Such possibilities include a translocal social imagining, with which modernity is perceived as no longer an exclusive domain of the metropolitan populace or the urban privileged class. As it becomes 'a social practice' available to anybody, imagination, as Arjun Appadurai said, is:

...[n]o longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is elsewhere), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete purposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people) and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity) [...] [T]he imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (both in the sense of labor and of culturally organized practice) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency ('individuals') and globally defined fields of possibility....The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (1990:5)

Practices to reclaim and reincorporate modernity into the subjective mind of migrant workers is a sort of confirmation that modernism in workers' *kampung* is not a 'separate process' (Kahn 2001:20) from the dynamics that are taking place elsewhere. Thus, the existence of 'working-class' in Tangerang is 'a relational consciousness' (Appadurai 1996:186) with the other existence beyond the workers' realities in their *kampung*, be it a nation state undergoing modernisation, middle-class lifestyles (and their modern novelty symbolising advancement), or other global reality. The class

experience and urban marginality, as a result of their industrial subordination and socio-economic status, produce a threat to their pursuit of a modern identity, a menace to their efforts to realise the imagination of modernity as a social reality. Therefore, modernism as the practices to transform the imagined into an actual experience is also a struggle of a class against the process of their exclusion from modernity in order to gain modern recognition as equal to other (privileged) citizens. The incorporation of urban symbolism by migrant workers simply underlines how the 'subaltern consciousness' (Mills 1999b:187, see also Spivak 1999:24-8) of exclusion from the great global current is creatively reversed to a state of inclusion.

Nonetheless, the embrace of modernity does not necessarily make irrelevant working class politics—typically centred around the labour activism discourse, as already discussed by some authors (e.g. Ford 2001, Hadiz 1997, Kammen 1997). As indicated in Figure 1.4 (Chapter 1), the numbers of industrial strikes remain high, nearing the pre-crisis figures (1994-1996) and mass media keep reporting labour actions in industrial enclaves throughout the country. The classic issues of poor working conditions and industrial marginalisation certainly remain present in today context, as much as the circumstance from early or mid-1990s. Nevertheless, the subjective conditions within the labour movement suggest that it is not prepared, not yet, to transform itself into a solid workers' class instrument. The fact that workers in Gambir are peripheral to their local union organisations, let alone the national ones, their connection being limited to the deduction of their monthly dues for the workplace union from their wages, substantiates the claim of the problems of 'consolidation' in working-class organisations. This is not to mention the workers' discontent at the failure of unions—both workplace-based and national-based—to represent their aspirations as indicated in Chapter 4. Even Hadiz—who, in his *Workers and the State in New Order Indonesia* (1997), had an optimistic appreciation of the early and mid-1990s Indonesia labour movement under Soeharto repressive regime—in his subsequent article assessing the post-crisis and post-*reformasi* labour movement, admits that the recent climate of political change has only enabled the

'proliferation' of unions and organisation, but not 'consolidation' and 'effective unionism' (Hadiz 2001:123).

The minor involvement of working-class elements in the historic 1998 *reformasi*—in which the role of the middle class elements, including students, was significant—is an indication that labour movement—in which the middle-class activists' role is crucial (e.g. Ford 2001, Hadiz 1997)—remains centred around the issue of economism. What happens when a part of this issue of economism is partially addressed through the improved waging conditions, which was central and became a rallying point in early and mid-1990s labour activism? What happens in Gambir, an important industrial neighbourhood in the Tangerang industrial subdistrict, simply demonstrates that working class politics can no longer solely rely on the notion of workers' powerlessness and their total subjection to the dominating forces (state and corporate agents). The objective conditions (e.g. improved wages, cheaper luxuries, improved education, and greater exposure to media) that I have indicated throughout the thesis suggest that the contemporary workers have a different playing field, and hence aspirations, from the ones experienced by the previous generation of industrial workers. These conditions provide the subaltern with a range of possibilities to address their class aspirations in multiple arenas beyond (or along with) the factory floor and labour-capital relations, without undermining their critical capability to criticise inequality and injustice within the society.

Unless the unions and labour-concerned organisations discard their old-fashioned language, less appealing to the workers, and relate their discourse with the workers' actuality, workers themselves—with the same access to information and improved education as the union activists—can judge and critique a range of issues independently from the involvement of members of other classes. In the future, it will not be surprising if the workers themselves can produce their own 'organic intellectuals' in Gramsci's sense (1971). They will be those who understand better

their ‘class’ issues and consciousness, as well as speaking for themselves, to replace the non-worker elements, the ‘middle-class activists’ within the labour movement.

### **Is Workers in Gambir Typical?**

Exposure to a variety of practices, expressions, and domains in which workers are represented has revealed that their identities are not fixed or predetermined—that they are constructed by some constant conditions such as their engagement in industrial production which determines their ‘workerness’, or by tradition and history which imbue them with a homogeneous rural identity, no matter what their contemporary circumstances. Through this exposure I learned that the construction of identity amongst the workers is not a finished process, but, rather, it is constantly transformed and altered by various forces: in short, it is dynamic. To the migrant workers, the dynamics of their search for identity are shaped by their interaction with global discourse and the ever-changing world. This is made available to them through what Appadurai (1990:7-9) terms an ‘ethnoscape’ (their physical mobility, engendering shifting realities and places) and ‘mediascape’ (their increasing literacy and exposure to media), producing alternate images from which they envisage their existence, present and future. These dynamics suggest that their current existence is not necessarily about the factory. There is also the countryside where their imagination of migration, modernity, and urban work began. The countryside itself is not exclusively about tradition and conservatism, as it is similarly becoming modern through rural modernisation, in which modern education and mass media contribute to the production of imagined lives. In the city, the urban home, the neighbourhood is equally important as a domain in which their embodiment as modern individuals, through the embrace of urban lifestyles and modern practices, is expressed. In the same domain, the workers, coming from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, are fused in converged aspirations and ideas about their imagined community. There are also image-created domains, which they are never part of, but they fantasise their

inclusion, and this determines how they are going to imagine and construct their future.

It is no coincidence that the discourse of modernity relating to lifestyle and a modern way of life as it is revealed on the ground, fits very well with Marcus' conception of 'modernist' ethnography (1991:57-78). To come to the state of mind with which workers perceive and situate their being in the contemporary world, one can hardly ignore the part played by 'state and economy' as well as 'constant technological innovations' as 'the powerful integrating (rationalizing) drives' (Marcus 1991:63) to produce the self-appointed modernity. It is a modernity that has been transformed into a sort of universal language to rural youth-turned urban migrants, no matter what cultural setting they are from. That is how I understand education, industrialisation, and consumerism as the driving forces that place migrants into the current existence, sharing like-minded aspirations in the urban industrial neighbourhood of Gambir. At the same time, the impulses generated by these driving forces initiate the constant proliferation of life settings with which one's puzzle of identity is constructed and reconstructed by a range of pieces.

This approach does not necessarily mean that tradition or dominating power/s have lost their importance. Rather, their imposition on the existence of the migrant workers is not a one-way relationship, in which the subjects are merely passive agencies in the face of forces that appear to be beyond their sphere of influence. The presence of these forces is realised through their translation and the production of relevance to the here-and-now practices of the subjects. Thus, despite the migrants' search for a tangible and thorough modern existence in the city, urban transformation is not a complete discontinuation from the rural forms of life. In Chapter 2, for example, I point out how the going-home ritual for religious festivities is used by migrants as a medium to reinforce their modern identity through the conspicuous display of their material achievements. Bringing rural kin to the city to assist in child-caring (Chapter 4), using the rural network in finding urban employment (Chapter 3), or imagining the beauty of the rural past (Chapter 2) suggest that modernity to the

urban migrants also involves connection with the ‘un-modern’ existence they are seeking to dissociate from. This sort of dialectical interpretation by the subjects also appeared in Chapter 4 when we saw workers turn their workplace, in which the regime of production dominates, into a space in which they recover their conditions of humanity through individual and symbolic defiance. To the notion of ‘political economy’ (state, market, and productive capacity), Marcus suggests that the task of modernist ethnography is:

...to seek to display critically the voices/alternatives present at any site of political contest, and to define the politics and the alternatives addressed and not addressed by it in a cultural frame...[to bring] power through exposure to cultural discourse. (1991:75)

It is in this light that throughout the thesis I attempt to demonstrate how the process of structural ‘exclusion’ (e.g. marginalisation and domination), to use Kahn’s word, is continually translated in the framework of cultural discourse, which earns workers some sort of space to reclaim their dignity and subjectification as (modern) human beings.

However, the findings indicated in this thesis can not be viewed as the general pictures of the contemporary manufacturing workers who are spread across different localities and industrial areas in Indonesia. Firstly, the fact that my fieldwork was undertaken during the recovery period after the Indonesian economy was severely hit by the 1997 financial crisis, made the workers’ pursuit for modernity can find its realisation through some improved indicators (particularly, wages) in manufacturing industries. Yet, whether a certain modern standard of urban existence can persist if another crisis happens or there is a massive industrial relocation to other least-developed countries, threatening the economic well-being of the workers, is something that has to be tested through time and can be a matter for future research. Secondly, the issue of wage differentials, in which the rate of regulated minimum wage varies from one province to the other, makes the relative ‘affluence’ experienced by contemporary workers in urban Tangerang is hard to compare with the conditions of their counterparts employed in manufacturing industries in rural Java such as

previously found by Wolf (1992). In 2002, for example, the average regulated minimum wage in Central Java (rural and urban) only made up 50-60 percent of the government-set rate received by industrial workers in industrial areas surrounding Jakarta. In addition, while urban workers can easily go to the nearby market or downtown shopping centres for modern luxuries, the market for such consumer goods for their rural counterparts is often only available in the district town. With all these difficulties, however, it remains appealing for future project to learn how ‘modernity’ is expressed and realised by the workers subjects in the least urbanised areas. Lastly, unlike this current research that particularly focuses on one locality, comparative studies between the ‘affluent’ workers such as in Gambir with their counterparts from other urbanised industrial localities in which labour activism is also present, I believe, will be an important contribution to a greater understanding of whether ‘modernity’ is compatible with the notion of organised and politicised workers.

## **NOTES:**

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<sup>1</sup> Kahn (2001), in the case of Malaysia, for example, discusses how the global penetration of market forces has altered culturally and ethnically-designated identities into a mere ‘lifestyle choice’ (p.150) and a point to be compromised. The contemporary challenge posed by the global economy and Malaysia’s increasing involvement in global discourse make a national identity that is all-ethnic and inclusive an alternative to the previous model of exclusion.

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