Power and Difference
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Japanese Factories, Malay Workers

Class and Sexual Metaphors

in West Malaysia

in the previous paper, Blanc-Szanton explored the interaction of local and national management policies, and campaigns of "flying" (willing) culture meet. Ong's paper points to the importance of understanding how the introduction of a new industry, in this case the Japanese electronics industry, over the last fifteen years, in the context of West Malaysia, has reshaped the lives of young, unskilled Malay women.

Ong then explains the massaging of this shift of young unskilled Malay women into the workforce by exploring the interaction of local and national policies, and the control and surveillance of women in both rural and industrial settings. Women are defined as weaker than men in terms of self-control and spiritual potency, yet they possess a high degree of economic and social autonomy. Divorce poses a serious threat to women's security and social viability.

Ong begins with an examination of relations between women and men in rural village life in West Malaysia. Her account can be compared to Hatley's and Keeler's accounts of gender relations in Java. In both areas, women possess a high degree of economic and social autonomy, yet they are defined as weaker than men in terms of self-control and spiritual potency. Divorce poses a serious threat to women's security and social viability.

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Athwa Ong offers important insights into the industrial culture of Japan and its influence in Southeast Asia today. Several contributors to this volume (Rodgers, Hatley, and Blanc Szanton) have suggested that depictions and expressions of gender and sexuality serve as vehicles for social and political commentary. Ong analyzes how Malay factory women have become a focus for the expression of ambivalence about economic development and social changes in contemporary Malaysia by a number of powerful sectors of Malaysian society. Of particular note in a region of the world in which Islam predominates is Ong's exploration of Islamic revivalist responses to the participation of young women in the industrial sector of the Malaysian economy.

In Malaysian free-trade zones (FTZs), young Malay women working the "graveyard" shift are sometimes visited by demons. A bloodcurdling scream suddenly shatters the silence, followed by wailing and sobbing on the shop floor. The spirits of ancestors and aborigines, many claim, will not be appeased until corporate management hires bomoh ('spirit healers') to ritually cleanse factory premises with the blood of sacrificed animals. Such incidents of affliction, generally labeled "mass hysteria" by the local media and commentators, raise questions about the lived experiences of young Malay women who are being made into an industrial labor force. This paper will consider how the diverse images of docile female workers, "loose women," and spirit visitations in modern factories confound local and scholarly thinking about control, morality, and sexuality in the process of cultural change.

Recent studies about the cultural construction of gender tend to presume that sexual meanings are produced from core symbols derived from a cultural system (see some examples in Ortner and Whitehead 1981a). Feminist scholars have taken at least two different perspectives to account for producing sexual meanings in particular contexts. Sherry Ortner (1974) maintains that Western European cultures have fundamental philosophical principles for thinking about and ordering gender relations that persist over long periods of time. In another approach, scholars attempt to account for opposing views of gender in a single culture by discussing contrasting male and female perspectives of "the other" (e.g., Dwyer 1978; Brandes 1980). What has been overlooked is how sexual symbolisms become reinterpreted and transformed in the dynamic interplay of power conflicts rooted in class and national identities, which have often, but not inevitably, been culturally constructed as a gender dichotomy.

My inquiry into the diversity of sexual images that have blossomed with female proletarianization emphasizes the construction of gender in situations of conflict among groups identified other than by gender difference. I argue first that cultural notions of sexuality depend on an interplay between norms, practices, and the lived experiences of women and men in a material world. The gender of power, the experience of women and men in a material world. The gender of power, the experience of women and men in a material world.

In Malaysia, the term "FTZ" (Free Trade Zone) young Malay women working in West Malaysia...
The sexuality of neophyte factory women becomes a matter for public discourse and surveillance by the media, politicians, and Islamic revivalist groups competing for control over cultural production. Caught in a moral dilemma produced by family claims, factory coercion, and public criticisms, Malay factory women in daily acts of resistance attempt to construct alternative identities in their own terms.

Male and Female in Rural Malay Society

Male Reason, Female Passion

In the following sketch of customary norms governing Malay marriage, women articulate the higher incidence of spirit-possession among women. Yet, Malay society is considered a female-dominated patriarchal structure, especially in relation to rural households. Women's spiritual balance is said to rest on self-control and self-knowledge. However, if a woman violates the rules of spirit possession, she may fall into a state of weakened spirituality, which results in a state of weakened spirituality, which results in a spirit of weakened spirituality.

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The notion that women are economically secure in their marital relationships is a notion that is largely incorrect. In fact, many women suffer from great insecurity because of the impermanence of their marital relationships. This insecurity is compounded by the fact that women are traditionally subordinate in their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers. This is not to say that all women are insecure, but rather that the majority of women in Malay society are. The reasons for this insecurity are many, but they are primarily related to the fact that women are not given the same rights and responsibilities as men. This is true even in cases where women are considered to be the primary breadwinners of the family. Women are often forced to take on roles that are traditionally considered to be male, such as providing for the family, and are often left with little or no control over their own lives. This is particularly true in rural areas, where women are often expected to take on roles that are not in keeping with their own interests or desires. This lack of control and security can lead to a sense of helplessness and powerlessness, which can be further compounded by the fact that women are often not given the same opportunities for education and employment as men. This is not to say that women are not capable of taking care of themselves or of providing for their families, but rather that the system as a whole is set up in such a way that women are not given the same opportunities as men. This is a problem that is not unique to Malay society, but is a problem that is widespread throughout the world. It is a problem that needs to be addressed if women are to have the same opportunities and rights as men.
woman who dies in childbirth, and the pontianak, her stillborn child. The former has a gaping hole, concealed by long tresses, in the nape of her neck, through which she suckles the blood of infants at childbirth (Skeat 1905:320—28). Both langsuir and pontianak thus represent women in transitional states (existing between birth and death, both giving and taking life) who pose a threat to human social order (cf. Endicott 1970:61—63, 82). The pontianak, for instance, is also believed to materialize before men and attempt to seduce them into marriage. Like the pontianak, who is transformed into a human woman only when a man inserts an nail into the hole in her neck, the jandais is considered as socially respectable only when she remarries.

In rural Malay society, the form and content of gender relations are shaped by norms and attitudes that uphold male superiority and guard against women attempting to gain male prerogatives. The sexually fertile woman not legally tied to a man threatens family interests. In daily life, male authority is most easily enforced over young unmarried women, referred to as budak budak (children/virgins), whereas single, previously married women are most able to challenge male authority. Janda are not answerable to any kinsman; their sexual misconduct can only be punished by the Islamic judge (kathi) or members of the Religious Department.

The following sections of this paper will deal with the changes in-and-increasing complexity of sexual imagery when budak budak enter factory employment in large numbers and come to experience some of the social freedom enjoyed and managed only by janda. To sort out the divergent meanings embodied in the symbolic representations of Malay factory women, we will need to consider the different interests of social groups and institutions other than those in rural Malay society.

Japanese Factories, Malay Women: Manufacturing Gender Hierarchy

Japanese Factories in Kuala Langat

Export-oriented industrialization introduced since 1970 has reshaped the sexual division of labor among Malays, and the process of reshaping has been understood in the context of the symbolic reorganization of social interaction. The Japanese factories in Kuala Langat have been studied to understand how the social experience of the Malay women workers is shaped by the interactions between the factory environment and Malay cultural values.

The great majority of Malay women workers are employed in the electronics industry. There are over 40 factories in Kuala Langat that employ Malay women workers, and the majority of these factories are electronics manufacturers. These women workers are employed in the electronics industry, which is considered to be a high-status occupation. The majority of these women workers are employed in the electronics industry, which is considered to be a high-status occupation. The majority of these women workers are employed in the electronics industry, which is considered to be a high-status occupation. The majority of these women workers are employed in the electronics industry, which is considered to be a high-status occupation.

In the factory environment, the Malay women workers are exposed to a new set of social interactions, which are different from those in their rural communities. The factory environment is characterized by a strict hierarchy of authority, where the male supervisor holds the highest position. The Malay women workers are expected to follow the rules and regulations of the factory, and they are not allowed to deviate from them. The factory environment is also characterized by a strict hierarchy of authority, where the male supervisor holds the highest position. The Malay women workers are expected to follow the rules and regulations of the factory, and they are not allowed to deviate from them.

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Metaphors in West Malaysia

or would like to have in this country... profit is not everything" (Far Eastern Economic Review, June 11, 1982). The prime minister pointed out the Japanese company's concern for the "welfare" of its workers, who are said to show great loyalty to their company as "their family." Furthermore, he observed, Japanese trade unions promote the workers' feeling of belonging (ibid.: 38—39).

This picture of the Japanese company is part of the general Japanese corporate strategy of using the idiom of the family to disguise relations of production that systematically subordinate women to men. Here I will focus on the Japanese factories in Kuala Langat district, Selangor, where I conducted fieldwork in Malay villages and in the local free trade zone. In the early 1970's, three Japanese factories, which I will call Electronics Japan Incorporated (EJI), Electronic Nippon Incorporated (ENI), and MUZ, a micro-machine plant (manufacturing musical movement components), were set up in the FTZ. They have a constant labor force of over 2,000, the vast majority being young Malay women from the surrounding villages. The forms and gestures of male power in these factories, I argue, are informed by Confucian principles that sustain a corporate ideology rooted in non-Malay patriarchal values.

Mukim Telok is an agricultural subdistrict lying just south of the Klang Valley industrial belt. The FTZ has been inserted into a local economy of plantations and Malay villages. The five villages are settled primarily by Javanese immigrants, who produce coffee, coconut, rubber, and palm oil in their smallholdings. The plantations (which employ large Tamil labor forces) specialize in rubber, palm oil, and cocoa. In the wake of the establishment of the FTZ in 1971, state agencies, large private enterprises, and political parties have penetrated Malay village society, bringing about the emergence of new social groups.

In the local Malay society, "traditional authority" is vested mainly in Islamic scholars, locally elected hamlet leaders, and, less firmly, government employees like the penghulu (administrator of the mukim), teachers, and party functionaries, who all command, in varying degrees, the loyalty of the common folk. In day-to-day life, men enjoy moral authority over women, and adults over children, although such deference to men and elders is not inevitable and unproblematic in a situation where most adult women and men enjoy some measure of autonomy in work and access to some independent form of wealth (inland or savings). Malay values of male prerogatives are asserted and enforced in attempts to control and protect young unmarried daughters within individual households. Male authority is never realized in a systematic male domination of all women, who enjoy a moral authority of their own as older kinwomen and in the neighborhood.

Social differentiation, however, is engendered by population pressure. The excess of young women empowers the family's male authority over women. Although wives often control a rice field or a coffee plantation, they do not control significant amounts of productive land. Male-female differentiation is significant because it places the male head of household in control of the productive means of subsistence and the male is seen as the breadwinner. The excess of young women empowers the family's male authority over women. Although wives often control a rice field or a coffee plantation, they do not control significant amounts of productive land. Male-female differentiation is significant because it places the male head of household in control of the productive means of subsistence and the male is seen as the breadwinner.
The notion of gender hierarchy along with microcomponents.

Nimble Fingers, Slow Wit

Asian women employed by transnational industries have often been characterized in industrial brochures as biologically suited for the painstaking and fine handiwork required in labor-intensive processes. A Malaysian investment brochure notes "the manual dexterity of the oriental female" and queries: "Who, therefore, could be better qualified by nature and inheritance to contribute to the efficiency of a bench-assembly production line than the oriental girl?" (emphasis added; Federal Industrial Development Authority 1975). This dubious explanation of women's biological "qualification" for low-paying, semi-skilled work is further elaborated by the corporate policies of multinationals' subsidiaries. In ENI, the Japanese manager asserts that "females (are) better able to concentrate on routine work (which may be compared to knitting)." He adds that "young girls [are] preferable to the fine job of assembling microcomponents" than older persons, that is, because of eyesight. At EJI, the Malay personnel manager states candidly: "(The) assembly of components is a tedious job...I with the miniaturization of components feel that females are more dexterous and more patient than males." Thus nimble fingers, fine eyesight, and, by implication, the passivity to withstand low-skill, unstimulating work are said to be biological attributes unique to women. Perhaps not unexpectedly, the Japanese financial manager of MUZ links these imputed female attributes to cost considerations: "Each initial work is very simple...if we employ female workers, it is enough...Also, the cost of female labor is cheaper than male labor in Malaysia, not so in Japan. If we have male assembly workers, they cannot cope with the tasks [because they are] stronger than female workers in Malaysia." Also, the expensive handling nature of WIZ requires these trained females. This dichotomous view of women's biological "qualification" and by implication the passivity to withstand low-skill, unstimulating work is said to be a natural consequence of sanctions against female workers. The assembly of microcomponents was considered a woman's job. The assembly process is very precise, the hands of the women are not to be contaminated by oil or grease. In addition, secondary school graduates are not actively sought because, according to the Malay, women should perform tasks involving heavy expenditure of energy, like carrying loads, digging, and construction work. Women, being of smaller build, should engage in activities that require fewer bursts of strength and force. Thus the saying that men can carry two loads while women can carry only one of equal weight. This is an expression of the ideas that women's bodies are more dexterous and more patient than men's.

Giventhe continual supply of cheap female labor from the surrounding kanipung, the three Japanese factories can be selective about the type of female worker they wish to employ: between the ages of sixteen and twenty-four, with at least primary education (which is free in Malaysia), and unmarried. Young women are preferred because of their diligence, and their eyes can withstand the heavy use of microscopes employed in many of the basic production processes (wiring, bonding, and mounting of components). Married women are discouraged as they may cause problems that will affect the efficiency of the work. Other attributes associated with women, like patience (sabar), are considered to be the result of training and socialization processes. Women can do delicate tasks only on a well-organized basis. Women are encouraged to do the assembly work that requires a high degree of precision, and women are encouraged to do the more difficult tasks. Women are less likely to leave their jobs than men. Women are also less likely to be absent. In addition, secondary school graduates are not actively sought because, according to the Malay, women should perform tasks involving heavy expenditure of energy, like carrying loads, digging, and construction work. Women, being of smaller build, should engage in activities that require fewer bursts of strength and force. Thus the saying that men can carry two loads while women can carry only one of equal weight. This is an expression of the ideas that women's bodies are more dexterous and more patient than men's.

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from early childhood to hardworking to have modest expectations of reward, and to be more responsible toward their families than men as a measure of their worth as women (daughters, wives, and mothers). Malay women are not dissuaded from low-paying jobs as long as their families depend on those earnings. One can not simply argue, as Linda Lim has done, that the "traditional patriarchy" of Third World families is "at the bottom of women's subjection to imperialist exploitation" (Lim 1983:79, 86). I maintain that beyond preexisting ideas of innate sexual differences and inequities of power, women workers are also cornered by the manufacturing, production, and exporting of cultural and ideological narratives that produce and reproduce concepts of male domination and female subordination in the industrial system.

The Family Way: Managing Maidens and Morality

Within the factory, production processes are organized to reflect and reinforce the gendered hierarchies that define the concept of male domination and female subordination. The organization of work in the factories is designed to maintain and reproduce the status quo, using gender and ethnicity as key elements in the hierarchical structure of power. The distribution of workers by ethnicity and gender, as shown in the accompanying table, reflects the ways in which power relations are organized and reproduced in the industrial system. The table shows the distribution of workers by ethnicity and gender, with the highest proportion of female workers in the lowest-paying and lowest-status positions. This is a reflection of the ways in which power relations are maintained and reproduced in the industrial system. The table also shows the distribution of workers by ethnicity and gender, with the highest proportion of female workers in the lowest-paying and lowest-status positions. This is a reflection of the ways in which power relations are maintained and reproduced in the industrial system.
There are no unions at any of the three electronics factories. This is partly due to the fact that the only union that exists in the area—the local branch of the Malayan Factory Workers Union—is banned by the government. In other words, the workers are effectively prevented from organizing. However, there are some informal mechanisms that help to channel workers' concerns.

In ENI, the Malay personnel manager, an ex-army man with the air of an enlightened bureaucrat, explains that his company is "more Western in nature" than the other firms. There are no social gatherings or parties held on factory premises, which might encourage the mixing of male and female workers. He points out that the factory is located in "a kampung where the outlook of the people is too religious, old-fashioned," and that the informal segregation of young unmarried men and women is the norm. He adds that the factory has no time for social functions. Citing criticisms in the press about factory women being "too free" and the few cases of prostitution reported among FTZ workers elsewhere in the country, he explains his company's policy:

"We do not want to go against Malay culture and Japanese culture too... We are entrusted by the parents to give the girls good employment, not otherwise. This is a family system; we are responsible for their education and moral guidance. Of course, they are not very happy..."

Indeed, social control is so effective that the monthly turnover at ENI is less than two percent, compared to four percent at MUZ and six percent at EJI.

The corporate attempts to adhere closely to Malay values and attitudes toward young women not only reassure parents and promote social conformity "to make everyone happy," but also distract workers from work-related problems. Although unions are legal in Malaysia, the government registrar has thus far delayed recognizing unions in the electronics plants established by multinational corporations. In 1979, following a strike at MUZ, a new factory union was established, but the government refused to register it. Although some workers are legalized, their rights are limited.

In EJI, the Malay personnel manager, who is also a member of the Malay Workers' Association, explains his company's policies:

"We create a happy family environment... We do not want our workers to be exposed to any problems... We create a happy family environment..."
management to confine workers' grievances to manageable channels. At EJI, each work section sends a lead operator to the "employees' monthly meetings" to meet with the personnel manager. It operates as a "grievance procedure system" to pass all complaints to the top; group leaders are required to poll their workers for reactions to decisions and report back to management. "Operator representatives requesting second sets of factory shoes and overalls for workers are told to increase production output in the airline first. This procedure represents the informal bargaining relationship between fathers and children.

At ENI, corporate policies stress the social obligations that first-time women workers still have to their village families, thereby enhancing the discipline of the workers and also preserving the conditions in which parents send their daughters to seek wages at the factories. In monthly meetings with workers' parents (not with workers themselves), the personnel manager presents himself as the 'foster father' (bapa angkat) of all the female workers, whom he also calls 'children' (budak-budak). At the meeting, he acquaints the parents with the workers' schedules, because parents are particularly concerned about the night shift and "overtime," which may be used as a cover for non-work activities. Company bus drivers are given strict orders to keep to assigned routes, and parents are provided with "overtime" forms to check their daughters' daily schedules. The manager thus impresses upon the parents his concern for the moral reputation of his "charges," while eliciting parental cooperation in enforcing control over the workers' movements between home and factory (which affects production schedules). At the meeting the personnel manager also asks parents about the complaints of the female workers, because they are too "shy" (malu) to tell factory personnel. The kampung's parents thus unwittingly play the part of a grievance feedback system, adding their own moral weight to the social control exerted by the management.

Outstation women workers, who pose a threat to the carefully constructed factory-kampung alliance to control operators' movements, are grouped by ENI in the same rooming houses. "They are exposed to dangers (and) we have to look after them," they are told. Operators are not allowed by ENI to leave the rooming houses because complaints are addressed to the president of the factory. The president (a deputy manager) also refuses to write to the social control center of the factory. The president's letter-play the part of a grievance feedback system and enter the kampung, which is under the control of the president himself and has its own grievance procedures.

Ultimately, Japanese ideals of male authority and female subordination are reproduced and reproduced in the daily interactions between foremen and operators. The foreman-operator relationship is pivotal in enforcing such endless expectations. Each foreman is in charge of ninety operators, depending on the particular production process and shift. At ENI, the plant director calls the foreman the "head of...family members," leading a pyramid distribution of women workers, from their immediate assistants (charge hands) to line leaders of work benches, to operators at the bottom. To implement production goals, foremen rely heavily on charge hands and line leaders to deal directly with operators. One line leader complains: "The foremen, I..."
They give this job, that job, and even before the task is done they say do this, do that, and before that is ready, they say do some other work. At times I tell the operators and they get angry too because of the repeated orders... the endless orders to work fast. Besides exerting work pressures, foremen also try to control every aspect of operators' behavior within the factory and to influence their outside activities. In daily interactions, male power is demonstrated either in an authoritarian, intimidating manner or in a paternal, benevolent fashion to enforce general compliance and discipline among the women workers. Thus, Japanese officials tell me that women cannot make good foremen because they lack the necessary "leadership qualities," such as a "fiercely manner," the ability to give and stick by decisions, and the capability to command and demand respect of male technicians. Management thinks that it is necessary to be very strict with Malay operators, even though they are "very obedient and hardworking types." At MUZ, the engineering assistant and head of the in-house union describes the operators whose interests he represents: "Obedience covers all—lit makes it easier to control. But they are emotional—they cry when errors are pointed out. The three of us felt it there. Some (however) yell at you." At ENI, operators are instructed not to answer back when reprimanded by foremen, but to be "verypolite." Operators are scolded by overvigilant foremen for wanting to go to the prayer room (whereas Muslims they have the right to prayer five times a day), the clinic, and the toilet. Some workers are subjected to questioning, conducted in a humiliating manner, about their menstrual problems or non-work activities, and are even followed to the locker room. Thus, female inferiority is instilled in the operators by such daily surveillance and the need to ask for male permission for the most mundane activities. Other foremen believe in the paternalistic handling of operators encouraged by Japanese managers. Kindly foremen, who play a role more akin to "father" or "brother," can obtain the women's obedience and loyalty, while fostering a comfortable "family" environment amidst actual exploitation. An EJ supervisor explains his approach: "Force is not so important as understanding. . mutual understanding and respect. Understanding is the key to the job. The key to the job is mutual understanding. . mutual understanding. . mutual understanding. . mutual understanding. . mutual understanding. . mutual understanding. . mutual understanding. . mutual understanding. . mutual understanding.

The foreman-operator relationship is sometimes enhanced by the emotional gratitude engendered in the women workers by kindly foremen. An EJ supervisor says that he advises his foremen to treat all the operators equally, but a few fall in love. Other operators are favored with recommendations by their foremen for special cash allowances awarded for reaching high production targets. Favoritism by foremen of a few women workers thus creates division among the operators and reinforces the image of dependency on male authority figures dispensing orders and rewards.

Such factory experiences are in contrast to women's work in the village, where young girls and unmarried women enjoy self-determination in work and are taught complex skills by older women. The women set the pace, schedule, and objectives of their activities so long as they see their family needs. Many women tell me they like to work in the factories mainly for the friendships they make there. But they also feel that their work is less fulfilling. Many women tell me that they feel like they are not really being paid for their work.

Operators, on the other hand, are often treated with respect and are given more authority. This is particularly evident in the operations of production. Operators are given more responsibility and are encouraged to take initiatives. The operations of production are divided into three main categories: manual, mechanical, and electronic. In the manual operations, operators are responsible for assembling and testing components. In the mechanical operations, operators are responsible for operating machines. In the electronic operations, operators are responsible for testing electronic circuits. Operators are also responsible for maintaining the equipment and ensuring that it is in good working order.

The importance of the operations of production is underscored by the fact that they are typically the most skilled and well-paying jobs in the factory. Operators are often promoted to supervisory positions after several years of experience. However, some operators have expressed frustration with the lack of opportunities for advancement within the company. They feel that their skills are underappreciated, and that they are being paid less than they deserve.

In conclusion, while the operations of production are an important aspect of the factory's operations, there are a number of challenges that operators face. These include long hours, low pay, and limited opportunities for advancement. It is important to recognize the value of the operators' work in order to ensure that they are properly compensated and provided with the training and support they need to succeed.
A visitor to the large Malay towns will be struck by scenes of factory women not common even ten years ago. Pools of uniformly clad young women can be observed around bus stops, food stands, or factory gates at the FTZs. In the evenings, neophyte factory workers, dressed in more colorful Malay or Western clothes, may be seen on their way home, shopping at market places or wandering around downtown. A running commentary often follows in the wake of these women, many of them recently arrived from the countryside. Shop assistants, passers-by, and street urchins may cheerfully greet them with "Minahkaran" ('high-voltage Minah, a variant of "Minah letrik"), "kakien joy" ('pleasure-seekers'), and sometimes "perumpuan jahat" ('bad women' or prostitutes). Not only people on the streets but the Malaysian press, politicians, and religious institutions have all raised key moral issues in a cacophony of critical commentaries about these women of the nascent Malay working class.

The various epithets, public warnings, and pronouncements that these factory women have excited among different social groups represent overlapping but divergent perspectives on changing Malay culture. In the context of hegemonic crisis, conflicting dominant interests within Malaysian society—capitalist institutions, state agencies, and the Islamic resurgence movement—participate in the ideological struggle to reframe the status of the modern Malay woman.

Neophyte Factory Women and the Negative Image

Since 1970, the media (radio and Televesen Malaysia), which are controlled by the state, have played a role in focusing attention on young Malay factory women and providing the frame of reference for public discussion of their new status. Newspaper articles popularized public familiarity with street slang that was previously reserved for use among the older generation. A newspaper article in The New Straits Times (Aug. 31, 1979) described the phenomenon of factory women as "street walkers" and "joy-ridelectors," which defined and marginalized the image of the female factory worker. The article also highlighted the fact that many factory women, especially in the urban-based FTZs, spend their off-work hours shopping and going to the movies. In the villages, factory women go window-shopping after payday. They return home from their work by public transportation, where they are often subjected to the stares of nosy accouter women, dressed in more colorful Malay clothing, or actors who are supposed to wear "street clothes." The media's portrayal of these women as "street walkers" and "joy-ridelectors" has contributed to the negative image of the modern Malay woman.

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becausetheydonothave (high academic) qualifications. 

"By riveting public attention on women's consumption, the press trivializes the women's work and helps divert discontent over their weak market position into the manageable channels of a 'youth culture.'" 

The mass-circulating press also operates as a vehicle whereby public officials and politicians attempt to increase social control over Malay working-class women by amplifying events that tarnish their reputation. From 1976 onwards, newspaper reports intermittently have carried stories about factory women in the Penang Bayan Lepas FTZ who are said to service soldiers and tourists, under such headlines as "Factory Girls in Sex Racket" (The Star, May 19, 1978). In early 1979, The Star proclaimed on its front page: "It is not fair to associate all factory girls with immorality" (Feb. 18, 1979). The factory women featured in the story are from mainland peasant villages working in the FTZ. They rent rooms in kampung homes and are placed under the informal jurisdiction of village leaders so that they will not "fall prey to any city playboy." 

As the oldest and largest FTZ in the country (with twenty multinational factories on location employing some 18,000 workers), the Bayan Lepas FTZ has developed a reputation for sexually permissive women. Factory workers are dubbed with factory-specific nicknames such as "micro-syaitan" ('micro-devils') for operators at Microsystems, and "night-sales" or "nasise/ok" ('cold rice,' i.e., leftovers) for workers at National Semiconductors. Malay women in other FTZs are also described as "preyed upon" and "tricked" into prostitution. An Ipoh industrial estate has earned the label of "the Malaysian Haadyai," after the famous Thai border town frequented by Malians (The New Straits Times, Feb. 16, 1979). 

The alarm raised over the perceived threat of Malay factory women asserting social independence, thus casting doubt on official Islamic culture, has prompted state officials to call for greater control of women in the nascent Malay working class. In 1980, the then-deputy prime minister noted that rural women who work in factories are said to become "less religious and have loose morals." As a champion of the export-industrialization program, he advised that the solution to the problem is to blame the factories but for people to guide the "young girls" to "the right path." 

Islamic Groups and a New Model of Islamic Womanhood

Islam is the religion of all Malays in the Peninsula, but there are divergent Islamic perspectives on the changing status of Malay women. State religious offices, like other governmental agencies, tend to direct attention toward the perceived misuse of "free time" by factory women, whereas Islamic revivalist groups are more concerned with questions of defining appropriate spiritual and social boundaries. This reflects a parallel in the economic and social conditions of the women: those who belong to the traditional sector of Malay working women, whose traditional activities are more economic in nature and who are less exposed to the influence of commodified consumer culture, are more likely to face problems of Malay working women. 

Since the early 1970's, when the implementation of the New Economic Policy (NEP) brought thousands of rural Malays into urban educational institutions and factories, state religious institutions have begun to challenge traditional Islamic discourse and practices. The government's religious policies have been shaped by its recognition of the growing influence of Islamic fundamentalism. In 1980, the Islamic Affairs Department was established to monitor and control religious activities. This has led to increased scrutiny of mosques and Islamic schools, and to the arrest of individuals suspected of promoting "extremist" ideas. 

The problem of "immorality" among Malay women is presented as the outcome of rural-urban migration and the urban Westernized culture, rather than linked to industrial employment. This "sarong-to-jean" movement, the vice chancellor of Universiti Malaya argues, is responsible for problems of urban living that can be alleviated by providing counseling and educational facilities. "Lack of recreation," he says, leads to "toward patterns of behavior that are appropriate for factory girls, but not for traditional Malay women." 

The problem of the Malay woman is not "whether" she draws her strident and disdainful traditional associations in order to improve her lot, but more fundamentally, whether she can resist these pressures. Malay women are caught in the middle between the old and the new, and their dilemma is that they must challenge both. This is the central issue of Malay women's struggle, which has become a national issue in April 1980. The public association between Malay factory women and the press, resulting in the presentation of a "new" Malay woman, has been a significant factor in the mobilization of women's organizations.
Institutions and the Islamic revitalist groups (in the missionary or dakwah movement) have participated actively in attempts to shape the public image of modern Muslim women. I maintain that the increased vigilance of state Islamic institutions in monitoring the deportment of young Muslims is a deliberate state response, through its ideological mechanisms, to political protests by Islamic resurgence groups over corruption in state bureaucracies and the goals of the development program (see Kessler 1980; Far Eastern Economic Review, March 3, 1983).

To the young Malay workers, official Islam, as represented by the state religious offices, is often experienced as a legal system that deals with marriage, divorce, inheritance, and religious offenses. Since the influx of young Malay women to work in the FTZs, there have been more frequent reports of raids by members of the Religious Department in the poor lodgings and cheap hotels inhabited by workers and the semi-employed. Under current laws, women are considered criminals for minor offenses, such as not wearing Islamic attire, or being out after dark (The New Straits Times, Aug. 30, 1979). Both parties arrested in an incident are punished, but sometimes the female partner is given a heavier sentence. When the culprits are too poor to pay both fines ($5,000), the payment is sometimes made for the female partner's release by her male relatives, who are sometimes working with state police and the underpaid official. Thus, the state, through Islamic offices, disciplines the social conduct of working-class Malays, subjecting women to greater religious surveillance and sanctions.

The modern, religiously enlightened Malay woman is defined in opposition to what is considered capitalist and derivative of Western individualist and consumer culture. Through a radical interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah, the revitalists call for a revival of Islamic values and a return to traditional Islamic social and economic norms. In particular, women are encouraged to veil modestly, practice segregation of the sexes, participate in communal activities, and abstain from alcohol, cars, and foreign values.

Although the Malaysian government is concerned with foreign influences, which is more sensitive to other issues, the government has implemented policies to encourage the revival of Islamic values. The Religious Department has been active in monitoring the deportment of young Malay women, and the Mediai, or religious educational program, has been expanded to provide religious instruction and guidance to factory workers. The dakwah movement has struck a responsive chord in many young Malay women, who wish to be recognized as morally upright Muslims engaged in honest hard work (kerja bahu). They see in the Islamic resurgence an assertion of pride in Malay-Muslim culture and an affirmation of its fundamental values in opposition to foreign consumer culture.

The state, through Islamic offices, disciplines the social conduct of working-class Malays, subjecting women to greater religious surveillance and sanctions.
Metaphors in West Malaysia: 412 and Social Interaction

OWN IMAGES: Young Women Between Self-Esteem

In rural Selangor, Malay women employed in the Telok FTZ, together with their parents, reject the commoditized image of factory women as a legitimate and an affront to Muslim womanhood. The mass-media portrayal of industrial workers spending too much of their time and money on individual gratification is perceived as a threat to the community. Women workers feel that their identity is being eroded by the factory environment, which is perceived as alien to their traditional values. The factory is seen as a place where women are forced to work long hours under harsh conditions, with little chance for personal development or self-expression. They feel that their identity as Malay women is being lost in the factory setting.

The conflicting images of Malay factory women, linked to public agencies, official religious authorities, and the dakwah movement, are symbolic expressions of different mechanisms of social control. The portrayal of the Malay factory woman as a pleasure-seeking creature is connected with increasing social surveillance of her "freetime," where her in-factory presentation as a child requiring male custody is expressive of the industrial control of her working time. These images of factory women reflect attempts to link Islamic ideas of chastity and honesty with democratic notions, perhaps in the context of an emerging proletarian consciousness.

MALAY FACTORY WOMEN: IN THEIR OWN VOICES

We now turn to the off-stage voices of the Malay women workers, their own self-perceptions, which have emerged partly in reaction to external caricatures of their status, but mainly out of their own felt experiences as wage workers in a changing rural society. We will explore how Malay women workers develop a gender consciousness based on social interaction, bymediating the reconstruction of their subjectivities. We will see how, by negotiating the reification of their subjectivities, Malay women workers reframe their identity as workers. This process of redefinition involves the construction of a new self-image, which is developed in interaction with others. We will examine the ways in which Malay women workers construct their identity as workers, and how this identity is shaped by their interaction with others. We will also explore how this identity is constructed in negotiation with others, and how this negotiation is influenced by the interaction of the workers' own Mouffean and anticommunist consciousness with the mass-media representation of their work. We will also examine the ways in which Malay women workers negotiate their identity as workers in response to the challenges posed by the factory environment.
The emerging self-image of factory women is conditioned by institutional and social factors. The moral purity of unmarried women is a primary concern of the kampung community. This is reflected in the traditional role of the woman as a provider of moral guidance and role model for younger girls. The kampung women's self-image as workers is shaped by their role as wage earners and their responsibility to their families. This identity is often at odds with the Western individualistic behavior expected of workers in the factories. The kampung women's association with Western consumer culture is viewed as a threat to their moral purity and their traditional roles. The kampung women's struggle for social liberation is hindered by their familial responsibilities. The kampung women's identity is shaped by their role as workers and their responsibility to their families. This identity is often at odds with the Western individualistic behavior expected of workers in the factories. The kampung women's association with Western consumer culture is viewed as a threat to their moral purity and their traditional roles. The kampung women's struggle for social liberation is hindered by their familial responsibilities.
...
The phenomenon of hysteria outbursts, formerly associated with middle-aged Malay women afflicted by latah (see Murphy 1972; Kessler 1977), has in the past decade become associated with spirit-possession episodes among young Malay women who have flocked by the thousand to urban institutions and industries. Recent studies of the sudden spate of possession incidents reported among young Malay women in boarding schools and factories interpret the bizarre phenomenon as an "oblique strategy" (I.M. Lewis's term) of protest against male authority in these modern institutions without direct challenge of male authority figures. Workers' collective action and individual protest have been effective in forcing changes in working conditions and improving workers' lives. However, the threat of female fury, momentarily unleashed in spirit-possession episodes, is efficiently controlled; victims are given Valium and sent home on medical leave. In the context of the Klang Valley, possession episodes are viewed as a form of protest against the male-dominated society and the struggle for women's liberation in Malaysia.
employment changes the content of customary brother-sister, parent-child relations. Female factory earnings, in a situation of under- or unemployment of Malay youths, have provided daughters/daughters with the relative economic autonomy to realign domestic power relations. As sons are kept longer in school (training for potential bureaucratic careers) or out of the labor market by poor opportunities, parents feel that they can rely on their sons. One working daughter remarks: "The males of today don't want to listen to their parents' advice, and so the parents don't have much hope in them... By now, they have become quite independent." The male children's economic independence from their parents helps in defining their new self-image in the context of the family. Working daughters, often with the implicit backing of mothers and the expected but weak disapproval of fathers, demonstrate their resistance to male authority in their consumer behavior, use of savings for planning alternative careers, resistance to unwanted marriage matches, more daring enjoyment of premarital sex, and refusal of money to parents who remarry. Nevertheless, the self-image of these new-generation factory women continues to uphold family loyalty, Islamic asceticism, and male authority as central values.

In maintaining the official view of male responsibility, kampung women manipulate their formal subordination to kinship men by playing factory men (largely from outside the district) against kampung men. Male honor/prestige depends on men's ability to protect their sisters/kampung women against nonkin/outsiders, especially in the contemporary situation in which kampung men have the economic ground cut out from under their feet. Thus individual factory workers who are overtly critical in the workplace may, for example, be blacklisted (blacklisted) in the factory. Gossip, complaints, and tears goad village undertakers to take acts of retaliation against the blacklisted culprits. In Telok, there have been at least three incidents of attacks by village youth gangs on factory personnel as they leave the FTZ gates in the evening. The victims include one Indian, one Chinese, and two Malays, none of whom is of local origin. Such incidents reveal that within the kampung matrix of enforced rough justice and settling scores, especially where female honor is concerned, village men and women are forging a new kind of solidarity. Rural youths not only empathize with the women's harassment in the workplace, but also wish to register their vengeance against outsiders who not only hold relatively well-paid jobs in the FTZ, but are placed in daily situations of control and competition over nubile village women. This creates a form of solidarity between the women workers within the kampung. Those who are critical of the factory's working conditions and manipulation of women are considered by the women to be protecting their interests and are held in high regard. Thus, the kampung women are thus interconnected with their factory sisters. The values and choices that inform the gender consciousness of young Malay kampung women are thus interconnected with family strategy and dependence upon their wage earnings at this phase of their lifecycle. This helps account for the actions of many village women who reject individual emancipation as wage workers in the kampung in favor of fulfilling family obligations by working in the factory. In this context, the factory women are thus interconnected with their farm counterparts.

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Women's self-evaluations and value choices have not been achieved without internal conflict, doubts, and distress. The commoditized image of urban factory women holds up to view the modernized image of urban factory women who are overtly critical in the workplace may, for example, be blacklisted (blacklisted) in the factory. Gossip, complaints, and tears goad village undertakers to take acts of retaliation against the blacklisted culprits. In Telok, there have been at least three incidents of attacks by village youth gangs on factory personnel as they leave the FTZ gates in the evening. The victims include one Indian, one Chinese, and two Malays, none of whom is of local origin. Such incidents reveal that within the kampung matrix of enforced rough justice and settling scores, especially where female honor is concerned, village men and women are forging a new kind of solidarity. Rural youths not only empathize with the women's harassment in the workplace, but also wish to register their vengeance against outsiders who not only hold relatively well-paid jobs in the FTZ, but are placed in daily situations of control and competition over nubile village women. This creates a form of solidarity between the women workers within the kampung. Those who are critical of the factory's working conditions and manipulation of women are considered by the women to be protecting their interests and are held in high regard. Thus, the kampung women are thus interconnected with their factory sisters. The values and choices that inform the gender consciousness of young Malay kampung women are thus interconnected with family strategy and dependence upon their wage earnings at this phase of their lifecycle. This helps account for the actions of many village women who reject individual emancipation as wage workers in the kampung in favor of fulfilling family obligations by working in the factory. In this context, the factory women are thus interconnected with their farm counterparts.

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negative consequences of extreme individuation, while their own
possession episodes give vent to the pain and protest engendered
by the dehumanizing effects of capitalist production. The gender
consciousness of Malay factory women in rural Selangor has, I
suggest, this fundamental, dynamic ambivalence: adherence to
kampung communal values, asceticism, and male authority on
the one hand, and different forms of incipient claims as wage
workers and resistance to the power of male authority in the
home and in factories on the other. The subjectivities of these
women are thus reconstructed in the one hand, as different forms
of subjectivity in the factory, and in the home as wage workers and
resistance in the factory. This fundamental dynamics is evident in
the consciousness of Malay factory women in rural Selangor. The
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while their own
failure of husband to provide maintenance was cited by the local kadi (Islamic judge) as the mam reason (i.e., from 1969—79, it accounted for between 30 percent and 70 percent of all divorces each year; see Table 1 in Ong 1987:132). Of course, the issue of non-maintenance can also be interpreted as evidence of husbands withdrawing funds from the family budget in protest against working wives not contributing significantly to the family budget. In 1978, there were 20 percent more working women petitioning for divorce throughout West Malaysia. "The problem centered on the fact that some men expected their working wives to contribute a big chunk of their income toward household expenditure while the wives felt that their contributions ought to be of a supplementary nature" (The New Straits Times, Mar. 27, 1979).

Malays do not make alimony payments. Partly for security considerations, divorced Malay women frequently remarry, and some may keep children by previous husbands with them. Thus relations among siblings often override their different paternal ties. Such children are referred to as ‘milksiblings’ (adek beradek susu).

In Japan, only a few large Japanese companies—e.g., Sony, Hitachi, Toyota, Nissan, Japan Steel—provide extensive welfare coverage for their workers, who are largely male. The vast majority of working women (70 percent) are employed as temporary, part-time, or unpaid family workers in medium-size and small firms, and they seldom, if ever, enjoy lifetime employment (Cook and Hayashii 1980:5). Besides, in Malaysia, some 220 Japanese firms in the late 1970's did not expect their workers to become lifetime employees, and many of the companies did not have house unions (see Far Eastern Economic Review, Mar. 31, 1983).

All interviews with factory managers, engineers, and supervisors (whom may have been Japanese, Indian, Chinese, or Malay) were conducted in English. Interviews with Malay technicians, production operators, and villagers, which took place in village settings, were conducted in Bahasa Kebangsaan (Malay).

This point is not quite accurate. In 1975, Japanese women comprised some 10 percent of the total labor force in Japan. Even with the same educational background as men, women by the age of thirty-five earned less than half of men's wages. Moreover, since women cannot be considered part of the permanent labor force, do not enjoy lifetime employment (Cook and Hayashii 1980:1-14; Matsumoto 1978:62).

This practice of employing young women for a short span of their lifecycle means that multinational industries are generating, not a classical proletariat, but rather a labor reserve among rural Malay women (Ong 1987).
participate in many agricultural projects and operate a number of small factories to produce halal (religiously pure) foodstuffs. The Jemaat Tabligh, influenced by Indian Muslim missionary activities, is based on a network of congregations for religious lectures and retreats. Both groups are composed of university students, white-collar workers, and professionals who practice communal life, intensive religious study, and sexual segregation, in contrast to the individualist lifestyle pursued by many middle-class Malays. Women in the Darul Arqam work in the factories, operate the school and hostel, and prepare the communal meals while their men travel the lecture circuit. Female members of the Tabligh group are more confined and are excluded from the men’s vigorous missionary activities (see Nagata 1981:416–23).

16. Some of the very small sects modelled after foreign groups try to introduce obligatory sexual activity between female converts and the khalifah (Nagata 1981:416; Far Eastern Economic Review, Mar. 3, 1983). This association between Islam and female sexual service is extremely repulsive to Malaysian Muslims and has been condemned by all authorities and major dakwah groups.

17. The impact of multinational corporate advertising in West Malaysia has been particularly powerful on young Malays recently arrived in the cities from rural kampung. Many factory women are captivated by the portrayal of white women in the commercials and seek to emulate their Western, glamorous images. Annual beauty contests held in multinational firms also reinforce Western images of feminine passivity (see Grossman 1979).

18. Cases of female spirit possession during the colonial period and up until recently more commonly involved middle-aged Malay women than any other female age group. Such women have a particularly stressful status at this phase of their lifecycle, when they become divorced or widowed and children begin to depart from home. They may also begin to sense a different role of the body when they become divorced or widowed. Any other female age group, such women have a particularly stressful status at this phase of their lifecycle, when they become divorced or widowed and children begin to depart from home. They may also begin to sense a different role of the body when they become divorced or widowed.

19. Michael Taussig (1980) argues that the "fetishization of evil" in the form of the devil represents a mode of critique of capitalist relations by Colombian plantation workers and Bolivian tin miners.

20. These images of "filth" and pollution, following Mary Douglas (1966), also reflect the women's sense of having transgressed the boundaries between kampung and public life.

21. Many working women only began to use these products because of the long hours confined at work. Thus factory employment also introduces kampung women to an urban culture of modern sanitary systems and practices that change their experience of the self.