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## **MULTIPLE IDENTITIES, MULTIPLE STRATEGIES: CONFRONTING STATE, CAPITAL AND PATRIARCHY**

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## MULTIPLE IDENTITIES, MULTIPLE STRATEGIES: CONFRONTING STATE, CAPITAL AND PATRIARCHY<sup>1</sup>

Amrita Chhachhi and Renée Pittin

This paper is based on reflections arising from research on women factory workers over a number of years.<sup>2</sup> The issues and questions in each phase of research changed as our own understanding grew, along with changes in the general political and economic environment. In spite of variations in research objectives, there were certain common themes concerning the ways in which women were perceived and their self perception as workers, and as women, the possibilities and the limits to organising, the differences between the interests of women and men workers as well as the differences between women workers themselves. These issues are explored in this paper. The paper is divided into three sections. In the first section we discuss the theoretical implications of the relationship between identity, consciousness and strategies. In the next section we raise issues concerning strategies and organising/lack of organising on the basis of two case studies of women factory workers in electronics and electrical equipment factories in India and Nigeria.<sup>3</sup> The final section looks at existing struggles within the theoretical perspective elaborated earlier.

Considerable work has been done in recent years on women's employment, locating features ranging from restructuring at an international level to labour control on the factory floor and the use of gender divisions to place women workers in low paid, unskilled, part time and casual jobs (Elson & Pearson, 1981; Mitter, 1986; Redclift & Mingione, 1985). Theories of women's employment have moved from a critique of dual labour markets and orthodox Marxist categories to highlighting the linkage between production and reproduction, domestic labour and wage labour and the necessity to study gender construction within the labour process as well as within the sexual division of labour in the household (Beechey, 1986).

One theoretical area which remains 'underdeveloped' is the question of women workers' consciousness. The issue of consciousness is essential to any discussion on strategies for organising, and in this paper we will explore certain areas which link identity, consciousness and strategy. The relationship between perception and action is extremely complicated. We examine two approaches – the marxist and poststructuralist feminist analyses of the relationship between identity, consciousness and strategy – and then elaborate a tentative framework.

The dominant model in orthodox Marxist debates has been the model of dual consciousness initiated by K. Kautsky and Lenin, and systematised by G. Lukacs. On the one hand is actual consciousness, i.e. what the worker normally thinks, and on the other hand is ascribed consciousness, i.e. the consciousness that the worker ought to have given his position within the production process. Identity in this formulation is singular, fixed and derived from positioning in the production process. This model not only constructed an ideal type model of class consciousness, but it also assumed a one-to-one correspondence between the objective class structure and consciousness. Further, this conception transferred the locus of radical consciousness from the working class to the intelligentsia. Since classes are seen as passive objects determined by economic functions, their consciousness is also seen as completely controlled by dominant ideologies. The concept of 'false consciousness' not only ignores the existence of 'everyday forms of resistance', but also reduces a worker's identity to that of class positionality.

An alternative to the above orthodox problematic was developed through rich historical studies of the 'moral economy' and resistance of working classes and slaves in the work of E.P. Thompson and E. Genovese, as well as more specific studies of the labour process and the

politics around the points of production by M. Burawoy (Thompson, 1963; Genovese, 1974; Burawoy, 1985). These studies have highlighted that there is no 'objective' notice of class prior to its appearance in action, as for example in Thompson's well-known formulation of class as a 'happening' whereby classes are constituted in history. Rejecting the distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' as arbitrary, Burawoy also emphasizes the need to look at the formation of consciousness as an effect of the combination of economic, political and ideological realms. He also highlights the formation of a specific type of consciousness arising specifically from the structures of the workplace. Instead of the notion of 'habitation' used by H. Braverman, which refers to an extreme form of objectification, eliminating the subjective moment, Burawoy uses 'adaptation' and examines, in the struggles over the labour process, the ways in which 'fragmented arenas of subjectivity expand into collective struggle, or, more narrowly, under what conditions...adaptation turn[s] into resistance' (Burawoy, 1985:76).

The application of Gramsci's notion of 'commonsense', the discovery of counter hegemonic discourses developed by subaltern groups, and the acknowledgement of covert forms of resistance in recent historical and contemporary studies have opened the way towards developing a more 'grounded' theory of consciousness (Gramsci, 1985; Scott, 1985; also see the work of the Subaltern Studies group). For instance James Scott, in his sensitive study of peasant resistance through the creation of an oppositional culture, points out that:

Class after all, does not exhaust the total explanatory space of social actions. ...within the peasant village, ...class may compete with kinship, neighbourhood, faction, and ritual links as foci of human identity and solidarity. Beyond the village level, it may also compete with ethnicity, language group, religion, and region as a focus of loyalty. Class may be applicable to some situations but not to others; it may be reinforced or crosscut by other ties; it may be far more important for the experience of some than of others. Those who are tempted to dismiss all principles of human action that contend with class identity as "false consciousness" and to wait for Althusser's "determination in the last instance" are likely to wait in vain. In the meantime, the messy reality of multiple identities will continue to be the experience out of which social relations are conducted.

(Scott, 1985, p. 43)

Scott's work has moved from a critique of the Gramscian concept of hegemony and the notion of false consciousness, to emphasise the creative capacity of subordinate groups to reverse or negate dominant ideologies. A similar project is envisaged by the Subaltern Studies historians who recover the subject in the social history and resistance of subordinate groups in the colonial period. However, although both Scott and the Subaltern Studies group do look at men and women in struggles and point out areas of gender discrimination, their work does not incorporate the categories and relations of the sex/gender system into the analysis of the construction of wider political relationships.<sup>4</sup> It is to feminist theory that we have to turn for a re-conceptualisation of working women.

The first fracture in the notion of a monolithic working class identity was in fact made by feminists when they highlighted the fact that the working class had two genders.<sup>5</sup> The specificity of women workers lay not only in that they had special issues, e.g. maternity benefits, equal pay, sexual harassment, but also that their position in the labour market was determined by their position within the household. The double burden of wage work and domestic labour, and the ideology of domesticity implied that women entered the labour market already determined as 'inferior bearers of gender'. Elson and Pearson succinctly identified three tendencies in the dialectic of capital and gender: 'a tendency to intensify the existing forms of gender subordination; a tendency to decompose existing forms of gender subordination; and a

tendency to recompose new forms of gender subordination' (Elson & Pearson, 1981). Women workers therefore had to struggle as workers as well as women. The lack of participation by women in trade unions was located in certain structural features: male domination in unions, the internal structure of union organisation, the dead-end nature of women's jobs, the fact that women were employed in industries which are difficult to organise, the double burden which implied that women simply did not have the time for union activities. However, in many studies on women workers, the traditional marxist model of consciousness still operates. The focus on gender has also led to the setting up of another model of 'feminist consciousness', and women who do not exhibit these characteristics are seen as victims of patriarchal ideology, backward and reactionary (For critique, see Beechey, 1986).

Another approach to women workers' (lack of) consciousness has argued that women's lack of participation in unions was due to gender socialization and the reinforcement of women's roles as mothers and wives through the ideology of domesticity. An extreme formulation of this argument, and one that is often used in developing countries, is that women's consciousness is based on a 'fatalistic approach to life' (Purcell, 1981). Women workers were seen as more fatalistic than men in that they had little or no control over most aspects of their lives, a fact that was reinforced in the working environment as well. Further studies emphasized the 'familial orientation' of women workers (Pollert, 1981). These concerns of women are not seen as a sign of backwardness, but as a reflection of the fact that for women 'it is gender subordination which is primary, while capitalist exploitation is secondary and derivative' (Elson & Pearson, 1981, p. 89). Banerjee for instance points out that 'the ideology of the superior male worker' does not originate in the labour market, but rather arises from the position men occupy in other areas where their dominance is guaranteed by 'powerful social institutions of the family, religion and the state' (Banerjee, 1991: 307). However, such a formulation could result in focusing only on social institutions outside the labour market, depicting women workers as trapped within a vicious circle of 'traditional patriarchy'.

Recent socialist feminist theory on women's employment has stressed the importance of looking at all areas, i.e. the labour market, household, and labour process as well as the state and other institutions as sites for the construction and reconstruction of women's subordination. Cynthia Cockburn has argued for the significance of the 'socio-political and the physical dimensions as constituting the material basis for male domination'. A focus on these dimensions and on processes opens up examination of:

questions about male organisation and solidarity, the part played by institutions such as church, societies, unions and clubs for instance. And the physical opens up questions of bodily physique and its extension in technology, of buildings and clothes, space and movement.

(Cockburn, 1986, p. 96)

While these formulations have been useful, in the 1980s the notion of dual identities was challenged further as the significance of race, caste and ethnic differences in structuring the labour force as well as in being a locus of consciousness was highlighted. It is no longer possible to use the category 'woman' without specifying distinctions such as race, caste, ethnicity, and stage in the life cycle. In trying to accommodate these differences, there has been a tendency to stress the primacy of one identity over the other, or simply to add together gender, ethnicity and class as parallel identities based on parallel systems of domination: patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism.

On the basis of research and discussions with women workers, we feel that there are serious limitations in the priority as well as the additive approaches. Further work in the area of consciousness would have to account for the pluralistic expressions of feminism and consciousness on the basis of multiple identities, rather than subsuming them under class or

gender.

Feminist theorising on women's employment has to take on the challenge of multiple identities and the deconstruction of the category 'woman,' articulated by black and third world feminists, as well as the analyses presented by the corpus of theory referred to as poststructuralist feminism.<sup>6</sup> In pointing out the limitations of the concepts of 'double and triple jeopardy' (discrimination on the basis of race, sex and class) for assuming that the relationship between various discriminations are merely additive, Deborah King argues not for the simultaneity of several oppressions but for the multiplicative relationships among them i.e. that these are imbricated into each other in interlocking and mutually determining ways (King, 1988). The capacity of black women to encompass mutually contradictory positions and sets of attitudes also points to multiple and creative ways whereby women have handled these multiple identities.

Poststructuralist feminism has addressed this issue by questioning unitary, universal categories and has attempted to develop a theory of subjectivity. De Lauretis highlights what she calls the 'third moment' in feminist theory as:

- 1) a reconceptualisation of the subject as shifting and multiply organised across variable axes of difference; 2) a rethinking of the relationship between forms of oppression and modes of formal understanding – of doing theory; 3) an emerging redefinition of marginality as location, of identity as dis-identification; and 4) the hypothesis of self-displacement as the term of a movement that is concurrently social and subjective, internal and external, indeed political and personal.

(de Lauretis, 1990)

Although there are differences within poststructuralist feminist approaches, the notion of identity as the locus of multiple and variable positions which are historically grounded, the significance of the nexus 'language/subjectivity/consciousness' in the constitution of the subject, and the recognition that the subject is defined not only in relation to the polarities of masculinity and femininity, provide an important corrective to the limitations of theoretical formulations elaborated earlier. This approach also maintains a focus on agency, i.e. women and men are seen as active subjects rather than as passive victims, a perspective developed by social historians such as E.P. Thompson as well as A. Giddens.

There remain problems, however, in the formulations of some poststructuralist feminists such as Teresa de Lauretis, in the recourse to psychoanalytic approaches as explanations for the construction of gender identities. The fundamental assumptions of psychoanalytic discourse about the acquisition of gendered subjectivities and sexual difference lie in an almost inevitable model of psycho-sexual development. The difficulty of transforming such a realm, as well as the universalism implicit in these models, leaves such approaches open to well-established criticism.<sup>7</sup>

The post structuralist feminist perspective, whatever its other shortcomings, does warn against a notion of essential women's consciousness as well as the privileging of a particular definition of consciousness as the feminist or non-feminist consciousness. The construction of ideal feminist/truly feminist concerns and issues projected as universal, without articulation of the location from which such a formulation is made, continues in contemporary women's studies. For instance, a formulation which is widely used in women's studies as well as in policy formulation today is the distinction Maxine Molyneux introduced between practical gender interests and strategic gender interests.<sup>8</sup> This distinction is also based on a certain assumption of what feminist consciousness should be, i.e. that it should be oriented towards action on strategic gender issues. It has been pointed out that it is difficult to make such a distinction in

relation to issues (Whitehead, 1990).

A struggle around wages or water taps shifts power relations, and the above-mentioned distinction leaves out the importance of the changes that occur in any context of mobilisation and struggle. Here, the concepts of agency and process are vital: the subject as actor, and the struggle itself, are key components in these changing relations.

The use of 'gender' to refer to what are specifically women's issues (though differentiated by class, etc.) is confusing, since gender refers to men as well. If it is implied that such issues are also in the interests of men (as Molyneux in fact does), then it is necessary to distinguish between short-term and long-term interests. In an immediate sense, many of these issues (most of the ones included in the practical as well as strategic interests categories in Molyneux's article) ensure men's interests, and women's demands/organisation to change these will necessarily involve confrontation and conflict. The conflation of gender with women in this case completely negates the basis of women's subordination: a patriarchal system implies that men benefit from the denial of women's interests.

Caroline Moser substitutes 'needs' for 'interests', arguing that this separation is essential because:

of its focus on the process whereby an interest, defined as a 'prioritized concern' is translated into a need, defined as the 'means by which concerns are satisfied'.

(Moser, 1989, p. 1819, endnote)

A further distinction is developed by Kate Young (1988) between 'strategic gender interests' and 'practical gender needs'. She points out that the distinction made by Molyneux differentiates theoretically deducible interests from empirically verifiable wants or needs. She however find it more useful to talk of practical needs and strategic gender interests.

The concept of 'interests' is a contested concept, yet in all these formulations the differing basis of the concept of interests and needs in distinct theoretical approaches is not examined. The notion of interests emerged historically and is located in the utilitarian view that society consists of rational, economic men seeking to maximize their satisfactions. Some feminists have rejected the use of interest theory on the grounds that:

...human beings are moved by more than interests. The reduction of all human emotions to interests and interests to the rational search for gain reduces the human community to an instrumental, arbitrary, and deeply unstable alliance, one which rests on the private desires of isolated individuals.

(Irene Diamond and Nancy Hartsock, 'Beyond Interests in Politics...', American Political Science Review 75(3), 1981, p. 719, cited in Jónasdóttir, 1988, p. 45)

They argue for needs as an alternative to 'interests' and 'rights'. Others such as Anna Jónasdóttir feel that a clearer, historically located notion of interests which emphasises its form rather than a particular content, could be useful for feminist analysis. The concept of interests has consisted of two aspects: the form aspect which is the 'demand to be among' (from the Latin base), which implies the demand for participation in and control over society's public affairs; and the content aspect which concerns the substantive values put into effect and distributed in relation to groups, needs, wishes and demands. In this sense then, the notion of 'interests' only emerges in a context where there is not acceptance of authority as immutable, divinely ordained

or natural.

If the focus is on the formal aspect of interests, the content aspect is kept open. Interests then could be seen as extending the conditions of choice without presuming the content of the choices offered. Jónasdóttir points out that discussions of content are better expressed by needs and desires. However, she sees the use of 'needs' in political analysis as based on a view from above, i.e., it is the perspective of socially engaged experts, of administrators, who design policies for weak groups who have their needs met without 'first having to overcome their weakness and fight for their own positions of influence' (Jónasdóttir, 1985, p. 48).<sup>9</sup>

Three crucial questions arise in discussing the application of the concept of 'interests' to women. Can one ascribe to women objective interests, irrespective of their subjective consciousness? Do all women have common interests, given class and other forms of differentiation? Do women and men have different interests? Jónasdóttir puts forward the proposition that given the pervasive mobilisation of women in history and society against their oppression, it is possible to ascribe to them objective interests. In spite of differences between women, there is agreement on a 'minimal common denominator' that all women share: an interest in not 'allowing themselves to be oppressed as women, or, in fighting patriarchy' (1988, p. 38). She argues that women and men do have different interests, due not to essentialist/biological differences, but to the sexual division of labour which allocates different and hierarchical positions to them.

We feel that such a notion of women's interests, which is both theoretically deduced as well as historically located, can be useful in examining women workers' actions and strategies for organising. The focus on the form aspect of 'interests' does not impose any specific content on what ought to be feminist interests, which is a problem in Molyneux's formulation of strategic gender interests. Women's interests would therefore imply extending the conditions for choices to be made about the sexual division of labour, etc., without presuming what these choices have to be to qualify for inclusion into a 'feminist' agenda.

We outline a series of propositions which form a grid, or a shifting of lenses, through which we examine and develop a further understanding of women's work and consciousness, and strategies for organising.

1. The contradictory and historically specific impact of patriarchy, colonialism and capitalism has resulted in a fragmentation and wide diversity of women's experiences. Both men and women workers possess multiple identities. Identities refer to subject positions which are made available and mobilised in specific historical contexts.<sup>10</sup>
2. Identities are selectively mobilised in response to economic, social, political and cultural processes. Identities therefore may be constantly shifting, not only historically, but also at a given point in time.
3. Identities involve the interplay of objective and subjective factors; class, gender, caste, race, ethnicity, and age, for example, therefore have both a material and ideological existence.<sup>11</sup>
4. Consciousness cannot be read off from objective positions. The expressions of adaptation and resistance, overt and covert are the result of complex processes (hidden and public scripts), which are constantly constructing the subjectivity of actors in multiple subject positions.
5. Women's interests are represented and reflected at all empirical and theoretical levels. Given the very nature of multiple identities, interests vary with the nature of the



broader persona, or grouping, seeking change. Women's interests in this context represent the expansion of women's conditions of choice. The conditions of choice will change, as the process of asserting interests changes the subjects and the arena within which the protagonists contend.

6. The separation of private and public, of factory and home, of personal and political creates misleading dichotomies.
7. The double burden of women's work is not necessarily an impediment to organising; it can also be an impetus.

## THE MESSY REALITY OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

In this section we present certain issues highlighted by electronic and electrical equipment factory workers in Nigeria and India. There are significant differences between the two countries – nature of the state, patterns of industrialization, state ideology as well as gender ideology. However, without attempting to build a comparative framework, we felt that there were many similarities in the experiences and perceptions of life, work, as well as gender relations, of these women which provided a basis to raise more general questions about the relation between identity, consciousness and strategies for organising.

### The Research Setting

The oil boom in the 1970s produced a number of initiatives on the part of the Nigerian government to encourage industrialisation in order to generate employment, strengthen the manufacturing infrastructure, and provide new investment opportunities. Multinational investments in Nigeria increased significantly at this time, as Nigeria offered the possibility of high profits, a possibility which was to be severely reduced with the oil glut. It was at this time of high hope and flowing oil that EMCON, the company under consideration here, was created.

EMCON, the Electricity Meter Company (Nigeria) Ltd., was established in northern Nigeria, in the city of Zaria in Kaduna State, to supply electric meters and circuit breakers for the expanding electrification programme of NEPA, the Nigerian Electric Power Authority. In 1976, a contract was signed between the Federal Government and the Swiss-based technical partners, Landis and Gyr, for the creation of EMCON, to be owned primarily by the Federal Government (60%), and NEPA (20%). In line with the increased manufacturing capability desired by the Federal government, EMCON was intended to produce as well as assemble the electric meters and circuit breakers required.

Full production was begun only in 1982, at a time when the growing economic crisis in Nigeria was severely affecting most industrial production. By the end of 1983, many Nigerian companies had closed, or retrenched most of their workers. EMCON remained open, though few assembly-line workers were permitted to work throughout the year, or received their full wages. Periods of compulsory leave followed, and it is an indication of the parlous state of the Nigerian economy that few EMCON employees found work elsewhere. The company returned to full staffing at the end of 1984. This was maintained through mid-1985, the final date of the present study.<sup>12</sup>

Differing expectations and effects of capital and the state in Nigeria are reflected in the EMCON situation in terms of hiring practices and changing perceptions in relation to gender. EMCON began operations at a time when other Nigerian companies were systematically

reducing their numbers of permanent women staff, replacing them with men. In Nigeria, few categories of work are seen as only "women's work", and occupations previously available to women, such as secretarial work or nursing, become increasingly masculinised. The reduction of women's formal waged labour in Nigeria included considerations such as the constraints of protective legislation, the costs to capital of maternity and child-care benefits, and management perceptions of conflicts between domestic labour and waged labour responsibilities. EMCON, however, hired against this tide, employing so many women – more than a third of the 300-strong EMCON labour force – that it became the largest employer of women in Zaria; most of the women employed at EMCON came to Zaria from elsewhere in Kaduna State and Nigeria specifically for this work.

In India the electronics industry has been state supported with the government involved directly as a manufacturer, especially of high investment electronic items, and indirectly through support policies for private sector production. Since the 1970s the electronics industry in India has gone in for subcontracting to small scale industry, particularly in the area of consumer electronics. Domestic subcontracting in the industry by large firms extends even to final assembly operations, with the company concentrating only on quality control, testing and marketing (Annavajhula, 1988). Corporate decisions favouring subcontracting have been based on the overinvestment and underutilisation of earlier in-house capabilities which were highlighted in the slump in the mid-70s, and to avoid worker militancy. For example, Philips, a multiplant multinational, has stepped up subcontracting along with modernisation and automation programmes due to workers organising against productivity loads. Even a public sector unit like Keltron has subcontracted production to women's cooperatives and welfare societies.<sup>13</sup> In 1982, colour transmission was introduced and an industrial and licensing policy for indigenous production of colour TV sets was formulated. Along with indigenous production of colour TV, however, international subcontracting was also allowed to a certain extent. This took two forms – the provision of free trade zone facilities to local firms undertaking subcontracting on behalf of foreign firms for re-export after processing, as well as subcontracting by local firms, from Japanese companies in particular, for the domestic market.

Monica Electronics started the production of colour television sets in 1984 in collaboration with the Japanese company JVC. Initially the company imported kits and carried out screwdriver assembly but now was using some indigenous components which were manufactured in other units. The company has had a phenomenal growth in sales turnover moving from \$ 0.69 million in 1982-83 to \$34.0 million in 1986-87. At an all India level, 'Onida' (brand name) colour TVs ranked highest in sales and in ratings of reliability. The most important factor pointed out by management were the strong Quality Control Systems and regular training of technical personnel by the Japanese in the latest production techniques. Regular visits were also made by the Japanese and training workshops conducted by them on labour management relations.

Management strategies were akin to the post-fordist shift to flexibility. Initially, the workforce was 80% men, but by 1987, 70% of the workforce were women. Confirming the general trend in Indian industry of a preference for male labour on the part of employers, the company first hired men (N. Banerjee, 1991:310). Due to 'union trouble', they soon shifted to young unmarried women. However, when many got married and left at almost the same time, the company recruited married women. The personnel manager said that they found that a balance of married and unmarried women works out better. The advantages of a mixed workforce were also extended to recruitment of workers from Delhi and migrants from the southern state of Kerala. Out of a total workforce of 250 production workers, 179 were women, of whom 100 were from Allepy district in Kerala. Most of the women and men were between the ages of 20-29 and had finished secondary school. In the sample there were some women who were graduates, or were studying for their first degree through correspondence, while two men had done a short industrial technical course.

Shifting and Contradictory Discourses: The construction of masculinity and femininity in the workplace

The production process at Monica Electronics was divided into eight sections: Insertion, Auto-soldering, Touch-up, EHT fixing, Sub-assembly wire cutting, Pre-testing, Final testing, Servicing. In the insertion section only women worked and in the servicing section only men worked. Apart from the Auto-soldering section where again men did the soldering and women carried out visual checks, in the other sections both men and women worked on the same process. Management, women workers and men workers deployed contradictory and different discourses in relation to the sexual division of labour.

Women workers saw themselves as capable of doing any job on the production line, based also on the fact that they often substituted for men in situations of male absenteeism, during peak production periods, or for rush orders.

There is no difference between boys' and girls' work... although it is true that girls are more soft hearted (weak) however it is not true that girls work less. All are equal. How can there be a difference when we know that we can stand in for them? We can do their work equally well.

(Geeta, female)

Differences in individual capacity were stressed far more than gender differences in relation to the kind of work. However, differences in methods and attitudes towards work were seen as due to gender.

Girls work better. They work consistently for one to one-and-a-half hours without moving on one job. Boys also work hard but they keep getting up, going for a cigarette... what can I say. That is why there are fewer boys now.

(Sarla, female)

Male discourses on work also acknowledged the similarity of tasks and, given the shared experience of working on the same jobs, there was acknowledgement that if women were trained they could handle most machines. However, a link was constantly reestablished between heavy machines and masculine physical strength. Qualities of 'speed, dexterity and lightness', the hallmark of managerial constructions of essentially female qualities were projected as essentially **masculine** attributes. **Feminine** qualities were located in fear, delicacy, and sensitivity, which impinged negatively on their capacity to work. Recognition of women workers' skill and competence at work was combined with a mixture of derogatory and paternalistic judgements on their naivety and vulnerability as women.

Both girls and boys do the same work. Girls also do heavy work but there are differences. Men work on other machines – girls cannot work on them because it is too difficult. Girls would need to have speed, lightness, dexterity to do that. If girls are trained perhaps they could also work. They do work on similar machines but those are the Japanese type.

(Akhram, male)

Girls get scared, they don't say anything. They are hardworking but so are men who have responsibilities. Those who do not have responsibilities tend to play the fool. Girls cannot do soldering because one needs to be quick with the machines and they can't bear the heat.

(Ram Naresh, male)

Managerial discourses, however, emphasized that these very same 'feminine qualities' i.e.

dexterity, delicacy, 'the training by parents which made girls more responsible and diligent in their work', sincerity, and docility, made women better workers than men. Women workers were seen as able to do the same jobs as men, and in fact better than men. Managerial ideals of a women-only workforce however had to be jettisoned due to the restrictions of protective legislation (ban on night work for women), given the frequency of overtime and rush production schedules.

The fact that we have only girls as relief workers shows that the work in all sections can be done by anyone.

We have learnt through past experience that girls are more sincere. They are easy to convince. They devote themselves to the work, since they are taught traditionally by parents to be more responsible – such training is useful for this kind of work.

(Sushil Kumar, male, Personnel Manager)

The conflicting constructions of masculinity and femininity in these discourses have to be seen in the context of a three-way power struggle as management substituted women in place of men, and used this as a threat to discipline the men who were still employed. Tension between women and men workers was expressed in the shifting meanings of masculinity and femininity, where men tried to carve out and preserve an 'essentially' masculine 'heavy machine' area of work, while at the same time appropriating women's qualities for themselves.

Conflict between supervisors and production-line workers became simultaneously a gender struggle, since most of the supervisors (called group leaders) were women. Men found it difficult to accept women in supervisory positions.

I want to leave this company because they do not give work according to capacity. I was shifted because I told the group leader I would slap her. I didn't abuse her or anything. She was hassling me about the target and I told her what's your problem – I'll do it in my own time. She started screaming at me so I told her I'll slap her – then they shifted me from that section.

(Ram Naresh, male)

Managerial deployment of a discourse on the more productive capacities of women workers created a constant feeling among men that they could lose their jobs – one signifier of their masculinity. They identified negative feminine attributes in women workers which were presented as reasons for the incapacity of women to do certain jobs. In addition, men workers emphasised that the same feminine qualities were reasons for the lack of a joint alliance as workers against the management. Women workers were thereby represented by men as doubly incompetent – at their work as well as in unionisation and organising against management. In response to company policy and men workers' resentment, women began to flaunt their qualities of patience and diligence at work, reconstructing broader social models of femininity in the workplace.

In spite of the 'pro-women' slant in managerial discourses, skill distinctions and payment of bonuses created a hierarchy whereby men workers got a higher consolidated wage.<sup>14</sup> Although women did exactly the same kind of work as men, women were called production assistants, while men were called production technicians.<sup>15</sup> There was also a difference in the payment of bonus, with men getting 40% and women getting 20% of the turnover. No one – management, women or men workers – would give a reason for these differences. The arbitrariness of the gendered definition of the division of labour and differential remuneration reflected the continuing three-pronged power struggle between management, women and men workers.

The shifts in managerial discourses, in a context where an opposite process occurred i.e. women were substituted by men, and the changing discourses of women workers are evident in EMCON as well. In its hiring, EMCON acted on the basis of its world-wide production network and methods, seeking an amenable, inexpensive and replaceable labour force. Particular assembly-line tasks – the assembly of meters and circuit breakers, meter check and calibration – were to be primarily the work of dexterous women, with the well-known stereotypes indicated even in a local press release:

...the calibrating is being done by female employees. The meter demands the care of the feminine touch due to its sensitivity to accuracy and women are known for carefulness, the world over.

(R. Anyamikegh, New Nigerian, Sept. 1, 1982)

The labour force was not, however, either inexpensive or replaceable. Women workers were not cheaper than male workers, where both were carrying out the same tasks, and had the same job description.<sup>16</sup> Neither women nor men were easily fired. Labour legislation provides a number of safeguards for workers, and the one area in which the (correctly) much maligned union did take some responsibility was in relation to the threat of unfair dismissal.

Over the course of the first few months, management found that the women workers were not the docile group they had expected, and that relations between intermediate staff and assembly-line workers were fraught. A number of the women workers felt that they were being discriminated against by their superiors, and treated with discourtesy. They continued their work, but without enthusiasm or interest. At this point, management shifted discourses, abandoning their traditional stereotypes, which favoured the recruitment of women. Now men were 'more obedient than women'; 'women workers in calibration were no more effective than men'; 'men weren't "proud" like women'; 'women weren't responsive to the problems of the company'(!). The company embarked upon a policy of hiring men rather than women: for some months, an unofficial ban was placed on the employment of additional women.

Women workers, however, continued to maintain the importance of women's special qualities – 'patience and carefulness' as essential and irreplaceable by men in the production process:

It is only women that can do calibrating. The company knows the work of the women, and they won't employ men.

Men are not patient enough to do calibration; they would overadjust the machines. This work must remain for women, who are more careful.

But section by section, men workers were brought into the formerly predominantly women-staffed sections.

Management discourses and strategies at both EMCON and Monica Electronics point to the arbitrary nature of the gender-linked stereotypes, and the ease with which employers shift emphasis on gendered requirements to maintain flexibility of hiring, as interests and production priorities, and labour relations change. Both women and men workers were also involved in changing and arbitrary definition of women's work and men's work.

Both case studies show that there is no unilinear trend towards masculinisation or feminisation of the workforce in these companies, and that shifts in discourses and recruitment practises are due more to labour control and disciplining the workforce rather than simply as a result of technological changes. Whether the direction was towards substituting women for men or vice versa, managerial, women's and men's discourses constructed masculinity and femininity at the workplace as essentially different, though the content of these gender categories was fluid and

shifting.

### Agency and Illusion: Contradictory Consciousness

The treatment of factory work as temporary for women workers has been a feature in many studies of women workers in very different cultural settings. A. Pollert sees the temporary nature of factory work for women as reflecting "shared female identity along a continuum of different stages in a woman's life cycle" (1981, p. 106). The socialization of women into seeing marriage as their main aim in life is given as one of, when not the main reason, that women lack a commitment to work, and therefore do not get involved with workplace organising. However, if we examine further the assumption of women's factory work as a temporary phenomenon, a number of questions arise, which must be addressed. For example:

1. Does the reality fit the assumption: Do women work only temporarily?
2. If #1 is true, do women leave work for marriage?
3. Is the notion of expecting to work temporarily specific to women workers?

In the Indian case study, almost every unmarried woman worker saw her job as temporary, as a means of 'passing time' until she married. In discussion with women garment workers in 1982, women focused on marriage as an exit from factory work, even though many of these workers had been working for over six years. Many of these women were earning money for their dowries, seeing a good dowry as a passport to marriage in a higher economic group. Coming from sections of a disintegrating middle class, they maintained the illusion of escape even though they knew that the rising cost of living meant that it was necessary to have two earners at least, even to maintain middle-class status. The story of Shanti brings out the operation of this illusion:

Shanti had been working in WINGS, a garment company which dismissed women when they married. She had been working for over seven years, 'passing time and earning for her dowry'. Her earnings, however, were being used not for dowry but rather for supporting the whole family, and she spoke with pride about the way in which she had paid for her brother's education and got her younger sister married. There was no way she could leave her job with so many family members dependent on her. Entering her thirties, Shanti had little chance of getting married, and even less chance of moving up the economic ladder to become a dependent housewife, for her 'dowry collection' had in fact disappeared in supporting her family. Yet she believed that the work she was doing was temporary.

In many cases this cycle has resulted in the emergence of the permanent single women worker. In 1987, the women in the electronic factory also shared the same illusion, but there was a different attitude. They were also passing time, but were more conscious of reducing the burden at home and being 'useful'. But even older married women workers saw their work as temporary. They too dreamt of a time when it would not be economically necessary for them to work outside.

Women should not have to work after marriage. There is so much work anyway and we can barely handle that. Cannot add more work. However if the economic situation is bad then of course women have to do it.

(Geeta, female)

Women work outside because they have to. If there was comfort at home then of course it is O.K. for women to go out and work. Men should also help -

after all when both husband and wife are working outside, men should also help at home. That way housework would finish faster and that would benefit both.

(Ramani, female)

In reality, factory work was not a temporary phase; marriage was not an inevitable part of a woman's life cycle; and even when marriage took place, it did not preclude the continuation of factory work. In computer terms, marriage and associated domesticity are "the default setting", the norm, the ever-present point at which one arrives, or to which one returns, although other possibilities may (temporarily) intervene.

Monica Electronics women workers display contradictory consciousness, reflecting multiple identities, and multiple scenarios both actual and desired. Their own words reflect both acceptance of economic and social realities, the wish that that reality were different; and preferred alternatives. (In this context, one must note also, in the example of Ramani above, yet another permutation: that married women may want to work, even if they need not; and that, in that best of all possible worlds, the sexual division of labour should be more equitable.)

The women work, and continue to work. They are agents, making choices which are in part compelled, supporting themselves and their kin (and taking pride in that support), yet keeping alive alternative not-yet-and-perhaps-never-to-be-realised realities. This may be seen as agency: taking on, though not fully accepting, the non-preferred alternative, the remaining, the only "choice", taken from the stock of one available.

However, the Monica Electronics example, and the perception of women's factory work as temporary and ended with marriage, cannot be generalised for Indian women, much less more broadly. In India amongst traditional working class communities such as the Ahmedabad textile workers, who were also dalits, no workers said they were 'passing time'. Indeed, older women textile workers were only concerned that when they left work, their daughters should get jobs in the mills, since the mill management had stopped hiring women for factory work (Chhachhi, 1983).

EMCON women were very young when hired, most being recent secondary school graduates. In a 1982-83 survey of 95 EMCON women workers (more than 80% of the female staff at that time), 57 women, three-fifths of the women surveyed, were 20 years of age or younger. More than four-fifths (76 women) were no more than 22 years old; the youngest were seventeen. Eighty of the women surveyed at that time were unmarried.

Most of the EMCON women had sought factory work en route to their next goal. But that goal is not marriage, but rather higher education. For some of the women, the reaching of that goal might be years away, if attainable at all. But women assembly-line workers saw themselves, ideally, as educated women with additional academic or vocational training in their future, and an excellent job as the endpoint. And indeed, EMCON assembly-line women are well-educated by Nigerian standards.<sup>17</sup>

Women worked to further their education, insofar as they could. Poor results could be overcome through application and good networking, and a prime reason for single women to take time off was for interviews, admissions tests, and repeat school certificate examinations. During the 1982-83 period, twenty EMCON women workers resigned; thirteen of these women had gained admission for further education, and, hopefully, ultimately a better occupation. Other women continue to apply for interviews, for tests, and for work outside the assembly-line. However, in present Nigerian economic realities, the latter is difficult to find, nor are school places easily available. Alternatively, some women worked towards opening a shop, or saving enough money to begin another venture.

For Nigerian women, marriage is not an alternative to earning an income.<sup>18</sup> Marriage does not end women's waged labour, and indeed, marriage and child-bearing virtually require a women's earnings. Assisting kin, particularly junior siblings before marriage, Nigerian women partially or fully support their children, themselves and their kin, as possible, with marriage. Waged labour and domestic labour are not an either/or proposition, but rather are equally women's responsibilities. The colonial and neo-colonial ideology of housewifisation and domesticity has had relatively little purchase, fitting neither traditional or contemporary marital and kin expectations and obligations, and manifestly impossible in the present period of economic crisis.

In Nigeria, where the optimum number of children favoured by women and men ranges between six and eight, additional economic support is not a luxury, but a necessity. By the middle of 1983, thirteen of the eighty single women had married; nine were pregnant or had already delivered. Only one woman (who married the EMCON accountant) resigned her post on marriage. Marriage not only would not distract Nigerian women from waged labour; it could well concentrate their interests and organising efforts, if this would assist them in gaining additional economic benefit.

The idea of work as temporary varies along sections of the working class itself, as has been well demonstrated also in advanced capitalist countries, where many women cannot afford not to work. Women do continue to work, and we find further that the proposition that a woman's identity, given its social construction, necessarily orients her towards a narrow familial orientation, and away from workplace organising, cannot be sustained as a general theoretical argument. We take up this issue further below.

With regard to our third question, whether the expectation of temporary work is specific to women, we find that this is not the case. Men may also see their work in the factory as temporary, a means to another end.

In the interviews with male workers in Monica Electronics, one of them used the same term of 'passing time'; others hoped to earn enough money to return to Kerala either to own and ply an auto-rickshaw or set up an independent business, while others hoped to get further technical training and set up their own unit, manufacturing components or undertaking assembly work. At EMCON in Nigeria, men had more opportunities for advancement than women, and some men intended to stay with the company, working their way up the seniority ladder. But a number of men sought to improve their education, and left EMCON when they gained admission for further studies, or planned to leave if they gained admission. Thus, some men too saw their work in the factory as temporary, a (paid) step in time, as they sought to make for themselves a better future.

### Multiple Identities: Differences and Alliances

We have noted that identities are selectively mobilised, with different emphases and foci in different contexts. In this section, we address issues of identity important nationally in Nigeria and India; and consider whether these or other distinctions are relevant or forefronted in the industrial context. We examine those identities which are actively brought into play in the factory, how this activation of particular identities may facilitate the creation of alliances, result in the dissolution of prior solidarity, or render such solidarity unlikely or impossible. In this context, gender is taken as one marker of identity (among others), selectively prioritised.

Women and men at EMCON act, are perceived, and see themselves on a variety of bases. Among the significant features which identify men and women in Nigeria are religion, ethnicity, gender, place of origin, education, marital status, and of course positioning in the



labour process, the final three being particularly important in relation to women at EMCON.

Religion is a profoundly important issue in Nigeria today, with the division between Christians and Muslims having become a focus of riots, pogroms, and forms and sites of control over women not hitherto seen. On the other hand, it is less directly relevant at EMCON; almost none of the women, and few of the men, are Muslim. Christianity plays an important part in EMCON women workers' lives: bible classes, fellowship meetings, church organising and of course Sunday services are foci of women's non-working hours. None of these activities are carried out in the company, nor do the workers belong to the same sects.

The fact that the vast majority of the workers are Christian points up another feature of the EMCON community, noted above: most of the workers are labour migrants, representing several major areas of Nigeria. Among the women surveyed, more than a third were from the southern part of Kaduna State. Almost a quarter of the women were Igbo, from the eastern part of Nigeria, while the third largest grouping were the Yoruba women from western Nigeria: few EMCON employees are indigenes of Zaria, or of the Muslim Hausa community which forms the vast majority of the local population. The widely diverging origin of EMCON women is mirrored in local residence: the workers are scattered through the city. Friendships, shared activities and alliances, certainly among women, tend to be contracted outside the company, rather than within it. Ethnicity and region did not form focal points for organising in the factory: the very multiplicity of areas and ethnic groups represented, and the split of workers into different parts of the production process, were not conducive to division, or organisation, along these lines.<sup>19</sup>

Marriage is a major dividing and uniting factor among EMCON women. Unmarried women are treated as girls, inexperienced and immature. Discussion of possible women's organisations often brought up the issue of the differences between married and single women. This was raised also in operationalised organising strategies: the union was ineffective in pursuing "women's interests", but the issues involved – breast-feeding, maternity benefits, shiftwork<sup>20</sup> – affect directly married rather than single women. Gender did not create automatic affinity or shared action on these issues among women. Some married women saw the issues as "personal"; other felt that married women must organise to fight for their rights. On the other hand, as women remained with the company, and the numbers of married women increased, this group would become larger and stronger, and could organise more effectively, possibly carrying the single women, who look to the married women as their seniors, with them.

We have noted that identities are available subject positions, selectively activated and mobilised. Yet that activation can be external also, as workers are forced into categorisations and identities which they reject. Thus, for example, images and stereotypes of the assembly-line worker ("rough", "uncouth") were called up by women administrative staff (clerks, secretaries, etc.) to distinguish and distance themselves from assembly-line workers. The distinction reflected hierarchy and privilege, objectively demonstrated in labour practice: different working hours and relations to management; more flexibility for administrative staff; different workplace dress. Assembly-line workers were even refused admittance to the administrative toilet facilities.

In the industrial setting, divisions were created which had hitherto not been experienced by the assembly-line women, in terms of inferior positioning reinforced by associated action. This was an issue which produced anger and bitterness among the assembly-line women. The EMCON assembly-line women workers were incensed at these derogatory images, particularly given their good education, generally better than that of the white-collar women who looked down on them. The distinction was particularly galling to the assembly-line women, for they aspired to become white-collar workers, yet knew both that EMCON labour policy precluded the move from assembly-line to administration, but that, nevertheless, their qualifications were

as good as those of the administration workers. The two groups projected **the same identity**, that of the educated and socially adept woman, in a bid to improve (or maintain) their situation and conditions. The assembly-line women and administrative staff did make periodic attempts to move beyond the unwelcome images and actions, generally through the mobilising of personal ties reflecting other identities (regional links, school networking, ethnicity, etc.), extended to the broader group of workers.

The main division between the women at Monica Electronics was between the rural migrants from Kerala, and women from Delhi and other parts of North India. Keralite women complained that they were called 'madrasis' – a term used by many North Indians for anyone from Southern India which has a derogatory connotation. They found the North-Indian, and particularly Punjabi women, racist in their attitudes. They did not make friends with them, or meet them outside the factory.

However, there were close ties between the Keralite women themselves, since many of them were related or close friends and neighbours before they came to Delhi. The other women workers did not meet each other outside, living in scattered parts of the city. Some of the women came from relatively better off middle-class families (their fathers were middle-level civil servants) and were ashamed of working on the production line. Having a job at an Onida factory sounded glamorous, and that was all they said about their work to relatives and friends at home.

Regional and class differences came out more sharply in the discussions than differences based on religion or caste. Though there were a number of Christians and a few Muslims in the total workforce, the majority were Hindu.

In both studies, association created in the workplace was not carried outside, nor were other organisations or networks formed outside the workplace; support groups were not shared, and even issues such as maternity benefits were differently perceived and responded to. Vertical company lines of communication, sectional rivalries and gender conflicts exacerbated differences in the company context, and rendered horizontal linkages more difficult, although not impossible. Gender did not create an automatic basis for affinity, although such affinity could be built up over time.

#### Women's Interests/Men's Interests: Different Demands

Women workers at Monica Electronics had not organised actively around the issue of wages, although they had supported the initiative by men workers to demand a higher bonus. However, they had initiated and organised to demand transport and uniforms which had been granted by management. Both these demands related to specific problems they had experienced as women. Transport was essential to avoid the sexual harassment women faced in public transport buses, particularly late evenings when they worked overtime. A company bus which picked and dropped the women also allayed the fears of parents, particularly of unmarried women. Since overtime meant double pay, the demand also related to wages and wage differentials in an indirect way.

The demand for uniforms was explained by Sarla:

Due to the fact that women in the factory come from different economic backgrounds and many cannot afford to wear a different dress during the week, we thought it would be nice to solve the hassle of what to wear everyday if we had uniforms. This also meant that now girls do not envy each other or pass nasty remarks and compare clothes.

Male workers interpreted these demands in a very different way:

Girls do not know how to raise demands. They fall into the trap laid by management. They ask for general facilities while the real issue is wages.  
(Madhusudan M.R.)

This company tends to favour the women. Why? Because they keep quiet and accept everything. Onida has a big name, now the girls have a bus, uniforms so they are just happy with that. They don't ask for wages.  
(Ram Naresh)

They had been indifferent to the women's initiative, though some had supported them half heartedly. Men wanted to form a militant union which would take up the issue of wages. They had raised the demand for bonus, which after a long period of negotiation, management granted, with a different rate for men and women – 20% for women and 40% for men.

EMCON women raised specific demands, although some of those demands (breast-feeding, maternity leave, etc.) were not necessarily seen by the women themselves as relevant to all of them, or as demands to be taken up by all of them, given the distinction made by the women themselves between the married and unmarried women workers. Thus, these demands were not equally strongly pursued by women, and were certainly not followed through by the union.

Another demand made by the women reflected the strongly gender-linked differential treatment in the factory, and was relevant to many of the female production-line staff. These demands centred around issues of dignity, respect, and shared humanity.<sup>21</sup> The women reported that men (some of the foremen, and others in authority) would shout at the women workers. They would clock women's toilet breaks, but not those of men, and in general they did not accord to women the same respect they gave to men. Women raised these issues with the union representatives. So strongly did the women feel these insults, and so strongly did they express them, that the former union president had been told, among other things, that the women "felt they were being treated like animals". These issues, however, were not taken up by the union.

Some issues affected, and were relevant and of value to all workers. Thus, for example, union support and attention to issues of unfair dismissal benefitted men and women, and were recognised as useful by all.

Other demands have been of interest only to men workers but these demands have also been put forward as general demands. And where the EMCON men were particularly keen on a particular benefit, they applied themselves wholeheartedly. Thus, the union managed to obtain motorcycle loans, which they treated as a benefit available to all EMCON staff. However, given that Nigerian women do not generally drive motorcycles, this particular "unisex" benefit was not relevant to them. The motorcycle loan was taken up by one hundred men – and two women.

Women's demands were different from men's demands in both case studies, reflected in the different forms and content of demands. Women's demands for improvement in general facilities linked together their identities as women and workers, in addition to being a disguised/indirect demand for an improvement of wages and working conditions. The derogation of women workers as women reinforced simultaneously the dominance of capital and patriarchy within the workplace.<sup>22</sup> Issues treated as general workers' interests tended to benefit men primarily (bonus and motorcycle loans). Women's interests were expressed in initiatives by women to raise specific demands and act together, though demands which were specific to a category of women (maternity benefit and breast feeding) were not followed

through. Monica Electronic women workers had gained tremendous self confidence in relation to management and men workers, through the process of independent mobilisation and action in pursuit of their interests.

#### Apathy, Indifference, Irrelevance or Covert Critique? Unions and other Organising Strategies

Monica Electronics has an organisation called the sansad, which handles grievances, and management called this a union. Members are partly appointed and partly elected. There was an attempt to form a union from outside, but this was scuttled by the management. The personnel manager, after giving a variety of inconsistent and contradictory reasons why women were being hired in preference to men, finally let on that the substitution of men workers by women two years earlier was due to the attempt to unionise.

The majority of women were against the formation of a union.

If a union comes there will be fights, strikes, lock outs – too many problems.  
If a union is inside then it is O.K. and can help us but an outside union will  
lead to too many fights.

(Ramani, female)

The sansad had responded to their demands for transport and uniforms. A creche was not an issue because the married women had grown-up children, and there wasn't a wage differential in basic pay between men and women within each section.

The rejection of unions was not in itself a rejection of a worker's organisation. The distinction many women made between an inside union and an outside union was a reference to the fact that outside unions were affiliated to political parties, and interunion rivalry had led to violence in many industrial sectors. A desire for an independent organisation which truly represented their interests was the underlying theme in discussions around unions.

Women also belonged to other organisations which expressed their regional/ethnic or religious identities. These organisations, like the Malayalee Association to which all the women from Kerala belonged, also functioned as support networks finding jobs, arranging housing etc. There was an enthusiastic response from all the women when a woman's organisation was mentioned, and a number of them took the address of a local women's resource centre. Rather than apathy or indifference, women workers were not reluctant or hostile to the idea of organising. Their reactions to unions were far more a covert critique of unions as they were presently structured. Alternative organisations which reflected other identities were seen in a positive light.

Organising around women's issues was problematic at EMCON. Women did not necessarily ally with each other, given the different identities and interests evoked. The union was weak, suspect in relation to the administration, relatively unconcerned with women's issues, and active only in support of demands which were of interest to the male membership, which then might (e.g. dismissal, wages) or might not (e.g., motorcycle loans) be relevant to women workers.

Lack of promotion of women in some sectors was accompanied by (limited) promotions in others, and the waging of internecine battles (see Pittin, 1984), although it was the case that women generally were demonstrably being passed over for promotion and training. In this case (but not in others), the union insisted that "promotion and training are not the union's business". But union weakness meant that many issues, not only women's issues, were untouched. Women's dissatisfaction, associated with frustrated career opportunities and differential treatment, became more evident in individual reaction than in organised response, although

there had been attempts to involve the union. Complaints had been brought to the union, but the union did not take up these complaints.

However, asked whether there were any kinds of organisations for women which they would like to see at EMCON, the women responded with a variety of suggestions, from what was virtually a women's caucus: 'We should talk about how the company is cheating us: we don't get enough time for maternity leave; we don't get our end-of-year bonus; and there are a lot of other things wrong too' to sports groups (a very popular idea), to groups which include married and single women, with the married women acting as advisors and mentors to the single women "so that we can learn how to behave, and how to look after children". The sting in the tail of this particular suggestion, echoed by others, is that complaints could also be aired in this group, which could then act on them. Thus, the group would take on for women, among other responsibilities, the undone work of the ineffective union executive. The need to organise was reflected in women's expressed interests within the workplace, and demonstrated in their activities within the community.

On the basis of the studies in Nigeria and India, we discuss below the issues which arise in relation to our propositions.

#### MULTIPLE IDENTITIES, MULTIPLE SITES OF STRUGGLE

Women, with their multiple positionings in the family, the home, the workplace and the community, respond to the sometimes reinforcing, sometimes contradictory pressures arising from these contexts. These disparate positions are reflected in the nature, forms and categories of organising and struggle in which they engage, in the extensiveness and necessarily comprehensive nature of the terrain which they contest, and in the alliances which they create. The wide-ranging issues, foci, and organisations associated with the women's movement, for example, give a very partial picture of women's mobilizing and organising, or of the extent of women's struggles, or of the breadth of the areas in which women act. Many of the struggles are carried out in the context of, or in alliance with, other groups with related interests and demands.

The very process of conscientising, mobilizing, and organising inherent in struggle undermines the power and intended certainties of dominant discourse, and, as significantly, creates new perspectives for those engaged in confrontation. Thus, the mobilisation itself and the creation of coalitions, and the character of the organisations or categories involved, may act to modify or to transform the very sites, forms and direction of struggle, with structural, organisational, and individual effects.

While much organising is carried out independent of the state, the mobilising, organising and positioning undertaken is eminently "political", in terms of the political dimension being represented in all social practice (Laclau, 1985, p. 29); and in terms of the agendas and priorities regarding recognised and contested relations of power symbolised and/or privately discussed in homes and in gatherings among disaffected others,<sup>23</sup> now gaining voice and impetus in fora of action and/or confrontation. Equally, it is political in terms of feminist theory linked to strategy, which recognises and forefronts the pervasiveness of hegemonic patriarchal ideology and practice, historically and specifically constructed. Within this ideology and practice, unequal gender-based power relations are the norm. Action which addresses these and associated structures and relations of inequality, and differential access to resources, reflects, where it does not directly confront, the structure and fabric of relations of power in society.

The varied nature of political cultures and processes, the development of a culture of civil

society, and the nature of the relation between the state and civil society, necessarily affect the possibilities and forms of response to specific issues (K. Young, 1988). The contexts in which categories of women act, the bases on which they act, the issues which they address, the alliances and linkages which they create, and the contradictions and conflicts which arise, cannot be generalised. Differences among women may militate against, but do not preclude, general unity.<sup>24</sup> Alliances may be created on the basis of affinity (Haraway, 1991; Young, 1988). Affinity provides the scope for multiple and temporary alliances,<sup>25</sup> and for organising on numerous fronts.<sup>26</sup>

The possibilities of women organising are predicated on the availability and interaction of time, space and place. Time signifies not only time available to meet and organise, but also time lacking, the constraints of time, due to multiple obligations, which may prevent women from even beginning to organise or participate in struggle, or which may galvanise women into necessarily actively engaging in struggle, in a bid to reduce the pressures of those conflicting obligations. Place is intended here as primarily locational (the site of work, and/or struggle), while space has a broader meaning, indicating the psychological and strategic creation of, or perceived need for, room to manoeuvre, to negotiate, and to challenge existing structures and controls.

### Confronting Capital and the State

The constraints imposed by the double burden of domestic labour and waged labour – or, in some countries, the "triple shift" of domestic labour, waged labour, and party political activity – have had a profound impact on women organising. But with regard to this double burden, triple shift, and multiple obligations of women, we have demonstrated above, and we would posit that **the very multiplicity of roles and plethora of pressures may provide both the impetus and the necessary networking and organisational structures or base for women to organise.**

The pressures of multiple forms of work may reinforce each other, with the contradictory nature of these obligations ultimately precipitating action and strengthening women's demands at the various work sites (Coulson, Magas and Wainwright, 1982; Hunt, 1980). Conversely, workplace organising, in terms of process (conscientisation, negotiation, incorporation in struggle, re-examination and revision of demands, etc.) and outcome, can lead to re-evaluation of other areas of labour and unequal power relations such as the home, and to unequivocal demands for change.<sup>27</sup>

The importance of the concatenation of women's multiple identities in women organising, in organising women, and in creating coalitions with other workers, and other categories of persons through alliances of affinity, has been demonstrated in numerous contexts. In South Africa, organising has been successfully carried out in relation to domestic service, the waged occupation most recalcitrant to the improvement of labour conditions. Here, through the growth and strength of community organisations, access to and support from the union organising body, sections of the women's movement, and the shared commitment and involvement of a large grouping of women united also by race and class, action was undertaken to organise and recognise the body of domestic workers.<sup>28</sup>

Conflicting demands upon women, and the ideology buttressing the sexual division of labour, have provided the basis for women's seeming incorporation in the reserve army of labour, moving in and out of waged employment as state and capital, working at times in conjunction, and at times in contradiction to each other, have decreed. However, this movement has been contested and resisted, with historical studies demonstrating that women's waged labour did change in form and locus, but that women retained, wherever possible, their stake and involvement in, and earnings from, waged labour. Thus, for example, Rosie the Riveter may

have been forced out of heavy industry, but she moved into the office, the shop, the cafe.<sup>29</sup>

The very structures and institutions which define the public/private ideology, which has served to define and constrain women,<sup>30</sup> are changing, and being changed by women's actions. We have seen how women in developing countries have responded to pressures created by changed economic conditions, and have initiated or joined in actions at various levels to support themselves and their kin, with family and neighbourhood ties and relationships necessarily being modified in the process. Such changes may take very different forms depending on production relations, nature of the state, etc. It has been suggested that US women are becoming less "domestic" beings: fewer women remain in conjugal families, or marry at all; neighbourhoods are dispersed; and more women are engaged in waged labour (Kessler-Harris and Sacks, 1987). "Family" concerns are then necessarily extended to a wider framework. Alice Kessler-Harris and Karen Sacks note:

As women come to perceive "family" issues as social and public ones, they move beyond the community to the national arena. ... with a corresponding shift in locus from community struggle to workplace and state-centered arenas.

(1987, p. 81)

One sees a significant move to other levels and areas of struggle, and from the privatised and localised arenas of the community and home, thus also providing the context within which to broaden the struggle, and the issues, as more persons are directly affected.<sup>31</sup>

Analysts differ with regard to the effects of state intervention in domestic matters. Jónasdóttir (1988) suggests that in states with strong welfare provisions, changing state policy and increasing intervention in domestic matters increase public consciousness concerning the possibility of transformation of oppressive living conditions and domestic relations. In this case, she finds that it is the state-led revision which precipitates action among women to make further gains. Others find that that very intervention provokes confrontation with the state, as public/private boundaries shift. From dependence on individual men, women seemed to have shifted towards dependence on the state. Given the cut-backs and dismantling of the welfare state today, women are being forced to confront the state and engage in party political actions. With the present massive changes in state ideology and practice, and the move to free market economies in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, women organise on new bases as they find long-held and assumed rights affecting their bodies, their work, and all aspects of their lives, swept away in waves of religious, ethnic, nationalist, and capitalist fervour.

Women have allied to question assumptions arising from the relations between waged and domestic labour, and from the assumptions underlying marital and domestic ideology, in order to assert alternative positions in relation to the community and the state. For example, in a South Korean case (Suh Myung Sun, 1985), issues regarding labour legislation, domestic ideology, valuation of domestic labour, economic provisions for married women, and the rights of the individual were raised and queried in the context of an injury compensation case, fought to the highest level through the support of a coalition of women's organisations. Perhaps the most striking example of women's querying of and resistance to a hierarchical and oppressive sexual division of labour was the national action taken in Iceland, with the Women's Strike of October 24, 1975 (James, 1985; Hardadottir, 1985).

The building of alliances in relation to women's mobilising around issues of labour is and has been of the utmost importance, although this is an area where the establishment of allies has long been problematic. Historically, there have often been uneasy, when not openly conflictual, relations between women and men within the formal labour force, and the history of first world trade unionism has not often exemplified worker solidarity in relation to gender. Coalitions

which have been created have sometimes worked around formal union structures, rather than through them, and certainly even at present, women workers may find more immediate (and useful) support through women's organisations, the church, ethnic groups, civil rights groups, etc., than through the labour structures, although this reflects also present limitations set on union powers, as in free trade zones.

Women sometimes tend to straddle opposing camps in labour relations, and indeed the growth of women workers' organisations, in-house unions as a preferred organising strategy, and "active non-participation" in unions reflects these considerations. However, the creation of coalitions is an important and effective strategy for women workers; and of course certain benefits extend throughout the coalition. These may not relate directly to the workers or to the labour process, but rather to the changed consciousness brought from the shared perspectives of the coalition, and the effects of struggle.

### Coalescing Strategies

The actions elaborated above have led women workers into direct confrontation with capital, patriarchy, and the state. All the examples discussed demonstrate the importance of coalescing strategies. By coalescing strategies, we mean the formulation of demands which overcome divisions such as factory and household,<sup>32</sup> wage work and domestic labour, private and public.

The practical demonstration of coalescing strategies has occurred in situations of economic, social and political crisis. However, even in 'normal' situations it should be possible to develop organisational strategies which go beyond defensive reactions, and address multiple identities and their multiple linkages. For instance, in relation to women workers in industry, the following demands could break through the constructed divisions of capitalist society, as well as the compartmentalisation of organisational action:

a demand to include domestic labour in minimum wage determination would link together strategically household and factory, as well as the interests of women and men workers;

a demand to redefine industry so that it would include the whole chain of subcontracting in a particular industry, would therefore make it possible to extend labour legislation to a wide range of casual work, including home-based work and related work of rural women; and

a demand for compensation in relation to divorce, injury, etc., incorporating proper recognition and valuation of domestic labour. This would link labour law with family law, ensure greater financial, social and possibly physical security for women, and be more effective than the notoriously elusive equal pay.

Such demands are practical and therefore could be the basis for discussions around these issues in unions, women's centres, and other organisations. We need to move from criticism of the limitations of dichotomies in theory, towards confronting and challenging the divisions of practice, drawing on the praxis of struggle and resistance of working women as they have confronted state, capital and patriarchy.



### ENDNOTES

1. We should like to thank participants in the ISS international workshop, "Women Organising in the Process of Industrialisation", and colleagues in the Social Movements Seminar for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Special thanks to Wicky Meynen, Peter Waterman, Virginia Vargas, and Nira Yuval-Davis. A revised version of this paper will appear in Amrita Chhachhi and Renée Pittin (eds.), Confronting State Capital and Patriarchy: Women Organising in the Process of Industrialisation, Macmillan Press Ltd., Basingstoke and London, forthcoming.
2. Between 1981-83, Chhachhi was involved in research with women textile workers in Ahmedabad and Bombay, exploring the reasons and experience of the massive retrenchment of women from the textile industry. In 1982-83, she worked with a research team interviewing women garment workers in the export garment industry in New Delhi. In 1987, she conducted a case study of an electronics factory manufacturing colour television sets in an industrial estate near Delhi.

Pittin's research concerning women workers in an electrical equipment factory in Zaria, Nigeria, was carried out from 1982 to 1984, with an additional short period of research in May, 1985. The research was done by the author, with the voluntary assistance and advice of Ms. Patience Aliogo, who was Head of the Calibration Section, EMCON, and a fellow member of Women in Nigeria.

3. In Chhachhi's research on Monica Electronics, questionnaires covering basic data as well as issues concerning nature of work, changes in technology, relations and perceptions of management and men and women workers, etc. were distributed and returned by 100 workers. In-depth interviews on tape were conducted with 50 workers, of which 10 were men. The interviews took the form of discussions where the researcher herself was questioned, particularly on her status as a single woman. Interviews were also conducted with the managing director and personnel manager, and a company profile from company documents and factory returns was compiled. The workers were interviewed within the factory. The emphasis was on recording the statements made by workers in their own language and style.

Pittin's research methodology included in-depth interviews primarily but not exclusively with EMCON women workers. A series of open-ended questions focussed on concerns and issues such as organisational structures and strategies, problems encountered in the workplace, and women's involvement with and attitudes towards the union. Other topics included the double burden, obligations and responsibilities, and women's aspirations and expectations. Most interviews were conducted in English, the only shared language of all EMCON workers. Additional discussion was held outside the workplace concerning matters of mutual concern, particularly in relation to interest in possibilities presented by Women in Nigeria to improve women's working conditions.

It is necessary to point out that what is offered here is an interpretation, based on the accounts provided by women workers supplemented by the researchers' observations and analysis of broader trends in industrialisation. This cannot be a complete account of experienced reality and consciousness since factors such as concealment, contradictory responses, responding to ideal types, etc. create limitations in research situations where the researcher still remains an outsider.

4. This is a point made by Gayatri Spivak (1988) in her introduction to Selected Subaltern Studies.
5. 'The Working Class has Two Sexes', Monthly Review, No. 28, July–August 1976, initiated a critical review of H. Braverman's Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century, New York, 1974.
6. There is a wide range of theory within the post-structuralist feminist corpus. See, for example, Chris Weedon, 1987, and Linda Nicholson, 1990, for review and elucidation of some of the approaches.
7. Another problem with many of these approaches is their exclusive focus on heterosexuality, and on lesbians as the definitive metaphor for self-displacement. Other categories of women (as, for example, women who remain single) may be perceived as equally or additionally marginalised, inasmuch as they lack the reinforcement and recognition even of the (jointly displaced) marginalised group.
8. Molyneux's strategic interests include, for example, the abolition of the sexual division of labour, removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, and the attainment of political equality. Practical gender interests include, e.g. domestic provision, childcare, and public welfare (1985).
9. It should be noted that the division between interests and needs, strategic and practical, inductive and deductive, etc. tends to (wrongly) hierarchise and prioritise particular ideologies, perceptions and actions. Thus, for example, 'practical interests', or 'needs', tend to relate to socio-economic areas; while 'strategic interests' relate to the ethereal, and seemingly superior, realm of politics. Needs per se often focus on women's vulnerability or survival.
10. 'Identity' is used in many different ways: to refer to sameness vs. difference, the search for an identity, the crisis of identity and/or the assumption of a political identity as in black feminist movements. We use identity to refer to subject positions rather than in the specific sense of a conscious political articulation of an identity.
11. This interplay is nicely expressed by Chris Weedon:
 

How we live our lives as conscious thinking subjects, and how we give meaning to the material social relations under which we live and which structure our everyday lives, depends on the range and social power of existing discourses, our access to them and the political strength of the interests which they represent.

(Weedon, 1987: 26)
12. EMCON later went through a dormant period of several years, re-starting full production in July, 1990.
13. The linking of women's cooperatives into the network of capital through subcontracting is an example of the convergence of interests between the women in development strategy and capital's strategy to lower costs of production. In developing strategies, we need to question the relationship with the state and the market. Cooperatives may be established without sufficiently reflecting on the nature of the product (how socially useful it is), the kind of production process, the nature of the internal structure, and relations within the household. Over time,

and in the context of capitalist relations, such cooperatives may become exploitative, or may collapse altogether.

14. Production-line workers, both men and women, received the same basic pay, most of them earning below Rs. 600 per month. Supervisors received much higher salaries which, combined with the fact that they were mainly women, fuelled further resentment amongst men workers.
15. The definition of skill on the basis of the sex of the job occupant rather than on the basis of any 'objective' assessment of job content has been pointed out in a number of studies. See, e.g., Phillips and Taylor, 1986.
16. This does not exclude the various ways in which women may be discriminated against through differential promotion, access to training, etc., points which are raised elsewhere in this paper. Nigerian law ostensibly requires equal pay for equal work for women and men, but there are numerous ways in which the work is rendered unequal. In other Nigerian factories, gender differentiation was maintained through the allocation of temporary and part-time work to women (di Domenico, 1983), and through differential categorisation and valuation of labour processes carried out by women (Dennis, 1984).
17. Given the limited job and higher education opportunities in Nigeria, EMCON could and did recruit a relatively highly educated female workforce: about 70% of the women had completed secondary school. This paper qualification was offset by the women's generally poor performance in their final examinations, a prerequisite for further schooling. This combination was considered optimum in EMCON hiring policy: sufficient education to make training and paperwork reasonably easy; poor enough results to reduce the likelihood of women rushing to further their education, and suggesting a lack of cleverness consonant with the monotony of assembly-line work. EMCON management was incorrect in its assumptions regarding women's lack of educational possibilities, as is demonstrated in the text.
18. Even secluded Muslim women in Nigeria earn income from house-based trade and petty commodity production, a fact which is not recognised in statistics, or evident in dominant discourse.
19. In a study of Nigerian oil workers (all men), Adesina also notes that ethnicity cannot be assumed to be solidary or divisive in the industrial (or other) context, whatever its importance as a national political concern or mobilising point. He suggests from his research that a common working-class solidarity, with an 'African ethos' of sharing and support, can be instrumental in the 'deconstruction of ethnic loyalties' (1990: 143). The EMCON data, which demonstrated more fully controlled hierarchical labour relations, and divisions among the assembly-line workers, did not show that generalised solidarity or shared support.
20. These specific issues, and the relationship between domestic labour and waged labour, are the focus of Pittin, 1986.
21. James Scott (1990) notes that among the oppressed, slights to the dignity (of the individual, or group) figure as often as material concerns in terms of areas of contention and unacceptable pressure.

22. The issues of dignity and self-respect have mobilised both men and women into resistance in many contexts elsewhere, including in the industrial setting.
23. Here, we refer to the dialogue and alternative discourse of the oppressed exemplified by Scott's 'hidden transcripts', 1985, 1990.
24. Jónasdóttir, 1988, suggests three levels of unity. In her formulation, sisterhood presupposes the greatest shared identity, with bonds of friendship and affection; and solidarity suggests supportive ties, with possible sacrifice and the sharing of burdens. Alliances reflect minimal linkages, and represent the only level which could unite all women.
25. It should be noted that the linkages which women make, and the support which they receive, is often of a transnational or non-national nature (Walby, 1990; Frank & Fuentes, 1990), reflecting the broader (or less state-focused) nature of the issues raised; the less direct relationships which women have (or in some cases want) to the state per se; and the immediacy of certain issues, evoking individual response.
26. See, for example, Berger, 1990, for the process and outcome of a series of actions by men and women workers in South Africa, linked through fora and groupings based on identity and affinity, wherein issues and discourse of gender, race, class, and nationalism were mobilised to unite the workers in relation to and in confrontation with the state.
27. See, e.g., articles by Lamphere, Ladd-Taylor, and Zavella in Feminist Studies 11, No. 3: "Women's Work, Work Culture, and Consciousness", for exemplification of this latter process in the US.
28. Discussion with SADWU Executive Committee members Violet Motlasedi, Florence de Villiers, and Myrtle Witpool, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, November 1988. See also Gaitskell et al., 1984.
29. Noted for the post-World War II USA by Kessler-Harris and Sacks, 1987.
30. An effect of this ideology is that women may not necessarily "see" themselves, or develop a consciousness of themselves, as workers (Safa, 1990; Mies, 1988), although this work may be a prime constituent of their daily life – often throughout their life – and of their survival.
31. Not examined specifically in this chapter are the ways in which issues such as sexuality, consumption, representation, and culture are also taken up by working women.
32. The dynamics and effects of power relations within the household have been thus far only partially addressed in the context of coalescing strategies.

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