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Hidden Histories:

Gender, Family And Community In The
Ombilin Coalmines (1892-1965)

CLARA Working Paper, No. 13

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Introduction¹

In focusing on the proletarianization process of male miners and their entry into the masculine world of the mining community, historians have tended to neglect women's roles and the gendered nature of workers' communities (Klubock, 1997: 232; Rothermund, 1978: 1-19; Simeon, 1995). Indeed, mining communities have often been portrayed as reflecting ideologies of masculinity at various levels, but in doing so, scholars have often understated the ways in which gender ideologies have structured the formation of mining working classes, transformed relations between men and women, and generated specific ideas about masculinity and femininity.²

This article will look at the way men and women from the Ombilin mining community have been defined by management, and how they have responded to workplace and national politics. The shifts in the miners' response from resistance to accommodation and to political protest and confrontation should also be seen in conjunction with the social position of women as workers, 'entertainers', and wives. Changes in women's social position are also inseparable from shifts in labour force recruitment policy by management. The problem is to identify the kind of ideology behind the changes in labour force recruitment policy that were imposed by the company.

As other studies have shown, the gender composition of enclave communities, such as plantations and mines have followed identifiable courses. In the early period of their formation the labour force would mainly consist of single male (and often) migrant workers. Recruitment of female labour was very limited. Women were part of an

¹ The opportunity to write this paper was provided by a three-month research fellowship (February-April, 2001) in the 'Changing Asian Labour Relations' (CLARA) programme, a collaboration between the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) in Leiden and the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam. My thanks go to the IIAS, IISH, and CLARA, which have funded my three-months stay in the Netherlands. The first version of this article was presented at a seminar organised by the Werkgroep Indonesische Vrouwen Studies (WIVS) in March in Leiden. Criticism and challenging questions on gender issues from participants during that discussion helped me improve this article. My special thanks go to Ratna Saptari for her invaluable comments and sharp criticism of the early version of this article. I also wish to thank Marcel van der Linden for introducing me to the literature on labour history in the mining industries in West European countries.

² Nevertheless, there were at least two studies that dealt with women's involvement in defining the politics of men in the mining sector. See June Nash (1979) and Robinson (1986). For comments regarding the neglect of the women's role in Indonesian history, see also Locher-Scholten (2000: 13-37).

employer's attempt to tie male workers to the plantations longer. At first female labourers were positioned as 'entertainers' for the men. Eventually, however, the expansion of the enterprise and shortage of labour led to the need for a more stable and permanent work force. Employers shifted from recruiting single males to recruiting married workers, which meant that establishing families and stable communities became a priority. In the process of family formation by the enterprises 'the family' was not only viewed as an economic unit or kinship structure, but it became an ideological configuration resonating far beyond the narrow definition of family. Labourers cannot be regarded as passive subjects, simply as objects of shifts in colonial policy.³ Workers respond to changes in recruitment policy as well as to attitudes of family formation, often using the family as a means to ensure survival and for enhancing political alliances. This chapter will address the following questions: to what extent were these conditions true for the Ombilin coalmines? What were the miners' reactions to state labour recruitment policy following the various shifts in policy? What types of actions did women or female labourers take with regard to the male-dominated world? Can we trace the effects of the economic development of coal to the survival strategy of the household, to the gender hierarchies, and the ideology of family solidarity? How did the male-dominated policy of the colonial state influence of social relations among mining families?

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section deals with the historical background of the Ombilin coalmines and the labour force formation in this area. This will be followed by an examination of the politics of resistance of the miners and their families from 1892-1927. The third section will cover the period of 1928-1942, focusing on the politics of the miners' accommodation during the Depression and the years afterwards, especially when family and mining community had been established. The fourth section will discuss the Japanese occupation and the period of Revolution (1942-1949), after which the politics of resistance and accommodation emerged. Discussions of radical changes in the miners' politics and the women's involvement in the public political sphere during the period of 1950-1965 are taken up in the fifth section. This is a period when the mining community had more intensive contact with local people, depending on local economic sources to survive. Both men and women were involved in various informal and formal representations.

³ Stoler (1979: 43), Stolcke (1988).

Entering the World of the Ombilin Coal Miners

Located in Sawahlunto about 115 km from Padang, the capital city of the West Sumatran Province, this mine was discovered in 1868, and its coal deposits were estimated at about 200 million tons.⁴ After a long debate in the Dutch Parliament on whether it should be exploited by the state or by a private company, in 1892 the colonial government finally decided to create a state mine.⁵ The decision was based on the importance of coal as a source of energy for the Dutch navy and for most state-owned companies such as railways, and for various industries. In the early years of the exploitation coal production from the Ombilin coalmines met about 95% of the colonial state's demand for coal. Although this declined to 65% in the 1930s, its contribution remained a significant amount of the total coal production in the Netherlands East Indies.⁶

The Different Categories of Labour

A cheap labour force could not be obtained by recruiting local people. Besides the fact that contract work was not a familiar pattern, the status of a miner was low (miners were regarded as less than human, and are still viewed that way). Apart from this, the area's low population density and the availability of other economic opportunities strengthened the bargaining position of the local populace. The local people were mainly Minangkabau and the inhabitants of Nias (called 'Melayus' in the Dutch reports). They only sought work sporadically, when their rice harvest failed or when they needed cash to participate in traditional ceremonies. Recruitment of casual workers was unsatisfactory because the supply was irregular and uncertain. Consequently, the management was continually complaining about the shortage of labour.⁷ This was not new: the estate plantations in West Sumatra had experienced the same problem previously and had to import contract labourers from outside West Sumatra. Thus, not long after coal reserves were found, Dutch local officials in West Sumatra advised their superiors in Batavia to import labour from outside the region.⁸

⁴ van Diest (1871) R.J. van Lier (1915).

⁵ F. Colombijn (107: 437-458).

⁶ There was not sufficient capital to accommodate the high demand of the colonial state for coal. The colonial budget was at that time mainly directed towards supplying the war effort against Aceh.

⁷ As did also the engineer, Th. F.A. Delprat, in 1898. See Mining Archives (Bandung), *Dwargarbeiders te Ombilin Steenkolenmijnen*, VI-A/85. Letter by Delprat, 11/2/1899 no.127 to the Governor-General.

⁸ Stibbe (1884: 698-700).

To ensure a permanent, regular labour force, the colonial government recruited convicts and then contract labourers from outside. The convict labourers were recruited from the Department of Justice, and were political prisoners and criminals mainly from the prisons in Java such as Cipinang and Glodok in Batavia to work as convict labourers at the Ombilin coalmines.⁹ But there were not enough of them, because many convict labourers from Sawahlunto were brought to Pidie in Aceh to transport goods in the war against Aceh, Jambi, and other regions. In order to solve the labour problem, the company also recruited contract labourers, first from China and then from Java. They worked for at least three years and were subject to penal sanctions (laid down 'Coolie Ordinance'). These groups were called contract labourers A, to distinguish them from the free labourers (called contract labourers B), who were free to define the duration of their own contracts, usually one or two years, and were not subject to penal sanctions. The third category of workers were the casual labourers. These were local people who worked without any contract. In later years casual workers included other ethnic groups (such as Sundanese and Javanese who had finished their previous contract with the company) as well as members of the local populace.

Convict labourers would be punished by flogging if they ran away, shirked work, participated in a protest against their foremen, or fought with other workers or with the foremen. The contract labourers covered by the Coolie Ordinance were punished by flogging if they did not fulfill the requirements of the contract (for example, running away or shirking work), but the other convict, contract, and free labourers were also controlled by police officers who could be described as semi-military. The officers wore a black uniform and were recruited from the Minangkabau and Batak areas.¹⁰ Colonial officials introduced strict state control to counteract the 'lazy mentality' of the local populace society, whom they deemed to be lacking in a proper 'work orientation'. Miners were mostly seen as criminals who could only be productive under strict control and discipline.

In 1896 there were 1,234 labourers, all of them convicts. Along with the increase in the number of mines, the total amount of the labour force also increased. In 1921 the number of labourers rose to 11,046, the majority of which were convict and contract labourers.¹¹ The company preferred to recruit convicts rather than contract labourers because it was cheaper to maintain them and their productivity was higher than the contract labourers. The daily cost of convict labourers averaged 34.9 cents per

⁹ *Arsip Nasional*, Jakarta (ARNAS), *Register 1891-1907*: 412.

¹⁰ *Hoa Po*, 13/2/1915.

day, whereas contract labourers were 60 cents per day. In the following years, this discrepancy became even more striking.¹² The background of the labourers was very fragmented. Not only were their work contracts different, but so were their social and cultural backgrounds. They were typically young males, physically strong and unattached, unaccompanied by any family members. There were also several different sub-cultures and sub-ethnic groups: Javanese, Sundanese, Buginese, Madurese, Makassar, Chinese, Minangkabau, and Nias. The convict labourers consisted of two different groups, sentenced to different penalties. The first group were criminals recruited from the prisons of Glodok and Cipinang in Batavia. The second group were political prisoners jailed for political actions against the government. The duration of sentences varied from one to five years or five to twenty years. Differences in the categories and cultural backgrounds of the labourers influenced their social relations and politics with regard to management.

Up to the third decade of the twentieth century there were very few women in this world, whether they were wives accompanying their husbands or working as labourers in their own right. These women functioned as mine workers, wives, or 'entertainers'. The first category were labourers recruited by the company from Java as contract or free labourers. No women or female prisoners were recruited as convict workers for this mine. The cost of recruitment was the same for both male and female labourers, and like males, the women labourers were recruited by recruitment agencies in Batavia and Semarang (Soesman, Hilderbrands, and Algemeen Delisch Emigratie Kantoor, or ADEK) to work on plantations and mining industries in the Outer Islands. Little is known how the recruitment of women was carried out. Family members of the recruited women tell that most of the recruiters for women were also women. Jobs available to the women were transporting coal from open-pit mines to the area of collection, sorting coal in three sizes: large, middle, and small, or cleaning the mine hospital.

Table 1 shows the percentage of female to male contract and free labourers from 1910 to 1930. The highest percentage of female labourers was 4.2% in 1911; although the percentage varied in the subsequent years, it remained under 4%. (Unfortunately, no information is available about why the recruitment of female labourers varied.) The highest percentage of female labourers was 4%. This may have come about because in

¹¹ Erwiza (1999: 41).

¹² In 1916 the daily cost of convict labourers was only 53.4 cents, and contract labourers were 86.8 cents. See Mining Archives (Bandung), *Steenkolenpolitiek*, no.IV-32B. Letter of the Mining State Companies Director to the Governor General, 27/2/1918.

1910 the Labor Inspectors suggested that more women be recruited from Java. Nevertheless, as a whole, there was little increase in the number of women recruited from Java whether they were labourers, wives, or entertainers. Only in 1929 and 1930, did the percentage of female labourers increase compared to 1926 and 1927 (Table 1).

Table 1: Percentage of female to total male contract labourers (contract and free labourers), 1910-1930

| Year | % | Year | % |
|------|-----|------|-----|
| 1910 | ... | 1921 | 1. |
| 1911 | 4.2 | 1922 | 5 |
| 1912 | 2.7 | 1923 | 0. |
| 1913 | 2.1 | 1924 | 4 |
| 1914 | 3.2 | 1925 | 0, |
| 1915 | 2.8 | 1926 | 5 |
| 1916 | 1.3 | 1927 | 1, |
| 1917 | 0.9 | 1928 | 0 |
| 1918 | 1.0 | 1929 | ... |
| 1919 | 2.7 | 1930 | ... |
| 1920 | 1.9 | | 1. |
| | | | 4 |
| | | | 1. |
| | | | 9 |
| | | | 3. |
| | | | 4 |
| | | | 3. |
| | | | 1 |

Source: *Verlagen van den Sumatra-Staatsspoorweg en de Ombilinmijnen 1910-1916* (Batavia 1911-1917). *Verlagen van de Ombilinmijnen 1917-1923/24* (Batavia/ Weltevreden 1918-1925). *Jaarverslagen van 'slands kolenmijnen 1925-1930* (Weltevreden 1926-1931)

The number of female contract labourers increased 6% from 1926 to 1927. In 1926 female contract labourers were only 17.1% of the male contract labourers. In 1927 the percentage increased to 23.1%, because there had been a decrease in the total number of male contract labourers. Many contract labourers were dismissed because of their involvement in a series of strikes in 1925, 1926, and the communist uprising in 1926/1927. As is shown in table 2, the total number of male contract labourers was reduced dramatically from 4,170 in 1925 to 2,783 in 1927.

Table 2 : Comparison between Female and Male Contract Labourers, 1923-1928

| Year | Male contract labourers | Female contract labourers (%) |
|------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | |

| | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1923 | 4.196 | 17.7% |
| 1924 | 4.801 | 16% |
| 1925 | 4.170 | 21.3% |
| 1926 | 3.839 | 17.1% |
| 1927 | 2.783 | 23.1% |
| 1928 | 2.839 | 22.4% |

Source: KITLV, Korn Collection OR 435. No. 368, 'Het Ombilin Steenkolen Bedrijf door een bestuur ambtenaar bezien', 1931: 97-98.

The second category consisted of women who functioned as wives or 'partners' for the male labourers. They went to Sawahlunto with their husbands who worked as contract or free labourers there. Some were also former female contract or free labourers who did not return to Java but got married in Sawahlunto. The yearly company reports do not provide any information about the total amount of female labourers repatriated to Java, which suggests that the former female labourers had become wives or partners for male labourers or housekeepers or 'bed-servants' of the European staff on the East Sumatran plantations. Nor is any information available on the married labourers and those who stayed with their families in Sawahlunto. Only very few Javanese male contract labourers married local women because they were regarded as having low status by the local people. Only the Javanese foremen who had high status and much money could marry local women.¹³ Javanese labourers preferred to stay at their wife's house or construct a new house in the vicinity of the mines.

The third category consisted of women who acted as entertainers, either as traditional ronggeng or tandak dancers or prostitutes. Ronggeng and tandak dancers¹⁴ entertained the miners and were contracted to stay a longer period with the company. They were recruited for six months at a time. The dancers were beautiful young women. Two or three times a year (or following completion of the work contract) the company recruited new, more beautiful, younger dancers. Generally speaking, they were also prostitutes. Some former dancers did not return home, but remained in Sawahlunto and were married with contract or free labourers. Others who remained reverted to prostitution. It would be misleading to categorize these three different types of women as one.

The ronggeng and tandak dancers had come to the attention of Dutch officials and Labor Inspectors. Van Kol, for example, who visited Sawahlunto at the beginning

¹³ Interviews with Pak Warso and his son Pak Suwardi Kisut, 22/8/1995. According to Pak Suwardi Kisut, up to the end of 1970s, mixed marriages between local people and Javanese workers in Sawahlunto very seldom happened. See also Joustra (1923: 27). Joustra reported that the Javanese men who married local women tended to change their occupation from miner to peasant.

of the twentieth century, reported that many ronggeng dancers were recruited along with 439 contract labourers in 1901.¹⁵ Van Kol was concerned about the emergence of 'bad elements' because the ronggeng dancers' relationship with the male labourers was very vague. He warned the Dutch officials that dangerous elements might emerge if the women were sold to convict labourers. In the following years recruitment of the ronggeng dancers as entertainers occasioned heated discussions among state colonial officials. A Labour Inspector, D.B.W. van Ardenne, who was investigating labour conditions in the Ombilin coalmines in 1921, reported that there was not enough entertainment for the miners. There were only five groups of ronggeng dancers, and he believed that 15 groups were needed to entertain the 1,500 Sundanese labourers.¹⁶ This did not even include the other kinds of entertainment such as gamelan (a Javanese musical group), gambling, and opium. In the following years the recruitment of ronggeng dancers continued apace, and by 1928, B.H.F. van Heuven, the Assistant-Resident of Solok seized in Sawahlunto, reported that there were 50 groups of ronggeng dancers to entertain labourers.¹⁷ Heuven pointed out that this number was far more proportional to the male labourers, noting that it would have a calming effect on the labourers because ronggeng dancers also acted as prostitutes.

The previous policy of recruiting only unmarried workers was also in effect for the European staff. Recruiting Europeans along with their families would increase the cost of production, because the management would have to prepare facilities such as housing and schools as well as provide the costs of family returns to Europe for vacation. Stoler, in her study on East Sumatran plantations, showed that this would greatly increase the cost.¹⁸ Thus marriage was prohibited to all incoming European plantation employees. As a result many European employees took Javanese women as concubines (nyai). In the Ombilin coalmines the European employees preferred to oversee the Javanese, Chinese, and Nias women. These partners bore Indo-European children who later became mine overseers.

Government Responses to Women as Members of the Mining Community

H. G. Heyting, Assistant-resident of Tanah Datar in 1903, was aware that the lack of women was a problem for male labourers. He suggested that management recruit

¹⁴ *Ronggeng* and *tandak* are traditional dance performances. *Ronggeng* is found in West Java, whereas *tandak* is from East Java. For a story on a *ronggeng* dancer's life, see Tohari (1982).

¹⁵ Van Kol (1903:37).

¹⁶ ARA, MvK, MR 1924/2608.

¹⁷ KITLV, Korn Collection OR 435. No. 368 (1931: 98).

¹⁸ Stoler (1992: 319-352).

25 unmarried Javanese women from the southern part of Kedu. They were expected to marry male contract labourers and provide an incentive for recruiting other married male contract labourers.¹⁹ Engineer-director A. H. van Lessen agreed to this and tried to convince his superior, W. de Jongh, the Chief of the Sumatran Railways and exploitation of the Ombilin coalmines, that there was no need to be concerned about an increase of population in Sawahlunto because of the recruitment of women and their marriage to male labourers. He believed that about 80% of the married male labourers would return to their homeland after finishing their contract.²⁰ There is no data on whether the 25 women from Kedu actually married male labourers, as neither local Dutch officials nor labour inspectors wrote any reports on this subject in the following years; even the Ombilin company staff did not report on this. Heyting also suggested building a coolie village for 200 contract labourers in Sawahlunto to create a social environment for the miners, provide miners with the opportunity and incentive to form a family and produce a future generation of miners that in the long run would reduce the difficulty of recruiting labour from outside. The Engineer-director did not agree with these suggestions. He argued that the construction of the coolie village would need a great deal of capital.

In 1910 and 1917 labour inspectors again suggested creation of a village. Engineer-director Van der Kloes said that the state had forced the company to create a Javanese colony as a reserve labor force in Sawahlunto. In 1918 the company sent an administrator at the suggestion of the central government. This administrator, A. Stark, wrote a comparative study for East Sumatra. But the company decided not to do this in Sawahlunto because land was too scarce there and it was afraid that the Javanese labourers would stop functioning as miners and become peasants.

Although local colonial administrators commented on the absence of female labourers and family members (wife and children), the company remained convinced that bringing in women would be unprofitable and too expensive. Female labourers were only permitted to engage in a few specific occupations (see above). More than solely economic motives were behind this labour policy, and the abnormal life of the

¹⁹ This is not only true for the Ombilin coalmines. In 1864 the Billiton tin mining company on the Island of Belitung tried to recruit 137 Javanese women from Batavia and Semarang to 'marry' Chinese coolies. This was intended to encourage permanent settlements among the Chinese male contract coolies on that island. Only a few of the women returned to Java; the rest formed partnerships, as intended. Attempts to provide the basis of a settled population had almost no effect. Five years after the project more than 100 women had given birth to only 26 children, 11 of them males. It is not known what eventually happened to the women. In any case, most miners could not afford to maintain a family. See Somers (1991: 6); de Groot (1887: 356-358).

²⁰ ARA, MvK, Mr 1904/1151. Letter of A.H. van Lessen, 3/6/1904 to the Chief of Exploitation, W. de Jongh.

Sawahlunto coal miners was maintained up to the second decade of the twentieth century. It is also not surprising that only a few female labourers were ever recruited to work, and then only at very limited jobs, in the Ombilin coalmines.

Gender Differentiation in Hiring Policies

In the early years of exploitation the company did not differentiate in the way male and female and contract and free labourers were paid. In 1911 Female contract labourers, like their male colleagues, received 20 cents a day for the first contract year for working on the surface, as well as three meals a day. In 1921 female labourers were paid 30 cents a day (5 cents lower than their male colleagues). The company's annual reports for subsequent years reveal no differentiation in pay between male and female labourers. Differences in pay were based only on the place of work: underground miners were paid more than those who worked on the surface.

The company's discriminative policy with regard to women was especially apparent in the system of promotion. Promotion of female contract labourers was very limited because they were only recruited as partners for male labourers after completion of their contract, although a male labourer could pay a ransom of 80 guilders for a female labourer (1911) still on contract with the company. If the female contract labourer had already completed her contract, she could become the wife of a contract or free male labourer. One labour inspector admitted that this price was too high, so not many male labourers were interested in ransoming a female contract labourer. Later the ransom was reduced to 50 guilders to provide an incentive for marriages to increase, encouraging establishment of proper family life. It was hoped that this would cause the men to remain longer at the mines. But management policy was unsuccessful, not only because the recruited women were too few in number, but also because they preferred to remain single.²¹ Some former miners believed that being unmarried provided women with many opportunities to engage in financially profitable illicit relations with male labourers. The fact that there were so few women put the women in a very good bargaining position.

The Miners' Politics Of Resistance And The Hidden Role Of Women

²¹ Interview with Pak Warso, 4 May 1995; Pak Rusman, 5 May 1995.

The institutionalized system of controlling the miners by beating them with canes was unsuccessful because it did not result in the disciplined labour force as the Dutch officials hoped for. Proof of its ineffectiveness was the high rate of desertions and work avoidance from 1892 to 1925.²² In 1922 the average convict labourer had deserted more than once, and by 1924, this had increased to three times a year.²³ The workers' show of resistance by running away and avoiding work was also true for contract workers: for example, between 1907 and 1909, contract labourers tried to escape from the mines an average of 2 to 2.5 times a year.²⁴ This meant that a contract labourer received punishment by caning about 2 to 2.5 times a year.

No female labourers attempted to escape or avoid work, nor were any involved in the series of strikes and protests in 1925, 1926 and 1927. Although this could suggest that women were more politically passive, that is not necessarily true because it fails to take into consideration the underlying factors of the miners' resistance. The miners' political resistance was not only directed at the misuse of power by state agents, but also at the insecure and vulnerable position of the miners themselves. The insecurity and vulnerability of the coolies' barracks and the mines resulted in ethnic conflicts, an embedded culture of violence among convict labourers, and conflict and competition within and between various categories of labourers in their efforts to gain scarce resources such as food, money, and women. Thus, the Ombilin case suggests the importance of a nuanced understanding of the miners' resistance as well as the hidden role of women.

Two interesting points should be noted here. First, the limited number of women in the mines caused conflict in the social relations among male labourers because they competed to gain access to women. Second, women found their own ways to respond to the labour policy imposed by the company or the state. Female contract labourers preferred to remain unmarried rather than be ransomed by male labourers, even though the company reduced the ransom from 80 to 50 guilders in 1911. The company's annual reports show that no female contract labourers returned home after finishing their working contracts. There was no indication that women who finished their contract wanted to marry. Figures for married male labourers up to the third decade of the

²² Erman (1999: 45); See also van Empel (1999: 158-179).

²³ *Verslag over de Hervormingen van het Gevangeniswezen over 1921 t/m 1925*, Batavia: G. Kolff and Co, 1926: 6; Bruinink-Darlang (1986: 143).

²⁴ ARA, MvK, Mr 1911 no. 218. Report of Labour Inspector, Stibbe, 12/11/1910.

twentieth century remain very low, and even in 1924 only 600 children were born to the miners' families in Sawahlunto.²⁵

Thus, women had a strong bargaining position in this world dominated by men. Women preferred to become partners to male labourers or *nyai* for European personnel. Prostitutes and gambling were essential means for keeping male labourers indebted and indentured because they encouraged male labourers to spend more than they earned, ensuring that male labourers worked for the company even longer.

After 1925 the politics of resistance changed from individual, unorganized resistance to collective, organized protests. Labourers were able to express their demands through a series of trade union strikes in 1925 and 1926. Their struggle culminated in the communist uprising of 1926/1927. The changes were linked to formation of a miners' trade union, the Persatuan Kaum Buruh Tambang (PKBT) in 1925. The PKBT was established on the initiatives of the leaders of the Sarekat Rakyat and the Indonesian Communist Party or PKI in Sawahlunto. The leaders of the political parties were successful in uniting the differing interests of the indigenous people inside the mines (foremen, clerks, police officers, coolies) and outside (petty traders, teachers, local peasants, and religious and political leaders). They spread the ideology of class struggle among different groups in the mining town (including labourers, teachers, hajis, petty traders, and peasants). The labourers saw the PKBT as a vehicle for the struggle against injustice and a means to build a better life in the future. The PKBT also reduced the social distance between various categories of labourers and the clerks, petty traders, and local populace, because such an organization bridged ethnic differences.

Although no specific information is available about the gender and background of the strikers, we should not assume that women were completely passive in this context. My interviews with the former miners' wives reinforced the argument that women were indeed active behind the scenes in the political activities. Many women from the coolies' barracks prepared meals for strikers. Women who were servants for European families were regarded by Dutch colonials officials as dangerous, which caused most European families to dismiss their indigenous help before the uprising broke out. They were afraid they would engage in radical political activities. Women servants had indeed become a social force in the mining society.

²⁵ Mining Archives, *Arbeid aangelegenheden Mijnbedrijven VI-A/5*. Report of Labour Inspector Deibert, 3 July 1924.

The Politics Of Accommodation And The Emergence Of The Family (1928-1942)

After the communist uprising of 1926/1927, the miners' politics shifted from resistance to accommodation, or collaboration. This politics of accommodation took the form of increased rates of work attendance. There is no strong evidence that the accommodation politics were simply a result of the political pressure exerted by the state, especially after the communist uprising in 1926/1927. The conciliatory attitude was not only associated with the absence of strong leaders in radical political parties, as shown by Ingleson in the case of Java,²⁶ but was also linked to the effects of the economic depression and the changing face of mining society.

Since the leaders of the political parties involved in the communist uprising had been imprisoned or executed, labour movement momentum in West Sumatra and Java declined. This was followed by repressive state actions that made it impossible for the miners to protest openly in their struggle for justice. In 1932 and again in 1933 management was forced to restrict mine production and reduce the labour force. These factors suggest that the politics of accommodation was a rational decision by the miners, taken after considering the pros and cons of the situation.

What was the role of women in this politics of accommodation? If women had played a marginal part in political activities previously and had been a source of conflict among male labourers, after the 1930s, women played an important part in defining miners' politics. Before delineating what the women's contributions to the accommodation politics were, we need to appreciate the growing presence of women and married miners in the context of changing management policy.

The scarcity of women and its effect on work discipline has been discussed from the beginning of the twentieth century, but it had been a closed discussion until the 1920s. The opening of the discussion coincided with the liberal rule of Governor General Fox in the Netherlands Indies, both in the Volksraad and the mass media. Attacks were directed at companies that ignored the social welfare of the miners. Reports by labour inspectors about miners' complaints that they missed their family, that they had no moral support for work, that there was a great deal of homosexuality and conflicts over women strengthened the argument for a change in management labour policy. At the same time international pressures were growing to abolish slavery in countries that still used penal sanctions for contract labourers as well as those that

²⁶ Ingleson (1981a: 485-502; 1986).

used convict labourers in production.²⁷ The company was also confronted by a high demand for coal and very low discipline among miners, which led to significant economic losses.

In addition to international pressures, internal attacks from politicians and journalists in the Volksraad and the mass media, the management was itself motivated to change policy. The move to replace convict and contract labourers was at least partly motivated by the difficulty of recruiting convict labourers from Batavian prisons after 1927. (Most of the prisons in the Netherlands Indies had used convicts for productive jobs.) Second, recruiting contract labourers without allowing them to come with their families had led to poor discipline among the labourers. This led the company to recruit more women and male labourers with families. By 1934 management no longer recruited contract labourers under penal sanctions, and contract labourers were replaced by free labourers. In 1937 convict labourers were no longer supplied to Ombilin, and in 1938 only free labourers were employed. The company's main policy was to recruit free labourers with families and create a mining community. It was expected that establishing a mining community would bring favourably affect reproduction of future generations of labourers.

The percentage of female contract labourers rose from 17.7% to 22.4% in 1928 (Table 2). This was intended to reduce the unequal ratio between males and females. From December 1929 to March 1930 9.9% of the total labour force was married, and 30.7% was female. Furthermore, the average number of married male labourers rose from 40.7% in 1931 to 56.44% in 1933, and reached 62% in 1934.²⁸

The increase in female labourers and wives was intended to serve the needs of the male labourers and to keep them from political activity. This policy was successful (attested to by the large presence of labourers). The rate of attendance for the various categories of labourers rose between 1929 and 1934. The lowest attendance was in 1929, especially for contract labourers who had signed their contract under the penal sanction (67%). Compare this with the rate of attendance of convict, free, and casual labourers, which was above 88% in the same year.²⁹

It is the traditional male attitude of the company that restricted the role of women to serving men. One indication of this is the fact that after finishing their contract female labourers were expected to remain in the town, marry male labourers

²⁷ For a discussion on international pressure for the abolition of convict and contract labourers in Indonesia, see Keppy (1998: 29-50).

²⁸ Mining Archives, *Jaarverslag van de Ombilin Mijnen 1934*, no. 2502.

and become mothers for their children. The company also established a family allowance²⁹ that became a crucial stimulus for men and women to marry. The family allowance was a bonus paid to married miners with children. In addition, the company also distributed staples in an amount defined by the company. These included rice, oil, and salted fish, which were distributed to each member of a miner's family, and were intended to reinforce a husband's responsibility towards his family. In short, the company's attitude increased women's dependence on their husband's wage from the very creation of the mining community.

The company's predominantly male attitude was also evidenced in the case of entertainment. Various kinds of entertainment such as gambling, ronggeng or tandak, football clubs, etc. were more directed at entertaining men than other family members. The company tended to subordinate the position of women and the family to the men. Not only did these entertainments leave the miners in debt, but by spending the money on the various kinds of entertainment, the miners could not give all their wages to their wives. Bu Ruiyah (76 years old) described how her father and first husband went gambling straight after work. She said the habit was common in Sawahlunto. 'Every Saturday and Sunday, or after receiving their salary, my father or my husband went directly to the gambling rooms or watching ronggeng or tandak.'³⁰

The family's dependence on a miner's wages encouraged miners to work without protest, even though it was a time of state pressure (after 1927) and poor economic conditions (the Depression affected everyone since 1929). My interviews with former miners suggest that the miners did not protest because they were afraid of being dismissed. It was also difficult for men to look for additional income outside the mine, because the company had closed opportunities for working extra jobs not related to the mine. The presence of family encouraged the collaborative politics by the miners, and establishment of the mining community can be seen as an early attempt at the formation of a mining culture. The adaptation process to the world of the mines started earlier among the children of miners. It should not be surprising that many in the mining community viewed working in the mines as a status symbol.³¹

What were the survival politics women engaged in under the layers of repression by state, management and their husbands? Women or wives had their own strategies to survive. They prepared and sold traditional Javanese food, either at the barracks or in

²⁹ Mining Archives, *Arbeidersvoorziening van de Mijnbedrijven II*, no.1V. Secret letter of Engineer-Director V.H. Ploem, 10/8/1929 no.14 to the Head of State Mining Companies.

³⁰ Interview with Bu Ruiyah, 22/5/1995.

the Sawahlunto market. They collected firewood in the forest, planted vegetables and worked as housemaids for Europeans.³² Bu Semi (92 years old) described her role in the household economy three years after arriving at Sawahlunto in 1926. Bu Semi's experience as a miner's wife who came to Sawahlunto with her husband and daughter provides an interesting example. When I met her in her daughter's house in the village of Teleng, Sawahlunto, in October 2000, she described her experiences as follows:

I told my husband that he did not need to go on strike, because I was afraid that he would be punished by having his salary withheld. You know many people were dismissed and repatriated to Java, because they went on strike several times. His salary was 30 cents per day at that time. That was not enough. When my daughter was six or seven years old, I thought that I could leave her to look for additional income. In Java I was also familiar with selling various kinds of food at my mother's food stall. In Sawahlunto I started to buy krupuk singkong (cassava chips) made by the miners' wives in the barracks. My husband permitted me to do this kind of work because he knew that we did not have enough money. My daughter helped me collect the krupuk singkong from other women, and I took them to Padang. I cooperated with five women. I stayed there for a few days and then would return to Sawahlunto, bringing back other basic necessities to be sold on credit to people in the barracks (Sawahlunto, 20 October 2000).

We can conclude from Bu Semi's story that women were not only important in helping to alleviate the economic difficulties of the household, but also in defining the forms of their husband's political participation. Nevertheless, women were confined to a more limited social sphere than were men. The company did not form any associations to channel women's interests or hobbies as they did for men - at least until Indonesia proclaimed its independence.

The Japanese Occupation And The Period Of Revolution (1942-1949)

The Japanese occupation and the Indonesian Revolution were turbulent periods for the mining society. The society endured ongoing destruction of the mines by the Dutch (before the Japanese occupation) and by the Indonesian populace (before the Dutch returned to Sawahlunto in 1948). Oil and coal were two mining commodities regarded by the Japanese as especially important, and were subsequently exploited by the Japanese military as well as by a semi-official government company, the Hokkaido and Steamship Co., Ltd. There were also some changes in the management system during this period. The lack of skilled labour caused the Japanese to promote many Indonesians to higher positions than they had enjoyed before. The position of director was occupied

³¹ My interviews with some families of former miners are the basis for this argument. Many former miners hoped that their children could work at the Ombilin coalmines, even up to the present day.

³² Interview with Bu Ruiyah, 22/5/1995; Mrs Ketty Urban, 13/12/1994.

by a Japanese engineer, Kobuta, while the position of deputy-director was held by Roesli, a graduate of the mining school at Sawahlunto. Some other former students of the mining school including A. Aziz, Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando, and Baharson were also promoted to higher positions. Those advanced were mostly Minangkabaus who held important positions in the company following Indonesian independence.³³ The company also changed the status of workers from free labourers to convict labourers, or romusha, employed not just in the mines but also for projects vital to Japanese war needs. Although the miners were under the iron discipline of the Japanese company, they were no longer confined in the cage of production. They could have social contacts with local people, especially after finishing their jobs in the mine. But they could no longer watch the ronggeng or tandak dancers or gamble, because the company did not provide these diversions.

Work and living conditions were very poor, especially in the final years of the Japanese occupation. On the one hand, the labourers were forced to produce as much coal as possible for the war effort, and on the other hand, there were few social amenities. It is easy to imagine how the lack of food and medical treatment affected working and living conditions. Many workers died, falling victim to mine accidents and worn out by the impossible workload. Apart from these hazards they also fell ill with malaria, typhus, various other diseases, and suffered from malnutrition.

Under such circumstances it should not be surprising that some labourers tried to break their contracts and escape from the mine. In 1942, 123 labourers ceased working or escaped to other places within and outside West Sumatra. Eight of these labourers ran away. In 1943 153 labourers stopped working in the mine and moved elsewhere, and 104 ran away completely. As a result, supervision was increased and strict controls were imposed by the Japanese military, which reduced the number of people who stopped working to 30 and 12 who ran away in 1944.³⁴

Mainly unmarried labourers followed the politics of resistance. It was easier for those who had no family to stop working or run away from the mine, and to earn a living in other places within or outside West Sumatra. Those who were married could not afford to stop working. They were forced to survive in the mine under harsh working and living conditions. To overcome economic difficulties they worked together with their shift mates or in work groups growing cassava, sweet potatoes, and other vegetables.

³³ PTBA-UPO Archives, Buku Register, 1942-1948.

³⁴ Erwiza (1999: 138).

The working and living conditions of labourers during the Indonesian Revolution (1945-1949) were even worse. The Ombilin coalmines had a dual function, as they produced coal as well as guns for the struggle. The labour force was also divided in two: working in the mine or following the guerilla groups fighting in the jungles. Those who stayed in town and worked in the mine continued the same survival strategy they had pursued in the previous years.

Political Protest And The Unity Of Interest (1950-1965)

The development of the mining sector in general and coal mining in particular between 1950-1965 cannot be separated from political and economic developments in Indonesia. The economic recovery following the Indonesian Revolution was very slow and uneven. Apart from the lack of capital and strong dependence on foreign sources of finance, the state faced separatist movements such as Darul Islam in West Java and Aceh. It also had to deal with the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI) rebellion. These separatist movements totally absorbed the government's attention.

At this time the Indonesian coalmines also experienced difficulties. Much of the machinery had become old and was breaking down. In addition, the state-owned railway companies that had been the greatest coal consumers faced rising debts. Moreover, the state was unable to repair or modernize the mines, and coal began to compete with oil as the main source of fuel. All this led to a collapse in coal production. The company suffered continual losses, especially in 1951 and the following years, and in 1958 the PRRI local rebellion caused further difficulties. The company became an arena for various political groups and military factions of both supporters and opponents of the PRRI and the central government. Although there were plans for renewal in 1954, and again in 1964, coal production was unable to regain the production figures of the pre-Independence years.

Table 3 below shows the fluctuations the labour force, including all levels as well as labourers. In 1950, there were only 1,526. By 1953 this number increased to 2,214 as new labourers were recruited together with their families (especially from Java). After 1953, the number decreased to 1,371, because many labourers were dismissed by the managers as punishment for their involvement in the strike. Between 1955 and 1958 the total number of labourers remained fairly constant. But in the years 1958, 1959, and 1960 the total number of labourers dropped each year, because many

labourers, especially non-Javanese, left the mine to join the PRRI as a regional movement against the central government.

The labour force again increased from 1,946 in 1960 to 3,082 in 1965. This increase was caused by the recruitment of new labourers from Jakarta and other cities in central Java. For example, on 8 March 1963, 200 unemployed people from Jakarta were hired for the Ombilin coalmines. A second and third group followed their countrymen. In all, there were 319 people. They were preman,³⁵ or unemployed people, and a group of 'volunteers' (sukarelawan) from the Indonesian army, recruited to fight for the liberation of West Irian. Some of them had been sent to Kendari (Southeast Sulawesi) and Irian, while others had remained in Jakarta, where they waited for an indefinite period of time.³⁶ Both preman and the volunteers were young men and unmarried. In 1964 the company recruited 23 men with families from Central Java through the office for Allocation of Labour Force located in Yogyakarta. This recruitment system sent Javanese men who had remained a long time in Sawahlunto to central Java in order to attract more Javanese to work in the Ombilin coalmines. These recruits were labourers under contract for three years. They included both day and monthly labourers, and were mostly men. Indeed, there were a few women, but they were hired only to sort coal or perform subordinate administrative tasks in the office.

Table 3: Fluctuations in the labour force, 1950-1965

| Year | Total number in labour force | Year | Total number in labour force |
|------|------------------------------|------|------------------------------|
| 1950 | 1,526 | 1958 | 2,199 |
| 1951 | 1,565 | 1959 | 2,088 |
| 1952 | 2,001 | 1960 | 1,946 |
| 1953 | 2,214 | 1961 | 2,025 |
| 1954 | 1,371 | 1962 | 2,083 |
| 1955 | 2,064 | 1963 | 2,269 |
| 1956 | 2,026 | 1964 | 2,472 |
| 1957 | 2,199 | 1965 | 3,082 |

Source: PTBA-UPO Collection, *The Yearly report of the PTBA Ombilin 1995*.

The Natsir cabinet banned strikes and lockouts in vital undertakings under a prohibition issued on 13 February 1951 - not by the Ministry of Labour but by the

³⁵ The group of *preman* could also be divided into two categories, the criminal *preman* and those who were regarded as *preman* by police because they had no identity cards. Both categories were recruited mercilessly when the central government in Jakarta mounted 'cleansing' operations, or *sapu bersih*. The police rounded them up from the streets or food stalls. They were arrested, put in a truck, and taken to a collection place located in Bekasi. For this story, see Erwiza (1999: 177).

³⁶ Antara, *Berita Ekonomi dan Keuangan*, 13/3/1963: 8.

Ministry of Defense. The strike ban could not stem the wave of strikes and strong protest actions by the unions. There was an eventual compromise in the Sukiman period under Emergency Act no. 16, in 1951, which stated that the state did not prohibit strikes but did restrict them.³⁷ Thus, the state aimed at minimizing the number of strikes through careful regulation. In addition, to solve labour disputes the state also created the P4P (Panitia Penyelesaian Perselisihan Perburuhan Pusat, or The Central Labour Disputes Committee), or an equivalent institution for the different state institutions. The Central Labor Disputes Committee had branches on regional and local levels. The mechanism for resolving labor disputes was made more complex, enabling interference by a wider range of parties or state bureaucracy.³⁸ In 1957 martial law was declared. The military and the Ministry of Labor became more repressive, and in August 1957 the state banned strikes in vital industries and in the government-owned companies.³⁹ The Ombilin and Bukit Asam coalmines, as state-owned companies, were included among the vital mining industries. After nationalization of foreign companies, the government set up the Dewan Perusahaan (Company Board). The Dewan Perusahaan was set up in 1964 in the Ombilin coalmines, and representatives of labour trade unions were chosen.

If the miners had been more accommodating in the 1930s when their families were formed, what happened after 1950 when the mining community was experiencing social and cultural changes? Workers had more social contacts with local people and were involved in formal and informal representations. Although the Indonesian coalmines were experiencing difficulties, the state was relaxing its controls on political parties and trade unions. This was especially felt by the contract labourers who stayed in the barracks. Political leaders also went into the mines, appealing to the collective consciousness of the mining society and encouraging workers to be more daring. Under such conditions the boundary between the world of politics and the world of work, between political control and labor control became blurred and in some case the two overlapped.⁴⁰ In these circumstances the mining community before 1942 became involved in formal politics.

The formation of political parties and trade unions in the Ombilin coalmines can be divided in two periods: before 1960 and afterwards. Table 4 shows the contrasting picture of political parties and trade unions within the company in the two periods. While the Masyumi and the PSI were strong parties in 1960, afterwards both were

³⁷ Feith (1962: 187).

³⁸ Saptari (1995: 50)

³⁹ Hawkins (1971: 233).

⁴⁰ Erwiza (1999: 172).

completely eclipsed, disgraced by their involvement in the PRRI rebellion. A new balance of political power emerged that was born of the fusion of three ideological streams: Nationalist, Islamic, and Communist, or Nasakom. Subsequently these streams were represented by the Indonesian Nationalist Party, or PNI, the Nahdhatul Ulama, or NU for religious traditionalists, and the PKI.⁴¹ Before 1960 the PSI and the Masyumi vied for power with the PKI, but after 1960 its main competition was the Functional Group (later called Golongan Karya, or Golkar).

Table 4: Development of Political Parties and Trade Unions at the Ombilin Coalmines, 1950-1965

| Year | Political Parties | Trade Unions |
|-------------|----------------------------------|--|
| 1945-1959 | Indonesian Socialist Party (PSI) | Indonesian Miners' Trade Union/All-Indonesian Congress of Workers, SBTI/KBSI |
| | Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) | All-Indonesian Workers' Central Organization (SBTI/SOBSI) |
| | Masyumi | Indonesian Islamic Trade Union (SBII) |
| 1960-1965 | Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) | All-Indonesian Workers' Central Organization (SBTI/SOBSI) |
| | Indonesian National Party (PNI) | Marhaenist Workers' Union (KBM) |
| | Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) | Indonesian Muslim Trade Union (Sarbumusi) |
| | Functional Group | Coalmine <i>Karyawan</i> Union/Central Organization of Socialist White Collar <i>Karyawan</i> (PKBT-SOKSI) |

Source: Erwiza, 'Miners' 1999: 145, 187-188.

In the period between 1945 and 1959 the SBTI-SOBSI had the most members. Its strength lay in the modest attitude adopted by its leaders and their willingness to give

⁴¹ For a good introduction and review about Soekarno's ideas on nationalism, Islam, and marxism, see Mc Vey, (1963: 113-122; 1970).

labour problems a central place. The SBTI's concern for labour problems is evidenced in the demands it made of management. These demands included strikes (in 1953) as well as demands for improvements in the nine basic needs: food, clothing, wage increases and others. Other trade unions such as SBII and Sarbumusi did not pay much attention to labour problems, but concentrated instead on religious issues. The KBM-PNI was more elitist, and not interested in any concessions to labour that would endanger the comfortable positions of its members in the company. Finally, support for the SBTI-KBSI and PKTB-SOKSI had never been strong among the miners.

Outside the company the miners and their families were involved in social and cultural organizations, some of which were affiliated with the PKI (e.g., People's Youth (Pemuda Rakyat), the Association of Indonesian Farmers (Barisan Tani Indonesia-BTI) and the Indonesian Women's Movement (Gerwani). The mining community also established various musical, sports, and religious groups. The musical groups included Ketoprak, Kuda Kepang, Kecapi Sunda, Randai, and Keroncong - but ronggeng and tandak, which had been formed by the Javanese community and recruited by company, disappeared from the mining community. These associations created solidarity among the miners.

What differed from previous years was the emergence of formal representations for women (miners' wives and daughters). Many women became members of Gerwani, the Pemuda Rakyat, and other social-cultural clubs. Gerwani not only provided helpful strategies in domestic matters and social survival, but also created a consciousness within the working class community. The leaders of Gerwani were very active in supporting SBTI-SOBSI, the Pemuda Rakyat, and the BTI, by continually seeking additional members, spreading the ideology of class struggle, and promising a better life for the future.

At the Sawahlunto some women became the leaders of Gerwani; these included Djalinus, Subranti, Martini, Satidjah, and Gadis. Djalinus, a well-known member of the PKI in Sawahlunto, led Gerwani. She was from Minangkabau and worked in the Department of Information office at Sawahlunto. She co-operated with several educated women that included Subranti, Martini, Satidjah, and Gadis. They represented the second generation of the Javanese contract labourers. For the most part their husbands were also workers at the Ombilin coalmines. These women actively mobilized others for various activities in Durian, Surian, and Sikalang villages such as arisan, a voluntary savings association that provided mutual assistance in times of need (such as deaths, births, and marriages), literacy courses, co-operative shops, sports, and political

courses. Gerwani's activities intensified after 1964, adding military training to its programme. About twice a week, 20 or 30 women from each village reported for military training, wearing long shirts and trousers and holding bamboo spears. They were led by the Pemuda Rakyat. Moreover, Djalinus and her friends successfully placed about 25 women in jobs in the mines.⁴²

The involvement of miners and their families in formal and informal representations also changed the forms of their responses to company. The politics of protest was marked by a set of strikes from April to July, 1953, which was two years after the Minister of Defense announced the law against strikes.⁴³ Table 5 shows the strikes that took place from April to July, 1953, which involved the majority of the labourers. In total, the company lost over 60 working days.

Table 5: Strikes and Strikers in 1953

| Date of strike | Duration | Total Strikes |
|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| 18 April | 2 hours | 144 |
| 9 May | 24 hours | 1,200 |
| 17-23 May | 6 days | 933 |
| 23 May-30 May | 8 days | 856 |
| 31 May-15 July | 48 days | 760 |
| 16 July | ? | 400 |

Source: *Haluan*, 8-6-1953; *Sumatera Tengah* 1953: 17

The strikes of 1953 were not simply a protest by the Javanese workers, but were also a reflection of conflicts between the two trade unions and political parties that were exacerbated by ethnic and class tensions. The strikers were Javanese labourers, members of the SBTI-SOBSI. They demanded an end to the power abuses of the Minangkabau, socialist manager, Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando and the overseers, as well as an end to arbitrary mistreatment, wage cuts and taxes on company land used by labourers to construct their houses. This group was from the socialist trade union (SBTI-KBSI) and mostly Minangkabau. The leaders of the SBTI-SOBSI - Sugino M. Wiguno, Ramali, and Ronojudo were all sons of former contract Javanese labourers, and were very vocal in their slogans and demands. Their posters were plastered on the walls of every miners' barracks, with slogans such as 'Move! Fight for honesty and truth!'.⁴⁴

⁴² Erwiza (1999: 152).

⁴³ As a whole, in fact the attempt by the state to restrict the strike was successful. No more than 11% of the Indonesian labourers went on strike in 1956. On this, see Hawkins (1971: 239)

⁴⁴ PTBA-UPO Archives, letter by Sugino to Aminoeddin, the leader of the Durian village branch of SBTL, 20/8/1952.

The miners' politics of protest through the 1953 strikes were not only a collective conflict between the Javanese miners from the communist trade union and their Minangkabau socialist manager and overseers, but also a battle between a mining working-class community and the company. What we see in this instance is the emergence of class consciousness among the mining community - a consciousness that was bound up with class and ethnic conflicts. Perhaps even more important was the presence of mining working-class community in the strikes, where the role of informal associations shaped the political consciousness of the miners. In addition, there was the involvement of women in the public political sphere. The role of women played was complex and fragmented. Women were not only involved in the politics of survival for their own households (like the 1930s), but also in formal representations, and informal associations. These associations had become a locus of communication among the townspeople and also a place where political choice and actions were defined. Arisan, a very active association among women in each of the barracks in Sawahlunto, functioned as a bridge for their political actions.

The role of women in supporting the miners' struggle under the SBTI-SOBSI can be seen clearly in the preparation for strikes and in the 1953 visit by the member of Parliament, Werdojo. Women or miners' wives had prepared food for meetings of the leaders of SBTI-SOBSI and Werdojo in Sawahlunto. Their involvement was an important stimulus, deriving from their own husbands' involvement and the leaders of Gerwani. What motivated the women in their activities can be seen from the following statement by a miner's wife:

I had to prepare and bring some snacks to the branch office of the SBTI-SOBSI in the village of Durian. I was ordered by my husband to do this. I did not mind because I felt it helped my husband in the struggle for our future. I had to help the organization because it had helped me so much, and my husband, especially when our daughter passed away (anonymous, 19 April 1995).

The above statement indicates there was a reciprocal relationship between the men, women, and trade unions. Members of the trade union would obey their leaders so long as the organization provided protection. In this respect the SBTI-SOBSI and other organizations affiliated with the PKI were indeed more concerned with the labourers' interests.

Werdojo's visit renewed the enthusiasm of the SBTI-SOBSI and the PKI leaders both in Sawahlunto and West Sumatra in their efforts to gain greater political influence. Their demands contained two main themes: the need to replace the socialist manager, Sjahbuddin Sutan Radjo Nando, and improvement of miners' living conditions. The

latter included concerns such as health care, housing, and wages. The miners were successful, especially after a visit to Sawahlunto in July 1953 by a member of the P4P, two high officials from the Ministry of Court, and the Head of mining industry from Jakarta. They were charged with the task of solving the labour conflicts in the Ombilin coalmines.

The women's support for their husbands' struggles through the trade union (SBTI-SOBSI) increased after 1960. They helped collect contributions of rice and money from barracks residents, attended meetings of their husbands' organizations and their own associations, followed political courses and para-military training, and attended the meetings of arisan. Women also accompanied their husbands, demanding improvements in working and living conditions from the company. Although there were no strikes during the 1960s, the miners' remained vocal in their demands, which were sometimes successful. What was different from previous years was the women's involvement in military training, which was intended to help in the struggle for West Irian. About twice a week 20 to 30 women reported for military training, wearing long shirts and trousers and holding bamboo spears. They were especially eager in the villages of Durian and Sikalang. The training was led by members of the Pemuda Rakyat, which planned that the women would be sent as female volunteers, helping the Indonesian military struggle for West Irian.

This essay describes the politics of the miners and its relation to the role of the women who were involved in the communist organizations. Apart from the unity of interest between the miners and their wives in the miners' struggles, women also played a more complex and fragmented role than before. The lives of both the miners and their wives became more varied. The miners not only performed their jobs in the mines, they also sought to take additional jobs to make ends meet - as well as attending meetings of informal and formal organizations. Like their husbands, the women or wives also performed more than one task: they now had both domestic and public roles. They not only took care of their children, husbands, cooking, and washing, but they, too, sought additional income by preparing snacks, planting vegetables, and attending meetings, courses, arisan, and military training. This unity of interests in the struggle for their rights during the period of democracy was certainly not the intent of the company when it created a community of stable households. In contrast with the events of the Depression period, when state control was strong and the miners, with the support of their families, were more accommodating, in the period of democracy state control and the Indonesian economy were both weak, and the miners, with the economic and

political support of their families became more militant. The democratic political climate allowed them to protest more openly, struggling to improve their future by means of labour strikes. Thus, married labourers and their wives began to plan for improved lives in the barracks.

Summary

It is too early to make any definitive conclusions because there is a dearth of information on gender response to state control. We do not yet know how the negotiation process between women and their husbands will develop, or between Gerwani and the SBTI-SOBSI. We can, however, draw some preliminary conclusions based on the preceding description of events in the Ombilin coalmines. First, not only did the social-political and economic pressures by the state and management lead to a similar response by men and women, but these pressures also determined the demographic, social, cultural, and economic nature of the miners themselves. The history of the mines: the imbalance between men and women, the formation of the mining community, socio-political and cultural organizations and associations were important factors influencing the forms and intensity of gender response to state and management control.

Second, the gendered response to state control was not a linear process. In the first years of mining exploitation miners used a politics of resistance and maintained this up to the second decade of the twentieth century. Afterwards they changed to a politics of accommodation. The change in the miners' politics was caused not only by a shift in management and state labour policies, but also by the changing social composition of the miners. Women had an important role in defining the politics of resistance and accommodation of the miners. Third, after Indonesian independence, when state control was weak and the role of society became stronger, women started to become involved in formal organizations, strikes, and protests, which suggests that their struggle was the same as that of their husbands in the trade union.

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