Claiming industrial citizenship: The struggle for domestic worker rights in Indonesia

Introduction

Indonesian domestic workers are taking to the streets. Not in marches by the thousands, but in small groups of women who carry the personal risk of losing their jobs by going public with demands for rights at work. Supported by non-governmental organisations, domestic workers have been trying to organise in cities across Indonesia since the early 1990s. Ever since its beginning, one of the central demands of this embryonic movement has been to secure formal worker rights and social security. Despite years of combining local organising activities, alliance-building and parliamentary lobbyism, domestic workers in Indonesia have had limited success in securing formal recognition as workers.

Understanding this political mobilisation as a struggle for citizenship is in line with how one of the NGO activists describes the movement of which she is a part:

“The domestic worker issue is a woman’s issue, a worker issue and a human rights issue. Everything relates to the domestic worker.”

This article argues that the strategies of political mobilisation of domestic workers, as well as their (yet) limited legislative impact, can benefit from a conceptual discussion of industrial citizenship. To cite Zhang and Lillie (2014, p. 3), “[i]ndustrial citizenship, despite the long history of the term, remains an underdeveloped concept within citizenship studies”. One can think of many reasons why. Today’s global workforce differs on several accounts from the workers of 19th century industrial Britain on whom T. H. Marshall modelled his concept of industrial citizenship. Moreover, worker organisations like those who represent Indonesian domestic workers are often not trade unions in the classic sense. In a contemporary era when unions experience decline across Europe and North America, and when academic observers propose alternatives to trade unionism altogether (Standing, 2009; Waterman, 2005), the concept of industrial rights might seem archaic and passé.

Still, workers claim rights all over the world, in workplaces as well as in political publics. Even under unfavourable conditions, there are examples of innovative worker
organisations in developing countries that see their membership rising, not falling. This article argues that the concept of industrial citizenship can still inform the study of contemporary struggles for worker rights.

The argument is based on qualitative research a group of marginalised workers, namely those who perform paid work in Indonesian homes. According to a national network of domestic worker organisations in Indonesia, there are an estimated 10.7 million workers employed in private homes across Indonesia. In addition, a majority of the more than 6 million international migrants working outside Indonesia work as domestic workers according to the International Red Cross. During 2015, we conducted interviews with organisational representatives, activists and government officials in five Indonesian cities – Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Medan, Palembang and Kupang – as well as holding focus group discussions with domestic workers in Yogyakarta and Jakarta.

By analysing the mobilisation of Indonesian domestic workers through the lens of industrial citizenship, two objectives are achieved. First, the analysis highlights some key limitations to an NGO-driven, rights-based political approach to domestic work in Indonesia. Theories of industrial citizenship assume that the realisation of worker rights rests on the mutually constitutive dynamics between class-based solidarity and political mobilisation. This is a useful starting point to understand the obstacles facing domestic workers and their organisational allies. Second, the case supports and expands on an existing critique of the concept of industrial citizenship. Even though the differences are striking, I would argue that the experiences of exploited, informal workers in the global South should lead us to update and revise, rather than reject, industrial citizenship as an analytical concept.

Before the concept is critiqued, however, it should be properly introduced. This article sets out with a brief introduction to the original concept as presented in Marshall (1992 [first published 1950]), and its appropriation and critique by academic scholarship in recent years. Inspired by Marshall’s original idea of a mutually reinforcing relationship between different forms of citizenship, I draw on Zhang and Lillie’s (2014) distinction between industrial citizenship as process and industrial citizenship as status. I favour a process-oriented approach, and use the organising efforts among domestic workers in Indonesia as a case to exemplify the merits of a de- and re-contextualised understanding of industrial citizenship.
**Industrial citizenship and the struggle for rights**

Industrial citizenship refers to the ability of workers to organise collectively in the realm of work – from the workplace to systems of industrial relations – which in turn may give workers sufficient leverage to enforce rights outside the realm of work through, for instance, labour legislation and welfare reforms. As the concept can be traced back to Marshall’s ([1950]1992) historical analysis of citizenship and social class, it is worth revisiting its original interpretation. Marshall made the now famous distinction between three forms of rights: civil, political and social. He also linked their development throughout the history of capitalism to three stages, the emergence of civil rights in the eighteenth century, via the expansion of political rights in the nineteenth century, to the establishment of social rights in the national welfare states of the twentieth century. The relationship between capitalism and these categories of rights is contentious in Marshall’s reading, but not in a straightforward manner. Civil rights, for instance, are individual in their nature and correspond well with the private sale and purchase of labour power at the heart of capitalist accumulation. Political rights, on the other hand, are collective in nature and hence contra to the logic of capitalism. But political rights were not seen as a threat until the emergence of social-democratic labour parties in the twentieth century. This represents the last phase of Marshall (1992), when citizenship became ‘at war’ with capitalism during the expansion of social rights.

Marshall argued that one of the main vehicles for expanding social rights in industrial Britain was trade unionism. Trade unions, in Marshall’s reading, breaks with the linear movement from civil, via political, to social rights. Rather, trade unionism established *collective civil rights*, the right to bargaining as a collective unit:

> “This meant that social progress was being sought by strengthening civil rights, not by creating social rights; through the use of contract in the open market, not through a minimum wage and social security. [...] [T]he acceptance of collective bargaining was not simply a natural extension of civil rights; it represented the transfer of an important process from the political to the civil sphere of citizenship” (Marshall, 1992, p. 26).

Hence, Marshall saw industrial citizenship in the form of a well-organised working class as instrumental in the securement of broader social rights.
Given the specific historical and geographical context of Marshall’s analysis, one might raise concerns about the applicability of the concept to worker struggles in Indonesia or other developing countries in the 2010s. Such a concern is not unfounded. Not all forms of worker organisation represent a struggle for industrial citizenship. This would be to dilute the concept. Industrial citizenship is not an all-encompassing concept suited to explain the politics of work in all its breadth. Informal employment, the situation in which most Indonesian domestic workers find themselves, involves issues that transcend a traditional trade union agenda. In the growing literature on informal worker organisations (e.g. Brown, Lyons, & Dankoco, 2010; Lindell, 2010a) it is documented that the conditions of work are shaped by a range of societal actors, including religious brotherhoods, saving schemes and product associations. Here, the politics of informal work are often negotiated without making use of rights-based or class-based rationales.

This article argues that neither geographical area (the global North as opposed to the global South) nor economic sector (traditional industrial sectors as opposed to, say, informal work arrangements) should determine the applicability of industrial citizenship as an analytical concept. Rather, what serves as the defining feature in Marshall’s account is the active mobilisation of class-based mobilisation strategies and rights-based discourses. This limitation still leaves ample room for an organisational multitude of trade unions, workers’ associations, non-governmental organisations and support networks, whose presence and influence has been documented far away from 19th century industrial Britain (see Lindell, 2010b for an overview). This reading of the concept opens for a more dynamic understanding of industrial citizenship, instead of reducing it to a historical account.

**Status- and process-oriented approaches**

Zhang and Lillie (2014) argue that industrial citizenship, as an academic concept, can be understood both as a status granted to individuals within a territorially defined community and as a societal process. Whereas Marshall’s original notion, as depicted above, clearly described industrial citizenship as a socio-historical process, others have since come to use the term to describe a state (or a desired state) of worker rights protection.
Fudge (2005, p. 635), for instance, uses Canada as an example to show how industrial citizenship can be understood as a “status limiting commodification and conferring rights to influence terms of employment”. Fudge thus conceives of industrial citizenship as a status of worker rights protection. Like in other Western economies, this corresponds well with the levels of employment security granted to Canadian (male) workers during the post-WW2 era. But the decommodification of work is neither complete nor stable, and Fudge (2005, p. 643) argues that since 1980, Canadian industrial citizenship has been narrowed due to the “combined pressures of globalization, deregulation and feminization”. The ascent of a neoliberal ideology with its universalistic conceptions of civil rights ran counter to the ‘distinctive class inflection’ of industrial citizenship (Fudge, 2005). This is in line with Aguiar (2006, p. 451), who argues that individualised rights are “increasingly privileged over collective rights”, which means that groups who are marginalised in the labour market experience ‘incomplete citizenship’ at work.

The protection of worker rights is unevenly distributed between genders, social groups, industrial sectors and regions of the world. This has been the case since the birth of capitalism. In industrial Britain, the emerging industrial citizenship Marshall seemed to be premised on the subject the ‘male breadwinner’ (Fudge, 2005). Zetlin and Whitehouse (2003, p. 774) point out that Marshall “appears to assume that women will gain their entitlements through their husbands, and his concept of citizenship clearly takes for granted the unpaid labour of women”.

The unevenness of industrial citizenship creates a variegated landscape of labour market regulation between and within world regions. For many workers, this represents a motivation to migrate in search of better conditions for work. Indonesian domestic workers represents an illustrative example in this regard. In addition to the rural-urban migration that many of the workers in Indonesia are engaged in, a majority of the country’s estimated 6 million international migrant workers are also domestic workers (Rudnyckyj, 2004; Silvey, 2004; Yeoh & Huang, 1999). While legal migration might allow certain workers to move into territorial jurisdictions with better employment security, illegal labour migration bereaves workers of their legal status and excludes them from industrial citizenship in both absolute and relative terms (Castles, 2011).
There are clearly advantages to conceiving industrial citizenship as status. It can be useful to understand the relative gains and losses which result from worker mobility (see Ball & Piper, 2002; Castles, 2011 for both micro and macro approaches). It can also serve as an ideal type for comparative reviews of formal worker rights between regions and countries as evident in the databases of the ILO (see also Caraway, 2009). But there are also problems with this approach, as it easily leads to what Somers (1996) appropriately labels an ‘epistemology of absence’ – meaning that a phenomenon is explained by what it lacks, instead of its observed qualities.

This is particularly the case when investigating workers in countries outside Europe and North America. Perhaps this is why industrial citizenship is rarely applied to worker struggles beyond this particular geographical region in the world economy. One of the few usages in the global South can be found in Kenny’s (2007) analysis of post-apartheid workplaces in South Africa. She describes how employers lobbied for regulatory dispensations in labour law to the detriment of casual workers, served to “reinforce[e] the social imaginary of the full-time, permanent worker as the subject of ‘industrial citizenship’” (Kenny, 2007, p. 285). While full-time, permanent employment might be the reality for a small core of industrial and public sector workers in certain industrialising developing countries, like South Africa or Brazil, most workers in the world are very far from enjoying the level of employment protection and social security associated with industrial citizenship. Hence, a status-oriented approach holds limited relevance beyond a particular Western historical experience.

If we on the other hand choose to focus on industrial citizenship as a process, the implications are different. What Marshall’s original use of the term contained, was a sophisticated understanding of how different sets of rights developed in a mutually constitutive sequence, and how social citizenship (e.g. social security and welfare rights) was the result of political struggle and worker mobilisation.

Approaching industrial citizenship as a process is potentially a more open approach to the concept, as workers politicise their conditions of work in every corner of the world, and often through a language of rights. As this article is concerned with understanding the political mobilisation of a group of workers who enjoy very limited worker rights, it seems more suitable to adopt a process-oriented approach to industrial citizenship. The organisations of domestic workers in Indonesia do engage in rights-based mobilisation,
not only at work but also in the political sphere. Hence, we can use Marshall's concept to explore the interconnections between worker organization and the realisation of citizenship rights. In particular, Marshall’s insistence on worker organisation as a decisive factor allowing workers to translate political and collective civil rights into social rights, might be important here.

But even a process-oriented approach to worker mobilisation could lead to eurocentrism (Cabrera, 2008), where empirical cases are studied to “explain the absence of an expected outcome” (Somers, 1996, p. 180), such as collective bargaining or tripartite social dialogue. As Zhang and Lillie (2014, p. 13) aptly put it, “we must be cautious about the teleological and unidirectional reading of the development of citizenship rights”. The struggle for rights at work does not always take the form of trade unionism, nor is it necessarily motivated by clear goal of building a socialist or social democratic society.

Hence, to facilitate a contemporary use of industrial citizenship in Marshall’s original, we need to de- and re-contextualised the processes of citizenship formation. If we manage to do so, we open up the concept of industrial citizenship to alternative trajectories and other mobilising identities. In the remainder of this article, I will use the case of domestic workers’ organisations in Indonesia to illustrate the usefulness, but arguably also some of shortcomings, of the concept in a contemporary labour struggle.

**Mobilising for domestic worker rights in Indonesia**

The end of the oppressive New Order regime in 1998 signalled new opportunities for industrial citizenship in Indonesia. In the phase immediately after the fall of Suharto, labour legislation was put in place which guaranteed organisational rights and the number of independent trade unions increased dramatically (Ford, 2000). Expanded industrial rights were a result of international pressure, as well as pressure from domestic trade unions. But this initial extension of rights was followed by another process of labour law reform where flexibilisation and outsourcing were introduced to deal with the effects of the Asian financial crisis in the late 1990s. This paved the way for the Manpower Act of 2003, stipulating essential rights and obligations of employers and workers in the country (Suryomengglo, 2009), which was only passed after contestation
with the newly established trade unions. It is this law that the country’s domestic workers are excluded from, under the current interpretation of the law.

The political mobilisation of domestic workers dates back to the activities of women activists in Yogyakarta in the early 1990s, and has since then yielded local unions in several cities and a national network for domestic workers' rights, Jala PRT. Ever since 2004, Jala PRT have lobbied the Indonesian parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat) to pass a Domestic Workers Protection Bill that would end the exclusion domestic workers from formal worker rights. Despite the activism of Jala PRT, which has included a high-profile hunger strike in 2014 and the involvement of international organisations like the ILO, the bill has been dropped from the list of legislative priorities (Prolegnas) several times by Indonesian elected politicians. Moreover, despite having one of the world's largest domestic worker workforces, Indonesia has yet to ratify ILO Convention 189 concerning Decent Work for Domestic workers.

A ministerial regulation in 2015 (Permenaker No.2/2015) compensated to some extent for the legal vacuum surrounding domestic work by requiring domestic employers and employees to formalise their agreement in a written contract (Austin, unpublished).

While the regulation was welcomed by activists interviewed in our research, it was also criticised for relegating the politics of domestic work to the private sphere (cf. Silvey, 2004).

I would argue that the case of domestic worker mobilisation in Indonesia highlights three political challenges that have not been sufficiently discussed in the literature on industrial citizenship: the conflict between social identities and alternative collective identities; the intersectionality of informal domestic work; and, finally, the problem of scale as it relates to the organising strategies of domestic workers in Indonesia.

**Challenging social identity through collective identity construction**

For worker mobilisation to emerge in the first place, argues Zhang and Lillie (2014, p. 5), it requires the development of class capacities and bonds of solidarity through “shared symbols, networks, organizations” – all of which they see as on the wane in many Western countries. In developing countries like Indonesia, this class-based solidarity has never been established beyond a limited group of workers in the industrial sectors.
Workers in both these contexts are therefore forced to base their mobilisation on other identities than those who served as the basis for industrial citizenship in 20\textsuperscript{th} century Europe.

Questions of solidarity and identity construction are critical to the continued relevance of industrial citizenship but were not discussed explicitly in Marshall’s original account. If bonds of solidarity and a common identity as workers do not exist prior to mobilisation, they must be created \textit{through} mobilisation. Identity, solidarity and political mobilisation can thus be seen to stand in a mutually constitutive relationship to each other, and as a precondition for the realisation of industrial citizenship. Mapping the geographies of industrial citizenship is therefore not limited to documenting its end product – in the form of social and economic rights – but also implies studying concrete attempts to construct worker identities, to establish alliances between different groups of workers, and to mobilise politically. Political mobilisation will always seek to maintain a firm foundation in social categories and identities from where they draw their members (cf. Cox, 1998).

A fruitful analogy is arguably to think of industrial citizenship as an imagined community (cf. Anderson, 2006) of common interest, continuously in need of being affirmed and reproduced. But all imagined communities entail processes of exclusion and inclusion. For many workers across the world – in particular for marginalized groups like informal workers, transnational migrants and domestic workers – the struggle for industrial citizenship is therefore also a struggle to be included in existing class categories, or to create new ones. Processes of collective identity construction is therefore an important part of struggles for industrial citizenship (Kelly, 2012; Melucci, 1995).

Indonesian domestic workers are constrained by their social identity, as their contribution to society is still seen as having limited economic value (Gastaldi, 2015; Weix, 2000). This social identity is borne out of the semi-feudal and familial work arrangements that traditionally has governed domestic work in Indonesia. The fact that Indonesian domestic workers are women working in a patriarchal society, serve to deepen their social exclusion. This feeds into a politics of intersectionality (cf. Bernardino-Costa, 2014), where their role as outsiders in the public domain is cemented
by their status as poor, migrants and women, whereas their role as insiders in the
private domain excludes them from acting as political subjects.

Interviewer: Have you ever asked her how she describe herself?

Employer in Kupang: No, we don’t ask things like that. We don't even introduce
her as a 'helper' (pembantu), we introduce her as 'the one
who helps us'. More polite.

These are not only the perceptions of employer. Domestic workers encounter this social
identity also in in their own social networks:

“Some of our own family members don’t think that we are workers. We get less
respect than other family members who work as factory workers. Society doesn’t
think domestic workers exist, we are just a complement at neighbourhood
meetings.” (member of domestic worker union in Yogyakarta)

Given the social exclusion this group experiences in their own communities, it comes as no
surprise that legal and political society fails to include this category of worker in legal
framework and political practice:

“We want recognition from the state as workers not as maids, and that as domestic
workers we are not despised or viewed as incapable.” (leader of domestic worker
union in Jakarta)

Domestic workers’ social identity more often frame them as subjects in need of
protection than as social actors with political agency. In some Indonesian cities were we
conducted interviews, such as Palembang and Kupang, the issue of domestic workers
rights were thus limited to campaigns by middle-class women’s organisations around
domestic abuse and human trafficking. This raises an important strategic dilemma in
Indonesian civil society which has also been recognised in Varghese’s (2006) analysis of
domestic workers in the US: does mobilising on behalf of domestic workers risk
marginalising mobilisation by domestic workers?

Related to this, it is worth recalling that Marshall (1992) did not see social rights as a
result of benevolent ruling elites but rather as the outcome of a mobilised working class.
As Zhang and Lillie (2014, p. 5) aptly puts it, “where social citizenship reflects working-
class power, industrial citizenship is the source of that power”.

The mobilization of Indonesian domestic workers since the 1990s can be understood as an attempt to challenge the social identity described above through a process of collective identity construction. A collective identity serves to important purposes. First, it builds solidarity within the group. The establishment of domestic workers schools (Sekolah PRT) in Yogyakarta and Jakarta have been important in this respect (Gastaldi, 2015). In the schools, trained activists and domestic workers meet to define what it means to be a ‘domestic worker’ together.

“For every meeting we held, the more we get our mind clear about our rights as domestic workers. [...] Thanks to this organisation, my friends now are able to stand up for themselves. We didn't have the guts before, including me.” (leader of domestic worker union in Jakarta)

“I used to be a helper. But now I am a worker.” (member of domestic worker union in Jakarta)

“When I first met [the union] I was hopeless, had many problems. But joining up with other members gave me the spirit not to give up. Now I know I’m not alone. We have a solidarity network with many activities.” (member of domestic worker union in Yogyakarta)

In addition to Sekolah PRT, worker associations and credit schemes offer domestic workers in Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Medan and Semarang a community in which they can experience worker solidarity and develop their own sense of empowerment.

This collective identity construction serves to reconfigure the relationship between domestic workers and society. In the slogans publically displayed on placards and t-shirts, domestic workers are explicitly portrayed as workers. This is also very visible in the language used by activists in media. In a culture where they are predominantly referred to as domestic helpers (pembantu rumah tangga), maids or even servants (ILO, 2006; Weix, 2000), even the act of referring to themselves as ‘domestic workers’ (pekerja rumah tangga or PRT) represents a political act. Gradually, the acronym PRT is in the process of becoming well known in Indonesian public discourse. A quote from a provincial government official is illustrative of the paternalistic conception of domestic work:
“[S]uddenly they are called ‘workers’ *(pekerja)*? Maybe they do it to elevate the housemaids’ dignity a little. It is not a problem for us about who changed the term, right?"

Even though the number of organised workers is still limited, it is clear that this alternative collective identity emerging is already making a mark on official discourse. But amidst this rhetorical shift, the institutions that govern working life have proved hard to alter.

**From private and informal to public and formal?**

One reason why industrial citizenship has been geographically associated with Western Europe and Northern America is the assumption that it corresponds with a boundary between formal and informal employment. Formal employment took on very different expressions during the development of post-war Keynesian welfare states, than they do in most countries in today *(Standing, 2009)*. Many of the processes that led from industrial citizenship to social citizenship in Europe entailed the formalisation of a standard employment relation as well as extensive welfare provisions. Understood as such, employment arrangements of informal labour markets in developing countries appear as the antipode to industrial citizenship.

Reiterating our commitment to a process-oriented understanding of industrial citizenship, it would be ill advised to neglect the possibility of meaningful claims for rights and recognition outside the realm of standard formal employment. Moreover, such claims do not have to be met with the same trajectory of formalisation that workers in industrial and public sectors have done in the past. While the literature on labour regimes in the global South rarely employ the theoretical lens of industrial citizenship, the exclusion from formal labour regulation has been identified as a key challenge for very different subjects: workers in special economic zones *(Jenkins, 2015)*; street vendors and other informal workers forced into self-entrepreneurialisation *(Lindell, 2010a)*; and domestic workers working within the confines of private homes *(see Ally, 2010 for her analysis of South African workers)*.

Industrial citizenship has always been exclusive in nature, excluding particular groups and being confined to particular spaces. Even more than in countries like South Africa
Indonesian domestic workers have found the boundary between home and work – between what is perceived as the productive and reproductive spheres of society – hard to cross. But this boundary is not static. Since the Suharto era, urbanisation and a growing middle-class has led to an increasing commodification of domestic labour. Even if the arrangements remain informal, urban domestic work is no longer confined to kinship networks and constitutes a de facto employment relationship between an employer and an employee. This has opened for attempts to establish a collective ‘domestic worker’ identity by union activists. But the Indonesian state still represents a main hurdle for these attempts, by refusing to accept domestic work as a public concern, confining it to the intimate politics of the home (Silvey, 2004).

To domestic workers, the formal-informal divide also entails renegotiating multiple roles and relationships with their employers, as well as with other workers. This intersectionality of domestic work is reflected in the exclusion of domestic workers from the institutions of industrial relations. Domestic workers lack a national trade union in the formal sense in Indonesia. Like other informal workers, levels of unionisation are extremely low among domestic employees, and it is only recently that some of the major trade unions have attempted to organise informal workers in a separate organisation. To compensate for this, the national network Jala PRT cooperates loosely with trade union federations on certain lobby activities. Building trust between trade unions and the organisations is a painstaking exercise, however, as both trade union leaders and many of their members employ domestic workers themselves.

This dilemma also manifests itself on the other side of the negotiation table. Because employers are private households, there are no employers’ associations or interest organisations dedicated to those who employ workers in their own households. This does not mean that the interests of the employers are not channeled into the political process, albeit in an informal manner. In fact, politicians, employers, trade union leaders and NGO representatives are all likely to be employers of domestic workers in Indonesia, spurring the leader of Jala PRT to comment that “they are all the employer side”. This is an often-overlooked aspect of intersectionality underlying the politics of domestic work. The hesitance of various actors to embrace the extension of minimum wage regulation to domestic workers is illustrative of this fact, and was repeatedly expressed during interviews with the author (Jordhus-Lier & Prabawati, forthcoming).
The problem of scale

A third set of constraints relates to the current forms of representation within the domestic workers’ movement. The domestic workers’ movement in Indonesia is currently drawn between national legislative change as the main goal, and a small and embryonic group of membership-based organisations focused on recruiting and servicing members. Whereas the legislative campaign is coordinated by a network of NGO activists at the national scale, the latter group views the metropolitan area (or even the neighbourhood) as their scale of organisation. Conceiving the politics of domestic work as a problem of scale, was done by Silvey (2004) in her study of Indonesian domestic workers in Saudi Arabia. She argued that individual strategies of migration and collective strategies of transnationalism was a way to challenge the Indonesian state’s construction of the household scale as beyond the scope of state jurisdiction. By using the language of industrial citizenship, we can add nuance to the problem of scale by identifying a mismatch between a national scale of political activism and the local scales of organising among domestic workers working in Indonesia.

The growing presence of the domestic workers’ movement in a national political space has been strengthened by the alliance-building between Jala PRT and various actors in civil society. Coming out of the women’s movement, activists in Jala PRT maintain close ties with women’s groups. They also have an active international engagement as part of the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) and other transnational activist networks. Often, these international NGOs employ a rights-based discourse with a focus on strengthening legal protection at the national scale. But these actors are also faced with the above-mentioned dilemmas of intersectionality and institutional exclusion. The ‘Decent Work’ agenda of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is a good example as it, on the one hand, acknowledges the political character of worker rights through championing ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on the right to organise and to engage in collective bargaining. On the other hand, however, its main efforts remain top-down, geared at compelling states to commit to formal agreements guaranteeing rights at work, social security and tripartite social dialogue. As described above, the ideal of tripartite social dialogue as stated in appears far-fetched for Indonesian domestic workers.
Indonesian domestic workers are in other words still not represented by their own at the national scale (what Pitkin, 1967 would label 'descriptive representation'). Moreover, they are unable to sanction their demands for social rights through acting as collective actors in the labour market (e.g. in the form of industrial action). While the organising efforts of Jala PRT range from relatively well-established unions in Yogyakarta to younger, emergent organisations in Jakarta and Semarang, a crucial challenge for this movement is how to connect their activism at a national scale with a strategy of establishing domestic workers’ unions across Indonesian cities.

Again, lessons from the discussion of industrial citizenship can help explain why a liberal discourse of citizenship, where socio-economic rights are only granted the role of a secondary accompaniment to civil and political rights (cf. Jones & Stokke, 2005), prove insufficient. Attempts to enforce socio-economic rights from above are often less effective than struggles that substantiate their mobilisation through worker mobilisation (cf. Marshall, 1992). Policies and legal protections targeting domestic workers in Indonesia are predominantly anchored at the national level. At present, there is a lack of mutual benefit between these national lobby efforts and the embryonic organising activities in local urban communities across Indonesia. Drawing on the scalar language of (Cox, 1998), the Indonesian domestic workers’ movement suffer from a disarticulation between their spaces of dependence (privatised workplaces and local associational life) and their spaces of engagement (a national legislative process).

A further spatial dilemma facing this movement is the mobile nature of the domestic labour workforce. Millions of Indonesian workers work abroad, many of them in the Middle East and in Asian megacities like Singapore and Hong Kong. While domestic workers abroad experience 'triple exclusion' from citizenship in their host country – by being female, foreign and working in private homes – there are also examples of attempts to claim citizenship through establishing social organisations and interest groups (Yeoh & Huang, 1999). The level of international mobility among Indonesian domestic workers is also likely to impact on claims for citizenship at home. The future prospects of working abroad attracts many Indonesian domestic workers and functions as a disincentive to invest long-term in organisational efforts in their current place of work. Many workers interviewed in this project had alternated between overseas work locations and employers in Indonesia throughout their careers, meaning that the social
basis for unionising workers in ‘transit ports’ such as Kupang or Medan was fluid and unstable.

**Conclusion**

Struggles for worker rights such as the attempts to build a domestic workers’ movement in Indonesia can be understood as an ongoing and non-linear process driven by claims for industrial citizenship. Indonesian domestic workers’ organisations and their national network, Jala PRT, has as its articulated goal the realisation of social rights in the national legislative assembly. Success in this political arena, however, hinges on the concomitant creation of a collective domestic worker identity, meaningful access to the civil society institutions regulating industrial relations, and on effective political mobilisation. Despite years of committed activism, the movement has yet to see fundamental legislative reform.

But as Austin (unpublished) aptly notes, one should not be content with simply asking why Jala PRT has not achieved greater political success. A one-sided focus on the structural limitations to industrial citizenship in Indonesia reduces the analytical significance of this case. Understood as a process, not an end state, industrial citizenship can also inform an actor-centred analysis of political mobilisation strategies. In fact, even though the goal of political recognition has still not been achieved, the organisations united under the Jala PRT umbrella seem to be well aware of the critical connections between identity construction, class-based solidarity and political mobilisation.

Industrial citizenship, as conceived by Marshall (1992) in his seminal essay “Social citizenship and class”, was never intended to be a universal concept, but rather based in a concrete historical analysis of industrial Britain. Still, it drew up some profound connections between political mobilisation and the realisation of socio-economic rights that seem to resonate with contexts far beyond the time and place of Marshall’s analysis. What could be argued to be universal, is that wherever and by whoever work is undertaken, it can be politicised and expressed by collective actors. Acknowledging important criticisms of the concept, particularly regarding its blindness for identity construction and the intersectionality of informal work, this article has attempted to
demonstrate the continued relevance of industrial citizenship in today’s world of work. Even though domestic NGOs and international development organisations have been eager to promote a rights discourse in support of Indonesian domestic workers, and can claim some successes as a result, a substantial realisation of rights for domestic workers still rests on the active mobilisation of those working lives are at stake.

References


