Workplace and community: workers' politics of representation in Semarang and Pekalongan, Central Java

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PART I WORKERS' MOVEMENTS AND HETEROGENOUS CONSTITUENCY

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1. The Local Movements[1]

It was nearly half past seven in the evening when I encountered three women who were cycling along the road in a fishing village, in the northern coastal area of Pekalongan city, in the Province of Central Java. They were workers of a nearby fish canning factory. Arriving at the house in the corner of a residential street, they entered a yard, and joined dozens of their fellows who had gathered in a meeting for a political training workshop held by union branch leaders from the National Workers' Union (SPN). The workshop targeted female workers. Opening with the union salutations, the union leaders – mainly men – took turns delivering speeches about the 2014 Legislative Elections that would be held in the following two months. They spoke about labour candidates who would run for the Legislative Elections, about their programs and the merits of the candidates in fighting for local wage increase. The leaders also brought to mind the services of the candidates who had advocated for the rights of the workers and their families, to access healthcare services provided by the local government. Therefore, they suggested strongly to the workers and their families to vote for the legislative candidates from the union. During the closing speech, the union leaders emphasised the significance of these political actions at the regional legislative body for improving the workers' life. Both the unionists and majority of workers recognised the experiment as a valuable experience despite the union's candidates eventually failing to win the parliamentary seats in the 2014 Legislative Elections finally.

A different response to a similar experience was expressed by the labour activists who were affiliated with the same organisation (SPN) in Semarang, an industrial region close to Pekalongan, a few days after the 2014 Legislative Elections ended. When I attended a regular meeting of this local trade union, the atmosphere of

1 This study focuses on labour union activism in two regions: Pekalongan City and Semarang Regency. While 'City' and 'Regency' serve as administrative categories, I will henceforth use 'Pekalongan' and 'Semarang' without specifying the administrative statuses for the practical purpose of this writing. Complete regional designations will only be used for comparisons requiring detailed information on these differences.

the meeting was calm. There were only a few people in a relatively small room at the union's regional branch office of Semarang. When the union leader started the meeting, he made an announcement about the local labour candidates who failed to gain significant votes in the Legislative Elections. The announcement was brief. The leader explicitly requested the unionists not to discuss it further, without giving any clear reasons. All who attended in the meeting followed the leader's request. As if nothing significantly happened, they turned to discuss other labour issues such as wage negotiation, preparation for annually union's branch level meeting, and union's plan to join the celebration of May Day. Over the following days, when I met other unionists and workers in the factories and in the neighbourhood, the topic of the local union experiments in electoral politics nearly disappeared, swallowed up by their stories about the day-to-day works in the factories.

The above illustration depicts the trade union events that highlight contrasting experiences of workers and labour activists in electoral politics across two industrial regions. While unions of both regions equally relied on their own respective organisations rather than political parties to mobilise workers to vote for union-backed legislative candidates, they differed significantly in several ways. In Pekalongan, the workers' political experiment was deeply rooted in a community-oriented movement. The unionists extended their outreach beyond the workplace, engaging with constituents from the broader community and combining workplace-based interests with larger social concerns (Dahana and Arifin 2017). Conversely, the Semarang unionists' political experience lacked integration within their primary organisational structure. They primarily focused on a traditional form of labour movement, placing strong emphasis on workplace-based interests as the main goal of struggle, rather than embracing broader societal interests (Juliawan 2010).

This thesis explores the dynamics of representation of workers who are organised under different forms of movements – the community-oriented unionism and the workplace-based unionism – in different industrial regions in Central Java, Indonesia. The questions I explore are: how do the workers in each region develop strategies that led to different kind of unionism despite some similar underlying conditions? To what extent do the chosen strategies adequately serve the interests of each constituent they mobilised under the existing social, cultural and economic-political contexts? [2] I argue that the character of each union in

2 I define the constituent as the people whose voices and interests are championed by their representatives or leaders through the movement. The people are not limited to workers as being shown by the case of unions in Pekalongan which extend the target of activism to various marginalised groups in the local communities.

each location and the way that character is exercised to serve the interests of its constituents are shaped by, firstly, the way in which the unionists, as the main actors of the movements, respond to the existing local economic and political regimes, but also, secondly, by their subjective experiences and the interactions of the unionists and the constituents they claimed in fulfilling their collective interests. This thesis, thereby, primarily emphasises the interactional processes of the movement actors in different social, economic and political contexts.

Community unionism, as exemplified in Pekalongan, was arguably uncommon among unionists in many industrial areas during the first decade of Indonesia's Reformation (Törnquist 2004, 385; Törnquist 2022; Caraway and Ford 2020, 36-38). While most local trade unions maintained the workplace as the core arena of activism, the union activists and workers in Pekalongan sought to integrate workplace-based struggles and various forms of broader socio-political activism with diverse groups of constituents. Despite the fact that Pekalongan alone is only a small town with a minor industrial area, the workers have demonstrated themselves as a militant force seeking to transcend conventional form of unionism. It challenges the common premise saying that the emergence of such militant labour movements is influenced by the extensive industrialisation (Silver 2003; Seidman 1994, 15).

The expansion of unions' activism into broader community poses some highly complex issues due to the heterogeneity of their constituencies. It confronts unions to a high degree of differentiation of social groups, whose interests and identities are defined by varying economic activities, social and political affiliations, and cultural values.[3] The making of a common interest becomes a critical point in organising heterogeneous constituencies. It requires strategies

3 Industrial labour encompasses a wide range of categories, with workers being legally and structurally classified. These categories include permanent workers, temporary workers in various roles such as short-term contractors, outsourced workers, casual workers, and even homeworkers. Production organisation often give rise to diverse relationships based on social identities such as gender, skill, age, regional origin, and positions within the work hierarchy. Some of these identities and positions intersect with the workers' role as part of a larger social community beyond the workplace. Gender identity, age, religion, and class position interact with regional affiliations, political preferences, and more. The heterogeneous nature of the workforce, whether acknowledged or not, influences how labour unions manage this diversity. Therefore, when union organisations in Semarang, especially in Pekalongan, attempted to establish connections with non-worker communities, they encountered a complex web of heterogeneity. In Pekalongan, for instance, activists strove to mobilise groups such as fishers, street vendors, residents affected by regional infrastructure projects, as well as, established networks with religious organisations, students, political parties, and others. Consequently, the diversity of identities, interests, and political orientations becomes an inevitable aspect that must be navigated.

and prerequisites to bind all these diverse groups into a common consciousness and identity that serves as the foundation of the collective interest.

Conventional unionism that emphasises workplace-based activism with economic orientation also poses another problem related to their constituents. This is particularly evident in the unions in Semarang. Workers in this region grew out of a manufacturing industrial economy that was built by large-scale globalised enterprises, against the backdrop of an agrarian economic region as illustrated by Wolf's extensive study (Wolf 1992) on the same region three decades ago. The core goal of the unions' struggle was an economic welfare gained from jobs in industrial sector. They organised unions that were close to the character of business unionism (Taft 1963), emphasising workplace as the core terrain of struggle. They were certainly not isolated from activism beyond the workplace. They also had chances to compete in legislative elections, and were also involved in organising community advocacies. However, the interest in electoral politics in Semarang remained marginal in these unions and workers' activities. The community-based activism they organised was fragmentary and short-lived.

Even though these unions in Semarang usually claim that the working class is a unified constituency, the facts show that it has never been homogenous. Workers' heterogeneity is formed by various types of labour which have long been reproduced by labour markets and capital forces of labour processes and the maximisation of capital accumulation (Saptari 2000, 149-150; Teal 1985, 8). The current reproduction of labour types has resulted in the growth of precarious non-standard labour (Standing 2011). The reproduction of such labour in Semarang, including elsewhere in Indonesia, is facilitated by pro-market labour policies, which create the increased marginalisation of this category of labour in particular and the working-class in general (Islam 2001; Juliawan 2010, 26). Precarious non-standard labour, such as short-term contract workers, outsourced workers, home-based workers and other various kinds of casual labour, have grown significantly everywhere. Female workers are frequently the most affected group by the increasing size of this non-standard labour (Ledwith 2012; Kabeer 2018). The growth of these kinds of labour has put unions in difficult situations in organising their membership – largely due to high turn-over rates of workforce. It is this condition that has resulted in unions claiming that factory workers are their main constituents, as being evident in the case of Semarang. By contrast, it has increasingly strengthened the grip of capital and state control over non-standard labour, excluding them from the bulk of stable, protected, permanent industrial workers.

Thus, I argue that workers in Semarang and Pekalongan have faced equally complex problems of heterogeneity that was reproduced by economic organisations, and social and political differentiation in communities. This is regardless of any choice of organisational form of movements – whether workplace-based or community-oriented unionism. The movement in each region created its own complexity in the relationships between organisations, leaders, and constituents. The constituents – both workers and other community groups – had multiple identities and interests that were shaped by differences in gender, employment status, union membership, locality, political preferences, religious affiliation, etc. Consequently, synchronisation of interests among the heterogeneous constituents became a critical democratic issue within movement organisations.

The most potential issue of representation may arise since most constituents were subjects with less power to define their own collective interests, let alone the formal interests of the organisation. In contrast, key actors of the movements, such as unionists and other labour activists, played dominant roles. They established and asserted collective goals and interests primarily by extracting resources available in the local and broader contexts throughout the development process of the movements over time: from the initial formation of a unionism to the subsequent representation practices.[4]

The problem arose when the unifying instrument they used to bind all constituents under the same set of interests does not recognise the constituents' heterogeneity. In fact, the formation of movement agencies is inevitable in the making and maintaining of the movement, which requires a complex social process. For instance, the strategies that the unionists choose in defending the constituents' interests are influenced by the way they define the conception of workers' movements and the unionists' biographical experiences in previous movements.

4 Nevertheless, a categorical separation of constituents and the key actors of movements should be examined carefully. In practice, these categories are sometimes inseparable, depending on different times and context. The cases in Pekalongan and Semarang have shown that some ordinary workers at the rank-and-file have emerged as prominent key activist as the movement progressed. By contrast, a labour activist who played a vital role in building a movement might eventually face elimination and lose their leadership position when the movement organisation faced ongoing challenges from company management or hostile political attacks. These shifts in position are often accelerated by strategic missteps in collective actions, changes in local political support, shifts in employers' attitudes, and even internal conflicts within the union itself.

Thus, a socio-anthropological approach makes pivotal contributions to the illumination of social and cultural process of movements, filling in the gaps in the accounts of social structure and the political-economic analysis of the institutions behind them. The character of a movement is basically the product of interactions among actors over a certain period of time and space. Thereby, the relations of constructed types of movement and the heterogeneous constituencies would be also critical.

Although labour unions in Semarang and Pekalongan share some similarities and are located in close proximity, it is essential to explore the conditions that led workers to engage in different types of movements. Despite their similarities in terms of organisational affiliation, historical union legacy, and available political opportunities, this exploration aims to explain their differences. Furthermore, and most importantly, the analysis emphasises the consequences of these differences for the relationship between unions – represented by leadership circles – and diverse constituencies.

1.2. Workplace and Community in Trade Unionism

The comparison of workplace-based unionism and community-based unionism can be perceived as an analytical rather than strictly empirical distinction, as labour activism typically involves a mix of community and workplace elements despite different emphasis (Mollona 2009, 664). Nevertheless, a brief exploration of these analytical categories is necessary for understanding the conceptual landscape (Eimer 1999).

Workplace unionism refers to unions employing collective bargaining institutions in employment relations as the primary instrument to defend workers' traditional interests: such as better working conditions and welfare schemes that emphasise the significance of wage (Eimer 1999; Taft 1963, 21). Workplace unionism remains the dominant form of labour organisations (Wang 2005; Pringle and Meng 2018; Murray, et al. 2010), although globalisation has dispersed production sites geographically through supply chains and thus undermining workers and unions' bargaining power (Mosley 2011).

For workplace-based unionism, workers are the main source from which this union mobilise its collective force. External entities like communities, political organisations, and NGOs are only deemed a supporting structure. The ideological adherents of this movement assume that the main tasks of the workers' struggle to be within the economic sphere rather than the political fields, although it does not entirely preclude it (Mollona 2009; Walsh 2012). Several studies show that

some workplace-based unions in Europe and Asia have undertaken political actions that includes lobbying and campaigns against government's policy (Beale 2003; Chan and Hui 2012). Likewise, as commonly observed in Indonesia, trade unions have entered political agreements with local political parties in exchange for support during annual minimum wage negotiations. Nevertheless, such political actions never outweigh the unions' core principles in economic struggles.

In contrast, community unionism, often connected with social movement unionism (Waterman 1993; Moody 1997; Stewart, et al. 2009, 6, 12), has been growing extensively in many countries over the last few decades. Community unionism refers to unions work with communities and community organisations over issues of interest to either or both (Stewart et al. 2009, 3).[5] This unionism exhibits varieties that are shaped by the process of its emergence. One variant emerges as a strong response to the impasse in the face of contemporary capitalism which results in the growth of precarious labour that is excluded from standard protection system (non-standard labour) due to decomposition of production structure and labour market liberalisation (Fine 2007, 36). These unions build alternative forces by incorporating precarious labour. This includes informal labour employed under community base occupations while retaining its traditional constituency in the workplace (Kamath and Ramanathan 2017; Philips 2005; Li 2017).

Aside from the aforementioned expanded trade-unionism that remains centred on work-based interests (Fine 2007, 44; Collins 2006), another form of community unionism focuses on broader issues, merging citizenship issues into labour concerns such as healthcare and educational access, housing and public transportation. These forms of unionism collaboration with broader and more diverse constituents and networks beyond industrial working-class such as, NGOs in diverse issues, religious and cultural communities, farmers communities, etc (Collins 2006; Holgate, et al. 2012, Lee 2015). Some notable exemplars have been shown by workers' movements or popular movements in Brazil and South Africa during 1970s–1980s (Seidman 1994), and in The Philippines (Scipes 2018, 350), Argentine (Serdar 2015) and India (Nowak 2017) during the early 2000s.

5 There has been a wide range of perspectives in defining "community" within the concept of unionism. Stewart (2009, 4-12) has presented a complex landscape, demonstrating how scholars have defined it based on geographical settings, as well as social relations shaped by various interests and identities.

These categorical classifications, however, are not absolute. The aforementioned unions in Semarang, for instance, were also involved in limited community-based social and political experiments, while political experiments in Pekalongan were intertwined with their workplace struggles as well. The intersectionality between workplace and community activities underscores the fluidity and interdependence of these categories despite their primary strategic focus.

1.3. Diverse Trade Unionism and Social Movement perspectives

Numerous studies link the emergence of the diverse types of unionism to factors derived from both the political-economic structure of capitalism.[6] These explanations, however, fall short in comprehensively elucidating the social and political processes that shape a specific form of labour organisation. As a result, they do not sufficiently allow for an in-depth exploration of the ramifications arising from the emerging process of each type of unions, and the dynamic relations between movement actors and the economic and political structure, for movement constituents.

While acknowledging the validity of political-economic variables in the capitalist economy remains useful, the adoption of social movements theories provides more room for the discussions on the social processes operated under the political-economic structures.[7] The application of these theories into studies on community unionism, for instance, have contributed valuable insights on political processes, historical relevance, and socio-cultural factors as crucial elements of analysis (Waterman 1993; von Holdt 2002). It reveals

6 The political-economic approaches emphasise the capitalists' organisations of productions, like corporate accommodative politics, as factors that keep workers adhering to traditional strategies that represents conventional organising models of movement, despite globalization pressures (Heckscher 1996; Gindin 2012; Chan and Hui 2012). Likewise, the emergence of community unionism is also attributed to factors such as strong the pressures of neoliberal capitalism that limit channels for workers and unions expression, exacerbated by bureaucratic union constraints (Moody 1997, Geer 2008, Barchiesy and Kenny 2008).

7 The labour movement, as the 'old' form of social movement, has developed its own theoretical tradition. Its approach, based on material relations (Losada et al. 2014, 104), emphasises the connection between employment relations and the capitalist economic surplus (Kelly 1998, 4; Blyton and Turnbull 1998, 28-31), setting it apart from the explanatory models embedded in social movement theories that many non-material movements contribute to. While political economy explanations of material relations remain valuable in this study, social movement theories that highlight individual actors, organisations, and networks as central elements of movement agency prove particularly useful in explaining the circulation of unionism.

the peculiarity of the movements and the complex contextual nuances as being shown by studies on the emergence of these movements against authoritarian regimes in developing countries (Seidman 1994; Schiavone 2007; Scipes 2018). The contextuality becomes even more significant since these movements are increasingly spreading at the local level (Agarwala 2013; Nowak 2017). Mollona also argues that understanding the social and political process of how each form of movement was formed is useful to present a historical and anthropological reflection of the moral economy of the workers in different place and time (Mollona 2009, 663). Therefore, similar benefits are also found in explaining the tendency of workers to maintain traditional workplace-based union models. Although they may limit themselves to political actions, workplace unions are not separable from political influences, including political ideologies (Hyman 2001; Beale 2003).

1.3.1. Agency in Workers' Movements

Various theories of movements have accorded equal attention to individual autonomy (Eidlin and Kerrissey 2019, 518), aiming to balance the predominant structural analysis in studying social movements such as exemplified by theories of mobilisation (Tilly 1978; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Some scholars have integrated the role of individuals and groups into the concept of structure, as evident in opportunity structure theorists, allowing subjectivity within the overarching framework. This integration encourages a deeper exploration of the agency roles, not only in the emergence of organisational forms of the movements but also in the relationships between activists and their constituents. Agency serves as a bridge that fills the gap between the macro and micro levels of analysis, resolving what Burawoy and Von Holdt term a false opposition between determinism and voluntarism (2012, 52).

The relationship between structure, social process of mobilisations, and key actors of movements, particularly in the working-class movements, holds a central position in Gramsci's concept of the intellectuals of movements (Tarrow 2011; Annunziato 2011). According to Gramsci, the transformation of a mass into a movement is impossible without the roles of key actors whom he calls 'intellectuals' (Gramsci 1971). In this context, intellectuals include not only thinkers, but also those who undertake organisational responsibilities (Gramsci 1971: 97).

These key actors emerge from the natural need of the masses for leadership capable of guiding them. Gramsci assumes the masses have a limited capacity to understand themselves due to the obstruction of the hegemonic power that

historically subordinates them through forces and consents (Green 2011, 68-70; Denning 2009, 70). The masses can feel the situation of which they are complaining, but the feelings are incoherent and fragmentary (Crehan 2002, 129-130). They can feel but they are not be able to comprehend the hegemonic power relations that subordinate them, and therefore, are difficult to formulate and organise their own will. Thus, the role of the driving actors is to perform a counter-hegemony. They unite the incoherent feelings, produce and instil counter-knowledge (Crehan 2002, 132). This notion clearly dismantles Marx's idea of economic determinism that considers culture as the product of the political-economic structure. Gramsci contends that cultural reproduction is necessary for exposing the political-economic dominations that are embedded in the minds of the masses (hegemony) (Crehan 2002, 139).

The actors derive their capacity to understand and represent the masses from their experiences in the class to which they belong. Although Gramsci strongly opposes Marx's economic determinism, he accepts the idea that the economy shapes classes in which actors belong to certain social position and find experiences of class antagonism. It is this experience that transforms their consciousness giving them the potential to become a movement actor (Gramsci 1971, 6-8; Crehan 2002, 144). What distinguishes him from Marx is that the struggle is not carried out in the economic sphere, but in the realm of politics and ideology instead (Burawoy and Von Holdt 2012, 57).

The transformation from the ordinary people into the a conscious actor does not occur in a mechanical way. The social process to learn the class antagonism is essential particularly for the working class, as evident in the experiences of some key unionists in Semarang and Pekalongan (see chapter 4 and 6). This social process of learning can be linked to Bourdieu's *habitus* (Husu 2013), which unfolds the social and cultural process of the formation of movement agency in more detail, enriching Gramsci's concept of movement agents. Although Bourdieu and Gramsci differ in their views of social classes, and Bourdieu alone never discusses specifically social movements, and did not even believe in class struggle, both share many similarities (Burawoy and Von Holdt 2012, 52-53, 58). Thus, Bourdieu's fundamental concept is useful for understanding the essential relations between learning to be the agents of movements and class belongness (Crossley 2002, 177).

Bourdieu's habitus of actors refers to any schemas of perception, forms of know-how and competence, disposition, and actions that are derived from the actor's biographical roots that embedded in their social class (Bourdieu 1992, 54; Crossley 2002, 174-175). Habitus of social movements explains how the

capacity of movement actors to practice as agents is historically shaped. Bourdieu defines it as the capacity to feel for the game (Bourdieu 1992, 66; Maton 2008, 54). Therefore, the degree to which actors engage in past contentious politics influences how they perceive existing social problems and utilise their skills in organising the movement (Passy and Monsch 2019, 501-502). Habitus also explains why some individuals who belong to the same social class, and emerged from the same social institutions such as families, educational institutions may appear to be competent actors while the others do not.

The process of 'selection' of these agents resembles the way in which Gramsci perceives the emergence of intellectuals in movements (Gramsci 1971, 9; Crehan 2002, 131-132). In the case of Pekalongan and Semarang, not everyone from the working class appeared as militant unionists or political activists who are able to mobilise the others (see chapter 4 and 6). Those who became activists also operated at different levels of movements. Some led at the regional level, organising wider-scale movements that brought them to broader networks of actors, while others become key figures either only in the factories or the communities, or even in smaller groups. This also confirms how Bourdieu defines the scope of agency[8] (Maton 2008, 51) and how Gramsci assumes that the term intellectual that does not only refer to individuals. Instead, it refers to a group or a network that has the capacity for agency (Crehan 2002, 133). He even refers to the intellectuals' force can be institutionalised into an organisation. Organisations such as trade unions and political parties are the structured authority of the workers' agency.

Departing from this assumption, I argue that the networks built by actors – both formal and informal, are an essential element of agency; the network is not a mechanical structure that mobilises a movement, but rather a collection of actors who have interests, values, and various resources that are synchronized with the movement's goals. They circulate new knowledge, instil new interpretations, build counter-hegemonic narratives that form a new collective consciousness. In other words, the actors in a movement cannot act alone in mobilising the resources. Instead, they mobilise the resources through interactions with networks, alignment of values and goals, and the formation of a cultural framing that becomes a collective ideology. But this is certainly different from the accounts of resource mobilisations theory that focus on organisational resources per se (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Edwards, McCarthy and Mataic 2019), setting aside

8 Bourdieu defines habitus as a property that is attributed to agents. However, these agents are not limited to individuals; they can also encompass groups or even institutions (Maton 2008, 51).

the social process by which the individual actors develop their capacity and make connections between the class orientation and the present actions in the movements.

1.3.2. Movement Actors and Structures

Stemming from these assumptions of agency capacity, any form of organisational development involves the complex roles of unionists and their networks and the interpretation process of the existing structural conditions and the constituents they represent. They perceive the meaning of threats and opportunities that lead to certain strategies, determining the emergence of particular form of organised movements and its development.

In the analysis of political process, threats propelling the movement and political opportunity structure appear as crucial elements influencing the circulation of a movement (Tarrow 2011). Political opportunity refers to the objective social and political conditions that enable the mobilisation or the success of collective actions or social movements in general (Tilly 1978, 133-138; Porta and Diani 2020). As any social movement inherently challenges the status-quo or ruling regime, its mobilisation carries political implications, and therefore, its success hinges on the prevailing political opportunities or barriers. The opportunities manifest through factors such as the availability of institutional access or the openness to new actors; the stability of political alignments and inter-elite conflicts; the Influential allies; changes in repression or facilitation (McAdam and Tarrow 2019, 25-26). The movements flourish and evolve when these variables favour the mobilisation attempts.

The opportunities will not result in mobilisation of movements without the individuals' subjectivity. The mobilisation depends on the individual interpretation of the availability of opportunities, which is called perceived or attributed opportunities (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2004, 43). This element of subjectivity also requires interactional processes such as communication and learning how to interpret opportunities (Tarrow 2011, 164). The concept of opportunity structure, admittedly, focuses mainly on political institutions, excluding economic relations where workers can also access their opportunities (Seidman 1994, 93; Schurman 2004, 246). Nevertheless, this opportunity structure remains useful for explaining the rise and the limitations of the working-class movements in various places over multiple periods of history, as also extensively found in the works on Indonesian labour movements (Caraway and Ford 2020; Tornquist 2004; 2004).

Although individual roles still take a smaller portion than structural accounts in this theory, the individual element has given a wider space for further analysis on subjective and interactional processes, particularly on the existence of agency (Husu 2013, 266). The role of agents in mobilisations is essential in the learning process to perceive the availability of opportunities to develop a particular strategy of movement. The agents assist the people in movements to learn and to define their interests, to interpret the meaning of the opportunities and to transform individual resources of the mass into a collective power through organised mobilisation (Ganz and McKenna 2019, 185). A collective movement is impossible to run in a mechanistic way in order to respond the threats and the opportunities. Otherwise, it only becomes an irrational crowd behaviour without any specific goal and organisation (McPhail 2007). Thus, roles of key actors who organise mobilisation are essential. They are not simply reactive to the sources of discontents, but they mobilise rationally the restless people.

A threat, on the other hand, is a situation where discontent is poised to escalate unless a defensive collective action is taken (Almeida 2019, 44). In workers' movements, the primary threat is inherent in the existing industrial economy, which erodes union capacity and hinders workers from demanding better socio-economic and living conditions. The economic threat is a useful concept compensating the over-emphasis of the concept of political opportunity structure that focuses mainly on political institutions that excludes economic relations where workers are obviously in effect (Seidman 1994, 93; Schurman 2004, 246). Schurman (2010) links the economic situation with the concept of industrial opportunity structures: a concept that shows an economic dimension of opportunity decisive for movements. Since Schurman does not elaborate further on what distinguishes the industry as a threat with the absence of industry opportunity, I prefer to use threat in this conceptual framework.

The dynamic interplay of threats, opportunities and the roles of activists should be recognised as pertinent not only during the emergence of an organisational form, but throughout the entire trajectory of a movement. It proves crucial for comprehending the implications for their relationship with constituents. This is where the representational problems become essential.

1.4. Representation Task in Movements and Its Limitations

As I have argued above, any form of movement organisation, mobilised by key actors, potentially creates vulnerabilities due to the heterogeneity of its constituents and inherent power relations within the movement. Scholars have framed this as the problem of democratic representation (Gumbrell-McCormick

and Hyman 2019; Pitkin 1967; Laclau 2007; Durrenberger and Reichart 2010). The central question is: what constitutes vulnerabilities in democracy of the mass movements, particularly in labour movements? Various studies define democratic practices in labour movements through institutional measures (Morris and Fosh 2000), power concentration versus constituent participation through employment-related institutions (Stephan-Norris 1997), or complex behavioural and structural measures (Martin 1968). These studies, however, often overlook the fundamental social and cultural processes that underlie democratic representation, sparking a debate about whether the focal point should be on the "represented" or the "representative."

The fundamental debates of this issue centre around the discussion in which Ernesto Laclau challenges Pitkin's premises on democratic representation. Pitkin, a key figure in modern political representation studies, asserts that people or the represented is the central subject of democratic representation (Pitkin 1967). Pitkin argues that those who 'act for others' are democratic, as they deliver the will of the represented and act in their interests. She deems symbolic representation, based solely on shared identities, without concrete actions for the represented, as irrational and impure (Disch 2012, 210).

By contrast, Laclau, influenced strongly by Gramsci, gives emphasis more on the roles of representatives as the primary democratic actors. For him, Pitkin gives less attention to complex social and cultural process that underlies the making process of representation, in which constituents are mostly unable to express their will on their own, and therefore they rely on the actors – which Gramsci calls as intellectuals – to assist them articulating and bringing out their voice (Disch 2012). Laclau emphasises the essential roles of agencies in constructing people and defining collective interests through a dynamic two-way process between the represented and the representative (Laclau 2012, 392; 2007; 161-162). It is the task of movement leaders to communicate with the constituents they claim and build the meaning of the existing threats and opportunities to define the collective interests and a particular strategy to organise the movement. In this process, Laclau points out the importance of how representatives or movement leaders creating symbols through rhetoric, narratives, or discourse that attach to the people as an instrument to understand their own will or interest as well as a unifying identity in a particular context (Laclau 2007: 68-72, 161).[9] This constructed symbol serves as a counter-hegemonic stance against

9 The existence of representatives is constitutive as they are not simply passive agents. Their task goes beyond delivering the will of the represented, but also giving the credibility to their will in different environments (Laclau 2007: 158). To add 'something' to the will of the represented, the

the opposition, forming a collective consciousness (Thomassen 2017, 547; Laclau 1996: 40; Disch 2012: 215).

Such a symbol unifies diverse constituents, serving as a chain of equivalence that connects various social demands under a common political identity. This allows for the construction of a collective identity by connecting diverse social demands with different origins and interests. Laclau asserts that such symbolic representation becomes the means of homogenizing a heterogeneous mass (2007: 159). it is a cultural process that makes a counter-hegemony becomes the essence of democratic representation in mobilising the constituents (Mouffe 2003, 126). Nevertheless, it's certainly crucial to note eventually that this homogenization is a strategic action, and does not imply a loss of real heterogeneity (Laclau, 2007: 158-159).

Therefore, it is also crucial to consider critically the problematic issues of the gap between the constituents' heterogeneity and the representative's homogenization in their relationship. Laclau acknowledges that, after all, the demands of the represented people remain essential in the representation. In the dynamic two-way process, by which the representatives play a significant constitutive role, they learn the feelings, the needs, and the perceptions of the diverse constituents (Laclau 2007: 158). A shared consciousness is formed when the representatives assist the constituents to understand who they are in a social order or in production relations (in an economic system), and what distinguishes them from each other and what constitutes a common identity. These attempts are enabled especially by the key actors who come from the same class or social category and have similar general identities (Kamath and Ramanathan 2017, 254). As Buraway and Von Holdt assert, "This is not a matter of bringing consciousness to the working class from without, which marks Gramsci off from Lenin, but of building on what already lies within it." (Burawoy and Von Holdt 2012, 64).

Nevertheless, such attempts are still constrained by some inevitable conditions. Hardt and Negri (2012, 28-29) even sceptically argue that the will of the people cannot be fully represented in a homogeneously framed identity and interest, as collective heterogeneity is inherently fundamental. According to both, representation diametrically opposes democracy (Thomassen 2017, 547). In

representatives use an 'empty signifier' a symbol that represent the represented as a uniting identity. This constructed signifier is not a 'neutral' commonality. Instead, this is made under the idea of antagonism of the people vis-à-vis the opposition from different class. The idea is created to form a collective consciousness against the hegemony of the regime (Laclau 1996: 40; Disch 2012: 215).

essence, they claim that representation will inevitably result in flawed democracy under any condition, challenging the empirical premise of perfect democratic representation.

In labour movements, the diverse groups within the working class indicates the roles of other forces that are influential in the formation of workers heterogeneity, which may limit the unionists' representation tasks. A labour regime, particularly the capital, is a significant force that deliberately divides labour into different occupational groups based on different level of skill, task and wage structure, gender, and age groups (Bowles and Gintis 1977). The capitalists, facilitated by labour policies, divide workers in these categories through labour process in order to create maximum capital accumulation (Bowles and Gintis 1977, 174; Smith 2016, 209). Engles (1987) have even argued that capitalists have forced these different groups of working class into competition in order to maximise the extraction of surplus value from the labour. The labour process does not even only divided workers into different categories within the production structure but also influence the segmentation in labour markets (Gordon, Edwards and Reich 1982).

These divisions within the working-class result in a highly fragmented labour, leading to diverse identities and conflicting interests among workers (Teal 1985, 2), as exemplified in the interactions between factory workers and home-based workers in Semarang (see Chapter 4). Such a production politics and its consequences on labour fragmentation highlights the shortcomings of Marx's notions that oversimplify the prospects of developing a shared class consciousness and collective mobilisation for resistance to capital through concentrated labour within industry (Teal 1985, 7-9). This condition presents a significant challenge for union leaders aiming to represent the interests of the workers, especially considering that capitalists deliberately create this fragmentation to prevent the formation of collective working-class power (Bowles and Gintis 1977, 178-179). Thus, the shaping of labour heterogeneity and the establishment of working-class homogeneity become the battleground between unions and capitalists.

The utilisation of social identities and other culturally-derived categorisations instigates complexity into the dynamics of union representation. For instance, ethnic minorities the UK face limited access to union advocacy (Holgate, et al. 2012). Female workers in Asian countries often find themselves underrepresented in trade unionism due to the persistence of a masculine organisational culture perpetuated by political institutions (Cooke 2011; Broadbent and Ford 2008). Therefore, community-oriented unions face higher complexity in representation as they contend with intricate forces that shape the heterogeneity of their

constituencies. These unions grapple capital-formed categories of labour that are combined with identities socio-politically constructed by political forces, local economic structure, and other social forces (Waterman 1993, 260; Brown 2007; Glenn 2016).

Another limitation lies on the vulnerable power relations between the unionists, as the key actor of labour movements, and the union constituents. The vulnerabilities become more pronounced since trade unions legitimise organisationally the power of those receiving the mandate from constituents to be leaders or representatives. Robert Michels (1999) warns against the undemocratic consequences of bureaucratic institutions, countering Gramsci's emphasis on organisations as the political vehicle of the movement agency. Larger and more bureaucratic institutions may incline leaders toward oligarchy, undermining their representational roles. While Michels' view is structurally over-deterministic (Lipset, 1999), it offers insight into the limits of hegemonic representation. For instance, in Pekalongan, union leaders accepted an agreement with employers on unsatisfactory severance payments for laid-off workers in exchange for long-term political interests. This agreement led to divergent interpretations between the workers and organisational leaders regarding the meaning of workers' political interests.

However, bureaucratic oligarchic constraints also shape the opportunities for unexpected actors to emerge through informal structures within the movement organisation. In highly bureaucratised movements, the possibilities for new actors may be limited, yet factions within a movement can succeed by leveraging their own resources, as seen in the case of Semarang workers (see chapter 4), and an anthropological study of labour in the mining sector (Reichart 2010). This situation underscores that movement organisations do not consistently achieve perfect internal hegemony. Organised movements often experience rivalries (Taylor 2018; Rokhani 2008), differences between groups based on cultural identities and layers within the working class (Lazar 2022), and changes in attitudes resulting from compromises made by organisational or informal leaders at the grassroots level to defend strategic advantages (Wright 2000).

To conclude this section, I argue that the emergence of leaders within the movements – the labour movements in particular – is an inevitable social process. Their dominance over the reproduction of ideas in the movement is also a logical consequence of the historical development of the mobilisation itself. They have a major role in determining the direction of the movement, collective hegemonic values, relevant actions and interactions with constituents and other actors in the movement network. But therein also lies the limits

of agency. Along with the institutionalisation of the movement that accords the movement leaders a power to mobilise the movement, they deal with the structural and cultural consequences of the heterogeneity of its constituents.

1.5. Contextualising Fieldwork: The Methodology

Numerous studies on Indonesian workers' movements in the post-colonial era have predominantly focused on labour unrest and organised activism in densely industrialized regions, notably western Java (Kammen 1997; Hadiz 2001; Saptari 2008; Silvey 2003; Caraway and Ford 2019), with a few examining Sumatra and Eastern Java (Kammen 1997; Weix 2002; Ford 2014). However, little attention has been given to the workers' movements in the industrial areas of Central Java following the collapse of leftist movements during the New Order era (Juliawan 2010, 23). This region is often referenced mainly to signify the initial awakening of organised labour during the colonial and early post-colonial periods, viewed as the embryo of modern Indonesia's labour (Ingelson 1986; Supriyono 2013).

Nevertheless, the lack of contemporary studies on workers' movements in Central Java does not imply the absence of dynamic labour activism in this region. While unionists, workers, and NGO activists have primarily focused on labour unrest and activism in Jakarta and surrounding regions in addressing national labour issues in the first decade of the 2000s, local workers and unionists in some areas responded with their own strategies. They have leveraged local resources and engaged with various actors in factories, communities, and local politics.

These differences significantly influenced my perspective as a researcher in labour studies. Initially preoccupied with workers' movements at the national level and major industrial regions in western Java, my viewpoint gradually shifted after interacting with some NGO activists and unionists from Central Java. Learning about the workers' movements in Semarang and Pekalongan highlighted the local complexities in these regions, challenging my previous perspective that had overlooked the crucial connections of the movements with the local context, especially in Central Java

My interactions with labour activists during fieldwork brought to the fore the distinctive characteristics of workers in Semarang and Pekalongan, revealing the intricate labour dynamics in each region. The first distinction lies in the orientation of the movements. Unionists in Semarang consistently adhered to narratives, discourses, and actions that upheld the traditions of conventional unionism, emphasising the essentiality of workplace and welfare. In contrast, unionists in Pekalongan displayed a strong interest in community activism and

actively engaged in local political struggles. The second distinction pertains to the economic context in which the movements developed. Workers and unions in Semarang organised within the framework of a large-scale and globalised industrial economy. Conversely, workers and activists in Pekalongan initiated their movements within the context of a smaller-scale industrial economy. The third distinction revolves around the movements' constituents: the people whose interests the unions were fighting for. In Pekalongan, workers' activism dealt with highly diverse constituents, including local community groups and the local working class. In Semarang, workplace unionism faced the challenge of the diverse industrial workforce, both inside and outside the factory, shaped by the production structure. Finally, the leadership structure differed between the two regions. In Pekalongan, leaders of the branch union, supported by other activists, played a central role in initiating, organising, and building the movements. In Semarang, the development of the workers' movement lacked strong leadership from the regional branch union, and fragmented leadership was evident across various levels of the organisation.

This distinct pattern of leadership influenced my fieldwork approach. In Pekalongan, where the main union leaders at the branch level union-management took a leading role in transforming movements, observations began from this circle to investigate how they defined and shaped the development of the movement organisation. This observation then extended to union members and other constituents to examine impacts and responses. In Semarang, with a relatively more decentralised distribution of power among various actors within the layers of movements, the approach took a reverse path. Stronger initiatives to mobilise actions and defend the interests of specific groups of workers, including union members and non-unionised workers, emerged at the rank and file, making them the essential starting point in the observation stages

The primary phase of my fieldwork commenced in January 2014 and concluded in June 2015. Additionally, several short visits were conducted in 2016 for complementary data collection. During the initial four months of 2014, Pekalongan was prioritised as the primary research site, allowing me to closely follow the experiences of local unionists and workers leading up to and during the General Elections in April 2014. The workers' active involvement in the political competition to secure candidacy for the local parliament (DPRD) members was a crucial aspect of studying this region, given the political nature of their movement.

Throughout this period, I lived at the research site, providing ample opportunities to engage with unionists, local activists, political elites, workers, and community

members. Living in the area enabled a more in-depth understanding of how unionists navigated the complexities of incorporating political interests and experimenting with community engagement in their day-to-day activities at work. This fieldwork phase also allowed for the observation of how union members at the rank and file, along with other constituents in the communities, responded to the ideas and actions of the unionists.

While my official fieldwork in Pekalongan began in 2014, my engagements with local trade unionists began as early as 2010. During this period, I had the opportunity to attend various meetings and discussions with local activists and participate in several union activities. Initially, these interactions were not part of a well-planned long-term research project. At that time, like many other Indonesian labour scholars and activists, my focus was still on the contentious national disputes surrounding the controversial new labour law (no. 13 of 2003), which sparked massive protests from trade unions due to its articles which positioned workers in even more precarious positions. While the public's attention was directed towards national media coverage and street protests surrounding this issue, a different perspective emerged through interactions with NGO activists. They shared insights into what was happening in Pekalongan, highlighting local unionists experimenting with a new form of unionism that integrated workplace-based interests with community-related concerns. It took a few weeks for them to convince me of the significance of this development and encourage me to visit Pekalongan. Eventually, I made the trip to this small industrial town and discovered a distinct landscape within the local workers' movements.

Through several visits to the location, I had the opportunity to build relationships with key actors in the local movements. These interactions allowed me to conduct informal preliminary observations and interviews, resulting in early descriptions of the historical processes of founding the local unions and the formation of local community activism. The insights gained during these interactions contributed valuable supporting field notes for the current study, complementing other written documents such as organisational minutes of meetings, local mass media clippings, and regional statistics.

My longstanding interactions also provided me with broader access to engage in active participant observation during subsequent fieldwork. Establishing bonds with the people in the research sites enabled me to immerse myself deeply in various local formal and informal activities, including personal social settings. This approach allowed me to closely follow the process by which certain workers transitioned into union leaders at the factory and branch levels, and conversely,

how a leader might become an outsider. These relationships also facilitated close observation of critical events, including a labour dispute leading to the confinement of corporate management officials at the local mayor's office, a street vendor protest involving union officials, intense debates between activists regarding the dilemma between unionism tasks and union political agenda, and the circulation of rumours among the community, union members, and local activists.

My fieldwork activities in the Regency of Semarang commenced in February 2015 and extended over four months. In contrast to my initial engagement in Pekalongan, where relationships with union activists were pivotal, the entry point for my access to the Semarang site was through local NGO activists advocating for women workers in the informal occupation. This initial access served as a gateway to dozens of local factory workers, particularly those in the rank-and-file, including home-based workers who formed a part of the local industrial workforce.

Further access was facilitated by union key leaders in the Semarang branch of SPN, guiding me to unionists at the factory level. However, my observations of union leaders at the branch level in Semarang were admittedly more limited compared to those of the unionists in Pekalongan. This limitation was a consequence of the existing power structure within the local unions. As mentioned earlier, Semarang movements were characterised by a dispersed distribution of power among local unionists, with relationships among leaders at different layers coloured by conflicts. This situation became more apparent, especially after the split of the local unions, indicated by the foundation of another new union, called KSPN, that significantly altered the union patronage (see chapter 4). These conditions posed challenges in maintaining equal access to all potential research participants. Consequently, working mainly at the grassroots level, collecting stories from ordinary workers and mid-level unionists under such circumstances, not only provided me with wider access but also offered a broader understanding of the existing informal and formal power structures within the unions.

The strong emphasis on workplace activism in Semarang and the decentralised distribution of power to mobilise diverse interests among workers in various layers prompted the selection of a specific company for in-depth exploration. The objective of this selection was to investigate more detailed unionists' experiences within organisations in the workplace and understand the relationships between unionists and workers in that setting. A large-scale, export-oriented company, namely Tapak (pseudonym), a European shoe-making company, was carefully chosen for a specific case study of the workplace unionism.

The reasons of selecting the company is as follows: firstly, the workers in this company portrayed dynamic activism in the region, reflecting efforts to break away from traditional corporatism's legacy and challenges in resisting corporate strategies. Secondly, the primary focus on workplace activism confronts complex realities of defining the workplace and union constituency, dealing with both in-factory and out-of-factory labour, challenging the heterogeneity concept of union constituencies. Thirdly, worker leadership emerges across various layers of the production structure, including workplaces in the communities. Lastly, some unionists in this company aim to influence transformation at the branch organisation level (Semarang) but face divisive organisational politics. Therefore, given the intricate employment structure in this shoe manufacturer, a deeper discussion is given for the relationships between different types of labour, corporate managerial apparatus, and unionists.

In total, in both regions, I conducted interviews with 28 local union leaders and officials, 31 ordinary workers - a few of whom were then emerging as either new union leaders or informal worker leaders - and 16 NGO activists. I interviewed several local union leaders and NGO activists on more than one occasion. Additionally, I interviewed dozens of other relevant people: including government officials, employers and business owners, journalists, politicians and academics. I also interviewed people at the national level, who also occupied similar positions - including ILO officials. The research also involved observing specific social settings, such as union official meetings, workers' strikes or demonstrations, political campaigns, community gatherings, factory sites, home-based production sites, workers' community settlement areas, and numerous informal settings where research participants interacted and engaged in relevant activities. Numerous government documents were collected to provide insights into the economic, social, and political resources available in both regions, including unions' documents that recorded the history of their collective bargaining and dispute cases.

Examining the internal dynamics of the labour movement presented a complex situation, given the heterogeneous groups within the different movements. Specific contexts, such as political campaigns requiring unionists to mobilise their base, often generated conflicts and competition within the movement organisations or between unionists and constituents. In a union with a strong centralisation of power, like the one in Pekalongan, conflicts were evident both overtly and covertly, manifesting through interpersonal conversations or rumours. In movements where mobilisation of forces spread across various groups and organisational hierarchies, wider conflicts were inevitable, complicating my role

as a researcher. This was particularly evident in union splits in Semarang and the fragmentation among homeworkers at the grassroots level.

Such situations impacted the strategies of data collection, as suspicions of partiality to one side restricted flexibility. Building trust with conflicting groups took time and the role of research assistants, including NGO activists and some unionists, was significant in managing these situations and maintaining relationships. The longstanding interactions with these actors were crucial in managing interpersonal relationships during data collection and beyond. These relationships, however, also influenced my evolving perspective on the meaning of each movement. For instance, in Pekalongan, optimistic views about the significance of community-based movements gradually shifted to a more reflective understanding. Moreover, my personal interactions with research assistants helped overcome initial tendencies to oversimplify classifications within the labour movement.

Finally, two crucial methodological notes, closely intertwined with the subject of this study, deserve attention that I have discussed elsewhere (Nugroho 2019). Firstly, the ethical dilemma emerged as a prominent concern. As an active participant in the observation of these social movements, I found myself in dual positions – both as an independent researcher and as an intellectual claimed by the participants (movement actors) as their potential network and resource. Unionists from both regions often expected more involvement than just a researcher, asking for opinions on collective actions, political moves, organisational suggestions, and the fundamental ideas of their movements. Resisting such requests risked creating a distance that could complicate the researcher-participant relationship, while deeper involvement might introduce bias, blurring the line between the movement's ideas and the researcher's intervention. This dilemma persisted throughout my fieldwork and interactions with the unionists. However, I eventually discovered that my presence as an 'intellectual' merely affirmed the ideas they had already developed. My role did not change the history they had shaped themselves.

The second note pertains to changes in my perspective on the dichotomies within the movement and their impact on my analysis. The research commenced with a view of a contrast between community unionism and workplace unionism, anticipating that this dichotomy would be consistently reflected in the organisations, forms of action, and narratives of the movements. The expectation was that each form of unionism would be isolated from the other in both reality and analysis. However, both field exploration and the analytical process revealed that these typologies of movement cannot be seen as strictly

dichotomous. Instead, they require similar elements of comparison because, in reality, the two case studies do not exhibit an absolute separation from each other. Studying community unionism needs an understanding of the social processes occurring in the workplace, and workplace unionism is intertwined with strategies at the community level. The differentiating factor ultimately lies in what Mollona (2009) regards as the 'morale of the movement.' This realisation significantly influenced the way I analysed this study and structured this dissertation

1.6. Organisation of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organised into four parts, with the first part encompassing two chapters, including this introduction. Chapter Two offers an overview of the historical development of labour movements in Indonesia. After a brief illustration of the movements in the colonial and early-post colonial era, an important attention is given to historical trajectory faced a thirty-year interruption during Suharto's New Order regime, implementing a state-corporatism approach to trade unionism, eradicating political orientation and community networks. This legacy still characterises the organisational culture of labour movements in Indonesia's democratic era. The dominance of workplace unionism persists. Some embryos of community-oriented unionism emerged despite their unstable bases.

Part two explores the experiences of workers in Semarang in organising workplace-based movements, comprising two chapters. Chapter Three outlines the socio-economic context of the movement in this region, characterised by a large-scale industrial economy integrated into global production chains. Abundant job opportunities have arisen, but social supports from existing agricultural and modern industrial economies also serve as structures of control. Chapter Four describes the most active union in the region attempting to break away from corporatist unionism legacies but facing fragmentation. Experiments in electoral politics and community-based activism had short-lived impacts, with the workplace remaining the main arena of struggle. Industrial production expansion into community areas created pockets of home-based workers, leading to informal movements supported by NGOs.

Part three discusses the development of union movements in Pekalongan, consisting also of two chapters. Chapter Five provides the regional context, illustrating how workers' social and economic life in Pekalongan was shaped by a longstanding history of an industrial economy that developed in limited scale. Social tensions due to regional economic growth limits ignited political struggles, forming the ground for broadened movements. Chapter Six details

how local unions transformed the legacy of workplace unionism into community unionism but have faced impasses due to political obstacles and difficulties in building social and cultural ties among heterogeneous constituencies. The final section presents the discussion and conclusions, addressing the conceptual discussion linking agency and structural forces in explaining the characterization of different movements and their evolving relationship with constituents.