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'It's Not a Him, It's a Her':
An Exploration into the Changes and Challenges, Meanings and
Mechanisms in the Lives of
Timorese Women Workers
on the Offshore
Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the ways in which the potentials of a group of Timorese women, with early aspirations of achieving economic self-reliance through formal work, have been realised through their recruitment into non-traditional jobs on the Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project in the Timor Sea.

The aspirational horizons and experiences of the sixteen women who comprise the sample of this study run counter to those of most women in Timor-Leste, where poverty and pervasive patriarchal ideologies relegate them to the domestic sphere as wives and mothers subject to the authority of men. Their reality as working women also runs counter to that of other female waged workers in the developing world reported as experiencing poor wages and working conditions and discrimination in the workplace and for some, resentment or violence from husbands.

The findings of this study point to new evidence of young Timorese women at the beginning of their post-secondary school journeys exhibiting a high level of agency. This is reflected in their personal qualities, both inherent and socially fostered, of determination, courage and self-belief, and confidence in their aptitude to learn new competencies, with strategic goals of economic independence and an awareness of their right to shape their own lives towards this end. In addition to this they have had the crucial social resource of support from family members and from husbands and male partners.

It is rare to see the inclusion of gender, explicitly or tacitly, in the local content commitments associated with petroleum extraction projects in developing countries. This thesis has identified the pivotal role, played by a locally-owned Timorese contracting company, confident in the capacity of Timorese women to be effective offshore crewmembers, in shaping the employee component of the Bayu-Undan project's local content to incorporate females. What is also of significance is that these women occupy well-paid, valued positions of responsibility on the western platform, where a culture of non-gender discrimination sees them receiving respect from male

personnel, including their Timorese male co-workers, and being supported in their ambitions to up-skill, in some cases into historically male areas.

At home, the women's new identities as high income-earners employed in non-traditional work have given them greater social and economic status. While there is some concern that their economic autonomy could be eroded by excessive family demands, the new financial resources provided by the women are seen by them, and others, as important obligations towards improving the lives and prospects of extended family members. Additionally, as a 'realising potential' outcome from their incomes, new opportunities and valued ways of being have opened up for the women themselves and their immediate families.

Key words: Timor-Leste, women offshore workers, aspirational horizons, self-belief, social support, local content, realising potential, economic autonomy.

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Glossary

<i>Adat</i>	Customary/traditional laws, values and belief systems
ANP	Autoridade National do Petroleo
ASV	Accommodation Support Vessel
CEDAW	Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoP	ConocoPhillips
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
CPP	Central Processing and Production
CUQ	Compression, Utilities and Quarters
DNE	Direccao Nacional de Estatistica (National Statistics Directory of Timor-Leste)
DPP	Drilling, Production and Processing
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
FIFO	Fly-In-Fly-Out
FSO	Floating, Storage and Offloading
GAD	Gender and Development
GBV	Gender Based Violence
HR	Human Resources
HSE	Health, Safety and the Environment
HUET	Helicopter Underwater Evacuation Training
IPIECA	International Petroleum Industry Environment Conservation Association
JPDA	Joint Petroleum Development Area
LADV	Law Against Domestic Violence
LCP	Local Content Policy
LDC	Least Developed Country
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
<i>Malai</i>	Foreigner
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PF	Petroleum Fund
PSC	Production Sharing Contract
PPE	Personal Protection Equipment
RDTL	Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste
SEPFOPE	Secretary of state for Professional Training and Employment Policy
T-BOSIET	Tropical- Basic Offshore Safety Induction Emergency Training
SEPI	Secretariat for the Promotion of Equality
TSDA	Timor Sea Designated Authority
UNTAET	United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor
WDR	World Development Report

Chapter One: Introducing the Thesis

My vision was actually wide. Our culture prioritise men. You will see in a family gathering the men sit separately and discuss the serious things and the woman is more the one preparing the meals, looking after the kids. I see women who are smart, very bright. Someone have to say: "Women can do more than that!"

(Caltech Co-owner, 2 July 2013).

1.1 Thesis topic, rationale and research questions

The topic of this research is about women in a Least Developed Country (LDC), Timor-Leste¹, realising their potential through the pathway of waged employment. That is, young women who had wider visions for their futures than succumbing to the normative expectations for girls in their society not to seek a role beyond becoming a wife and mother. In particular, these are women who have sought enhanced competencies and work experiences that have lead to the unexpected new opportunity of jobs on a western offshore gas platform.

For women in developing countries where patriarchal ideologies² pervade socio-cultural systems to even consider setting goals and pursuing pathways to economic independence in paid work there are considerable barriers. The literature on the aspirational horizons of girls in LDCs is heavily weighted with explanations of their limited agency, resources and opportunities (Wigglesworth, 2012). Further, those that do enter the labour force are reported as likely to face discrimination in the workplace, poor wages and working conditions and for some, resentment or violence from husbands (Desai, 2010; Jutting & Laiglesia, 2009; SEPI, 2013).

The typical depiction of workingwomen in developing countries is of them earning less than men doing work that is valued less than men's. Additionally, they are reported as being further disadvantaged by having the responsibility for household roles on top of working for money (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Momsen, 2010). Less typical is

¹ Timor-Leste is one of 48 countries designated LDCs based on per capita income, human assets and economic vulnerability (UNCTAD, 2012).

² A broad definition of patriarchal ideology from the development literature is employed in this study where it is seen to stem from structured patterns of social organisation that are based around gender roles and relations that: i) see women confined to the domestic sphere and traditional femininities centrally associated with the activity of motherhood, and; ii) have a socio/cultural predisposition towards male dominance and authority and female docility (Feldman, 2001; Moghadam, 2004).

the image of women in a LDC, such as those in the circumstances of this study, experiencing dignity³ in and at their work, where they are well remunerated and feel valued, respected and supported to perform their work well.

The sample group of this study comprises sixteen Timorese⁴ female employees working in non-housekeeping⁵ positions on the Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project in the Timor Sea on a Fly-in-Fly-out (FIFO) basis. The equation that has seen the successful recruitment of these women of differing levels of education, none of who had had prior offshore petroleum industry experience, has two integral components:

- The women having aspirations to advance their vocational learning and to earn their own income, and;
- A local contracting company, confident in the women's capacity to be effective offshore crewmembers, taking a proactive equal opportunities approach to promoting their incorporation into the *local content* employee pipeline of Timorese nationals to offshore O&G industry positions.

The experiences of the Timorese women in the study contain dichotomies that promise to heighten understandings of the challenges they have faced entering an alien work environment, their shifting identities, changing status and new sense of self. The stark contrast between the socio-cultural systems the women inhabit and have inhabited onshore in Timor-Leste, and the relentless offshore organisational systems based around production processes that they are integrated into is brought into relief through the month-on-month-off FIFO schedule that they live. This thesis explores the interface of this interrupted lifestyle where the women's new offshore-worker identities and roles influence those on shore. Further, how their new competencies and status as the main breadwinner in their families have opened up new opportunities for the women and members of their families to further their potential and improve their lives.

³ The concept of dignity in and at work is one that appears in the literature on labour issues, such as in International Labour Organisation documents. It is widely accepted to encompass notions of autonomy, freedom, equality, being trusted to make decisions, being respected, taken seriously and not subject to bullying and harassment, having one's competency trusted, having safe and secure working conditions and earning an income (Bolton, 2007; Sayer, 2007).

⁴ The denotation 'Timorese' is used throughout the study for the indigenous people of Timor-Leste, a term that separates them from those that dwell in the Indonesian province of West Timor.

⁵ 'Housekeeping' jobs on an offshore O&G site are concerned with areas of catering, cleaning, washing and making beds, which would be deemed women's work by most Timorese in Timor-Leste although historically men perform this work on offshore facilities.

Four main research questions coalesce with these areas of interest, being:

- What capabilities and enablers have supported the women in their pathway to securing the offshore work?
- What are the challenges, adaptations and experiences of the women as offshore workers?
- What changes have arisen in their at-home lives?
- What new opportunities have emerged as a result of their employment?

The thesis began by being situated uncomfortably within the feminist empowerment conceptual framework which tends to be formulated around a deficit state of women's dis-empowerment, with the goal of empowerment requiring them to be actively engaged in transformative change of the power structures and relations in their world that disadvantage them as women (Kabeer, 2005; Mosedale, 2005). Viewing the research participants' aspirations and experiences through a 'realising women's potential' lens was seen, as the study progressed, to be more appropriate to their individualised journeys. On these journeys they have benefitted from the influence of contemporary ideas of gender equality in their society, the support of family members and male husbands or partners, and an employment culture that supports equal opportunities and non-gender discrimination. This approach opens up discursive space for explanations of a segment in these women's lives that has them, as its starting point, represented as eager learning agents with an understanding of, or belief in, their potential to accomplish new competencies and shape their life. They were not ostensibly disempowered and had a determination to escape from or avoid falling into the dead-ends of poverty and pervasive narrow normative expectations of women's behavior, roles and achievement.

A conceptual 'drawing board' provides a basis for this study comprising an amalgam of Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, Pierre Bourdieu's notion of critical consciousness and the empowerment ingredients of resources, agency, and opportunity that inform gender and development (GAD) and feminist theory and literature. The study looks to the fruitful interconnections between agency (as the ability to make

strategic life choices), resources and opportunity that can generate greater capabilities leading to empowering changes in self that may be both sought or arise unexpectedly (A. Sen, 1985). Out of this can be generated understandings of the characteristics of the target group, the different factors in multiple dimensions of their lives that have influenced their choices, and the intrinsic and extrinsic values of their successes.

These interconnections and changes need to be understood within the historical, socio-cultural, education, employment and economic contexts of women's lives (Hart, 2013). In the case of this study, the bearing Timor-Leste's history has had on women's life paths and also the degrees and areas of traction in their society gained by the cross-cutting influence of post-independence contemporary ideas around gender equality and women's rights. The value given by women themselves to their aspirations and achievements must be seen in relation to these contexts.

To explain the phenomenon of Timorese women nationals being employed on Bayu-Undan a description of the historical development of the relationships between Timor-Leste, the O&G industry and the women's recruitment company, Caltech Offshore Services (hereinafter named Caltech) is important. Descriptions of the competencies required for offshore work, of the platform environment, operational systems, processes and overwhelming male presence are required to understand the particular characteristics, skills and human capital potentials that have led to the women being recruited. Additionally this gives some idea of the new challenges the women have faced in adapting to and developing new capabilities in their roles as offshore workers.

Lastly, to most profitably gain an in-depth understanding of the meanings the women themselves place on their aspirations, experiences and achievements, a qualitative research approach based around semi-structured interviews is taken. The narrative testimonies of the participants form the primary raw material from which conclusions are drawn around how, why and to what degree the women's potential as social agents seeking to improve their lives has been realised,

The thesis structure encompassing all of these aspects and the research findings and conclusions is now presented.

1.2 Thesis chapters outlined

Chapter One has provided an introduction to the parameters of the study, outlining the research questions and the rationale behind the approach.

Chapter Two builds a synergy of GAD and feminist theoretical and conceptual ideas on empowerment, Sen's capabilities framework and Bourdieu's theory of critical consciousness as they relate to the realisation of women's potential in developing countries. A scoping of the experiences of women in the developing world in paid employment highlights the rarity of women such the target group of this inquiry with diverse learning and work backgrounds achieving economic independence and social status via good jobs on a gas platform. It also draws attention to the links between workingwomen's economic status and roles and power in the household.

Chapter Three details Timor-Leste's history of colonialism, conflict and its impact on the country's development followed by an outline of the challenges around the incorporation of women's interests and gender equality into national reconstruction efforts since independence.

Chapter Four gives the reader a briefing on the history of Bayu-Undan, the role of Caltech in shaping local content to include Timorese women, and the rigours and protocols associated with offshore O&G operations. To assist with insight into the challenges facing the Timorese Bayu-Undan women a number of studies are drawn upon around the lives of offshore workers in other parts of the world including personal and at-home issues arising from living the FIFO lifestyle.

Chapter Five outlines the qualitative research design and methods used to garner the situated knowledge and shared meanings of the research participants. Details are given of fieldwork preparations, my positionality, the nature of the data generated and how my reflexive/flexible processes influenced the shape of the fieldwork⁶.

In *Chapter Six* the fieldwork findings are presented and analysed with reference to the research questions and the realising potential lens.

⁶ The fieldwork took place over a one-month period in June/July, 2013.

Chapter Seven concludes the study by distilling the main themes that provide answers to the research questions, highlighting the usefulness of the conclusions to the literature on workingwomen in LDCs and local content and pointing to threads that would profit from further research.

Chapter Two: Realising Women's Potential through Employment Opportunities

We need to encourage the women out of the kitchen. We see the potential in the women (Key Informant, Interview 5 July, 2013).

2.1 Introduction

The chapter begins by locating the concept of women in developing countries realising their potential within GAD discourse which tends to be conveyed either as a broad rhetorical aspiration or more narrowly, instrumentally associated with girls' and women's learning and earning potential. This broadens into discussion of aspects of the empowerment literature that are relevant to this study, such as women's strategic goals and agency and the multidimensional nature of the process of empowerment from the personal to relationships and collective levels.

A conceptual *drawing board* incorporating Sen's capability approach emerges upon which the study is based. This assists in exploring the relationships between a woman's agency, including self-efficacy and understandings of cognitive aptitude, and the resources, from the social to the political, that support her. We see how the fruitful combination of these can result in the conversion of opportunities into new capabilities that contribute to the fulfilling of well-being aspirations.

It will next be explained how women's identities might evolve and change as they navigate diverse social settings⁷, or a duality of identities might comfortably co-exist within different worlds. Bourdieu's concept of a critical consciousness sheds light on how the rejection by a woman of gendered norms of behavior and roles can be a key motivation that can change her life trajectory and aspirational horizons, in the case of this study to seek formal employment.

The chapter will next move on to discussion around women in developing countries pursuing employment. Negative portrayals of working women marginalised and exploited and shouldering the double burden of doing both tiring productive work and

⁷ The term setting for the purposes of this study denotes a bounded environment where particular situations, interactions, roles and relationships and behaviours accrue to it as normal by virtue of its history, purpose, socio/cultural values and beliefs (Agee, 2010)

reproductive mothering and domestic work are examined alongside studies highlighting the positive economic and social benefits working women and their families can experience. It will be seen that accounts of women in LDCs performing non-traditional work for equal pay, with the potential to up-skill, in male dominated workspaces, such as in the circumstances of this study, are hard to find in the development literature.

The chapter concludes by suggesting that the example provided by the Bayu-Undan women provides a platform for understanding ways that other Timorese women could realise their potential in similar ways.

2.2 Realising women's potential: focusing the lens

The quote that begins this chapter is a simple but powerful goal statement from a Timorese professional woman associated with this study who sees her role as fostering the potential of women in her country into good jobs. The concept of women realising their potential in developing countries has gained traction in international development. Seen as integrally linked with gender equality and women's empowerment it is a concept that stems from the recognition that women make up half of the potential talent-base for moving forward a country's development (OECD, 2008). The Beijing Platform for Action⁸ sees empowerment, a key aspirational goal, as women being able to enjoy equal status with men to realise their full potential and ambitions (DAC/OECD, 1998). It is now common for governments and development agencies to have gender equality at the centre of their agendas as a cross-cutting theme that influences social and economic processes, and to argue that goals of long-term sustainable development cannot be achieved without harnessing the knowledge, human capital and economic potential of a country's women (Asian Development Bank, 2013). Some unpicking of the terms *full* and *harnessing* potential is required in order to clarify the focus of the realising potential lens in this study.

Ideas of harnessing women's potential tend to be directed towards the improved development outcomes that are expected to arise should investment in their under-

⁸ The Beijing Platform for Action arose out of the Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 and has become a blueprint for measuring progress on women's empowerment globally (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2013).

utilised human capital⁹ occur, particularly in economic growth terms (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; H&M Conscious Foundation, 2014; Kwon, 2009; OECD, 2008). Gender equality in education and employment is strongly advocated to capture the learning and earning potential of girls and women, give them awareness to exercise their rights and enable them to fulfill their potential as equal members of society (UKaid, 2010). Whether even with, let us say, equal opportunities to education and employment, pay parity with men and freedom from domination or gender-based violence (GBV) by men, women are able to realise their full potential is doubtful, if in fact they or others know what their full potential is. In reality, realising one's potential is a process occurring in different areas of one's life at different times and to differing degrees and is dependent upon one's aspirations, priorities and available resources and opportunities (Alkire, 2011; Kabeer, 1999).

Thus, for the purposes of this study, this opens up discursive space for exploring what influences women's own and others' understandings of their potential to improve their lives, in particular through the capability of paid work. It also draws attention to the value women themselves and important others in their lives place on the outcomes, economic and other, on both intrinsic and extrinsic levels, of realising some aspects of their potential through this avenue. Fulfilling or understanding one's potential may be directly linked to original aspirations, such as learning English that then leads to getting a job in a hotel or non-governmental organisation (NGO). It can also come about in unplanned for or unpredicted ways, perhaps in women growing greater self-efficacy for contemplating more physical or skilled jobs previously deemed men's work, as is the case for some respondents in this study.

Many of these ideas can be found in the empowerment literature and social theories of Sen and Bourdieu, particularly with reference to concepts of agency and strategic goals, resources and opportunity, critical consciousness and capabilities, and the multidimensional nature of the process of empowerment.

2.3 Explanations from the empowerment literature

⁹ Human capital can be defined broadly as the knowledge and skills acquired by a person's learning activities and work experience (Kwon, 2009).

The meaning of women's empowerment has been explained in international development literature with an array of definitions and phraseologies shifting over time (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009). At its simplest the broad definition of women's empowerment from the World Bank serves as a starting point for discussion being: 'the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life' (Narayan, 2002). Sen, whose writing has had a significant impact on GAD thinking (Alkire, 2004), qualifies this freedom as requiring women to have real opportunities as social agents to achieve valued ways of doing and being and not simply the notional possibilities promised by, for example, gender equality legislation and equal opportunities policies (A. Sen, 1999). In a similar vein, feminist writer Naila Kabeer's concept of women's empowerment is predicated upon their degree of *agency*, that is having the ability to make strategic life choices 'in a context where this ability has been previously denied', such as those to do with marriage, having children and making a livelihood (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). This agency is seen to rest upon her inner sense of agency, that is, the self-belief that she has the freedom, entitlement and ability to define her aspirations and act upon them (A Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010; Kabeer, 1999; Moffat, 1992; Rowlands, 1997; Unterhalter, 1999). To be empowered, it is argued, requires an inner transformation of consciousness that increases self-esteem and the self-confidence to face obstacles to accessing resources, take up opportunities and to challenge traditional ideology (Roy, Tisdell, & Blomqvist, 1996; G. Sen & Grown, 1988).

Nelly Stromquist (1995) writes of cognitive and psychological components to empowerment, where women become cognitively aware of gender equality, women's legal rights and the reasons behind female disadvantage in their society and hence understand the need to go against socio-cultural expectations (discussed later in the chapter as a critical consciousness) and psychologically have the belief and self-confidence that on personal and group levels they can actively alter their condition for the better. In other words where women have a change of mindset from accepting the status quo of gender inequality or women's dis-empowerment as the natural order of things (R. Scheyvens, 1995; Strandberg, 2002). Jo Rowlands outlined three dimensions of empowerment as being the personal, close relationships and collective within which there are limiting or enabling factors that affect core values and which may or may not bring about empowerment changes. Examples she gives are of low or high self-confidence, encouragement or prohibition from a husband, being part of a supportive

group, and learning to analyse in order to take action (Rowlands, 1997). Stromquist (1995) has added women's economic independence and their collective, political action to bring about change as two further empowerment components.

Much of the feminist writing about gender and development posits that the precondition for empowerment as the ability to make strategic life choices must have been a previous state of being disempowered, subordinated or denied the ability to make these choices. This then is the basis for the imperative of women to individually and collectively take action to transform disempowering social structures that privilege men over women (Agarwal, 2001; Battliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Desai, 2010; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; Kabeer, 1999; Mosedale, 2005; Rowlands, 1997; R. Scheyvens, 1995; Stromquist, 2002). Therefore, at the collective level, this has resulted in state sanctioned gender reforms being carried out in many developing countries. For example, Timor-Leste women's organisations *Fokupers* and *Rede Feto* have played major roles in advocating for women's political representation and highlighting issues of domestic violence, with the resultant women's quota in parliament and on local councils and the Law Against Domestic Violence (LADV) (SEPI, 2013; Wigglesworth, 2012). In post-conflict societies, such as Timor-Leste, reconstruction supported by Western led development assistance, where gender considerations are often a precondition of funding, has offered opportunities to highlight gender equality, to transform learning and work environments into equal opportunities settings and to foster wider horizons and choices for the realisation of young women's potential (Zuckerman & Greenberg, 2004).

It will now be seen how these approaches to empowerment bear relation, or not, to the parameters of this study.

2.4 The empowerment 'fit' for the study

While not denying that the condition of most Timorese women is not one that reflects gender equality or the triumph over patriarchal ideology, the experiences and achievements of the women in the sample represent a departure from the norm generally depicted in gender studies. In line with this, the study is not premised on the thinking that for young women in LDCs to have the ability to make strategic life choices, they have to have previously been denied this ability (Kabeer, 1999). It is arguably possible

that numbers of young women can be imbued with an inner strength and belief in their potential that feeds a determination to pursue non-normative pathways, and/or have been encouraged to develop these qualities through the positive attitudes of family members. That is, they feel they have some freedom of choice and action to shape their lives. It is also possible that not all family settings in communities that are embedded in patriarchal customary systems must, *per se*, value boys above girls nor that all husbands, male partners or fathers should be pathologised as having controlling behavior towards women or expectations that their wives and daughters will cook and clean for them, or as having culturally limiting ideas of women's aptitude, potential and appropriate spheres of activity (A. Cornwall, Harrison, & Whitehead, 2008; Strandberg, 2002).

Mosedale (2012) warns of making generalised assumptions that women in male-dominated societies, must, *per se*, be oppressed or victims, or have internalised beliefs that women's powerlessness is natural or justified. The segment of the target group's lives that is the focus of this study begins with them collectively represented as eager learning agents, not ostensibly disempowered, making decisions about their futures. Seen by me as already equipped with a sense of agency based on their own understanding of, or belief in, their potential to learn new skills and shape their life, they collectively exhibited a determination to escape from or avoid falling into the dead-ends of poverty and pervasive narrow normative expectations of women's behavior, roles and achievement. Thus an important aspect of this study is indeed the acknowledgement that to pursue goals of economic autonomy women need to have a mindset that rejects socio-cultural ideologies that limit the scope of their aspirations and activity (Kabeer, 2012; Strandberg, 2002). This mindset need not, however, have come from a place of victimhood or subordination.

Further, while the relevance of women's collective political action to their empowerment is of interest to the study, it is at a step removed from the activities of the target group. It is more as consideration of linkages for individual women's agency within the settings they traverse rather than a focus on political pre-requisites that were indeed paramount to providing opportunity for these women, or as co-requisites in their process of carving out empowering pathways for themselves. If inroads have already been made as a result of women's collective action into transforming disempowering

social structures, strengthening gender equality and improving women's access to the resources and opportunities required for them to realise their potential, then it follows that there will be vanguards leading an increasing number of women in developing countries with individualised self-belief and a sense of their rights already taking control of their lives, or at least control in some areas of their lives. That is, individual women who have already gone some way along the cognitive process of practically redefining gender roles 'in ways which extend their possibilities for being and doing' (Mosedale, 2005, p. 252).

It also follows that the individual unorganised actions of these women can collectively, by default, make inroads into changing normative perceptions of women and women's place in society. For example, in changing the gendered orthodoxy of a historically male work environment through female recruitment, limiting feminine worker stereotypes can be broken down and space opened for new gender identities to be accommodated within these and the workers' outside social and labour market settings.

The need to consider different dimensions to empowerment aside from the political already discussed, has resonance for the study. Becoming empowered and realising potential is a process, a journey and not a destination, that occurs in stages and at any point is likely to be partial or incomplete (Alkire, 2011). Multiple frontiers in women's lives (personal, relational, material, social) need strengthening and cognitive, psychological, behavioural and normative frontiers need to be crossed, usually incrementally and not all at the same time (Agarwal, 2001; Alkire, 2011; A. Sen, 1985). The study is concerned with what frontiers have been crossed by the women in different settings, rather than those still to be crossed, and what were the challenges, with what personal, material, social, workplace and political supporting factors, via what opportunities.

The binding for aspirations to become achievements is the availability of resources and opportunities and the driver is agency. Feminist and GAD discourse tends to have a narrow view on resources being those productive and instrumental ones such as land, income, micro-finance or the presence of a school or medical clinic, with agency also defined sparsely as the ability, based on self-belief, to make strategic life decisions

(Kabeer, 1999). For the study to benefit from existing theory around these ideas, a more nuanced interpretation of the elements of Sen's capabilities approach relevant to the context of Timor-Leste, has been necessary.

2.5 Sen and the art of agency, resources, and opportunity

As signaled in Section 2.2, Sen's capability approach, where the central issue is having the freedom to choose how to live (A. Sen, 2009), has had considerable influence on both feminist and mainstream development discourse. The approach integrates the concept of women's agency with their access to resources and opportunity (Alkire, 2011; Bhavani, Foran, & Kurian, 2003; Kabeer, 1999; Mosedale, 2005; Muraleedharan, 2005; World Bank, 2012). Its usefulness for this study is in two areas:

- The assumption that opportunities simply represent potential, that is are notional, unless one has the capacity and resources to convert them into change agents in one's life, and hence achieve capabilities (Hart, 2013; A. Sen, 1985; Tipple, 2004).
- The idea that individuals have notions of valued ways of being and doing (Alkire, 2011), such as being independent and respected, learning new skills, or earning an income.

These areas will now be explored separately.

2.5.1 Converting opportunities into success

Whilst the capacity to convert opportunity into achievements or capabilities can be equated with agency Sen offers a wider range of both personal characteristics and human capital than simply the ability to choose and having self-belief. Examples are determination, physical well-being, skill, cognitive ability, and qualifications (Robeyns, 2011). Self-efficacy is an important personal characteristic bolstering the agency of women faced with the challenges of learning new alien technologies and responsibilities in the high-risk offshore O&G industry. Self-efficacy is a task-specific and domain-specific type of self-esteem, that is, 'the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations' (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). In other words, having positive judgments about one's competency to learn or perform particular tasks, respond to unforeseen contingencies or to accomplish goals

in certain situations. Self-efficacy is the driver for the motivation in seeking to master rather than avoid difficult or intimidating tasks, which in turn, when mastered, enhances self-worth and can earn the respect of others (Bandura, 1995).

Sen argues that the resources that might support the conversion of opportunities into achievements, such as in education and employment, span broader parameters than simply the productive and instrumental. Resources can include institutional rules, laws, state policies and enabling social norms (Robeyns, 2011). An extension of this thinking that lends value to the study is the incorporation of other social resources (alternatively called social capital¹⁰). In Timor-Leste other social resources identified as significant were information networks, linkages to mentors, equal opportunities practices within educational, vocational and employment institutions, access to the internet, diaspora and urban egalitarian influences, and the economic resource of savings.

2.5.2 Aspirations and valued ways of doing and being

A cornerstone of Sen's capabilities approach involves people's valued ways of doing and being, both of which are reflected in their aspirations and reflect the scope of activities and opportunities that they perceive to be possible (Alkire, 2004). Harris and Goldsmith (2011) have suggested that what matters to a sector of Timorese people, that is their valued ways of being and doing, is having self-initiative and working for money.

It was clear to me in the early stages of this research that the women's initial aspirations reflected these simple valued ways of doing and being. The scope of activities and opportunities that they perceived to potentially achieve these ranged from learning English, getting a waitressing job to securing a scholarship to study mining engineering at an Indonesian university. Becoming highly paid, respected and valued offshore workers for the O&G industry by realising unexplored potentials along unexpected and challenging training pathways was beyond the scope of their imaginings. Of interest to this study, using Sen's ideas, are the new or re-shaped valued ways of doing and being that have arisen from the women's new capabilities, such as an

¹⁰ The World Bank offers a broad definition of social capital that encompasses horizontal associations between people such as within families, peer groups and communities that share a sense of identity and common purpose, and vertical bridges or linkages such as an information network about job vacancies, an equal opportunities training programme, or a court system that gives one recourse to justice (The World Bank, 2014).

increase in income allowing for savings for the future, previously not considered possible, or improving strength and fitness in an offshore exercise gym, as some of the women respondents have done, in order to build the physical capacity required for upskilling to a more physically demanding offshore position.

It will now be explained how linkages between agency, resources and opportunities supporting the process of pursuing aspirations and achieving successes are determined to a large degree by the different settings humans inhabit such as the family, educational, rural/urban, and equal opportunities NGO and employment spaces traversed by the women in the study.

2.6 Women navigating diverse social structures

A woman can be located in multiple, differential and overlapping domains and networks. Increasing agency in one setting or social context can have positive ‘spillover’ impacts on agency in others, (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Kabeer, 2005). However, it would be a mistake to make assumptions that a woman’s sense of personal power in one area will automatically be translated into other areas of her life, such as having agency and autonomy both as paid workers and as women in households (Ibrahim & Alkire, 2007; Mohanty, 1988).

2.6.1 Women working outside and within the household

In developing countries women’s identities have traditionally been associated with household constructs – as wives and mothers. The household is argued to be the last bastion where deep asymmetric divisions of labour are learned and persist – where women do the cooking, washing and caring for children regardless of whether they have work outside the home or not. (McKie, Bowlby, & Gregory, 2001; A. Sen, 1987; Wolf, 1990). It is hard to locate evidence of widespread re-negotiation of gendered household roles and responsibilities occurring, with men shouldering a greater share of domestic tasks, when a mother spends more time working away from home (Dlamini, Anucha, & Wolfe, 2012; Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Momsen, 2010; Muraleedharan, 2005; Pearson, 2000). More often cultural arrangements see daughters allocated extra jobs. In particular, they or females in the extended family are expected to provide compensatory child-care support (Chant, 2003; Hicks, 2007; Kabeer, 1994; Kucera & Xenogiani, 2009; Muraleedharan, 2005)). The translation of gender-egalitarian laws into more

egalitarian approaches to core reproductive work in the household seems remote in many developing countries (Charles, 2011; Kabeer, 1994; McKie et al., 2001; Syed, 2010). The Wigglesworth (2012) reporting of the work of four Timorese NGOs focused on generating greater incomes for women notes that by neglecting to address unequal gender relations in other critical areas they failed to bring about significant empowerment changes for the women.

Female out-labour migrants share some commonalities with women in FIFO work in negotiating adjustments around gendered household positions, where the men often lose their central breadwinning role and the women must lose their central parenting role (Chant, 2003; Hoffman & Buckley, 2010). Return migration can present challenges when women are faced with re-integration into their home cultures and communities (King & Vullnetari, 2012). In a 2010 study by Hofmann of Georgian female migrant workers were seen to re-define their identities as mothers by cognitively framing their work as a necessary sacrifice of their at-home positions for ‘away from home’ work in order to provide for their families (Hoffman & Buckley, 2010). These same women had little faith in the fathers’ ability to adequately fulfill parenting responsibilities while they were away from home.

Alternatively, there is evidence of where the wider extended family and community structures can, in the sense of a social welfare net, unproblematically buttress the household’s domestic needs or mothers’ needs and interests through shared social resources such as child-care (Hicks, 2007; Stewart-Withers, 2007). Research into Guatemalan migrant couples in the United States, where the woman is the breadwinner, found the men willing and happy to shoulder domestic roles (Menjivar, 1999), and among Albanian migrant couples who both work there is a shift towards egalitarian sharing of domestic tasks (King & Vullnetari, 2012). On the other hand, there are stories of business and professional women in developing countries portraying a sense of pride that their work commitments are able to reside comfortably with their commitments as wives and mothers (Das, 1999; The Dili Weekly, 2012). Walker (1995) warns against the problematising of mothering into a burden imposed on women by men and legitimised by pervasive patriarchal directives, thus leaving no space for different meanings mothers might themselves attach to their roles and experience, or different strategies with which mothers might comfortably reconcile socio-cultural norms of

behavior with their expanded agency and how these meanings might shape new mother identities (Walker, 1995).

It will now be argued that the differences in working women's experiences is closely related to the specific social context and the level of critical consciousness.

2.6.2 Bourdieu, context, critical consciousness and Timor-Leste

To understand how an individual's identity, agency and opportunities for achievement are bound up with social context Bourdieu describes a dialectical relationship between a person's subjective being, or *habitus* and the social worlds around it (Fernando & Cohen, 2013). An individual's self-identity, aspirations and behavior are mediated through these various worlds all of which contain certain norms, values and power relations (Hart, 2013; Maton, 2008). Socialisation within the family and community settings during one's upbringing promotes conformity to normative gendered behavior and roles which has a high degree of resilience and intransigence and can be reproduced over generations (World Bank, 2012). In a socio-cultural context that is predicated on male dominance, as in Timor-Leste, prevailing feminine identities, especially in the rural areas, of self-abnegation, modesty, responsibility for tending to family needs and unquestioning acceptance of male authority have endured despite gender equality reforms since independence (Charlesworth & Wood, 2002; Corcoran-Nantes, 2011; Leach, Scambary, Clarke, & Feeney, 2012; SEPI, 2013). Kabeer (1999) has suggested that women in societies, such as Timor-Leste, who make the choice to seek economic autonomy, which is antithetical to the normative reproductive choice and which confers status upon women by virtue of their fertility, may pay a high price.

Prevailing patriarchal ideologies and relations and the persistence of gender discrimination in these countries pose significant barriers for women to pursue, or even think about pursuing, pathways to economic independence through paid work. Kabeer (2012) points to one of the reasons behind the slow pace of women's entry to the labour force being the authority vested in men, which in many countries is legally supported, over the mobility of women and the ways they utilise their time. It is common for women in these settings to have to ask permission from husbands or fathers to seek employment, and of those that are able to, the overwhelming majority seeks work that

can accommodate the expectation that they will be able to continue to cook and clean for their husbands (Kabeer, 2012).

Within traditional socio/cultural domains, such as in Timor-Leste, the possibility of choices for different behaviour and action, such as attending an NGO computing course, for women may be visible, but often not considered feasible (Maton, 2008). In workplace and vocational settings these choices may be confined within a ‘glass ceiling’ defined by socio/cultural or labour market ascriptions of the job types and career advancement suitable for men and women (Ismail & Ibrahim, 2008). Kabeer (2012) explains this gender discrimination as arising from customary norms and beliefs that assign a lower value to women’s aptitude and skills¹¹. The self-efficacy exhibited by young women who choose to seek higher education and formal jobs, as in the case of this study, reflects a non-normative understanding that places higher value on their aptitude. While this self-efficacy is a personal trait that comes from within (Bandura, 1995), for it to develop or be exercised requires supportive settings and influences.

Bourdieu has argued that when an individual inhabits or enters new social fields such as tertiary educational institutes, new urban peer groups, and workplaces, different material or cultural ways of thinking and behaving can be perceived as possible (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This gives rise to a *critical consciousness* that rejects previous conformity and opens possibilities for one to shape one’s own destiny (Hart, 2013; Hilgers, 2009; Maton, 2008). Further, this critical consciousness can imbue some young women, as has been the case in Bangladesh, with the confidence to negotiate with families and within relationships their right to enter the workforce (Feldman, 2001). When these new social settings intersect and overlap with traditional settings, non-conformist actions by individuals or groups of individuals, such as, for example, a group of women from a LDC working on a Western offshore gas platform, can bring about changes to the gendered orthodoxy of their home, community and also their new work settings (Fernando & Cohen, 2013).

¹¹ It is important to note here that even in the developed world jobs characterised as mainly female such as nursing, secretarial, child-care and the service industry have ‘historically been designated inferior, not because of the skill involved but because of the female identity associated with them’ (Kabeer, 2012, p. 12). The persistent gender wage gap in both developed and developing country labour market whereby women overall tend to earn less than men, arises from this pervasive thinking.

Consequently, Bourdieu's insights assist sense-making of the Timorese context and the revealed critical consciousness of the Timorese women in the study. These women have traversed a range of diverse settings from the rural village, Indonesian Universities, urban NGO-run vocational courses and NGO and urban hospitality workplaces and ended up being employed on a Western offshore gas platform. Inquiry around changing identities and non-traditional influences is highly applicable as it may provide insight into how there can be assistance in creating pathways for other women. Feminist Srilatha Battliwala alluded to the effects of external change agents that facilitate changes in women's self-image and consciousness through exposure to new ideas, values and knowledge of alternatives to structures of male dominance (Battliwala, 1994). Education and urban settings and diaspora communities, where ideas of gender equality are becoming embedded, have been documented as being catalysts for women's changing social identities and expectations of being more highly valued, respected and treated as equals (Carey, 2001; Diabah, 2011; Gordon, 2004; Majstorovic & Lassen, 2011; Moffat, 1992).

The diasporic space of the Western offshore O&G site in this study operates around rules of zero-tolerance for sexual harassment and gender discrimination which is in contrast to the near absence of protection from this in Timor-Leste (Appleby, 2010; SEPI, 2013). At the same time Western male superiors dominate the chain of command, which raises an important question of how the women manage these contradictions with regard to their assertiveness and sense of self.

Identities, attitudes, behavior and aspirations are increasingly, and with acceleration, being shaped by globalised social forces operating across cultures and geographical space. An interesting angle is the argument that young people in developing countries are exhibiting bicultural identities that enable them to comfortably straddle local and new global cultures (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2005), for example reconciling traditional reciprocal cultural obligations to financially support extended family members with new individualised personal needs to invest time and money into one's own studies. There is now a global trend that is increasingly legitimising the role of women as part of the paid workforce. While this may superficially appear to offer empowerment opportunities for women, globalisation can be seen as new phase of capitalism where labour is a commodity, and women are the

cheapest of the commodity (Bolton, 2007; Kabeer, 2012). Women's empowerment may or may not occur as a by-product.

2.7 To what extent is women's potential being realised through paid employment in the developing world?

The experiences of women in a developing country seeking greater economic well-being in employment, seen through a *realising women's potential* lens, are complex requiring understanding of the macro, meso and micro levels, and their interconnections. However, this study is not primarily focused on the macro level but a smaller unit of analysis. Instead, while considering bigger pictures, it ultimately narrows to explore perceived realities of the study group such as the degree to which job types, income and working conditions reflect the value placed on women's contribution in the workforce, the relationship between job satisfaction and self-worth, whether incomes or camaraderie with work colleagues can compensate for the personal deficit of unfulfilling work, and how household decision-making around spending might change as women become income earners.

The literature around women in paid work in developing countries is largely representations of persistent gender gaps in the global labour market that see women continuing to be disadvantaged in relation to men (Desai, 2010; Kucera & Xenogiani, 2009; World Bank, 2012). While there have been significant increases in women's entry to the labour force throughout much of the developing world in the past quarter century, they tend to be concentrated in low-skilled jobs with no prospects (World Bank, 2012). As Jutting and Laiglesia (2009, p.19) have stated, 'The issue lies not so much in [women] having a job, but in having a bad job'.

Desai (2009) has identified three trends associated with women's increased economic participation in the developing world: a growing *feminization* of labour; women more likely to be located in informal or vulnerable employment, and; the out-labour migration of many women to service industry work in developed countries.

The first trend of the feminisation of paid labour sees women disproportionately concentrated, many say marginalised, into economic sectors producing consumer goods for the global market (Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; Momsen, 2010; Pearson, 2000;

World Bank, 2012). This gender segregation is characterised by low wages, low status, low skills and poor working conditions for women (Desai, 2010; Razavi, Pearson, & Danloy, 2004). With the second trend, women working in informal work such as in domestic or manual labour or sex work experience all of this and, further, face precariousness of income. Features of employment relationships in the informal sector include: wages and conditions of work not subject to labour legislation, a tendency to have no written employment contract, short-term or casual assignments, and health and safety risks (Charmes, 2009; Hüssmans, 2004; Jutting & Laiglesia, 2009). There is little or no opportunity for up-skilling or upward mobility (Kucera & Xenogiani, 2009). Women migrating from rural areas to urban centres tend to be found in informal employment. This is a significant feature of post-independence Timor-Leste where of the 28% of Timorese women participating in the labour force 78% are in informal work (SEPI, 2013, p. 46).

The trend of women migrating for work outside their country of origin is yet to be significant in Timor-Leste but options for seasonal labour schemes are being explored (World Bank, 2013). These jobs also tend to end up in low paying *women's work* areas with little job security (Gordon, 2004; Hoffman & Buckley, 2010). There are, however, some cases of women from developing countries working in traditionally male areas in a developed country, such as women construction workers from India working in the Middle East. Preferred by employers because of their docility and uncomplaining nature they perform menial work earning less than men doing the same job with no opportunity to advance (Mathew, 2005).

The literature does suggest, however, that even where women are in segregated and marginal occupations they can experience important degrees of empowerment (Feldman, 2001; Kabeer, 2010; World Bank, 2012). Paid employment is seen as a central capability by Sen, bringing with it income, self-esteem and social interaction (Nussbaum, 2001). Or, as Kabeer (1999, p.438) citing Sen has argued, a capability that represents a new potential for these women for, ‘living the lives they want, of achieving valued ways of “being and doing”’. Working outside the home and earning an income can bring about new freedoms, personal independence and social status (Kabeer, 2005; Malhotra & Mather, 1997; McKie et al., 2001; Moghadam & Senftova, 2005). For some women this can mean escape from patriarchal controls (Kabeer, 2005; Menard-Warrick,

2004; Momsen, 2010; Wigglesworth, 2010). Having a job and income can give a woman wishing to leave an abusive or unhappy marriage a fall-back position (Gordon, 2004; Moghadam & Senftova, 2005; World Bank, 2012).

Statistical accounts of changes to household decision-making and gender roles and responsibilities have drawn links between working women's higher sense of autonomy and ability to improve her bargaining power in these areas (World Bank, 2012). Importantly for the children of workingwomen, it has been widely documented that mothers are more single-minded than fathers in devoting income under their control to their children's well-being and education (Chant, 2008; Grasmuck & Espinal, 2000; Lesser Blumberg, 2006). Also, a woman's income can have the direct benefit of improving the lives of extended family where her cultural background is one of sharing money amongst kin, such as in Kiribati and Timor-Leste (Borovnik, 2006; Earnes & Faulkner, 2009).

A catalyst for women's empowerment in developing countries is often seen as coming from the public sector and NGOs. These are important sources of formal employment for women which bring higher pay, often pay parity between men and women and social protection (Kabeer, 2012; Kucera & Xenogiani, 2009). Certain levels of numeracy and literacy, vocational training or higher education are human capitals required for women to be able to compete for these and other jobs of higher quality.

With the trend to increasing social acceptance and opportunities for paid female employment there are growing numbers of parents, aware of the expansion of job opportunities for women (and in some countries in professional and technical work), who are investing in higher education for their daughters (Momsen, 2010; World Bank, 2012). Whether empowerment of their daughters is a primary driver is perhaps less relevant than the fact that expansion of education opportunities is normally inherently empowering. However, it must be noted that young women need time and opportunity for this and due to their domestic workload possible new opportunities remain out of reach for many (Kabeer, 2012; OECD, 2008). To add to these limiting factors there has been criticism that many vocational courses in developing countries are gender stereotyped (carpentry or mechanics for men and nursing or teaching for women), or

teach skills that do not match with labour market requirements (Kucera & Xenogiani, 2009).

However, positive results from equal opportunities vocational training programmes in Peru, Colombia and Kenya have seen young women with greater capacity to enter traditional male occupations (World Bank, 2012). In Timor-Leste, while still small, the number of women receiving vocational training is growing, with the bulk choosing finance, computing and administration (SEPI, 2013), and as the data of this study shows, a few are now choosing to pursue tertiary qualifications in male dominated areas such as engineering. The proportion of women entering professional and technical jobs has risen in some countries such as in the Caribbean, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh (Momsen, 2010).

Nonetheless, despite these successes the predominant representation in the literature of the so-called economically empowered woman of the developing world is ‘a smiling black or brown member of a self-help group for rural women with low incomes’ (A Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010, p. 146). The phenomenon of a very small group of non-professional women from a LDC, such as in this study, securing formal, highly paid jobs in a historically male work site with HSE standards, social protections and the opportunities to up-skill is unlikely to show on the radar of progress in women’s employment in international development literature.

2.8 Individual outcomes to widen collective horizons

As will be shown in the next chapter, poverty, chronic underdevelopment and limiting socio-cultural norms of femininity in Timor-Leste have left the means (or resources) and opportunity to achieve social and economic well-being outcomes through paid work out of the reach of the majority of women. Yet there was a combination of agency, resources and opportunity that has worked in the interests of this capability achievement for the Timorese women in this study. The study thus looks to the reasons behind this outcome, and further it also evaluates the extent to which this outcome brings enhancement of the women’s human capital, self-worth, self-efficacy and sense of personal power, social status and access to new resources and opportunity.

It is difficult to generalise about the extent and ways (expected and unexpected) that paid employment, as a capability achievement, may or may not reflect or contribute to the realisation of women's potential, be it through job satisfaction, enhanced self-worth, social and economic status or the expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life (A. Sen, 1999). However, it is expected that this evaluation could be extended to entertaining the idea that the collective outcomes of these women represent a platform that provides a catalyst for other Timorese women to look to realising their potential in similar ways.

2.9 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has introduced Sen's notion that paid employment is a key capability for individual women in developing countries aspiring to exercise some control, or have greater freedom of choice, in shaping their lives and activities in ways they value (Nussbaum, 2001; A. Sen, 1999). For the purposes of this study, paid work and accompanying vocational training are also identified as important avenues through which women can realise potential on personal, social and economic levels such as having greater self-confidence and economic autonomy, the ability to better support immediate and extended families, social status and a new workingwoman identity that is respected by others (Borovnik, 2006; Kabeer, 2012; Lesser Blumberg, 2006).

Women's aspirations and outcomes associated with securing formal paid work are shaped largely by the intersecting social and political forces in their worlds (Hart, 2013; Zuckerman & Greenberg, 2004). The chapter has explained how what many women perceive as possible is constrained by traditional patriarchal socio/cultural norms of femininity that limit their activity to the domestic sphere (Majstorovic & Lassen, 2011; Pires, 2004). Further, prohibition from men, non-recognition of their aptitude, poverty, lack of time and social support, and the absence of opportunity such as a nearby vocational training course, are all factors that can narrow women's aspirational horizons and prevent their learning and earning potentials being realised, let alone identified (World Bank, 2012).

On the other hand it has been shown that women's exposure to egalitarian ideas, the presence of laws, state policies and organisational settings that promote gender equality and equal opportunity to education, vocational training and employment can widen the

possibilities of choice and expand women's understanding and confidence, or as Bourdieu terms a *critical consciousness*, that they have the potential and the right to be more than a mother and a wife (Batliwala, 1994; Robeyns, 2011). While acknowledging the importance of women's collective action in transforming social systems and structures that are disempowering for women, the focus that this study directs at the validity, as a development outcome, of individual women's successes in achieving greater freedoms has been clarified.

The more directly relevant dimensions that require strengthening for an individual woman to have the capacity to realise at least some of her potential outside of normative expectations have been alternatively described in this chapter as comprising her resource portfolio. That is, encompassing the personal (such as self-efficacy, determination, skills and cognitive awareness) material (for example cash for a course fee), relational and social (Rowlands, 1997; A. Sen, 1985; Stromquist, 2002). Attention has been directed to the role of supportive families and relationships, female mentors and social networks which can be critical in paving pathways for women to social and economic empowerment (A Cornwall & Anyidoho, 2010) which, while being absent for many women in the developing world, has been a key component in the pathways of the women who are the subjects of this study.

As well as having a resource portfolio there must be the availability of educational, training and work opportunities. Further, it is a woman's degree of agency, that will determine to what extent these resources and opportunities can be utilised in the pathway to achieving the capability of paid work (Hart, 2013). Additionally, it is her agency that will impact upon how new resources might be activated such as income, and new possibilities might be opened up such as re-defining restrictive feminine stereotypes, in ways that expand her freedom of choice and action in improving her life (Narayan, 2002).

To assist with answering the main research questions this chapter has created a synergy and extension of ideas from GAD and feminist empowerment literature, Sen's capabilities approach and Bourdieu's theory of critical consciousness. In this, women's aspirations and potential for achieving capabilities in paid work and thereby becoming more empowered are integrally linked with resources, agency and opportunities, which

in turn are governed by the social and organisational settings they navigate. Additionally, a *realising women's potential* lens is seen as a useful tool to employ in place of an empowerment framework. Realising potential is deemed a process that occurs in stages, as cognitive, psychological, behavioural and normative frontiers are conquered in women's lives and at different times with each incremental step being deemed valid (Agarwal, 2001).

This study captures a timeframe in the target group's lives whereby, given the non-normative direction their lives had taken, at the starting point I saw them as already being possessed with a critical level of agency and social support, and in their subsequent success had secured high-paying work offshore that was considered of high status in their communities. This premise behind the study, formed before the fieldwork, is a departure from much of the empowerment literature that focuses on women in developing countries with a pre-empowerment or income-earning experience of a deficit state of dis-empowerment or disadvantage.

It may or may not be that the positives of having the agency to break with tradition and enter the labour force results in women in developing countries being able to choose work that pays well, has social protection and where one is afforded dignity and opportunities to upskill. It also may or may not be that gains made in one area, such as securing income-earning work outside the home, trigger improvements in another, such as greater gender equality around household roles.

The approach taken in this study is to allow for degrees of freedoms, or the intersecting balance of empowering capabilities or potentials realised, to be understood within the specifics of women's contextual realities, which for the female subjects of this research is the Western offshore platform and Timor-Leste, a post-conflict LDC.

Chapter Three: Women and Change in Timor-Leste Society

Clearly some East Timorese women activists are motivated by feminist concepts – equal rights, political emancipation, and liberation from subordinate and oppressive social roles. But the majority would describe their quest as one for greater equality and a modicum of economic independence, and against violence (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p. 3).

3.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to situate the research topic, and the target group's quest, which could be said to be broadly reflected in the above quote, within the socio-cultural, historical, economic and political context of Timor-Leste. It begins by painting a brief geographical and demographic picture, and then moves into an explanation of local custom, which prevails in much of the country. Women's position and expectations within traditional socio-cultural systems and structures are initially touched upon. Recognising the impact on the Timorese people of a history of dominance by outside powers and of violence, the chapter builds a historical backdrop that leads the reader to a depiction of the status of newly independent Timor-Leste in 2002 as a neglected and traumatised post-conflict LDC.

In section three there is discussion of the economic, political and social dimensions that have accompanied the reconstruction and nation-building efforts. A bleak picture is painted of fragile livelihoods and a sluggish economy with infrastructure and social service sectors being bolstered by injections from the Petroleum Fund. The spread of the influence and impact of women's rights and gender equality lobbies and laws is explored alongside depictions of the subordinated status of the majority of Timorese women faced with the threat of domestic violence and an absence of choice to shape their lives.

Section three finishes with a look into the labour market and women's participation in vocational training and employment. This leads into the final section which dissects the state-level framework for gender equality that holds some promise that a climate will spread within which increasing numbers of Timorese women might begin to

understand their potential to be more than being wedded to the domestic sphere should they aspire to this.

3.2. Background

3.2.1 Geography and cultural aspects

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste (RDTL) occupies the Eastern half of the island of Timor, its border shared with West Timor, a province of Indonesia. Within West Timor on the north coast is the small enclave of Oecusse, which, along with Atauro and Jaco Islands, is incorporated into Timor-Leste. To the southeast, across the Timor Sea, is Australia. The small country, of approximately 15,000km², has a width ranging from fifty to one hundred kilometres and is five hundred kilometres long, largely mountainous with difficult or no vehicle access to many areas (Nixon, 2008). Fanzo (2013) comments that it takes five hours or longer to drive the 120kms from the north side to the south due to the ‘god awful’ state of the roads (Fanzo, 2013, p. 1). The ferry trip to Oecusse takes twelve hours.

With a population of over 1.1 million the country is divided into thirteen districts (JICA, 2011, p. 6). Outside of Dili district that encompasses the capital Dili, over 70% of the population and including 80% of the female workforce are living primarily by subsistence agriculture (World Bank, 2013, p. 5). The main subsistence crops are maize, cassava and rice, with only one crop produced a year and yearly shortfalls underlying the country’s high malnutrition rates (World Bank, 2013). Coffee production is the main agricultural industry. With very few cases of value added activity in processing of food crops, women, especially, commonly resort to selling surpluses and imports such as oil and soap (JICA, 2011). There are two official languages, *Tetum* which is spoken by around 90% and Portuguese, with *Bahasa Indonesia* and English as working languages (Ramos-Horta, 2012, p. 1). The main religion of Timor-Leste is Catholicism (99.1%), although animistic spirituality is still widely practiced in the rural areas (JICA, 2011, p. 7).

Anthropological studies have revealed that in traditional religion women’s fertility is of central importance (Hicks, 2004; Hohe, 2003; Niner, 2011a, 2011b). Niner (2011) notes that whilst fertility confers considerable status upon a woman, her primary

importance as a mother and wife limits her role in society¹². The traditional home is seen as the interior world and as such a feminine space, whilst the outer masculine world of secular affairs is dominated by men (Hicks, 2004). Local laws, conflict resolution and customs, or *adat*, still predominate in most communities that, in the majority patrilineal areas¹³, define villagers' social identity according to male and elder authority, status at birth and through validation by ancestral myth (Hicks 2012; Kovar 2012).

Both political and spiritual forms of local governance are responsible for maintaining social order and hence community survival, and emphasise the importance of family and collective rights over those of the individual (Cristalis & Scott, 2005; Pereira & Lete Koten, 2012). It is a system that Tilman (2012) explains as a 'cultural package that [has] worked to safeguard the community, regulating peoples' relations with each other, with the environment, and with the ancestors' (*Tilman, 2012, p. 204*). Traditional justice seeks to restore the cosmic disorder caused by a crime, for example domestic violence or adultery, with the family of whomever is determined to be the guilty party paying goods to the victim's family in order to re-establish peace (Hohe, 2003). A good example of where the collective interests supersede those of the individual is in the case of rape, where the crime is not seen as a violation of the individual but as shameful to her family (Hohe, 2003).

Along with hamlet and village-based systems of authority, complex webs of extended family connections continue to shape social life, with marriage playing an important role in maintaining social structure through inter-c cooperation and social support (Brown & Gusmao, 2009; Cristalis & Scott, 2005; Hicks, 2012; Hohe, 2003). Traditionally marriages have been arranged and accompanied by the ritual exchange of gifts between the wife giver and wife taker families. Today potentially 50% of marriages are still traditional (Hicks, 2012, p. 145) with many young rural women marrying around the onset of the menarche to a man often 7-10 years older where his age gives him greater status (Wigglesworth, 2012). Hicks (2012) argues that Catholic values that privilege family over individual interests and foster a femininity of modesty

¹² Timor-Leste has the highest fertility rate in South East Asia and Asia (along with Afghanistan), averaging at 5.7 children per family nationally and 4.6 in Dili with unmet needs for family planning in Dili at 32% (SEPI, 2013, p. 51).

¹³ Timor-Leste has some matrilineal areas where *adat* is implemented by female leaders and women are permitted, for example, to speak during dispute resolution processes (National Statistics Directorate, 2010, p. 50).

with women having the role of maintaining stability within the household are able to reside comfortably with traditional marriage rules.

Much complexity surrounds the traditional institution of marriage with its systems of mutual rights and obligations and where ‘culturally specific social constructions of gender are based on complementarity rather than equality’ (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011, p. 82). Since Timor-Leste’s independence in 2002 there has been a foment of criticism of the *barlake*¹⁴ component of traditional marriage, with commentators ranging from those who argue the bride is ‘bought’ like a commodity thus entitling the husband and his family to expect her obedience and to mistreat her, to those who say *barlake* is a way of honouring womanhood, that makes a young woman feel valued by her parents, but which should not exceed the capacity of the family to pay (Allden, 2007; Carey, 2001; Corcoran-Nantes, 2011; Hicks, 2012; Niner, 2012; Wigglesworth, 2012).

Local law, *adat*, has also come under fire for not having worked in favour of women’s rights, particularly around land inheritance, polygamy, gender-based violence (GBV), and in women having a political voice (Cristalis & Scott, 2005; Cummins, 2011; Kovar, 2012; UNFPA, 2005). However, there has been a post-conflict cultural resurgence of adherence to *adat*, by a rural majority seeking the security and familiarity of resilient customary socio/political/cultural systems (Brown & Gusmao, 2009; Corcoran-Nantes, 2011; da Silva & Kendall, 2002). As Hohe (2003) says about fragile post-conflict societies, even if they are not seen from the outside to adhere to international standards of human rights ‘familiar institutions represent a link with ‘normality’ for the communities’ (Hohe, 2003, p. 355).

Up until this century Timor-Leste’s people have endured the yoke of four hundred years of Portuguese colonialist domination, unwittingly the devastating impacts of World War Two, a relentless war of attrition during a lengthy occupation by a neighbouring power, Indonesia, and brutal retaliation by pro-integrationist militia on the eve of their country’s independence (Nixon, 2008). As a new nation, this century, Timor-Leste is confronting major issues of poverty and poor health, lack of

¹⁴ *Barlake* is the groom’s family’s contribution that traditionally accompanies marriage, which can assume hugely asymmetric proportions in comparison to the wife’s (Cummins, 2011).

infrastructure and a judiciary, gender inequality, low levels of human capital and capacity and a stagnant economy (UNDG, 2002).

3.2.2 *A History of colonialist neglect and crushing occupation*

From the early sixteenth century East Timor (as Timor-Leste was previously known)¹⁵ was a colony of Portugal. While the Portuguese exploited the country's natural resources such as marble and sandalwood the predominant Timorese subsistence economic mode and inter-clan warfare continued throughout the next 400 years of colonial rule. The traditional *suku*¹⁶ mechanisms for justice and conflict resolution that had characterised Timorese society were threaded through the colonial administration (Nixon, 2008). The Portuguese authorities showed little interest in industrial development, improvements to agricultural practices, or social modernisation, no real commitment to educating the Timorese, nor in building an infrastructure. So, by the time World War Two broke out the colony was described as 'the most economically backward' of South East Asia and the Portuguese administration as 'languid and apathetic' (Nixon 2008, p. 72).

Nixon (2008) comments that the period of the Japanese occupation of East Timor during World War Two, when a 'merciless Japanese food collection policy' led to the deaths of up to 50,000 East Timorese due to famine, was the country's 'only break from colonial rule' (Nixon, 2008, p. 74). Vicious acts of retribution were perpetrated in punishment for Timorese support given to the Allied Forces (Silove, 2000). When the Portuguese 'liberated' Timor back from the Japanese occupation they continued their previously practiced policy of forced labour for Timorese males and restriction of movement between areas. They did, however, put some effort into developing education and health services, but with negligible Timorese input and poor results (by 1973 the illiteracy rate was still hovering at 93%) (Nixon, 2008, p. 94). Right up to decolonisation in 1974 the East Timor economy remained undeveloped resulting in a stagnant, disease-ridden and neglected society (Hill, 2002; Nixon, 2008; Whittington, 2003).

¹⁵ The short-form names 'East Timor' and 'Timor-Leste' are both commonly used by local Timorese and in the literature on the country, and are used interchangeably within this text.

¹⁶ *suku* (*or suco*) refers to village.

The Roman Catholic Church accompanied Portuguese colonisation and the clergy was responsible for pockets of education of Timorese elites. Ironically, after World War II some seminaries encouraged criticism of the colonial presence, deliberately teaching in *Tetum*, resulting in a deeper bond being forged between the members of the religious orders and the (especially young) East Timorese people. However, Catholicism did not achieve widespread popularity until the Indonesian occupation when the church became both a sanctuary and a significant player in the movement for independence and self-determination (Carey, 2001; Cristalis & Scott, 2005). It has been suggested that the Catholic faith in East Timor ‘helped to empower women in the face of adversity’ (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p. 61).

Political instability, abandonment by Portugal, and a lack of international support during the de-colonisation process opened the door to the unprovoked invasion by Indonesia in December 1975 in a bid to force East Timor’s integration into the Republic of Indonesia. In just the initial few months of the invasion an estimated 60,000 East Timorese lost their lives, and many women and young girls were raped, in a rampage of indiscriminate killings and violence (Silove, 2000, p. 67). In 1976 East Timor was officially declared an Indonesian province (Nixon, 2008). There followed a quarter of a century of punitive occupation where the internal security activities of the Indonesian military forces (assisted by Timorese collaborators) were characterised by frequent atrocities of terror and intimidation (L. Grenfell, 2006; Gunn, 1997; Silove, 2000). Fokupers (a prominent East Timorese women’s group) calculated in 1996 that 65% of women had been raped (da Silva & Kendall, 2002, p. 2). Curfews were imposed and identity cards required to be carried, all accompanied by the rule of the gun. A process of ‘Indonesianisation’ of the territory was carried out with the imposition of the occupiers’ language and concept of state (Gunn, 1997).

The economy from 1976 to 1999 was so controlled by the Indonesians that the capacity for Timorese to engage in business was very limited. Indonesian military officials controlled the coffee industry, Indonesian migrants related to military and civilian officials dominated trade and the markets, and basic commodities were increasingly imported from Indonesia adding to the economic marginalisation of the people of East Timor (Silove, 2000). Gunn (1997) remarked on the lack of commercial

activity in the capital when he visited in 1991 ‘Dili’s once vibrant and elegant promenade... run-down and deserted’ (Gunn 1997 p.1).

The Indonesian authority established Indonesian schools, taught in *Bahasa Indonesia*, which were attended by waves of Indonesian trans-migrants as well as Timorese children. Scores of Timorese students attended Indonesian universities but the jobs in East Timor were predominantly filled by Indonesians and their relatives that with just a handful of Timorese employees (Carey 1999; Gunn 1997). By 1991 there were over 11,000 Indonesian civil servants employed in the government departments, filling all of the key positions and dominating the teaching and health care (Gunn, 1997, p. 11). All of the judges, prosecutors and public defenders were Indonesian men (Hohe, 2003). Some women, however, were able to take up opportunities of positions in the public service, and others with NGOs and state-sponsored women’s organisations working to raise the capacity of rural women (Niner 2011). Most of the building contractors were from outside East Timor, and capital works such as the construction of roads, while benefitting the Timorese, primarily facilitated the movement of the military (UNDG, 2002).

East Timorese resistance movements maintained a tenacious guerilla campaign, supported by clandestine civilian networks, throughout the occupation. Women played a critical role in the resistance, some as combatants, and many others fulfilling non-combative support, intelligence and diplomatic activities (Christalis & Scott 2005; Niner 2011). They were also subject to considerable violence throughout the Indonesian occupation – with reports of harassment, rape, sexual assault, and concubinage by the Indonesian troops (CAVR, 2006; Whittington, 2003).

In a bid to sever the rural masses from contact with the resistance movement there were massive relocations of hill dwellers to resettlement villages in the coastal area (Gunn, 1997). This displacement, along with the widespread destruction of farmlands, property and livestock, contributed to the further decline of agricultural productivity and severely disrupted livelihoods, the repercussions of which would be felt for a long time (Nixon, 2008; Silove, 2000). The end of 1979 saw at least 300,000 and possibly more than 370,000 East Timorese being held in the ‘internment camps’ (Nixon, 2008, p. 169). It is estimated that during the occupation a minimum of 100,000, with possibly up to

over 180,000, people died as a result of famine, disease, torture and killings (D. Grenfell, 2006, p. 2). The International Red Cross, in 1979, reported a widespread famine ‘as bad as Biafra’¹⁷ (Gunn, 1997, p. 16) and Gunn (1997), visiting the once bustling market of Baucau in 1991, noted ‘misery and poverty [showing] in the faces and skeletal frames of, especially, the women and children’ (Gunn, 1997, p. 4).

When the people of East Timor voted for independence in the 1999 UN-supervised referendum, pro-integrationist Timorese militia initiated a vicious campaign of retaliation which, combined with a ‘scorched earth’ policy of the withdrawing Indonesian military, resulted in at least 1400 deaths and major destruction of the existing infrastructure of the country (CAVR, 2006, p. 19). It is estimated that at least 70% of administrative buildings were destroyed, leaving schools, government offices, medical clinics and 37 out of 58 power stations inoperable, along with the complete breakdown of government administration, banking and public services and market systems (UNDG, 2002, p. 5). The entire judicial apparatus disappeared leaving behind a handful of Timorese legal experts with Indonesian qualifications (Hohe, 2003). Chronic disruption to agricultural production was caused as 40% of livestock were killed or appropriated and 40% of rural houses burned and farm implements smashed (UNDG, 2002, p. 5). An estimated 75-80% of the population was displaced, with 300,000 fleeing to West Timor, tearing families apart and thrusting tens of thousands into poverty (D. Grenfell, 2006; IEG, 2011, p. xiv). When independence was formally established in 2002 East Timor was one of the poorest countries in the world (UNDG, 2002).

3.3 Independence, gender equality and ‘patriarchal reconstruction’

3.3.1 Building a fragile nation

In 2002 East Timor officially became independent and changed its name to Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste. A United Nations Transitional Authority of East Timor (UNTAET) was deployed along with international humanitarian and development assistance with the mission to provide security and assist with post-

¹⁷ In the 1960’s when the independent state of Biafra was blockaded by Nigeria up to two million Biafrans starved to death. The images of emaciated people shocked the world and at least for the generations that witnessed these images via the media of the day ‘Biafra’ became synonymous with the worst of famines (Trembath & Frenfell, 2007).

conflict reconstruction. The people needed a functioning democracy, judicial system and law enforcement, the development of a civil and social sector, livelihoods, common languages, education, health and peace, (Allden, 2007; Corcoran-Nantes, 2011; Brown & Gusmao, 2009). State-building incorporated imperatives for the development of a national (modern) identity (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011). Modern values such as the promotion of universal human rights and sustainable development, filtered in from outside and residing within a political leadership with diaspora experience, became assimilated into state apparatuses, institutions and policies, such as the Gender Affairs Unit within UNTAET (Cummins, 2011; Hohe, 2003).

An ambitious agenda was initiated for tackling the challenges posed by limited human capacity, serious health deficiencies, poverty, limping agricultural performance and a non-viable economy (UNDG, 2002). Nation-building efforts were seriously jeopardized in 2006 with the eruption of violence amongst factions of the police and military and emergent street gangs that generated further civil strife and political chaos resulting in homes and property being destroyed, around 150,000 people being displaced and significant escalations of poverty (D. Grenfell, 2006; World Bank, 2011b, p. 1). Nonetheless, despite this political instability, organised advocacy from Timorese women and the Gender Affairs Unit of UNTAET had made some inroads into recognition of gender equality, at least at state level.

3.3.2 ‘Timorisation’ and women’s interests

After independence Timorese women put up a determined struggle to gain a share of political power. Despite many experiencing some equality with men through participation in the resistance to the Indonesian occupation, carving out a space for women’s voice in the new nation where patriotic expressions have tended to extoll male heroism, has taken some considerable effort (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011). In 2000 an umbrella women’s lobbying organization, *Rede Feto Timor Lorosae*,¹⁸ was formed with the role of pressuring the transitional government and Constituent Assembly to recognize gender equality and the right of women to full participation in public decision-making (Corcoran-Nantes 2011; Niner 2011). 2002 saw the creation of the

¹⁸ *Rede feto* represented a unity of women who had been active within East Timor supporting women during the Indonesian occupation and returning women from the diaspora who were working through the UN (Selwyn-Holmes, 2010).

Office for the Promotion of Equality (OPE)¹⁹ (UNFPA 2005). OPE was the driving force in ensuring that gender mainstreaming requirements were included in the promulgation of new legislation, policy and procedures – in line with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, (CEDAW), (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011; Whittington, 2003). Corcoran-Nantes (2011) was not alone in expressing a concern that it was a moot point whether independence would ‘act as a conduit for new ideas, changing perspectives and mindsets’ (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011, p. 82).

State building activity was highly centralised in Dili, with most official communications either never arriving or not being understood in the rural areas (Niner, 2011b; Wigglesworth, 2012). Promotions and trainings around gender equality within the districts were often poorly received as being alien to a local system of politics which Corcoran-Nantes (2011) has described as ‘retrogressive, conservative and highly patriarchal’ (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011, p. 97). Milena Pires (2002), Vice President of the National Council in the transition period, characterised East Timor by the ‘unfair and deeply entrenched, systemic attitudes and stereotypes that assign women to the private and men to the public domain’ (Pires, 2004, p. 1). Modern nation-building ideas of an egalitarian ‘Timorisation’, incorporating ‘foreign’ systems of governance and justice, faced indigenous barriers of incomprehension from a large section of the populace (Hohe, 2003).

Meanwhile, as previously alluded to, *Timorisation* in the rural village was being played out as a strengthening of cultural mores. Communities turned to traditional leaders perceived to have the right to lead with their authoritative knowledge, moral responsibility and spirit of humanity (Pereira & Lete Koten, 2012), and family-based structures were embraced as basic sources of security (Cummins, 2011). Traditional ascriptions of femininity and masculinity and a power dynamic that place the man as the authoritative household head and limits women’s agency were reinforced. As a woman activist who was a messenger for the clandestine resistance movement said:

There is a strong tradition of customs and ceremonies which reinforce discrimination against women. As a wife I’m expected to work – cook and clean – and eat later.... A lot of women don’t believe they have rights. They still think

¹⁹ OPE was to later become SEPI – Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality.

that we are supposed to respect men's decisions and simply obey. They still think that if a man hits his wife it is to teach her a lesson (Cristalis & Scott, 2005, p. 87).

3.3.3 How women have fared since independence

The subordinate status of the Timorese woman has often meant her isolation from many social activities (DHS 2010; Leach et al 2010; JICA 2011). In spite of a recent study suggesting over 90% of young Timorese men agree with women having equal rights to study or work outside the home (Niner, Wigglesworth, dos Santos, Tilman, & Arunachalam, 2014, p. 46) the latest CEDAW (2013) report identifies one third of women whose husbands insist on knowing where they are at all times, and the same figure for women whose husbands get jealous if they talk to another man (SEPI, 2013, p. 29). The Niner et al study (2014, p. 46) on young men's attitudes on a range of gender equality issues has revealed that over 50% (rural and urban) think that the man should have the final say in household decisions. The same study showed around half of young men in Dili believing that a woman should always obey her husband and that he has the right to punish her if she makes a mistake - a figure that is higher in Dili than in one district and lower than in another²⁰ (Niner et al., 2014, p. 46).

At the time when the 2010 Law Against Domestic Violence (LADV) was enacted statistics on domestic violence indicated 86% of women to believe a husband is justified in hitting his wife for the above reasons, with a smaller percentage of men (80%) agreeing with this (SEPI, 2013, p. 24). The 2009-2010 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) revealed 38% of married women had experienced physical, sexual or emotional violence from a husband or partner (Kovar & Harrington, 2013, p. 5), and a third of women believed that marital rape was acceptable (SEPI, 2013, p. 31). Consequently, domestic violence has been a normalised (and often considered justifiable) male response for when a woman steps outside of culturally accepted behavior, such as speaking out against her husband, flouting his authority or not performing her role as a wife or mother satisfactorily (Allden, 2007; Kovar, 2012; UNFPA, 2005). With Timor-

²⁰ The two districts where young men's attitudes surveyed were compared to Dili were Baucau and Viqueque. The Viqueque results showed a significantly higher number of men with positive views on gender equality than for Dili and Baucau which could reflect the Viqueque matrilocal socio/cultural systems whereby women have a higher social status (Pereira & Lete Koten, 2012). The results for Baucau District, rural and with patrilocal systems, were lower than for Dili.

Leste's formal justice system is still under development and the court system inaccessible to most rural dwellers, and especially women (Kovar & Harrington, 2013) GBV has remained a family matter to be dealt with according to *adat* rather than through a system that recognises women's human rights (JICA, 2011). Coinciding with this has been the influence of the Catholic Church, opposing divorce and encouraging women to behave in ways to keep the family together (Kovar, 2012; Niner, 2011b).

The 2013 CEDAW report puts women employed for cash at a higher risk of physical violence due, it suggests, to the threat the independent working woman poses to the social norm of women being dependent on their male partners (SEPI, 2013, p. 23). The concern is raised that 'further economic empowerment may subject women to greater violence if the behavior and attitude of men do not change' (SEPI, 2013, p. 24). The obvious corollary of this threat is that it is a disincentive to more women entering the labour force, despite the fact that women with an independent income facing a marriage breaking down because of domestic violence do have a fall-back position (Kovar & Harrington, 2013). It is hoped that these concerns will not act as a deterrent for NGOs or government to initiate programmes aimed at the economic independence of Timorese women. These concerns are critical to this study where the evidence runs counter to the CEDAW report findings. Overwhelmingly the Caltech/Bayu-Undan women's experience is revealed as one of receiving support and encouragement from the men in their lives to seek and secure incomes well above theirs. The importance of this finding therefore is in providing an example of the existence of potential groups of Timorese women with agency enriched by the social support of their husbands/partners who are willing and able to seek and benefit from the capability of economic independence.

There is also the social resource of some church and local leaders who are vocal in their concerns that domestic violence has become a major problem, bemoaning that its definition as a crime has eluded local understanding (da Silva & Kendall, 2002; Ermelia, 2012). It is also worth noting that many Timorese believe problems are best solved through talking things out rather than the use of force (Kovar & Harrington, 2013). And while it is still the practice for girls in rural areas to marry early, there are young women who are rejecting traditions that in practice render a wife fearful of a beating if she does something wrong and that restrict girls' social movement (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011). A recent study by Wigglesworth (2012) of the opportunities and

limitations for young Timorese women's empowerment in social and political spheres advises that, even if policies that promote gender equality and freedom from domestic violence are disseminated successfully to rural areas, reconciling these with the daily reality of women's lives lived with social relations which have been the norm for generations is a big challenge, and yet 'young women with initiative can find pathways towards a different life from that of their mother and grandmother' (Wigglesworth, 2012, p. 49).

Alluding to the previous chapter, it is important not to essentialise all young women as having been negatively affected by local systems or comprehensively subordinated to men. Cummins' (2011) research into rural women's entry into *suku* councils saw women teachers, nurses, local NGO leaders who:

...work hard, take care of their families and their household responsibilities, and recognize that there many difficulties that they must navigate. However, they have been able to carve out a space for themselves which enables them to do their [suku] work and gain the respect of their colleagues (Cummins, 2011).

A study by Corcoran-Nantes (2009) found that family joint decision-making was the norm and it is usually the women who control the household income. This has been corroborated by Thu et al (2007), and the latest CEDAW report that further shows an increase, from 44% in 2003 to 63% today, of married women making decisions alone about household finances (SEPI, 2013, p. 24). In the same report it was revealed that most men surveyed believed women's participation in household decision-making to be necessary.

Lessons have been learnt in the gender and development community in Timor-Leste about the pace of change within local systems, be it through external influence or internal social dynamics, and of the need to acknowledge that while customary governance is not egalitarian it does make sense to most Timorese, and does have the capacity to evolve (Brown & Gusmao, 2009; Cummins, 2011; Hohe, 2003; Kovar, 2012; Niner, 2011a; Thu, Scott, & Van Neil, 2007). And yet for the majority of women the daily grind of survival in the midst of poverty will be taking precedence over pressing for the social transformation of unequal gender roles and relations (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011).

3.3.4 Poverty and livelihoods

Despite the endowment of natural resources generating a petroleum revenue boom, and having billions of dollars of donor funding spent in Timor-Leste on aid projects and reconstruction since its independence the country still has some of the most damning development indicators, making it one of the poorest countries in Asia (Niner, 2011; Oxfam, 2013; UNDP, 2013a; WFP, 2013). UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI)²¹ 2012 ranked Timor-Leste 134 out of 187 countries (UNDP, 2013a, p. 2). The percentage of the population living below USD1.25 a day is 37.4%, with 68.1% experiencing multi-dimensional poverty (UNDP, 2013a, p. 2). Households reporting monthly cash incomes from USD50-300 has been reported at 50%, with 23% earning less, and only 10%, mainly in Dili, earning at least USD500 (SEFOPE & DNE Timor-Leste, 2010, p. 25). Food insecurity and livelihoods vulnerability are particularly high in the rural areas where there is low productivity and limited agricultural development compounded by inadequate roading, poorly functioning markets, lack of irrigation, and loss of food production from drought, floods, strong winds and pests (Fanzo, 2013; WFP, 2013; World Bank, 2013). Issues of malnutrition, sanitation, hygiene and access to safe drinking water are serious, and lack of operational capacity has contributed to the unreliability of electricity systems (Asian Development Bank, 2013; Fanzo, 2013).

The government has drawn on petroleum revenue to fund the provision of basic social services through public and private sector providers, which are beleaguered with human capacity shortfalls and corruption (World Bank, 2013). Access to services remains a major hurdle in the rural areas due to the abysmal state or absence of roads (Fanzo 2013). Timor-Leste has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world at 557/100,000, with just 30% of births assisted by a skilled provider (SEPI, 2013, p. 55). Education statistics are also of concern with the 2010 Timor-Leste Labour Force survey putting the percentage of the population over 15 years who had received no education at 45% of females and 34% of males (SEFOPE & DNE Timor-Leste, 2010, p. 18). However, while budget allocations for health and education are much lower than those of other developing countries there has been a 38% increase in enrolment rates to secondary school between 2001 and 2010, with a doubling of the number of teachers (SEPI, 2013, p. 41). The 2013 CEDAW progress report warns that school dropout

²¹ The HDI is a composite human development index encompassing indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income (Cristalis & Scott, 2005).

rates²² are undermining this progress and there are concerns over the quality of education being received.

Nonetheless, incremental progress in poverty and vulnerability reduction is being made with improved social outcomes due to increased government spending. The World Bank suggested that Timor-Leste's social and economic development can be seen as 'remarkable' given that the World Development Report 2011 posits that the time a country can take to transition out of post-conflict fragility can be as long as thirty years (or a full generation) (World Bank, 2011b). The oil revenue windfall, accumulating in the Petroleum Fund (PF), whilst being seen by some as being poorly responsive to women's interests (Costa, 2008), has buttressed socio-economic development as the non-oil sector of the economy has struggled to gather momentum (Stevens & Cassinadri, 2008).

3.3.5 Economy, labour market and vocational skills

Timor-Leste is the second most oil-dependent country in the world with petroleum revenues financing 90% of public spending (World Bank, 2013, p. 12). Timor-Leste's non-oil and gas economy, growing at a rate of 12% annually (World Bank, 2013, p. 4), is driven by public spending. With inflation running at 11% and a tiny number of skilled workers the country has little attraction for foreign investors (International Crisis Group, 2013, p. 6). The urban private sector is very small and unviable. It is dependent largely on government contracts and is uncompetitive on international markets. It consists mainly of small or micro businesses dominated by foreigners such as Indonesians or larger state-owned enterprises (JICA, 2011; World Bank, 2013). Contracts for the building of infrastructure by insufficiently competent tenderers have been too easy to obtain through dubious procurement processes and have produced, in many cases, second-rate results that are not fit for the purpose (International Crisis Group, 2013).

Most products are imported (around half of cereal-equivalent consumption needs) and city rents and property prices have been artificially pushed up due to inflated purchase/rental prices by international aid agencies. To exacerbate matters there is a

²² The 2013 CEDAW Report reveals that 70% of children leave school before Year 9, with the highest rate of dropouts occurring in the first two years of primary school (SEPI, 2013, p. 41).

massive demographic youth bulge (44% of the current population are under 15 years) potentially entering the labour market over the next seventeen years presenting a serious challenge to the economy's capacity to absorb it (Umapathi & Velamuri, 2013, p. 10). Rural-urban migration is creating a bottleneck of citizens seeking economic advancement (44.5% of the population of Dili come from outside the city) (Umapathi & Velamuri, 2013, p. 18).

As well as growth in formal job opportunities being urgent for Timor-Leste's youth, vocational training of the requisite skills for available jobs is a priority. Low levels of educational attainment and job-related skills of Timorese workers and the availability of higher-skilled foreign labour are key supply-side factors inhibiting labour market growth for locals (Umapathi & Velamuri, 2013). So too is low productivity of Timorese workers due to poor nutrition and health (World Bank, 2012). Serious mismatches are evident between the skills and qualifications acquired and those required in the workforce. The three women in the study who have mining engineering degrees (via scholarships to Indonesian institutions) illustrate this point – there are no mines in Timor-Leste. Of those who had completed a tertiary qualification by 2010 there were three times as many men as women (SEFOPE & DNE Timor-Leste, 2010, p. 19). There is a significant lack of appropriate training courses and organisations for providing skills for manual and service, technical/professional, and administrative workers, and of those that have received training in these areas males again significantly outweigh females (SEFOPE & DNE Timor-Leste, 2010; World Bank, 2012).

A 2008 survey identified two main reasons for lower female participation in vocational training as: lack of time due to expectations that women must perform domestic duties, (the 2013 CEDAW report revealed that 36% of women give this as a reason compared to 7% of men (SEPI, 2013, p. 63)), and; the belief that if a woman is too successful in education or employment it will be hard for her to find a husband (Secretaria de Estado da Formacao Profissional e Emprego, 2008). Again the target group of this study represents a departure from the trend.

There are problems of clarity surrounding the real labour force participation rate which is stated as at 43% for those aged 15 to 59 years according to the 2010 Labour Force Survey (LFS) (SEPI, 2013, p. 62). The definition of employment only requires

someone to work for a minimum of one hour a week. The labour force participation rate of women is half that of men, with that of young women (age 15-24) at a low 10% (World Bank, 2013, p. 14). The education sector absorbs 30% of employed women, 3.6% are in manufacturing, 10.1% in the arts and entertainment, 9.4% in wholesale and retail and 9.7% in health and social work (SEFOPE & DNE Timor-Leste, 2010, p. 40). Women working in the offshore oil industry do not feature in the statistics. Further female employment disadvantage is evident in the vulnerable or informal employment rate²³ where women and men employed in vulnerable jobs are 78% and 66% respectively (SEPI, 2013, p. 63). There are twice as many professional men as women and there is evidence of discrimination at managerial levels where women have to have higher education qualifications than men.

3.4 Formal gender equality and its reach

In 2008 the Timor-Leste government pledged to invest in women and girls to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women (UNMIT 2008). The achievement by 2010 of around 38% women's representation in National Parliament must be seen as a significant success (SEPI, 2013, p. 49). However, unsurprisingly at the local level progress has been slow with only 2% of *suku* chief positions and 28% of seats on the *suku* councils held by women (SEPI, 2013, p. 37). Observations have been made that these women are often to be seen serving food and drinks or doing note taking (Cummins 2011; Kovar 2011).

The New Civil Code passed in 2011 has established among other rights the minimum legal marriage age for both women and men at 18 years, (in the previous Indonesian Civil Code it was 15 years for women and 18 for men respectively) (SEPI, 2013, p. 90). It also specifies that both spouses should be free to engage in any activity or profession without having to have the consent of the other spouse. Equal opportunity in education and employment is established in law with the New Labour Code 2012 making provision for paid maternity leave, time out from work for breast-feeding and emergency child-care for women (SEPI, 2013, p. 46). Since most of the female labour

²³ The ILO defines vulnerable employment as encompassing own-account and contributing family workers, most often with no formal work arrangements and lacking decent work conditions, social protection and representation (UNDP, 2013b). An estimated 70% of the Timorese workforce is in vulnerable employment (Umapathi & Velamuri, 2013, p. 14).

force is in informal or vulnerable work these improvements have little meaning for many women.

It is too soon to see how far these recent legal changes aimed at the removal of formal impediments to the realisation of Timorese women's potential are positively impacting on the fostering of new aspirations and the fulfillment of these. Certainly, a literature search has been unable to uncover any in-depth studies of women who have achieved economic success in spite of the seemingly overwhelming obstacles and limiting socio-cultural prescriptions for women's roles and futures nor of private sector businesses or NGOs operating in accord with equal opportunities and pay parity between men and women.

Space is open therefore for the atypical study of the experiences of the diverse group of economically independent women (married, divorced and single) in a LDC (namely Timor-Leste) employed in an equal opportunities environment where their potential has been recognised, fostered and in some degree realised through the outcome of highly paid, dignified FIFO work in a predominantly male setting.

3.5 Chapter conclusion

The chapter has looked at the history, socio-cultural, economic and political developments in Timor-Leste with references and explanations around the position and prospects for its girls and women. The subjection of a population to a turbulent history of degradation and violence up into this century have differently shaped the priorities of both the rural base riddled with abject poverty and habituated to undeveloped agricultural practices and local customary systems, and also an urban leadership and civil bodies imbued with ideas of building a modern post-conflict nation. The place of women in traditional society, with gender roles and responsibilities centred on the home, bearing many children from an early age and expected to accede to the authority of men contrasts starkly with contemporary ideas of gender equality.

Clearly inroads have been made into providing a political framework for gender equality. However, for this to become a widespread reality and more women's learning and earning potential to be realised, requires a process of socio-cultural change in

attitudes towards women's aptitudes and scope of aspirational choice. The following quote from Niner (2011) sums up the issues confronting Timorese women today:

Yet women face a sticky web of cultural, religious, and political pressures that force them to accept lower status. While the work of the women's movement, government, UN and NGOs – including both practical and strategic initiatives for women – creates the space for changes in practices that will in turn shift the status quo in East Timor, a deeper shift is needed (Niner, 2011a, p. 430).

And yet in a small way, the entry of the global O&G industry into the economic picture of Timor-Leste has opened up a corner in which a group of women has been given higher status.

Chapter 4: Timor-Leste and Women Connect with the Oil and Gas Industry

I enjoy my job as a Bridge Controller because now I realise the meaning of working offshore. I also like the working environment at Bayu-Undan and I feel that I have improved professionally and personally (Araujo, 2013).

4.1 Introduction

It could be said that the above quote illustrates how a Timorese woman offshore worker has realised some of her human capital potential through job satisfaction, skills development and feeling she is performing her work well. In posing questions around women from a Least Developed Country (LDC) such as Timor-Leste realising potential through their entry into work on a Western offshore oil and gas industry site some understanding of the development parameters surrounding petroleum industry activities in developing countries is first required. To this end Sections 2 and 3 of this chapter describe the arrangements around production sharing between global petroleum industry contractors and developing countries, with reference to Timor-Leste and the employee pipeline of Timorese nationals to the Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project. Where and how the question of gender fits into the picture of production sharing, if at all, is discussed.

Section four provides details of the operational and physical world that is Bayu-Undan which leads into discussion in the fifth section, drawing on a range of social studies, around the negative and positive aspects of the life of an offshore worker. The third main research question of this inquiry seeks to elicit narratives around the challenges, adaptations and experiences of the women as offshore workers. Attention is therefore drawn to the particular issues that women personnel have experienced globally in entering historically male work environments, such as the offshore O&G site.

The last section, encompassing Research Question Four, provides some insights into at-home changes offshore workers can face, including mothers, sourcing literature on the FIFO lifestyle. These insights cover shifting identities, separation issues, at-home relationships and household roles.

4.2 Timor-Leste benefits from petroleum resource

4.2.1 Timor Sea Treaty and the Joint Petroleum Development Area (JPDA)



Figure 1: Joint Petroleum Development Area²⁴

The discoveries of oil and gas in the Timor Gap predate Timor-Leste's independence. This area in the Timor Sea, originally within Portuguese dominion, was created into a Zone of Cooperation between Indonesia and Australia in 1991 with the view to the two countries sharing the resources equally (UNDG, 2002, p. 65). When the Timorese people voted for independence the existing treaty was re-negotiated by UNTAET and Timorese leaders, with the continuation of existing contracts, in particular for the Bayu-Undan gas field (UNDG, 2002). The Timor Sea Treaty was signed between Timor-Leste and Australia in 2002, which, though it does not fully address the disputed maritime boundary between the two countries, did establish the Joint Petroleum

²⁴ Source: ConocoPhillips (ConocoPhillips, 2013, p. 4).

Development Area (JPDA) (Figure 1, p. 49), which recognizes the oil and gas fields within this part of the Timor Sea as a shared entity (UNDG, 2002). Timor-Leste and Australia are thus partners jointly managing the JPDA with the Treaty providing for 90% of the petroleum revenues to go to Timor-Leste (Australian Department of Industry, 2013, p. 1).

The Treaty underpins the Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) between petroleum corporations such as that between the Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project's operator ConocoPhillips JPDA Pty Ltd (hereinafter named CoP), on behalf of its joint venture companies, and the Timor Sea Designated Authority (TSDA) (Autoridade National do Petroleo, 2013, p. 3). Bayu-Undan is the larger of two currently operating fields in the JPDA. The Timor-Leste Petroleum Act 2005 preamble outlines the potential value of petroleum revenues from the JPDA in allowing the struggling country to:

.... more effectively deal with developmental needs and priorities, further strengthen its human resources, consolidate the advancements made thus far, speed up and sustain economic growth, reduce poverty, and improve the well-being of the Timorese people (RDTL, 2005, p. 1).

This statement is in the nature of a goal, which, as will be seen in the next section, is not one that will necessarily be straightforwardly met.

4.2.2 JPDA petroleum revenues

Timor-Leste's oil and gas revenue has the promise of providing a major boost to the country's development. Gross capital inflow from O&G royalties and taxes get deposited in to the Timor-Leste Petroleum Fund (PF), established in 2005. The fund is responsible for at least 90% of the country's state revenues and 80% of Gross Domestic Product and the balance sat at USD14 billion in October 2013 (Scheiner, 2013, p. 1).

Discussion on whether the PF will be managed wisely is not within the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that on the one hand the government seems to be committed to transparency, prudent management and saving revenue for future generations (Lundahl & Sjoholm, 2006; Transparency International, 2013; World Bank, 2011a), and on the other, concern has been expressed that Timor-Leste is at risk of suffering the 'resource curse' or 'Dutch disease' that for other developing countries reliant on oil revenues has resulted in failure to bring about sustained development and poverty reduction

(International Crisis Group, 2013; Lundahl & Sjoholm, 2006; Nicolau & Scheiner, 2005; Norad, 2008; World Bank, 2013). Concerns over corruption in bureaucracies²⁵, a culture of secrecy and a low capacity for the public and media to understand the PF mechanisms have also been raised (Benner, 2013; Drysdale, 2005; Scheiner, 2013). The Prime Minister has himself acknowledged there is a need to '*identify malpractices in administration and management* [where money has] '*just melted away ... simply been wasted away*' (Jornal Independente, 2013, p. 1).

Notwithstanding this, direct benefits to Timor-Leste are implicated in the 'local content' section of the PSC between the TSDA and the Bayu-Undan co-venturers. This has established a commitment to: i) the training and employment of an unspecified number of Timorese nationals for Bayu-Undan operations and, ii) the fostering of a local supply chain for goods and services. The first commitment, particularly as it has played out in the employment of Timorese women, is a key focus of this study.

4.3 Local Content and the Petroleum Industry

4.3.1 Defining Local Content

The definition of local content is complex and spans a range of industry, business, financial, employment and social linkages (Tordo, Warner, Manzano, & Anouti, 2013). Until recent years local content commitments have tended to be acts of voluntary corporate social responsibility (CSR) by some global companies encompassing such aspects as human capital development, technology transfer, the provision of infrastructure and support for local community projects (Esteves, Coyne, & Moreno, 2013). It has been claimed that the 1990s growth of CSR commitments was a defensive move by O&G companies in the face of growing pressures to clean up their act around environmental degradation, malpractice and labour rights abuses in Third World operations (Utting & Ives, 2006). Today, an increasing number of companies are incorporating CSR into their agendas as good business practice and a win-win approach, where doing good for the environment and a host countries' people can result in competitive advantage and cost reductions for themselves (Utting & Ives, 2006). Increasingly CSR has been translated into local content policies (LCPs) of PSCs.

²⁵ East Timor has a ranking of 30 (100 means a country is very clean) on Transparency International's Corruptions Perceptions Index 2013 which is considered to imply serious corruption problems (Transparency International, 2013, p. 2).

Today the local content footprints of transnational O&G companies are evident in developing countries encompassing skills and technology transfers, capacity building, infrastructure and community projects, and revenue sharing (Tuodolo, 2009) with a growing number including the delivery of local content as a key value proposition in negotiations with host governments (Overseas Development Institute & Engineers Against Poverty, 2007a, 2007b). By the same token, governments of developing countries, such as Angola and Nigeria, are now requiring local content compliance to be more exacting (Overseas Development Institute & Engineers Against Poverty, 2007b).

It has been suggested local content initiatives of the petroleum industry come from a *risk management* assessment, are driven by short-term expediency, or are simply public relations exercises to favorably manage external perceptions of a company's relationship with a developing country (Frynas, 2005). There are undoubtedly cost savings for Bayu-Undan, for example when in the event of a cyclone it is cheaper to fly Timorese nationals back to Dili by helicopter than Scottish personnel to their country on fixed-wing flights (Key Informant Interview, 4 July, 2013). However, the International Petroleum Industry Environment Conservation Association (IPIECA) links local content with sustainable development, advising companies not to view it as 'a quick fix or a route to achieving short-term benefits. It requires planning, coordination, resources and perseverance to obtain improvements—which are often realized in the long term' (IPIECA Local Content Task Force, 2011, p. 2). A multiplier effect as new capital and wages enter the local economy leading to downstream job creation and enterprise growth is considered an important dimension. Yet the literature contains little about the likely developmental importance of families being lifted out of poverty or siblings' tertiary education being subsidised when high wages are paid to nationals from a LDC working on O&G operations, as has been the case with the Bayu-Undan offshore workers.

4.3.2 Local Content as a development initiative?

Of new oil and gas production operations for the next twenty years, 90% will be situated in developing countries (IPIECA Local Content Task Force, 2011, p. 7). Matthews (2008) argues that through local content mechanisms the extractive industries sector with its skills, technology, economic power and global reach can 'make a decisive contribution to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by aligning its

business activities with developing countries' development priorities' (Matthews, 2008, p. 63). Others have argued that aspirations of solving complex society-wide problems in developing countries through oil and gas inputs are idealistic and flawed (Blowfield & Frynas, 2005). In the non-oil private sector in Timor-Leste little expectation has been held that meaningful linkage effects from O&G industry local content commitments will stimulate significant development nor that significant downstream job creation will flow from the industry into other sectors of the economy (Lundahl & Sjoholm, 2006; Stevens & Cassinadri, 2008).

O&G production is a highly capital-intensive industry requiring specialised input and technological complexity. In a developing host country such as Timor-Leste, where there is a low existing skill and industrial base, low technological capacity, and a poor critical infrastructure, there can be a considerable barrier to its ability to fulfil professional industry requirements (Olsen, 2010). The knowledge, experience and skills gaps beleaguering the labour forces of developing countries have historically tended to be filled by expatriates which effectively closes the door to local workers (Tordo et al., 2013). Ambivalent definitions of *local* in LCPs can provide a loophole to enable locally-registered but foreign-owned companies and resident expatriates to be contracted. Some commentators hold the view that effort should be made by oil companies to enlist only locally-owned businesses and citizens of the host country (Esteves et al., 2013). This is problematic in Timor-Leste where levels of human capital are low and the number of businesses operating to international Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) standards tiny. Nonetheless, the component of the Bayu-Undan PSC that this study is based on is the commitment to the recruitment of Timorese nationals through a locally-owned contractor.

Mandating training and/or employment targets or quotas for nationals coming from a low-skilled labour pool is problematic (IPIECA Local Content Task Force, 2011). Targets set in LCPs have been more favourable for countries that have a higher level of maturity in oil/gas exploration and production than Timor-Leste but do not necessarily contain a guarantee that nationals will be employed in anything more than menial work (Tordo et al, 2013). This raises the concern that the setting of mandatory targets could only result in low-skilled jobs being filled by nationals – in a '*ticking the boxes exercise*' as one of the key informants was heard to say rather than developing

opportunities for their entry into higher skilled positions (Key Informant 1 Interview, 4 July, 2013). Complicating the shape of local content regarding employing nationals is an issue of timing. Each of the phases of exploration, construction and production during the period of a field's development require different personnel configurations, as do shutdowns²⁶ and inspections²⁷ (Careerjet, 2014; Tordo et al., 2013). The IPIECA advises operators to practice transparency in providing local stakeholders with information about future job requirements and employment opportunities as a project progresses in order for them to have the lead-in to invest resources into developing the requisite new skills among the local workforce (IPIECA Local Content Task Force, 2011).

Ovadia (2013) warns of how simply reporting head counts of local content employment outcomes is not sufficient and metrics need to contain break-downs of, for example, the levels of training or career progressions of the nationals and the gender dimension. Understanding the context of the wider economic and social environment could be important in formulating programmes to develop employee pipelines of host-country citizens, such as how the availability of childcare within the extended families can facilitate the recruitment of women to FIFO jobs as has been the case with Bayu-Undan (Warner, 2011). The IPIECA has a blueprint of O&G local content performance indicators which is inclusive of minorities such as women as a component of workforce development (IPIECA Local Content Task Force, 2011). However, it does not seek to measure skills acquisition or aspects of the women's empowerment. This study looks in a small way to adding knowledge around this issue.

4.3.3 Gender and Local Content

Re-dressing any historical/societal gender imbalance or sex discrimination in employment and supply chains is not typically considered to be the function of local content. Global Rights Alert (2013) has reported on a study of how women were being integrated into the development of oil fields in Uganda in low paying (casual labour) jobs such as 'cooking and serving tea to the oil workers, picking litter, cleaning and digging along the roads within the exploration sites, displaying guiding signs at these

²⁶ Shutdowns within the oil and gas industry occur when production is suspended while essential maintenance is carried out (COGIS, 2014).

²⁷ At the time of the fieldwork an extra 200 personnel, approximately, were employed on Bayu-Undan during an integrity inspection and maintenance schedule.

sites and as well making beds and washing clothes for the expatriates staying at the sites' (Global Rights Alert, 2013, p. 7).

A rare pro-women sentiment can be found in the Government of Ghana's Local Content Plan (2011):

While Government will provide equal opportunities for all citizens of the Republic of Ghana, the participation of women in the oil and gas industry will be actively encouraged, facilitated and promoted. The LCC will ensure that Operators maintain a gender balance in their Annual Recruitment and Training Programmes (Ovadia, 2013, p. 12).

How this sentiment is being borne out for Ghanian women and whether pay parity with men is a factor is not known. There is no gender component in the PSCs of the JPDA in the Timor Sea.

4.3.4 Local content and Timor-Leste

Sub-section 5.2 (i) of the PSC for JPDA 03-13 between CoP and the TSDA states broadly that the contract operator shall 'give preference to the employment of Timor-Leste nationals and permanent residents, having due regard to safe and efficient activities and good oilfield practice' (TSDA, 2003, p. 8). One could read into this that the HSE and operational requirements of Bayu-Undan demand the employment of only highly skilled and/or experienced (read expatriate) personnel, making the prospect of significant or meaningful numbers of Timorese being employed more a hopeful than realistic goal. Building linkages with local businesses for the training and employment of Timorese nationals could also be undermined by Sub-section 5.2(h) which only stipulates that preference should be given to subcontractors operating from within Timor-Leste thus not necessarily locally-owned (TSDA, 2003, p. 7).

However, CoP claims that its investment in training and employment in relation to Bayu-Undan is an important contribution to supporting the human potential of Timorese nationals (ConocoPhillips, 2012a). In this it works closely with its contractors, one of

which is Timorese-owned Caltech Offshore Services²⁸. Another, CAJV, who won the Operations and Maintenance Services contract, (approved by the TSDA in 2003 under Article 10 of the PSC), tendered a specific social value proposition of capacity-building and the employment of Timorese nationals via ‘a national employee pipeline [encompassing] a training programme to provide a continuous supply of skilled personnel’ (Overseas Development Institute & Engineers Against Poverty, 2007a, p. 3). Engineers Against Poverty (EAP) and the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) carried out a case study in 2006 of the national employee resourcing strategy incorporated into the Bayu-Undan local content programme of CAJV, hailing it as ‘a rigorous, staged process of building the necessary competencies of successive groups of Timorese trainees to allow them to safely perform skilled trade work on the off-shore facilities’ (Lynch & Matthews, 2008, p. 9). Additionally, as I witnessed during my fieldwork stay, the Dili-based CAJV Office Manager is a Timorese woman and the onshore staff contingent are Timorese men and women.

Information contained in a 2012 submission by CoP to a Timor-Leste Foreign Affairs Sub-Committee indicates the Bayu-Undan Joint Venture has exceeded its contractual and statutory obligations, directing more than US \$36 million to training and employment programs, purchase of local goods and services and community projects (Creeger, 2013, p. 2). Confidentiality protocols have precluded the study being privy to any information on whether a quantitative target or numerical figure for Timorese to be trained or employed on Bayu-Undan has been agreed to between CoP and the Timor-Leste petroleum authority (ANP), however the employment of 247 Timor-Leste nationals associated with Bayu-Undan has been reported²⁹ (with no gender disaggregation) (ANP, 2012, p. 56).

The number of Timorese women working offshore for the Bayu-Undan project (or pregnant and in onshore work until they intend returning offshore after maternity leave)

²⁸ Caltech Offshore Services (hereinafter called Caltech) is the locally-owned contractor through which the Bayu-Undan employees in the study are recruited. Co-owners are a husband and wife team of a French-Canadian Engineer and a Timorese businesswoman.

²⁹ The total Person on Board (PoB) capacity of Bayu-Undan is 415, which includes the temporarily linked up Burj ASV with 236 PoB capacity during the inspection and maintenance time frame (ConocoPhillips, 2013a, p. 4). During normal operations the Timorese women would constitute around 4.5 % of the total offshore workforce.

at the time of the study was sixteen contracted through Caltech and seven employed through foreign-owned Eurest Support Services (ESS)³⁰.

4.4 Bayu-Undan Gas Recycle Project

Bayu-Undan Gas Recycle Project is located in the Timor Sea 250km south of Suai on the southern coast of Timor-Leste and 500km northwest of Darwin, Australia (Offshore Technology, 2013, p. 1). Bayu-Undan's operator CoP has a 56.9% stake, with co-venturers Eni, Santos, Inpex, and Tokyo Electric Power and Tokyo Gas sharing the rest (ConocoPhillips, 2013b, p. 10). Development of the Bayu-Undan field's gas and gas liquids resources has been implemented in two phases. Phase I, with production beginning April 2004, involved constructing the offshore natural gas recycle facility for processing wet gas in order to separate and store condensate and liquefied petroleum gas or LPG (propane and butane) and re-inject dry natural gas back into the reservoir. Phase II, the gas phase which was commissioned in 2006, involved installing a 500km subsea pipeline to Darwin from the facility, through which the extracted lean gas is transported for liquefying at a single-train processing plant. It is then exported as Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) to international markets (Ryan, 2001, p. 1). A third phase has been initiated mid-2013 involving subsea technologies to further develop the field (FMC Technologies, 2013). It is estimated that the project contains reserves of 400 million barrels of condensate and 3.4 Tcf³¹ of gas with the field life predicted to be up to 25 years (Carstens, 2005, p. 6).

Details of the offshore world of the Bayu-Undan women illustrate the highly technical, high-risk and unforgiving space in which they have had to adapt. The Bayu-Undan surface facilities (Figure 2, p. 58) consist of three primary components: a massive central production and processing (CPP) complex; a remote unmanned wellhead platform (WP1) at a distance of 7km; and a floating storage and offloading facility (FSO). CPP comprises a drilling, production and processing platform (DPP) and a compression, utilities and quarters platform (CUQ), the decks of which are bridge-linked (Han, 2004, p. 12).

³⁰ ESS has the contract for catering and facilities management for Bayu-Undan.

³¹ Tcf stands for trillion cubic feet.



Figure 2: Bayu-Undan Gas Recycling Project³²

Both CPP platforms rest on 90m high, 8-leg steel jackets. The dimensions of the topside deck float overs are 65m long by 64m wide for DPP and 72m long and 80m wide for CUQ (Offshore Technology, 2013, p. 1). DPP provides around two thirds of the raw liquid rich gas from the reservoir via four production wells, as well as processing facilities that separate this into gas and liquid products. CUQ platform provides the compression facilities and from here processed gas is either re-injected into the reservoir or exported to Darwin. Like DPP it is three levels high and also contains a helideck, two crane pedestals, power generation, waste heat recovery units and living quarters for 80 personnel (Ryan, 2001). The FSO accommodates 60 people (Offshore Technology, 2013). In February 2012 an Accommodation Support Vessel (ASV) equipped with a crane on a 20m cantilever structure was mobilised and established alongside the Bayu-Undan facility by Millenium Offshore Services (M.O.S) to cater for up to 236 extra personnel engaged in integrity inspection and repair/mediation activities (Millenium Offshore Services, 2012). A bridge links ASV to CUQ.

All Bayu-Undan structures have been designed to withstand extreme cyclone and earthquake events and the occasional boat collision. Offshore inventories of liquefied hydrocarbon gases, contained at high pressure, such as on Bayu-Undan, constitute a significant fire and explosion hazard. Having the FSO, with the refrigeration,

³² Source: ConocoPhillips (ConocoPhillips, 2013a).

liquefaction and gasification, and storage facilities, moored at some distance from CPP and ASV is one of many risk-mitigating features of the complex (Dubar, Forcey, Humphreys, & Schmidt, 1998).

Caltech, as a major engineering contractor in Timor-Leste, is the main Timorese-owned company providing support services to Bayu-Undan³³ - most significantly in the recruitment, training and supply of Timorese onshore and offshore labour (Caltech, 2013). As will be shown in Chapter Six, Caltech has played a pivotal role in fleshing out the shape of Bayu-Undan's local content commitments to include women recruited into non-traditional offshore jobs. The ESS women workers' responsibilities, situated in ASV, relate to housekeeping which, within the *realising potential* framework of the study, although providing valued highly paid work, competencies and social outcomes for the women, are considered to be in the realm of traditional women's roles. For this reason they have been excluded from the study. At the time of the study there were thirty-one Timorese Caltech men working offshore alongside the sixteen women. The women's Fly-in-Fly-out (FIFO) work schedules are the same as the men's.

4.5 Working on an offshore oil or gas operation

4.5.1 *The offshore environment*

Offshore oil and gas operations function on a 24/7 basis. This requires crews that are 'back-to-back', covering day- and night shifts and that operate on the on- and offshore FIFO rotational basis of a specified number of weeks away and at-home. The Bayu-Undan women usually do a four week on- and off rotation. Shifts are long – usually twelve hours, and much of the work is physically hard. Every job is integral to the successful and safe running of the facilities that make up the complex – from entry-level positions like the Bridge Controller, to Roustabouts³⁴, Drillers and Tool-pushers, to administrative and HSE roles, Medic and management (JobMonkey, 2013). The tenor of work relationships is set by efficiency and safety imperatives, with strict adherence to rules, and rational, learned responses to communications, task or activity requirements and emergencies - all requiring alertness and good health (Parkes, 2013). Emotion has very little place in workplace culture. Workers know that if they have emotional,

³³ The only other locally owned company involved supplies security services for onshore premises.

³⁴ Roustabouts are members of the drill crew with responsibility for loading and unloading of equipment and assisting with general rig operations (COGIS, 2014).

physical or mental problems these must be dealt with expeditiously (the medic is at hand around the clock) in the interests of a clear-thinking commitment to the achievement of production targets (Sutherland & Cooper, 1996). Precise planning and the preparedness for informed responses to maintenance and operational contingencies have generated a specific objective social structure, something like human machinery, in which action, reaction and interaction occur.

Steel, tools, heavy equipment, turbines, generators and cranes, choppers³⁵, dangerous goods, noise, temperature, vibration and heights, and harsh and variable ocean climates characterise the offshore physical environment. In a study of Chinese offshore workers Chen et al (2009) identified all of these factors as stressors with the potential to impact on their well-being, which along with separation from family and friends, creates a potentially problematic interface between work and family/social life (Chen, Wong, & Yu, 2009). A pervasive sense of anxiety around perceptions of safety as well as ongoing fatigue from demanding shifts, have been found to be characteristics shared by many workers (Parkes, 2013; Sutherland & Cooper, 1996). A compromising factor to some offshore workers' wellbeing, called *rustout*, (under- stimulation and boredom, feeling under-utilized and having little variety in the work), has been identified as linked with workers switching off and reporting job dissatisfaction (Sutherland & Cooper, 1996). Working together with the same people in close proximity for long hours can bring the rewards of teamwork and life-long friendships but can also be psychologically challenging (Sutherland & Cooper, 1996). There is no physical escape, little personal privacy and the cultural mix of many crews requires personnel to be open-minded and to have a sense of humour (Savanna Energy Services Corp, 2012).

This challenging environment demands a high degree of versatility and mental and physical toughness – a willingness to confront the challenges and become part of a new FIFO support network offshore so that one can get the best of the benefits (Carter & Kaczmarek, 2009). Crew quarters are usually clean and equipped with TV lounges, Internet and recreational facilities, and communication links to home. Crews are fed well and there is a medic on hand round the clock. Importantly, the hard work, long hours, dangers and difficult living conditions faced by many oil and gas workers do

³⁵ Chopper is a colloquial name for helicopter.

tend to be well rewarded financially (JobMonkey, 2013). Despite the many challenges of the FIFO lifestyle, studies (albeit largely of western male offshore workers) have revealed a pattern of positive adjustment, attitude and self-belief (Carter & Kaczmarek, 2009). This could be partially due to the support and understanding workers have received offshore from supervisors and medics (Chen et al., 2009), or could reflect a filtering process whereby only those workers with a proclivity to survival and the ability to handle the rigours stay for any length of time offshore (Mearns, 2011). It must be assumed that in recruiting the Timorese women, most of who have had no experience or understanding of a high-risk heavy industry work environment, nor of the HSE protocols this requires, Caltech had high expectations that they had the capacity, or human qualities, to handle the challenges.

4.5.2 Offshore masculinities and women workers

Commonly held beliefs about offshore oil and gas platforms, wellheads and FSOs being staffed predominantly by males are not unfounded or outmoded. A 2012 report on the UK O&G industry put females representing 3.7% of the offshore workforce (UK, 2012, p. 16). Of the Middle East and South American oil and gas workforces (on- and offshore) 3% and 10.3%, respectively, are female (Hays, 2012, p. 20), and for Norway 9% of offshore workers are women (Kammerzell, 2011, p. 1). Overall, women working offshore are still most prevalent in catering jobs (Kammerzell, 2011).

Literature on female nationals from host developing countries employed on western-operated oil or gas installations tend to be in the form of interviews in oil industry publications and focus on those with petroleum industry qualifications (ConocoPhillips, 2012b, p. 39). Studies of western women engineers, medics, geologists (in ones and twos) working offshore portray their work sites as exuding masculine identities embodying qualities of courage, endurance, humour and hard physical work (G. E. Miller, 2003; Shrimpton & Storey, 2001; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). While these qualities might equally be characteristic of female workers³⁶ the culture of male camaraderie fostered by the harsh and unforgiving work environment, and the predominance of men at management and decision-making levels clearly contribute to a

³⁶ Many of the Timorese Bayu-Undan workers interviewed for the study, women and men, commented that the two western women co-workers (an Australian rigger and a New Zealand Blaster/Painter Supervisor) were tough and hard working.

mesh of masculinity in offshore communities (G. E. Miller, 2003). For most of the Bayu-Undan women, this predominantly Western male world is a whole new experience, coming from a society where working women tend to be located in jobs designated *female*. Their ability to adapt and feel valued as crewmembers needs to be seen with regard to their sense of self-worth, the degree to which the workplace culture reflects gender equality and respect for women and the resource of social support from other personnel.

Two studies by Austin (2006) found women working offshore in Norway on to be fully integrated into the workforce and women from Louisiana having their positive so-called female qualities valued by their male offshore colleagues as this comment from a Louisiana female offshore helicopter pilot shows:

[The men] like seeing a female out there. It brings some sanity to this machine world and nothing but a bunch of guys out there. It brings a humanity, a gentleness back to their spirit, and that's quoting one of the young men that I worked with out there (Austin, 2006, p. 193)³⁷.

Onshore however, the stereo-type of the Louisianan women being nurturers was seen by the women in the study as a limiting feminine ascription whereby people have the attitude that offshore work is a domain demanding superior male strength and skills, saying '*if it was easy they'd have women doing it*' (Austin, 2006, p. 193).

Canadian female offshore workers in the Gulf of Mexico did not see the male culture as problematic. They preferred to be accepted on their own merits and, contrary to their expectations, experienced chivalrous, respectful behaviours from their male co-workers (G. E. Miller, 2003). Contrary to these experiences women working in the mining industry in Australian on the FIFO system have reported challenges coping with sexist male attitudes that made them feel they needed to prove themselves as capable workers (Pirotta, 2009). The women in both the Miller (2003) and Pirotta (2009) studies did report developing feelings of social isolation onshore, where they had less in common with other women than they did with their offshore male counterparts. The integration

³⁷ KI:1 told me he had heard from a management person in one of the client companies that having the Timorese women on Bayu-Undan had positively changed the site atmosphere. Some of the women suggested that this was because they are cheerful and friendly.

into onshore lives of the new FIFO worker identities of the Bayu-Undan women in this study comes under inquiry relating to the third research question.

4.6 Challenge and change in the FIFO lifestyle

Research question three focuses on the target group's at-home lives exploring issues around their new identities in their communities as well-paid, offshore workers and the changed economic and social status this brings, the effects of this new status and the FIFO schedule on close and family relationships, household roles and onshore activities.

The lived experience of the FIFO interface of work and home is characterised by challenges around concepts of change, adjustment, and adaptability. The literature is plentiful on the FIFO rotation's impacts on relationships and families, albeit dominated by accounts of male western offshore workers and their at-home spouses in a nuclear-family context. Positives arising from the pattern of partings and reunion have been reported in enhanced relationship bonds, heightened caring and mutual respect with men sharing domestic tasks and in workers making the most of family time when home although with the corollary of distress at partings, and loneliness or unhappiness while apart (Gallegos, 2006; Parkes, Carnell, & Farmer, 2005; Shrimpton & Storey, 2001; Tang, 2012). Negatives are reported of emotional stress caused by alienation, wives' unfulfilled expectations of chores or projects being undertaken when tired workers return home and tension and confusion arising around household roles and responsibilities (Tang, 2012; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). Stressful patterns of repeated re-negotiation of roles, responsibilities and decision-making around parenting, finances and who wears the hat of household head can prevail (Handy, 2010; Shrimpton & Storey, 2001; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). Problems from home can adversely affect a worker's well-being whilst offshore and some companies are seeing the importance for supervisors and medics in playing a more supportive, even counseling role (Chen et al., 2009).

Social isolation and disruption to family and social life have been revealed as problems in several studies of male offshore workers (Chen et al., 2009; Sutherland & Cooper, 1996; Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). Significant events in children's lives or in family life or the community can be missed and friendships hard to maintain. Workers'

new identity as well-paid oil workers has been seen in some cases to attract jealousy in home communities, however the literature on cultural obligations within kinship systems in many developing countries suggests that at least within extended families offshore workers will provide a source of financial support (Austin, 2006; Carter & Kaczmarek, 2009; Costa-Pinto, 2012). Of note is that seafarers from Kiribati were careful to blend back into their communities rather than appear aloof or superior (Borovnik, 2005).

Much of the literature points to positive individual and family coping abilities. Families of Australian FIFO workers have been shown largely to have good levels of cohesion and flexibility, balancing separateness and togetherness in a healthy manner, able to adjust roles, routines and rules as required and provide emotional support to each other (Taylor & Simmonds, 2009). A study of male Filipino FIFO workers showed that spare time offshore was largely taken up with keeping in touch with family and community events and news, with the result that when home they were easily able to pick up the social threads with friends, relatives and neighbours (Acejo, 2012). Borovnik (2005) looks to the construction of occupational-social identities of I-Kiribati male seafarers, sharing danger and close confines with international crew members, that fluidly reside with their national-cultural identity (Borovnik, 2005). These findings have particular resonance for the Timorese Bayu-Undan workers who share the commonality of having dual identities as workers inhabiting a transnational workspace imbued with globalised cultural meanings and as women living in Timor-Leste society where traditional values and norms are strong.

There is a lack of specific evidence of how these issues are played out in the family and social lives of women offshore workers. One difference has to be in the types of pressures on mothers when compared with offshore fathers. A study of eastern European women out-labour migrants identified what the researcher called the women's creation of 'cognitive narratives' that spoke of their great sacrifice in leaving their loved ones and their mothering work in order to seek a family income emphasised by their emotional communications with home from afar (Hoffman & Buckley, 2010). These narratives were interpreted as being necessary for the women to uphold their normative identities as primary caregivers in their origin communities. Another *take* on this could be that the women did indeed miss their children terribly, and wanted to feel connected

to them as a mother and play whatever role they could as mothers from a distance making the so-called narrative simply a life lived with difficult choices. And it may be that the resuming of care-taking roles when at home might not be deemed a ‘double burden’ on top of income earning, but a pleasure for FIFO mothers.

4.7 Chapter Conclusion

The capturing of the benefits of petroleum extraction in developing countries is being increasingly written into production sharing arrangements between countries and global oil and gas companies. For Timor-Leste, the development of the gas fields in the Timor Sea has resulted in its multi-billion dollar Petroleum Fund. If managed well, this revenue promises to be a major boon to the country’s sustainable development. Formal commitments to *local content* involvement in hydrocarbon field development now characterise relationships between the O&G industry and developing countries. An example is the development, usually in unspecified numbers, of a host country *nationals* component of an operation’s workforce, commonly with the rider that industry standards of safety and efficiency must not be compromised.

Whether vague or strongly regulatory, the devil is in the sustainable development detail of local content clauses. This study seeks to reveal the outcomes of some of that detail with particular reference to the realisation of Timorese women’s potential through offshore employment. It is neither common for any mention of gender to be included in local content undertakings, nor is it the reality that significant numbers of women from developing countries are engaged to any degree, or to any level beyond menial work, within oil or gas field development. The Bayu-Undan project in the Timor Sea is an exception to this with the note-worthy entry of a group of Timorese women into responsible positions in the offshore workforce. This alone is a *realising women’s potential* outcome.

However, life as an offshore platform worker has many challenges – the isolated, unforgiving and hazardous physical environment, immutable operational processes and systems, long shifts and rotations, and close confines within living arrangements. While the rewards of income, offshore camaraderie and lengthy at-home periods with friends and family are considered motivators for the workers, this is very much countered by physical, emotional and mental stressors both off- and on shore. For women working

offshore there is the additional challenge of entering a predominantly male work site and negotiating their space and work relationships from a gendered perspective along with re-negotiating roles and relationships when at home. Change, adjustments and adaptions are wrought upon a woman's identity, and none more so than for those coming from a society where ascriptions of norms for female behavior and roles are at odds with the different identity of the female rig or platform worker on a Western, globalised worksite setting.

These issues are key aspects of this inquiry that seeks the narrative testimonies of the on- and offshore experiences of the Bayu-Undan Timorese women and insights from others involved in their training and employment. Conclusions drawn from these accounts will add to a corner of the literature that is thin on studies of women from developing countries engaged in FIFO O&G industry work as a gender component (albeit ad hoc) of a local content commitment.

Chapter Five: Research Design and Methods

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design employed in this study. Section 5.2 outlines the purpose of the research and explains the type of knowledge it aims to produce. This requires discussion on the nature of social reality and how my choice of qualitative research methodology is designed to elicit understandings of that reality. The methods for selecting sources of data, and of collecting, organising and analysing the data flow from this. There follows a précis on the preparations for entering the field and a canvassing of considerations taken into account during the fieldwork. This includes the relationship with the gate-keepers, research approvals and power issues, explanations of decisions made and my reflexive process during the fieldwork, and clarification of my positionality in the conducting of the research

5.2 Research purpose and strategy

5.2.1 Purpose

As a précis to this discussion the four main research questions are now re-visited:

- What capabilities and enablers have supported the women in their pathway to securing the offshore work?
- What are the challenges, adaptations and experiences of the women as offshore workers?
- What changes have arisen in their at-home lives?
- What new opportunities have emerged as a result of their employment?

These questions have *why*, *how* and *what* dimensions designed for explanatory knowledge to be derived around the aspirations, pathways, achievements and changes in the lives of young Timorese women becoming offshore petroleum industry workers from a *realising potentials* perspective (Blaikie, 2000; Mason, 2002).

The first question is asking *why* and *how* it has been possible for the women to choose a pathway, navigated through a newly independent society characterised by endemic underdevelopment and steeped in patriarchal ideology, that has led them to the western offshore gas platform. Firstly, it was necessary to reveal the antecedent

components fuelling the journeys that the women carved through time and social spaces up to their arrival at the Caltech portal. Secondly, it was important to unravel, within the processes of the employing entity Caltech, the *how* of the company's gendered approach to the recruitment and training of the women, and its catalytic effect on their lives.

Research questions two, three and four, are *what* questions aimed at descriptive as well as evaluative knowledge, looking through the realising potential lens, of the women's lived experiences as FIFO offshore platform workers. In other words, what have been the outcomes, in particular with reference to their agency, around new learnings and opportunity, changing identities and status, gendered relations at work, gender roles at home, economic autonomy and sense of power over their own lives and futures.

It was never expected that the actual degrees of influence of enablers could be measured, or that the change in different dimensions of the women's agency to the overall change in their lives could be ranked. Further, the texture of people's everyday lives and their nuances of understandings have layers of complexity which may not be revealed within the timeframe of an interview, such as the issue that arose in this study of the extent to which cultural obligations to support male extended family members might undermine a woman's sense of autonomy around her income. However, the overall shared meanings of these women's journeys and social reality were expected to shed light on the possibilities for women in a LDC to achieve similar outcomes. This knowledge can therefore be used to support the entry of other women to the O&G industry.

5.2.2 *Strategy*

Qualitative research literature advises that a research strategy or methodology must be founded on ontological assumptions made about the nature of social reality and epistemological premises on the ways in which we come to know that reality (Blaikie, 2000; O'Leary, 2004). Social reality, as socially constructed and reproduced through the actions of individuals, is interlaced with relationships with others, can be coloured by cultural and religious belief systems, intersected by state policies and legislations, and is shaped by organisational rules, processes and structures (Mason, 2002; Maton, 2008; Moses & Knutsen, 2007). The social constructivist perspective looks to the subjective

meanings people place on their social reality, such as on their and others' behavior and values within different settings, their potentials and achievements, their relationships with others and the masculine and feminine identities in their worlds (Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). As an example, Fleetwood (2004) argues that a social reality that sees women significantly less represented in the formal labour market than men, earning less and located in a narrow range of *soft* jobs has arisen due to sexist discourse on *women's work* that represents socially constructed attitudes that place less value on women's aptitude and skills than men's. In this study there is a new social reality that sees the aptitude and potential of the target group for acting as competent offshore crewmembers being recognised, captured and remunerated at a rate not previously experienced in the social reality of Timorese women.

Moses and Knutsen ((2007, p. 10) argue that in social research humans should be seen as 'intelligent, reflective and willful and that these characteristics matter for how we understand the world' (Moses & Knutsen, 2007, p. 10). From the start of the study the young women were seen by me as exhibiting intelligence, reflectiveness and willfulness that all impacted on their critical consciousness and ability to pursue goals that run counter to traditional expectations for Timorese women and carve out their new social reality. One could say there was also a vein of realism in my expectation that these characteristics, along with other personal qualities such as courage and determination, all seen as inherent and non-discursively constructed, might be meaningful attributes shaping the ontology of the target group or their way of being (Blaikie, 2000; Maxwell, 2013).

Additionally, there was the recognition by myself that there is little room for discursive interpretations of much of the women's offshore activities and proficiencies, determined as they are, not by gender but by the value-neutral organisational, operational and safety requirements for petroleum extraction and processing (Fleetwood, 2004). This thinking reflects an ontological realism which sees value in separating out and positioning the actions and interactions of the target group that are objectively shaped by the directives of their offshore work schedules, tasks and responsibilities and learned responses to different contingencies of risk (Chafetz, 2004; Groff, 2000). These rules, roles and systems, while devised by humans, have an objective, activity-dependent momentum of their own, independent of belief systems

and not likely to be subject to differing or competing subjective accounts (Outhwaite, 1998). Yet, subjectively, they are integrally linked to the ways the women crewmembers feel about their own competency, role and those of others in their workspace.

Thus, the social realities and activities of the women offshore workers have both objective and subjective aspects that require exploring and knowing if a *women realising potential* evaluation is to be made about them in their particular contexts. The epistemological premise that this study shares is the interpretivist viewpoint. Research that draws on people's narrative testimonies to generate primary, raw data is a meaningful and legitimate way to garner their situated knowledge and shared meanings, and hence gain an understanding of their social reality (Mason, 2002). Additionally, this *knowability* is filtered and conceptualised through the perceptions and inductive interpreting processes, and in the case of this study the *realising women's potential* lens, of myself the researcher (Murray & Overton, 2003).

5.3 Research methods

For the purpose of the research, and arising from the methodological rubric of this study as outlined above, qualitative research methods, based around the in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interview, were considered to be the most appropriate tools to employ in this study.

5.3.1 Data selection

The non-random sample of the sixteen women who had been employed on the Bayu-Undan offshore gas recycling operation through Caltech in 2013 was selected for data generation. The women's offshore positions were as follows:

- 8 Bridge Controllers (2 onshore as data clerks during pregnancy)
- 3 Document Controllers (1 onshore as data clerk while on Maternity Leave)
- 2 Timesheet Co-ordinators
- 1 Safety Officer Trainee
- 1 Materials Coordinator
- 1 Fabric Maintenance Technical Assistant

A summary of job descriptions for these positions can be found in Appendix A.

The key informants, of whom there were five, comprised the owner/management and human resources (HR) strata of the company, Caltech, selected to add valuable insight as opinion leaders and stakeholders with interests in the female Bayu-Undan workers' experiences (Davidson & Tolich, 1999, p. 229).

Seven male Timorese workers, either working on or associated with Bayu-Undan, were brought into the interview frame on an ad hoc basis during the fieldwork period. Their role was to provide a view from Timorese men in the O&G industry on gender equality and the phenomenon of female Timorese offshore workers. The men's positions were a company driver, three bridge controllers, a blaster/painter and blaster/painter leading hand, and an engineer.

5.3.2 Data generation

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all of the selected participants.³⁸ The venue for the interviews was the Caltech conference room in Dili and the length of interview time ranged from one and a half to two hours for all except the driver who was only able to spare thirty minutes. A few interviewees indicated that their time was limited. However all of these were keen to extend the interview to the full time when I alerted them at the end of their initial time allocation, saying that they were enjoying themselves.

The semi-structured aspect of the interviews allowed for narratives to evolve and with judicious prompting more detail and elaboration to emerge (Davidson & Tolich, 1999; O'Leary, 2004). The largely pre-meditated sets of questions were open-ended to lend the study an exploratory nature and the space to generate rich or *thick* description (Chari, Irving, Howard, & Bowe, 2011; Patton, 1980; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Having pre-structured question guides also helped to keep the conversation on track and ensure the same material was covered with the different groupings of interviewees and thus allow for commonalities to emerge (hall & hall, 2004).

³⁸ I have chosen to refer to the interviewees as *participants* to reflect their active involvement and the sentiment of researcher/interviewee equity underlying the study (Seidman, 2013).

The interviews with the women and men began with descriptive questions about their offshore positions and trainings, designed to put them at ease and get them talking (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). Further questions seeking description were peppered throughout the interviews, as well as inquiry soliciting participants' attitude, opinion, feelings and values (Patton, 1980). Needless to say the focus of the male interview questions was more to elicit opinion and attitude about Timorese women as offshore workers and gender equality. The question guides for the female and male workers' interviews can be found in Appendices B and C.

The question guide for Key Informants one and two, hereinafter referred to as KI:1 and KI:2, is located in Appendix D and scopes issues surrounding their reasoning behind employing women offshore, Caltech's approach compared with the rest of the Timor-Leste business community, observations of the women's adjustment in becoming platform workers and new opportunities that may have arisen. Further primary data was gathered from KI:1 and KI:2 during the briefing on arrival and other meetings, and in much informal conversation engaged in over the fieldwork period.

I became interested, as time went by, in an ethnographic dimension³⁹ unfolding in the gathering of the narratives of KI:1 and KI:2. Davidson & Tolich (1999, p.250) argue there is legitimate data in the 'unplanned, and often random, conversations that spontaneously occur in hallways, cafeterias, while waiting for a lift, etc'. The proportion and depth of this type of data gathered in this study, of both an empirical and subjective nature, was greater than expected in relation to the other testimonies. It was later to provide a comprehensive contextual and narrative basis for interpreting the impact of Caltech's leadership and approach on the women's experiences and achievements, and for considering its replicability to other O&G industry partnerships in developing countries.

The interview formats for Key Informants three, four and five (hereinafter denoted KIs 3, 4 and 5) were more loosely structured and spontaneous, based around memos I

³⁹ While the length of time in the field was not sufficient to deem this study ethnography, some key elements of an ethnographic study, as outlined by Bryman (2012), emerged. I was able to observe and interact with the culture of Caltech as an organisation and a community over a period of time and at different times of the day, thus gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the hows and whys of its causal role in fostering the women's potential.

had made on what questions would draw out greater insight into both the changes they have observed in the women and also the ethos, processes and practices of the Caltech entity. I was also interested in KI:3 and KI:4's views on their minority status as qualified management-level Timorese women and how this has played out with relation to the attitudes of the employees. As their interviews were at the end of the fieldwork period I had had time to observe their roles and thus was able to narrow down the focus of the interviews.

Keeping a diary during the time in Dili was a vital part of the fieldwork detailing important observations, experiences and interactions, my thoughts and personal feelings, as well as things to do or follow up on. These notes became sources of data during interpretation and analysis.

The use of focus groups (FGs) as a further source of primary data was incorporated into the original research design, on the proviso that the women's FIFO schedules and limited at-home time might preclude this. It was hoped, given my prior expectation that *empowerment* as a concept might not draw much recognition or response with the Timorese⁴⁰, that a FG might be a powerful technique for gleaning greater insight into different cultural definitions or meanings from the women's own socio-cultural frame of reference (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Additionally, I anticipated that self-assessments of the empowering changes the women may have experienced might not be of relevance or priority in the women's sought-for outcomes of economic well-being. As KI:1 suggested, in the face of potential poverty and the competition of 1000s others for the scarce commodity of paid work (Caltech has 1000 CVs in its database with around one third of these being women) '*They will just be grateful to have a job*' (KI:1, Diary Entry, June 17th, 2013).

As it transpired, a FG was arranged and, while there was some discussion of the members' different meanings around the concept of empowerment, the most important data to come out of this concerned the Timorese systems of contractual kinship

⁴⁰ Preparation for how to meet this eventuality, prior to travelling to Dili, involved organising a mock focus group discussion that included a young German friend and two New Zealand women, around the topic of a significant empowering event in their lives. In this discussion the German woman explained the difficulties of trying to both understand and express conceptual ideas, and also to convey subtleties of thought, feelings and experience via a second language.

obligations that required the women to financially support their extended family. The women individually completed a pie chart depicting the fractions of their total monthly income dedicated to an agreed upon range of household, family and personal expenditures, cash support and purchase of items for extended family, contributions to *culture events*, savings for future studies, projects and for children's education. These charts they then explained in English.

The four women FG participants had some diversity around age, marital and motherhood status, post-secondary school education, social background and pre-Bayu-Udan job experiences. This diversity underscored the need in qualitative research methodology to allow for narrative space within which a breadth of meanings around an issue can emerge. The cultural arena is not necessarily defined by a single belief but rather a set of evolving understandings, and this also applies to a subgroup in the same organisational setting such as the offshore platform (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The pie-chart exercise, whilst somewhat rudimentary, did give scope to revealing different shades in the women's priorities and emphases around the issues.

5.3.3 Organising and analysing the data

The FG and all of the individual interviews were recorded on a Digital Voice Recorder after the participants' consent was given. At the end of each day the recordings were backed up into password-protected *Dropbox*. The recordings were then transcribed and the transcriptions uploaded back into *Dropbox*. Everyone was given a code name, with the women and men workers denoted by W and M respectively and numbered chronologically according to the interview schedule. As has been mentioned the Key Informants have been code-named as KIs 1-5. KI:1 and KI:2, the Caltech co-owners, have indicated that they realise and accept that even with code-names they are fairly easily recognisable.

So as not to confuse the reader the term *coding*, in its qualitative research sense, is henceforth used to denote the process used after returning from the fieldwork for identifying and noting passages in the transcripts that symbolise or demonstrate the same theoretical, conceptual or descriptive notion (Robson, 2011). Patterns or themes of importance to the four research questions, arising out of these initial codings, were further coded into main and sub-categories. A detailed exercise followed of constructing

thematic maps, matrices, and causal networks on paper to assist in seeing the coherent patterns and to conceptually cluster elements in the data. During the coding diaried notes were also incorporated about the participants' facial and hand expressions such as the adamancy used in stressing the degree of responsibility for safety in their job, or one woman's use of fingers in the air to put quotation marks around the term *culture parties* to express her derision of the legitimacy of some of the so-called family events men require her cash for.

In the process of coding I remained alert to some qualitative research pitfalls. For example, what Robson (2011) classifies as *outliers*, that is, exceptions or threads that did not fit into the patterns discovered. These were noted and their meaning or significance checked in the analysis phase. Because, prior to travelling to Timor-Leste, a conceptual drawing board was established through which to explore the research questions, it was important to be vigilant to not skew the data into predetermined themes nor ignore problematic responses that unbalanced general patterns or potentially opened a *can of worms* (Robson, 2011; Sumner & Tribe, 2008). An example is the issue of women becoming pregnant since being recruited to Bayu-Undan (see Appendix G).

The analysis stage entailed establishing links between the theoretical and conceptual framework and background contexts outlined in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 and the meanings unfolding in the narratives, taking care to let the data tell the story (Sumner & Tribe, 2008). As the narrative testimonies seemed to be rich enough and saturation⁴¹ had been reached there was some confidence that worthwhile meaning structures would emerge and that some sense of the shared social realities of the women could be made 'understandable and intelligible' through cognitive explanation (van Manen, 1989, p. 27). Additionally, prior to collecting the data I had formed a tentative view that Caltech had been a critical catalyst for the realisation of the Bayu-Undan women's potential through offshore work. I was therefore keen to establish whether this causal function actually existed within the Caltech entity and if so, how it operated (Blaikie, 2000; Bryman, 2012).

⁴¹ While it was not planned, the sample size of Bayu-Undan women was sufficient for their interviews to reach theoretical saturation, (Robson, 2011). In other words by the end of them no new data was emerging around the research questions and theoretical/conceptual framework apart from a degree of diversity in social background and household and relationship configurations.

5.4 Fieldwork

5.4.1 Initial contact and the gatekeepers

My interest in the Timorese workers on Bayu-Undan was sparked by the stories of a close friend who had previously been employed by the owner and operator companies and had met and spent time with the Caltech owners and staff in Dili in 2008. Email approaches to KI:1 revealed the addition, subsequent to my friend's involvement, of sixteen women to the Caltech offshore payroll. KI:1 welcomed my interest in researching their experiences and very early on I became aware of the company's approach to equal opportunities for women, as this quote shows:

Caltech was the instigator in offering [offshore] employment opportunities to female. Timor is normally male dominated so our girls are certainly worth writing about (KI:1, personal communication, October 16th, 2012).

Further email communications established some of the history of the relationships between Caltech and its client oil/gas industry companies and of the development of the Bayu-Undan field. The Caltech owners, as the gatekeepers to the research, took every step to facilitate my entry into the fieldwork and access to the women employees, and to non-sensitive information about the target group and Bayu-Undan. In addition KI:1 had given assurances to the client companies that the research was academic and was being conducted with ethics approval from my university, but also that it could be of benefit to all stakeholders.

5.4.2 Research approval, field logistics and power considerations

The research project was evaluated by peer review of senior members of the Development Studies Programme, School of People, Environment and Planning, Massey University, and then judged by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) as low risk. The Ethics Application is attached to the Information Sheet in Appendix E.

The support of my 21-year old daughter was enlisted as a research assistant. Her role was to provide IT, logistical and technical support during the fieldwork stage of the study. Her involvement extended to sitting in on interviews and meetings, adding helpful input when I was trying to find the right words to communicate inquiry or comprehend responses, and as a sounding board for my thoughts and fieldwork decisions. She was involved in the ethics discussion with members of the Massey

University Development Studies faculty and was bound by a Confidentiality Agreement.

During the ethics approvals process discussion was held around issues that might arise when the gate-keepers to the target group are their employers. Employers are in a position of power and research involving their employees must be conducted in a manner whereby there are no repercussions that could harm interviewees' job security and prospects and employee/employer or employee/employee relations. I entered the field fully cognisant of the possible dynamics around gate-keeper/key informant/employee power inequalities, but also with considerable trust in the employers' integrity. This understanding came initially from information received from my aforementioned close friend who had good reason, due to her working relationship with the gatekeepers, to have faith in their high level of integrity. My own trust subsequently grew as my communications with them progressed and it became clear to me that their support for my study originated from their dedication to Timor-Leste's development, to enhancing local content initiatives, and to facilitating positive well-being outcomes for their employees. Both KI:1 and KI:2 saw the study as providing a learning opportunity for them as the following quote indicates:

If they say they hate Caltech then it is good that we know because we can see why and what can be done about it... we want to know how the women are coping at home... if they are all on the verge of divorce then maybe we need to re-think our strategy (KI:1, Diary Entry, June 17th, 2013).

I endeavoured to convey to the interviewees KI:1's hope for free expression (albeit with privacy protocols in place) for what it seemed to be – a genuine interest in gaining a clear picture of how things were for the workers in order to see what could be improved.

There is also an implicit power dynamic between the researcher and respondents. The qualitative research literature on this on the one hand warns of disclosures being restrained due to interviewees' anxiety, and on the other of trust being heightened because the researcher is seen to have formal, legitimate authority (T. Miller & Bell, 2002; Mullings, 1999; Patton, 1980). It was suggested by KI:1 that as I would be interviewing the women in the company boardroom they might think I worked for Caltech but that I needed to make it clear that I was invited there, which on balance he

thought would probably work in my favour in enhancing my credibility. Additionally, the HR Assistant indicated that my seniority (I am fifty seven years old) would engender trust, respectfulness and co-operation.

I had already considered the risk of open expression being constrained by my relationship with the Caltech bosses, but logically it was the most convenient for all concerned for the interviews to take place on the office premises. These were in the same compound as my accommodation (Venture Hotel⁴²) and had Internet access, which was of great help in allowing me to source pertinent documents on the spot and store data safely in the cloud. Some of the women would be coming in to the office anyway, and the company HR Assistant had been detailed for scheduling the times and contacting the women. Logistically, given that the women were on different rosters, and many travelled to the districts in their onshore time, being at *camp base* meant it was easy to capture the often-narrow window when they were available. Plugging in to the existing office communication system had the advantage that every participant was on time and more often early for his or her interview. Forwarding a profile with a photograph of myself to each of the interviewees meant that they were prepared and, it seemed, excited to be involved in the study, albeit nervous, as some indicated, about the interview process. Some of them brought this photo out from their handbag to show me on arrival at the interview.

5.4.3 Being reflexive and flexible

Murray and Overton (2003) advise that designing research around international development questions should be seen as an ongoing process that requires flexibility and reflexivity when the researcher steps into unfamiliar places and cultures.

For this study reflexivity meant being attentive to the nuanced reactions of interviewees to questions and aware of the risk that in using English as their second language the Timorese participants might not fully convey their meanings of their experiences and their worlds. An early diary entry illustrates my thinking:

⁴² Venture Hotel, situated in the same compound as the Caltech and some client company offices, is owned by KI:2. Hotel patrons and employees of Caltech and the adjacent companies use its cafeteria. Three of the Bayu-Undan women have been recruited out of the hotel staff.

The only questions/areas I get blanks on are those subjective areas around what personal qualities they think got them the offshore job. No matter how I phrase it they are confused. I have to re-phrase & suggest words – such as determination, confidence, or about not being shy. ‘Self-belief’ is the concept that resonates the most, which came from one of the first women... [KI:2] tells us that Timorese parents do not tend to exhibit pride in their kids when they are growing up – more likely to put them down to other parents, like, “my kids are so naughty, they give me a lot of trouble” & so they don’t grow up with a lot of ability to advertise their strengths to others (Field Notes, June 22, 2013).

While ‘*believing in myself*’ became almost a by-word in the women interviews for agency and self-efficacy, the notion of Timorese women realising their potential did arise spontaneously out of the interviews with KIs 1-4. This lent the study some conceptual continuity whereby their data around this could be integrated with my realising potential lens as explained in Chapter Two.

Being flexible once in the field ensured that a really important topic that arose in the women interviews, of the increased financial support to extended family given by or expected of the women with their new salary, could be explored more deeply in the FG. Additionally, a change of mind whilst in the field on the value to the study of canvassing the attitudes of Timorese male offshore workers resulted in a group being interviewed. Appendix F illustrates the reflexive process in which I engaged in around this decision.

5.4.4 Positionality

Of importance to the study is my positionality – that is, my history and prior understanding pertaining to the research topic (Deer, 2008; Mullings, 1999). There are those who insist that the researcher’s positionality and any pre-conceptions must be set aside so that interviewing is conducted in an unbiased or value-free manner (Deer, 2008). Advocates for researcher neutrality argue that this can foster spaces where interviewees do not sense that anything they say will be met with an emotional or judgmental response thus facilitating the giving of higher quality and more meaningful data (Rountree & Laing, 1996). Conversely, there are strong arguments for qualitative research approaches that acknowledge and incorporate the researcher’s positionality,

and in a reflexive manner, as the study proceeds, re-visit and evaluate the ways in which this may enhance or inhibit the spontaneity and openness of participant responses, and the subsequent accurate interpretation and analysis of the transcripts (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985; O'Leary, 2005; Rountree & Laing, 1996). While I see merit in both arguments, I believe it is an issue of balance. Fundamentally, I agree with Scheyvens and Storey (2003) that there is an aspect of duty in exhibiting considerable knowledge of the research topic, political awareness and sensitivity to the respondents' local context if one is to establish open and reciprocal dialogue in interviews (R. Scheyvens & Storey, 2003).

From the inception of the study I deliberately placed my O&G positionality at the forefront of my communications with the gatekeepers and participants. For over fifteen years my husband and I have lived and raised a family while he has worked as an employee on offshore O&G sites via various FIFO schedules, with the result that I know much anecdotally about the systems, technologies and culture of the offshore oil industry and personally about the human interface of the on- and off-shore life of FIFO workers and their families. As an introduction to the women and men's interviews I showed a photo of my husband taken in his PPE⁴³ on his platform, and used drawings to explain the facilities, technologies and geographic location of his operation in New Zealand waters. Without a doubt this explanation and my familiarity with the O&G industry and FIFO lifestyle helped to put the interviewees at ease and enhanced the quality of the subsequent dialogue.

With the gatekeepers and key informants I believe my positionality as an *oil wife*⁴⁴ gave me greater legitimacy in carrying out the research and engendered rapport and trust. For example, on the one hand it was clear that I was aware of the overwhelming masculinity that characterises the offshore oil platform environment, and yet on the other, I did not come across as a naïve outsider with intransigent, ill-informed views of a predominant macho offshore worker stereotype. Further, my prior knowledge base significantly reduced the gamut of industry-specific questions I needed to ask or issues to clarify.

⁴³ PPE denotes Personal Protective Equipment, which consists, for example, of regulation overalls, safety glasses and ear muffs/plugs, steel-capped boots.

⁴⁴ Oil wife is a term used descriptively rather than derogatively within oil worker circles in New Zealand.

Another aspect to my positionality concerns my personal/political history as a woman who has been involved at the coalface of the struggle for gender equality in New Zealand dating back to the 1970's. The challenge was in deciding when speaking of this might be an advantage in facilitating deeper insights into the respondents' attitudes to and understandings of gender equality issues in their own worlds, and when this outcome might be better achieved by maintaining an air of neutrality.

Notwithstanding both sides of the positionality debate, of prime importance was my awareness that my women's rights consciousness and my knowledge of the FIFO life and oil industry world have been inculcated in a Western, developed country. As an interpreting outsider entering the life-worlds of the participants I could not assume that my own attitudes, belief systems and comprehensions of these worlds could be ascribed to them and needed to be open to understanding different perspectives and interpretations (Groenewald, 2004; O'Leary, 2004).

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has first explained the research purpose and methodological approach taken in this study. The *why*, *what* and *how* dimensions of the research questions have been discussed and an indication given that underlying the research strategy are influences from the theoretical paradigms of both realism and social constructivism. Next it has been shown that, as the study is focused on gathering shared voiced meanings of the research participants around their social reality, qualitative methods of semi-structured interviews and the focus group are the appropriate tools for gathering this primary data.

The chapter has described the positions of sample group of female Bayu-Undan workers, those of the Timorese men who were brought into the interview frame and the roles of the Key Informants from Caltech and given an indication of the lines of questioning used for these different groups. Mention has been made of the important addition to the data of ethnographically-inclined observation and informal conversations that will have a bearing on the conclusions around the role of Caltech in the women's capability achievements.

Ethical and power issues have been canvassed with a view to providing assurances that I entered the field and conducted the data-gathering and analysis fully cognisant of the constraints around openness that can arise when the gatekeepers are the interviewees' employers. The importance of being reflexive and flexible in the field has been raised with mention of how keeping a diary helped with this and how the shape of the fieldwork evolved to include the male interviewees and the FG topic of contractual family obligations as a result.

The chapter lastly discussed my positionality with respect to my history of proxy-association with the O&G industry and involvement in the New Zealand women's rights movement, and how this was brought to bear positively on my relationships with the participants. The chapter concluded with a reminder of the importance of the researcher being sensitive in attempts to interpret the stories of participants from a vastly different socio/cultural setting.

Chapter Six: Findings and Discussion

That is certainly a testament to their strength because the standard role for the Timorese woman is certainly not to get on a chopper and go to work for twenty-eight days. Five years ago nobody even thought about that
(KI:1, briefing meeting, Dili, 17 June, 2013).

6.1 Introduction

The quote above encapsulates the essence of the women's collective experience as Timorese female offshore workers. Their narratives, once mined, sliced and spliced emerged into themes that in this chapter are grouped sequentially around the four main research questions outlined on page 67. In the first section, issues of the women's early critical consciousness, cache of personal, political and social resources and opportunities, activated as capabilities, that underpinned their pathway up until their successful recruitment to their offshore jobs are explored.

The chapter will then move into exploring the women's offshore experiences –the challenges they have faced in preparing for and entering the isolated, highly specialized and high risk work site heavily populated by western men, their evolving work identities, new competencies and capabilities and the changes in self-worth, the attitudes of the Timorese men towards equal opportunities and Timorese women working offshore as well as data on how the mothers have adjusted.

Section four, which also incorporates the fourth research question around new opportunities, looks at issues around the women's attitudes to domestic work when at home, decision-making around incomes, new community and family status, and positive and negative aspects associated with their new position of being the highest income-earner in their extended families.

The final section discusses the approach and role of Caltech in helping to shape Bayu-Undan 's local content to include Timorese women.

6.2 Young women growing capability pre-Bayu-Undan

6.2.1 Early critical consciousness

Bourdieu's *critical consciousness* has been explained as a cognitive state that sees individuals rejecting previous conformity or perceiving alternative ways of doing and being to pervasive social norms (Maton, 2008). The following simple quote from one of the women describes a pervasive gender norm in Timor-Leste society:

Mum never do any job when Dad was still alive – he never allow her to, except just take care of the kids (Interview: WI:10, 26 years).

By the completion of their senior secondary school (around 18 years of age) the women had all categorically rejected, as the inevitable lot for a Timorese woman, normative ascriptions of femininity that expect women to be obedient to their husband and, with the possible exception of one, had greater aspirations than to be a wife and mother - the one coming to her realisation when she was a young wife with a baby:

When I got married I thought it would be enough, I would be happy, but no!
(Interview: WI:11).

There is an age range in the target group from the older women who grew up before independence to the youngest who were teenagers during the time gender equality was being promoted as a state-level aspiration for Timor-Leste. However, none of the women mentioned that their early thinking was directly influenced by ideas of gender equality. This seemed to have occurred for many when they had jobs with NGOs, in the Bayu-Undan onshore office or went to university in Dili or Indonesia prior to Bayu-Undan. Most of the women, growing up in small villages or towns, mentioned societal pressures to conform to traditional female identities. And yet all have chosen to move away from their childhood settings to seek formal employment and/or vocational training opportunities in Dili where the bulk of non-agricultural work is centred and where they thought their goals of economic independence could be achieved.

The data builds a picture of the women's early critical consciousness around a woman's right, and their own potential, to shape their lives differently to the norm coming from a combination of their own determination and attitude, the influence of the educational spaces they traversed where their aptitude was fostered, the awareness of their equal opportunity to take a vocational course near their home, and/or the attitudes

of their parents and families. The following quotes show the strength of their critical consciousness:

Staying at home looking after the kids? It's so stupid! Why is it a woman cannot work? (Interview: WI:6, married, 28 years, previously a waitress, the only woman whose mother told her she should stay at home as a wife and mother).

In Dili so many women... everything goes towards the husband but I make my own decisions (Interview: WI:9, divorced, 32 years previously a waitress. Parents died when she was a child).

Me and my friends, when we left school, want to improve our mind. Sometimes I see other women in the village want to be like me, but I'm single, no problem (WI:7, single, 27 years, has a Degree in Mining Engineering).

:

We have the culture that some men think the women should stay at home and have kids, look after their husbands. But different for me, I [choose to] work (Interview: WI:8, single, 26 years, Degree in Engineering).

If you with men oh the headache! They cannot allow you to do this, they cannot allow you to go everywhere. You have to ask permission. Oh shit! The men in here they say "ah the girl she is nothing" ...I say "you wanna try you can". I never care about the man...I have to focus on my career. I want to see the world, not suffer like girls I know (Interview: WI:10, single, 26 years, Degree in Engineering).

I can say that 70% of women when they are 18 or 19 years they just get married and stay at home. I am very worried about my sisters. I talk with them, I say not get married until the future, go to university, get the good job, then get married (Interview: WI:14, married, 26 years, no tertiary education).

The two youngest women came from far away from Dili and their attitudes around male dominance and female self-abnegation, and education or work being pathways towards independence are respectively as follows:

Most women stay at home in the village, just stay the same. But different for me – no good. I say to them to just try ... but maybe they too shy. I come from a small village so I have to prove myself (Interview: WI:16, married, 22 years, completed three semesters at university in Dili).

I see in my environment one of my friends find her husband is very strict. Always try to tell her every morning, every night... and I said to myself to make sure that cannot happen to me. I have to have a job (Interview: WI:13, single, 23 years, completed computer and English courses while working in Dili).

The next two sub-sections discuss the social resources that have supported the women's journeys to the valued outcome of paid work and the importance of the availability of opportunity in fulfilling their intent to develop their learning and earning potentials.

6.2.2 Social resources in families

As noted previously the incorporation of new concepts of gender equality into households, families and relationships throughout Timor-Leste society has been reported as problematic and superficial, affecting the lives of young women with greater aspirations (Niner et al., 2014).

Regardless of whether state policies of equal opportunities in education had been established and actioned⁴⁵, all of the women had completed senior secondary school which, given the high post-independence school drop-out rate mentioned in chapter three, indicates that this group is a quite select sample. There is a formidable range of reasons a Timorese girl may not finish her schooling, such as unplanned pregnancies, lack of family income, lack of transport, perceptions of the relevance of education and poor learning outcomes (SEPI, 2013). Aside from reflecting their cognitive aptitude the early educational success of the target group points to their benefitting from parental attitudes that value girls' education. This is of critical importance to their early

⁴⁵ During the Indonesian occupation urban schools were open to Timorese girls but the absence of records during this time precludes an understanding of the gender policies of the Indonesian governing authority (Gunn, 1997).

understandings of the links between education, their human capital and the ability to convert opportunity into the capability of employment.

While many of the women described their upbringing as poor but '*having enough to eat*', their mothers, especially, strove to finance their children's education:

My mother sell this product and the extra money paid our school and things we need like shoes, pencil, pen, uniform, bags etc (Interview: WI:1).

When we were kids we helped our mother to sell vegetables and cookies in order to earn money for buy books, shoes, bags etc for school (Interview: WI:4).

We have not enough for our daily necessities so my Mum made the bread and grow the vegetables to sell. Then she do the tailoring at home so that she can provide us to study (Interview: WI:10, father died when she was at primary school)

While the above evidence (albeit from a very small sample) supports claims in the GAD and feminist literature that mothers in developing countries tend to invest in their children's education (World Bank, 2012), it has also been fathers, and brothers or uncles in Dili with whom two stayed whilst at high school, giving support.

Factors that inform family decision-making around children's schooling in developing countries are complex, and not necessarily clustering at either end of a binary of those following or going against the tide of a patriarchal ideology that undervalues girls' education (Sardenberg, 2012). Factors other than gender can be influential, such as parental income and level of education, family size, birth order, the buffering effect of extended family, the need for child labour in productive or reproductive work, the prioritising of investment in the children with greater academic promise and the perceived economic returns to parents and extended family if education leads to paid employment (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001; Huisman & Smits, 2009).

It is not within the realm of this study to explore these issues in depth in the women's childhood settings. Suffice it to say that parental and extended family support for the education of the women as children and adolescents, and for their pursuit of

vocational training and paid work opportunities beyond school, for whatever reason, constituted a major social capital or resource available to the Bayu-Undan women. This support has been in the form of moral encouragement, financial input for studies, or providing free board. Many of the parents appreciated the importance of financing English courses. Two of the four women respondents who studied for Engineering Degrees in Indonesia, (one of whom was a Key Informant), were strongly encouraged by their fathers, receiving scholarships, also a form of social resource, and yet, of note, engineering (for open pit mining) was not the preferred choice of these two who wanted to work in medicine. The parents of the other two were teachers or worked in education and jointly encouraged their daughters to become qualified, the first also supported by her brother with living costs, and the second:

Because we are all sisters my parents say you have to study because “some day you are married, your husband can’t give you much, you can survive your life”...Because in our culture if you have no brothers you have to take care of yourself (Interview: WI:12).

A fifth woman with an engineering qualification begged her mother (who was struggling to support a family of five children in the village on her own) to give her USD20 a month for her to go to Dili where she graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering Informatics:

After I graduate from the World Vision course [six months in Baucau] in office skills, communication, peace-building, English, I have to stop learning because it’s too expensive to go to university. Every day I was crying and crying because I cannot just stay here and do nothing. I say to my Mum, I need to study (Interview: WI:10).

Her mother was concerned for her daughter’s moral safety in Dili but was persuaded to let her go. The third woman whose parents were teachers in a remote village received moral support for continued study but because they could not afford to finance this she travelled to Dili after senior secondary school and got a job with an NGO.

A point to note is that while this was not directly alluded to in the interviews, the importance of the role-modelling of the mothers who were teachers should not be underestimated. And while it appeared only one other mother had clear social and economic status as the owner of a small shop, it could not be assumed that for a mother to be a positive role-model for her daughter’s sense of agency she must be more than a

wife and mother. As WI:3 stated '*I am stroppy like my mother*'. As this thesis was going to print this woman, married with children, was near completion of a scaffolding course, and in all likelihood the first Timorese woman to achieve this skill. Her mother had run a household that included thirteen extended family children. WI:10 admired her mother:

With all her ambition and pride Mum start everything from zero after Dad died.....with her courage she passed the suffering...with that courage I'm independent, and want to be a success in the future (Interview: WI:10. This woman's family home and livestock were destroyed in the 1999 violence).

Two other women with university degrees, both with six siblings, had parents who were too poor to support their studies, so they worked at nights to support themselves and stayed with extended family in Dili. One woman is completing her degree during her FIFO onshore spells. The personal resources of determination and self-efficacy have driven these efforts. These characteristics are key components typical of all the women's agency.

One of the women received financial and childcare support from her mother to study when she was married and a mother.

When I got married we had no money, it was very difficult. My Mum told me to "be strong, don't be disappointed. I look after baby while you do a course in Dili" (Interview: WI:11).

A crucial plank of social support that has enabled most of the women with children (and will enable two of the pregnant women when their babies are born) to be engaged in FIFO work has been extended family members fulfilling childcare needs whilst they are offshore. Contrary to a wealth of evidence that the absence of child-care support acts as a deterrent for many women in developing countries seeking full-time work (Kabeer, 2012), this factor would appear to reflect more the studies of societies, including Timor-Leste, where extended family networks can act as a social resource in buttressing mothers' needs through shared childcare (Hicks, 2007; Stewart-Withers, 2007). It is important to note that the providers of this child-care support are female reflecting the norm in Timor-Leste that looking after children is women's work. However, while the husbands of all of the other mothers, except for the divorced woman, have full-time jobs

at least three of them play some domestic part in cooking for their children and taking them to school when the women are offshore. As the evidence suggests that this phenomenon is very rare in Timor-Leste, this finding, whilst very minor, should be seen as a ray of hope that narrow gender roles can change as women become more economically active.

As well as young women having a critical consciousness, determination and self-efficacy and the support of family members in pursuing the pathway to economic independence through paid work, as was discussed in the second chapter, there must be opportunities available for them for employment and/or for developing the requisite skills to be job-ready. And as proposed in the synergy of GAD, feminist and Sen's ideas around which this inquiry is based, women must have aspirations and be able to exercise agency to uptake these opportunities. The next sub-section expands on these further aspects to women realising potential.

6.2.3 Opportunity uptake and agency in action

The women's narratives imply that in many cases their efforts to up-skill themselves were not necessarily related to a particular career aspiration but carried out on an ad hoc basis, making choices around what courses were available, that might lead to any kind of job, as a pathway out of poverty for themselves and their families, or to escape the backwater of normative female activities and roles. The following testimonies support this understanding:

You know in Timor-Leste it is not good economy. So I just decide to attend a course –whatever! Yeah some people think we are women just stay at home, carry babies. But for me personally if I can have opportunity I have to take it (Interview: WI:15).

When we are growing up, very poor, we see other people who have the money. I believe that maybe in the future I can change our life (Interview: WI:11).

For many years my dream is to be a doctor, but the decisions of my brother and father made me late to register. They say “you have to wait for another year” so I think I am wasting my time and decided to do the mining (Interview: WI:7).

The one skill that the women (and the men) had all sought and believed to be of very high value in their curriculum vitae was fluency in English. As WI:1 explained '*English is the international language*'. Jobs in Dili requiring a degree of fluency in English are in areas where women tend to be recruited such as in the hospitality sector and with foreign NGOs and aid agencies. Twelve of the women had had prior work experience in these sectors, with the remaining four coming into the O&G industry work after university attendance, but with some English fluency acquired from courses. The Bayu-Undan women have thus all exhibited vision and practical action, that is agency, in seeking opportunities to gain English fluency from a range of learning settings, with the resultant capability of the jobs they were able to secure.

As explained in the previous chapter there was an interest in this study in how young women in Timor-Leste might conceptualise notions of agency as a component of their empowerment. A consequent line of questioning in the interviews established that the concept of *self-belief* resonated most with the women as a key personal attribute driving the pursuit of their goals. A further interest being in how these women's meanings might assist with understanding how other Timorese women might develop greater agency led to my asking where this came from. As has been reported several sourced this from their mothers' encouragement. One village girl who lived with extended family in Dili during her secondary school years and then went into work off her own initiative explains:

Mum taught me to believe in myself. Teach us to go everywhere (there are eleven children in her family), concentrate on your best in your job (Interview: WI:5).

However, several women were adamant that their self-belief came '*from myself*'. This suggests a high degree of agency in these women, especially for two for whom there was an absence of support from their parents to become paid workers. The first, and only one of the group whose parents expected that she see her future solely as a wife and mother, chose to defy them (unbeknownst to them, but with the support of her brother with whom she was living in Dili) by taking up waitressing work at the end of her schooling. The second, who lost her parents when she was 11 years old, became a waitress after a divorce as a solo mother, also with the support of her brother. Both of these women did not see offshore work as an option for them until they were singled out

from the Venture Hotel staff⁴⁶ by the Caltech owners and offered the opportunity to undergo training and be interviewed for positions which points to their employers recognising a greater potential in them than their own understanding.

In discussion around what it might take for Timorese women to apply, undergo an interview and be selected for employment with Caltech several women reflected that they advise their interested friends to show confidence. The key informants were very clear that women who exuded confidence (quiet or bold, and regardless of tertiary qualifications) in the initial interview gained the edge on others, and that if this translated into being assertive in the Radio Telephone (RT) training/screening session they had a good chance of being recruited. Other traits, as part of agency, looked for by the Caltech management in female prospects for Bayu-Undan were a hunger to learn and the potential to adapt to a harsh, isolated and highly technical new work environment dominated by western men.

6.2.4 Women's employers as social capital

On entering the Caltech portal the women encountered (the social capital of) a leadership committed to driving society forward by fostering the increased capacity of the Timorese. KI:1 explained that it's about men and women, who come home and talk about their job [as an architect, nurse, offshore worker]:

...and the kids have big eyes and they are thinking “when I grow up I can be that”. Not brain-dead jobs where the girl at the sink hears about her Mum’s job washing dishes and thinks “I’m seven years old, this is what my job is going to look like for the rest of my life”.

One of the women expressed this simply as '*I want my daughter to be same like me*' KI:1 avows the decision to consider recruiting women for Bayu-Undan offshore positions was not a feminist one, that it just made good business sense:

We like to employ women because they understand punctuality and planning and have tenacity. They learn these skills by helping their mothers... Many urban boys are not learning skills alongside their fathers, but are often looked

⁴⁶ Venture Hotel is owned by the Timorese woman co-owner of Caltech and is in the same compound as the Caltech and CAJV offices. It is viewed by KI:1 and KI:2 as a source of potential recruits for offshore work due to the English fluency that some of the staff develop in their work there.

after by their older sisters who learn to be independent early... Women are not as cocky as men, but they are not afraid to admit their mistakes and ask for advice... (KI:1, Interview, 4th July, 2013).

However, KI:1 said that his Timorese wife approved of his initial idea to put women on the rig as she '*likes the gender equality*'. When I asked KI:2 whether her vision is wider regarding gender and Timor-Leste society she responded:

My vision was actually wide. Our culture is very male – they prioritise men. Most of the Timorese women work very hard – they do all the work. Sometimes they do all the men's work and the men are just sitting at home watching them working and that for me is not right. Someone have to say women can do more than that!..... One of our waitresses who shows promise to go further was a little girl selling vegetables, recommended to me by the local nuns. She is learning English just by remembering (Interview: KI:2).

Her sisters share the same viewpoint:

We need to encourage women out of the kitchen. We see the potential in the women (Interview: KI:3).

For me personally I like to promote the girl... because it's really good to see women in [offshore] (Interview: KI:4).

Along with Caltech's commitment to opening opportunities for Timorese women to extend themselves in meaningful ways beyond the domestic realm and earn a decent income, as a social resource the Caltech management women see one of their roles as keeping an eye on the women's personal and family well-being – of engaging in pastoral care to various degrees. KI:3 and KI:5 (involved at an assistant level with the HR side of Caltech) indicated that they like to chat *like sisters* with the women about how their work is going. KI:1 sees part of her function as an employer as checking that everything is okay in the women's at-home lives. Interactions I observed between Bayu-Undan women and these Key Informants were warm and animated.

As well as being arch supporters of the women KIs 2, 3 and 4, as successful professional Timorese women, can also be deemed the social resource of role models.

Knowing these women will reinforce the female employees' belief that Timorese women can aspire to high levels of economic and social status and their cognitive awareness of the benefits of the experience of gender equality (Stromquist, 1995). One of the women, who was recruited from the Venture Hotel staff, enthused about how KI:3 was a '*great inspiration*' to her.

KI:2, as a Timorese female company owner, and thus one of a small minority among business people in Timor-Leste, told me she was always ambitious – having seen her mother as a workingwoman but still dependent on her husband to make decisions. Ironically it was her Canadian husband (KI:1) who has greatly influenced her progress (and that of her sisters, KI:3 and 4), as she told me:

Women in the Western society are very independent...my husband was pushing me to the top and passing it on to my sisters as well [KI:3 and KI:4, single women]. My sisters are very successful and very much financially independent (Interview: KI:2).

KI:4 described how she '*fell in love with law*' and became the first woman in her family to get a Law Degree. She found that at first the male Caltech workers would only want to consult with KI:1 over issues that arose, but that when they were given no option but to go to her they began to respect her thus changing the gender role balance in the Caltech culture and the men's attitudes to Timorese women in senior company positions.

Whilst the data from the Key Informants was not infused with western feminist terminology, the evidence is of the target group as beneficiaries of the tenacity and commitment of Caltech's owners and managers to create an empowering enclave in a quiet corner of the Timor-Leste private sector, where, as a manifestation of the Beijing Platform for Action goals, women can enjoy equal status with men to realise their potential and ambitions (DAC/OECD, 1998).

6.2.5 Gender equality as individualised political capital

Traversing or inhabiting organisational settings within which principles of gender equality are manifest was not actually an alien experience for many of the women pre-Bayu-Undan. As WI:12 remarked:

Maybe the government policy change things because now we read many about the job vacancy “women are strongly encouraged to apply” (Interview: WI:12).

Tertiary institutes in Dili and Indonesia (at which eleven women had studied) operate on equal opportunities mandates, and so too do government departments, international aid agencies and NGOs. Over half of the women and KI:5 had worked for or completed vocational training courses with NGOs, with three involved in work related to gender issues. NGOs in particular have been seen as ‘typically drivers of change enabling new ideas and concepts to take root and challenge the traditions and norms of society’ (Wigglesworth, 2012, p. 45). Not only have the women inhabited these pro-women settings, they revealed at least a cognitive awareness of the impact (or not) of gender equality initiatives on women’s position in society, as seen by the following comments:

Now girls go to school and women to work....In the government job and oil and gas industry there is gender equality approach, but the government not take the action in the rural areas (Interview: WI:5).

I think now it is happening like we have SEPI, and Rede Feto- they care about domestic violence and the other things (Interview: WI:9).

Now the government is growing up...make the regulation of the gender equal rights...but now....has to make the regulation to improve the violence...it's everywhere (Interview: WI:10).

This cognitive understanding appeared to have extended to the male respondents.

6.2.6 Timorese men as a social resource

If a viewpoint informing this study is to avoid essentialising all men in a patriarchal society as having dominating and controlling behavior towards women and viewing women’s potential as inferior to theirs, then the logical corollary to this must be that there are men in these societies with attitudes and behaviours that value women as equals. All of the women in relationships indicated that their male spouse/partner supported their actions in applying for offshore work.

The views of the male interviewees around gender equality, while from a very small sample, are seen as important additions to the literature on Timorese men’s attitudes:

Gender equality in Timor - people can talk about it but in reality it's not high...when I was at primary school my father – he is lia na'in, the man who is the leader in the village – when we have dinner we just sit all together, no-one outside [KI:2 has mentioned that in Timorese culture women cannot be sitting at the same table as the men]. He say we do not look down on anybody. And then I think when we have the gender equality policy so it seems a little bit like this (Interview: MI:1).

SEPI is doing a good job – I'm proud because Indonesia has less women in government positions than Timor-Leste (Interview: MI:4).

When Caltech take the Timorese women to work offshore I think it's not bad – good for my company (Interview: MI:2, 57 years).

Most women here when they get married they have a limited life. But I say she has the right to work, not just to wash the dishes...And still there are those that go to work and then come home and do everything. The mentality I got from outside Timor-Leste is that I'm not going to treat my wife like that, and I feel sad that they are beaten and things like that (Interview: MI: 5, single, 10 years' experience living and studying in Europe)

A younger man, single, one of nine siblings, whose father is a farmer and mother a teacher, tells of how in his childhood the brothers and sisters did the same amount of work, and how he sometimes now cooks at home. When asked about the women working offshore, he said he believes if women feel they can do any job, ‘*even they are mothers*’ they should have the opportunity.

The next section, discussing findings around research question two, seeks to evaluate the women’s experiences as offshore workers on Bayu-Undan.

6.3 Timorese women navigating the offshore gas platform

In my job I am very enjoy because I can get the new experience, the many new friends, improve my English, adapt to the offshore (WI:5 Interview, 20th June, 2013).

6.3.1 Courage, self-Efficacy and excitement

All of the workers, women and men, prior to their first swing⁴⁷, have to undergo the HUET and Fire Safety or T-BOSIET⁴⁸ training. Once on deck they undergo an induction and thereafter are required to respond to any alarm as per Emergency Procedures at Station Bill.⁴⁹ Before I started the interviews KI:1, with a twinkle in his eye, suggested I ask the women about how the HUET/T-BOSIET training in Darwin went for them. KI:1 ‘*Some had never even seen a chopper before*’. A prior mock exercise had been carried out with much hilarity in the hotel pool for both male and female candidates to get used to holding their breath under water. The Timorese are not a nation of swimmers.

It was in the descriptions of these trainings that the women’s self-efficacy and courage in facing up to new challenges and the empowering outcomes in their achievements of new competencies became obvious. Nearly all passed the first time, most, but not all, initially being terrified as these woman described:

Oh my God, was very scary. But I think I have to pass – first time! I am very happy (Interview: WI:15).

The first time I freaked but got it seven seconds on the first go. Exciting!
(Interview: WI:3).

Two women simply took it in their stride:

Not scared, it's my job. Only one time to pass (Interview: WI:4).

⁴⁷ Swing is an industry term used for the period spent offshore as part of the FIFO schedule.

⁴⁸ The T-Bosiet and HUET include the same helicopter evacuation training - being inside a dummy helicopter cockpit as it crashes into a deep pool and then having a very small window of time to push out through the window and swim to the surface. In addition it covers fire fighting, sea survival, lifeboat training and emergency first-aid.

⁴⁹ Station Bill is a ‘posted list, which sets forth the special duties and duty stations of each member of a manned platform for emergencies, including a fire’ (IADC, 2013)

The HUET is good – I never make a mistake. Yes, I feel strong inside after taking the training (Interview: WI:9).

Overwhelmingly their attitude towards the training could be summed up as ‘*Bring it on!*’, in other words as hugely empowering and nourishing of self-efficacy. All of the women felt excited about the Fire Training (where they have to be able to exit, helping co-workers, from a whited-out smoke-filled space). WI:16 described it as ‘*fantastic!*’

Most westerners could probably conjure up an image of an offshore oil or gas platform. Very few Timorese would have reason to. When KI:1 offered the opportunity to work on Bayu Undan to Venture Hotel waitresses one asked what a *platform* is and he realised the women had absolutely no reference point. For all of the women and some of the men this was their first time in a helicopter and on an offshore installation:

Oh, what the hell is this? We are in the middle of the ocean – we cannot see land, anything, just busy machines, heavy items, noisy ones (Interview: MI:4).

Scared first time on platform – can't see anything but sea (Interview: WI:12).

All I can see is deep sea and sharks (Interview: WI:6).

One cannot underestimate the degree of adjustment the Timorese women had to undergo, immediately, in order to perform their work confidently. Initial reactions tended to be fear and awareness of the noise.

It is very hot in the coveralls, the crane is very noisy, our eyes look red. When there was an emergency on my first swing I cried – miss my family (Interview: WI:1).

I'm very scared, I can't see anything and it's very dark (Interview: WI:4, first swing was nightshift).

Two women were terrified when they heard the first drill alarm, thinking there was a real fire.

With the induction on arrival and the encouragement of Western supervisors and more experienced Timorese male workers it appears the women adjusted to the environment early on. WI:10 was excited as soon as she arrived ‘*I say it's like one*

island – it's nice. I'm dreaming'. Three of the women expressed their appreciation of the 24/7 availability of a Medic to go to when they feel tired or have the headache or backache. KI:1 and a New Zealand Aid Programme contact had warned me that I would not want to have an accident in Dili as the hospital facilities were woefully inadequate, which gives some appreciation of the value the women placed on the offshore services for the crew's physical and mental well-being. It was one aspect of a pervasive and entrenched culture of safety that they became integrated into and shared responsibility for.

6.3.2 Women with safety empowerment and systems effectiveness

Organisational behavior literature refers to employee safety empowerment, taken as a certain degree of autonomy in decision-making around safety, for individuals involved in teamwork in high-risk environments (Dainty, Bryman, & Price, 2002). Hsu et al (2008) claim that employee empowerment is one of the key elements of safety climates on oil refinery plants to be evidenced in the degree to which employees feel accountable for site safety and actively contribute to safety reporting and discussions (Hsu, Lee, Wu, & Takano, 2008). On Bayu-Undan, while the Offshore Installation Manager (OIM) who heads the offshore platform chain of command has overall responsibility for the safe management of a facility, individuals must play their part, with everybody trained to check for and report hazards:

It is not just the top man – as long as you involved, you have the responsibility. Everybody feels responsible for everything. Everyday before we start we have the talk about the safety (Interview: MI:6).

My diary notes describe how assertive the women were all about their level of responsibility for safety in the big picture of the offshore HSE culture as is shown by the following quotes:

So my responsibility [as bridge controller] is to notice anything wrong, note on yellow card, say to the guys can't go across as crane has dropped something. My responsibility is to everybody (Interview: WI:1)

Just always in the mind is safety, safety, safety (Interview: WI:15, Timesheet Coordinator).

My job, when people come and request the things they need, they have to have the work order number because it is all about the safety (Interview: WI:10, Materials Controller).

A conclusion arising from the data around this issue is that competency around safety was a capability outcome for the women.

As well as the alien physical environment and imperatives surrounding safety responsibilities, the next big challenge for all but two of the women⁵⁰ was in entering a predominantly male world.

6.3.3 Women entering a mesh of masculinity

To get some visual impression of the women's work setting I viewed a *You Tube* video clip about jobs and life on Bayu-Undan (ConocoPhillips, 2012b). If this was all one came to know about the site one could be forgiven for thinking that it is all about men only running the operation, strong men doing all the physical work, and crew relations based around male camaraderie. The sixteen Caltech women, as well as those working for ESS and a New Zealand female Supervisor give the lie to this perceived male monopoly.

Nonetheless, with the crew exceeding 400 personnel (including the 200+ maintenance and inspection additions since early 2013), the atmosphere is overwhelmingly male, and Western. It was definitely a culture shock for most of the women, many of whom are small in stature, to be confronted with big Australian, English, Scottish men when they began their jobs offshore. The work relationships of the women with these men vary according to their position. For some of the bridge controllers, the prospect of having to stop the men, and even the OIM, to say they could not pass over the bridge due to maximum Persons on Board (PoB), or a crane operating, or because they were not wearing the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), at first seemed daunting:

⁵⁰ These two women had worked in Indonesian mining settings where most of the workers were Indonesian males. Of note is that while male this potentially would have created a different work culture to the Western male Bayu-Undan environment.

The first time stopping the OIM I'm very afraid. Now I'm happy. The first meeting had to speak – very afraid. The second time I just tell them (Interview: WI:13, the tiniest woman).

Some of the guys are very big. I'm frightened for my language but they always listen to me (Interview: WI:8).

But others had no issue with having to stop busy men:

I stopped the OIM many times. That's why they give me the shopping voucher (Interview: WI:3)

Yes of course! I have to stop one of the operators. Of course – this is our job! (Interview: WI:7).

I am comfortable with the other people because at the [NGO] we have all people from other countries (Interview: WI:14).

I say, "No you have to stop! Even you are in a hurry" (Interview: WI:6).

Some women with other positions had barriers of anxiety to overcome in presenting their first reports to site meetings. One of the women expressed pleasure that her supervisor had taken her under his wing, making sure she knew what she was doing:

They take care of me because they say I'm the young girl and only woman in here. My first safety presentation went well because they help me. I am successful (Interview: WI:8).

WI:10 who is also working as an only woman alongside Western men in her area is adamant that it is all about communication '*If I don't know I just ask*'.

It appears that the Timorese women have exhibited considerable agency in having the confidence to ask advice from superiors, with the possible exception of one who described herself as quiet and shy. This latter *outlier* can be seen in the light of a Timorese cultural dictate that she explained thus: '*When your boss is doing something you have to wait. You don't interrupt him*'. Nonetheless, this particular woman, with a

degree in mining engineering, had had her potential valued and re-directed into a new, more skilled position on the platform that she expected to master imminently.

It seems that any barriers around the women's imperfect grasp of English were also being broached with determination:

My supervisor is a big man and I have to ask him to speak slowly because the English here is different to what I learnt at school [American pronunciation]. Many people from Scotland, they speak so fast and I understand maybe five out of a hundred words (Interview: WI:11).

This woman had no problem reproving any men who laughed at her attempts at English telling them that they needed to correct her, not laugh, and this can be seen to reflect her sense of agency that she has the right to be supported in her goal to do her job well. Three of the men (all bridge controllers) observed that the women are open to and skilled in interacting with anyone.

As a social resource the Timorese men with greater industry or English-speaking experience have helped the women become integrated into the crew by translating instructions. The narratives point to a cohesiveness within the Timorese sector of the Bayu-Undan community. As MI:1, who has a Bachelor of Education in English explained: '*We're all comfortable working together – all cultures. Like brothers and sisters because we are in the middle of the ocean*'.

As explained in sub-section 6.2.5, being respected by men in their at-home lives pre-Bayu-Undan was not an alien experience for these Timorese women. However, now they inhabit new identities as the first Timorese women to be recruited into permanent positions on a platform where there had only ever been other highly skilled women from other countries working in ones and twos, which suggests they might have had new attitudinal frontier of acceptance from male co-workers to surmount.

6.3.4 '*The rule is the men have to treat us with respect*'

(WI:6 Interview 20th June, 2013)

One of the women was keen for me to have a copy of the platform owner company's "HSE Culture Expectation" notebook. The cover Logo 'WAVES' stands for 'We All Value Each Other's Safety'. WI:3 explains how this is interpreted:

In the offshore every person is the same, that's why they put the motto 'All of us must value each other'. So no discrimination (Interview: WI:3).

Another woman alludes to feeling safe from male advances:

The company offshore is about respect and is very strict on no relationship allowed offshore. It's the policy so I trust that nothing happens (Interview: WI:10).

Without wishing to stereotype an ethnicity, the only blurred edge to the line that must not be stepped over regarding male/female relations seemed to be in the behaviours of some non-Timorese South-East Asian men. One married woman mentioned that on her first swing they jokingly said "*You are married?... Are you single?... You want to marry me?...OK no problem, no problem*". Only one woman reported having any experience that might be construed as seemingly blatant sexual harassment when one of these men brushed too close to her butt for her comfort in a space where there was plenty of room. She discussed this with a Timorese male co-worker, declined his offer to deal with the issue, and then confronted the man herself saying that if he did it again she would report him. The male was very apologetic, knowing that his job could be jeopardized. The woman was well aware and confident that she had access to recourse should she wish for it. As another woman explained: *If anyone makes us feel uncomfortable we have to report this to our supervisor* (Interview: WI:2).

The above incident could be seen to reflect three things: the woman's self-confidence that she had the right to be offended by the man's behaviour; the perhaps overly protective attitude of the Timorese man to his female co-worker, and; an apparent workplace culture based around strict behavior protocols that discourage men from seeing their female work colleagues as anything other than co-workers to be respected as such. KI:1 cynically suggested that as '*...Timor as a nation hasn't curbed domestic violence and is not real harsh on harassment either so the rig is safer than the Dili market*'. In there not being space for the women to be objectified as females the

way is less problematic for them to evolve into their new identities as competent offshore workers.

6.3.5 Offshore identities: women doing ‘women’s work’ and women doing ‘men’s work’

As a prelude to the ensuing narrative interpretations, it is important to bear in mind that all of the Timorese women have had to meet the level of competency required for their position. Nonetheless, one of the male bridge controllers expressed initial surprise to be working alongside women on the platform, and implied that he had adjusted his thinking about the Timorese women’s aptitude being less than the men’s:

When we come we think they do it not fast or make a mistake, but it is not what we think. It is good – they are performing like men as well (Interview: MI:1).

While I did not get the sense that the women felt that male crew members were waiting for them to prove themselves as women workers in a male world as was the case of the women mining workers in Australia (Pirotta, 2009), a theme arising from some of the male interviews was that the Timorese women are better suited to the *soft jobs* like the bridge control and data entry:

I think it is best for them to be the secretary (Interview: MI:3).

Of the catering and stewarding jobs one man commented:

The job the Timorese women are doing in the ASV is right for them – like in the kitchen (Interview: MI:6).

It is of note that men also perform the bridge control and housekeeping jobs. Interestingly, I felt that two of the male bridge controllers interviewed (both of whom have tertiary undergraduate degrees in non-petroleum related studies) *talked up* their job – not in an egotistical way, but perhaps to give it more status thus maintaining their self-esteem. They presented it as less simple than the women did and more as an important educational role integrated into wider platform systems. While all of the offshore positions require high levels of accuracy, meticulousness and responsibility, bridge control was described by KI:1 as:

The level that requires the least skills and pretty much any background can learn. You don’t need to be an engineer (although one of the female bridge controllers has a degree in mining engineering) ...*you just need to be willing to go offshore* (Interview: KI:1).

One of the more skilled men, concerned to see qualified Timorese women doing bridge control, was asked how he would feel about his sister doing the job:

I say no way if you spend all this time at university (Interview: MI:5).

This man has had experience of working alongside women engineers in the O&G industry, which could explain his view that women should be employed in work that measures up to their skills capital.

The women bridge controllers were much more frank about the job being boring at times. Some mentioned ways in which supervisors tried to introduce variety into their jobs. Whether being bored in scarce dignified well-paying work, at an early stage of the employment relationship when you come from a LDC, is a serious threat to a woman's sense that her potential is being realised is a moot point. Yet, while eventually the *rust-out* syndrome raised in Chapter 3 could well be a compromising factor to their well-being, in fact, the key informant testimonies indicated that Caltech regard this position more as a port of entry or recruitment bank. That is, a way to get the Timorese recruits offshore experience in order for them to be more *job-ready* if an opportunity should arise for a different, more stimulating position.

If we know more by working offshore we get the higher job (Interview: WI:15).

Some of the women have had their eyes opened to the possibility that women have the capacity to perform some of the more ostensibly male jobs on the facility. This reflects a cognitive shift in their thinking around for women to realise their potential through non-traditional work, and also the degree of self-efficacy that they could achieve the competencies required. Women entering work that is normatively considered a male domain draws attention to themes in both chapters two and three around new female identities changing the gendered orthodoxy of workplaces.

A fortuitous reality of Bayu-Undan, unknown prior to the fieldwork but that stimulated a level of intensity in the narratives around this issue, was the presence of a New Zealand woman with the position of supervisor of the blaster/painter team that included two Timorese men, one of whom was Leading Hand⁵¹. Additionally, an

⁵¹ A leading hand can allocate work to other workers under the direction of a supervisor, help with training new workers and also perform manual work as per his/her job description (WorkplaceInfo, 2014).

Australian woman rigger⁵² had worked temporarily on the platform. The Timorese women's comments are testament to their sense of agency in feeling, on witnessing these expat women at work, that they can expand their choices of occupation:

The Aussie rigger woman – oh she is strong, big shoulders! I'm interested to try. I'm going to the gym every night offshore... (Interview: WI:6).

I would like to do blaster/painter. The men said it is hard job, only for the men. I have to wait and train but I think it is possible (Interview: WI:3).

She [the Kiwi woman] works very hard. My [male] supervisor asked if I would like to be blaster/painter. I say maybe one day I try (Interview: WI:9).

First time I saw the Australian rigger woman I feel excited. I want to be like her but I'm too small (Interview: WI:11).

KI:2 says expanding the range of work for women is about willingness, and after being approached by one of the women about training for so-called men's jobs she observed:

When you like the job it doesn't matter how small you are. When I hear about [the New Zealand woman] I think wow, then she [WI:3] can! If the Kiwi woman can why can't she? (Interview: KI:2).

WI:10 was the first woman who had secured a more *male* job, doing materials control, and showed a high degree of self-efficacy and self-confidence in asserting her competence:

I have to carry heavy things. First time my supervisor was worried I wasn't strong enough and then first swing they were very excited and said "Wow, she can do it." I say of course, it's not just part of the men's job. If I can I will do (Interview: WI:10).

When I put the question to the male interviewees about the Timorese women doing the more *male* jobs such as rigger and blaster/painter they were in a way *put on the spot* about their attitudes and opinions. I believe that some of the men made cognitive shifts

⁵² Some of the many jobs a rigger performs on an offshore platform revolve around transferring equipment from one facility or vessel to another, operating winches, loading and unloading supplies from the helicopter, erecting and dismantling scaffolding (The Resource Channel, 2014).

during the interview in their thinking around equal opportunities for Timorese women to pursue non-traditional work. Some examples can be found in Appendix F.

However, one of the men came into the interview with his views already clear on this issue:

Even we can say that some women have a different build and they can do the same job as the man – yeah strong (Interview: MI:7).

Of note is that this young man shares the domestic task of cooking when he is at home, uncharacteristic for men in his society, indicating that he has more flexible views on gender roles than the Timorese male stereotype. He was also supportive of the notion of Timorese mothers working offshore.

6.3.6 Straddling worker and mother identities

Chapter two raised the issue of the playing out of household gender roles when mothers work away from home for extended periods such as the month-off of the Bayu-Undan women's FIFO schedule. All of the Timorese offshore mothers talked of making a clear demarcation between times offshore when they can and those (whilst at work) when they must not, think about their children and home. One mother with her baby being looked after in a far away village waits until she returns home to make contact (twelve hours by ferry and then a long overland hike). Another was grateful of the company of other mothers offshore to talk with at the end of a shift. Of those who had children living with their fathers, they straddled two roles. The women get 5-10 minutes every evening to call home, and this is when they clearly put their *mother hat* on:

Have to focus offshore. Can't think about family [during work hours]. When I call I remind the kids to eat their veges (Interview: WI:6).

I tell my kids when they miss me that I have to work (Interview: WI:3).

I want to feel my mother responsibilities when offshore – I remind my husband of his [parenting] responsibilities (Interview: WI:4).

I talk with my daughter, tell her to go to school. Sometimes my husband complain, so I call to my Mum to come to looking after her (Interview: WI:11)

There did not seem to be a need among the mothers to explain their decision to work away as a big sacrifice of having to leave their children – that is, of having developed a cognitive narrative to assert their continued commitment as mothers. Nonetheless, KI:2 had this to say:

These women are special – willing to do that for their family. Very committed to their kids.... You can't find many Timorese women to do such a thing – especially with pressure from their family (Interview: KI:2).

Chapter two discussed how workingwomen in developing countries may or may not be in a position to re-negotiate household roles that have traditionally seen them as having to carry out the reproductive work on top of their income-earning work. It was suggested that for some women this might not be a priority. Further, the empowerment aspect of workingwomen's new economic status opening possibilities for greater decision-making power over household spending, and new opportunities for achieving valued well-being outcomes was raised. These issues will now be discussed as they manifest in the at-home lives of the women in this study.

6.4 Changes to the women's onshore lives

6.4.1 Household gender roles

Most of the women assume some responsibility for domestic tasks when back in their homes, with mothers taking care of children. While some mothers commented that this was hard work, all enjoyed seeing their children after missing them offshore and got pleasure from noticing 'growing up' changes in them. One said that she liked to give her husband a rest from family duties because he got stressed when she was away. Those who mentioned taking up the cooking role in the family were happy to be relieving a female family member of the responsibility. Three women told of their pleasure in maintaining a garden and caring for livestock while at home. One woman, whose child was in the district, stated that she found housework boring. KI:4 reported her volunteering to do jobs in the company office in her at-home time:

Because she say she only do the housemaid [when home] and she was like, "Oh my God, can you give me something so I have reason to get out of the house!" (Interview: KI:4).

Another woman (pregnant with her first child) said she sought outside stimulation in voluntary work as an English-speaking guide to relieve the boredom of being at home.

As many of the women showed a disinclination to discuss relationship issues this small amount of evidence simply gives a range of responses to their shouldering of domestic tasks when not at work⁵³. It would be disingenuous to attempt to make any evaluations as to whether any gender-role re-negotiation had occurred in their relationships or to make assumptions about whether the women desired this or not. Nonetheless, none of the women showed any sense of feeling subordinated in their management of their domestic responsibilities which suggests that they have not experienced the interface of their work and at-home identities as being a see-saw between high and low self-worth.

6.4.2 New 'at-home' identities

Most of the women were reticent about describing how their new identities as offshore workers might have changed their status in the community⁵⁴. However, one response to inquiry around this issue is worth mentioning:

You know if the woman goes to work offshore the people think the woman is smart because in here [Timor society] the men is actually everything.... So when the girl go to work offshore the people think she is very, very smart that's why she can get the Visa and work over there.... When the men in here want to talk with her they are scared They are not used to that. Even with me doing my job they think I am operating the oil and gas there! (Interview: WI:10)

One of my diary entries on tells of a physical demeanor in the women that I interpreted as reflecting a strong sense of self (as I have had my own contemporary dance school for over twenty years I am a skilled observer of body language):

I am so impressed by these women. They appear shy, but that could be because of their struggles with expressing their answers in English ... I watch how they walk out of the room after the interview and chat with the office ladies and some

⁵³ The narrative of KI:5 (single) with a job in the onshore office was to the contrary. While not corroborated by data from other Timorese onshore workingwomen, her situation did seem to reflect the literature that reports of the typical over-burdened lot of workingwomen in developing countries expected to cook and clean on top of working (Momsen, 2010). This woman faced considerable stress in having to arise very early in order to complete domestic tasks before going to work, and her weekends seemed to be filled with having to cook for extended family members who converged upon her household when she would have preferred to rest after an intense week at work. The offshore swing precluded this occurring for the target group while they were working.

⁵⁴ As stated in Chapter Five by K:1 Timorese children are not brought up to talk about their strengths.

have quite a sassy, firm step, others are laughing and expressive. Some I have seen with their girlfriends or other male offshore workers and they are animated and relaxed (Diary entry, 22 July 2013).

Further observation would be required to assess whether this confidence transfers into kinship and social settings. One mother, who had sent her 11-year old daughter to a seminary to keep her safe and give her a good education, did say she felt judged by some people for not being a hands-on mother, but that this did not faze her as her work was very important to her. The pregnant women are committed to going back offshore as soon as their maternity leave expires, one saying how much she misses Bayu Undan and the other that the money is good. For all of these women, being a working woman sits comfortably with being a mother which, given their initial aspirations to realise at least part of their potential by working and earning an income, is not inconsistent with their belief in women's right to be other than solely a wife and mother. For all of the women the new income was a major incentive to continue working offshore.

6.4.3 Enhanced economic status and greater opportunities

The main finding around the women's new economic status is the expansion of options for spending, saving and providing financial support to extended family members. As one woman said '*the onshore salary is not enough to support your goals*' (Interview: WI:2). The offshore salaries they are receiving are exponentially higher than those from previous onshore levels. For one woman previously working in a stationery store for wages well below the minimum wage (USD112 per month), she is now earning in a day what previously she earned for a month. At the very least, for most women they are around ten times better off. Their current offshore incomes considerably exceed those of most middle class incomes of Dili families, which are anecdotally established at USD300-500 a month. For at least half of the women their incomes absolutely dwarf the family incomes they grew up with in the villages.

When asked about how their income is allocated most of the women spoke in a clear, direct way, using sharp hand gestures to indicate divisions for their monthly salaries. On this level of income it is not surprising that all of *daily necessities* (that is *practical needs*) of the women and their immediate families have been met. A significant amount is separated out into savings in the bank (at least 25% for the four FG members). All of

the women who have children or are pregnant showed a big commitment to supporting their children's future education. One of the single women expressed concern that she, as a woman, needs to save for children she is yet to have to a father she has yet to meet. Saving for their own study needs was a commitment of five women, single and married, and a single woman has plans to accumulate enough for a building for a future business. Being able to have savings in the bank was indicated to me to be a whole new phenomenon, and new material resource, for Timorese people. A key informant explained that even if a husband and wife both work onshore and pool their money '*they cannot save the money*'.

Three women talked of savings as buffering them for everything they will need in the future. The women in the FG indicated spending on, or savings for, *quality of life* purchases such as clothing, handbag, family outings or a computer. Four women have bought motorbikes: '*Now we can go wherever we like one the weekends, on the motorbike. I think it is better, lots of change*' (Interview: WI:6). Paying for a nanny or babysitter (who also cooks and cleans) was budgeted in to the outgoings for three mothers, a 'local content' multiplier effect. Having economic autonomy was a particular valued capability for the mother on her own: '*Not many women in Dili own their own house. So many women depend to their husbands. I feel like I have the confidence in the future* (Interview: WI:9).

6.4.4 Decision-making around new income

Shared decision-making between spouses around spending and savings goals stood out as a common feature. For one woman who describes herself as stroppy:

My salary is higher than my husband's but it is not like I am the big boss. We share incomes and have savings goals (Interview: WI:3).

For another:

We have to discuss it. My salary is bigger than his (Interview: WI:6).

None of the women have husbands or partners earning more than half their salary, and for those with spouses doing security guard or driver jobs, their salary might be as much as ten times bigger. The mother on her own was proud to say that she can make her own decisions around how her income is spent.

6.4.4 Agency, high incomes and cultural obligations

One of the major themes to emerge from the data is the cultural expectation that those with more money will support extended family members and contribute more to cultural events such as weddings, funerals and birthdays. Kinship or family obligations in the Timorese community are compelling and tend to over-ride all other considerations (Costa-Pinto, 2012). These are important social mechanisms that have ensured the collective survival of families, and several of the interviewees indicated their contributions to family were expressions of love, for example in the re-roofing of parents' houses, sending sugar and tobacco to a father, buying goods for an aunty to sell at the market, giving a sister access to a bank card whilst offshore and supporting siblings through tertiary studies. Others explained their contributions to extended family thus:

It's a cultural thing. If you have the job you also have the responsibility towards your brother, your cousin, your nephew because when I went to school they also help me (Interview: WI:8).

It depends on who you live with. If you have lots of family and get a better job, it's natural that you have to support your family (Interview: MI:6).

Most of the family around Timor, when you have a bigger income you have lots to pay – your cousin getting married, or your neighbour. You have to give the money (Interview: KI:1).

I was told, however, that these obligations can place a huge burden of responsibility on both women and men which the literature on this issue in Timor-Leste reports (Costa-Pinto, 2012; Earnes & Faulkner, 2009). As MI: 5 explained: '*When you marry, you marry the family. You can end up with no money left*'.

The general impression I was getting was that, aside from the intrinsic or extrinsic reward (of greater inner self-worth or of family appreciation) through having the economic capacity to fund extended family advancement or well-being, all of the interviewees had assumed an extremely important and pivotal position in the family. In fact one of the youngest and single women had been able to use her higher economic status to demand time out for herself:

I say to them, “You have to understand me. Everything depend on me, every month I give money. Let me rest and take care of myself so that I don’t get sick offshore” (Interview: WI:13).

Given the very high comparative salary levels of the women, it did seem that family demands would need to be excessive before their new financial status was seriously undermined. KI:3 thought that most of the women were managing to save but warned that you have to be strong to do this. She reported some of the women had called her from offshore saying they need to ‘*pay this or that culture thing*’, and that these demands would largely be coming from men. KI:2 made the distinction that these demands were more for social than cultural needs.

It was not far into the FG, which had been initiated to further explore these issues, when we were establishing headings for the different areas of spending for the women’s pie charts, that commitments to fund *culture parties* arose, in particular those involving male drinking that they seemed to doubt as legitimate. A lively dialogue broke out between two of the women:

FGW1: *Culture parties ... how to call in English? The party, the celebration*

FGW2: *Sometimes every week when you are at home someone is asking [for money] ... even when we are not at home*

Me: *Because you are rich?*

FGW2: *But it is true!*

FGW1: *Because in our culture, when a woman gets married, or it’s something like the brother or aunt when they have some party or funeral we have to help them – to give the buffalo, or like money. This is our culture!*

We discussed the practice of *barlake* and how they are asked to give buffalo or cash to their parents, brothers, uncles for a marriage or money for the wedding party. They told me a buffalo can cost from USD500-800, a monetary demand can be as much as USD5,000.

FGW2: *Sometimes if they ask for buffalo we cannot save for something – that is more important than what we have [for ourselves]*

FGW1: *Every month we have to pay 10% for the culture*

FGW2: *They ask too much! Sometimes they ask for beer!*

Me: *Do you give them money for beer?*

FGW2: Yes. We have to. Usually from the uncle. Not every month, but if they have a celebration for something they always ask us.

Me: How do you feel about that?

FGW2: Not happy. But we have to. Even if the uncles are working. Even if we don't have, we have to go to borrow from someone else or the bank....But for now we have the savings. We get it from there....

Me: Are you able to say no to any of the demands?

FGW1: Not to our uncles because even we say like that they are angry, and in our culture when our brother or uncle get angry we get sick

FGW2: (sighs) Yes!

FGW1: Bad culture. Every day have a culture party!

FGW2: Every weekend!

FGW1: We have a big family.

One of the key informants told me that going offshore was like a 28-day holiday from family demands for some of the women. While the high salaries have still clearly enhanced the women's and their immediate families' valued ways of doing and being, a serious question around agency needs to be raised with respect to the ways in which men in kinship networks have capitalised, sometimes accompanied by intimidation, on some women's ability to fund their spurious *culture parties*.

6.4.5 Capability around safety spills over into at-home lives

Sub-section 6.3.2 notes the women's enhanced empowerment around safety. This could also be deemed a realisation of a potential as they have learnt new behaviours and are exercising greater leadership on this issue at home. Additionally, this can have an impact as a catalyst, albeit small, in inculcating a wider HSE culture in Timor-Leste society, As MI:6 described:

Here [in Dili] safety is not on the top– here most of the people never wearing anything, guys on roofs with no helmet, no glasses, no boots. If you say you have to wear these it is like something strange.

The following quotes from the women attest to these low levels of safety awareness that they now feel they have a new role in rectifying:

All mothers care a lot about the children and the safety but the offshore experience means applying at home ..., not to rush, to look for risks, not playing

with the sharp tools ... I told my husband the gas inside the lighter is under pressure and flammable, because now I know. And I tell him to wear a mask when he paints (Interview: WI:3).

Now at home they listen to me, they know that safety is number one (Interview: WI:9).

When I go on the [big] ferry to Atauro Island I say to my sister, Oh my God! Where are the life boats? (Interview: WI:15).

According to KI:1, the construction arm of his company was for a long time one of the few, if not the only, business to adhere to international HSE standards in Timor-Leste.

Safety at work was not the only issue around which Caltech has played a leading role in Timor-Leste. At the time of the research anecdotal and data evidence suggested that Caltech was also one of the few, if not the only, private sector business committed to fostering the realisation of female potential in ways beyond the scope of most Timorese women. Chapter five raised an intent of this thesis to evaluate the ways in which Caltech's ethos, approach and processes might constitute an *enabling* mechanism for, or have a catalysing effect upon, the target group's enhanced agency, capabilities, opportunities and well-being outcomes. This function relates to research questions one, two and four and is now explored.

6.5 Employers play a pivotal for women realising their potential

Caltech, as the only locally-owned company contracting nationals onto Bayu-Undan, has played a critical role in advocating for and initiating the inclusion of Timorese women in this aspect of the project's local content. This role is alluded to in the title of this thesis as a *mechanism*, which also incorporates the actions of Caltech's owner/management individuals in fostering the women's learning and earning ambitions and in taking a pastoral interest in their well-being. As an economic and social entity operating in the sense of a causal mechanism, Caltech is rendered a primary contextual unit of analysis around the concept of Timorese women *realising potential*. As such it must also be seen in relation to the socio/cultural, economic and historical contexts of Timor-Leste, to the rarity of gender as a component of O&G local

content commitments in developing countries and in light of the immense frustrations encountered on a daily basis in trying to run a business in the chaotic realities of the newly independent country (Interview: KI:1).

As previously referred to, Caltech's intent in promoting women for offshore positions did not arise from a lofty development goal of contributing to Timorese women's empowerment. Nor was there a deliberate strategy to assist with transforming a wider social environment that is disempowering to women, as KI:1 explained:

The idea we had when we started Caltech was not to empower women, it was to help with the development of East Timor by creating as many jobs as we can...Most employees were young and inexperienced and needed to be trained and time to build up confidence. They also needed to come to terms with the fact that they were now expected to make decisions rather than consistently have a malai⁵⁵ telling them what to do (Interview: KI:1).

Caltech's commitment to hiring Timorese accompanies its employers' understanding that there are obvious reasons for their often low capacity, a reality as explained in Chapter Four that in other developing countries has prompted the employment of expatriates on O&G projects and for a reluctance on the part of global O&G owner/operator companies to agree to mandating numbers of nationals, let alone women nationals, on these operations (Tordo et al., 2013). As K:2 said of Bayu-Undan's situation:

They don't have to have gender equality in the local content but we push for the women and they kind of like the idea.....It's hard to find people at this stage who are really qualified to do the job so I'm looking for attitude, commitment, how many people in their house ...these things are all tied up together...One of our waitresses who shows promise to go further was a little girl selling vegetables, recommended to me by the local nuns. She is learning English just by remembering (Interview: KI:2).

In the context of Timor-Leste's LDC status and limited labour market there has been little opportunity for many to gain hands-on experience navigating technology or

⁵⁵ *Malai* is the Tetum word for foreigner.

operating machinery, tools and equipment, (let alone even recognise a lot of tools, machinery or equipment), follow instructions, develop a good work ethic, or put into practice qualifications gained that may not bear any relation to available jobs. Thus much of Caltech's HR approach has been about recognising potential in the staff and then patiently (not without much frustration) building capacity and advancing the opportunities of the '*bright stars*' such as in the case of three ex-Venture Hotel waitresses now working on Bayu-Undan:

With the women I'm probably like a father-figure so if I say "you should probably apply for this [offshore] job, I think you have what it takes" they do. A lot has to do with the growth we have given them as women. They have started with the low job and never thought they would end up on the rig (Interview: KI:1).

While Caltech is now not the only company contracting Timorese women offshore⁵⁶, it was they who first tendered women as prospects to join offshore crews and have influenced later decisions on promoting women's interests offshore, such as putting a woman forward for rigging/scaffolding training. Being locally-owned and having Timorese at management level would appear, from the data, to have given them greater insight into the Timorese woman's reality and lent weight to their negotiations around women's issues as can be seen in Appendix G on the subject of Bayu-Undan women becoming pregnant⁵⁷.

Prominent Australian writer about East Timor, Gordon Peake, in his newly released book *Beloved Land: Stories, Struggles and Secrets from Timor-Leste* talks about the individuals with flaws and qualities who have played a role in changing the society (Leigh, 2013). The often ad hoc approach told to me of growing Caltech amidst the uneven, chaotic, fluctuating flow of social change, incoherence of the bureaucratic systems with which the owners have had to engage, and the mostly stagnating pace of economic progress of Dili, into a business model operating to international standards in construction, training, clerical support and safety could read like a fiction of struggle on a post-conflict Third World frontier. Yet, the empirical tone and detail of both KI:1 and

⁵⁶ As has been previously mentioned global company ESS is contracting Timorese women to do housekeeping jobs.

⁵⁷ This issue did not arise as a significant theme in the data, yet warrants a mention as an example of the need for women's socio/cultural context to be considered in these circumstances.

KI:2's narratives represented a cogent oral source of truth and information, which combined with what I believe to be my robust observation over a month of their daily activities and interactions with the Bayu-Undan workers, have lead to the interpretation in this thesis that this employing entity has constituted a major causal system facilitating the enhancement of the women's potential, personally, socially and economically. KI:1's many stories, especially, coloured with historical and social contextual insight, drenched with incisive clarity of recall, and laced with cynical humour were as far from fiction as a masters researcher could want⁵⁸.

Nonetheless, in concluding this chapter I have chosen to use a poetic style, using verbatim interview and email excerpts of KI:1, to bring to life for the reader (Thody, 2006) this important thread of pioneering history (of both Caltech's actions in shaping local content to include women and the outcomes of the women entering non-traditional offshore jobs):

local content door opens for Timorese women

*2004 x-delegation came to Timor
looking for a Timorese business
driving round Dili-town
no HSE standards on most construction sites
until they drove past one of ours
surprised
safety boots being used and even more to see
overalls
safety vests
hard hats
and eye protection*

⁵⁸ I gathered these narratives knowing that there is a fine line between a person's description and interpretation of social reality, and that while I had considerable faith in the truths of my observations and of what I was hearing, in unpicking the essence of the Caltech reality from these data sources I was not seeking to make claims that are absolutely true (Van der Mescht, 2004).

*we sign a MOU was rather vague
we did not know what we could offer
they did not know
what they really wanted
out of their Timorese partner
first is a driver and vehicle
then a logistic person
this is where we recruited
the first lady
if you do not need physical strength for the job
hire a woman*

*several year went by
no insurance company
to insure a Timor-based company
2009 or thereabout x-company ask us
put Timorese trainees on our books
then we had fifteen Timorese offshore
all men
off the record
corridor chat, our idea
regarding possibly employing ladies
for some of the roles*

*x-company like the idea
give it a try
back-to-back female bed spaces limited
our first two offshore ladies admin clerk
a few months later
document controller
we got no objection when we proposed two more ladies
then bridge controller positions
a mix of male and female
recruitment bank for other positions
now sixteen female offshore*

*you know it seems to be going well
we have exceeded the required level of Timorese
there is an economic incentive
there is a cyclone
you just bring them back to Dili
it tests your will
as a company
do you actually believe in it
or do you actually do it because you had to
throw in a few extra bodies
and not affect your operations*

*so if the people we send
are very competent
the operational people won't see
the number of Timorese as a problem
now there is a fear
if we start pushing too hard
this woman wants to become a sand blaster
you double up pushing the boundaries
"I had a competent Filipino doing this job
now you want me to hire a Timorese?
now you want that person to be a Timorese woman?"*

*therefore to me
if you want to be a blaster painter
you gonna have to wear the gear
for as long as any man
you gonna have to put the painting
in the same coating
if you fail
you will get the same bollocking
you pass the verification of competency
no longer a female blaster painter
a blaster painter*

*you remove the gender from the equation
you look at the human doing the job
so now I need to fight to get the riggers' position
I don't have any rigger offshore
it's how you sell the person
you know
“Jean, I need a rigger”
yeah I've got someone
very competent
“yeah Jean, send him”
it's not a him it's a her!*

(Adams, 2013)

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

I think the most important thing is to encourage the female to be a leader, to know how to take a decision. Because male, it's natural for them, even from the family, it's already natural for them (KI:3, July 5, 2014).

This thesis has looked at the experiences of a group of women in a Least Developed Country (LDC), Timor-Leste, whose pathway to realising their learning and earning potential has led to the capability of non-traditional work on an offshore oil and gas (O&G) operation. In being trained in new competencies, respected as responsible offshore crewmembers and paid well, the women have experienced dignity in and at work, and enhanced social and economic status. For these women to achieve this unimagined outcome has required their commitment in pursuing aspirations and opportunities for vocational training and paid work, and the commitment of their employing body to the belief that, as the above quote suggests, women in their country can do more than cook and look after children.

Timor-Leste is a society where a patriarchal ideology pervades that undervalues womens' aptitude and relegates them to the domestic sphere subject to the authority of men (Pires, 2004; Wigglesworth, 2012). Nearly half of the girls do not have any education and of the minority of Timorese women who are in the labour force most are in vulnerable work (SEFOPE & DNE 2010;SEPI 2013). The stories of the target group of this study paint a different picture. From the end of their secondary school, (and for one shortly into marriage), the women in the study have exhibited a *critical consciousness* in crossing normative aspirational and behavioural frontiers to set themselves the strategic goal of economic independence (Agarwal, 2001; Alkire 2011; Maton, 2008). Thus the data points to an early high level of agency in the women encompassing psychological and cognitive components characterised by a self-belief in their right and potential to shape their lives, a thirst for learning and self-efficacy, courage and determination (Stromquist, 2002).

The evidence of this agency in late adolescence provides an important contestation to the implication in much of the literature that girls in societies like Timor-Leste where patriarchal mores prevail must, per se, be rendered docile and passively accept limited

activity and aspirational scope for their futures (Corcoran-Nantes, 2011; Feldman, 2001). A conclusion is also drawn that equal opportunities educational environments have shaped the women's positive attitudes towards their cognitive aptitude, understandings of their learning potential and of the benefits of pursuing further competencies (Charles, 2011; Stromquist, 2002). In the light of research question one, all of these characteristics represent part of the capability set that assisted the women in their pathway to offshore work.

Whether these personal aspects alone would have been sufficient for the target group's goals to be met is a moot point. The data has revealed them as also having a critical cache of social resources and the fortuitous availability of opportunities for developing their human capital, which are some of the enablers the first research question has sought to canvass. The amalgam of ideas from Sen's capability approach, Gender and Development (GAD) and feminist literature informing this study sees agency, resources and opportunity as integrally linked to women's aspirations and achievements (Kabeer, 1999; World Bank, 2012; Robeyns, 2011).

The evidence of tangible encouragement and support from family members to seek formal work, for most especially from their mothers, shows these women's experience, many of who grew up in the remote areas at the weaker end of the reach of state-sponsored gender equality initiatives, to be an important departure from the limited aspirational and activity scope ascribed to Timorese girls in family settings as portrayed in the literature (SEPI, 2013; Wigglesworth, 2012). Further, in being supported by their male spouses and partners, the Bayu-Undan women's experience departs from concerns raised in the 2013 CEDAW Report of a prevailing attitude in society that having an independent income reduced the likelihood of single workingwomen finding a husband and also that Timorese wives who are no longer economically dependent on their husbands can face resentment, and for some violence, from them (SEPI, 2013).

The narratives show the women's belief in their value as equals to men, their right to seek enhanced skills and to hold non-traditional positions has been reinforced and normalised in new social realities within which exist a culture of gender equality, outside of their family, and for many village, settings (Hart, 2013; Flick, von Kardoff, & Steinke, 2004). These have been the tertiary, vocational training, NGO, onshore and

diaspora O&G industry spaces they have inhabited which, along with acceptance by the Timorese male co-workers interviewed for this study of women working as equals alongside them, are seen to be a social resource.

This thesis argues, therefore, that if greater numbers of jobs in non-traditional fields, accompanied by relevant trainings, were made available for women in Timor-Leste there will be other young women with a critical consciousness, self-efficacy, courage and determination, and family or relationship support who will be keen to take up the opportunity.

It has been an intention of the research to explain the catalysing role (or causal mechanism) of the women's employers, Caltech, in opening opportunities for non-traditional offshore work on Bayu-Undan for the Timorese women participants. The Caltech co-owners, confident that there were Timorese women, both with and without tertiary qualifications, who had the potential to meet the challenges demanded of offshore workers, tendered the idea to the owner and operator companies of including them in the local content employee component on Bayu-Undan. The ensuing training and recruitment of the women in this study has resulted in the evidence of the women adapting and coping successfully with the challenges and requirements of working on the platform. The realisation of their potentials has materialised into new competencies and responsibilities, improved English fluency, confident interactions with male personnel, advanced understandings of risk as actioned through the practice of HSE imperatives, and in their acclimatising to the long shifts, the FIFO schedule, and the isolated and harsh work environment.

In answering the second research question, this thesis concludes, from the shared meanings found in the women's narrative testimonies, that their new capability as effective offshore crewmembers has brought about important personal empowerment outcomes of enhanced self-worth and self-efficacy and the respect of others in their workspace (Kabeer, 2012).

The research confirmed my prior expectations, arising from the literature on offshore work cultures and information on the site behaviour protocols, that the women would largely encounter respect from offshore male co-workers and management personnel

(Miller, 2003; Austin, 2006). In the one instance raised in the data of disrespect being shown the woman in question was confident of her right to expect respect from men for her personal space. In spite of the warnings some were given by family members of the risks of women entering a workspace dominated by foreign men, the data has indicated that the platform was experienced as a safe and secure place for them to be as females. Additionally, the women received support from Timorese male workers in their initial adjustment period.

The realising potential lens was used in the study as a tool to highlight whether, and/or to what extent, this had eventuated through the women's recruitment to offshore jobs. As it has been pointed out in the second chapter *realising potential* is a process occurring in different ways and in different stages, and needs to be considered in the light of the women's shared contextual realities (Kabeer, 2014; Alkire, 2001; Hart 1995), in particular in a newly-independent, post-conflict country where job opportunities are sparse, the spectre of poverty is ever-present and contemporary ideas of gender equality have yet to be integrated at all levels of society (Wigglesworth, 2012).

Kabeer (2014) argues that the kind of work that is empowering for most women in developing countries and that they value is simply formal employment that offers some form of social protection and security. It is therefore not surprising that job satisfaction was not at the forefront of the Bayu-Undan women's responses around research question two. At one level there was a perceived sense of self-confidence in knowing their work was integral to the efficiency and safety of operations and that they had unproblematically taken on board the non-discursive nature of offshore roles and objective tenor of workplace flow and systems (Parkes, 2013; Outhwaite, 1998). On another, there was a shared enthusiasm about the new learnings and crew camaraderie, pride around fear thresholds being crossed and having responsibilities for site safety, feeling comfortable about the offshore culture of mutual respect and in having the support of the medic, and appreciation of earning incomes that are exponentially higher than any they could ever earn onshore. These subjective positives seemed to outweigh the reported stresses associated with fatigue due to long shifts and separation from friends and family. Seen by the women as an important outcome, and therefore

requiring highlighting, was that their HSE training had resulted in them exercising more informed leadership than previously around safety in at-home spaces.

The risk of *rust out* undermining the realising of potential of the bridge controllers raised in chapter four has been identified by their employers who see their role as opening up opportunities where possible for these workers to upskill into more stimulating jobs. This is a fundamental response to the fourth research question enquiring about new opportunities arising for the women. One woman has, since the fieldwork, been trained in rigging and scaffolding as a result of this thinking, which reflects her enhanced agency in believing it to be possible to redefine gendered roles (Mosedale, 2005). Other women in the study have come to see their potential to acquire skills and ultimately secure work in historically male occupations such as blaster/painter and rigger brought about their witnessing a Western woman performing hard physical work on Bayu-Undan. The literature suggests that globally there is only a small minority of women filling these positions in the O&G industry (Kammerzel, 2011). For this opportunity to be available for, and taken up by, more women in developing countries with discriminatory gendered orthodoxies in their labour markets, such as Timor-Leste, would represent a significant, albeit small, change expressed through new feminine identities of strong and strong-willed female workingwomen.

How the new workingwomen identities of the target group accommodate household roles was an important line of inquiry for research question three. The stresses reported in the literature encountered in the households of FIFO and female migrant workers as gendered roles are re-negotiated when they return home were not evident from the data of this study with all of the women indicating they willingly resumed their usual domestic responsibilities. There was no sense that they felt subordinated or that their household task load was unfair, as has been typically reported of workingwomen in developing countries (Momsen, 2011; Syed, 2010). Yet it would be of interest to gain a greater understanding of the ease with which the mothers adapt back into a parenting/domestic role as time goes by living the FIFO life and to more deeply explore the attitudes of fathers towards their assuming greater parenting responsibilities when the mothers are offshore.

Informing the main thrust of the thesis, and underlying the fourth research question of this thesis, is the argument put forward in the GAD, feminist and Sen literature that formal employment for women in developing countries can bring about an expansion of freedom to exercise choice in shaping their lives in ways that they value (Kabeer, 2012; Nussbaum, 2001; World Bank, 2012). The research has revealed that the new feminine identities of the women, as competent, well paid offshore O&G industry workers has increased their social and economic status at home. This is a clear well-being outcome of their original strategic goals to become economically self-reliant, and to improve their lives through learning and earning. As Sen would say, their increased capabilities have led to well-being freedoms as manifested in their enhanced ability to support a better lifestyle and future for themselves and their children (Sen, 1999). Additionally, their enhanced economic resources have served to buffer the livelihood and shelter needs of, and open opportunities for better futures for, extended family members. Some of the outcomes of this have been re-roofing the parents' house, saving to build a new family home, purchase of a computer, handbag or motorcycle, supporting an aunt's market stall, funding siblings' education and paying for extended family events.

While the evidence suggests that the women as a whole are willing and proud financial contributors to extended family causes, a potentially significant compromising aspect to the women's greater economic status was raised in the narratives that would benefit from more in-depth research. This being the concern that the incomes and hence sense of economic autonomy of Timorese workingwomen are at risk of being eroded by demands from dominating male family members for cash for spurious *culture* reasons, or from the escalating incidence of more lavish culture events as a result of the collective family financial resources being boosted by the women's earnings.

To conclude, whether it is possible to replicate the combination of a group of women from a LDC imbued with agency and social support, a local private sector employing entity embodying commitment and tenacity in fostering local women's potential and advancing their interests and a workplace setting, historically male, where the women feel respected and valued is not for this thesis to say. However, it is hoped that the findings of this research might encourage the more widespread inclusion, in meaningful ways, of more women employees from host developing countries in the local content of offshore O&G operations. Where more women will feel they can say, as one Bayu-

Undan woman, previously a waitress, has said '*I am proud of myself as a woman*' (Interview, WI:15).

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Appendix: A

Bayu-Undan Women Interviewee Job Descriptions

Bridge Controller: this job is largely to monitor the flow of human traffic across the bridges to DPP, CUQ and ASV, to notice and notify of problems arising at the crossing point, and to check if passing personnel are wearing the correct Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) (Caltech Human Resources Department, 2013).

Document Controller: responsible for the management of the organisations' documents
Timesheet Co-ordinator jobs have offshore administrative responsibilities for collating and transmitting crew timesheets and are office-based.

Materials Coordinator: has to, among other tasks, manage materials (e.g. hire and non-hire equipment, dangerous goods) and expedite orders for materials (Rigzone, 2012).

Fabric Maintenance Technical Assistant work concerns work orders, procurement, records and data relating to fabric maintenance (Caltech Human Resources Department, 2013);

Safety Officer Trainee position involves assisting, monitoring and encouraging compliance with safety management systems, and participating in incident investigation and reporting matters (Maersk Oil, 2013).

All positions require personnel to participate in special safety musters as directed.

Appendix: B

Questions for the individual female Bayu-Undan workers

SECTION A: Life on Bayu Undan

1. I am interested in what your job on the platform entails (what are your areas of responsibility, how your days are organised, where on the platform you carry out your work). Can you tell me about what you do out on the platform?
2. Can you talk about the people you work amongst? Are there other Timorese women or men doing the same job as you? Who do you have the most to do with and in what ways? How do you get on with your other crewmembers? And your supervisor and bosses? How do you feel about working with mostly malai men? Using English?
3. How do you find the safety regime? The drills? What is your level of responsibility for safety? How has this changed your behavior around safety at home?
4. Can you tell me about your training with Caltech before you started work offshore eg Huet, T-Bosiet & Fire? and the ongoing trainings you have?
5. Can you talk about your first swing on Bayu-Undan? Coping with the 12-hour shifts and month-on? What has been the hardest thing to get used to? What do you think about the accomodations? Having a Medic on hand? The isolation and weather?
6. How do you feel you are received as a woman crewmember? How do the men relate to you – while working, and at knock off? Are there ways that you think you are treated differently because you are a woman? (If so/not how do you feel about this?)
7. Are there any women from other countries working on the platform? If so, what are their jobs? What did you think when you saw them working offshore?
8. How do you rate your job satisfaction? Are there other jobs you would like to do offshore? How do you think your bosses would respond if you asked them for training in, say, blaster/painter or rigger?
9. Tell me about the ways in which you communicate with people at home while offshore. What are the challenges?
10. Are there particular things your family and/or husband need to talk to you about?
11. How does being offshore affect your relationships back home? (eg harder to keep a finger on the family pulse and decision-making, discontinuity with friendships, family/school/community events, its worth doing offshore work for the month at-home time, handling strife, kids/husband/partner miss you, you miss them)?
12. How would you describe the changes in your role in the family while offshore? Eg being an absent mother?

SECTION B: The pathway to Caltech & Bayu-Undan (agency, resources, opportunities)

1. How did you find out about the offshore work on Bayu-Undan? What were your reasons for applying for the job?
2. What made you think that you could ask for a job interview for offshore? How did you know that women could apply for offshore work?
3. What were your qualifications/work experiences when you applied for the job? What is the most important skill in your job? Eg English?
4. What was it about you that you think made Caltech choose you for Bayu-Undan work? How did you feel when you got the job?
5. What do you think it takes for a Timorese woman to work offshore? What advice do you give to other women who are interested?
6. What makes you different from other Timorese women, in the pathway that you have chosen? (Can you describe your upbringing, family circumstances and standard of living, attitudes of parents to your future expectations and aspirations?)
7. What sort of opportunities did you get to pursue further studies or work after senior secondary school? And encouragement/support? (from parents, family, husband? With childcare?) What is it in you that was the driver to pursue these?
8. What do you think about your Timorese female bosses at Caltech etc?
9. How is Caltech different from other Timorese businesses in their approach to female employees? How do you feel in being employed in an equal opportunities setting?

SECTION C: Life on shore

1. Tell me a little about your home life. Who do you live with? How many people live in your home?
2. I know it is hard to adjust physically, mentally and emotionally when FIFO workers come back to the beach. Can you talk a little about how it is for you? (Picking up the threads, expectations, circadian rhythm and tiredness, family understanding these stresses)
3. What happens when you first come back home? What are the things that are most important to you when you return home? How is it having limited time?
4. Can you describe how the jobs that family members do around the home might change when you are away and return? What are the jobs you do around the home? How do you feel about your role when back home? Has this changed since you started working offshore?
5. And your friends? What are the social things you do? How much time do you have for friends? Are there things you would like to do but cannot because of time or family commitments? How do your friends relate to you now you are an offshore worker?
6. What do you think people in your community think about you as an offshore worker? Are there changes in the ways they talk to you?
7. How did your husband/partner/family feel about you working on Bayu-Undan at first?
8. Can you talk a little about how decisions are made when you are at home? Eg around the use of your income?
9. How is it for your position in the family now that you have the highest income?

10. It seems as if you might have two different identities in your different work and home worlds. Can you comment on this? How is it for you shifting between these identities?

SECTION D: Capabilities, achievements and opportunities

1. What are your most important achievements associated with working for Caltech on Bayu-Undan? Skills acquisition? Learnings? Improving English? What are the benefits?
2. What are the hardest challenges? What helps you to face/overcome these?
3. Are there resources or types of support that would make it easier or more enjoyable for you in your training and work?
4. What opportunities have opened up for you as a result of your employment on Bayu Undan? Are there opportunities you would like to have?
5. Has knowing about women from other countries doing so-called ‘men’s work’ on offshore operations changed your ideas on what Timorese women (and you) could do?
6. What sorts of improvements in your life have happened? For you and your family?

SECTION D: Gender equality in Timor-Leste society

1. What was your thinking about gender equality before you took up this work? And where do you think this thinking came from?
2. How do you think government policy gender equality is having an effect on women’s rights issues in Timor-Leste?
3. Has being an offshore worker changed how you think about Timor-Leste women’s place in society?
4. I’m interested in how working on a Western platform that has equal opportunities practices and policies supporting the equal treatment of women workers has influenced your thinking about women in paid work in Timor-Leste?
5. What opportunities are there in urban Timor-Leste for women to get vocational training and paid employment? Have you any thoughts on what would have to change for more Timorese women to get well-paid, skilled work?
6. Do you have any comments on the idea that the Bayu Undan women workers could be role models for their daughters and other young Timorese women?

Appendix: C

Questions for individual male Bayu-Undan workers

Section A: offshore work history

1. Can you tell me a little about your job(s) in the petroleum industry? Offshore work? For how long? What operation? What responsibilities/job description?
2. Where did you do your training? What is the extent of your education?
3. How did you feel when you first went offshore?

Section B: women offshore workers

1. What did you first think about Timorese women working offshore? How do you think they are doing on Bayu-Undan? What is your relationship with them?
2. What do you know about women from other countries working offshore? What offshore jobs do you think Timorese women should be doing offshore?
3. What would you think of a Timorese woman doing say the blaster/painter job?
4. What do you think about Timorese women having equal pay and opportunity with Timorese men offshore?
5. How do you think the offshore work environment is affected/changed by having women (and especially Timorese women) working offshore?
6. How do you see other men (Timorese, Filipino, Western, co-workers and supervisors/management) relating to the Timorese women offshore?

Section C: Timorese offshore women at home

1. What opportunities do you think the offshore work has opened up for the women? Especially with the higher salary?
2. How do you feel about mothers working offshore? About the extended family looking after the kids? What challenges and adjustments do you think would be encountered by the women?
3. How do you think roles in the home might/should change when the women are offshore & at home? Also decision-making?
4. What sort of role do you have when at home? Domestic work? Children?

Section C: New social and economic status for Bayu-Undan women

1. What changes might have occurred to the Bayu-Undan women workers' status in their families? In the community?
2. How do you think having the much higher salary has changed life for the women?
3. How do you think the husbands/families/friends/other men respond to them having a much higher salary?
4. What sort of demands does having the higher salary place on you to support your extended family? How do you think this would be for the Bayu-Undan women?

Section D: Women & Caltech in Timorese society

1. What do you think these women have that others do not that enables them to get the offshore work? What qualities do you think the oil/gas companies and Caltech are looking for in their female employees?
2. How does Caltech's approach to women compare with other companies? How does being part of an equal opportunities/gender equality culture affect you as a man?
3. Do you think society in Timor-Leste is changing in its attitude towards women? In what ways have the state gender equality policies improved things for Timorese women? GBV? Women's aspirations and opportunities for paid work? Rural/urban women?
4. Where does your thinking (*if evident*) on gender equality come from?
5. What changes do you think are needed for more women to get vocational training & paid work?
6. In what ways (if at all) has seeing women working offshore change your attitude to/beliefs about Timorese women & paid work?

Appendix: D

Interview questions for KI:1 and KI:2

1. My research is looking at your pro-active approach to training and recruiting Timorese women to work offshore. What have been and are the influences, events and personal drivers in your life and outlook that have led to the gender equality practices that you have incorporated into your company systems?
2. Can you describe how you see your role as private sector employers in a developing country such as Timor-Leste? Is fostering the realisation of Timorese women's potential an explicit or conscious element in your company's goals, strategic planning and evaluations or is it more implicitly woven into your company values and the relationships you establish with your employees? How do you view their potential?
3. Regarding promoting women into offshore work? Are there particular insights you have about women in Timorese society that impact on your approach and practices?
 - a) What have been the types of personal qualities, education, skills and work experience that you have looked for in your female off-shore cadres?
 - c) How easy has it been to attract women to being interested in the offshore work?
 - d) Are there any particular supporting factors that make it possible for some women to apply for the jobs?
4. I am wishing to get a picture of the experiences of skills-training of the women for the offshore work. How did they respond to the training experiences? Did you have any particular approaches that took into account their gender?
5. And the same for their introduction to the offshore FIFO schedule and 12-hour work roster and the platform environment?
6. What sort of feedback do you get from the women of their experiences of working offshore? How have they adapted to working in a 'male' work environment? What are the changes evident in their sense of self?
7. Is there a place for your senior company women to carry out pastoral care for the offshore women workers?
8. Can you talk about what happens if a woman becomes pregnant while in an offshore position?
9. Can you tell me about the Bayu-Undan protocols around gender discrimination and sexual harassment? Have you been aware of any need to emphasise these?
10. Have you any understandings of how the Timorese women are received on Bayu-Undan? Have they changed the workplace environment?
11. What new opportunities/choices/obligations do you think or know have arisen with the women now receiving a huge increase in income?
12. Are there opportunities for the women to upskill/change positions on Bayu-Undan? For example what would be required for the women to train as a painter/blaster or rigger?
13. How is the phenomenon of a Caltech owner being female received in Dili private sector?
14. As an integral component of your fulfillment of the local content drive for the oil/gas industry in Timor-Leste, how do you view the phenomenon of your female employees, with skilled jobs working both FIFO and in non-traditional

work, in relation to social development in your country? Are there socio-cultural changes around women identities that you might foresee happening in the at-home lives, the family and urban/social communities of the women?

15. How much of similar equal opportunities practices to yours do you see happening around you? What are the socio-cultural and economic changes that are needed in your country to make this a more widespread practice?
16. What attitudes/belief systems/gender roles & power dynamics that still exist in Timor-Leste society might undermine the Bayu-Undan women's sense of empowerment?
17. Who, other than the women themselves, will benefit from their offshore work, and how?

Appendix: E



Te Kunenga ki Pürehuroa
Development Studies Programme

An Exploration into the Experiences, in their On- and Offshore lives, of Timor-Leste Women Employed in the Oil and Gas Industry

Information Sheet

Greetings,

My name is Virginia Adams. I am from New Zealand, and am conducting research for my Masters thesis into the experiences of Timor-Leste women who are employed to work on the Bayu Undan offshore gas and condensate platform. As a result of my extensive study of women involved in offshore work for the oil and gas industry globally, working on the Fly-In-Fly-Out roster, I am aware that this group is probably unique. Therefore I feel privileged to have the opportunity to tell their stories.

These women live in two different worlds – the offshore, Western platform and the at-home Timor-Leste society. I am interested in the challenges, changes and adaptations they experience as they move in and out of these worlds. I am also keen to understand how their vocational training and recruitment through a local company's equal opportunities practices have impacted on their lives and sense of self. I am seeking to gather accounts of the women's experiences as well as the insights of other key people who have an understanding of their work, or of issues around women and education and paid employment in Timor-Leste urban society.

If you agree to participate in this research I invite you undertake an interview with me to offer your thoughts, observations and opinions. For the women offshore workers I also invite you to join a group discussion with some of your co-workers that will be scheduled to fit around the FIFO roster. Please be assured that everything you say will be confidential and anonymous, and that you may decline to answer any question, may ask me anything about the study, or withdraw at any time.

I will be happy to distribute a summary of my findings to participants in the research.

If you have any questions about the research project please feel free to contact my supervisor or me. See contact details on the back of this sheet.

***Thank you very much for participating and supporting this project.
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Ethics Declaration

“This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently it has not been reviewed by one of the University’s Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Professor John O’Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz “

Appendix: F

Insights into men interviewees as a social resource for the women

1. Research design adapts to include men

Initially I was adamant that I would only interview the women workers and key informants, no male workers. I felt that this would give me plenty of narrative material to work with. By the time I had interviewed ten of the women the prospect of interviewing some of the men had arisen, but I was still adamant that the study should rest predominantly upon the women's stories. The following field notes indicate my thinking process in changing my mind:

'I am not feeling like I want to interview the Caltech men because the women seem to feel privileged to be interviewed as a unique group of women.... Not sure if this limits the richness of my data! S [KI:2] thinks it will be very interesting for me to see what the men think'. (Diary Entry, June 24th 2013).

'I do not want to interview any men as the women are clearly empowered by being singled out & if they saw me interviewing offshore Timorese men I think they would feel less special'. (Diary Entry, June 28th, 2013).

I then re-considered as I learned more about how much all of the Timorese offshore workers, men and women, consider themselves to be like a family drawing moral and practical support from each other on the platform.

'Sooo, my thinking has changed haha. Am now interviewing men. And blown away by their attitudes and opinions...[an enthusiastic Portuguese male contact in the office] offered to contact the offshore guys in his soccer team....so far six, including [a 57-year-old driver] who has been associated with the company since its inception. What a rich mine of informant data I would have missed out on if I hadn't done this. Doesn't bear thinking about'. (Diary entry, July 4th 2013).

It was in the male interviews that I was required to self-negotiate my positionality around gender equality. At certain points, having been fore-warned by KI:1 and KI:2 of the Timorese sexist male stereotype, I could feel my inner feminist rising and wanting to leap to conclusions over some comment made by one of the men. My subsequent restraint and neutral probing, however, was rewarded again and again as the men qualified their responses in ways that were supportive of the women and revealed a depth of insight into the complexities around the advancement of Timorese women's interests on a predominantly male work site. While nonetheless cautious that the men could tell me what they think I wanted to hear I did sense that the men were being frank and honest.

As my diary notes imply, the study has been enriched by these contributions, particularly as they support the warning expressed in Chapter 1 of the dangers of pathologising all men as sexist in societies with patriarchal legacies. The following quotes give some insight into some of the the men's attitudes:

MI:1 Gender equality in Timor- people can talk about it but in reality it's not high...when I was primary school my father – he is lia n'in, the man who is the leader in the village – when we have dinner we just sit all together, no-one outside [KI:2 has mentioned that in Timorese culture women cannot be sitting at

the same table as the men]. *He say we do not look down on anybody. And then I think when we have the gender equality policy so it seems a little bit like this.*

MI:2 (57 years old) When Caltech take the Timorese women to work offshore I think it's not bad – good for my company.

MI:5 (single, 10 years' experience living and studying in Europe) Most women here when they get married they have a limited life. But I say she has the right to work, not just to wash the dishes...And still those that go to work and do the job and then come and do everything. The mentality I got from outside Timor-Leste is that I'm not going to treat my wife like that, and I feel sad that they are beaten and things like that.

A younger man, single, who is one of nine siblings, father a farmer and mother a teacher, tells of how in his childhood the brothers and sisters did the same amount of work, and how he sometimes now cooks at home. He believes if women feel they can do any job, '*even they are mothers*' they should have the opportunity.

Given that there is a dearth of writings about the attitudes of male nationals from developing countries towards female co-workers on offshore operations, and that this study could well be a first, I felt a heightened obligation to listening to and interpreting their narratives with an open mind.

The diaspora experience of two of the men in Australia, Europe and England had undoubtedly informed their views on gender equality. MI:5 talked of how his 10 years in Europe has given him an appreciation of equality in gender roles in the household, that women deserve the same rights as men, and of how the cross-cultural influences offshore could change the Timorese male mentality where men say, for example: '*I pay for everything therefore I can do what I want. You should be happy with your lot, you have to cook my dinner*'.

2. Men making cognitive shifts

The following dialogues reflect what I felt to be were cognitive shifts being made by the men interviewees as they took the time to think through the issue of Timorese women being employed in jobs offshore that have overwhelmingly historically been filled by males:

MI:1 (who initially expected that the Timorese Bayu-Undan women might be less competent than the men) when asked how he felt about equal opportunities policy meaning that a woman, WI:8, got the HSE job that he was interested in, replied:

Yeah yeah yeah (lots of laughter). That's good once how to the gender equality make competition about the job...even the woman working as men I appreciate, don't look down on them (Interview: MI:1).

MI:3 (Has a BA in Architecture from Australia and been doing labouring, scaffolding, rigger, blaster/painter, and TA jobs since 1998 – when asked about a Timorese woman being a blaster/painter..)

I worked with a female Portuguese engineer – it was very good... I think the blaster/painter job is very hard for the Timorese women – very difficult. It is a very high risk for the boat, because sometimes the ladies can't live in the boat...I think it is best for them to be the secretary [the bridge control and other office positions]...They can't become these scaffolder, blaster/painter without the experience.....

They get the training and I think Yes. I think Yes! I think maybe more than five years...I have a very good working relationship with N.. [Kiwi female blaster/painter supervisor] - she is tough. That is progressive for the woman to come to work on Bayu Undan but she is working very hard- she is a strong worker.

MI:4 *For example [MI:3] has been working here for six years, actually he is still only leading hand not supervisor, so to become supervisor [like the Kiwi woman] there is many processes to go through – for Timorese women it could be okay for them but hard thing to be a supervisor.*

MI:6 (who thought the ASV job in the kitchen was right for the Timorese women and has spent some time working in restaurants and a car factory in England)

Because painting you can say in our country that's a man's job. In another country everyone can do anything because some of them is strong....I'm not seeing that in here [Timor-Leste]....

...but if some of them are wanting to I appreciate that and say "Go for it!"

MI:5: *Oh firstly I think it is a bit tough for Timorese women to work 12-hour days...doing the bridge control job – it's not tough job but 12 hours to stay there and sometimes they do nightshift.....it's good that they work in the office, like doing timesheets that's better than go to the field and involve with technical work"....."Yes, they are physically not strong enough ... Timorese people their health is different for example from Australia. Because they are small and the condition of the food sometimes is not so good...*

By the end of the interview:

When I mention before the way the women not qualified – they have to be qualified to work as blaster/painter. But should be okay if they want to learn. And we don't find that many women here like to do this – we don't actually have here women who act as builder or scaffolder or painter – I never see this in Timor. That's why their thinking is limited.

Appendix G

Caltech handling the issue of Bayu-Undan women becoming pregnant

An example of the way in which the company fosters the interests of the Bayu-Undan women regards the issue of the pregnancies that threatened to disrupt the continuity of the effectiveness of Timorese workers on the platform. This issue had generated some rumblings of frustrations amongst the client companies and offshore male personnel. A pregnant woman is not permitted, due to safety rules, to continue working on the platform. Before their Maternity Leave provisions come into play (as per the Timor-Leste 2012 Labour Code) Caltech provides them with onshore office-based work. The key informant women assumed the responsibility of reassuring the pregnant women of their long-term job security, and of finding a way to cultivate an understanding among client company personnel and male co-workers of the realities for women and fertility in Timor-Leste. Further, it appeared that KI:1's actions in ensuring an ongoing supply of *offshore ready* female employees, had diffused client company concern over the site stresses caused by a potentially untenable number of positions being vacated by pregnant women. In doing so he had also retained the trust that his company, whilst continuing to pursue an equal opportunities mandate, was aware of the primary importance of Bayu-Undan's operational integrity.