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WHAT HAS BECOME OF THE SLENDANG? CHANGING IMAGES OF WOMEN AND JAVA

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The images of women in Java as depicted in academic studies, like their realities, have changed over the last half-century. An illuminating analogue can be found in the use of the *slendang*, a wide shawl originally made from batik cloth or from *lurik*, a striped coarsely woven material for daily use. To us, the transformation of the slendang over the past decades runs parallel to the development of studies on women in Java.

The slendang is a predominantly female attribute, used by women and girls. Men occasionally use a slendang, but only for carrying small children. The anthropologist Hildred Geertz describes the slendang in the 1950s as more than just a piece of cloth for practical use: "Carrying a baby in a shawl is called nggéndong; and it is this action that is usually re-enacted as symbolic of the mother's total care — for instance, at the wedding ceremony or at the harvest when the first ears of rice are carried home in a slendang. The slendang represents complete security…" (Geertz 1961:94). Women also use the slendang as a working "tool," to transport other loads than babies such as firewood, trading goods, or jamu. The saying "sapikul, sagendong" depicts the different ways men and women carry goods: men in two baskets on a bamboo shoulder-pole, women in one basket fastened in a slendang on their backs. "Sapikul, sagendong" sums up Islamic inheritance rule allocating sons twice as much as daughters, as well as the settlement formula upon divorce, when communal property is divided in three — two parts for the husband and one part for the wife (Geertz 1961:47, 50).

In the 1970s something peculiar happened to the slendang. Let us take a closer look at the ultimate Indonesian mother, Ibu Negara,[1] the late Ibu Siti Hartinah Soeharto, Indonesia's first lady in the New Order period, and how she transformed the humble slendang into a symbol of the Indonesian people as one big harmonious family. Following the pictures of her life we see

[1] *Ibu* is mother or Mrs.; *Ibu Negara* thus connotes not only The First Lady but also the Mother of the Nation.

that Ibu Tien never wore a slendang in her younger years, but rather carried her babies in her arms and posed for official portraits in kain kebaya (the traditional Javanese blouse, worn with a batik long skirt) without a slendang. From 1967 onwards, however, she appeared on all official occasions with a plain sash, which she wore diagonally, mostly from her right shoulder and knotted on her left hip, very much like her husband's official sash and the regal bands worn by visiting queens. Sometimes she had her regalia fastened on the end of this slendang. In private settings, Ibu Tien was never pictured with a slendang, for instance in photos showing her receiving representatives of women's organizations in her residence in Jalan Cendana, or cutting tumpeng at home for birthday celebrations. An official photograph with Soeharto and her mother in Javanese costume (Gafur 1993:510) underscores the fact that the slendang does not belong to the traditional costume of the Javanese aristocracy. In fact it never belonged to formal dress in Java. In the 19th century, the kain kebaya had become the costume of all classes of women, both Javanese and Eurasian, and until about the 1920s it also figured as a morning costume for Dutch women in Indonesia (Taylor 1997:103, Locher-Scholten 1997). President Soekarno revived the wearing of kain kebaya and it then acquired more or less the status of the national dress for women (Schulte Nordholt 1997a:13). The slendang, however, was never part of this costume.

So why did Ibu Tien add the slendang to her official dress of "Ibu Utama Indonesia" (the First Mother/Lady of Indonesia)? Her biographer notes that she started a trend of baju seragam, or uniforms, for women at meetings or other formal occasions like wedding receptions. This is in line with the general craze for uniforms under the New Order (Schulte Nordholt 1997a).[2] Ibu Tien herself explained that if everyone wore the same color and material for kebaya and slendang this expressed "kerukunan dan kebersamaan," or harmony and equality (Gafur 1993:293). For example, at the opening of Taman Mini Indonesia Indah theme park, all ladies from Ibu Tien Soeharto down to the most junior committee member wore a soft yellow kebaya, a batik kain, and a bright red slendang: "truly harmonious" (Gafur 1993:384). It looked as if the slendang in this outfit had a separate symbolic role. It was added to the basically Javanese costume for its "Indonesian-ness," as it was reminiscent of customary adat clothes from several other regions where a piece of cloth is worn vertically over the shoulder (Achjadi 1976). The impression of egalitarianism Ibu Tien wanted to convey through her

[2] Sekimoto (1997:319, 321) describes the new uniforms worn by members of PKK (the State sponsored Family Welfare Association) in Central Java in 1975, which included a slendang, stressing the function of uniforms in general as a sign of the wearer's closeness to the state in the New Order era.

uniform was ironically undone by the fact that in her costume she retained the batik kain, which is the Javanese status marker par excellence. In addition, the way Ibu Tien wore her slendang — diagonally — served as a reminder of status and power with its reference to the sashes of royalty and the military.

Thus, Ibu Tien managed to change the slendang from a practical tool for working mothers into an impractical part of a uniform national dress symbolizing national unity and harmony. Her slendang is definitely unfit to carry babies or heavy baskets but is loaded with overtones of status and power. As such, the slendang is a perfect example of what happened with the idea of “Java” during the New Order. It was transformed and reinterpreted according to political agendas: Java became more than the rice bowl of Indonesia. It became a lifestyle for all others.

This chapter is an offshoot of the discussion on the subject of “Java” (Pemberton 1994). It examines images of women in Java and the question of what the literature on women and gender in Java contributes to the subject of “Java” itself. Until recently the discussion on “Java” seems to have taken place outside the circles of those involved in research on women and gender in Java. There are various reasons for this state of affairs. The discourse on “Java” does not have much in common with the bulk of gender research, which until recently has primarily covered the daily realities of women’s lives: work, family and household , fertility, and health. In women’s studies the dominant discourse originating in the 1970s focused on gender and development and initially was not much concerned with “images” as such, neither images of women in Java nor of Java itself. Many of these studies belong to the category of applied social science. It is only during the past decade that a more symbolic approach has developed which has a clearer connection to the “Java” debate. In Indonesia another reason for the incongruence between “Java” and gender studies is that many authors focus on general, non-localized themes only. The image of Java seems to be a suppressed theme — another indication of political agendas at work? Finally we ourselves find it difficult to speak in terms of “the” image of Java, as there seem to be so many images of Java. One need only think of the sheer fact that Java has over 100 million inhabitants, more than 50 per cent of whom are women, which implies a huge diversity in terms of ethnicity, residence, education, class, age and life cycle, work, appearance, ideas, and aspirations.

Despite reservations, we decided simply to begin the exploration of images of gender and Java. It turned out to be a very exciting quest![3] We will start with a short overview of the major trends in gender studies within the earlier "feminist" and "development" perspectives. As mentioned, this part of the literature is not directly concerned with images, but they surfaced when looked for and support our conclusions on the images of Java. In the second part of this chapter we will dive into the realm of the cultural and discuss some recent studies that explicitly deal with "images" of women and gender.

MAJOR TRENDS AND IMAGES IN STUDIES OF WOMEN IN JAVA SINCE 1970

The archetypal image of woman upon which gender studies first focused was the "traditional" rice-harvester of Java — with *ani-ani* (finger knife) and slendang.[4] Inspired by the proliferation of studies on agro-economic transformation in the 1970s, women's studies — limited in number, but influential — examined the differential labor input of men and women in agriculture and management of the rural household (Hull 1975, Stoler 1977, White 1977, White and Hastuti 1980, Sajogyo 1981, Hart 1986). An important subject of these studies was the impact of the "Green Revolution," which made a significant contribution to agricultural production. But it also upset labor relations and resulted in a loss of employment opportunities for many poorer rural households in Java. These first authors related women's status directly to economic stratification and land tenure. Women from landless households seemed to be the worst off in terms of income and time-investment. Ann Stoler (1977) described how women have "traditionally" been more involved than men in income-producing activities outside rice cultivation. It was Nancy Peluso (1981, 1982) who shifted the focus from rice agriculture to the market. In addition to class, Peluso added household composition and local economic conditions to the analysis of women traders' work strategies. She pointed out that women's earnings are not just additional, but often constitute the largest contribution to household income. This conclusion was supported in many other studies.

[3] Exciting, not least because of the list of relevant literature we started to amass: it became longer and longer! Due to limited space we had to make a selection for this chapter; we have focused on Ph.D. theses and monographs in English, Indonesian, and Dutch with women in Java or Javanese gender as the main subject of study covering roughly 1975-2000. To do more justice to all the relevant literature, in particular the swelling literature published in Indonesian over approximately the past five years, we plan another extended publication. Here we would like to thank Roger Tol, Head Librarian of the KITLV, for his kind help in our long-distance search for material, Elsbeth Locher-Scholten for her valuable comments, and the two editors for both their encouragement and their efforts to rein us in again and again.

[4] The important role of women in rice cultivation has been significant in influencing the image of Javanese women since colonial times (see Locher-Scholten 1987:91).

Women's involvement in the diversification of Java's economy became the leading theme in the 1980s. Rural industrialization, combined with ever-increasing demographic pressure, changed women's work. Joan Hardjono (1985) noticed the general "enforced idleness" faced by many rural women due to a lack of employment opportunities. Most other studies of the 1980s and 1990s, however, deal with very hard working women, because they focus specifically on sectors dominated by women workers: handicrafts (Smyth 1986, Wieringa 1987), food processing (van Velzen 1994), and trade (Hetler 1986, Alexander 1987, 1990, Murray 1991). It is particularly the small-scale "informal" sector where most of women's work is located. The attention given to the informal sector also brought working women in urban areas into view. This sector absorbs many women who are married and need an income, but who do not have the opportunity to enter the industrial labor force as they are tied to the home and often lack sufficient schooling and access to capital (van Velzen 1994).

The growth of large export-oriented industries on the urban fringes created new employment opportunities for some and attracted a new type of worker: mostly rural female migrants, not necessarily from the poorest households, who were generally young and unmarried (Mather 1985, Hetler 1986, Wolf 1992). This profile contrasts with that of married older women working in long-established industries such as the cigarette industry (kretek), sugar cultivation, textiles, and tea production (Saptari 1995, Sukesi 1995, Hardjono 1990, Grijns 1987). Alongside factory work new patterns of putting-out and homework developed, which are often very exploitative (Chotim 1994, Grijns et al. 1994), although not always detrimental to women (Holzner 1994).The increasing scale and commercialization of prostitution, both in urban and rural areas, attracted researchers' attention as well (Purnomo and Siregar 1983, Murray 1991, Sunindjo 1993, Hull et al. 1997, Sulistyaningsih 1999). The diversification of the economy has obviously led to new forms of gender segregation in the labor market. Discrimination of women does not appear so much in the obvious form of different wages for the same type of work, but in a more hidden way as men and women are employed in different sectors of industry and in different divisions in enterprises. Generally speaking women have ended up in the more marginal sectors.

By following the economic changes in Java, the focus of gender studies widened. While earlier studies on women often used broad categories such as "class," "rural—urban," and

"women versus men," later studies added the complexity of relations between members of different gender, age, and marital status within the household. The theoretical debate also changed from the "different but equal" approach to discussions along the line of segregation and marginalization, autonomy versus dependency, and eventually differentiation and diversity.[5] Household studies became "en vogue" again, stretching the boundaries of the concept and introducing "forgotten" groups like female-headed households and issues of conflict and fluidity (Wolf 1990, Oey-Gardiner and Surbakti 1991, Koning et al. 2000). Whereas "woman" in the early studies was almost synonymous with "wife," attention to life-cycle and household relations brought a wide spectrum of roles to the fore, including the very young (White and Tjandraningsih 1998) and the elderly (Rudkin-Miniot 1992). Macro- and micro-level analyses are now often combined to show that women's working life seems to be in constant flux. Starting for example as unpaid family workers, young "unmarried" women move on to wage work in factories, or to jobs in the service sector, including the sex industry. After they have children they turn to putting-out work and become family workers or small entrepreneurs depending on the age of their children and available capital. When their children grow up, women may return again to wage work (but often in lower paid sectors), or they remain unpaid family workers or become self-employed, often in the most marginal sectors. Some older women with access to capital manage to expand their business as they have more time at their disposal.

Along with the theme of diversity, the 1990s added agency to the debate, especially when discussing relations in the family (Kusujiarti 1995, Koning et al. 2000). Wolf (1992) showed that village girls had their own reasons to choose factory work, going beyond economic push-and-pull factors and parental wishes. An analysis of women's agency makes clear that women do not just accept the status quo without question. The image of Javanese women and of the Javanese in general as "the meekest people of the world" (Het zachtste volk der aarde, as the Dutch used to call them) is shattered by studies on industrial strife, ranging from everyday resistance such as sabotage to full-blown strikes accompanied by violence and destruction (Mather 1985, Saptari 1995, Smyth and Grijns 1997).

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[5] See, for example, the contrast between Geertz's rather static picture of "The Javanese Family" (1961) and Koning's "Generations of Change" (1997), which emphasizes change and diversity and prefers not to generalize.

There is a basic image of Javanese women that inspired many of the above studies on women's work. It is the "delightfully refreshing cliché" of the Javanese woman as economically independent and thus enjoying high status, which has a long history in studies of women in the whole of Southeast Asia (van Esterik 1996:1). The fascination with work, independence, and power is rooted in the Western feminist debate of the 1960s and1970s, which struggled to do away with women's confinement to household and family. Interestingly, the debate on the "high" status of women in Java has not abated in the least (although there is no space here to develop this), but the rather naïve assumption that their work automatically provides them with a more elevated status towards men in comparison to women in the West has been convincingly challenged. As we will see below, this is an important contribution of the symbolic approach, which has built on data provided by these earlier studies.

A different set of images appears from the studies on women's reproductive capacity and reproductive health. The high fertility of women in overpopulated Java (and Bali) has been a headache for the Indonesian New Order government since its inception, and it was a constant objective of that government to reduce the birth rate as much as possible. It is therefore not surprising that several studies of the 1970s and 1980s explore those factors that determine fertility (White 1977, Achmad 1980, Williams 1987). Van Esterik (1996:xi) is even of the opinion that "the family planning literature vastly overwhelms all other concerns." Next to the New Order government's policy, research has also been directly or indirectly engendered by multilateral donor agencies that have given vast support to the Indonesian family planning program (primarily the World Bank and World Health Organization).

In the 1990s the general acceptance of the principle that the state has to strive for "health for all" generated reproductive health as a new concept. This concept has stimulated a shift of emphasis away from the narrower focus on women's fertility as such and includes a marked interest in women's perception of their own needs in relation to health care, their agency, and the problems they face (Wibowo 1991, Niehof 1998). Although reproductive health seems at first sight a conveniently neutral term, many researchers have used it to open up the discussion on a range of subjects still sensitive in Indonesia such as maternal mortality (the highest in Southeast Asia), teenage sexuality, unwanted pregnancies and abortion, women's

reproductive rights vis-à-vis responsible birth control, women's sexual rights, and women's vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases.[6]

The choice of subject and location in most research on reproductive health has given rise to a lopsided representation of women. The studies deal to a large extent with health in the modern medical definition, and most research populations consist of poor rural women who have come into contact with modern health care fairly recently. Therefore many studies transmit ignorance as the overall characteristic of this large category of women in Java. They are also predominantly portrayed as at the mercy of the state in taking care of their health and as tending to defer to figures of authority, men, women of higher social class, as well as male and female health providers (see for example Wibowo 1991, Sciortino 1992). It is interesting that those who are reluctant to accept criticism of the Family Planning Program (Adioetomo 1993) as well its most ardent critics (Yuliantoro 2000) seem to share the same image of poor rural women in Java as generally passive and subservient. Another image that comes through is women's conservatism. If women take action to care for their health, they tend to do it in a traditional way or only as far as their limited understanding of the benefits of modern health care allows.

If we look at the visual image of women in Java conveyed by the literature, it has diversified tremendously. Taking the archetypal woman of Java as our starting point — the traditionally clad woman in sarong and kabaya with a sanggul at the nape of her neck, standing in a rice field — we can only conclude that this image has truly become a stereotype of the past.[7] So many other images have come forward in the meantime. We see a woman at work on a tea plantation, wrapped in plastic between the tea bushes, and we stumble on another nearly falling asleep in her shed in an urban shanty town, frying banana fritters at three in the morning to be sold later in the day at the local market. We also meet women in the village Posyandu (family health care centers) with many other young mothers with babies on their laps and young children hanging around. We mainly come across women in modern outfit: hundreds of factory girls in t-shirts, jeans, or the uniform of the factory leaving the gates at

[6] The new focus is evident, for example, in the series "*Kesehatan Reproduksi, Kebudayaan, dan Masyarakat,*" published by Sinar Harapan (12 titles published between 1996-2000) and numerous publications by the *Yayasan Lembaga Konsumen Indonesia* and *Pusat Penelitian Kependudukan*, Universitas Gadjah Mada.

[7] It is interesting to note that, after the 1970s, rice-producing women do not figure prominently at all in any monograph on contemporary rural Java.

5:00 p.m. (or later); sex workers in alluring garb at night, or in a leisure outfit — the duster — in the morning; nurses and midwives in the white costumes so typical of the medical profession everywhere in the world; female office employees and executives in the cities in their modern "uniforms," high-heeled, stockinged, in mini-skirt and blazer.[8] And we should not forget all those teachers and other government employees in their safari uniforms.

In conclusion, the images of women in Java have become kaleidoscopic in recent decades, and we think it is due to the gender studies discussed in this section that this unfolding picture has been documented in the first place. Referring to theoretical categories, we can say that these studies do much more justice to the variety of women's work and social life than before. As we will see in the next section, these images have become even more diverse, as recently more attention has been paid to women's involvement in activities beyond the ordinary routine.

GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN TRADITION, RELIGION, AND STATE IDEOLOGY

Three great "forces" directly influence the life of women in Java: Javanese tradition, religion, and the Indonesian nation-state. Each of these addresses women in its own way through institutions such as the palace, the mosque, and the government office, and each offers women different opportunities to participate. Through these institutions and their bearers of authority, women and men are presented with gendered norms and values about proper behavior as well as powerful gender images. The extent to which women conform to and reject these images and shape them in their turn is a subject that has recently been given attention in a number of studies.

When discussing tradition we immediately end up in a terrible mess: what is to be defined as "tradition" and, more particularly, as Javanese tradition? Is it the same as customary law (adat)? Is it culture? Arts? A Way of Life? Instead of trying to guess what is what, we should look at what the literature has to offer. Kejawen culture comes forward markedly as a

[8] Van Leeuwen (1997b:349) describes a 25-year-old woman from an elite Islamic family, a marketing strategist, in her office outfit: "Zoraya is wearing extra-tight Armani blue jeans with a gold girdle fastened by a huge, rhinestone buckle. Silver high heels. A black see-through blouse and a black bra. Lots of imitation and real gold ornaments like bracelets, earrings, hairpins. From her shoulder dangles a black velvet Chanel handbag on a heavy gold chain. With her striking make-up and distinctive, sweet perfume she is stunningly voluptuous. She is carrying an attaché case."

recurrent theme. This is understood as the syncretist beliefs and traditions of the people of (mainly Central) Java, combining pre-Hindu, Hindu, and Muslim elements. Women and gender in kejawen culture cover an astounding variety of female roles, gendered symbols, and norms. Its locus is not only the Javanese royal court or keraton, but also the village, each giving their own different interpretations.

When we look at female figures that have been the focus of research we can come up with an attractive list. There are the goddesses Dewi Sri (Heringa 1997), Nyai Loro Kidul (Schlehe 1998), and the fertility symbol Nini Thowok (Wahjono 1992), who are more or less still-familiar female symbols for Javanese and Sundanese alike. Then there are women of flesh and blood who appear as public symbols and are therefore not to be equated with common womenfolk. These include female dancers — the bedaya (Van Brakel-Papenhuyzen 1992) and the srimpi who perform in court, as well as the coarser ledhek and others who are part of popular culture (Hughes-Freeland 1995, Hatley 1990) — as well as the female singers or pesinden, who perform both at court and in modern wayang performances for mass entertainment (Walton 1996). Other women are outstanding because they function as ritual specialists preparing and guiding ceremonies related to the life cycle of humans such as the dukun pengantin (Puntowati 1992) and dukun bayi (see Niehof 1992:183-186 for titles on traditional midwives). Obviously, both court and common women in Java are far from restricted to the roles of wife, daughter, mother, housewife, peasant, trader, and small artisan.

The prominence of women in these non-ordinary roles stands in striking contrast with the most conventional Javanese female gender norm that is supposed to apply to all women, i.e., to become a kanca wingking, a faithful wife and companion to her husband, whose domain is the back of the house. This image is associated conceptually with the private sphere of the household, home management, sexual fidelity, and motherhood. Barbara Hatley labels it the backbone of the dominant Javanese ideology of female subordination (Hatley 1997). As we have seen in the previous section, many studies on women and work have already shown that gender ideologies locating women in the home do not correspond with the reality of (common) women working outside the home. Now the validity of the kanca wingking as representing reality is also challenged from another venue.

With regard to gender and Javanese dance, Hughes-Freeland's contribution (1995) is one of the more sophisticated. She informs us that female dancing may express the characteristics of Arjuna's three wives: Sembadra, who is submissive and demure; Srikandhi, her belligerent, martial, and lively co-consort; and Larasati, Arjuna's less-known first wife who combines characteristics of both. These female archetypes obviously provide more choice of emulation than the kanca wingking ideal. In the singular female dance "mode" called putri, all the mentioned characteristics are expressed. This feminine mode is considered the most refined (alus) of all dancing modes, a manifestation of two categories, asceticism (tapas) and desire (kama), combining the qualities of chastity and sexuality. The putri mode is available to men as well, who may perform in this mode or the masculine mode closest to it, for example in the role of Arjuna, the refined hero of the Mahabharata. On the basis of her analysis of dancing modes, Hughes-Freeland concludes that the asymmetry between the singular feminine mode and the multiple masculine modes is not a sign of lower female status. It is superior to the masculine modes in the sense that the latter are considered coarser (kasar). Neither is the feminine mode an imposition of a repressive standardization for females, as it allows for considerable variation in performance, including martial expression.[9]

Susan Pratt Walton (1996) also discusses Javanese gender identities in her study of another female artist in kejawen culture: the pesinden or singer who performs at court and during shadow puppet plays (wayang). She has recorded the life histories of three famous pesinden of different generations. More than the courtly bedaya these women have ventured out of the world of the keraton, but due to the court origin of their profession they are still respected as skilled artists and sometimes viewed as "heavenly nymphs" as well. The oldest of Walton's informants was conscious of this background: she worded her interpretation of the role of the pesinden as conveying rasa, the Javanese concept of a deep spiritual and aesthetic experience. At the same time the pesinden are the symbol of yet another powerful Javanese female gender image, the alluring sexy woman, and sometimes put down for it. As a symbol of female sexuality, she is the opposite of the faithful and obedient wife and as such is even considered a danger to harmony. In the Hindu Javanese pantheon, the sexually powerful gender image is also personified by Nyai Loro Kidul, the Goddess of the South Sea, who is not only the symbolic consort of the sultans of Java, but is also feared in popular belief for her fatal

[9] The existence of a female militaristic tradition in court has also been explored by the historians Carey and Houben (1987).

attraction to men who dare to venture out into the sea — they drown, especially when dressed in green, her color. Walton concludes that the acknowledgement of female sexuality is a characteristic of Javanese culture. Perhaps we may add that sexuality has its spiritual and profane face in Javanese dance and wayang performance, each coming out in a different setting. The spiritual and sensual aspect is stressed in the bedaya danced in court, while the pesinden plays out her earthly sexual attractiveness in wayang performances in the village or in large modern theatres like Taman Mini, Jakarta. Apparently the definition of female sexuality in Java is more complex than in Western Christian culture where it is still often conceptualized as worldly at best, not seldom as debased and dirty (the whore!), and in any case devoid of the divinity which is reserved for the Virgin.

Yet another gendered image relates to fertility. Fertility is mainly treated as a female capacity in the discussion of Javanese symbolism. Its representation par excellence is Dewi Sri. Rens Heringa (1997) analyses different interpretations of myths on the origin of this deity, including the Nymph from the Sky (or Jakatarub) and the myth of Princess Sri and Prince Sedono, comparing versions originating from the Pasisir rural area of Tuban in Eastern Java and the Central Javanese courts. She shows that the different interpretations are related to the social status of groups and reflect group interests. For commoners the myths function as instructions on the agricultural cycle and on related rituals that serve to guarantee a rich harvest. The village elite emphasize the initiation of men and the incorporation of a female outsider to perpetuate the patrilineal line, and stress village independence vis-à-vis the larger political structure. Court interpretations support the sole authority of the ruler over the people, the land, and its produce.[10] It is interesting that all interpretations are concerned with the fertility of and control over land and do not particularly celebrate women's fertility as such, i.e., her capacity to give birth. It is tempting to see this as a mirror of Java's overpopulation: Java's land, not its women, should be fertile.

Heringa's contribution is also important for what it conveys implicitly. How is the considerable violence against women, which is part of these myths, to be interpreted? There is the story of a young bride from "outside" who is raped by a group of village youngsters and

[10] Heringa (1997) also discusses the use in these myths of symbolic categories such as warm–cold, raw–cooked, insider–outsider, underworld–sky, and socialized–unsocialized sexuality, and places these uses within the context of rituals around graves, the harvest, circumcision, marriage, etc. She shows that several rituals underwent changes under Islamic influence.

murdered, her dead body enabling the land to become fertile. Another tale is about a princess born of an egg from the ocean who is raped by her father and dies, after which her interred body allows a variety of cultivated plants to sprout. In the Jakatarub myth a heavenly nymph is forced to remain on earth by the theft of her robe by a young peasant; she donates to humanity the cultivation of rice after she finds her garb and returns to the skies. The forced (and sometimes negotiated) submission of these female figures to earthly men contains a message beyond that of Walton's: woman is "the other" from "outside" the village, coming from the sky or the sea; in this capacity she appears to enable humans to enhance the fertility of the land, but in her interaction with human men she has to be forced to succumb. It suggests that Javanese symbolism emphasizes essentially hierarchical gender relations. It appears at odds with the principle of complementarity in gender roles which Hughes-Freeland shows for dancing, at least if complementarity is understood as different but equal.[11] Something else we have observed is a dearth of female interpretations of these myths.

Changes in gender identities are considered by all authors mentioned above. It is also a central theme in Barbara Hatley's introduction to gender images in modern Indonesian literature (1997). She links the shifts in the emphasis of gender roles and images in literature to broader changes in Javanese culture through past and present Islamic and Western influences, the loss of political power of the Javanese courts, and the birth and subsequent development of the Indonesian state, including the violent and traumatic political events of 1965-66.[12] A similar interpretation of literature can be found in Sobary (2000). Both observe, for example, that the mark of the New Order regime on literature is evident in stereotypical representations of (house)wives and mothers, while the earlier generation of novelists (Pujangga Baru) presented women as active beyond the sphere of the home and family.

We can deduce several major themes from studies on Javanese tradition and gender. First, Hinduist elements in kejawen ritual and art expressions, in which women or female Javanese symbols play a prominent role, tend to become less pronounced over time and sometimes quietly vanish. Hinduist ritual elements are also sometimes modified and incorporated in

[11] Placed on a different plane of discourse: is there a relationship between the violent subjugation of women in Javanese myths and society's "tolerance" of domestic violence and rape, acknowledged today as deeply disturbing social phenomena (Prasetyo and Marzuki 1997)?

[12] Hatley's article is just as much a "must" for the field of Javanese literature as Hughes-Freeland's is for dance, but space prevents us from discussing it in detail.

Muslim rituals. Cases in point are the fertility ritual of Ninik Thowok (Wahjono 1992), the traditional visits to the graves of ancestors in Laweyan, Solo (Brenner 1998), and the performance of the bedaya in court (Brakel-Papenhuyzen 1992). This development is supposed to be the consequence of the loss of political power and economic strength of the Javanese courts as well as the growing strength of Islam on Java.

Another trend observed is democratization. Some Javanese art forms which in the past belonged to the courts have moved beyond this realm and become forms of modern and mass entertainment. Consequently the opportunity to become an artist or a writer has also become available to more men and women, as instruction has partially moved out of the court and entered state-controlled institutions such as art academies and universities. Walton's study suggests that the democratization of court culture is not always unproblematic. The pesinden of her study were all very much aware that they have to balance on a tightrope, because as a pesinden operating outside the keraton they continue to represent sexuality, but they also want to guard their reputation as decent women, which they find quite difficult. According to Walton this is due to the inroads made by puritan Islamic and Western gender values (neither of which acknowledges sexuality as possessing spiritual power and being of divine origin). In other words, the high regard of female sexuality in kejawen performing court culture appears threatened by a more debased evaluation of its popular equivalent. Also important to note is that pesinden of the younger generation do not view themselves any longer as communicating spiritual tranquillity or rasa as the older ones did. Perhaps they have lost this typical Javanese understanding of their artistic role?

A third theme is the manipulation of female Javanese gender identities, whether consciously or not. As we have seen, female gender images are there for the choosing. For example, Srikandhi as an ideal to be emulated seems to be more present in certain places and at certain points in time, reflecting such different historical developments as Yogyakarta's military breakaway from the Surakarta palace, women's participation in the struggle for independence, or the more recently felt need to motivate women to enter public life. During Soeharto's New Order the kanca wingking gender role (the woman as a faithful wife and companion) has become dominant as evidenced in the literature, particularly in literary works written by women. Women are the ones who "surrender to fate" (menyerah) and do their utmost to keep their families going when faced with political upheaval and economic distress. They should

try to preserve harmony at all costs and do whatever it takes to pursue that end. Hatley and Sobary also notice an inward-looking attitude in the most recent literature, which often focuses on the family without showing concern for what is going on beyond that microcosm.

The fourth theme surfacing in studies on kejawen culture and gender covers the connection and interaction between older Javanese gender representations and the gender ideology propagated by the modern Indonesian state. This brings us to the next great force, the state, which influences women's lives in Java.

The Indonesian state has inherited a gender ideology from colonial times which firmly placed the married woman in her home and the circle of her family.[13] The New Order government elevated the housewife ideal to official state gender ideology. It was expressed in the "Dharma Wanita[14] code," which allocated five duties to women and exhorted them to be: (1) loyal supporters of their husbands, (2) caretakers of the household, (3) producers of future generations, (4) the family's prime socializers, (5) and Indonesian citizens. In the early 1980s, Norma Sullivan (1983) discussed this set of roles and its implementation in her study of the Family Welfare Association, or PKK, in a neighborhood in Yogyakarta, pointing out that its program was entirely focused on the family and the household. She concludes that the fifth role of women, i.e., their civil role, remained a dead letter. If specific projects had a wider impact on the local community, this was mainly due to creative interpretations by local female leaders of what could be done under the aegis of PKK. Sullivan (1983:170) links Javanese gender stereotypes with the program and indeed, for those with more intimate knowledge of Javanese gender categories, the Dharma Wanita code looks like a faithful replica of the kanca wingking ideal, with the addition of the fifth role.

Madelon Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis (1987) takes the modern Indonesian interpretation of the role of women and its roots in Javanese culture a step further in her article, "Ibuism and Priyayization: Path to Power?" Ibuism, a new concept she introduced, contains yet another representation of Javanese women — in this case, those of elite or priyayi status. According to this author, the modern Ibu is the product of Dutch education in colonial days, traditional

[13] For Indonesian women of lower classes, however, a more Orientalist view predominated of "female labor as a 'self evident' Eastern institution," which conveniently corresponded with the economic interests of capital (Locher Scholten 1987:91).

[14] The New Order women's organization for wives of civil servants.

Javanese gender values, and economic hardship in post-independence Indonesia. Indonesian elite women, the majority of them from Java, aspired to fulfil the role of wife and mother as they were taught in school before the Japanese occupation, values which were already heralded by Kartini. But faced with diminished means after independence they could not afford to devote themselves solely to these roles. They had to create the material resources to sustain the priyayi status of their families. This includes the control over status attributes such as expensive batik cloths, jewelry, real estate, and the financial ability to organize slametan, ostentatious rituals. In order to procure the necessary resources they started to engage in trade in batik and jewelry, like elite Javanese women of former generations had done, and in a variety of modern businesses as well. In so doing, they moved beyond the home-based role of wife and mother. As Ibu they not only take care of their own nuclear families, but also provide for a much larger group, including kin and dependents such as servants and employees. The management role of the Ibu should be recognized and appreciated by the husband.

Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuys argues that the Ibu's reward is power in the Western sense, as she uses all available resources at her disposal to control the world around her and determine her own and other people's actions. But she is still excluded from power in the Javanese sense as this is based on priyayi attributes such as individual disinterest, spiritual strength (kekuatan batin), and magical energy (kesakten), which can be acquired only by (the pretense of) distancing oneself from the material world. Her practical activities, on the other hand, are considered motivated by personal interest (pamrih). Thus, the successful Ibu enables her husband to uphold his status as a priyayi, without having access herself to its traditionally Javanese attributes. Although the author considers both Ibuism and priyayization as relevant to the Indonesian elite as a whole, she locates the concepts in Javanese culture, not least because both the first two presidents were Javanese. In Norma Sullivan's book, *Masters and Managers* (1994), which is based on new fieldwork in the same urban neighborhood in Yogyakarta she studied before, the importance of women's management roles is also stressed. Her conclusion, similar to Djajadiningrat's, is that women's managerial functions do not imply that the wife is conceived of by the Javanese as the "Master," a status which continues to be reserved for the husband.

Susan April Brenner's work (1991, 1998) is interesting because she points to the reverse of the process discussed by Djajaningrat-Nieuwenhuys. While elite women successfully stretched the concept of Ibu to include generating income and enhancing family status, the group of female batik traders from Brenner's research location, the Laweyan quarter in Surakarta, has increasingly lost the capacity to do so. The emergence of new forms of factory-based batik production has caused the decline of the traditional family business in Laweyan, which centered on home-based batik production.[15] In this process, the autonomy and access to productive resources of the female batik traders gradually dwindled. Today the formerly prosperous quarter of Laweyan has become a shadow of what it used to be. Lack of prospects induces daughters not to take up batik trading anymore. Brenner attributes this tendency not only to economic factors, but also to the pervasive influence of the New Order gender ideology, which constantly reminds women to devote themselves to their families, denies the value of their economic independence, and stresses the husband's role as the family's provider.

In her study on Javanese women's perceptions of female status, position, and power, Siti Kusujiarti (1995) links feudal Javanese, Dutch colonial, and Islamic ideas to the New Order gender ideology, situating women firmly in the home. She notices that her informants still perceive female status as being rooted mainly in this ideological amalgam. Their perception does not reflect actual changes such as the increasing level of women's education and their entrance into public office, albeit both education and public office are acknowledged by her informants as elements of status. This gap between dominant norms and practices that deviate from such norms is not surprising. Ideological concepts — although apparently obsolete — are often tenacious and may give way to new ones only if reality persists in contradicting them.

We can conclude that the Dharma Wanita code as a construct with roots in the Javanese kanca wingking ideal and the gender ideology instilled through Dutch colonial education for the upper classes seems to have had a diverse impact. It may have induced women to move away from formal economic activity as suggested by Brenner. Whether this also applies to common women in Java remains to be seen: like before, they still have no choice but to work outside

[15] Wieringa (1987) has observed this process too.

their homes to generate income.[16] Among elite women, its impact appears far from uniform, even bewildering. On the one hand the Dharma Wanita code expected these women to stay at home as dependent housewives, while on the other hand all wives of government officials were expected to function outside their homes as unpaid and voluntary managers for the state. Ibuism in this sense became the de facto — not ideological! — backbone of the Dharma Wanita organizations created by the New Order government, as wives of officials were expected to devote time, energy, and, if possible, money to support state programs. We suggest that the New Order government thus actually betrayed its own gender ideology. As a consequence of the conflicting demands on women by the state, two types of complaints could be heard during the late New Order. First, some women were uncomfortable, because their duties for the state as Ibu took so much of their time that they felt they could not pay sufficient attention to their homes and families. Another complaint, particularly among better-educated women of the younger generation, was that their obligations in Dharma Wanita organizations were an obstacle to the advancement of their individual professional careers.

It remains to be seen whether the Ibu as a manager and as a largely Javanese gender construct will survive under democracy and political reforms. Membership in Dharma Wanita organizations has become voluntary in post-Soeharto Indonesia. Women do not have to manage on behalf of the state anymore, although probably the practice will continue as one is so used to it. Moreover, economic necessity as a consequence of Indonesia's present economic crisis may preserve women's managerial roles for the time being.

The New Order government manipulated not only the representation of women as wives and mothers, but also the Javanese representation of female sexuality, not in its subdued and agreeable form, but as a potent, evil power and danger to the spiritual order. Saskia Wieringa (1995) contends that this latter representation was evoked at the birth of the regime to crush Gerwani, the women's organization affiliated with the communist party, PKI. By attributing the murder and fictional sexual mutilation of seven generals on 30 September 1965 at Lobang Buaya to a group of Gerwani members, the government depicted Gerwani as totally devoid of morality and constituting a complete denial of womanly virtue. By striking out at its women in this way, the military successfully discredited the communist party, its political adversary.

[16] It would be interesting to study the dynamics of gender ideology behind the increase in putting-out work amongst lower-class women.

At the same time it rallied support from Islamic groups which for long had been very disturbed by PKI's allegedly anti-religious stance. It had also clashed in the past with Gerwani over several of the gender issues raised by this organization, such as its insistence on monogamy. Wieringa concludes that the construction of the "Lobang Buaya myth," with its evident use of gendered images, eventually paved the way for the annihilation of both the PKI and Gerwani by way of the well-known huge massacres all over Java and Bali in late 1965 and early 1966. It also restored male and state domination over Indonesian women who in the aftermath were ideologically denied any political power by being relegated to the realm of home and family. Through the association of Gerwani, the most vocal exponent of women's organizations in the Soekarno era, with loose sexual morals and political radicalism, the New Order government effectively discredited any future organized female political involvement on behalf of women (Tiwon 1996). Barbara Hatley (1997) concludes that conservative standards of modest, constrained feminine behavior were not difficult to maintain afterwards. She presents the spirit of modern literature written by Javanese women as a clear example: any interest in politics is absent there.

In fact, Wieringa does not dwell at length on Javanese symbolism in what she calls the second coup (the crushing of Gerwani and PKI).[17] But she mentions that the atmosphere created by the military's orchestrated media campaign against Gerwani and PKI must have "struck a familiar chord in Javanese minds" (Wieringa 1995:296). It evoked the image of the great fight or gara-gara scene, which is part of a full-length wayang performance.[18] In this battle between Good and Evil, it is the hero with inner strength who eventually restores the equilibrium and moral order. Wieringa suggests that the PKI and Gerwani were considered the forces from hell, representing the lower instincts, while the army was the hero with Soeharto as the brilliant dalang who had set the stage.[19] In addition, we encounter other hints at Javanese gendered symbols in Wieringa's quotes of articles on the events at Lobang Buaya. For example, Gerwani is compared with kuntilan — a female ghost with a hole in her back who

[17] The first coup was against the military (or a faction of it), through the murder of seven generals.

[18] The most well known scene is probably the great fight between Korawa and Pandawa of the Mahabharata story. Although it represents the battle between Good and Evil, it is not a fight between the bad guys and the good guys, as some of the Korawa's heroes are essentially good (Bishma, Drona), but such subtlety seems to have been absent in 1965.

[19] But as he played a role himself in the 1965 events, he might as well have wanted to be considered the hero with inner strength, Arjuna, who comes out victorious in the battle.

lures men at night and brings disaster upon her victims — and depicted as "untrue" Srikandhi (Wieringa 1995:309-310).

Islam is the third important force shaping women's lives and gender notions in Java. Many books and booklets on women and Islam have appeared on the Indonesian market since the early 1990s. Most of these belong to the popular and semi-scientific genre and deal with representations of women in the Qur'an and other standard Islamic texts written by ulama experts on Fikh law. The themes covered are the elevated and respectable position of women in Islam, women's social roles, women's rights and duties vis-à-vis those of men, the relationship between husband and wife, and proper clothing for women. This body of literature mediates a static, general, and therefore ahistorical and non-sociological image of the Islamic woman (Meuleman 1993). No reference is made to the realities of the lives of Muslim women in Indonesia, which show remarkable differences from the images conveyed.

In sharp contrast are two more recent volumes (Marcoes-Natsir and Meuleman 1993, Munir and Zaini 1999). These collections of articles show that authoritative misogynist interpretations of Islamic texts are challenged today by Indonesian women and men. By pointing to the historical context in which Islamic texts have been formulated, these works question the absolute imperative to follow these to the letter and make a case for different interpretations still acceptable from an Islamic perspective. There is also greater emphasis on the activities of the major Muslim women's organizations in Java — Muslimat and Fatayat (affiliated with the more traditional Nahdatul Ulama) and Aisyiyah (affiliated with modernist Muhammadiyah) — in the fields of education, social work, religious instruction, and even income generation programs for women. Obviously, Muslim women in Java and their representations are in a process of change. Striking is not only the more confident presence of Muslim women and their organizations, but also the more open discussion in these circles on old and new gender issues such as polygamy, the access of women to leadership positions (Megawati!), reproductive and sexual rights, domestic violence, abortion, and so on. Even Ibu Nur, wife of prominent Muslim leader and former President Abdurrahman Wahid, ardently supports a more vocal Islamic women's movement;[20] while still the First Lady of Indonesia, she took an active part in the public discourse herself.[21] However, although Muslim women's

[20] By no means do we mean to suggest that she supports the Islamic women's movement only.

[21] See for example her appearance on television to discuss Islam and gender on 24 March 2000.

organizations from different streams obviously have their own agenda regarding gender issues today, research on this topic is still in its infancy.[22]

The general "emergence" of more confident Muslim female identities is not an exclusively Javanese affair. But most influential traditional and modernist centers of Islamic learning and education can be found in Java, and the majority taking part in the Muslim gender discourse are Javanese. So we consider the discourse to belong to "Java" as well. What strikes us, however, is that those who advocate change in the interest of women do not position themselves as Javanese (or Sundanese, the ethnic group in West Java). And it is as yet not clear whether the discourse will lead to a more explicit *Auseinandersetzung* of Muslim women in Java with their cultural gender identity.

Only a very crude image of Muslim women in Java emerges from the literature. Muslim women in Java, particularly West Java, are considered to live under the firm authority of male religious leaders and male-biased interpretations of Islamic teachings (Mather 1985, Wibowo 1991, Adioetomo 1993). Perhaps the discourse sketched above will eventually generate a more refined image. More studies on female Muslim leaders such as that by Lies Marcoes (1992) and on women's reactions and ambivalence to Islamic teachings (Woodcroft-Lee 1983) may be helpful in that exercise.

BETWEEN THE CURTAINS, OUT ON STAGE: IMAGES OF WOMEN REASSESSED

The last section has made us acquainted with yet another range of images of women in Java apart from the ordinary women peasants, small traders, factory workers, and mothers in the family planning program we met before. The female artistic performer, the spiritual mediator, and the religious leader have now appeared in front of the footlights. This makes us confident that the contribution of women and gender studies will become only richer and more varied. To further this, we would like to make up the balance: who are the women who have already come out on stage and who are still waiting behind the curtains?

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[22] An interesting start in this area is provided by Ida Ruwaida Noor in "Diversitas Kultural Gerakan Perempuan di Indonesia," a paper presented at the 3rd International Symposium of the Journal *Anthropology Indonesia*, Denpasar, Bali, 2002.

Central Javanese Play the Lead

When we look at regional representation the imbalance is obvious. The women we encounter are predominantly from Central Java, while the Sundanese from West Java and even more the women from East Java with cultures influenced by the neighboring islands of Madura and Bali do not often appear.[23] Viewed from yet another perspective, it can be argued that coastal *Pasisir* culture, its women, and gender symbols are underrepresented in comparison to inland Javanese culture. Looking from the angle of ethnicity we also notice that women in Java are primarily perceived as Javanese and to a lesser extent Sundanese, excluding those women of Chinese, Arab, and Indo-European descent whose native families have lived in Java for generations. And how about all those migrants from other islands who have added their touch to "Java"? Do the teachers from Manado, the Batak female moneylenders, the factory girls from Lampung, the salt-workers from Madura, and all the other women in Chinese *tokos*, Indian textile shops, Padang restaurants, and Jakarta offices not belong to Java? The image of Java as a multi-ethnic society still seems to be far off.

Poor Women for Starters

Since the 1970s Western researchers have focused on poor women, at first in rural areas, and later in urban settings. This focus is probably to some extent related to a disposition towards "solidarity" with the poor in the Third World during the unruly 1960s and 1970s in Western academic circles, combined with a feminist outlook. Another reason is the mission of development projects to improve the condition of the poor and therefore the demand for research to be done on "them." So the image of women in Java in many studies is that of "poor" women.

Middle-class women are more often the subject of research conducted by Indonesian researchers. Probably this can be attributed to the different life experiences of Indonesian and foreign female scholars and a difference in access to resources. The problems of middle-class women struggling to combine work and family were observed directly and sometimes also experienced by Indonesian female academics themselves, so the choice for the subject came naturally. Most foreign women scholars, on the other hand, did not yet have children at the time of their field research and were also influenced by the dominant feminist ideology of the

[23] We can only guess at the reasons: perhaps this imbalance is due to the fact that research is often done in the framework of a project, and research projects are often linked to a university of good academic standing, like Yogyakarta's Universitas Gadjah Mada.

time that stressed the importance of work and economic independence for women. They looked with disdain upon such a problem as the "double burden" of middle-class Indonesian women, which was actually quite naive as this also became a hot feminist issue for married women in the West. Another reason for a more urban middle class focus in Indonesian research arose from ideological restrictions on the mobility of local women working in universities as well as financial constraints (costs of transport and lodging) on doing research in rural areas. Indonesian academics receiving stipends or working within the framework of a sponsored project have published work with a different focus as is shown by several recent Ph.D. theses.

The least has been said about upper-class women. The Indonesian public has always been interested in important public figures, including women, but this general interest has not as yet generated serious academic work on individual women, excluding work on Kartini. Although quite a lot has been written about women's organizations, which in general involve the powerful and the upper class, an analysis of how these female elites are socially embedded and advance the interests of their own class and elite-based gender is usually lacking. Wieringa's work is an exception, because at least we learn more about women prominent in politics until 1965. Dominant cultural trends such as priyayization also bring us back to elite circles. An entertaining insight in a specific segment of the elite can be found in "Air--conditioned Lifestyles" (Leeuwen 1997a). It looks like the patterns of conspicuous consumption among the nouveau riche, the OKB (orang kaya baru) in Jakarta, have more in common with the middle and upper classes of Chicago or Osaka than with the elite in Banyuwangi or Sumedang. The author does not aim for a gender analysis, but the clues she gives make one's mouth water for a gendered perspective.

Married Mothers Only

If we look at the studies from the point of view of life cycle, we again observe an imbalance. The great majority of the studies are on married women with children, who do productive work in order to bring home an income and who act as social mothers as well. Young girls with their special needs hardly figure. Not much study has been done on elderly women either. We know something, but not that much, about the many women in charge of "female-headed" households, in particular about widows and divorcees who are part of this group.

Women who choose to stay unmarried are an altogether "forgotten" group, although there are such women despite the undeniable social pressure on both men and women to get married.

We have been wondering why the emphasis is so squarely on married heterosexual women, women having a family of their own, most often in the setting of a nuclear family. Perhaps these researchers, Indonesian and foreign alike, are equally convinced at heart that ultimately life is lived most fully as an adult, married woman with children? Given this stress on women as mothers and wives, it is surprising how little the role of women in raising children has been researched. Or has this literature perhaps escaped us because it is catalogued under the subject of children (aside from Hildred Geertz's classic study from the 1950s (H. Geertz 1961)? And where women appear on stage as mothers, the entourage remains vague: we actually do not know much about the material circumstances of women's main responsibility, housework and childcare, in Java, nor what their houses, or for that matter their kitchens, look like. Nor do we learn which women are behind the scenes, such as relatives and friends, who form the networks women rely on.

Sanggul and Jilbab

The literature on Javanese culture has yielded a rich harvest. Javanese women are engaged as artists, and Javanese female representations in art, theater, and literature are of a great variety. Yet we learn little about kejawen rituals adhered to in the home and in the village community and how these have fared over the past decennia. Considering the prominent role of women in Hindu Bali rituals that at first sight seem to display striking similarities with kejawen ones — think only of the flower offerings, rice cakes etc. — it might be worthwhile to scrutinize gender roles in and perceptions of kejawen rituals, contrasting men and women as well as kejawen and Islamic leaders.

In studies on Javanese women it is simply assumed that they are of the Islamic faith. But actually we still know little about how Muslim women in Java view Islam and their gender identity in relation to it. This is all the more remarkable as differences in this respect are so strongly suggested by the eye-catching variety in clothing of Muslim women in Java (van Dijk 1997). The Javanese priyayi Muslim woman wears a Javanese sarong and a kebaya for official and ritual occasions, as her sister from the lower classes does in daily life. Others wear a baju Muslim, which range from very feminine to very austere. Many Muslim women

wear Western dress, at least in daily life. More in-depth studies are needed to bring out what these different styles of dress stand for in terms of affiliation to religious teachings, at which occasions a certain style of dress is used, and which social class and gender identity are emphasized.

The assumption that women in Java are Muslim is not surprising; the vast majority belong to this faith. But there are also religious minorities in Java, aliran kebatinan, Buddhist, Christian, and Hindu. We have not encountered reference to women from these minorities, their relation with their religion, and how this affects the other areas of their lives.

We would like to speculate for a moment on the reasons for the scarcity of academic publications on women and religion and the vague and superficial images of women in their religious capacities. This situation contrasts sharply with the more numerous and in-depth studies on gender and (Javanese) culture. Does it have something to do with the New Order's discourse on race, ethnicity, and religion, which stipulated that Islam needs to be "tamed" and which viewed religious diversity as a source of conflict, so the less said about "religion" the better? As far as the Muslim communities are concerned it is easier to make an informed guess: obviously the discourse aiming at the repositioning of women vis-à-vis Islam absorbs academic energy. In this perspective a more sociological and anthropological approach to gender and Islam in Java might seem of secondary importance. Perhaps unfamiliarity with and uneasiness to use such (secular) approaches also play a role.

Although there are enough Western academics who have done and do research on Islam and Muslim communities, Western (female) researchers have generally refrained from looking at gender and Islam. Perhaps the main reason is the existing mutual awkwardness, if not antagonism, between Western feminism and Islam.[24]

Targets of the State, or Actors in Their Own Right?

We can be brief on the subject of women's relations with the Indonesian state. In academic studies women primarily figure as targets of development programs and as the half of Indonesia's population that is restricted in its productive, civic, and political roles by the prevailing gender ideology of the state. That the state has been effective in this respect is

[24] Such antagonism does not surface in the relationship between Western researchers and *kejawen* culture.

almost an accepted truism in the literature. It might nevertheless be worthwhile to explore the extent to which a readjustment of this image is possible. After all, the ultimate Ibu of the New Order, Ibu Tien Soeharto, wielded enormous power, including political power. Was she just acting as Ibu, or more than that? Why has the coordinating ministry of Women's Affairs – a junior minister was already installed in 1978 – never been given any serious attention in academic work? Who were the (Javanese) women in the government, parliament, and regional councils? We assume that during the New Order the majority were faithful party members without a willingness to raise gender issues, but is that altogether true? Did they negotiate freedom of movement for themselves? There are female village heads in Java — how did they cope? And what about women leaders in the official labor unions?

The emergence of women activists during the 1990s, outside the political establishment, not a few of them based on Java, is another important subject for research. There are so many of them: Karlina, Emmy, Chusnul, Sandra, Kamala, Binny, Nursjabani, Smita, Gadis. Most of these women are highly educated and part of the younger generation of professionals who were unsatisfied with the New Order. They chose the channel of NGOs as the basis for a political counter-movement to confront the establishment. The women mentioned here sometimes did this in a very creative way and with an outspoken gendered and feminist agenda. The other major change on the political scene in terms of gender concerns the sex of the Head of State. Megawati Soekarnoputri obviously has no deep affinity with gender issues, either Javanese or national. But whether she likes it or not, the debate around her eligibility to be President because of her sex was a hot political issue. And in power, does her sex really not influence her policies and political style? Let's look at her slendang later.

When we consider the great variety of representations of women in Java that are rooted in past and present reality, the poverty of the New Order state's gender ideology is all the more striking. The latter only acknowledged women's roles as wife, mother, and housekeeper in a nuclear family setting. Many, though not all, authors have been appalled by the "blindness" of the New Order state to the realities of women's lives in Java and its denial or denigration of Javanese female representations. Many studies also show concern about the detrimental effects of the New Order government's gender ideology: on women in Java, gender relations, and society at large.

Studies on women and work have established that ordinary women in Java have been economically active in the past and undeniably still are today, while the same holds true for elite women, albeit in a different way. Equally important is the conclusion that the value attached to women's role as income-earners is not basically affected in the perception of both women and men in Java, although a certain reluctance to acknowledge it openly has crept in as result of the state's denial of its importance. Many authors have laid bare the processes by which the New Order state's development paradigm marginalized women's work; faithful to its own gender ideology, this paradigm consistently denied women's economic activities a place in its mainstream economic policies. The worrying question remains to which extent a society can afford to foster a gender norm denigrating the importance of women's earnings, while at the same time making more demands on its population to pay for so many of the facilities it offers.

The studies on prostitution and Javanese court and popular culture, which point to the persistence of older representations of women as sexual beings, also paint a disturbing picture of incongruence. The state, officially only acknowledging the rightful existence of the faithful wife and "morally high-standing" woman, has been unable to come to practical terms with the ever-expanding sex industry in Java, which preferably just "shouldn't be there." On the ideological level female sexuality has been denounced as extremely dangerous to the harmony of the family and even society as a whole. But the state has actually condoned prostitution, and many of its authority-holders are known to appreciate the female sex, resulting in the new institution of the *simpanan*, a kept woman on the side, a new variety of the concubine (*selir*) of the sultans and high Javanese officials from the colonial past. In other words, the New Order was inconsistent in the images it conveyed, its rhetoric diverging from its practice. Apparently Javanese constructs of women as sexual beings are in fact much more resilient than the professed norm would have it, not only in society, but also within the body of the state itself.

A similar inconsistency can be observed in the way the New Order treated the masses of women in Java through its Family Planning Program. Several studies have shown that, while proclaiming to foster women's dignity (*meningkatkan harkat dan martabat wanita*), the state hardly took the trouble to educate them in family planning and the responsible care for their reproductive health (Yuliantoro 2000). Through the deployment of its apparatus the state

treated them as ignorant, while counting on their submissiveness to male authority, such a typical representation of the Javanese woman. The Program is a success in demographic terms, but at the expense of the credibility of the state's own gender construct. The denigrating way the state viewed (lower class, rural) women contrasts with the views of these women and men of themselves, who both acknowledge women's capabilities.

After All, Is She Still the Prima Donna?

The "high status" of women in Java, finally, is another recurrent theme in the literature and has been the subject of a lively discourse over time. At first, the image was clearly part of "Orientalism': the West evaluating the East. The absence of obvious social evils such as female infanticide (China/India), wife-burning (India), or foot-binding (China) allowed the position of Indonesian women in general, and Javanese women in particular, to contrast favorably with that of the women of South and East Asia in Western eyes. In the 1960s and 1970s Western researchers were struck by the economic independence of women in Java and the fact that they held the strings of the household purse. As economic power in the West is regarded as the ingredient of power par excellence and at the time was considered the main avenue for improving women's position in Western society, women in Java were regarded as "already there" — again an "Orientalist" position.

This evaluation has been modified over the years by both Indonesian and foreign researchers. At first by differentiating between lower and middle class women, the latter regarded as more restricted than the former because fewer middle-class women earned an income. The next stage in the discourse showed the strengths of the — at the time — new concept of gender, which argued that women's position had to be understood in relation to that of men. The gender approach brought gender constructs into focus, especially by examining how the feminine and masculine are defined and valued in each society. This led to the understanding that the position of women in Java must be evaluated in terms of the culture itself. As a result of this conceptual development, the Javanese concept of power as essentially spiritual in nature (Anderson 1972) has been exposed as gendered: women have less access to it than men, because they are considered more bound to the practicalities of life. Last but not least, different evaluations of men and women in Java on what constitute the ingredients of status have been brought to the surface. The development of the debate on the position of women in Java exhibits a convergence of material and symbolical approaches.

"JAVA": MYTH AND REALITY

In conclusion, we would want to present what studies of women and gender have to say about a number of popular clichés about Java. Each of these images refers to an assumed timeless characteristic of Java or at least a characteristic with a long history. As will be clear by now, the studies reviewed are seldom concerned with "*das Sein von*" Java. Nevertheless, every study gives us an insight into an aspect of Java as an economic, social, cultural, and political entity, although more often implicitly than explicitly. Therefore we would like to stress that the following conclusions, based on the work of others, are entirely ours.

Java as the Homeland of the Javanese and Javanese Culture, but also as "Indonesia"

For quite a number of authors, Java is definitely the homeland of the Javanese and of Javanese culture *par excellence*, and thereby the "pars," the Javanese of Central Java and their culture, comes to stand for the "toto." These authors often look at an aspect of Javanese keraton life or popular art and language. Some mention Java in the titles of their works, without additional clarification. If reference to Sundanese culture is made, the author always uses West Java as a geographical reference.

When a study is not on culture, it more often tends not to mention "Java" in the title at all. This points to an interesting trend: Java is very often presented as "Indonesia." The title of quite a number of studies mentions "Indonesia," but when reading further one finds out that it is about Java/Javanese women only. Obviously some researchers do not consider the cultural environment — either Javanese or Sundanese — relevant in relation to their research problem (for example Wibowo 1991). There may also be a reluctance among Indonesian scholars to refer to ethnicity in Indonesia, since focusing on *tunggal* (unity) rather than potentially disruptive *bhinneka* (diversity) is regarded as a more politically correct approach toward the unitary nation-state of Indonesia. Sometimes placing Indonesia rather than Java in the title is preferred in order to attract a larger reading public (Grijns et al. 1994). We therefore may conclude that "Java" and "Javanese-ness" is a suppressed theme in studies outside the cultural field. It is perhaps because of this that the very interesting question of how "Javanese" Indonesia actually is has hardly surfaced as a theme, at least in women's studies. An exception is Djajadiningrat's contribution on Ibuism. According to our view, it might be

relevant to look at institutions such as Dharma Wanita and the Ministry for Women's Affairs from this point of view, not to mention the way Ibu Tien has shaped the role of the First Lady.

We should on the other hand also be critical of Western scholars' fascination with "Java." Some imply that the emphasis on cultural difference is a conscious effort to continue a policy of "divide and rule," a form of cultural neo-imperialism. Or is it possible that because cultural difference is so striking in Indonesia, Java alone engenders great interest? Java as different from Bali, from Sumatra, and — last but not least — from Western culture?

Java as Overpopulated

Presenting Java as "Indonesia" is not that surprising considering that over half of Indonesia's population lives on this island. Java is the most densely populated area of the archipelago and therefore has been viewed of old as "overpopulated." The Netherlands–Indies colonial government already worried about Java's growing population and started a transmigration scheme in the early 20th century. The succeeding government of Soekarno, on the other hand, did not regard population growth in Java as a problem and assumed that the Javanese could make a living anyhow and that there was plenty of room for them on other islands. But during the New Order, the issue gained salience again. Java as an overpopulated island that cannot feed its population comes forward as a powerful image in many of the studies on women and work covering the time span of the Soeharto administration. The agricultural sector ousts men and women, both sexes migrate to cities and transmigrate to other islands of Indonesia. Java's overpopulation is also a major theme in studies on women, health, and family planning.

Java as Agrarian, Rural, and Poor

The traditional image of Java as a predominantly agrarian economy and as a rural society — evoked by the traditional picture of the rice-harvesting woman — has been shattered. At present Java is an island with diminishing natural resources in relation to its growing population that finds less employment in agriculture and must look frantically for new opportunities. Women's studies highlight this process: rural women work in off-farm activities, migrate to cities, enter petty trade, go to factories, and enter prostitution. Java has become a newly industrialized region in Southeast Asia. Unfortunately its masses have remained poor while social inequality, such a striking feature of the big cities, has become even more pronounced than it was in the past.

Java as Bureaucratic and Feudal

Another traditional image of Java is that of a bureaucratic, feudal "state" dominated by patron–client relationships. According to this image, Javanese political structures did not make possible a monolithic influence on village society as local leaders could still build up some measure of political independence. This image does not figure so much in the literature on women in Java. In particular those doctoral studies and other publications on women and reproductive health depict the power of the Indonesian state to influence women's lives down to village, family, and even individual level through the national Family Planning Program. There was one continuum: the Indonesian government, like the Javanese feudal state, made use of the village elite, in this case for the execution of the program. This village elite thereby lost much of its political independence and was "forced" to cooperate. The Indonesian state was also able to exert much more control by creating a structure of health care facilities at the village level (Puskesmas, Posyandu) and by using government-paid medical and paramedical personnel such as doctors, midwives, and nurses. The apparatus of the New Order women's "movement" (PKK) was also mobilized by the state to ensure the demographic success of family planning, and sometimes even the military were involved. So Java as a bureaucratic, feudal state seemed to be swept aside by a Java subjected to the control of a Javanese-style, bureaucratic, but definitely more centralized New Order nation-state. A Javanese society that is peasant and rural on one hand and feudal on the other represents not only a duality but also a hierarchy. An echo of this is the contempt with which Indonesian bureaucrats sometimes look upon rural life and peasants, including poor rural women.

Java as Islamic but Essentially Syncretist

Java is assumed to be Islamic, and this image is confirmed in the studies reviewed: as far as women's religion is discussed, the women are of the Islamic faith. However the general image of Islam is not homogenous. Clifford Geertz has already introduced the idea of priyayi, santri, and abangan traditions in Islam. We have not come across research that studies this subdivision and relates it to gendered codes of behavior. This is surprising, because adherence to different streams of Islam is so obviously reflected in women's dress. Only Brenner makes mention of changes in religious belief and ritual in Java in her study on the Laweyan women traders from Solo. She indicates a process of change towards stricter adherence to an Islamic dressing code, a new way of celebrating Idul Fitri, and the gradual disappearance of Javanese syncretist rituals commemorating the ancestors in this community. Is the kejawen way of life

or elements of it really disappearing? And if so, how does this process come about, and are processes like this also taking place in other parts of Java? And how do the male and female guardians of kejawen culture react to such a process? In this respect the influence of the kind of Javanese syncretism of the state might be crucial. The cultural aura of former "Javanese" President Soeharto was definitely left behind by two "Muslim" presidents with their respective first ladies. At present President Megawati conveys a rather opaque message. So it remains to be seen which mark she will leave on the Islamic–kejawen balance and how this will influence the state's gender ideology. Or maybe she just does not want to convey one. One thing is clear: President Megawati does not have any use for the slendang of Ibu Tien anymore, either in the form of a veil or a sash.

CONCLUSION

Similar to the transformation of the *slendang* from a working tool and symbol of care to a national accessory and symbol of (enforced) national unity as pictured in the introduction to this article, studies on women in Java have taken us from a specific focus on their daily lives to a broader interest in symbolism. Gender studies have put women on the stage in increasingly varied capacities, just like an unfolding fan painted with a different flower on each feather. From a narrow starting point that equated the active economic role of women with high status, gender studies have progressed to much more subtle analyses of the palette of gender ideologies available to women in Java. We have observed that the diversity of women's activities and gender ideologies stands in striking contrast to the New Order government's official monolithic gender ideology, which has attracted much (disproportional?) attention from researchers.

We have also tried to outline the contribution of gender studies to general images of Java. This has sometimes resulted in an affirmation of these images such as its central position within the archipelago, its overpopulation, and the hierarchical structure of its society. But it has also led to a readjustment of other images: from a static, rural society towards a more economically diversified one, with Islam playing a more pronounced role and an emphasis away from the Central Javanese domain. This contribution has gone largely unnoticed in the literature on "Java," which seldom refers to women or gender studies. To some extent the reverse is also true: studies on women and gender in Java have until recently not often quoted the discourse on "Java" either. It seems that academics from different disciplines or

specializations are not well acquainted with each other's work on Java. We hope this article remedies this problem to some extent by making a case for the interesting insights that the literature on women in Java has to offer, in particular for those who are fascinated by the subject of "Java."

So where does all this leave the slendang and Indonesia's first woman president Megawati Soekarnoputri? The slendang would fit Megawati perfectly, because her public image is that of a patient, motherly housewife who unobtrusively orchestrates the big family from the backstage. Even her rise to power came, like many of her Asian colleagues, in the context of family relations as the daughter of a former president. But no, the slendang is out and Ibu Mega seems to have chosen against "tradition." Her attire for daily use and also at most official receptions consists of a dress of Western cut and a smart handbag, more reminiscent of Margaret Thatcher than Ibu Tien. She reserves Javanese or Muslim clothing for occasions that are firmly placed in a traditional context, such as weddings and Muslim holidays. Megawati in her role as president does not have any use for Ibu Tien's slendang which is so loaded with political symbols, either in the form of a veil or a sash. John Pemberton (1994:267) argues that the only real resistance allowed under Soeharto was to refuse to be ritualized and placed as an object at the Taman Mini theme park — silence and absence was the reaction of the Javanese. Does Ibu Mega consciously refuse to wear the slendang the way Ibu Tien did? It appears as if she wants to bestow a new identity on Java: a Java that is modern and Western, where a woman can take care of her own purse and is confident in her own playing ground.

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