Among political anthropology’s long-standing insights, Indonesianist anthropology has contributed to how power is performatively constituted: the “state,” for instance, derives its ritual authority from monological spectacles (Geertz 1980; see also Errington 2000; Keane 2003). This monological performativity of politics, however, could be further examined by asking how politics operate dialogically (cf Bakhtin 1986); that is, by asking how claims to political legitimacy operate by invoking powerful audiences and their potential responses (cf Rutherford 2012). Taking the performance- and spectacle-like qualities of rule as a starting point, this paper suggests that political subjects are contingently differentiated and recognized through the dialogicality of communicative practices. Drawing from feminist insights (e.g. Landes 1998; Spivak 1988), I will pay attention to how gendered political subjects become asymmetrically differentiated from subjects deemed general and universal. In particular, by paying attention to gendered consequences of public speaking in a rural locale near Kupang (West Timor), I will ask how the subject of the “woman” (perempuan) and the “mother” (ibu/mama) are performatively gendered in public forums (“musyawarah”) and in the circulations of public political discourse. I contend that contemporary figures of the Indonesian “mother” and “woman,” which are often conflated, stand in relation to two processes: (1) national imaginings of motherhood as a feminized form of national belonging (Shiraishi 1997; Suryakusuma 2011); and (2) local histories of asymmetrical gender relations (e.g. Kuipers 1986). This paper thus contends that situated notions of governance emerges out of processes that are power-laden and yet persistently dialogical: processes that fragment and splinter ways of belonging as they invoke contingent forms of diversity.

Among Indonesianist anthropology’s contribution to the study of politics is the idea of performativity: “The state ceremonialis of classical Bali were metaphysical theatre: theatre designed to express a view of the ultimate nature of reality and, at the same time, to shape the existing conditions of life to be constant with that reality; that is, theatre to present an ontology, and by presenting it, to make it happen - make it actual” (Geertz 1980, 104). In this paper, I contend that such forms of performative theatricality are not past; in fact, such forms of performative theatricality are central to how contemporary Indonesian democracy is both idealized as and falls short of “rule by all.” Through an ethnographic study of how governance practices are performed within an administrative “village” (Bl: desa), I contend that new political subjectivities emerge in public forums, such as meetings (Bl: musyawarah). These new subjectivities are not only represented or reflected in these interactions; rather, these emergent subjectivities are produced, differentiated, and splintered by the interactions and exchanges that constitute these very meetings. Through five months of ongoing fieldwork in Oelbaun (a pseudonym),35 a multi-ethnic locale in West Timor, I contend that democratic political forums, such as the “town-hall meeting” (Bl: musyawarah perencanaan pembangunan), becomes a performative modality through which new forms of gendered political subjectivities emerge (cf Butler 1990). In the two ethnographic examples that I will analyze in this paper, I argue that “gender” as a form of political subjectivity emerges out of meetings and other discursively mediated interactions – following feminist scholarship on publics and political discourse, I analyze “gender” beyond preconceived notions of sexual difference between male-bodied and female-

35 All village names and names of persons in this paper are pseudonyms to protect my research subjects’ privacy.
bodied persons (cf Landes 1998, Scott 1999). Rather, as I will demonstrate, “gender” in its local understanding emerges out of how one performs and relationally situates one’s self as “male” or “female” participants of local political processes. Thus, gender is not merely a descriptor of persons; rather, issues, genres of speech, and other forms of interaction are also gendered (Gal 1991, 1995). Thus, in response to this panel’s call for non-calculative practices of rule, I will pay attention to how performatively constituted subjectivities characterize relations of governance across a heterogeneous populace.

THE PRODUCTION OF GENDERED DIFFERENCES

My aim in this section is to provide an analytic of dialogicality (cf Bakhtin 1986)– one that is based on the recognition of speakerhood and an anticipation of other’s response in the performance of governance practices (cf Rutherford 2012). These forms of subjective speakerhood, in turn, are mediated by numerous institutions that operate as sites of governance in my field site – NGOs, churches, village governments, and kin ties, among others. In Oelbaun, I counted no less than 4 NGOs that already have conducted projects dedicated to “women’s empowerment” (Bahasa Indonesia [BI]: pemberdayaan perempuan) in different parts of the same village. In my view, however, what is particular (though not unique) to Oelbaun is the fact that women are quite well-represented in local leadership positions (i.e. 40% of all chiefs of neighborhoods [ketua RT/RW] are women). According to Oelbaun’s village chief, “these women are now brave enough to speak in public although they were shy in the past” (BI: mama-mama sudah berani berbicara di depan umum meskipun dulunya malu-malu).” Especially among women in Oelbaun who have interacted extensively with feminist NGOs, they claim that, now, women can “speak in public” (Bahasa Kupang [BK]: baomong di depan umum) after they “have understood gender” (BI: sudah mengerti gender). The question, therefore, is how women recognize themselves and be recognized by others as those who speak efficaciously as a representative of “women’s interests” (BI: kepentingan perempuan) in public. I contend that gendered forms of public speakerhood emerge as subjectivities that are contested, differentiated and unpredictably called upon during interactions in political forums. Though almost all NGO staffers and village officials would describe these as changes as a process that takes years, I would like to emphasize how these performances are also organized spectacles – one that allows an imaginary of democracy as being inclusive and transformative of gendered differences to emerge. At the same time, these spectacles also constrain and limit how one can perform one’s self as being attentive to “women’s issues” while being a participant in political processes.

In one recent meeting where I observed a village legislation (BI: perdes) being drafted and discussed, I was party to a rather tedious session where an NGO staffer was tasked with reading a multi-page draft of two draft legislations: one on maternal health and another on child marriage. The NGO staffer, a woman named Ina, was tasked with reading these two documents word-by-word and allow for village council members to interrupt her and ask for clarifying details, or even to add additional suggestions on how to “use words correctly” (BI: penggunaan kata yang baik”). In Oelbaun, village council members are notorious for their dislike of the village chief, which is the NGO’s key ally in lobbying for village regulations that proactively include women in local governance structures. In a meeting that I witnessed, Ina was asked to define “postpartum bleeding” (BI: nifas) for a 50-something year-old male councilmember, much to the chagrin of women public health volunteers who were present (and have aided the birth of countless babies in the village). Another council member asked for a “mother who is a health volunteer” (BK: mama kader) to provide an explanation. In response to the roaring bouts of laughter that followed, the
councilmember said that “this is something that is reasonable for a man to ask” (BI: wajarlah kalau laki-laki bertanya hal ini). At this moment of interaction, governance is performed as a dialogue: one not only responds to what has been said, but one anticipates what others will say. Furthermore, in this particular instance, it is not only women and men who are differentiated by their responses to the question what “postpartum bleeding” is; rather, by assigning the labor of explicating and translating to women who are public health volunteers, childbirth and safe labor were gendered as a women’s issue. This brief exchange illustrates how gendered subjectivities are performed during a public meeting, which is one of local democracy’s defining spectacles. Through this local spectacle, Ina’s NGO claims that women’s voices” (BI: suara perempuan) are performed as part of local democracy, though in a position that is inextricable from the masculine forms of knowledge presumed by the village council member.

A FAILED SPECTACLE

One of democracy’s defining spectacles is the Habermasian idea that anyone can become public speakers in deliberative forums that are supposedly based on rational principles of debate (Habermas 1989). In the following example, I would like to point how “women’s voices” (BI: suara perempuan) that seem to be unitary in meetings are constituted by the exclusion of certain groups of women from these decision-making forums. Following feminist scholar who have extensively described women and those presupposed as irrational have been excluded from public political life (Fraser 1990, Landes 1998, Warner 2002), I would like to point out that exclusions do not neatly classify political subjects as those who rule and those who resist: these democratic practices, such as meetings, are not one-off performances that fully enact a form of political totality, but forms of discourse that animates political life even among those who are excluded from privileged decision-making forums. In Oelbaun, for instance, invitations to the town-hall meetings (BI: musyawarah perencanaan pembangunan) where budgetary decisions are made are politically charged – one could be invited or even expelled from one. Such practices demonstrate how political subjectivities are constituted through disagreements and exclusions, even when a village has supposedly embraced the importance of including women’s voices in deliberative forums.

Even with Annie, a woman representative in the Oelbaun village council, many Oelbaun women were only reluctantly incorporated as part of town-hall meetings, including Mariah, Jane, and her neighbors, all of whom run businesses out of their homes for a living. In 2018, Mariah and her neighbors were not invited to the last town-hall meeting (BI: musyawarah perencanaan pembangunan), but they showed up anyway, though they were severely reprimanded when they were about to get food during lunch time. Annie, a village council member and the chief of a women’s co-op, reprimanded them by asking “why are you here eating our food” (BK: bosong buat apa makan makanan katong). Offended, Mariah and her friends left. This, however, was only the start of a long series of interactions with Annie that left Mariah feeling incredibly disappointed. Among others, budgetary appropriations from the village’s annual fund were decided in the town-hall meeting, which they were expelled from.

In Oelbaun, Mariah, Jane, and a group of women who all belong together to the same coop (BI: koperasi) were surprised one day when their village chief showed up with Annie to distribute cooking equipment and ingredients for a kind of banana jelly (BI: dodol pisang). One woman, Jane, received a set of cooking equipment, including large kerosene stoves that people normally use for large functions. Another one, Mariah, received a whole shipment of ingredients for the banana
pudding - according to Annie, the instigator of this enterprise, the ingredients are worth Rp 1,800,000 (~$130), and coop members are expected to return the money within a span of one year to the village government. That way, the money is supposed to become part of a rotating fund that could be accessed by other members of the women’s coop in the village as start-up capital. Mariah was incredibly baffled because, in effect, she received an order not only to cook for the village, but also to pay the village government a substantial amount of money. She refused to obey Annie’s instructions and instead began to investigate how the spectacular amount of Rp 1.8 million came into being.

In this instance, the village’s centralized form of rule ruptured as soon as it fails to materialize the money that Annie and her collaborators wanted to collect from villagers. In fact, it splinters the women villagers who belong to the same coop, SP, into several different factions: the ones who have access to lobbying the village government (Annie), and the ones who do not (Mariah and Jane). Annie, who was assigned by the village government to coordinate food production by household cottage industries, subsequently gave Mariah a list of ingredients and their prices to justify the 1.8 million Rupiah that needs to be returned to the village. Mariah, however, was shocked, because the value of the ingredients was severely overestimated. For instance, rice flour, which should cost only Rp 9,000 per kg, was listed as Rp 20,000 per kg in the manifest that Annie submitted. According to her, Annie said that these increases are due to “taxes” (BI: pajak), which Mariah didn’t believe. Mariah was even baffled by how she was told to cook banana jellies using these ingredients, because the process involves stirring a vat of thick liquid non-stop for hours - something that would exhaust her group of 4 women who are all above the age of 50. Making these jellies, according to her, is a “man’s job” (BI: tugas laki-laki).

Although Annie technically has a leadership position in both the village and the women’s coop, her credibility was damaged by this one interaction – she is said to no longer be one “who fights for women’s rights” in the village. Furthermore, the banana jelly, albeit more long lasting than other forms of preserved foods, spoiled only after one week, which made it impossible to raise the US$ 130 demanded by Annie and the village government. Weeks later, Mariah was still diligently accounting for the made-up differences that caused the cost of ingredients to blow-up - she meticulously asked the owner of a dry goods kiosk about how much these ingredients should cost in the local market. These details were recounted to me during one meeting of the women’s coop, and I labeled this instance as “robbery by way of banana jelly” (BI: ditodong dengan dodol pisang).

In this incident, forms of democratic ruling through budgetary decision-making splintered a supposedly coherent social grouping (“the women’s coop) into factions who disagree. Though the village government has incredible powers to form financial decisions and entangle its own citizens in financial quagmires, its legitimacy was thrown into question as soon as Mariah refused to cook for the village and Jane returned the set of cooking equipment. The sheer material force by which the village exerted itself as a governing entity – the command to cook banana jellies – fails to get reciprocated with labor and money, but this incident manages to incite a set of debates and dialogues among those who are excluded.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The two ethnographic vignettes I drew from demonstrate how politics operate as dialogical practice: one’s own actions are always evaluated relationally according to one’s own interlocutors, although they might not always be co-present in the same space or time. I draw this analytic from
Bakhtin’s (1986) notion of dialogicality: that all voices do not stand as total representations of an individual or a singular entity, rather, all voices are mediated though the voices of others. Through this paper, I contend that voices are essentialized as taxonomically organized forms of political subjectivities. Many institutions that claim “democracy” as their key value thus claim that governance needs to include an ever-increasing variety of voices in governance—women’s voices, the voices of those with disability, the voices of sexual minorities, and others. At the same time, once these voices are recognized as a separate entity, they are already given a discursive slot in which their political roles are circumscribed. Echoing Geertz’s insight on how performances constitute governance itself, the ever-increasing multiplicity of voices in public staging’s of democracy demonstrate how these performances define the terms through which democracy’s political subjects could be recognized. Thus, going beyond how a voice is understood as a form of representation, analyzing voicing as dialogical phenomena in which actions are always already relational and political would allow ethnographers to analyze the power-laden relationalities that emerge across emergent political subjectivities.

Secondly, I have emphasized how political subjectivities are constituted not only by becoming part of performances of governance, but also by citing and reanimating such performances. In both ethnographic vignettes I have presented, meetings, public forums, negotiations, and other discursively mediated performances are privileged sites where legitimate governance supposedly emanates from. In the first example, I have shown how “women’s voices” are performed and restricted in a forum that is seen as a legitimate gathering of decision makers. In the second example, I have demonstrated even those who are excluded from decision-making forums also voice the same aspirations to be included in these performances of democratic governance. Rather than understanding these phenomena as hierarchical schemes that neatly divide those who rule from those who resist, I would like to point out how these performances demonstrate how political subjectivities are performed and differentiated through contestations and disagreements.

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“They Call It a Revolution”: Affect in Reproductive Governance and Health Politics in Indonesia

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This paper explains how health metrics are used as technologies of rule to shift women’s perception from homebirth to clinical birth in East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The Maternal and Neonatal Health Revolution is a bilaterally funded program between the Australian and Indonesian governments, initiated in 2009 and formally ended in 2015. This “revolutionary” program works through advancing strict rules and regulations, bureaucratic procedures, guidelines, and metrics. Yet, if a massive maternal mortality intervention should lead to more women accessing healthcare and thus reduce maternal mortality, why is it that so many women in this village still hesitant to go to the clinic? Considering the heavy reliance on statistically robust results in global health projects, what do numbers do when they are used to make women change their decision regarding place of birth? In this paper, I describe how people react to, reflect, and challenge the apparent function of numbers intended to change women’s child birthing practices. As the circulation of numbers is attached with certain values, people’s encounter with numbers influences their experience of the world. To answer my questions, I use the concept of affective numbers to see people’s sensorial and spatial experiences in the supposedly vital moment of childbirth. I draw my framework from the phenomenological approach of counting or being counted to underline how numbers are constructed, experienced, and understood by different actors.

Keywords: affect, metrics, maternal and child health, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

It was noon on a day in July 2017. Elena, a woman in the small village of Tengku Lese, nestled in the Manggarai highlands of Indonesia, had given birth at her home. I accompanied Maria, one of the two nurses stationed at the Tengku Lese health post (and who was herself pregnant at the time) as she went to check on Elena’s condition. Maria was upset. When we travelled from the village health post to Elena’s house, she complained about the difficulty of making people change their preference from birthing at home to using the village health clinic. Since 2009, the state-