Violence in the day-to-day lives of women plantation workers in Central Java, Indonesia

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Chapter Five
Demands for Gender Equality and Government Responses: Linking the Macro and Micro Contexts

Introduction

The chapter has a tripartite structure, first focusing on a short discussion of the roots of the formation of women’s national political movements in Indonesia prior to and during the Dutch colonial era and the ebb and flow of such movements during the struggle for and shortly after independence. As Indonesia has signed many international conventions concerning women and human rights, the second part of this chapter aims to describe government policies and programs on gender issues as responses to growing international and national demands for gender equality. Questions about the government’s role in accommodating the needs and interests of women -politically, practically, and by merely paying lip service- are posed to understand women’s status and rights in the macro-context of Indonesia. This covers the New Order period (1967-1998) through to 2001. In the third section, the interrelationships between the macro and micro contexts of the plantation community along with local ideas on women and gender relations will be analyzed. In this way, women’s life experiences will be contextualized in the ecological framework of gender violence. As such, this chapter addresses the structural and socio-cultural constraints which explain why it is difficult for women’s movements and government policies to reach grassroots levels, in this case plantation workers.

In addition, the chapter discusses four substantial issues related to the difficulties of government and other concerned organizations to address the needs and interests of women plantation workers using gender and women’s rights perspectives. First, situated in a relatively remote area of Central Java, the plantation community is rarely impacted by the ongoing demand of gender equality and women’s rights in the broader community. Village governments and the plantation authority are not concerned with the concept of gender equality and justice and thus do not implement programs related to the elimination of gender-based discrimination and violence. Instead, the role of rural women as active household earners is taken as proof of women’s high status and role in the community.

Second, women workers play crucial roles in day-to-day plantation operation through their labor both for production and reproduction roles. Unfortunately, efforts to improve women’s social status and their bargaining position in the domestic, public and community spheres necessarily bring them into contact with the highly hierarchical and male dominated plantation social structure, leaving women in a vulnerable position when engaged in such activities.
The third issue has to do with the operational definition of the concept of violence against women used by government and non-government agencies. International and national treaties on violence against women have included physical, psychological, and sexual violence as aggression against women’s health and rights but little attention has been paid to violence and harassment considered ‘less harmful’ and ‘more bearable’ which takes place in the daily lives of women at all levels, in this case in the plantation community.

Finally, there are also socio-cultural gaps that hinder the influence of ideas on gender equality and the elimination of gender violence on women plantation workers.

1. The Women’s Movement in Indonesia: Demands for Equality and Justice

No discussion of the Indonesian’s women’s movement would be complete without Kartini, celebrated Indonesian feminist of the early 20th century. This section briefly describes the initial demands for women’s emancipation based on Kartini’s writings and life experience and the Indonesian women’s movement’s struggle for equality and justice during pre-independence and in the newly independent state.

1.1. Kartini’s Inspiration and the Birth of Women’s Organizations

Several Indonesian women have been politically influential in local efforts to fight colonialism at different times and places in the archipelago. It was with Kartini, however, that the women’s movement in Indonesia came into being. The beginning of the twentieth century, a time of growing consciousness in Indonesia for independence, was also marked by the opening of women’s eyes as to their position both as colonized citizens and women. Kartini, who died at a young age in 1904 only a few weeks after she gave birth to her only son, was declared a national hero in 1964 for her inspiration and action taken for the future of Javanese women and Indonesian women generally. This heroine was born into a noble family, a fact that might lead to some criticism, but she had brilliant thoughts and ideas that differentiated her from other aristocrat women. This was because her criticisms were directed at her personal life experiences, a life that for many others would be seen as a dream. On the basis of her life experiences and her witnessing of women who were stuck out of sight in unequal social roles and relations with men as well as her encounters and correspondence with Dutch feminist Stella Zeehandelaar and the Dutch Director of Education, Abendanon and his wife, Kartini’s ideas of emancipation magnificently expressed the living conditions of Javanese women and eventually her own crises and tears. Kartini was a true nationalist when she argued that by educating women, their roles as wives and mothers would be significantly improved and, in turn, future family and community welfare and nation building would be secured. She also expressed her feelings about the damaging effect of colonization to not only the lives of civilians but also to the local elites. The latter referred to her own father, who upheld colonial political interests and had no independent status as regent.

1 For greater detail see Wierenga (1995) whose book introduces crucial periods in Indonesian history that were significant for the women’s struggle for equal rights.
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(bupati) of Jepara, and therefore could not defend the interests of his own people (see also Toer 1990).

Kartini was, in fact, the first Indonesian feminist who questioned and demanded women’s emancipation in her era. For the most part Kartini blamed women’s universal lack of education as a result of traditional restrictions on women’s participation in public life. At that time, noble women were free only during the first twelve years of their life. After this they were shut away behind the walls of the palace (keraton) and kept from independently engaging in public appearances or public issues. This was supposed to be the ideal time for women to find husbands and start their new lives as wives. This was also the time in a woman’s life when she might encounter marital abuse or polygamy, two issues that Kartini fought against. Kartini’s enduring demand for women’s involvement in public affairs was not readily applicable to most Javanese women who exist outside royalty and elite family backgrounds. Indeed, most rural (Javanese) women have been involved in agricultural and other productive activities for time immemorial and through this attained more equal status with their male counterparts in the household and in the community. But, education was not irrelevant for these women. History reveals that women’s status had been degrading due to changes in the modes of production (Boserup 1970) and the idea of womanhood held by the patriarchal system of royal elites, colonials, and the interpretations of religious teachings (Traitler-Espiritu 1996). Years later, the Indonesian state’s construction of gender roles during the New Order era would have a significant impact (see section 5.2). By demanding equal opportunity for education as a basic weapon to enter society, Kartini was intrinsically asking for equality of the social roles of men and women regardless of their socio-cultural backgrounds. She was aware that when women and men had more equal access to education and public life, their traditional roles and the notions of manhood and womanhood would be transformed.

While Kartini’s work is noted as an individual struggle that indirectly worked to emancipate women, the milestones of the history of the Indonesian women’s movement were the establishments of Poetri Mardika and a number of other women’s organizations in the 1920s. Facilitated by the first nationalist movement Boedi Oetomo in 1920, the birth of Poetri Mardika clearly showed the close connection between the Indonesian women’s movement and a broad nationalist movement struggling for emancipation, nationalism, and freedom from colonization (Suryochondro 1984). At that time, women’s organizations were inspired by Kartini’s ideas to improve women’s social status through the establishment of women’s schools and periodicals in both collective and systematic ways. The women’s movement in Indonesia during its early stages, indeed, shared general political interests with that of the struggle for independence. It is understandable that women marched hand in hand with their male counterparts to fight for justice while at the same time also struggled for their own interests: women’s rights and equality. Nevertheless, the fact that colonization also limited men’s political rights, meant that the demand for gender equality did not play a

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2 The word ‘emanisipasi’ (emancipation) defined as persamaan hak (equal rights) is much referred to in Kartini’s work. Usually ‘equal rights’ is used more widely.
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strong role in the struggle for emancipation and thus women's suffrage was mainly taken up by European women (Wierenga 1995).

During the pre-independence era, women's organizations held four Women Congresses (Konggres Perempuan) that addressed several issues substantial for the improvement of women's status and welfare. Among these were education, the protection of widows and orphans, marriage reform, the improvement of women's dignity, forced marriage, traffic in women, political rights (the vote), women's labor, health and sanitation, and the infant mortality rate, one issue still relevant in Indonesia today. Women's interests, however, were not uniform mostly due to the differing ideological backgrounds of their corresponding organizations. Tension arose over marriage law, specifically the issue of polygamy and the improvement of women's status in marriage, between nationalist, Islamic and non-Islamic organizations. Resistance came from male leaders of Islamic organizations who did not allow their women's sections an equal voice. The three types of organizations were able to agree on the need for improving women’s married life and at the same time not challenging Islamic marriage law, interpretation of which allows up to four wives. The fight against polygamy was unlikely to be won, so many women activists let the issue slide to make progress in other areas. The need to serve the major political collective interest of the Indonesian people, rather than to address solely the interest of women, excluded the debates of polygamy and other exclusive gender-related matters. It wasn't until the Indonesian marriage laws of 1974, that polygamy was finally constrained. These laws, however, remain open for discussion because their underlying principles are conflicting and biased, as shall be discussed later.

1.2. The Japanese Occupation

The Japanese occupation from 1942 to 1945 had an extremely devastating effect on the life of the Indonesian people. In this period, all human and economic resources were devoted to support the war against Western domination by promulgating the Asian, Eastern spirit. Promises by the 'older brother' (Japanese occupiers) to fulfill Indonesia's dream of an independent state were not realized until the war turned in favor of the Allies in 1945. Women's movement organizations active before the occupation were destroyed during this time. Japanese war policy only allowed mass organizations to support the war; three women sections were created as part of main organizations, namely Barisan Poeteri Asia Raja part of Gerakan Tiga A, a Japanese military force; Barisan Pekerja Perempuan Poetera part of Poesat Tenaga Rakja (Poetera), a labor organization; and Huzinhokokai, a women's wing of the Java Service Association (Java Hokokai). However, the Japanese authority gave women no clear roles in the establishment of these women's sections.

The only all women's organization, Fujinkai, was initiated in 1943. Its activities supported Japanese soldiers and Peta (a guerilla force of Indonesian men trained by the Japanese military), through the food supply and red-cross assembly. In addition, social work was initiated to improve women's skills in the form of literacy programs, health care, and food diversification programs to cope with famine and shortages that emerged as a result of the war. Fujinkai was organized in line with existing bureaucratic systems,
and its members were thus wives of elite bureaucrats. Despite its social work with poor women in certain areas of Jakarta, in some areas of Surabaya the word Fujinkai carried a negative connotation as it only involved elite women, the wives of civil servants (Lucas 1997). During that time the spread of the split values of womanhood as heavy workers who yet had to maintain their beauty were made through speeches and newspaper advertisements as part of the Japanese effort to promote the image of women as wives, mothers, and workers. Because many women had to work hard to make a living, only those who belonged to the elite, predominantly Fujinkai members, could attain the beauty aspect of this campaign. The association of the word Fujinkai with high-class prostitution was most likely a form of hidden protest by rural poor women who lived in severity against prosperous women who lived in high style in the shadow of their husbands.

Older Indonesians who experienced the Japanese occupation easily recall sad memories of living through famine and shortages. However, this period provided experience in physical and mental training and exercises in surveillance under the Japanese military that to some extent were taken advantage of by women as well as men. Women learned how to make a virtue out of coping with the brunt of food, clothing, and essential daily goods shortages (Lucas 1997). The most damaging effect on women, however, was the Japanese use of comfort women (jugun ianfu) to entertain Japanese soldiers. The term glosses over the sexual brutality that survivors have described in their testimonies years later.

Many members of former women’s organizations were involved in Fujinkai activities or other local women’s social networks, and thus were able to stay active and connected to their goals of improving women’ status. Through maintaining contact, they were able to develop their ideas and await their reunion, apparent in the inauguration of the Indonesian Women’s Congress (Konggres Wanita Indonesia or Kowani) in February 1946, a few months after independence from the Japanese.

1.3. The Soekarno Era (Post-Independence)

Shortly after Independence, the re-birth of the women’s struggle for equal rights was made through the establishment of a new organization called Indonesian United Women (Persatuan Wanita Republik Indonesia, or Perwari), which was then followed by the creation of several other women organizations. Similar to the pre-Japanese occupation era, these women’s organizations came from diverse backgrounds related to political ideology, locality, and interests. Later these organizations joined Kowani, which served as a federation run by representatives of member organizations. While these organizations were united by the same goal to fulfill the needs of the newly independent Indonesia, tensions around the issues of marriage laws and polygamy resurfaced during the post-independence era (1945-1966). Other issues such as political rights and women’s labor were more clearly addressed during Soekarno’s era. In this period, women were given the right to vote and to have parliamentary positions, signs

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3 For details in the disclosure and impact of the sexual enslavement of Indonesian women see among others Hartono and Yuliantoro (1997) and Juningsih (1999).
of the recognition of the political rights of Indonesian women. The era was also marked by appointment of three women ministers at different times. In addition, laws concerning women’s labor were produced. Some gender biases, however, remained. Elliot (1997) argues that the laws were concerned with protecting women’s roles as mothers and wives and had nothing to do with women’s rights in choosing work or gaining promotions, which would thereby secure economic independence. For instance, Law No. 1/1951 forbid women from working in mines, operating heavy equipment, working underground and working at night. Exceptions were made only if the job benefited the public good, such as in a case of hospital nurses. Women really needed improvement of their status at work and not merely the protection of their gender roles as mothers and wives. In the same manner, the launching of Law No. 80/1958, a labor law that demanded equal pay for women and men in the same work and position, was a sign of government accommodation to gender equality rights proposed by women activists. However, the law gave women little advantage and the underlying principles in the context of the law have been questioned. The real problem was that women and men were mostly engaged in segregated work in which women occupied low-wage employment positions. This was associated with the characteristics of work, which required patience and manners suitable to women’s traditional attributes.

Women’s struggles for better marriage laws were badly betrayed when President Sockarno took his second wife. This was a real blow to the struggle to end polygamy which started with Kartini and which was fought for since the first women’s congress in 1928. Contrary to the demands of women activists to create marriage laws that would ban polygamy, government decision number 19/1952 allowed for civil servant pensions to be granted to up to four widows. This law clearly demonstrated the government’s commitments, and resulted in protests by women activists, both individually and on behalf of their corresponding organizations, during the eighth anniversary of Perwari on December 17, 1953.

The era was also marked by a weaker demand for modern laws to protect women from marriage abuse and polygamy. There was even a loss of support from nationalist and non-Islamic organizations, once the steady opponents of Islamic women’s organizations in discussion of such issues in the past. Wierenga (1995) argues this was the fault of women. Women were prominent figures during pre-independence not only as good mothers and wives but also as fighters for equal rights in the domestic and public spheres. After independence, however, the public and domestic arenas were more focused on the re-conceptualization of equality and difference that had traditional and religious basis in kodrat (women’s virtue). Interpretations of kodrat argue the four M’s of reproductive rights, namely menstruasi, mengandung, melahirkan, menyusui (menstruation, pregnancy, giving birth, and breastfeeding). Most women perceived their domestic roles as homemakers and childcare providers as related to their kodrat as these roles are a consequence of their womanly virtue. At this time, many women’s organizations were gradually turning from politics to involvement in charity and social issues, thus associating themselves more with traditional gender roles. One could argue that the women were satisfied with their achievements in political rights, thus they left the issue of politics to male leaders while busying themselves with social welfare issues.
related to their *kodrat*. As a consequence, men were then dominant in the political arena, and thus there was no attention given to household issues; marriage law and polygamy were abandoned.

Although a few strong women were elected to parliament and served on the Kowani board, their efforts met with little success. Issues like marriage and polygamy laws were seen as irrelevant in the dominant (male) political nation building agenda. Demands centered on the improvement of women’s status were considered independent social issues with defined gender interests that should be discussed by women. Therefore, the women’s struggle for equal rights was again handicapped by the definition of gender differences and spheres, which were re-emphasized after independence.

The battle against polygamy, however, has been a long one, continuing even today⁴. Despite the introduction of marriage laws in 1974 which are seen to empower wives, women still face conflict over their roles. This was because during the New Order era, women’s position and roles in the nation were formulated in decentralized ways that have big impacts even in present Indonesia. As was shown in the previous chapter, women living in the village and working as plantation workers are nonetheless influenced by the dominant interpretation of gender roles and expectations, which are observable in cultural practices and division of labor.

2. The Birth and Progress of Government Commitments to Gender Equality during the New Order Era

This section extensively examines the demand for and government response to gender equality and justice during the New Order regime. This era was a significant period in the development of all aspects of Indonesian livelihood. For more than 30 years under the New Order regime, Indonesian women were the targets of systematic state formulation of the ideal woman. This strategy is evident in official documents that clearly define women’s roles in contemporary Indonesia. In practice, it made use of bureaucratic organizations involving the wives of civil servants at all levels of government. This strategy followed its predecessor, the Japanese era Fujinkai. Thus the ways in which the government mobilized women for the development process was not totally new.

2.1. Constructing the Ideal Indonesian Women

The ambivalence regarding Javanese women’s status was crucial with regard to the political changes that took place in Indonesia during the New Order era. A distinct pattern developed, known as *ibu-ism* (*ibu* is a respectful term used to address wives, mothers, and other women, thus *ibu*-ism could be defined as Mrs.-ism; Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis 1987), providing the basis for a specific form of gender ideology. This

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⁴ 2001 and 2002 were marked by contesting campaigns between pro-polygamy and pro-monogamy movements, particularly in Jakarta and Yogyakarta. The former was represented by a notable Javanese restauranteur who has four wives and declared himself a polygamy campaigner; the latter was a reaction organized by women activists and organizations to block the restauranteur’s extensive polygamy campaign in which he used mass media and Islamic activities.
combined elements from both Javanese and Dutch social values, with a strongly idealized concept of ‘mother’ at its center. It revolves around the notion that women ‘naturally’ perform the role of mothers, caring for men, children, family, and beyond to include the wellbeing of a community and even so far as to include the State, doing all of this with no demand for power or prestige in return. *Ibu-*ism achieved its most formal and influential position by its ruthless application to members of ‘Dharma Wanita’, a national organization extending its (compulsory) membership to the wives of civil servants. It has subsequently prompted the introduction of the term ‘State-*Ibuism*’. Ideally, women are seen and behave as “...appendages and companions to their husbands, as procreators of the nation, as mothers and educators of children, as housekeepers, as members of Indonesian society - in that order...” (Suryakusuma 1996:101).

One direct result from the clearly defined, hierarchical nature of Indonesia’s bureaucracy during the New Order era was the successful and systematic development and implementation of this ideology in all layers of society, particularly in Java. It was instrumental in reproducing and reinforcing the strongly patriarchal social system. At its center lies the implication of submissiveness of a woman’s position as wife and mother. When a woman’s position as a wife is considered more important than as a mother and head of the (nucleus-) family, there is a strong negative influence on her economic independence as a wage earner, which in turn condones a weak bargaining position in general for women when facing their husbands. In public life too, through this ideology it became possible to regulate the subordination of a woman’s position to that of a man’s, any man’s, regardless of their marital relationship. The roles ascribed to and expected from women as defined by the successful implementation of ‘*Ibu-*ism’ thus resulted in the subordination of their position in the public domain. No longer would their public appearance be independently, individually theirs, but instead it would forever be associated with their gender role. This also brought about the marginalization of women in labor positions.

The creation of the specific gender roles and expectations during the New Order era was strengthened by rapid economic developments, particularly industrialization, which resulted in the separation of household and workplace. In one study (Wolf 1986:287-292), it is described that married women are forced to choose between housework and paid work in the factory. A similar situation for the young generation of women entrepreneurs was identified (Brenner 1998:240-241). They gradually adopted the role and image of housewife, responsible for housework and child care, while the acquisition of economic resources was left to their husbands. In Indonesia, and particularly in Java, the government-sponsored role and image of women reinforced by political gender economics found easy acceptance, since it was not dissimilar to the Javanese cultural ideal of women’s lower social status in the public domain, as compared to men.

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5 Regardless of the workers’ position, men were found to receive better pay than women, doing the same work, assuming that men are the primary income earners, while women are not (Wolf 1986).
It was in the early stage of the New Order era when the struggle for equal rights of men and women came to fruition in the establishment of the much fought for marriage law, finally signed in 1974. Although opposition from Islamic organizations which resisted the implementation of any marriage law was present, the launching of Law No. 1/1974 as the first modern marriage law promised the development of equal gender rights. The practice of polygamy is restricted among Indonesian civil servants in government regulation No. 10/1983, which serves as the guideline for implementation of the marriage law. Substantial weaknesses in the law, however, leave many issues open for discussion. This is because the law makes it possible for a man to take a second wife, so long as this is approved by the first wife. Men have many ways, however, of securing this permission, and it is not unthinkable that wives could be forced into agreement or that husbands could use other ruses to obtain approval. In addition, the implementation of the law is limited to civil servants and thus still allows all other Indonesian men to use the Islamic interpretation of polygamy law. Currently, the revision of this law is one of several issues on the agenda of women activists.

Additionally, this law is politically disadvantageous to the struggle for gender inequality. The implementation of the 1974 Marriage Law can be interpreted as one means to legalize gender-biased ideology and the process of ‘housewife-ization’. Despite Indonesia’s boast of equal rights for all citizens, as is formally laid down in both the 1945 Constitution and the encompassing state ideology known as *Pancasila* (Five Principles), women are treated unequally in the 1974 Marriage Law in terms of rights and opportunities. This law clearly defines that the husband is head of the household and provider for the family, and that the wife is mother, whose main responsibility is the household. Thus Article 31 states that the husband is head of the family and Article 34 states that “… (1) The husband shall protect his wife and provide all necessities of life required in a family to the best of his ability; and (2) the wife shall manage the household to the best of her ability…” The law legitimizes the inferior and economically dependent position of married women, while, at the same time, the lack of support for women to independently acquire income places them in a vulnerable position.

Through the establishment of official state-defined roles of women in *Panca Dharma Wanita* (Five Women’s Duties), stated in the *Garis-garis Besar Haluan Negara* (GBHN, the State’s Policy Guidelines) 1974, gender politics were introduced into the Indonesian discourse. The five women’s duties include being a loyal companion to the husband, a wife and manager of the household, a mother and educator of the children, an earner of extra income and a social worker, as well as an Indonesia citizen. The implications of this strongly familial ideology go beyond validating the exclusion of women from public life. It provides a naturalized model of hierarchy and authority and showcases the patriarchal family as a model for social behavior and for the unequal exercise of power and rights. According to this model, ideal women share attributes of submissiveness, quietness, soft-spoken-ness, vulnerability and willingness to be the supporting partner (of the male).
During the New Order era the establishment of Dharma Wanita and PKK (Peningkatan/Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, the Improvement/Education of Family Welfare) were used effectively as channels for the state ideology of gender relations, which embraced all public and domestic issues. For the 30-year New Order period, Dharma Wanita was the official women’s organization both for the wives of civil servants and women civil servants. In addition, PKK, with its Ten Basic Programs, was a cutting edge program on family and community welfare targeting women in diverse communities throughout the country. It was the principal mediating body between the state and urban lower-class neighborhoods (kampong) and rural households, which operated through women-centered activities.

The basic principle of Dharma Wanita and PKK was the improvement of women’s skills in practical issues related to traditional women’s roles as wives, mothers, and community members. Membership was mandatory for women. Women who worked as civil servants or were working women married to government officials had to join Dharma Wanita, and all married women in the community regardless of the status of their husband or their husbands’ work had to join PKK. Women’s full participation in both organizations was expected, and their time and labor to be given voluntary. In the plantation, too, the influence of these two women’s organizations was significant. Permanent women workers were expected to be involved in Dharma Wanita Perkebunan (Plantation Dharma Wanita) formerly the worker’s wife association (persatuan isteri karyawan, or Periska) in their capacities as wives (of plantation workers) or themselves as workers. At the same time, as village community members they were also expected to participate in the PKK activities.

During the early stages of the reformation era, shortly after the 1998 resignation of Suharto, Indonesians were in a state of euphoria over the freedom from authoritarianism. Among other impacts, on my observations, this included a feeling of detachment from the uniformity of organizations. Dharma Wanita dealt with this by changing its name to Dharma Wanita Persatuan as an effort to reform its image. Other women’s organizations also changed their names; Dharma Wanita Perkebunan became Paguyuban Ibu-ibu (The Association of Ibu-ibu, a term used to refer to women, wives, and mothers). These name changes, however, were more of an effort by the organizations to distance themselves from the New Order era than to substantially change their philosophy or activities. Indeed, there were few changes made to the organizations, and over time, people gradually began to again refer to Dharma Wanita rather than Dharma Wanita Persatuan, as they found that they remained the same in character.

As the only women’s organization for women civil servants and the wives of male civil servants, Dharma Wanita was a strategic government weapon for the spread of its

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6 The programs covered Pancasila, fostering mutual help (gotong royong), food and nutrition, clothing, housing and home economics, education and skills, health, cooperatives, environmental preservation, and appropriate domestic planning. See Wierenga (1995), Blackwood (1995), Tiwon (1996), and Suryakusuma (1996), for exploration of the link between Dharma Wanita, PKK and other wife organizations, and government ideology and their influence on local interpretations of gender roles.
ideas of femininity to all levels of the bureaucracy. The appointment of wives of the heads of government bodies as the heads of local Dharma Wanita organizations facilitated the dissemination of these ideas. This mechanism had a clear end, the idea of gender roles were transferred to families and communities through involvement in the organization. Through this mechanism, women who were exercising power due to their husbands' position in a government institution had the opportunity to develop their own style of persuading other women -especially the wives of their husbands’ inferiors- to accumulate power to secure the husbands’ position. Low-level women civil servants and the wives of their male counterparts often felt as though they were forced to participate in the organization’s activities as participation would significantly affect their own or their husbands’ kondite (working records used in evaluation). The more active the women were in mobilizing members to be involved in activities, the more successful they were considered at securing their husband’s position. In this regard, women were forced to become involved in the political interests of their husbands as subordinates of them. Interestingly, although women were seen as submissive, as stated in the first of the Five Women’s Duties (loyal companion to the husband), at the same time they were frequently considered powerful. This was because of their capacity to secure or endanger their husbands’ career through their involvement in Dharma Wanita. Most recognized that husbands’ positions more or less depended on their wives strategic moves. Active efforts to approach the wives of a husband’s superiors through involvement in the circle of powerful women behind the boss could be achieved through Dharma Wanita⁷. With regard to this, women’s subordinate positions were utilized for (male) political reasons and thus the powerful position of women was neither because they stood on their own nor because they were pursuing their own interests. Instead, their efforts were an attempt to promote the status of their husband to whom they were loyal.

PKK, as a state-initiated women’s activity, was also a channel for introducing gender roles to women in the community who were expected to be its members. The wives of government leaders at all levels headed PKK. This mechanism made it possible for the program to involve women in the community. Rural and urban middle- and lower-class women, who make up the vast majority of Indonesian women, were members of this program, which was established in multilevel small groups of household and neighborhood associations. As in Dharma Wanita, the wives of government leaders did their best to successfully use PKK to support their husbands’ prestige. Wives of village heads were prominent PKK leaders in the neighborhoods. The program mechanisms and activities effectively supported the dissemination of state-defined gender roles.

⁷ In order to foster personal prestige most women acted as if they themselves were in power rather than their husbands. This was popular among men and women inferiors, which gave Dharma Wanita a negative reputation.
Interestingly, many women’s organizations were created and organized following the nature of Dharma Wanita and PKK. These organizations were established on the basis of men’s positions and prestige regardless of the women’s personal positions. The reproduction, socialization, and general acceptance of the ideal images of masculinity and femininity were widely spread, and managed to reach even grassroots women, including women plantation workers as targets of village PKK programs.

2.2. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (1978-2000)

The establishment of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs in 1978 was a remarkable political step in the acknowledgment of women’s issues in Indonesia. In its efforts to achieve gender equality and justice, the Ministry underwent several changes in its strategies reflected in changes to its nomenclature. In 1978 the Ministry was initially named the Junior Ministry of Women’s Roles and Affairs. In 1983 this was upgraded to the State Ministry of Women’s Roles and Affairs commonly referred to as MenUPW (Menteri Negara Urusan Peranan Wanita) through the issuance of Presidential Decree No. 25 1983. From 1998-1999 the Ministry was named the State Ministry of Women’s Roles, commonly called Memperta (Menteri Negara Peranan Wanita), having removed the word Affairs (urusan). Despite its weaknesses, the Ministry played a central role in channeling ideas and providing space for debates on women and development in Indonesia.

Initially, the Ministry adopted global ideas on Women in Development (WID) established during the United Nations Women’s Decade. Following the WID paradigm, the underlying assumption of women’s problems was rooted in the low quality of women’s lives, which resulted in their inability to join the development process in the same ways as men. The solution, therefore, was to integrate women in development through the improvement of women’s skills and the creation of technologies that suited women to ease their burdens. The strategies included women’s projects, women’s components within larger projects and increasing women’s productivity, income, and ability to look after the household (Moser 1993). Through the Ministry, for the first time the vision for the improvement of women’s roles in the development process was set up in the GBHN 1978 which clearly argued the role of women in nationbuilding. At

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8 Organizations of armed forces’ wives such as Persatuan Isteri Tentara (Persit) Kartika Chandra Kirana (land forces), Pia Ardia Garini (air forces), Jalasenatri (navy), and Bhayangkari (police), which were established much longer than Dharma Wanita also had mainstreamed ideas of gender roles similar to Dharma Wanita. Outside the bureaucratic orders of government institutions, many women’s organizations deliberately imitated Dharma Wanita through Persatuan Isteri (wives associations), such as Persatuan Isteri Insinyur Indonesia (the association of the wives of Indonesian engineers) and Persatuan Isteri Dokter Indonesia (the association of the wives of Indonesian medical doctors) which were set up as charity organizations. In this way other women’s organization were associated with PKK activities in which they gained widespread cynical remarks as the abbreviation of Perempuan Kurang Kerjaan (women who have no work).

9 Several women’s organizations that contributed to the founding of the Ministry were the Komite Nasional Kedudukan Wanita Indonesia (KNKWI), a union of a number of women’s organizations under the New Order regime such as Kowani (Konggres Wanita Indonesia), KAWI (Kesatuan Aksi Wanita Indonesia), and SEKBERGOLKAR (Sekretariat Bersama Golongan Karya). Through Decision No. 04/KEP/MENKO/KESRA/3/1984, all KNKWI activities were organized through the Ministry (Center for Population and Policy Studies and Ministry of Women’s Empowerment 2002).
that time, the influence of gender roles stated in the 1974 Marriage Law were stressed in a broader context.

The development programs implemented by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs emphasized the multiple roles (peran ganda) that women play, which consist of three aspects: in family welfare, the labor force, and community management. These embrace both the reproductive and productive roles of women (Moser 1993). In the implementation of programs related to domestic tasks and community welfare, the implementation of most women’s development programs overlapped or were designed cooperatively with Dharma Wanita and PKK. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs worked in cooperation with other government institutions such as the former Department of Labour Force, Transmigration and Cooperative, the Department of Health, the Department of Social Affairs, and the former National Family Planning Board in the improvement of women’s skills and education to integrate them in the development process. Standardization of the ideal Indonesian woman was achieved through the integration of several programs.

To improve program formulation using local and/or regional perspectives, the Ministry played a significant role by stimulating the establishment of university-based Women’s Studies Centers. These centers were expected to be think tanks for research-based policies and programs applicable to the areas of Indonesia in which they were based. As government-initiative institutions, candidates trained in gender matters let alone gender sensitiveness did not always staff these centers. Thus, the centers grew in different directions and achieved different levels of performance. Several centers were strongly influential while many others remain stagnant10. Despite this, the centers did stimulate gender awareness among junior and senior intellectuals, which led to the inclusion of gender studies as a focus of interest in their respective academic disciplines. As the Ministry of Women’s Affairs had opened Indonesian eyes to gender issues, so the university centers, despite their weaknesses, brought women’s issues to the fore of academic disciplines and allowed their recognition as important social issues at the universities concerned (Center for Population and Policy Studies and Ministry of Women Empowerment 2002).

In the late 1970s, the global women’s struggle adopted a new paradigm of gender and development (GAD). Rather than improving women’s role in the development process, this strategy focused on the enhancement of women’s status related to gender relations pertaining in the community. Worldwide this strategy was adopted as a response to the failure of the WID approach to improve women’s status. This strategy stressed the socio-cultural factors affecting gender inequalities. The underlying assumption was that women had become victims in the development process and were left behind because of unequal gender relations in the community. Therefore, it was seen as important to address gender sensitiveness to both men and women, as the goal was to empower women and transform unequal gender relations.

Prindiville (1992) concludes that it is an inherent transformative potential of the subject matter and the method or commitment and energy of those involved the development of women’s studies in Indonesia.
In Indonesia, though, the change in name of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs from the State Ministry of Women’s Roles and Affairs (MenUPW) to the State Ministry of Women’s Roles (Menperta) was less significant. Yet, the insertion of a gender and development strategy in the global context influenced the perspective of Menperta. The use of the GAD perspective in the Ministry was evident in the adoption of the vision of gender equality in the development process. The GBHN 1983 stated that the Ministry was responsible to improve gender equality, and aim for “the equal and perfectly harmonious partnership between men and women”. These changes were made possible through the participation of women leaders and activists in several international meetings which enriched their gender perspective, such as United Nations (UN) gatherings to write and establish the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1978 and the 1985 Women’s Conference in Nairobi. In 1984, the Indonesian government ratified the UN Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW). International gatherings such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Cairo in 1994 and the Fourth World Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995 further stimulated initiatives to accommodate this new perspective. Signatures and declarations, however, did not translate directly into action.

In reality, there were no clear achievements in the efforts to improve women’s status owing to the persistent ideas behind policies and programs that emphasized women’s reproductive roles rather than empowering women to have equal power relations with men and equal rights in all aspects of their livelihoods. Most programs still used the framework of development paradigms that considered women as labor assets in the development process. These program stressed the improvement of women’s roles to make them part of development processes. At the same time, it was expected that their traditional domestic tasks be fulfilled, leaving these women with multiple burdens. The United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) in its 2002 Human Development Report noted that Indonesian women aged 15 and above made up 55.6% of the labor force for the production of economic goods and services in 2001. However, these women tended to form the majority of low-paid, low-ranking workers. They typically earned 60-70% of the wages earned by men for comparable work. These statistics reflect the general situation of women’s work by which their wages are perceived as secondary incomes and their involvement in manufacturing is mostly related to the stereotype of the docile women. As a result, women are subject to low-waged work and exploitation neglecting the fact that hard work has never been secondary for these women. For a long time the idea of partnership was merely political rhetoric in government efforts to improve the status of women.

3. The ‘Reformation’ Era

The reformation era began with the resignation of Suharto and the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998. Following the first free presidential election in 1999, a new cabinet was formed, in which the name of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs was once again changed, this time to the State Ministry of Women’s Empowerment (Menteri Negara Pemberdayaan Perempuan or MenegPP), which was then changed in 2002 to
the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment (Kementrian Pemberdayaan Perempuan). The insertion of the words pemberdayaan (empowerment) and perempuan (a synonym of wanita, woman) symbolized two principles. First, it demonstrated the government’s commitment to the gender and development paradigm which focuses on empowerment issues. Second, the replacement of wanita (with its negative connotations) with perempuan was an effort by the new government to distance itself from the New Order discourse and definitions of gender relations\textsuperscript{11}. Therefore, the name of the Ministry politically reflected women’s needs in the new paradigm along with changes to the broader political context of Indonesia, from the old New Order era to the new reform era\textsuperscript{12}.

It should be mentioned that the struggle to gain gender equality and justice was justified in the 1999-2004 National Development Program (Program Pembangunan Nasional, or Propenas). The document mentions that the state is responsible for improving 1) women’s roles and status in the nation and state through national policy carried out by institutions capable of fighting for gender equality and justice and 2) the role and self-sufficiency of women’s organizations while keeping the values of unity and uniformity and the historical values of women’s struggle in order to continue the efforts of to empower women, the family and social welfare.

The inclusion of gender issues in state documents was a part of the government’s attempt to mainstream gender in development programs. The statements serve as a political basis for introducing gender equality and justice as the only visions of the Ministry for policy planning, programs and implementation. As a consequence, the mission of the Ministry is formulated into five strategic issues, namely: 1) the improvement of women’s quality of life; 2) the socialization of gender equality and justice; 3) the elimination of all forms of violence against women; 4) the reinforcement of women’s human rights; and 5) capacity building and improvement of self-reliance of women’s institutions and organizations. This was later followed up with the formulation of the 2000-2004 National Development Master Plan on Women’s Empowerment (Rencana Induk Pembangunan Nasional Pemberdayaan Perempuan, or RIPNAS PP).

In pursuing its goals, in 2000 the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment set a new strategy to address women’s issues in Indonesia called gender mainstreaming (pengarusutamaan gender, or PUG) through the issuance of Presidential Instruction (Inpres) No. 9/2000\textsuperscript{13}. This strategy was adopted as a reaction to changes in the global

\textsuperscript{11} The word ‘wanita’ (woman) was used during the New Order era in accordance with the state’s construction of women’s roles which reinforced the subordinate position of women. Many Indonesian activists oppose this word, as it is derived from the Javanese clause ‘wani ditata’ meaning ‘subject to be ordered’. The word ‘perempuan,’ means ‘yang diempukar’ (highly-respected person) and thus is preferred as it more greatly values and respects the positive attributes of womanhood (see Feillard 1997).

\textsuperscript{12} The change was made possible since the Minister appointed belonged to the political party of the new president. The young bright Minister had not yet achieved any significant improvement in challenging the bureaucratic and substantial issues of women and empowerment when a new Minister was appointed in 2001.

\textsuperscript{13} See Center of Population Policy Studies and Ministry of Women’s Empowerment (unpublished report 2002) for a critical evaluation of the Ministry’s capacity to use gender mainstreaming strategy. This section is derived from assessment research I participated in during 2001-2002 with CPPS GMU and the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment.
paradigm of the women’s movement initiated in the Fifth World Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995. While there are varying definitions of the concept, gender mainstreaming strategy entails any effort made to accomplish gender equality and justice systematically through government structures. In previous programs, the improvement of women’s roles and status in the development process targeted women directly; the strategy of gender mainstreaming, however, focuses on the government to achieve change. The roles of policy makers and government staff are central as they occupy the layers of government bureaucracy. This strategy deals principally with policy analysis and program implementation with the assumption that development will achieve its goals only if all steps of the planning process and programs include gender perspectives. Therefore, gender awareness among policy makers and implementors is key to gender mainstreaming.

In order for the gender mainstreaming strategy to be effective, the Ministry announced a One Door Policy on the basis of Law No. 25/2000 regarding the National Development Program (Propenas). This policy is meant to bring together concerned parties with the same vision of gender mainstreaming strategy. This is applicable to all aspects of development and all levels of central and regional governments. In doing so, the organizational structure of the Ministry has been transformed by establishing a gender mainstreaming division headed by a deputy minister. Direct constraints, however, occur related to the legal order in Indonesia. Legally, Inpres are less politically forceful than Keppres (Keputusan Presiden, Presidential Decisions). Inpres are usually made as a response to temporary issues; these are generally less controlled and provide no clear sanctions against those who do not follow them. Keppres, however, are the result of the demand that clear action be taken in an issue being discussed. The decision that called for the use of Inpres rather than Keppres in the gender-mainstreaming document reflected a lack of government awareness of gender issues at that time. During the proposal for the Inpres, political rumors spread that the Ministry would be disbanded. Many hoped that a Keppres would be issued, but there was concern over time constraints. as Keppres require legislative evaluation. This led to support for the quick approval of the gender mainstreaming statutory law, thus an Inpres was favored as it only requires the president’s signature. The Ministry still exists, but at the time, there was much uncertainty over its future, and thus an Inpres was preferable as a binding legal document for gender mainstreaming strategy; given the fear that the Ministry would be abolished with no legal documents for gender mainstreaming in place. The low statutory level of the document can also be seen as a reflection of gender (in)sensitivity in Indonesia. The Indonesian paternalistic bureaucratic system added to the critical need for the statutory document. Gender equality and justice were simply not seen as crucial matters deserving legislative attention.

The essential shift in the Ministry’s paradigm supported by official legislation and documentation, did not, however, lead to the automatic achievement of gender equality and justice. Internal challenges include lack of appropriate organizational and ideological support for gender equality, justice, and empowerment. The Ministry’s Strategic Plan (Rencana Strategis, or Renstra) does not clearly state how the institution
will adopt ideas of empowerment in their future work. There is little consensus on defining gender matters. This does not reflect merely a lack of gender sensitivity, but also gender bias on the attitudes of state staff. Little can be expected from policies and program planning implemented by staff with inappropriate knowledge and outlook. As indicated by partner institutions, lack of gender sensitivity and commitment to the paradigm changes were reflected in the inability of the Ministry to serve as a resource center for women’s issues. Most officials assigned to deal with gender issues in low levels of government - at the provincial and district level - reported a lack of information and other technical and material support from the Ministry. Their offices were not provided with sufficient guidelines, papers, and other materials to support gender-mainstreaming efforts. It is understandable that they expect further support from the Ministry in program implementation, as the Ministry has traditionally played a significant role in the establishment of the women’s sections in their offices in the past.

Externally, biases and misunderstanding of gender issues and the characteristics of partner institutions have eradicated commitment for the achievement of gender equality and justice. Even though the legal basis of a gender mainstreaming strategy has been taken up and serves as a political basis for institutional relationships between the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment and other government institutions, coordination lacks synergy. Low participation of other institutions in the support of women’s programs can be seen clearly in how they respond to meetings initiated by either the Ministry or women’s sections of lower levels of government offices. The Ministry has worked on a number of focal points with several government institutions. The Ministry’s staff are very proud of this achievement because the focal points are considered critical for introducing gender mainstreaming in these institutions. Unfortunately, the staff that often attends these meetings are from echelons three and four (relatively low level officials) who play less significant parts in policy formulation or program planning. The lack of commitment to gender mainstreaming is evident in this. This is also worrying as it means that there is little hope for future action in these institutions and thus that gender insensitiveness in policy will continue to remain a serious problem.

Furthermore, in some programs initiated by other sectors of government institutions, the gender mainstreaming strategy has been misunderstood as a WID perspective. This creates programs that are based on the idea of ‘add women and stir’, thus, the indicator of success relies only on whether or not women are present in the program. In addition, there is little attention given to gender related issues since these programs tend to believe that the inclusion of women is enough, and that those women already have high status. Indonesian women of the lower and middle classes are actively involved in income activities in agriculture, petty trade, and small-scale industries as wage or family laborers. Program planners see this, and as a result have no clear idea of how to address gender sensitive programs to women whom they think have

14 As one enters the office of the Ministry, the absence of a spirit or aura of struggle for equality and justice can be observed. Ornaments and artifacts displayed around the building symbolizing traditional women’s roles as mothers and wives do not reflect the official goals of the new Ministry.
no problems. Instead of prioritizing the involvement of women in program identification, planning and implementation, they disregard women’s issues in sarcastic ways, as wasting time, money, and energy. In practice, gender mainstreaming is confused with gender-related programs and both are identically misunderstood as the participation of women in development and other aspects of livelihood. By involving women in such development programs those institutions can claim their program is gender mainstreamed or gender sensitive.

Basically, gender mainstreaming strategies are handicapped by ideological and structural constraints. Values and attitudes of program implementers are often unsupportive of dissemination and operationalization. The current president of Indonesia is a woman, but this in no way constitutes a guarantee that gender concerns are mainstreamed at the executive level. The president must remember that in the days leading up to the 1999 general elections, the possibility of a Madame President being elected was seen as a threat and drew negative reactions from many religious leaders. Some stated openly that a woman could not be the president of Indonesia. Therefore, the need for the improvement of women’s participation in politics is still high and is relevant to CEDAW.

The 2000-2004 National Development Master Plan on Women’s Empowerment (RIPNAS PP) stipulates a quota of 30% women in the legislative, judicative, and executive bodies, and was expected to improve women’s representation in the political arena. Indonesia ranked 112th in the 2003 UNDP Human Development Indicator in women’s political participation, out of 175 countries surveyed (United Nation Development Project 2003). In general, women are underrepresented in the political arena as demonstrated by the percentage of women 9.2% and 9% in Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (MPR, The People’s Consultative Assembly) and Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR, House of Representatives) respectively. Women tend to be concentrated in DPR commissions in post that are traditionally seen as ‘soft’ relating to women’s issues such as religion, education, culture, health and population (CETRO 2002, Parawansa 2002). In addition, in 2001, only 2% of 336 districts were run by women and only 3.4% of the country’s 670,000 village heads were women, although women have been allowed to serve as village heads since the 1950s (Surbakti 2002). Women have served in ministerial posts, but typically as ministers of social or women’s affairs: only recently has a woman been appointed as the Minister of Industrial Affairs. There is therefore a great need to position women in critical areas of decision-making and to ensure that women’s representation in parliament fairly reflects their numerical strength. The purpose of an affirmative action quota is to correct the current government gender imbalance and to provide women with the rights that have been so long denied them, but not to favor women15.

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15 In the second half of 2003 the political parties submitted their legislative members’ proposals for the 2004 national election. The 30% women quota caused a long debate and controversy as none of the political parties was able to meet the quota. Most parties placed their women members in low ranking positions which make it difficult for them to sit in parliament.
Returning to ministerial issues, it has been lamented that the Ministry does not have sufficient budgetary allocation or real policy making power. Gender mainstreaming in several departments has started but is only at a minimum. The lack of structural support and institutional commitments are related to budgeting and priority. The fact that the National Development Planning Board (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional, or Bappenas) and Bappeda at the local level have introduced gender budgeting initiatives in their overall work is a good step. However, with the implementation of regional autonomy and decentralization in 2001, other problems have arisen, as now there is no direct structural link between the central and local governments. Thus, the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment cannot exert legitimate pressure to order local and regional governments to support gender programs. On the other hand, regional autonomy gives more space for the government to address women’s issues using local perspectives. In this, local women’s organizations and civil society need to be strengthened. Yet, the accommodation of gender needs and interests and the implementation of women’s empowerment programs are not prioritized. Women at the grassroots level, such as those working in Kaliguda plantation, are underserved due to structural and socio-cultural constraints that will be discussed below.

4. Long Journey Reaching Women Plantation Workers

Why is it that women’s movements and government policies do not reach the grassroots level, i.e. women plantation workers? The constraints on reaching these women will be discussed in this section.

4.1. Structural Achievements and Constraints

Previously it has been discussed that the Ministry of Women’s Empowerment is the main state mechanism for the advancement of women. Together with other state-created and independent women’s associations, for more than 30 years the Ministry (under all its various names) has fostered the creation of ideas concerning gender roles and relations in Indonesia. While issues of discrimination of women in all areas have been discussed and legislated against significantly in state documents (though questions still remain on the extent of implementation and action), in recent years particular attention has been paid to the specific issues surrounding violence against women. Law No. 7/1984 regarding CEDAW played a significant role in inspiring efforts to uphold women’s rights and to free women from all forms of violence. ICPD Cairo in 1994 and the Beijing Conference on Women in 1995 also served as crucial stimulation for the growing awareness of such issues. Globally, the 1980s witnessed the mushrooming of women-centered non-government organizations stimulated by the launch of the United Nation’s international women’s decade in the 1970s and CEDAW in 1979. This was a period of awakening for a number of free young educated women to initiate organizations focused on women issues. In the 1990s, more and more women’s NGOs focusing on special issues such as domestic violence, rape, reproductive health, migrant

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16 For example, Yayasan Amista Swasti, a Jogjakarta based women’s NGO that is concerned with women’s labor, was founded in 1982, and Kalyanamitra, which documents women’s issues, especially violence against women, was founded in 1985.
workers, women’s labor, trafficking in women, prostitution, and legal aid were established along with growing awareness of gender-related issues in Indonesia. Indonesian women’s NGOs include several women’s legal aid foundations and crisis centers for survivors of violence against women such as a Yogyakarta-based women’s crisis center Rifka Anissa, a Jakarta-based women’s legal aid group LBH APIK (Lembaga Bantuan Hukum Asosiasi Perempuan Indonesia untuk Keadilan), and a Jakarta-based women’s NGO Mitra Perempuan, all of which were previously perceived as mainly charity organizations and hotline services disengaged from demanding structural reforms. Now fully established, they have come to be important government partners in speeding up the process of achieving gender equality and justice through the elimination of violence against women. Below, a variety of these government efforts that reflect a change in the government’s attitudes toward the issues are discussed.

The establishment of a National Commission on Violence Against Women during the short term of Suharto’s successor B.J. Habibie in October 1998 was an important step in raising women’s issues, particularly violence against women. The commission is a national body that obtained its mandate through Presidential Decree No. 181/1998, but was essentially created and articulated completely by the Indonesian women’s movement. The establishment of this commission was triggered by the gang rapes of (mainly Chinese) women during the May 1998 riots in Jakarta and the violent experiences of other women in armed conflict areas such as Aceh and the former East Timor. It aims to create national and international forums to address Indonesian women’s cries for help and better their lives.

Although the government is reluctant to acknowledge state violence against women, nevertheless, its response to the incidence of violence against women has been quite significant (see National Commission on Violence Against Women of Indonesia 2002). This began with the ‘zero tolerance policy’ outlined in the Declaration of State and Community Commitment to Eliminate Violence Against Women in November 1999. This policy is aimed at encouraging people to reject all forms of violence against women in their attitudes and behavior to ensure the safety and security of women. In February 2000, Indonesia became the first Southeast Asian country to sign the protocol of the UN convention for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. Several laws and regulations that have been scheduled for discussion concern violence against women related to health and migrant workers, and include the revision of marriage laws. Through networking with other central and regional government institutions and NGOs, the Ministry produced a plan of national action for eliminating violence against women in 2000. Other achievements are the establishment of several women’s crisis centers by state institutions. By 2001-2002, 163 women’s desks in police offices had been established in 19 provinces around the country. As part of this project a number of workshops and training sessions were held for social workers and police in the posts.

Despite the explicit wording on protecting and promoting women’s rights in the recent amendment to the 1945 constitution and in the human rights Law No. 39/1999, the Indonesian justice system is still lacking in its capacity to protect and promote the
rights of women, particularly survivors of violence. The drafting of bills on witness and women protection, domestic violence, trafficking in persons, reproductive health and the protection of Indonesian workers are on the agenda and, yet, the fight to eliminate violence against women has hardly begun. Pressure exerted by the National Commission on Violence Against Women and other women’s organizations and activists cannot be disregarded. It is the complexity of the problems that explain the slow and incremental changes in attitudes toward the issue. The recent National Plan of Action for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (Rencana Aksi Nasional Penanggulangan Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan, or RAN PKTP) was created in 2000 as part of government and NGO commitment to eliminate gender-based violence. Yet, despite all this progress, the goal of eliminating gender-based violence is still far from being realized.

The recent Indonesian political transition (from the New Order to the so-called reformation era) may lead to the improvement of women’s status. Previously ignored demands can be voiced with more strength and conviction to the new government. There is also growing international support, in terms of funding and programs, for increasing women’s empowerment and participation in the democratization process. Gender relations remain a sensitive issue and go to the heart of social, religious and cultural relations. Thus, changing them involves confronting entrenched, vested interests. For these reasons, it is difficult for the reform of gender relations to be prioritized. Amidst Indonesia’s current economic plights and political uncertainty, there is a deep concern that the call for gender equality will be treated as marginal to other more pressing issues of national interest. In the shifting power structures, there are those who are intent on maintaining their patriarchal privileges, at whatever expense. Hence, there is a real risk of gender issues being sidelined until times are more stable.

4.2. Socio-Cultural Constraints

As has been argued earlier, gender inequality based on the exclusive division of labor and responsibilities has been actively manipulated by reinforcement of culture-linked inequality. Developments in social, political and economic conditions, from the period of pre-independence onwards to the ‘New Order’ are seen to have reinforced existing and strongly traditionalist cultural images and practices concerning gender (roles). As a result, women are likely to continue to live out these roles, and there is little impetus for them to question this unless they are given a chance to speak.

It has been argued that gender ideology, in the every-day reality of marital relationships in Javanese culture, shows an ambivalence of expected mutually exclusive gender power relationships in the domestic sphere. Culturally defined as head of the household, husbands are expected to be the one to whom their wives can turn to for advice involving personal, marital, familial and social matters. Harmonious social relationships are maintained through the wife’s responsibility for the family’s practical affairs, combined with the husband’s economic and social activities outside the family in the public domain. In reality, though, a wife’s responsibility to guard and maintain the family’s wellbeing leads her to take an active role beyond the boundaries (of the household) which are culturally assigned, to her. At the same time there is a strong
notion of a husband’s superiority and a wife’s inferiority, a relationship perceived as complementary and characteristic of all married couples. Conducting their roles, tasks and responsibilities in separate social spheres is perceived as essentially equal.

One can thus safely assume that a wife is not inferior to, nor totally dependent on a husband, while it is frequently indicated that husbands seem to have passively surrendered decision making to their wives concerning the day-to-day management of the household (Geertz 1961:125). However, in the realm of public prestige and social status, a wife is still positioned in the shadow of her husband (Keeler 1990:80, Brenner 1998:140). Traditionally, women refer to *kodrat* to legitimize their hesitation to oppose their husband’s will. Citing the virtuous identity of womanhood, wives subordinate themselves to their husbands in exchange for protection. In conjunction with this, women are constantly self-denying of their own accomplishments while upholding their husbands’ prestige. No matter the extent of a woman’s superiority and independence in the domestic sphere, in the wider social context of public appearances with her husband, a married woman tends to conform to the culturally ideal image of being dependent and subdued (Berninghausen and Kerstan 1992:146).

Paradoxically, although married women are capable of achieving great success for their family, it is still the husband who takes the credit for this. Djadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis (1987:44) nicely sums this up by saying that a *Bapak* (husband) “... has authority and prestige, whereas the *Ibu* (wife) acts....” Thus Javanese married women consciously support the unequal gender ideology of male superiority by supporting their husbands’ prestige in the presence of others, both within the wider (extended) family and particularly in social situations. In pursuit of ideal gender relations and harmonious relationships with their male counterparts and for the sake of family pride, women comply with conditions that are not always favorable to them. Even though the *kodrat* virtues of self-denial and submission play a great role in gender relations, whether women (in) voluntarily act against their interests remains a big question. Thus, the extent to which women perceive and handle any (man’s) action against their will and the consequence of this can only be understood through cautious and vigilant study, as this research aims to do.

A big challenge occurs in the form of the ideal types of women found in and based on religious teachings and beliefs and traditions. Indeed, state construction of gender relations in Indonesia is deeply rooted in tradition and religious teaching, politically reinforced during colonialism and reproduced by the state during the most influential periods of Indonesia’s establishment. Many women still believe that their religion gives the right to the husband to punish his wife in cases of misconduct. Islam is particularly influential, as more than 80 percent of Indonesian citizens are Moslem. Despite emerging interpretations of several verses in the Qur’an that favor women, the influence of dominant religious teachings and interpretations of Islam is vast. Theological interpretations of *qaawwamun* (variously interpreted as leader, caretaker, ruler, protector and the like) and *nusyuz* (often interpreted as ‘disobedience’) are most often cited. In Moslem communities these concepts have placed women at a disadvantage and vulnerable to acts of violence by men (Muhammad 1999, Mas’udi 1995). Being
**qawwamim**, men as husbands are allowed and expected to exercise power over the women who are their wives. In a powerful position over his wife, a husband is entitled to beat his wife whenever he questions her *musyur*. This hierarchy of power is theologically legitimized. Feillard (1999) has analyzed how the Islamic revitalization undergone by Indonesia since the 1980s has been crucial in bringing and increasing conservative discourse on women's life and roles.

Nationally, the current trend in raising consciousness on issues of gender equality and justice through the media, seminars and campaigns, and changing attitudes on personal relationships conducted by predominantly women-centered NGOs, activists, and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment is instrumental to increase community sensitivity of discrimination and violence against women. The growing awareness of gender matters and specific issues of violence against women within civil society can be seen in the increase of reported cases to women's crisis centers and legal aid foundations. Although the increasing reports can be interpreted as an increase in the number of incidents, it is still a sign of women's changing attitudes. On the other hand, there is also evidence of the challenges inherent in changing viewpoints and attitudes in the fight for women's equality and justice in the community. Television programs continuously promote images of women as weak, submissive and obedient, and limit their roles to family caretakers. Elementary school textbooks and curricula also still maintain gender inequality values through pictures and text.

Anecdotal evidence demonstrates that many men do not take gender issues seriously in daily life. Men often defend their positions in conversation by saying that they are actually the ones who are scared of their wives. Men cite the fact that they are responsible for feeding their families, their assigned role as head of the household. They feel sorry for themselves and envy their wives who just sit and wait for money provided from their labor. Jokingly they declare themselves ISTI (*ikatan suami takut isteri*, the association of husbands who are scared of their wives). But this only addresses their wives' roles as household finance managers and neglects other gender inequalities. This anecdote reflects the general perception of the respect given to men's work to feed the family while women are perceived as dependant and reliant on their husband's labor to fulfill their tasks as household managers, ignoring the reality that women also significantly contribute to the household economy. This also undervalues women's domestic work and childcare. Moreover, the anecdote does not address the fact that many husbands fail to be good providers for the household, forcing women to be economically influential despite living in an economically depressed family. Positioning women as household managers with empty resources is problematic for the women, as will be shown in this study.

It is crucial to understand the heterogeneity of Indonesian women in the demand for equality and justice and not focus solely on the socio-cultural constraints of Javanese values, norms, and traditions pertaining in the community. There is little consensus on which group represents Indonesian women given the diverse backgrounds of women each with their own understanding and expectations of gender relations. As discussed earlier, while a number of educated women and women activists fight for their rights
through their respective organizations or individually, a considerably large number of women remain silent. These women often turn to their traditional beliefs and religious teachings. The work of women activists and NGOs is often biased toward urban and middle class issues, which creates blind spots and limits the ability of these organizations to understand or approach the diverse problems of multicultural Indonesia. The fight to obtain the kinds of structural reforms, which are necessary for the long term, translates into a limited capacity to protect the rights of victims of violence. In addition, grassroots women are handicapped by their limited access to services and information. Only urban-based, media-exposed, financially well off, and well-educated women have access to information, and thus have raised awareness of gender issues which might lead to them asking for help in gender violence matters. Certainly rural women and lower-class urban women have an equally urgent need for gender equality and protection from discrimination and injustice. The difference between these groups of women is a serious gap in the fight against gender-based discrimination and violence.

4.3. Identification of Actual Gaps

While the previous sections discussed the structural and socio-cultural constraints on the elimination of gender-based discrimination and violence in Indonesia, this section aims to unravel the real gaps related to the difficulties of government and other concerned organizations in addressing the needs and interests of women plantation workers. There are four issues that will be discussed: geographical gaps, misunderstanding of the concept of gender equality, the operational definition of gender violence, and the existing values and norms related to gender relations.

The first gap is related to the geographical position of the plantation. Java is usually considered the main island of Indonesia, possessing the best access to public facilities compared to other islands, yet, the plantation’s location does not have the same privileges as more developed areas. Although the area is relatively close to main provincial roads and big cities, like many other areas in rural Java and urban lower-class neighborhoods, this community needs further improvement in its facilities and living conditions. Urgent agriculture and infrastructure spending to meet the basic needs of the community are prioritized over abstract policy programs such as gender mainstreaming. It is too much to expect that village officials can understand what gender mainstreaming is or how to apply it to their programs. As explained above, these officials often see women in equal roles to men, as rural women are active participants in household income earning activities. Whether or not these women have their personal needs and interests fulfilled or are protected from discrimination and violence does not seem to be a crucial issue.

Second, the existing agricultural employment opportunities for rural communities do not necessarily secure community livelihood. The previous chapter on the historical roots and recent conditions of the Kaligua plantation community made it clear that the community is trapped in plantation work and that there is little or no opportunity to make a better living. In addition, the plantation does not take advantage of the significant labor force for industrial processing of the tea, but instead expects the
women to engage in backbreaking labor as tea pickers. Women are responsible not only for tea picking, but also for household tasks and the care of household members. Women also play an important role in providing future plantation workers through reproduction. With the household, workplace and community so entangled, programs need to address all of these domains and ensure women’s equal participation in each. It is also important to remember that any efforts to improve women’s social status and their bargaining position in these three overlapping areas bring them into contact with the highly hierarchical and male dominated plantation social structure, and thus, this, too, requires attention.

Third, the operational definition of the concept of violence against women that is used by government and non-government agencies is particularly -but not necessarily-limited to physically visible acts and impacts of violence. Most documents on violence against women such as CEDAW, the ICPD 1994 Platform of Action and the Beijing 1995 Plan of Action clearly cite physical, psychological, and sexual violence as aggression to women’s health and rights. In practice, however, little attention is paid to psychological, sexual, social, and economic abuse, often considered ‘less harmful’ or ‘more bearable’ violence. As discussed in Chapter One, this research focuses on women’s experiences of any act of violence in their daily lives. It concerns the experiences of women plantation workers who are subjected to a highly hierarchical male-dominated social structure that has continued from the establishment of the plantation in the colonial era through present-day Indonesia. These women live in a total community that directs all aspects of their lives. They are subject to the intersection of two social authorities, that of the village and the plantation. This means that they must play the role of mother, wife, worker, and community member simultaneously in time and place. As low-level workers they are subject to discrimination and exploitation. For women, the harsh situation is doubled, as they are also vulnerable to acts of violent behavior by male supervisors and co-workers.

Violence is not merely abuse, rape, or the use of dangerous or deadly instruments on women’s physical bodies, but can also take shape in daily interactions and communication in the form of harassment, intimidation, and other spoken and non-spoken gestures which can be non-physical and non-material and represent power inequality between genders. These forms of violence can occur in both the domestic and public spheres; in the household or within the boundaries of marriage and family, or in the wider social community and in the workplace. Therefore, this research includes in its definition of violence, any act of violence experienced by women plantation workers as a consequence of their role as mother, wife, worker, and community member with special attention given to marital relationships and labor relations. Given the limitations in the definition of violence against women by government and non-government agencies, efforts made by these groups to eliminate discrimination and violence against women often neglect the real complexity of women’s conditions.

Fourth, as has been discussed in section 5.4.2, the existing values, norms, and traditions related to gender relations play significant roles in influencing ideas on gender equality and the elimination of gender violence. Given the context of the
plantation and the village environment, women’s perceptions and responses to the occurrence of gender violence will also shape and be shaped by socio-cultural conditions.

5. Concluding Remarks

Indonesian women have a long history of struggle for emancipation. However, during the New Order era, the government introduced state-constructed gender roles into urban and rural communities using bureaucratic machinery. As a result, Indonesian gender roles are rigidly defined, having crucial implications in the lives of Indonesian women. Currently, efforts to empower and transform existing unequal gender roles do exist, but are making slow progress. Government gender mainstreaming strategies have not yet been successful due to gender bias and misunderstanding of the concept. More importantly, socio-cultural constraints in the community and practical gaps hinder women from influencing ideas on gender equality and the elimination of gender violence.

How the Indonesian macro-context of the state and micro-contexts of plantation communities have influenced the occurrence of gender violence in day-to-day lives and working experiences and how women perceive and respond to their experiences will be discussed in the next two chapters.