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Sharon Bessell

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Dr Sharon Bessell (sharon.bessell@anu.edu.au) is a Senior Lecturer in the Asia Pacific School of Economics and Government at the Australian National University.

Abstract

Indonesia's transition towards democracy since 1998 has been welcomed by democrats around the world as an important gain in a worldwide shift towards democracy. The nation has now held two democratic parliamentary elections – the first in 1999 and the most recent in April 2004. Each of these elections was free from violence and deemed to be free and fair by Indonesia and international observers. Yet there remains significant questions about who participates in and is represented by Indonesia's new democracy. Importantly, few women have gained access to political power, either within national or local parliament, despite considerable debate and the adoption of strategies to increase the number of women in politics. This paper explores the ongoing barriers to women's participation in parliaments in Indonesia against the backdrop the legacy of history – particularly New Order ideology, prevailing stereotypes and a particular interpretation of Islam.

Women in Parliament in Indonesia: Denied a Share of Power*

Sharon Bessell

Policy and Governance Program

Asia Pacific School of Economics and Government

The Australian National University

sharon.bessell@anu.edu.au

On 21 May 1998 Indonesia's President Suharto resigned, ending more than three decades of authoritarian rule known as the New Order. During Suharto's New Order, parliament existed, but exercised little decision making power. Indeed, few beyond a relatively small circle of men had any share in power. The military played a 'dual role' (*dwi fungsi*) that went beyond issues of national defence. The military had an institutional role in politics with 75 seats within the National Parliament reserved for unelected military officers. The military also played a lucrative role in the economy. The New Order regime placed great emphasis on national stability and economic growth. The price for national stability was the imposition of a national identity on a country made up of peoples with different histories, languages, cultures and religions. Indonesian national identity, as constructed by the New Order, was homogenous and highly gendered. Economic growth was the centre-piece of the New Order's achievements. Indonesia was often presented as a show case of good economic management. While the benefits of economic growth were not shared equally across the population, there were marked improvements in the quality of life during the New Order period. Education enrolment rates increased, with equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled in and completing primary school by the late 1980s. Access to health care improved and infant mortality rates and deaths from preventable diseases fell. Income per capita increased.

In 1997 with the onset of the Asian Economic Crisis, the two pillars of President Suharto's success – national stability and economic improvement – were shattered. The rupiah plunged against the United States dollar and price of basic commodities increased dramatically. Both white collar and factory workers faced widespread retrenchments. As the nation faced economic devastation, national unity and stability began to fracture. In May 1998 massive student demonstrations were held across the country. On May 12 four students from Trisakti University in Jakarta were shot and killed by security forces. On 13 and 14 May riots broke out in Jakarta, destroying large areas of the city's business precinct. Jakarta's ethnic Chinese community was a primary target of the riots, which took on a highly gendered dimension with extreme sexual violence and gang rape against (primarily ethnic Chinese) women. Indonesia's long awaited political transition was, as John McBeth pointed out in late 1998, seriously flawed (McBeth 1999: 23). Given the particular consequences of the economic crises for women and the gendered violence of the May riots, the transition appeared especially flawed for women.

* An abridged version of this paper will appear in Yvonne Galligan and Manon Tremblay (eds), *Sharing Power: Women in Parliament in Post-Industrial and Emerging Democracies*, Ashgate, London, 2004

Upon Suharto's resignation, Vice President Habibie stepped into the Presidency, in line with the nation's Constitution. General elections, announced for June 1999, were duly held, and widely heralded as the first free and fair elections held in Indonesia since 1955.¹ As part of the political transition that followed the resignation of Suharto, the Habibie administration introduced a wide range of political reforms including new electoral laws and a program of radical decentralisation, which was the antithesis of the heavily centralised and authoritarian state of the New Order. Within Indonesia, decentralisation was widely considered to be central to democratic consolidation. It is also an immensely ambitious task. The 1999 elections were held after rapid and extensive revision of the electoral system, whereby a complex hybrid of proportional representation and district quotas was agreed upon for the new elections. Under the 1999 regional autonomy laws, substantial responsibility for decision-making and service delivery – previously concentrated in the national government – will be devolved to district (kabupaten/kota) level. Thus, while the focus of this chapter is on the national parliament, the role of district level assemblies – and the extent to which women share in decision-making within those arenas – will become increasingly important in coming years. At the national level, the reforms undertaken following the resignation of Suharto gave rise to more active legislatures, with considerably greater scope to influence and indeed shape the political agenda than was possible during the New Order, when parliament was essentially the rubber stamp of the executive. Significantly, the early initiatives of the legislature following the 1999 elections sought to limit the power of the President, initially by placing two-term limits on the offices of both the President and Vice-President. Subsequent constitutional and legislative changes strengthened parliament's powers to monitor and demand accountability from the executive. Initial steps were also taken towards ending the political role of the military, with the number of parliamentary seats reserved for military officers reduced from 75 under the New Order to 38 (just under eight percent) following the 1999 elections. In 2003, all reserved seats for the military were abolished and the Parliament became fully elected.

Indonesia's transition towards democracy in 1998 and the general elections of 1999 were welcomed by democrats around the world as significant for several reasons. First, with a population of some 210 million Indonesia is one of the world's most populous nations. Second, prior to 1998 Indonesia's leadership played an important role in the politics of Southeast Asia, particularly within ASEAN, and had long championed the Asian Values perspective that rejected the relevance of democracy and human rights discourses to Asia. Political transition in Indonesia was regarded by many as critical to the shift away from authoritarianism in Southeast Asia and the emergence of a liberal wing within ASEAN. Finally, as the world's largest Muslim nation, Indonesia's political transition provides a potential example of the compatibility between parliamentary democracy and Islam.

¹ I observed the general elections in Tanjung Priok, a port area of north Jakarta. The elections, in the small area that I observed, were free and fair – and accompanied by a carnival like atmosphere and great hope for the future. Both men and women voted in large numbers. A particularly moving image was a woman in her seventies being helped to the polling booth by her grandsons. Bent over and struggling to support herself, she made a great effort to enter the booth alone and cast her vote. With a smile she dropped her ballot into the box. She later told me that she had waited a long time – too long – for this day.

For these reasons, Indonesia's transition towards democracy received a great deal of attention from scholars, the media and donor agencies and governments. The problems that accompanied transition – including deep-rooted and ongoing corruption, severe communal violence, and questionable leadership – and Indonesia's bold experiment with decentralisation have all been the focus of detailed commentary and analysis. A critical question is whether political transformation will result in the establishment of a parliamentary process that is both accountable to and representative of the people. Throughout the nation's independent history, parliament has not been genuinely representative, with the most obvious shortcoming being the very small numbers of women. In exploring the question of whether transition will open the way to greater numbers of women in parliament, this chapter examines the history of exclusion and the serious obstacles that remain.

History of Women's Legislative Involvement

The Emergence of the Women's Movement

The women's movement grew markedly during the late colonial period, as nationalist aspirations intertwined with concern about so-called 'women's issues' such as education for girls, child marriage and polygamy. A primary concern of women's groups was that the interests of women would be advanced in an independent Indonesia. The first in a series of Indonesian Women's Congresses was held in 1928, and the Federation of Indonesian Women's Associations was formed the following year at the 1929 Congress. The Federation adopted a stance of non-involvement in politics, but in reality issues of nationalism and the struggle for independence were not, and could not be, avoided. If women's groups were concerned to secure certain rights and protections for women in an independent nation, the nationalist movement could see the value in winning the support of the women's groups. In his address to the Third Women's Congress in 1932, Ki Hadjar Dewantoro described to his audience the important contribution of women's groups to the nationalist movements in India, Turkey, Persia and China (Vreede-de-Steurs 1960: 92). Women were urged to inspire patriotism in their children and their duty as mothers of the people was invoked (Jayawardena 1986: 151). These images of woman-mother have since been a consistent theme of gender relations in Indonesia, with important implications for women's political roles. The 1930s brought the emergence of Isteri Sedar (Alert Women) which was openly political and nationalist. The movement encouraged women to participate actively in politics. While earlier groups had focused primarily on the concerns of middle class women, Isteri Sedar adopted socialist rhetoric around demands for improved conditions for working class women and education for the masses (Jayawardena 1986: 151). In 1932, Isteri Sedar's conference was addressed by a young, male nationalist leader who delivered a speech entitled 'The Political Movement and the Emancipation of Women'. The speech drew an explicit link between the struggle for nationalism and the struggle for women's rights. The speaker was Sukarno, who would become Indonesia's first President.

While the focus of women's movements in the 1920s and 1930s continued to be on girls education, polygamy and child marriage – with some intertwining of these issues with nationalism – the issue of women's franchise did feature of the agenda, often in a nationalist context. For example, the 1941 proposal that Dutch women, but not Indonesian women, be granted municipal voting rights was met with considerable protest. Indonesian women finally won the right to vote in the final years of Dutch

rule. The right of women to vote and stand for election in the new independent nation was enshrined in the 1945 Constitution.

Women and Parliament in Independent Indonesia

Following Indonesia's independence in 1949, women's rights in relation to marriage – particularly issues of polygamy, consent, and child marriage – remained the priority concerns for women's groups (see Blackburn and Bessell 1997). Demands for a national marriage law dominated the agenda of many women's groups. As Susan Blackburn has argued, it is not surprising that “governments and parliaments dominated by men did not give this matter high priority” (1994: 171). And indeed successive parliaments of independent Indonesia were heavily male dominated, and often indifferent to the priority concerns of women.

Upon independence, Indonesia adopted a system of parliamentary democracy and established the Konstituante (Constitutional Assembly), which was tasked with providing a framework for governance in the newly independent nation. Women were among the representatives who took part in the Konstituante debates of the 1950s, and discussions included the role of women within independent Indonesia. While women were guaranteed certain rights and protections, these debates failed to provide the basis for equal opportunities for women in political life. Early in the independent life of the nation, some political parties developed women's organisations, such as Nahdlatul Ulama's Muslimat, which lobbied for women to be put forward as parliamentary candidates. Nevertheless, political parties failed to preselect women. Other ostensibly 'representative' organisations – such as trade unions – remained male dominated, as did the leadership of religious organisations. Despite the linkages that had been drawn between women's emancipation and political independence – not least by the male leaders of the nationalist movement – women did not gain anything close to an equal share in the parliament of the new nation.

Between 1950 and 1955 only nine of the 272 members of parliament were women (less than four percent). The first national election was held in 1955, with women turning out to vote in large numbers. This did not, however, translate into significantly greater numbers of women in parliament. Following the 1955 general election, the number of women increased to 17 (less than seven percent). As Blackburn has noted the “lack of women is taken so much for granted that most commentators on Indonesian elections do not bother to mention it” (1994: 272). During the 1950s no women were appointed to Cabinet.

By 1957 Indonesia's party system was disintegrating and by the end of the decade the new nation had abandoned its short experiment with parliamentary democracy. The shift away from parliamentary democracy stifled the potential for debate about the parliamentary representation of women (and of many other groups). With the rise of the New Order under President Suharto in late 1960s, Indonesia's shift to authoritarianism was consolidated. Women were included in successive parliaments under the New Order regime, but the percentage remained low. Like their male counterparts, female parliamentarians had limited space to advance issues beyond those approved by President Suharto and the ruling elite. Debates about the rights and roles of women that did not accord with New Order political and gender ideology were explicitly excluded from the parliamentary agenda. There was a conspicuous

absence of women from each of Suharto's Cabinets until 1978. The few women who were appointed to Cabinets during the 1980s and 1990s were inevitably limited to those ministries and responsibilities associated with women, such as social welfare and the role of women (see Blackburn 2001: 278).

While the absence of women in successive Indonesian Parliaments and Cabinets gained relatively little attention, the accession in 1996 of a woman to the leadership of one of New Order Indonesia's three officially sanctioned political parties attracted widespread comment. As leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan, PDI-P), Megawati Sukarnoputri – daughter of Indonesia's charismatic first President who presided over the transition away from parliamentary democracy in the late 1950s – attracted an enormous following and prompted widespread debate about female leadership. Megawati's popularity was, in large part, a result of the fact that she was her father's child, which was of more significance for her supporters than the fact that she was her father's daughter. Among her opponents, however, her sex was seen as a political weapon to be used against her.

In May 1998, amidst a collapsing economy, mass demonstrations against Suharto and the political elite, riots in several major cities and violent attacks against ethnic Chinese (particularly women), Suharto announced his resignation and Vice-President Habibie was sworn in as President. A week after taking power, Habibie – with the agreement of parliament – announced that general elections should be held in mid-1999. On 7 June 1999 the nation held its first democratic elections in more than forty years. In the weeks leading up to the election, non-government organisations ran campaigns to encourage women to vote, impressing on them their right to cast their vote as they wished, without pressure from husbands or male relatives. On election day, women demonstrated an enthusiasm for the democratic process and – like men – turned out to vote in large numbers. As will be discussed below, the party that won the largest number of votes was Megawati's Democratic Party of Struggle; an outcome that was to provoke considerable debate about female political leadership. Yet the percentage of women in parliament decreased from 16 percent to 8.8 percent.

In addition to the National Parliament (DPR), Indonesia has the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR). During the New Order, the MPR was the supreme political body and central to Suharto's control of the political landscape, with half of the 1000 members appointed. The MPR has undergone several changes since 1998. Changes prior to the 2004 elections saw the MPR become fully elected, consisting of members of the DPR and members of the Regional Representatives Council. The MPR no longer elects the President, as was the case in 1999, but has responsibility for constitutional amendments and impeachment of the president. Over the past decade, the number of women in the MPR has remained consistently low. In the period 1992–97, 60 of the then 1000 members of the MPR were women (some six percent). This number declined to 56 in the 1997–1999 period. Following the transition towards democracy, the number of women in the MPR stood at fifty-nine.

In October 1999, the new President – Abdurrahman Wahid – announced his Cabinet, which included two women. Khofifah Indar Parawansa was appointed to the traditional Cabinet post for women: Minister for the Role of Women. In a break with

traditional stereotypes, Erna Witoelar was appointed Minister for Housing and Regional Development. Two years later, Megawati replaced Abdurrahman Wahid as President. Her Cabinet of National Unity included two women: Rini Suwandi was given the non-traditional portfolio of Trade and Industry, while Sri Rejeki Sumaryoto replaced the outspoken feminist Khofifah Indar Parawansa as Minister for Women's Empowerment.

Women have been politically active through Indonesia's history, both prior to and since independence, yet this activity has not translated into parliamentary representation. The fall of Suharto's authoritarian New Order was not accompanied by greater representation of women in the nation's parliament and the opportunities for women to engage in the formal processes of decision making are as limited as ever. Overcoming the barriers to women's parliamentary representation presents a major challenge for Indonesia, but one that must be met if democratisation is to have substantive meaning and include that 51 percent of the population who are female. As the following discussion indicates the barriers are formidable.

What are the Barriers

New Order Ideology

With Indonesia's transition towards democracy, New Order ideology is being openly challenged and fundamentally revised. Nevertheless, aspects of that ideology – developed and reinforced over more than three decades – remain highly influential in shaping social and political relations in Indonesia. This is particularly true in regard to gender relations. The image of the domesticated woman – central to New Order ideology if not to the reality of most women – remains strong and is a major barrier to women gaining an equal share of political power.

The New Order state was highly gendered, as were the roles promoted by the state as acceptable. As I have argued elsewhere, the construction of 'ideal types' was central to New Order ideology and control (Bessell 1998). Within these constructions, citizens, families, children and, particularly, women were allocated specific roles and attributes. While women were not formally excluded from political life or parliamentary representation, the dominant ideology militated against it. Moreover, while the 1945 Constitution guarantees women's right to vote, it does not contain provisions on gender equality or non-discrimination in political representation (Katyasungkana 2000: 262). Indeed, it would have been somewhat extraordinary for a document adopted more than five decades ago – in Indonesia or anywhere else in the world – to have addressed such issues.

Julia Suryakusuma has argued that during the New Order period, Indonesian social organisation and relationships were infused with paternalism, with President Suharto portrayed as the father of the nation. Suryakusuma also argues that strong paternalist strains in Javanese political culture – which are characterised by deference to power and authority – coincided with military norms of hierarchy and obedience to command (Suryakusuma 1996: 92-102). These highly gendered characteristics were translated into key features of the New Order State. The concept of *azas kekeluargaan* – or the family principle – was central to New Order philosophy, with the state itself conceptualised as a family. The Department of Information's Official Indonesian Handbook stated that

The family is the smallest unit of the nation....The state can only be strong if it is made up of strong families. A just nation can only be achieved through a just arrangement of families. For that reason, building a family implies participation in the building of the foundation of a nation (quoted in Suryakusuma 1996: 97).

If building families was to be central to building the nation, then it was necessary to build the right kind of family. This meant extending state control into the family. Within the carefully structured official power hierarchies of the New Order, the family was the smallest administrative unit. Families held an identify card (*kartu keluarga*) and were grouped together into neighbourhood associations. Several neighbourhood associations formed the next level of administrative unit and so on up the hierarchy. Of course the extent to which people actually felt this quite pervasive web of state control in their everyday lives was widely variable. But this structure does clearly reveal the way in which the family – and women’s roles within it – was utilised by the State. This was most effectively done in the case of civil servants. In New Order Indonesia, civil servants were not permitted to join political parties but were required to belong to the civil service organisation known as Korpri. Significantly, not only civil servants, but also their spouses – generally wives – were subject to state control. The wives of civil servants were required to join Dharma Wanita – the association of wives of civil servants – as a means of supporting their husbands in their service of the nation.

It is interesting to note that in the early 1980s about 25% of civil servants were women, by the end of the New Order figure was around 38%. These women tend to be concentrated in the lower levels of the service (in the late 1990s only about 16% of executive level positions are filled by women) (Oey Gardiner 2002: 108). But overall their numbers were significant. Nevertheless, the concept of Dharma Wanita was based on the assumption that the civil service is male dominated. Female civil servants were automatically members of Korpri but also had the option of joining Dharma Wanita. For Suryakusuma, Dharma Wanita was the embodiment of the idea of women as appendages of their husbands and an ideology that defined female dependency as ideal (Suryakusuma 1996: 98). Indonesia’s New Order is not unique in the formal association of power and authority with male characteristics, and obedience and deference as female traits. In New Order Indonesia, however, the regime actively sought to depict the state in gendered terms and harnessed constructions of gender as a means of state control.

The depoliticisation of the women’s movement was one aspect of the New Order’s overall strategy of social and political control. The mass-based organisation, the Family Guidance Welfare Movement or PKK (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga) was central to this strategy. Apart from religious groups, the PKK was the only mass organisation that village women were permitted to join. PKK had a central role to play in promoting and implementing official development plans at the local level and sought to harness women’s support for the national development agenda. The state also exerted considerable control over Kowani (the Federation of Women’s Organisations), the official umbrella body of women’s organisations, of which Dharma Wanita is a member. Rather than representing women’s interests, Kowani has been criticised (most vehemently by Indonesian women activists) as contributing

to the domestication of women and excluding them from the public sphere (see Sadli 2002: 83).

Through the activities of Kowani, Dharma Wanita and PKK, and the policies and rhetoric of the New Order regime, women were constructed first and foremost as mothers and secondly as instruments for national development. Law number 5 of 1974 defined the relationship between the women's movement and the state, allocating five roles to women: (i) wife; (ii) household manager; (iii) child bearer; (iv) educator; (v) citizen (Nadia 1996: 240). It is somewhat ironic that while this law severely curtailed women's public and political roles, Law number 4 of the same year provided women's groups with what they had demanded for so long: a national marriage code, providing some protections to women in relation to marriage – particularly polygamy, consent and age of marriage. While some of the rights and protections to which women were entitled within marriage and the domestic sphere were now codified, their scope to act outside of that sphere had been curtailed in law.

Julia Suryakusuma has dubbed the New Order's construction of the role of women 'State Ibuism'. The term Ibu literally means mother, but is also used in a variety of contexts including as a respectful form of address for women. Suryakusuma argues that the New Order State co-opted the term and used it in a very narrow way that emphasised the biological meaning (Suryakusuma 1996: 101). Thus the New Order state sought to present motherhood as the primary, predetermined and natural role for women.

Within New Order ideology, there was little scope for the ideal woman to enter the masculine world of politics, parliament and formal decision-making. In her study of an urban community in Java, Norma Sullivan has noted that despite New Order ideology and rhetoric women did engage in politics at the community level and often exerted considerable power. Sullivan argues, however, that "the decisions women make in this female dominated realm do not have the same consequences for others as do decisions made in the mainstream of public affairs which is characterised...by male dominance" (1994: 114). Given the ideological constructs imposed by the New Order it is not surprising that few women entered the national parliament, and even fewer gained a place in Cabinets. While the constructs of the New Order are now being challenged and often cast aside, their legacy – particularly in relation to the politics of gender – remains influential. Ibuism is likely to remain a barrier to the representation of women in the national (and local) parliaments for many years to come.

Religion

While New Order ideology remains a barrier to women's parliamentary representation in the post-New Order era, additional barriers are evident. One potential obstacle opposition to women's parliamentary representation, and more precisely women's political leadership, on religious (Islamic) grounds. The position of women within Islam has long been the topic of debate. These debates are often complex and nuanced, weaving together the teachings of the Prophet, interpretations of religious jurisprudence and local custom. At the simplest level, there is stark contrast between those who see a sex-based hierarchy as inherent, legitimate and divined by God and those who emphasise the egalitarian nature of Islam. The latter group argue that inequality between men and women are shaped not so much by Islam as by particular

social, cultural or political contexts (see Platzdasch 2000 for an excellent overview of the issues).

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, the possibility of a female president saw these debates erupt with great vigour and passion. In the wake of the 1999 general elections, debates were no longer theoretical and the possibility that the country would have a female leader was very real. Megawati Sukarnoputri's Democratic Party of Struggle had won the largest number of votes and held 153 – or 35 percent – of the 462 seats contested. Given her leadership of the party and her substantial personal following, Megawati had a strong claim to the presidency. Under the 1945 Constitution the President is elected by the then 700-member People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR). As noted above, the MPR – like the Parliament itself – is a heavily male dominated institution. The MPR met in October 1999, some four months after the general election, allowing ample time for speculation and debate about the presidency. Much of this debate played out in an ostensibly Islamic context.

The deep divisions among Islamic scholars and Muslims on what Islam defines as the appropriate 'place' for women and, more specifically, on the legitimacy of women taking up positions of political leadership, came to the fore. Bernard Platzdasch has succinctly captured the debate as follows:

On the question of women and political leadership, there is a general lack of clarity. There is no statement in the Islamic tradition to prohibit a woman from becoming a rajah, caliph, sultan or president. But neither is this explicitly permitted. (Platzdasch, p 341).

In February 1999 the *kiai* (Muslim scholars) of Nadatul Ulama, Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation, declared that a female president would be acceptable to the *umat* (Muslim community). This did not, however, end the debates – largely because they were fuelled not only by varying interpretations of religious doctrine, but also by political self-interest. The month after the declaration of the *kiai*, Abdurrahman Wahid argued that a woman president would be unacceptable to the majority of Muslims (McIntyre 2001: 94). As a potential presidential candidate, Abdurrahman Wahid's objection to women in positions of national leadership must be understood in the context of a political power struggle. Another political leader, Hamzah Haz also expressed strong opposition to the idea of a female president in 1999, declaring that it would be contrary to Islamic teaching. As leader of the Muslim United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP), Hamzah had a strong stake, not only in not only in Islamic teachings but also – perhaps more so – in a far more secular world of politics. In the lead-up to the MPR sitting, Amien Rais (leader of the National Mandate Party – Partai Amanat Nasional, PAN – and speaker of the MPR), Hamzah Haz and other leading Muslim politicians formed the so-called central axis (*poros tengah*). This was an alliance of Muslim parties, designed to capture the majority of votes within the MPR and ensure that Muslim parties maintained a strong stake in power. The agreed candidate of the central axis was Abdurrahman Wahid, who was duly elected to the presidency (see Bouchier 2000: 23). Megawati's claim to the presidency had been overcome, and her sex was a useful weapon in the campaign to keep her out of the presidential palace. As president, Abdurrahman Wahid was able to overcome his misgivings about female leaders sufficient to appoint Megawati to the

position of vice president. By 2001, Hamzah Haz also appeared to have overcome his aversion to a female president, as he accepted the Vice Presidency under President Megawati.

Prevailing Stereotypes and Ideology

While some opposition to the possibility of a female president was based on various interpretations of religious principles, the ensuing debates suggested that prevailing stereotypes, about not only the role but also the 'nature' of women, act as an implicit barrier to the political representation of women. Such stereotypes pre-existed Suharto's accession to power, but reinforced and were reinforced by New Order ideology, which sought to harness gender stereotypes for political ends. The New Order construction of women drew on particular aspects of Islamic and Javanese traditions that define women's roles as limited to the domestic or private sphere and secondary to those of men. At the same time, traditions whereby women acted in public roles were studiously excluded from the official discourse. Barbara Hatley has suggested that the influence of patriarchal Hindu ideology, which slowly spread across Southeast Asia from the second and third centuries AD, resulted in the emergence of "polarised images of dependent, devoted wife and wild temptress/widow-witch" (Hatley 2002: 132). These images are captured by the verses of the Ramayana that suggest "when women are independent it will bring curses" and traditional Javanese proverbs such as "Swargo nunut, neroko katut" (to heaven by your leave; to hell by your command) (quoted in *Democratization in Indonesia: An Assessment 2000*: 178.). There is little scope for women to be cast as autonomous political actors within such stereotypes, which provided fertile ideological soil in which the New Order could plant its own gender ideology of 'State Ibuism'. Aspects of traditional belief systems, Islam and New Order ideology – which are contradictory on many issues – have all served to construct an ideal of womanhood that is centred on notions of wife and mother. Woman as political leader and decision-maker *outside* the realm of the household does not sit easily with this ideal.

In the debates about a female president, there was considerable focus on Megawati herself, who was considered by many to be a housewife who was uneducated, unprepared and unfit for national leadership. As debates around Megawati's possible presidency raged, the tension between the privately important role wife and mother who manages the household and the seriously important public role of political leader were clearly demonstrated. It should be noted that there were serious question marks over Megawati's credentials as a potential national leader and policy maker. Of course, similar question marks have hung over many other (male) political leaders and would-be leaders. The difference was the highly gendered nature of the debates around Megawati's potential ascendancy, and the way in which her sex and the imagery of the housewife became central. No longer was the image of the housewife one that evoked respect; in the context of political leadership, housewife appeared to become a term of derision. Krishna Sen has suggested that while there may have been general opposition to the notion of a woman as president, there was particular opposition to this woman (Sen 2002: 15). But underlying the debate was a more general theme about what public roles were appropriate for women. Regular use of the term 'housewife' to describe Megawati, and an apparent fascination with her attire and handbag, permeated media reports and political commentary – both within and beyond Indonesia. While the opposition to Megawati as President was, in part, opposition to her personally, the debates raised profound questions regarding the

potential to significantly increase the numerical and substantive representation of women within Indonesia's fledgling democratic parliament.

Strategies to Increase Women's Parliamentary Representation

During the New Order, strategies to increase the parliamentary representation of women were extremely limited. The disappointingly, but not unexpectedly, low number of women elected to parliament in the 1999 general election focused the attention of those supporting greater parliamentary representation of women on how that objective might be achieved. Many women's groups, which had previously given comparatively little attention to women's political rights, have taken up the challenge. These groups have found an ally within policy making circles in the form of the Ministry for Women's Empowerment. Formally called the Ministry for the Role of Women, and charged with implementing the New Order's gender policies, the Ministry has now emerged as a champion of women's rights and gender equity.

The Role of Women's Groups

Despite the relatively few women who have entered Indonesia's National Parliament, the considerable barriers to women's parliamentary representation, and official ideology that seeks to define women's roles in the private sphere, women have been important within the broad political scene in Indonesia. Throughout the New Order, women's groups were significant political actors – either as state sponsored advocates of official policy or as critics and opponents of the repressive regime. In early 1998, as the economic crisis worsened, a group of largely middle-class women calling themselves *Suara Ibu Penduli* (Voice of Concerned Mothers) launched a protest at a busy intersection in central Jakarta. Describing themselves as housewives, the group protested against the spiralling commodity prices, arguing that it was impossible for women to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers when unable to afford to buy food for their families and milk for their children. The arrest of three of the group's leaders drew considerable media attention in Indonesia and raised the profile of the groups. *Suara Ibu Penduli* serves as an example of what might be described 'politicised motherhood' – whereby these women sought to co-opt the role accorded to them by the regime to make a strong political statement. The likely impact of this politicised motherhood is somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, these women are demonstrating their preparedness and capacity to engage in and influence the political life of the nation – albeit from outside the formal corridors of power. They are also showing the ways in which stereotypes can be subverted and used as a point of resistance. On the other hand, it could be argued that politicised motherhood reinforces the stereotype that women only engage in the public, masculine world of politics when their 'natural' roles of wife and mother is under threat. This is the very stereotype that acts to exclude women from parliament or, when a handful of women gain access, restricts them to the feminine portfolios.

In post-Suharto Indonesia, both women's organisations and individual women have staked a political claim – albeit largely outside the formal decision-making arena. As Oey-Gardiner has pointed out, several of Indonesia's largest and most influential non-government organisations – including the Centre for Electoral Reform; the International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development; the Urban Poor Consortium; and the Environmental Forum – are headed by women (2002: 111).

Non-government organisations provide an avenue through which women can engage in the politics of the nation, and in the post-New Order these groups have far greater space in which to operate. The political transition and the debates around the possibility of a woman president has alerted some non-government organisations – particularly women’s organisations – to the need to confront the relative absence of women from formal decision-making processes. As Susan Blackburn has noted, women’s organisations entered the debate on the merits of a female president rather late. However, by 2001 the issue of women’s political representation had gained momentum (Blackburn 2001: 278-79) and strategies to improve what is considered an unacceptable and undemocratic situation are being actively explored and debated.

Quotas, Women’s Caucuses and Electoral Reform

Gender quotas, women’s caucuses within parliament and electoral reform have all been raised as possible strategies to increase women’s parliamentary representation. The Ministry for Women’s Empowerment has identified its role in post-Suharto Indonesia as achieving “more equitable treatment for women in the family, society and nation” (Parawansa 2002: 73). To this end, the Ministry has stated the need to increase women’s involvement in decision-making processes, both within parliament and the bureaucracy. The Ministry supports a quota of thirty percent for women in parliaments – as well as at the senior levels of the civil service – as one strategy for achieving this.

The notion of adopting quotas received support from a broad constituency, including parliamentarians, senior officials, non-government organisations, labour unions and activists. In April 2001, advocates of women’s political rights came together at a workshop hosted by the Centre for Electoral Reform, the Indonesian Women’s Political Caucus, the Indonesian Women’s Coalition for Justice and Democracy and the Indonesian Centre for Women in Politics. The workshop, held in Jakarta, was part of the Asia Pacific 50–50 campaign, which aims to achieve thirty percent representation of women in parliaments, cabinets and local decision making bodies by 2003 and equal representation by 2005. The participants at the Jakarta workshop agreed that quotas are a necessary strategy if the number of women in national, provincial and district legislatures is to increase. Debate focused not on the necessity of quotas, but on the percentage required and the form that quotas might take (Report of the Jakarta Workshop of the Asia Pacific 50/50 Campaign). There was no consensus on whether quotas should be ‘gender neutral’, preventing either men or women holding (or contesting) less than a stated percent of seats, or whether it would be preferable to simply set a minimum requirement for women. There was also debate as to whether quotas should apply to parliament or to pre-selection for winnable seats. There was agreement, however, that political parties should be lobbied to support a quota system. The Ministry for Women’s Empowerment reconfirmed its support for quotas.

The notion of quotas remained contentious, but support was building. In Indonesia, one of the most influential opponents of a quota system was herself a woman – President Megawati Sukarnoputri. Megawati argued that quotas are counterproductive and undermine the dignity of women; any advancement secured as a result of quotas would be neither genuine nor sustainable. Instead the President, who came to power in no small part as a result of her family pedigree, argued that accession to political office must be based on merit alone (see Jakarta Post, 2 March

2002). Despite the controversy, some parties moved to adopt at least a rhetorical commitment to quotas. Interestingly, one of these is Megawati's Democratic Party of Struggle, which has a standing order requiring one woman be represented for every five men on local executive boards.

In 2003 advocates of quotas won a significant victory. The 2003 electoral reform bill mandated that women must make up thirty percent of candidates for the 2004 parliamentary elections. The reform does not go so far as some would have liked. Importantly, the quota applies to candidates, not to seats – or even winnable seats. Nevertheless it was hailed by Indonesian activists and some international organisations as an important step forward.

While the question of quotas provoked particular debate, it is only one strategy promoted by advocates for greater representation of women in parliament. In addition to supporting quotas, the Ministry for the Empowerment of Women has promoted the development of networks between women engaged in party politics – both within parliament and beyond (Parawansa 2002: 76). The Indonesian Women's Political Caucus – one of the co-organisers of the Jakarta workshop on women's political participation – now operates across party lines, with some 200 members from seventeen parties. The agreed need to increase the number of female candidates and the number of women in parliament galvanises women of very different political, religious and ideological persuasions.

A third potential strategy that has received limited attention to date is the need to make the electoral system more 'woman friendly'. Advocates of greater parliamentary representation for women have pointed out that experience elsewhere around the world shows that proportional representation and mixed systems are more likely to produce parliaments with a better gender balance. During the revision of electoral laws in 2002 and early 2003, debates about the relative merits of electoral systems raged, this included discussion of open- versus closed-list proportional representation. These debates focused on the implications for political parties, with concern for gender equity largely relegated to women's groups.

The 2004 Elections

Indonesia's second democratic parliamentary elections were held in April 2004. This was a little more than twelve months after the adoption of the requirement that 30 percent of candidates be women. The 2004 elections saw an increase in the number of women elected to the DPR – but the increase was small. In 1999, 43 women had won seats, meaning that women made up just under nine percent of the parliament. In 2004, that figure increased to just 11.1 percent, with 61 women elected. Only 12 sitting female candidates were re-elected. No party achieved 30 percent representation of women in the parliament. This result suggests that a quota for candidates is not a sufficient tool to redress the barriers to women's parliamentary representation in Indonesia. 2004 also brought Indonesia's first direct Presidential election. In that contest, Megawati lost office to Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. In the lead-up to that election debates about female political leadership were not as prominent as in 1998-99. President Megawati's defeat can be attributed to her political performance, rather than to her sex.

Democracy and Decentralisation: Opening Opportunities or Closing Doors?

In her study of the consequences of political liberalisation on women in Jordan, Tunisia and Morocco, Laurie Brand concludes that “shock transitions appear to offer the greatest opportunities and the most serious challenges to women” (Brand 1998: 256). In Indonesia, the onset of the economic crisis and the fall of Suharto represent a severe “shock transition”, and indeed there are both new opportunities and enormous barriers to women’s parliamentary representation in the new political environment. Opportunities arise from new freedoms of expression and association, a free media and international support for a transition to democracy. But, as discussed earlier, barriers of sizeable magnitude remain. These barriers are reinforced by the nature of party politics in post-New Order Indonesia and by the decentralisation that has accompanied democratisation.

A striking feature of Indonesia’s political transition is the proliferation of political parties. During the New Order period, only three political parties were officially recognised and permitted to contest elections. In contrast, 48 parties fielded candidates in the 1999 general election. The 1999 Law on Political Parties identifies three roles that are expected of parties. First, to provide political education to enhance people’s awareness of their political rights and obligations. Second, to promote and champion community interests in policy through deliberative bodies; and third, to prepare community members to fill political positions in accordance with democratic principles and institutions (Fealy 2001: 99). This gives parties considerable responsibility to foster and ensure popular participation in the processes of democracy. Such a responsibility should include fostering and ensuring the participation of both women and men in the political processes – and guaranteeing women’s access to party membership, pre-selection on equal terms and opportunity to enter parliament. To date, few parties have risen to the challenge of ensuring these opportunities for women.

Political parties in Indonesia, while often having a women’s branch, are for the most part heavily male dominated and highly patriarchal in structure. Even when women reach positions of authority within party structures, they tend to be excluded from the informal power structures where ‘real’ decisions are made. The reluctance of political parties to take up issues of gender equity in any serious way acts as a significant barrier to women’s parliamentary representation. Perhaps more importantly, the prevailing attitudes within the majority of political parties prevent women from substantially influencing their policy agenda.

Indonesia’s political transition has been accompanied by a program of far-reaching decentralisation. The highly centralised nature of Suharto’s New Order is seen as antithetical to democracy and participation. Consequently, decentralisation is widely considered to be critical to democratisation.

Is it possible that the process of decentralisation and the devolution of substantial powers to local parliaments will create space for women to enter local parliaments in greater numbers? It has been suggested that there is greater opportunity for women to enter local level parliament, where higher levels of education, literacy and ‘political knowledge’ are arguably less important than at national level. India provides an example of relative success in increasing the numbers of women in local parliaments (see Jain). Yet in India, where a democratic system was adopted upon independence,

it took several decades, legislative intervention in the form of quotas, and resolute determination on the part of female candidates for the number of women to increase significantly (see Jain). In Indonesia, an early assessment provides little optimism that decentralisation will increase women's representation in local parliament, at least in the short to medium term. As discussed earlier, the 1999 general elections included elections for parliaments at provincial and district (kabupaten/kota) levels. As at national level, women fared particularly poorly in the local elections, with the absence of women particularly noteworthy at the highest levels of decision making. Only one of the thirty provincial parliaments is chaired by a woman (approximately three percent), while a mere six of the 245 regency parliaments are chaired by a woman (around two percent) (Oey Gardiner 2002: 106).

Resistance to women's parliamentary representation is – in some areas – stronger at local level than at national level. While New Order ideology, some interpretations of Islam and prevailing stereotypes continue to obstruct greater parliamentary representation of women, there is nevertheless some rhetorical commitment to promoting opportunities for women to enter politics at the national level. In part this commitment responds to the rhetoric of donor agencies (including bilateral donors who themselves have a rather poor record in terms of women's parliamentary representation) which demands attention be paid to this issue. The Indonesian government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women in 1968 and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1984. The extent to which these commitments were translated into practice is open to question – particularly in regard to women's political representation. Nevertheless, these instruments provide a potentially important source of pressure for reform, both from within Indonesia and from outside. Yet if the national government failed to act to advance women's equal access to the parliamentary processes, it is likely that local governments will be even less active. Early indications suggest that decentralisation will result in a diminishing commitment in many districts to an international discourse that advocates equal access to political representation.

Laurie Brand has argued that in periods of political liberalisation, “political and social conservatives of various stripes – and in some cases even so-called progressives...construct similar programs for women when given free rein and voice: glorification of motherhood, promotion of women as repositories of family honor and societal values, the retreat of women from the work place, restriction to various forms of public space....” (Brand 1998: 263). In Indonesia, such developments appear to be particularly problematic in some local areas and have serious implications for women's representation in local (and national) parliaments – and indeed for all aspects of women's lives. Edriana Noerdin has argued that the opportunity for the formation of village councils and customary institutions, provided under the Law Number 22/1999 on decentralisation, is likely to be deleterious for women because there is no accompanying regulation to “prevent the revitalisation of feudal and patriarchal values embedded in many of these customary institutions” (Noerdin 2002: 182). Noerdin identifies the Nagari system of West Sumatra, which excludes women from the formal decision making processes by restricting participation to (male) clan chiefs (2002: 182), and the revival of syariah law in some areas, as examples of reemerging structural barriers to women's representation in local and regional decision making bodies. Noerdin also points to the disturbing example of Regional

Regulation Number 5/2000 adopted by the local parliament of Jakarta, which is antithetical to both democracy and gender equality. This regulation states that only the head of the family can be a member of the village council, thus severely limiting the extent to which councils can be representative. When taken in tandem with the 1974 Marriage Law, which states that the man is the head of the family, this Regulation can be seen as explicitly excluding women from the formal decision making process (see Noerdin 2002: 185)

Do Women ‘Make a Difference’?

The question of whether women parliamentarians can make a difference in post-Suharto Indonesia is an open question. Any collective influence of women, in terms of progressing particular issues or impacting on the culture of the institution, is necessarily limited by their small numbers and the ongoing barriers to greater representation. Democratisation will not necessarily be accompanied by greater representation of women in parliament. The accession to power of a female president sent a clear signal that women can engage in political decision making at the highest level. Yet Megawati herself demonstrated no enthusiasm for a feminist agenda.

While Indonesia’s history over the past century is characterised by the absence of women from the parliamentary life of the nation, recent examples show that individual women are able to make a substantial difference to policy. Since the fall of Suharto there have been substantial changes to policy at the national level that have practical and symbolic significance for gender equity. Prior to 1999, the Indonesian Government adopted aspects of the international agenda for women, for example the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was ratified and the government committed itself to the principles of various international conferences including the Beijing Platform for Action. Yet commitment remained shallow and was overshadowed by the essentially patriarchal ideology of the regime. Political transition has brought potential threats to gender equality, but has also resulted in notable advances for women.

As noted earlier, the Ministry for the Role of Women changed its name to the State Ministry for the Empowerment of Women in 1999. Susan Blackburn has suggested that the change went far beyond the name. According to Blackburn, “[I]t marked the end of women’s affairs being seen as issues restricted to wives and mothers; the approach is now to tackle the construction of gender in Indonesian society that limits women’s rights to equity and equality” (2002: 78). Significantly, the Ministry began to agitate for greater parliamentary representation of women, supporting women’s political networks and the establishment of women’s caucuses at national and provincial level, and advocating the introduction of quotas (see Parawansa 2002: 76). The Ministry has played a crucial role in seeking to transform the role of the state sponsored women’s organisations of the New Order period from perpetrators of the status quo into forces for women’s empowerment. The New Order’s ‘Women in Development Management Teams’, designed to coordinate the government’s women’s programs and promote women’s role in contributing to national development, became ‘Women’s Empowerment Teams’. In a similar vein, the Ministry has proposed that the 1974 Marriage Law be amended to redefine women’s roles beyond the domestic sphere (see Parawansa 2002: 76-77). One of the most notable proposals put forward by the Ministry is the suggestion that young women

who become pregnant should be permitted to continue with their studies, given that education will be crucial to their ability to support themselves and their babies in the future. There is deep division on the issue and debate has been considerable. That the debate can occur at all, let alone be driven by a State Ministry, is a sign of remarkable change. Such ideas would have been both anathema and threat to the family and gender ideology of the New Order.

The National Plan of Action for Women (2000-2004) was a result of collaboration between the Ministry and a range of political, religious and community organisations. The Plan identifies five key areas for action:

1. Improving women's equality of life;
2. Raising awareness of justice and equity issues across the nation;
3. Eliminating violence against women;
4. Protecting the human rights of women; and
5. Strengthening women's institution (including increasing women's parliamentary representation).

The changes that have taken place within the Ministry – and the new agenda that it is advocating – should not be romanticised or idealised. Shifting from the rhetoric to the actuality of empowerment will require an abundant supply of resources, political will and determination; as will influencing the agenda beyond the Ministry. Nevertheless, it is clear that a new era has dawned.

The change of name and focus of the Ministry was ushered in by Kofifah Indar Parawansa, who was elected to parliament as a member of Nadatul Ulama (the party of Abdurrahman Wahid) and appointed Minister for Women's Empowerment and head of the National Family Planning Coordination Agency (Badan Koordinasi Keluarga Berencana Nasional, BKKBN). Under the stewardship of Kofifah, the Ministry was transformed. Similarly, the aims and approach of the National Family Planning Coordination Agency changed markedly, as issues of quality, choice and empowerment were given prominence over reduction in the number of births.

Both Megawati and Kofifah demonstrate the potential for women to take of the mantle of political leadership in Indonesia and dramatically influence the policy agenda. The particular ways in which each has wielded power demonstrate the very different agendas that women parliamentarians will have. Notably, Kofifah was replaced as Minister for Women's Empowerment when Megawati acceded to the Presidency. During her tenure as Minister for Women's Empowerment, Kofifah pursued an agenda that focused specifically and explicitly on the empowerment of women and the promotion of gender justice and equity. While the obstacles to fully achieving these goals remain enormous, Kofifah did indeed 'make a difference'. Megawati, too, has made a difference. The very fact of her presidency placed the issue of women's parliamentary representation on the public agenda and demonstrated in the most practical way that political office is not the preserve of men. Yet Megawati did not have a directly positive impact on issues of gender justice and equity. Not unlike other notable female heads of government, Megawati not only resists, but appears to reject, a feminist agenda.²

² Megawati's performance as President has been criticised not only by feminists concerned about her disregard of gender issues, but also by a range of political commentators concerned about what are often seen to be questionable policy decisions and an apparent disregard for democratic principles.

Kofifah and Megawati can also be seen as individual embodiments of the general principal that has been well demonstrated. Women can and do make a difference within parliaments – both individually and en masse. But the nature of that difference is determined by a range of factors, including the opportunities and restrictions women parliamentarians face, the degree of support or hostility from parliamentary colleagues (both male and female) and their constituencies, their political allegiances, and their personal ideologies and belief systems. Female parliamentarians, like their male counterparts, pursue a range of agendas and bring a range of qualities – both positive and negative – to parliament. Unlike their male counterparts, however, female parliamentarians are conspicuous by their low numbers.

Concluding Comments

As the foregoing discussion indicates, women have actively engaged with democracy throughout Indonesia's history. This is evident in the campaigns of the women's movement prior to independence, in women's involvement in the Constitutional debates of the 1950s, in the numbers of women that voted in the 1955 and 1999 elections, and in the role of women's non-government organisations in the protests that lead to the fall of Suharto and since 1998. Historically, women's groups have also sought to influence the policy agenda and have had some success in doing so. This is apparent during the Constitutional Debates of the 1950s and in relation to marriage laws. Yet this success has been limited and largely from outside parliament. The small number of women within parliament during the New Order period had extremely limited space to influence the policy agenda within the authoritarian political environment that prevailed. However, the same could be said for men. While the ruling elite in New Order Indonesia was both largely male and heavily masculinist, neither women nor men outside this elite were able to exert significant influence over the parliamentary agenda. With the fall of Suharto and the subsequent political transition, women have openly agitated for representation within the formal processes of decision-making, and a very small number – including Megawati Sukarnoputri and Kofifah Indar Parawansa – have successfully taken up the mantle of political power. For the most part, however, political transition has not opened up greater space for women to share in the formal political life of the nation. Indeed, in some districts the space for women to engage in parliament appears to have been closed down in recent years.

The obstacles to Indonesian women entering parliament arise from a combination of historical legacy, a particular interpretation of Islam, the patriarchal ideology fostered by the New Order regime, gendered stereotypes, and political self-interest on the part of some male power brokers. Political transition has not wrought immediate benefits for women in terms of parliamentary representation, while decentralisation appears to be creating new barriers for women. In the new political environment, women's groups are adopting and lobbying for a range of strategies to increase the numbers of women in parliament. The demand for greater representation of women in both national and local parliaments is now on the political agenda. The path towards a greater – let alone equal – share in power for Indonesian women looks set to be a long and difficult one. It is a path being pursued by women and men who envisage a genuinely representative and equitable political system for their nation, and consider that such a system can only exist when women gain an equal share in the formal processes of decision-making.

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