Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia

Volume 24
Number 2 *Reclaiming women's space II*

Article 4

June 2023

Indonesia's women; Diversity and dynamics

Anke Niehof
Wageningen University, The Netherlands, niehofanke@gmail.com

Wacana Vol. 24 No. 2 (2023): 268-283

Indonesia's women: diversity and dynamics

Anke Niehof

Abstract

The study of Indonesian women inevitably involves methodological questions, a prime one being whether Indonesian women as a category form a meaningful object of study. In edited volumes on Indonesian women, the contributions usually form a mosaic of different kinds of Indonesian women, defined by variables such as ethnicity, class, residence, or historical time. This raises questions about diversity and difference and the applicability of specific findings to Indonesian women in general. Taking as a point of departure that it is useful to treat Indonesian women's studies as one field of study, I explore these issues in relation to women's agency and empowerment. First, I do so by applying a system's approach to a case which I know best from my own fieldwork, that of women in a Madurese fishing community. Second, I use an intersectional approach to explore the subject of Indonesian women and social change, focusing on the aspects of family and food, and urbanization. Finally, I interweave the two parts and draw conclusions on the resilience of traditional values in the family food domain and on the impact of women's paid work, but I also point at many remaining questions for further research.

Keywords

Indonesian women, diversity, agency, social change.

Anke Niehof worked for twenty years as Professor of Sociology at Wageningen University until her retirement in 2013. Before coming to Wageningen she worked in Indonesia for about ten years and, in Leiden at the Bureau for Indonesian Studies, and in The Hague at the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 1985, she obtained her PhD in anthropology at Leiden University on a thesis entitled *Women and fertility in Madura, Indonesia*. Her main research interests include the fields of livelihood and food security, informal care, and reproductive health, always using a gender lens and a comparative perspective. Anke Niehof can be contacted at: niehofanke@gmail.com.

Anke Niehof | DOI: 10.17510/wacana.v24i2.1167.

INTRODUCTION

In 1935, a prominent Dutch ethnologist pondered the question of the socio-cultural unity of Indonesia. He concluded that Indonesia forms what he called "a field of ethnological study", which he defined as a certain area "whose culture appears to be sufficiently homogeneous and unique to form a separate object of ethnological study, and which at the same time apparently reveals sufficient *local shades of differences* to make internal comparative research worthwhile" (J.B.P. de Josselin de Jong 1977: 167-168, my italics). This seems a useful starting point for a discussion on the study of Indonesian women, in which I also pay ample attention to difference.

Edited volumes on Indonesian women, for example, those edited by E. Locher-Scholten and A. Niehof (1992), S. van Bemmelen et al. (1992), J. Koning et al. (2000), and K. Robinson and S. Bessell (2002), offer a mosaic of local and other types of "shades", but still aim to present a fairly representative though composite picture of Indonesian women, mostly in relation to a certain theme. Such volumes or special issues of journals are immensely important to understanding the diversity of Indonesian women's identities and experience, and – at the same time – for revealing the challenges and changes to which they are exposed in the Indonesian society. These changes are visible in economic, political, sociological, and demographic studies on Indonesia. What these mean for women can be gauged when data are differentiated by sex or when certain national-level changes which are particularly relevant for women, such as the rise of age at marriage (G.W. Jones 2002) or the decline in fertility (A. Niehof and F. Lubis 2003), are described.

The discussion above indicates the two tracks this paper follows. First, I apply a holistic approach, with a particular locality as the level of analysis. Key questions here concern the relations between culture, gender, diversity, and women's agency. After a conceptual discussion, I proceed to present the case of women in a Madurese fishing community, because this case illustrates so well the questions with which we are dealing. The case material comes from fieldwork in Madura during 1978-1979 (Niehof 1985) and in 2004 (A. Niehof, R.E. Jordaan, and Affandy Santoso 2005; Niehof 2007), and from the meetings and discussions I had during regular visits up to 2013.

In the second part of the paper, I take an intersectional approach. In it I address social change in Indonesia, how it involves women, and how it might affect them differently. This is a very broad subject and I do not claim that I can deal with it comprehensively within the scope of this paper. To narrow down the discussion, I focus on two aspects: first, family and food; second, Indonesia's rapid urbanization, since – in various ways – urbanization creates employment opportunities and is a driver of social change. This part has the character of a sociological exploration, rather than of an in-depth sociological analysis.

I see both parts as necessary to the understanding of Indonesian women in an era of social change. Although both approaches are – each in its own way – valuable, they also have their own shortcomings. When using the cross-sectional sociological approach only, one could apply the etic categories used in this

research (such as class) to the Madurese case, but then the emic distinctions which people use to describe their own community would disappear. It would also fragment the holistic picture which emerges from those emic categories and allows us to see gender structures. Using only the Madurese case, one would miss the trends affecting women and social change which are revealed by looking at the results of surveys in other parts of Indonesia and by aggregate statistical data. Hence, in my view, the two parts as complementary for constructing the bigger picture. In the conclusion, I forge linkages between the two discussions and formulate questions for further study. In doing so, I am treating Indonesia as a field of women's studies, much in the same way as De Josselin de Jong (1977) conceptualized Indonesia as a field of ethnological study.

Conceptual framework

In his book on diversity and complexity, S.E. Page (2011) offers clarity on these two concepts which often feature in the context of women's studies. In this field, the term diversity is often used in various ways, and socio-cultural gender systems are often referred to as complex. Such characterizations are usually taken at face value. According to Page, complex systems "consist of *diverse* rule-following entities whose behaviours are interdependent. Those entities interact over a *contact structure* or *network*. In addition, the entities often *adapt*" (Page 2011: 17, author's italics). Regarding diversity, Page distinguishes three types: diversity "within a type, or variation"; diversity of types, referring to "difference in kind"; and diversity of composition, referring to "how the types are arranged" (Page 2011: 20).

The first two distinctions are especially relevant to our discussion on Indonesian women in relation to prevailing gender systems. In an enlightening article, H.L. Moore (1993: 195) distinguishes between "differences within" and "differences between" in his discussion on differences between women in a given context, much in the same way as Page distinguishes diversity within a type (variation) and diversity of types (difference in kind), respectively. In developing my argument, I treat the two classifications of diversity and difference as similar.

In the literature on women's and gender studies, differences between kinds of women have been receiving increasing attention. The concept of intersectionality has been coined in accounting for and to develop sensitivity to difference. Intersectional analysis looks at the ways certain variables can produce heterogeneity in the experiences of a seemingly homogeneous group of women. For example, the experience of older Javanese women might be quite different to that of young Javanese women, the experience of rural Javanese women different to that of urban Javanese women, and the experience of elite Javanese women quite different to that of poor Javanese women. In these cases, the gender experience of Javanese women as an ethnic group is intersected by age, residence, and class, respectively. Hence, according to N. Ward (2015: 60) "intersectionality is at the heart of difference."

When quoting Page (2011), I have rather loosely referred to gender systems, by which I mean interacting systems of gender rules, norms, and values which are shared by a socio-cultural group and produce similar gender practices. In my view, the ''entities'' Page (2011: 17) speaks about are not only the women involved but also the elements of the gender system they share and on which they act or are judged socially. The interactions arise from the way women interact with significant others and from how they use the prevailing normative structures in their practices. It is here that variation and difference become visible. Within such a system, women are not just constrained by normative gender structures, they also can turn these to their advantage and can derive power from structural niches in the system. When doing so, they use their agency, defined as "*reflexively* monitored flows of conduct in the direction of calculation in the broad utilitarian sense of balancing means and ends" (A.T. Carter 1995: 65, my italics). Hence, in enacting their agency, to achieve certain outcomes women consciously consider the efficacy of their actions as well as the socio-cultural appropriateness of their behaviour.

The above still leaves us with the problem of the level at which the system is defined. The higher the level of definition, the more differences we find. The level of definition determines whether diversity is classified as variation (or difference within) or as difference in kind (difference between). In my PhD research on fertility in Madura (Niehof 1985), I struggled with this question, though not in those –yet uncoined – terms. I decided to conduct my research on women and fertility in two villages with different dominant livelihood systems: a fishing village on the north coast and an agricultural village in the interior, both in the district of Pamekasan, which I called Patondu and Tambeng, respectively.[1] I created diversity in kind. I found that the women in both villages shared pervasive values and norms regarding the child-bearing process in terms of its beginning (marriage and first child) and on breastfeeding and birth intervals. However, the women in the fishing village (henceforth called by its real name, Pasean) stopped childbearing much earlier than those in the agricultural village who had pregnancies until their natural fecundity declined. This resulted in a significantly lower total fertility rate Pasean (4.04) than in the agricultural village (5.87) (Niehof 1985: 263). Had I selected only one type of village for my research, I would been unable to see this.

PART I: THE CASE OF PASEAN

LOCALITY AND COMMUNITY

Since time immemorial, life in Pasean has revolved around fishing, though – over time – fishing methods have changed. Up to the 1970s and early 1980s, most Pasean fishermen were involved in *ngaddhăng*. In the main season, they would make daily trips to buy fish at sea from *majăng* fishermen (mostly from the neighbouring fishing village), who would stay at sea for about ten

[1] The real names of the villages were, respectively, Pasean and Plakpak. I used Patondu's real name, Pasean, in later publications and I use it in this paper in the description of the case.

days. Then they would return to land the fish on the beach in Pasean, where the fish-traders would take over. All *ngaddhăng* boats were equipped with an outboard motor. In the 1980s, when the inboard engine became available to *majăng* boats and *majăng* fishermen could now also land their catches daily, the distinction between *majăng* and *ngaddhăng* became blurred. Hence, the demise of *ngaddhăng*. In the mid-1980s, a new type of boat, the *klotok*, a relatively small vessel suitable for an inboard engine, became popular and soon dominated the fishing scene. It could absorb the now redundant *ngaddhăng* crews (Niehof, Jordaan, and Santoso 2005). A later innovation was the ice-box which could be taken along to keep the fish fresh (Niehof 2007).

Apart from fisheries, Pasean was (and as far as I know still is) known for its *pettis*, fish paste made by boiling small fish (*Decapterus* spp) with palm sugar. After some time, the fish is taken out and sold as *ikan pindang*. The remaining liquid is boiled until it becomes a thick paste, which is then put into little jars to be sold as *pettis*. All *pettis* enterprises (*pemindangan*) are owned and run by women (confer Niehof, Jordaan, and Santoso 2005).

Pasean is not a homogeneous community. Its social stratification results from two intersecting distinctions. The first is that between *orèng lowar* (lit. 'outsider') and *orèng dalem* (lit. 'insider'). The first category refers to people who are involved in fisheries, the fish-trade or fish-processing, the second to those with occupations outside fisheries, like shopkeepers, small entrepreneurs, primary school teachers, religious leaders (*kiyai*), et cetera. The second distinction is the one between *orèng sè andhi* and the *orèng sè tak andhi*, which can be literally translated as the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. People classified themselves and others according to these two principles (Niehof 1985; Niehof, Jordaan, and Santoso 2005). The kinship system is bilateral. Among the *orèng lowar*, sons inherit the boat and fishing-tackle from their father, and daughters the house (matrilocal arrangement). Overall, there is not much difference between the treatment of sons and daughters (Niehof 1985, 2007).

The women of Pasean

The focus here is on *orèng lowar* women, because of the predominance of this group, numerically and otherwise. Many studies of fishing communities claim the validity of a gendered spatial metaphor, namely that female is to land as male is to sea, which creates land- and sea-based forms of localized femininity and masculinity (E. Alonso-Población and Niehof 2019). Although women do fish (see, for example, R. Fitriani and N. Stacey 2012) and men also engage in the fish-trade, the metaphor obscures more subtle gendered divisions of labour and ignores the liminal zones between land and sea (Alonso-Población and Niehof 2019). In Pasean, fishing at sea is clearly men's business, dealing with fish on land that of women. The emic and moral character of the metaphor is apparent from the rule that women should never board a fishing-boat and that it brings bad luck when a woman accidentally trips over a net drying on the beach. Women should stay clear of fishing-boats and tackle, lest they "pollute" these.

The Pasean fishing economy rests on three female pillars: the *pangamba'*,

the fish-traders, and the women who run a *pemindangan* (in combination with trading *ikan pindang*). Once fish is landed ashore, fishermen no longer have any say about the catch. Generating an income from fishery is now in the hands of women: the fishermen's wives, the *pangamba'*, and the traders.

Pangamba' constitute the core of the fishing economy. They invest in fishing-boats, engines, and ice-boxes, and market the fish from "their" boats through their network of traders. Boat-owners who are indebted to a *pangamba'*, as most of them are, do not have to repay the debt. The *pangamba'* gets her 10 percent of the value of the catches from each trip for as long as the boat sails. If it founders in a storm, the debt is cancelled. One could speak of a *pangamba'* dynasty, since the titles are inherited matrilineally. Kusnadi (2001) calls the *pangamba'* a phenomenal group of women. In his study of fishery on Java's east coast, he came across a few cases in which titles had been transferred to a son. However, these male *pangamba'* were not successful (Kusnadi 2001: 121). For the Pasean *pangamba'* it is important to have a daughter to take over. If they have only a son, they try to make him marry a girl suitable to follow in her mother-in-law's footsteps. If childless, they might adopt a niece and groom her to become a successor (Niehof 2007). *Pangamba'* belong to the group *sè andhi*, and their economic power often extends to non-fishery activities, such as running a profitable *arisan* (rotating credit association). Their influence can reach beyond Pasean. For example, a *pangamba' ngebok* (who had invested in ice-boxes) had dealings with male wholesale traders from Surabaya to market "her" fish (Niehof 2007).

There is some socio-economic variation in the group of fish-traders, but many of them belong to the group of *orèng sè tak andhi.* The poorest traders sell small quantities of fish at the local Pasean market; the more enterprising sell their fish to local traders all over the island. For the second category especially, it is important secure a steady supply of fish. To this end, they attach themselves to a *pangamba'*. Hence, there is a fairly fixed network of traders around the *pangamba'*. This way, the *pangamba'* assure themselves of buyers and the traders secure their supplies. *Pemindangan* owners can have a favourite *pangamba'* or trader to buy from, or might just follow the negotiations in the groups of *pangamba'* and their traders, before buying where they see fit. After all, they are mainly interested in a specific type of fish.

Fish is the engine of the local economy, which extends beyond village borders through trade and labour (fish-traders from outside Pasean). Since it is women who convert fish into money, they are pivotal to this economy. Men accept this. Crew members get pocket money from their wives who secure and manage the household income through their dealings with the *pangamba'*. A *pangamba'* can inform her husband that she has saved enough money for him to go to Mecca and become a *haji*. This pattern, whereby it is accepted that women are cleverer and more trustworthy with money than men (who could spend it on vices), extends to the *orèng dalem* in Pasean. It has also been observed in Central Java (S.A. Brenner 1998; J. Alexander and P. Alexander 2001).

Concluding note on difference and agency in Pasean

The subject matter of my PhD research was fertility levels and patterns in Madura, and the starting level of the analysis was that of rural Madurese women. Subsequently, I decided to distinguish two strata according to the local livelihood system: agriculture-based and fishery-based (Niehof 1985). In this paper, I have lowered the level of analysis to the gender system in the fishing community, its core being the equations of men and masculinity with sea-based work and women and femininity with land-based work, which can be summarized by the following formulae: masculinity : sea = femininity : land.

I have investigated difference and diversity among and between the women, and how women use the prevailing gender structures to enact their agency. Socially, the community is stratified according to two intersecting variables: (1) relation of occupation to fishery, fish-trade, and fish-processing and (2) socio-economic position, as summarized in Table 1.

	Relation of occupation to fish			
	YES: *orèng lowar*		NO: *orèng dalem*	
Socio-economic status	*orèng sè andhi*	*orèng sè tak andhi*	*orèng sè andhi*	*orèng sè tak andhi*

Table 1. Socio-economic stratification in relation to fishery.

The distinction between *orèng lowar* and *orèng dalem* is one which Page (2011) would call diversity in kind and Moore (1993) difference between. The borderline between *orèng sè andhi* and *orèng sè tak andhi* is more fluid. I would call this (classified) variation (Page 2011) or differences among women (Moore 1993). As shown in Tabel 1, the last intersecting variable is subsumed under the first, which is reminiscent of Page's (2011: 20) diversity of composition. This makes the intersections hierarchical. The way L. Dumont (1978) conceptualized hierarchy as encompassment, helps to understand why such an important gender norm as women's autonomy and husbands' dependency in money matters in Pasean is not only followed among *orèng lowar* but also among *orèng dalem*. Dumont (1978: 396-397) argues that complementary dual structures become hierarchical when one structure is encompassing the other and thereby becomes superior to the encompassed structure. The *orèng lowar* are the backbone of the Pasean' economy, which would collapse without them. The dual fish-based social structure is the encompassing one. Hence, in this sense, the *orèng lowar* are superior and set the standards for gendered rules and practices. This holds for the context of Pasean as a fishing community. In another context, fishing folk can be looked down on as coarse (*kasar*), uneducated, and inferior people.

From the overriding principle which guides the gendered division of labour in Pasean, summarized as masculinity : sea = femininity : land, it follows that fish becomes a female commodity once landed on shore. Because it is on land the fish acquires its monetary value, women have the best part of the

equation. In the space provided, they use their agency and entrepreneurship to their own advantage and that of their dependants. Successful *pangamba'* are hard-working women who skilfully build and manage their capital. They look for opportunities to expand their commercial activities and influence, and take technological innovations, like the *klotok*, radio communication with their boats, and ice-boxes in their stride (Niehof 2007). They turn the allotted ideological niche into a source of empowerment (N. Kabeer 2005). Of course, not all *orèng lowar* women are a *pangamba'*. In 1978, I counted twenty-five *pangamba'* among 196 women working in fishing-related activities out of a total female work force of 374, the population of women in the ages 15-65 being 504 (Niehof 1985: 40, 52). However, they rule over their clientele (Niehof 2007) and their performance is a benchmark for all women. Pasean women not only exercise their agency in the economic domain, but also in that of reproductive decision making, by deciding themselves on the use contraception, not necessarily telling their husband. Hence, the relatively low fertility rate in Pasean (Niehof 1985).

PART II: WOMEN AND SOCIAL CHANGE

In this part, I leave the local-community level of analysis and refrain from defining a gender system beforehand. Instead, I highlight key aspects of the ongoing processes of social change in Indonesia, while focusing on women and taking difference and intersectionality into account. In an earlier article on the changing lives of Indonesian women (Niehof 1998), I discussed such aspects, some of which will feature in the present discussion. Here, I focus on two subjects: first, family and food; second, urbanization. These subjects differ in their relationship to the two levels of analysis distinguished in this paper. The first, the family-and-food domain, can be investigated on any level, from micro- to macro level, but by different methods. So, one can take the reflection on a macro-level pattern back to the micro-level of households and communities, in this case Pasean. I plan to do this where possible. The gendered dynamics of urbanization and the urban lifeworld, however, cannot be seen on the local rural level. Of course, in the Madurese case, there is the history of the large numbers of Madurese migrating to the big cities in East Java (the proverbial Madurese *becak* driver in Surabaya). But that is another issue, which is not relevant to the argument in this paper.

FAMILY AND FOOD

In an interesting analysis, S. Tiwon (2000) explored the ambiguity of Indonesian state policy regarding the role of women in building the nation. On the one hand, women are considered equal to men and seen as active players in development; on the other they are held responsible for establishing the "happy, prosperous small family" and – in line with the *kodrat wanita* – to be good mothers to the next generation. Indeed, in the early 1990s, when I was working with women's groups in rural BOTABEK (Bogor, Tangerang, Bekasi), I witnessed for myself how the ladies of the PKK ('Family Welfare Movement')

mobilized women for activities by appealing to them as responsible mothers and to the contribution to development they were expected to deliver.

Whether this ideological appeal to women's *kodrat* still prevails, the fact is that families have indeed become smaller during the past five decades, in particular because of the decline in fertility. Between 1965 and 1997, the total fertility rate declined from 5.91 to 2.78 (Niehof and Lubis 2003: 1). The 2021 fertility rate is estimated at 2.26. Additionally, household size declined for other reasons. Jones (2002: 220) mentions "changing conventions about young people sharing accommodation in group housing with peers or living alone." And households are increasingly nuclear-family based, not only in urban areas. Among the rural Minangkabau, it has been observed that more couples are setting up their own nuclear-family household instead of living with the woman's matrilineal kin in the *rumah gadang* (J. van Renen 2000).

The above raises the question of whether ethnicity plays a role in family and household change. Using data from four rounds of the Indonesian Family Life Surveys (1997/1998 to 2014/2015), Y.S. Kunto and H. Bras (2019: 190) found significant differences in average sibling size between Javanese (lowest), Batak (highest), and Minangkabau families. The averages of mother's education in years also differ significantly between the ethnic groups. It is highest among the Minangkabau and lowest among the Javanese. Regarding dietary diversity (a robust indicator of nutritional status) of school-age children, they found interesting gender differences related to ethnicity. The dietary diversity of both Batak and Minangkabau boys was lower than that of their female counterparts, because they consumed (were given) more high-status foods (meat and dairy products) than girls, who compensated this by eating more (low-status) vegetables and tuber crops. Among the bilateral Javanese, there was no such status difference in foods consumed between boys and girls. As could be expected, there was a positive association between socio-economic status and dietary diversity, but this was significantly more pronounced among the Minangkabau than among the other two groups (Kunto and Bras 2019: 194). Apparently, the influence of ethnicity on food-related family practices, including gender-specific influence, is quite resistant to social change.

The decline in fertility and family size has changed the experience of motherhood. Mothers now have fewer children to care for. However, more than in the past, they must comply with "modern" standards of childrearing and they have higher aspirations for their children's education and futures. When their husbands are the breadwinners and work long days away from home, the mothers are virtually on their own, and child care becomes ideologically "a principal-defining aspect of women's role" as Robinson (1985: 52) once described it. One way of judging the quality of women's mothering is by the health status of their children, which is largely determined by a mother's performance as food-carer in the family (Niehof 2019).

Regarding food care, also in Indonesia there is a serious and growing problem of overweight among schoolchildren and adolescents. Children who skip breakfast and get pocket money to buy snacks instead are especially

at risk. Working mothers are always pressed for time, having to juggle child care and work. In their study on overweight among schoolchildren, K.R. Ekawidyani et al. (2018: 191) found that "children of working mothers had poorer eating habits than those whose mothers did not work". Breastfeeding working mothers face additional challenges. To be able to work and breastfeed, they are dependent on an enabling work environment and a supportive husband. When, as "modern" mothers, they accept the advice of the health centre to follow the WHO recommendation of exclusive breastfeeding during the first six months, female colleagues and other mothers can accuse them of being "stingy" for depriving their infant of traditional supplementary foods (J. Februhartanty et al. 2012).

The linkages between gender and nutrition are complex (Niehof 2019). Often, women's nutrition is only considered as instrumental to child nutrition, since children of undernourished mothers are at risk of stunting. At the same time, however, the cross-cultural empirical evidence of women as the primary food-carers for their families also shows that, when good food is scarce, they can perform this role at the expense of their own food intake. Tenggerese mothers in East Java, for example, scored much lower on food intake than the other family members yet they saw themselves as food secure. In fact, their nutritional status could be poor (D. Hastuti 2018).

The above testifies to the elementary role of women as food-carers. Social change can affect a lot of domains, but norms about women's role in feeding the family seem to be strongly engrained (Niehof 2019). In Pasean, the many women who worked from dawn to dusk in the fishing economy also remained responsible for household food security (by securing income and rice) and family nutrition (by preparing food and distributing it in the family). Apart from contributing an income, no man would take over these food-caring activities. Therefore, in performing their role as food-carer, women are guided by deep-rooted cultural notions. Some of these differ according to ethnic group, such as differential treatment of daughters and sons, others are shared across ethnic boundaries, such as mothers prioritizing the food intake of the husband and children above that of their own and infants from the age of three to four months being entitled to specific foods to supplement breastfeeding.

Women's role in social change will differ according to phase in their life course. Because of the rise in the age at first marriage, the group of unmarried young women has grown. They can be working or studying. In the 1990s, D. Wolf (1993) described the many adolescent girls and young unmarried women working in the industrial centres. Some of these "factory daughters" commuted to the work site daily, others left the parental home to find lodgings near their work (see also Jones 2002). Apart from this physically distancing themselves from their parents, they also claim financial autonomy. Wolf found that commuters and boarders alike did not remit a steady flow of cash to their parents and that transfers of cash from a worker to her family had the "quality of a gift", rather than an obligatory contribution (Wolf 1992: 95). Presumably, these trends have not reversed. All those unmarried young women who work

or study away from the parental home have broken with the tradition that adolescent girls and young women should live with their family of origin until marriage. In his seminal article, N.B. Ryder (1965) points out the often decisive role of cohorts of young adults. By using the ideological space which is theirs because they are not yet committed to a family of their own, they can bring about social change. Wolf's pioneering factory daughters, young women working in other sectors (see also below) and female students seem to prove his point.

Urbanization

Although not as fast as in the 1980s, Indonesia's urban population is still rapidly increasing. The share of the population living in urban areas has increased from 12 in 1950 to 56 percent in 2019 (WORLDBANK 2019). Urbanization creates challenges, for instance for housing and infrastructures, but it also stimulates economic growth. Regarding employment opportunities, women's labour force participation in urban areas has been steadily increasing. In the age-group 20-24 between 1971 and 1995, women's labour force participation doubled, from 24.2 to 50.3 percent, the greatest increase in the professional and clerical occupations (Jones 2002: 230). Data from four rounds of the Indonesian Family Life Surveys (1997/1998 to 2014/2015) display similar trends. In the data on mother's working status (excluding single women), the trend of the increasing labour force participation of women as reported by Jones (2002) shows in the decrease of non-working mothers (that is not doing paid work!) from 42.3 in the first round to 29.1 percent in the last. There is an increase in both blue-collar and white-collar workers, from 13.5 to 22.4 percent and from 44.1 to 48.5 percent, respectively (Kunto and Bras 2018: 650-651).

In the relatively high share of white-collar work, women's rising level of educational attainment is probably a key factor. Especially in urban areas, in the late 1990s, the gender gap in education had already narrowed significantly (M. Oey-Gardiner 1997: 158). The question of whether education and labour force participation empower women was addressed in a study on women's empowerment on the household level in Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Timor-Leste (L. Phan 2016). In all four countries, the researcher identified three major factors which affect women's empowerment: labour force participation (strongest effect), education, and household decision making. According to the researcher, "higher education of women often coincides with higher chances of involvement of women in the labour force, which in turn, leads to higher economic independence and more involvement in household decision making. All these factors increase the level of empowerment of individual women" (Phan 2016: 376).

Kunto and Bras (2018) distinguished three groups of women according to labour force participation: "non-working" mothers, mothers with blue-collar jobs, and mothers with white-collar jobs. Whether the strong empowerment effect of labour force participation (Phan 2016) applies equally to the last two groups, is unclear. Even though the proportion of "non-working" mothers

has declined substantially over the years, in absolute numbers it still is a large group. In an article on women and the labour market during and after the 1998 financial crisis, the author categorizes women according to working status in three groups: self-employed, employed, and unpaid. The 2000 figures show an urban-rural gap. In urban Indonesia, the percentages of self-employed, employed, and unpaid women are 32.50, 48.34, and 19.16, respectively, whereas in rural Indonesia these are 32.69, 17.02, and 50.29 (S. Cameron 2002: 154). The urban-rural gap for the last two categories is striking.

To understand the bigger picture, we need the concept of class. In 1997, Oey-Gardiner (1997: 158) was already commenting on the rapidly expanding middle class in urban areas. Would most of these "non-working" mothers of Kunto and Bras (2018) have been middle-class women? Presumably, the work of mothers with blue-collar jobs is necessary to earn much needed income for the household. These families would be predominantly lower-class families. Well-educated mothers with white-collar jobs earn better incomes, will have more positive motives to work (personal development, interesting job), and can afford domestic help. Their families are upper class. The middle-class "non-working" mothers are literally caught in the middle; they do not have to work out of economic necessity but are also not able to do the kind of work which would make their effort worthwhile. This picture resembles the one which V. Hull (1976) found in rural Java at the time. The fertility levels of lower- and upper-class women were lower than those of middle-class women. The explanation was found in the working status of the women. Both lower- and upper-class women were engaged in paid work, albeit different work and for different reasons, which motivated them to control their fertility, whereas middle-class women often did not have paid work and were full-time housewives and mothers.

CONCLUSION

In the first part of this paper, I used a holistic system approach for the Pasean case. This allowed me to see how difference between and among women works and why the one type of difference is superior to the other. By using this approach, I could explain the hegemonic character of certain gender norms and practices in several domains, beginning with the financial domain. The core of the social structure, as expressed in the formulae masculinity : sea = femininity : land, has not changed. Instead, social and technological changes have been accommodated and integrated, although we cannot foresee for how long this will be so.

The second part applies a macro-sociological approach to social change. This exploration yielded a number of interesting results. An initial one is the strong effects of women's labour force participation. Whereas there is an overall relationship to women's higher educational attainment, in the Pasean case women's education is not an explanatory factor. From her cross-sectional study, Phan (2016) concludes that the empowerment of women results from higher education of women, leading to higher involvement of women in

the labour force, greater economic independence, and more involvement in household decision making. In Pasean, women's empowerment is linked to culturally underpinned financial independence and a dominant role in the household and in the fishing economy, not to level of education. Therefore, Phan's conclusion only partly applies. Sociologically, women's labour force participation is a layered variable; it is intersected by level of education and class. The empowerment effect might differ by class. However, the evidence seems to suggest that for empowerment, the difference between women who have paid work and women who do not, is more important than the class difference. Based on both the Pasean case and the sociological data, I conclude that having paid work or not, is "diversity in kind" (Page 2011) or "difference between" (Moore 1993), irrespective of the kind of work or the level of education. And, yes, this presupposes women's control over their own income. I think that, in general, Indonesian women do have this control, unlike many women in South Asia, for example, which would make this a characterizing feature of Indonesia as a field of women's studies (confer De Josselin de Jong 1977).

The role of ethnicity remains a bit puzzling. The data of the Family Health Surveys (Kunto and Bras 2018, 2019) reveal ethnic differences in certain aspects. The gendered ethnic differences in the diets of schoolchildren relate to another phenomenon, which seems to be resistant to change, namely that of the archetypical role of mothers as food-carers in the family domain. However, it could be that in other domains, ethnic differences – the "local shades" of De Joselin de Jong (1977) – are diminishing. When, for example, the experience of urban Javanese women resembles more that of urban Minangkabau women than that of rural Javanese women, the "difference between" – ethnicity, has become less important than the "difference within" – residence (confer Moore 1993). The diversity in kind, Javanese women versus non-Javanese women, is losing meaning to residence (confer Page 2011). Perhaps excepting the household food domain, in the experience and profile of urban middle-class women, ethnicity might no longer play a role of significance.

Lastly, since the early 1990s, we have seen a process of increasing emancipation of young unmarried women, fuelled by industrialization, the rising age at marriage, and the narrowing gender gap in education. This will be especially visible in the urban context. Certainly, the increase and positive image of young female urban professionals will provide ample role models for younger generations of women. In Pasean, so far, the basic social structure of the community has not been affected by technological and social change, but young female cohorts might make a difference (confer Ryder 1965). When *pangamba'* and fish-traders are sending their daughters to high school and even to university, as some do, it is doubtful these young women will be willing and have the skills to follow in their mothers' footsteps. They probably have a different vision of their future than to engaging in the demanding and dirty work of the fish-trade and marketing, even though it can make them rich.

In this paper, I have followed the logic of the conceptual framework and – as much as I could – used empirical evidence. However, on many points I cannot draw definite conclusions and must leave the reader with a lot of question

marks. Starting from the local level, and having in mind the pioneering "factory daughters", one might wonder whether better educated young women are bringing about fundamental change in the social structure of local communities such as Pasean? Will "generation" create a divide there, a new "difference between"? For the urban context, the following questions spring to mind. What is the profile of urban middle-class women? How do working mothers cope with the challenges they face, and how does their working status affect the role of fathers and values of masculinity? How does that differ according to type of work and socio-economic status? Are mothers still the primary food-carers in the urban context and what role can they play in preventing poor nutrition and overweight in their children? What does ethnicity mean for women in different contexts? And, finally, for all contexts an important question would be how women's wellbeing features in the context concerned and against the backdrop of social change. I rest my case, and I hope that these questions and similar ones will be taken up by other researchers. Paraphrasing De Josselin de Jong (1977), I am convinced that Indonesian women's studies does present an exciting and fruitful field of interdisciplinary study.

REFERENCES

Alexander, J. and P. Alexander. 2001. "Markets as gendered domains; The Javanese pasar", in: L.J. Seligmann (ed.), *Women traders in cross-cultural perspective: mediating identities, marketing wares,* pp. 47-69. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Alonso-Población, E. and A. Niehof. 2019. "On the power of a spatial metaphor; Is female to land as male is to sea?" *Maritime Studies* 8(3): 249-257. [DOI 10.1007/s40152-019-00148-z.]

Bemmelen, S. van, M. Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, E. Locher-Scholten, and E. Touwen-Bouwsma. 1992. *Women and mediation in Indonesia*. Leiden: KITLV Press.

Brenner, S.A. 1998. *The domestication of desire: women, wealth, and modernity in Java*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Cameron, S. 2002. "Women and the labour market during and after the crisis", in: K. Robinson and S. Bessell (eds), *Women in Indonesia: gender, equity, and development,* pp. 144-158. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Carter, A.T. 1995. "Agency and fertility: for an ethnography of practice", in: S. Greenhalgh (ed.), *Situating fertility; Anthropology and demographic inquiry*, pp. 55-86. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dumont, L. 1978. "Vers une théorie de la hiérarchie; Postface pour l'édition 'Tel'", in: L. Dumont, *Homo hiérarchicus; Le système des castes et ses implications,* pp. 396-403. Paris: Gallimard.

Ekawidyani, K.R., I. Karimah, B. Setiawan, and A. Khomsan. 2018. "Parents' characteristics, food habits, and physical activity of overweight schoolchildren in Bogor City, Indonesia", in: A. Niehof, H.N. Gartaula, and M. Quetulio-Navarra (eds), *Diversity and change in food wellbeing; Cases from Southeast Asia and Nepal*, pp. 177-195. Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers.

Februhartanty J, Y. Wibowo, U. Fahmida, and A. Roshita. 2012. "Profiles of eight working mothers who practiced exclusive breastfeeding in Depok, Indonesia", *Breastfeeding Medicine* 7(1): 54-9. [DOI: 10.1089/bfm.2011.0017.]

Fitriani, R. and N. Stacey. 2012. "The role of women in the fishery sector of Pantar Island, Indonesia", *Asian Fisheries Science* 25S: 159-175.

Hastuti, D. 2018. "Household food security, food care, child nutrition, and wellbeing of ethnic Tengger families in East Java, Indonesia", in: A. Niehof, H.N. Gartaula, and M. Quetulio-Navarra (eds), *Diversity and change in food wellbeing; Cases from Southeast Asia and Nepal*, pp. 87-115. Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers.

Hull, V. 1976. *Women in Java's rural middle class; Progress or regress?* Yogyakarta: Institute of Population Studies, Gadjah Mada University.

Jones, G.W. 2002. "The changing Indonesian household", in: K. Robinson and S. Bessell (eds), *Women in Indonesia: gender, equity, and development*, pp. 219-235. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Josselin de Jong, J.P.B, de. 1977 [1935]. "The Malay Archipelago as a field of ethnological study", in: P.E. de Josselin de Jong (ed.), *Structural Anthropology in the Netherlands*, pp. 164-183. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Kabeer, N. 2005. "Gender equality and women's empowerment: a critical analysis of the third millennium development goal", *Gender and Development* 13(1): 13-24.

Koning, J., M. Nolten, J. Rodenburg, and R. Saptari. 2000. *Women and households in Indonesia; Cultural notions and social practices*. Richmond, VA: Curzon Press.

Kunto, Y.S. and H. Bras. 2018. "Women's empowerment and gender inequalities in adolescent nutritional status; Evidence from the Indonesian Family Life Survey", *Journal of Biosocial Science* 50(5): 640-665.

Kunto, Y.S. and H. Bras. 2019. "Ethnic group differences in dietary diversity of school-aged children in Indonesia", *Food and Nutrition Bulletin* 40(2): 182-201.

Kusnadi. 2001. *Pangamba' kaum perempuan fenomenal. Pelopor dan penggerak perekonomian masyarakat nelayan*. Bandung: Humaniora Utama Press.

Locher-Scholten, E. and A. Niehof. 1992 [1988]. *Indonesian women in focus*. Leiden: KITLV Press.

Moore, H.L. 1993. "The differences within and the differences between", in: T. del Valle (ed.), *Gendered Anthropology*, pp. 193-205. London, New York, NY: Routledge.

Niehof, A. 1985. *Women and fertility in Madura, Indonesia*. PhD Thesis, Leiden University.

Niehof, A. 1998. "The changing lives of Indonesian women; Contained emancipation under pressure", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 154(2): 236-258.

Niehof, A. 2007. "Fish and female agency in a Madurese fishing village in Indonesia", *Moussons* 11: 185-209.

Niehof, A. 2019. "Gender and nutrition security", *CAB Reviews: Perspectives in Agriculture, Veterinary Science, Nutrition, and Natural Resources* 14(023). [DOI: 10.1079/pavsnnr201914023.]

Niehof, A. and F. Lubis. 2003. *Two is enough; Family planning in Indonesia under the New Order 1968-1998*. Leiden: KITLV Press.

Niehof, A., R.E. Jordaan, and Affandy Santoso. 2005. "Technological and social change in a Madurese fishing village", *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* 161(4): 397-433.

Oey-Gardiner, M. 1997. "Educational developments, achievements and challenges", in: G.W. Jones and T.H. Hull (eds), *Indonesia assessment: population and human resources*, pp. 135-67. Canberra: Australian National University / Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Page, S.E. 2011. *Diversity and complexity*. Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Phan, L. 2016. "Measuring women's empowerment at household level using DHS data of four Southeast Asian countries", *Social Indicators Research* 126: 359-378. [DOI 10.1007/s11205-015-0876-y.]

Renen, J. van. 2000. "The salty mouth of a senior woman; Gender and the house in Minangkabau", in: J. Koning, M. Nolten, J. Rodenburg, and R. Saptari (eds), *Women and households in Indonesia; Cultural notions and social practices*, pp. 163-81. Richmond, VA: Curzon Press.

Robinson, K. 1985. "Modernization and mothering", *Prisma* 37: 47-57.

Robinson, K. and Bessell, S. (eds). 2002. *Women in Indonesia: gender, equity, and development*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Ryder, N.B. 1965. "The cohort as a concept in the study of social change", *American Sociological Review* 30(2): 843-61.

Tiwon, S. 2000. "Reconstructing boundaries and beyond", in: J. Koning, M. Nolten, J. Rodenburg, and R. Saptari (eds), *Women and households in Indonesia; Cultural notions and social practices*, pp. 68-85. Richmond,VA: Curzon Press.

Ward, N. 2015. "Care ethics, intersectionality, and poststructuralism", in: M. Barnes, T. Brannelly, L. Ward, and N. Ward (eds), *Ethics of care; Critical advances in international perspective*, pp. 57-69. Bristol: Polity Press.

Wolf, D. 1992. "Industrialization and the family; Women workers as mediators of family change and economic change", in: S. van Bemmelen, M. Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, E. Locher-Scholten, and E. Touwen-Bouwsma (eds), *Women and mediation in Indonesia*, pp. 89-109. Leiden: KITLV Press.

Wolf, D. 1993. "Women and industrialization in Indonesia", in: J.P. Dirkse, F. Hüsken, and M. Rutten (eds), *Development and social welfare; Indonesia's experiences under the New Order*, pp. 135-159. Leiden: KITLV Press.

WORLDBANK. 2019. "Indonesia: bold reforms needed to realize urban potential". [Press release, 3 October 2019.] [Retrieved from: www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/10/03/indonesia-bold-reforms-needed-to-realize-urban-potential; accessed on 28-01-2022.]