Introduction

During the New Order regime in Indonesia (1967–98), political life was entirely oriented towards the state. Women were affected as much as men. Whether or not it was possible for women's organisations to work on issues they considered important, and how successful they might be in such endeavours, depended heavily on whether the state looked upon them favourably. Then, in the space of only a few months, with the fall of President Suharto, the nature of political life changed dramatically, as the state grew weaker and civil society flourished in all kinds of admirable and repulsive ways – a mixture of mushrooms and toadstools bursting out of the debris of the authoritarian state. In 2001 the first Indonesian woman president took office, something unthinkable under the military-dominated New Order. Freedom of association was enjoyed by women and men, but women in particular soon began to feel the lack of state services and control of law and order. Sudden changes like these focus attention on the importance of the state for women.

This book investigates how the state and Indonesian women have engaged with one another over the past century. Because the state is such an important institution in people's lives, Indonesian women have had to come to terms with it. How have they done this, and with what results? How has the state responded and how has it sought to influence women?

Analysing the state's engagement with women is always a difficult task. Is the state autonomous in its treatment of men and women, or does it reflect the interests of certain groups in society? Although the state in Indonesia is dominated by men, it is not enough to say it reflects their interests rather than the interests of women. For a start, men, like women, are not a homogeneous group: the gender interests of men may vary with religion, ethnicity, class and age, to name just a few of the differences among men. States have to respond to many interests, both internal and external, which accounts for the complexity of decision-making. Nor is the state itself homogeneous, consisting as it does of a number of institutions with their own competing interests. Apart from the

executive arm – the government – with its own contending ministries, the state also consists of the bureaucracy, the judiciary, the military and the police, which cannot always be relied on to administer government policies as they were intended. In the Indonesian case, moreover, the state has changed its nature over the course of the last century: starting out as a Dutch colony, it is now a fragile democracy. Not surprisingly, then, state attitudes to women have differed considerably. They are best appreciated by analysing particular issues, which is the approach taken in this book.

If the state requires dissection, so does the category of Indonesian women. Given the great diversity among Indonesian women, it is unlikely that one can identify common interests among them in their dealings with the state. It is necessary to ask which women's concerns are being advanced, by whom and why. A cognate question concerns women's agency in influencing policy; how much influence do they have, on what issues?

Indonesia is a large and extraordinarily diverse country. Its population of some 220 million people is spread over thousands of islands, the most important being the densely populated island of Java. There are about three hundred ethnic groups, none able to claim a majority. While about 90 per cent of Indonesians are nominally followers of Islam, significant minority religions exist and the extent to which religion dominates people's lives varies considerably. In the twentieth century, most Indonesians were poor and lived in rural areas, yet there were also wealthier urban groups and even aristocrats. All these factors cause divisions among women, making it difficult to say what might be 'women's issues' in relation to the state.

For the purposes of this book, 'women's issues' are those publicly defined as such by Indonesian women. Inevitably, in discussing the way in which women and the state have engaged with one another, the spotlight falls on a narrow group of women, the ones who are organised and articulate, capable of defining what women's issues are. For this reason women's organisations and their spokeswomen feature prominently in this book. I do not claim that these women are typical of all women, nor that they represent the interests of all women. Although it is possible to argue (as this book does) that when some women take up an issue, many women's lives are touched, it is not contended here that the issues featured in this book represent what all Indonesian women want. In fact it is recognised that the issues have been selected by certain groups of women as of concern to themselves or to their preconceived view of Indonesian womanhood. We have no way of knowing what other women may have wanted because they were not organised and had no public voice.

Unfortunate as that may be, it should not lead us to dismiss Indonesia's women's organisations as valueless because they are 'unrepresentative'. To do so would be to commit the same mistake as the colonial government, which derided nationalist leaders as unrepresentative of the masses of the 'Natives'. Rather, we should value the women's organisations as giving some insight, however limited, into the perceptions and feelings of certain groups of Indonesian women. From the point of view of the state, these organisations were the only ones that they could consult or that gave voice to the concerns of Indonesian women. As such they could not be discounted on matters about which they felt strongly, particularly if the state required women's cooperation. What this book tries to do is to validate these women and their organisations as political actors, while acknowledging their limitations – just as the Indonesian political party system must be recognised as deficient in its ability to channel people's demands to governments.

Despite the importance of the state, one should nevertheless be wary of attributing too much power to it. Women are embedded in gender relations that are only partly determined by the state. The power relations between men and women are produced and perpetuated by beliefs and practices about the appropriate behaviour and treatment of men and women in a particular society at a particular time. The bigger question is: What causes (and prevents) change in gender relations? Finding an answer depends on weighing up the respective influences of the actions of women, the state, or other forces such as socioeconomic and cultural change largely outside the control of state. Current literature about the value of reducing or restoring the role of the state can throw light on what the state should and can do about something as complex as the construction of gender relations. On occasion some efforts on the part of the state may be counterproductive. It may, then, be better for the state to leave the burden of effecting change to other forces in society and in the economy. From the point of view of the strategies pursued by women seeking to increase their power in gender relations, they need to consider how important it is to focus on influencing state policy and legislation as against changing social attitudes in other ways. Around the world women activists struggle with such dilemmas.

Central questions

A number of questions are addressed in this book. Whereas each chapter concerns a particular 'women's issue', the book as a whole attempts to answer various broad questions. Some of these questions focus on the state. When and why has the state in Indonesia been interested in women's

issues? Which elements within the state have pursued which agendas and why, and has there been inconsistency within the state on these issues? Useful in finding answers to these questions are others concerning state ideology. In what ways has state ideology affected the construction of gender in Indonesia, intentionally and unintentionally? What causes changes in state ideology on gender?

Another group of questions relate to the women's movement in Indonesia in its dealings with the state. What role can a women's movement play in promoting the interests of women? What can it do by itself and what kinds of collaboration with the state are helpful? How can cooption by powerful states be avoided? How has the changing nature of the women's movement in Indonesia affected the kinds of issues placed on the public agenda, the actions taken on those issues and their outcomes?

Finally, questions are asked about the wider context of gender relations in Indonesia. What have been the outcomes of the state's interventions on women's issues? Who has benefited? What actions by the state can in fact advance women's empowerment? What has international pressure achieved in the way of advancing the 'women's agenda' in Indonesia?

Resolving all these issues is not helped by the fact that little has been written about Indonesian women from a political perspective at all. Explanations include the long neglect of the study of women in political science generally. By the time women began to enter the field of vision of political scientists and historians, the New Order regime had settled upon Indonesian society, with a fixed agenda that discouraged the study of politics or of women except in very restricted ways that accorded with its version of Pancasila, the state ideology.[1] This situation is rapidly changing, but in the past, conducting research on women from a political perspective was difficult. For instance, in the 1980s the Dutch researcher Saskia Wieringa found it quite dangerous to try to interview Indonesians about Gerwani, the banned pro-communist women's organisation (Wieringa 2002). Another obstacle has been the nationalist hegemony in Indonesian historiography. Women are only recognised, grudgingly, for their role in the nationalist movement.

While there are no studies of Indonesian women and the state that cover the duration of the twentieth century, this book builds on some very useful secondary sources. Anyone writing about the modern history of Indonesian women must pay homage to the pioneering work of Cora Vreede-de Stuers (1960), a Dutchwoman who studied the Indonesian

[1] The five tenets of Pancasila are belief in God, nationalism, humanity, sovereignty of the people, and social justice. Although intrinsically quite vague, these principles were interpreted by the New Order regime in such a way as to exclude all alternatives.

women's movement during the period of parliamentary democracy in the 1950s. In the last few years there has also been a revival of interest in the colonial period, signalled by the publication of books by Elspeth Locher-Scholten (2000) and Ann Stoler (1996). Recently, too, Saskia Wieringa has produced a landmark book on the remarkable women's organisation Gerwani, which was prominent in the 1950s and early 1960s. Her book also offers many valuable insights into earlier and later relations between women and the state (Wieringa 2002). While studies of women in the New Order abound, they focus on particular regions and particular issues, like birth control. But there are still many gaps in the secondary literature, even on important topics like gender and education in independent Indonesia.

Readers may be puzzled by the paucity of secondary sources by Indonesians used in this book. Occasional works, such as Sukanti Suryocondro's study of the women's movement (Suryochondro 1984), and Nani Suwondo's book on the legal position of Indonesian women (Suwondo 1981), stand out because of their rarity. Little has been written or published in Indonesia on women and the state. A litany of reasons could be cited: the education system under the New Order, which discouraged independent thinking and controlled the areas of research and publication; the decline of history as a subject and lack of funding for its research in the New Order, especially for topics relating to women which have low prestige; the loss of command of the Dutch language by Indonesians, leading to problems of accessing material from the colonial period; and the state of the publishing industry in Indonesia, with its small market for scholarly works, particularly on women. This all helps to account for why I, as an Australian woman, am writing this book rather than an Indonesian scholar. The situation is likely to change in the near future, as more Indonesians gain the opportunity to research and publish on the history and activities of their women's movement.

Primary sources have been used here where possible, especially the publications of Indonesian women and their organisations. I hope that the strong and varied voices emanating from these sources will encourage more writers to mine their full depths. These writings constantly remind us that the issues being discussed here are not the substance of dry political analysis but the deeply felt concerns of Indonesian women. Struggles for education and against polygamy have aroused particularly strong passions. Current high levels of violence in Indonesia cause deep anguish.

The lack of studies on Indonesian women and the state is surprising on at least two counts. Although there is considerable interest now in comparative essays on women and the state in Islamic countries

(e.g. Kandiyoti 1991; Moghadam 1994), Indonesia is almost always omitted from such collections. Yet it is the largest Islamic society in the world. Those observers who do register this fact often comment on how little the Indonesian state reflects the interests of Islam, in its relations with women as in many other matters. On certain issues, however, religion is critical in restricting the autonomy of the state, as this book will show.

Secondly, it is worth studying Indonesian women in their interactions with the state because of the strong social position that has frequently been claimed for Southeast Asian women compared with elsewhere in Asia. From early times visitors to Indonesia, as to other parts of the region, have been impressed by the apparently high status of female inhabitants, as evident in their frequent control of family finances and their high degree of public visibility, particularly in commerce (Reid 1988). Nevertheless it is striking that this celebrated high status has not translated into a commensurate recognition by the state in Indonesia. Women have not found it easy to enter the public political arena and articulate their needs and concerns to the state.

The structure of this book

Chapter 1 provides historical background information about the evolution of state gender ideology in Indonesia and of the women's movement, indicating the relationship between the two. Subsequent chapters focus on issues on which Indonesian women and the state have engaged publicly and usually controversially over the course of the twentieth century. Each of them is a weighty matter from the point of view of both parties, involving differences of opinion about goals and means.

Each chapter will concentrate mainly on the period in which the issue entered the public agenda and was taken up by the state, but it will also discuss the lack of state (or women's) interest in the issue at other periods, and whether or not the issue disappeared from the public agenda after state action was taken. It will consider, too, what effects that action has had for the construction of gender in Indonesia and for the lives of Indonesian women generally. This will assist in evaluating the efforts of the state (and of the women's movement) on behalf of women.

Each of Chapters 2 to 8 investigates who raised a particular topic as a matter of interest to both the state and women, and why. From the point of view of Indonesian women, two of these issues, education (Chapter 2) and suffrage (Chapter 4), were considered by women's organisations to be the keys to combating the perceived evils of early marriage (Chapter 3), polygamy (Chapter 5) and economic exploitation (Chapter 7). Indonesian women themselves can be seen to have initiated

pressure on the state to engage with these issues. In some cases little pressure needed to be applied because the state itself took an interest in the matter: this could be said most accurately about the education of girls. On other issues the state was generally most reluctant to admit that the topic was one of public importance or that it was appropriate for the state to act: this applied to suffrage, polygamy, economic exploitation and violence against women. In some cases the Indonesian women's movement did not take a prominent initiating role: suffrage (Chapter 4), birth control and reproductive health (Chapter 6). It was the New Order state that pushed strongly for birth control, with support from foreign aid; in the case of suffrage and reproductive health, the initiative came from outside. External pressure was brought to bear, drawing attention to the need for action in areas that had otherwise been neglected by both the women's movement and the state. In the case of violence against women (Chapter 8), while women's organisations in the late twentieth century had been trying to put domestic violence issues on the public agenda, it was the breakdown of law and order from 1998 onwards that forced the state to confront the issue more generally.

Finally, the Conclusion draws together the threads of the individual chapters, reflects on their lessons and considers what the twenty-first century may hold in store for Indonesian women and the state. Completed in January 2004, this book is able to cover events only up to that date.

1 State gender ideologies and the women's movement

As a prelude to later thematically based chapters, this chapter examines the changing nature of the gender ideology of the Indonesian state during the twentieth century, and how it relates to the development of the women's movement. Some basic questions are raised about the influence of the state on that movement and about the extent to which the state reflects or seeks to change society's views of gender. Subsequent chapters will explore the ability of the movement itself to influence state gender ideology.

Gender ideology

Gender ideology spells out expectations of how men and women should behave according to their ascribed sex. In this book I use the term to refer to ideas about the construction of gender in Indonesia. Such ideas are being constantly contested from various quarters, because of the diversity of views about gender within and outside Indonesia.

In Indonesia, different ethnic groups have their own gender traditions. Some of the best known include the matrilineal system of West Sumatra (Minangkabau), where inheritance of property follows the female line: husbands are 'guests' in their wives' houses. Nevertheless, Minangkabau men still have their own power bases, since family and community decisions are formally made by male representatives of lineages – the brothers of female property-holders. By contrast, nearby Batak society in northern Sumatra is strongly patrilineal: women are unable to inherit and are economically dependent on men as well as excluded from public decision-making. And in Java, society is organised bilaterally: there is a greater degree of equality between the sexes, and women play a prominent role in commerce and agriculture, although tradition has excluded them from public political life. In addition to these variations on the role and power of men and women, some ethnic groups do not clearly differentiate between male and female: instead of a dichotomy there are held to be more than two sexes and a more fluid notion of sexuality. Bugis society

in south Sulawesi, for instance, accepts transvestite male priests (*bissu*) as constituting a third sex with its own gender expectations.[1]

On top of and often conflicting with these ancient gender practices, various world religions, notably Islam, have imposed their own rules relating to how men and women should behave. Religious expectations have often been more rigid than the older notions of gender, but in some places compromises have been reached. Thus the matrilineal Minangkabau have been regarded as devout Muslims although their inheritance practices conflict with Islamic notions that inherited property should be divided among all children, with larger shares going to sons.

More recently, Indonesia experienced the influx of Western views of gender via the colonial system as Dutch rule spread across the archipelago from the seventeenth century onwards. This proved to be just the first instalment of 'modern' ideas that continue to be influential, as Indonesia has remained open to world trade and communications, foreign investment and foreign development assistance, and participation in international forums.

Ideas about gender in Indonesia in the twentieth century have thus made up a heady brew. There have been frequent inconsistencies and contradictions, the most obvious being amongst Muslims concerning acceptable behaviour for men and women according to religious teachings. What is striking about both the state and the women's movement is how much more limited their range of thinking has been about gender than that found in society at large. The New Order state in particular endorsed a restrictive and fairly consistent gender ideology. Within the women's movement also, the alternatives espoused have not been very numerous except at times when greater freedom of expression has been possible. Here the prevailing nature of the state has clearly been important for the development of gender ideology amongst women.

State gender ideology refers to the assumptions about gender on which the state acts and the way it attempts to influence the construction of gender in society. Sometimes these assumptions on the part of the state are overt, contained in official statements about policies relating to women. More often assumptions have to be deduced indirectly from actions and policies, for example by examining policies on the education of girls and boys. These reveal what the state believes is appropriate for men and women in that society, or what aspirations the state has for gender relations. Most commonly gender ideology is incoherent and inconsistent, reflecting the preoccupations of the different segments of the state and

[1] Examples of regional studies of gender in Indonesia can be found in Atkinson and Errington (1990).

pragmatic responses to pressure applied from different quarters. Indonesia has experienced many kinds of state – colonial, democratic and authoritarian, some of them more monolithic in their ideological stance than others.

Unpacking the state in Indonesia reveals a number of puzzles. The degree of homogeneity and autonomy of the state, already mentioned in the Introduction, is a question to which this book will return at various points. Different segments of the state apparatus will often have conflicting interests and objectives as far as gender (and many other matters) is concerned. During the New Order, for instance, the army influenced state gender ideology, but its vision of domesticated women diverged from that of the Department of Labour which increasingly sought to exploit women as a cheap workforce in the manufacturing sector. From the point of view of women, the more heterogeneous the state, the more points it offers for them to apply pressure. The disadvantage is that with a fragmented state, while it may be easier to stall unwelcome measures, it is harder to push through new policy initiatives. As we shall see, although the women's movement was able to get extensive discussion of marriage reform in parliament in the democratic 1950s, it had to await an authoritarian state that had its own reasons for backing marriage law reform before a Marriage Law was manoeuvred through the state system by the New Order Government.

The degree of autonomy of the state in pursuing gender policies is a central concern of this book. Did the colonial state reflect the interests of the Dutch, or more narrowly of Dutch men or Dutch capitalism, in the gender ideology it practised in the Indies? Certainly those interests were influential, but the colonial state also felt obliged, for pragmatic reasons, to consider other interests that might otherwise cause it trouble. On issues related to women, for instance, the concerns of Islamic groups had to be balanced against others.

Nor, once independence was achieved, could the state be said to reflect views about gender within Indonesian society at large, for the simple reason that those views vary considerably between different sexes, classes and religious and ethnic groups, not to mention other sources of diversity. Even to say, as a crude approach might have it, that the state reflects the views of men about gender is far from illuminating, considering the diversity among men. On a few matters it may be possible to talk about 'men's interests' in so far as male prerogatives may be challenged. The case of polygamy is one such instance, where Indonesian men proved most reluctant to allow restrictions to be placed on their right according to Islam to have more than one wife at a time. Nevertheless, the state did finally move to impose such restrictions.