Introduction

A CONUNDRUM AND TWO RESEARCHERS

In the spring of 2010, a woman was elected the bupati of Bantul, the head of a sprawling and diverse district (kabupaten) adjoining the city of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Ibu Midiwati is the first woman bupati in the special province of Yogyarta and one of the few in the entire Republic of Indonesia. Her election appears to be another step in the formal empowerment of women in a nation where recent transformation of the political system has promised to offer new opportunities for democratic politics and where conflicting perceptions and interpretations of women’s real power and status have been the subject of controversy for years. The appearance of progress is somewhat belied by deeper knowledge of the circumstances surrounding Bu Midiwati’s election, which in many ways reflects very old patterns. She was convinced to run by the political supporters of her husband, the previous bupati, when he reached his limit of two terms in that office. As the former bupati’s wife, her political education and administrative experience come from being the formal head of the PKK and Dharma Wanita, women’s auxiliary organizations whose membership and leadership were automatically conferred upon the wives of government officials during the previous political regime.

Bu Midiwati herself is the first and “official” wife of the former bupati, who has been the subject of rumor and gossip about
possible additional wives, a practice that previously was a rarity in Indonesia and met with ambivalence at best by women in the society, but is becoming increasingly common among those who can afford it. She has experienced condemnation from some religious leaders who believe women are religiously prohibited and spiritually unfit for political office. As if to validate these doubts, she openly acknowledges that she has appointed a special consultant to help her in her new duties—her husband, the previous bupati. Like her more famous compatriot, the former president of Indonesia, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the sources of her power and authority appear to lie in her relationship to a powerful male political figure, and her own identification with and execution of her position involve numerous ambiguities and contradictions. Does Bu Midiwati’s election represent increasing power and public space for women in a society that already has a strong record of according women relatively high status and power, or is it an example of a “deceptive distinction” (Epstein 1988) that masks deep culturally sanctioned limits to their power?

The status of women in rural Java appears contradictory to observers from both inside and outside the culture. On the one hand, past studies indicate that women have high status and power in Javanese society, with substantial access to resources inside the household and in the larger society, especially in comparison to women from other Asian societies and Islamic cultures. Other, more recent accounts create doubt about this assessment, suggesting that Javanese women are neither as powerful nor as autonomous as previous studies have described. These two contrasting approaches view Javanese gender relations from two different perspectives, focusing on different aspects of women’s lives. Javanese women have major responsibilities in supporting their families, often as the primary income earners in their households. They typically control household finances, and they own and manage property in their own names. Increasingly, their presence is evident in public office. Yet these symbols and potential sources of independence and influence are tightly circumscribed by a culturally prescribed,
state-reinforced, patriarchal gender ideology that limits women’s autonomy and mobilizes their labor for particular political ends. The contradiction pervades gender relations and is reflected both in Javanese women’s lives and in the studies that attempt to explain them.

Contradictions in gender roles and practices are not unique to rural Java or Indonesia and have been broadly identified and analyzed in numerous social and political settings. Yet these contradictions remain deeply puzzling to gender analysts, all the more so when they appear as starkly evident as in modern Indonesia, a society that has long stood at the crossroads of cultures and development trajectories. Thus, it is not surprising that unraveling the conundrum of Javanese gender relations would come to preoccupy the intellectual energies of two feminist scholars from opposite ends of the world, each of whom brought to the research both general interest in gender relations and specific interest in Indonesia.

Ann Tickamyer is an American-born sociologist who first visited Indonesia in 1986. Siti Kusujiarti is an Indonesian-born sociologist who first came to the United States two years later. As our worlds and interests intersected, we found ourselves increasingly preoccupied by the seeming contradictions that envelop Indonesian women’s lives and livelihoods. This book represents the efforts of two sociologists who share an interest in gender roles and development to understand the status of women in rural Javanese villages in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. As an Indonesian from Yogyakarta, steeped in Javanese culture and tradition; and as an American veteran of second-wave academic feminism, we brought very different backgrounds and perspectives to this study, but we were united in our perplexity at understanding the “true” status of women in Indonesian society. As we studied and discussed past research, popular culture, and our own experiences and impressions, we each took turns asserting and denying women’s equality and subordination, sometimes reversing ourselves completely.

This book and the research on which it is based are the culmination of our efforts to sort through the contradictions in women’s
status and power in Indonesia and to bring some resolution to these debates. Our research results shed light on the ways that gender relations are constructed and reproduced at multiple levels, from within the intimacy of household and community to a project of state and nation. This book contributes to a larger literature on the gender politics of development, demonstrating the power and limits of an authoritarian state and hegemonic gender ideology. Finally, we have provided a picture of the lives of women and men in a country that is a major power among developing nations and a growing force in a global political economy.

The study is located in two rural Javanese villages in the special province of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and also more broadly in the island of Java and the Republic of Indonesia. Yogyakarta is a primary center of Javanese culture and power for Indonesia, a country whose existence and importance has only slowly been recognized by the Western world. Indonesia is the world’s fourth-largest nation, trailing China, India, and the United States, and has the largest population of Muslims. It is a nation of immense diversity, composed of thousands of islands and innumerable language, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, but it has been tightly controlled throughout its modern history by a central government seated in the most populous island of Java and steeped in Javanese culture and custom. Although densely populated, two-thirds of Indonesia remains rural, and the crowded landscapes of rural Javanese villages provide the backdrop for understanding central issues in social and economic development and the role gender relations play in this process.

In this book we provide a detailed examination of the ways gender is negotiated in the daily lives of rural Javanese villagers to support and reproduce family life, to earn a living, and to sustain community and the larger society. We focus on the lives of women, but we investigate both women and men to understand how gender is constructed and reproduced, how power is exercised, and how these influence women’s roles and status as Indonesia faces the challenges of building a new social order. By placing our tale
in a comparative framework, using two research sites that at the inception of the study represented different levels of rurality, development, and state intervention, we are able to examine both the unities and the common features of women’s experience and the sources of difference and change in a country that has experienced rapid and sometimes cataclysmic social change from its birth as an independent nation to the current period of reorganization, reconstruction, and stabilization.

**The Conundrum**

The contradictory views of women’s status in Indonesian gender relations are part of a conundrum formed by a gender role ideology that requires active and assertive roles for women in a culture that devalues these qualities. The vigorous participation of women in economic life and village affairs, a long-standing staple of Indonesian society, is matched by a combination of state, cultural, and religious prescriptions that promote domesticity and denigrate women’s agency. The discrepancy in perception and interpretation is compounded by difficulties in reconciling the results of past research. In part these difficulties arise from one-sided views that neglect the complexity of gender role ideology and construction and fail to appreciate their multidimensionality. Examples include the failure to understand the meaning and exercise of power and how it is gendered in Indonesian culture, the failure to simultaneously examine power within the household and in the larger society, the failure to distinguish between power in these two realms, and the failure to investigate how the two realms intersect.

In this book we examine how power is defined and manifested in both public and private domains to construct gender roles and practices that transcend any distinction between the two. The research draws on four areas of scholarship: (1) the nature of power relations that focuses on forms of hegemony, domination, subordination, and resistance; (2) gender relations and the role of women
in economic development; (3) livelihood strategies, families, and household economies and practices; and (4) detailed knowledge of Javanese history, culture, politics, and gender relations. Thus we merge research traditions from Indonesian culture and area studies with a broader social science and sociological perspective. The result is a greater understanding of Javanese gender relations and women’s access to status and power in a Muslim-majority society as well as a case study that provides a window on sources of stability and change to established gender orders.

The Research

The research discussed in this book began in 1993 and is now well into its second decade. Fieldwork in one village conducted by Siti in 1993 as part of her dissertation research was followed in 1995 and 1996 by more-comprehensive research at the original study site and at a second rural village. Subsequent return visits to the field in 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2010 have extended data collection into the present. Both villages are located in the special province of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and were selected to provide a comparative framework for the study of gender and development. While sharing a regional economy and culture, in the mid-1990s when we began the study, the two villages differed in their degrees of urbanization and isolation and the types of government-intervention programs in use to promote women’s roles in economic development.

Research originally intended to be a cross-sectional study grew into longitudinal research that is still ongoing. As the research extended over time, we were able to take advantage of the unique opportunity to study gender relations and practices during a period of immense change in Indonesian society that spanned the time just prior to, during, and after the crises provoked by economic collapse and the end of the New Order government. This work depicts life in the waning years of this period of nation-building,
demonstrates the politicization of gender roles harnessed to this goal, and provides a foundation for understanding some of the new developments and issues emerging in the subsequent (current) chapter of Indonesian history. Thus we use the story of gender roles at the end of the old regime as a springboard to examine changes in how gender is discussed and politically mobilized since the fall of Suharto’s New Order and the movement toward democratization and decentralization.

We employ multiple research methods: participant observation, secondary and archival data sources, surveys, and in-depth interviews with eighty-three couples, both wives and husbands, including residents and formal and informal leaders of both villages. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of women’s organizations and government officials. Much of the study analyzes qualitative data, using the respondents’ own words to develop the narrative. Multiple sources of data, however, have allowed us to balance different accounts.

The results of this study underscore the contradictions in women’s roles and also the impacts on these contradictions made by modernization, globalization, urbanization, economic development programs, and the Islamic revival. Women’s ability to capitalize on their access to and control of resources is limited by a cultural concept of power that devalues material wealth and conflict and elevates spiritual values of nonworldliness and repose. Similarly, a patriarchal gender ideology that is reinforced at all levels, from within the family to the highest levels of government, pervades both daily life and structures of power to restrict women’s ability to gain real autonomy. Programs to enhance women’s access to resources and opportunities play into these contradictions by bringing women under greater state surveillance and more social and community pressure to conform to gender role expectations. Thus the more urbanized village, with a larger number of economic development programs for women, provides greater opportunities not only for acquiring income and other amenities, but also for social control and pressure to
conform to gender role expectations. Women’s bodies, beliefs, and capacities become fertile terrain for the unfolding of sometimes competing but more often coinciding nationalist, developmental, and religious agendas.

Our analysis relies on an understanding of gender as fluid, constructed, and multidimensional, entailing both structure (a set of patterned institutional arrangements) and process (ongoing change in action and interaction). The “gender order,” or the general pattern of gender arrangements (Connell 2009, 4), and the “structure of gender relations” (Connell 2002, 55) are complex, occur in multiple domains, and cannot be reduced to a simple hierarchy of “institutionalized inequality” or patriarchy, although power differentials and domination/subordination are real and recurring. The exertion of state power, of religious authority, and of cultural norms and values reinforces inequalities that circumscribe the options available to both women and men and that historically have limited women’s access to full participation in public life. Gender differences are the outcome of institutionalized practice (J. W. Scott 2007), and persist through an internalized and normalized hegemonic ideology (Gramsci 1971). The state assumes a powerful role in this ideology’s formulation and enforcement, deliberately deploying its resources to control women’s labor in pursuit of nationalist and developmental goals. At the same time, gender is continuously negotiated and reproduced, an emergent phenomena that changes in the practice both of daily life and of larger institutional realms, suggesting ongoing opportunities to destabilize even the most restrictive gender ideologies.

In order to understand how this takes place, in this study we follow Diane Wolfe’s prescription in Factory Daughters that household (and by analogy community and societal) processes “should be studied rather than assumed” to “work toward a more satisfactory theoretical framework . . . that analyzes the interactions among local, state, and global structures, intra-household dynamics and extra-household networks and groups” (1992, 264–65). Through detailed scrutiny of how power and gender are related within the
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household and in the larger community in the context of Javanese culture and Indonesian politics, this research builds on recent feminist frameworks and rural development research to gain a greater understanding of women’s status and roles in constructing gender and power in daily life.

The Researchers

While this is primarily a tale of two villages and the gender relationships that inform and shape everyday life in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, there is also a subtext that cannot be divorced from the research reported here. It is the story of how this research came into existence—a tale of two researchers from very different cultures and backgrounds whose lives and interests intersected to produce this study. We briefly diverge from our joint account to explain in our individual voices how we each arrived at the scene of this study.

An American Goes to Indonesia: Ann Tickamyer

I did not originally plan to go to Indonesia or to study gender issues in that complex society. My first trip was the result of a fortuitous encounter with a postdoctoral student at the University of Kentucky when I was a young faculty member there. Bambang Suwarno of IKIP Bandung (now known as Universitas Negeri Bandung) had completed his PhD in sociology at UK and had returned for further study. He had read some of my early work on fertility, labor force participation, and gender roles, and more important, from his perspective knew that I was highly trained as a quantitative data analyst. He asked me to consult on a funded research project studying fertility in West Java. At first I wasn’t interested. Typical of the cultural insulation of Americans
growing up in the 1950s and 1960s (even those for whom Vietnam antiwar protest had put Southeast Asia on the map), I had barely heard of Indonesia, had only the vaguest idea of its location, and knew even less about its culture. It was not on my cognitive map and initially held little attraction for me as a destination, with my knowing only that it was tropically hot, politically suspect, and a very long way away. Bambang persisted, however, and eventually I agreed to be a consultant to his project and a courier for the latest software.

That first trip occurred in the summer of 1986. I was charmed by the country and its landscapes, by the people I met, by its cuisine, by the complexity of its history and culture, and was eager to learn more and, most important, to return. This began an odyssey that has to one degree or another preoccupied my personal and scholarly interests ever since. I did not instantly or even ultimately become an Indonesianist or a Southeast Asian scholar, but sought opportunities to augment my knowledge, beginning with efforts to learn the language as well as extending scrutiny of the issues that had always dominated my scholarly endeavors—gender and work—to the context of Indonesian culture and society. Many years later, I still struggle with these goals, but I certainly have metaphorically traveled an even longer distance since that first journey.

In many ways that first trip not only shaped my interests in Indonesian society but also heavily influenced how I viewed American institutions as well and sealed my appreciation for the value of comparative work, regardless of scale. Indonesia brought together interests in gender, interests in work and livelihood practices within rural communities, and interests in their intersection in the context of economic development. These are issues that are not unique to Indonesia or to developing countries but also are central to the dilemmas facing all countries, including the affluent postindustrial nations of the global North, in an era of uneven development amid increasing globalization. The experiences of villagers in rural Java have implications, if not repercussions, for women and men in many locations. Both explicit and implicit comparisons
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sharpen understanding of the phenomenon at hand and the larger social picture.

One aftermath of the trip was that I became the automatic choice for adviser to the occasional graduate student from Indonesia. This is how I first met Siti Kusujiarti. Siti arrived at UK in the fall of 1988 with a scholarship to study rural sociology and an interest in rural development and gender roles. The next part of the story is hers.

An Indonesian Contemplates Her Culture: Siti Kusujiarti

As a Javanese woman I have always been intrigued by the ways husbands and wives interact in the family and in the society, as well as how women as mothers are perceived as important figures. From my own experience, I have been socialized to the idea that women as mothers have important roles and a relatively high status in the family. The proverb that “heaven is located on the bottom of your mother’s feet” has been instilled in children to ensure that they respect and treat their mothers well. Local legends and oral traditions (e.g., the legend of Malin Kundang, a son who was cursed for not properly appreciating his mother) reinforce this value as well. There is a strong message that we have to pay respect to mothers because they have such important roles in our lives. Women as mothers have been put on a pedestal.

I have always heard that Indonesian women enjoy equal status and have more freedom than women do in other countries, including Western countries. However, I also witness that women, including mothers, are not regarded or treated as well as the traditions suggest. In a family, the father is the ultimate head of his household and makes most of the significant decisions for the family. He may enforce his role as family head both directly and indirectly: directly by making and imposing his decisions and viewpoints on other members of the family, and indirectly through the internalization
by himself and family members of the perception that he has the most power, wisdom, and knowledge to make the best decisions for the household.

In the public sphere, despite an absence of formal discrimination against women, significant barriers exist for women in educational and work environments. Women generally do not experience difficulties in achieving educational levels similar to those of men as long as resources are available. When funding is limited, however, frequently men receive priority in education. Women who want to go abroad to get a higher education usually need formal and informal permission from either their husbands or their fathers. Some of my friends who qualify for higher educational training abroad are unable to do so because their husbands or fathers disapprove or family obligations prevent them from going.

Women’s participation in politics is generally limited, despite the fact that various efforts have been made to increase women’s visibility in political affairs. Women receive different treatment and internalize their role expectations mostly through a more subtle, embedded social construction of gender; yet, because of its subtlety, it is quite challenging to pinpoint the main sources and mechanisms of women’s subordination. Moreover, there are various contradictions in expectations and social pressures put upon women, but these contradictions are perceived as “normal” and are taken for granted.

These contradictory points of view of women’s status and positions puzzle me and encourage me to seek further understanding of why most women put up with the situation and apparently accept these contradictory positions. I also have wondered why I used to believe that gendered arrangements and perceptions were the best way to maintain harmonious relationships in the family and in a larger context. I myself have been subjected to these situations. I want to unravel the puzzling situations and to better understand the fundamental and institutional reasons that support and perpetuate these gender relations.
I have been interested in gender issues since the end of my undergraduate education in Indonesia in the mid-1980s, when women’s studies and gender issues began to be addressed in academic settings. Because of the emergence of various centers for women’s studies in universities and exposure to articles, research, and increasing discussions on gender issues, women and gender issues became more visible. Exposure to information and knowledge led me to question existing gender relations and encouraged me to further investigate the issue. However, this effort has been challenging. As a woman who has been socialized in the culture, I tend to accept the established beliefs and norms, yet I want to be critical of the norms to understand underlying reasons and ideologies of gender relations. Opportunities to further my endeavors in understanding women’s status, power, and gender relations among the Javanese were realized when I came to the United States to receive my graduate training. During this time, with the encouragement of my adviser (my coauthor, Ann Tickamyer) and increased exposure to feminist theories, ideas, literature, and research, I developed a stronger commitment and curiosity to conduct research to gain more knowledge and understanding of the issue. My dissertation included research in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, my hometown. I did the field research for my dissertation in a village in the district of Sleman. Then, after the dissertation, my adviser and I decided to extend the research and include a second, more urbanized, village located in the district of Bantul for our collaborative research that became the basis of this book.

This book is the result of a long and continuous struggle to comprehend Javanese women’s lives and to untangle the conundrum of our contradictory roles, status, and power. With the rapid social change in Indonesian society occurring now, these contradictions are even more apparent as past values and perceptions start to disintegrate and new expectations are instilled. However, Indonesians and Javanese want to retain their unique culture and identities. How we handle this pressure and whether we manage to survive in this era of globalization partly depends
on our honest understanding of ourselves; and to understand ourselves, we need to understand the status, power, and roles of women in the society.

*Collective Voice: Insider/ Outsider Collaboration*

While we bring different experiences and perspectives, the study itself is very much a collaborative effort, resting on an emergent shared understanding that would not have been possible individually. Our different backgrounds and complementary division of labor have enabled us to engage in an ongoing dialogue concerning the meaning of our findings and to scrutinize them from different angles. All data collection for the initial field study was conducted or supervised (research assistants from a nearby university assisted in some of the data collection) during the years of 1995–1996 by Siti in her native Bahasa Indonesia and Java languages, building on prior data collected in 1993. These data were augmented during return visits by Siti in 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, and 2010; she was accompanied on many of those visits by Ann, the American researcher. Research design, decision making, and analysis have been our joint responsibility spanning this interval. Supplemental interviews with key informants on women’s issues in Indonesia were conducted by the American author in English and Bahasa Indonesia with the assistance of bilingual assistants/ translators. The ability to approach this subject from both inside and outside perspectives has greatly enhanced our understanding and ability to interpret what we have found.

There is a substantial amount of debate in the literature about the desirability and liabilities of conducting field research from within—by a researcher immersed in the meaning and uniqueness of a setting by birth and socialization; versus from without—by a researcher whose neutrality, objectivity, and flexibility are enhanced by distance from the setting. The former permits access, cultural sensitivity, understanding, and empathy. The latter provides the
space necessary to be able to analyze and detect patterns that may be hidden by the blinders of familiarity.

Diane Wolf (1996) examines the various claims made for inside versus outside knowledge and demonstrates the multitude of both advantages and disadvantages cited for each and their sometimes overlapping nature. Both insiders and outsiders have occasionally asserted the superiority of their standpoint for bringing balanced understanding to the research. Insiders more often claim superior access and understanding, but also more often cite problems arising from divided allegiances and the same dual consciousness that also provides deeper understanding. The problems of the outsider are obvious, ranging from practical obstacles hindering entry into the field to lack of understanding and insensitivity in a variety of forms.

It seems clear from both the past record and our own experience that a combined approach is preferable to either one individually, and, in fact, the distinction itself has been branded as yet another example of false dualism that feminist approaches have taken such pains to deconstruct and overcome (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser 2004). There is limited evidence demonstrating the value of bringing different views to the same research setting with resulting differences in disclosure (Wolf 1996, 15), and even more evidence that demonstrates the variation and fluidity in insider/outsider categories to the point that they appear almost meaningless. A researcher may be an insider in some respects (e.g., language and culture) and an outsider in others (e.g., class and race), and the possible combinations and permutations of different dimensions of these and other categories (or positionalities), even within the same individual, let alone across collaborators, create complex arrays of position and standpoint that both enrich and complicate the research process (Bhavnani 2004; Naples 1999).

In our case, as American and Indonesian collaborators, there are obvious respects in which we each represent straightforward inside-outside positions. This is as basic and as important as facility in the languages spoken by the people in our study. Even if the
American researcher had adequate facility in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia (and she doesn’t), the research would be impeded by her lack of Javanese in all its forms, the local language of most families in these communities. It was not just a matter of conducting interviews in the language of home and most comfort for many of the villagers, as was the task of the Indonesian researcher, but also Siti’s ability to recognize the important cues provided by how Javanese was spoken and by whom.1 On the other hand, Ann’s tendency to interrogate the assumptions and meanings often taken for granted by the native researcher, Siti, played an important part in the research process and opened areas of investigation that otherwise might not have been available.

This dialogue was enhanced by our experience together in the field. In many cases we saw the same phenomena from different angles and using different lenses. These differences, however, sharpened our understanding and analysis. Many additional questions arise from this dialogue, many lessons learned that further enhanced our interests and commitment to the issue. Our questions and answers were tested and revised through our conversation and exposure to the people, the culture, and the political context in the field. These combined efforts eventually enriched our understanding of Javanese gender relations and women’s status and power.

While we cannot claim to know definitively that we were able to transcend all of the very real pitfalls in conducting this research, or that we have no bias, we have struggled for a nuanced approach that combines sensitivity and analysis. Ultimately, it was the dialogue created by our separate standpoints but joint endeavors that created an outcome larger than our individual contributions. In that spirit, while we will refer to separate experiences when necessary to make sense of events or findings, we generally continue this account with one collective voice.

Additionally, we needed to be sensitive to other dimensions of the differences between us and between us and our subjects. These include differences in position, privilege, and life trajectories. Even the “insider” to the culture and society (Siti) was an outsider to the
communities in the study, a distinction with real ramifications, both positive and negative, for her ability to gain access and establish rapport. Siti’s status as a married woman, university faculty member, and daughter of a prominent urban family with a comparatively high economic and social position had a significant impact on social relations with village residents, sometimes in almost dizzyingly contradictory ways. Despite her intention to be as “native” as possible, her identity and status marked her as an outsider. At the same time, however, she was accorded honorary insider status as a fictive member of one subvillage head’s family. The subvillage head frequently mentioned this in conversation and her hosts (this head’s aunt and uncle) sometimes introduced her as their child. “Adopted” status in their family opened doors but also created obligations and expectations as well as giving her a defined location in the village social order that at times was at odds with the objectives of the research.

Ultimately, the success of this project was in the hands of the research subjects, who pivotally helped us in this endeavor. We tried to make clear that the main reason for this research is to learn more from them because they are the experts of their own lives. Their willingness to be open to us, to answer our questions, to satisfy our curiosity, and to accept us as part of their families and communities has been a critical part of this process, creating yet another form of collaboration between us and them. They collaborated with us in their own ways and emerge as the subjects and the central voices of this book. We hope that we are able to present their voices as they were presented to us.

**Access to the Field**

There are numerous practical considerations that influence selection and entry into the field. The selection of the two villages was based on practical considerations of access and proximity, as well as their suitability for this study. Access at both sites benefited from
Siti’s personal connections. The more rural village in Sleman was selected because Siti’s brother had done research in a Japanese eggplant-processing plant located there, and his familiarity with the location and his good rapport with the village officials and residents facilitated access and further study both in 1993 and subsequently in 1995–1996 and after. The second village in Bantul was chosen for similar reasons of access and established connections with key informants.

Access is not a matter to be taken lightly, as it requires not only the cooperation of research subjects and local officials, but also involves negotiating the many layers of Indonesian bureaucracy for permission to do fieldwork. This was especially important during the rule of the New Order government, which was when much of the fieldwork was conducted. The strong hierarchical structure of the government created a lengthy and sometimes frustrating process that included numerous steps. Good relations with village officials were significant factors for gaining entry to the village since they are the gatekeepers of the community. Without their consent, which was assisted by Siti’s local and family connections, the research could not have taken place. In addition to the informal consent from village officials, formal letters of permission from the provincial, district (kabupaten), and subdistrict (kecamatan) officials were required. These, in turn, required a local sponsor and connections with a local university. A letter from the head of the Center of Women’s Studies at that university fulfilled those requirements.

Such negotiations highlight another facet of the complexities of the relationships between the researchers and the researched in this setting. At the same time that it is important to establish intimacy and rapport while in the field, the traditional Javanese and Indonesian social hierarchy places great value on finely drawn distinctions in social status. Access at many stages of research is facilitated by rank and symbols of status that may need to be carefully calibrated to match the expectations of the subject. Thus, in contrast to conducting fieldwork in settings where the challenge is to demonstrate that the fieldworker is not “above” or socially “better” than
subjects, but can fit in or become accepted as a plausible participant as well as an observer, in Indonesia, status displays and credentials can provide a currency for overcoming obstacles such as getting permits or a sympathetic hearing from local gatekeepers. Material resources may permit forms of reciprocity that allow the researcher both to display valued status and to offer assistance in exchange for acceptance and inclusion, outcomes that may not seem plausible on the surface.

For example, a priori it seemed obvious that although an automobile was necessary to get to the most rural research site and occasionally could provide valuable assistance to villagers who lacked transportation, traveling on foot within and between subvillages would be preferable as a rule. Walking would provide more opportunity to encounter and participate in informal conversation with people working in their fields or gathering in front of their homes as well as reduce social distance. Furthermore, the state of village roads made driving a car difficult. However, in one village, Siti’s hosts had very different perceptions. They urged her to borrow their motorcycle on the grounds that people are more receptive and enthusiastic toward guests who do not come on foot. They claimed that when they hear the sound of an engine they immediately open their door. In contrast, a person on foot will not be heard or welcomed.

Even so seemingly simple a matter as where to park the car can become a matter of complex negotiation and exchange. For practical reasons in one of the villages, Siti planned to park in front of her host’s house, but the subvillage head had other plans. Ostensibly for safety reasons, he suggested parking at his house. At first she did not realize the ramifications of this request. However, on reflection it became clear that the parked car symbolized her connection and dependence on him as well as giving him a more direct claim to the car when needed (as he himself acknowledged). During her stay in this subvillage, she frequently and willingly drove him and his family to meetings and visits with other family members. The fact that her car was parked at his house strengthened her connection
and rapport with him and his family while simultaneously emphasizing her dependence on him (since access to subjects was heavily dependent on his approval and permit). His status and power in the community were also enhanced.

Similarly, although somewhat more ambiguously, the existence and presence of the American researcher appeared to open doors by lending prestige and gravity to the research process, serving an analogous function to that of the automobile. Ann’s visit to a research site generated substantial interest as well as generous hospitality that were punctuated with requests for information on how to advance village children’s opportunities for education and study abroad. While access did not rest on these interactions, it appeared to provide additional importance and credibility to the research in the eyes of both officials and research subjects.

Other more obvious challenges to access came from gender, age, marital status, and religion. Despite the fact that we were primarily interested in women, all initial access to village sources was controlled by men, typically village and community officials and informal leaders. It was necessary to establish good relations with these men before it was possible to proceed with the study. In both villages, men served as the gatekeepers, and cultivating their approval through use of family and friendship networks played a pivotal role in the process.

Since we were studying gender, not just women, it was important to include men in our study. However, most social gatherings in the more rural village are segregated by sex. Women and men mostly have separate meetings. In the few meetings open to both, they are seated separately. Because of this, we mainly had to rely on information supplied by male research assistants to understand what was happening in male gatherings. On a few occasions, due to her “outsider and researcher” statuses (another example of the ambiguity of insider/outsider position), Siti was allowed to attend more formal male gatherings after negotiating the terms with village officials and local religious leaders. However, being the only female in these gatherings created awkwardness and on some
occasions, such as a male gathering conducted the night after the birth of a baby, permission was not forthcoming. This was because the gathering was conducted at night right outside the house of the parents of the baby. The men usually played card games or other games until morning, and it was not considered appropriate for a woman to accompany them. Negotiating her position as a relatively young married woman was an ongoing challenge in the field research, subject to frequent reminders from senior males of her dependence on their goodwill and protection.

In contrast, Siti’s shared age and marital status facilitated establishing rapport with the majority of the women and enabled discussions of the gender division of labor in the household, family planning, and marriage. Evidence of her success in establishing rapport came not just in the openness of subjects, but also indirectly by comparison to the experience of research assistants hired to assist data collection. Some women indicated to Siti in follow-up interviews necessitated by incomplete information that the reason for omissions was concern over lack of understanding from younger, unmarried assistants.

These examples could be multiplied many times over to further illustrate the complexities of access to and in the field. In general, combining the need to impress officials, satisfy local gatekeepers, and gain the confidence and acceptance of research subjects was a constant balancing act requiring sensitivity to the nuances of the situation.

From the New Order to Contemporary Indonesia

At the very time that we were completing the initial field research in 1995–1996, the social, political, and economic system in which this work is embedded was beginning to unravel. Within a year, the Asian economic crisis and the subsequent collapse of the New Order government opened the way for massive restructuring of the political system and new scrutiny of many social arrangements,
including many that affect gender roles. The political and economic upheavals that have characterized Indonesian social life since that time might initially call into question the value of a study that originates within the old regime. In addition to the severe economic hardships experienced by millions of Indonesians, the fall of the Suharto regime, the revelations and subsequent political machinations of Reformasi leading to the controversial election of a woman president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, and the rejection of the tightly centralized government for a new democratized and decentralized political structure suggest the magnitude of the changes that Indonesians have experienced.

Unlike the widespread political violence that marked the mid-1960s overthrow of the regime of the founding president of Indonesia, Sukarno, Reformasi was accomplished with much less bloodshed and open conflict. Political protest, while common and sometimes violent, was often localized, and the change in political institutions occurred over a span of years, in many cases reflecting more continuity than change. Among the biggest changes was the progressive implementation of direct elections of political offices, starting at the top with Parliament in 1999 and the president in 2004, and working down to smaller political jurisdictions. Accompanying direct election was the increasing importance of political parties and the massive decentralization of what had previously been a tightly controlled centralized system of administration. As political control loosened and became democratized, there was increasing room for a variety of social and religious movements, new organizations, and new voices and actors in the political process, including women, many of whom were very active in the democracy movement (Collins 2007). At the same time, efforts to hold the old regime accountable and to tackle corruption, collusion, and nepotism often met with little success, suggesting that former centers of power found new avenues to exercise their control.

Especially since one of our objectives is to look at the political dimensions of women’s roles in Indonesian society, it is important
to understand the foundations of the current situation. Our study begins during the former New Order as the prelude to making sense of current social life. This study makes important contributions to understanding the social and political arrangements that are emerging from the ashes of the New Order.

The recent history of gender roles and relations provides an important window on the social arrangements in place before and during the crisis. It provides an anatomy of a system that defined and reinforced Indonesian gender relations for more than three decades. This study has more than historical interest, however. Situated at the intersection of old and new, it provides both an account of the status quo ante and the foundation for understanding the roots of change. In many ways the society depicted remains very much the same, with social arrangements that are slow to change. Political and economic crises have opened opportunities for increased scrutiny and change in these and other realms, but the impact on other institutions is more muted the further from the source. Although there has been increased discussion and some actual change in the way gender is perceived, conceptualized, and manifested, especially in the political realm with much talk and some action about gender mainstreaming and empowerment, we argue that, overall, there is more continuity than change in dominant conceptions of gender relations and women’s roles in society. This is the case in spite of genuine opportunities for political participation as new structures of democratic governance take hold in place of the waning influence of New Order organizations and institutional practices. Finally, our study does not end with the fall of the New Order but continues into the present. We extend this research to consider recent developments with numerous visits back to the research sites, additional interviews with original participants and new informants, analysis of existing data, and evaluation of how recent events shape and are shaped by the gender politics revealed in our research. The results provide a window onto possible futures for gender role ideology, politics, and practice in a new social order.
Gender Roles and Relations in Two Villages

The remainder of this volume traces the gender roles in the two villages and beyond from the end years of the New Order into the current period of consolidation and implementation of reforms. Chapter 1, “Like Our Own Mother: The Limits of Gendered Power in Theory and Daily Life,” provides background and lays a theoretical foundation for subsequent work analyzing the contradictions in gender relations by taking a close look at the nature of gender roles in Javanese and Indonesian history and culture. It uses the example of the difficulties encountered by Megawati Sukarnoputri in her bid to become president of Indonesia to gain insight into the cultural barriers to women’s achievement and the contradictory expectations all women face. This chapter creates a conceptual framework for examining gendered power in the lives of village residents. It considers the meaning of power in Javanese society and in the context of everyday activities in the household, in the community, and in the economy. We discuss different definitions of power, ranging from Western ideas that frame power within a context of overt or covert coercion and conflict, to the seemingly opposite Javanese concept that emphasizes power in repose and lack of exertion. In each case, these meanings are embedded in gender ideology that influences how power is conceptualized in the abstract and how it is attributed to different social actors. We examine the sources of gender ideology from state proclamation and intervention to culture and religion and its daily reproduction in mundane activities to construct a truly hegemonic belief system. Finally, we explore the resulting conundrum of a gender-role ideology that requires active and assertive roles for women in a culture that devalues these qualities.

Chapter 2, “Two Villages in Yogyakarta,” enters the villages that are at the heart of this study and provides a detailed look at the settings as they appeared in our first encounters with the villages, their officials, and their residents, and what they look like now. It sets the scene, describes the differences between the two villages as
well as their similarities, and depicts the changes in both material and cultural environments. It provides a window on the physical and social arrangements of village life as it appeared in the mid-1990s and in the present and lays the foundation for the subsequent effort to understand gender roles and relations in this environment.

Chapter 3, “Goats and Doves: Contradictions in Gender Ideology and the Gender Division of Labor,” picks up the themes from chapter 1 to show how in practical terms the exercise of power is gendered and the resulting implications for women within rural Javanese society. In this chapter we examine how the seemingly contradictory constructions of gender roles that were discussed in chapter 1 are manifested in the gender division of labor and how they are understood and practiced in daily life for rural Javanese villagers. The purpose is (1) to describe gender role beliefs and behaviors adhered to by rural Javanese women and men; (2) to examine how these beliefs and behaviors are influenced by cultural practices and state intervention; and (3) to determine whether and how the beliefs and behaviors vary by location and state-sponsored development programs. Extensive interviews with women and men in the two villages supplemented by survey data illustrate the ways in which women and men negotiate these roles.

Chapter 4, “Gender and Agricultural Production,” scrutinizes the role of agriculture and how it structures gender roles and relations in these two rural villages. The villages vary in the degree to which they are dependent on the farm economy, but even in Bantul, the more urbanized village, agrarian pursuits and traditions permeate village life. This chapter profiles a household in each village to show the role of agriculture in livelihoods and the ensuing gender division of labor. Similarities and differences between the two villages are examined as these play out in gender roles. Both survey and interview data are used to illustrate the power of traditional ideologies in women’s work, even in the midst of changing economic circumstances.

Chapter 5, “Involuntary Voluntary Service: Gender and Social Welfare in Crisis and Reform,” looks at the way women are used to
deliver basic social welfare services in rural areas. Indonesia’s New Order government initiated community-based social welfare programs that were designed to mobilize support for the government’s domestic policies and agenda while minimizing the cost to the state. Women were the primary targets of these programs, and although their participation was formally voluntary, in fact their time, labor, energy, and other resources were conscripted for these programs. The two villages differed in the numbers of programs and the expectations for women’s participation, and we first examine how this affected village life and then how it changed after the demise of the New Order. We illustrate with examples from the two rural Javanese villages that show how official gender ideology serves the state and determines the parameters of women’s power and authority in the family and in the larger community.

In the final chapter, “Men’s Rib: Women’s Power and Empowerment,” we examine women’s political roles and participation in the village and the nation before and after Reformasi, the political upheaval that ended the New Order and initiated a period of political, social, and economic reform. We use this as a means to return to the issues that guided this study: women’s access to power, the ways gender shapes women’s roles, the contradictions embedded in traditional and contemporary gender ideology and expectations, and the prospects for change.

Indonesia has experienced immense change. Efforts to build civic institutions that were repressed under the New Order regime have materialized, taken root, grown, and changed. Social movements and popular mobilization in support of a more democratic system have emerged and met with some success, including peaceful transition in the central government, mass electoral support for a woman candidate for the highest office, and her obstacle-ridden ultimate attainment of this post. However, the New Order government was in power for more than thirty years, and produced deep impacts on people’s livelihoods and civic culture, and its influence will not change overnight. In many ways the difficulties encountered by former President Megawati in her quest for the presidency parallels the problems faced by women...
who seek village-level office, and we use village examples of women officials and candidates for office to examine the problems and prospects women face in acquiring power in the larger society. In this book, we evaluate the obstacles and challenges to creating a more democratic society with more balance between the state and the civic institutions and more opportunities for women’s full citizenship and participation.