

## **‘No Matter What—I’ve Got Rights’: Women’s Land Grab Protests in Banyuwangi, East Java**

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### **Abstract**

For the past twenty years, the residents of Wongsorejo in the East Java Regency of Banyuwangi have protested against the expropriation of their land, clashing sometimes violently with government and company forces, and today women lead this struggle against land grabbing. In this chapter we interpret women’s participation in protest movements in the light of feminist understandings of peace as inherently agonistic and involving struggle. We trace a shift from male to female leadership in the anti-land grab protests in Wongsorejo, arguing that they empowered women to enact everyday citizenship. We also trace the way in which gender was deployed strategically in this shift and how it informed performances of identity. During the Reformasi era, men led the protests, but women supported them in a subversive appropriation of the ideology of Ibuism. Today this gender division of protest has shifted, in part based on the idea that putting women at the front will ensure that protests are less violent. But this has also enabled the political empowerment of women and raised their status in the household. We argue that the protests allowed women to establish themselves as rights-bearing citizens and as skilled politicians. As they renegotiate gender relations in their families and communities, their struggle over land rights becomes a struggle for recognition of a new kind of peace.

Peace is when the economy improves. When people are prosperous, and the agricultural sector is developed, and the water from the reservoir is diverted here [...].

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with Organisasi Petani Wongsorejo  
Banyuwangi/OPWB and Organisasi Petani Perempuan Wongsorejo  
Banyuwangi/OPPWB, February 2017

...

At the time, see, the movement only involved men. The women, if they wanted to get involved, they could. They weren't really needed, and they'd only come if needed. Bu sk said to the women ... said they were needed when the shooting occurred. [...] After that we stayed involved. The men weren't mobilised, so it was the women who remained.

Interview with SK, November 2016<sup>1</sup>



## 1 Introduction

Since the end of the Suharto regime in Indonesia, the residents of Wongsorejo, a subdistrict in the Regency of Banyuwangi in East Java, have protested against the expropriation of their land. In the 1980s, the regime gave land rights to PT Wongsorejo, an Indonesian company under Chinese ownership, to develop a kapok plantation, and in 2015 the Banyuwangi Regency extended these rights to allow the company to build an industrial estate.<sup>2</sup> The rationale for the government in both instances was to enlist the private sector for development purposes. From the perspective of local farmers however, the land in question belongs to the families of the ca 11,000 residents of Wongsorejo. Although few have titles certifying ownership, their ancestors cleared the land and their families have worked it for generations. From their perspective, the government's land grab is patently unjust—not least because it has not delivered the economic prosperity promised and has led to a diversion of water for tourism. Building peace in Wongsorejo means building prosperity; and for the farmers prosperity requires land and redressing unjust land grabbing, as implied in the first quote above.

Men led the farmers' protest initially. But, as the second quote above makes clear, women are its main protagonists today. This is surprising since the

1 In the Javanese language, there are several ways to address people: *bu* or *ibu* is for elderly women or can also mean mother, *pak* is for elderly men or can mean father, *mbah* means grandmother or grandfather, *mbok* is for elderly women or can mean mother (usually from the lower classes), *mbak* means big sister, *mas* big brother. We keep these forms of address in our quotes from our interviews in order to convey a sense of the status of the individuals referred to.

2 Kapok, also known as Java cotton, is a fibre derived from the kapok tree and is used mostly for the stuffing of pillows and mattresses, but also for insulation.

(admittedly scarce) literature on gender and land grab protests in Indonesia paints women's involvement as marginal. For example, in West Kalimantan women are considered to be apolitical, and they have joined protests only when provided with informal opportunities to do so (Julia and White, 2012; Morgan, 2017). The case of Wongsorejo constitutes a stark counterexample to this, with women having the lead. Because women's involvement has changed over time, it provides an opportunity to ask about the way gender matters in land grab protests. How did the shift from men's to women's leadership happen? What role did gender play in this shift? And what does it mean for gender relations in Wongsorejo and for the type of peace created through the struggle?

Feminist peace researchers tend to reject the idea that war and peace stand in opposition and are mutually exclusive. They focus instead on the way violence is pervasive in societies as they reproduce inequalities, exclusions and othering. Thus, from the perspective of the marginalised, violence is experienced every day, whether in the form of economic insecurity and hunger, crime and domestic violence, or misrecognition and epistemic violence (Wibben et al., 2019). Relatedly, such scholarship recognises that advantage, inequalities and oppression are often contested, and thus that conflict is an integral part of society; as Shinko (2008, 487) reminds us with Foucault (1979), politics is a continuation of war by other means. As a result, she argues, peace is always 'agonistic': because 'peace, or what is referred to as peace, is rent with subordination, repression, and domination, where the strong marshal all of their force to institutionalise, legitimate, and instantiate a system of order that will maintain their strategic position of privilege', struggle is an integral aspect of 'the war/peace nexus' (Shinko, 2008, 488). Such struggle is a crucial site for producing (sometimes begrudging) respect and recognition across difference. We read the anti-land grab protests in East Java as a performance of agonistic peace that achieves this kind of recognition of the standpoints of the subordinate. Peacebuilding is thus reformulated as a type of political practice geared towards gaining recognition across difference, an ongoing contestation of power relations, including struggles for social justice (Richmond, 2013). The concept of citizenship can usefully be appropriated for such an understanding of peacebuilding. Rather than simply meaning political participation, citizenship practices become everyday enactments that centre antagonisms and passion (van Klinken and Berenschot, 2018).

Gender is deeply imbricated in such peacebuilding or 'dissident citizenship' (Sparks, 2016). As outlined in the introduction to this volume, gender informs stereotypes that circumscribe possible agency, offers scripts to enact identities, and sometimes constitutes a strategic resource for change. The war/peace binary itself is hardly thinkable without gender. It normalises the stereotypical

association of men with war, citizenship, and leadership, on the one hand, and of women with peace, the home front, and needing protection, on the other (Hutchings, 2007; Young, 2003; Elshtain, 1982). In so doing, it establishes hierarchies and exclusions. A variety of situated constructions of femininity and masculinity join these stereotypical associations, often in intersection with other constructions and sometimes disrupting the gender binary. These include, for example, the pious activist described by Rinaldo (2013a), whose femininity or feminism needs to be read in conjunction with religion, and the 'queered' gender advisor suggested by Jauhola (2013a, 174), who in her work interrupts normalised understanding of gender. Like the 'Ibu' celebrated in Suharto's Indonesia, they perform gender in distinctive ways—often unconsciously, but sometimes consciously deploying stereotypes and performing identities to strategic ends. In all cases, their enactments are political, shaping contestations and with them different forms of peace.

In the following we explore women's shifting enactments of citizenship in the anti-land grab protests in Wongsorejo, the role that gender has play in this shift, the effects of this on society, and the kind of peace it has helped bring into being. We first situate the protests in Indonesian history, tracing their origins in the politics of Suharto's New Order regime and the post-Suharto ('Reformasi') era. We then show how women and men have participated in the land struggles and the way gender has informed their activism. We document how women appropriated a gender stereotype from the Suharto era, that is 'Ibuisim', to legitimate their political agency. While they initially saw their activism as supplementary to that of men, the gender division of protests shifted over time as the movement strategically deployed women to flaunt femininity in order to preempt violence from security forces. The movement thus employed gender as a resource and thus opened the door to giving women the lead. Their identities changed in the process, allowing women farmers to establish themselves as rights-bearing citizens and as skilled politicians who participated in political activism in the Regency and beyond. In this way, their struggle over land rights reconfigured the meaning of peace as it brought into view the concerns and priorities of their communities from the perspective of the feminised margins.

Our analysis draws on 14 interviews and two focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted between November 2016 and February 2017 in the hamlet of Bongkoran in Wongsorejo,<sup>3</sup> where the land dispute has been centred since 2012. Interviewees included farmers, members of the male and female branches of the farmers organisation Organisasi Petani Wongsorejo Banyuwangi (OPWB

3 Bongkoran is located between two villages in the subdistrict of Wongsorejo, one with the same name as the subdistrict (so, Wongsorejo), the other called Alas Buluh.

and OP2WB, respectively), and villagers and activists who had clashed with local strong men and security officers hired by PT Wongsorejo. Interviews were conducted in two rounds of visits by a team of researchers in the context of the r4d project on Gender and Conflict.<sup>4</sup>

## 2 Land Struggle, Gender and Reformasi

The end of Suharto's New Order regime (1966 to 1998) spawned an avalanche of conflicts in Indonesia. These included not only communal conflicts and insurgencies, such as those in Aceh, East Timor and Maluku, but also conflicts over land. Many trace the origins of Indonesian land conflicts back to the 1960 Basic Agrarian Law (BAL). In order to foster national unity while facilitating development, the BAL overruled customary *adat* law, which varies by community, and put all land under the control of the state (Bedner and Arizona, 2019). The Suharto regime used the law to advance export-oriented economic policies, including the establishment of plantations and the vast exploitation of natural resources. It ruthlessly appropriated untitled lands without obtaining the consent of the local communities and without paying compensation (Fitzpatrick, 2007, 137).

Not surprisingly, this created massive grievances. However, resistance to the government's land grabs risked accusations of communist sympathies and invited violent repression. The regime had risen to power following the failed 30 September Movement coup in 1965, which it blamed on the Communist Party of Indonesia. Land was one of the issues entangled in the politics of the subsequent purge, as the Indonesian Communist Party had advocated for land reform, and many of its members were small farmers who opposed the rural landholding elite. Labelling people communists became a government tactic to criminalise the opposition, and the New Order regime now framed all forms of protests by farmers as communist efforts to regain power (Larasati, 2019, 2).

Not surprisingly, when the Indonesian political system opened up and free expression became possible once more, people organised and protested against their loss of land. The Reformasi era saw a mushrooming of peasant movements, civil society and feminist and environmentalist organisations (Candraningrum, 2018; Robinson, 2018). It also saw the establishment of Legal Aid Centres whose programmes support marginal groups and communities

4 They included, in addition to Wening Udasmoro (WU), Arifah Rahmawati (AR), Dati Fatimah (DF), and Asnawan (A) and Yeni Lutfia (YL).

to this day. Their arguments often are legal, opposing 'folk law' and state law, and proposing that farmers' claims are valid based on custom (Sholahudin, Siahaan and Wiratraman, 2020). But land conflicts have continued to fester, in part as a result of legal complexity, in part because of economic interests. The Jokowi government, in power since 2014, has sought to certify farmers' traditional land rights, but the 1960s land policy remains in place and the legal status of land is not always clear. Moreover, economic policies continue to favour commercialisation and generate demand for land. In the aftermath of decentralisation policies implemented in the Reformasi era, authority regarding economic development and natural resources lies at the district level, and often local elites profit from the unclear legal status of land (van Klinken and Schulte Nordholt, 2007). Decades of land conflicts have sharpened inequality as powerful elites have been able to secure titles while poor farmers are left without land certificates and become the victims of expropriation.<sup>5</sup>

This scenario also plays out in Banyuwangi, where the local government's response to the new land policies has been slow (Subandio, 2018). The district has become a poster child for successful economic development with a focus on local industry and tourism (taking advantage of its proximity to Bali). In 2019, at the commemoration of its twenty-third year of regional autonomy, Banyuwangi received the appreciation of the Minister of Internal Affairs for its outstanding performance in accelerating development (Fanani, 2019). In the meantime, struggles over land rights continue not only in Wongsorejo, but also in other parts of the district; and they are increasingly overlaid with struggles to preserve the environment.

As elsewhere, state building in Indonesia has been gendered. The New Order government promoted an ideology of a gendered separation of public and private spheres, with public activities reserved for men and women structurally placed in the domestic sphere (Suryakusuma, 1988; Wieringa, 2001). In what Suryakusuma has termed 'state Ibuism', women were constructed as mothers for the sake of national development in support of male power. Wieringa explains the shift from Sukarno's early post-independence state, when women were seen as independence fighters, to the New Order: 'The "woman" was no longer defined as a comrade in the revolutionary struggle; under the New

5 This has been richly documented in the case of oil palm cultivation in Kalimantan, where land grabs have enriched entrepreneurs, politicians and bureaucrats at the expense of small-holder farmers (Li, 2017; Julia and White, 2012). Not surprisingly, such violence has produced clashes between people defending their lands on the one side, and companies and the state on the other, with farmers in Kalimantan using economic strategies to resist industrial oil palm cultivation (Semedi and Prasetya, 2014).

Order, she was a submissive wife and devoted mother. General Suharto became the super-patriarch as father of the development family he wanted his New Order state to become' (Wieringa, 2001, 72). Government-sponsored activities and women's organisations (the PKK or Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga/ Education for Family Prosperity and Darma Wanita or Women's Duty) supported this role assigned to women in development from the central to the village level.

The structures created by the Suharto regime were broken down during the Reformasi era, and with them state-sponsored Ibuism. But the figure of the mother proved powerful in the protests that led to the overthrow of the New Order regime, motivating women's opposition and resonating among the disgruntled (Robinson, 2009). In addition, cultural and religious understandings of motherhood as powerful continue to thrive, often among women who organise in a context of Islamic revival, sometimes in tension with and sometimes in support of a politics of gender equality and women's empowerment (Jauhola, 2013b; Rinaldo, 2013b). We read the protest of women in Wongsorejo in the light of such constructions; understandings of motherhood circumscribe their struggles, as do languages of equality and rights. They limit and open up different modes of agency, offer strategic resources for activism, and shape a distinctive vision of peace involving prosperity, justice and environmental preservation.

### 3 Ibuism as Resistance

In the 1980s, PT Wongsorejo was granted usage rights over 603 hectares of land, which it used to cultivate kapok plants; 220 hectares of this land was taken from farmers. In the 1970s, soldiers and village administrators had coerced farmers into signing contracts (using their fingerprints) that stated that they approved the transfer of land to PT Wongsorejo. Those who refused to give their approval were branded communists. But despite experiencing significant violence at the hands of local strong men and security officers, the farmers were unwilling to abandon the land that they and their ancestors had worked. In 1999, after the collapse of the New Order regime, residents of Wongsorejo organised in the Farmers' Organisation of Wongsorejo, Banyuwangi (OPWB) to reclaim their land. With a membership of some 1,000 in its early days, the OPWB began to organise protests, including confrontations with the village chief and demonstrations before parliament (Fatimah, 2019, 3). It received support in its struggle from Surabaya Legal Aid and the Association of East Java Farmers.



Although men dominated in the OPWB, women were actively involved in the movement from the beginning. They employed a range of strategies and tactics, participating in demonstrations, serving as witnesses in court, and sometimes going face-to-face with local thugs and security officials (Fatimah, 2019). But there was a clear gender division of labour: men led the organisation and women supported it. Now in her sixties, SM remembers:

DF: So, Ibu, from the beginning, when did you start joining in with the OPWB's activities?

SM: Me, ... I don't know the year. I never went to school, but if there are any activities, I'll take part.

DF: So from the beginning?

SM: Yes, from the beginning.

Interview with SM, November 2016

A major trigger for women's participation was a violent clash with security forces during which a young man was killed. One of the current leaders of the OPWB women's wing recalls:

YL: Bu, you joined the struggle from the very beginning?

LS: Me, before I married my husband, I was already part of the struggle. So, the struggle started in 1999, if I'm not mistaken, and I married in 2000.

YL: Oh, so you were already involved when you married?

LS: Yes. In fact, my husband was already taking part. When the shooting happened, I was pregnant with my first daughter. I was first ... when the shooting happened, with Mas TK, that was in front of my house. I was with the women, with Bu SK, and she was with me. Pregnant too.

Interview with LS, November 2016

Thus the women jointly with each other participated in protest activities. Motherhood and pregnancy were far from a hindrance; indeed, motherhood was a motivator and gave women's activism legitimacy. In Java, kinship is traced bilaterally, and it is customary for women to inherit and thus own land. While Islamic law prescribes that women inherit a percentage, though less than men, families often divide the land equally between sons and daughters according to customary practice; indeed, the eldest sister sometimes inherits more than the younger brothers (Robinson, 2009, 23). As part owners, women farmers are motivated to protect the land. Having land allows them to meet the everyday needs of their families, such as providing food and water, both of which are considered women's responsibility.



This unique feminine responsibility provided a strong motivation for women's protest, and sometimes led them to adopt relatively radical positions. For example, SL was a long-time activist who had participated in the struggle since the beginning. When the company offered the villagers 60 ha of land in 2014 in order to resolve the conflict, she argued as follows:

A number of officials came, and the lands were all measured, Mbak. A lot of them came ... see, we should have been given a bit. We didn't want it. Yeah, didn't want it. Our people didn't want it. What would we eat? Me, I didn't go to school. The smart people said, 'It's okay for the government to take the land'. Well, what would the government have the children eat? ... I'd never gone to school, and I answered like this: 'I'm one of the government's children too. What would I eat?' There were a lot of people facing difficult times, but no they only focused on that.

Interview with SL, November 2016

SL spoke from her role as a mother ('what would the government have the children eat?'), but also called in the government's responsibility ('I'm one of the government's children too. What would I eat?'). Illiterate, she saw no future for her in jobs outside farming and was loath to give up the security provided by the land. What drives her argument is familial commitments: as she has a responsibility to feed her family as mother and wife, so the government—as a father—should have a responsibility to ensure she can fulfil this responsibility.

With the morality of the protest thus anchored in familial commitments, women were deeply motivated in their cause. But their activism contradicted the patriarchal imaginary of the New Order era. They were not simply bystanders providing numbers to protests organised by men; they also strategised independently of them. Moreover, they organised sabotage and tried to kill the kapok plant seedlings that the company had planted on what they considered to be their land.

SK: Mbah NA all of a sudden came to the house, because she didn't have any work ... nothing much. She said to me that she'd bought some poison for the randu trees.<sup>6</sup> It wasn't enough ... then I decided to use my husband's. I gave her a litre and I said, 'No need to pay'. And at the time, see, I had a three-month-old baby. So I apologised to Mbah NA. I couldn't go. I was responsible, had to work here. Bu SK answered,

<sup>6</sup> Randu is another term for kapok.

'Yeah, let the women be responsible, not the men'. So, if the women went, and there were company supervisors, they would be careful. And my husband suddenly came out of the house and said, 'Where's my weed killer?' I answered, 'It was taken by one of my friends to treat roots'. Even though I'd taken it myself. But when I went to the market, I bought some more. So I asked some friends and discussed things with people I could trust.

YL: Right, because it was a secret, Bu?

SK: Yes, a secret. And after that, I said to my friends that, if we wanted to poison some plants, we should find plants that hadn't been contested [that is, plants on land allocated to the company that had not been contested]. Like the one on my family's land, there'd been no cases. That was the first one I wanted them to poison. Then we went to other plantations, taking turns.

Interview with SK, November 2016

Two issues stand out in this narrative. First, women strategised and took the initiative, going far beyond participating in protests organised by the men. And second, they felt that they needed to keep their strategising secret from their husbands, presumably because they might not have agreed. Another one of our interviewees confirmed the importance of acting independently from the husbands.

SM: The important thing is that, if anything happens, we can go without our husbands knowing. At the time, Bu SN was in the field, very pregnant. If I'm not mistaken, she was almost nine months along. And her husband didn't know [that she was going out]. At the time, I was working the green beans ... I wanted to know what the police and mobile brigade were like. So I left the beans, then I found out that Bu SN had been fighting with the police and the mobile brigade.

Interview with SM, November 2016

Indeed, women also did not shy away from violence. One of our interviewees recounted an incident where women beat security staff: 'I mean, we were protecting ourselves. At first, the ones who beat them were actually the women. Like, Mbah NA, her daughter Mbak SU and then the thug named MA.' (Interview with LS, November 2016).

Today there are no more kapok trees in Bongkoran, the main site of the land grab in Wongsorejo, in part because they were the constant target of sabotage and costly protests. As two leaders of the movement joked with the interviewer:

YL: So now there are no more kapok plants left?

SK: Maybe they’re tired, Bu.

YL: Hehehehehe ... tired of fighting against SK.

YA: Here [in Bongkoran] there are none left.

SK: Replaced by mangoes, by what have you, after the women here ...

FGD with the OPWB and OP2WB, February 2017

SK thus gives credit to the women of Wongsorejo for having defeated the plantation. Their participation in the protest after 1998 reflected both continuity and a break in the New Order gender division of labour that saw women’s place as being at home. They assumed a subversive role in the conflict—justified by their familial role of ensuring that their children can eat—yet kept their most radical activities hidden from the men. They supported the goal and the actions of the OPWB, but also showed independent agency through enactments of motherhood. In this way, they appropriated Ibuism and changed its meaning so that it allowed them to perform protests and make their voices heard.

#### 4 Women in the Lead—New Gender Divisions of Protest

The women of Wongsorejo may have killed the plantation, but they did not defeat the company. PT Wongsorejo’s land usage rights ended in 2012, but the Banyuwangi Regency gave the company building-usage rights two years later. The plan was to build an industrial estate, again partially on contested lands.<sup>7</sup> Although there was an effort at mediation (as referenced earlier, farmers were offered 60 hectares of the 220 they claimed), and although the company promised to create 70,000 new jobs, farmers did not give in (Sholahudin, Siahaan and Wiratraman, 2020, 428). They feared not only the loss of their livelihoods, but also that the new industry would have detrimental ecological effects and negatively impact soil fertility (Arifianto, 2018). The plans thus revived the conflict

7 According to the farmers we interviewed, the new industry would be vehicle spare parts. The Banyuwangi Regency Spatial Plan foresees an industrial area consisting of ‘base metal industry, basic chemical industry, petroleum industry, machinery and equipment industry, wood, rubber, plastics, paper, food, and beverage industry’ (Sholahudin, Siahaan and Wiratraman, 2020, 426).

after it had somewhat receded. But the leadership had now shifted from men to women. The OPBW's membership was less than a third of its original size by 2019 as a result of internal organisational dynamics and intimidation by the company (Fatimah, 2019, 3). But in 2015, the organisation established a women's branch (OP2WB), in which it enrolled the wives of OPWB members—by 2017 the OP2WB consisted of 280 members (FGD with the OPWB and OP2WB, February 2017). And the OP2WB came to spearhead the resistance against the planned industrial estate. As an elderly villager explained, 'now the men can't be on the frontlines. The ones out front are the women. The men, they have to be dragged along.' (Interview with SL, November 2016). In addition to land rights, the struggle came to include environmental issues, also forging links with related struggles in East Java, for example about sand mining and water.<sup>8</sup>

The idea that women should move to the front is familiar from other movements that take advantage of constructions of women as needing protection to deter the violence of security forces. Such instrumentalisation has been criticised (Doss, Summerfield and Tsikata, 2014; Lamb et al., 2017; Park and Maffii, 2017) though some have questioned the characterisation of women as pawns without agency (Joshi, 2020). In Wongsorejo activists seemed to have learned from movements outside the region, in particular from Rembang. But they also drew lessons from their encounters with security forces during the violent clashes of 2001. As SK, one of the OP2WB leaders recalled, after the shooting, 'The son of Bu SN's sibling was captured and brought into the mobile brigade's vehicle. Her sister came and told the mobile brigade to let the kid go. And the mobile brigade, he said, "You're lucky you're a woman. If you weren't a woman, I'd shoot you.'" (Interview with SK, November 2016).

And SK confirmed that the mobile brigades acted differently towards women and men: 'Yes, there'd surely be violence' if the brigades faced men.

This understanding that the security forces would treat women differently became an integral argument for women's organising in 2015 and for women increasingly moving to the front in protests. As one young man asserted after being asked why women are up front now: 'Because if someone were to hit them ... they wouldn't hit women, right. Maybe they'd hurt fellow men, but at most they'd rustle the women's shirts and hats.' (Interview with BI, November 2016). And a senior man agreed:

8 Organisations involved in the environmental movement in the area include, apart from the OPWB and OP2WB, the Movement of Wongsorejo Banyuwangi Youth Nature Lovers (*Gerakan Pemuda Pecinta Alam Wongsorejo Banyuwangi, GAMPA*) and the Community Forum for Environment Care (*Forum Masyarakat Peduli Lingkungan, FORMALIN*) (Kholik, 2018).

We have to face a lot of things, violence, and then we have had our heads broken, beaten, rivers of blood. ... We are all tired of that. Kidnapping is often done too. And so problems should be resolved with a good strategy or approach. For that, using women is one strategy for resolving problems and avoiding violence.

Interview with SU, November 2016

During our focus group discussion with the OPWB and OP2WP in Bongkoran, participants confirmed moreover that this strategy has kept activists out of prison:

BO: Yes. Alhamdulillah, since we established OP2WB, there haven't been any people going in and out of prison.

WU: Why not, Bu?

BO: Yes, that is it. If the men were meeting the men, they'd end up fighting.

WU: And then be sent to prison? So after OP2WB was established, there's been nobody else sent to prison?

BO: Alhamdulillah. Because after that the women were in the front.

FGD with the OPWB and OP2WB, February 2017

The idea of 'using the women' may indeed have been an element in the creation of the OP2WB, which after all was an offshoot of an organisation led by men. But such a narrative discounts women's agency and strategising, which we have shown to be considerable. In Indonesia more broadly, women's activism blossomed in the post-Suharto era on issues ranging from political participation and violence to marriage and inheritance laws (see Robinson, 2018). Such activism also included rural women, as the case of Wongsorejo shows. Thus, while men originally led the OP2WP, women made it their own and shaped it to their own needs. One of its leaders recalled:

I've said to Mas YA ... Mas, these women, their goal is to meet once a week. That is OP2WB itself. Mas, I want to organise the women. But I didn't make it once a week. Maybe I am having too much trouble myself. I made the meetings once a month, but during the day. If it were night, I couldn't come. See, in the field I have trouble. So it's in the day. Mas YA said, 'That's better'.

Interview with LI, November 2016

Moving women to the front thus was not only an instrumental move but also led to a change in gender divisions of protest and in associated power relations.

As the women appropriated the organisation, they gradually became leaders in the movement. Importantly, they took control of the movement's finances. As a male leader of the movement recounted during a focus group discussion:

Before, there were routine funds, but it didn't work because we weren't careful. After that, because things kept developing, the issues didn't reduce in number but increased. In the end, we gave in. We surrendered the funding issues to the women. Alhamdulillah, they have helped us a lot. Especially in our other activities. We were helped a lot by the women.

FGD with the OPWB and OP2WB, February 2017

For women, assuming the responsibility for managing the money meant not just helping the men; it entailed a shift in gender divisions of labour and to some extent a shift in power. Quoting Sullivan (1994), Robinson (2009, 30) has argued that Javanese women's control of household budgets is not a source of power since money carries low prestige (in contrast to men's spiritual potency). However, our interviews indicate that the process of women taking over financial management from men was not without conflict, suggesting that having control of money is valued. Moreover, women's roles in the public and private spheres seemed entangled, and their leadership in managing movement finances apparently had implications for their status in the household. The following quote from the head of the OP2WB is telling:

See, now, the budget problems can be overcome, for the women. Me, I use the knowledge I got from Bu GU [one of the women members of the OP2WB], the knowledge from her. At first Bu GU said, 'Why is the budget held wholly by the women?' Because the needs, the women know them. If we have any money left over, we know the money, and we can put something aside. But the men, they'll ask the women for money. And then if the women don't know their finances, and there are other needs, then there will be fighting in the family. Some will get like this over funds.

After thinking about it ... well, yes, that's how it was. Me, before, when the money was still handled by my husband, it wasn't all 100 per cent there. 'What other money is there?' That's how it is. I'll admit it. And now, after we know how things are, and the women know it ... in a month, we'll put aside 5,000 rupiah [USD 0.38] of our shopping money. That's the key. See, the men, they feel offended. They don't trust us, the men. The Madurese, they are easily emotional. Me, I said, 'Pak, don't misunderstand us. None of us are belittling the fight you've undertaken. Because OP2WP, see, the ones who started things and established the group, it's

you. And your fight, it'll never be forgotten by OP2WB. In fact, you should be controlling us.' That's what I said. After that, bit by bit, they became aware of the need for a good budget.

Interview with LI, November 2016

The quote is remarkable for how easily it shifts between references to family budgets and the funds of the organisation. Taking charge of the organisation's budget went hand-in-hand with being in charge of the household budget. It also shows that women's taking over of the reins did not proceed without conflict, and LI found it necessary to appease the men, evoking their superior status in the family as father ('pak'), and telling them that their fight will not be forgotten and that 'In fact, you should be controlling us'. The fact that control of the finances was a matter of conflict indicates that it also involved relations of power. Indeed, we found both, jealousies and men supporting women's leadership in the organisation.

Overall however, the extent of men's support for women's lead and activism was surprising. Take, for example, SM's responses to our questions:

DF: Those meetings are at night usually, right?

SM: Yes, at night.

DF: And how does your husband take it?

SM: He usually waits at home. The children, sons and daughters, and the in-laws, they join me. There's nothing at night.

DF: How does your husband feel? He has no objections to you taking part in such activities?

SM: Sometimes he comes here too.

...

DF: Has he ever complained, Bu, that you take part in the demonstrations? That it disturbs the cooking and the like.

SM: That stuff ... for a bit I won't clean for a while. The important thing is that I cook, and things are ready, and then we have breakfast. If we need to pack something to go, we do. Me, it's like that, Mbak.

DF: So cooking is important. Cleaning can wait.

SM: Right, Mbak.

DF: And your husband doesn't protest?

SM: No. See, we work together. We understand each other.

Interview with SM, November 2016



Not only do some men seem to not mind women's activism and support them at home, they also offer assistance from behind in women's protest activities, including by bringing food. As LI recounts,

LI: If the *kentongan*<sup>9</sup> had already sounded, we wouldn't feel like eating. So we'd be on the road, we'd go. Sometimes, Bapak, he'd know that I hadn't had breakfast so he'd buy some bread before coming home.

YL: He brought it there?

LI: Yes.

YL: And did the other men do that too?

LI: Yes. The following day, if there was the opportunity, they'd expect that they'd have to come ... they'd bring some things. [...]

Interview with LI, November 2016

Creating a new organisation and putting women in the front thus generated a change in gender divisions of protest. We argue that this was not simply a matter of men instrumentalising women for their own purposes; instead, both women and men strategically deployed constructions of women as weak and needing protection to pre-empt violence from the security forces. This use of gender as a resource for activism had identity effects: it entailed a political empowerment of women, paired with a gain in status in the household. In the following, we read their activism as performing active citizenship and thus constructing a more inclusive peace in Banyuwangi, in which those intersectionally marginalised along the axes of gender and class have a role to play.

## 5 Organising Gives Us Passion—From Empowerment to Citizenship

The political empowerment of the women activists of Wongsorejo is significant not only at the personal and household levels. Our understanding of peace as agonistic leads us to suggest that their leadership contributes to the enactment of a particular kind of peace, one that recognises their claims even if it does not fulfil them. Another way of framing the issue is to suggest that the protests of women in Wongsorejo empower them to perform citizenship at the level of the everyday (van Klinken and Berenschot, 2018). It is possible to identify in the narratives of the women two aspects of such empowerment—one signalling personal bravery, the other adopting an understanding of rights-bearing citizens in a changed polity.

<sup>9</sup> A gong the villagers use to call people to assemble, and that has been used to signal the need to assemble for protest.

Women's resistance has entailed a considerable amount of courage in the face of significant violence, and the stories women tell of their struggles are replete with testimonies of bravery: 'Those thugs said, "*Bu*, don't stand out too much. Something will happen." And she answered, "I've surrendered myself to the Almighty. Live or die, I have the courage. I have to fight for the land where I was born, whatever happens. Whatever happens.' (Interview with SK, November 2016).

This recounting of bravery also highlights the role of religion in the movement. Indeed, the revival of Islam and the role of piety in women's activism in Indonesia have been a topic of scholarly investigation (Jauhola, 2013b; Rinaldo, 2013b; Robinson, 2009), and gaining courage by surrendering oneself to the Almighty constitutes a distinctive way of enacting empowered citizenship. But another source of power was being organised and was part of a larger movement.

DF: OPWB and OP2WB, what benefits have these organisations offered?

SM: Yeah, they've given us the passion.

DF: I mean, since these organisations were established ... You've been involved from before. Are women more active now, since the establishment of OP2WB? Has there been a change, or has it remained the same?

SM: Yes, there's been a change. I'm not afraid of anything. We can overcome things together.

Interview with SM, November 2016

Van Klinken and Berenschot (2018) advocate a re-conceptualisation of citizenship that appreciates the passion and antagonism involved in the political. SM tells us here that organisations are crucial to this—'they've given us the passion', that is, the motivation to face danger in order to change things, to overcome fear.

The empowerment that comes from religion and organisation comes through vividly, for example, in the stories women tell about learning how to speak in political forums, a daunting prospect for anyone, but especially for women often labelled uneducated. SM recounts her first time speaking up spontaneously.

SM: When we demonstrated at parliament, I took part. Joined when we went to the regent too. To the house of the village chief too. I just joined in then.

DF: And if you joined, did you just come physically, or did you talk too?

SM: Yeah, I also talked, spontaneously. Like, 'Pak, what will the fate of the farmers be? Nothing to eat ... poor.' And then the official asked 'Why?' and Bu SE added, 'Yeah, they're hungry, Pak. There's nothing to eat.' Like that, Mbak.

Interview with SM, November 2016

LI, meanwhile, recalls how she found herself for the first time having to speak in front of cameras at a press conference, involving activists from different parts of Indonesia, in Yogyakarta:

Like, in Yogya, I was teased by Mas GO. ... I didn't know that it was a press conference. It turned out that there were a lot of reporters and a press conference. The ones from Kalimantan, they were accompanied by the legal body. And then from NTT [Nusa Tenggara Timur (East Nusa Tenggara)] they were supported by Mbak IT, and then from Kendal they were also supported ... but we from Wongsorejo, where was Mas GO? Even though things were ready to begin. And then the conference began, and they were all supported by their own legal organisations, and the group from Wongsorejo was left all alone. I couldn't do anything. I was stiff. I read whatever I could. Me, I tried to answer what I could. Over there, we all forgot that we weren't sure. ... I answered as I could. Mbak W1 said, 'Oh My God! What is all this ... alright, answer.' I got hot and cold. 'Mas AG, where is Mas GO?' 'I don't know where.' The first one to speak was from East Nusa Tenggara, and then the second was from Kalimantan. The third one was from Wongsorejo. Oh, by Allah ... but Alhamdulillah, what I talked about was what had happened. So after the conference was over, Mas GO was clapping his hands. What did he want? 'I've succeeded, Bu, in guiding you,' Mas GO said. 'Where were you? I was looking for you.' Mas AD laughed. 'Bu, you were already correct and proper in your speaking.' 'That's what you say, Mas.' 'No. We have it recorded here, Bu,' Mas AG said. 'But oh, Pak, I'm so afraid. You really know how to give us a lesson.' That's what I said. I'd told Mas GO that I couldn't speak. But me, I had no idea what I was talking about. I forgot what I said. Like I was unaware. I was a witness, Bu. I was surprised. Just look at it.

Interview with LI, November 2016

Overcoming fear in this context meant something quite different to overcoming fear in the face of police violence. Being part of an organisation, encouraged by other members, and tutored by supporters, LI ended up discovering

her speaking abilities and polishing her political skills: 'I was surprised. Just look at it.'

LI's story also shows the importance of external non-governmental organisation (NGO) support for the activists. Surabaya Legal Aid is perhaps the most important of these, represented by the figure of Pak HE often mentioned by our interviewees. The organisation began supporting local activists in 1999, bringing the struggle of villagers in Wongsorejo to the public attention 'when the shooting happened', providing a legal defence, and helping strengthen their organisations.

LI: Mas HE came before the organisation was established. In 1999 he was already here.

YL: How important has his presence been, Bu?

LI: Very important, because Mas HE, he can share ... we can expand our network, and from the beginning it was Mas HE who helped us develop our network. We met our friends, at the very first, through Mas HE. ... Before, every time something happened he'd come. But now, he said this ... Every time there are problems, he relies on me, he can only depend on me. And what was his message ... to not depend too much on him.

Interview with LI, November 2016

The training and support provided by this NGO was crucial not only for providing individuals with the courage to speak up and polish their political skills but also for organisational development. LI talks in particular about the importance of training.

The training, the paralegal training. See, we have never known the different forms ... once a fight, always a fight. And from before, we hadn't had a team for security, for records, for negotiations, or a camera team. Since then, some of the men have brought cameras and they have been used to it. And the records team, we hadn't had it, but with training we have started to understand.

Interview with LI, November 2016

Training from the Legal Aid Centre has also given the farmers a new vocabulary, allowing them to set out their arguments in the language of rights. Indeed, during the protests in 2001, the farmers went to the National Human Rights Commission in order to complain about human rights violations on the part the company, its 'spies' and hired 'thugs', and the police (interview with SA,

November 2016). And this language of rights is now providing women a powerful framing for their grievances.

SM: ... no matter what, I've got rights. This is the land where I was born, which I must defend for my children and grandchildren. If not, what will my grandchildren have in the future?

DF: ... Bu, earlier you said that you're not afraid because you have rights. Ibu SM, where did you learn that you have rights?

SM: I learned it from my parents, my grandfather, and my father, all of whom said that.

DF: What did your father say then?

SM: This is your birth land. This is where the land was cleared before, and where death will come.

DF: So you've been here for generations?

SM: Yes, over generations.

DF: Did you also take part in any training sessions? Or discussions with Pak HE?

SM: Owwww. Just considered it ... see, I didn't go to school, so I can't speak Indonesian. So I just give passion to the youths. 'Come on, child. You must fight for your future.' I only give that spirit to the young ones. I only help as I can, and I'm always involved.

Interview with SM, November 2016

SM knows that she has rights. NGO discourse may or may not have informed SM's arguments, but she defines her struggles through the language of rights. These are not rights bestowed by formal government law, but ones that come from having been born on the land. Her rights claims come 'from my parents, my grandfather and my father', who taught her that 'this is your birth land'. In other words, SM makes her argument drawing on customary law by which those who clear the land own the land (compare Bedner and Arizona, 2019). She is not alone in doing so. When we asked people in our focus group discussion whether anybody in the village opposed their struggle, they told us that, of about 1,000, 'at most there are only four people against it' (FGD with OP2WB, 24 July 2018). Thus, we can assume that SM's attitude is widespread.

SM performs citizenship. The struggle has shaped how she perceives herself and her community in the context of the Indonesian state and the Banyuwangi Regency. Like the other women active in the Wongsorejo resistance, she emerges as a rights-bearing subject who has learned to speak the language of national politics and makes claims drawing on notions of rights. In addition, some women have become leaders with increased political efficacy, knowing

how to strategise and organise efficiently, and gaining political skills and confidence. Through their activism, these women are changing the meaning of peace in East Java, sounding the final death knell of the gender-segregated violence of the New Order as they struggle for a more just future.

## 6 Conclusion

The anti-land grab activism of Wongsorejo tells the story of how social protest can anchor a different kind of peace—one not defined by harmony, but one that allows for an expression of clashing interests and a recognition of differences. It also tells the story of how gender matters in peacebuilding and how it participates to construct different kinds of peace: from New Order Ibuism, to the powerful and activist motherhood of the Reformasi, to the emergence of female political leadership. In these different scenarios, gender is both strategically deployed for political ends and generates unintended effects. Thus, the Suharto regime consciously sought to order gender relations for developmental ends; similarly, the activists in Wongsorejo strategically deployed gender, though for very different ends—that is, to manipulate the security forces. In both instances, gender constituted a strategic resource. In both instances too, the workings of gender spilled beyond their intended purposes: Ibuism came to support not just neo-liberal development, but also protests; and moving women to the front of protests not only made these less violent, it also served to empower women as political leaders. As activists, women are building new forms of peace that take note of their claims and enable their diverse (gendered) enactments of citizenship. Thus, peacebuilding emerges as a process rather than an outcome, as intrinsically political and as fighting violence in its multiple forms, from land grabs to poverty, and environmental pollution. Peacebuilding becomes dissident politics, and what makes such politics 'peaceful' are values such as non-coercion and the ability to see not enemies that need to be destroyed but opponents that need engaging with.

We interpret the protests of women activists in Wongsorejo as enacting such peacebuilding. This has entailed establishing themselves as opponents by strategising with men (to put women in the front), but also having 'passion' and being empowered to brave violence, having the courage to speak in public, applying their financial skills to maintaining the movement, and speaking the language of rights. It also has meant debating the uses of violence for movement activism—something that caused tension in the OP2WB as some criticised Bu NA for her violent tactics. As they have engaged in such politics, the women of Wongsorejo have participated in building a peace in which women

have a recognised and public role. This is not to say that they have achieved gender equality—plenty of gender-specific economic and political inequalities continue to characterise life in the district. However, the women activists of Wongsorejo have established themselves as worthy opponents and passionate citizens, and have engaged in shaping a more inclusive and egalitarian future for their community.

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