

The Antagonisation of *Gerwani* and State *Ibuism*: The New Order's Strategy of Shaping Collective Memory and Gender Hegemony

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Abstract

This paper explores how the New Order regime used the antagonisation of *Gerwani* and the institutionalisation of state *ibuism* as ideological strategies to shape collective memory and maintain the hegemony of gender power. *Gerwani*, as a symbol of the progressive women's movement, was erased from history through narratives of moral depravity and political threat. At the same time, the concept of state *ibuism* is institutionalised through organisations, such as *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK*, with its inherent doctrine of subordination. This paper uses the process tracing method to examine the relationship between political repression, the formation of gender narratives, and the framing of women's roles in the New Order. The results of the analysis show that the strategy was not only successful in suppressing critical women's movements but also in creating gender constructions in social memory and institutional structures in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Gerwani*, state *ibuism*, women's organisations

Introduction

Towards the end of the Soeharto era, women's involvement in the democracy movement became more apparent. This was evidenced by the emergence of organisations such as *Suara Ibu Peduli* (Voice of Concerned Mothers), which actively protested against the regime. This demonstrated that women were not only victims of the crisis, but also important actors in Indonesia's democratisation process. Various forms of activism and women's organisations continued to emerge, including the establishment of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) and various women's foundations, as well as non-violent campaigns related to other women's rights issues. As the Reformation era progressed, women became increasingly involved in various aspects of society. Despite facing significant obstacles due to patriarchal norms and gender inequality deeply rooted in society, Indonesian women continued to fight to ensure that women's rights were fully respected and upheld in all sectors of society. Consequently, the Reformation era is widely regarded as a pivotal moment for women's organisations in Indonesia.

However, despite the political openness of the Reformation era, Indonesian women still face significant challenges in achieving full equality and representation.

Inequality of access to various resources is still common. Limited meaningful representation in government has widened the gender gap in policymaking. In fact, women in government positions often experience psychological violence and intimidation when promoting the political agenda of women in parliament (Pratiwi 2019). This has resulted in policies that often marginalise women's needs. According to data from the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics, Indonesia has more than 137 million women, accounting for about 49 percent of the total population. This figure certainly shows a composition that is not much different from that of the male population. However, women's role as active agents in the political sphere, particularly in decision-making and policymaking, is still overlooked. This highlights the gap between formal democratic change and the reality of life for many women in Indonesia. The underrepresentation of women in politics not only reflects structural injustice but also directly impacts the effectiveness of policies in everyday life. Policies that fail to consider women's perspectives risk failing to address the real issues.

Furthermore, women still experience massive gender-based violence. Unfortunately, legal protection for women remains weak. Many cases of violence are not taken seriously, due to a lack of law enforcement officials, limited access to support services and justice,

and a deeply rooted culture of victim blaming. Existing laws often fail to provide comprehensive protection for victims, and legal loopholes complicate the reporting and handling of cases. Several state-affiliated women's organisations, such as *Dharma Wanita* and the Family Welfare Empowerment (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga/PKK*), continue to promote traditional gender roles focusing on domestic responsibilities rather than political activism. In light of these issues, the study aims to explore how the collective memory of women's organisations in Indonesia was formed and maintained as a political instrument serving the interests of the ruling regime.

Our exploration of this research question will be based on the concept of the 'Politics of Naming' as discussed by Mamdani (2009) in relation to genocide. The concept of the 'Politics of Naming' relates to the process of producing a label that is heavily influenced by power structures. This labelling is not a neutral description but rather a political consideration, a consequence of the application of a power structure. The Politics of Naming is implemented to serve political interests, distort understanding, or shape a narrative in line with the prevailing power structure. The outcomes of the Politics of Naming determine the broad understanding of a conflict.

In addition to the Politics of Naming, this paper will explore research on state motherhood (*ibuism*). Suryakusuma (2011) defines state *ibuism* as a gender ideology that results in the 'domestication' of women within the economic, political, ideological, and cultural spheres. This ideology clarifies the concept of the ideal woman within the boundaries of women's identities as wives, mothers, and citizens, confining them to the domestic sphere and separating them from men. The term '*ibu*' (mother) has thus become a static and singular identity, homogenising the complex realities of Indonesian women across various ethnic, religious, and socio-economic categories (Hyunanda et al. 2021). This ideology creates a homogeneous identity for Indonesian women centred on the gendered definition of motherhood. According to Djajadiningrat (1997), in the context of state *ibuism*, the term '*ibu*' refers to all married women or women of childbearing age. This implies that all women will become mothers. As mothers, women play an important role in managing the household and in meeting the physical and emotional needs of their family members. This includes caring for and socialising their children so that they learn to show respect and politeness (Hyunanda et al. 2021). According to the

principles of state *ibuism*, women who fulfil their duties within their families also fulfil their duties to the state by providing passive political support.

Research Methodology

This study uses process tracing to examine the relationship between potential causes and observed outcomes (George & Bennett 2005). The data used in this study are secondary data collected through a literature review. Process tracing enables a systematic, inductive analysis that reveals the interrelationships among cases, connecting events and providing deeper insights into the dynamics of women's organisations in Indonesia. This method is therefore a powerful tool for exploring how antagonistic narratives against the Indonesian Women's Movement (*Gerwani*) were formed and utilised by the regime to legitimise the elimination of progressive women's movements. Furthermore, the study traces how this antagonism became part of the state's ideological strategy to implement state *ibuism* as the dominant norm for women through the *PKK* and *Dharma Wanita*. By tracing the process of reframing women's roles from active political actors to ideal domestic symbols, the method allows us to explore the interactions between political discourse, state policy, and the apparatus of power that shape gender constructions. This study aims to use process tracing to gain a deeper understanding of the physical, political, and epistemic repression of *Gerwani*, which involved controlling historical narratives and state gender ideology.

This study's main argument is that the collective memory of women's organisations in Indonesia prior to the reformation era was shaped and maintained by the ruling regime through the antagonisation of *Gerwani* and the institutionalisation of the concept of state *ibuism*. Both were manipulated as political tools to suspend gender hegemony and certain ideologies, especially during the New Order era. The New Order regime systematically carried out the antagonisation to erase the historical traces of the progressive women's movement. Through state propaganda, *Gerwani* was positioned as a symbol of moral depravity and a threat to the social order. This stigmatisation delegitimised all forms of political activism by women and silenced their collective potential as agents of social change. Meanwhile, the concept of state *ibuism* was institutionalised through the establishment and strengthening of organisations such as *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK*. These organisations directed women towards

domestic roles as mothers and wives who support their husbands, making these the only forms of service recognised by the state. Thus, the state defined women's roles within a hierarchical framework of service to the family and the state, thereby removing their ability to participate in the political and public spheres.

In this context, antagonism and *ibuism* are ideological tools used to limit women's agency and reproduce patriarchal structures that serve the interests of the regime. Examining the causal relationship between the antagonisation of *Gerwani* and the implementation of *ibuism* can reveal how the state has shaped collective memory and understanding of women's roles in Indonesia. The state then reconstructed a hegemony of knowledge, forcing post-*Gerwani* women's organisations to grow and operate in a centralised manner rather than implementing decentralisation and reaching grassroots levels. Therefore, this paper is part of the construction of a counter-narrative and an effort to reclaim the memory of women's history.

The History and Ideology of *Gerwani*

The struggle of Indonesian women throughout history has always been intertwined with the political dynamics that have shaped the nation's journey. One of the most prominent women's organisations in modern Indonesian history is *Gerwani*. Founded in the early post-independence era, *Gerwani* underwent complex and dynamic ideological developments, evolving from a movement focused on women's emancipation and education to an organisation that adopted a revolutionary proletarian ideology. This evolution reflects not only *Gerwani's* internal transformation but also the interplay of power structures, state ideology, and social movements in shaping the political experiences of Indonesian women.

Early Phase: Emancipation and Progressive Nationalism (1950-1954)

Gerwani was founded on 4 June 1950 in Semarang as *Gerakan Wanita Sedar (Gerwis)* by S.K. Trimurti and other women activists who had fought in the Second Dutch Military Aggression. The organisation emerged from the experiences of young women involved in the physical struggle for Indonesian independence. At the time of its formation, *Gerwis* had only five hundred members, most of whom were educated, middle-class, and politically aware. *Gerwis* was established with the aim of achieving a society free of all forms of slavery and oppression, whether between individuals, groups,

or countries (Fanani 2024). *Gerwis* began to expand its movement among Indonesian women in both urban and rural areas.

Gerwani's membership recruitment policy was very open: this women's organisation accepted women of all ages and backgrounds, provided they were at least 16 years old or married (Rahmanudin 2022). By 1953, *Gerwis* had grown to 40,000 members, demonstrating its rapid expansion in just three years. Over time, the organisation's focus also began to expand beyond its original aims. *Gerwis* began to reach a wider audience, aiming to elevate the status of Indonesian women through education, increased political awareness, and economic empowerment. Various initiatives were launched, including the establishment of daycare centres, the implementation of literacy programmes, and the organisation of income-generating activities. Ideologically, this phase was characterised by progressive nationalism and emancipatory feminism. *Gerwis* sought to raise women's awareness of their rights as citizens of the newly established republic. *Gerwis* represented a form of strategic resistance within a patriarchal society and power structure.

Its main agenda included eradicating illiteracy, strengthening women's role in development, and advocating for labour rights. While the organisation was not openly affiliated with any political party at this stage, its focus on working women and farmers revealed its class orientation. This contrasted with the approach of bourgeois women's organisations of the time, which emphasised equality within the framework of law and family. *Gerwis*, on the other hand, addressed structural issues such as labour exploitation and poverty.

Transformation into Gerwani, Class Approach, and Strategic Movement (1954-1959)

Gerwis membership doubled from 40,000 to 80,000 people in 1954. This rapid growth also led to a change in *Gerwis'* overall direction. At the First National Congress in Jakarta, it was decided that the organisation would eliminate 'sectarian' elements and focus on building a mass base (Wieringa 1993). To symbolise this significant change, the word '*sedar*' was removed, and the organisation was renamed the Indonesian Women's Movement (*Gerwani*). The transformation of *Gerwis'* name to *Gerwani* was an ideological turning point. *Gerwani* began strengthening its ties with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and adopted a class-based approach to its struggles. While it never formally became PKI's women's wing, the two organisations were

closely linked ideologically and structurally. From that point on, *Gerwani* could be categorised as a Marxist-Leninist women's organisation that believed women's liberation was inseparable from the class struggle against capitalism and feudalism.

Gerwani grew rapidly in 1955, reaching a membership of 400,000. Most of its members at that time were uneducated peasant women. There was a significant change in the organisation's demographics; previously, when it was still known as *Gerwis*, its membership had been dominated by educated middle-class women. This change prompted *Gerwani* to expand its movement and struggle. *Gerwani* developed the idea that women's oppression was not only the result of the patriarchal system, but also of economic and political structures that oppressed the population as a whole. According to this line of thinking, peasant and labour women experienced double oppression: as an oppressed class within the economic system, and as a marginalised gender within the patriarchal social system. Therefore, for *Gerwani*, the struggle for women's liberation demanded comprehensive structural change.

Gerwani initiated the development and struggle for broader rights. The organisation began to focus on the issue of sexual violence and fought for a more democratic marriage law (Fanani 2024). *Gerwani* also rejected Western bourgeois feminism, considering it elitist and ineffective in addressing the root causes of the problems faced by the majority of women in Indonesia. For *Gerwani*, women's struggles were not just about equal rights in law or education; they were also about land rights, fair wages, and social protection. Within this framework, *Gerwani* provided political education for women, advocated for agrarian reform, and backed policies deemed to be in the public interest.

Amidst various internal developments, *Gerwani* demonstrated significant external movement. The organisation began actively participating in Indonesia's first general election, held in 1955. *Gerwani* showed its support for PKI due to their shared ideology of fighting for women's rights and emancipation. A total of 23,480 *Gerwani* members were recorded as being actively involved in the 1955 election campaign. This won PKI many votes from the female electorate, placing it fourth in the election. Subsequently, six *Gerwani* members were elected to parliament representing PKI. *Gerwani's* political manoeuvring became apparent through lobbying activities with party leaders. This strategic approach secured PKI's support for two of *Gerwani's*

feminist agendas: the demand for a new marriage law and women's right to participate in village head elections. This movement marked a significant shift in societal perceptions of women, moving away from the idea that they must be submissive and obedient.

Active Involvement and Radicalisation (1960-1965)

As PKI gained power as a mass party in the 1960s, *Gerwani's* political position grew stronger. *Gerwani* openly supported the 'National Democratic Revolution' programme promoted by PKI and President Soekarno. During this period, *Gerwani* began encouraging women to participate in active political struggles, such as paramilitary training, anti-imperialist campaigns, and demonstrations against conservative forces in the country.

Gerwani's ideological radicalisation was also evident in its willingness to criticise state institutions deemed unfair, feudal, and patriarchal. One of *Gerwani's* key objectives was to advocate for equal rights for women in political and economic life, including agrarian reform, education, and legal protection. They also demanded that violence against women, both at home and within state institutions, be recognised as a serious issue requiring structural solutions.

In *Gerwani's* speeches and publications, ideological terminology such as 'feudalism', 'imperialism', and 'monopoly capitalism' became the main language. *Gerwani* viewed the unjust global economic and political system – dominated by Western countries and the domestic ruling class – as the root cause of people's suffering, including that of women. Therefore, women must be directly involved in the people's revolutionary struggle.

The relationship between *Gerwani* and PKI was, in fact, quite complex. *Gerwani* supported many of PKI's national campaigns, including the movement to free Irian Jaya from Dutch control and Soekarno's campaign to destabilise the newly formed state of Malaysia in the early 1960s. However, *Gerwani* did not automatically support PKI as a whole. Although *Gerwani* succeeded in securing PKI's support for two of its feminist agendas, PKI did not explicitly prioritise women's issues. PKI still viewed women's roles as an extension of domestic duties rather than as part of a strategic movement. According to PKI, all problems faced by women would be solved once the colonial, imperialist, and feudal aspects of Indonesian society had been eliminated (Wieringa 1993). This certainly did not align with the

Gerwani movement's desire for immediate revolutionary change. Although PKI recognised the double burden faced by women, it considered this to be a problem for the distant future. PKI failed to realise that this hindered women significantly from taking action.

PKI's failure to address women's issues demonstrates the extent to which the power structure was still patriarchal. Nevertheless, *Gerwani* continued to mobilize its movement broadly and strategically. *Gerwani* emphasised that women were independent and socially active in economic and political spheres. *Gerwani* also actively promoted the idea that the family could be a driver of progressive change. The organisation emphasised that the relationship between husband and wife should be characterised by mutual respect and equality, rather than subordination.

In the early 1960s, *Gerwani* developed a wide range of activities, including credit groups, kindergartens, consumer cooperatives, literacy courses, counselling for women with marital problems, handicraft courses, and campaigns to lower the prices of staple foods and provide assistance to PKI and other left-wing mass organisations (Wieringa 1993). At the national level, *Gerwani* supported Soekarno's and other socialist writers' calls for continuous revolution. The organisation also trained women to become volunteers in the anti-Malaysia campaign. In translating national policy, *Gerwani* played a two-way mediating role. They implemented national policies that were considered appropriate at a local level. *Gerwani* conveyed the demands and issues of women at the local level to the government. Locally, *Gerwani* members mobilised mass demonstrations to protest against the arrest of farmers and labour leaders. *Gerwani* branches collaborated actively with other local women's groups to address issues such as social work, flood relief, and supporting victims of forced prostitution. These strategic initiatives aimed to raise awareness among Indonesian women, both rural and urban, of the underlying causes of their oppression. *Gerwani* fought to transform society sustainably, enabling women to become active and vocal members of society.

Amid Indonesia's developing political and economic crisis at the time, *Gerwani* faced both internal and external pressure to affiliate with the PKI officially. Consequently, at its Fifth Congress in 1964, *Gerwani* voted to join PKI. This decision caused internal conflict within *Gerwani*. The founder of *Gerwani*, Trimurti, left the movement in 1965 due to this change. However, *Gerwani's* increasingly radical political stance also

provoked opposition from the military, conservative religious groups, and other political elites. These tensions culminated in the events of 30 September 1965.

Following the events of G30S in 1965, *Gerwani* was subjected to a systematic smear campaign. Through the use of mass media and military propaganda, *Gerwani* was slandered for its alleged involvement in the torture and murder of TNI generals in *Lubang Buaya*. This slander was used to silence the progressive women's movement and remove leftist influence from politics. This narrative was then used to justify the dissolution of the organisation and the mass arrest of *Gerwani* members and sympathisers. Within a short period, *Gerwani* — the largest women's organisation in Indonesia, with over 1.5 million members — was disbanded, and its history of struggle was erased from the country's official narrative for decades.

The Antagonisation of *Gerwani*

In the early hours of 30 September 1965, women volunteers were dragged by rebel soldiers, namely *Pemuda Rakyat*, PKI's Youth Organisation, where *Gerwani* had been training for an anti-Malaysia campaign (Wieringa 1993). The women were forced to witness the brutal murder of military officers at a place now known as *Lubang Buaya*. They were forced to witness these murders before finally being allowed to escape. The next day, 1 October 1965, the army-controlled media began spreading a campaign of sexual slander against *Gerwani*. Various newspapers, such as *Surat Kabar Harian ABRI*, *Berita Yudha*, and *Kompas*, as well as national radio stations, began publishing false information accusing the communist women of *Gerwani* of torturing seven senior military officers, including six generals, at *Lubang Buaya*. The accusations went even further, slandering *Gerwani* members as stabbing army officers with knives, cutting off their genitals, and gouging out their eyes. They were also accused of performing a seductive nude dance called 'Tarian Bunga Harum' as a ritual (Fanani, 2024).

In addition to spreading false news, the military created several false witnesses by arresting and torturing prostitutes in the *Lubang Buaya* area. These women were then forced to confess to being *Gerwani* members, make false public statements, and stand trial for the *Lubang Buaya* incident (Fanani 2024). Wieringa (2002) discovered that the photographs used as evidence of 'Tarian Bunga Harum' were taken of female volunteers who were forced to undress and dance naked in front of

their torturers. Furthermore, the military under General Suharto concealed medical reports showing that no knife or razor cuts had been found on the bodies of the murdered generals (Wieringa 1993). The smear campaign against *Gerwani* continued to be published in newspapers from October to December 1965. Claims were also made that Aidit, the then Head of the PKI, had trained hundreds of *Gerwani* members to serve him and other male party leaders sexually (Wieringa 1993). As a result of these smear campaigns, *Gerwani* was stigmatised and became a political scapegoat. In October 1965, *Gerwani* was expelled from the Indonesian Women's Congress (*Kowani*) at the insistence of the *Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama* and the Catholic Women's Group. Ultimately, the New Order government disbanded and banned *Gerwani* shortly thereafter.

Following the events of G30S in 1965, *Gerwani* became the main target of the New Order's propaganda campaign. Through the media and films such as *Pengkhianatan G30S/PKI* (The Treason of the 30 September Movement/Indonesian Communist Party), *Gerwani* was portrayed as a cruel and immoral women's organisation involved in the torture and murder of generals at *Lubang Buaya*. This narrative discredited *Gerwani* and shaped negative public perceptions of the organisation. Representations emphasising the sexualisation of violence, such as accusations of dancing naked around corpses and mutilating the generals' genitals, were constructed to instil disgust, fear, and hatred towards *Gerwani*, as well as to reinforce the idea that politically active women threaten the patriarchal social order. This strategy was highly effective in delegitimising *Gerwani* as a political actor and silencing the progressive women's movement in general. By creating a strong association between *Gerwani*, communism, and sexual violence, the state froze the women's movement in the political and public spheres for a very long time.

Several decades later, another perspective on the events of 30 September 1965 began to emerge. In the mid-1980s, Wieringa (2001) interviewed several surviving *Gerwani* leaders who had recently been released from prison, as well as members involved in the events surrounding *Lubang Buaya*. One of the female volunteers who had been present at *Lubang Buaya* recalled the events of 30 September 1965, stating:

"I was sixteen years old and a member of Pemuda Rakyat, PKI's youth organisation. I had received training in Cipete and participated in numerous exercises in preparation for confronting Malaysia, so when I was asked to go to Lubang

Buaya, I went immediately. I witnessed the soldiers killing the generals and then ran home. I was arrested at nine in the morning and imprisoned for two weeks. I was beaten and interrogated. They forced us to strip and dance naked in front of them while they took pictures. Then I was released. After a while, I was arrested again, only to be released once more. In total, I was arrested five times before they finally decided to detain me."

According to the report by the International People's Tribunal (2016), *Komnas Perempuan* stated that members of the communist women's organisation *Gerwani*, as well as other women suspected of being affiliated with PKI, were the victims of systematic killings, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention, torture, and sexual violence. *Komnas Perempuan* believes that *Gerwani* was the target of a "smear campaign designed to destroy this political group completely" (*Komnas Perempuan* 2007). Unfortunately, the smear campaign regarding *Gerwani*'s alleged involvement in the *Lubang Buaya* incident was widely believed. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands to one million innocent people were victims of massacres and imprisonment (Pohan 2020). The negative stigmatisation of *Gerwani* spread widely throughout Indonesia. In addition to stigmatisation, the New Order government made systematic efforts to erase *Gerwani*'s history from the nation's collective memory through what Suharto called a "mental transition".

The New Order government further perpetuated the sexual slander surrounding the *Lubang Buaya* incident by constructing the "Pancasila Sakti" monument. The relief on the monument depicts women dancing naked while the PKI killed the generals and threw their bodies into a pit. Through the education curriculum, media, and information control, the narrative about *Gerwani* was reduced to a story of betrayal, ignoring the organisation's contribution to the struggle for independence and women's empowerment. This erasure effort impacted the younger generation, who grew up unaware of *Gerwani*'s complete history. Talking about *Gerwani* became taboo, as people feared being labelled as communist sympathisers. Thus, the New Order regime shaped collective memory not only through a single narrative, but also by creating a deliberate historical void – a blank space in the national memory that made radical women's movements such as *Gerwani* seem as if they had never existed. This erasure reinforced the dominance of patriarchal and anti-communist ideologies, leaving no room for diverse historical narratives. Consequently, the class- and politically oriented struggles of Indonesian women in the past were marginalised and replaced by passive

representations of women confined to the domestic sphere or limited to supporting the state. This strategy of erasure demonstrates the power of the politics of memory as a continuation of the politics of naming — both of which limit discourse, control knowledge, and reproduce deep-rooted fears.

Gerwani was likely chosen as an ideological repository for resistance against the military's male order and conservative societal forces because its advocacy of women's political activism was deemed an unacceptable form of rebellion (Wieringa 2001). In the context of a post-colonial state that was building its national identity, women's participation beyond the domestic sphere was seen as threatening the established patriarchal power structure. Through its involvement in leftist movements and support for issues such as agrarian reform, gender equality, and women's labour rights, *Gerwani* reflected a form of politics that was progressive and radical by the conservative standards of the time. Consequently, the organisation became the target of delegitimisation and demonisation to eliminate all forms of resistance to the masculine, authoritarian hegemony of the New Order state.

Gerwani is a clear example of how naming practices shape, change, and erase collective identities. In the context of political naming, *Gerwani* underwent a stigmatising renaming process. Its name, which was previously synonymous with women's struggles and social justice, came to symbolise betrayal and cruelty. This shows how those in power can manipulate historical narratives and shape public opinion through naming. In this case, naming is not neutral, but rather laden with ideological interests. Names became a tool for the state to distinguish between those considered "nationalists" and those labelled "subversive". Through this renaming process, *Gerwani* was not only distanced from its historical roots as a progressive women's organisation, but also positioned as an enemy within the New Order's grand narrative of national security, political stability, and morality. Consequently, *Gerwani*'s original identity was buried beneath a caricatured image widely reproduced in the media, education, and popular culture.

The case of *Gerwani* shows that the politics of naming is not only a labelling tool but also an instrument of state hegemony used to silence alternative histories and define the boundaries of legitimate citizenship. *Gerwani* experienced not only stigmatisation, but also became a social and political burden passed down across generations. Individuals who were once involved

with or associated with *Gerwani* often experienced social exclusion and were labelled as "communists", and even lost access to civil rights. The name *Gerwani* became a field of symbolic conflict, revealing the tug-of-war between state power and society's collective memory. In this context, naming becomes an ideological battleground that determines who is recognised, who is forgotten, and who is erased from national history.

State *Ibuism*

Gerwani was the most reactionary and revolutionary women's organisation that grew rapidly at that time. However, due to massive and structured antagonisation, the organisation was forced to disband. Not only was it officially disbanded, but it also faced the stigma of cruelty and sexual crimes after a smear campaign intensified in various forms of mass media. Suharto further damaged *Gerwani*'s reputation in *Berita Yudha* on 9 November 1965, when he said that *Gerwani* was unworthy of emulation (Lestariningsih & Soekarba 2019). Various mobilisations of hatred were evident in the smear campaign against communist groups, particularly *Gerwani*. The existence of *Gerwani* and its success in mobilising the masses were seen as a threat to the dominance of the deeply rooted patriarchal system within the government at that time. This fear manifested as the myth that *Gerwani* had cut off the penises of generals. This myth then became an ideological pillar for establishing the New Order regime and a political tool for purging socialist-communist thought (Lestariningsih & Soekarba 2019). The deep-rooted patriarchal culture was a major factor in the public acceptance of the New Order's propaganda regarding *Gerwani*. The mass violence of 1965-66 was particularly terrifying for women because of the narrative that those who were actively involved were communists and enemies of the state. Following the dissolution of *Gerwani* and the establishment of the New Order government, the women's movement was paralysed and subordinated. Women's organisations were delegitimised and reduced to only social and cultural activities.

Following the dissolution of *Gerwani* and the 1965 tragedy, Indonesia's women's movement underwent a drastic transformation, characterised by the weakening of political activism and the strengthening of state *Ibuism* discourse. This ideology positions women primarily as wives and mothers whose duty is to support national development through their domestic roles. Within this framework, women are not viewed as independent, politically active citizens, but rather as complements

to men and guardians of family morals. The New Order regime systematically developed and institutionalised this concept through various organisations, such as *Dharma Wanita*, *PKK*, and *Bhayangkari*. These organisations instilled values of obedience, loyalty, and devotion to husbands and the nation. The New Order regime established a new social norm, namely that women were seen as second-class citizens. They were no longer seen as partners in the revolutionary struggle, but rather as obedient wives and devoted mothers (Wieringa 2011).

Under the New Order regime, women were no longer positioned as active political subjects, but rather as supporters of national stability through their domestic roles as wives and mothers. The state promoted the ideal of the “good mother” (the perfect housewife) through various women’s organisations that instilled values of obedience and devotion to husbands, as well as a strong attachment to the domestic sphere. This created rigid restrictions on women’s expression and participation in the public sphere while normalising their subordination in social and political structures. Women’s roles were narrowed to those of moral agents of the family, tasked with giving birth to and raising the nation’s next generation in accordance with a masculine, centralised development ideology. In this context, women were not only politically controlled but also used symbolically as a tool to legitimise state power. Their identities and roles were shaped by the regime’s ideological interests rather than by equality or free choice.

Through state *ibuism*, political power asserts control over women’s bodies and social roles while presenting this as a narrative of gender harmony and national stability. Consequently, women’s presence in politics and society is limited. Any form of women’s activism that deviates from this narrative is seen as threatening the nation’s order and morals. The implementation of state *ibuism* has a wide-ranging impact on women’s roles. The *Gerwani* revolution, which had even reached the economic sphere, collapsed instantly. Under the New Order government, women’s organisations were forced to limit their movements to minimal formal efforts towards national development. Consequently, women were no longer active agents in shaping macro- and micro-level policies, nor in driving national development and change.

Following the establishment of the New Order regime in 1966, state *ibuism* was disseminated through educational textbooks and TVRI (Indonesian National Television) (Kim 2017). State *ibuism* was also manifested

in institutions such as *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK*, which were formed to nurture and guide women in line with the state-idealised domestic roles. The promotion of state *ibuism* was institutionalised and disseminated at the grassroots level through *Dharma Wanita*, founded in 1974. *Dharma Wanita* acted as an umbrella organisation for all women’s groups within government offices. Its members are the wives of civil servants, and women are positioned as supporters of their husbands’ careers and guardians of the family image, in line with the values of obedience, loyalty, and devotion. *Dharma Wanita* also contributes to the development of the state’s *ibuism* ideology at the village level through government institutions (Kim 2017). This ideology is explicitly stated in the *Panca Dharma Wanita*, which describes women as: loyal wives; mothers who educate their children and nurture the younger generation as the future of the nation; homemakers; workers who supplement the family income; and useful members of society (Wieringa 2001).

In addition to *Dharma Wanita*, the New Order government also supported the *PKK* in spreading the ideology of state *ibuism*. In 1967, the wife of the Governor of Central Java began using *PKK* as part of a regional development initiative. This programme was later expanded to become a nationwide initiative under the New Order government in 1972 (Kim 2017). *PKK* focused on developing women at the village and sub-district levels through programmes emphasising household skills, childcare, and family consumption management. Both organisations function as instruments of social control and as means of internalising the state’s ideology of *ibuism*, in which women are valued for their ability to manage the household and support development behind the scenes. Through a hierarchical structure based on the husbands’ status, *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK* reinforced the narrative that women’s primary role was to complement men rather than to act as autonomous individuals with full rights to public and political spaces. This hierarchical pattern, based on husbands’ status, also indicated a regression in the structure of women’s organisations. Leaders were no longer elected through more democratic processes.

The New Order systematically altered the nature of women’s organisations in Indonesia, transforming them from political and emancipatory entities into apolitical, domestic ones by implementing the state’s *ibuism* ideology. Women’s organisations that were previously active in fighting for labour rights, gender equality, and social justice, such as *Gerwani*, were disbanded

and replaced with organisations directly directed and supervised by the state, such as *Dharma Wanita*, *PKK*, and *Bhayangkari*. Rather than strengthening women's bargaining position in politics or the economy, these organisations were designed to integrate women into the state's development project as wives and mothers who support their husbands and maintain family morals. Thus, the New Order eliminated women's political potential and subdued the women's movement, forcing it to conform to conservative values and patriarchal gender hierarchies. Through state *ibuism*, women became institutionalised as part of a national stability strategy rather than as agents of social change. This reduced women's organisations to extensions of the state rather than vehicles for independent collective struggle.

A comparison between *Gerwani* and women's organisations during the New Order era reveals a radical shift in the state's view and regulation of women's roles. Active in the 1950s-1965, *Gerwani* was a progressive political women's organisation with an agenda that included class struggle, gender equality, women's labour rights, education, and agrarian reform. *Gerwani* positioned women as autonomous agents of social change who dared to challenge patriarchal power structures. In contrast, women's organisations during the New Order era, such as *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK*, placed women within the framework of state *ibuism*. They were seen as wives and mothers whose duty was to support their husbands and maintain household harmony for the sake of national stability. While *Gerwani* encouraged women to participate actively and critically in political and social spaces, New Order organisations limited them to domestic and symbolic roles, distancing them from structural struggles. This fundamental difference demonstrates not only how the New Order silenced women's activism but also how it reconstructed the meaning of the women's movement to align with the conservative and patriarchal interests of the state.

Conclusion

Since the dissolution of *Gerwani* in 1965, women's organisations in Indonesia have experienced a significant decline in terms of both political vision and societal influence. *Gerwani* was a revolutionary women's organisation that played an active role in the struggle for gender equality, labour rights, and anti-imperialism. In contrast to the substantial transformation that *Gerwani* brought about, subsequent women's organisations have experienced a narrowing of their vision and role.

This has indirectly strengthened the patriarchal order and limited possibilities for emancipation. Under the influence of state *ibuism*, women's organisations were presented as a complement to the patriarchal family structure, with the primary role of women being that of housewife and supporter of their husbands. After *Gerwani*, there was a significant shift in the orientation of women's organisations in Indonesia, from political struggles for substantive equality to apolitical, normative social activities. The formality imposed on women's organisations by state *ibuism* caused them to lose their critical power and capacity for change, as they were constrained within the framework of institutionalised patriarchal ideology.

Gerwani, originally a representation of progressive women due to its active involvement in social, political, and economic issues, was destroyed by a systematic campaign that physically dismantled the organisation and destroyed its image in the nation's collective memory. This void was then filled by organisations formed and approved by the state, such as *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK*, which functioned more as instruments of social control than spaces for women's struggles. The extreme labelling of *Gerwani* and the institutionalisation of the concept of state *ibuism* were powerful tools for the New Order government to use in order to reinforce the subordination of women systematically. Consequently, women's political movements and feminist discourse were silenced and marginalised. This depoliticisation erased the legacy of women's activism, sidelined gender issues in national policy, and set back the advancement of women's rights by decades. Although various independent women's movements re-emerged and flourished during the Reformation era, they were still far from achieving what *Gerwani* had. Its widespread presence in various aspects of society in the 1950s and 1960s was deeply rooted. Unlike many women's organisations at the time, *Gerwani* did not position women merely as supporters of male-led movements, but as active political subjects with their own agenda. This revolutionary movement successfully mobilised the masses and directly addressed various social issues. *Gerwani* successfully tackled the direct violence faced by women at that time and managed to incorporate the revolutionary process against violence into its structure and culture. This remains a challenge for many women's organisations, even in the Reformation era. Although there have been developments in women's representation, not many feminist discourses have been successfully accommodated, let alone implemented. The success of *Gerwani* in forming a massive grassroots

network is difficult to replicate, as the collective memory of the New Order's systematic campaign still lingers in society.

The antagonisation of *Gerwani* post-1965, coupled with the implementation of state *ibuisism* through the establishment of *Dharma Wanita* and *PKK*, is concrete evidence that the collective memory of women's organisations in Indonesia before the Reformation era was shaped and maintained by the ruling regime. In this context, antagonism and feminism are ideological tools that limit women's agency and reproduce patriarchal structures in line with the interests of the regime. The regime defined women's roles in accordance with ideological hegemony and masculine power structures closely linked to militarism. Consequently, women's organisations at that time were directed to support these structures to avoid changing the status quo. Rather than advocating for women's rights, these organisations served as instruments to mobilise women for the state's development agenda, which often failed to address women's needs sustainably.

Although various women's organisations and movements flourished during the Reformation era, none have yet emerged to rival the scale and systematic approach of *Gerwani*. Indonesian women's organisations and movements have experienced a dramatic decline. Efforts to reclaim the narrative of women's history can raise awareness of the potential manipulation and coercive integration of women's movements. Therefore, revisiting the discourse on *Gerwani* and its grassroots network could provide a basis for future women's movements. This discourse can also provide an overview of the framework *Gerwani* successfully established through an intersectional and inclusive approach. All new agendas across movements should adopt these values to influence broader, more integral, and sustainable outcomes.

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