Introduction

This volume contains fourteen articles – sociological, anthropological, and historical – ranging geographically 'from Sabang to Merauke', from the Toba Batak (North Sumatra) to the Dani (Irian Jaya). The articles are loosely arranged around the concept of mediation, many of them including new data derived from archival research or fieldwork.

In the discussion on mediators and mediation as it developed in the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s, women were never included. Mediation processes were studied in the context of social, economic, and political change in developing societies. Since men played a more visible role in these processes, the subjects of the theories were men (Wolf 1956; Geertz 1960; Kuitenbrouwer 1982). Only recently has the mediatory role of women in socio-political and cultural change been given some consideration (Abeyasekere 1983; Schrijvers 1985).

Mediation by women has been overlooked not only in the social sciences in general but also in the field of women's studies in particular. Reminiscent as it was of the traditional view of women as the 'oil in the machinery' of society, and contrary to the feminist ideal of identity and autonomy for women, mediation by women was not a popular subject. Yet, the recent approach in women's studies, concentrating as it does on female networks, or 'the specific feminine sphere', and being aimed more at finding out how women live today and have been living in the past than at fitting them into particular schemes and strategies, has offered scope for new research (Branca 1978; Smith-Rosenberg 1975). Therefore, mediation by women in general, and in Indonesia in particular, seems to be an appropriate theme to explore.

The concept of mediation

Whether or not we wish to ascribe a mediating function to women depends first and foremost on the definition of 'mediation'. In ordinary language the meaning of the word is clear. The most recent edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1982:629) lists two different meanings for the word 'to mediate', viz.: '1. to form a connecting link between; be the
medium for bringing about (a result) or conveying (a gift); 2. to intervene (between two persons) for the purpose of reconciling them'. Although perhaps not used daily, the word is 'plain language' to the public at large. Scholars, however, are not the general public and not every scholar uses 'plain' language. Anthropologists, sociologists, and diplomats use 'mediation' in a different sense, with different connotations. To prevent a Babel, we need to take a closer look at the ways the word is used.

In sociology, the word 'mediator' is closely connected with the words 'broker' and 'middleman'. Brokers function in a societal context of patron-client relationships, or are equated with patrons (Breman 1971). They are the 'hinges' in nation-community relations, for instance. They stand guard over the crucial junctures of synapses of relationships which connect the local system to the larger whole', as Wolf, one of the first scholars to use the concept, put it (Wolf 1956:1075).

Boissevain added to this the idea of profit, and stressed the use of resources. Brokers have access to resources that are needed by, but are out of direct reach of, others. Brokers command these resources because they have access to particular assets, which may be of different kinds: knowledge, connections, money, or power. Boissevain drew a distinction between mediators and brokers: contrary to the former, the latter profit by their mediation. 'A social broker places people in touch with each other either directly or indirectly for profit' (Boissevain 1969:380). This profit may be material or nonmaterial.

In general, in these sociological studies the emphasis is on power differences between the three parties involved. Mediation is considered as taking place between unequal parties; communication here is hierarchically structured.

This approach, known under the name 'transactionalism', has provoked criticism (Bax 1988), because it does not give due attention to the larger organizational structures of which mediators and brokers also form part, such as the social group, class, and state. The floodlight directed on the broker reveals a strong man who, unimpeded by his surroundings, mobilizes a clientele by dealing in human relations (Thoden van Velzen 1973; Asad 1972). Another point of criticism is that all attention is focused on the broker in social and political structures, while the cultural dimension, ideology, and collective notions are underrated (Davis 1977). Moreover, the temporary character of these mediating relationships tends to be overlooked: these relationships form part of certain processes and undergo change, as well as themselves bringing about change.

Legal anthropology and the related field of international diplomacy, from which the term 'mediation' originally derives, start from different premises (Barton 1949, 1969; Gulliver 1977). In these fields, the second of the
dictionary definitions applies in full, mediation being taken to be intervention for the purpose of reconciliation. Contrary to the sociological interpretation, this tradition presumes the involvement of persons in horizontally structured relationships instead of unequal parties, the latter tending to address themselves to courts of law. Moreover, the mediator should ideally stand above the two parties, as a trusted, neutral, and impartial third party, profit-making being the direst accusation to be levelled against him/her. The legal anthropologist Gulliver (1977), however, has pointed out that the mediator may profit from his/her mediating role as well. According to him, the commitment of the mediator in processes of mediation can be placed on a scale ranging from strict neutrality and detachment to direct involvement, whereby the mediator actively guides the process to his or her own advantage. Successful mediators invariably strengthen their own position. Even the most impartial mediator gains by his/her mediation, be it in a material or in a nonmaterial sense, such as in status, influence, or power. In this way Gulliver has overcome the discrepancies between the sociological approach and the legal-anthropological approach to mediation on one point, namely the point of profit.

As for the less well researched topic of women and mediation, the scant literature seems to indicate that there are culturally defined and historically developed domains in which female mediators feature prominently (Schrijvers 1985). Because of lack of formal power, they may choose certain fields of mediation more or less actively and consciously. As Schrijvers (1985) states: 'For the powerless, men and women alike, mediation serves as a last resort to exert influence over others'. Mediation in this view is connected with the balance between formal and informal power.

The present volume offers a wider perspective on mediation than the ones discussed above. It is not restricted to the usual arenas of mediation: diplomacy, adjudication, and national versus local politics. This brings us to a brief overview of the contents of this volume.

**Overview of the volume**

For clarity's sake one may isolate different clusters of articles: one concentrating on theoretical questions concerning the concept of mediation, one dealing with brokerage in the economic and social fields, and one focusing on mediation in the cultural domain or between the human and the supra-human world, between the macrocosm and the microcosm. The last cluster may extend to mediation between different 'cultures' (elite-agrarian, Western-Indonesian).

Von Benda-Beckmann, in the theoretical part of her article, 'Joint brokerage of spouses on Islamic Ambon', tries to clear up some of the confusion
created by concepts like patronage, brokerage, and mediation. She stresses the existence of a triadic relationship as an indispensable condition for mediation. Without a rift, there is no need for a bridge. Only when two (or possibly more) parties need a third party to establish communication between them and when the nature of the communication is indirect is it justifiable, in her opinion, to use the term mediation. The mediator may belong to one or both parties – may belong to 'both worlds', as it was phrased during the workshop – or at least have access to these worlds. But in any case the impossibility of direct communication between these 'worlds' in certain respects is a prerequisite. Von Benda-Beckmann follows Gulliver in his emphasis on profit, be it material or nonmaterial, for the mediator. Moreover, for the activity to qualify as mediation, the mediator has to mediate actively, if not always consciously.

Von Benda-Beckmann bases her definition of mediation on fieldwork data concerning an Ambonese couple who act jointly as male and female brokers. Through their networks they provide the people in their village with access to schooling and health care in the capital of Ambon, and, conversely, enable government authorities and traders to have access to villagers and the fruits of their labour. She shows that the division of labour between the two spouses is not strictly gender-based. The wife mediates mainly for women but also for men, and the resources she commands are not 'typically' female, either. Her position is not a derived one, but is independently achieved, the position of the husband being strongly reinforced by her talents.

Far more critical of the concept of mediation is Ines Smyth in 'Indonesian women as (economic) mediators'. She is the only author to raise the interesting question of whether mediation by women should be pronounced a phenomenon that needs to be strengthened. Placing mediation in the context of sociological role theory, she denies the value of the concept of 'female' mediation. In her opinion it is dangerous to include it in feminist theorization, since no strategies for removing gender-based inequalities can be built upon it. In her criticism of this role theory, she argues that it reduces women to a subordinate, female role and stresses the achievement of social harmony. One may ask whether Smyth is not leaning too heavily on an old-fashioned, Parsonian functionalism. However, her argument brings us to the core of the feminist discussion. What are the goals we are striving to attain when studying women in Indonesia? Is it sufficient to broaden our understanding of their position in life, or do we need to evolve strategies for effecting change and greater power for women at the same time? This may be a matter of emphasis and timing. Strategies have to be based on knowledge and insight. Acquisition of knowledge and insight must precede action. This present volume being about knowledge and understanding...
rather than action, Smyth's contribution can be considered as a counterpoint in the discussion.

While in the first part of her article denying the usefulness of the concept for evolving strategies, Smyth nevertheless goes on to use it, like others, as a tool for analysis. She discusses the activities of women in connection with bamboo weaving in West Java. Their assets are knowledge of bamboo weaving and its sale, as well as the circumstance that their other activities are mostly house-bound, which make them easily accessible to traders.

Mediation or brokerage in the economic sphere is dealt with in a number of contributions (Krisnawati/Utrecht, Grijns, Wolf, De Vries). In their article on female petty traders in Lombok, which presents a fine example of recent fieldwork, Tati Krisnawati and Artien Utrecht describe the different kinds of petty trading in Lombok. Being an extension of house-bound and garden-bound activities, petty trading is carried on by women, as it is nearly everywhere in the Indonesian archipelago. The authors paint a lucid picture of factual mediation under difficult circumstances. Not so easy for women, either, although for different reasons, is mediation by women in the context of labour relations on a tea plantation in West Java, as Mies Grijns shows in her article on labour brokerage by mandors in West Java. Pivotal as women are as mediators in petty trading, they are rare as mediators in labour relations, as a result of prevailing gender ideology and the poorer resources of women as compared with men.

That mediation in the economic sphere affects other areas of life as well is the theme of Diane Wolf's contribution on Javanese young village women working in factories. Mediating cash and labour between their families and the factories, these young women bring about change in their family situation, as they become more autonomous and independent vis-à-vis their parents, yet help them in times of economic hardship. As for the factories, the 'factory daughters' mediate subsidies to the industry through their cheap labour. In conformity with prevailing gender ideology, their low wages are regarded as extra income and are legitimated as such.

In 'West Dani women as mediators', Len de Vries deals with mediation in the economic field, describing the interrelationship between the economy, gender construction, and the meeting of two cultures. In agreement with prevailing gender ideology, Dani women were considered first and foremost as producers, providing men with food for pigs, the male status symbol. The difficult ecological circumstances in which the West Dani lived made women easy victims and scapegoats for male deprivation. Tensions were translated into sorcery accusations against women. But their economic role, together with these tensions, made West Dani women ready acceptors of agricultural innovation offered by the Protestant mission from 1954 on. As
their economic production increased, they came to be seen as 'good' women again, and fears of female sorcery disappeared. Through economic mediation women brought about economic growth and cultural change.

Sita van Bemmelen's 'Educated Toba Batak daughters as mediators in the process of elite formation' describes mediation in the social sphere. Van Bemmelen shows that, through marriage, women link two patrilineal groups, providing social status for their own family. The author argues that Western education disrupted neither the patrilineal kinship system nor the mediatory role of women in that system. The traditional gender-based role was not reduced by such education, but was integrated into modernization processes. This aspect of integration is also discussed in De Vries's contribution.

Mediation is used not only in the case of specific groups of people requiring access to particular commodities, labour, or status, but also in the cultural sphere. Some of the contributions (Niehof, Puntowati, Marcoes) deal with mediators between the human and the supernatural domains. From the participants' perspective, this may be viewed as a case of mediation in which the supernatural order functions as a party in a triadic relationship. Anke Niehof, in 'Mediating roles of the traditional birth attendant in Indonesia', shows that the traditional birth attendant mediates in two different spheres. According to popular belief, she mediates between the supernatural and the natural world; in practice she also mediates between the traditional and the modern health care systems. Niehof strongly emphasizes that mediation in modern health care will never be successful if the training of traditional birth attendants does not take into account the beliefs of the traditional system.

Silvy Werdhani Puntowati, in her discussion of the Javanese wedding ceremony, describes mediation by the dukun pengantin through rituals, between the macrocosm and the microcosm, between the world of the spiritual forces and the bridal couple and their families. The dukun pengantin, or wedding decoration specialist, is dependent on her resources of inner strength, which, however, are threatened by recent commercialization.

Lies Marcoes, in 'The female preacher as a mediator in religion', also deals with mediation in the religious sphere. Her examples of female Muslim preachers provide a vivid picture of these mediators and give a clear idea of their popularity, their influence, and their messages for women.

Messages may be passed on not only in the socio-religious but also in the politico-ideological sphere. Laura Cooley shows in 'Maintaining rukun for Javanese households and for the state' how such women's organizations as Dharma Wanita act as mediators in the transmission to the general public of specific values regarding women, based upon the Javanese concept of...
harmony (*rukun*). This concept has its roots in a village-based society, where it applies to a very different kind of mediation by women. Originating in a context dominated by the family and the village, it results in the 'familialization' of society and functions as a means of achieving order and stability in society.

We now enter the field of history, where mediation between Indonesian culture and Western culture is dealt with (the articles by De Vries and Van Bemmelen also have a historical dimension). In 'Women as mediators in VOC Batavia' Jean Gelman Taylor reviews mediation by Eurasian women during the VOC period. The exchange of women from an Asian/Eurasian background between different colonial families belonging to the Batavia elite in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was meant to effect a balance between the different centres of power, while at the same time preserving the existing political order and offering scope for socio-cultural exchange. Conflicts were resolved by marriage. As a reward for their mediation, women earned legal status as Europeans.

As a counterpoint, Elsbeth Locher-Scholten's 'The *nyai* in colonial Deli' gives an example of non-mediation. The author argues that the *nyai* (indigenous housekeeper) in colonial Deli (on Sumatra's East Coast) did not occupy the mediating position that is generally ascribed to her in the literature. In colonial labour relations in this 'neo-society', with its strong racism, all the resources and conditions necessary for mediation, first and foremost an interest in the indigenous people and their culture, were lacking.

**Some comments**

This volume illuminates many aspects and interpretations of the theme of mediation. Nevertheless, a general picture emerges from the great mass of details. Despite the general criticism of the concept of mediator/broker, the concept of mediation seems to retain a certain value. The theme makes possible a wider approach than research in the political arena alone. Because the mediating position of women in politics is traditionally weak, the contributors to this volume had to turn to other domains of life. Thus, mediation in the cultural field became one of the main topics.

Moreover, contrary to the general trend in mediation studies, the focus here is on change. Several contributors (Niehof, De Vries, Van Bemmelen, and Wolf, to name just a few) pay ample attention to change.

This volume does not support the familiar view of the mediator as a strong, independent person pulling the strings. There is no question of strong men being replaced by strong women. Only a few authors restrict their focus to the mediator as such. More often, the functioning of female
mediators has to be deduced from the context (including Von Benda-Beckmann's triadic relationship).

It is the context, often overlooked in more traditional studies on mediation, that provides the scope and the limitations for mediation. Focus on the context furthermore opens the way to research on power relations, power resources, and their significance for women. Many, if not all, of the contributions also deal with these power relations and their concomitant dependencies (among others Niehof, De Vries, Locher-Scholten). However, the hypothesis that women may choose, more or less consciously, certain fields of mediation as a result of their lack of formal power (Schrijvers 1985) has not been researched. None of the articles gives even an indication that this view might be supportable.

Emphasis on the context provides further insight into the activity of mediation by women. The concept brings us 'back to basics' in women's studies, namely the importance of gender construction for women. Gender construction to a large extent determines mediation by women. Dani gender ideology, for instance, which regards women as producers, made women more inclined to accept Western methods of agricultural production in circumstances of economic hardship; women thus became mediators between two economic systems and two cultures (De Vries). The traditional association of petty trade with women made women economic mediators in the northwestern part of Lombok (Krisnawati/Utrecht). Javanese belief systems have always pre-ordained women to be mediators between the natural and the supernatural world, thus facilitating their transition to modern health care mediation in villages (Niehof). The existing kinship system of the Toba Batak, with its concomitant view of women as links between two clans, cleared the way to mediation for educated Toba Batak daughters within the elite (Van Bemmelen). This list could be extended by examples from other contributions.

Thus mediation by women is structured largely by the gender expectations of the surrounding culture. These expectations form the basis on which women's actions are founded. This general remark should be qualified, however. Mediation may be directly prescribed by prevailing gender ideology: the traditional Javanese birth attendant (Niehof), and the Toba Batak daughters (Van Bemmelen), to name just a few, owed and owe their mediatory position to gender roles embedded in their cultures. Or mediation may be more indirectly influenced by specific notions about gender: for

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1 'Gender ideology' or 'gender construction' is a term designating the ideas that give social significance to the physical differences between the sexes, turning two biological categories (male and female) into two social categories (Ortner and Whitehead 1984).
example the idea that the income of women serves as only a supplemental rather than a primary contribution to the family income (Grijns, Wolf).

It is interesting to note that traditionally prescribed mediatory roles display great resilience in the face of change (Niehof, De Vries, Van Bemmelen). But an even more striking conclusion of a number of contributions is that these mediatory activities not only are resistant to change, but also may become integrated into processes of change. Up till now, traditional birth attendants (Niehof) have managed to retain their role as intercessors between the natural and the supernatural world. But they also fulfil the new role they are expected to play as advocates and practitioners of modern health care. The value attached to productive activities by West Dani women (De Vries) has remained unchanged and still serves the same end: to provide men with their traditional status symbols, even though the activities themselves now involve the production of new crops and Dani society has undergone tremendous change as a result of the arrival of the mission. The traditional role of women as guardians of harmony (Cooley) has been reinforced by its institutionalization in organizations like Dharma Wanita. Educated Toba Batak women (Van Bemmelen) have continued to form links between two familial groups. Their education has made them even better equipped to help forge the desired marriage alliances necessary for preserving elite status. This is a remarkable finding, as Western education is often regarded as a force that is disruptive to the existing social order.

The emphasis on gender construction in mediatory activities by women gives rise to the question of whether it is possible to point out gender-specific differences in mediation as such. Do men and women mediate differently? Most authors start from the premise of a gender-specific form of mediation, thus making comparisons between men and women irrelevant. Only a few contributions explicitly compare mediation by men and by women (Von Benda-Beckmann, Grijns, Niehof). In view of the predominance of gender ideology, it seems likely that, here again, the differences in mediation between men and women are reducible to the same gender ideology. Access to resources may (Grijns), but does not necessarily need to be (Von Benda-Beckmann), gender-specific. If this is so, the activity of mediation itself does not display any gender-specific differences. This would mean that female mediators do not act as 'oil in the machinery' any more than do male mediators. The harmonizing effect of mediation is inherent in the act of mediation itself, not in the gender that does the mediating.

Summarizing, the concept of mediation by women brings us back to the central importance of gender construction for the position of women in society. But it does more than tell us the things we already knew. For it not only identifies such constructions, but also offers us an opportunity of finding out how these gender constructions operate in practice. As a tool for the
analysis of the position of women in society, the concept of mediation pro-
vides another avenue to a deeper understanding of the operation of gender
ideas and beliefs.

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