

WOMEN AND NATIONALISM IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia was established 65 years ago, but the progress of Indonesian nationalism had not yet done when the independence was proclaimed. The nationalism movement in Indonesia has been growing since the early of the 20th century until today because nationalism is not static but it always changing. In the nationalism development process, women always play the basic and important role. However, in many academic discourses discussing the nationalism history, women are neglected most of the time. Women participation in the nationalism movement is rarely discussed. The gender relation and its association with the development of Indonesia development is also neglected most of the time. Therefore, women role in the nationalism movement and the women interest tend to be removed. However, women always play the central role in the nationalism movement, such as in the beginning of the 20th century, during the colonialism government and Japanese era, the Revolution era against the Dutch, and the regime of Soekarno and Soeharto era. In this article, I will focus my discussion on the women movement development since 1920s and their role in the Reformation movement and Indonesia nationalism. This article will discuss: (1) the first discussion starts with the summary of the women movement and nationalist movement background in the twentieth century; (2) the second discussion is about the the development of women movement in the reformation era; and (3) finally, I will explore some issues that affect the discussion of the women and nationalism in the Reformation Era – the Indonesian nationalism developed by the Government utilizing the women's body and sexuality for achieving their goal is the central issue in the discussion about the form of Indonesia nationality.

Key Words: *Nationalism, women movement, reformation, sexuality*

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Introduction

The development of women movement in the 20th century

Before 1928 and *Sumpah Pemuda* (the youth vow) there were some basic alteration in the social and politic institution of Indonesia. The end of colonial government was the foundation of various new movements, particularly the nationalist movement. The development of various nationalist organizations during that moment was followed immediately by the development of Indonesian women movements. The first women organization, Puteri Mardika, was officially established on 1912. However, the tendency of women movements to be political was emerged on 1920s when many large political organizations such as Sarekat Islam, PNI, and others had their women division (Jayawardena, 1986; Wieringa, 1988).

In 1920s and 1930s many new women organizations were emerging. There were organizations which based on religion (such as the Chatolic and Islamic organization), the organization that based on some particular region of Indonesia (such as in Maluku and West Sumatra), and many other women organizations such as Istri Sedar, established on 1930 as the organization that focused to improve the women's role in the political struggle (Noerdin, 2005). The first Indonesian Women Congress was held in the end of 1928, during the blooming of these women organizations. However, on the early 1930s, during the fast growing of nationalist struggle, the women struggle was set aside and the national struggle was the main consideration.

As most of the nations that succeed in fighting the colonialism in the middle of 20th century, the development of Indonesia as a nation had started before the nation consolidation. The Indonesia's tertorial borders had been determined since the colonial government ruled the region of Sumatra to West Nusa Tenggara in the early of the 20th century. The important task of the nationalist movement during that time was to create a congruent nation with its people on many areas that had been forcefully unified by the Duchth East Indies Government.

For Soekarno, as the leader of the nationalist struggle, the main task of nationalist movement was to achieve our own independence and unifying all regions to be a new Republic. Therefore, the main purpose of nationalist struggle was to maintain the unity of the already existed borders. To achieve the indepence, every parties, organizations, and movements was required to be unified in a nationalist movement against the Dutch. To convince the women organizations, Soekarno promised to these women movements that when the national independence is achieved, the supression toward women would be abolished (Wieringa 2002).

In the Second World War, the Japanese had campaigned to conquer the South East Asia in the end of 1941, and Japanese had defeated the last Dutch troops on March 1942. It seems that the Japanese had used the Indonesian leaders for their purpose, which was to mobilize the Indonesian people (particularly in Java and Sumatra) for their interest in the Pasific war. However, the Indonesian leaders also

took advantages from the Japanese. Soekarno and the other nationalist leaders took the Japanese offer with the independence of Indonesia as the main objective.

Under the government system of this new colonialist, the political and social organizations were disbanded and new organizations were established and owned by the Japanese. Once again the women movements were set aside during the Japanese colonialism era from 1942 until 1945. The Japanese government had only allowed one women organization, the *Fujinkai* (established on 1943), which activities was limited on education and social work only.

During the Revolution era on 1945 until the end of 1949, women once again appeared in the frontline. Basically, the form of Indonesian women movements on security and defence during the revolution era against the Dutch were as follows: (a) struggle organizations; (b) women exclusive armies or troops that work together with other troops; (c) troops under men instruction; and (d) individual movement (Wieringa 2002).

Other researcher, Saskia Wieringa, explain that even though Indonesia was still struggling against the Dutch, independence was more important among another matters (2002). Even though women involvement was needed during the revolution movement, Soekarno's promise - that if the national independent is achieved, that the women suppression will be removed - was neglected. When the Republic of Indonesia was proclaimed as a nation on August 1950, the national movement goal had been achieved. However, for the interest of national unity, this result is not achieved under a collective fight for the people of the new Republic's interest, especially the women's interest.

During the Orde Lama era (1950-65) Indonesia people had been through a meaningful change. Essentially, the Orde Lama government had two methods, the Parliamentary Democracy (until 1959) and Lead Democracy (1959-65) when Soekarno decided to "return to Revolution" by eliminating *Dewan Nasional* (National Board). During Soekarno's governmental era, the women organizations were actively included in various sectors associated to women. Most interest of these women organizations was the education for women - most of them were focus to eliminate the illiteracy among women - and marriage improvement. All women organization during that era was vocalized their disagreement against the forced and child marriages. However these organizations had a disagreement toward the issue to eliminate polygamy.

The focus of these women organization during the Soekarno era was not merely to the interest of women and marriage education, but also to the general social problems, such as health. Generally, Indonesia's leader followed the general pattern to place women in the matters that considered "suitable" - such as the matters of education and health - and therefore they would not compete against men in ruling the political matters (Wieringa 2002). However, in the early 1960s the women organization had been involved in all political activities. At that moment, President Soekarno explain his vision for Indonesia development - the Manipol/USDEK (acronym of *Manifesto Politik* (Political Manifestation)/ *UUD' 45* (the constitution of 1945), *Sosialisme Indonesia* (Indonesia Socialism), *Demokrasi Terpimpin* (Lead Democracy), *Ekonomi Terpimpin* (Lead Economy),

and *Kepribadian Indonesia* (Indonesia's Personality). Every social and political organization in Indonesia – including the women organizations – was suggested to join the Manipol and to fight against the influence of imperialist culture, and help Soekarno and the nation in achieving the revolutioner goal. These revolutioner goal had been formulized vaguely by Soekarno, including the Confrontation and “*ganyang Malaysia* (destroy Malaysia)”, the campaign of “free” Irian Barat (the Trikora Operation), and other campaigns that had achieved the Indonesia's glory.

In addition for the women involvement in the revolutioner activities, the women participation and representation in the national or local political institutions was low during the Soekarno era. After the first general election in 1955, there were only tens legislative member candidates from the leaders of women organizations that included into the *House of Representative* (also known as DPR). In every government level, during this period, the women representatives were low. However, the women organizations of that period continue to follow the various political or social welfare goals. These women organizations were involved in various social and political matters and were active in other sector – developing schools, health clinic, boarding house, etc.

During the Revolution and Orde Lama era the women movements were active and dynamic in various social and political sectors. However, during the Orde Baru era (1966 – 1998), such conditions were collapse. The President Soeharto government was authoritarian and centralistic, resulting to the decline of women movements. This decline was the result of the disband of the communist women organization, the *Gerwani* (*Gerakan Wanita Indonesia/ Indonesian Women Movement*) during the period of mass assassination and repression toward the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (PKI/Indonesia Communist Party) on 1965-1966. As mentioned by the other researcher, the disbanding of *Gerwani* was “the opening the door for the Orde Baru government to continue the practice of ‘practice dismissal’ by institutioning the Indonesian women domestication” (Noerdin 2005: 47).

During the *Orde Baru* era, more women organizations were “disbanded”, or forcefully joined the domestication process, under the President Soeharto government. These organizations were altered to something like Dharma Wanita – the organization for the public servant's wives – or PKK (*Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga/Family Welfare Education*). These organizations, that were established and ruled by the government, were to avoid the danger experienced by the progressive organization during the Orde Lama era by re-underestimating women in accordance with their “natural destiny” as women. According to Suryakusuma, this women domestication during the Orde Baru era can be viewed as the “state ibuism” (1987: 13-15). According to this ibuisme, women must obey and loyal to the husband, become a good mother, child educator, house holder, and the useful member of the nation. Moreover, this ibuism could also be seen in the national program (in the organization such as Dharma Wanita and PKK) for domestic arrangement. Noerdin explain, “By keeping women busy

with their domestic chorus, or charity, and education activities, they will not have time and energy to get involve in the decision-making process of their community” (2005: 47-48).

Reformation and the Revival of Indonesian Women Movement

In the end of Soeharto’s regime era, the women roles in the democracy movement were more prominent. During the monetary crisis, the Rupiah inflation and the high increasing price of groceries had caused most Indonesian people to suffer. During that time the women organizations were actively involved in the demonstration and protest againts Soeharto’s government. For example, one of the active organizations at that time was *Suara Ibu Peduli*, this organization was demonstrated againts the incresing price of groceries. In February 1998, *Suara Ibu Peduli* had demonstration on the issue of the rare baby milk at Bundaran Hotel Indonesia in Jakarta.

At the last days of the Orde Baru regime, the women movement moved forward. The reason was the mass violence and crime toward women on May 1998. Few days after four students of Universitas Trisakti was deadly shot in the demonstration againts Soeharto’s government on 12 May, riot and violence occured toward human and properties. People burned, robbed, shot, and did various other violences in Jakarta, Bandung, Solo, and other cities. During the riot at 13-15 May 1998 mass were destroying many stores - particularly toward the property owned by the Indonesian born Chinese people. More than one hundred people were killed in that riot. One of the most evil incident during that Mayy riot was that hundreds Chinese born women were raped and experienced sexual harassment. There were some victims who was raped by several people, presecuted, and killed. Few days later, the mass movement of students, women, and independent institusions come together to force the Soeharto’s otoriter governement to get off their authority.

The new government respond toward this horrible case was very slow. After the mass raped by some group of people (some says that the perpetrators was unidentified, but possibly were the security appartus), many women organizations united demanding investigation for the raped case of May 1998. In some statement and demonstration, many organizations critized the government and the security apparatus who had failed in performing their duty to protect the citizen. They also critized that Habibie’s government had not provided any attention and serious effort, or even the real step to find and punish the perpetrators. Some women activist of these organizations, including many women figures of academic dan society had met President Habibie to demand the concrete action of the government responsibility, such as forming a team to investigate the mass raped case entirely (*Perempuan Menuntut Keadilan*, 1998).

President Habibie finally provided his respond after many demonstrations and demands from those women organizations. Two months later the government decided investigate by forming the *Tim Gabungan Pencari Fakta Peristiwa*

Tanggal 13-15 Mei 1998 (the Alliance Team to Investigate the Fact of 13-15 May 1998 Incident). The team report concluded that the violence was mainly caused by “the struggle of politic elite to defend the Orde Baru regime in the middle of economy aggravation and the occurrence of many riots” (ICTJ dan KontraS 2011: 18). The report also explained that there was a strong indication of a systematic pattern regarding the mass sexual harassment. However, the report did not blame any senior figures of military or elite politician for their involvement in this violence.

In addition to the team, President Habibie also responded the women activists' demand by forming the National Commission of Anti Violence Toward Women (also known as *Komnas Perempuan*). Since the beginning, *Komnas Perempuan* has become a national independent commission which task is to eliminate any kind of violence toward women and the enforcement of the Woman's Right in Indonesia. This commission has developed a documentation system and evaluating any fact of violence toward women and the violation of woman's right. This commission has also performed an independent investigation of the gender based crime Aceh, Timor Timor, Papua, and another conflict area. The *Komnas Perempuan's* activities and mandates shows the unique of this commission as the institution that involved in the mechanism to advance and protect the human rights in Indonesia, particularly for the improvement of violence countermeasures on women and to protect the women's rights.

In the Reformation era (1998), *Komnas Perempuan* is the connector of Indonesian women movements in general. For almost thirteen years, *Komnas Perempuan* is an organization that set the direction and goal for the Reformation policies that may affect the women's right fulfilment and the elimination of every discrimination and violence toward women. Like another woman's organizations – such as Kalyanamitra, Women's Research Institute, Mitra Perempuan and Solidaritas Perempuan– *Komnas Perempuan* works to improve the public awareness on the women's right and women's interest, or anything affecting women of the power relation between man and woman, which is the structural obstruction to achieve the social fairness. They also focus on the tendencies that may give negative effect for women and society, such as military violence and the fundamentalist and impunity of heavy Human Rights violence actors. They also fight against the discrimination toward women, including the law and policy that not conducive enough for the state's responsibility regarding the elimination of any violence and discriminations toward women.

The number of women organizations have grown fast in the recent years. Nowadays, compare to the era *Order Baru* regime, there are many women organizations that work for woman's right and interest. These organizations include national or local organization that focus on issues related to the women's interest such as mother and child health, women's crisis center, protection for women migrant workers or poverty feminization and small investment credit. The growth of women organizations in the Reformation era have some pattern, that include the liberalization of organization and NGO freedom, the development

of women movement since the Orde Baru era and the demand from various public sector to the government institution that has responsibility to the Human Rights.

Nationalism, Conflict, and Women's Body

Finally, I am going to discuss the use of women's body and sexuality in the discussion of nation and nationalism. Women's bodies are frequently become the object of power conflict or as the "target" of country development program in the Indonesian history and politic. This can be seen clearly in history of the nation relationship with its women citizen, particularly in the Orde Baru era.

One example for is the *Keluarga Berencana* (KB/Family Planning) program. Eventhough the KB program had been planned since 1957, the implementation and its wider socialization was started on 1970s (Udasmoro 2004). The nationalism ideology of the Orde Baru government had focused on the development that support the KB Program and established a national organization special for that program under the name of *Badan Koordinasi Keluarga Berencana* (BKKBN/Coordinating Institution for Family Planning). Through this institution – that form a structural network in every governmental level, national to village – women's reproduction function had become some kind of slogan of the nation development interest. "Two children is enough" is the slogan for a prosperous family that have better financial condition compared to the family that have many children.

During Order Baru era the KB program have become a successful program to control the Indonesian population number, however, we should question its effect to women. In the program, women are considered as the one who's responsible to arrange any reproduction matter, this program was aimed to women. Therefore, the KB Program was socialized in PKK activities, Dharma Wanita, Posyandu, and any ather organizations and program (Udasmoro 2004). According to this KB Program, women must participate in this program because KB is important for national development. Through this program the women's reproduction function is placed under the government control. As explained by Wening Udasmoro, "the nationalism goal was aimed toward women as the symbol and material body that has the obligation to resolve the national problem. It can be said that women was not only as the reproductive symbol but also as the producer of national interest in real" (2004: 153).

Women's body and sexuality was also the object of the power conflict in every conflict area in Indonesia since the independence era. The Soekarno's government was collapse because the massacre of 1965-1966 and the sexual attack toward woman who was considered as the member or supporter of *Partai Komunis Indonesia*, particularly the Gerwani member. During Order Baru, sexual harrashment was widely happened it military area, such as Aceh and Papua, including Timor Timor. During the conflicts, every women considered as the government "enemy" was attacked with rape, sexual slavery, and another

violence. During the riot of May 1998, mass raped toward the Indonesian born chinese women occured.

It is clear that the mass and wide sexual violence was such a “weapon” to attack women during conflict. Violence toward women during conflict in Indonesia shows how women’s body and sexuality had become a battle field of political view. In this situation, sexual violence toward women was everyday terror (Subono 2002). As a terror weapon and military strategy in destroying its enemy, sexual violence toward women was considered as an intimidation method to the local people and as a form of law. Understanding the position of women’s body in conflict may avoid raped and sexual violence as the terror weapon during conflict. The power battle, which had been the conflict in Indonesia, will continue to attack women’s body that was considered as the part of the “enemy”. The attack against women’s body, including raping and other violence, is the most horrible form of the power battle during conflicts in Indonesia.

Conclusion

A century ago, when the first women organization was established and the women movement had just begun, the goal of those women was the women development and Indonesia welfare. Today, in the year of 2011, the purpose of the women organization is also the development of women, women’s rights, and Indonesia’s welfare. Eventhough the law system and government is entirely different, there is only a slight improvement of women’s rights situation as a result of various policies after the Reformation era. The law and security institution fail to institutionalize the women’s rights in their institution.

The nation’s transition process from the repressive regime under Soeharto’s power into the democratic nation life that respect the human right and fundamental freedom must include the effort to respect the rights of every citizen. Any kind of discrimination which considered as the serious obstacle for women to enjoy their freedom and rights in accordance with the right equality with man must be eliminated. The implementation of law and human right is the main object of the reformation movement, which is to improve the justice and law implementation over a law system that is indiscriminate and fair, and also to protect the human rights.

However, there are many obstacles for women in Indonesia. The limitation of institution to help women violence victim is one of the obstacles in providing access to service and justice. In addition, there are rules and policies at the national or regional level that is still gender discriminative which express the government’s limitation in implementing the elimination of violence and discrimination toward women and the fulfillment of women’s rights. However, the worst is that until today no government in Indonesia have had the guts to be responsible of the systematical violence against women. In reality, many changes associated to the human rights protection is blocked by the political incapability to judge the actors

of a serious human rights violation toward women. This failure was against the Indonesian government obligation to protect all citizen.

Two weeks ago was the memorial of the 13 year of May 1998 tragedy, the 13 years of Indonesia Reformation and the National Revival day. Women organization of Reformation era should demand a complete involvement in the process of Indonesia Reformation and Democration. Women movement must demand the nation's political commitment and will, particularly to seriously implement its obligation and responsibility of the human rights protection, implementation, and fulfillment for all citizens.

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