

FES - Young Women Leaders Network

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# Young Women = New Politics?!

*Expectations and Experiences from Asia and Europe*



*Conference Proceedings*

**FRIEDRICH  
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Contact to FES-Young Women Leaders Network  
Dr. Gabriele Bruns  
prefes@asiaaccess.net.th  
GPO Box 2781, Bangkok 10501, Thailand  
Tel: (66 2) 246 7013  
Fax: (66 2) 246 7030  
www.fes-thailand.com

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With the development of social affairs and increased attention to women, I have no doubt that women will display the qualities of love, patience and wisdom, as well as engage broadly in the affairs of state politics, economics, environmental protection, education, and public health. Women will demand the same rights as men, and will not be satisfied with being a supplement to social development. Outstanding women set a good example for their sisters in all sectors.

Having the future in their own hands, women must develop the self-respect and self-confidence necessary to improve themselves. The future belongs to, and depends on, the youth, and it needs to be created by the youth. Young women will always occupy "half the sky", but it will require a sustained effort by the government and society to improve the status of women and bring about true equality between the sexes.

## Indonesia: feminine politics

Adeline May Tummengung

### Abstract & introduction

The nations of the world that most vigorously foul the planetary nest and those in possession of the most destructive arsenals ought to be governed only by young women with small kids. More than anyone else, such mothers must live in the future, and they also face each day the realities of raw human nature. This gives them a special insight. (Marry Doria Russel, Children of God)

The above quotation is from a science-fiction book. While it is only fiction, it neatly encapsulates what this paper would like to suggest.

The story tells about a planet, somewhere in another galaxy, where the female inhabitants are the ones working as leaders. There's no such thing as patriarchy or masculinity. The adult females, possessing sensitivity and nurturing instincts, but still strong enough to fight when threatened, are the ones who dominate in the public sector.

This paper doesn't suggest replacing all the male leaders with young women or young mothers, but instead that we dispense with the patriarchal paradigm. For a moment, try thinking as the young women in that fictitious planet do. Young women, having feminine sensitivity and

intuition by nature, yet properly educated and able to analyse situations rationally, can indeed fashion a new politics.

Before participating in politics, women should first be comfortable working outside the home and family. Our world has been patriarchal and dominated by the masculine way of thinking for too long. The first step is deconstructing this outdated paradigm. We shouldn't endeavor to destroy masculinity, but to balance it with feminine ways of thinking. This idea has its roots in Chinese philosophy, which stresses the interplay of yin and yang energies.

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Not only do women's issues need to be articulated, but also "feminine issues" such as poverty, human rights, environmental protection, and education for all.

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As Fritjof Capra put it: Yin was associated with the feminine and yang with the masculine. This ancient association is extremely difficult to assess today because of its reinterpretation and distortion in subsequent patriarchal eras... the Chinese ancients believed that all people, whether men or women, go through yin and yang phases. The personality of each man and each woman is not a static entity but a dynamic phenomenon resulting from the interplay between feminine and masculine elements. This view of human nature is in sharp contrast to that of our patriarchal culture, which has established a rigid order in which all men are supposed to be masculine and all women feminine, and has distorted the meaning of those terms by giving men the leading roles and most of society's privileges.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore we need to go beyond the gender-dichotomy. Women's participation in politics shouldn't be a mirror of men's. It's more important that feminine elements, points of view and sensitivity be incorporated into politics than it is for women to have absolute equal representation in number. Not only do women's issues need to be articulated, but also "feminine issues" such as poverty, human rights, environmental protection, and education for all.



## Background

*"Herstory"* The women's movement in Indonesia can be traced back as far as the Dutch colonial era. Indonesia acknowledges women, such as "national heroine" Cut Nyak Dien of Aceh (1873-1942), who fought in battles alongside her male counterparts. However, in some cultures, for example, Javanese, which are mostly agricultural and therefore patriarchal, women were considered to be property. Kartini (1879-1904), the national icon of female emancipation, struggled in her time for her right to be educated. She was destined to marry a noble man and therefore was not allowed to go to public school. She was, in effect, "imprisoned" at home until her wedding day. Her letter to a Dutch friend, which was published in 1911 under the title *Door duisternis tot licht* ("Through Darkness into Light"), demonstrated the need for Indonesian women to have equal opportunities for education.

The Indonesian Women's Congress (Kongres Perempuan Indonesia), 22 December<sup>2</sup>, 1928 brought up the issues of education for girls, arranged marriages, polygamy, and girl trading. The congress was held annually until 1941, but in 1929 the name was changed from Perikatan Perkumpulan Perempuan Indonesia (Indonesian Women's League Association) to Perikatan Perkumpulan Istri Indonesia (Indonesian Wives' League Association). Although no research has been done on why the name was changed, the implication is that a woman's role is domestic.

During the Japanese colonial era (1942-1945), the women's movement, as well as other political and social movements, were forbidden. The only legal women's organisation was Fujinkai, which focused its activities on support of the war, e.g. marching, first aid, fire fighting, children's evacuation, as well as effective farming and food conservation.

Indonesia's first president and founding father, Soekarno, encouraged the women's movement and political participation. Women's organisations that were started included: Persatuan Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Association), Korps Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Corps), Persatuan Wanita Kristen (Christian Women's Association), Muslimat Aisyiyah (Moslem Women's Association), Pemuda Puteri Indonesia (Indonesian Young Women) and many others. Among those, one significant organisation was Gerwani (Gerakan Wanita Indonesia, or the Indonesian Women's Movement). Active in education, social issues, and politics, the organisation had very a large membership which included women from both rural and urban areas.

The Soeharto regime not only oppressed the political and student organisations, it also domesticated women. To discourage them, the regime associated women's (political) movements with Gerwani, whose members were labelled as immoral and communist. Gerwani, being the major women's movement in Soekarno era, became illegal, and their members were considered "sexually loose women". Female activists who took a stand were labelled Gerwani (connotatively meant: communist and immoral). As Saskia Wieringa put it in "Sexual Metaphors in the Change from Sukarno's Old Order to Suharto's New Order in Indonesia" (working paper series no.233 of the Institute of Social Studies, Netherlands, 1996):

"The association of Gerwani with the castration of the symbol of the nation's virility, its top-level Generals, was the strongest way to effect Soeharto's "mental transition" that he believed was needed to effect the building of the New Order.<sup>3</sup>

To legitimate women's domestication, the New Order created Dharma Wanita (civil servant's wives' association), military wives' associations, and Pendidikan Kesejahteraan Keluarga (Family Welfare Movement, a community family welfare organization). Women were considered complementary to their husband's career. Even some of the female members of parliament (MP) were 'products' of this system (many of them had family members who were or had been members of parliament). During Habibie's presidency, he removed some of the women MPs, replaced them with male politicians, and claimed it was a move made to reduce "corruption, collusion and nepotism"<sup>4</sup>.

## Data

Today, there are 57 women-or 8.2% out of 595 members-in Indonesia's People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) who will serve from 1999-2004. In the House of Representatives (DPR) for the same period, women comprise 9% (45 persons) out of the total 500 MPs. This is fewer than for the period of 1997-1999 when it was 11% (58 persons) and even fewer than during 1992-1997, when it was 12.2% (61 persons).

Although fewer in number, the quality-indicated by level of education-of Indonesian women MPs today is higher. Out of a total of 45 female MPs, 9 (20%) have master's and doctorate degrees. All of the women currently in parliament have an education level of at least high school.

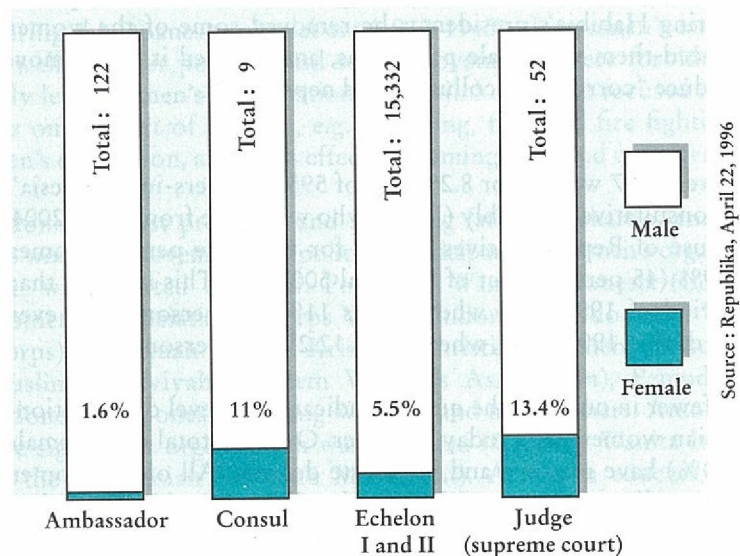


31% of women in parliament for the 1999 - 2004 term were re-elected. Others had previously been entrepreneurs (27%), professionals (38%) and housewives (4%). In addition to Vice President Megawati Soekarnoputri, the Indonesian cabinet today has two women ministers: Minister of Settlement and Regional Infrastructure (Ms. Erna Witoelar) and State Minister for Women's Empowerment (Ms. Khofifah Indar Parawansa). In percentage, they are 8.7% (President Abdurrahman Wahid's cabinet consists of 23 ministers/state ministers).

While there is no current data on women in key positions as ambassadors, consuls, judges and first echelon civil servants, the data from 1996 as shown in table 1 is still more or less valid today.

What are the obstacles that women who wish to enter politics face? A survey<sup>5</sup> by *Republika* and The Asia Foundation of 104 women MPs in the House of Representative, and 5 Provincial Legislative Councils in the provinces (DPRD I) showed that 30.8% of women MPs believed "women's inadequate capability" was the major obstacle, 10.6% considered "women lack the ability to do political work", 7.7% replied "women lack self-confidence". Other obstacles mentioned in the study

Table 1. Ratio between female and male in several key positions in Indonesia (1993)



were "politics is man's work" (25%), "lack of government support" (14.4%), and "no support from the husband" (10.6%). Only one person (1%) saw no obstacles for women in politics.

While the above study polled women who already had positions in the parliament-only 7.8% respondents were under 36-a study by students at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN)<sup>6</sup> showed that younger women didn't have a more "positive" perception. Among 3,000 respondents-female students at Islamic Institutes-53.7% were against the idea of a woman leading a (student) demonstration, 74.6% didn't believe a woman should be president. Not only were they against women entering politics, 86.6% of the respondents were still against their own gender becoming head of the family.

From our own observations of student movements and some non-governmental organisations in Jakarta during the so-called "Reformasi" movements (1998), women activists were still far outnumbered by men. In some demonstrations where female students participated, their responsibilities were within the 'women's area' i.e. first aid, administration or catering. No women were field leaders or field co-ordinators of a student demonstration. However, as a tactic, several times female students marched in the front line, facing the police and the military.<sup>7</sup>

One possible definition of politics is *the social institution that distributes power and makes decisions*<sup>8</sup>. It is important to understand what the priority issues are - i.e., problems and interests-according to female politicians as decision-makers. According to a study by *Republika* (1996), the women MPs of the 1992-1997 parliament identified 8 priority problems that Indonesian women face: the number of women in decision making positions is still very low (92.3% of the total 104 respondents); not enough regulations to protect female victims of violence / sexual harassment (87.5%); women's labour wages are less than men's (78.8%); sexual harassment at work (76.0%); the mass media's tendency to make women sexual objects 76.0%); no regulations to protect female house servants / informal workers (75.0%); exploitation of women through migrant worker export (75.0%); and an inadequate amount of women's official leave (70.2%).

Political parties are the organisations who should be aware of, and responsive to, important issues. Nevertheless, among 48 political parties in the 1999 electoral campaign, only 23 had a women's department, 12 of



which had no programs for women. Five parties did have women's programs, but did not have women's departments within the organisational structure. Only one party mentioned "equality, gender fairness, women's political participation, and women's access to the public sector" in its strategic program.

### **Current women's issues in Indonesia**

The Law (UU) No.1 / 1974 on marriage is very gender-biased. It states that a woman can only be married with permission of her father or a person acting on behalf of him. There is no such regulation for men. Article 31, line 3, states that the husband is the head of the family. Article 34 says that the duty of a wife is to manage household matters properly, while the duty of husband is to protect his wife and provide the household necessities according to his ability. This article affects regulations for working women who are considered to be single and are therefore unable to claim dependant allowances.

According to Indonesian law, polygamy is legal in the event of a wife's failure in satisfying / pleasing the husband (sexually) and/or in the case of her inability to reproduce. It is also legal with permission of the first wife.

This law, along with government rule (PP) No.10 / 1983 about marriage and divorce permission for civil servants, is in the process of being revised or possibly overturned. Indonesia's Minister of Women Empowerment Khofifah Indar Parawansa has called for the law to be repealed. However, First Lady Sinta Nuriyah Abdurrahman Wahid and former Minister of Women Empowerment Mien Sugandhi believe that the law protects women against polygamy.

In addition to struggling with institutionalized gender discrimination in the legal system, many Indonesian women also literally risk their lives when giving birth. Maternal mortality is still a danger today, as it was during Kartini's day. Statistics show that in 1999 the maternal mortality rate was 390/100,000 live births, which is down from 1998's 450/100,000 live births, but still higher than the designated target of 225/100,000 live births for 1998. The number is even higher in Nusa Tenggara and Papua, i.e. 727 and 950 per 100,000 live births, respectively (1999). In the "Indonesia National Plan of Action", a follow-up to the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, the office of the State Minister for the Role of Women set a target mortality rate at 225/100,000 for 1998 and 80/100,000 for 2018.

Some other conditions that need immediate consideration are discriminatory office rules on remuneration for female employees (women are considered single; hence, they receive no allowances and no health insurance for their dependants), violence against women, children in military operation areas; sexual harassment at work, forced family planning; domestic violence, and rape. This is what Indonesian women face everyday, although many Indonesian women-not to mention men-are unaware of these problems.

### **Analysis**

Indonesian women in politics today are far from making a difference. While the State Minister for Women's Empowerment Ms. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, and a few "upper-class-educated-feminist-women" are fighting to change discriminatory laws and regulations, some women MPs are still talking about bazaars and garage sale as "women's issues".

The slight changes in the profiles of women in politics are more like retouching an old painting. While the new concept of feminism is spreading, resulting in a new point of view among young activists and a small number of older women in politics, it is still far from reaching the population at a grass-roots level.

Feminism in Indonesia, a country with institutionalized patriarchy, is just an ideal--something students and scholars study at universities. While the feminist movement has successfully changed the word "wanita" to "perempuan", oppression and violence against women are still common.

Equality is a concept no one cares enough to apply. Even some women in parliament-those considered to be distinguished in their political careers-still operate within the paradigm of patriarchy. A female member of East Java's Provincial Parliament (DPRD I) said, "Naturally, once a woman has a family, she feels guilty about leaving home. It is different than men. Later, when her children have grown and are independent, she will start her career over from scratch." (Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan, 1999). Another member of parliament said, "I would not approve if a woman became the Indonesian president. There are some cultural limitations, and the duties of a president are too serious."

With the exception of a few genuine feminists (mostly in big cities like Jakarta), those who claim to be gender-sensitive and feminist are still



living in the masculine and patriarchal world and subscribing to its' ideology.

Among many discriminatory laws and regulations that need to be changed is Law No.1/1974 on marriage, which contradicts the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. In educating young women (and men!) who are about to enter politics (and other fields as well) to be more gender-sensitive, there are some "best practice" tools that can immediately be applied to make a difference. In order to do so, an "affirmative action"<sup>10</sup> program must be implemented.

To begin with, more women, possessing broader, gender-sensitive points of view should enter politics. The quota system is another tool that is required. Considering that Indonesian women's political awareness is still very low, a 30% quota for women in parliament as suggested by the UN might be adequate. Then again, the system should be reinforced by appropriate and detailed regulations to facilitate the most beneficial result. Once the quota system is employed, everyone should keep in mind that it is only a tool. The goal is not only to increase the number of women in politics, but also to change the discriminatory conditions.

Another tool to ensure women's participation in politics is the media. While notorious for its tendency to exploit women sexually, the media can be an effective tool for reinforcing the idea of women in politics. There are numerous campaigns that can be run through the media—either print, audio, audio-visual or multimedia. A program by Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan radio has run already. The idea is to socialise women's empowerment throughout Indonesia by co-operating with local radio stations.

While tracking numbers and statistics is important, the patriarchal system, and the perception of the world that it engenders, must be changed. This system not only torments women—it also divides society. This is what women in politics should fight against.

### Conclusion

Today, women in Indonesia still need "affirmative action" (more specifically: quotas) and more socialisation through the media, in order to increase women's participation in politics.

But at the end of the day, we should not be talking about gender dichotomies, or women's subordination and oppression. We must realize that all of us—women and men—need to work together to redefine masculinity. It is time for the patriarchal system, which encourages exploitation, aggression, and competition, to retreat and give way to a more "feminine" system which is more nurturing, responsive, and cooperative.

Chinese philosophy would hold that the yang, or masculine power, has reached its climax, and it is time for it to retreat in favour of the yin, or the feminine power: not to dominate and to oppress its counterpart, but to allow for a natural balance to occur.

As Paulo Freire has said, emancipation should first be initiated by the oppressed, not so that they can become the oppressors themselves, but to further emancipate and liberate the oppressors from their de-humanised condition<sup>11</sup>. Therefore, young women in politics must become the agents of change.



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## Notes

- 1 Capra, Fritjof. 1982. *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*. p.36 .
- 2 Later became national mother's day .
- 3 Wieringa, Saskia E. 1996. "Sexual Metaphors in the Change from Sukarno's Old Order to Suharto's New Order in Indonesia". p. 2.
- 4 Kompas, June 1999 .
- 5 The survey was done in 1996 and first published in *Republika* daily newspaper September 30, 1996. Then it was printed as a supplement of the Indonesian edition of Azza Karam, et.all. 1999. *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*.
- 6 A study / survey entitled "Gender awareness and political participation among women students of Islamic Institutes in Java and Sumatera", held on February - May 1999. The result was published in *Kompas Daily Newspaper*, June 3, 1999.
- 7 The description is mostly based on observation during May - November 1998, in Jakarta only. There has not been a special study on young women activists.
- 8 In this paper we refer to politics as 'the social institution that distributes power and makes decisions' (Macdonis, John J. 1996. *Society the Basics*. p. 277) or 'a field in which the state and the society interact' (Surbakti, Ramlan. 1992. *Understanding the Science of Politic / Memahami Ilmu Politik*. P.11) .
- 9 Literally, both mean woman, but "perempuan" has higher connotation. The word "perempuan" was adopted from an old Sanskrit language; "empu" that means a holy-person with supernatural power like medicine men and ancient priests.
- 10 First defined by the Kennedy Administration (1961) as efforts by employers to find the qualified minorities, "affirmative action" is largely known as law and regulation that require compensation and privileges to certain groups in certain cases to attain more proportional representation in various institutions and occupations.
- 11 Freire, Paulo. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed (Indonesian Edition)*. Chapter 1.

## Media politics: do women have a say?

### Germany

Marianne Wellershoff

THE MEDIA IS SUPPOSED to be the most progressive industry: It is their job to detect new trends or phenomena in the society and to watch, describe and analyze them. And, of course, to comment on them. This requires a certain openness towards everything new. Therefore, journalists should be the first to pick up on new ideas and to adopt them - in their work life as well as in their private life. The seventies were the beginning of the women's movement - in the US as well as in West-Germany. At that time, only 13 per cent of the journalists working for the German public TV-stations were women and 26 per cent of them were magazine writers - the percentage was twice as high only because many of the magazines were women's journals. Since then, the number of female journalists has risen continuously. Today, 30 per cent of the journalists working for public TV are women. The number is 40 per cent for journals. Currently almost 60 per cent of young professionals who start their career in the media are women. The numbers suggest that the women's movement has almost achieved equality for women in the media - or is, at least, well on its way.

Unfortunately, this is not true. A close look at the facts shows that most of the female journalists work at the lowest level of the hierarchy - as staff writers, researchers, and TV or radio journalists. The leading positions are held by men. For example, not a single public TV-station is led by a woman, nor is one of the five biggest weekly political journals. Not even half of the newspapers have made a woman department head. Even in the US, the percentage of female journalists stagnates at around 30 per cent. The media has spread the idea of women's liberation, of their fight against discrimination, has written thousands of articles about their will to have a career, and broadcasted hundreds of features on equal rights - but they haven't heard the message themselves.

Why is this? The reasons are old, inflexible structures, long work hours, the baby trap, fear of power and that fact that women don't create networks. In general, people in the media work more than 40 hours a week and, furthermore, they have to be very flexible with their time.