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Indonesian Women and Local Politics: Islam, Gender and Networks in Post-Suharto Indonesia

KURNIAWATI HASTUTI DEWI

Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2015, xxi+246p.

Indonesia began its political reform almost 15 years ago following the collapse of Suharto's authoritarian administration in 1998. As in many other democratizing countries, increasing gender equality in government became an important reform agenda in Indonesia and greater democratic freedom and increased demand for gender equality were believed to move women's issues to the center of social policymaking. The newly democratic Indonesian government introduced Law No. 31/2002 on Political Parties and Law No. 12/2003 on General Elections, as part of an "affirmative action" policy which set quotas for women's representation. These two laws were later revised into Law No. 2/2008 and Law No. 10/2008 regulating women's wider participation in politics and obliging political parties to nominate at least one woman in every three candidates to run in legislative elections.

To date, women's representation in the national legislature has increased from only 8.8% during the Suharto administration to 17.3% in 2014. This means there are now 97 women out of a total of 560 members in the national parliament. In addition, Law No. 32/2004 on Direct Elections has lifted structural barriers to women running for leadership positions in local elections. This Law has helped a number of women to become district Mayors (Regent), Vice Governors, and Governors. In Java, the most populated island in Indonesia, there were five women elected as Regent, one Vice-Governor, and one Governor as the result of the 2005 direct election (p. 18).

Yet, regardless of the increase in women's representation in government, Indonesian women continue to receive unfair treatment and are discriminated against in many social policies and practices. To name a few, the introduction of sharia-based regional regulations in the Province of Aceh and in 52 districts and municipalities since 2001 has expanded discrimination against women and limited women's freedom of expression (Bush 2008, 176). Misogynist policies continue to be put in place. In 2013, the National Ulama Council (MUI), for example, supported the initiative of some Regents to require female students to undertake a virginity test in order to get into high schools (Kompas 2013). Meanwhile, Indonesia's Military and the National Police continue to require female candidates to pass virginity tests before joining (Russin 2015). It was only recently that Indonesia's Constitutional court rejected an application made by women activists to increase the marriageable age for girls from 16 years old, as stated in Article 7(1) of the 1974 Marriage Law, to 18 (Sciortino 2015). The legislative review was initiated due to the increasing risks of unwanted pregnancies, sexual disease, maternal health hazards, and violence as girls at the age of 16 are not mentally and physically ready to enter marriages. Women and human rights activists argue that

this continuing discrimination against women is the result of many contributing factors, from Indonesia's misogynist socio-cultural tradition and poor gender-based policy making to a lack of women's representation in government.

The issue of whether or not an increase in women's representation in government will lead to the advancement of women's issues, in fact, has become a subject of scholarly debate among political scientists. The debate centers on the role of democracy in improving women's access to political positions, thereby enabling the women elected to pass more women-friendly policies (Fallon *et al.* 2012). Researching women's representation in the legislature and its impact on advancing women's issues into women's friendly policies in the United States, Osborn (2012, 1, 6) argues that while many people expect women elected to public office to address women's policy concerns and represent women's needs, it is, in fact, political parties that work in shaping and influencing women legislators in addressing their agenda and producing policies that affect them positively.

Indonesian Women and Local Politics: Islam, Gender and Networks in Post-Suharto Indonesia discusses at length Javanese Muslim women's ascendancy to power in post-Suharto Indonesia. The book is a product of the author's PhD research and is an attempt to contribute to the scholarly discussion on the place of women in the public sphere and women's rights in Muslim societies. In particular, it attempts to contribute to the wider discussion on women's political leadership. It tries to unpack the cultural, structural, and institutional barriers that hinder women in gaining public office. With the majority of Indonesia's population being Muslim, the author argues that Islamization and modernization have changed Indonesian society's gender perception towards women. The author chooses to focus her research on Java because a considerable number of Javanese Muslim women, she argues, have been successful in taking public offices by becoming Regents and Vice-Governor between the period of 2005 to 2010 (p. 18).

Given the broader context of democratization and issues surrounding Islamization, the book's attempt at answering important questions around the role of Islam and gender under the victory of female Javanese politicians is a timely and valuable contribution to Indonesian scholarship. The author uses the Javanese concept of power and the local conception of women's role in public life when explaining women's ascendancy to power in a Javanese context. Apart from Islam and gender, the book also scrutinizes how female politicians use their male networks and their familial ties with male authority to help them win elections (p. 16). This book uses four constructs to explore women's increase political participation at local level: Islam, gender, networks, and familial ties.

The book consists of seven chapters. The first three provide overviews of the research background, methodology, and the theoretical framework on Islamization, democratization, and cultural conceptions of gender and leadership. Chapter 2 discusses Indonesia's political reform, including the introduction of national legislation that favors women's participation in politics, and explores the socio-political context of the emergence of women's leadership at the local level. In

Chapter 3 the author considers the role of Islamization and democratization in changing societal attitudes towards women's public roles. It discusses how two mainstream Muslim organizations, the Nahdhatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, have continued to shape public discussion and perception of the role of women in public and in leadership. It highlights the different public responses towards female leadership at local and national levels by looking at the debate over, and rejection of, the nomination of Megawati Sukarnoputri as Indonesia's first female President in 1999 (pp. 62–63, 177).

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 discuss specifically three female leaders: Rustriningsih and Siti Qomariyah in Central Java, and Ratna Ani Lestari in East Java. Each chapter reviews the particular socio-religious and political landscapes that shape the political opportunities for these women to gain power. The discussion demonstrates how female candidates use Islam and their identity as women to gain popular support. There is also lengthy discussion of the socio-educational background of the women, their level of religiosity, networks with male politicians and religious leaders, their attachment to women's organizations, and their agenda on advancing women's issues. Each chapter also provides an overview on the particularity of the pressing issues that confront women in the respective regions.

Chapter 4 on Rustriningsih highlights the candidate's strong family background in politics and her close attachment with the nationalist and secular political party, the PDIP. The chapter demonstrates that Rustriningsih won and became the Vice-Governor due to strong PDIP support. It also details how "religious symbols" such as the headscarf and the tactic of approaching religious leaders from the Nahdhatul Ulama were used in order to win Muslim support.

Chapter 5 on Siti Qomariyah presents the interesting story of how a woman with no previous political background and experience became Regent. Her status as the daughter of a respected NU *Kyai* led the Muslimat NU, the women's wing of NU, to nominate Siti Qomariyah to run in the election for district Major in Pekalongan. The fact that she gained her higher education from an Islamic higher educational institution increased her religious profile, thus securing the nomination of PKB, an Islamic political party that is strongly affiliated with the Nahdhatul Ulama and the majority party in the local parliament. Her family's strong affiliation with NU helped her to win the full support of NU *Kyais*.

Chapter 6 on Ratna Ani Lestari shows that her rise to power was due to the support she received from her husband, who is a member of PDIP and was a former Regent in the Province of Bali. Despite having no religious background, Lestari made efforts to use Islamic symbols such as wearing a headscarf and approaching religious leaders to gain support.

Interestingly, the author reveals that none of these female leaders had any previous attachment to women's organizations and had no knowledge about issues that women face at the local level. As a result, none of these female leaders had a clear social policy agenda to advance women's interests. In the case of Siti Qomariyah, the author argues that her nomination was mainly because

the Nahdhlhatul Ulama wanted to take control of both the legislature and the executive branch of the local government (p. 114).

Generally speaking, the book provides an in-depth analysis of the changing political landscape, Islam's view on women, and changing perceptions on gender. These aspects, the author argues, provide women the opportunity to take up public roles. The changing public mood towards male leadership is also a factor that leads voters to look for alternative candidates. The appeal that women would be less corrupt and could make better local leaders also helped women candidates to win votes.

The book demonstrates that getting women into local leadership positions may be claimed as an achievement in Indonesia's process of democratization. But the book clearly demonstrates that getting women candidates into public offices does not necessarily mean that women's interests receive better policy attention. It possibly raises the question as to whether putting women who have no previous engagement with women's issues into power may have contributed to the government's ongoing failure in addressing women's issues and in introducing women-friendly policies.

The book clearly demonstrates that the political success of these women was due to their political affiliation and support from political parties, however, the author does not make any attempt to discuss the political parties' platform regarding women's issues. It would be helpful if the book also unpacked the platform of PDIP and PKB, the two parties mentioned that strongly supported two of the subjects, in regards to women's issues. Further discussion about political parties' platforms on women's issues might help deter readers from feeling that women and religion are merely being hijacked by male politicians, in a country where the majority of the population are Muslims and where women constitute 55% of Indonesian voters. This book forces us to think that Indonesia's democracy should not only able to put women in power but should also enable women leaders to exercise authority to advance more women-friendly policies so that Indonesia will progress towards gender equality in education, health care, work, the family, and the public sphere.

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Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age

FILOMENO V. AGUILAR JR.

Singapore: NUS Press in association with Kyoto: Kyoto University Press, 2014, xii + 293p.

The central argument made by Filomeno Aguilar in *Migration Revolution* is that overseas migration, as it is occurring since the 1960s, has brought about important social, cultural, and institutional changes in Philippine society. The migration of Filipinos overseas has become a crucial economic factor because of the enormous remittances that they have generated every year. Migration has accordingly reconfigured class structure, transnationalized social relations, and engendered legal and discursive shifts pertaining to migrants' political participation and inclusion in the Philippine state. It has also rekindled a sense of nationhood and national identity among migrant Filipinos, contributing to a profound reinterpretation of the national narrative. *Migration Revolution* offers us a thorough examination of these changes and their consequences.

Contemporary cross-border migration has enabled the Philippine nation to envision itself within a plurality of nations, pushing the Philippine state to reorient its foreign policy and redefine the boundaries of both citizenship and the nation across borders. It has also important emotive implications. The public outcry caused by the execution of Flor Contemplacion in 1995, for example, marked not only a traumatic moment pointing at the vulnerability of overseas labor migrants, but also produced unprecedented surges in Filipino transnationalism.

The book is a collection of essays written by Aguilar over the past decade and a half, mostly during his sojourns outside the Philippines. He focused on Filipino migrants because "the situations described here¹⁾ are somehow internal to, albeit not identical with, my own life experiences

1) Here, Aguilar writes about migrant Filipinos in the United States and Filipino contract workers in the Asia-Pacific region.