

More than Just Passion: Reflective Note of a Young Female Scholar in Promoting Gender Studies and Improving the Participation of Women in Indonesia's Academia

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I would like to present, today, a reflection of my academic understanding and academic involvement in gender and women's studies. I want to share my individual experience and how I tried to develop gender studies in my institution, as well as how I tried to improve individual and social capital in order to strengthen gender studies.

Women's problems as "other": The limitations of an institutional approach

I initially encountered gender or women's perspective because of my fieldwork [as researcher] with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI). I was on the Research team of Regional Autonomy which tried to understand the new decentralization policies in Indonesia. However, when I did the fieldwork, I encountered many questions that I couldn't answer by using the institutional approach. For example, when I interviewed women in the field, they said that there were many problems related to violence against women and malnutrition of babies and children. I could not investigate these issues with the research questions of my team. So in the end, I was asking myself, is there any approach that I can use to answer these very real problems in the field? That was the beginning of my understanding of a new approach.

From that time I understood the inadequacy of the approach of my team, and I started seeking an individual answer, an approach that could answer the very real questions I encountered in the field. I began meeting with peers who I found outside the institution. I had a network with Islamic women's organizations; I developed knowledge and furthered the network with them. I also tried to map out the challenges and opportunities from the institution [my office LIPI]. One of the things that I really came to understand is that the gender perspective or approach was not included or had not been considered as a primary approach in the research plan of my institute. That was became one of the basic understandings that I got from my fieldwork.

Building new knowledge

From there, I tried to improve my individual capital, because there were not enough peers in the institution for me to talk with. My strategy was to improve my knowledge and my individual capital in gender and women's perspectives. Fortunately, the knowledge I gained from my masters' degree broadened my understanding of the importance of a gender and women's studies approach. From 2004 to 2007, I studied gender studies with a broad approach and a wider perspective of regional and Southeast Asian studies at the Australian National University. At that university I learned about theory, methodology, and praxis. Theoretically, I learned about the various approaches within gender studies. Methodologically, because my supervisor had an anthropology background, I tried to understand how to bring women's everyday experiences into the publication. This helped me a lot.

My academic peers were also very influential. I met various students working on masters' and PhD degrees. They integrated gender and women's studies with various disciplines, for example anthropology and politics. Basically my background is in politics, but by also doing [familiar with methodology of] anthropology, I then had a sense of fieldwork and how to bring women's experiences into a more academic narrative. The praxis element [of various experiences of Indonesian women's problems] came across with the Western experience [both theoretical and experience of women in the West] which was very important for my reflective academic work. I

was able to be an intern student at the national Parliament House of Australia. There, I dealt with the Labour Party, which strongly supports women's representation in national politics in the Parliament of Australia. This provided me with a good example of the connection between the theoretical and practice.

I then tried to develop this new base of knowledge and approach in my masters' thesis. At the time, I had a background in Islamic studies. Most of the studies on women's leadership up to that point were mainly on Nahdlatul Ulama, or the traditional Islamic organization in Indonesia. There were not yet many studies on Muhammadiyah, or the Islamic modernism movement in Indonesia. So, I decided to develop more gender study on women's leadership in Muhammadiyah. I was combining gender and history, Islamic studies, and anthropology. What I mean by anthropology is to follow with the narratives of the women, and bring them into the publication, something that my masters' supervisor asked me to do. This was a new approach for me. I tried to capture the impression of everyday politics rather than institutional politics. What I mean by institutional politics is everything dealing with political parties and parliament. But the writing of my masters' thesis was more about everyday politics, how the women were dealing with the patriarchal struggle, how they were dealing with their everyday lives, and how they were seeking better leadership positions in Muhammadiyah.

My PhD degree in ASAFAS at Kyoto University was also very important for me because it provided a very strong platform to write with a gender perspective. It taught me how use historical materials and data critically; I had to be able to see the data clearly, to not only see the positive side, but also the negative side of the data. For example, in one of the stages of my PhD degree I wrote about the changing identity of Javanese women from a Hindu-based identity to a Muslim-based identity. That was only one part of my PhD thesis, which was trying to understand the rise of Indonesian female political leaders in local politics. I was digging up of all kinds of approaches that I could use to write my PhD degree. Overall, what I learned from gender or feminist studies is that women's personal experiences become the source of knowledge.

The importance of networking

Another very important thing is networking with academia beyond Indonesia. Around 1999-2000, the issue of women's human rights was getting a lot more attention in Southeast Asia. I was really fortunate to be able to join a women's human rights training by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI) based in Sweden, which conducts trainings in Bandung and in Thailand. I was selected to join the basic and advanced trainings in 2008 and 2010. This training provided very basic infrastructure of knowledge as well as actual connections with other academics in Southeast Asia.

I learned that it is difficult to develop individual action on gender or women's studies into creative and collective action if we do not have such solidarity.

Back in Indonesia after I finished the PhD degree, I looked for academic peers internationally who had the same approach. I developed a gradual connection with the Asian Association of Women's Studies (AAWS) and Ehwa Women's University based in Korea. And in 2012, I presented a part of my PhD thesis at the university as part of a training workshop. I have maintained this academic connection until today. I can say that without connections with academics in Southeast Asia, especially with the Asian Association of Women's Studies and Ehwa University, the approach to develop individual into the collective action could not be easily done.

The Asian Association of Women Studies also provides trainings for

young scholars interested in women and gender studies. They held a series of trainings from 2012 to 2016, and the last training was made into a publication in 2017. I learned that it is difficult to develop individual action on gender or women's studies into creative and collective action if we do not have such solidarity. AAWS, in my experience, provides an important platform for young scholars across Southeast Asia. I had collaborative writing projects with friends, professors, from Malaysia and Thailand. This kind of the intergenerational connection is very helpful, in our experience. The *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* produced by Ehwa Women's University also provides an important platform for young scholars to promote a gender and women's study approach. This journal is very specific because it only accepts publications with a gender or women's perspective. It provides a forum, or academic platform, for scholars from Asia to discuss and have a dialogue, which is also very helpful.

In Indonesia, this approach would not be able to be delivered constantly without connection with women's NGOs and government stakeholders. The publication *Jurnal Perempuan* (in English *Women's Journal*) is a leading journal by feminist activists in Indonesia. I tried to publish one of my writings in this journal. This step is really important in order to engage with women activists and feminist academics in Indonesia. Secondly, I also tried to engage with Komnas Perempuan, or the National Commission of Human Rights of Women in Indonesia. Lastly, it's important to have a connection with government bodies. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Children's Protection at the moment very much welcomes the issue of promoting more female political leaders in Indonesia.

Challenging the institutional mindset

After this accumulation of knowledge, I found in 2012 that my institution, LIPI, had instituted a regulation [*Peraturan Kepala Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia Nomor 03/E/2012 tentang Penegakan Disiplin Dalam Rangka Pelaksanaan Pemberian Tunjangan Kinerja Pegawai di Lingkungan Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, tanggal 22 November 2012*] stipulating that the performance benefits [wages] of female researchers who took maternity leave for three months would be cut by 2 percent each day. Imagine, multiplying 2 percent by 90 days. Protests mounted against this regulation. My research center, the Research Center for Politics, asked me and some friends to develop a kind of protest letter. Then, The Research Center for Politics sent the protest letter to the head of LIPI and fortunately it was accepted and now the regulation is revised. If LIPI still used this regulation, we could say that LIPI would be violating women's human rights, because maternity leave is the right of women and their salaries should not be cut for taking leave after giving birth. So, in this case the accumulation of our knowledge about gender and women's human rights was really practically useful.

I was very fortunate to be able to publish my PhD degree. Rather than just another book, I positioned the work as emphasizing the importance of everyday politics beyond the classical approach of politics. This applies to my institution as well, because the tendency is to focus research on politics with a big "P," politics of political parties and parliament. This is not bad, but with this book I would like to encourage more people to do research on everyday politics.

Developing a separate research team on gender

Back in my institution, I tried to develop research teams after I finished my PhD degree in 2012. According to my literature study, there are two approaches to develop gender studies. The first is mainstreaming, and the second is to develop a research group. A mainstreaming approach includes a gender perspective in each research. The second option is to develop your own research cluster or groups on gender studies apart from other research. At that time, although

the government of Indonesia was already promoting a gender mainstreaming approach, not all research had this kind of awareness. So I chose the second approach of trying to develop a separate research group.

In terms of the strategy and challenges, first of all I have to admit that not all of our colleagues in my institution agreed with the plan to develop research groups on gender and politics. I faced some apathetic or sinister responses from female academics or female colleagues who believe that there is no gender problem because we all are equal, and we should not propose a gender perspective into the research. For me this was quite sad. I tried to lobby these persons personally and informally, and have discussion with them. I also tried to gather support from female colleagues across generations, because usually it is the senior generation who is reluctant to open up to this new approach.

At the last stage, when I proposed and discussed my approach to bring a gender study group into reality, there was open and clear opposition during the meeting. However, after I explained the importance of bringing this new approach into our research plans, they all agreed. I have to acknowledge the importance of the help from the local politics cluster, which supported my plan. Lastly I had to ensure that the plan was written in to RENSTRA, or the five-year research plan from 2015 to 2019. Now it is included in RENSTRA.

This is the research team that I have developed up to this point. During 2015 to 2019, we will delve into Indonesian local politics by using a gender or women's approach. In the first year, 2015, we tried to understand the importance of religion and culture to the rise of Indonesian women in local politics. In the second year, we tried to understand the importance of familial ties and democratization behind the rise of these political female leaders. In 2017, we tried to understand the networks of political party elites in candidacies, because the candidacy is really important and the networks of political parties of the elite have to be looked at. In 2018, we will try to bring in the issue of women's leadership and poverty. The feminization of poverty is multi-faceted and we are interested in how female political leaders are dealing with poverty as well as sustainable development. Finally, in 2019, we will try to gain a real portrait of female political leaders in Post-Suharto Indonesia by conducting empirical research. In 2016, we published *Women's leadership, religion and culture in Bali*, and in 2017 we published *Female political leaders and oligarchy networks*.

Challenges

Although we successfully developed this research group on gender and politics, we are facing new levels of challenges. The first is intergenerational issues, related to the second problem, a different level of understanding of gender. The gender studies or gender approach that we use in the team is really specific compared to other general teams. The term and the understanding of what gender is, is also specific, and the way we are connecting the research has to be very careful and use a specific methodology. I have encountered this difficulty of different levels of understanding between those who have just come into the gender understanding very recently, or newcomers, and those who already have more understanding. Bridging this gap is not an easy task.

The third problem is institutional constraints. In our research center, we are divided into three clusters: the international relations cluster, the national politics cluster, and the local politics cluster. Actually gender can be applied to all three research clusters, but the gender and politics research teams are under the local politics cluster, which I belong to. Other persons who belong to the international or national cluster, however, are reluctant to join the gender and politics team in the local cluster, because they believe that all the resources or positive advantages will

go to the local cluster. This kind issue is really difficult to deal with and we still have to cope with this, to assure people that it is not a big problem.

Fourth, it is difficult to find new, younger academics who have a similar passion to go hand-in-hand to develop the group and to endure. Many are looking for a short and quick answer to everything, while gender study is really tiring and you have to endure for a long time. At the moment I could not find people who have this kind of endurance.

Finally, when you are able to develop a team, it means you can become an obvious object of attack. What I mean by this is that, while the mainstreaming strategy actually intend to integrate the gender approach in every research site, in reality it is difficult. But becoming separate research teams means all the people who do not agree with a gender approach can attack you—you become a very obvious object to attack. Everything related to gender, everything related to women, will go into your team. So this in reality it is really tiring.

Initiatives and way forward

Our research team is developing a relationship with the government's Ministry of Women's Empowerment. This ministry, with our help [especially I, as the consultant], has developed a module to increase the capacity of female politicians in Indonesia. They have been using this module for training in fifteen provinces in Indonesia since 2016. It is good that our research can develop and have an institutional impact.

As a part of our effort to develop a gender or women's perspective in research, we collaborate with the University New South Wales (UNSW) Indonesia program to develop research writing on the ethics of social care in Indonesian politics from the point of view of female politicians. We also collaborated with Asean Study Center UGM in Yogyakarta to develop research with a gender perspective to better understand the impacts of the ASEAN Economic Community, specifically the coping strategies of women involved in traditional weaving.

Through these efforts to connect and collaborate, we will develop a women and gender conference in 2018. The workshop on women's and leadership and democratization in 21st-century Asia [this is one event namely International Conference and Workshop on Gender, in short ICWGLIPI 2018], will be the first one of its kind at the level of Asia. We will try to come up with a publication that is reflected from the scholars from Southeast Asia.

After the conference, we plan to develop a research cluster in LIPI on gender or women's study, because at the moment the gender and politics research team is only available within the Center for Politics. By doing these activities, we are trying to gather all the resources and academics who have the same interest on gender or women's studies. After that, we have to be able to bridge all the differences to come together in one body or one section, a gender equality section in LIPI. It is still not certain if this can happen in reality or not.

I am also thinking to develop some comparative empirical research on female political leaders in Asia, utilizing the AAWS connections with young academics in Southeast Asia. Research about 21st century women's leadership is needed particularly now that we are in the era of women, especially in Asia, and given the changes of global power structures, and the impacts of rising Islamization and globalization.

We still face many challenges. As I said, I have an uncertainty about the gender and politics research team because of the difficulty in finding the next cadre who has the same passion, endurance, and can go hand-in-hand. Now I am thinking back to the mainstreaming strategy or

soft approach. Is the mainstreaming approach better, or is doing a team strategy better? I am still confused at the moment. Perhaps after 2019, we will go back to the mainstreaming strategy, but I still do not know.
