

# Representation For Javanese Women in The Affirmation Policy in Indonesia

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RESEARCH BRIEF

## Political Representation for Javanese Women in the Affirmation Policy in Indonesia

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Since the Reform Era in Indonesia, the women in development (WID) approach has shifted into gender and development (GAD). In politics, the perspective is characterized by an electoral system that set the minimal quota, 30%, for women's representation in the parliament. So far, Indonesia has held three elections with that minimal quota. However, with the 2014 election, the representation of women in the national parliament is under 30%.

Java is the most advanced island in Indonesia, meaning that the development of education in this island is more than the other Indonesian areas. Still, Java also failed to attain the desired 30% target. Among six provinces in Java, none of them has attained the 30% women representation—Jakarta Province (26.6%), Banten Province (18.8%), West Java Province (22%), Central Java Province (24%), Yogyakarta Province (25%), and East Java Province (25%).

According to Richard Matland (2002), the most important characteristic of the society associated with the representation of women, is development. Development may cause weakening of traditional values, increasing urbanization and education, raising women labor force participation, and changing perspective about the proper role for women. Thus, one obvious result of the development is the

decrease of women's barriers to be active in politics. This is because culture has a very close relation to development, and development can encourage women to have equal status with men. Therefore, although Matland recognized that it is hard to see the immediate effect of culture on women's representation, he still emphasized that culture is correlated with women's representation, in which the development is going to be followed by the change of culture.

Hence, this article aims to describe the substantive representation of Javanese women in the parliament and study it in a local cultural perspective to understand why, even though the Javanese community has advanced in educational development, women's political representation cannot achieve maximum results. The substantive representation is interpreted as a substantial impact because women's representation may influence policies which are beneficial for women. In addition, the term descriptive representation will be applied, meaning the attendance of women in politics is a symbol of women's existence because of quota (Phillips, 1995, p. 5).

This study is a literary study conducted through analyzing papers, books, journals, magazines, and any related source. Data are collected by reviewing documents, books, journals, and other related sources. Finally, open coding data analysis is conducted by

processing, checking, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### Women's Role and Position in Javanese Culture

It is known that Javanese culture is regionally varied. All the variants centered on Nagariung region in Jogjakarta and Solo as the central of Mataram Kingdom in the past (see Figure 1). It meant that the Mataram Kingdom bequeathed strict culture structure and feudalism values in Javanese culture. Javanese society has social level based on the master and the servant; and the status in social system. The lower system is ordinary people (*kawula*) and the higher one is rulers (*gusti*) (Moertono, 1985, p. 19).

Before discussing the dynamics of the political representation of Javanese women in local perspective, this paper is going to present the role and position of women in Javanese culture. The perspective on Javanese women is important to illustrate the meaning of political representation for Javanese women. Hence, this crucial explanation is presented in the next section.

Several studies on the role and position of women in Javanese culture show that women are responsible to manage household's income and expenditure.

This is emphasized by Koentjaraningrat (1967) who agreed that women and men as husband and wife in the household are complementary living beings, in which the women give a substantial contribution to the family economy through active participation in productive activities. In line with Koentjaraningrat, Geertz (1961, p. 48) has stated that the position of women in Javanese society in general is powerful. A wife will make decisions, mostly, if they are domestic problems. Also, the wife controls all the family finances even though they still give a formal tribute to the husband. Therefore, although the wife listens to her husband's consideration in major problems, commonly, the wife is dominant. Most jobs, such as working in the fields, trading, doing business, and teaching are carried out by Javanese women. Moreover, Geertz also mentioned that Javanese family centers on the figure of the mother; again, emphasizing the dominance and the position of women in the family.

However, beside it, there are experts who see the subordinate position of Javanese women because there is cultural and institutional obstacles to play a role in various sectors. The patriarchal system is an obstacle for Javanese women to obtain the equal role with men. In Javanese society with strict social system and feudalism values, women's destiny is determined mainly by how women obey their

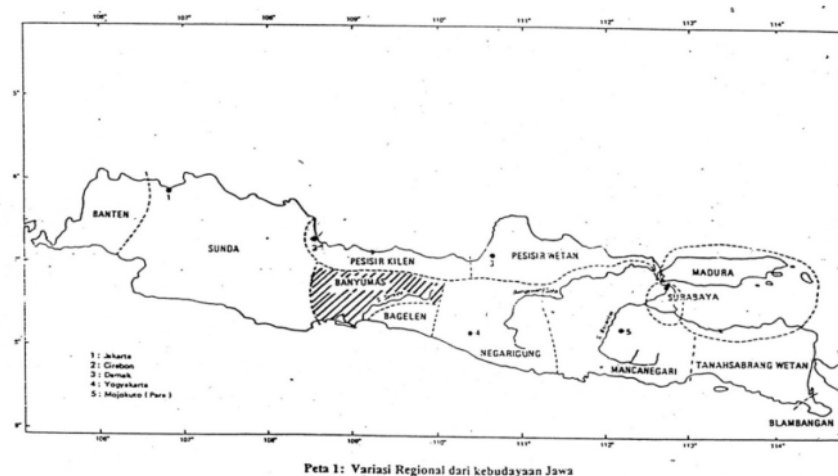


Fig. 1 The regional variations of Javanese culture (Koentjaraningrat, 1984).

<sup>1</sup> husband. That is why there are many obstacles which are caused by cultural and institutional system for women to get important roles in any sector, according to Scholten and Niehof (1992) and Berninghausen and Kerstan (1992). But according to Prof. Heddy Shri Ahimsa Putra, the views were influenced by Mataram Kingdom's values, which were reflected by historiography books like *Serat Centhini*, *Serat Cendrarini* and *Serat Wulangputri*. It means that the views are incompatible to see the role of women in Javanese villages.

Furthermore, the mother figure in Javanese culture is a very important position as the mother is always trusted. Hence, a mother is always respected in the family. Besides, Javanese women have a decisive role in the family, even the decision concerning the public. Javanese women who are *sumeleh* or patient, calm, and flexible can build power through her devotion to her family. Structurally, there is men's hegemony against women, but there is a strategy to have a dominant position vis-a-vis men from the inside, hence promoting women's hegemony within domestic arena. The strategy is "*memangku*" which is about understanding, forgiving, accepting, protecting, and comforting their husband through service, devotion, and respect. Women do not destroy formal structure because they keep the men as the most powerful and respected. This proves the greatness of Javanese women who are attached by maternal instincts to protect, maintain, and provide others gently. That is why, in this condition, the men become dependent on women, but they do not feel the mastery over them (Handayani & Novianto, 2008).

Moreover, the phenomenal study from Benedict Anderson (1991) showed that power in Javanese tradition is signed by the ability to concentrate. It includes the ability to absorb power from outside and centralize opposite things. Harmony to maintain and restore order is a social sign of power and king's task. This is because, in the context of authority in Java, the position of a king as the reflection of God makes a king maintain and restore order (Moertono, 1985, p. 52). In this case, feminine dimensions in social sign of centralization power are about fertility, prosperity, stability, and glory. Moreover, harmony

and orderliness are also feminism dimensions as women have the ability to give in, think unselfishly, and understand.

The Javanese also has a tradition called asceticism or *laku tapa* which is done in order not to think of their own interests or *sepi ing pamrih*. This means that the Javanese has the will to apply asceticism to achieve inner strength to refrain from worldly pleasures. The sincerity in this asceticism contains feminine dimensions. Javanese society also emphasizes fertility and harmony manifested in the principle of *tata tentrem karta raharja* which means orderly, peacefully, prosperously, and happily. Fertility contained in the principle of *tata tentrem karta raharja* also reflects feminine dimension. This is explained by the study conducted by Handayani and Novianto (2008) who said that fertility is about agricultural land, and the land is closely related to agrarian culture of Javanese society. Hence, since the land is the source of people's lives, Javanese expresses it by *ibu pertiwi* or motherland.

Feminine dimension is also proven in the point of view of Javanese which centers on harmony, tranquility, and equanimity. This principle of life is very prominent in the Javanese tradition shown by spirit to live in harmony and respect. Moreover, Javanese always conduct themselves gently and control their behavior well. A ruler in Java is required to have nobility in conducting his administration, and this nobility is prerequisite. This is strengthened by Frans Magnis Suseno (1987, p.42) saying that nobility is an element of religious legitimacy of a ruler besides having supernatural power and having the ability to create justice and prosperity. That is why maintaining harmony, tranquility, equanimity, and nobility describe feminine dimensions. In social relations, Javanese society has a model of social stratification called *kawula-gusti* which means subordinate-supervisor. The relationship is smooth and familial, but it still applies respect (Moertono, 1985, p. 19). In connection with *kawula-gusti*, the feminine dimension is dominant because the pattern implies conquering the outer world and developing the inner world—requires sympathy, attention, and respect and maintains the position of social hierarchy.



Hence, Javanese women have the ability to apply such connection—caring and compassionate to others—and maintain social status.

The description given by the experts on the role and position of women in Javanese culture implies that the feminine dimension is strongly associated with Javanese women. In this context, feminine dimensions are characterized by a loving nature, having high sympathy, understanding, being unselfish, gentle, compliant, patient, and so forth. Women are the managers of the household. Household management requires precision, patience, and unselfishness. Even when a woman contributes to the family economy, the characteristic of a mother is someone who always cares. In such circumstances, when a Javanese woman devotes her life to serve the family, she is building power in her domestic space. However, power in the Javanese tradition is in essence different from power in the tradition of Western political science as it is described in the study of Anderson (1991). Generally understood in political science, the meaning of power starts on Max Weber's point of view of power quoted by Robert Dahl (1957) which illustrates "that power (macht) is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on the which this probability rests" (p. 202). On the other hand, Anderson (1991) saw that the essence of power in Javanese tradition emphasizes the ability to concentrate, adjust, maintain order and sincerity, and achieve balance, gentleness, and compassion. Therefore, as Javanese women have a role and position that is in line with feminine dimensions within the meaning of power in Javanese culture, the question which needs to be answered is how the substance of women's representation in modern politics is represented when the state interferes with women's representation through affirmative policies.

### Javanese Women's Political Representation: A Contestation Arena

Quota policy to increase the political representation of women in parliament was enacted in Indonesia during the 2004 election. On the one hand, the

policy can be interpreted as a success story of the feminist movement in Indonesia in seeking electoral system that integrates quota policy for women's representation. It is a great success for the feminist movement in Indonesia, considering that during the New Order which applied the WID framework places women only as men's companion and convince women that having a role in politics is inappropriate. On the other hand, the affirmative policies in the electoral system in Indonesia also show that the struggle of women demands state's intervention. In this context, Rai (2002, p. 8) stated, "In the development discourse, women's struggle will not be separated from the economic and political agenda determined by the national elite." It means that the impact of state intervention on the issue of the advancement of women in developing countries can produce varied situations, and it may result in negative situation. Of course, each country has its own local culture values, which may wholly not apply in a democracy, face economic inequality and poverty, and have not established welfare state structures. Yet, the impact of the implementation of affirmative policies can vary among various countries. Thus, affirmative policy does not resolve all of the issues in the various places. Furthermore, Matland (2002) showed that the representation of women in developing countries are different from that of developed countries, where higher education for women, labor force participation, and literacy rate vary, which affect the political representation of women. When there is a significant highly educated and skilled female population, the effectiveness in relation to realizing gender equality is high. In this case, the development is an important part to support the achievement of the condition (Matland, 2002, p. 29). Thus, women in a particular country will understand and get different experience from women in other countries because of development. The next question which is needed to be answered are the significant meanings of political representation for women in Indonesia, especially for Javanese women and whether the quota policy for women in Indonesia is the right answer to accelerate the quality of life of Indonesian women.

Sofa Marwah (2012) conducted studies in several places in Java which are influenced by Javanese

culture. The studies in Banjarnegara, Purbalingga, Banyumas, and Cilacap district in Central Java Province showed that the number of women legislator did not reach 30%, and only a few number of women legislator had occupied strategic positions, such as board chairman, faction chairman, commission chairman, special committee chairman, and board of fittings chairman such as legislation board, budgeting agency, deliberative board, and honorees board. Political parties also had difficulty in fulfilling the 30% quota of women candidates, so the candidates had to be recruited from the political non-cadres. Besides, the support of their fathers or husbands to be elected in parliament election was really needed, reinforcing the affirmation that male hegemony is indeed very present in the "outside" world as opposed to the domestic arena where the women can exercise a certain level of authority and decision-making power. Furthermore, when elected, just a few women contributed in legal drafting discussion and public hearing. The women legislators could not always defend their interests. They represented their political party or community constituency interests more. Ironically, several of the women legislators did not feel themselves as representatives of women (Marwah, 2012).

This paper attempts to understand the political representation for Javanese women who have not yet reached substantive representation in perspective of local culture. In this regard, the role of women in the Javanese family as the family manager where they totally devote themselves to the family constructs their power from domestic space. Feminine dimension is associated with patience, compassion, unselfishness, accuracy, tranquility, and harmony, and these can be valid and accepted women's values in politics. Javanese community believes that women roles in the domestic sphere have power. In this private space women are able to build and exert their power for the well-being of their family. That also means that when the public office is held by women, women promote their Java feminine dimension as political representation. In this case, women in Java and possibly in other regions in Indonesia have "its own agreement" on their role. They believe that being in the domestic sphere is not always inferior, and if they

have opportunity to be in public spaces, they do not become superior. It is time for Indonesian women and Javanese women to speak up and convey their point of view. Feminine dimensions should be continuously produced to demonstrate the power of women and women's issues in the parliament. Theoretically, the real idea also inspired Joni Lovenduski (2005, p. 34) when analyzing feminizing politics. She stated that the political representation of women in parliament institution follows the precise rules constructed by men. It is time for feminine politics to change the practices and political nature in which feminist theory should take a part in the process of political representation. Maybe, the emphasis of this paper contributes political practice purposed by Lovenduski. It is time for Javanese women and women in various other areas in Indonesia to realize their strengths based on their local values. Thus, affirmative policy must be supported by strengthening the local identity in each community.

Thus, political representation for women's representation in Indonesia, especially, in Java, is difficult to be developed based only on modern principles and state's intervention which is conducted by supporting the quota of women's representation. This is because major principles apply in liberal democracy. In this case, women in parliament should promote local values to form medium contestation in the parliament as public space by showing their strengths based on feminine dimensions. Furthermore, according to Franz Fanon, it is time for women in the Third World to free themselves from the grip of the public space by doing resistance from domestic space. When the public space is occupied by modernity, the only medium that allows women to have the resistance is precisely from the private sphere. In this case, the domestic space is a contestation arena where women show their abilities (Baso, 2005).

This paper also seeks to convey the importance of formulating the direction of the feminist movement in Indonesia, including in Java, to improve women's quality of life. The formulation of the feminist movement that does not solely follow the demands of modern women and country's rules may be the ideal formula. The quota policy for women's political representation is still important to be implemented,

but the representation of women in parliament bodies is also necessary to promote feminine dimensions that are based on local values on women's roles in the family. It is beneficial to formulate local identity of women in Indonesia when they involve themselves in the public space of the parliament. From that, the description about the identity of local women in Indonesia will be reflected to achieve the goal in which advocating for certain women's issues is included.

## Conclusion

Substantive political representation for women is a political process that lasts long and gradually. In that regard, the meaning of political representation for women in various parts of the world may be different. In this case, the meaning of political representation for Javanese women is related to women's roles as managers in the management of the household. From the domestic space, Javanese women can build power. Javanese society has a local meaning of power and the meaning of it precisely represents feminine dimensions. The role of women as the central manager of the household that is parallel to the meaning of power for the Javanese society confirms that the local dimensions of feminism narrowed to the value of patience, affection, tranquility, unselfishness, gentleness, and sympathy. When the state implemented the quota policy because of the principles of modernity, Javanese women understand and find different experiences. In this case, the number of women representation has not reached the ideal number. In addition, substantive representation of women cannot also be achieved. Finally, it is important to formulate and implement actions on how to strengthen feminine dimension values based on the role of women in the local culture.

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