

SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The post-Suharto period was expected to establish Indonesia as a democracy, committed to equality between citizens and human rights, but respect for women's equal rights, for example the freedom to terminate a pregnancy, freedom of expression, freedom from polygamy, has not occurred. Indonesia has enjoyed some expanded political liberties, but the civil liberties of the Indonesian people are not protected. Why has democracy failed to deliver civil liberties in Indonesia despite its success in opening up political liberties? Why has democracy strengthened the ties between the government and dominant religious institutions? These are the questions I address. In the case of Indonesia, the transition to democracy has not necessarily led to the liberalization concerning laws on gender and freedom of the individual. In fact it has led to the opposite. This is true in the case of women's sexual liberation, which is condemned and restricted both by the democratic elected government and the dominant religious institutions.

Key Words:

•*Gender Issues* •*Democracy* •*Human Rights* •*Religious Fundamentalism* •*Liberal political views*

Women in Indonesia have always played a significant part in shaping Indonesia's history. This was the case in pre-colonial Indonesian society and it continues to be so in today's post-Suharto era. However, their significance is left unnoticed by most historians and repressed by the dominant political regimes. Ironically, it is in places where women have traditionally assumed particularly important roles in their society such as in Aceh and Padang that women are currently being silenced.

For instance, in the pre-colonial period, after the death of Sultan Iskandar Muda in 1636 and his successor Iskandar Thani five years later, Iskandar Thani's widow, Taj al'Alam Safiyat al-Din Shah (1641-75) succeeded to the throne, initiating a period of almost sixty years of rule by women in the Sultanate. The rule by women ended when Sultana Kamalat Shah was expelled from power as a result of a fatwa issued by the Sheriff of Mecca, who decreed that it was un-Islamic for a woman to serve as a ruler (Anthony Reid, 2006:43). Later, during the colonial period, we see women who organize themselves collectively, although colonial administrators often ignored it. Roehanna Koeddoes (1884-1972), from West Sumatra, was one of the pioneers of *Soenting Melajoe*, the first women's newspaper. Her article on 23 May 1913 called for women to organize themselves and make important social, economic and political changes (Fitriyanti, 2001:78).

Both in the pre-colonial and colonial periods, to some degree women enjoyed more independence. Land was held in common and women had use right over it. Women often carried out the majority of agricultural work and had responsibility to feed their children. Women in those days were more or less free to express themselves. Their sexuality was viewed as autonomous and women had control over their bodies. The nineteenth century story 'Serat Centhini' by Prince Mangkunegoro III depicts women and sex in traditional Javanese culture. Also, in the stories of women as 'nyai' (mistresses) of Dutch workers of the VOC (East-Indian Company) are often portrayed as 'loose' or 'misbehaving' women but they certainly did make history (Wahyudi, 2003:53).

Indonesian women's liberation movements began with Gerwani, a women's organization that was established in the nineteen fifties and it affiliated itself with the communist party during Sukarno's regime. Gerwani was the first Indonesian women's organization that considered itself to be a revolutionary movement. Gerwani wanted to bring equality for women through mass action and not through organized roles. Gerwani's ideological enemies were feudalism, imperialism and colonialism. As a feminist movement Gerwani launched grassroots programs on education for women, land reform and an anti-polygamy campaign. The liberated women portrayed by Gerwani were labeled as 'whores with no morals' by Suharto's New Order regime and it was banned and dissolved.

Gerwani was replaced by Dharma Wanita (association of wives of civil servants), an organization supported by Suharto and the role of Dharma Wanita is more traditional. Dharma Wanita categorizes women in supporting, peripheral roles, serving the government, working voluntarily on charity issues, and being obedient to their husbands. The representation of female sexuality by Dharma Wanita is women in *kebaya* uniforms, and somehow the uniform killed the traditional *kebaya* along with the empowered women wearing the *kebaya*. The *kebaya* was used to personify the nation, defining the pure 'Indonesian woman' and it also symbolized restrictions on women's mobility.

It is important to note that during the New Order regime the state tended to dominate the public realm and attempted to control all political activity; the state also restricted women's organizations. After thirty-two years of silence, on February 23, 1998, a small women's organization, Yayasan Jurnal Perempuan (YJP – the Foundation of the Women's Journal), organized a group of women to demonstrate at the Hotel Indonesia roundabout in Central Jakarta. The group was called the Voice of Concerned Mothers (SIP), and it comprised lecturers, activists and middle class women. Because of the ban on demonstrations and political activity before parliamentary sessions to re-elect the president, this demonstration was strategically portrayed as a public expression of concern about the soaring price of milk. In fact it was the beginning of a political movement aimed at toppling Suharto's regime. Three activists were detained and the demonstration generated much sympathy and publicity.

Unfortunately, the demonstration was also regarded by many academics as only a movement of *ibu-ibu* (mothers), a moral movement

using a maternal discourse. The Voice of Concerned Mothers also played a major role in supporting the student movement in May 1998 that brought Suharto's regime to an end and re-introduced more democratic principles and practices to Indonesia's governance. However, once again SIP's role in supplying vast quantities of logistical support and strategic guidance to the students was perceived as a trivial role. This depiction of the role of women activists ensured the depoliticization of women, further reinforcing the view that women's participation in the post-Suharto era is merely reactive and crisis-driven.

Tackling the issue of sexuality

For most contemporary Indonesian women activists and writers, oppression is seen primarily in the male control of women's sexual and procreative capacities. Sexuality is an alienating experience for women and it is by exploring and writing about women's sexuality that Indonesian women understand the roots of oppression that are buried deep in the patriarchy's gender system. Such are the views expressed by most Indonesian women writers from 1998-2008 in *Jurnal Perempuan*, Indonesia's first feminist journal. More than one hundred writers have contributed to *Jurnal Perempuan* over the past ten years since it was launched. A selection of the issues brought up from year to year can be seen in the table below:

JP Edition	Writer	Title	Theme
1998	X (anonymous)	Poetry: 'Whose womb is this?'	Body
1999	Fenty Novianty	Short story: 'Paddy fields, coffee, 'sambal', cowboy'	Domestic violence
2000	Ratri	Short story: 'Pro-choice, pro-life'	Abortion
2001	Soe Tjen	Poetry: '7 January 1934'	Body consciousness
2002	Djenar Maesa Ayu	Short story: 'Sucking Father'	Sex, violence
2003	Oka Rusmini	Short story: 'Flower'	Traditions contested

2004	R. Valentina	Short story: 'I, the woman'	Sexual revolution
2005	Christine Refina	Short story: 'Looking for justice'	Law and women
2006	Soewarsih Djojopoespito	Poetry: 'Free from rein'	Poligamy
2007	Etik Juwita	Short story: 'The porcelain spoon'	Women migrant workers in Hong Kong
2008	Ayu Utami	Theater: 'Indecency Court'	Anti-pornography law

Although Jurnal Perempuan mainly publishes articles written by women in an academic setting, I have chosen samples of fiction writings to discuss the discourse of sexuality in Indonesia. Most of the fiction authors have explored a new style of writing, which is referred to as 'feminine writing'. Helene Cixous has defined feminine writing as: "the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural standards (1986:63, 65)."

Most of the women writers are under thirty-five years old. Some are activists, and others are students, academics and homemakers. Most of their writings are about desires. A desire to live an autonomous life from within, with a voice of one's own that creates a dominant self. Djenar Maesa Ayu's short story 'Sucking Father' (*Menyusu Ayah*), describes her main character Nayla as empowered rather than victimized, although Nayla has been sexually molested by her father and his friends.

My name is Nayla. I am a woman, but I am not weak, because I was not fed from my mother's breasts, I was fed from my father's penis. I did not suck my mother's milk, I sucked my father's semen (JP no.26, 2002).

Nayla breaks every girl/woman stereotype. She describes herself as:

I wear shorts or long pants. I play with marbles and cars. I climb trees and fight. I piss standing up. I do everything boys do.

My hair is short. My skin is dark. I don't have a pretty face. I am thin and dry, and I am not attractive. My breasts are flat. But I don't really care about breasts. They are not important. Breasts are not for feeding but only to be enjoyed by men, my father said. I don't want to be enjoyed by men. I want to enjoy men, like when I was a baby; I was fed on daddy's penis.

'Sucking Father' is not only a short story to liberate women's sexual fantasies, but more importantly, it reveals power-structured relationships that are supported to be either by consent or violence. The character Nayla is not only abused by her father, she is also abused by her father's friends. Each performance of oral sex she performs for her father's friends she describes as enjoyable because this is what she was accustomed to since she was young. On the other hand, Nayla does not like to be enjoyed by men, she does not appreciate men fondling her breasts, or penetrating her by force with their penis. One day, when her father's friend forced himself on her, Nayla ended his life with a statue of a horse's head.

I reached for the horse head statue on my side and smashed it to his head. His body convulsed and crashed down. His body was still and his eyes were vacant when I last saw him, before all around me went dark. His eyes were not like daddy's other friends. His eyes were more like daddy's.

Most women writers in *Jurnal Perempuan* do not regard men as individual oppressors, although most of the antagonists are men who are violent to women. On the contrary, most of the stories and poems try to stress the patriarchal system as women's primary source of oppression. They ask questions about the male privilege, priority and prerogative in society. These are the questions addressed by R. Valentina's story, 'I, the woman' (*Aku yang Perempuan*) in JP no.35, 2004.

Why me, the woman who has to guard my virginity and present it respectfully to my future husband. Why is my father's family name, Sagala, used beside my name, and then I have to change it to my husband's name. Maybe Sinaga, Sirait, Siregar, or others; the ones permitted by Batak customs. These are questions not ended by question marks.

The character, Valent, did not feel that the questions asked needed an answer because she knew the answers already. Her mother had been telling her all her life that it is a woman's destiny.

The writers address many issues including local traditions that discriminate against women. Oka Rusmini's short story, 'Flower', tells a story of a Balinese girl named Bunga, i.e. flower. Bunga is a dancer, but not a dancer from a privileged caste. She is from the lower caste, therefore looked down upon by most Balinese. Her mother is a prostitute who lives in a brothel. Nevertheless, all the boys admire her dancing. Putu, a young boy becomes her friend who also admires Bunga's talent. Putu tries to help her out with food despite protests from his mother. Then one day, Bunga was raped by three men. The rape did not cause a stir in the community; most people regarded the incident as acceptable since Bunga's family is not respected. Putu's mother thought that she deserved it. Putu was the only one who was sad and as he went on to his adult life watching crime shows on television or women activist groups protesting, he often wondered why these groups did not demand the death penalty for raping children.

When speaking of sex and sexuality, I found that many of the women writers include discussions of gender issues such as domestic violence, trafficking, cultural violence, sexual harassment, women migrant workers, HIV/AIDS, etc. The body is also a major subject and discussed as reproductive entity or as the object of patriarchal society. However, the body discussed as the source of power and oppression does not cancel pleasure. There is a sense of a heady experience of feeling powerful and 'in control'. With such a framework, one can see that the representations of women in JP's collection of short stories are not always passive 'victims' of sexism but empowered women. As Foucault often emphasized: "Where there is power, there is resistance (Foucault: 1983)."

Soe Tjen and Kamilia Manaf wrote of their resistance to a patriarchal definition of a woman's body.

*Why do I have to borrow his body
To enjoy my own body...
I do not want his body anymore...
But why did I fail to reach satisfaction
With my own body...
Is it because I do not know my own body
And I am more conscious of his?
(Soe Tjen, '7 January 1934', JP no.19, 2001).*

Right then, she sat next to me, a woman with a head veil. This woman who is religious expected my vagina to reach an agreement "to cease fire with penis" But it is hard for my vagina to imagine if one day "a nuclear penis" colonized my grass home which gives clean air to my whole body, which already declared it self a democratic state, which does not accept oppression, domination, patriarchy and discrimination. (Kamilia Manaf, 'My Vagina's Face', JP no.41, 2005).

Both Soe Tjen and Kamilia Manaf showed in their work that sexuality and its meanings and values are historically and socially constructed. Kamilia Manaf, who is a lesbian and an activist for sexual minority rights in Jakarta, used her own experience to express her work. In 'My Vagina's Face', the vagina is the critical voice that refuses society's norms and often rebels against religious traditions.

Sex and the State

The over one hundred women writers who contributed their work to Jurnal Perempuan are ready for democracy. For them, democracy constitutes the right to freedom of expression, women's equal rights, the freedom to terminate a pregnancy, freedom from polygamy and human rights. The post-Suharto era which successfully attains political liberties, granting a thirty percent quota for women in politics, do not however favor sexual liberation for women and reform of family laws.

In 2003, YJP conducted a research on Shariah law. It was implemented in limited areas such as Sumatra: Aceh, Padang; West Java: Tasikmalaya, Cianjur, Ciamis; East Java: Jember. Shariah law designed in these regions govern three aspects of public life: (1) to eradicate social ills such as prostitution and gambling; (2) to enforce Muslim rituals; and (3) to enforce Islamic dress code such as head veiling for women. These laws also restrict the freedom of movement for women such as the case in Padang, where women are not permitted to be outside of their homes from 10 pm-5 am (JP, 2004:12-3).

A similar law is implemented in the municipality of Tangerang (West Java). The case of Lilies Lindawati of Tangerang illustrates the impact of these laws on women. Under Tangerang's Local Regulation on the Prohibition of Prostitution no.8/2005, police may arrest anyone in any public place whose attitude or behavior seems suspicious, thus creating the

impression that one is a prostitute (National Commission on Violence Against Women: 2007). Lilies Lindawati was detained for three days. She felt shamed and humiliated.

Recent developments in Padang go as far as to force all students regardless of their religion to wear head veils (*jabab*). An investigation by Jurnal Perempuan found many non-Muslim students feel uneasy with the dress code but they are too scared to oppose the rules (Guntur, Jurnal Perempuan Online: April, 2008). Tempo Magazine has also published a report on the matter (Tempo Magazine, no.08/XXXVII/14-20 April 2008). Padang's local law of 2005, instructed by the mayor, declares that all students must wear Muslim attire and non-Muslims must adjust.

Women's organizations have protested endlessly on the implementation of Shariah based law. In the case of Aceh, they have documented incidents of violence from the local authorities such as shaving the heads of women who are not wearing their head veils. They have also protested against public government signs urging women to cover themselves. Recent incidents include:

- ✓ Women raided in Banda Aceh, one hundred detained for not wearing a head veil (20 May 2005).
- ✓ Women not wearing a head veil have their hair cut off in East Aceh (25 May 2005).
- ✓ Two women lashed forty times for drinking alcohol (27 August 2005).
- ✓ Two teenagers forced to marry after being caught together alone (28 Januari 2008).

Several women activists such as Cut Hasniati from MISPI (Mitra Sejati Perempuan, i.e. True Friend of Women) and Soraya Kamaruzuman (Flower Aceh) spoke publicly that the local government never included women's organizations to discuss the plan of Shariah law in Aceh. The local government ignored the participation of women in public policy (2004, p20-21; see also Shariah Raid in Jakarta Post, 11-16-2007).

Shariah law has been implemented in Aceh despite many women's organizations protests spread widely across Indonesia. Dewi Chandraningrum, an Islamic Scholar and feminist from Muhammadiyah University, Surakarta, noted that until 2006, at least twenty-six regions implemented Shariah law. Here are some of the laws she noted:

Regulation no.04/2003 of Bulukumba regency (South Sulawesi) regulating Muslim dress code. All parts of the body forbidden to be seen in public, i.e. 'aurat', except the face and palms of the hand, need to be covered. The state obligates women civil servants to cover themselves, which limits the freedom of women to express their civil liberty. If they refuse to abide the rule, they would lose their job.

Regulation no.6/2005 of Enrekang regency (South Sulawesi) regulating Muslim dress code.

Policy letters no.025/3643/Org and no.061.2/2896/Org from the head of the Cianjur regency (West Java) obligating all civil servants to wear Muslim dress code during weekdays.

Regulation no.6/2002 from the district Solok (West Sumatera) regulating Muslim dress code.

Instruction no.0451.442/BinsosIII/2005 from the mayor of Padang (West Sumatera) regulating Muslim dress code.

Regulation no.15, 16, 17/2005 from Maros regency (South Sulawesi) regulating literacy of the Quran, Muslim dress and the management of alms ('zakat').

Policy letters from the head of Garut regency (West Java) regulating Muslim dress code for all women civil servants.

Regulation from the Gowa regency which obliges all civil servants to wear head veil and study Islamic teachings.

Policy letters no.451/SE/04/SOS/2001 from the head of the Tasikmalaya regency enforcing the quality of 'iman' (faith) and 'taqwa' (observance of Islamic teachings).

Regulation from the district Takalar (South Sulawesi) regulating Muslim dress code.

Policy letters from the head of the Indramayu regency regulating Muslim dress code and literacy of the Quran.

District Regulation no.2/2004 from East Java regulating the income of migrant women workers with retribution. Instead of protecting women's rights, this law regulates how to get profit from women's workers abroad.

Siti Musdah Mulia, an academic at IAIN and a Muslim feminist, pointed out that in the euphoria of regional autonomy, some local governments have an obsession with Shariah law. In fact, some districts plagiarize the law from another district with the same words and some times forgetting to change the name of the district (Mulia, 2007:114). She said that they are so obsessed to go as far as developing Muslim model villages that strictly implements Shariah law. For example, in South Sulawesi there are at least twelve villages that are in progress to be developed. The purpose is not only to win the prize of the perfect Muslim village but also to tap in to regional autonomy funds from the district government. Therefore, the head villages try as hard as they can to show their village as the most 'Islamic' (Mulia, 2007:115). Mulia criticizes these village leaders on poor governance skills. Mulia thinks that village leaders should prioritize on eradicating corruption, education and health care, and not on moral issues.

Mulia criticizes the indicators of an Islamic village made by local administrators: (1) performing Muslim rituals, including going on a pilgrimage ('haj') numerous times; (2) wearing head veil; (3) using Arabic calligraphy; (4) using a Shariah banking system; (5) public government notice displayed not to give any services to women who are not wearing a head veil. Mulia notes that there is an obsession not only to implement Shariah law but also an obsession to regulate women's bodies. Mulia accuses the local administrators who implement Shariah ordinances of discrimination of women. Moreover, she claims, these ordinances are inconsistent with and violate the higher laws of Indonesia, such as:

Pancasila, i.e. the state ideology, and the constitution.

CEDAW (Convention of the Elimination Discrimination Against Women's Right), which is ratified by Indonesia (law no.7, 1984).

International Convention on Civil and Politic Rights, which is ratified by Indonesia (law no.12, 2005).

Human Rights Law no 39, 1999.

International Convention on Economic, Social, Cultural Rights, which is ratified by Indonesia (law no.1, 2005), which states that the state should protect workers' rights, family rights, right to health and an adequate standard of living, educational rights and cultural rights.

(Jurnal Perempuan Online, 9 August 2006).

The National Commission on Violence Against Women, KOMNAS Perempuan, stated that the Shariah ordinances have produced many misinterpretations and caused many victims. KOMNAS Perempuan urged the ministry of Law and Human Rights to evaluate the Shariah ordinances. In a statement to the press on 20 June 2006, KOMNAS Perempuan said: "It is the responsibility of the Constitutional Court to review the laws that are insensitive and unjust to gender issues. Moreover, the government should take immediate measures if the Shariah ordinances violate the constitution (Jurnal Perempuan Online)."

However, neither the government nor the parliament is taking the matter seriously. The parliament decided to pass an anti-pornography bill. The bill seeks to regulate the use and spread of pornographic materials and related acts deemed pornographic. However, the definition of pornography includes sensuality and any movements, sounds, pictures, images and films that could arouse desire. In short, the bill's purpose is not to regulate pornographic materials but to regulate women bodies, denying women's sexuality in public space.

This bill is heavily supported by PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, i.e. Party of Justice and Prosperity), a political party based on an Islamic platform. PKS is on the rise, winning recently the North Sumatra and West Java local elections. PKS is also a key player to push Shariah law on the district levels. Its website displays articles favoring polygamy, rejecting the rights of sexual minorities as well as condemning literary communities such as KUK (Komunitas Utan Kayu, i.e. Utan Kayu Community), that promote Ayu Utami's novel 'Saman', which is considered too sexual, too liberal and Western oriented.

If PKS is playing its role in gaining political power, MUI (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, i.e. Council of Indonesian Muslim Scholars) recently widens its role to not only specializing in issuing 'fatwas' (i.e. Islamic decrees), but also meddling in the politics of pop culture. MUI recently publicly supported a film called 'Ayat-ayat Cinta' (Verses of Love). This film promotes an Islamic way of life, including polygamy as a life style. It is advocating what Indonesia should represent and it is believed to be a genre of film that fits Indonesia's culture (Bramantyo, 2008). 'Ayat-ayat Cinta' was also promoted by the president himself, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who shed tears watching the film.

In protest of Yudhoyono's appearance at the launch of 'Ayat-ayat Cinta' with dignitaries from foreign countries, Olin Montenegro, posted a poem widely circulated in the mail lists of Jurnal Perempuan:

*sitting in a cushy seat
you cried for Aisyah who becomes a co-wife
or Fabri who was framed
then your tears fell?*

*but where are your tears for Lapindo?
the same tears for millions of children malnourished
where is your pain for our forests
...corruptors who live comfortably
...prices rising...
where is your brain for the women who are beaten to death by their
husbands?
so, why now, you are sad?
(Olin, 'for the big boss who cried watching the film
Ayat-ayat Cinta', 4 April 2008).*

Olin's poem questions the president's intention to promote the film 'Ayat-ayat Cinta' and tolerating misogyny publicly. This is not the first time the president engages in the politics of the body. In 2005, he gave a statement condemning women who show their navels and encourage Indonesian women to show decency in their clothing (Kompas, 2005). It is therefore no surprise at all that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's administration tolerates misogynistic attitudes from local government officials. The most misogynistic statements came from the Jakarta Tourism Agency (Dinas Pariwisata, DKI) and the local administration in Batu, East Java, ordering women working in the massage industry to use underwear padlocks, to prevent them from prostituting themselves (Mediacare, 2008).

Religion and Women's Human Rights

*The 'mullah' says: "When they will die we shall not burry them."
Villagers say, "Wherever they want, they go. They do not cover their heads.
They talk with men. They will be sinners."
I said: "If Allah does not see us when we stay hungry then Allah has sinned."
A Bangladeshi wife, participant in a literacy skills program
(Cited from Nussbaum, 1999).*

Women around the world are aware of their rights and regard themselves as autonomous persons. There is certainly tension building up

between the concept of autonomy and religious traditions. This tension hardens when religions have been permitted to make laws and claims its legitimacy. It poses a problem when religious leaders' discourses contradict basic liberties, which are usually already guaranteed in the constitution and international law such as CEDAW, a multilateral treaty ratified in 131 countries including Indonesia. This is the case with the recent anti-pornography law passed by the parliament.

It is also the case with the Letter of Collective Decision (Surat Keputusan Bersama, SKB), which was signed by three cabinet ministers in 2008, instructing Ahmadiyah to halt their religious practices. Mainstream Islamic groups in Indonesia consider Ahmadiyah as non-Islamic. Clearly in both cases, the government defers to wishes of dominant religious groups, and as a consequence individuals or other groups lose their basic rights. In the case of the anti-pornography law, many women will lose their freedom of expression, and in the case of Ahmadiyah, the members of this group will lose their basic rights to practice their beliefs.

The signing of SKB and the passing of the pornography law is a move by the government to satisfy dominant religious group, an act that is seen as worrisome. By passing the pornography law, the message entails that women be judged unequal to men, that women be punished for dressing in a particular way.

Martha Nussbaum questions in her book 'Sex and Social Justice' the reluctance of Western liberals in raising the issue of discrimination against women (Nussbaum, 1999:84-85) or, in the case of Ahmadiyah, discrimination against members of religious minorities. According to Nussbaum, one reason for the Western liberals to hesitate to take appropriate political action is the political hopelessness of it all. Economic sanctions against other countries are never issued on the base of discrimination against women or religious freedom. Liberals in this sense are at a loss and do not see in clarity that sex-inequality is a threat to human basic rights, even though foreign to a religious tradition.

Feminists have criticized liberals for being negligent to women's concerns, and liberalism needs to respond particularly to the criticism that the law is 'sex blind'. It should be noted that there is not a single position of liberalism. For example, Rawls emphasizes a distinction between formal equality and 'equal worth of liberty', also between equality of opportunity and truly fair equality opportunity. Rawls thoughts are aimed at protecting the minority by involving redistribution (see *Theory of Justice*, 1971). Nussbaum express the same interest as Rawls in using the term capabilities,

promoting the capacity of people to choose a life in accordance to their thinking (Nussbaum, 1999:68-69).

Conclusion: Facing Multilayered Challenge

There is a wave of movements against women's rights in Indonesia from all sides including the state. Women's freedom to write about their experiences, their bodies and sexuality that was opened up at the beginning of the post-Suharto era is now being challenged. A cultural battle has been declared; the fight for the redefinition of Indonesia has started. Clearly the conservatives have no intention to accommodate women's freedom in the Indonesia they imagine.

What conclusions can be drawn from these experiences? On the one hand, Indonesia is the most democratic country in the region and the largest Muslim country in the world; it has modernized its economy and implemented political freedoms. And yet, its civil freedom is restrictive and shaping itself conservatively under the influence of Islamic culture that is not necessarily Indonesian. There is a strong brand of Wahhabi Islam spreading throughout Indonesia.

Wahhabism is the dominant faith of the Saudi Arabian people, and has spread widely throughout the Muslim world. It advocates a literal interpretation of the Islamic texts. Its followers advocate a return to the perceived Golden Age of Muhammad, his Companions and their immediate successors. The Wahhabi movement does not celebrate differences of opinion or juristic diversity (Abou el Fadl, 2001:18). Kim Adren, in her theses referring to el Fadl, states that the Saudi government has created proxy organizations to distribute Wahhabi literature, and to fund schools, mosques and religious organizations. Accordingly, "individuals and institutions learned to shape their thought, speech, and behavior [...] to [...] benefit from Saudi largesse (Adren citing Abou el Fadl 2005:70)." Abou el Fadl asserts that, "with Saudi Arabia bankrolling the Wahhabi creed, it is doubtful that anything could have effectively stemmed the spread of the Wahhabi influence (Adren citing Abou el Fadl, 2005:93)."

Democracy in Indonesia has opened many doors including to illiberal influences such as Wahhabism. The political clout and influences of increasing Islamic conservatism is enormous, because of the lack of history in strong civil society organizations, Suharto managed to silence society for thirty-two years. This lack of a strong civil society is also a reflection of why

there is a lack of upholding liberal traditions. The founders of Indonesia, Sukarno and Hatta, have adamantly argued in the past for a secular state, i.e. a separation of religion and state (Rahardjo, 2006:303). Sukarno and Hatta together produced the most liberal constitution, a strong foundation for the new independent country called the Republic of Indonesia. They believed that the state should exercise self-restraint in order not to infringe on the individual rights of citizens.

However, after Suharto's dictatorship, Indonesia failed to pass through a democratic transition and strengthen the foundation of individual freedom. It has missed its opportunity. Furthermore, the democracy that Indonesia is experiencing may be more conservative than authoritarian regimes. While global liberal networks pressure the government to seek egalitarian principles, conservative networks, though, pressure the same government successfully to implement a conservative agenda.

As for the feminist movement that was mobilized around the transition and was strong at the wake of a democratic Indonesia in 1998, it has lost its momentum during the democratic consolidation. The feminist movement was put aside when political parties gained center stage along with old patterns of cooptation, corruption and infighting. This pattern is not particular to Indonesia, Latin America experienced more or less the same pattern (Hunt, 2003:172-5).

For Indonesian women's organizations, democracy has made women gain significantly in women's political representation and women's presence in senior executive posts. The latest gain is the law requiring political parties to nominate a quota of thirty percent of women for the parliament. Yet, women's presence in decision-making is no guarantee for liberal policies. Their voice is often silenced and countered with forces of opposing change and with political institutions reluctant to prioritize women's rights and the government is also too busy to please religious conservatives. The government may uphold laws conforming to Shariah doctrines, not always because they agree with these laws, but because they need the conservative's political support. Thus, Indonesian women seeking for change face a multilayered challenge; the government, the institutions and religious groups, all wrapped up in a patriarchal and misogynist attitude towards women.

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