

Gender Interpretive Socio-Cultural Review: Women's Position in Indonesian Society

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Abstract: Since 1998 women in Indonesia, within the context of their socio-cultural status, have believed that they are not politically empowered, they earn less income, they are victimized in domestic violence cases, and as far as they are concerned, they are less fortunate and not as lucky as the men are. The theoretical interpretive view of this paper proposes that the dissimilarities in conditions between men and women, from the perspective of gender, are shaped within the biological, cultural, and historical contexts, in which gender related attribute occurred on its own, whereas status is something that must be achieved. This paper shows that women in Indonesia have been for quite a long time actively engaged in various roles in the fields as diverse as the military, police, functional-educational fields, politics (both in the legislative and executive branches), in trade as well as in traditional market. Nowadays some women are also actively pursuing careers in the service sectors for instance by becoming GRAB or Gojek drivers, and a few of them are also involved in the production of television drama series (sinetron=sinema elektronik).

Keywords: status, socio-cultural, gender

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I. REASONING

In the 1990s (particularly after 1998, when the concept of political reform was put forth by the partisan politicians and adopted later by the government), we saw the birth of gender oriented NGOs, which impressively, in addition to supporting the achievement of gender welfare and equality, also strive to uphold women's rights with the objective of (assumptive) eliminating the discriminatory treatment against women, including violence against women—and specifically to promote the socio-political roles of women. In theory, the legal issues associated with the stated objective lie within the cultural context from the existing conflict of interest between men and women (as widely discussed in the mass media). Positively, from the socio-psychological perspective, the women would like to assume the role that would counter balance the men's socio-political position (among others). In short, with regard to the points above, we now have concepts that are more prominent, such as equality, equal rights, quota, etc., all based on the idea of political reform and democracy (Malonda, 2009).

Case in point, prior to (and during) the 2004 election, the widely discussed topic in the mass media at the national stage was the women's quota (raising the basic principles related to the concepts on balance, decision making, equality, equal rights, political reform, democratic principles, etc.) for the seats in the Parliament (DPR), which was greatly exaggerated by the various political parties in their campaigns. Despite the fact that empirically within the cultural perspective and from the direction and end result of the national development there is no blue print from any parties involved that would specifically provide a special position and advantages only to the men and not to the women. The author is of the opinion that this circumstance was triggered by the political condition in Indonesia under the guise of accepting the popular concept of "political reform-democracy". There is a tendency that prevailed among the public that women and men as well have been using this popular concept to advance the interest of their own cliques or even subjectively and individually so they may gain some economic advantages, lead a better lives, and still have a role in politics. Apart from the gender issues, and besides the objective of the research on political condition in Jakarta at that time, the author once interviewed an informant who took part in a demonstration and claimed that he was paid by an "organizer" or "a demonstration planner" and by his own admission he did not have a clue with regard to the concept and political objective of the demonstration. On the other hand, also in line with the popular concept mentioned above, there was also a demonstrator who took part in a street demonstration at Imam Bonjol Street in Jakarta who claimed that he took part in the demonstration because he was promised a position as a member of the East Jakarta Municipal Legislative Council (East Jakarta DPRD).

When it comes to gender related issues, members of women oriented NGOs are quite active in seminars, as well as publishing articles in printed media, etc. Their activities are founded on the notion that women are not compensated fairly in the work places compared to men who worked at the same company, i.e. by interpreting the main concept of gender justice that has not been achieved for women. The basic idea is that women are striving to and aspiring to achieve an ideal socio-political position that would be favorable for them, or at least to have an equal footing with men.

In this section on reasoning, we have learned that the ontological and epistemological thinking of gender phenomenon for women is to highlight the fact that the condition of women is not positively favorable in comparison to the socio-cultural and political position enjoyed by men in Indonesia.

Specifically with regard to the epistemological perspective (theoretical issues), according to the reasoning above it is as follows (and it is also the general formulation of this research), "What are the basic concept and gender theory that serve as the backdrop for the perception and socio-cultural status of women in Indonesian society?" However, the spin-off issue from that initial premise is as follows, "Do women actually have fewer roles in social lives?"

The objective of this research is to explain the phenomenon of women's socio-cultural position in society through literature reviews and a qualitative empirical review.

The data were collected (based on the epistemological context) through interpretive literature reviews along with a qualitative research method through observations and "casual" interviews that are thorough and open. The interviews are paralleled to Malonda's (2017) methodological concept.

The scope of this research (to answer the theoretical issues related to the research's objective, are 1) reasoning, 2) gender theoretical concept, 3) a brief overview of the research and field data, and 4) closing.

II. THEORETICAL CONCEPT ON GENDER

As quoted from Heien Puspitawati's work (2013) about the Concept of Gender, the term gender was first introduced by social sciences' scholars to explain the differences between men and women that are innate as God's creation and other traits that are shaped by culture, or learned, and socialized from the early age. The distinction is quite important because throughout these times we have been blurring human traits that are natural and not natural (gender). Distinction in a gender role is quite beneficial in helping us to rethink the division of roles that have been considered to be inherent in men and women in order to build a dynamic and precise gender relationship that fits into the realities of society. Differences in the concept of gender have created distinct roles for men and women in society. In general, the term gender has shaped the roles, responsibilities, functions, and even the space where humans are conducting their activities. Gender distinction is deeply instilled in our consciousness, as it influences our perspectives, and we often forget and we perceive the distinction as something that is permanent and eternal just as the biological traits of men and women.

Heien's work also refers to the term "gender" as a distinction in the roles, functions, statuses, and responsibilities of men and women, which are shaped (or constructed) through socio-cultural interactions, which are planted through the familiarization process from one generation to the next. Therefore, gender is the result of an agreement between humans and it is not something that has occurred naturally. Consequently, gender will vary greatly from one place to another, from one period to another. Gender is not natural; it may change and can be transferred from one human to another depending on the time and local culture. The author is of the opinion that this theoretical concept has touched the domain of anthropological science within the perspective of "socio-cultural" concept as in the following conceptual perspectives.

As can be discerned further from Heien's work, the definition on gender according to various literature reviews is as follows: "Gender is a difference between men and women in the roles, functions, rights, responsibilities, and behaviors that are shaped by the values of social and cultural customs of a community group that may change according to local time and conditions. "Gender refers to the economic, social, political, and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being a female and male. The social definitions of what it means to be female or male vary among cultures and change over time. It is also described as follows, "Gender should be conceptualized as a set of relations, existing in social institutions and reproduced in interpersonal interaction" (Smith 1987; West & Zimmerman 1987 in Lloyd et al. 2009: p.8). Then there is also, "Gender is not a property of individuals but an ongoing interaction between actors and structures with tremendous variation across men's and women's lives individually over the life course and structurally in the historical context of race and class" (Ferree 1990 in Lloyd et al. 2009: p.8). It is also explained that gender, "At the ideological level, gender is performatively produced" (Butler 1990 in Lloyd et al. 2009: p.8) 6. "Gender is not a noun—a "being" – but a "doing". "Gender is created and reinforced discursively, through talk and behavior, where individuals claim a gender identity and reveal it to others" (West & Zimmerman 1987 in Lloyd et al. 2009: p.8). Next it is stated that, "Gender theory is a social constructionist perspective that simultaneously examines the ideological and the material levels of analysis" (Smith 1987 in Lloyd et al. 2009: p.8). Therefore, the term gender refers to the social rules that are related to the sex of men and women. Biological differences in

reproductive parts between men and women consequently lead to different reproductive functions (women experience menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding; men impregnate with sperm). The biological gender is God's own doing, it is natural; it is fixed, unchangeable, and constant throughout the ages.

However, it can be argued that this very definition has touched the domain of theoretical anthropology, since (in Heien's work) a culture which is driven by a patriarchal perspective tends to interpret these biological differences as indicators of appropriateness in behaviors that eventually lead to restrictions on rights, access, participation, control, and the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of resources and information. Ultimately, the demand with regard to the roles, duties, positions, and obligations that are appropriate for men or women or something that is not appropriate will vary greatly from one society to another. Some societies tend to be quite rigid in restricting the roles that are appropriate for men or women; for instance, some society may say that it is a taboo for a man to enter a kitchen or hug and hold his children in public, and it is a taboo for a woman to go out and seek work. Nonetheless, another society may be quite flexible when it comes to the activities that can be carried out by men or women; for instance, in some society a woman may work as construction laborers and even climb up the roof of a house or climb a coconut tree, whereas some of the men are wasting their time gambling and cock fighting. Thus, the concept of gender is quite different from sex. The meaning of gender is not the same as someone's genital (sex).

In support of the above mentioned views (emphasis on Malonda 2017), theoretically, the concepts of gender in anthropology are often attributed by scholars to the meanings of certain behaviors that are culturally marked as in a person's role that is based on his or her sex, which is regarded by human society as something that separates a man from a woman. The widely held opinion among scholars is that gender behaviors are shaped by historical influences and not solely related to biological factors (Ortner & Whitehead 1981; Rosaldo & Lamphere 1974; Sacks 1979; and Sanday 1981a).

Continuing the emphasis on theoretical views, Linda Lindsay (1990) states that gender is related to the socio-cultural and psychological aspects of men and women. How a society places a restriction on men and women is a gender component. Within such a situation, gender related attribute is achieved by its own accord, whereas status is something that must be achieved. Every society puts its members into certain categories that define how they will be restricted and treated. These social categories or positions are perceived as statuses, and all of them will serve as clues that govern how we relate to others.

III. RESULTS OF FIELD RESEARCH (THEORETICALLY INTERPRETED)

To quote Idrus Makram's view (Legislative and Executive Political Outlook 2016) in analyzing the content of printed and electronic media, he gets the impression that certain women movements in Indonesia tend to set their focus on positioning themselves in legislative and executive positions. He claims that certain women movements do not realize that in fields such as the military (army, navy, and air force) there are women who hold ranks from the lowest recruits to officers. The same goes in the National Police, many women are holding high-ranking positions. In addition, the undeniable facts that a high number of women are holding functional positions (teachers and university lecturers). Therefore, the claim by some women NGOs that women in Indonesia do not have a role is simply unfounded. Regardless of that, nowadays we see more and more women holding political positions (both in the legislative and executive branches). In North Sulawesi, a number of women are currently serving as the local head of government as *bupati* (regent) (in the regions of Minsel, Minut, and Mitra); even though we could not refer to them by name, quite a few members of North Sulawesi Municipal Legislative Council (DPRD Sulut) are women. A number of universities also are also led by women Rectors, for example UNSRAT and UNIMA. Furthermore, still on the subject, we also see a number of women artists and non-artist who serve as legislators in Senayan.

If we were to argue about the still higher proportion of men serving in the socio-political fields and in other fields mentioned above, anthropologically it is a natural process of human adaptation and selection in life. Malonda's work (2006) refers to the three theories that are widely used to explain the origin and development of cross-cultural patterns found in a culture regarding the division of work (role) based on sex as follows:

1. Power theory. According to this theory, because men in certain societies are physically bigger than women, it is naturally assumed that the men would carry out the tasks that require stronger physical strength.
2. Theory related to childcare. According to this theory, women tend to be better suited to perform activities related to childcare, while performing other alternate tasks, such as managing matters related to crops, water, and food preparation (Weisner & Gallimore 1977). On the other hand, men prefer other activities, which are sometimes dangerous and require enormous energy, such as hunting animals at sea and in the field, chopping down tree, clearing fields, long distance trading, and going to war (Murdock & Provost 1973).
3. Business economic theory. According to this theory, the tasks of men and women are divided according to how they could maximize the total production based on gender specialization, wherein the specific activities will depend on the structure of the society and their economic.

In the year 2006, which is described as an elemental theory in our field research, we saw that women passengers (students and adults alike) on board the Bogor-Jakarta KRL train demanded a special treatment, i.e. to occupy every seat, even though there might be an elderly man standing near them. This condition reveals the weakness in the bio-psycho-socio-culture. During a recent field research carried out until 2017, the above condition still occurred on board the commuter train from Bogor to Jakarta Kota. The author made a number of observations and conducted interviews in 27 train trips from 2015 to November 2017. The empirical fact of the field research clearly reveals the phenomenon that women receive preferential treatment by getting a seat, as biologically speaking, it may be argued that men may have more endurance; however, this puts women in a lower socio-cultural position than that of men, with an added interpreted connotation that women are privileged and therefore from the perspective of bio-psycho-socio-culture must be protected. Therefore, this empirical reality leads to, at least theoretically, that from the gender perspective they should be protected and not protecting.

Guided by the reasoning concept discussed in section 1, as author set the premise that anthropologically speaking, a theory may be derived from field research, which is also defined as elemental theoretical data, in this part the author would like to emphasize that there are portions of social life that where women play a role. Not all researchers can see the phenomenon or reality in the "traditional market", wherein the women play major roles. This type of trading may include the buying and selling of foodstuff up to convenience goods. The author, anthropologically speaking, does not view the social structure vertically, in a sense that there is no basis to assign a high or low social status to humans. Therefore, the role of women in trade is quite balanced with that of men. Indeed, in this paper the author does not make any observation or research on the role of women who work in companies and offices; nonetheless, through observations conducted in traditional markets in Karombasan Manado and in Kemiri Muka Depok from October to December 2017, the phenomenon of women's role in trade quantitatively speaking is positively balanced with that of the men in the sector.

During a field research conducted in 2009 in Jakarta, it was clearly revealed that women did not play a major role in the *sinetron* industry (television drama series). In this specific industry, women are more likely to be the artists, the makeup artists, or the clerks in administrative duties. However, in more recent research conducted in December 2017, the author saw that in addition to the previously mentioned roles, now there are three female assistant directors, wherein previously there was only one. Moreover, now there is also a women director. Admittedly, the observations and interviews were only conducted in one field-producing house (with a total of 50 workers) from the total of five producers under one major company in the *sinetron* industry; however, the interviews cover the operations of the five field producers.

In the service sector, the author conducted observations and carried out a number of interviews to learn more about women's involvement in the transportation sector, namely in GRAB and Gojek. The author attempted to quantify the proportion of GRAB and Gojek drivers, how many of them were men and how many were women, and came with a figure of 100:2 for GRAB and 100:1 for Gojek. The figures are admittedly quite small; however, within a theoretical context it is qualitatively positive, because here we see women play a dual role, jumping from the domestic role to a job that requires physical fitness.

The positive nature of women's role in other fields will be quoted from Malonda's work (2009). In the article entitled "The role of women and development in Indonesia", Malonda states that nationally, men play a dominant role in structural positions, with a ratio of 80% men and 20% women; however, in functional roles the ratio is 60% women and 40% men. The latter point clearly shows that women play a bigger role than men in the functional-educational fields. The data show that no theoretical concept can assert that women have no role in Indonesian society.

To highlight this interpretive qualitative analysis, the author would like to stress that the discourse which has been raised about women having no social role needs to be reinterpreted wisely and scientifically and without exaggeration.

IV. CONCLUSION

According to the anthropological views on gender, the theoretical process states that the differences between men and women are naturally formed and within the biological, cultural, and historical contexts. Gender related attribute occurs on its own, whereas status is something that must be achieved. Therefore, from this research, the author surmised that in field theory on gender, qualitatively, women have achieved and in fact have played various roles in the fields as diverse as the military, police, functional-educational fields, politics (both in the legislative and executive branches), in trade as well as in traditional market, and some also play a role in the transportation sector in GRAB and Gojek. Admittedly, only a handful of women work in the *sinetron* industry, but they still have a role there.

As a recommendation, women should tread carefully before abandoning their domestic role, because in the effort to bring into being qualified human resources through family, then the role of mother is the most important. There is a scholar in the field, such as Schlegel (1972), who states, "the hopes of success and

individual satisfaction (which is aspired by women) in an arena, will threaten and undermine other factors in the arena". It may be assumed that when a husband and wife have roles outside their homes, then their children from the preschool years to teenagers will have no figures that will serve as role models, someone who will provide moral guidance and care on various aspects from providing nutritional needs to other social and health requirements that are the prerequisite for the development of qualified human resources.

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