

# Obstacles to Women's Political Independence

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Title	: <b><i>Menuju Kemandirian Politik Perempuan</i></b>
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Siti Musdah Mulia's book entitled *Menuju Kemandirian Politik Perempuan*, which was written in November 2007, is based on the author's experience and a form of reflection towards women's participation in politics. As stated in the preface, the author has experience as a program coordinator of voter education for women at *grassroot* level. It was also mentioned four main aims of the program; they are: deliberate and systemic processes of women depolitization, women still do not completely understand the meaning of democracy and the importance of Election as a tool to build democratic Nation (Indonesia), women still do not understand the true meaning of human rights, and fourth, political education is still lacking and not well-planned for women. This book has four chapters, discussing about the author's concern, which

enable her to provide critical suggestion such as ideas and thoughts that she hopes can be introspection, self-criticism, and evaluation for people to realize that gender inequality exists, and injustice that disable women to fully participate in politics.

The first chapter is about the paradigm in Islamic country on political response. She writes about political history as Islamic issues. Some records on the thoughts about the relation of religion and state mentioned that they found three thoughts patterns in the thoughts of contemporary Islamic politics, especially in the study of the relation between religion and state; they are secularist, traditionalist, and reformist. Secularist pattern affirms that Islam is a religion that regulates the relation between human and God, and the rules for nation affairs are not exclusively stated in it. On the other hand, traditionalist emphasizes that Islam is a plenary religion. Reformist rejects both extreme thoughts.

The religion reinterpretation studies is a necessity, because the main cause of the deterioration of women's position in politics is religious interpretation that is deliberately constructed based on the religious authorities, not based on the teaching. *"Therefore, the solution to solve this problem should start from revising the study through ijthad, Moslems nearly agree that ijthad in Islamic teaching reinterpretation is basic need, not only after the death of Muhammad, but also even when he still lived."* (p. 39). In chapter 4 about theological debate related to leadership, the author writes the historical facts, which clearly stated that leadership issue was the most crucial issue in the history of Islam. Policies support women's participation in political space by requiring the political party to pay attention on the gender equality and justice.

As regulated in Act No. 13, 2002, Section 13 on Political Parties, the government has taken Temporary Special Measure by applying minimum quota of 30% of women as Legislative Candidate in the political party members of Public Election (as regulated in Act No. 12, 2003, Section 65 (1)). *"Because, the quota meant to equate the starting line, to equate the foundation. Therefore, women and men would be able to walk side by side and hand-in-hand in fighting for their position in public space"* (p. 93). There are several barriers experienced by women in accessing political world. Ideology and psychology barriers in the form of rooted

tradition and culture forming norms and labor division pattern, which are based on gender stereotype. Women are placed as second citizens, being discriminated and marginalized from public area such as people's representative institutions, government, and political parties. The hindrance in human resources is caused by the fact that the current condition make women feel unsafe and uncomfortable in the political world. Some women remain less-educated and it is also a disturbance to the information and technology access. It is also connected to the low understanding of the political world and education for women.

Another challenge is the obstacles in organizational and structural aspect, as mentioned in this book, are fundamental human's rights; it can be seen through the teachers' actions in school and in gender-biased textbooks. There are only a small number of political party that show their strong commitment to allow the opportunity for women by taking affirmative action, which involve women in the organizational structure of political party and political recruitment. The obstacles in law and constitution include the misunderstanding of the 30% quota as Special Measure that is only temporary. *"30% quota for female legislative candidate in legislative election as stated in the Law of General Election was considered less-effective because the system of general election still opened opportunities for party elitists to arrange and decide the running number for each legislative candidate. The fact showed that even though the number of female candidate had fulfilled the quota, commonly they were placed in last running numbers (nomor sepatu)"* (p. 99). The lack of data also poses as an obstacle, which is now has been tackled by the NGOs as they did the data compilation in national and regional level. The appearance of networking called *"Gerakan Perempuan Peduli Politik"* (GPPP) or Women's Movement for Political Affairs presents as a pressure group, which finally drives DPR to adopt TKS minimum 30% quota of woman for Legislative Candidate.

The second part of the book discusses women's political rights in Islamic view. She also suggests to review and deconstruct the old *ijtihad* or interpretation, which are gender-biased and patriarchal values-biased. In the religious teaching context on women's position, there are two reasons of the emergence of gender-biased religious understanding. First, commonly Moslems understand Islam dogmatically; second,

Moslems receive the teaching from religious scholars. Therefore, the writer can conclude that Moslems in Indonesia need a new interpretation in *tafsir* and their understanding about Islam. It is, of course, the Islamic understanding that accommodates human values and concerns about women's lives in Indonesia. In realizing women-related interpretation, there should be an affirmation that Moslems truly understand that Al Qur'an and Hadits are text they need to read/interpret contextually, which is by understanding the cultural and societal context where Al Qur'an was bestowed. "*Reading Al Qur'an contextually will show that Al Qur'an bring universal moral messages such as justice, rights, respect for humans, love and freedom*" (p. 151). In the book, it is also explained the reasons why women need to have career in politics. Reformation and democratization era trigger the implementation of regional autonomy, which emphasizes the importance of society's participation. Then the efforts to women empowerment emerged by rising awareness, changing the mindset of democracy principles that guarantee equality, human's rights, law supremacy, and justice. The author also talks about the role of Islamic women organizations that have networking to the lowest layer (grassroot), and will whole-heartedly improve the quality of human resources and the organizations performance. They will also revise the gender vision while building solid networking among the organizations to avoid being fragmented in political interest, which will send suspicions towards each other.



The author also discusses about the New Order (*Orde Baru*) political policy that depolitized women. The policy ushered women as traditional being and had the responsibility of bearing good name and pride; this made women's function and participation in the New Order as political tool. It was done merely for two main purposes: political stability and economic growth.

If we talk about budgeting structure, we talk about database. The unawareness

of database, which can be used as a reference, can pose problem. The existence of database can give clearer image that the construction planning and National and Regional Budget is still insensitive to gender issues, which results in the lack of social prosperity. In the end of chapter three, the author talks about the authority problem faced by women. She further explains the concept of women's authority was different to men's, and in the future can be a reference to all parties. It is also mentioned that authority in feminine concept is a loving/caring power. This kind of authority do not focus on one self, rather it will focus on one purpose. By improving women's authority, women can be a competent politician.

The fourth chapter contains the theme on trying to build a gender-perspective politics that expressed the traditional gender (female) role. She also writes that double gender role should not be women's only, but also men's responsibility. Women naturally bear the responsibilities in domestic sphere; those responsibilities can be men's too. Just like the title of this book, the fifth chapter, *Menuju Kemandirian Politik Perempuan*, is presented in the form of preface from the author. In the conclusion part, the author is able to raise four main points. The first is by promoting *networking* between women group from various elements through National Conference. Second, the women groups have to be brave to support and do cultural reconstruction efforts, especially in changing the thick patriarchal culture in the society into gender-perspective culture. Third, women groups have to be brave to support and to do reinterpretation efforts of the religious teaching, in order to create religious interpretation that accommodate human values, supportive to women, and *rahmatin lil alamin*. Fourth, internally, women have to be able to boost self-capacity with education and spiritual ability.

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