

ISLAMISM & DEMOCRACY:

A Gender Analysis on PKS's Application of Democratic Principles and Values

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Abstract

The increasing popular support for Islamist parties in democratic countries incites public suspicion concerning whether the Islamists' participation in procedural democracy guarantees their commitment for substantial democracy, which in principle requires equality of rights among citizens regardless of their religion and gender. Indeed, gender politics often appears at the centre of the Islamist agenda, as they seek to construct a new moral order based on a conservative gender perspective. A greater concern arises on whether the Islamists will eventually lead society towards democracy or, conversely, towards theocracy. In Indonesia, the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera/ PKS) shows a remarkable development and significant electoral achievement. Some observers viewed that PKS is opportunistically using democratic means to "hijack" it for their Islamist agenda waiting for when political power is in their hands. Others believe PKS's involvement in real politics will, in the end, lead to a "gradual secularisation" of their Islamist agenda. Based on a gender analysis, this paper examines whether PKS's fulfillment of the formalist criteria of democracy is compatible with their application of democratic principles and values.

[Semakin menguatnya dukungan terhadap partai Islam memuncu kecurigaan publik yang mempertanyakan apakah partisipasi kalangan islamis dalam demokrasi prosedural menjamin komitmen mereka bagi tegaknya demokrasi substansial, demokrasi yang mensyaratkan kesetaraan bagi semua orang

tanpa terkecuali. Sebenarnya, agenda politik gender yang didengungkan oleh kalangan islamis tidak bisa dilepaskan dari perspektif konservatif mereka mengenai relasi gender. Pertanyaannya kemudian, apakah yang mereka agendakan akan berlabuh pada pemantapan demokrasi atau --sebaliknya-- menuju teokrasi. Di Indonesia, Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) adalah satu-satunya partai Islam di Indonesia yang berhasil berkembang pesat dan mampu mendulang suara secara signifikan. Bagi beberapa pengamat, PKS merepresentasikan partai Islamis yang berhasil “menunggangi” demokrasi untuk memperjuangkan agenda islamis mereka. Ini akan tampak jelas jika PKS berhasil menjadi partai penguasa. Kendati demikian, beberapa kalangan lainnya berkeyakinan bahwa keterlibatan PKS dalam politik demokratis akan “mensekulerkan” agenda islamis mereka. Dengan analisis gender, tulisan ini hendak menjawab apakah kriteria formal mengenai nilai dan prinsip demokrasi yang melekat pada PKS sejalan dengan apa yang mereka praktekkan.]

Keywords: PKS, gender, democracy

A. Introduction

One of the major challenges to democratisation in predominantly Muslim countries comes from the Islamists’ participation in the legal political process. Despite the fact that recent popular uprisings in the Middle East were not Islamic revolutions, apparently the Islamists have been emerging as the leading political force in the region due to the poor performance of other political organisations. The major fear that underlies the Islamists’ participation in democratic process is that their acceptance of democracy is no more than a strategy and instrument to obtain power so that they could impose an alternative political system when power is in their hands. In other words, suspicion remains on whether the Islamists’ participation in procedural democracy guarantees their commitment insubstantial democracy, which requires equality of rights of all citizens regardless of race, religion and gender.

Primarily, the Islamists perceive Islam as a complete system governing all aspects of life, encompassing all things material and spiritual,

societal and individual, political and personal.¹ Their ultimate goal, therefore, is to establish an Islamic system that ensures the implementation of *sharī'a* derived from the Islamic sources of the Qur'an and Sunna. The tension between the Islamists' conviction in divine sovereignty with the concept of popular sovereignty that constitutes the pillar of democracy, in addition to the terrible democratic performance of Islamist regimes in some Muslim countries, have raised doubts regarding the Islamists' commitment to democratic principles and values. Furthermore, the Islamists' position are often considered ambiguous in several issues pertaining to Islamic law, the use of violence, political pluralism, civil and political rights, religious minorities and the rights of women.²

Gender violence, in particular, is seen mostly as the immediate consequence of Islamisation schemes wherein women become the first and foremost victims of discrimination and oppression engendered by the Islamist agendas.³ Accordingly, the rise of Islamism is deemed responsible for the marginalisation of women and the restriction of their mobility. In fact, although the Islamists enforce a gender division of labor and sexual segregation, they do not necessarily call for women seclusion. Considering the family as the vehicle for the establishment of the ideal Islamic society, which is the ultimate goal of their political activism, the Islamists seek to mobilise women and enhance their participation in the public sphere to press forward their Islamist agenda.⁴ Women's activism on behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), for instance, was pivotal for the movement's achievement as the largest opposition within Egyptian

¹ Sana Abed-Kotob, "The Accommodationists Speaks: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 27, no. 3, 1995, p. 323.

² Nathan Brown, Amr Hamzawy and Marina Ottaway, *Islamist Movements and the Democratic Process in the Arab World: Exploring the Gray Zones* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), p. 17.

³ See Hala Shukrallah, 'The Impact of the Islamic Movement in Egypt' in *Feminist Review*, no. 47, 1994; Haideh Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd, 1999); and Norani Othman, 'Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Fundamentalism/Extremism: an Overview of Southeast Asian Muslim Women's Struggle for Human Rights and Gender Equality,' *Women's Studies International Forum*, no. 29, 2006.

⁴ See Ghada Hashem Talhami, *The Mobilization of Muslim Women in Egypt* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996).

parliament in 2005.⁵ Women also played a significant role in mobilising considerable votes for the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS) in Indonesia.⁶

PKS's remarkable development and electoral achievements have been interpreted in various ways. Some observers are pessimistic viewing that PKS is opportunistically using democratic political means to hijack it for their Islamist agenda when political power is in their hands.⁷ Other scholars are optimistic, viewing PKS as the only party to develop an internal culture and organisational discipline that is desirable for the proper functioning of a consolidated democracy.⁸ The latter assume that PKS's involvement in real politics will eventually lead to a gradual secularisation of their Islamist agenda. In this context, this paper examines whether PKS's accommodation of the formalist criteria of democracy is compatible with their commitment in the substantive value of democracy by looking through a gender specific lens. Here, procedural democracy refers to a set of processes by which a society ensures popular participation in governance, while the substantial definition of democracy ties certain values and principles to the functioning of democratic processes.

As a religio-political movement, PKS falls into the category of a moderate Islamist group since it ideologically accepts electoral democracy, political and ideological pluralism, and aims for a gradual social, political and economic changes. Behaviorally, it works within the established state institutions and rejects violent methods to achieve its objectives.⁹

⁵ Lisa Blayds and Safinaz El Tarouty, "Women's Electoral Participation in Egypt: The Implications of Gender for Voter Recruitment and Mobilization," *The Middle East Journal*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2009, p. 367.

⁶ Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "Islamism and Women in Politics: Analyzing Female Political Participation and Representation of Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)," *Jurnal Substansia*, vol. 1, no.1, 2009, p. 68.

⁷ Cited in Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "Thinking Globally, Acting Locally: Analysing the Islamist Activism of Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) from a Social Movement Theory Perspective," *Master thesis* presented in the Australian National University, 2008, p. 7.

⁸ Greg Fealy, 'Foreword' in Yon Machmudi, *Islamizing Indonesia: The Rise of Jemaah Tarbiyah and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)*, (Canberra, ANU Press, 2008), p. xi.

⁹ Omar Ashour, *The De-radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (London-New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 4.

I observe that as a political institution (*jam'iyah*), PKS is flexible and pragmatic in its gender policies. In comparison, as religious movement (*jamā'ah*), PKS is strict and dogmatist in its gender ideologies. The internal dynamic between the conservative wing that are more ideological and the progressive wing that are more pragmatic has created ambiguity in PKS's stance pertaining to gender issues. However, the internal leadership's vision and the external pressure for reform will determine PKS's direction toward either real or pseudo democratic principles.

B. Islamism and Women's Rights: Sexual Clash of Civilizations?

The recent wave of democratisation in the Middle East seems to imply that there is no more evidence for a 'clash of civilizations,' a controversial thesis in which Samuel P. Huntington argued that democracy -and other Western concepts like individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, secularism, human rights, equality, liberty, and the rule of law-are not applicable in non-Western cultures, particularly Islam.¹⁰ Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris tested this rather simplistic and generalised argument, through the World Values Survey (WVS) that investigates socio-cultural and political change around the globe.¹¹ Although confirming Huntington's cultural approach that religious traditions play a key role in the formation of social norms and values, Inglehart and Norris dissent from his opinion by arguing that the values separating Western and Islamic civilizations have much more to do with gender equality and sexual liberalisation than democracy.¹² In other words, it is the clash of 'eros' instead of 'demos.' Although most Muslim societies support democracy, according to this survey they do not favor equal rights and opportunities for women and disapprove of divorce, abortion and homosexuality.

The 'sexual clash of civilization' theory receives little attention because there is no consensus among scholars on whether sexual liberty is a prerequisite for democracy. Charles K. Rowley and Nathanael Smith suggest that the lack of religious freedom, instead of sexual freedom,

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3, 1993, p. 40.

¹¹ Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "The True Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Policy*, no. 135, 2003, p. 64.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 65.

lead to a democratic deficit in Muslim-majority countries.¹³ They were unsure nevertheless whether gender-specific rights have to do with the ability of a country to sustain a political system wherein people can hire and fire their leaders through the ballot box. In this regard, Shahra Razavi reveals the feminist critique that the liberal notion of rights has excluded the important domain of social life --the private sphere of marriage and family life-- from democratic scrutiny.¹⁴ For this reason, the feminists campaign 'the personal is political' to emphasise what happens within women's personal lives as a political issue that necessitate attention from the state, such as in the matters of domestic violence, reproductive rights and child care for example.

The Islamists, by contrast, are excessively preoccupied with family issues and the regulation of the private domain including sexuality, marriage and gender roles. Sexual politics become the centre of the Islamist agenda,¹⁵ which seek the reordering of society and the construction of a new moral order based on a gender discourse derived from literal, non-contextual and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts. The sexual division of labor, the inegalitarian nature in the matters of marriage, divorce and inheritance, and the restriction on women's leadership and sexuality are seen as indicators of the misogynist gender politics of the Islamists. 'The private' here is indeed political, and has become increasingly politicized.¹⁶

Nevertheless, the Islamists' gender perspective is neither static nor monolithic. It is continuously changing over time and varied according to the context. In Egypt, for instance, Sherifa Zuhur observed how the Islamists' gender ideology become flexible since their aspiration for social change necessitates mass mobilisation. Their message concerning

¹³ Charles K. Rowley and Nathanael Smith, "Islam's Democracy Paradox: Muslims claim to like democracy, so why do they have so little?," *Public Choice*, 2009, no. 139, p. 294.

¹⁴ Shahra Razavi, "Women in Contemporary Democratization," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2001, p. 202.

¹⁵ See Nilufer Narli, *Unveiling the Fundamentalist Women: a Case Study of University Students in Malaysia* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 1991); John Stratton Hawley, *Fundamentalism and Gender* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

¹⁶ Shahra Razavi and Anne Jenichen, "The Unhappy Marriage of Religion and Politics: Problems and Pitfalls for Gender Equality," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 6, 2010, p. 835.

women appears in various versions, depending on whether the audience is internal or external to the movement. There is also disparity between the Islamists' gender theory and practice, as they tolerate deviation from their ideal norms in certain areas like education, employment, family planning, child rearing and family relations.¹⁷ In Jordan, Lisa Taraki found that the Islamists' official and popular discourse pertaining to women indeed remained conservative although the changing circumstances required reformulations. On the contrary, interestingly, the Islamists' practice concerning women is constantly in a state of negotiation, contestation, redefinition, and experimentation.¹⁸ Anthony Bubalo, Greg Fealy and Whit Mason viewed that such an ideological shift is driven by a calculation of what might be gained by playing within the rules of democratic politics and is the logical conclusion of a decision to pursue goals through participatory rather than revolutionary processes.¹⁹

C. Gender Discourse of PKS: between Equality and Equity

Throughout her in-depth study on the gender discourse of the Islamist ideologues including the Muslim Brotherhood's influential figures Hassan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Zaynab al-Ghazali, Lamia Rustum Shehadeh identified three common elements within the Islamist discourse on women. *First*, domesticity as women's primary role; *second*, the physical, physiological, biological, and psychological differences between the sexes are viewed as universal and immutable, dictating parallel differences in the respective roles of husband and wife, although they both spiritually equal; *third*, an element of danger is inherent in a women's nature.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, the trace of all of these features is apparent in the official and popular discourse of PKS pertaining to women.

As a political movement, PKS recognises the significant effect of

¹⁷ Sherifa Zuhur, *Revealing Reveiling: Islamist Gender Ideology in Contemporary Egypt* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1992), p.107.

¹⁸ Lisa Taraki, "Jordanian Islamists and the Agenda for Women: Between Discourse and Practice," *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 32, no. 1, 1996, p. 141.

¹⁹ Anthony Bubalo, Greg Fealy and Whit Mason, *Zelous Democrats: Islamism and Democracy in Egypt, Indonesia, and Turkey* (Australia: Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2008), p. iv-v.

²⁰ Lamia Rustum Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women under Fundamentalist Islam* (Florida: the University Press of Florida, 2003), p. 219.

women's political participation, particularly in terms of gaining votes in the election. In fact, they perceive the mobilisation of women, who constitute half of the population, as essential to realise their social and political agenda for Islamist reform. PKS's official stance on gender equality, nevertheless, is both ambivalent and contradictory. On the one hand, PKS views that creating an Islamic vicegerency (*kehilafah*) is a collective duty for both men and women, which indicates equality and necessitates partnership between them. However, the women's role and activism must be conducted within the Islamic framework and must be adjusted according to their distinct nature (*fitrah*).

Because of a women's nature to nurture, PKS determines that the most important women's role and function is in the management of the family as 'the pillar of the nation.' Although they emphasise the 'natural' role of women as mothers and wives, these roles are considered more political rather than domestic. Family is seen as the most important political, social and cultural unit of the society, in which the division of labor between men and women is maintained because each has a different role to play in establishing the ideal Islamic society. This is reflected in the guidelines concerning the role and duty of women in the PKS's Basic Policies: 1) to optimise the woman's role in all fields of life, while *preserving her dignity* (*harkat martabat wanita*); 2) to establish a condition that is conducive to optimise woman's political role, while *maintaining the Islamic values and the natural disposition* (*fitrah*); 3) to set equilibrium in the political rights; 4) to place women in strategic institutions in proportional ways, in terms of quality and quantity; 5) to pay attention on women's contemporary issues that develop among society; 6) *To make family the institution of political education*.²¹

Instead of asserting that men and women are equal, PKS view that men and women have a different nature, role, and rights, although they have the same value before God. Rebecca Foley referred this notion as gender equity instead of gender equality.²² Gender equity centers on affirming women's access to rights that are not necessarily equal to those of men, and this differentiation does not imply a hierarchy in

²¹ Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, *Kebijakan Dasar Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Jakarta: DPP Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, 2005). Author's translation with additional emphasis.

²² Rebecca Foley, "Muslim Women's Challenges to Islamic Law," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2004, p. 59.

value.²³ Thus, instead of acknowledging that the problems of women are the result of gender disadvantage and discrimination, PKS view their problems as the result of a societal process wherein proper Islamic principles are absent.

According to the PKS Development Policy Platform, the problem for Indonesian women is part of multidimensional crisis that is rooted in the crisis of morality. Without elaborating in details, the platform correlated the moral crisis with the global concern upon poverty, poor health, low education, violence against women, limited access to economic resources and decision-making and communal conflict, wherein women are the most vulnerable. To solve these problems, PKS argued in its platform that women's empowerment in all aspect of life is more urgent than the realisation of gender equality. PKS proposes several solutions as follows, which mostly deal with practical instead of strategic gender interest:

First, to generate Indonesian women who are pious (*bertakwa*), as piety guarantees emotional and physical happiness, through giving women the rights to carry out their religious obligations and to obtain religious education, as well as funding their religious activities. Second, to create a prosperous life for Indonesian women (*sejahtera*), through financially supporting poor widows as well as subsidising the health care for women who are pregnant, giving birth, and breastfeeding; ensuring fair wage and friendly working hours and conditions for women as well as ensuring law enforcement on crimes against women. Third, to generate Indonesian women who are intelligent (*cerdas*), through providing women chance to obtain education and *developing a curriculum that commensurate the women's nature*, as well as endorsing women's entrepreneurship. Fourth, to generate Indonesian women who are empowered (*berdaya*), through improving women's role in decision-making and accommodating their aspiration and interest, PKS encourages women to play role for the progress of the nation, to take a critical stance against detrimental public policy, *to preserve and defend their honor*, and to refuse any kind of exploitation. Fifth, to generate women who are cultured (*berbudaya*), through building Indonesia

²³ Azza Karam, "Women, Islamisms, and State: Dynamics of Power and Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt," in Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl (eds), *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform* (Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 19.

as a religious nation and to develop the culture that *raises women's dignity*.²⁴

PKS considered women's activism in the public sphere is indispensable because Allah has assigned both woman and man with the same duty to enjoin what is good and forbid what is evil.²⁵ For the purpose of *dakwah* that can be manifested through social and political activism, women are allowed to leave their houses, to interact with the opposite sex, and to convey their messages before the public. Like any other Islamists, PKS use the historical examples of women who participated in the public sphere to justify women's activism. For instance, the classical narrative of women (*ṣaḥābah*) who pledged their political allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad (*bay'at*) and women who participated in jihad by providing food and water for the combatants in the battlefield and taking care of their wounds. Nevertheless, women's activism in the field of *dakwah* and politics must be conducted in the consideration of principles and requirements prescribed by the Central Sharia Board of PKS as follows:

(1) *Man's leadership over woman*, (2) *Husband's permission*, (3) *Cooperation among husband and wife in the management of household (ta'āwun)*, (4) *Party's notification to the husband*, (5) *No dichotomy between woman's role in dakwah and politics, and her role in the family*, (6) *Balance between family and dakwah (tawāzun)*, and (7) *the woman is allowed to hold a position in the legislative and executive levels, but not in the top level of leadership (al-imāma al-uṣṣma)*.²⁶

This *bayān* (explanation/guidance) on *dakwah* and political activities of Muslim women clearly shows patriarchal considerations, which mainly determine the man as the leader, superior, and guardian of woman. The unequal gender treatment is also evident here, wherein woman's activism should meet the interest and approval of her husband, while it is not the case with the man. Thus, a woman is not free in making choices and decisions, because her actions and movements depend largely on

²⁴ Majelis Pertimbangan Pusat PKS, *Platform Kebijakan Pembangunan Partai Keadilan Sejahtera: Terwujudnya Masyarakat Madani yang Adil, Sejahtera dan Bermartabat*, pp. 379-81. Author's translation with additional emphasis.

²⁵ This concept is known as *'amr ma'rūf wa nahi an al-munkar* derived from Qur'an 9: 71.

²⁶ Dewan Syari'ah Pusat (DSP) PKS, *Bayan DSP PKS no. 19/B/K/DSP-PKS/1429 Tentang Aktivitas Dakwah dan Politik Muslimah*, 2008. Author's translation with additional emphasis.

her husband's permission. It also emphasises a woman's familial duty, wherein she is required to balance her role in the public sphere and her responsibility in the domestic sphere. The guidance conveys multiple expectations on woman:

“Islam does not want a woman to have a great role in public, to have high social status, to have a successful career, to have a lot of academic titles, yet she cannot observe her main role and duty to be the partner for her husband and mother for her children. By contrast, it is not wise to waste the potency of woman whose knowledge and skill is needed by the Muslim society (*umma*), yet this gift from Allah cannot be utilised because she only stays at home.”²⁷

In order to solve this dilemma, PKS encourages cooperation between the husband and wife, particularly in the matter of children's education and household maintenance. Nonetheless, the extent of woman's public activism is still limited, as she can hold any position as far as it is regarded to entail a real benefit for Muslim society with the exception of being in the top leadership. PKS's disapproval against a women's leadership is based on their interpretation of Qur'an (4:34): "Men are the leaders of women, because Allah has made one of them (men) to excel the other (women), and because they (men) spend of their property. Therefore, the righteous women are obedient to Allah and guard (means that they do not cheat and they keep the secret and property of their husbands) in the husband's absence, because Allah have guarded (them: Allah orders husbands to treat their wives well)."²⁸

Based on this verse, PKS also maintain the traditional division of labor and determine a man's duty to provide for his wife and children with financial support (*nafkah*). However, if the wife works and earns money, she is entitled to her own wealth, while if she wants to provide for her family, it is considered as charity (since it is above her prescribed duty). The consequence that can appear from such a division of labor is that the man may curtail women's freedom and mobility in public, while women -being financially dependent upon their husbands- may have limited access to decision making within their own household. Indeed, economic power is a necessary ingredient for female empowerment,

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

as feminist Heidi Hartman argues that economic independence is an important determinant of female autonomy.²⁹

Women's restrictions also tend to dominate the Islamist rhetoric, in which the ways women act, dress, and behave are deemed crucial in the reconstruction of an appropriate Islamic order.³⁰ Here, the PKS guidance includes restrictions on women's activism in the public sphere based on their misogynist perception that women are the source of *fitnah* (social disorder or chaos), who are sexually attractive and naturally seductive:

When a woman should become active in *dakwah* and politics, she must pay attention toward the Islamic ethics as follows: (1) The primary nature (*fitrah*) and role of woman is to be the mother for her children and the wife for her husband; (2) To wear the Islamic dress; (3) To avoid being alone with a non-relative member of the opposite sex (*kebahwa*); (4) Do not show her accessory and beauty off (*tabarruj*); (5) Do not soften her voice sensually as she speak; (6) To control her gaze; (7) To uphold ethics in the communication (8) Do not shake hands with a member of the opposite sex; (9) To guard her sanctity and honor (*'iffah*) and to avoid the *fitnah*.³¹

This perspective is in conformity with the Islamist sexual discourse, in which unsatisfied male sexuality is considered a social danger and female seductive powers as conducive to *fitnah* or social anarchy and chaos.³² To maintain order and safeguard the sanctity of the family and community, their sex drives must be controlled by removing the source of temptation, which is enforced through gender segregation as well as sexual restrictions, which are mostly imposed upon women.

On the other hand, to enhance the family unit, PKS affirmed polygamous marriage as part of Islamic law (*shari'a*) and the tradition of the Prophet (*sunna*). It is also deemed as being wise (*bikmah*) and as a solution for social and household problems. Before turning into the PKS, the Sharia Board of PK issued specific explanation (*bayān*) on polygamy

²⁹ Cited in Roksana Bahramitash, "Myths and Realities of the Impact of Political Islam on Women: Female Employment in Indonesia and Iran," *Development in Practice*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2004, p. 509.

³⁰ Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Jane I. Smith, "Women in Islam: the Mother of All Battles," in Suha Sabbagh (ed.), *Arab Women between Defiance and Restraint* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2003), p. 137.

³¹ Dewan Syari'ah Pusat (DSP) PKS, *Bayan DSP PKS*.

³² Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Al Saqi Books, 1985), p. 45.

(*ta'addud*). It set up two loose requirements as follows: (1) capability of providing financial support; (2) fair in terms of material and physical allotment. It also advised several ethics as follows: (1) straighten out one's intention, wherein the objective of marriage is for the sake of *dakwah* instead of fulfilling one's lust; (2) discuss this matter with family; (3) give a good example, by not lying or oppressing his wife.³³

In sum, women are represented in PKS's official and popular discourse as important actors who carry out various social functions, in which family is the most important function that necessitate their involvement. For this reason, women are responsible for guarding morality, specifically sexual morality, and to improve social welfare. Women also play a key political role in terms of supporting the party's policy through campaigns and demonstrations as well as a regeneration process that preserves the party's viability and survival.³⁴ Nevertheless, the rights to issue *fatwā* is under male authority, that must be followed by all members including female ones who have limited access to decision making, for instance in the case of polygamy.

D. Gender Practice of PKS: between Polity and Piety

In the 2009 election, PKS gained 7.88 % of the popular vote or 57 seats of the total 560 seats at the Indonesian parliament, making it the fourth-largest party in the country as well as the biggest Islamic party.³⁵ Burhanuddin Muhtadi argued that this electoral success was not only due to PKS's strong brand image as the "Clean and Caring" party, but was also due to its cadres' socialisation inside and outside of the party's constituencies. With a higher proportion of female cadres, who constituted 57% out of the total member, Muhtadi suggested that they played a key role both in the political socialisation and in the mobilisation of mass supports.³⁶ Unfortunately, women are not well represented in PKS's structural institutions and its members of parliament in the

³³ PKS, *Bayan DSP PK no. 01/B/D/DS-PK/VII/1422 tentang Ta'adud/Poligami*, 2001, Author's translation.

³⁴ AD Kusumaningtyas, "Perempuan dalam Partai-partai Politik Peserta Pemilu 2004: Representasi dan Pandangan Politik," *Master thesis* presented in the University of Indonesia, 2005, p. 109.

³⁵ <http://partai.info/pemilu2009/>

³⁶ Muhtadi, "Islamism and Women in Politics," p. 68.

national, provincial and district levels. In the time of PKS's formation in 2002, only 6 out of 50 founders were women (12%). In 2009, PKS surpassed the 30% quota for female legislative candidates recommended in the Election law, wherein 212 out of 576 PKS's candidates were female (36.6%).³⁷ However, only 3 out of 57 (5%) of the PKS legislators elected that year were female, indicating a lack of support from the PKS leadership to put its female cadres as feasible candidates. Men dominate PKS's political structure, wherein only 3 out of 44 members of the PKS central executive board are female (7%), 2 of them serve as the head and secretary of the department of women affairs.³⁸ Despite having a large number of well-qualified and politically talented female senior cadres, no PKS woman has a high public profile, suggesting that the party's internal culture hinders women from attaining prominence.³⁹

PKS women's activities are mostly concentrated in the Department of Women's Affairs, which consists of three divisions: (1) Division of Family Affairs whose programs include pre-marital courses, family counseling, parenting classes, early education, and a public campaign on the importance of building strong and happy families, (2) Department of Women, Children and Family Studies whose programs include research and public advocacy on women, children and family issues as well as providing recommendations to related institutions and publications in the mass media. (3) Department of Women's Capacity Building whose programs includes leadership trainings and workshops for female cadres, networking with public figures and strategic elements of society, and organising Local Posts for Justice Women (Pos Wanita Keadilan/POS-WK). Here, the department's vision mostly reflected the Islamist discourse on women as *mar'ah usriyah* (family women), whose main duty is to take care of their families.

Women's significant contribution for PKS is apparent through their involvement in POS-WK, which has been established in 5000 locations across the country, in order to gain voters rather than to empower women. The objectives of POS-WK is as follows: *first*, to strengthen the image of PKS as a caring *dakwah* party; *second*, to recruit as many people as possible

³⁷ <http://kanalpemilu.net/?q=node/151>.

³⁸ <http://pk-sejahtera.nl/inilah-susunan-pengurus-tingkat-pusat-pks/>

³⁹ Anthony Bubalo, Greag Fealy and Whit Mason, *Zelous Democrats*, p. 67.

to be the members and supporters of the party; *third*, to nurture people's trust in PKS as the leader of society; *fourth*, to raise PKS female cadres as the leading figures among society. To attract female supporters, POS-WK offers various programs like women's Islamic study groups, social services and charities, religious education, book clubs, entrepreneurship and providing health care for mothers and children. The programs mainly focus on the *practical* gender interests such as access to childcare and healthcare rather than *strategic* gender interests to generate social gender changes. While the former can be attained through charity or income-generation projects, the latter can be achieved through strengthening women's feminist consciousness and their bargaining power to confront social and political discrimination.⁴⁰

In terms of public policy, although PKS are not the only political party or social organisation supporting the Anti Pornography and Pornographic Acts Bill (Undang-undang Anti Pornografi dan Pornoaksi, UUAPP), they have certainly been one of its most prominent advocates. Since the linkage of faith to modesty is essential to the Islamist argument, PKS became the main initiator and supporter of the bill, which was controversial as it is seen by many feminists as an attempt to curtail women's autonomy in controlling their bodies and freedom in choosing what to wear. PKS was its staunch promoter, inside and outside of the parliament building, since they deemed (sexual) morality as the root for collective well-being.⁴¹ Gadis Arivia views that, in the discourse surrounding the bill, which previously including pornography and pornographic acts, women had become the focus of improving Indonesia's moral standard, as though they are both the cause and solution to the so-called moral crisis.⁴² The PKS Women Department's vision to amplify women as 'the pillar of the nation', which is inspired by the Prophet's saying that a nation's excellence and decadence both depend upon women, also shows

⁴⁰ Sophie Richter-Devroe, "Gender, Culture, and Conflict Resolution in Palestine," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2008, p. 42.

⁴¹ Norma Permata, "Islamist Party and Democratic Participation: Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Indonesia 1998-2006," *Doctoral thesis* presented in the University of Munster Germany, 2008, p. 266.

⁴² Cited in Lydia Trotter, "Islam, Women and Indonesian Politics: the PKS Challenge to Substantive Theories of Democracy," *Master thesis* presented in the University of Sidney Australia, 2006, p. 39.

how women are made the symbolic representation of religious identity. According to PKS, UUAPP will protect women from sexual harassment and violence, in which they epitomize the Islamists' view that women are responsible for causing immoral sexual desires in men, and hence, women must act and dress modestly in order to avoid encouraging men's inappropriate sexual behavior.⁴³

In her research on women's political representation and views in Indonesian Islamic political parties, Kusumaningtyas categorised PKS as a party that is limitative upon the women's rights.⁴⁴ Adopting Islam as its foundation, PKS viewed that Islamic *sharī'a* entails a set of values and laws that must be implemented in daily life. Prohibition of women's leadership, permission of polygamy, and restrictions on women's activism are deemed as the logical consequences of their understanding of *sharī'a*. Women are seen as the backbone of society, whose main role concerns family care, societal education and moral guardianship. Various programs are proposed in order to guard morality, sexual morality in particular, through family institutions, public education and dress regulations. Consequently, the women's rights and roles are limited to particular prescribed sectors.

E. Conclusion

Like Islamists elsewhere, PKS's gender discourse revolves around three interlinked elements of faith, family, and state. Faith provides the instruction, the state provides the tools, and the family provides the building foundation for an Islamic system.⁴⁵ In this regard, women are positioned as bearers of religion and tradition, who preserve (sexual) morality and sustain (biological and social) continuity. For that reason, mechanisms and restrictions must be placed on a woman's sexuality in order to safeguard her honor and dignity. Although the Islamist normative restriction on sexuality is applied to both sexes, in practice it is women who must maintain their modesty physically, emotionally, and socially. This is the reason why PKS, as a religious actor and movement (*jam'iyah*), are strict and dogmatist in their gender ideology.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Kusumaningtyas, *Perempuan dalam Partai-partai Politik*, p. 116.

⁴⁵ Shahin Gerami, *Women and Fundamentalism: Islam and Christianity* (New York-London: Garland Publishing, 1996), p. 31.

As a political player, PKS has shown several transformations in their gender practice, reflecting intensive negotiation and contestation in the gender field. Previously, PKS female cadres were mostly working behind the scenes or engaged in the department of women's affairs or, at most, serving as a deputy or secretary in the PKS structure. Currently however, the central leadership is diversifying the roles of female cadres. Female cadres who used to accept party decisions and policies as a given have begun to express their dissenting opinions and aspirations. The use of a partition wall (*hijāb*) to segregate sexes in official meetings is no longer used in the central office, indicating symbolic but meaningful step in PKS gender attitude.⁴⁶

Janine Astrid Clark and Jillian Schwedler argued that the transformations within Islamist parties are no more than a strategy to present the moderate image and to gain more votes.⁴⁷ This pragmatism is also apparent in various PKS initiatives to reach broader female constituency, ranges from giving awards to prominent women figures considered as inspiring (some of them are unveiled), to establishing thousands of women support centers across the country through Pos Wanita Keadilan. PKS also fulfilled the 30% quota for female legislative candidates recommended in the election law, and supported female candidates for executive position in the regional elections, indicating their gender paradigm shift. Evidently, as *jam'iyah*, PKS is flexible and pragmatic in their gender policies.

The internal dynamic between the conservative wing that are more ideological and the progressive wing that are more pragmatic has created ambiguity in PKS's stance pertaining to gender issues. The ambivalence appears, for instance, in the controversial recommendation of the PKS Governor of West Java Ahmad Heryawan to make the traditional Jaipong dance less attractive (sensual) by removing its hip movements known as *goyang*, *gitek*, *geol* (3G). The female dancers must not wear strapless or see-through costumes either, in conformity with the pornography laws. This case indicates PKS's obsession in controlling women's sexuality and moral

⁴⁶ Lanny Octavia, "Women and Islamism: Women's Activism and Gender Perspective within Indonesia's Prosperous Justice Party," *Master thesis* presented in the University of Exeter, United Kingdom, 2011, p. 52.

⁴⁷ Janine Astrid Clark and Jillian Schwedler, "Who Opened the Window? Women's Activism in Islamist Parties," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2003.

conduct as they acquire and exercise political power. Meanwhile, in the presidential election 2009, PKS deputy secretary Zulkieflymansyah said that the hearts of PKS's supporters were in favour of Jusuf Kalla-Wiranto whose wives wear headscarves. Therefore, PKS parliamentary chairman Mahfud Sidik advised the wives of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono-Budiono to wear Islamic attires as well to boost their husbands' appeals among Muslim voters and solidify the Party's support. Here, PKS envisaged women's dress code as the marker of the 'good' society and utilised this 'religious' vision further for their political interest.

PKS's preoccupation with family issues, however, follows a different direction from the feminists' struggle of making personal matters as political. In the formulation of Anti Domestic Violence Law, PKS female member of parliament Yoyoh Yusroh insisted in including the law under the complaint crimes (*delik aduan*/ [Dutch] *klachtdelict*) instead of the ordinary crimes (*delik biasa*/ [Dutch] *gewone delict*). Consequently, domestic violence cannot be processed unless the victim reports the case to the police. Yusroh did not want the law to fall under the ordinary crime, wherein anyone who sees domestic violence can make a complaint and thus it will ruin the marriage. This stance is in direct contradiction with the feminist who adopted 'zero tolerance' to all forms of violence.

The ambiguity above is a natural consequence of the marriage between religion and politics. While religion emphasises amoral absolute, politics is all about compromise. In this context, women issues become the battlefield between the conservative wings who view religious moral principles as an absolute truth and non-negotiable, and the progressive wings who seek to accommodate democratic and humanist principles under the religious spirit and norms. In the end, the internal leadership's vision and the external pressure for gender equality that constitutes substantial democracy will determine PKS's direction in the future.

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