



## Indonesian women and local politics: Islam, gender, and networks in post-Suharto Indonesia

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### **Indonesian women and local politics: Islam, gender, and networks in post-Suharto Indonesia**

DEWI KURNIAWATI HASTUTI, 2015

Singapore: NUS Press

336 pp., ISBN 978 9971 69 842 3, \$34.00 (paperback)

In her new book, Dewi Kurniawati Hastuti seeks to counter the ‘general perception ... that Islam is a source of discrimination and oppression against women ...’ (p. 1). To this end, she examines the direct elections of local government heads in Indonesia. After the New Order dictatorship collapsed in 1998, elections were introduced for governors, district heads and mayors. These figures were elected by local parliaments between 1999 and 2004 and through popular elections since 2005. The number of women running as candidates in these direct elections has been ‘significant’ Hastuti claims (p. 3) and there are now several female local government heads in Indonesia.

To support her argument, Hastuti examines the political careers of three women who were elected after 2005, devoting a chapter to each. The first portrait provided is that of Rustriningsih who became the first directly elected female district head in Kebumen district in 2008. Rustriningsih’s career shows that she hailed from a well-known family whose involvement in local politics dates back to the independence war against the Dutch. In her campaign, Rustriningsih frequently mentioned her father, a well-known activist in Kebumen during the Sukarno years. She also became more overtly pious and began wearing a headscarf when running for office. In addition, her campaign also made use of her gender by telling voters that ‘woman vote for woman’ (p. 95).

There are several similarities in the career trajectory of Siti Qomariyah, who was elected district head of Pekalongan in 2006. While her family had no prior involvement in politics, her father was a well-known religious teacher (*kyai*) in the district. His reputation helped Siti Qomariyah mobilize the electorate. Likewise, she also made strategic use of her gender, intensifying her contacts with women’s networks in Pekalongan during her election campaign. Finally, Siti Qomariyah also became more religious as a result of her political ambitions and approached Islamic organizations and prayer groups in an effort to use these groups as vote-getters on Election Day.

The last career analyzed in this book is that of Ratna Ani Lestari who became the first female local government head in Banyuwangi district in 2005. Again, family ties were crucial for her success at the ballot box. During her campaign she frequently mentioned her husband, a district head and politically influential figure in Bali at the time. She also made use of religious symbols during her campaign, and began wearing a headscarf as part of her campaign. Like the other two women portrayed in this book, Lestari also played up on her gender in the hope to attract broader support.

Overall, then, in the conclusion of Dewi Kurniawati Hastuti, the largest Muslim-majority country and third largest democracy in the world shows that Islam is not an

obstacle to women's advancement in politics. Hastuti argues that this has much to do with the position that Indonesia's main Muslim organizations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama, have on female leadership, and which 'provide a strong religious foundation for female Javanese Muslim politicians to become local political leaders' (p. 194). Consequently, local politics have become a space for women to be actively involved in politics and it is from within provincial and district governments that national female leaders will eventually emerge, according to Hastuti.

However, the way in which Hastuti reaches these conclusions is problematic for several reasons: one, the number of women participating in local executive elections continues to be incredibly low. Indonesian local government head elections are contested by pairs of candidates, which, if successful at the ballot box, come to occupy the government head and deputy government head post. Only 9.9% of all these *pairs* of candidates running in direct elections in Java, Indonesia's main island, and 4.2% of all pairs of candidates in Outer Island Indonesia included women. If Hastuti had reported the actual number of women out of all candidates (not pairs), the percentage of female candidates would have been even lower. Arguably, the number of *successful* female candidates would have been lower still. Until 2009, and after more than 490 elections, only 9 (!) women had been elected into local government head offices (Satriyo, 2010, p. 243). Only two women became local government heads during the 32 years of authoritarian rule under Suharto, a figure that Hastuti does not provide in her book but which puts the number of women occupying formal positions in democratic Indonesia into perspective. It is difficult to see how these figures can be interpreted as a sign for the increase of female politicians in newly democratic Indonesia and the compatibility of female leadership with Islam. If anything, the three women portrayed in this book are statistical outliers rather than representatives of a broader trend and the book should have explained why these women have been successful against all odds.

Two, in a similar vein, the author chose to examine only successful candidates but does not spend any time discussing unsuccessful female candidates. This case selection based on the dependent variable undermines the findings in this study further. For instance, how shall we explain the many female candidates that engaged with Islam and Islamic symbols during their campaigns but where not elected?

Three, given the very low numbers of female candidates in gubernatorial and district head elections, focusing on local *executive* elections seems an odd choice for a study that wants to prove that female leadership is compatible with the religious values of Indonesian voters. The percentage of female candidates competing for power in *legislative* elections, which have been conducted in Indonesia every five years since 1999, is much higher. In addition, many of the female candidates in these legislative elections would have made for more interesting case studies to prove the author's point. Particularly since the introduction of an open party-list system in 2009, which allows voters to vote for both a party and an individual candidate and which therefore has placed a premium on 'face-recognition', soap opera stars, soft porn actresses and popular singers have been running for office and have been elected in great numbers. Providing an explanation for why and how such less-than-obvious female candidates who also refuse to play up to religious symbolism have been successful in their run for power, would have allowed the author to make a much more powerful argument about the compatibility of Indonesian Muslim mores with the growing political aspirations of many Indonesian women. These methodological problems do not disprove Hastuti's thesis that female political leadership is compatible with Islam. However, fact is that

women struggle to enter politics in the world's third largest democracy and a more comprehensive discussion is needed about why this is the case, taking into account religious, socio-economic and gender dimensions. Hastuti's study may help initiate such a debate.

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## The securitization of rape: women, war and sexual violence

SABINE HIRSCHAUER, 2014

London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan

272 pp., ISBN 9781137410818, £65.00 (hardback)

Academic works on rape and sexual violence are few and far between, and admirable contributions to this topic are rarer still. Sabine Hirschauer's 2014 publication, rich in detail and structured in a way that intertwines theory with evidence, is an important contribution for its content as well as its presentation.

One of the most estimable qualities of this work, and something that resonates throughout, is her unshaking tone and, at times, shocking honesty about the atrocity of rape. Her argument acts as her unquestioning foundation throughout, and such focus is admirable when considering the challenge that such a title must have been to complete. The numerous instances of unnecessary and at times frustrating levels of repetition do little to draw away from the overall quality of the work, but one might ask how much detail Hirschauer could have gone into without such frequent reiterations.

Using the case studies of Bosnia and Rwanda, Hirschauer seeks to explore how war-time rape is seen through the lens of securitization theory, a theory developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in the late 1980s. Hirschauer presents this theory in a coherent and applicable fashion for the most part, although there are instances where there seems to have been an unnecessary over-complication of certain theoretical elements. Despite this, the work is still accessible and engaging: Hirschauer sets aside a number of pages to lay her theoretical groundwork, which then allows her to layer her argument with detailed analyses of Bosnia and Rwanda. The structure of the work as a whole makes for a dense concluding section, where Hirschauer makes a very clear stance on the importance of the permanency of rape's securitization.