

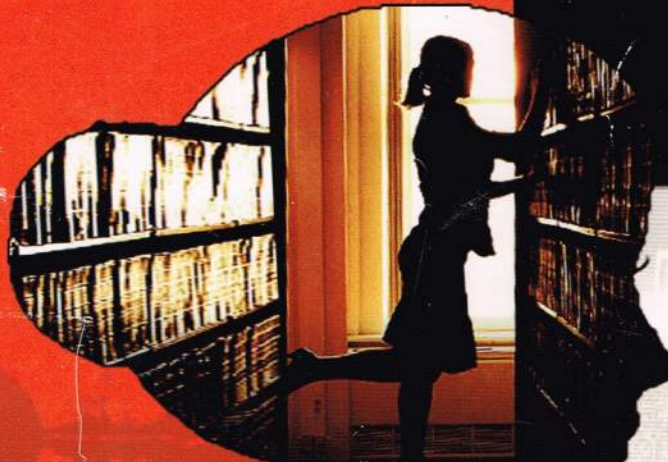
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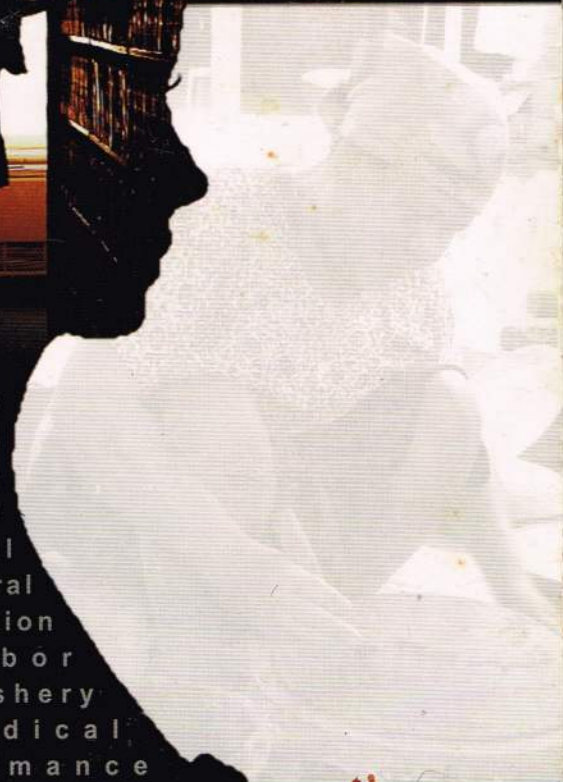
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A Paradox of Women's Politician in Matrilineal Society and Muslim Patriarchy in West Sumatra

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■ 1. Background

This study is a cultural sociological inquiry into the political participation and social agency of Minangkabau women in West Sumatra province, Indonesia. Unlike most other Indonesian ethnic groups, the Minangkabau maintain a matrilineal social system, albeit with substantial accommodations for the prevailing patriarchal Indonesian Muslim social system.

Although Minangkabau society prescribes female inheritance of land and property and other customs associated with matrilineality, at the same time it also operates within a larger national system that generally endorses patriarchal values. This system is often justified by reference to Islamic teachings, since although Islam is not Indonesia's state religion, the overwhelming majority of Indonesians, around 88%, are Muslim (Indonesian statistic, BPS, 2003). Consequently, the activities of Minangkabau women display both matrilineal and patriarchal influences.

While this study focuses more specifically on female political participation in West Sumatra, additional information such as interviews is examined from Riau province. The population of both provinces belongs to the Malay ethnic group, with Islam the dominant religion. Riau, a province of 5.3 million people, is 88% Muslim, while West Sumatra is 98% Muslim and has a total population of 5.4 million (Indonesian Statistic, BPS, 2005).

Over the last two hundred years, Minangkabau migration to Riau province has been ongoing; currently the 'Minangkabau' comprise about 65% of Riau's population (Andaya 1995: 503). In such *rantau* (migration) areas, observers note that residents in the capital of Riau, Pekanbaru, use the Minangkabau language in

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their economic and daily activities, especially in the market area. Nonetheless, it is also evident that Minangkabau customs have undergone considerable change in the *rantau* and the social status of women has declined markedly. According to Els Postel-Coster (1992), the image of Minangkabau women is very different in the *rantau* from image in the original area. Women's life in the *rantau* is generally viewed as a milieu marked by 'a deterioration of social status' (p. 231).

As an index of female political participation in society, data about women legislators in provincial level in these two provinces can be seen from table 1 and 2.

Table 1
Sex-ratio of Parliamentary Candidates in the 2004 Election

Province	Male	Female	Total
Riau	460 (72%)	180 (28%)	640
West Sumatra	454 (74%)	163 (26%)	617

Source: <http://www.kpu.go.id>.

Table 2
Sex-ratio of Members of Parliament in the 2004 Elections.

Province	Male	Female	Total
Riau	55 (95%)	3 (5%)	58
West Sumatra	50 (90%)	5 (9.1%)	55

Source: <http://www.kpu.go.id>

Table 3
Composition of Parliamentary Delegates from Selected Indonesian Provinces

Province	Male	Female	Total
Bali	50 (91%)	5 (9%)	55
South Sulawesi	64 (96%)	3 (5%)	67
NTT	51 (94%)	3 (6%)	54
Papua	40 (91%)	4 (9%)	44
Riau	55 (95%)	3 (5%)	58
West Sumatra	50 (91%)	5 (9%)	55
North Sulawesi	38 (86%)	6 (14%)	44
Central Sulawesi	38 (85%)	7 (16%)	45
Aceh	62 (95%)	3 (5%)	65
East Java	85 (85%)	15 (15%)	100
West Java	89 (89%)	11 (11%)	100
Yogyakarta	50 (92%)	5 (9%)	55
Banten	70 (93%)	5 (7%)	75
West Kalimantan	51 (95%)	3 (6%)	54
East Kalimantan	35 (83%)	7 (17%)	42

Source: <http://kpu.go.id/> Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding.
(Tabulation by author)

Yet, table 3 shows the composition of parliamentary delegates from selected Indonesian provinces, 2004. Although West Sumatra has the most matrilineal system in Indonesia, which presumably provides more opportunities for female participation in society, female political participation is barely mediocre, as measured by the number of female legislators (9%).

■ 2. Research Questions

This study is founded upon the premise that women have a higher status in relation to men (in the sense of having opportunities for carrying out outside activities) in West Sumatra Province than in the more patriarchal systems of other provinces in Indonesia, because it operates in a combination of matrilineal and patriarchal systems. The research presented here examines this question further. The three research questions areas of interest are as follows:

1. What opportunities do Minangkabau women in West Sumatra. Do women in West Sumatra have a more advantageous bargaining position relative to men than women in other provinces?.
2. What contradictions exist between the expectations placed upon Minangkabau women legislators by the matrilineal and patriarchal systems of West Sumatra and Riau?

■ 3. Discussion

The influences of combination matrilineal system and patriarchal system for women's politician in West Sumatra can be seen through their effort to be member of House of Representatives and their activities as female legislators. As Matrilineal system and patriarchal system were tied of West Sumatran society, this culture affect women's politician in their activities.

3.1 Matrilineal System

As Peggy Reeves Sanday (2000) explains; "The matrilineal system is the transgenerational link in the maternal chain, through which pass ancestral land and matrilineal title from the grandmother to the mother, and then to the granddaughter, and her descendant in the female line" (p. 27). Sanday emphasizes that women are positioned at the core of the generational family. Largely through this matrilineal social organization, the leading figure in a Minangkabau extended family, usually the oldest sister, is a symbolic 'queen mother,' or '*Bundo Kanduang*' (Sanday 2002). As *Bundo Kanduang*, her responsibility includes teaching customs, *adat*, to members of her extended family (Sanday 2002). Her role also includes serving as an important advisor to her relatives and kinfolk.

Another scholar, Evelyn Blackwood, also says that the '*Bundo Kanduang*' is the senior woman in her kinship group. Women are like mothers (*Bundo*

Kanduang) of the lineage, because they own the family's property, and are thereby able to control their own social identity. One apparent consequence is that the Minangkabau language has no term for domination or subordination, because women also have privileges in their clan and kinship network that also gives them social power in their community (Blackwood 2000). Yet Ranny Emilia also mentions that Minangkabau women who have life skill to face their life problem are also called *Bundo Kanduang*.

3.2 Islam and the Patriarchal system

Matrilineality characterized the Minangkabau long before Islam reached West Sumatra in the sixteenth century (Dobbins 1992). Despite the initial tension between traditional Minangkabau beliefs and Islam, the world religion was ultimately very successful; today, more than 97% of the Minangkabau population is Muslim (Indonesia Statistic, 2003)

At first, the two traditions conflicted violently; disputes over religion and culture even broke out into open warfare in the nineteenth century, the so-called *Padri War*. However, since the mid-nineteenth century, the two traditions have settled into a comfortable plurality, as the Minangkabau intertwine Islamic law with their older traditions (Sanday 2002). One common Minangkabau motto is: 'Adat stands on Islam and Islam stands on the Qur'an' (De Stuers 1960: 26).

In feminist theory terms, patriarchy is a system of male dominance over women in society (Lerner 1986: 7). The domination of men affects women's lives by relegating them to subordinate positions due to gender discrimination. In West Sumatra, however, Islam frequently adapts to the local, Minangkabau culture. In other words, being a devout Muslim in Western Sumatra does not mean that a woman has little authority or little influence.

3.3 Male connection

The electability of women legislators is related to their connection to their relatives, especially men. Most female legislators are inspired by their male relatives to engage in politics. For instance, among nine female legislators were interviewed in West Sumatra, five of them have connection with their male relatives. Specifically, two female legislators in West Sumatra have a husband and a brother as legislators at the provincial level. Two others have a connection with their father and uncle who became informal leaders in West Sumatra and one of them is connected to her husband, who is a professional and businessman. The rest of informants have husbands who are civil servant and merchants.

The proxy power of male connection can be seen through the support, networks and power of male relatives. Most respondents confessed that their efforts to be legislators are motivated and supported by their male relatives. Male support is evident where the husband provides financial support and some

facilities during the campaign process, including taking responsibility for campaign attributes such as T-shirts, hats, and stickers related to their party. Another female legislator stated that support not only came from males active in the political arena. Even though her husband and her male relatives are not involved in the parties as politicians, her husband also supports her political activities:

"My husband is in engineering. As an entrepreneur, he supports me as a legislator. During his free time, he accompanies me to events related to my job, such as picking me up after attending a political party meeting, especially at night". (Interview with informant No.9, on Friday, August 4, 2006).

Beside support from their male relatives, another form of male connection with women's politician is the male network. This is evident in the story told by the female legislator from Padang Pariaman. Her uncle is an informal leader who became an eminent person in their area. As a leader in one of Minangkabau's clans, this uncle is called *Datuak*. The popularity of her uncle helped her during campaign time. As she stated:

"During the campaign, my uncle helped me to persuade people in our village to vote for me. He told them about me and asked his colleagues and most people in our village to vote for me. He promoted the idea that I, his niece, would be the best choice for the people in the village for the next election". (Interview with informant No.2, Tuesday, August 1, 2006)

This statement shows that the social position of male relatives can be of benefit for a female legislator in regard to getting more votes. As the uncle or (*mamak*)¹ has a dominant role in West Sumatran culture, he helped this female legislator in campaigning with voters and even in meeting with her constituents.

3.4. Power of Political Party Policy

When questions were asked about whether or not political parties play an important role in deciding whether they would run for election, all of the female legislators that I interviewed affirmed that their parties played a dominant role in giving them a seat in the Parliament. Each party has different policies in putting their cadres in parliament. The newer parties tend to have policies consider women, meanwhile for largest parties, they still keep their former policies, and without much more change. The Prosperity and Justice Party (PKS-*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*), for instance, has a specific system to provide oppor-

1 Uncle in West Sumatra is called Mamak. He is the mother's brother, an uncle from mother's line. He has a significant role in an extended family.

tunities for women to be elected as legislator. In PKS, the system is called 'internal election.' This election gave the option for constituents of the PKS to vote for their candidates to run in the 2004 election. In this internal election, women can be elevated based on votes from their supporters in their region of election or the so-called DPW (*daerah asal wilayah pemilihan*)² rather than from the PKS committee. As stated by a women legislator from PKS:

"...Thus women have to show their capabilities to their constituents whether or not they deserve to be chosen. For our party, the problem is not that women don't have opportunities, but rather how many female candidates have the capability to be legislators. We are still mindful of the question because not many women are capable, qualified and interested in running in the election at the same time". (Interview with informant No.5, on Tuesday July 25, 2006).

Similar to PKS, the Crescent Star Party (PBB; *Partai Bulan Bintang*) has its own policy of fielding female and male candidates together. The PBB provides opportunities for female candidates to be placed at the head of the DCT's list, based on their district area or DPW. PBB party has instituted a ratio at least 4:1, which means that for every four male candidates the party has to nominate one female candidate or more. This ratio means that in a DPW consisting of four regions in each of which there is a PBB chapter; one out of four chapters has to put a woman candidate at the head of the DCT. This system provides fine opportunities for women candidates to be elected since every PBB chapter is compelled to follow this policy, which is different from the 30% quota for women suggested for political parties without any serious obligation. As stated by one female legislator:

3.5 Male Dominated and 30% Quota

As Indonesia's democratic institutions evolved, the reform era has continued, but increasing female political participation has remained the official goal rather than a national goal. For example, in 2003, a new law encouraged—but did not require – political parties to reserve 30% of their seats in the national and local legislatures for women. The Indonesian government already adopted CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) with the enactment of Law No.7/1984 and Presidential Decree

2 Region of election or *Daerah Pemilihan Wilayah (DPW)* is one aspect of the 2004 election systems. The 2004 election system operates 'open list proportional representation,' in which the voters punch the symbol of the parties or candidates. Those candidates representing their area will be named on the ballot paper and voters will have the opportunity to cast a vote for a single individual as well as party in different regions and levels. This also means that to be elected, the legislators have to represent their areas such as DPW I, DPW II, DPW III and so on. Every region is divided into areas for the election process; for provincial legislators, candidates have to represent the municipal and regency where the candidates live. For municipal legislators, they have to represent the county or district where they live.

No.9/2000 at the national level. In 2001 feminists in Indonesia had urged the government to put in place a reservation of 30% women in parliament. Activists argued that the more women in parliament who contribute to the creation of public policy, the more public policy debates will develop concerning women's issues (Hapsari 2001).

Since debating the reservation discourse almost three years, women's reservation in parliament meant providing a 30% quota system have already been mentioned in Indonesian Electoral Law with the enactment of Law No. 12/2003. Article 65 (1) of this Law states that: 'Every political party has an opportunity to present their candidates with a consideration of female candidates, at least 30%'. This law provides opportunities for women to be involved in the election process and to be elected as legislators. However, the regulation is just a suggestion without strong law enforcement from the Indonesian government that will establish real involvement of women in politics. After revision of the Law, the 'zipper system' will be enacted to the next 2009 election. However, it is still become a questions whether the system will increase the number of women in parliament or not. This is because the autonomy of political parties in selecting their candidate is stronger than this law and has far yielded little result in the way of increased political participation for women in Indonesia.

Many other factors besides discriminatory laws influence the decisions of women to participate in politics. In the case of West Sumatra, because of the centralize system of political party, women's politician in this area are also trapped by the central policy in which they cannot do more to create strategy in order to have a seat in parliament.

Males also dominate in the provincial level politics, where they are reluctant to permit women to hold real power. For example, in West Sumatra, only five out of 55 legislators are female (KPU data, 2004), despite the official policy goal of at least 30% female candidates, and the expectation that this will bring more female legislators into national and regional parliament.

In addition to the effects of Soekarno's regime, and the pervasive male domination of Indonesian culture, the consequences of a 1958 unsuccessful rebellion of West Sumatra against the central government added to the obstacles facing local female empowerment by making the Minangkabau more reluctant to defy the Jakarta government (Kahin 1999). Moreover, local political party members follow national party leaders in the central city in regard to policies about women politicians. Though the matrilineal system is a potential boost to female agency and active participation in politics by women, the influence of the national culture is proving stronger than local traditions.

The liberative force of matrilineality is further undermined by reinterpretations of certain *adat* writings to accommodate the old Soeharto regime. As an example of men who reinterpreted *adat* writings, Blackwood (2004) discusses one Idrus Dt.Hakimy Dt. Radjo Penghulu. It was in 1966 when the Soeharto

government formed the Association of Adat Council on the Minangkabau World (Lembaga Kerapatan Adat Alam Minangkabau-LKAAM). Under central government direction, the LKAAM institution, together with Idrus Dt.Hakimy Radjo Penghulu, reinterpreted *adat* writings. The reinterpretation conformed to the policies of the Jakarta government, as expressed by such institutions as Dharma Wanita and PKK, which declared that the most important role of women in society was to serve as good wives and mothers, or Bundo Kanduang (Blackwood 2001, p.141). Furthermore, the very reduction of *adat*, originally an oral tradition, to writing illustrates the influence of the new Indonesian state. Although the restructuring of *adat* reflects Jakarta's concern with the restive nature of the Minangkabau people, especially after the 1959 rebellion, the changes also illustrate the local power of men, particularly when they are cooperating with a central government dominated by men.

■ 4. Conclusion

Despite the continued importance of matrilineality in West Sumatra, and continuing national efforts to increase political participation by Indonesian women, Minangkabau women seeking political office are still largely dependent on their family relationships and on politically-powerful males in winning office. The West Sumatra matrilineal tradition exists as part of a dualistic local social order; matrilineality heavily influences custom and the provisions of *adat*. However, as typical throughout Indonesia, men impose and perpetuate social standards that prevent women from gaining power or even from having their concerns heard in public bodies. While Minangkabau men accept that women can be more publicly active than is socially acceptable for women in other parts of rural Indonesia, they also believe that the best place for women is in their homes.

The female legislators of West Sumatra epitomize the dualistic nature of this regional matrilineality. Compared to other female legislators in other provinces in Indonesia, female politicians can publicly voice their opinions. However, like their counterparts in Riau and other provinces, they cannot ultimately change the overwhelming domination of parliamentary power by men and the views of men. In addition, cultural factors like concern for 'wifely duties' further burden their overall effectiveness in parliament. Ultimately, Minangkabau people, male and female alike, live in a dualistic social order; Islamic values favor male leadership, and consign women to domestic concerns, while traditional matrilineality permits women to serve as community leaders, although it also prioritizes the duties to spouse and children that both traditions impose on women.

Another interesting phenomenon pertaining to interpretations of Islamic teaching regarding women in politics can be seen in the PKS. The members of PKS adhere to a form of Islam modernism that is willing to see women have more opportunities to be active in politics, even if this is only at the local level. This characteristic of PKS is found not only in West Sumatra but also throughout its branches in Indonesia.

Finally, the educational background of female legislators interviewed in this project shows that most have higher education. Since attainment of educational qualifications usually indicates that people are intelligent and are highly motivated, it seems it should lead to opening up more opportunities for women in the future to participate in politics. As yet, however, results in Indonesia generally are disappointing, primarily because of the way the political system functions. Nonetheless, it is encouraging to see that there are more women elected at the local level now than there were ten years ago, in the final years of the Soeharto era. If this trend continues for another decade and improved economic and educational status provides opportunities for women to be active outside the household, then women politicians may be able to inspire and motivate the younger generation, especially their daughters, to be more active in politics and thereby to address problems and issues of particular concern to women. This will be the case even though the matrilineality has little effect on women politicians.

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