WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND FAITH BASED REGULATION

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Abstract

Women are human beings that should have rights as well as men. In the past women were only wives and mothers. However, nowadays many women achieve high positions in the workplace and social life. This achievement would be impossible without the work of feminist that have struggled to fight for women empowerment. This paper discusses women empowerment struggle and development process in comparison between Australia and Indonesia from the beginning to the contemporary era deals with faith of the communities. The reasons, of studying these two countries are because the two countries are different in levels of development and culture. Australia is developed country that recognizable as a very multicultural country where being engaged in a religion is not compulsory where Muslim people is minority among the population, the majority of Australian that belief in faith are Christian; meanwhile Indonesia is a developing country that has the biggest Muslim populations in the world. The methodology of writing will be study of published literatures on the issue. This paper will show how the two countries adapt ideological backgrounds of populations to support the women empowerment.

Keywords: Women, Gender, faith, Muslim, Islam, Indonesia, Australia, Empowerment

Introduction

As the changes from the ancient time to when the theological notion dominated in the Middle Ages in the fifth centuries, the beliefs of God result in some religious groups have certain thought of rights that could be different one to each other (Robertson 2006). In addition, Robertson (2006) mentioned having belief in God is the law of nature, because all people are civilized societies. Furthermore, Islam was introduced in the Middle East and spread out all around the world.

According to Kaplan (1990) many conflicts have been exaggerated by religious and or cultural beliefs. This paper deliberates women empowerment development in Australia and in Indonesia that aim to transform gender equality in relation to the ideological backgrounds. The acknowledgement for the rights of people has strengthened by the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human rights in 1948. As (Ali 2000) also stated that the declaration has generated various world conferences on human rights. Moreover, some Muslim countries refused the implementation of this law in to global. They argued that this law is not suitable to be implemented in Muslim countries. In 1990, the Islamic countries declared Cairo declaration of human rights in Islam, with some differences; however, the regulations in both declarations are very general and could not answer further problems on human rights; including some problematic issue on women rights (UNHCR 1990). The inequality and sexual discrimination against woman rights pumped up feminist’s spirit. Moreover, this spirit encourages the establishment of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in 1979.
Indonesia and Australia are both signed the convention in 1980 and further Australia ratified it in 1983 and Indonesia a year later in 1984 (UN Women 2015). The successful in the birth of the convention is could not be separated from the history of feminist struggling to fight for gender equality. In this paper I will discuss how Indonesia and Australia progress in achieving the raising awareness on gender equality through empowerment and I will analyze the role of Islamic faith and majority population voice in smoothing or obstructing the evolution.

Methodology
This paper will be analyzed and written using the descriptive qualitative methodology. Indeed, the method to gather data and information to produce this paper is the study of available literatures. Furthermore, as mentioned by Hart (1998), study literatures enable to examine the previous researches related to the topic, it could lead us to look for updated facts and statistics so that we could result in further idea from different perspective. This method is followed by the possibility to make our research different from others and could show that our research is important. Indeed, from study the literatures many information is gained to result in a reliable paper.

In Massey and Havern (1997), Havern states that based on his experience; he refers the literature as a map, where one map can only explain one area; to explore other places that are not covered in that map, we need to utilize other maps. In addition, by using the information from literature, it possibly expands knowledge and understanding about the issue. Finding and exploring the map makes us familiar with the place in the map. The literatures of related topic also do the same.

The Beginning of Women Emancipation
From many literatures mentioned that the emancipation of women in Indonesia has never been separated from the struggle of Raden Ajeng Kartini to fight for women’s education in Indonesia. Raden Ajeng Kartini is an Indonesian woman who was born in 1879 in Jepara, Central Java. In 1964, President Soekarno declared her as Indonesian Heroine and set her birthday, as one of Indonesian National Day. The synonymous of Kartini day for Indonesia is stated as the women emancipation day. In addition, The Jepara government proudly stated that Kartini is the first Indonesian women who being recognized rebel silently trough letter to her Dutch friends discussed the education for Indonesian women (Pemerintah Kota Jepara 2008). Moreover, she was also one of Indonesian women who experienced the subordinate of women. She only studied until twelve years old and as woman should stay at home until the marriage time. The common practice of polygamy formed her to marry and be the fourth wife of a man of age fifty. However, she never gave up she studied by reading by herself and then became the founded of women school in 1903 in Central Java. She passed away one year later before brought into reality her dream of the equality between men and women to be educated. However, her work gave an important influence on the women's movement in Indonesia (Bali directory 2011).

Meanwhile, many centuries ago, in the 16th M, a woman from Aceh, the most western Province of Indonesia (was an Islamic Kingdom at that time), who known as Laksamana Keumala hayati is a very educated woman. She was born in 1589 and graduated from one of Academic Military and then was employed as a commander of...
front liner fighting against colonialism (Arroisi 2010). In addition, (Mahameru 2011) mentioned even though her birthday were not setting as the woman emancipation day, she is a famous, brave and talented admiral in her era that the fact that she married her senior at her school as a proved that she studied in regular school with boy students. Moreover, as the general knowledge that Aceh province is a more Islamic than the other provinces in Indonesia (KBRI Canberra 2006) shows that the Muslim Woman emancipation in Indonesia started earlier than it is identifiable. However, the opportunity to receive better education might not be spread evenly.

In Australia, the recognizable of women fights for the rights began and known as the first wave of women development. The suffrage rights have achieved with very hard attempts that the idea should deal with several obstacles. According to Kaplan (1996) in Australia, the possibility reasons to be more difficult than other places due to the insecurity as a young country, or because it is the requirement of cultural integrity. However, the feminist in Australia should be proud of their achievement as stated by Matland (2003) that Australia is the second country in the world that received women rights to vote in 1902. Indeed, the New Zealand started earlier as the first country which gave that suffrage rights to women in 1893. Matland also mentioned in that period, internal factors including strong national women movements are the main factor contributing to the realization of suffrage rights.

Furthermore, after the World War II the rights for women to vote became part of International construction goals and started to be implemented worldwide. However, the indigenous women in Australia only got the rights to vote in 1967 since then they also obtained their citizenship (Seibert and Roslanie 2010). However, there are still Muslim countries have not permit women to vote yet until nowadays.

The Contemporary Era; Woman Education and in Politic

The data from Department of women empowerment of the Indonesian Republic, men and women obtaining higher school are now relative balance, even in some provinces in Indonesia the number of girls study higher education is more than the numbers of boys (Kementrian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Kesejahteraan Anak RI 2011). Indonesian women nowadays enjoy the rights to vote, work, be active outside the home, attend school, and have obtained legal protection against violence. Women in Indonesian politics have demonstrated by the election of Megawati as the Indonesian president from 2001 to 2004. Even though in recent government, the numbers of women in Indonesian parliament still significantly lower than men: 18.03 %, but the numbers of them continue to increase compare then previously (BBC Indonesia 2001).

Meanwhile, in contemporary Australia, more than five thousand organizations in all around Australia working to empower women (Department of Foreign affair and trade Australian government 2011) and 425 of them are spread out around Victoria itself. This shows the diversity of purposes, targets and programs. There are also some are faith based organizations and some are culture and ethnic diversity based organizations. For example, the Islamic Women welfare’s council that aims to facilitate Muslim women's full participation in Australian society and many others (Multicultural hub 2011).

In the 1990s as mentioned by Seibert and Roslanie (2010) the feminist in Australia started to encourage women to participate in politics to ensure women had
access to the public sphere. Moreover, in 1921; Edith Cowan became the first woman in Australian parliament in Western Australia, followed by in 1943; Dame Enid Lyons and Senator Dorothy Tangney who were elected as the first women to sit in Federal Parliament (Department of Foreign affair and trade Australian government 2011)

The numbers of women in politics and workplace have climbed in Australia. The data from Department of foreign affair and trade Australia (2011) shows that the numbers of women in Australia more than a half of Australian populations. Numbers of women graduated from secondary school and universities are higher than men. In January 2008 the data showed that almost 4.8 million women were in various form of paid employment. Meanwhile the unemployment rate was 4.6 per cent for the same month. In 2011, in the federal parliament women representatives are 28.3 per cent of members and senators. In the Senate, from 76 senators, 27 of them are women. And in the House of Representative, there are 37 women from 150 total members. Obviously, the Australia Prime Minister is a woman, Julia Gillard, for the first time in Australian parliamentary history.

The Voice of the Majority in Determining the Implemented Law

In democratic countries, every contexts of development the opinion of majority population will control the parameter. Including the law implementation; the government could not able to apply the law that against the majority wills. This demonstrates on how the law that related to faith base could be implemented in a country such as Indonesia where Muslim communities is majority and in Australia as a very multicultural country deals with the issue.

In this section will talk about the polygamy and the burqa ban. Bernardi (2010) an Australian senator purposed the government to ban burqa. The burqa is a Muslim woman’s headdresses that cover all part of woman’s body except eyes. According to him, this could set those women in the situation as marginalized by preventing them from socializing in daily activities and it show the domination man over women and could be misused to perform criminal wills. Similarly, Flower and Hudson (2010) argued that the burqa is reported often misused to execute robberies and terrorism. Indeed, they consider it express Muslim women differ from others. However, this statement has resulted in protest from Muslim activists in Australia as Australia claims itself as a multicultural country the banning of burqas in Australia will not be easy. In Australia, some Islamist activist said banning the burqa will prevent women who wear a burqa from leaving their house (The Age 2010). Since the first time the issue emerged in Australia in 2010 until now the Australian government has not ratified the law of burqa ban

This issue came out earlier in some countries in Europe such as Spain and some Italian municipalities but still remains pending. However, in French where Muslim is minority has get a head on the issue. As reported by The Age (2010) The French government has approved the banning of burqa in public places such as government offices, public transport, hospitals and schools.

On other hand, in Indonesia, wearing burqa in public places is not a big issue. Indeed, wearing burqa is not compulsory too in Indonesia. Women to wear or not wearing burqa in Indonesia is as they wish. However, the Indonesia Ulema Council in the Jakarta Globe (2010), the Council opposed the regulation to ban the burqa on the basis that it is against the freedom of faith. According to them wearing a burqa is
part of local culture and religious belief. In fact not any section mentioned about the regulation of what the woman should wear in the quran. The Quran says that women should cover themselves to avoid sexual abuse. As mentioned by (Ali 1999) in her book ‘Gender and Human rights in Islam and International law: equal before Allah, Unequal before man?: the message in the Quran is general and vague have been interpreted variously by male Muslim scholars on how Women should cover their body. Some clergies strongly argue that women should be fully covered including their face; some argue that as long as women are dressed in a well-mannered way it will be tolerable. That is why the burqa ban raises protest by people who strongly believe that is one of God’s wills.

Interestingly, the polygamy issue that is acceptable in Islam community result in the Indonesian government that could not support to ban it. Even many feminist in Indonesia purpose to forbid the system, the polygamy is legal in Indonesia. Meanwhile in Australia polygamy is illegal even there are organizations such as the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils has purposed the legalization of polygamy in Australia, but this system still illegal in that country (O’Brien 2008). The reason for this is because most of the Australians are Christians and polygamy is not permitted in Christian. The different with burqa is not others religions have regulate the wearing of burqa. This two issues and how the law is implemented confirm that the majority’s opinion is important.

**Faith Based Organization and Woman Emancipation**

Besides the fact that, inequality between men and women have not only in Muslims societies, The implementation of Islamic law often argue place Muslim women are more marginalized compare to Non-Muslim women. However, the Islamic Information and Services Australia, 2010 argues that the way of women in Muslim’s family are being treated are often misleading by misunderstanding and misinterpretation the Quran (Islam scripture) and Hadist (The life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad) (IISNA 2010). Indeed Badawi 2011 stated that we cannot find in the Quran or any other primary sources of Islam about the superiority of men over women.

Moreover, There are the emerging of several organizations that aims to clearing the confusion. The United Nations Populations Fund (2009) stated that In Indonesia, some faith based organizations have compassionately responded to violence against women. In Australia, The Islamic Information and Services Australia (IISNA), has been produced many brochures and a website to clarify misinterpretations in the Quran and Hadist, including the position of women in Islam that equal to men. The Islamic Information and Services Australia 2010 further stated that in the Quran do not promote the subordination of women.

Meanwhile, the achievements of woman emancipation in both countries; Indonesia and Australia ; there are more and more faith based organizations have emerged to deliberate their vision and mission. Furthermore, some faith based organization has been worked to overcome the marginalization of Muslim women in Indonesia. One of those is The Fatayat Nahdatul Ulama (Fatayat NU). This is a faith based organizations in Indonesia, that concern on gender equality. As stated by Ulfah (2010) this organization was established in Surabaya on April 24, 1950. One of the aims of this organization is to achieve gender equality in Indonesia. The work of the Fatayat NU then results in the ratified of domestic violence law by Indonesian
government in 2004. Also, as maternal mortality rate in Indonesia was the highest in 
South East Asia, 307 for every 100,000 live births, that moderately caused by unsafe 
abortion. The Fatayat NU advocated for the government to legalize abortion. The 
result of this is in 2005, Indonesian Council of Ulama published a fatwa (a Islam 
binding ruling in religious matters) that allowing abortion for women victims of rape 
and incest before 40 days of pregnancy; debate on amending the Law on Health it is 
on-going (Ulfah 2010).

Another organization is the Puan Amal Hayati that has been work to support 
the victims of violence against women in pesantren (Muslim educational institution 
in Indonesia) communities. One of the programs is to set up the women crisis center 
in the pesantren. The result of this many cases of violence against women, including 
rape, physical abuse and economic deprivation are collected and settled. The 
organization also organized campaign and information and education class for men 
(UNFPA 2009). There are also the Rahima, the Nahdina and the Fahmina that has 
been worked in critical education on women’s rights within Islam with men & 
women religious teachers in pesantren communities by distributing books to make 
clear the wrong impression of Muslim regulation. The achievements of Muslim 
women development in Indonesia are not possible to show in numbers. But, the 
awareness to reduce violence against women all around Indonesia can be reported 
increasing as well as more women is being educated and employed.

Conclusion

The awareness of gender equality as well as women empowerment has 
increased due to the feminist spirit and global support. It is known that in the early 
1900s when the women in Australia obtained the rights to vote, Indonesian women 
still struggle to gain the rights for education. However, there is a fact of the existence 
of woman who is very educated from the land of Indonesia long decades ago. That 
show that Indonesian woman power received earlier than that is acknowledged 
however, it should be uneven yet, as there are still cases of women fight to gain 
education rights.

As previously mentioned, the work of feminist and the governments to 
empower women often raise controversial, especially if it is contradicts with their 
faith regulation. But, the approaching to the community trough consideration and 
respective to their knowledge and culture is the best way to deal with that problems. 
It is very difficult to change people’s conviction, especially when faith is used to 
strengthen their arguments. When people support their arguments to regulate social 
behavior with faith path, it can be seen as faith based regulation.

The feminist have made several changes to empower women. Even though, in 
both Australia and Indonesia the beginning is more difficult as it is started by 
rebellion and protest but then as the awareness increase and gaining support from the 
communities, government and global world. The various attempts that have been 
done by feminist and government will be effective by respect to the local belief, 
culture and knowledge. Faith based does support the system that shows by how the 
the burqa ban in Australia and the Polygamy against in Indonesia is facing obstacle 
because of faith based regulation. As Kaplan (1990) stated that the Australia 
women’s movement has not succeeded in swing up people minds about their 
conviction. The reason for this could be as there are still groups of anti-feminist 
movement, still many work need to be done. However, the positive changes of
women development in countries increase gender equality, by getting equal access to education, health, employment, and politics and so on. Moreover, the countries will achieve better development when all communities in the countries can support and contributing to development. Not different men and women.

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