

**THE BALINESE WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION  
IN THE GENERAL ELECTIONS CONDUCTED FROM  
1997 TO 2004  
(IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF CULTURAL STUDIES)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study discusses the Balinese women's political participation in the general elections conducted in 1997, 1999 and 2004. During these years, in spite of being supported by reformation, there was a gap with regard to the Balinese women's participation in politics, which was assumed to result from numerous factors. Therefore, the problems formulated in this study are (1) how the Balinese women politically participated in the general elections conducted in 1997, 1999 and 2004; (2) what factors affected their political participation in the general elections conducted in 1997, 1999 and 2004?; (3) what were the effects and meanings of their political participation in the general election conducted in 1997, 1999 and 2004 viewed from the values of equality in gender? Qualitative method with multidisciplinary approach from the perspective of cultural studies was adopted in this study. Several critical social theories were employed for sharpening the analysis.

The results of the study show that the Balinese women's political participation in the general election conducted in 1997 was 11.11%; that the recruitment system still referred to the concepts applied in the New Order, that is, through the women's organizations established by the government with high nepotism. While their political participation in the general election conducted in 1999 decreased by 1.62% as a consequence of reformation, in the general election conducted in 2004 it rose by 7.27%, resulting from the changes in the general election regulations. The factors which encouraged the Balinese women to participate in politics were that they were influenced by the men who were politicians and close to them such as their husbands and fathers, the women's movements and the general election regulations. As far as the domestic domain is concerned, their political participation was positive. What is meant is that they were able to acquire asymmetric relation of power; however, negatively, they had multiple responsibilities resulting from the multiple roles they played. In the political domain, they were dominated by men; in addition, their political participation gave the meanings of equality, being constitutional and being prestigious.

Keywords: the Balinese women, politics and general election

## **INTRODUCTION**

The democratic life in Indonesia cannot be separated from women as the citizens. In clause 1 of article 27 of the 1945 Constitution, it is stated that:

“Every citizen has equal position both in law and in the government which should be highly respected without any exception.”

The clause above reflects that women as the men’s partners should have the same opportunities as the men in carrying out all aspects of development including voting and being voted for in democratic life.

As far as the political rights of every female and male citizen, Indonesia, as a state, is committed to implementing the Beijing Declaration and the Declaration of the United Nations that guarantee that every woman has the right to take part in the decision making institutions. Such a commitment guarantees that the men’s political participation is equal to the women’s and this was followed up by stating in clause (1) of article 6 of the Act Number 12 of 2003 that the women’s representation was 30%.

Normatively, the participation of women and men in politics should not have been a problem. However, the fact shows that, although Indonesia has been independent for 64 years and has conducted 10 general elections, the percentage of the women’s participation in politics is still left far behind compared to the men’s.

The low participation of the women in politics and public positions was responsible for their being underdeveloped in numerous areas of life particularly in education, health, matters pertaining to manpower and discrimination and coercion, which affected the state’s welfare and progress as a whole (Soetjipto, 2005).

Based on the background described above, this study aims at identifying the Balinese women’s political involvement in the general elections conducted starting from 1977 to 2004. The problems in this study were formulated as follows: (1) how the Balinese women politically participated in the general elections conducted from 1997 to 2004?; (2) what factors affected their political participation in the general elections conducted from 1997 to 2004?; (3) what were the effects and meanings of their political participation in the general

elections conducted from 1997 to 2004 viewed from the values of equality in gender?

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The multidisciplinary approach in the perspective of cultural studies and qualitative method were adopted in this study. The study was conducted in Bali Province. The data needed was obtained by in-depth interview, note taking and documentation. The data was interpretatively, qualitatively and descriptively analyzed using the theory of post feminism, the theory of hegemony, the theory of power relation/knowledge and the theory of communicative act. The results of the study were analytically and descriptively presented.

## **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

The results of the study are as follows: (1) in the general elections conducted from 1997 to 2004 the women's participation fluctuated resulting from the change in political system from the New Order era into the Reformation era; (2) the factors leading to the women's political participation in the general elections conducted from 1997 to 2004 were their being close either to their husbands or their fathers who happened to be politicians, the women's movements and the change in the general elections regulations; (3) the women's political participation in the general elections conducted from 1997 to 2004 provided positive and negative effects. Positively, the women were able to have asymmetric relation of power in the domestic domain. Negatively, the women had multiple responsibilities. Politically, the men dominated the women. The Balinese women's political participation in the general elections conducted from 1997 to 2004 provided several meanings; they are the meaning of being equal to the men in the society and the meaning of being prestigious.

## **DISCUSSION**

The women's representation in the Bali Province Legislative Assembly (DPRD Bali) obtained from the general election conducted in 1997 was 11.11%. This general election was conducted in the transition period from the New Order era into the reformation era. The women were recruited with reference to the concepts applied during the New Order era, that is, through the women's

organizations established by the government such as *Darma Wanita*, *Darma Pertiwi* and *PKK*. The number of women recruited was based on the quota determined with nepotism through the *Golongan Karya* political party. In the process of the female legislative assembly candidates, the practices of hegemony were imposed by the government over the *Golongan Karya* Party, which was the dominating party at that time. Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in Ritzer (1996) stated that hegemony refers to one group's dominance over others with or without force, making the ideas given by the dominating group accepted by the dominated ones and considered as common sense. The men's hegemony over the women in the *Golongan Karya* political party also affected the recruitment process.

As opposed to the general election conducted in 1977, the women's political participation decreased in the general election conducted in 1999 from 11.11% to 1.82%. The changes in regulations regulating how the general election should be conducted and the number of political parties taking part were responsible for such a decrease. No quota was made for the female candidates from the *Golongan Karya* political party. They freely fought within the 48 political parties taking part for being voted for as the candidates of legislative members. The system of general election in which the symbols of the political parties with the candidates of female legislative members were elected listed them with great numbers. Such a numbering constituted the practice of the men's hegemony over the women in the public space.

The correlation between knowledge and power also causes hegemony to take place. Foucault (1980: 130-131) states that knowledge contains power, meaning that power contains knowledge. Both refer to the same process. The female politicians' understanding and knowledge were still less developed than the male politicians', making the relation of power/knowledge between the men and the women in political parties asymmetric. This was responsible for the inequity underwent by the women with regard to their numerical numbers and for their failure in being voted for.

However, in the general election conducted in 2004 the women's political participation went up from 1.82% to 7.27%. The reformation era leading to the changes in general election regulations led to this. One of the basic changes was that the first direct general election was conducted as far as the history of the

Indonesian general election is concerned. The other change in regulation was that the least political representation of the women was 30% as prescribed in clause (1) of article 65 of the General Election Act Number 12 of 2003. Such an article was the form of affirmative action made to encourage that the women's representation for the political parties submitting the candidates of their legislative members to the General Election Committee should be at least 30%. No sanction was imposed upon the political parties who did not implement the article, making the women's representation in the Bali Province Assembly increased by 7.27%; however, 30% participation was not achieved. The imposition of no sanction led to the men's practices of hegemony over the women and caused the relation of power/knowledge within the political parties to be asymmetric.

The factors which affected the Balinese women's participation in politics were external factors, the women's movements and the changes in regulations. The external factors included the fathers or husbands who encouraged them to be politicians and who happened to be politicians, the women's activities shown through the organizations established by the government such as *PKK*, *Dharma Wanita* and *Dharma Pertiwi*. Unlike when the general election was conducted in 1999, when the general election in 2004 was conducted, the organizations established by the government did not play any role resulting from the reformation era. Instead, families played an important role. What is meant is that the decisions pertaining to time, labor and the costs needed for conducting the general election in 1997 caused the women to be dependent on the support given by their families.

The women's movements to encourage their representation in the legislative assembly in the general election conducted in 1997 were still passive. As the reformation era started, they were becoming active. The changes in regulations which caused the affirmative action to take place nationally started when the general election was conducted in 1999. In Bali the movements to encourage the women to get involved in politics started in 2000. Such movements caused the awareness of the political parties to start being seen and the women who were politicians started being encouraged to fight politically in the general election. The increasing number of the women who were involved in politics can

be explained by the theory of post modern feminism, that is, being aware of being unconstitutional, being suppressed and exploited (Arivia, 2003: 128).

The movement to struggle for the women's representation in politics can also be explained from the theory of the women's communicative act which is intended to acquire equality. Habermas in Magnis Suseno (2000: 221) stated that the very basic human act is the communicative or interaction act which is intended to acquire mutual understanding.

The effects of the Balinese women's participation in politics on and its meanings to the values of equality in gender are both positive and negative. Positively, the Balinese women who got involved in politics were able to create asymmetrical relation of power in domestic domain. The women's hegemony over their husbands in domestic domain took place gently. What is meant is that they used the strategy which was specific to them for resisting their being subordinate in patriarchal culture, that is, *giving in* in order to win. In domestic domain, they did not want to lose their power. In addition to being politicians, they still managed their domestic responsibilities. This is one of the negative effects resulting from their participation in politics; they had multiple responsibilities. However, they enjoyed having multiple responsibilities to maintain their hegemony over their partners as well as the asymmetric relation in domestic domain.

The effect of their participation in political domain was different from that in domestic domain. In political domain, the women were dominated by the men and their relation of power was asymmetric. The reason is that the number of the women who were politicians was less than the number of the men who were politicians. The limited number of the women who were politicians was responsible for their low bargaining power and their inability in making important decisions and political agenda in the legislative bodies.

In addition to giving positive and negative effects, the Balinese women's participation in politics also gave the meanings of being equal, being constitutional and being prestigious. The equal numbers of the men and women as the legislative members showed the meaning of equality. The asymmetrical numbers of the men and women who were politicians in the general elections conducted in 1997, 1999 and 2004 showed the meaning of asymmetry between

the women and men who were involved in public domain in general and in the political domain in particular. Although the number of the women who were involved in political domain was asymmetrical with the number of the men who were involved in political domain, the attempts made to increase the number of the women's representation in politics can be explained using the theory of postmodern feminism. This had the meaning of acquiring being constitutional in the societal life.

To be constitutional in the societal life, the women should not have been left behind by their male partners. Therefore, opportunities should have been given to the women to show that they were able to contribute economically to their families and to be the pride of their families. Therefore, being politicians was highly meaningful to the Balinese women themselves and their families. Being politicians made them more confident and prestigious.

## **RESEARCH NOVELTIES**

The findings in this study are as follows: (1) the Balinese women's and men's relations of power in domestic domain and public domain were found out to reverse. In domestic domain the relation of power between the women and the men was asymmetric; the women dominated the men using their specific strategy to resist their being subordinate in patriarchal culture. In political domain, the men dominated the women in such a way that the latter was not able to participate in making decisions and controlling political agenda; (2) the Balinese women were motivated to participate in political domain by the women who were close to them such as their fathers or husbands who happened to be politicians; (3) the women's partners and their families, their political and intellectual abilities, their network and finance enabled them to be successful in becoming politicians; (4) the Balinese women were able to create specific strategies to resist their being subordinate in patriarchal culture. Such strategies were applied so gently that they did not sacrifice others, always respected and appreciated the men, and gave in order to win.

## **CONCLUSION**

It can be inferred that the women were recruited in the general election conducted in 1997 through the women's organizations established by the government with nepotism. The decrease in the women's participation in the general election conducted in 1999 resulted from reformation. However, the increase in their participation in the general election conducted in 1994 resulted from the changes in the general election regulations. The factors which encouraged the Balinese women to take part in politics are the influence of the men who were politicians and close to them, their movements and the changes in the general election regulations. In domestic domain their participation in politics was positive, that is, they were able to create asymmetric relation of power; however, negatively, they had multiple responsibilities resulting from the multiple roles they played. In political domain, they were dominated by the men; however, their political participation gave the meanings of being equal, being constitutional and being prestigious.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the findings above, it is suggested that political comprehension should be socialized to people, the political laws should be revised, the women's network organizations should be strengthened, and the role of the mass media to give impression that the women's involvement in politics is positive should be created.

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