

## Praxis of Feminist Movement in Indonesia: Dynamics of Political Action and Knowledge Production

**Ruth Indiah Rahayu**

Kandidat Doktor Program Studi Filsafat, STF Driyarkara  
Jalan Komplek Cempaka Putih Indah No. 100A, RT 1 RW 7, Cempaka Putih Barat, Cempaka Putih, Jakarta  
Pusat, Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta 10520

ruth.indiahr@driyarkara.ac.id

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### Abstract

Women face barricades at all levels of activity, but not all of them understand that they face problems as women. Feminism contribution throughout the history has been to formulate the “women’s question” as political knowledge and action. This feminist knowledge includes the experiences of “women’s question” at the personal level, family organizations, community organizations, cultural organizations, production organizations and state organizations. Political action and feminist knowledge are praxis that is also happening all over the world and also in Indonesia. Praxis in Indonesia can be traced since Kartini raised “women’s question” as a personal experience to the growth of the women’s movement which has experience in emancipating “women’s issues”. The problem is that there is often inter-issue stress and support between political action and production so that “women’s question” seem to be reduced to prominent issues. This paper is self-reflective, that is, dialogically reading the collective history of the feminist movement from the personal side of the activists themselves.

Keywords: “woman question”, women’s political action, feminist knowledge production

### Introduction

The feminist movement in Indonesia has important transformative qualifications for change at both the personal awareness level and the level of society and the state. Like many Asian women, Indonesian women do everything from within the family, activist organisations, the workplace, the community, and the state. Yet at all these levels, there are barricades and thorny shackles whose forms that can be identified as discriminatory practices, sexual violence, exploitation of labour value, trafficking in women, and so on. These can take place within the family unit, community organisations, economic organisations, and also state organisations.

Although women face barricades at all levels of their activities, not all women recognise that they face problems because they are women. Most women consider these problems to be natural and accepted as the “fate” of women. The contribution of nineteenth-century first-wave feminism was to formulate the “women’s question” as knowledge so that it could be transformed through various media. Vogel states that the formulation of “women’s question” is to conceptualise issues of women’s oppression in the context of social and economic-political power relations. When knowledge is

formulated, it assumes that there is the formulation of knowledge about “women’s liberation” (Vogel 1983, p. 105).

Second wave feminism builds feminist epistemology and methodology based on “women’s issues”. This movement entered the realm of philosophy of science and defined the categories of sex and gender as methods of analysis in uncovering “women’s issues” (Code 1991, p. 1). Although “feminist knowledge” originated in the history of Western Europe and the US, it experienced different praxis according to time and space, including when it transformed into Indonesian women’s knowledge. Praxis, as Lefebvre defines it, is the unravelling of complexity at various levels that includes the production of materials that are abstract and formal such as symbols, culture, representation, and ideology (Lefebvre 2002, pp. 236-237). The praxis of the feminist movement itself reveals the dynamics of tension, disparity, and unification of political action and knowledge production on “women’s issues” and their emancipation.

This paper intends to be self-reflective on the praxis of the feminist movement in Indonesia, although the discussion cannot be separated from the context of world

feminism. Self-reflective is a method used by feminists in the philosophy of history to read androcentric historical philosophical texts, namely reading texts critically according to a feminist personal perspective with past texts (Lloyd 2002, pp. 1-2). In addition, the self-reflective method can be used to “read” the experience of the feminist movement from the personal side of its activists as a dialogue with its collective history.

### Discussing Feminism Across Time

The etymology of feminism is Latin, *femininus*, from *femina*, which means “woman”. In old French, it means “feminine qualities”, namely characters attached to the sexuality of the female sex. According to the New World Encyclopedia, the first person who used the word feminism was Charles Fourier, a French socialist activist, in 1837, to refer to the idea or politics of female emancipation. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word feminism was first used in England in the 1800s, also to refer to women’s emancipation activities. In its development, the word feminist is used to refer to women activists who carry out political activities demanding equal rights for women under the law, especially the right to vote and be elected (women’s suffrage). Meanwhile, the word feminism is used to refer to the notion of emancipation for social, legal and political justice based on gender. During this period, the formulation of “women’s issues” as feminist knowledge was an issue widely discussed by socialist intellectuals (Vogel 1983, p. 105). The political action of women’s emancipation is known as the first-wave feminism, which has a strong character in the mass action of working-class women and black slave women.

The first-wave feminist movement gave birth to the production of feminist knowledge written by both women and men, for example, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft, *Early Factory Labour in New England* (1883) by Harriet H. Robinson, *Ain’t I a Woman?* (1851) by Sojourner Truth, *The Subjection of Women* (1869) by John Stuart Mills and Harriet Taylor, *The Origin of the Family Private Property and the State* (1884) by Friedrich Engels, and *Women and Socialism* (1879) by August Bebel. Their writings became important references for the construction of theories of knowledge in the second-wave feminism era.

Second-wave feminism in the UK, France, Germany, Canada, and the US emerged in the 1960s-1970s in defence of women marginalised by racial difference,

as immigrants and working-class people who had no civil rights as citizens. They brought knowledge of oppression and liberation together in women’s political action (Vogel 1995, p. 10). These female student activists then pursued a doctoral degree and reflected on their experiences as materials for their doctoral thesis. In general, these second-wave feminist activists were New Left student activists, who spread knowledge within communities of “black” and “coloured” immigrant women to acknowledge their oppression and demand civil rights as citizens (Sargent 1981, p. 9).

In the early 1970s, feminist activists sought to answer the question “what is the source of women’s oppression?”, and did a lot of research. Their critique of social theory drew from Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels (Vogel 1983, p. 34), and Sigmund Freud (Mitchell 1974). In addition to criticising social theory, they also criticised philosophy and especially the philosophy of science to build feminist epistemology, which is to build feminist knowledge so that it has scientific truth.

A significant second-wave of feminist knowledge production was the ‘discovery’ of the patriarchal system as a source of women’s oppression and the categories of sex, sexuality, and gender to analyse “women’s issues” (Oakley 1972). Sex is biological sex, sexuality is the genital organs that signify sex characteristics, while gender is the meaning of sex and sexuality in the social division of labour, behaviour, and identity. This social category was later added by feminists to be placed side by side with other categories, such as race, class, ethnicity, and others. By using these analytical categories, feminist research can dismantle androcentric (patriarchal) assumptions that dominate social theory and practice (Walby 1990, p. 19).

The third-wave feminism was influenced by post-modern and post-structuralist influences in the 1980s and 1990s. Feminist activists in this era were not satisfied with the theory of knowledge that had been built by the second-wave feminists, especially in questioning the categories of sex, sexuality, and gender. Judith Butler, one of the pioneering post-modern feminists, questioned the categories of sexuality imposed on women (vagina) and men (penis) as something fixed and universal. The fixed and universal nature of the categories of sex, sexuality, and gender is a social construction. In contrast, sex, sexuality, and gender are fluid and vary according to culture (Butler 1999). Thus, male and female are “fluid” identities, which is evident from intersex (LGBT). This third-wave enriched the explanation of LGBT under the umbrella of queer theory (Butler, 2004).

Following the 2008 global financial crisis that severely impacted families in the US and Europe, some feminists returned to the second-wave feminist thinking about women's oppression in relation to capitalism (Bhattacharya 2017, pp. 3-4). Some of these feminists combined Marxism and post-modernism, and this genre of feminists is often called "4<sup>th</sup> wave feminists" or materialist feminists. Rosemary Hennessy as the pioneer argues that materialist feminists developed a theory of culture that is personal and structural. Therefore, materialist feminists revived the concept of structure and agency in relation to language and culture. In other words, materialist feminist married the discourse as a social analysis based on the material conditions of local society. These material conditions were examined not only in terms of gender, but also in relation to women's real lives that were intersectional with race, ethnicity, class, language, and others. The topic of women's marginalisation was an important concern for materialist feminists (Hennessy & Ingraham 1997, pp. 7-8).

The strengthening of knowledge production among contemporary feminists in developed countries reinforces the wave of knowledge emancipation instead of building a mass women's movement like the first-wave feminists. This tendency suggests that feminism in developed countries is praxis in the ivory tower rather than praxis in social movements.

In contrast to feminist tendencies in developed countries, women's political actions in Asian countries, mostly developing countries or former colonies, are still building mass women's movements. Kumari Jayawardena is quite comprehensive in describing women's political actions in India, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, India, China, South Korea, Japan, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, the Philippines, China, and Afghanistan. These women's political actions generally link women's issues with the struggle for independence, against military dictatorships, and some of them against imperialism in the form of the expansion of Transnational Corporation (TNC) and Multinational Corporation (MNC). Nevertheless, Jayawardena acknowledges that feminism in Asia was influenced by feminism in the West in both theory and practice (Jayawardena 1986, p. 260).

Women's political actions in Latin America as a former colony are similar to women's political actions in Asia. In Argentina, Peru, Uruguay, Brazil, and Chile, women's political participation grew alongside movements for independence, democracy, and resistance to military dictatorships. Then in contemporary times, women's political actions are centred on mobilising movements

of the urban poor women, resisting TNCs/MNCs, and also fighting for indigenous communities (Jaquette 1989, p. 205).

### **Transformation of Feminism into Indonesian Women's Knowledge**

Feminism entered Indonesia through the relations between Dutch and Dutch East Indies citizens. Kartini was the agency who experienced the transformation of knowledge from Dutch feminists, namely, Estella Zeehandelaar and Marie Ovink-Soer, among others. A significant novel that shaped Kartini's agency character was written by Cecile Goekoop entitled *Hilda van Suylenburg* (1897). Kartini identified herself with the character in the novel, Hilda, who refused to live and wait for a potential husband's proposal. Instead, Hilda was determined to go to university to study law. Her aspiration to become a lawyer to defend oppressed women in marriage was realised (Toer 1997, pp. 143-144). Kartini's personification of Hilda reflected her rejection of young marriage and polygamy.

The emancipation of the "women's issue" underlined the struggle for the importance of education for women, the opportunity for women to earn a living and work according to their skills, and the abolition of polygamy as it was considered degrading to women's dignity. However, the issue of polygamy was not easily emancipated by Kartini. Even Kartini eventually accepted polygamy. Nevertheless, the impact of this knowledge and struggle continued in a number of national movements until Indonesia's independence and up to the present day.

Kartini's knowledge of feminism in the form of correspondence with Dutch feminists was then written as a book by Mr J.H. Abendanon entitled *Door Duisternis Tot Licht* (1912). The book was later translated by Armijn Pane into Malay under the title *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* published by Balai Pustaka in 1923. Several women activists, such as Suyatin Kartowiyono, S.K. Trimurti, Umi Sardjono, Maria Ulfah, Siti Sundari Darmobroto, and others gained feminist knowledge transformation from *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (Rahayu 2021).

The transformation of feminist knowledge could spread widely thanks to the 'revolution of printing press' in the Dutch East Indies, which gave birth to newspapers led by female journalists, such as *Soenting Melayu* led by Rohana Kudus, *Tjahaja Siang* published by PIKAT-Manado women's organisation led by Walandaw

Maramis, *Wanita Sworo* led by Siti Soendari Darmobroto, *Poetri Hindia* (1914) published by the Poetri Mardika organisation.

It was not only Malay women who experienced a transformation of feminist awareness. Auw Tjoei Lan, the daughter of a "Chinese Captain" (head of a gang and protector against crime) from Majalengka, was active against the trafficking of poor women from China to Batavia. Tjoei Lan studied Dutch language and literature in Batavia with Dr Zigman, founder of *Ati Soetjie* organisation. Furthermore, Tjoei Lan was active as an organiser in *Ati Soetjie* to protect women victims of trafficking, who were generally sold as domestic slaves or sex slaves in the prostitution industry in Batavia (Koran Sulindo 2019).

During Indonesia's independence, the women's movement was quite diverse in its fight for "women's issues". In addition to the issues already mentioned, they also fought for women's representation in parliament, the defence of women workers, women farmers, and also international solidarity with colonised countries. The transformation of feminist knowledge has further developed in international networks by becoming members of international organisations, namely the Women International Federation Democratic (WIDF) and the International Council of Women (Rahayu 2020).<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, women's political actions were stronger than the production of feminist knowledge. However, the production of knowledge in the form of newspaper articles on the minimum age for marriage and monogamous marriage was significant. Umi Sardjono, Chairperson of Gerwani, even proposed the age of 21 as the minimum age for marriage as a proposal for the Marriage Bill (Sin Po, 26 January 1953).

The transformation of feminist knowledge was interrupted during the New Order era, but the 1975 International Women's Conference in Mexico renewed the course of this transformation. There were three significant moments: *firstly*, the International Women's Conference in Mexico City, which gave a new colour to the tradition of social research; *secondly*, there was a transformation of feminist knowledge among young women activists both working for community empowerment and campus discussion groups; and *thirdly*, there was pressure on the government to implement the mandate of the 1975 Women's Conference to "improve the status and role of women" in development. During the New Order era, the words "improving the status and role of women" were accepted by the government, including among researchers and

academics. Meanwhile, the word feminism was only used and developed in the guerrilla movement of women activists against New Order authoritarianism.

An important contribution of feminist knowledge to the social research tradition was the use of gender-disaggregated data. The special issue of *Prisma*, which included a woman researcher's paper entitled *Women and New Horizons* (Prisma, October 1975), was the beginning of "women's issues" entering social research. In its development, gender-disaggregated data method was used by population research to uncover women's behaviour and family planning. At this time, the concept of gender was used more as disaggregated data to look at the differences between men and women in society as beneficiaries of development. Applied research models tend to have the capacity to influence state policies in development, especially related to family planning and women's work in agriculture and urban areas. Research conducted by Pudjiwati Sajogjo during the 1980s-1990s on women's work in agriculture has dismantled BPS' assumptions about women's work. Women researchers from LIPI such as Yulfita Rahardjo, Melly G. Tan, Mayling Oey Gardiner, Saparinah Sadli (UI), T.O. Ihromi (UI) can be said to be the pioneers of women's studies who succeeded in breaking the basic assumptions of women in development regarding "work", "participation", "status", and "role" of women in the household unit of analysis (Rahayu 2019 p. 187).

The non-developmental research is generally done by Indonesian feminist students as Master's thesis in European and US universities. For example, Julia Suryakusuma's Master's thesis at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), the Netherlands, on the domestication of women is called *Ibuisme-Negara (State-Motherism)* through state corporatized organisations, such as Dharma Wanita, Dharma Pertiwi, and PKK.

In the corridor of inter-campus women's discussion groups and non-governmental organisations, the word feminism became a concept of resistance to the ideology of *konco wingking*, namely Panca Dharma Wanita, which is the reference for state corporatist women's organisations. The word *koncowingkingism* (Javanese: friend who is behind) refers to the Javanese conception of the position and role of women "behind" the position of men, or in the concept of home, being "in the kitchen". This *koncowingking* ideology was the imagination of New Order militarism to domesticate women's political actions (Rahayu 2006). The word *koncowingkingism* in relation to state power in feminist theory was often referred to as *ibuisme-negara*. The formulation of "Panca Dharma

Wanita" positioned women as (1) wives who accompany their husbands, (2) housewives, (3) offspring bearers and child educators, (4) additional breadwinners, (5) and citizens and community members.

Before the word gender became known among activists, especially those working in the field of community empowerment, the government popularised the word "women's role", which was associated with development. The concept of "women's role in development" was a new word that became a government's programme with the support of financial institutions or international donors. The government's project to implement the concept of "women's role in development" was concretised by the establishment of the Junior Ministry of Women's Affairs (1978), which was later changed to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (Ministry of UPW). In accordance with the mandate of *GBHN REPELITA V 1988*, under the instruction of the Ministry of UPW, every university was required to establish a Centre for Women's Studies (CWS) as a scientific support in the form of gender analysis on various aspects and dimensions of development issues. This was also intended for the development and integration of women in nation building (Pudjiwati 1991).

At the same time, the word gender was used by women activists in women's NGOs and CWS as a tool to analyse social inequality, especially in the early 1990s. The mid-1980s was the birth of NGOs that specifically advocated for women's interests or upheld women's rights. Kalyanamitra, one of women's NGOs based in Jakarta, has a programme that has never existed before, namely gender training. This gender training is intended for NGOs that have both community empowerment and women's empowerment programmes. The materials include an introduction to the concepts of sex and gender, gender distinctions and discrimination within the self, family and society, and challenging development that discriminates against the female gender. At an advanced level, Kalyanamitra provides training on the use of gender analysis tools for women's empowerment programmes.

It is likely that the gender training initially organised by Kalyanamitra and other women's NGOs was a venue for the transformation of the second-wave feminist knowledge. Although this transformation was still within the framework of development and detached the concept of gender from feminism for practical reasons, the detachment of the concept of gender from its origin had reduced feminism as a political action and theory of

knowledge to the concept of gender for the purpose of women's empowerment programmes. Meanwhile, in the 1990s, there were still few women activists in Indonesia who read the work of the second-wave feminists outside the context of development. Feminists who did their Master's degrees in Europe or the US had the opportunity to read the second-wave feminist literature. Likewise, Indonesian women who did their Master's degrees in these developed countries then gained knowledge of feminism and transmitted this knowledge to Indonesia through NGOs or development programme consulting activities. In other words, feminist literature was something that was only accessed by the elites in the 1990-2000 decade and a small number of women activists.

It is important to note the success of feminist activists in establishing the Gender Studies Programme at the University of Indonesia, which was originally called the Centre for Women's Studies, in 1990 for Master's degree. This establishment was an achievement of feminist scholars in breaking androcentrism on campus, led by Saporinah Sadli and T.O. Ihromi. In this gender studies programme, feminist knowledge can be transformed to students, some of whom are already working within the state bureaucracy. In addition, "gender" courses have been taught mainly in Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, and Linguistics, but depend largely on the lecturers' alignment with feminism. However, this success was not widespread in all universities and to date the most advanced gender studies in producing knowledge have been on the politics of affirming women's representation.

The existence of feminist lecturers has influenced the development of feminist knowledge in Indonesia. A number of women's NGOs and feminist journals in Indonesia were initiated by feminist academics. In short, female students and lecturers are significant agencies for introducing gender concepts in research and women's empowerment programmes in the community, and consultants for development policies. In particular, *Jurnal Perempuan* is the first journal that serves as a forum for writings using feminism as a theory of knowledge. Through *Jurnal Perempuan*, readers are introduced to non-development feminist theory through book reviews, which is quite significant in recognising feminist knowledge.

At the time of reformasi and afterwards, there were two prominent feminist issues, firstly, the 30% quota for women's representation in formal political

institutions written into the Election Law. The inclusion of women's issues into the state sphere was considered an achievement of women's political action in the early reformation that was significantly accepted by the public. The second issue was the struggle to uphold women's human rights, specifically related to gender-based violence and sexual violence. These two issues, raised by women/feminist activists, then entered into state policy. Among the impacts were the change of the nomenclature of the Ministry of UPW that became the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection and the inclusion of the issue of sexual violence as one of its programmes. Another manifestation of feminist knowledge in Indonesia was the birth of *Komnas Perempuan* as the work of the women's movement recognised by the state.

Feminism is now recognised as a personal and women's movement identity. Many women are brave to declare themselves feminists and they are generally connected to NGO activities, feminism courses, and feminism fan pages. Many interdisciplinary studies have been conducted to encourage various social transformations. In the context of climate justice, for example, various feminist approaches often form the basis of movements and research on environmental issues. Amidst the achievement and development of feminism knowledge in Indonesia, there are also various counter-feminism movements in the society. Conservative women's organisations and political parties in the name of religion often seek to domesticate women and/or exclude them from the public sphere. Some forms of counter-feminism that are heavily campaigned for are the call for polygamy under the pretext of family resilience.

After following the transformation of feminist knowledge in history from agency to agency, from institution to institution, this paper then aims to answer the question of "what is feminist knowledge and how is it theorised and transformed"?

### **Feminist Knowledge: Correcting the Tradition of "Who Knows?"**

The formulation of feminist knowledge theory is an epistemological journey that is still "young" compared to existing epistemologies. Feminists feel the need to build a feminist theory of knowledge (epistemology) because they are faced with the question of "who knows" (knower) and thus has the authority as the knowledge owner.

Dale Spender (1985) revealed that the starting point of the question of "who knows" was raised by Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). In the 1950s, men were the source of public knowledge about women. According to Friedan's observation, as cited by Spender, it was men who review, analyse, and direct what women should be happy with, namely being a wife and housewife both academically and in the mass media. The definition of a happy woman was not built on women's experiences and reflections but from a male perspective. Friedan believed that men's writing about women influenced women's lives as wives, mothers, housekeepers, and even the meaning of happiness. Friedan then wanted to know the perspective of women themselves and met women in suburban areas of the US to learn about their life experiences. It turned out that many women were unhappy when required to be wives and mothers who took care of the household. They were bored and burnt out, and wanted to work and actualise their capabilities. Thus, the campaign that women were happier at home and in taking care of the household was a male assumption rather than a fact (Spender 1985, pp.7-8).

The way Friedan revealed women's experiences, according to Spender, was not yet in the framework of building a feminist theory of knowledge. However, the way Friedan explored knowledge based on women's experiences inspired "who knows" in feminist research methodology in the 1970s (Spender, 1985, p.9).

According to Spender, Ann Oakley was the feminist who started feminist methodology in research to explore the invisible existence of women in sociology. Oakley interviewed 96 women about their lives in the household. At that time, the experience of living in the household was not recognised in sociological research, which only focused on structural social relations. Oakley then found the figure of Hannah Gavron, whose life experience illustrated a spider web with structural relationships. Gavron's figure inspired Oakley to look at the experiences of other women and make Gavron a model of knowledge-making. Not only that, Oakley collected all-sex data across cultures and found that the nature of being female and male was shown to be the result of societal characterisation rather than natural traits (Spender 1985; Oakley 1995).

Spender believed that "who knows" in knowledge theory is significant. The "Who" based on sex and gender determines the formation of knowledge. In fact, knowledge that comes from women is different from knowledge that comes from men. Meanwhile, the

existing structure of knowledge theory was androcentric because it was derived from male knowledge and made women's knowledge invisible and unobservable. On this basis, feminists then built a feminist theory of knowledge (epistemology).

Previously, Simone de Beauvoir had conducted a philosophical reflection on the existence of women as "the others". The definition of women as "the others" was that women were not representations of the world. The representation of the world was male, in fact, the world itself was shaped by men (Beauvoir 1953, pp. 95-96). The consequence of this was that "who knows" and the recognition of the truth of knowledge rested with male authority. The practical implication of "who knows" was that men then created values, norms, and political meanings for the structuring of society and the state based on men's views. This showed that the common good as the political goal of citizens or the state only concerned men's perspectives and interests. Thus, in this androcentric realm of knowledge and politics, women were seen as non-existent as subjects of the world, subjects of knowledge, and subjects of politics (Code 1991).

Then what is knowledge? Lorraine Code in her work *What Can She Know: Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (1991) attempted to build a feminist theory of knowledge by focusing on "who knows". Because feminists confront the issue of "who knows" as something abstract, featureless, which is formulated in the proposition "S knows that p", namely S is who knows the object p. When the world is represented as male (Beauvoir 1953), S is assumed to be male and in the epistemological analysis of the male community so that they make truth claims on the knowledge they get. Feminists in the realm of knowledge face issues about claims to truth in addition to "who knows" (Code 1991, p. 1).

The scientific tradition as Code puts it departs from the rationalist theory of knowledge pioneered by René Descartes (1596-1650). As quoted by Code, Descartes stated that knowledge is the production of ratio. Descartes' theory of knowledge is called rationalism. Descartes favoured the ratio as the centre of knowledge, at the same time the human body (non-ratio) was considered as something unknown in the process of knowing and creating knowledge. The construction of Descartes' theory of knowledge is also called Cartesian dualism because Descartes made clear and distinct aspects of the ratio and non-ratio (body). According to Code, the implication of Descartes' rationalism is that

women who are associated with the body are considered non-rational beings. The implication is that women's experience, reflection, and knowledge are considered as non-knowledge. The subject of knowledge in Descartes' definition is a person who has the cognitive capacity to master mathematics, astronomy, physics, and philosophy (Code 1991 pp. 5-6).

Code said that the tradition of rationalism is to seek truth based on the coherence of knowledge and reality in a proposition "S knows that p" or can be formulated in the example of "Sandra knows (S) that the door is open (p)". The scientific process is the testing of existing knowledge (prior knowledge thesis) into experiments on observed objects. The discovery of observed objects must obtain justification from the scientific community, which according to Code is dominated by male scientists or knowledge owners (Code 1991, p. 8).

The method used in the tradition of deductive rationalism simplifies the complexity of "who knows" (S) and also the object of knowledge (p). Rationalism's proposition is based on the formulas A and non-A, thus excluding any possibilities other than A and non-A. Everything must be either one (dominant) or the other (subordinate). There is no continuity between A and non-A elements. This pure logic becomes problematic when confronted with the human side that deals with feelings, emotions, and love, and considers this side as "the others" that is not in continuity with the ratio. Therefore, women's experiences related to the capacity to love and care for their family members are seen as non-knowledge because they are subjective (Code 1991, p.13).

In Code's analysis, feminists also face problems in recognising truth related to objectivity. Objectivity according to the rules of science is (1) presenting evidence that is accessible to the public and not in the form of subjective experiences such as a woman's life experience. "Who knows" or scientists, such as Copernicus, Newton, and Einstein when presenting evidence of their findings could be accessed by other scientists exactly the same as their findings. In this case, objectivity means that (2) the evidence is invariant and universal no matter how many people access it. For example, Newton's theory of gravity is invariant from the time of its discovery to the present day. For this reason, objectivity is (3) evidence in the form of facts and not values, or also called value-free (Code 1991, p. 11).

According to Code, women are hidden in the theory of knowledge because "who knows" is not gender neutral

and the criterion of objectivity does not recognise subjectivity. Meanwhile, feminists' attempts to uncover women's knowledge through their lived experiences are subjective. The subjective nature of women's knowledge is inaccessible to the public across time and space, invariant, different according to the "woman who knows" and therefore, not universal. On this basis, Code offered a subversion of "who knows" based on clear and distinct gender (Code 1991, p. 8).

Code rejected the objective/subjective dichotomy which implies that only 'purely objective' knowledge deserves epistemological recognition. *Firstly*, Code rejected the premise that some knowledge could be said to be entirely objective and some entirely subjective. According to Code, knowledge is a product of the blending of objective and subjective elements. *Secondly*, in relation to truth, Cartesian Dualism holds that either all is objective or all is subjective. The implication of this premise, according to Code, is that the intrusion of subjectivity into objectivity is seen as undermining thesis (which has been recognised as true by the scientific community) *qua* knowledge (which has not been recognised as true by the scientific community). Conversely, in the Cartesian view, if knowledge can be declared all subjective it is feared that it will fall into extreme relativism, even solipsism, which is the view that personal experience is a fact that can be trusted. Code's position rejected this notion and offered the intrusion of subjectivity into objectivity as an attempt to reclaim the feminine within the tradition of rationalism (Code 1991, p.12).

In addition, Code also examined the notion that women lack the capacity to reason. Code cited research that reveals that there are natural cognitive differences between women and men. Such findings ultimately, according to Code, depend on the political orientation of "who knows", namely it will be interpreted as an affirmation of male supremacy and female inferiority or as an indication of the need to reassess womanhood. Code cited Ruth Bleier's opinion regarding the study of the lateralisation of the human brain that the biology of the brain is shaped by the environment and individual experiences. This opinion was proven by Janet Sayers that there was no difference in brain research based on gender. One example is the belief that the male brain is good at spatial skills (math skills) while the female brain is good at verbal skills (language). This research evidence confirms Bleier's suggestion to be cautious in drawing conclusions from brain laterisation studies. Differences in female and male brain function are as plausible as the

socio-cultural factors that shape sex-based stereotypes perpetrated by parents from childhood (Code 1991, pp. 16-17).

Code arrived at a formulation for theorising feminist knowledge. *Firstly*, Code did not abandon objectivity but also did not glorify pure objectivity. She abandoned the dualism of objective and subjective so as to allow the experience of cognitive agents of different sex or gender as a source of knowledge. *Secondly*, Code used the category of sex differences to clarify "who knows" so as to allow women as owners of knowledge. In other words, Code sought to affirm that women's experience with all its emotions has epistemic status.

Until now, the debate in the philosophy of science, even among feminist philosophers themselves, is still full of dynamics. However, the affirmation of "who knows" based on the use of sex and gender categories to analyse social inequality has created a significant "knowledge revolution". The "knowledge revolution" has changed assumptions in social science, development policy, social movements, and individuals.

### **"Women's Issues" in the Tension of Knowledge Production and Political Action**

Reflection on the journey of feminism in knowledge about "women's issues" and political action for emancipation shows that there are dynamics. In Indonesian praxis, the dynamics of uncovering "women's issues" are often in tension between issues and also between political actions and the production of knowledge to support such actions.

Knowledge production is a broad category that includes various forms of products generated by research and modelling processes that can be applied to practical action and policy. Feminism's version of knowledge production encompasses the whole reflection on action and research on personal and group experience of action, which is then analysed and formulated as models for women's political action and policy.

If we trace "women's issues" from Kartini to the present day, we can see that there are ongoing issues that are currently not creating widespread political action and significant knowledge production. For example, the issues of young marriage and polygamy. These issues are like an endemic disease, an epidemic that women activists have tried to eradicate in the past but they have never gone away and have even created dissent among activists themselves. Meanwhile, the production of counter-feminist knowledge is stronger,

using the pretext of poverty and certain religions to justify the practice of polygamy and young marriage. In contrast to the issues of polygamy and young marriage, the issues of women's representation and sexual violence are now successfully creating widespread political action and knowledge production. The strengthening of these two issues creates tension and gap with the issues of polygamy and women's labour, which have little political action and weak knowledge production.

At the beginning of the reformation, political action to expose gender-based violence in a structural context involving the policies of state authorities was strengthened. Knowledge production was also strengthened to formulate gender-based violence in past gross human rights violations. Komnas Perempuan has been instrumental in nurturing political action and knowledge production on gender-based violence. The model of remedy for victims and crisis centre development by women's NGOs was quite developed at the beginning of the reformation but was weakened especially after the issue of women's representation was strengthened.

In its development, many crisis centres established by feminist activists were closed. The government has now established an Integrated Team for the Prevention and Handling of Cases of Violence against Women and Children under the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPA). This institutionalisation has actually been initiated when Khoffah Indar Parawansa became Minister of Women's Empowerment at the beginning of the reformation. In addition, the passage of the Sexual Violence Crime Law (TPKS) on 22 April 2022 was an achievement of women's political action that included women's NGOs, Komnas Perempuan, and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection.

Political action to realise the 30% quota for women's representation in parliament was strengthened at the beginning of the reformation. This strength was accompanied by the work of research institutions in producing knowledge. Initially, the Centre for Electoral Reform (CETRO) was established as an election monitoring institution and specifically helped develop political strategies for the affirmation of women's representation. Ani Soetjipto, one of feminist researchers who was active at CETRO, was quite productive in disseminating electoral knowledge production from a feminist perspective and its practical offers in newspapers. After that, campus-based research institutions such as the Centre for Political Studies (Puskapol) FISIP UI were established. Outside

the campus, such as Cakra Wikara Indonesia (CWI), the Association for Elections and Democracy (Perludem) produced research and strategy models for candidates to win legislative and local elections. They also used the results of the research to revise the Election Law, which still hinders women from winning in national and local elections.

It seems that women candidates are not only hampered by electoral administrative procedures, but fundamentally by obstacles that come from political parties. CWI has released a research report entitled *Meretas Jarak Afirmasi dan Administrasi: Studi Tentang Penerapan Kebijakan Afirmasi Pada Struktur DPP Partai Politik (Hacking the Distance between Affirmation and Administration: A Study of the Implementation of Affirmation Policies in the Leadership (DPP) Structure of Political Parties)* (2021) found problems such as: (1) the fulfilment of the 30% quota of women's representation in the formal structure of the DPP of political parties is still intended as a mere administrative requirement in order to participate in elections; (2) after the election is over, the percentage of women in the DPP tends to decrease and will increase to reach the 30% quota before the next election (CWI 2021).

The issue of women's representation in formal politics had actually become the mandate of the Third Women's Congress in Bandung in 1938. In 1939, there were four women activists who won the elections as members of the Municipal Council, namely Sudirman for Surabaya, Ema Puradiredja for Bandung, Siti Sukaptinah for Semarang, and Siti Umiyati for Cirebon. Siti Sukaptinah was later elected as a member of the Committee for Preparatory Work for Indonesia's Independence (Badan Penyelidik Usaha-Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia/BPUPKI) in 1944 (Janti 2019). The mandate for women's representation was consistently fought for during the first elections held after Indonesia's independence in 1955 for members of the Constituent Assembly and the House of Representatives (National Archives 2015). This mandate was again declared at the Women's Congress after the 1998 reformation on 22 December 1998 in Yogyakarta and subsequently formed the Indonesian Women's Coalition as a forum for political action on women's representation.

The issues of women's representation and sexual violence, to date, have been quite advanced in political action and knowledge production. However, there is a tension and gap with the issues of women workers or "women and work". The tension is in the form of the political expression that issues of women's representation

and sexual violence receive large-scale support across gender and social class while issues of women workers get less support.

However, significant research on women and work is supported by labour research institutes such as INKRISPENA (Research Centre for Crisis and Alternative Development Strategies), TURC (Trade Union Research Centre) and academics. The book entitled *Women, Work and Social Change* (1997) written by Ratna Saptari and Brigitte Holzner has also pioneered the production of knowledge on women's labour situation. Meanwhile, the Sedane Labour Resource Centre (LIPS) has produced their own research on women workers' experiences. However, feminist political action remains weak due to the gap between the labour movement and the women's movement. Women's labour issues do not seem to mobilise the politics of all women because the social class is different and therefore the interests of "class politics" are different. In addition, the issue of women's labour is often still associated with the stigma of "PKI/Gerwani", and is therefore seen as sensitive.

In contrast to the issue of women's labour, the issue of women and the ecological crisis have received widespread, albeit temporary, acceptance. The production of knowledge about women and ecological crisis has increased significantly. Meanwhile, political action on LGBT issues is happening on a small scale and knowledge production is still limited.

## Closing

This reflection has informed us that: *firstly*, "women's issues" can be reduced to the salient issues of women's representation and sexual violence. *Secondly*, the prominence of the issues of women's representation and sexual violence has opened up opportunities for conservative movements to raise the issues of polygamy and young marriage. *Thirdly*, there is a gap between the political action and knowledge production of women workers, which is expected because these issues are stigmatised and do not represent the interests of all women. *Fourthly*, a balance between political action and knowledge production is needed so that each issue of "women's issues" has significant achievements.

This reflective paper concludes with a follow-up question on why the issues of women's representation in politics and sexual violence are prominent today? Does this prominence reflect today's "women's issues"? Of course, the explanation to this question requires further research and not just a reflection as this paper does.

In addition, the praxis of feminism in Indonesia provides lessons that political action and knowledge production should be balanced. This is so that an issue of "women's issues" is not only a political action but also a research activity and knowledge production. If we refer to Lefebvre, praxis includes the totality of the material and spiritual (in the sense of knowledge, ideology, symbols). Therefore, the feminist movement should have the ability to encompass this totality so that its capabilities have emancipative power.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Despite the contradictions between the agendas of WIDF and ICW during the Cold War, both made considerable contributions to the Commission on the Advancement of the Status of Women at the UN until the World Women's Conferences in 1975 in Mexico, the second conference in Copenhagen in 1980, followed by Nairobi in 1985, and Beijing in 1995.

