

WOMEN'S POLITICAL ROLE IN ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM (CASE STUDY OF HISBUTTAHRIR INDONESIA)

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Abstract

This article examines HTI's view on the role of women (*Muslimah*) in the public sphere. HTI encourages *Muslimah* to take part in promoting HTI's agendas in terms of domestic and public level. Therefore, it is quite often that in many public demonstrations on street HTI employs women and children. However, the political participation of women in the public arena for disseminating HTI's objectives, especially sounding its particular demands such as corruption, is not driven by a sense of gender awareness, but this merely relates to religion's obligation to conduct *dakwah*.

Key Words : *HizbutTahrir Indonesia, public sphere and political participation women.*

A. Introduction

After the downfall of Suharto's regime, Indonesia entered a new phase in its history. Indonesian government, at that time, employed new democracy system which was marked by journalistic freedom and direct election of president, governors, and regents. ¹Moreover, the new system led to political freedom and participation for activists and for groups that needed to endorse emancipator agendas. One actual example of this was that the emergence of women's activism and participation at various levels in society. Women active roles also mushroomed and their voices were much louder and critical - compared to the Suharto's era- in political dynamics of the country. However, this era also became a catalyst to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism² movements which tried to promote different scene of women's role in social and political sphere and women tended to perceive feminism agendas as part of the Western hegemonic project.³

However, fundamentalists disagreed with feminism agendas, sharing a common sense of threat from shift in gender relation which was stimulated by the growth of capitalism and feminism. They contended that religious doctrine had a tough regulation on women. Based on the *sharia* and *kodrat* (nature) women should be regulated and controlled as well as live in the domestic realm. *Hasan al Banna* for example, a founder of *IkhkwanulMuslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood), argued that women's world is the home, and their prominent roles are a mother, a wife, and a housekeeper, and he did not allow the social mixing between men and women.⁴ Another fundamentalist is *AbulA'la al Mawdudi*, a founder of *Jamaat al Islami* (the Islamic revivalist party) in Pakistan, who declared that one of the basic human rights was respect for women's chastity. Consequently, women must be kept housebound and in *purdah*.⁵

This essay will look at the case of *HizbutTahrir Indonesia* (HTI). *HizbutTahrir* (Party of Liberation) was an Islamic transnational party established in 1952 in *al Quds*

(Jerusalem) by *Taqiyyuddin An Nabhani*. HTI is one of Islamic fundamentalism groups which is more interesting than other groups because this party is more active⁶ and creative⁷ in disseminating its idea and objectives. Also, HTI never uses violent ways in achieving its purposes. This is because HTI's treatment for women is different from many Islamist movements that avoid female participation in political sphere. HTI even encourages women to engage in this field and welcomes women into the ranks of party membership, though they have different roles from men.⁸ This essay will focus on HTI's views on women's political roles by arguing that women's political role of HTI is not a kind of gender awareness but this merely relates to religion's obligation to conduct *dakwah*.

B. Brief History of Hizbut Tahrir

Hizbuut Tahrir was founded in Jerusalem in 1953 by *Taqiuddin an-Nabhani*. He was born (1909) in *Ijizm*, a village near Haifa,⁹ in the North Palestine. He passed away in 1977 and buried in *Auza'i*, Beirut.¹⁰ He became a jurist in Amman, Jordan, after studying law at *al-Azhar University*, Cairo. During his study, he got involved in many activities of Muslim Brotherhood. He also read various literatures authored by the thinkers and activists of this organisation.¹¹ Not surprisingly, when he went back to his home, *Haifa*, he was acting as a key figure in the branch of the Muslim Brotherhood until the detachment of Palestine.¹² His contact with the organization would in turn affect the way he thought and looked at the social-political problems which he dealt with.

After finishing his study in *al-Azhar University*, *al-Nabhani* went back to Palestine and worked in the Palestinian ministry of education as a teacher in junior high school in *Kaifa*. He also worked as a teacher in one of the Islamic schools in the same city. In 1938 he quitted his teaching career and started working as a judge in *Sharia* court because he wanted to demolish Western influence in education. Furthermore, by engaging in the *Sharia* court, he wanted to keep a distance from the education sphere in the ministry in order to have greater opportunity to implement his knowledge of *Shariah* law. Apparently, he was really concerned with the implementation of *Shariah* law that had not been totally applied in his society's daily lives. One aspect of concerns by *Nabhani* is relation between men and women. According to *An Nabhani* women cannot socialize with men in private sphere except with their family, a wife is not allowed to leave her house without getting permission from her husband, also women are not allowed to travel overnight without guidance from her male relation, and women have to wear modestly outfits in public realm. Nevertheless, *Nabhanisaid* that this does not mean that men and women may not meet in public for the welfare of society such as commerce, agriculture, education, worship, and activities to promote Islam.¹³

Nabhani's anxiety, criticism of the conditions experienced by Muslims, and offered solutions had been continuing to be propagated, not only when he became a teacher and judge, but also when he took advantage of the pulpit and acted a sermon at the mosque *al-Aqsa* and *al-Ibrahim al-Khali*.¹⁴ In his contention, the main problem faced by Muslims was politics, so that building a strong political institution was the best solution for this problem. As a result, in 1953 the Islamic Liberation Party (*Hizbuut Tahrir*) was established with the prominent aimed to revitalize the Muslim

Word from its current adversity, to liberate Muslim from the secular thoughts, system, and laws, and also to restore the Islamic caliphate.¹⁵

From explanation above it can be understood that *HizbuutTahrir* acknowledges Islam as its ideology of struggle. Like Muslim Brothers, *HizbuutTahrir* declares that Islamic values cover all aspects of daily lives without any exception.¹⁶ In other words, Islam is a religion including spiritual and social lives simultaneously.

C. *HizbuUtTahrir Indonesia*

HTI is a branch of *HizbutUtTahrir* which was brought from Australia in the early 1980s. In Australia,¹⁷ Abdullah bin Nuh, an Islamic teacher and preacher who owned *al-Qazahali-pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Bogor, West Java, was acquainted with *hizbiyyin* in Sydney. One of the *hizbiyyin* that Abdullah met was Abdurrahman al-Baghdadi, a Palestinian activist of *Hizbuuttahrir* who immigrated to Australia in the 1960s. Bin Nuh invited *al-Baghdadi* to disseminate the teachings of *HizbuutTahrir*.¹⁸

When al-Baghdadi arrived in Indonesia in 1982, he utilized Bin Nuh's *pesantren* as HTI headquarters to disseminate *Hizbuuttahrir's* teachings. From the headquarters, the teachings of *Hizbuuttahrir* and the recruitment were expanded. *Halaqah* (study circles) and *daurah* (training programmes) were introduced as intensive methods of recruitment.¹⁹ Both *al-Baghdadi* and *Bin Nuh* tried to attract recruits on several university campuses, in particular the Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), and the University of Indonesia (UI). HTI also advanced its recruits to many Mosques across Java Island.²⁰ Great attention to science (*thaqafah*) is main feature of *HizbutTahrir*.

Under Soeharto's regime, HTI became a clandestine organization to avoid Soeharto's intimidation. HTI never used *HizbuutTahrir* terminology in their documents. It waited until Soeharto's fall to use it.²¹ In 1998 the downfall of Soeharto's regime took place. This situation encouraged HTI to bring it into public view. Therefore, in early 2000, for the first time the organization held an international conference hosted in Jakarta which aimed to introduce the goal of the Islamic caliphate. In 2001, HTI added "Indonesia" to the party's formal name.²² In August 2007, HTI organized the second caliphate conference at Bung Karno stadium in Jakarta which attracted approximately 50,000 people. Until now HTI has built a number of branches which are mainly located on Indonesia urban areas.²³

Amongst the groups that HTI targets are students and women. The important presence of women in HTI's struggle is marked by establishing a women's chapter of HTI called *PerempuanHizbutTahrir Indonesia* (Women Activist of *HizbutTahrir Indonesia*). This division aims to encourage women's participation to carry out particular activities targeted at women such as publishing women's magazine entitled *Female Reader* which produces articles related to fashion, women's health, child caring, cooking and articles about women and Islam. HTI also has special part of its own official website which discusses issues concerning about women such as women and violence, gender equality, and other women's rights issues.²⁴ In this regard, HTI clearly claims that men and women have the same obligation to revive the caliphate.²⁵

D. General Picture of Women of Position in Indonesia

After 1998, two general trends could be recognised, on the one hand an increasing intolerance and on the other hand a strengthening of human rights discourse.²⁶ The examples of the later can be seen from the government's policy

supporting women's right. The progress of women's movement at this time was formally seen by establishing Komisi Nasional Penghapusan Kekerasan terhadap perempuan (Komnas Perempuan, the National Commission on the Elimination of Violence against Women) through Presidential Decree no. 181/1998 which aimed to uncover cases of state violence against women. The establishment of this commission was also a follow-up of the recognition of women's rights as human rights. This recognition appeared on the adoption of the law no. 39 in 1999 on Human Rights having particular rulers which protected women's rights, including 1) the recognition of women's rights as human rights, 2) the guarantee of women's representation in electoral systems, party, and government in terms of legislative, executive and judicial, 3) the right of gaining education, 4) the right to vote, be elected and be appointed, and protect reproductive health rights.

In 2001, some normative rules were made as the foundation of government policy, such as *Instruksi Presiden* (Inpres, the Presidential Instruction) no.9 in 2000 on gender mainstreaming in various sectors of development. This policy was founded so that all government departments, including the bureaucracy in the region should enact gender mainstreaming with its emphasis on the program of strengthening institutions. Another thing was there was a change in word usage "role of women" as contained in GBHN to "women empowerment". The change was followed by shifting the name of women's ministry from "Minister of the Role of Women" to "Minister for Women Empowerment". In 2004, normative rules demanded by women's movement were validated, namely *Undang-Undang Penghapusan Kekerasan dalam Rumah Tangga* (KDRT, the Law of the Elimination of Domestic Violence). The existence of this law aimed to prevent all forms of violence against women in the household, to protect victims and to prosecute perpetrators. The law was the result of long work done by NGOs and women organizations which cooperated with the government and parliament.²⁷

Alongside Government's effort, there were also varied efforts struggling for women's empowerment. At present, many Muslim feminist scholars debate the ways Islam can be built to hand in hand with women's right and to become more gender sensitive. For example, RAHIMA is an NGO which is a rural-based Islamic women. This organization is led by Farha Ciciek which poses a centre for education and information about Islam and women's rights issues, and emphasises on women's empowerment with an Islamic perspective. Its vision is the realization of democratic society which is gained by completing women's rights and its mission to empower women through a variety of awareness increasing activities related to women rights in Islam, focusing on women, men, institutions, where gender discourses are raised. Its goal is to stimulate and promulgate Islamic discourse so as to make stronger of women's position in Islamic society. By strengthening the position of women based on equality and justice and enhancing gender awareness, Indonesia will become a democratic country.²⁸ Of course, there are still lots of organizations or movements concerning empowerment of women in Indonesia.

Another trend is the movement which emerged by Islamists or Islamic fundamentalism. In Indonesia there are many kinds of these movements such as *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI, The Indonesian Council of Mujahidins), *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI, The Islamic Defender Front), *Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia* (HTI), *Laskar Jihad* (Soldiers of Jihad), *Jamaah Islamiyah*,²⁹ and so on. Even though these movements have different emphasis in their objectives, they can be characterized into three inter-connected

domains: anti modernity, anti democracy, and anti feminism.³⁰ Apparently, the presence of those groups has significant contribution in incorporating Islamic values in the law. Minimally, there are two indicators which point out this cause, firstly, ratification of the anti-pornography and *pornoaksi* by the House of Representatives in late October 2008. According to the opponents of these actions, the bill discriminated women because women and their body triggered *pornoaksi*. This bill may escalate violence against women because of the assumption that the victim trigger and are responsible for the violence they may cause and are also potentially suppressing the diversity of ways of dressing in various traditions existed so far.³¹ The second is the case of implementations of *Perda Shari'a* in many regions in Indonesia. In Pamekasan (Madura), Gowa (South Sulawesi), Cianjur (West Java) and Padang (West Sumatra), for instance, women are asked to wear the *jilbab* in public places such as schools and offices. While in Gorontalo (North Sulawesi), women cannot walk alone after midnight. Furthermore, in Tangerang (West Java), women can be arrested because they are merely suspected of practicing prostitution if they are found in public places during the night's curfew for women³².

E. HTI's Critiques to Women's movements

Before seeing HTI's view on women's role in political sphere, we are going to scrutinize HTI's critiques toward the usage of Western terms such as gender and feminism. The ideas of justice, equality, and gender are seen by HTI as further conspiracy of the West to demolish Islamic civilization and to prevent its revival by destroying Muslim families. This conspiracy can be clearly seen through its programs such as women empowerment which aims to obliterate male's leadership in the family and society as well as to devastate the role of motherhood which become the backbone of the birth of qualified Muslim generation. Moreover HTI argued that gender agenda poses a means of devastating *Muslimah* (female Muslim).³³ It is not good solution to empower women. It even leads to new problem, that is, women are not honoured when they play domestic roles because they do not generate income.³⁴ These trigger women to leave their home to play public roles so that this will eventually damage family institutions and Muslim generation.

HTI also criticizes feminism which has carried many changes, such as women nowadays have more freedom to express their own interests and feelings. A set of embodied norms in a society called taboo which tends to restrict the space for women does not cause more obstacles for them.³⁵ This in turn, according HTI, will cause social catastrophes, for example the devastation of family institutions, the rise number of divorce, the spread of free sex, the rise case of abortion, the dilemma of career women, sexual harassment, the problems of children, etc.³⁶ Therefore, feminism agenda does not create a strong society which is indicated by peace and certainty, and equality within it. It even creates its opposition. The society will be fulfilled with the number of conflicts elsewhere.

HTI's critiques to gender and feminism can be summed up as followings. Firstly, gender inequality that has been institutionalized in the structure of patriarchal society is indisputable because of what women experience in the society such as poverty, discrimination, harassment, malnutrition, and so forth are general problems that are faced by not only women but also men, especially in the third world countries.³⁷ Secondly, the idea of gender and feminism is absurd and utopia because

this is contradictive with the nature which has depicted that women are different from man physically so that both women and men have different roles in society. In this context, HTI disagree with constructivism approach explaining that the embodied divisions of roles in patriarchal society are based on social and cultural construction. HTI argues that this framework has made a big mistake by placing religion as one of the builders of such social and cultural constructions. Through a long process, gender concept has been eventually regarded as God's provision. That is, as if it is biological and natural that cannot be changed again.³⁸ Thirdly, HTI argues that feminism has done the reduction of varied political phenomenon into power and legislation only. As a result, women are only encouraged to get involved in government, legislative institution, political parties, and others. It is as if when a woman has been involved in policy making, the women's issues will be resolved. However, it seems that there is no definite correlation between women's political progress and completion of women's problems. One perfect example is the case of Indonesia which had been led by a woman president, but the fate of women was no better than the fate of women in the country led by men.³⁹

Fifthly, the base assumption of democracy is questionable. Democracy itself in terms of theory and practice has any ambivalence such as the notion of sovereignty in the hands of people always leads to the tyranny of the minorities. The will of majority must submit to the representatives who are minority.⁴⁰ Moreover, the freedom value carried by democracy brings destruction and misery in all aspects of life. For instance, the freedom act has placed women as objects of exploitation through the Miss Universe event or something like that. Women are only considered as commercial commodity and sexual objects for men. Therefore, it is impossible, in HTI's viewpoint, to expect democracy that can provide welfare, happiness, and particularly the good fate for women.⁴¹ Sixthly, HTI is also more concerned about female leadership. According to HTI, Islam prohibits women to be leaders such as becoming a caliph, *mu'awintajwid* (caliph assistant in government affairs), a governor, and a regent. Such restriction applies absolutely to women because this is based on the fundamental resources in Islam (al Qur'an and *hadits*).⁴²

F. HTI's View on Political Role of Women

Before jumping to deep explanation of this cause, there is a term that should be made clear, namely 'politics'. HTI argues that the term 'politics' in Islam has different meaning with politic in secularism perspective. The prominent aim of politics in Islam does not intend to achieve power, but to '*ria'yahasy-syu'un al-ummah* (to manage *ummah*, Muslim community). It refers to ensure that all problems of *ummah* must be solved in accordance to God's law or Islamic law. In other words, politic is a part of *dakwah*.⁴³ Islam obligates all Muslims (man and women) to conduct *dakwah*, calling for people to have faith in God by applying *shariah* in their lives. Consequently, the political responsibility is not only the rights and obligations of rulers, but also the rights and obligations of all Muslims, including women.

In the viewpoint of HTI, there are two strategic roles of women, being *al-umm warabbah al-bayt* (as mother and manager in their home) in one side and being a leader in public sector in another side⁴⁴ to play a pivotal role in *dakwah* to resolve social problems. Both roles should be done optimally and simultaneously.⁴⁵ Women's role as mother and 'domestic manager' will determine the success of a family as the first and

main institution in creating qualified generations. That is why, this role is very precious and must be appreciated. Hence a Muslim woman who intends to get married has to prepare several things. Firstly, she needs knowledge about how to be a mother, to manage her home and also how to play role in public sphere. The second is physical preparation. A future muslim bride must have healthy physical condition in order to give birth and look after the strong generation. Thirdly, the bride to be must also have good mental preparation because life before and after marriage is completely different. After marriage the Muslim woman will live with her husband and children, and the problems she will deal with will be very complicated because of involving lots of people.⁴⁶

Meanwhile, women's political role, according to HTI, is part of the obligation to perform *dakwah*. *Dakwah*, as explained before, is a compulsion for both women and man to convey, spread, and fight for Islam so that more people will comprehend and implement Islamic values. In social context, Muslim women are obligated to do *dakwah* in social life in Islamic order. *Dakwah* which serves to respond to social issues and fight for the establishment of Shari'a in public life and state is also called political *dakwah*. Such *dakwah* must also be carried out by Muslim women in regular programs such as seminars, talk shows, etc, which aims to educate women so that they have better understanding on Islamic law. In addition, such *dakwah* will make women to be aware of their roles in political world to correct the misled rulers according to Islam ways. Another role of *dakwah* is that Muslim women and men are hand in hand to struggle in restoring Islamic caliphate over Islamic world⁴⁷.

In short, there are four main political roles of women. Firstly, women have the right to vote and inaugurate a caliph. HTI argues that Islam gives all Muslims the duty of allegiance to a caliph as has been practiced by women in the time of Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁸ Secondly, women have the right to vote and to be elected as members of the *ummah* assembly. The *ummah* assembly refers to an institution in Islamic State consisting of representatives of the people in charge of providing advice to the caliph, asking what people needed, giving advice on how people's needs can be met, correct and advise the caliph when he stipulates certain ways against the rules of God and His Prophet.⁴⁹ The third role of women in the political world is advising and criticizing authorities. According to HTI, every single Muslim is compulsory to correct the ruler so that the ruler can correct his mistakes. Such role of adviser and corrector can be done directly or through assembly and political parties.⁵⁰ As for instance, in Indonesian case, on 22nd December 2006, Muslim women of HTI demonstrated to reject the concept of gender. The rejection was based on the argument that gender equality was the mission of liberalization that would be distributed over the world including Indonesia. The liberalization is now applied in Indonesia, which according to HTI, is not the right solution. Poverty, for example, which affects many Indonesian families, is due to application of capitalist system allowed to continue running.⁵¹ Similarly, in Turkey, women of *HizbutTahrir* engaged in protest for the ban on wearing headscarves for women who work or go to school. Also France's tough policy against headscarves was criticized by women of *HizbutTahrir* by issuing a letter of protest to the French president.⁵²

The last political role of HTI's women is the obligation to become the member of a political party. The political party in HTI's viewpoint is fulfilment of God's law. It serves to maintain the implementation of syariah laws in daily lives. The existence of

Islamic party is something inevitable whether the Islamic state has been established or not. If the Islamic state has set up, getting involved in the Islamic party is *farudukifayah* (group liability), whereas if not, every single Muslim (women and men) must engage in the Islamic party to restore the caliphate.⁵³

However, there are a number of strict prerequisites which women should meet before getting involved in the political role which are mentioned as follows. First, women have fulfilled their obligations as a wife and a mother. The main reason is, as mentioned before, the natural function of women as *al-umm warabbahh al-bayt* (a mother and a housewife). Second, women should get permission from their husband in order to be involved in the political world. This is because a husband, as provided in the al Qur'an and the law of marriage in Indonesia, is responsible for his wife's life and security. Third, women are not allowed to be a leader of *ummah*, which in Indonesian context includes president, governor, regent, and so forth. Fourth, the next rule for women to be involved in politics is correlated with moral values in Islam such as the obligation of wearing headscarves,⁵⁴ the prohibition to interact freely between men and women, etc. Otherwise, it can be concluded that women are permitted to engage in the public sphere or in the political role as long as they abide by Islamic morality and virtue and they do not take leadership position.⁵⁵

G. Analysis and Conclusion

In general, the existence of HTI may hamper the agendas of women's empowerment promoted by government and outside of government such as NGO or other Islamic organisations. The reason for this is that HTI and other Islamic fundamentalism have significant contribution in enforcing Indonesian government to establish the law. The ratification of the anti-pornography and *pornoaksi* bill by House of Representatives and the enforcement of Islamic Shari'a through the application of Perda Shari'ah can become indicators of this contribution.

Specifically, the involvement of HTI's women in public sphere is not stimulated by a sense of gender awareness (women and men have equal position) but this is only religion's obligation. This is because, women cannot absolutely become a leader and women must meet a number of very strict conditions before they can get involved in political role such as getting permission from their husband, and so forth.

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