

Women in Politics: The (un)empowerment of *Emak-emak* during 2019 Election Campaign Period in Indonesia

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Abstract- *Cyber feminism has been posited as a new medium to promote women's opinions. In Indonesia, the Community of Mothers (Komunitas Emak-Emak – KEE) has determined itself as a cyber feminism movement promoting gender equality, especially for mothers. In fact, its presence has been attracting interests during the period of 2019 electoral contestation in Indonesia. By applying the theory of cyber feminism, this study analyzes the presence of patriarchal wrappings in the KEE movement. Apparently, there is a patriarchal dominance that exists in the KEE, implying women in the community to still be guided by men who have their own vision and missions. It hence contradicts with the fundamental meaning of cyber feminism. Besides, there is a dominant influence from the campaign team of one of presidential candidates to strengthen the shares of their voters.*

Keywords: *Komunitas Emak-emak, cyberactivism, cyberfeminism, patriarchy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Politics has been stated to have an attached stigma as being a patriarchy dominated realm. It is practically difficult for women to get involved in a series of political structures and practices. In Indonesia, the cultural construction of the country's mostly patriarchal society has been resulting in significantly less opportunities for women to hold higher positions than men. In a situation as such, feminist movement has begun to arise in giving contributions to the democracy. During the 2019 political year in Indonesia, the Community of Mothers (*Komunitas Emak-Emak – KEE*) rises as a controversial feminist movement. It is a feminist-claiming group consisting of mothers who gather up and pursue a mission to get better life and equality for their social and cultural roles as mothers. In Indonesia, people incline to limit opportunities for mothers, by which a vast number of mothers think the government as often ignoring their voices. Due to those reasons, a group of concerned women agree to make their community larger by establishing a virtual community.

On Twitter and Facebook platforms, about 6,000 persons have joined the KEE movement. At some points, the virtual community have finally gathered in real-life to promote their primary goal for including the voices of mothers in Indonesia to improve the welfare of their families and to eventually participate in advancing the nation. Women who identify themselves as mothers are the priority target to be involved in the community. In a broader sense, it is a manifested action to deconstruct a negative stigma regarding

the identity of mothers in the society, especially in a democratic country. The identity as mothers has in fact been considered as an obstacle to fully realize women's potentials in pursuing their careers, especially in a political context, due to burdens culturally attached to women in their families, *i.e.*, taking care of children and husband. Other structural indicators such as marital status, age, occupation and residency (urban or rural) have also played critical roles in determining the viability of female voices. The presence of KEE movement has hence made it easy for mothers to participate in such a way as in the real democratic context. Democracy itself has emerged as a powerful ideological platform for taking people's aspirations into consideration in political issues, by which they will have their voices properly considered by the government in doing policy making and analyses. Democracy is not a seasonal matter taken merely during an election. It is also critical to treat some irregular issues emerging in the society. Then, the KEE has developed a website to build a closeness among its members. With all the freedom and partiality of women, who identify themselves as mothers, in the KEE movement, can it be classified as a cyberfeminism? The circumstance emerges as a controversy in Indonesian cyberspace.

In general, the dynamics of electoral contestation has been expected to bind each other in ways that are difficult to guess. In between early 2018 until April 2019, Indonesia held an election campaign period. It concluded in a general election involving parallelly held presidential and legislative elections. Electoral integrity applied in the stages of election implementation including pre-election, election and post-election process. First is in the process of program planning and budget of election. Secondly process of socialization and voter information is carried out by taking into account the involvement of the community activities to make room for the district election committee and the commissioner in providing socialization Sarofah, et. al (2019). One of exciting phenomena during the election period was mothers fighting for their previously marginalized votes through the KEE movement. Mothers, whose voices have suffered discriminations against their capabilities, have rapidly surfaced as voices that deserve a legitimacy.

Political news and issues in Indonesia, which focus on electoral contestation between the country's politicians, have dominated discussions among the people. In fact, it has forced people to take sides and try to promote their preferred candidate as the country's future president. Some comments

on Twitter consider the KEE to mainly exist due to patriarchal elements disguising as a fight for women equality. The problem is increasingly converging on the conception of cyberfeminism and its relevance to the interests of patriarchy in leading and dominating cyberfeminism movements.

An emerging question on the presence of KEE movement remains on the issue whether the movement is purely from women with the primary purpose of rising concerns on their aspirations in elections, or it is a sign of directing feminism by the patriarchal culture. Therefore, this work attempts to answer a research question: How and to what extent does the KEE signify cyberfeminism in Indonesia?

II. METHOD

This study applies a qualitative research method with the case study of KEE. Qualitative methods refer to approaches to establish patterns of knowledge based on a constructivism perspective. For example, meanings derived from individual experiences, social and historical values, to establish certain theories or patterns of knowledge, or based on a participatory perspective, *e.g.* political orientations, issues, collaboration, or change or both [1]. In this work, data are gathered through passive observations where the researcher is present, observing and recording the activities studied in a certain place [2]. Besides, textual approach is applied to examine information on KEE provided on Twitter platform and KEE-owned website (partaiemakemak.co.id). Then, processed data are further analyzed to understand and formulate the predetermined problem.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Representation of Women in the KEE movement

Gender equality issues have been predicted to be the main objective of the KEE in forming parties with women who identify themselves as mothers. To discover issues on women representation in the community, this work applies the theory of representation by Stuart Hall for describing its meanings that come into contact with the women. In general, the power of representation lies in its ability to revive some knowledge and turn off several other views [3]. Regarding this issue, it is closely related to the circuit of culture, where the ideology and owner of a hegemony in a text will be revealed.

As a start, this study analyzes signs contained in a tweet posted by KEE's Twitter account on November 22, 2018 (Figure 1). The tweet shows a physical gathering of KEE members that follow a series of virtual discussions. According to the tweet, the meeting, which is referred to as a socialization and consolidation session, was initiated by a man (Twitter handle: [@ekagumilars](https://twitter.com/ekagumilars)). The term "initiator" according to the Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* – KBBI) denotatively refers to someone who initiates or has the initiative. Meanwhile, its connotative meaning in the context refers to someone considered as a leader who guides and directs the women to do something according to the initiator's interests.



Fig 1. Tweet by KEE account on Twitter

In the context, mothers refer to women who are inclined to feminist elements beyond cultural women status, by which they may expect to elevate their opinions actively and freely without patriarchal pressures. Thus, feminist politics needs to at least reach an agreement on what it means to be a woman and the specific interests of women in certain circumstances [3]. The identity is widely interpreted by KEE members, even if their views contain patriarchal interests.

Next, Figure 2 shows another tweet by KEE presenting male leaders for their handsomeness. It creates contradictions with feminist elements KEE wanted to point out. They posted the photos of Prabowo Subianto (a presidential candidate), Sandiaga Uno (a young businessman and vice-presidential candidate), Tommy Soeharto (a senior politician), and Agus H. Yudhoyono (a young politician) as representations of a masculine and ideal leader. The production of content being described was continuously rolled out by the KEE to attract both current and potential new followers of the community. Mothers who were active on Twitter platform would quickly be attracted by the masculine content being presented.



Figure 2. Tweet by KEE account on Twitter

Apparently, KEE members responded well because they reached their pleasure on masculinity portrayed in the content. Theoretically speaking, what was consumed was not an object but the relation itself. There would never be a satisfaction because the fingers of the markers could stimulate relentless desires [4]. Basically, it indicates responding KEE members to be thirsty for a male leader who is manly looking to guide towards a better Indonesia. In this context, the paradox of gender justice has been clearly shifting. The feminist concept promoting democratization of women is present in the freedom of expression, but it is ultimately dominated by a series of patriarchal images in the content.

The feminist element that should be well represented is in fact the opposite of the main purpose of KEE establishment. However, social relation narratives constructed from the text are a form of attachment between the KEE and the pair of presidential/vice-presidential candidates, in which mothers joining the KEE believed Prabowo-Sandi would be leading their followers towards justice and prosperity. The narrative was closely related to a patriarchal domination interested in seeking mass supports for the pair, in which the target masses in this context are “emak-emak” (mothers). In fact, potential exploitations of women who identify themselves as mothers are carefully taken by KEE. The pair of candidates ultimately held the highest dominance to regulate KEE direction, by which “emak-emak” was made a commodity to follow them.

B. Contradictory of Gender Equality

Women’s representation pointedly influences an identity politics promoted by the feminist-claiming movement in this case. Contributions shown are tangible as revealed by Partini [5], women are subjects who have strategic truths in voicing their feminine issues. The figure for women should

be present and show a genuine discourse in fighting for genders equality without the dominance of patriarchy.

Looking at its website (Figure 4), KEE represented itself in the main column as “Partai Emak-Emak” (the Party of Mothers), implying a construct of members desiring to build. Thus, reviewing textual bonding, assessment, representation, relationships, and identification is expected to reveal how the bonding is realized **Invalid source specified..**



Figure 3. Homepage of partaiemakemak.co.id (defunct)

The pair of candidates was displayed in a photo on the homepage with a tagline “Adil makmur bersama Prabowo Sandi” (justice and prosperity with Prabowo Sandi). It is a clear sign of a patriarchal cognition of interests to be formed by the directive to visitors of *partaiemakemak.co.id* website. It contains symbolic domination values that stand above the KEE unconsciously. A mature cognition is formed by KEE, which was originally existed on Twitter, to finally lead to a web-shaped community with stronger constructs to bind their followers to the interests of referred candidates. Besides, it provides persuasive representations formed through a call for “Join Us” to get a free book titled “Paradoks Indonesia” (the Paradox of Indonesia) for lucky applicants. In short, it is not only a persuasive form of an invitation to join and become feminists, but it tends to promote a support for the candidates.

The elements of women’s representation according to Latifah Iskandar have two types, *i.e.*, representation of ideas and representation of existence [5]. The elements are not precisely presented by the KEE, yet they are more inclined to promote a pair of candidates who echoed their fights for justice and prosperity. The presented metaphor seems to support women to speak out in a democratic context; however, there is a clear allegiance to patriarchal dominance in electing their preferred candidates.

Strengthening women’s self-modalities in a democracy is similar to the emergence of feminist movements. If patriarchal traditions are present to initiate a feminist movement, desired sustainability of the movement and women in it are expected to get dominated by patriarchal elements. Fights to achieve a gender equality is shifting to a practical politics, which hence leads to the formation a commodification of participating women to be supporters of a certain presidential candidate.

C. Commodification of Women to Strengthen Voters in 2019 Presidential Election

The presence of women advocating voices, opinions and participation in practical politics has made the 2019 electoral contestation interesting. Women have been participating in Indonesian elections since 1995. However, the number of female representatives elected into parliamentary seats is still low, covering as much as 6.5% (17 seats) of the total number of seats. In 2019, there was a discourse to set a 30% minimum of women's representation in the parliament [6].

The KEE conveyed an idea of required breakthroughs by Indonesian women to contribute to the spirit of democracy. The cyberspace was rushed out by KEE through their social media accounts and websites to provide strengths for women to express their opinions and hopes for Indonesian leaders. There was no clear condition requiring KEE members to be "ideal women" based on physical standards (beauty), which was taken to attract the general public to the KEE. The tendency is observed in the emergence of marginalized mother figures for specific purposes. A group of mothers is a valuable commodity to expose and spread dissatisfactions to the performance of incumbent governance. In interviews with members of the KEE in Surabaya, their participation in KEE was purely due to their dissatisfaction to the performance of current government in regulating the prices of rice, cooking oils, onions, and other basic foods. Directing their supports to challenging candidates was to put their hopes and aspirations.

Supports and campaigns promoted by KEE have become a valuable political commodity for the campaign team of referred presidential candidates. It is in fact a model of Karl Marx thinking, who stated the capitalist system to have made the female body a commodity because it has a high exchange rate [7]. Concerns on economic issues faced by mothers have constantly been raised by the pair of candidates, becoming a critical factor for mother-identifying women to get provoked to speak out for cheap "basic food prices."

In general, there is an obvious inconsistency between the real meaning of "cyberfeminism" term and the vision of KEE. Cyberfeminism was stated by KEE as a radical cyberactivism to provoke internet users by incorporating very masculine ideas of feminism into the cyberspace, by which women are unconsciously trapped in issues full of masculinity elements. It was perilously captured by hidden patriarchal intentions that mistakenly appeared to have concerns on a salvation for the mothers. Rightful aspirations of *emak-emak* have then become a basis for the candidate pair to bring up issues of marginalized and neglected mothers. Symbolic power shown by men involved in the KEE was masked behind massive quasi-supports for the welfare of mothers.

Women, in this case, have therefore become an exploited commodity to gain supports during the 2019 election. It was not necessarily a physical exploitation of women's bodies, which refers to attraction in the media to fulfill male pleasure. Instead, the exploitation in question refers to the presence of men directing or leading women in the KEE, indicating an irony of women wrapped by a mere symbolic

power. In other words, the concept of cyberfeminism was not well rooted in the KEE movement, delivering mistaken perceptions in the use of cyberspace as a medium to express women's freedom from a patriarchal bondage.

The campaign team of challenging presidential candidate well captured the high exchange rate for gaining more voter supports from the KEE. According to one member (Interview B), KEE members volunteered to hold an Islamic worship gathering (Indonesia: *pengajian*) in the pursuit of an electoral victory of a certain pair of candidates and spread the network. *Pengajian* refers to an Arabic term *at-ta'allimu*, or *ta'allama yata'allamu ta'liiman* in its longer form, literally meaning learning or understanding. Hence, the religious meaning of *pengajian* or *ta'liim* is presented as both worshipping and studying Islam under the guidance of a knowledgeable person (Arabic: *Aalim*). It has been becoming an obligatory form of worship for every Muslim. *Pengajian* as a religious activity conducted by a community of Muslim mothers in Indonesia has since then become a valuable opportunity to gain more voters, especially with the rising concerns on "Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender" (LGBT) and Pedosexual legalization. Mothers are afraid to know the exposure of their children to get caught up in LGBT relationships. Fears of a situation as such had made them feel protected if a certain presidential candidate won the 2019 election contestation.

IV. CONCLUSION

The political arena in Indonesia is still dominated by patriarchal symbols. In a context as such, women are kept accustomed to the constructs of traditions and norms in their families. Cyberfeminism, which should widen opportunities for women to participate in and contribute to democracy has not been strong enough to make them independent without the presence of patriarchy. In that sense, capitalist actors take over the helplessness of women. During the 2019 election period in Indonesia, a feminist-claiming community so-called the KEE was mistakenly referred to as a cyberfeminism. The patriarchal dominance observed through various markers has in fact strengthened the existence of patriarchy in the KEE. Gender equality issues, which should be the primary goal of KEE, are thus posited as a pseudo concern by the content of online posts and discourses. Practically, these contents more likely appear as political strategies in leading the masses to support a referred pair of candidates.

In the end, this study raises some critical notes to advance cyberfeminism in Indonesia. First, there is a need for feminist constructs pursued by women themselves, in which women's representation is an essential requirement for internalizing a clear mindset of feminism within women themselves. Second, the feminist commitment among women communities shall be mature and depart from active elements of feminism. It will expectedly be resulting in a fundamental courage for forming a particular space for women and fighting for it to the public. Then, a strengthening of modalities for women is required. It is necessary to establish a capacity as a woman who represents a true empowerment in addressing any symbolic domination often faced by women.

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