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Siti Kusujarti

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Introduction: Gender Relations, Equality, and Inclusion in Indonesia: Contradictions, Complexity, and Diversity

By Siti Kusujarti¹

Gender and Women's Studies have flourished in Indonesia since the 1980's. Since then, various studies have analyzed and unraveled the dynamics and complexities of gender relations, women's status, and their connections to cultural, political, social, and spatial landscapes within the context of Indonesian society. As the fourth largest population in the world with the highest Muslim population, Indonesia has more than 17,000 islands with over 350 ethnic groups. This cultural diversity serves as a breeding ground for rich study regarding gender and women's positions, yet also poses formidable challenges. The diversity and complexity of the society lead to debates and inconclusive perspectives on the nature of gender relations and women's positions in Indonesia. Some past studies indicate that women have high status and power in Indonesian society, with substantial access to resources inside the household and in the larger society, especially in comparison to women from other Asian societies and Islamic cultures. Other, more recent accounts articulate doubt regarding this assessment, suggesting that Indonesian women are neither as powerful nor as autonomous as previous studies describe. However, these two seemingly contradictory views on Indonesian women may depict the different elements of Indonesian gender relations. In many cases women have access to power and resources, yet they may have limited roles and ability to express their agencies in other settings--women's lives may seem contradictory, but their agencies enable them to negotiate these contradictions. The manifestations of the structural constraints and agencies may differ depending on the cultural, social, and political context. To create a better understanding of the diversity, complexities and contradiction of gender relations and women's positions in Indonesian society, the use of multiple approaches and perspectives is pivotal. This special issue offers diverse approaches and perspectives on gender relations in Indonesia.

The articles for this special issue were selected from the papers presented at the International Conference on Contemporary Social and Political Affairs held in 2019 in Surabaya, Indonesia. Although the themes of the conference were more general, most of the papers presented focused on gender relations and women's positions in Indonesia and in the global context. Therefore, we entitled this special issue "Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Local and Global Societies." Numerous existing articles and past studies on Indonesian gender relations in international journals were written by authors or scholars from outside Indonesia, providing some foundations and insights on the topic. However, more research and articles written and conducted by Indonesians using their insiders' perspectives are important for enriching the field and providing different perspectives. The voice, experience, and positionality of the authors serve as important factors affecting how they approach certain topics. This special edition offers various voices and positionalities of Indonesian researchers and authors from diverse background and ethnicities that will enhance our understanding of gender relations in Indonesian societies.

¹ Siti Kusujarti is a Professor at Warren Wilson College, USA. This special issue was edited by Professor Siti Kusajarti and Dr. Professor Bagong Suyanto, Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia. skusujia@warren-wilson.edu