

Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia

Women and Gender

The Middle East and the Islamic World

Editors

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Susanne Dahlgren

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Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia

Women's Rights Movements,
Religious Resurgence and Local Traditions

Edited by

Susanne Schröter



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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

I dedicate this book to Lily Zakiyah Munir who passed away much too young
in 2011.

Lily was a tireless fighter for women's and children's rights, and she
advocated new, emancipatory interpretations of Islam. I will always cherish
my memories of her kindness and optimism, and of the wonderful
conversations we had.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this book was first conceived in 2005 at the University of Passau where I had been appointed Chair of Southeast Asian Studies the year before. I organized an international conference on the topic of “Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia”, and invited renowned Asian, Australian, and American scholars and Muslim women activists to the small Bavarian province town, which is situated picturesquely at the intersection of three rivers amidst breathtaking scenery at the border to Austria. Amongst those invited were Arahmaiani, Nelly van Doorn-Harder, Siti Musdah Mulia, Lily Zakiyah Munir, Vivienne Angeles, Amina Rasul-Bernardo, Jamal Kamlian, Sisilia Astuti, Maila Stivens, Saroja Doorairajoo, and Suraiya Kammaruzzaman. Participants from Germany included Monika Arnez and Alexander Horstmann. The Volkswagen Foundation generously provided us with funding, and the university, too, supported the conference in any way we could possibly wish for. I thus express my most cordial thanks to both institutions.

We all enjoyed the intellectual exchange of ideas and the relaxed atmosphere, and for me this was the beginning of wonderful friendships with many of the contributors to this volume. In the following years our paths kept crossing. We stayed in touch at conferences and organized workshops together; during our travels and research visits abroad, we seized every opportunity to meet and to discuss new developments in the transformation of gender relations in Southeast Asia. Together with Monika Arnez I launched a research project in Indonesia focusing on the role of women’s rights activists and the implementation of the U.N. agenda against the discrimination of women. Under my supervision, Birte Brecht did research on gender among the Mranao in the Philippines for her PhD thesis, and Amporn Marddent conducted fieldwork on Salafist women’s organizations in Thailand. Jointly, we laid the foundation for a focus on gender studies in Islamic societies at the University of Passau.

In 2008, I left Passau for a professorship on the anthropology of colonial and postcolonial orders at the Goethe University Frankfurt; I became a member of the Cluster of Excellence “Formation of Normative Orders” and was given the opportunity to contribute this focus to an interdisciplinary research project. Within the context of the Cluster I was in the happy position of being able to invite international guests such as Nurul Ilmi Idrus, and to organize further conferences. One of these was held in May 2010 on the topic

of “Formations of Normative Orders in the Islamic World”; at that conference Farish Noor presented the results of his research, and we came to talk about a contribution by him to the projected book. He was the last member to join a group of authors that had formed over the course of five years and written a number of excellent articles. To all of them I wish to express my appreciation for the fruitful cooperation, as well as for their patience in those recurrent phases when the project seemed to stagnate.

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INTRODUCTION

Susanne Schröter

The volume “Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia” is the first compilation of texts on gender constructions, normative gender orders and their religious legitimizations, as well as current gender policies in Islamic Southeast Asia, which besides the Islamic core countries of Malaysia and Indonesia also comprises southern Thailand and Mindanao. By including politically and geographically peripheral regions, countries where Muslims constitute minorities and ethnically and religiously charged conflicts have a major impact on the everyday life of the population, it was possible to employ a broad analytical framework; thus, the readers will gain comprehensive insight into the diversity of Islamic cultures in Southeast Asia. The interdisciplinary background of the authors—ethnologists, theologians, historians, and scholars of literature and religion—further contributes to achieving that objective. Almost without exception, they are experts in the field of Southeast Asian studies. Some of them have made a name for themselves as women’s rights activists and women politicians in their own countries, combining scholarship and social commitment. The texts by these authors represent insider perspectives into ongoing debates in Southeast Asia, and reflect activities at the level of civil society. Methodologically the contributions are also diverse, with some based on studies of normative and literary sources and others the product of long-term ethnographic fieldwork.

The volume opens with a comprehensive survey article by Susanne Schröter, who highlights the distinct historical and geographical features of the region that have earned Southeast Asia the reputation of being a comparatively gender-liberal part of the world. Schröter traces the impact of national development programmes, modernization, globalization, and political conflicts on the local and national gender regimes in the 20th century, and elaborates on the consequences of the revitalization of a conservative type of Islam—a phenomenon evident across all Islamic Southeast Asia. The contribution elucidates the boundary lines of cultural and political processes of negotiation in which the actors are developing concepts of new gender orders in the context of utopias related to state, society, and community. Furthermore, it is shown how transnational Islamic discourses are being appropriated on the local level.

Four authors address Indonesia, the nation with the largest Muslim population in the world—and a nation that has witnessed fundamental changes since the end of dictatorial rule in 1998. Religious studies scholar Nelly van Doorn-Harder gives an outline of the women's politics pursued by the Muhammadiyah, the country's second largest Muslim mass organization. Founded in 1912 as an organization of reformist Islam, the Muhammadiyah has always had a progressive wing that encouraged women to pursue education and employment. At the same time, however, there has always existed an influential conservative majority that referred to the Islamic traditions and the Qur'an as the foundations of a social order with gender inequality that dates back to the time of the Prophet. The conflicts between these two poles become particularly apparent in the women's organization 'Aisyiyah and the young women's organization Nasyiat ul-'Aisyiyah. Using the example of the 'harmonious family model', van Doorn-Harder examines how female activists try to gradually expand women's scope of action. In that process, women face a dilemma: on the one hand, they wish to transcend the Indonesian gender role concepts that have been passed down; on the other, they cannot fundamentally challenge the dominance exerted by husbands.

Monika Arnez discusses same-sex relationships in literary texts written by female authors after the fall of the Suharto regime. The end of his rule spawned a flourishing literary scene, and women in particular seized the opportunity to present their ideas to a broad public. They broached issues of injustice in the existing gender regime, their frustration with the restrictions imposed upon them, and their reflections on erotic desires and religious values. In the latter context, the topic of homosexuality is particularly controversial. The writers whose novels Arnez analyses tell of ambivalences, of inner struggles and provocative decisions. While the novels reflect an awakening on the part of women, this spirit of optimism characterizing the attempt to transcend the boundaries of normative mainstream discourse goes along with an inner turmoil, and does not always result in a real break with the prevailing order.

Anthropologist Nurul Ilmi Idrus reflects on an older genre of texts. Her contribution focuses on the importance of traditional manuscripts of the Bugis—a Muslim ethnic group living on the island of Sulawesi—to the organization of relationships between men and women. These so-called *lontara*' texts narrate stories that have educational value and shed light on the central norms of the group. The *Lontara*' *Daramatasia* exemplarily analysed by Idrus relates how a woman named Daramatasia, even though innocent, arouses the wrath of her husband, is chased away from the house and uncomplainingly accepts her fate. She is rewarded for her complete

submission: Allah stands by her and sees to it that she can eventually return to her husband in order to serve the latter and take care of her daughter.

The Indonesian theologian Siti Musdah Mulia objects to this way of constructing gender. She was formerly head of a working group in the Indonesian Ministry of Religion charged with preparing suggestions for a reform of family law. According to Mulia, women are still at a disadvantage in family law and subject to the authority of their husbands. The proposal submitted to Parliament was an attempt at deducing the principles of the international women's rights agenda from the Qur'an and the Islamic traditions. In her contribution, Mulia shows how Islamic texts can be interpreted in a progressive way, and that it is possible to view Islam as a source of emancipation and gender equality.

Malaysia's postcolonial family ideology is the topic of the contribution by Maila Stivens. The goal of national leaders such as Mohamad Mahathir was, and still is, the creation of an Islamic modernity that combines economic progress and the preservation of powerful family values. This is defined in contrast to 'Western' constructs, the 'West' being imagined as immoral, destructive and associated with various social ills such as criminality and drug abuse. The propagated Malaysian family values, on the other hand, are a mixture of so-called Asian values and Islamic traditions. Stivens traces the discourses communicated by the media and explores the state-run campaigns used to justify and implement the family value project as an alternative to 'Western' concepts. At the same time, however, she shows that Malaysian politicians had no qualms about forging coalitions with conservative Christians, who advocated comparable positions on the international level.

Three contributions explore changing gender relations among Philippine Muslims at the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Amina Rasul-Bernardo is an authentic voice of those Muslim women activists who interpret Islam as an emancipatory force. She is the daughter of Senator Santanina Rasul, who herself had a stunning career as a politician and activist and has for many years been advocating equal rights for Philippine Muslim women. Rasul-Bernardo describes how Muslim women activists closed ranks in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao and sought ways, often jointly with Christian women activists, to resolve the conflict and to overcome the hostilities between Catholics and Muslims. In her contribution, Rasul-Bernardo makes recommendations intended to pave the way for the democratization of the region, as well as bring justice for Muslims and equal rights for women (and men).

Religious studies scholar Vivienne S.M. Angeles has done research on one of the phenomena associated with conservative Islam: the converts' movement 'Balik Islam' ('Return to Islam'), which emerged in the 1970s. Many women converts are former migrants who encountered Islam in Saudi Arabia, sometimes facilitated by their husbands, and who organize themselves in Islamic centres in the Philippines. Some of these groups are followers of the Tablighi Jama'at. Others belong to the Darul Hijrah, the Fi Sabilillah Media Foundation or the group 'Islamic Studies Call and Guidance'. The last of these is the group among which Angeles conducted her research. Tracing the personal life stories of the women she interviewed, she discusses the problems and crises for which Islam is offered as a solution, the consequences of the new religion for the converts and their relations with their non-Islamic parents, siblings, and other relatives.

Birte Brecht-Drouart's article on 'Muslim Women Leaders in the Philippines' is based on twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork among the Mranao on Mindanao. For many years, Mindanao has been in a situation of 'no war, no peace' characterized by recurring warlike clashes between regional liberation movements and the Philippine army, as well as by violent internal forms of managing conflict. Brecht-Drouart shows the possibilities of exerting agency open to women even under these problematic circumstances. For women of the traditional elite, agency is acquired primarily through royal titles that bestowed considerable influence on the group of title holders; today, more and more women have come to hold leading positions in politics and economy. Since Islamic discourses have become increasingly important, the strategies employed by women to achieve their goals include gender-egalitarian interpretations of the Qur'an.

Alexander Horstmann's article, too, focuses on women who reject the idea that women and men are equals. He has done fieldwork among communities of the Tablighi Jama'at in Thailand and—like Amporn Marddent and Vivienne S.M. Angeles—highlights women's active participation in a conservative Islamic organization. All three contributors point out that the project of social and cultural Islamism is by no means merely imposed by men on their wives; it is, quite to the contrary, a distinctly female concern as well.

Anthropologist Amporn Marddent has studied Salafi women in Thailand. She presents her analysis within the larger context of the situation of Thai Muslims, which in the southern part of the country is characterized by a long-standing conflict with the central government. During past years, women played an important role in that conflict, taking an active part by means of the so-called *hijab* movement. Marddent, herself a Thai Muslim, has done

ethnographic fieldwork among the Nahdatul Muslimat, the women's wing of the Al-Jama'at group. She describes the women's piety discourse and their efforts to create a new social and moral order completely guided by the principles of Islam, or rather by their specific exegesis of Islamic sources. In contrast to the Islamic feminists discussed by Mulia and Rasul-Bernardo or the reform-oriented Muhammadiyah women activists who aim at reconciling Islam with the targets set by international women's rights conventions, the women of the Nahdatul Muslimat reject the idea of gender equality.

The paper of Farish A. Noor looks at the Tablighi Jama'at itinerant missionary movement and how it frames the status and identity of woman/women in its discursive economy. It has been argued by some scholars that the Tablighi Jama'at is an (almost) exclusively male-dominated movement that distances itself from women who are cast as a disruptive influence on the conduct of their missionary work, but this paper argues that from the very beginning the Tabligh has had a complex view of women—beginning from the models of 'exemplary female Muslims' found in its foundational texts—and remains in a complicated relationship with women in general who are seen as both a threat and a necessity to the Muslim community and the Tabligh's pursuit of an idealised mode of Muslim religious normativity. What, then, is the place and role of women in the Tablighi universe? This paper will argue that the Tabligh in fact has a rather complex and nuanced view of female Muslim subjectivity; but that despite the apparently ambivalent status that womanhood enjoys in the discourse of the Tabligh, the figure of 'woman' (in both the historical and real sense) can never be radically exteriorised from the Tabligh's discursive economy, for woman is the constitutive other to the Tabligh itself.

All contributions in this anthology show that Muslim women are taking an active part in shaping their own present and future, the present and future of their communities and countries, and that they have a say in political and religious debates. This will to reshape society is not dependent on their political orientation or their attitude towards Islam. Rather, it is rooted in a self-awareness as positioned subjects in their respective societies and as citizens who must strive to bring their moral visions to bear on the national order. Progressive, conservative, and Salafi female actors alike try to exert influence, even though some of them favour an asymmetrical gender model that grants ultimate authority to men.

GENDER AND ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: AN OVERVIEW

Susanne Schröter

Introduction

Compared to South Asia or the Middle East, Islam in Southeast Asia is considered to be moderate, especially with regard to its gender orders. There are an unusually large number of documented cases from the past where women ruled as sultans and queens, or participated in battles as resistance fighters or even as leaders of guerrilla movements. Southeast Asian women traditionally work as artisans and traders, have an income of their own, and are not subject to the laws of *purdah*.¹ In many local communities they are land and home owners and occupy respected positions in the clan hierarchies. Due to the existence of female-centred kinship systems in some societies, women may even be granted special rank higher than that of men.

This high status is a result of traditional social structures prevailing in Southeast Asia, which have repeatedly given rise to euphoric appraisals in the social and cultural sciences. In her groundbreaking introductory contribution to the anthology *Power and Difference; Gender in Island Southeast Asia*, Shelly Errington wrote that western observers are impressed by the ‘complementarity of men’s and women’s work and the relative lack of ritual and social differentiation between men and women’ (Errington 1990:1). Penny van Esterik had already commented along a similar line in 1982. In light of the ethnographical gender studies conducted since then, many of these assumptions no longer seem tenable today, and theses postulated at that time—such as Geertz’s claim that Hindu Bali is a ‘unisex society’ (Geertz 1973:417–418)—could not be substantiated by more recent research. Nonetheless, weakly pronounced gender hierarchies are an evident feature of many Southeast Asian societies.

Neither has the UN-Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women² (CEDAW), which had been ratified by all Southeast

¹ This word derives from the Urdu language and means ‘veil’ or ‘curtain’. It refers to the separation of the sexes through women’s spatial seclusion and the covering of their bodies in public.

² CEDAW was adopted in December 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. It

Asian countries, been fully implemented in a single country, yet, nor is the women's domestic sphere of power in any way complementary to the male-dominated public sphere, as some feminist scholars have argued.³

It must also be kept in mind that Southeast Asia is by no means a self-contained space where social and political systems have survived through the ages without being affected by outside influences. The contrary is the case. Southeast Asia has been the destination and hub of activity of traders and mercantile companies for many centuries; it was exposed to the influence of Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim missionaries; and it had to ward off Portuguese, Spanish, British, French, and Dutch colonial powers.⁴ All these forces had an effect on the local gender orders. In the most recent past, social changes were primarily triggered by the gender concepts of the colonial powers and the Christian missionary societies.⁵ However, the spread of Islam had an impact as well.

Islam probably arrived in Southeast Asia as early as in the eighth century, and was not only spread by Indian traders who established themselves along the coasts, but also by missionaries of Sufi orders (*tarekat*). It blended with local traditions and beliefs, which led to the emergence of systems that were for the most part syncretistic, and compatible with the existing social structures. Since the nineteenth century, so-called modernist Islam in particular has presented itself as a decided opponent of traditional local social structures and gender relations. This constellation continues to the present day, as Salafi and Wahabi varieties of Islam still exert a strong

defines 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field [...] The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life—including the right to vote and to stand for election—as well as education, health and employment. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms' (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>).

³ See for example Ilse Lenz and Ute Luig who introduced the term gender symmetry, or non-patriarchal societies, into the scholarly debate. They suggested to view several spheres—economy, symbolic order, reproduction, politics, and sexuality—as equal, and to exemplarily add up spheres of power. They argue that we are dealing with gender symmetry whenever there is equilibrium between the possible positions of power, even if some sphere is dominated by one gender.

⁴ Compare Reed (1993), among others.

⁵ Compare Schröter (2010).

influence on the Islamic communities of Southeast Asia. In all societies discussed in this anthology, one encounters polarizing discourses in which representatives of a scripturalist variety of Islam, orthodox conservatives, and liberals argue over the prerogative of the theological interpretation, as well as over an adequate interpretation of the Qur'an and *sunnah*. At the same time, ideas of democracy, emancipation, and liberalism are taken up and tested for applicability to local conditions. Southeast Asia is in flux, and the same is true for Southeast Asian Islam and the gender relations in societies shaped by Islam.⁶ Both the front pages of the daily press and the talk shows on television are dominated by major debates about family law reforms, public morals, and the access of women to leading positions, reproductive rights, polygyny, and marital violence. Female activists, politicians, women scholars, and religious experts discuss the current social developments in the media and in parliamentary sessions, in national planning commissions, at demonstrations and conferences. In that process, the future relevance of religion is negotiated; the point at issue is whether there will be acceptance for a plurality of lifestyles, or whether preference will be given to the stabilization of an orthodox system of values that is viewed as unalterable. Gender is a central issue in that context.

Islamic Queens, Female Military Leaders, and Anti-Colonial Fighters

In the Indonesian province of Aceh, which calls itself the 'Veranda of Mecca' and to this day takes pride in being the region in the Indonesian archipelago where Islamization began, people still proudly remember several female military and political leaders. An epitaph near Minye Tujuh refers to a queen named Nur Ilah who is said to have ruled over Pasai and Kedah in the fourteenth century.⁷ A female admiral, Laksamana Keumalahayati, reportedly lived in the sixteenth century; she is said to have recruited an Armada Inong Bale, a fleet of widowed women. Even though verifiable historical facts about her life are scanty, Malahayati—as she is popularly called—ranks among the generally accepted folk heroines.⁸ There is empirical proof of the existence of four women who successively ruled as sultanahs and controlled the fate of the then powerful mercantile nation: Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1641–1675), Sultanah Nur Alam Naqiatuddin Syah (1675–1678), Sultanah

⁶ Compare, for example, Liow and Hosen (2009); Nathan and Kamali (2005); Rabasa (2003).

⁷ Compare Molen (2007).

⁸ On the body of source material and the emergence of the myths surrounding Laksamana Keumalahayati, compare Clavé-Çelik (2008).

Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (1678–1688), and Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah (1688–1699). Their regencies were quite obviously no exception in that region. In the neighbouring sultanate of Patani, which was situated on the Southeast Asian mainland and vied with Aceh for territorial influence, four successive queens are also said to have ruled even 60 years earlier (1584–1688). In popular historiography they are referred to as Ratu Hijau (Green Queen), Ratu Biru (Blue Queen), Ratu Ungu (Violet Queen), and Ratu Kuning (Yellow Queen). There are narratives about an Islamic queen in the southern Philippines as well, yet these records are even vaguer than those from Patani.⁹

With regard to more recent history, the evidence is sounder. There is material that refers to female fighters and political leaders in Indonesia and the Philippines. In Aceh, women fought in the anticolonial liberation army, and some of them even became commanders. Cut Meutia and, most notably, Cut Nyak Dhien are prominent examples. After their husbands died, they succeeded them in their positions and led the fight against the Dutch colonial army, militarily and politically. Emmy Saelan, who was one of the activists in an uprising in South Sulawesi organized by Wolter Monginsidi, also acted in support of her husband, as did Martha Tiahua, who accompanied her husband Pattimura in the Moluccas, and Roro Gusik, who played a prominent part in the revolt of Untung Suropati in Java.¹⁰ In Mindanao there are reports about an army commander named Panglima Fatima of Tandubas, an island of the Tawi Tawi group. After her husband's death, she succeeded him in leading an uprising against the Americans. She was not the only female local leader who caused astonishment among the colonial officials and generals. In fact, it seems to have been quite common for courageous women to become the military and political successors of their slain husbands.¹¹ And what is more: even during the lifetimes of male sultans and clan leaders, ambitious women succeeded in exerting considerable political influence. With regard to the pre-American period in the Philippines, Vivienne Angeles writes: 'Some women were reputed to be powers behind the sultans' (Angeles 1998:211).

At first glance, the considerable number of women in political and military positions of power seems surprising, because many Muslim leaders to this day oppose female leadership, referring to verse 4:34 and the *hadith* according to which 'a people who entrust power to a woman will never prosper'. Despite this disapproval, there is evidence of numerous female rulers in the history of

⁹ Compare Majul (1999:8).

¹⁰ Compare Wieringa (1988:71f.).

¹¹ Compare Abubakar (2005b:120f.).

the Islamic world. In pre-Islamic Arabia and in Muhammad's time, women were active as traders, fighters, and politicians (Schröter 2008). Later, in dynastic times, they distinguished themselves as regents (Mernissi 1993). As a rule, however, a woman could only attain such a position when acting on behalf of her husband or son. In such a case she acted as proxy, so to speak, of a son or husband who had either died or who was still too young to reign. Women's careers were always linked to those of men. For that reason, female historical figures, be they fighters or politicians, should not be equated with female leaders in the modern sense of the concept. We must also beware of another misconception: the mere fact that women did participate in military conflicts, or were members of guerrilla movements, cannot per se be interpreted as indicating an egalitarian gender order. In order to appraise any concrete case a thorough analysis is necessary. In that context, a distinction needs to be made between women of the elite—that is, women who indeed held leading positions—and common female fighters or supporters of combatants. Elsa Clavé-Çelik rightfully criticizes that official Aceh historiography primarily commemorates female resistance fighters who conform to the 'archetypal frame of the noble, beautiful and successful elite warrior woman' (Clavé-Çelik 2008:10). We do not know anything about women fighters who did not belong to the elite; the names of peasant women and female commoners who were involved in battles were not recorded and have not been passed down.

The historical and sociological evidence is better with regard to warlike conflicts that ended just recently, such as the war of Aceh's independence movement against the Indonesian army, or the still ongoing conflict between guerrilla organizations in the southern Philippines. Women have been organized within the Philippine Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) since the 1970s.¹² Angeles notes, however, that their function rather conformed to traditional ideas about female work: 'Their main task on the battlefield [...] is to provide moral support to the men and to take care of wounded fighters' (Angeles 1996:139). Since the late 1980s women have repeatedly made efforts to organize themselves within the MNLF and to effect a change in their role. 'A turning point in the women's involvement in the MNLF at this stage was the organization of the Bangsa Moro Women's Professional and Employees Association in 1986' (Angeles 1996:142). This organization at first pursued the goal of providing the MNLF with financial means; later, the women also used the setting to discuss the empowerment of women and Muslim women's

¹² Siapno mentions a 'military sub-organization of women, the Bangsa Bai' (Siapno 1994:192).

rights. They lobbied to further the interests and needs of widows and orphans and committed themselves to economic capacity building for women. 'In this sense', Angeles believes, 'the MNLF has functioned as an agent of change for the women' (Angeles 1996:145).

This does not apply to the Acehese women fighters, the Inong Bale. Inong Bale are defined as widows—ideally, of fighters or at least of men who died at the hands of the Indonesian army. In addition, official Acehese propaganda usually portrays them as rape victims. This is illustrated by the following text from the internet magazine *AcheTimes*, which introduces female armed fighters of the independence movement Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM, Free Aceh Movement):

This widow has been raped by the Indonesia military and abused physically, spiritually and mentally, and she is not alone; a lot more of other Acehese women experienced the same thing. Now they need to defend themselves for self-worth and freedom.¹³

Suraiya Kamaruzzaman, a women's rights activist with the NGO Flower Aceh, who in an essay published in 2000 claimed that 'women want to silence all the guns, whether Indonesian or Acehese', also believes that Acehese women fighters were not primarily prompted to take up arms by patriotism, inner persuasion or any other political motivations. According to Kamaruzzaman, they chose that path because they did not have any other choice. Their husbands were dead and their honour was violated. If they wanted to survive and to be protected from further assaults by the enemy soldiers, joining the guerrilla was their last resort. Now that the war has ended, nothing remains of the Inong Bale but the shadow of a gruesome past. They symbolize the suffering of the Acehese people, and not the latter's widely celebrated heroic courage and adamancy. Unlike Cut Nyak Dhienh, the raped Inong Bale is nameless and has disappeared as quietly as she first appeared on the scene. It is doubtful whether Acehese women will be more honoured in the future than they were in the past, and whether maybe even a new type of heroine, the human rights activist, will make her appearance on the public stage, as is supposed by Paul Zeccola.¹⁴

Nowadays significant changes are underway; these are due to new debates, spurred by the pressure to implement CEDAW, about women in leading

¹³ Compare www.achehtimes.com/photos/gam/gam01/index.htm (accessed 11 February 2010).

¹⁴ Zeccola wrote in *Inside Indonesia*: 'Heroes and heroines in today's Aceh are people who tirelessly risk their lives fighting for truth and justice, speaking out against hypocrisy, and defending the human rights of others, often without reward' (Zeccola 2007).

positions. However, these changes provoke controversies, as is illustrated by the example of Indonesia where Megawati Sukarnoputri was the first woman ever to be nominated to run for presidential office. Muslim clerics and politicians were aghast, insisting that it was incompatible with Islam to have a woman as the head of the nation.¹⁵ This rigorous attitude mobilized the democratic-emancipatory opposition. On 22 June 1999, civic women's organizations went public with a declaration countering that the exclusion of a woman from the presidential office was in fact an abuse of Islam. They argued that the granting of fundamental political rights to women also entails the right to access to the highest office. Despite these interventions, Megawati first only became vice president. Only when the elected president, Abdurrahman Wahid, was forced to resign in 2001 was she elected to the highest public office, which she held until October 2004.¹⁶

However, spirited speeches held by feminists were not the primary reason why Megawati Sukarnoputri was elected to the highest public office. Just as in former cases of female rule in the history of the Islamic world, dynastic factors played a decisive role as well. She was identified with the aura of her late father, Sukarno, the charismatic first president.¹⁷ In post-colonial Asia, there have been several instances where women became appointed presidents due to this type of identification of women with deceased male leaders.¹⁸

Matrifocal Societies and Islam

The concentration of matrifocal societies in the region of western Indonesia and eastern Malaysia is one of the most interesting phenomena found

¹⁵ This debate was not a particularity of Indonesia; it surges up whenever women are aspiring for leading positions in nations dominated by Islam. With regard to the traditions and the Qur'an, it is possible to come up with arguments supporting the positions of both objectors and supporters. For an overview of this topic, see Mernissi (1993).

¹⁶ For the role of Megawati in the most recent development of Indonesia, compare Robinson (2009:159 f.); Sen (2002).

¹⁷ Such attributions often pose an obstacle to individual independent action, with the result that the female politicians will give the impression of being weak and incompetent. Sometimes, however, they will themselves toy with such 'markers' to conceal their own ambitions and to achieve their political and personal goals. On this topic, compare Fleschenberg (2008); Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Fleschenberg (2008); Thompson and Derichs (2005).

¹⁸ For example, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wajed in Bangladesh, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Corazon Cojuangco Aquino in the Philippines.

in Southeast Asia. The social conditions have frequently been termed 'matriarchal' by Western observers,¹⁹ a term that suggests a reversal of male-dominated, asymmetrical balance of power and ignores the realities of actual gender relations.²⁰ Thus, some basic features of these societies will be discussed in the following. Two Indonesian societies, the Minangkabau and the Acehnese, will serve as examples.²¹

While only experts on the region are familiar with the social structures of the Acehnese, rudimentary knowledge about the Minangkabau is widespread even among a non-scholarly public. The myth of a matriarchy on Sumatra has sparked many people's imagination, and locally relations between men and woman are indeed unusual. The social organization structure is based on a kinship organization consisting of so-called *suku*, matrilineal clans that claim descent from common ancestors. The most important socio-political unit within the village is the matrilineage,²² which is called *sabuah paruik*, 'fruit of one womb'. As a rule, it includes five or six generations of an ancestral mother's descendants, and forms corporative groups that jointly own property, mainly houses, wet-rice fields, dry fields, fallow land, fish ponds, and ceremonial titles. In the village council and in external relations, the lineage is represented by a male head who is usually the brother or uncle of the eldest woman.

¹⁹ Even the anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday, who has published the most recent monograph on the Minangkabau based on her own fieldwork (Sanday 2002), uses the term 'modern matriarchy'.

²⁰ This term, which has its origin in the cultural studies' theory of evolution of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and enjoyed a revival in women's studies in the 1970s, is highly problematic due to its scholarly vagueness and its ideological implications. It is associated with 'women's rule', a situation that cannot be verified empirically and thus is merely a fiction. The terms used today to refer to the social situation in these societies are matrilineality, matrilocality or uxorilocality, and matricentrality. Matrilineality means the kinship affiliation of an individual with the kin group of his or her mother. Matrilocality and uxorilocality are rules of residence according to which a married couple either moves to the home of the wife's mother or lives in the wife's home. Matricentrality refers to a tendential social and/or economic insignificance of men to the family, which is centred on the mother. Matricentrality is often characterized by unstable partnerships or long absences of men for economic reasons.

²¹ The Ngada in East Indonesia are another, less well known matricentric ethnic group (compare Schröter 2005). They are not mentioned in this anthology because they profess Catholicism.

²² A lineage is a kin group that traces its descent directly to a real or fictitious male or female ancestor. Membership in such a genealogically constructed group goes along with specific rights (such as land rights) and obligations. A distinction is made between descent traced through one's mother (matrilineality), one's father (patrilineality), or both parents (bilineality). On matrilineality among the Minangkabau, see also Blackwood 1999.

The lineage is subdivided into several houses (*rumah*) where several matrilineal generations live together: the eldest woman, her daughters, and the latter's children. In external relations, the house is again represented by a man, most commonly the brother of the eldest woman (*mamak*). Married women get rooms of their own in the large communal houses. After marriage they continue to live with their group of origin and can safely rely on access to its resources. The continuity of the kin group is based on female succession, and thus on women and their reproductive power. Their importance for the physical continuity of the lineage also implies a special appreciation of daughters as the guarantors of the social order.

While girls continue to live at their mothers' house, where they are integrated into a network of obligations and rights, boys are considered to be associated with their family in a comparatively loose manner. Sons sleep outside the house from a very early age, either on the porch or in the mosque. They often travel around, sometimes due to seasonal or temporary work contracts, or they migrate to other islands. Marriage effects hardly any change in their marginal existence. Even today so-called 'visitor marriage' is still widespread, where a man does not move into his wife's house after marriage, but continues to live with his mother and only visits his wife at night.²³ It is mainly his own descent group that benefits from his labour in the fields or in the house; however, when he is with his wife he shares his income with her as well. Basically, the function of the husband in traditional society can be characterized as being quite marginal, or even precarious. A proverb states: 'Like ashes on a burnt tree stump husbands blow away with the wind' (Sanday 2002:9). According to traditional gender norms, a man's loyalty, just as his labour, is supposed to be first and foremost for his own family of origin: his mother, his sisters, as well as his nephews and nieces. He exerts responsibility and authority primarily in his own descent group, that is, towards his sister's children. With regard to his own children and his wife, his formal responsibilities are minimal.²⁴ According to Sanday (2002:9), men are torn between both families even when living in good and stable marriages. As a result of the great autonomy of both sexes, marriages are unstable, divorces frequent and uncomplicated.

Against the background of Qur'anic verses that emphasize man's authority in the house and his primary role as the provider, the conditions outlined above seem hardly compatible with Islam, yet the Minangkabau have always viewed tradition (*adat*) and religion (*agama*) as equal-ranking, essential

²³ Compare Kato (1982:51).

²⁴ Compare Kato (1982:58).

pillars of their society. All attempts by religious zealots to change the traditions, and the gender relations along with them, have failed in the past.²⁵ Yet today there are imminent erosions due to changes in economic conditions that are conducive to the implementation of Islamic legal agendas. The more important money becomes as compared to rural self-sufficiency, the more importance is attached to the role of the husband. Moreover, many young families move to the cities and leave the context of the matrifocal village. The urban space the rules of the game are different and other ownership structures become more relevant. For example, if a family buys real estate in a city, this is usually the husband's property; he uses his income to raise the necessary money and to pay the price. The wife becomes subject to a double dependency: she now lives in her husband's house (virilocal), and he provides for the family financially. Due to this shift, matrilineal inheritance laws are put under particular pressure. Previously, men were able to freely dispose over the assets they had acquired and pass them on to their children. Yet in the second half of the twentieth century this customary law was changed to conform to Islamic rules. Thus male offspring today are entitled to a two-thirds greater share than female heirs. In general, there is also a tendency towards the strengthening of the nuclear family as opposed to the matrilineal clan, and a shift within families in the primary role from the wife towards the husband.

Acehnese society, too, formerly integrated Islam into a matrifocal social structure. The province of Aceh is situated in the northernmost corner of Indonesia. Its inhabitants consider themselves the most orthodox Muslims of all Indonesia and view their culture as being thoroughly shaped by Islam.²⁶ In the past, this avowal to orthodox Islam did not prevent them from granting women high-ranking positions in state and society. The four sultanas mentioned in the beginning, as well as the resistance fighter Cut Nyak Dhien, who commanded a battalion unveiled and wearing trousers,

²⁵ Islam arrived in West Sumatra as a tolerant Sufi variant, but subsequently underwent several modernizations provoked by Wahhabi ideas from the Middle East (compare Kraus 1984). An Islamic rebellion early in the eighteenth century, initiated by pilgrims who had been to Mecca, was of particular importance. In the course of their *hajj*, the pilgrims came into contact with the ideas of the radical reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who conquered Mecca in 1803. Upon their return to Sumatra they agitated against the matricentric *adat*, the use of drugs and luxury foodstuffs, the *pencak silat* (an indigenous tradition of martial arts), but also against traditional authorities. A large part of the aristocracy fell victim to their *jihād*. In 1838 the insurgents were defeated by the Dutch army. On the background of this so-called Padri Rebellion, compare Dobbin (1983).

²⁶ Nevertheless, Acehnese culture includes elements of local beliefs and manifests local and ethnic variations.

are not only remembered with pride, but are also cited as indicators of the distinctiveness of Acehese culture.

Yet, in the past, women played an extraordinary role beyond the heroic sphere, as is illustrated by the works of the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who published an ethnographic study on the Acehese in 1906. Snouck Hurgronje outlines basic aspects of Acehese culture as being women-centred: according to him, women were the proprietors of houses and land, dwelled in so-called uxori-local clusters, and lived on subsistence production. After marriage, the husband would move to his wife's home. Yet husbands did not permanently live under the same roof with their wives, because the men—much like those among the Minangkabau—strove to earn money as migrant workers on plantations or as traders. They returned to their families for a brief time each year, only to leave again once their earnings were used up. Snouck Hurgronje writes that they were merely guests at their wives' homes,²⁷ and adds that they were regarded as well-nigh dispensable due to their almost permanent absence. James Siegel, an anthropologist from the U.S. who conducted fieldwork in Aceh in the 1960s, concludes that men are more or less powerless in many respects (Siegel 1969).

The religious institutions—the Islamic boarding schools (*dayah*)—constitute a counter-world to this female-dominated local society. At the *dayah*, boys get away from the village permanently and move to a modern and at the same time patriarchal ideological space. Islamic preachers and religious experts distance themselves from the rural population, accusing the latter of deviating from the true Qur'anic teachings and practising pagan customs. They are also the ones who for many years called for the introduction of the *shari'a*. And more recently, following the implementation of the *shari'a* in 2002, they have been advocating compliance with rigid Islamic morals.

Graduates of Islamic schools also form the core of the urban middle class. Much as among the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, a social system that differs from that in the villages is effective in modern urban space. Whenever houses are bought in the city, it is the men who are the owners; it is also they who earn the family's income and dominate the public sphere. During my own research in August 2005, female street vendors and male casual labourers would affirm the existence of a matrifocal village structure, whereas my educated interlocutors—both male and female—denied the existence of such structures.²⁸ Instead, the family model of the Qur'an was cited to

²⁷ Compare Snouck Hurgronje (1906, I:339).

²⁸ Anthropological research on the more recent social structure of the rural areas still needs to be done.

me. I was told that the man is the head of the family and provides for its sustenance; that a woman moves to her husband's place after marriage; that girls inherit only half as much as do their brothers; that a woman's voice counts half as much as a man's, and so on.²⁹

Not only are processes of Islamic proselytizing conducive to a patriarchalization of society in Aceh, but also—and most importantly—political changes that have taken place since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Aceh is the only province of Indonesia where criminal law is based on *shari'a*. This dubious privilege is the product of a war between the Indonesian army and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) that lasted for thirty years.³⁰ Tensions between Jakarta and Aceh go back to the first days of the independent Republic of Indonesia, and did not least result from differences in ideas regarding the role of Islam in state and society.³¹ After independence, representatives of Islamic organizations—among them the influential Acehnese politician Daud Beureueh³²—called for the constitution of Indonesia as an Islamic State, or at least for a pronounced emphasis on Islam. In view of the multi-religious composition of the population, Sukarno, the first president of the republic, refused to implement such ideas. Instead, he developed a multi-religious state philosophy, *Pancasila*, which neither accorded Muslims a particularly privileged status, nor did it permit any Islamic legislation that went beyond family law. Daud Beureueh and his followers refused to accept Sukarno's concept of the state. For ten years they were able to realize their vision of an Acehnese Islamic state, until they were defeated in 1963. Despite the military defeat, however, the province never came to rest. The frustration of young Acehnese eventually led to the formation of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka), which from 1976 to 2005 was involved in a bloody civil war with the Indonesian military. The region was only pacified after the tsunami of 2004, thanks to the commitment of an independent group of mediators in the course of the international redevelopment mission.

Among other things, the leaders of the movement demanded that regional legislation conform to *shari'a*. The government had already made initial concessions in 1999 when it issued a decree to the effect that the organization

²⁹ However, when I asked young men from the urban lower class about post-marital residence practices or inheritance rules, it became apparent that these hardly differed from the rural customs outlined here.

³⁰ On this topic, compare Aspinall (2009).

³¹ Compare Kell (1995).

³² Daud Beureueh was the head of the Persetuan Ulama Aceh (All Aceh Ulama Association).

of politics and society was to be brought in line with *shari'a*. The implementation of *shari'a* was further pushed by a special autonomy law that became effective in 2002. Since then, Islamization has progressed steadily, month-by-month, manifesting itself in new regulations, public staging of Islamic jurisdiction, and the operations of a new *shari'a* police force (Wilayatul Hisbah). This development has been particularly dramatic with regard to gender relations.³³ Veiling is mandatory for girls and women, and no one can refuse to comply with this new dress code without facing massive repression. Self-appointed male juvenile moral guardians shore the heads of women who went unveiled in public. But that is not all. Hardliners condemn the colourful, often skin-tight Acehese dresses worn by fashion-conscious women, whose headscarf (*jilbab*) always matches with the colours of their handbag and high heels. They demand that women wear loose-fitting garments and thick fabrics so that the contours of the feminine remain hidden.³⁴ They are increasingly successful with their demands, and have at the same time gradually increased the normative pressure. As of 1 October 2010, for example, women in West Aceh will no longer be allowed to wear trousers. According to a statement released by the district regent, women will 'be forced to wear loose-fitting attire' (*Jakarta Post* 28 Oct. 2009). The *shari'a* police are authorized to enforce this regulation, and to cut off the pants of women who do not comply with it.

As there are convictions of offences against 'the Islamic moral order' (*khalwat*) that even deems it morally questionable if a woman is in a room alone together with a man unrelated to her, and as there are rigid regimentations of women in public, it is to be expected that women's scope of action will become further restricted. Punishments for infringements of Islamic law are drastic. Since 2005 there have been several spectacular whippings, and in September 2005 the parliament passed a law according to which adultery can now be punished by stoning. Decisions about an individual's lifestyle are no longer a matter of conscience—as was formerly stipulated by the more liberal interpretation of Islam—or something to be discussed with those in one's immediate social environment. In case

³³ Compare Kamaruzzaman (2004).

³⁴ Interestingly, these strict dress rules are not justified by referring to tradition, but exclusively by theological reasoning. This is remarkable because the Acehese usually employ an explicitly cultural-historical discourse in other issues related to the shaping of their society. Yet the new rules can hardly be deduced from past usage, as photographs document that the dress code in colonial times did not conform to today's laws. As already mentioned, the folk hero Cut Nyak Dhien, for example, wore clothing that was practical and suited for the rigours of guerrilla warfare, yet she did not cover her head and body.

of doubt, people must be prepared to defend decisions regarding their personal behaviour before members of the *shari'a* police or before *shari'a* courts.

Even though there has been hardly any protest against this development because no one wishes to risk being accused of turning his or her back on the foundations of Islam, that does not mean that women necessarily approve. Many Acehnese women think that religion should be free of coercion and that the state would be well advised to pay more attention to the rampant corruption rather than to the private affairs of its citizens.³⁵ Moreover, they wish that efforts be made towards improving the situation of women in line with the CEDAW. Even strictly religious parents send their daughters to universities to provide them with optimal chances for the future, and gainful employment of women is not a taboo. On the contrary: Acehnese women are successful as business women and scholars, and they are active in politics. They have called for a quota system in elections,³⁶ campaigned against gender-based domestic violence and for leading positions for women in the political parties, and they have committed themselves to microcredit programmes and marketing training for poor women.³⁷ In 2008 they even succeeded—in cooperation with the German Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)—to pass a Women's Charta that guarantees special rights to women. With regard to the implementation of *shari'a*, which requires the revision of many local laws (*qanun*), women's rights organizations have tried establish a gender-sensitive exegesis of Islamic law. Given the inroads made by Islamic strategists, however, it is doubtful whether this endeavour has yielded much success.

*Clan Societies, Islam, and Women's
Empowerment in the Southern Philippines*

In the Philippines there are tensions as well, involving local orders that grant women participation in social and political affairs on the one hand, and decidedly Islamic agendas on the other. In addition, women's status and kinship ties play a role that is often underestimated.

³⁵ Personal communication (2005, 2006).

³⁶ This is advocated by, amongst others, the Caucus Politik Perempuan, an amalgamation of the seven most important political parties: PAN, Golkar, PPP, PKS, PBP, PBR, and PK.

³⁷ This goal is pursued, for example, by the association Ikatan Wanita Perusaban Indonesia.

Everywhere in Southeast Asia, the hierarchical order of the respective local communities and the affiliation of women with a social group used to be the key determinants of their scope of action.³⁸ While peasant women everywhere enjoyed a large measure of freedom, because their participation in agricultural production was of vital importance for survival, elite women were subject to various restrictions and sometimes even to complete seclusion. This is particularly evident in societies that closely associate gender norms with concepts of honour and shame, such as the Maranao, Taussug, and Maguindanao in the southern Philippines. Women of the upper class were traditionally subject to a multitude of rules and prohibitions, including gender-related seclusion, which are uncommon in Southeast Asia and reminiscent of the South Asian *purdah* system. Labi Hadji Sarip writes in the journal *Dansalan Quarterly*: 'Traditionally, Maranao women, especially the single, were never allowed to go out of their respective homes. They were placed in a small room called *lamin* and could only be seen during important occasions' (Sarip 1986:68).³⁹ However, it is debatable whether this circumstance necessarily implies that women were per se powerless. Women of the nobility used female slaves to cultivate contacts and to engage in economic activities, and they were by no means devoid of influence in the clans. Both genders were equally represented within the local status systems, as becomes apparent from the fact that women appeared as title holders, just as did men.⁴⁰

These conditions changed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Slavery was abolished; the political structures in Mindanao underwent profound changes due to colonization and—above all—integration into the postcolonial Philippine state dominated by Catholics (Abinales 2000). Today, a woman's clan affiliation and her family background are still relevant, and the value of traditional titles has survived undiminished. Yet ancestry is no longer the decisive factor determining the kind of life a woman can lead. Education is gaining in importance, and the discussion of universal values, such as the equality of men and women, is growing more intense. Although marriage and motherhood continue to be the 'primary goal' (Hilsdon 2003:23), even of well educated women, as is pointed out by the Australian researcher Anne-Marie Hilsdon, this does not imply that women's ambitions do not also go beyond this role. There is no doubt that female scopes of action have

³⁸ As Mina Roces puts it, 'the parameters of women's power are defined by the dynamics of kinship politics' (Roces 1998:292).

³⁹ Compare also Usodan-Sumagayan (1987).

⁴⁰ Compare Brecht (this volume).

broadened considerably in the course of the past 100 years.⁴¹ Today, girls attend schools and sometimes even universities; an increasing number of women pursue gainful employment outside their homes⁴² and participate in community activities. On the one hand, this is the result of reforms passed by the government,⁴³ which promoted girls' education nationwide and created employment opportunities for women. On the other hand, this change also owes a lot to the activities of indigenous and international NGOs that monitored the actual implementation of measures against the discrimination of women.⁴⁴ The Bangsa Moro Women's Professional and Employees Association and the Bangsa Moro Women's Foundation—an umbrella organization uniting 60 individual organizations—are presently particularly active in promoting women's influence in politics and society.⁴⁵ This development is viewed as a big step towards women's empowerment in Mindanao. Local newspapers proudly refer to women in leading positions, and Moro women present themselves in a self-confident and modern manner.

Just as in Aceh and West Sumatra, however, Islamist organizations have a detrimental effect on women's newly-won freedom in Mindanao. Since the 1970s, female Muslims who returned from Arab states have been propagating a type of Islam modelled on Middle Eastern standards; various transnational Islamist organizations, such as the Tablighi Jama'at and Markaz al-Shabab, have gained a foothold; and Islamist terrorist groups such as Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah have been operating in the region. Islamization usually manifests itself in the public space by changes in the dress code. While women in the 1970s could wear 'tight pants and backless tops' (Hilsdon 2003:29), today they must dress in conformity with Islamic prescriptions. Just as in Aceh, there have been several instances in which women who did not comply with the rigid regulations were subject to physical abuse. If they did not wear a veil, their heads were shorn, and rotten fruits and vegetables were

⁴¹ Compare Lacar (1992); Maglangit (1975, 1980); Sarip (1986:68); Usodan-Sumagayan (1987:206 f.).

⁴² Women initially worked chiefly in family enterprises, but since the 1980s the majority of working women have been employed in communal institutions. Their occupational profiles have changed as well. At first only extensions of traditional female occupations were considered appropriate, and women became teachers and nurses. Today they can also become engineers and lawyers. Compare Abubakar (2005a:53).

⁴³ CEDAW was ratified by the Philippines in 1981.

⁴⁴ CEDAW Watch-Philippines, for example, is by its own account 'engaged in information and education advocacy campaigns to make national laws and policies consistent with CEDAW', <http://www.cedaw-watch.org>.

⁴⁵ Compare the contributions by Brecht-Drouart and Rasul (this volume).

thrown at them if they showed any bare skin.⁴⁶ However, compared to the introduction of an Islamic dress code, the introduction of a *shari'a*-oriented Code of Muslim Personal Law by the then president Ferdinand Marcos in 1977 had more serious and far-reaching consequences.⁴⁷ The impact of these laws on women is an issue of controversy among Philippine Muslims. The activist and former senator Amina Rasul criticizes: 'Unfortunately, the codification was conducted by men, with no inputs whatsoever from women experts [...] the separate set of personal laws that govern the Muslim population in the Philippines constrict women's freedom and rights' (Rasul 2003b:198). Maruhom and Allian, in contrast, argue that the establishment of *shari'a* courts also has certain advantages for women: 'Records of the courts show that the majority of those who filed cases were women who demanded support from their irresponsible husbands. Expectedly, they also petitioned for divorce. Most of the cases thus far were decided in their favour' (Maruhom and Allian 2005:150).

The new orientation towards an orthodox or scripturalist Islam, and the acceptance of—and indeed the call for—an implementation of Islamic law is also a result of the political conflict between Muslim actors and the government in Manila. The Muslim population is suffering under various repressive measures, a civil war that has been going on for decades, states of violence that in some cases are anarchic, and cultural discrimination. The reasons for this reach back to Spanish colonial times. Islamization in the Philippines began at the end of the ninth century, when Arab traders established themselves in the Sulu Archipelago and married indigenous women. The Sultanate of Sulu rapidly developed into a hub of maritime trade; from there, Islam began to spread to Mindanao and subsequently to Mindoro and southern Luzon in the fourteenth century. In the sixteenth century, the Spaniards claimed the Philippines as a colony and set out to counter-proselytize the population. In the southern Philippines, unlike in Luzon, they met with bitter resistance⁴⁸ which withstood the firepower of all the weapons available. Sultans and Muslim communities called for the defence of the *dar al-Islam*, and the holy war (*perang sabil*) continued even after parts of the archipelago were occupied by Spanish troops in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The USA, which purchased the Philippines from Spain in 1898/99,

⁴⁶ Compare Hilsdon (2003:30).

⁴⁷ This was the Presidential Decree 1083.

⁴⁸ The Spaniards, who felt reminded of their own battle against the 'Moors', thereupon called the Muslims of the South 'Moros'.

⁴⁹ Sometimes only armed with swords or knives, assassins would attack Spaniards or

continued the military subjugation of the South. The sultanates were not able to withstand the military pressure of the Americans, who after an almost ten-year-long war successfully occupied the so-called Moro Province they had established. In order to pacify the Muslims, they undertook large-scale resettlement projects and allocated arable lands in Mindanao to landless Christians from Luzon and the Visayas. These sorts of policies continued even after independence. Hence, the 1950s witnessed the beginning of a new surge of state-sponsored relocations that brought Christians to Mindanao.⁵⁰ The consequences were dramatic. While the proportion of Muslims on the island of Mindanao amounted to 98% in 1913, it has dropped to a mere 30% today. Muslims own less than 15% of the arable land, and 80% of them are eking out a scanty living as landless tenants. The land-grab sparked conflicts between resident Muslims and newly resettled Christians, clashes between Christian and Muslim militias, and constant interventions by the military.⁵¹ The tensions intensified during the government of Ferdinand Marcos.⁵² The separatist organization Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) called for independence, and Marcos reacted by dispatching a large contingent of troops. Even though new efforts were made to settle the conflict after his downfall, and partial autonomy was granted in several provinces in 1996, a final solution has not yet been found.⁵³ Today, in 2009, the MNLF has lost its claim of exclusive representation of the interests of Mindanao's Muslims. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a more explicitly Islam-oriented organization, now faces off with the government in the name of Moro interests. Catholics dominate the government, and Christians from

Christian Filipinos, trying to slay as many of them as possible before being killed themselves. Through such acts they became martyrs and could hope to be forgiven for grave sins.

⁵⁰ Yet the policy of the Philippine government not only aimed at Christianizing the Muslims, but also at exploiting the region economically. One hundred thousand hectares of land were leased to international agro-industrial companies such as Del Monte. In that respect, Mindanao shows several parallels to Aceh. In both cases the central government discredited itself by exploiting the respective region without allowing any benefits for the indigenous population. In Aceh, it was rich gas and oil deposits that whetted Jakarta's economic appetite.

⁵¹ Not only the Muslims, but also the animist Lumad people were affected by the inner colonization of Mindanao.

⁵² Marcos, the tenth president of the Philippines, was in office from 1965 until 1986. In 1971 he imposed martial law, which was in force until 1981. He also disempowered large parts of the political elite. In 1986 a national opposition movement, which had been joined by large parts of the former elite, forced him to resign from office, and he fled to Guam. He was succeeded by Corazon Aquino, the widow of the politician Benigno Aquino who was murdered under Marcos.

⁵³ On the genesis and analysis of the conflict, compare McKenna (1998) and Yegar (2002). On Islam in southern Thailand, see also Scupin (1998).

the Northern Philippines have immigrated in the course of the last century and now constitute the majority of the population; Islam thus presents itself as a natural oppositional reference system in Mindanao. The cultivation of a decidedly Islamic collective identity helps Muslims to assert themselves against the superior strength of the aggressors. In that context, a clear and visible commitment to the values and norms of Islam—including the latter's symbolic level—suggests itself, rather than a less expressive form of piety. This also applies to women who reject Christian-Philippine fashion, instead preferring to dress according to veiling regulations from the Arab world. One has to agree with Siapno, who writes that 'women's involvement in the struggle for independence in Mindanao involves symbolic forms of resistance, of which veiling is perhaps the most important' (Siapno 1994:193). Within the context of marginalization and discrimination, the neo-orthodox Islamic order is primarily used as an ideology of resistance against the dominance of the Catholic state, and as a means of ethnic-religious avowal. In the face of the ongoing political and military oppression, the concern about women's rights is of secondary importance to most people.

Muslim Women in Southern Thailand

In several respects, the situation in Thailand's Muslim South resembles that in Mindanao. In Thailand, however, the role of the colonial power fell to the Siamese royal dynasty. The Islamic Sultanate of Patani and a number of Malayan sultanates were subjugated by the kingdom of Siam as early as in the thirteenth century. Yet Siam was primarily interested in the establishment of tributary relationships, and contented itself with regular payments of the *bunga mas dan perak* (golden and silver flowers).⁵⁴ The Malay rulers retained a semi-autonomous status. It was not until the rule of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) that the South was annexed, a centralist administration was established, and a 'Thaiization programme' implemented. The Education Act of 1921, for example, made it compulsory for every child to attend a state-run school for four years and to learn the Thai language. Many teachers were Buddhist monks and instructed the pupils in Buddhist ethics.⁵⁵ In 1939, the name 'Siam' was replaced by 'Thailand', use of the Malay language became

⁵⁴ These payments of tribute only flowed regularly at times when Siam could enforce its claims by military means. The history of Patani (Thai: Pattani) can be summarized as a sequence of revolts and defeats, with alternating periods of subjugation and autonomy. Compare Yegar (2002:74).

⁵⁵ Compare Yegar (2002:89).

banned in government agencies, and traditional Malay-Islamic clothing was prohibited. These acts of discrimination resulted in a radical rejection of the Thai state and Thai culture on the part of Muslims.

After World War II, Muslims hoped to join 'British Malaya' with the help of Great Britain. Yet their expectations came to naught, and the territory inhabited by Malays continued to be part of Thailand. Hence, today there exist four provinces in the southern region bordering on Malaysia where Muslim Malays constitute the majority of the population:⁵⁶ Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun.⁵⁷ They speak a Malay dialect, feel that they belong to Malaysia in terms of culture of religion, and consider the regions they inhabit to be part of the *dar al-Islam*, whereas the remainder of Thailand is referred to as *dar al-harb*, the House of War. For fear of culture loss, but also due to the government-driven dichotomization between Thai-Buddhist and Malay-Muslim culture, governmental educational and development programmes were rejected, and sabotage and rebellions were frequent occurrences. Beginning in the 1960s, the Malay Muslims in Thailand organized themselves politically, with two organizations playing a particularly prominent part: the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), founded in 1963 by the cleric Ustaz Haji Abdul Karim Hassan and influenced by the ideas of Pan-Arabism; and the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO), which was established by the Islamic scholar Kabir Abdul Rahman in 1968. Even though both organizations employed Islamic rhetoric, their activities were for the most part secular and nationalist.⁵⁸

This changed in the 1980s. As the graduates of Arab universities returned home, they initiated an Islamic revival in Thailand, just as they did everywhere in Southeast Asia. Guided by the ideas of puritan and Salafist Islam, young Muslims challenged traditionalists and orthodox conservatives, using Islamic schools—the *pondoks*—for their purpose.⁵⁹ This did not fail to affect

⁵⁶ Due to the politically explosive nature of demographic data and their instrumentalization by both the government and Muslim organizations, the numbers are very contradictory (compare Marddent 2009:192). In a report dating from 2004, Anthony Smith states that there are about four million Muslims in Thailand, 80 % of whom are living in the southern provinces mentioned above plus the province of Songkhla. According to Smith, Thailand has a total of 62 million inhabitants. Compare Smith (2004).

⁵⁷ The territory of today's administrative district of Pattani is not identical with that of the former sultanate of Patani, which split up into smaller units in the course of history. At a later time, these units were reorganized to again form larger entities, namely, Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala. Satun originally was part of the Sultanate of Kedah, which today belongs to Malaysia.

⁵⁸ Compare Abuza (2006).

⁵⁹ For a detailed analysis of the changes in Southern Thailand's Islamic educational system, see Liow (2009).

political visions and cultural self-conceptions. As Patrick Jory noted in an article, the self-designation 'Patani Melayu' became transformed into 'Thai Muslim'. Religion—that is, Islam—became the marker of identity, replacing the dimension of ethnicity. The centres of the new organizations are found in mosques and Islamic schools, which are also the most important sites of recruitment. The BRN eventually split up and what remained took on an Islamist image. However, the PULO, too, reorganized itself in 1995 with a decidedly Islamist agenda.

As Horstmann and Marddent point out in in this volume, however, the resurgence of Islam in Thailand cannot be solely regarded as an ideology of resistance. Pious Muslims aspire to a life that is pleasing to God, and it is not primarily worldly but rather religious values and norms that that are decisive to the meaningfulness of an Islamic way of life. Women in the 'deep South' of Thailand traditionally used to wear a headscarf, but they did not observe the strict Islamic dress code already fashionable on the other side of the border in Malaysia.⁶⁰ This has begun to change recently. Over the course of the past years, many women have joined Islamic associations and are supporters of modern *dakwah* movements such as the Tablighi Jama'at or the women's organization Nahdatul Muslimat. They meet in prayer circles, attend courses of religious instruction, and wear garments that at first sight identify them as pious Muslimas. In the past, this very perceptible and even ostensive display of an Islamic identity in the public space has repeatedly sparked conflicts with representatives of the administration. In 1986 there were even mass protests in response to a series of events: a female teacher was expelled from a school north of Bangkok for wearing a veil; shortly afterwards, there was a similar incident involving a female civil servant in Pattani; and one year later an entire group of *hijab*-attired female students at the Yala Teacher's Training College was suspended from school.⁶¹ At the beginning of 1988, thousands of protesters assembled at the Central Mosque in Yala to voice their opposition to the repression. The government gave in, and the strict regulations prohibiting Muslim clothing were relaxed.⁶² According to Chaiwat Satha-Anand, a professor of political science at the Thammasat University in Thailand, the so-called '*hijab* crisis' is on the one hand a result of

⁶⁰ Compare Liow (2009). In his book, Liow argues that Muslims in Thailand practice a not very rule-abiding type of Islam anyway. He writes: 'The Muslims sometimes eat food generally deemed to be prohibited in Islam, and they do not necessarily observe obligations of prayer and fasting very strictly' (Liow 2009:16).

⁶¹ Compare Satha-Anand (1994:285).

⁶² Compare Prapertchob (2001:109).

worldwide Islamic resurgence; on the other hand, he interprets it within the context of the Thai state's 'legitimation deficit' (Satha-Anand 1994:296) vis-à-vis the Muslim border population. Interestingly, Satha-Anand emphasizes the gender aspect, as expressed by wearing *hijab*, of Muslim criticism of the Buddhist Thai nation. 'Some analysts', he writes, 'argue that the *hijab* must be viewed in relation to the desire of ethnic groups to reassert their autonomy through a gendered discourse. Because "masculinization" represents a claim to full humanity, the minority group asserts themselves by insisting on female conformity to a restricted dress code' (Satha-Anand 1994:299).

Yet the new orthodoxy is not only directed against the Buddhist Thai nation, but also—and decidedly—against a modernity often denounced as 'Western'. People oppose so-called 'Westoxification'⁶³—the poisoning of an idealized autochthonous way of life by corruptive influences from the outside. This toxification supposedly manifests itself in a neglect of religious norms, increasing individualism, and a liberal gender order. In a synthesis of religious and traditional local rationales, an order is constructed that is not only characterized by a fundamental difference between men and women, but also by an exactly defined complementarity of social roles. According to the preaching of the Islamic teachers and activists, a woman's place is first and foremost in the house, where she has to tend to her husband, her children, and the older members of the family. While this propaganda definitely falls on fertile ground, the realization of these noble goals is hampered by quite trivial circumstances. Many rural households in the southern provinces are poor, and women have no choice but to contribute to the economic sustenance of the family. Just as everywhere in Southeast Asia, women work in the fields and sell surplus produce on local markets. On top of that, quite a few of them migrate to Malaysia to work in rubber plantations or rice fields. The men who stay in the village have an ambivalent attitude towards this situation. On the one hand, they appreciate the women's earnings; on the other, they complain about the shortage of female labour in the house. Nisakorn Klanarong, who has done empirical research in the four border provinces in the context of her dissertation project on 'Female international labour migration from Southern Thailand', writes:

Female out migration did not create labour shortages in the village, but it was viewed as problematic for households. Members of female-migrant household gave the following negative impacts concerning the absence of women: lack of people to do housework, lack of people to look after children and the elderly in the household, and no one to take care of the husband. In addition, female

⁶³ Scupin (1998:254); Scupin used a term originally invented by Al-E Ahmad.

migration was viewed as creating family problems such as children being left behind with grandparents or relatives, family members living separately, and children lacking the love and warmth of their mother. Some parents indicated that they worried when daughters worked far away from home.

(Klanarong 2009:81)

Within the Islamic movements, women also occupy roles that have little to do with the proclaimed ideal of the housewife. This is not only due to the fact that because of the gender segregation women must play an active part in the *dakwah*. It is first and foremost a result of the civil war between Islamist militias and government soldiers, which has been shaking the region since the beginning of the new millennium, claiming thousands of lives. Just as in Mindanao, the conflict has entailed a virtual economy of violence and a proliferation of armed organizations in Southern Thailand. These days, it has become almost impossible to tell whether the latter's protagonists give priority to political or economic goals. They include the Patani Liberation Fighters (Pejuang Kemerdekaan Patani), who according to Human Rights Watch are terrorizing villages in the region bordering on Malaysia; they prohibit any cooperation between the local population and the authorities, and forbid the acceptance of monetary and food aid. Those who do not obey these orders are denounced as *munafiq* (hypocrites), which is tantamount to a death sentence.⁶⁴

Malaysia in the Process of Becoming an Islamic State

In Malaysia, too, Islam is 'not only a "religious factor" [...] but also an "identity marker", especially in the ethnic sense' (Shamsul 1994:113), but under conditions where Malaysian Muslims are culturally and politically dominant and hold exclusive rights. Fifty-three percent of all Malaysians are considered ethnic Malays. Along with about 12 % of the population who are members of indigenous groups, they enjoy special privileges as *bumiputera*, 'sons of the soil'. Twenty-six percent of Malaysia's population are of Chinese descent, and 8% have their origins in India and Sri Lanka.

Even though the links between ethnicity and Islam are emphasized by the state and appear to be clear cut, they are in fact are not. In principle, all Malays are presumed to be Muslims, but in reality this is not always the case. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which has been ruling in varying coalitions since independence, sees itself as the original

⁶⁴ Compare Human Rights Watch (2009).

representative of these Malaysian Muslims, and its statutes stipulate that only Malays may become party members.⁶⁵ In fact, however, its claim to sole representation is contested by the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS, Islamic Party of Pan-Malaysia), which was founded as early as in 1951 under the name of Persatuan Islam Sa-Malaya (Pan-Malayan Islamic Association).⁶⁶ In the 1999 elections the PAS won sweeping victories in the federal states of Kelantan and Terengganu where Malays constitute the majority of the population. The UMNO responded to this development by using a more pronounced Islamic rhetoric, and complying with the demands of orthodox Muslims in many respects. This turned out to be a successful strategy, and the parliamentary success of the PAS came to an end in the 2004 elections.

In contrast to the UMNO, the PAS is considered Islamist, and aims at establishing *shari'a* as the basis of criminal law. However, attempts to implement *hudud* punishments⁶⁷—such as stoning and the amputation of limbs—in the federal states governed by the PAS have so far been thwarted by the constitution and by the fact that such changes are rejected by all non-Muslims. Yet because the ruling UMNO adopted a more strongly Islamic profile, Malaysian society as a whole became Islamized. During the government of Mahathir bin Mohamad, who was a member of the UMNO and held the office of Prime Minister from 1981 until 2003, the National Islamic Religions Affair Council, renamed 'Pusat Islam', was put under the direct control of the prime minister, and Islamic religious classes were introduced at schools and universities. An Islamic bank was founded in 1982, and the International Islamic University opened in 1983. In 2003, the PAS made the next move by publishing the 'Dokumen Negara Islam', a draft for a future Islamic Malaysian state.⁶⁸ Today there are Islamic insurance companies, an Islamic economy foundation, and a governmental certification agency for products that are in conformity with Islam. Offences against Islamic morals are increasingly punished. Adolescents are arrested and accused of sexual offences for showing themselves publicly in mixed-gender groups, and in 2009 an Islamic court for the first time sentenced a young woman to caning for having consumed alcohol in a bar.

⁶⁵ Shamsul (1994:99) points out, however, that this does not necessarily need to be the case in reality.

⁶⁶ On the history of the PAS, compare Noor (2004b).

⁶⁷ Hudud punishments are imposed for so-called offences against God, such as theft, adultery, the consumption of alcohol and apostasy.

⁶⁸ PAS leaders such as Yusof Rawa at times propagated an Islamic revolution modelled after that in Iran, and battled secularization and materialism as alleged ills of modernity.

Measures strengthening Islamization in politics, law, and the public sphere meet with broad approval among the Malay population.⁶⁹ This is due—amongst other things—to the surge of Islamization mentioned above and the popularity of *da'wa* movements, which led to the emergence of a multitude of Islamic organizations. These included the Al-Arqam movement that combined Sufi spirituality, an orientation towards the *shari'a*, and a modest way of life. Al-Arqam's strongest competitor was the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement), set up in 1971 under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim who later on was to become prime minister. Besides these socio-critical Islamic organizations of civil society, there also emerged violence-prone or violent groups such as Kumpulan Militan Malaysia and the Al-Ma'unah brotherhood.⁷⁰ The government successfully took police and legal measures against many of these groups.⁷¹

While this part of the political Islamist opposition was eliminated, the popularity of 'Islam as a way of life' (Abu Bakar 2001:64) remained unbroken. An Islamization of the public sphere was, and still is, the most conspicuous evidence of this. Bars have been replaced by *halal* restaurants, and many women dress in an Arab style. They cover their hair, neck, shoulders and chest with a *tudung* instead of the Malay shawl (*selendung*),⁷² and conceal their bodies beneath a long-sleeved *baju kurung*. Women who want to express their religious convictions still more explicitly wear black robes, socks, gloves, and a face veil—all garments that are foreign to Malay traditions.

Islamization not only causes changes in politics and society, but also fundamentally affects the structure of the gender order. The traditional *adat* system of values and laws, which treated men and women as equals in many respects, has gradually been replaced by Islamic norms and Islamic law. Inequality in inheritance law became legalized, just as did polygyny and domestic violence.

Aihwa Ong and other Malaysian women scholars have interpreted the dramatic changes of the Malaysian gender order within the context of

⁶⁹ According to Ufen, many members of the elite nonetheless continue to insist on a 'laicist consensus' (Ufen 2009).

⁷⁰ In the 1980s, Malaysia was also the refuge of the Islamist ideologists Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'ashir, both of whom were exiled from Indonesia. While in Malaysia, they laid the foundations for the terrorist network Jemaah Islamiyah, which is held responsible for a number of assaults, such as the attacks on two Balinese discotheques in 2002.

⁷¹ The Internal Security Act, which provides for up to two years of imprisonment without charges, and other laws enabled the government to completely shatter groups that had fallen out of favour. Al-Arqam was prohibited on 21 November 1994; its leader Asha'ari was arrested in southern Thailand and extradited to Malaysia.

⁷² Young girls often wear the *mini-telekung*, which is a bit smaller.

the rapid economic and social changes undergone by Malaysia since the end of the twentieth century. In 1991, President Mahathir launched the ambitious development project 'Vision 2020', which aimed at the complete modernization and industrialization of the country within thirty years. Free trade zones were established, a national automobile industry was created, the educational level of schools and universities was improved, and government funds were invested in technology and cutting-edge research. New jobs were created, explicitly including jobs for women. Beginning in the 1970s, tens of thousands of unskilled women migrated from the rural regions to the urban free-trade zones where there was a demand for cheap labour by transnational companies.⁷³ In that urban environment, the strict rules of gender separation which characterized village life did not exist. Women worked together with men—even with men who were not Muslims. They began to dress stylishly, and entered sexual relationships with partners of their own choice, including non-Muslims. *Minah karan*,⁷⁴ 'electric girl', is the term for a 'young, attractive, sexually uninhibited Malay factory woman' who, according to Ackerman, is 'expressing her independence with heavily applied cosmetics and tight-fitting Western-style clothing' (Ackerman 1991:199).

Yet women not only jumped at the chance to become labourers. Many young women used the new opportunities to educate themselves, taking university degrees and aspiring to some academic profession. It is likely that men felt threatened by this entire process. Ong writes that 'the new class of female workers and college students induced in their male peers a widespread fear of female competition in the changing society' (Ong 1990:265). In a way, she perceives Islamization as a response to women's awakening on the part of men who feel disadvantaged: 'For Malay revivalists, the *umma* had been unmade by the influx of women into modern schools and offices, a new "sacred architecture" of sexuality had to be created, through everyday practises inventing "Islamic" traditions that would redraw boundaries between Malay men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims' (Ong 1990:267).

Not all women scholars agree with Ong's thesis. Sylva Frisk, who conducted a study on pious Muslim women in Malaysia, criticizes that Ong 'has produced an image of Malay women as victims of patriarchal structures and practices' (Frisk 2004:7), and suggests to redefine the concept of agency within the academic debate on gender. The anthropologist Judith Nagata already pointed out in 1994 that

⁷³ Compare Ong (1987).

⁷⁴ *Minah* is a common women's name and is used as a generic term for young women in this context.

[...] the image of the 'oppressed' Muslim woman has taken on a new and perplexing cast, particularly for the apparent voluntariness of women's participation in veiling and other highly visible religious activities, which seem to reduce their educational, career and other opportunities. The apparent contradiction in the fact of many of these much-publicised 'veiled' women, whether in Egypt or Malaysia, are also often prominent in the middle class seems to escape the attention of many outside commentators. They are highly-educated, and foreign-exposed, and actively involved in their career development.

(Nagata 1994:104)

One has absolutely to agree with this statement. Malaysian women engage in Islamization as actively as their male counterparts. They even make an effort to export values that have been contested by feminist activists for years. A bizarre example of this is the Global Ikhwan Polygamy Club headed by Hatijah Binti Am, who advocates polygyny as a good way to overcome jealousy and as an exemplary way to establish a happy Muslim family. When she opened a branch in the Indonesian city of Bandung in 2009, she found herself confronted with protests by women's rights activists and liberal Muslim women who disapproved of men's right to marry several women as they considered this practice unjust and discriminatory.

Indonesian Women's Movements with a Long Tradition

Among the women's movements in Islamic Southeast Asia, the Indonesian women's movement is particularly important. It can look back on a long tradition, is comparatively well organized, and has some prominent spokeswomen. Its beginnings are linked to the reform ideas of the Javanese princess Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1904), who was a very close friend of the Dutch feminist Estelle Zeehandelaar, and lobbied for women's education and the abolition of polygynous marriages. Unfortunately, Kartini herself ended up as the fourth wife of the Regency Chief of Rembang, Raden Adipati Joyodiningrat, and died in 1904, aged twenty-five, during the birth of her first child.⁷⁵

After Kartini's death, education continued to be the central concern of women's rights activists in the early twentieth century, along with the struggle for independence. A multitude of nationalist secular and religious organizations emerged, and all of them established special women's wings. Just one year after Kartini's death, the Budi Utomo (Noble Endeavour),

⁷⁵ Overviews of her life and work are given by Coté (2002) and Bouman (1954). Hildred Geertz (1985) publication of Kartini's letters includes a comprehensive biographical sketch.

which was mainly supported by intellectuals, founded the organization Putri Mardika (Free Women). Jong Java (Young Javanese), which constituted itself in 1918 and counted the future president Sukarno among its members, established the group Putri Indonesia (Women of Indonesia). The Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, which was inspired by the writings of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, organized female members in the 'Aisyiyah in 1917, and the conservative Nahdlatul Ulama (Revival of the Ulama), in which Islamic preachers (*kyai*) united in 1926 as a response to reformist Islam, created the women's organization Muslimat in 1946.⁷⁶ On 22 December 1928, the first congress of the Indonesian women's movement was held; it was attended by more than 1,000 delegates from 30 organizations, and a Federation of Indonesian Women's Associations (Perikatan Perempuan Indonesia, PPI) was founded.⁷⁷ The goals of the movement included national independence and the commitment to social issues (family law, education, health, social work).

Sukarno, the first president of the independent Republic of Indonesia, used to demonstrate his sympathy for the goals of the women's movement at public events. Above all, he sympathized with the socialist organization Isteri Sedar (Conscious Wives), which not only campaigned for education and social improvements in women's living conditions, but also for greater participation of women in politics; on one occasion, Sukarno titled himself the 'supreme shepherd of the revolutionary women's movement'. However, according to gender scholar Saskia Wieringa, this attitude was pure lip service, because the president only lent support to the goals of the female activists half-heartedly after independence.⁷⁸ In 1960, Sukarno declared that there was no need for feminist struggle and that the abolition of polygyny was no longer on the agenda,⁷⁹ in 1954 he himself made use of that privilege by marrying a second wife.

The women's movement was divided on such issues. Already in colonial times it had split into different wings that were primarily characterized by discordances between Muslim groups on the one side and secular-socialist ones on the other. Polygyny was the most controversial issue. While secular

⁷⁶ Abida Samiuddin and Rashida Khanam (2002:4) note that the general pattern of female organizations was to form groups that were complementary to exclusively male associations, and that their heads were frequently recruited from amongst the ranks of the wives of the male organizations' leaders.

⁷⁷ On the history of the Indonesian women's movements, compare Martyn (2005), among others.

⁷⁸ Compare Wieringa (1988:76).

⁷⁹ Compare Wieringa (1992:101).

women activists called for a complete proscription of polygamy, the female members of Islamic organizations viewed such radical views as incompatible with the Qur'an.

Tensions between the two camps steadily grew in the course of the first years of independence. This reflected a power struggle going on between communist, nationalist, and religious fractions of the elite. When a coup d'état of the Communist Party failed in 1965, this resulted in a violent catastrophe and a deep national crisis. The retaliation by the military and various Islamic organizations claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of communists and socialists,⁸⁰ and the largest Indonesian women's organization, GERWANI,⁸¹ which sympathized with the Communist Party of Indonesia and counted 1.5 million members in its heyday, became a target of the anti-communist mob as well and was crushed. The massacres, in which young men from Islamic organizations took a particularly prominent part, certainly had a lasting daunting effect on women. Many women were raped before being murdered, and sexual torture was practiced everywhere in the country.⁸²

Following the ban on the most radical women's organization with the largest number of members, the state took charge of the regulation of women's activities. In this context two important organizations were created: Dharma Wanita, in which membership was obligatory for all wives of civil governmental servants, and Dharma Pertiwi, Dharma Wanita's counterpart for the wives of army members. The activities of the women thus compulsorily organized amounted to little more than charitable undertakings and participation in the organization of national festivities where, amongst other things, cooking contests were held.

Despite a state ideology that basically attempted to define women in terms of their role as housewives, mothers, and supporters of their husbands, women increasingly succeeded in participating in the economic development already under Suharto. Today women are working in the low-wage sector of the budding new industries;⁸³ they have transferred wages earned as migrant domestic servants in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the countries of the Middle East;⁸⁴ and have step by step moved into positions

⁸⁰ The ultimate reasons behind these events have never been elucidated, because the new rulers—and in particular the military, which found itself enormously gaining in power—profited from the myths surrounding communist activities and a supposed chronology of events. Compare Cribb (1990), among others.

⁸¹ GERWANI: Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Movement).

⁸² Compare Wieringa (2002:300 f.).

⁸³ Compare, for example, Benjamin (1996); Tjandraningsih (2000); Wolf (1992).

⁸⁴ Compare Silvey (2004); Surtee (2003).

in the upper levels of the service sector.⁸⁵ Employment and a new consumer culture have effected changes in the gender order just as much as political developments. Robinson points to the 'growing importance of prostitution' (Robinson 2009:131), but also to the fact that young women, often pupils or students, enter sexual relationships with older men in order to get access to money or to sought-after consumer goods, such as mobile phones.⁸⁶ Against the background of an increasing commodification of society, the bodies of women and girls turn into objects of market-based exchange as well.

Even though independent forms of political organization were oppressed in Indonesia under its second president, Suharto (1966–1998), and a national cult of motherhood⁸⁷ that basically limited women's role to servicing and nurturing activities was fostered, female activists began to reorganize themselves in the 1980s. They demanded rights equal to those of men, and denounced the rampant sexual violence. Despite the difficult circumstances, things slowly progressed, and Indonesia signed the CEDAW in 1984.

Women's organizations such as the Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Coalition), which was founded in May 1998, played a substantial role in the downfall of the dictator Suharto, and female activists used the ensuing phase of social transformation to call attention to their grievances, and in particular to campaign against gender violence.⁸⁸ The female ideal (*kodrat wanita*) dictated by the state, according to which a woman's social role amounts to nothing more than her duties as a housewife, spouse, and mother, was criticized, and there was a call for equal access to professional and political positions. Part of the country's female elite publicly avowed themselves to the new emancipatory values. Siti Nuriyah, for example, the wife of the former president Abdurrahman Wahid, declared that the mere role of first lady did not satisfy her, and she developed a public persona of her own. She is a member of the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan), and has been involved in the reinterpretation of teaching materials for use in Islamic schools.

Since the end of the Suharto regime, female Indonesian activists have been able to achieve some remarkable successes. Centres for women studies were established at universities and Islamic institutes, programmes for

⁸⁵ On the new female middle class, compare Gerke (2000); Sen (1998).

⁸⁶ Compare Robinson (2009:132f.).

⁸⁷ Compare Suryakusuma (2004).

⁸⁸ On the developments of the gender discourse during the reform era, compare Blackburn (2004); Robinson and Bessell (2002).

women's empowerment were implemented in governmental and non-governmental institutions, and gender relationships were challenged. All over the archipelago, women's organizations have founded legal advice centres and shelters for battered women, and launched a nationwide campaign against domestic violence.⁸⁹ In Indonesian women's organizations, 'gender mainstreaming' is identified as part of the current transformation process, which is characterized by a renunciation of the order established by an orthodox Islam and former gender ideologies, and combines women's activism with democratization, pluralism, and a liberal type of Islam that is gender equitable.⁹⁰

Just as in other Southeast Asian countries, however, the upsurge of neo-orthodox Islam poses a threat to such developments. Islam has had an eventful history in Indonesia's more recent past. As already mentioned, Islamic organizations played a prominent part in the anti-colonial struggle against the Dutch, and many of their leaders strove for the building of a postcolonial Islamic state. Sukarno, the first president of the republic, first made concessions to the representatives of political Islam, but then gave preference to a multi-religious type of state. As a consequence of this decision, there were violent uprisings and proclamations of autonomous Muslim regions, which in some cases existed for several years. All these conflicts were eventually resolved with the use of troops, and after that the forces of political Islam could lead little more than a niche existence. Moreover, Islam was thenceforth under general suspicion in the largest Islamic nation, and any markedly Islamic behaviour could easily be interpreted as an act of subversion. Yet the repressive climate towards Islam changed when Indonesia's second president, former general Suharto—who had come into power after the course of the events of 1965–1966 and remained in office thanks to support by the military—felt that he was losing his power base in the army, and turned to Muslim organizations in search of ways to diversify his political support base. He undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca, founded an association of Islamic intellectuals,⁹¹ surrounded himself with Islamic symbolism; and his daughter Tutut popularized the veil (*jilbab*). Since 1990 female pupils have been allowed to wear the *jilbab* at school, and cloaked women have become an increasingly common sight in the streets of large

⁸⁹ The focus of the campaign is on raising awareness about domestic violence and trafficking in women and children. Compare Mulia (2005a), among others.

⁹⁰ Compare Affiah (2009); Arnez (2009); Blackburn, Smith and Syamsiyatun (2009); Robinson and Bessel (2002).

⁹¹ This was the Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia (ICMI).

Indonesian cities. Islamic television programmes enjoy great popularity, Islamic clothing has made a triumphant entry into Indonesian haute couture, and Islamic morals are a topic of discussions in the media.

Sexuality and Female Bodies as a Topic of Public Debate

The regulation of sexuality and control over the female body are central topics of these moral discourses. In the post-Suharto era, sexuality in Indonesia not only acquired a new meaning in the private or semi-clandestine space of bars, clubs, and discotheques, but also began to be negotiated anew in the public space. Young female authors such as Ayu Utami, Djenar Maesa Ayu, and Dinar Rahayu are winning fame for writing provocative and often pornographic texts, picking out incest, violence, and homosexuality as central themes.⁹² This new genre is called *sastra wangi*, 'fragrant literature'. Female artists such as Arahmaiani also transcend the boundaries of middle-class Indonesian sexual morals, staging the naked body—sometimes even their own—as a medium, as a surface on which meanings are encoded.

The state-decreed heteronormativity, which contrasts with the manifold models of gender-role crossing in local cultures,⁹³ has recently been challenged by the formation of the organization Arus Pelangi (Rainbow Flow), which views itself as the 'legal representation of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities'.⁹⁴ In November 2006, Arus Pelangi invited legal experts, human rights activists, and academics to an international conference in Yogyakarta, where the 'Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Laws in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity' were subsequently passed, being the first Magna Charta of homosexual rights in the world. Another conference organized by Arus Pelangi focussed on Indonesia itself and was a great success, too. For the first time, several Muslim public intellectuals publicly argued in favour of the full acceptance of homosexuality. An article in the *Jakarta Post* quoted Siti Musdah Mulia as saying: 'There is no difference between lesbians and non-lesbians. In the eyes of God, people are valued based on their piety' (Khalik 2008). Nurofiah, a representative of the Muslim mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), even espouses a constructivist view of gender orders and attributes the prevailing gender order exclusively to the balance of power

⁹² Compare also Arnez (this volume).

⁹³ Compare, for example, Boellstorff (2005); Peletz (2009).

⁹⁴ See <http://aruspelangi.pbworks.com>.

in society: 'Like gender bias or patriarchy heterogeneity bias is socially constructed. It would be totally different if the ruling group was homosexuals' (Khalik 2008). The participants emphasize that Indonesian culture is in principle not homophobic, but has always integrated homosexuality on the local level.

However, such positions are not undisputed. In March 2010, controversies were sparked by the upcoming fourth regional meeting of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), which previously had been held in Chiang Mai, Cebu, and Mumbai. The eastern Javanese wing of the Indonesian Muslim council proclaimed that the event was an offence against religion and culture. The local police thereupon prohibited the meeting, and eventually goon squads of the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders' Front) marched up in front of the hotel in Surabaya, where some LGBT activists who had already come to the city were staying. Before, conservative Muslims had used a beauty contest of Acehnese transsexuals as an occasion to stir up public indignation about supposedly indecent behaviour. Many religious leaders, as well as a large portion of the population, definitely have a negative attitude towards sexual liberalism and a new gender order. Women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming are viewed as unwelcome innovations. Both orthodox and neo-orthodox clerics even perceive these phenomena as transgressions of Islamic rules and values, and argue in favour of a return to conservative gender models. To achieve their goal, they use the modern media, in particular television, to spread moral teachings. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century they have also been able to functionalize a number of scandals where supposedly immoral behaviour was pilloried for their purposes.

This scandalization of alleged immorality did not only yield profit for conservative clerics, but functioned in general as a catalyst of virulent social controversies about the role of Islam in modern Indonesia. One of these debates was sparked when an Indonesian edition of *Playboy* magazine was about to be published in 2006.⁹⁵ There was an agreement between the authorities and the editors that religious reservations were to be respected, and that the magazine would not publish pictures showing undressed women. Yet many people nevertheless viewed the event as a scandal. During the run-up phase of the project, the attempt to place the magazine on the Indonesian market had already prompted heated discussions. Irfan Awwas, the chairman of the Majelis Mujahideen Indonesia (MMI, Indonesian

⁹⁵ After Japan, this would make Indonesia the second Asian country with its own, national-language edition of that magazine.

Mujaheddin Council), believed that the result would be disastrous. The infamous Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Islamic Defender Front) did not stop at verbal condemnations; feeling called to take direct action; it devastated the lobby of the office tower that hosted the editorial office.⁹⁶ The group's leader, Habib Rizieq, told the press that the FPI was ready to wage war should *Playboy* magazine actually be produced and sold in Indonesia.⁹⁷ The staff of the local office in Jakarta was terrified by the militant protests, and Erwin Armado, the magazine's editor-in-chief, fled to the more liberal island of Bali, whose population is predominantly Hindu. When he was reported to the authorities and put on trial in March 2007, this once again caused a big stir. While the public prosecution 'merely' pleaded for a jail sentence, radical Muslims—who used the courtroom as a stage for agitation—went as far as to demand death penalty. One of these agitators was Abu Bakar Ba'ashir, the ideologist of the Jemaah Islamiyah, who was just released from prison at that time. Yet Erwin Armada was found not guilty on all charges, and the first issue of *Playboy* made it to the magazine stands.

Another nationwide controversy was ignited by the young female dancer Inul Daratista, who managed to make a national career for herself as a pop star.⁹⁸ Inul, who was a so-called Dangdut performer, became famous for an erotic dance she created, in which she rotated her hips. Dangdut is a type of popular folk music that was even awarded the status of Indonesian national music by the first president of the republic.⁹⁹ A more sophisticated version of this type of music was later even used by Islamic interpreters to spread religious ideas. The Dangdut of the poorer sections of the population, however, was not so much characterized by piety as by a certain degree of suggestiveness. The female singers copy the style of dress of their role models on the international pop music scene, trying to radiate sex appeal. Every once in a while this will spark minor debates which, however, always ebb away after a short time. Yet when a private television station broadcasted Inul's dance in January 2003, making her an instant celebrity, Dangdut became an issue of national controversy. All of a sudden Islamic clerics and politicians became indignant about the 'pornography' performed, and demanded that the dancer be immediately banned from appearing on stage. The scandal

⁹⁶ For background information on FPI, see Jahroni (2008).

⁹⁷ Meanwhile, however, several issues of the magazine have appeared in print.

⁹⁸ On the controversy over Inul Daratista, see also Astuti (2003).

⁹⁹ Sukarno pursued a strictly anti-western course in politics and culture. He prohibited western music, including the very popular Beatles, and promoted domestic interpreters instead.

reached another climax when Taufik Kiemas, the husband of then president Megawati Sukarnoputri, appeared dancing side by side with Inul in another television programme.

Another sparsely dressed female body spurred the FPI to take further action in 2006, when they filed charges against the Indonesian candidate participating in the Miss Universe beauty contest held in Los Angeles. According to the group's lawyer and spokesman, the presentation of the candidate—who had appeared in swimwear—was an insult to the women of Indonesia. He referred to an older law already passed under the former dictator Suharto, which prohibited beauty contests. And indeed, a similar debate had already taken place in 1935 in the Javanese city of Semarang. Back then, a fashion show intended to promote clothing made in Indonesia and to support the domestic textile industry had roused feelings. Just like their epigones in the twenty-first century, male and female critics condemned the event as an insult on the honour of the Indonesian woman, and interpreted it as an assault on Indonesian culture and society because of the symbolic linkage between women and the nation.¹⁰⁰

The greatest controversy, which also attracted the most attention among foreign media, was sparked by the proposal, brought forth by several Islamic female politicians, to pass a law against pornography and pornographic acts. Particularly the newly created term *pornoaksi*,¹⁰¹ 'porno action', caused some irritation. What was this supposed to mean? Conservative male and female Muslims took the view that penalties should be inflicted for a whole parcel of supposedly indecent actions, such as kissing in public, wearing bikinis, strapless t-shirts and traditional Javanese and Balinese women's garb, erotic literature, portrayals of naked or sparsely clad bodies in art and photography, as well as all movie scenes showing any kind of erotic activity. Whoever is found guilty of a pornographic crime thus defined may be punished with fines or even several years in jail.

Harsh penalties are also to be imposed for adultery and the cohabitation of unmarried couples. There were various reasons why an issue was made of such a law at that specific time. Balkan Kaplale, for example, the head of the parliamentary committee in charge of drafting the bill, invoked a divine defence strategy to justify the law. He announced that the disastrous tsunami of 2004 had shown Indonesia that God takes issue with people's sinful lives. But the new law—he added—can help to avert such catastrophes in the

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed account of these events, see Locher-Scholten (2000:41–46).

¹⁰¹ The term was invented by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia.

future. The population of the non-Muslim majority regions of Indonesia rightfully felt that this pointed emphasis on a Muslim discussion on morals was an act of cultural discrimination. Balinese moreover feared a breakdown of tourism, and threatened to secede. Special concessions were hurriedly made to them and to the Papua, who have a proclivity for separatist ideas anyway. The feminist Nursyahbani Katjasungkana criticized the cultural blindness of those who support the law, but a member of the Majelis Ulama Islam, (MUI, Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars) commented that culture should be banished into museums if it is not compatible with Islam.¹⁰² The controversial law was passed in parliament on 30 October 2008; yet its definition of pornography is still open to interpretation, and some exceptions are already codified. On the island of Bali, for example, women are still allowed to wear bikinis.

Women and the Resurgence of Islam

As was shown above, the Islamization of politics and society in the countries of Southeast Asia, which began in the 1980s, has had a serious impact on gender relations.¹⁰³ Apart from the new importance of Islamic parties and the adoption of Islamic rhetoric by representatives of other parties, and apart from some changes in criminal and family law, this impact is first and foremost felt in the cultural sphere. The Islamization of culture is visible in the public space, which has become increasingly dominated by religion. Restaurants identify themselves as *halal*. Places that used to serve alcohol have given way to juice bars. Shops highlight Islamic mobile phones in their advertisements, book shops are selling guidebooks for an Islamic way of life, and religious videos are sold at booths in the streets. Women embody the new orientation towards Islam through veiling and covering the *aurat*—those parts of the body that are considered dangerous because they arouse sexual desires in men. These include not only the hair, but also the entire body except the face, feet, and hands. According to a strict interpretation of the Islamic law of veiling, even these parts of the body are covered with socks, gloves, and a face veil (*niqab*), leaving visible only the eyes. While many *ulama* disdain outer beauty—preferring to emphasize inner Islamic virtues (such as piety, humility, devotion to God, fulfilment of one's duties)—and point to it as one of the reasons justifying the law of veiling, many women

¹⁰² Compare Commins (2006).

¹⁰³ Compare Appleby and Marty (1994); Almond, Appleby and Sivan (2003).

still just want to be beautiful. The cultivation of female attractiveness figures prominently in guidebooks for good Muslim wives, and women assume quite correctly that the stability of a marriage does not least depend on such factors. It is easy for men to divorce under *shari'a* law,¹⁰⁴ and it is legal to marry up to four women. An appeal by Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the leader of the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, which was published in December 2009, clearly reveals that wives are chosen for their physical attractiveness rather than for their religious devotion. In a public statement about the promotion of polygyny, Nik Aziz criticized that the *ulama* discredit this type of marriage by their own behaviour. On 11 December 2009, he told the newspaper *The Strait Times*: 'Normally, when a man likes a beautiful woman, he will take her as his second wife. But after they have children, he will divorce the woman. This is the bad image that I meant which should be cleaned up.' It is not surprising that such conditions have given rise to an Islamic consumer culture that focuses in particular on feminine beauty. On the one hand, Islamization contributes to the flourishing of a female beauty industry that includes body care products, women's magazines, and an Islamic fashion industry; yet on the other hand, it condemns that industry for being too materialistic.

The balancing act between work and family is likewise fraught with ambivalence, because a woman's role is primarily defined as that of a housewife and mother. Only when she either fulfils these tasks herself or delegates them to relatives or domestic servants can she turn to the 'less important activities', that is, a professional career or politics. Modern Muslim women try—often successfully—to bring these duties into line with their career aspirations or their social, political, and religious activities. In August 2005, I had the opportunity to personally query female leaders of the Islamist Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, Justice and Welfare Party) in Yogyakarta about the compatibility of family and professional life, and I was amazed to learn that they regarded the reconciliation of these two spheres as a solvable problem. Each of the women I interviewed had several children, an academic full-time job, and was committed to activism.¹⁰⁵ Yet it is doubtful whether these academic exemplary biographies are also representative of the mass of women targeted by Islamist agitation.

¹⁰⁴ According to Islamic law, it is sufficient to say the repudiation formula *talaq*, which translates as 'I divorce you', three times. In Malaysia, there are even authenticated cases where husbands separated from their wives by sending them an SMS with the divorce formula.

¹⁰⁵ Yet these model careers, with which Asian women never fail to impress Western women, are only understandable if we consider that each academic household is run by badly paid domestic servants who take care of all routine duties such as cleaning, doing the laundry, shopping, cooking, and looking after the small children.

Islamist women's organizations have been studied by female anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists since the 1990s, and Zainah Anwar wrote about female Islamist students as early as in 1987. Some studies focus on a functionalist perspective, analyzing reasons why women benefit from Islamism. Especially scholars who have done research in Egypt will recur to an argument that is often brought forth but is largely unsubstantiated: they argue that covering the body prevents sexual assaults in the public space, and thus makes it easier for women to pursue activities outside the home, enabling them to attend schools or universities or to practise a profession. According to these writers, a woman who demonstrates, through her *habitus* and outward appearance, her subordination to the norms and values of Islam is respected as a human being, and not subject to discrimination as a sexual object.¹⁰⁶ They conclude that Islamism thus is conducive to women's empowerment. This logic is supported by the fact that female Islamists indeed are frequently members of the educated middle class who work and sometimes even hold prominent positions in Islamist organizations. A further counter-argument is that women work their way up exclusively in the women's wings, which, however, are invariably subordinate to the top leadership levels dominated by men. As far as lower-class women are concerned, such arguments do not apply anyway. The majority of Southeast Asian women have always worked, be it as peasants, craftswomen, traders, maids or, since the onset of industrialization, as factory workers. The implementation of Islamic gender concepts has by no means made life easier for these women. Since the introduction of *shari'a* bylaws in Indonesia, for example, women who return home after nightfall have on numerous occasions been assaulted by Islamist militias for allegedly being prostitutes. A woman who is seen on the streets unaccompanied by her husband or other male relatives arouses suspicion, and runs the risk of being arrested or maltreated.

Another functionalist explanation why women nevertheless join Islamist groups has been put forth by Susan Brenner.¹⁰⁷ She argues that young female Islamists are in search of an alternative modernity of their own, beyond the Western way that is rejected as being too materialist, immoral, and profane. Researchers have found the same motivation among Turkish, Malaysian, and Egyptian female Islamists.¹⁰⁸ In that process, they consciously accept breaking with their parents. The young female Islamists negate the older generation's position of power, overrule intergenerational power structures,

¹⁰⁶ Compare El Guindi (1981); Werner (1997).

¹⁰⁷ Compare Brenner (1996).

¹⁰⁸ Compare Frisk (2004); Göle (1996); Mahmood (2004); Werner (1997).

and demand to be accepted as individuals with religious and moral leadership qualifications. When interviewing female students who had joined the radical Islamist group Hizbut Tahrir, I found empirical evidence supporting this thesis. With great self-confidence the activists declared themselves leaders of their families, and stated that even their fathers had accepted them as ultimate moral authorities. In other cases, however, the self-appointed religious women teachers meet with less acceptance by their parents; instead, they have to face the latter's criticism, or are even expelled from their parental home. In a certain way, all these various processes can be regarded as the same type of post-adolescent rebellion that is common in Western societies as well, where it is considered an essential strategy of individualization employed by adolescents and young adults.¹⁰⁹ Confrontation with the social environment has a strengthening effect on the community of renegades, and provides for the emergence of a *communitas* whose members relate closely, and exclusively, to each other.¹¹⁰ Yet the intense relationships between the group members also have their drawbacks: there is permanent control, as well as latent or even open repression directed at those who have doubts or wish to leave the common path. Both Brenner and Karin Werner, who has done research on female Islamist students in Egypt,¹¹¹ describe the tight moral restrictions imposed by the respective group, and in particular the indoctrination that instils feelings of guilt in those who do not conform, or even fear of punishment in the hereafter if they cannot obey God's commands as demanded.

Even though the decision to commit to a radical Islamic way of life is made self-determinedly by women, and even though this enables them to strengthen their personality, Islamism is ultimately a system on which people cannot easily turn their backs if their high expectations are not fulfilled. Joining the milieu of political Islamism is much easier than withdrawing from it, particularly if people have burned their bridges to families and friends. In those cases where female Islamists' calls for an implementation of *shari'a*—which is an indispensable issue on the agenda of the organizations—

¹⁰⁹ On the universality and cultural contextualization of so-called 'rituals of rebellion', compare Schröter (2004).

¹¹⁰ The system of *communitas* within rebelling groups has been exemplarily outlined by Victor Turner. It is an integral component of the three-phase ritual process, whose first step consists of a separation of the adepts from society. The second step, where the rebellious group constitutes itself, is characterized by predominantly egalitarian structures and a democratic discourse. In the third step, there is a reincorporation into society, either on an individual level or by means of an integration of the whole group. Compare Turner (1969).

¹¹¹ Compare Werner (1997).

are successful, the last vestiges of voluntariness disappear: *imams* and *shari'a* policemen are then in charge of defining moral and religious action, and see to it that the proper sanctions are imposed for non-conformist behaviour.

Fighting against Patriarchy within an Islamic Frame of Reference

Moderate female Muslims, Islamic feminists, and liberal male Muslims oppose both the implementation of rigid Islamic norms and *shari'a*. They criticize the changes envisioned or implemented by the neo-orthodox conservatives and fundamentalists as being misogynous, and advocate a gender-sensitive Islam that emphasizes the equality of men and women. Furthermore, they view these changes as imports from the Middle East,¹¹² as an Arab custom that is inconsistent with local traditions. They believe that Allah has created all humans, both men and women, as equals, that Islam does not imply inequality but equality of the sexes, and that Islam and women's emancipation are mutually compatible. They try to lend legitimacy to their views by reinterpreting the Qur'an and the traditions, referring to the principle of *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, which permits every Muslim to read the holy texts of the Qur'an and *sunnah* and to draw his or her own conclusions from that reading. While male and female proponents of this hermeneutic school do not question the divine origin of Qur'anic texts, they nevertheless view these as time-bound documents that require permanent contextual interpretation. The Indian scholar Asghar Ali Engineer, for example, writes that the verses are divine but understanding them is human.¹¹³ He adds that the arguments put forth in the Holy Scripture are ambiguous, particularly with regard to women's rights. He argues that the equality of the sexes is explicitly stated in many central passages of the text but obscured in others, because acceptance of the book would otherwise have been at risk in seventh-century patriarchal Arabic society. Just like Engineer, scholars such as Khaled Abou El-Fadl (2002), Farid Esack (1997), Riffat Hassan (2004a, 2004b),¹¹⁴ and Asma Barlas (2002)—to name just a few—believe in the divine origin of the central texts of Islam, yet also see the necessity for incessant reinterpretation. This liberal branch of the Muslim community has found followers mainly in Southeast Asia.

¹¹² Compare Brenner (1996); Ong (1995).

¹¹³ Compare Engineer (2004:5).

¹¹⁴ Compare also Grob, Hassan and Gordon (1991).

The first place where such an interpretative approach began to spread was Malaysia, where it was picked up by a group of women who wanted to counteract the increasing fundamentalization of society and who later named themselves Sisters in Islam. Zainah Anwar, one of the group's founders, described its motives in an essay:

We felt powerless in the face of complaints by women that have to suffer in silence because it was said that Islam demands wives be obedient to their husbands, or Islam grants men the right to beat their wives or to take second wives. We felt powerless in the face of seminars on radio, on television, and in religious departments and in *shari'a* courts where women heard that men are superior to women, that a woman must obey the husband, that the evidence of two women equals that of one man, that a wife has no right to say no to sex with her husband, that hell is full of women because they leave their heads uncovered and are disobedient to their husbands. (Anwar 2001:228)

Being devout Muslims, Anwar says, they could not imagine that Allah approves of such injustice; they thus began to study the Qur'an in their group to find out whether oppression and violence against women are indeed substantiated by passages in the text. Their undertaking of reading the Qur'an in a new light was supported by the African American convert Amina Wadud, who had just completed a dissertation on 'The Qur'an and Woman' and was teaching at the Department of Revealed Knowledge and Comparative Religion of the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur. As a theologian with a doctoral degree, Amina Wadud not only had the authority needed to view critical passages in the text in a new light; she was also able to provide credible substantiation for this perspective from the religious sources. Anwar writes:

Our reading opened a world of Islam that we could recognize, a world for women that was filled with love and mercy and with equality and justice [...] We were more convinced that it is not Islam that oppressed women, but the interpretations of the Qur'an influenced by the cultural practises and values of a patriarchal society. (Anwar 2001:229)

Methodically, Sisters in Islam work with two types of text exegesis: on the one hand, texts cited to justify inequality are compared with such that emphasize gender equality; on the other, the meanings of individual terms are critically analyzed. Like other feminist 're-interpreters', the Sisters of Islam place particular emphasis on verse 4:34, which says:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one (more strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard (in the husband's absence) what Allah would have them guard. As to these women

on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them, refuse to share their beds, chastise them.

In their brochure 'Are men and women equal before Allah?' they contrast the text of this verse with other verses; these are used to infer that men and women are equal and of equal value, and to interpret the Qur'an ultimately as propagating a religion that espouses gender equality. Yet such a comparison alone cannot invalidate the quite explicit words of verse 4:3. Here begins the difficult sphere of philology and the definition of Arabic terms. In this context, for example, the term *nushuz*, which in orthodox reading is translated as 'disobedience', is of key importance. Referring to the Egyptian theologian Sayyed Qutb and quoting him as an authority, the Sisters in Islam present an interpretation that also pertains to the husband, and define *nushuz* as 'a state of disorder between [a] married couple'.¹¹⁵

In Indonesia, the movement calling for a reinterpretation of the Qur'an is by no means limited to a small group of female activists.¹¹⁶ Both men and women who support a liberal reform of Islam and participate actively in the democratic reform of the country comment on basic issues of gender equality. Nasaruddin Umar, a professor of theology at the Islamic University in Jakarta, contextualizes the Qur'an historically and geographically/culturally, and views it as a product of the conditions prevailing in seventh-century Arabia. Nevertheless, he states that among the holy scriptures of the world religions the Qur'an has the largest potential of achieving gender equality; it merely needs to be modernized, and its exegeses adapted to present-day conditions.¹¹⁷ Ulil Abshar Abdalla, the founder of the Liberal Islamic Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal), also views new exegeses of the scriptures as an adequate way to establish gender justice and objects to the imposition of 'alien concepts on gender equality' on the theological matrix of Muslim societies.¹¹⁸ Lily Zakiyah Munir, the former director of the Centre for Pesantren and Democracy Studies, made a distinction between present-day Muslim societies, in which women oftentimes experience discrimination, and Islam, which codifies gender equality.¹¹⁹ In an interview given to the internet magazine *Qantara*, she said that unlike in Christianity, where woman was created from man's rib, women and men in Islam emerged together from

¹¹⁵ www.sistersinislam.org.my/publications/beatwives.htm.

¹¹⁶ Compare Van Doorn-Harder (2005), among others.

¹¹⁷ Compare Umar (2004).

¹¹⁸ Compare Abshar Abdalla (2003).

¹¹⁹ Compare Munir (2002a, 2002b).

one soul. According to her, there is not a single verse that points to the inferiority of women. The Qur'an also does not distinguish whether a sin is committed by a man or a woman, further corroborating a fundamental ethic of gender equality. Moreover, both sexes have equal rights with regard to education and participation in social activities. Munir thus argues that women's discrimination is the result of incorrect exegesis of the scriptures by patriarchally biased readers. Although patriarchal-ideological hegemony is propagated by the media, amongst others, the spread of that ideology is also due to the attitude of influential women. According to Munir, women's rights must be asserted first of all by men, because 'it is them (sic!) who have the power to newly define freedom, to give it a new structure, and to implement it' (Munir 2003a).

Liberal Muslim Women's Activism

In Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, female Muslim activists have tried to put an Islam into practice that is pro-women and fair in terms of gender. The goals, strategies, and results vary widely.

As far as Indonesia is concerned, activists call for a reform of the current family law¹²⁰ and a prohibition of polygyny. They argue that rather than being a male prerogative, as is claimed by conservatives, polygyny is inconsistent with the principle of equality laid down in the Qur'an. According to Lily Munir and Siti Musdah Mulia, the fact that the Qur'an permits men to marry up to four women is due to a specific historical context: in the Prophet's day, there was a shortage of men on account of war. The rule was introduced to provide for the widows and orphans. Yet Munir stresses that there were definite limitations to that rule: verse 4:3 lays down that a man should only take one wife if he cannot guarantee that he will be fair to all spouses. Moreover, the Qur'an states in verse 33:4: 'Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his body'. Munir says that a pragmatic tolerance of polygyny has become untenable today, which needs to be reflected in legislation as well.¹²¹ Following the enactment of a law against domestic violence in Indonesia in 2004, this topic has been at the top of the agenda as well. Women further call for the introduction of a quota system, both in the registers of voters and in the parliaments; they fight

¹²⁰ Compare Mulia (this volume).

¹²¹ Compare Munir (2003b). On the current debate over polygyny in Indonesia, also compare Nurmila (2009).

human trafficking, and advocate women's education and reproductive health. They are monitoring the measures taken to implement CEDAW, give recommendations to the government in that regard, and are active in the sphere of poverty reduction. Women studies centres, which are also committed to promoting equality in the gender order, have been established both at secular and Islamic universities. In short: the catalogue of topics and measures is long in Indonesia, and the programmes are supported by public authorities. In spite of all this, there is a serious risk that such initiatives will not prevail, because conservative Muslim forces are mobilizing resistance to them, and find plenty of supporters even among younger, well educated men and women.

The situation is different in Malaysia, as both the most important political parties and the state have taken the lead in the Islamization movement. Female activists—first and foremost the Sisters in Islam (sis)—have taken action against these developments; using their own reinterpretations of the Qur'an and *sunnah*, and promoting a type of Islam that is pro-women. sis intervene in all issues that have to do with the legal discrimination of women. They demand, for example, that women be appointed judges in *shari'a* courts, and they participate in a transnational debate on family rights reforms in the Islamic world. For that purpose, they run an internet portal, distribute brochures, and host workshops and public lectures. In 2007 they initiated the international Musawah network, in which activists and NGOs from 48 countries¹²² joined forces to implement women's rights within an Islamic framework. The influence of sis in Malaysia is due to the fact that its members are almost exclusively academics from influential families; being scholars, lawyers, and journalists, they are well connected to key actors in politics, administration, and the media. And yet, they are not completely untroubled by state repression legitimized by Islam. The board of censors keeps banning books that are distributed by sis. *Fiqh Wanita: Pendangan Ulama Terhadap Wacana Agama dan Gender*, for example, written by KH Husein Muhammad, was banned in 2007. *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text From A Woman's Perspective* by Amina Wadud was banned in 2008. On 14 August 2008, the Ministry of Home Affairs proclaimed a ban on the book *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism* edited by sis-founder Norani Othman, one of the group's founders. The principal assistant secretary of the Publications and Quranic Texts Control Division, Abdul Razak Abdul Latif, said that the book was banned for

¹²² As of December 2009.

'containing twisted facts on Islam that could undermine the faith of Muslims'. It came with a prohibition order under Section 7(1) of the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, and if any individuals are found to be in possession, to make reprints, or distribute the publications, they are to be jailed not more than three years or subject to a fine of not more than RM 20,000 or both (Sisters in Islam 2008).

In Thailand, activists from all sides are involved in the conflict that, in turn, dictates the conditions for any type of activism. In the course of this conflict, women have stood up for their jailed sons, fathers, and husbands; they negotiated on their own with the authorities and were able to achieve some significant successes. But they are also active in NGOs that criticize the violence of militant Islamists, hence placing themselves at risk to become victims of violence. One case in point is the well-known Muslim peace activist Laila Paaitae Daoh, who campaigned for the peaceful coexistence of Buddhists and Muslims and was shot in Yala province on 12 March 2009.¹²³

The lack of safety defines women's lives in Mindanao as well. They are exposed to rampant poverty, state repression, and clan feuds. Upper-class women, however, enjoy remarkable freedom of action. An outstanding example is Amina Rasul, a feminist Muslim activist who incessantly looks for new ways to strengthen both Muslim rights within the predominantly Catholic Philippine state and women's rights within the Muslim communities. Her latest project is a national organization of Philippine Islamic Leaders, the National Ulama Conference of the Philippines. Two organizations are behind this project: the Philippine Council for Democracy and Peace, of which Amina is president, and the highly respected Magbassa Kita Foundation, founded by Amina's mother, former Senator Santanina Rasul. The birth of the organization went smoothly, involving a two-year process of workshops and consultations. An agenda was ratified that reflects a strong influence of Islamic feminism. The *ulama* organization is complemented by an *aleema* organization, that is, a council of female Islamic experts. Political routine business has since then been transferred to board of trustees composed of 15 members, with representatives from various areas. Two seats are reserved for representatives of the *aleema* group, and a third has been given to Santanina Rasul, the grand old lady of Muslim activism, who is now in her eighties.

¹²³ Lailas eldest son was murdered by Islamists in 2004, and her second son and her husband were assassinated in 2006.

Conclusion

Gender relations in contemporary Southeast Asia are a subject of controversy these days. Moderate and liberal female activists and intellectuals are campaigning for an implementation of the CEDAW, and for a gender-egalitarian Islam. Neo-orthodox conservatives and Islamists, on the other hand, are fighting for an order of difference that is based on the supposedly God-given inequality between the genders. Many individuals, be they activists, politicians, authors, scholars, members of religious communities, or common citizens, cannot be explicitly classified as adhering to either of these two views. Their positions are shaped by specific local, regional, and national conditions, by the opportunities or lack of opportunities to participate in the economic upturn, by their belonging to ethnic or social groups and by these groups' specific relations with the state or the ruling elite, or just by the opportunities they do or do not enjoy as individuals.

In spite of many throwbacks in the implementation of measures against the discrimination of women, and in spite of the fact that conservative ideas about the gender order are accepted by large segments of the population, it is unlikely that the clock will be set back, and that women will content themselves with being reduced to the position of mothers and wives. Southeast Asia has a long history of female participation in society and politics. Women activists are much more self-confident in that region than in other parts of the Islamic world, and even many men advocate a just order that is compatible with the principles of the United Nations. For that reason, it is likely that, even in regions where Islamic actors exert considerable influence, women will find ways to successfully assert their interests.

INDONESIA

POLYGAMY AND HARMONIOUS FAMILIES:
INDONESIAN DEBATES ON GENDER AND MARRIAGE

Nelly van Doorn-Harder

Introduction

During the past twenty years, we have witnessed the rise of vigorous Islamist discourses in the public and political sphere all over Southeast Asia and ongoing attempts to replace what was considered to be moderate expressions of Islam with more radical, Middle Eastern-oriented modes of being Muslim. Jemaah Islamiyah members have fanned out over Thailand, Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS) tries to reinstate Islamic law in Malaysia, while after the fall of the Suharto regime (1966–1998) which suppressed extremist expressions of Islam, a host of groups emerged that advocate the national application of *shari'a* laws.

Since the time of the nation's independence, Indonesian Parliaments have consistently rejected formalization of *shari'a* law. Yet, while suppressing all forms of radical Islam, the Suharto government passed several laws supporting Muslim demands: the marriage law (1974), and the laws regulating religious endowments (1977) national education (1989), and the Islamic religious courts (1989) all testify to a desire to live according to Islamic injunctions (Feener 2007:107).

When it became clear that there was not enough political and popular support to enforce national application of *shari'a* law, several Islamist-oriented groups and political parties lobbied for the introduction of Qur'an-based laws at the local level. As part of their strategy to make Indonesians accept their agenda, Islamist groups started national campaigns aiming for popular acceptance of the practice of polygamy (technically polygyny). Islamist political parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood-inspired Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, the Prosperous Justice Party) used to recommend their members to marry more than one wife, while a 'Polygamy Award' was bestowed on individuals who publicly tout the practice's benefits (Nurmila 2009:66–70). The practice is still promoted on multiple levels, especially targeting teen and adolescent girls via youth literature, movies, and other popular media. Although many Indonesians do not approve of polygamous marriages, these

campaigns and the growing obsession with women's bodies and social roles do affect public opinion. In her study on the practice of polygamy in Indonesia, Nina Nurmila (2009:147) observed that these campaigns impact Muslim women in everyday life and potentially threaten all Muslim marriages since they bestow a degree of religious legitimacy on the practice.

While these trends are equally worrisome to moderate Muslims and groups advocating the protection of women's rights, they are most upsetting for the members of 'Aisyiyah and *Nasyiat ul-'Aisyiyah* (NA), the women's branches associated with Indonesia's second largest Muslim organization, Muhammadiyah. Established in 1912 with the aim of reviving and reforming Indonesian Islam, political and puritanical trends have influenced its ideology during its long existence. Especially young, male Muhammadiyah members have joined the newly-founded Islamist parties while concurrently holding on to their Muhammadiyah membership.¹ The push towards polygamy especially challenges the Harmonious Family Programme developed by 'Aisyiyah, which advocates the nuclear family model.

This chapter discusses some of the challenges these Islamist discourses create for 'Aisyiyah women in defining the ideologies concerning women's religious position and rights as laid out in *The Keluarga Sakinah*, or Harmonious Family Programme. Although the programme aimed at guiding the entire family, it became particularly a tool to transmit the reformist views on gender and woman's position within marriage. These views, which now seem contested by Islamist opinions, were shaped over the course of several decades and have influenced significant parts of the Indonesian Muslim population.

This battle to clean up the morals of Indonesians is not new and is reminiscent of the actions undertaken by men and women members of the Muhammadiyah organization ever since it was set up in 1912. They waged wars against women with bobbed hair, men and women dancing together, Western movies, and other practices they considered vices. Much of their efforts involved the discourse about gender and sexuality. In their view, their organizations could only succeed by allowing women to participate in the societal and religious project, which resulted in the creation of the branch for women, 'Aisyiyah, founded in 1917. Muhammadiyah men led the discussions about how to create a reformist identity, 'Aisyiyah women discussed the new

¹ For example, see the findings of the research by the LibForAll Foundation, co-founded by Abdurrahman Wahid (1940–2009), summarized in: 'The enemy within; Islamic extremists and their dreams of a new caliphate', www.libforall.org/media/news-stories/expose/JakartaGlobe_The-Enemy-Within.pdf.

ideas among those attending their literacy courses, Qur'an study groups, and other meetings. The rules, laws, and customs surrounding Muslim marriage emerged as one of the central topics of those debates.²

Gender Discourses: The New and the Old

Gender discussions among all Muslim groups in Indonesia now and in the past are heavily focused on the topic of marriage in relation to a woman's *kodrat* or innate, inborn nature that—depending on who interprets the holy texts—limits her role to domestic activities only, or allows her to pursue a career outside the house.³

Discussions on marriage and *kodrat* were not even limited to the Muslim discourse, but were also the tools used by the Suharto regime (1966–1998) to control women's liberties. The state espoused an ideology that cast women in the role of spouse and housewife who depended on her husband and whose main task was to support her husband's career and raise good children. This ideology was heavily criticized by Indonesian feminists as it was perceived as a form of control on women's liberties and a way, quoting Lily Zakiyah Munir (2005), to make women 'invisible behind the husband's identity'.⁴

The Marriage Law of 1974 assumed women to be subordinate to their husbands in similar fashions, stating, for example, in article 79 that the husband's role is to be the head of the family and the wife's role is to be a housewife. This type of rules, in combination with the lived reality where many women are the main providers of the family's income, has led to the marriage law counter draft discussed in this volume by Siti Musdah Mulia.

During the Suharto regime, at times, the methods and projects of the state and those of Muslim groups seemed to merge. For example, many activists suspected 'Aisyiyah of allowing the state to co-opt their Harmonious Family Programme. They believed that in order to curb the high birth rate, the state coerced 'Aisyiyah to use its family programme as a vehicle to convince Muslims to use birth control.⁵

² For a comprehensive description of the marriage debate, see White (2004), chapter 4: 'A reformist agenda on marriage law'.

³ See, for example, White (2006).

⁴ For several articles on the state control of women, including Sears (1996b), see Sears (1996a). Especially the contribution by Suryakusuma (1996) discusses how the Suharto regime cast women in a certain role.

⁵ See, for example, Marcoes-Natsir (2004).

This family programme evolved from the intense discussions held within the Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah organizations about issues of gender and sexuality such as dating, mixed marriage (between Muslims and non-Muslims), Islamic marriage, polygamy, segregation, mixed dancing, and women's *kodrat*. Originally these themes were used as weapons to combat colonialism, Christian influences, and indigenous Muslim practices. Women's bodies were in fact used for ideological purposes and as tools to draw the line between Muhammadiyah-minded Muslims and the rest of society.

Furthermore, discourses on women and morality served as building blocks for the organization as it grew and spread its ideology throughout Indonesia. The ultimate goal was to Islamize society according to Muhammadiyah ideology. These methodologies mirrored the practices of the current radical Muslim groups that likewise aim at subduing all of Indonesia to their interpretation of Islamic law, the *shari'a*.

In order to understand the Muhammadiyah methods and philosophies, let me first provide some historic background.

The Indonesian Reformist Movement

When the organization of 'Aisyiyah was set up, its name was chosen carefully: 'Aisyiyah had been the Prophet's favourite wife, fully obedient but at the same time intelligent and economically independent. 'Aisyiyah women were going to assist the men in defining the new reformist interpretation of Islam in Indonesia. They specifically taught women about their role and status in Islam, and helped shape the definition of the ideal Muslim woman based on reformist interpretations. The discussion took place on multiple podiums, such as Qur'an studies for women (*pengajian*), conferences for Muslim and non-Muslim women, national and local meetings with the male leaders of Muhammadiyah, and via discussions and words of war waged in *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, the organization's journal.

The Muhammadiyah organization was founded by Ahmad Dahlan in 1912 as an antidote against the two influences that in his view kept Indonesians from fulfilling their potential of applying Islamic morals and laws. These were colonial Christian influences and local syncretistic expressions of Islam. Dahlan and other reformed Muslims were influenced by the ideas of the Egyptian reformer Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905) and his disciple Rashid Rida (1865–1935) who wanted to modernize Islam and purify religious practices from the influences of local culture and superstitions. 'Abduh especially wanted to build an alternative discourse to that of backward

religious leaders who relied heavily on folkloristic tales and popular use of the jurisprudence instead of seriously considering the original injunctions of the Qur'an. Nowadays, non-reformist-minded Muslims in Indonesia have become labelled as 'traditionalists'. They are those Muslims who practise and follow indigenous beliefs and rituals as long as these are compatible with the teachings of Islam. Followers of this type of Islam are mostly connected with the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) movement.

'Aisyiyah women became active in the areas of religious education for women, in journalism, and in health care. Following the Muhammadiyah model, the organization divided the work according to geographic stratifications, an approach that guaranteed that not only upper- and middle-class women could receive the new reformist teachings, but that these also reached lower-class women in villages and poor urban areas. Education and journalism were the two vehicles to advance women's causes. The journal *Suara 'Aisyiyah* covered the topics debated on gender and sexuality but also addressed issues specific to the organization's activities and image, such as which type of dress a good reformist Muslim should wear, how to conduct wedding ceremonies, how to spend one's income, whether women could travel without their guardian (*mahram*), were allowed to ride a bike, or could preach in front of a mixed audience of women and men.

Maternity clinics served to wean women away from local and traditionalist practices that were centred on rituals performed during pregnancy, birth, and the first years of a child's life. Until today, medical facilities remain a powerful tool to impart reformist Islam. For example, children born in a Muhammadiyah clinic are not bid welcome to this world by the recital of indigenous formulas to ward off evil, but the first words whispered in their ears are the *shahada*, the Islamic confession of faith.

However, initially these objectives were not necessarily pursued for the sake of women; similar to what Leila Ahmed (1992) observed in Egyptian reformist activism, they served as a tool to resist colonialism and to shuttle society into modernity. As in other Muslim countries, the Indonesian gender discourse on women remained connected to issues of secular nationalism and national advancement until the country gained independence from colonial powers. The reformist interpretation of Islam removed many roadblocks for women but did not fundamentally change unequal gender relations, leaving the system intact. In an attempt to solve this contradictory mode of being in daily life, 'Aisyiyah women came up with the idea of the Harmonious Family Programme. On the one hand, the programme served to protect women's position and rights within marriage, while on the other hand setting the premises for raising devout Muslim families based on reformist ideology.

The Marriage Discussion

In order to define what should be considered as acts permissible or not permissible to a good reformist Muslim, Muhammadiyah leaders based their views first and foremost on the Qur'an and secondly on the teachings of the reformists Muhammad 'Abduh and Rashid Rida. The Qur'an presents the view that God created humans, both men and women, in the best fashion (sura 95:4), and that God's creation as a whole is for just ends (sura 15:85) and not for idle play (sura 21:16).⁶ Men and women are called to righteousness and are expected to honour the rights of God (*huquq Allah*) as well as the rights of worshippers (*huquq al-'ibad*).

'Abduh and Rida stressed that society develops according to meticulous laws that express the *sunan* of God. *Sunan*, the plural of *sunnah*, means literally 'the trodden path', and refers to the conduct of the forefathers that exemplifies the norm for the behaviour of succeeding generations (Van Nispen tot Sevenaer 1996:35). The reformers believed that the *sunan* represented the reality that God created the world, people, and human society according to fixed laws, and according to precise and regular structures. In this context, cause and effect were obvious and depended on the acts of people (Van Nispen tot Sevenaer 1996:115, 116). Based on this belief the reformers stressed the Qur'anic words of sura 13, verse 11: 'Verily never will Allah change the condition of a people until they change it themselves'.⁷ Aisyiyah women thus set out to create justice for women based on the religious injunctions and following Muhammadiyah ideologies. To realize their goal, they chose the institution of marriage as the most effective means to strengthen women's rights.

Marriage provided the social unit from where Islam was taught, protected, or destroyed. The marriage debate dealt with a comprehensive institution, and not only defined women's role in Islam but also served to define reformist Islamic practices vis-à-vis Dutch colonial rules and Muslims who practiced indigenous rituals (at that time the majority of Indonesia's Muslims); marriage furthermore served as a tool of mission to spread the reformist vision of Islam. Ideally speaking, the blueprint for Muhammadiyah behaviour was to be created and transmitted via the unit of the nuclear family.

In the early years, Muhammadiyah challenged Dutch marriage laws that had encroached upon Muslim practices and enforced, for example, the non-Islamic rules stipulating that divorces and marriages should be registered and

⁶ This concise description on the Qur'anic view on creation of good and evil is partly based on Al-Ghazali (1997) and Hassan (1997).

⁷ Translation of the Qur'an based on Yusuf 'Ali (1991).

that Dutch-approved officials had to preside over the wedding.⁸ The Islamic requirements for a valid marriage were that the bride had given her consent, the marriage took place in the presence of her (of course Muslim) guardian or *wali*, the required number of witnesses were present, the bride price (*maskawin*) was paid, and the *ijab-kabul* (offer and acceptance) ceremony performed.

The missionary aspect of the debate became visible in various forms. For example, 'Aisiyah women also aimed at transforming the celebrations from elaborate feasts into simple, frugal gatherings. For that matter, they tried to reduce expenses for all types of religious ceremonies, including funerals and community festivities.⁹ Money thus saved could be used to build signs of Muhammadiyah presence in communities, starting with kindergartens and followed by clinics and hospitals. These visible markers testified to reformist vigour and would attract more followers to the movement.

Apart from being an act of resistance against Dutch/Christian interference, some elements of the marriage debate, such as the choice of a partner and the couple's maturity, constituted a frontal attack on traditionalist Muslims. Especially in the circles of Qur'an schools (*pesantren*), traditionalist Muslims did—and sometimes still do—not allow their children free choice of partner, and child marriage was not unusual (in principle, Islamic law does not know a minimum age of marriage).

Yet by choosing marriage as one of the lynchpins for its efforts to convert Indonesian Muslims to reformist Islam, Muhammadiyah had to come to terms with several contradictions. In the context of Muslim marriage, modernizing meant eliminating the engagement phase as this could only lead to the sin of premarital sex. It also meant returning to the Islamic injunctions that included polygamy, child marriage, and unilateral repudiation. Various Indonesian women's associations had lobbied precisely against these practices.¹⁰

⁸ For a comprehensive description of the marriage debate, see White (2004), chapter 4: 'A reformist agenda on marriage law'.

⁹ See the article about the 'Aisijah reception' in *Soeara 'Aisijah* no. 7–9 (July–September 1939).

¹⁰ In 1928, 600 women representing thirty women's associations met in Yogyakarta for a national congress that had education and marriage as main points on its agenda. Here the differences between the reformist agenda and the secular-nationalist aspirations came to the fore. While the majority of the congress participants saw polygyny as a great evil that destroyed women's lives, Siti Moendjiah, one of the 'Aisiyah representatives, defended the practice with great fervour. She advocated it as preventing men from having extramarital affairs and women without a husband from falling into prostitution (Blumberger 1931:376 f.); see also Vreede-de Stuers(1960), especially chapter six.

Muhammadiyah members realized that the practice of polygamy was counterproductive to its agenda, which by improving living conditions based on Islamic rules aimed at winning Indonesians over to the reformist interpretation of Islam. The organization encouraged women to study and to become leaders of Islam, and large discussions were held about whether or not women were allowed to travel by themselves without their *mahram* or male protector. Dutch law had offered protection against the practice of having more than one wife, and Muhammadiyah members were aware of polygamy's detrimental effects on the family and on women. Polygamy seldom implied free choice, and often led families into lives of poverty—a societal problem Muhammadiyah battled by instilling the virtue of frugality. Naturally, the discussion about these topics went round in circles as it was impossible to diminish the authority of the Qur'anic texts condoning the practice.

The Harmonious Family Model

In spite of the many controversial discussions, Muhammadiyah members had to focus on their ultimate goal: to apply what they considered to be the *sunan* of God, and to be different from traditionalist Muslims. The marriage discussion inevitably continued after independence, and led to the birth of the so-called Keluarga Sakina, or 'Harmonious Family Programme'. After several decades of preparation, this concept of family was officially launched in 1985, and described how a good Muslim family operated. Via this family ideal God's *sunan* would be brought to reality, albeit according to reformist principles.

The point of departure for the harmonious family model is sura 30, verse 21: 'By another sign He gave you wives from among yourselves, that you might live in peace with them, and planted love and kindness in your hearts. Surely there are signs in this for thinking men'. In Muhammadiyah ideology, women are the key to a stable family life where children can be raised harmoniously. The word *sakinah* is found in the Qur'an where, depending on the context, it translates as 'security', 'calm', or 'tranquillity'.¹¹ To assist its

¹¹ Suras 2:248, 9:26 and 48:4, 18, 26. In sura 2:248 *sakinah* is used in its original Old Testament meaning, referring to God's continual presence in the Ark that guarantees tranquillity and security: 'A Sign of his authority is that there shall come to you the Ark of the Covenant, with [an assurance] therein of security (*sakinah*) from your Lord [...]' See also the description of this family model on the Muhammadiyah website: www.muhammadiyah.or.id/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=248, translated in White (2006:11).

leaders in discerning whether or not a family is truly harmonious, 'Aisyiyah identified a kind of check list with five qualities that can more or less be measured: 1. the family's practice of the religious rituals, 2. the educational level of its members, 3. a stable income, 4. good health, and 5. the family members entertain good relationships with each other and with the people around them ('Aisyiyah 1993:5).

Following the family model entailed a detailed description of how to live the proper Islamic way. Guidelines comprised how to choose a partner, the duties of husband and wife towards their children, towards their parents, and towards each other. The ideal emerged that by worshipping together and by following the Islamic legal rules concerning rights and duties of the spouses, husband and wife would strengthen and improve their relationship. They no longer conducted Javanese ceremonies but instead performed the five daily prayers, read the Qur'an together, attended Qur'an studies (*pengajian*) frequently, had Islamic pictures on the walls, an area dedicated to prayer in the house, and greeted each other with the Arabic *assalamu 'alaykum*, 'peace be upon you', instead of the customary Indonesian greeting (see 'Aisyiyah 1993:6-12).

The checklist especially elaborates on the religious life of the family, setting out the dogmas of faith, stressing the ritual daily prayer, the fast of Ramadan, charity, and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Among the religious points it states that a member of the harmonious family cares about poverty and about the low level of religious observance in society ('Aisyiyah 1993:8). The points about education, income, and health demand a minimum level of middle-school education, enough income not to go into debt, and that the family members are vaccinated, always go to a doctor rather than visit a *dukun* (traditional healer), and that the house has a bathroom and running water. The last point concerning social relations, among others, covers the bond between husband and wife in ten points that each begin with 'each other' (*saling*): they love and cherish, honour and praise each other, take on responsibilities together, both of them attain their rights, they are sensitive to each other's needs, open to discussion, and they believe, help, forgive, and understand each other ('Aisyiyah 1993:10).

Mutual respect and concern of the spouses towards each other has become the central value in this family model. Ideally speaking, this model changes the traditional paradigm within marriage from dependent to interdependent, which strengthens a woman's position ('Aisyiyah 1995:3). Men need to know wives' rights and duties as much as women do. The harmonious family model assigns duties and responsibilities to all members of the family, thus creating an organic body with interdependent members.

Women and the Qur'an within the Harmonious Family Model

However, this family model, designed and applied by 'Aisyiyah women, does not address directly Qur'anic teachings that give men authority over women, such as the famous text: 'Men are protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more [strength] than the other [...] therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient [...]' (sura 4:34). In 'Aisyiyah circles, the words 'protectors' and 'maintainers' are conventionally interpreted to indicate that men are in charge of women, or have advantages over women. 'Aisyiyah acknowledges the contents of this verse by mentioning that a wife should exercise 'obedience, and respect with honesty and self-sacrifice' (*patuh, taat, dan hormat dengan tulus dan ikhlas*) towards the husband ('Aisyiyah 1994:19). But while using this language, 'Aisyiyah has introduced the notions of 'mutual' and 'each other' when referring to the marital relationship: 'mutual love', 'mutual respect', 'mutual trust', 'helping each other', and 'giving each other rights' ('Aisyiyah 1993:10). Teaching men to respect their wives invites them to redefine the notion of their authority over women by indirectly referring to the Qur'anic teachings, such as in sura 9:71 where it is said that 'men and women are protectors of one of another'. It also moves away from the Javanese opinions that consider women as inferior.

Mutual respect in this model requires that the husband not beat his wife. Although this is hotly debated, many understand sura 4:34 to mean that a husband is allowed to beat his wife in case of 'disloyalty and ill-conduct'. Even more radically, the harmonious family model does not allow the husband to marry more than one spouse, although sura 4:2, 3 allows a man to take up to four wives. Polygyny has mostly been discouraged in Muhammadiyah circles, yet a man who wants a second spouse cannot be forbidden to take one. If both spouses accept the principles of the harmonious family, however, Muslim women need not fear that a grudging husband one day will come home with a second bride. Since the responsibility for the relationship and the family's harmony devolves upon both partners, the man has to face his responsibilities as well. Another aspect of this teaching is that it guides young adults in selecting a partner, a pro-active strategy that aims at preventing divorce and marital problems such as domestic strife and adultery by husbands; it also is a safeguard against mixed marriage—that is, with Muslims who are not reformist-minded, or with someone of another faith.

The harmonious family model also guarantees that the marriage is legal, and rules out relationships that have become popular among university

students since the 1980s: influenced by practices from the Middle East, young couples who more or less want to have an engagement period without being considered sinful, opt to 'legalize' their sexual relationship via the secret marriage contract (*kawin sirri*) or the temporary marriage (*mutah*). They do this to prevent fornication (*zina*) (Fathuri 2004), and at times just pledge to each other that they are married 'with only God as witness' (Manshur et al. 2004).

Finally, the harmonious family model is a tool of propagating reformist Islamic rules. It advocates frugality and in fact prevents men from taking more than one spouse, although according to 'Aisyiyah, polygamy in itself can never be identified as a sin. However, its repercussions such as poverty and not treating the spouses equally, can be. But when all is said and done, this family model does not solve the ambiguous position Muhammadiyah women live with; ultimately, the success of the harmonious family relies on the willingness of the husband to participate.

Women in the Harmonious Family

'Aisyiyah women are convinced that when the laws and rules of Islam are applied correctly, women will be given their rightful place. Since its beginning, 'Aisyiyah has stressed this idea. However, not even in the organization of 'Aisyiyah is a woman's status unchanging, but has been reshaped and redefined from the beginning as the organization adapted to developments within society. From the start it taught that women had their rights and could earn the same religious merits as men when performing good deeds (sura 3:193).

There was, however, a perpetual tension between women's private and public roles and duties that has also affected the harmonious family model. In 1925, 'Aisyiyah women stated that 'running the household is 100% a woman's duty' (Pimpinan Pusat Aisyiyah 1940:8). This line of thought has remained the same until the present, whereas women's areas of work and activities have expanded. Paradoxically, 'Aisyiyah's own expansion and success depended on women leaving their household duties behind for travelling and preaching. Part of this dichotomy comes from the reformist method of interpreting the Islamic sources which, as M.B. Hooker (2003:55) has observed, can be based on other than the Islamic sources and is often more didactic than prescriptive. This approach has regularly led to unclear and ambiguous deliberations on thorny issues concerning woman's status. The women themselves have reproduced these ideas, often not even referring to the Qur'an. Contemporary

'Aisyiyah documents portray 'women as more emotional than men', then go on to explain this statement in a positive sense: women like to keep moving and 'expanding their potential', so that their emotion is translated not into a lack of spiritual power, but into giving 'love, care and self-sacrifice' ('Aisyiyah 1995:3).

Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi (2008) has analysed how this attitude translates into a lack of leadership positions for 'Aisyiyah women within the organization of Muhammadiyah, and concluded that the majority of its members, both men and women, agree that women should not be in positions of leadership. To illustrate this reality, she quotes part of the speech one of the male members of its Central Committee gave during the quinquennial Muhammadiyah conference (*muktamar*) in 2005. At that time women tried to run for a position in the Central Committee that governs all Muhammadiyah branches, including 'Aisyiyah:

Since K.H. Dahlan established Muhammadiyah and 'Aisyiyah, there have been places for each of them [for men and women]. Why do [women] want to penetrate (*blusak-blusuk*) into Muhammadiyah? It cannot be accepted [this was followed by loud clapping and cynical laughter from many male members]. 'Aisyiyah women can participate at the Muhammadiyah Muktamar [conference], particularly in the catering. (Kurniawati Hastuti 2008:177)

These remarks show that true equality between Muhammadiyah men and women is an ideal that might never be fulfilled. Part of the attitude concerning the serving role of women can be ascribed to the ways the harmonious family model has been applied by the members practising it.

Ultimately, the gender model of the harmonious family is interpreted according to the individual ideas of its members. The family model teaches the dichotomy that 'women can be anything in public life, but in private life they obey their husbands'.¹² Women bear all the household responsibilities, even though the model's advocates stress that the Prophet mended his own clothes. This imbalance in power is perennially present in the Muhammadiyah gender philosophies. A woman is always supposed to perform the duties most in accordance with her *kodrat* (nature, or inborn disposition).

The harmonious family model, however, also spells out the responsibilities and duties of the husband. Although it stresses that the man is the main provider, it does not rule out the possibility that women take that role. This is more in tune with Javanese and Indonesian reality where many

¹² Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, during the discussion of her paper (Ruhaini Dzuhayatin 1999) at the International Workshop on the Role of Islamic Women's Organizations.

women are the main providers of their families. In 'Aisyiyah's reality, women cannot be constant companions of their husbands and accompany them on their work duties. Women must preach and teach; hence 'Aisyiyah teaches that, ideally speaking, spouses should be interdependent friends ('Aisyiyah 1995:9).

Birth Control

The harmonious family model has harvested tornadoes of criticism especially from those who saw it as a government tool to advance birth control policies. The discussion about family matters naturally was influenced by the government's birth control drive that, beginning in the 1960s, suggested a limit of two children per household. At that time, many Islamic leaders still taught that interfering with God's design was forbidden, and Muhammadiyah was pushed into taking a decision concerning this matter.¹³ When the Muslim organizations of Muhammadiyah and NU approved of birth control in 1971, the precursor of the harmonious family, the so-called 'comfortable' or 'prosperous' family (*keluarga sejahtera*), emerged within Muhammadiyah circles. The idea was that the members of the *keluarga sejahtera*, the family with two or three children, could become the nucleus of a prosperous Islamic society by promoting its religious, social, and economic conditions. In their sermons, 'Aisyiyah preachers taught the importance of limiting the number of children. This was allowed when parents wished to give their children a better quality of life, education, and attention, but forbidden when they feared only for their economic conditions (meaning a lack of trust in God). 'Aisyiyah actively promoted the birth control programme and saw it as the tangible proof that the organization truly cares for women. Concurrently, 'Aisyiyah preachers started to talk about matters such as the proper Islamic way of choosing a partner, as well as the duties of man and wife towards their children, towards their parents, and towards each other.

Whatever the Suharto regime had in mind concerning its birth control policies, 'Aisyiyah women ultimately viewed the family model as one of the most effective means to protect women's rights and as a tool of *dakwah* (Islamic propagation) since, ideally speaking, it served as a training ground for future Muhammadiyah missionaries.

¹³ For the legal discussion about birth control, see Hooker (2003).

Criticisms

Criticism of the harmonious family has not remained limited to the birth control aspect. The younger generation of Muhammadiyah women, armed with graduate diplomas in gender studies, criticize 'Aisyiyah women for adapting to a situation that ought to be changed. They belong to *Nasyiat ul-'Aisyiyah* (NA, Young/Growing 'Aisyiyah), and one of its leaders, Siti Ruhaini, has summarized the critique as follows: "Aisyiyah *dakwah* (mission) often is not aimed at really defending women, but preaches how to raise children and how to be with one's husband'.¹⁴ She refers to the fact that 'Aisyiyah never has openly disapproved of polygyny', although it has obstructed the practice indirectly via the harmonious family project. This does no longer suffice. NA leaders wish to spell out its pros and cons in order to supply women with firm tools to prevent their husbands from taking a second spouse. Relying on ideas of Muhammadiyah leaders such as Amien Rais, they argue that Muhammadiyah followers who take a second wife deny the first one her equality in the eyes of God, which is a direct affront to the social application of God's *tauhid* (unity).¹⁵ Seen in this way, taking a second wife ranks as a sin.

This re-evaluation of the meaning of the holy text results in the stand taken by NA leaders on 'Aisyiyah's *keluarga sakinah* project. After several of them graduated from gender study programmes at Indonesian or international universities, reflections on the weaknesses of the *keluarga sakinah* project emerged within the NA. The arguments progressed from critique based on similarities between the project and the policies of the Suharto government concerning the role of women, to questions about women's dual role in the household and salaried work. While not questioning the Islamic teachings regarding a woman's duties, NA points out the inconsistencies this model produces when applied to reality. Moreover, NA demands that Muhammadiyah men participate in the considerations on gender issues, not just by theorizing but by applying these in practice as well. As a last step, NA rejects those aspects of the harmonious family that in fact deny a woman her basic human rights.

Terias Setiawati, one of NA's former National Chairs, has questioned woman's dual role and the inconsistencies in the model of male leadership:

We also pay attention to what is not covered in the writings about the *keluarga sakinah*: that women intellectually and economically can become independent

¹⁴ Interview with Ibu Siti Ruhaini and Mbak Ida, one of the directors of Rifka Annisa, 8 January 1998.

¹⁵ 'Through the lens of *tauhid*, whenever one person exploits the other this is denying that person equality in front of God' (Rais 1997:42 f.).

instead of having the double role. [...] Changing a discourse is not easy. For example, now Muhammadiyah teaches that a woman can become a leader on any level, but inside the house the man is the leader. This is problematic. Also there is inconsistency; the [Muhammadiyah] book *Adabul Mar'a*, published in 1972, already gives women the right to become active in politics, but after that, in 1985, comes the *keluarga sakinah* based on domestic thinking. The first source says that a woman can become a cabinet minister; the second source says that she is dependent. The harmonious family model does not match the reality of 'Aisyiyah women either; they all have careers outside and work as teachers, civil servants and in business. In the ideal pictures of the harmonious family, a domestic servant does the work while the wife watches TV, sits nicely (*duduk manis*), and smiles.¹⁶

Another point of criticism is that while leadership is assigned to man, it is woman who carries the responsibility for the family's well-being and its success in applying the harmonious family programme. For example, in the Muhammadiyah *pesantren* Sobron in Solo, lectures about Muhammadiyah philosophies require the female students to read the materials about the harmonious family. As far as the male students are concerned, it is only 'hoped for' (*diharapkan*) that they will acquaint themselves with these teachings.¹⁷ This by itself is inconsistent with the basic models of equality in leadership. In summary, NA critics deem the harmonious family model to be unrealistic, inconsistent with Muhammadiyah teachings concerning women's role, and in the end harmful to women by expecting them to accomplish multiple tasks.

Inspired by the Qur'anic interpretations on gender issues by scholars such as Nasaruddin Umar, in the new model NA leaders envision guidelines for the harmonious family that derive from universal basic human rights, democratic rights, and women's rights.¹⁸ 'Universal' is the key word here. Muhammadiyah scholar Amien Abdullah stresses that 'when you discuss what is limited to your own group only, and do not look at those outside you, it becomes problematic'.¹⁹ According to him, this universality is not just an ideal for Muhammadiyah but for all Muslims. Learning about others has positive, global effects.

One of the obstacles for the future is the gap between the attitudes of younger women and older men. Many Muhammadiyah men are still prejudiced concerning women's capacities. Their long-lived cultural influences,

¹⁶ Interview with Terias Setiawati, 8 May 1998.

¹⁷ Interview with staff of the *pesantren* Shobron, Solo, 10 October 1998.

¹⁸ Among others, Umar (2001).

¹⁹ Interview with Amien Abdullah, 7 August 2002.

combined with traditional interpretations of the Islamic sources regarding men's authority over women, have shaped their ideas, and they are conservative in their views of women. According to Terias Setiawati, 'in matters of science they are open-minded, but not in domestic matters'.

Conclusion

All possible criticism aside, it remains remarkable that by highlighting certain teachings of the Qur'an without changing one word from the holy writings, 'Aisyiyah managed to redefine the marital bond and helped improve the condition of women, achieving a certain measure of equality between men and women (*kejajaran*) through the application of the rules of Islam ('Aisyiyah 1982:73). Careful education of all those involved led to a slow change in attitudes towards women and created respect for the bond of marriage, even though the model remained firmly framed within the conservative Muhammadiyah paradigm. It gave women a stronger voice within their nuclear families, yet failed to make their voices more authoritative in Muhammadiyah circles.

In the early 1990s this attitude seemed to be changing when Muhammadiyah initiated a new committee with male and female members to study gender relations from the Islamic perspective. The committee stressed equal positions of men and women by moving the focus from the famous Qur'anic text of sura 4:34 (that presents men as the protectors of women and more or less indicates that under certain circumstances beating one's wife is allowed) to sura 2:187 where men and women are spoken of as each other's garments.

However, as is described in detail by Kurniawati Hastuti (2008), opinions stressing the use of sura 4:34 regained the upper hand during the 2005 Muhammadiyah conference. That this new attitude could take over can in part be ascribed to the fact that the position of women within the Muhammadiyah structure remains ambiguous. At the same time, by 2005 many young Muhammadiyah men had joined political parties such as PKS that openly promote the practice of polygamy, and a strong Islamist lobby had spread its ideas throughout Indonesia.

With many fundamental questions concerning the equality between men and women not yet solved, the harmonious family model has come under pressure from several sides. While Islamists attack its insistence on the nuclear family, feminist Muslims criticize it for not providing enough status and protection to women. In the end, the model does reflect the general attitudes of Indonesian Muslims regarding the position of women

that vacillates between freedom and restraint, and between respect and always ranking as secondary human beings.

However, the unsolved gender issue is secondary to the goals of 'Aisyyah women for whom the harmonious family remains one of the most powerful tools to promote the protection of women and the transmission of Islam. Via the family programme, many of the moral battles were won and the guidelines of what was appropriate and what not were clearly laid out. But the struggle to defend the harmonious family against alternative Islamist interpretations of Islam has only just begun.

A DIALOGUE WITH GOD?
ISLAM AND LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN
TWO POST-SUHARTO NARRATIVES*

Monika Arnez

Introduction

In Indonesia, as in many other countries, same-sex relations are viewed critically by society, particularly because they deviate from the heterosexual norm. Under Suharto's New Order reproductive heterosexuality through marriage was made the main relationship of normative social life (Blackwood 2010:60). Especially the New Order upheld an ideology that mainly ascribed to women the duty of caring for their husband and children. After the fall of President Suharto, the state has continued to promote the properness of marriage and sexuality within marriage by reverting to traditional and Islamic moral values. Since in many cases it is not possible to distinguish these from community norms, Indonesian Muslims consider sexual practise outside marriage offensive (Bennett 2005:122). Among Islamists the view prevails that women are creatures whose 'innate being and purpose is to bear children' (Blackwood 2005:872).

It can be stated that homosexual practice is not accepted in any Muslim country. The official doctrines of Islam forbid sexual relationships between males and pay hardly any attention to love between females (Wafer 1997:128). However, homosexuality is not subject to prosecution or punishment in predominantly Muslim countries. In Indonesia there are no specific laws against same-sex relations among adults, neither in religious nor in civil law. The state has so far remained neutral towards homosexuality. As Dede Oetomo asserts, the State Penal Code contains no laws prohibiting transgendered practices or acts of sexuality between individuals with the same genitalia (Oetomo 2001:296), except for same-sex relations with persons who are not yet adults. Indonesia's State Penal Code does not prohibit homosexual

* I would like to thank Michael Bodden for his valuable suggestions and comments on an earlier version of this contribution.

relations between consenting adults, but neither does the 1945 Constitution explicitly protect sexual identity rights.

In the 1990s, when lesbian and gay activists increasingly put forward demands for sexual rights and same-sex marriage (see Oetomo 2001), the Indonesian government clearly voiced its reluctance to grant *gay* and *lesbi*¹ more rights:

[...] in the 1990s the perceived threat of international gay and lesbian activists' demands for human rights—a threat to the stability of normative gender and heterosexuality in Indonesia—led to a more explicit discourse about the abnormality of homosexuality for properly gendered Indonesian citizens.

(Blackwood 2010:62)

In the same period there were some exceptional cases of 'political homophobia' involving violence against gay men who staked a claim to the public sphere. While the oppression of most homosexuals in Indonesia is due to a lack of recognition, which sometimes includes pressure to enter into heterosexual marriage even though they do not wish to do so (Boellstorff 2005:223), some gay men, and yet a greater number of lesbians, encounter violence and are sexually abused by friends or members of their own families.

In the post-Suharto era conservative Muslims have pushed for more restrictive laws on sexual mores. Although homosexuality is not forbidden by law in Indonesia, an increasing number of local bylaws (*perda*; *peraturan daerah*) have been implemented that run contrary to the principles of the state motto of 'Unity in Diversity' (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*). In some provinces and districts, such as Palembang, such *perda* criminalize homosexuality. Furthermore, Islamist groups such as the Islam Defenders Front (FPI) and the Muslim Community Forum (FUI) have affronted *gay* and *lesbi* people, as a reaction to them having voiced their rights more explicitly during the last decade. For instance, on the occasion of an international *gay* and *lesbi* event in Surabaya 2011, they intimidated the organizers to the point that they cancelled the event (Sabarini 2011). Despite such offenses perpetrated by small groups of Islamists, *gay* and *lesbi* are increasingly being included and recognized in Indonesian society, although their pleas for equal treatment have largely gone unanswered. As a consequence, the *lesbi* and *gay* community has to cope with problems in finding employment, especially in civil service, the Indonesian military, the police, and in sports (Hapsari 2011).

¹ I use these terms as they are commonly employed in scholarly works discussing same-sex relations in Indonesia. Both terms are derived from the English words 'gay' and 'lesbian', but they have slightly different meanings than their cognates. For a discussion of these terms, see: Boellstorff (2007b); Blackwood (2010).

In Muslim circles homosexuality is often rejected because it is associated with immorality. The argument is that it is 'not normal' for human beings to be homosexual (Hapsari 2011), and according to the common sense within society they need to be healed (Oetomo 2001:76; Sulandari 2009:1). Furthermore, a person who feels attracted to the same sex is expected to control him- or herself, and to refrain from actually entering into a same-sex relationship. As Philips and Khan argue, teenagers are vulnerable to influence by others, particularly their peers, and they tend to engage in same-sex relations because they are curious and eager to experiment (Philips and Khan 2003:31). But Muslim scholars still do not accept this as an excuse for same-sex relations. Rather, they stress clearly that homosexuality, although perhaps partly determined by the genes, is still not God-given in the sense that it determines a particular way of being: 'Human beings can put reins to their thoughts and make decisions on these grounds' (Philips and Khan 2003:32). Thus, entering into a same-sex relationship is a sign that an individual is unable to control his or her desire.

In the Indonesian context in particular, many people, when asked about same-sex relationships, say that Islam 'disapproves of sex between men or between women' (Boellstorff 2005:182–183). However, most homosexuals in Indonesia adhere to Islam and thus have to face the heterosexual norm and its corollary that marrying is central to organizing one's sexuality. Forced to position themselves within this heteronormative framework, *gay* and *lesbi* take different stances on their sexual orientation. While some accept the idea that they are committing a sin, referring to the story of prophet Lot, others have developed the counter-argument that homosexuality is part of God's plan and hence legitimate (Boellstorff 2007a:148, 151). As to *lesbi*, Evelyn Blackwood has observed that they are on their own when it comes to negotiating their relation to God since the Qur'an has nothing to say about same-sex relations between women (Blackwood 2010:15). A recent example illustrating this is the case of the *lesbi* couple Rinto alias Rohani and Nuraini who married in March 2011 in Nagan Raya, Aceh. They were handed over to the police and subsequently to the *shari'a* police after neighbours suspected in August that they were both women. At first, the officials were at a loss as to how to punish them. Since they could not find any reference in the Islamic sources about how to treat same-sex relationships between women they finally decided to revoke the marriage and send the women back to their parents.²

² 'Pernikahan kami sudah dibubarkan', *Serambi Indonesia*, 24. August 2011, <http://aceh>

This essay starts out from Blackwood's thesis that gendered practices are produced, understood and interiorized in different ways, depending on religious, cultural and social discourses of specific historical times (Blackwood 2005:850). It concentrates on the early 2000s, when two novels were written by young women authors which explicitly raised same-sex relations as a topic. It is worthwhile mentioning in this context that since Suharto stepped down female writers have become more visible on the literary stage in Muslim countries, and have begun to play a more prominent role. They increasingly avail themselves of the opportunity to make their views public, and often speak out against injustice. In Indonesia, several female authors who published their works after the fall of Suharto have addressed taboo topics such as same-sex relations. The works selected for this analysis were published in 2003, a time when the memory of the New Order regime was still fresh but its gender ideology was increasingly challenged, both in films³ and fictional texts.

The novels taken as a basis for this analysis are *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* ('A lesbian on the margins', 2003) by Herlinatiens and *Suara perih seorang perempuan; Lesbian dan kawin bule* ('A pained woman's voice; Being a lesbian and marrying a white man', 2003) by Putri Kartini. To my knowledge, these were the first novels of Indonesian literature since the fall of Suharto to take lesbianism as a main theme.⁴ For reasons of censorship, it would have been unlikely for authors to tackle this taboo topic during the New Order. The question this essay contributes to is how the novels narrate the deviant subjectivities of its *lesbi* protagonists with respect to their relation with God, Islam, and society. The contribution begins with an analysis of Herlinatiens' and Kartini's novels; the following section analyses to what extent the characters presented serve to demonstrate ways of coping with the demands and challenges of Islam in particular and the state and society more generally.

Same-Sex Relations on the Margins

Herlinatiens (Herlina Tien Suhesti) was born in 1982 in Ngawi (East Java) into a family with a *pesantren*⁵ background. She studied Indonesian language and

.tribunnews.com/m/index.php/2011/08/24/pernikahan-kami-sudah-dibubarkan (last accessed 24 August 2011).

³ One example of the former is *Arisan!* ('Savings gathering!'), written and directed by Nia Dinata, a satirical comedy portraying a gay relationship in Indonesian cinema for the first time.

⁴ In the subsequent years some other novels raised the topic of relationships among women, such as *Sepasang remaja lesbian di persimpangan jalan* by Ernest J.K. Wen, *Perempuan semusim; Kisah nyata metamorfosa lesbian ke heteroseksual* by Amitri Dinar Sari, and *Kembang kertas; Ijinkan aku menjadi lesbian; Sebuah novel* by Eni Martini.

⁵ Islamic boarding school.

literature in Yogyakarta. She has been writing literature since she was a child, although her parents did not want her to become a 'mad artist'. While still in high school, she participated in discussions about gender issues. *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* ('A lesbian on the margins', 2003) was her first novel, followed by *De javu; Sayap yang pecah* ('Déjà vu; Broken wing', 2004), *Malam untuk Soe Hok Gie* ('An evening for Soe Hok Gie', 2005), *Koella bersamamu dan terluka* ('Koella, with you and hurt', 2006) and *Sebuah cinta yang menangis* ('Crying love', 2006). She published one collection of poetry entitled *Yang pertama; sajak-sajak cinta Herlinatiens* ('The first; Love poems by Herlinatiens', 2005).

Her novel *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* gives the reader an idea of the challenges lesbians have to cope with in Indonesian society. It recounts the story of Ashmora Paria, an intelligent, emancipated, and independent woman, who does not meet the expectations of her social environment because she is in love with a woman called Rie Shiva Ashvagosha.⁶ Since Rie, however, complies with her mother's wish to marry a man, Paria loses sight of her and desperately longs for Rie to return. After having entered into affairs with various women to console herself, Paria almost consents to marry a man called Mahendra because, similar to Rie's family, her own relatives try to force her into marriage. But at the end of the novel she receives a letter from Rie who now lives in Paris, which raises her hope that she can become reunited with her lover. Herlinatiens proceeds to describe how the protagonist, who was just about to marry Mahendra although she does not love him, leaves everything behind and boards a plane to Paris, full of enthusiasm.⁷

Garis tepi seorang lesbian is an epistolary novel in which the protagonist Ashmora Paria writes letters to Rie and her friends Gita and Raphael. Her motives for writing are her deep love for Rie and her wish to 'explain her lesbianism and her existence to her two friends, Gita and Rafael, who seem quite conservative' (Marching 2008:10). Paria, the 'outcast' or the 'one without a caste', is denied her wish to be accepted as a 'normal' individual enjoying the same rights as 'ordinary', that is, heterosexual people. As she is unwilling to accept this stigmatization, she feels compelled to convince herself that she is 'normal'. She does so by repeatedly making herself believe that she is a 'normal woman who can do what's normal' (Herlinatiens 2003:27). But since her social environment constantly reacts negatively to her lesbian love,

⁶ Ashvagosha was a famous Buddhist philosopher, one of the founding fathers of Mahayana philosophy.

⁷ The reception of this novel was positive. For instance, at her book presentation in Surabaya in 2003 Herlinatiens was beleaguered by *jilbab*-wearing fans who idolized her for having written that book (Graham 2003).

Paria is confronted with her 'abnormality' ever more painfully. Her relatives try to persuade her to marry a man as soon as possible, and her friends Gita and Raphael, with whom she regularly communicates, do not show much sympathy for her love either. According to the protagonist, who reflects the opinion of the novel's author, it is disturbing that homosexual love leads to isolation: 'I'm certainly a woman loving women. But it is really unjust to isolate me'. She feels that patriarchal society does injustice to homosexual people while at the same time being hypocritical. As Tracy L. Wright Webster correctly observes, Paria highlights the many cases of sodomy and sexual child abuse perpetrated by members of the Catholic priesthood (Webster 2004:9).

Relating to the language of the novel, it can be stated that it is characterized by a poetic tone on the one hand, especially when Paria's lover Rie is addressed, and a vulgar one on the other, when Paria ponders on the difficult situation she is facing in society. Thus, poems are inserted into the text, but slang words like *bangsat* ('scoundrel', 'bedbug') or *dancuk* ('fuck'), for instance, are frequently repeated as well. This stylistic device serves to highlight the rapidly changing emotions and moods of the protagonist, whose controversial feelings can be explained by her unfulfilled love and the negative reactions of her family and friends to her homosexuality (Herlinatiens 2003:45).

Although Paria encounters much resistance against her lesbian relationship with Rie, she tries hard to find a way to reconcile her lesbian subjectivity with society and Islam. She argues that her being lesbian does not contradict her religiosity, and explains that her closeness to God is even deepened by her love to Rie:

When I love Rie, I feel even closer to God, although she is a woman and I'm also a woman. I feel that I can really be myself when the wings of love I feel for Rie spread out wide. I still enshrine the existence and greatness of the name of God in my heart.⁸
(Herlinatiens 2003:48)

Paria's love for Rie is described as so pure that it is even capable of reducing the distance to God, which is an important aim of Paria's, since Islamic faith constitutes a central element of her life. Her love is 'sacred' because she is willing to sacrifice much for Rie and even loves her more than she loves herself. She does not feel she is committing a sin when she is with Rie, and she also does not believe that Islam and lesbianism necessarily exclude one another. Rather, Paria thinks that love justifies any kind of human

⁸ All English translations of the quotes from the Indonesian texts are mine.

relationship and should find acceptance in any religion. She does not make Islam responsible for the marginalization of lesbians, but criticizes Islamic hardliners for making life more difficult for such women, causing them to feel even more isolated. The protagonist complains to a friend about such radical groups having reacted to her planned movie production by terrorizing the company she works with: '[...] my company is afraid of continuing my movie project. They were terrorized by religious figures' (Herlinatiens 2003:45). Islamic extremists, Herlinatiens argues, are a danger for society. Non-mainstream groups, such as lesbians, are in particular attacked by hardliners, who try to force a heterosexual way of life on them.

According to Paria, lesbianism is not incompatible with Islam. She reasons that homosexuality is not created by personal choice but by nature, by God's will, his omnipotence and omniscience. Given that God is all-knowing, all-wise and all-merciful, Paria concludes that she was created lesbian by God. Thus, she does not interpret her sexual activities with women as *haram*, but as natural and legitimate:⁹

If I love a woman this does not mean that I'm kicking religion out of my life. Oh unfortunate Raphael, in which language do I have to explain this again? Or do I have to force myself into having sex with men, while in my heart I'm having orgasms with a woman? Raphael, my pattern of thinking is still the same: there will never be anything in this world God has not created. Period!
(Herlinatiens 2003:64)

For Paria, same-sex relations are not sinful if they are based on love. However, she seems to adopt the view taken by many Muslims that a lesbian relationship is sinful, when she says: 'This is a sin. But I long for it. A God to whom I can express everything' (Herlinatiens 2003:142). The seeming contradiction Soe Tjen Marching refers to when asserting that at one point Paria describes her lesbian relationship as holy while at another she regards it as sinful (Marching 2008:22), can be explained by the gap between the official rejection of same-sex relations in Islam and the solution Paria herself has come up with, explaining lesbianism as a product of God's creation. Thus, the writer captures a well-known argument of the discourse about morality and same-sex relations in Islam (Boellstorff 2007a:154). This essentialist argument originates from debates in the nineteenth century, when biologists and physicians proposed the view that homosexuality must be innate since it has occurred at all times.¹⁰

⁹ Boellstorff observes that a similar perspective is taken by gay Indonesian Muslims (Boellstorff 2005:183).

¹⁰ See also Oetomo (2001:28).

Apart from arguing that she was born a lesbian, Paria takes a further step in justifying her relationship when discussing the issue of marriage. According to her, this is an important element in her life and a symbol of love uniting her and Rie before God. At this point she picks up on the fact that marriage is an important factor in the lives of Indonesian gay and lesbian women. This corresponds to Ismail Baba's observance for Malaysia that marriage remains the norm, and many homosexual people feel the need to get married to meet this social expectation (Baba 2001:146). The social pressure exerted by society, and particularly by the family, is another reason why marriage is a central to the life of Indonesians.¹¹ Since the majority of them cannot imagine not marrying, the observation that tomboys (masculine lesbians), rather than avoiding marriage with men altogether, prefer to marry men only to then divorce or separate to live with their femme partners, is convincing (Blackwood 1998; Boellstorff 2005).

However, all over the world one reads about homosexuals who have unofficially married¹² partners of the same sex. In Indonesia, the 'marriage' of two lesbian women, Jossie and Bonnie, on 19 April 1981, is a well-known example. This wedding, a public event attended by many guests and the respective families, even caused the terms *gay* and *lesbi* to find their way into the mass media (Boellstorff 2005:62). Herlinatiens refers to this marriage when she explains that many *lesbi* marry each other, just as did Jossie and Bonnie.¹³

In the context of her own marriage with Rie, Paria recounts that a priest has wed them in Paris in a church called Blaspheme, despite the fact that they are Muslims (Herlinatiens 2003:103). Although positive memories dominate this scene and Paris is described as a tolerant, 'typically Western' city associated with sexual liberation, a bitter taste yet remains, as is indicated by 'Blaspheme', the name of the church (Herlinatiens 2003:22). It is suggested that Paria's and Rie's wedding is in conflict with Islam, and that the church itself where the ceremony takes place is considered a site of blasphemy. The author indicates that although the same-sex marriage was tolerated in Paris, it will not be accepted in Indonesia because there it is seen as being in opposition to Islam.

The protagonist hopes that Rie still remembers the 'sacred' moment and the experiences closely connected with it that were uniting the two lovers, such as walking through Paris in the evening and buying sweets. The wedding

¹¹ Baba also describes this pressure in the Malaysian context; see Baba (2001:146 ff.).

¹² Only in some countries are official same-sex marriages allowed.

¹³ She does not explicitly mention their names but refers anonymously to the marriage of a lesbian couple—doubtlessly Jossie and Bonnie—in 1981.

in Paris is an event Paria often recalls to assure herself of Rie's love, to keep her picture alive, and to make herself forget her loneliness. As is indicated by the second possible reading of Paria's name, 'without a caste', there is probably another reason why she chose to marry Rie: the protagonist feels that without her partner she does not have any place of belonging. By marrying Rie, Paria expresses that she belongs to her.

Since Paria rejects heterosexual relationships for herself, she refuses the idea of marrying a man or even having children with one. She takes the view that 'normal' marriages often take place because the partners are looking for a legitimate way to satisfy their sexual needs, which in fact they already did before getting married. Thus, she associates heterosexual marriages with immorality and hypocrisy. However, there are several reasons why she considers marrying a man called Mahendra. First, she wants to escape the stigma of being an 'outcast'. Second, her confidence that Rie will return to her dwindles because she does not hear any news from her. Third, she thinks about marrying a man out of consideration for her father's feelings. Paria knows that her father, in contrast to her mother, is appreciative of her emotions, but at the same time she is aware that he is the only one in her family who supports her. When he suddenly falls ill, she does not want to burden him with her 'abnormal' lifestyle anymore. Paria not only explains her father's deep understanding for her situation with his experience in a *pesantren* where *mairil*¹⁴ was practised, but also—and foremost—with his deep love for her (Herlinatiens 2003:175). According to Paria it is her father's affection that makes him tolerate her being a lesbian, although he never wanted her to live in a same-sex relationship. Paria thus states that 'if in the end I enter into marriage, though a quasi-one, this is only for my father, for nobody else' (Herlinatiens 2003:262).

In contrast to her father, Paria's friends Gita and Raphael do not tolerate her lesbian relationship. Their negative reactions to lesbian love are not uncommon in Indonesian society. Raphael, for instance, reproaches Paria for choosing lesbianism accusing her of giving free rein to her sexual desire, and thus echoing the opinion that sexuality needs to be controlled (Philips and Khan 2003). This is reflected in the following quotation, where Paria tries to refute such accusations in the course of justifying herself:

¹⁴ *Mairil*, also called *sempetan*, is a certain type of homosexual activity practised by male students at the boarding schools. According to Achmad Zainul Hamdi, *mairil* occurs between senior and junior students and the *kyai* (heads of the schools) ignore it, although they know about the practice ['"Mairil" homosexuality in Islamic boarding schools', *The Jakarta Post.com*, 18 September 2004, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2004/09/18/039mairilo39-homosexuality-boarding-schools.html> (last accessed 9 February 2009)].

I do not engage in free sex, as you impute. I am married! Scoundrel! I have already married Rie Shiva Ashvagosha. And I have done it with love! I have had blessed sexual intercourse with Rie, I have reached sensuality because of love!
(Herlinatiens 2003:50)

However, Raphael's reproach of sexual immorality is closely connected with a second accusation: the imputation that Paria adheres to communist ideology. He considers Paria's supposed atheism a major sin and therefore sends her a book about the 'correct way' to properly intertwine sexuality and religion. Raphael accuses Paria of having become a communist, of having been led astray, having abandoned her belief in God, as becomes apparent from Paria's words of self-defence:

But I still believe in God, God is inside me, reminding me of and guiding me through life's trials. Isn't it wrong that you say I have been swallowed by abominable left doctrines? Isn't it wrong that you say I behave like an animal, having a same-sex relationship? Isn't it wrong that you call me a communist scoundrel?
(Herlinatiens 2003:49)

In the context of communism, the words 'behave like an animal' allude to a chapter of Indonesian history in which the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party) and the Gerwani (Indonesian Women's Movement) played an important role. This example demonstrates that Raphael raises a highly sensitive issue of Indonesian history to appeal to Paria's conscience, to make her aware that she has done wrong in choosing the path of atheism. By recalling the dangers of communism and linking it to lesbianism, which he associates with 'sexual perversion', Raphael points to the danger of losing one's faith. Raphael, who is a Christian priest, regards lesbianism as a threat to any faith.

Connecting lesbianism to communism is nothing unusual in Indonesia. Lesbianism, communism and feminism are often mentioned in the same breath since they are all in contrast to Islamic values (Marching 2008:9). As Saskia Wieringa (1999) highlights in her study on Gerwani—one of the largest women's organizations from the 1950s to the 1960s with ties to the PKI—, members of this organization became targets of a special campaign of sexual defamation launched by President Suharto in the aftermath of the massacre of 1965.¹⁵ In a newspaper article in *Duta Masyarakat* from 12 October 1965, for

¹⁵ This incident took place in the night of 30 September to 1 October 1965, when a group of officers staged a military coup. They believed they had evidence that a council of generals intended to overthrow Sukarno's regime on 5 October, and decided to foil that plot. They managed to obtain military support, and seven squads of soldiers set off, kidnapped the

instance, members of Gerwani were considered as displaying an 'immorality worse than animals' (quoted from Wieringa 2002:305). This campaign, as Wieringa notes, 'infiltrates the deepest psychic levels of Indonesian society, linking communism (and later liberal, critical thinking in general) to *fitnah*, the Islamic concept of sexual disorder' (Wieringa 2002:281). Members of Gerwani were not only accused of being responsible for the murder of the generals in Lubang Buaya but also of sexual perversion. Allegations that Gerwani members had engaged in licentious sex with each other and danced naked in front of the generals, torturing them with razors before murdering them, constituted an element in the government campaign that served to justify the detention and killing of these women (Wieringa 2002:301, 314).

Thus, the same-sex relations of Gerwani members have been used by the government to highlight the immorality and even unscrupulousness of lesbian women. To stigmatize *lesbi* this way also served the purpose of oppressing politically committed women who were close to the Indonesian communist party (Van Wichelen 2010:114). Sonja van Wichelen points out that after the fall of President Suharto women still have to fight against these stereotypes (Van Wichelen 2010:114). Since alleged communists are still being subjected to stigmatization in Indonesia, whereas the crimes committed against them have not yet been investigated, scholars feel encouraged to re-examine the Indonesian killings of 1965–1966 in the post-Suharto era.¹⁶ In the context of Gerwani, Annie Pohlmann has convincingly argued that, rather than legal instruments, testimonies of people who survived the events serve as a useful tool of coming to terms with the past (Pohlmann 2008:47).

The issue of Gerwani is also raised in Putri Kartini's novel *Suara perih seorang perempuan; Lesbian dan kawin bule* ('A pained woman's voice; Lesbian and marrying a white man'), a narrative fitting into Pohlmann's framework of 'testimonio' since it is based on women's personal accounts of experiences of violence. The following section analyses how in this novel the experiences of the protagonist¹⁷ have shaped the perception of society and her own subject position.

Generals, killed them, took their bodies to Lubang Buaya ('Crocodile Hole', a training field for Malaysian volunteers at Halim Air Force Base), and threw them into a deep well.

¹⁶ A recent example is the conference 'Indonesia and the world in 1965' that was held at the Goethe Institute Jakarta in March 2011. It brought together scholars such as John Roosa, Bernd Schafer, Jovan Cavoski, Natalia Soebagjo and Ragna Boden, who assessed the topic from different perspectives.

¹⁷ The novel describes her as a tomboy. There is a wide range of terms referring to masculine lesbian women, *tomboi* being the word used all over Indonesia. The use of other terms like *butchie*, *sentul*, and *cowok* is restricted to specific regions (Boellstorff 2005:9).

A Narrative of Violence, Religiosity, and Transgendered Subjectivity

Putri Kartini's novel *Suara perih seorang perempuan; Lesbian dan kawin bule*¹⁸ ('A pained woman's voice; Lesbian and marrying a white man'), launched by Galang Press in 2003 and reprinted by the same publisher in 2006, portrays a woman's struggle for subjectivity as a lesbian. The novel is an *Entwicklungsroman*, literally 'development novel', which highlights the psychological development of the protagonist Sania. Similar to Herlinatiens' narrative, the central character is an upper-class woman who adheres to Islam and moves in what Tom Boellstorff calls 'semi-private' spaces (Boellstorff 2005:145), such as cafés and bookshops. Sania is described as a successful business woman living in the East Javanese metropolis of Surabaya. She is in her early forties, and her enterprise, which employs about 20 workers, earns money by selling agricultural machines. In the novel she is mostly termed '*perempuan lesbi*', a lesbian woman. However, her appearance is referred to as being 'total *tomboy*' (Kartini 2003:67),¹⁹ and her character also reveals 'male features' such as an independent mind, smoking, and neglect of her appearance. This resonates with Blackwood's statement that tomboys identify as men, dress like men, and move freely in places where men usually meet (Blackwood 2005:867–868).

Sania begins several sexual affairs with women because of traumatic experiences she had as a child, which have left her with a negative picture of men. Prior to her trauma she dreamt of having a husband and children, and never thought of having relationships with women. She fears that men will not be willing to marry her anymore because she has had lesbian sexual affairs. Although her lesbian relationships are highlighted in the novel, the protagonist abandons her 'lesbian life' as soon as she overcomes her trauma and realizes that men still find her attractive. Finally, she even has the choice between two *laki-laki bule* (foreigners), one of them a former priest.

Interestingly, there is hardly any information about the author of the novel. At least it can be asserted that Putri Kartini has only written one novel so far. According to Webster, who briefly refers to this novel, its plot suggests that lesbianism is a 'political choice based on negative heterosexual relations, with heterosexual marriage to a *bule* (European) cast as a way to escape women's and lesbians' restrictive gender roles in Indonesia' (Webster 2004:7). It is at least partly based on the autobiographic experiences of several

¹⁸ In the following, I will use the abbreviated title, *Suara perih seorang perempuan*.

¹⁹ Indonesian spelling of 'tomboy'.

lesbian women with whom Putri Kartini was in contact for longer periods of time. In her acknowledgements the writer asserts that not only is the main character's trauma based on real incidents, including her life as a lesbian woman, but also the experiences of her friends. Excerpts of interviews Putri Kartini conducted with *lesbi* are added after the end of the story, in a section titled 'Confessions of lesbian women'. Because of the feeling of authenticity thus evoked, the publisher decided to release this novel. Another reason for publishing the book was the argument that suppressed female voices ought to be given a chance to speak out against injustice. The foreword explicitly states the wish of the publishing house to participate in women's liberation and empowerment as well as in a process of raising awareness (Kartini 2003: ix).

Looking at the framework of the narrative, the idea suggests itself that 'Putri Kartini'²⁰ is a pen name. *Puteri* and *Kartini* were women's magazines which in the 1980s published several articles on the topic of homosexuality, putting forward the idea that it is their environment that makes people homosexual, not their genes. One example is an article published in *Kartini* in 1984: 'A man and a woman can just become homosexual. Not because of their genes or because they are fated to it, but more because their environment makes them that way' (*Kartini* 1984:48, quoted in Blackwood 2010:83). However, the mass media still promoted this view in the early 2000s when violence, including mistreatment by a husband, was identified as a factor in explaining lesbianism (see Blackwood 2010:83).

An analysis of the novel *Suara perih seorang perempuan* reveals that it follows the same line of argument. Violence is a leitmotif of the novel because several female characters have experienced it, including Sania, the mother of one of her lovers, and Sania's girlfriend Selfi. Moreover, the text points out that there is a causal relationship between offensive acts men committed against the female characters in the past and their lesbianism. This is clearly illustrated when Sania narrates her memories of women involved in Gerwani. In a conversation with Baidah, a friend with whom she has once broken off contact because they disagreed over religious matters, she confides the memories of her violent past to someone else for the first time.

Before analysing the consequences of the trauma for Sania's subjectivity, it is worthwhile to examine the relationship between Baidah and Sania. It is through a process of struggle, reversal of roles, and reconciliation that

²⁰ To commemorate Raden Ajeng Kartini, an aristocratic Javanese woman born on 21 April 1879, who has become a symbol of feminism in Indonesia, sometimes beauty contests are held on or around Kartini Day (21 April) to select Putri Kartini (Miss Kartini).

their contrasting attitudes towards religion, love and the family change. Thus, the foundation for mutual understanding is laid. When Baidah is first mentioned in the novel, she is presented as a rich upper-class woman, a deeply devout friend of Sania's. Recalling their first meeting, Sania thinks of how impressed she was with the good manners and religiosity of Baidah's two little sons, Ichbal and Irza. She remembers how jealous she was of the relationship between Baidah and her husband Agus because she herself would have liked to have such a patient and calm partner. She envied their seemingly harmonious family life and their deep rootedness in Islamic faith. The narrator points out that in contrast to Baidah, who has advised her in various religious matters, Sania tended to question her own belief (Kartini 2003:74).

After an extended period of separation, during which the two women have not seen each other, contact is re-established through Baidah's son Irza, who is undergoing treatment in a rehabilitation centre for his drug problems. In the course of their meeting, the former roles of pupil and teacher are reversed, as it turns out that Sania already knows about Irza's problems because she has visited him and cared for him during his stay in hospital. This is in contrast to his mother, who has been on the *haji* numerous times but does not support her son when he needs her. As a consequence, the boy feels like an outcast; his family members do not show any compassion towards him. Thus, Baidah's lack of sincerity in faith is ironically exposed in this meeting. While at the beginning she criticizes Sania for not displaying any religious symbols in her house which show what religion she adheres to (Kartini 2003:79), she is later on confronted with Sania's accusation that she neglects her children, particularly Irza, and pays too much attention to worldly goods. Despite the fact that Baidah has formerly given Sania religious advice, it becomes clear that the latter, who does not pray five times a day and has never been on the *haji*, is closer to God. On the one hand Baidah condemns Sania for being a lesbian and thus violating Islamic rules. She feels justified on these grounds to insult Sania, calling her '*sapi betina kesepian*', a 'lonely heifer'. Such abuses are nothing exceptional for Sania, as can be deduced from the text. Rather, due to her being lesbian she is frequently confronted with incomprehension and insult which further isolates her, a problem she is particularly aware of ten years after her coming-out:

This is the tenth year that Sania bears the title 'Lesbian Woman'. A woman regarded by society as a disgusting, yet ridiculous human being. In fact, for almost everyone hearing it she is considered haram [...]. They see me as a dirty woman, as garbage, a sinner, who is usually being cut off from attention and social intercourse. (Kartini 2003:6)

However, the hypocrisy within society is highlighted in the novel as well, particularly by the example of Baidah. Her understanding of Islam is criticized, too, as she simply displays Islamic practices and symbols to give the appearance of being deeply devout. The argument is that neither she nor other people have the right to abuse Sania, especially since they do not act as role models themselves.

The misappropriation of religious symbols, specifically the veil, is a relevant theme in other contemporary narratives about Islam in Indonesia as well. Depending on the respective function of the veil and the intention of its wearer, it can serve different purposes. Two contrasting aspects in this regard are the veil as an indicator of personal piety on the one hand and as an ornament with even seductive character on the other hand. The first aspect is accentuated in the popular *dakwah* literature, particularly promoted by Forum Lingkar Pena since the collapse of the New Order.²¹ The above mentioned contested views of the veil become very apparent when looking at the reception of 'face-veil novels', narratives featuring women with face veils on their covers and fully veiled female protagonists as central characters (Amrullah 2011:55). The orthodox face-veil community criticizes narratives such as *Ayat-ayat cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy, arguing that these novels are a marketing product, a 'virus' distorting their true faith. Merely exploiting religious symbols, thus the argument, cannot be seen as proof of religious merit (Amrullah 2011:76).

Similarly, Sania reproaches Baidah for feigning piety, although she is evidently no orthodox Muslim herself. The narrator presents Sania's silent relationship to God as a suitable counter model. She tries to get closer to God in her reclusive home, asking Him to show her ways of reconciling her lesbian love with the demands of society:

What else [...] can I do apart from thanking You, loving fellow men, helping those who need it and not doing anything that is harmful for other people? What else do I have to do? And is my choice as a lesbian woman HARMFUL FOR OTHER PEOPLE?²² God ... only from You do I seek guidance, Only from You, and not from them, who are resourceful in giving all answers to my questions so that I only feel more humbled in their presence. Moreover, I am incapable of doing anything except feeling sinful. (Kartini 2003:98)

This quotation captures some of the points raised in Oetomo's study on homosexuality. The first sentences of the quotation above resonate with Oetomo's rhetorical question of whether homosexuality, as long as it is used

²¹ For a discussion of some narratives produced in this forum, see Arnez (2009).

²² Capitalization in the original.

to foster love and benevolence towards fellow human beings, is not the gist of religion (Oetomo 2001:78). Moreover, his argument that religion ought to serve people and help to stabilize their lives (Oetomo 2001:78) is reflected in Sania's belief that her religiosity and guidance by God can assist her to cope with her hostile environment. God gives her security in a male-dominated world that rejects her and causes her to feel sinful. Her relationship with God is described as something private. She figures that she can only entrust herself to Him:

It was so confusing for Sania to understand herself. It was not easy to guess who she actually was. Although she is insulted and humiliated by society, she still does not complain because she feels she has a more appropriate place to complain about all her sorrows. *She owns God.*

(Kartini 2003:97, emphasis in the original)

Apart from Sania's closeness to God, it is the reconciliation with Baidah that helps her to restore her inner equilibrium. This time, the impetus comes from Baidah, who apologizes for having repulsed Sania. Her problems with her own son, and the fact that Sania has taken over her role as a mother, make Baidah aware of her own shortcomings and lead to a change in her attitude towards Sania. As a result, she decides to no longer reject Sania because of her lesbian subject position but to try to listen to her narrative explaining this change. Finally, encouraged by Baidah, Sania recounts her experiences of the aftermath of the massacre of 1965, where women who were supposed to be members of Gerwani were condemned as infidels and murdered, often by Muslims. She remembers the mother of her friend Rawit being killed because she was accused of belonging to Gerwani. At that time Sania was six years old and still living in Madiun; one evening, she heard a woman crying for help and a man's voice calling her a member of Gerwani, a prostitute and an infidel, and commanding her to move on and to shut up (Kartini 2003:115). Subsequently, it turns out that this woman was Rawit's mother. A few weeks later, Sania overhears a conversation among a group of men. One of them boasts about having killed Rawit's mother:

Here [...] next to the grave of the heroes that they decorated with a basket full of flowers, we have buried a very sharp-tongued Gerwani. We could not wait to have it done because her mouth could not stay shut and she continued to struggle, even to offer resistance. We were forced to strip her of her clothes and I cut off half of her breast before I finally cut her throat [...]. (Kartini 2003:119)

The brutal behaviour of these men clearly traumatized Sania. But then she even became a victim of sexual abuse herself. In her youth, a group of men raped her because she was so careless as to enter their car. It can be argued that this transgression of humanity led to Sania's transgression of

homosexuality. In fact, Sania chooses lesbianism as a strategy to cope with her traumatic experiences, as a way to escape from men's oppression and violence against women. Before taking this deliberate step, however, she experiences sexual attraction to a young woman called Santy when researching the situation of women in villages of Sumba in eastern Indonesia. As Sania accompanies Santy on her project study on wet rice irrigation, she suffers circulatory problems. Recovering through Santy's soft touch and careful treatment makes her realize for the first time that she is sexually attracted to a woman. This experience draws on the real person of Ani, included in the section 'Confessions of lesbian women', who describes that at the same time when she was no longer attracted to men, she started to enjoy the kindness and gentle heart of women as well as their ability to anticipate needs (Kartini 2003:342). This experience is crucial for both Ani and Sania, as it helps them to repress their memories of men's savage behaviour towards them. While we do not receive much further information on Ani's conduct, Sania begins to exhibit male-connoted manners, such as a rejection of overly emotional behaviour in women, for example when she reproaches Santy for weeping as they have to part. For Sania, weeping is a clear sign of women's weakness that may easily be exploited by men to highlight female shortcomings. From then on Sania's subjectivity is increasingly marked by a rejection of characteristics generally associated with femininity, such as an inclination to cry.

In her relationship with Selfi this motive is repeated, when Sania reprimands her partner for this 'flawed behaviour', arguing that it counteracts their common struggle against the word 'weakness' being used for women in society (Kartini 2003:60, 61). In addition to rejecting weeping, Sania chooses silence as another way to suppress her feelings. For two of her lesbian partners, Selfi and Yuri, this characteristic is one reason why their relationships fail. Selfi demands that her partner show more sympathy for her situation, including the fact that she does not want to abandon her beloved mother, but Sania does not live up to that expectation. However, the subsequent quotation reveals that Selfi has only consented to a partnership with a woman because she sees the path to a marriage with a man blocked due to her own past:

Have you never understood and questioned who I really am, and also who my parents are and where they are? Have you ever, Sania? Do you think that with your muteness you will be able to explain everything? I hate and loathe your speechlessness that has almost killed me. Don't you think that I cannot look for a man to accompany my life! Don't! I have sacrificed my private concerns for my mother who has been mistreated by my father. My father, who gave me a bad example so that I no longer wish to have a husband. (Kartini 2003:58)

Selfi reproaches Sania for not showing understanding for her situation, although she, much like her lesbian partner, has experienced violence in her family. Selfi's negative perception of men, similar to Sania's, is rooted in her past. It is especially related to patriarchal society and violence committed by her father on Selfi's mother when she did not 'show any respect to him'. The narrator emphasizes that Selfi is afraid of her father and views him as terrifying because of his authoritarian nature and his propensity for violence. Interestingly, although Selfi's mother is portrayed as an obedient wife, she does not comply with her husband's wish to take a second wife, as she knows that his wish for another child is only a pretext; in reality, he merely wants to marry a woman much younger than herself. Both this courage and her decision to leave her husband considerably enhance Selfi's respect for her mother, whom she calls a 'lonely hero' (Kartini 2003:57). This statement shows that Selfi thinks her mother has taken the right path and made an important step towards emancipation. On the other hand, Selfi also believes that her mother cannot bear her loneliness and that it is her duty as a daughter to console her and to stay by her side. However, one might also argue that Selfi, when returning to her mother after her failed relationship with Sania, in truth wants her mother to 'take care of her' because Sania has been unwilling to play that role. Sania, in contrast to Paria in *Garis tepi seorang lesbian*, rejects marriage with her lover, thus destroying the latter's dream. Selfi urges Sania to marry her because she wants somebody to be responsible for her and to protect her in the same way a man would (Kartini 2003:52). Thus, although explicitly rejecting the patriarchal role model, Selfi falls into the trap of reaffirming it.

Sania, however, refuses Selfi's wish for various reasons. She fears that she will become the target of slanderous gossip, rejects the clear division of gender roles that Selfi demands from her, and objects to such a marriage because it would be illegal. Above all, Sania refuses to copy the heterosexual role model. She denies the traditional division of roles and labour between men and women and rejects the strict normative model of masculinity and femininity Blackwood has observed for tomboys and their girlfriends (Blackwood 2005:868). Rather, she holds the view that instead of reaffirming established role models, she and Selfi should look for alternative ways of living together, and should make an effort to turn their own plans into reality. In a dramatic scene she undresses herself to prove her 'femininity', making her partner aware of the fact that both of them share the same female physical attributes:

I have breasts and I also have a vagina, just as you, Selfi. Now look into my eyes and read! What do my eyes tell you? Okay, if you cannot read, fine! I will tell it to you. I only have a vagina! And I don't have a penis, you

know! That means I'm a woman! [...] I cannot marry you because both of us are women! Clear? (Kartini 2003:60)

Technically speaking, the divergent opinions on the issue of marriage are the main reason why the relationship between the two lovers falters. But with regard to Sania's behaviour, it is her coarseness and her silence that drive Selfi away, a male characteristic ascribed to tomboys, as is pointed out by Blackwood when she states that in everyday practice, men are seen as brave, women as timid; men as coarse, women as polite (Blackwood 2005:868).

Although Sania has a sexual affair with another woman called Santy after Selfi has left her, she gradually feels her attraction to men growing stronger. The narrator describes how Sania becomes more and more 'feminine', smoking less and choosing her clothes more carefully than before. A trigger for this change is her accidental encounter with a stray child. Even though this child never received an education, it reminds her of social conventions, specifically that it is uncommon for women to smoke. This encounter leaves an impression on her because it reveals her own 'weirdness', her reluctance to meet social expectations with regard to women's roles. Later on, her increasing femininity is associated with her rediscovery of her sexual attraction to men. A kiss from Mark, a former friend of hers whom she meets in Bangkok, makes her feel 'genuinely feminine' again. This is also the cathartic moment when she is able to show her emotions again, symbolized by her positive reinterpretation of crying and her regained ability to weep. Thus, the soft embrace of a white man makes her abandon her lesbian subject position.

However, it seems that in the end she will accept the love of Alexander, a white man of 40 years who has an Italian father and a British mother, both of whom were orthodox Catholics and urged their son to become a priest. But although he had already spent ten years on his studies of theology, he finally decided against life as a priest because he realized that he attached higher value to having a wife and family.

At the end of the novel, after Alex has proposed to her in a letter, it is suggested that Sania considers marrying him in spite of her past traumatic experiences with men. It is insinuated that she would prefer Alex over other men because he has learned to be patient and understanding in the course of his long education; thus, she neither needs to fear that he will become aggressive towards her, nor that he will blame her for her lesbian past. According to the domestic helper Tuti, Alex and Sania even share a similar characteristic in not having produced offspring due to their respective subject positions. This contradicts the tendency in religions to see offspring as an

important factor for a healthy relationship. Thus, ironically, a parallel is drawn between priests and lesbians.

Before having met Alex, Sania has already toyed with the idea of marrying some (former) priest, associating these religious men with calmness. This quality is important to her as she believes that it promises her a life without aggression and intolerance:

[...] if He allows it, I want to have a religious figure by my side who is strong in his belief. [...] Baidah, I want to have a good husband who is able to accompany me and take me as I am. I want to marry a priest. (Kartini 2003:147–148)

Alex even offers Sania to convert to her faith, Islam, but at the end of the novel she advises him not to reach any final decision unless they have debated the matter.

Conclusion

The two novels analysed strongly differ as far as the narratives of the transgendered subjectivities of the *lesbi* protagonists are concerned. *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* tells the story of a lesbian woman who does everything in her power to be reunited with her lover, whereas *Suara perih seroang perempuan* explains why the protagonist's lesbian relationships must fail. With regard to the narrative techniques, Paria's lesbian love only takes place in her memory and is thus less 'real' than in *Suara perih seroang perempuan*, where authenticity is a significant characteristic.

One reason accounting for the differences is that differing explanatory models are used to account for the causes of lesbian love. *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* postulates that homosexuality is innate, thus taking an essentialist position. At times, the protagonist feels sinful and is inwardly torn when being confronted with societal refusal of her same-sex love. However, at the same time she defends her view that lesbian love is natural. In contrast, *Suara perih seorang perempuan* proposes the view that lesbian love is socially constructed, a consequence of external influences. Taking the protagonist as a model, the narrative demonstrates that her subject position changes in the course of her personal experiences with violence. *Suara perih seorang perempuan* argues that the boundary from heterosexuality to homosexuality is only crossed as a consequence of boundary violations that occurred before. It puts forward the thesis that to become a tomboy is a strategy to cope with experiences of violence. The victim, thus the argument, can only 'return' to heterosexuality when the trauma is overcome. As long as the central character still plays a tomboy role, she cannot break the cycle of suppressed feelings.

Both central characters are Muslims, but they differ when it comes to practising their religion. While Paria is described as a *santri*, it becomes clear that Sania does not observe the five pillars of Islam in everyday life. As to her relation with Islam, she is portrayed as practising a non-orthodox Islam and praying in private, silent spaces, aspects that Blackwood has observed to be typical of tomboys (Blackwood 2010:15). In the discourse on the relevance of personal piety as opposed to the increasing use of religious symbols in everyday life, Sania sides with the former position and criticizes empty religious symbols and religious practices. She disassociates herself from Islamists, who argue for the necessity of religious symbols such as the face veil to underline one's piety, but also criticizes the use of religion as a consumer good.²³

The intense relation to the divine serves both protagonists to strengthen their own subject positions. In *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* this close relation to God is personified by Paria's love to her girlfriend, which seemingly merges God and Rie. Here the argument is brought forward that any kind of love should be accepted in religion. Thus, the text argues, homosexuality should not be conceived of as a sin. In *Suara perih seorang perempuan* the relationship to God is not linked to the love to a girlfriend but stands on its own. The narrative emphasizes that through the dialogue with God, Sania is able to cope with the rejection she must face as a consequence of her being a lesbian. Being rejected by close friends and family members is the most painful experience for both female characters, causing them to query the legitimacy of their lesbian subject position.

As far as the stance of the novels towards state and society is concerned, it can be argued that, on the whole, they neither share the gender order, nor do they accept the official historiography of the New Order. Both novels can be seen as narrative critiques of the New Order, and they also have in common that the persecution of Gerwani members is an important issue. In *Garis tepi seorang lesbian*, however, criticism is confined to the stigmatization of lesbians as communists ready to use violence, thus referring to a widespread narrative about unscrupulous Gerwani women during the New Order. By way of contrast, the second narrative takes personal experiences as a basis to illustrate the cruel acts committed against Gerwani members. Nevertheless, *Suara perih seorang perempuan* also reaffirms elements of the gender order established in the New Order. With regard to women's *kodrat*, their natural role as wives and mothers, Sania takes the position that 'war' should be waged

²³ For a discussion of this topic see, for instance, Van Wichelen (2010).

against traditional gender roles and cultural elements (Kartini 2003:46). Although at first reading this could be interpreted as an indicator that Sania rejects the prevailing ideology regarding women during the New Order, at second glance this assumption needs to be qualified. Her choice to take a tomboy subject position marked by a male-connoted demeanour confirms the binary gender order of 'hard and assertive tomboys' and their 'soft-hearted, kind' girlfriends. Furthermore, her final decision to date men again reaffirms the norm of heterosexuality. In contrast, Paria in *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* stays true to her lesbian sexuality, and through a dialogue with God learns to accept her lesbian subject position.

The different stances taken on the prevailing gender order and historiography of the New Order in the two narratives can be explained with the differing aspirations of the texts. *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* shows feminist traits and argues for the possibility of reconciliation between lesbian love, religion and society through personal struggle; though this often involves constraints. It focuses on the obstacles the subject needs to overcome to defend her lesbian love, whereas *Suara perih seroang perempuan* narrates lesbian love as an aberration caused by violence, with an eventual return to heterosexuality.

The question of how transgendered subject positions are being negotiated in recently published narratives about lesbian love remains unanswered at this stage and is an interesting topic for further research.

ISLAM, MARRIAGE AND
GENDER RELATIONS IN BUGIS *LONTARA*:
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE *LONTARA*' *DARAMATASIA*

Nurul Ilmi Idrus

Introduction

Lontara'—traditional Bugis' manuscripts—were being written long before Islam was introduced in South Sulawesi. This is illustrated by the *Lontara*' *Purukani*,² which describes the coming of a new religion called Islam (B. *assellengeng*).³ Although *lontara*' have been the subject of interest not only among Bugis scholars, but also among scholars from foreign countries, little, if any, attention has been paid to gender relations portrayed in *lontara*'.⁴ This contribution focuses on this topic and discusses one version of a twentieth-century *lontara*', the *Lontara*' *Daramatasia*,⁵ in terms of gender relations in marriage. The version deals with the dynamics of the relationship between husband and wife and offers marital guidance.

This gender-related *lontara*' shows heavy Arab influence, as is reflected in the names used in the manuscript.⁶ The central theme of the *Lontara*'

¹ The native inhabitants of South Sulawesi (Indonesia) are made up of four ethnic groups: Bugis, Makassar, Toraja, and Mandar, with the Bugis accounting for over 40 % of the population.

² *Lontara*' *Purukani*, Roll 41, No. 9, Arsip Nasional Wilayah Makassar.

³ In this contribution, terms in languages other than English are rendered in italics. The abbreviation 'B.' will be used to refer to the Bugis language, 'I.' to Indonesian, and 'A.' to Arabic.

⁴ See, for example, Nurmaningsih (2003), who generally discusses gender relations, based on the voluminous *Galigo* epic without picking up any specific aspect of the manuscript. Hadrawi (2009) examines Bugis manners of sexual intercourse based on a collection of 44 texts of *lontara*' *assikalaibin'eng*. In addition, most of the work on the text of *Daramatasia* does not go beyond a transliteration of the manuscript (see Djamaris 1983; M.D. Nor 1989; St. Djauhariah 1999). Another important work (Sabriah 2001) deals with the Mandar version of *Daramatasia*, and generally discusses the structure and cultural value of the text.

⁵ *Lontara*' *Daramatasia*, Roll 17/No. 17, twentieth century, Arsip Nasional Wilayah Makassar. Another twentieth-century Bugis version of *Daramatasia* is in Roll 36/No. 19. The latter version is preceded by a narrative relating to the Qur'anic studies undertaken by Daramatasia before she gets married to Sa'éhé' Bil-ma'rupi. However, the ending of the story is incomplete, some part of the conversation between Daramatasia and her prospective husband (Ahemadé) being unfinished.

⁶ In her article on women and Islam in Malay fiction of the 1920s, Hooker (1994) discusses

Daramatasia is the relationship between a virtuous wife, Daramatasia, and her husband, Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi (also spelled Syeh Bil-ma'rufi). The text portrays Daramatasia's loyalty to her husband, her love for him, and her remarriage after his death. This contribution analyses the significance of the message of this *lontara'* for the everyday life of the Bugis in general and Bugis marriage in particular, based on both a Bugis version of the *Lontara' Daramatasia* and my ethnographic fieldwork in South Sulawesi. I argue that any discussion of the dissemination of Islam by the Bugis requires a prior understanding of the Bugis combination of Muslim and indigenous ideas, as this is what was spread in Indonesia and Malaysia, and the use of *lontara'* was important in that process. Although the influence of Islam is significant in the *lontara'* under discussion here, much of its content is not consistent with the teachings of Islam, and it is thus possible that the reference to Allah (B. Allataala) and the Prophet (B. Nabitta) in the manuscript merely serves the purpose of legitimizing the message of this *lontara'*.

*Bugis Marital Life (Assikalaibinéngeng)*⁷
in the *Lontara' Daramatasia*

The *Lontara' Daramatasia* deals with the dynamics of the relationship between husband and wife and offers marital guidance. The text begins with an illustration of the happy family life of Daramatasia and Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi, who had a daughter, Cindara Dewi.⁸ Then the narrative states that God planned to test Daramatasia's husband (B. *riuji ri* Allataala). For that purpose, according to the text, God caused sin to enter Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi's body, who subsequently was under the spell of evil whenever his wife cut her hair without his consent. One evening when he was eating, the oil lamp was just about to go out. When Daramatasia attempted to look for a lamp wick, she recalled a saying of our Prophet Muhammad (B. *adanna* Nabitta): 'Any woman who leaves her husband when he is eating is considered a rebellious

the undertones of Islam in the love stories of *Hikayat Faridah Hanom* and *Hikayat Percintaan Kasih Kemudaan*.

⁷ The Bugis term for marriage—*sikalaibiné*—combines the nouns *lai* (man) and *bainé* (woman), and thus carries the connotation of the combination of the husband and wife to form a conjugal pair, indicating a social relationship between the couple. Thus, *assikalaibinéngeng* is derived from the word *sikalaibiné* with the prefix 'a' and the suffix 'eng', and means 'marital life'.

⁸ The name of their daughter is mentioned in two slightly different spellings. At the beginning it is Cindara Dewi, another time, Indara Dewi. I will use the spelling 'Cindara Dewi' for the sake of consistency.

wife—[rebellious] both towards Allah's command and her husband'.⁹ The message of the Prophet Muhammad, according to this *lontara*', illustrates that the rebelliousness of the wife is not just related to her husband, but also to Allah. If Daramatasia becomes a disobedient wife, she is thus not just being rebellious towards her husband, but also towards Allah. In practice, when the husband is eating, the wife should be at his side. Leaving her husband while he is eating is tabooed by the elders (*B. nappémmaliangngi tomatoaé*) among the Bugis, not just because it shows the wife's indifference and impoliteness, as she usually 'serves' her husband during meals, putting the food onto his plate, pouring his beverage into his glass, and so on. In addition, this is the time for the members of the family to have open discussions.

To keep the lamp from going out, to avoid both walking out on her husband¹⁰ while he was eating and leaving her daughter (who was sleeping in her lap) lest the girl cried, she cut seven strands of her hair to use as a lamp wick.¹¹ Knowing that Daramatasia had cut her hair without his consent, her husband was severely angry¹² because she usually first asked his permission before doing anything. Hence, he cast her out and told her to return to her parents. He ignored her apology and even hit her with a rattan cane until she fainted when she asked permission to stay to take care of their daughter,¹³ promising to cook and do her husband's laundry¹⁴ if she was only allowed to stay with them (see Hooker 1997:77–78). When she regained consciousness, her husband beat her again, and she was once more told to return to her mother.¹⁵ She finally left for her parents' home, but only after having asked permission from her husband.¹⁶ By doing this, she showed her respect for him despite his violent behaviour, as in Islam a wife is not allowed to leave the house without her husband's permission; moreover, he still might change his mind. But he did not, and Daramatasia left.

However, when she got to her parents' house, they turned her away, as they realized that her arrival in the middle of the night unaccompanied by

⁹ *Nigi-nigi makkunrai moloi manré lakkainna nakkeddé' mpélaivi dorakai ri Allataala nénnia risurona, namadorakatoi ri lakkainna (Lontara' Daramatasia:7)*. In the following, all original quotations of phrases and sentences from the *Lontara' Daramatasia* in Bugis will be given in footnotes for the sake of text fluidity.

¹⁰ *Mpéla lakkainna.*

¹¹ *Kurette' pitu lampa' kuala sunggu ri pajjennangengngé.*

¹² *Temmaka cai'na.*

¹³ *Tarona' monro ri bolata' taranakakki' ana'ta'.*

¹⁴ *Kiala arégga pannasu-nasu mutarekki' dapuretta'.*

¹⁵ *Lao méménno ria' riindo'mu.*

¹⁶ *Nalao suju' ri olona lakkainna.*

her husband meant there was something wrong between the couple.¹⁷ Her parents were reluctant to receive Daramatasia lest they accept a 'rebellious wife'.¹⁸ Furthermore, Daramatasia's mother was afraid of being sinful to God¹⁹ if she let Daramatasia into the house.

Finally, Daramatasia left without having a place to go, but whenever she needed something, she prayed to God (B. *Allataala*), and her request was immediately granted. When she wanted to pray, she could not find any water for her ritual ablution before prayers (A. *wudhu*), and she also needed clean clothes to wear for praying. God commanded Jibril (the archangel Gabriel) to prepare a blouse (B. *waju*) and a sarong (B. *lipa'*), and to provide her with a golden pool full of water from heaven.²⁰ After her afternoon prayer (B. *sempajang Assara'*), Jibril told Daramatasia that God wanted her to pray two *rakaat* (Arabic term for an essential unit of prayer ritual), wash her face with water brought by Jibril from heaven, and return to her husband.²¹ Daramatasia's face became luminous (B. *maccéia*) and younger (B. *malolo tangngaremma*). Before she departed, Jibril told her that both her husband and her daughter had suffered since she had left.²² When she came home, Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi apologized²³ for what he had done to her. Three days later, he died.²⁴

There are a number of messages in this *lontara'*, but its main message is that the wife should be obedient to her husband. For example, Daramatasia is given various things from heaven by God through His angel, Jibril, during her journey, as rewards for being an obedient wife. Before she is asked to return to her husband, she is beautified, which reflects the importance of the wife's beauty to her husband. But what about the latter's violent behaviour? One may say that according to this text, the husband is entitled to be violent toward his wife, as becomes apparent, for example, from the fact that Daramatasia's mother approves of her son-in-law's behaviour. Analogously, Daramatasia accepts her husband's anger as being 'her fault,' even though she has acted for the sake of her husband and daughter. In Bugis society, it is acceptable for the husband to 'warn' his wife when she neglects her domestic

¹⁷ *Dé'kumaélo' timparekko tange' nasaba' dé'muengka nawattu ri tangga bennié, majeppu' magellikotu lakkaimmu namuengka lettu' ri tangga' bennié.*

¹⁸ *Téa sisengnga' mitai makkunrai doraka ri lakkainna.*

¹⁹ *Mitau'ka' ri Allataala nennia ri surona.*

²⁰ *Kollang pulaweng pole ri Surugaé.*

²¹ *Réwe' ri lakkaimmu.*

²² *Maseroto anrasa-rasana ri munrimmu.*

²³ *Pakarajangnga' addampeng andi'.*

²⁴ *Naréwe' ri pammaséna Allataala.*

tasks. It is also common for the wife to ask her husband for permission to cut her hair. But I never encountered any case where a wife was cast out by her husband because she cut her hair without his permission. The text demonstrates the importance of the husband's consent for the wife before she engages in any activity.

When Daramatasia had returned home, and after Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi had listened to the story of her journey, he became aware of (B. *talinge'*) his guilt and asked Daramatasia for forgiveness for his 'wrongdoing'. But Daramatasia replied:

My excellency Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi, God forgives you, and it is His command [for a wife to be obedient], and Muhammad is Allah's messenger to lead you to well-being.²⁵

Daramatasia accepts her husband's violent behaviour because it is Allah's command that she must be obedient. Otherwise she would be being sinful towards her husband, and this is understood as akin to a sin against God.²⁶ On this account, the husband is identified with God. The importance of a wife's obedience is reflected in the following statement made by Daramatasia at the end of the text:

My fellow females, dedicate yourselves to your husbands. According to the Prophet S.A.W.,²⁷ a wife is under her husband's command. The Prophet S.A.W. also states there are no deeds better than a wife's obedience to her husband's command.²⁸

This statement emphasizes that not only is the husband entitled to the obedience of his wife, but the wife herself supports this idea as well. Despite Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi's apology, this *lontara'* reflects the male-dominated orientation of the text, and in some places suggests that violence against one's wife is a legitimate measure. This message is related to a 'textual interpretation' of a verse in the Qur'an (sura 4:34) that emphasizes obedience of the wife to her husband. That verse, in turn, is supported by a 'textual interpretation' of some *hadith*, according to which a wife has to obey her husband and must not

²⁵ *O Puwakku Saéhe' Bil-Ma'rupi, Allataala maddampengekki' sibawa ri surona naia ritu Muhammade' tau maseré nennia assalamakeng (Lontara' Daramatasia:36).*

²⁶ *Dorakai ri Allataala nennia ri surona.*

²⁷ S.a.w. stands for *sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam*, meaning 'peace be upon him,' a phrase pronounced or written after mention of the name of the Prophet Muhammad.

²⁸ *[O] pada-padaku makkunrai, patuju laloi kasuwiyammu ri lakkaimmu. Ri makkedanna Nabi s.a.w. naia makkunraie ilaleng paréntanai lakkainna. Makkeda toi Nabitta s.a.w., dé'amala' masero lebbi' nennia masero décéng napogau' makkunraie engkaé lakkainna sangngadinna tomaningénggi passurona lakkainna napoélo'é (Lontara' Daramatasia:48).*

reject his demand for sexual intercourse, which stresses women's subordination in marital life.²⁹ In fact, the Qur'anic verse explains that 'the good wife is obedient and harmonious in her husband's presence, in his absence guards his reputation and property and her own virtue, as ordained by Allah.' In case of marital conflict, there are four steps to be followed by both husband and wife, measures which are often recommended by religious leaders (*I. ulama*) in their sermons, and have to be taken in the following order: first, verbal advice or admonition may be sufficient; if not, sexual relations may be suspended; if this is not effective either, some slight 'physical correction' may be applied. While the latter is permissible, it is not advisable, and all authorities unanimously disapprove of any sort of cruelty, including even persistent nagging. If all these measures fail, it is recommended to summon a family council.³⁰

In Bugis marital life (*B. assikalaibinéngeng*), violence against wives is acceptable, but only for certain reasons, for example, if a wife behaves in a manner that brings *siri'* (shame)³¹ upon her family, or by committing adultery with another man. In the past, not only was the unfaithful wife was killed, but also the man she had an affair with. In such cases, the killing was culturally acceptable and not considered a crime. Indeed, in instances like these the husbands are acting as *to masiri'* (the Bugis term for persons who are being shamed and who are responsible for defending their family's *siri'*). Even though killing because of *siri'* is still culturally acceptable today, it now has to be brought to court. From the Bugis point of view, an adulterous wife is more shameful than a husband who goes astray, and it is very easy to divorce a woman who is deemed unfaithful. In such cases the divorce is hastened, and soon after divorce is granted the husband marries another woman.

In addition, the manuscript also provides marital guidance to the wife based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad, among others:

[I]f a wife cooks her husband's meal, she will be kept away from hell [...]; for washing her husband's clothes she will be recompensed with cleansing herself

²⁹ See Istiadah (1995:6–7) for a discussion of neo-modernist interpretations of the Qur'an and *hadith*.

³⁰ For a discussion of marital violence in Bugis society, see Idrus (2001, 2003: Chapter VI); Idrus and Bennett (2003).

³¹ Among the Bugis, the notion of *siri'* is derived from *sumange'* (B. energy of life). This notion is not only reflected in Bugis behaviour, but also in the Bugis social system and way of thinking. The word has a double meaning. On one the one hand, *siri'* means 'honour' (positive *siri'*); on the other hand, it can also denote 'shame' (negative *siri'*). For a discussion of *siri'* see, for example, Idrus (2005); Abdullah (1985); Said (1984).

of sin as clean as the clothes [...]; for praying for her husband's goodness the door of heaven will be opened for her.³²

All a wife's deeds for the sake of her husband will be rewarded in heaven with something beneficial because, according to this text, Allah requires the wife to work for her husband.³³

Within the context of the ideas outlined above, the 'cooking duties' of the wife (B. *mannasuangngi lakkainna*) not only pertain to providing meals for her husband, but also providing meals for the children and other members of the family who live in the same house. But when the husband is not present at lunch or dinner, his meal portion will be put aside before others enjoy the food cooked by the *to ri bola* (B. wife). In addition, I frequently heard a joking remark amongst young married women in the village when they were washing clothes near the well: 'The more you wash, the more good works you have' (B. *Mangking maéga musessa', mangking maéga amala'mu'*). The women would joke that way to entertain themselves when men were not around; they viewed doing the laundry as a good deed rather than a burden. Women also pray for their husbands (B. *tuling méllauangngi décéng lakkainna'*). More precisely, they usually will pray for their husbands' health, safety, and fortune, implying that without these qualities the husbands would not be able to 'surround the kitchen seven times' (B. *mattuliling dapureng wékka pétu'*). The kitchen symbolizes household affairs, and 'seven times' stands for the days in a week. A similar phrase is found in Indonesia: 'able to keep the hearth burning' (I. *mampu mengepulkan asap dapur*). Both sayings carry the sense that the prospective husband is able to feed the members of the family every day, imposing on him the financial responsibility to be a good provider for his family.

In addition to the rewards awaiting a good wife, the *Lontara'* *Daramatasia* also names the punishment for a wife's bad behaviour towards her husband, based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad, among others:

[I]f a wife always has bad thoughts about her husband, she will forever cry in hell [...]; if she is always angry with her husband, she will be thrown to hell by an angel [...]; if she lies to her husband, or does something without her

³² '[N]igi-nigi makkunrai mannasuangngi lakkainna inanré ri pabélaiangngi ri Allataala apinna ranaka [...] sessakengngi pakéanna lakkainna ri addampengangngi ri Allataala dosana padatoha paccinna pakéanna lakkainna nasessa'é [...] tuling méllauangngi décéng lakkainna ri esso ri wenni ri timpakengngi babanna surugaé' (*Lontara' Daramatasia*:50–53). For complete and original texts of the *Lontara' Daramatasia* pertaining to 'good behaviour' of the wife towards her husband, see Appendix 1.

³³ *Naékia naélorekko Allataala makkarésoangngi lakkaimmu.*

husband's consent, she will be beaten in hell similar to the way forty thieves are beaten.³⁴

Thus, while a wife's good behaviour towards her husband is associated with heaven (B. *suruga*), in this *lontara'* bad behaviour is linked to hell (B. *ranaka*). In practice, Bugis elders advise married women to be always pleasant towards their husbands (B. *tuli macenning atinna ri oroanéna*) and to be faithful to them (B. *malempu' ri oroanéna*). Yet rather than relating such behaviour directly to a wife's fate in afterlife, the elders hold that it is conducive to the fortune and happiness of marital life (B. *assikalaibinéngeng*) in this life on earth.

While the largest part of the text of the *Lontara' Daramatasia* provides guidance for the wife, a small portion is directed at the husband, based on the words of the Prophet Muhammad. For example, the best deeds of a husband are to take care of his wife (B. *piaraéngngi bainéna*), or to provide her with food (B. *anréna*), money (B. *balancana*), and clothing (B. *pakéanna*). He is also obliged to prevent her from engaging in bad behaviour (B. *gau' maja'*) and to guide her to behave in a good manner (B. *gau' madécéng*). However, the *lontara'* does not mention any bad behaviour of the husband towards his wife that might affect his life after death. All good behaviour towards his wife arises out of his above mentioned duties and does not imply that he will go to heaven. Likewise, his bad acts are not associated with going to hell. This reveals that the text mainly addresses wives. In practice, a man's economic and moral obligations in Bugis society are reflected in the image of the ideal prospective husband who has the ability to 'surround the kitchen seven times' and to be the role model in his family.

Sexuality in Marriage: The Manuscript versus Practice

There are a number of other manuscript versions of the *Daramatasia*. For example, Djamaris (1983:79–96) transliterated another version of the *Daramatasia* based on the Van Ronkel Catalogue, written on 18 April 1868. M.D. Nor (1989) collected six Malaysian stories, including *Hikayat Daramatasia*, in a book titled *Antologi enam hikayat*. St. Djauhariah (1999) has transliterated a

³⁴ [N]igi-nigi makkunrai maja' atinna ri lakkainna engkani matu' terri-terri muttama ri ranaka [...] tuling macai'na ri lakkainna ri addémperrangngi matti ri malaéka' muttama ri ranaka [...] mappolori lakkainna bettuanna pégau'i ri séuaé gau' natennaisseng lakkainna ri callai matti rilalenna ranakaé (*Lontara' Daramatasia*:50–53). For complete and original texts of the *Lontara' Daramatasia* pertaining to 'bad behaviour' of the wife, see Appendix 2.

Mandar version of the *Daramatasia*, and Sabriah (2001) analyses the structure of a Mandar version of the *Daramatasia* manuscript and the cultural values conveyed by that text. While the basic story of these versions is similar to that of the *Lontara*' *Daramatasia*, the ending of each version is different. The specific feature of the *Lontara* *Daramatasia* is that the story continues after the death of Daramatasia's husband, narrating how she was proposed to by a number of men and decided to marry Ahemade, an aspect that is not included in the other versions of *Daramatasia* manuscripts.

This Bugis version of the *Daramatasia* examines desire (B. *cinna*) through two conversations between Daramatasia and two groups of men who intend to propose to her after the death of her husband, Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi. The first conversation is between Daramatasia and the seven brothers (B. *oroané pitué mappada oroané*), the second between her and the three brothers (B. *oroané tellué mappada oroané*). Three days after the death of Daramatasia's husband, the seven brothers come to visit her with the intention of proposing marriage to her. The conversation between Daramatasia and her suitors³⁵ is as follows:

Daramatasia: 'If anyone can answer my question, he can take the place of [my husband] Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi.'³⁶

The seven brothers: 'Please state your question so we can hear, one of us will have the answer to your question.'³⁷

Daramatasia: 'How great is a man's desire for a woman? And how great is a woman's desire for a man?'³⁸

The seven brothers (who answer the question in unison): 'A man's desire for a woman is one. A woman's desire for a man is nine.'³⁹

Daramatasia: 'How loose you are and how inadequate your honour! Why do you come to me if you only have one desire? It is I who should come to you because I have nine.'⁴⁰

Hearing how Daramatasia responds negatively to their answer, the seven brothers (B. *oroané pitué*) leave Daramatasia's house immediately, ashamed because none of them could properly answer her question.

³⁵ *Lontara*' *Daramatasia*: 36–40.

³⁶ *Narékkó engka pakatajangékka' pakkutanaku' iana kuala passéllé pole ri Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi.*

³⁷ *Poadai maé pakkutanamu nariéngkalinga kalaséddikku ia pitué pakatajangékko pakkutanamu.*

³⁸ *Siaga égana cinnana oroané ri makkunraié, siagato cinnana makkunraié ri oroané?*

³⁹ *Naia cinnana oroané ri makkunraié seddimi. Naia cinnana makkunraié ri oroané asérai.*

⁴⁰ *Arugimmutu nennia akurassirsemmutu palé', magi naiko laoika' mai na séddimi cinnamu, sitinajamatu ia' laoiko nasaba' aséra cinnaku.*

On the seventh day after her husband's death, the three brothers (B. *oroané pitué*)—the eldest, Hasang; the middle one, Huseng; and the youngest, Ahemadé⁴¹—come, also intending to propose to Daramatasia. The second conversation takes place as follows:

The three brothers: 'We three brothers come to you, so you can choose one of us to take the place of [your husband] Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi.'⁴²

Daramatasia: 'Even though only a week has elapsed since the death of Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi, if one of you can answer my question, he can take the place of [my husband] Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi.'⁴³

The three brothers: 'Daramatasia, please state your question, so we can hear, one of us will answer the question, if the Almighty wills.'⁴⁴

Daramatasia: 'How great is a man's desire for a woman? And how great is a woman's desire for a man?'⁴⁵

Hasang and Huseng: 'A man's desire for a woman is one. A woman's desire for a man is nine.'⁴⁶

Daramatasia: 'How inadequate your honour and how loose you are! Why do you come to me if you only have one desire? It is I who should come to you because I have nine.'⁴⁷

Shamed by Daramatasia's response, Hasang and Huseng do leave. But Ahemadé (the youngest brother) stays and has his own answer. He says: 'It is true that a man has one desire for a woman, while a woman has nine desires for a man. But there is an explanation for that.'⁴⁸ Ahemadé goes on to describe why Adam and Eve (Hawa) were expelled from heaven because they were found eating the forbidden fruit (B. *aju tubi*) in heaven by an angel (B. *malaéka*'). When they were caught, the *aju tubi* was still in Adam's

⁴¹ The original names from this *lontara*' for these three brothers are Hasang, Huseng and Ahemadé'. A Malaysian text, the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiah*, states that Hasan and Husen are the sons of Ali with Fatimah; while Muhammad Hanafiyah (Ahmad) is Ali's third son with another woman (Brakel 1975:203).

⁴² *Aga nangkau' mai lao riko tellu mappadaoroané maélo'ka' mupiléi kalasédikku muala passéllé polé ri Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi.*

⁴³ *Mauniro pitumpenni maténa réwe'na ri pammaséna Allataala Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi narékko engka patajangekka' pakkutanaku' iana kuala passéllé polé ri Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi.*

⁴⁴ *Daramatasia poadani mai pakkutanamu nariéngkalinga kalasédikku naélorang Allataala pakatajangekko.*

⁴⁵ *Siagaro cinnana oroané ri makkunraié [...] siagato cinnana makkunraié ri oroané.*

⁴⁶ *Naia cinnana oroané ri makkunraié seddimi. Naia cinnana makkunraié ri oroané asérai.*

⁴⁷ *Akurassirisemmutu palé' nennia arugimmu, magi naiko lao'i mai na séddimi cinnamu. ia'ga sitinaja laoiko nasaba' aséra cinnaku.*

⁴⁸ *Tongengngiro adaé makkedaé séddi cinnana oroané ri makkunraié, aséra cinnana makkunraié ri oroané. Makkunraié saba'na enrenggé atajangenna.*

throat, so he squeezed his neck, and the fruit became the Adam's apple (B. *carido*). Eve, however, devoured many *aju tubi*, and her neck and chest became conspicuously bulky. Ahemade concludes that man's desire is weaker because the *aju tubi* is only in Adam's throat, while women's desire is 'ample' because Eve has eaten many of the *aju tubi* that are deep down in her chest. Had Eve not been more desirous than her mate to eat the *aju tubi*, the couple would not have been expelled from heaven, as Eve would have been able to hide her transgression from the angel, just as did Adam. Based on this story, Ahemade makes the point that women should not have more desire than men, or at least should not show their desire openly as such desire is dangerous. After listening to Ahemade's parable of men's and women's desires, Daramatasia tells him: 'You are the one who is allowed by God to take the place of Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi.'⁴⁹

Therefore, instead of nine desires-woman and one desire-man, there is a reversal: man has nine desires, while woman has only one⁵⁰ in order to protect the honour of the family. This 'nine/one' parable not only aims at demonstrating the contrast between the desires of men and women, but also at reflecting the notion that men's desire is supposed to be 'open' (B. *marisaliweng*), while women's desire should be placed 'behind the scenes' (B. *maperrenng*). Thus, male openness (B. *marisaliweng*) and female hiddenness (B. *maperrenng*) reflect the dichotomy of Bugis constructions of male and female sexuality. This complementarity is not just about the attributes of the masculine and feminine, but can also be associated with male and female behaviour in terms of sexuality. In fact, a woman's sexuality is firmly controlled because it is considered more susceptible to causing shame than the sexuality of men. This is reflected in a Bugis saying that 'men have only one *siri*', women have ninety-nine'.⁵¹ These numbers are not to be taken literally; they merely serve to illustrate the vulnerability of women with regard to *siri*.

But Daramatasia's statement above also implies that because the man is the one who comes forward to propose marriage, he should have more desire than the woman to whom he proposes. This is not to say that women cannot express their desire as men do, it just means that the sexes have different ways of expressing desire (see below). In her account of women's status in Islam, Geraldine Brook (1995:39) cites Ali's statement⁵² that in Islam 'Almighty God

⁴⁹ *Ikonatu naéloreng Allataala kuala passéllé pole ri aléna Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi (Lontara' Daramatasia, 47).*

⁵⁰ *Cinnana oroané aséra, cinnana makkunraié seddimi.*

⁵¹ *Urané séddimi siri'na, makkunraié aséra pulona aséra siri'na.*

⁵² Ali is the husband of the Prophet Muhammad's beloved daughter, Fatimah.

created sexual desire in ten parts. Then He gave nine parts to women and one to men.' Based on this statement, Islam holds that a wife can initiate a divorce if her husband does not fulfil her sexual desire at least once every four months. Yet among the Bugis, people are taught the opposite. Since men are believed to be sexually desirous and unable to control their lust (B. *dé'na ullé tahangngi cinnana*), women are taught to control their behaviour towards men, which is similar to the argument given by Brook (1995:40) regarding Christian teachings on sexuality.

For the Bugis point of view, the idea that women are sexually desirous is in contrast with the notion of modesty (B. *malebbi'*). Thus, in order to control women's nine parts of sexual desire that are postulated not only by Islam but also by the seven brothers and Hasang and Huseng in the two conversations quoted above, the Bugis apply the contrary parable (nine parts to men and one to women), as is explained by Ahemade and accepted as the correct answer by Daramatasia in the second conversation. This is not to say that the Bugis hold an idea that contradicts Islam. Rather, desirous women will threaten the *siri'*, that is, the honour of the family. Women are moreover regarded as being 'naturally weak' and thus can easily be sexually tempted. It is the task of their *siri'* defender (B. *to masiri'*) to protect them from men who 'by nature' have a strong desire.

It is interesting to note, however, that while Islam is the dominant religion of the Bugis, the parable of sexual desire between men and women is incompatible with Bugis practice. With regard to Islamic belief, Brook (1995:38–40) establishes a link between women's desire and the justification of clitoridectomy, seclusion, and veiling for Muslim women. Among the Bugis, however, the practice of female circumcision and the accompanying ritual are a public statement signalling that the girls are grown up (B. *malopponi*) and that they must begin to guard themselves from male peers because being around men will threaten their *siri'*. Thus, circumcision is not related to lessening women's desire in Bugis society, in contrast to many Muslim countries around the world.⁵³

In sexual intercourse, since man's desire (B. *cinnana oroané*) is nine, he should be the one who approaches his wife; because women's desire (B. *cinnana makkunraié*) is only one, she should wait. Despite the fact that women can also initiate sex with their husbands, it is considered modest (B. *malebbi'*) to wait for the husband's initiative. Thus, man/nine (B.

⁵³ Muhammad (2001:40 f.) discusses how male circumcision is medically positive, enabling men to avoid premature ejaculation and increasing pleasure in sexual intercourse, while female circumcision aims at lessening women's sexual pleasure.

aséra) and women/one (B. *séddi*) reflect the construction of male and female desires. In line with this, there is the misconception that men are sexual experts, which implies that they are the ones who know best what women actually need (Segal 1994). Thus, in sexual relations there is a close connection between masculine and feminine attitudes and the perceived biological nature of the sexes. This connection echoes the persistent stereotypes described by Oakley (1996:36), namely, that a female's 'open vagina' as well as her stereotypical 'feminine personality' (dependent, passive, non-aggressive, and submissive) reflect her 'receptiveness'. From this point of view, a man's penis and masculine personality (independent, active, aggressive) may be regarded as mirroring his hegemony. In other words, a penis entering a vagina signifies an active/passive relationship in sexual intercourse. In daily practice, women have to restrain themselves from expressing desire, while men's desire should be demonstrated, as stated in the following *lontara*': 'Men's desire is like a leaky roof, it is open. Women's desire is like a corset. That is why men are desirous. Women's desire is hidden, which means it can be held steady (B. *maperrengngi*').⁵⁴

The Bugis term *maperrengngi* ('able to hold steady') carries the connotation that a woman's desire must be strictly controlled, not just by herself, but also by her family, because a woman's sexual purity has a significant impact on her status in Bugis society. On account of this, a woman is expected to enfold herself in her honour in order to be in a steady state (B. *perrengngi aléna*), otherwise she is 'wild'. But the saying indicates that men become desirous of women precisely because the latter's desire is not visible (B. *padai wekkeng situ'é*). In other words, women control men's desire through their own unexpressed desire. In spite of the fact that this proverb comes from a *lontara*', it can be found applied in Bugis everyday life, especially when elders give advice to young people. For example, before marriage the mother of a prospective wife will advise her daughter not to initiate sexual intercourse with her husband. This implies that a wife should wait for her husband to take the initiative, and that her sexual desire should be expressed invisibly. Yet on the other hand a mother will instruct her daughter to be always attractive for her husband so that he will desire her (B. *nasanging macinna oroanéna mitai*).⁵⁵ In this context, 'waiting for initiative from' and 'signalling

⁵⁴ (*Lontara' Daramatasia*: 45).

⁵⁵ The *La Galigo* epic illustrates how Batara Lattu', the son of the middle world ruler, persuades his wife, We Datu Sengngeng, to enjoy the first night of their marriage. For details, see Idrus (2007).

attractiveness to' her husband indicate the ambivalent behaviour of a wife towards her husband in a sexual relationship.

Even though passiveness on the part of the wife is viewed as being consistent with feminine characteristics, and aggressiveness on the part of the husband as conforming to masculine traits, this does not mean that a woman cannot express her sexual desire. It is just the manner of expression that is different: the wife's is 'closed' and 'indirect,' while the husband's is 'open' and 'direct.' This implies that the invisibility and hiddenness of a woman's sexuality does not indicate that she is not active in expressing it. Women's sexual expression merely differs from men's, and at the same time suggests the power of the femininity of Bugis women in controlling men's sexual desire. This is not to say that a woman cannot be open (*B. marisaliweng*) in expressing her desire, but such an openness is considered inappropriate (*B. dé'na malebbi'*).⁵⁶ On the other hand, a man who is not expressing his desire openly is regarded as being 'not a man,' that is, as an individual whose behaviour is contrary to his biological sex. Such men are thus viewed as *calabai* (the Bugis term for males in the social role of a woman).

Conclusion

It is difficult to say which is the original version of the *Daramatasia* manuscript, and this contribution does not attempt to answer the question of whether or not the Bugis version discussed, or another Bugis version, is the original. Rather, the focus is on how the Bugis perceive and transform the text, how the text is received by them, and how they participate in the Muslim Southeast Asian world.

Most of all, the authority of the *Lontara' Daramatasia* is based on the use of names related to Islam, such as Allataala (God), Nabitta (the Prophet), and the reference to other personages well known in Islam, such as Saéhe' Bil-ma'rupi, Hasang, Huseng, and Ahemade. These are intertwined with local Islamic beliefs, and at the same time lend the *lontara'* authority. This serves the sole purpose of legitimating the message of the text. The influence of Islam in this text, however, is not necessarily similar to the teachings of Islam, which identifies women as subordinates to men. The application of values in this *lontara'* bolsters the idea of the 'natural authority' of the father, which was constructed by the New Order regime through its development

⁵⁶ See Bennet (2005: chapter II) for a discussion of inscriptive femininity and maidens' sexual desire among the Sasak in Lombok, Mataram.

policy that defined Indonesian women as subordinate to men within the family and the state (see Robinson 2000). It is not clear whether or not the *Lontara' Daramatasia* influenced the secular Marriage Law of 1974, but this ideology existed long before that law was introduced under Islamic influence, identifying the husband as the head of the household (*I. kepala rumah tangga*) and the wife as the mother of the household (*ibu rumah tangga*), it reflects the structural relationship between husband and wife.

Yet there is an important element absent in this *lontara'*, namely, the period of *iddah*, an Arabic term that refers to the period a widow or divorcee has to wait before she is allowed to remarry. *Iddah* needs to be observed for the duration of three menstrual periods by a divorcee and for four months and ten days by a widow. In the *Lontara' Daramatasia*, Daramatasia accepts Ahemade's proposal a week after her husband's death, which indicates that she does not observe the proper period of *iddah* required by Islamic law. In everyday practice, however, *iddah* is practised by Muslims. While a widow or female divorcee has to wait at least for the end of *iddah* before remarrying, in many cases this period of waiting is even longer. This is one of the ways the wife shows loyalty towards her late husband: and a woman who gets married not long after the end of her *iddah* is usually regarded as sexually desirous, and as publicly demonstrating these desires through marriage.

The authority of a widow to make her own decision with regard to remarriage is reflected in the text, because there is no description relating to any consent and direct involvement of Daramatasia's parents when it comes to her second marriage. In Islam, this personal authority is grounded in a *hadith* (Ibn Abbas) that states that 'a widow/divorcee has more rights for herself than her guardian' (Mas'udi 1997:98). Among the Bugis, however, widows rarely remarry without parental consent, because marriage involves the merging of two families into one, as is reflected in the Bugis term for marriage—*siala*—, which means 'to take each other'.

Appendix 1. *Passages of the Lontara' Daramatasia
Pertaining to 'Good Behaviour' of the Wife towards her Husband*

Makkedani Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai giling gandong nakana maélo' nanré lakkainna riwéréngngi décéng ri Allataala sitebbe' bilanna gandong nag-ilingngé. Makkedai toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai mannasuangngi lakkainna inanré ripabélaiangngi ri Allataala apinna ranaka. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi tennungangngi nenia jaikangngi pakéng lakkainna ripap-pakéanggettoi matti paké-pakéang malebbi'na risuruga. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai sessakengngi pakéanna lakkainna riaddampengangngi ri Allataala dosana padatoha paccinna pakéanna lakkaina nasessa'é. [...] Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai sara'-sarakangngi gemme'na lakkainna riwéréngngi appalang ri Allataala sitebbe' gemme'na lakkainna. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai tuling mallauangngi décéng lakkainna, ripasiwolongpolongngi matti lakkainna ri suruga. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai tuling cabberu-beru mitai lakkainna engkai matti micawacawa muttama suruga. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai tuling mario pulana mitai lakkainna ripura saraiangngi ri Allataala onronna rilalenna surugaé. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai masero mamaséwi lakkainna sibawa natumaninginna tungke'-tungke' passuronna ripasiwollompollongngi matti lakkainna rilalenna surugaé sibawa ritumaningi toi ri ana' bidadarié. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai tuling mellauangngi décéne lakkainna ri esso ri wenni ritimpakengngi babanna surugaé (Lontara' Daramatasia: 50–53).

Appendix 2. *Passages of the Lontara' Daramatasia
Pertaining to 'Bad Behaviour' of the Wife*

Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai maja' atinna ri lakkainna engkani matu' terri-terri muttama' ri naraka. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai tuling macai'na rilakkainna riadémperangngi matti ri malaéka' muttama' riranaka. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai tuling majjamerru' dé'na madécéng nyawana mitai lakkainna ripasibokorengngi matti rupanna. Makkeda toi Nabitta, nigi-nigi makkunrai mappolori lakkainna bettuanna pégau'i riséuaé gau' natennaisseng lakkainna ricallai matti rilalenna ranakaé pada paccallana patappuloé tellolang (Lontara' Daramatasia: 50–53).

TOWARDS JUSTICE IN MARITAL LAW: EMPOWERING INDONESIAN WOMEN

Siti Musdah Mulia

Introduction

It is no secret that religion and state 'conspire' against women. The Islamic Code of Law and a number of studies on women and law in Indonesia¹ show that women's position is marginalized and gender inequity is deeply entrenched in the country.² Gender inequity is a social problem that needs to be addressed integrally by analysing every factor involved in preserving it, including legal aspects that are often justified by religion.

Analyses of legal cases in Indonesia show that gender inequity in the legal field³ is found in the content, culture, and structure of law. Regarding law structure, gender inequity is marked by low gender sensitivity among law enforcers, particularly prosecutors and judges. Existing legislations and laws such as the Criminal Code, the Marital Law (Undang-Undang Perkawinan No. 1 Tahun 1974), and the Islamic Code of Law (Kompilasi Hukum Islam Tahun 1991) have inadequate contents, being heavily charged with gender-biased and patriarchal values. The Code of Law even blatantly defines women as sexual objects and confirms their subordinate status. The whole situation is worsened by a law culture that is still very much influenced by patriarchal values and strongly legitimized by religious interpretation. Religion is thus on trial as one of the guilty parties in preserving patriarchal culture and gender inequity.

On the other hand, Indonesian society is currently facing a number of social problems that require marital law reform. Cases of exploitation and discrimination against women are rampant, including domestic violence, woman and child trafficking using the *modus operandi* of marriage, the

¹ See the research results of Ihromi (1997); Mulia (2001); Irianto (2003).

² A more detailed analysis of the forms of gender inequity in Indonesia can be found in the report of the Indonesian State Ministry of Women Empowerment (2001:71–93).

³ Details on legal cases of gender inequity in Indonesia can be found in Katjasungkana (2002).

mushrooming practice of contract marriages that harm women and children, a high number of underage child marriages and unregistered marriages, and the widespread practice of prostitution. This contribution intends to point out the extent of Islamic marital law reform necessary in Indonesia to accomplish a democratic, just, and religious society and to empower women.

The Family Law Reform in Indonesia

While not formally declaring itself an Islamic state, Indonesia is the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The first attempts to reform the family law were launched in the 1950s. On 1 October 1950, the religious affairs ministry appointed a team to study all regulations on marriage and to draft a marriage bill that was appropriate for the situation at that time. However, one year after the bill had been handed over to the House of Representatives in 1958, the House was temporarily dismissed through a Presidential Decree on 5 July 1959. The bill was never heard of again (K. Nasution 2002:51).

There was another effort to reform family law in the 1960s, which resulted in the passing of the Law No. 1/1974 on marriage. This was the first law in Indonesia that regulated marriage on the national level. Before then, marriage had been regulated by several laws: custom laws for general citizens; Islamic law for Muslim citizens; the Christian Indonesian Marriage Ordinance for Christian citizens in Java, Minahasa, and Ambon; the Civil Law Code for citizens of European and Chinese descent; and the Interfaith Marriage Regulation for interreligious marriages. The main purpose of the Marriage Law was to unify or to standardize diverse marital regulations. Ideally, the Marriage Law needs to be evaluated as a legal source to see whether it is effective in controlling society's behaviour with regard to marriage. But 32 years have passed since its enactment, and there have been no real efforts to evaluate the law, how society has responded to it, and whether the law is still relevant.

On 10 June 1991, then President Suharto issued the Islamic Code of Law (KHI) through the Presidential Instruction No. 1/1991. Covering marriage, inheritance, and religious donation regulations, the Code of Law is the official legal guidance for judges in religious courts all over Indonesia (Indonesian Religious Affairs Ministry 2002:152).⁴ The law consists of three books: Book I

⁴ Indonesia has three types of courts: the District Court deals with general cases of citizens regardless of their religion; the Religious Court handles marital cases, divorce,

on marriage, Book II on inheritance, and Book III on religious donation. Of the law's altogether 229 articles, the largest portion is on marital law (170 articles). The Code of Law compiles all Islamic laws issued during the New Order regime, and its content is based on a number of Islamic jurisprudence books, mostly written in the Middle Ages. The law was the government's response to the 'social unrest' that resulted from different verdicts by religious courts on the same cases. This diversity is actually a logical consequence of various jurisprudential references of the judges. However, instead of perceiving the diversity of views as enriching the legal sources, the government responded by homogenizing the law. On one hand, the Code of Law made it easier for judges to issue verdicts, and for other parties to look for legal references. On the other hand, it restricts creativity and *ijtihad* efforts in the legal field. In the meantime, new challenges continue to emerge within the dynamics of society and the progress of science and technology, which in turn raise dilemmas among judges.

From the perspective of gender equality and equity, a number of articles in the Code of Law do marginalize women. The law confirms the majority views in Islamic jurisprudence, which rate women as second-class citizens as compared to men in issues such as guardianship, being a witness, *nusyuz* (disobedience in marriage), polygamy, and rights and obligations of husbands and wives. Yet, men and women have the same role in establishing a family, and in the eyes of Allah they both are equally appreciated for their hard work, without discrimination.

Meanwhile, the data shows that cases of domestic violence are rampant. A report by the State Ministry of Women Empowerment issued in 2001 revealed that 11.4 percent of the overall population—that is, 24 million women—said they have experienced violence, mostly domestic, ranging from torture to sexual assaults, economic violence, abuse, adultery, and polygamy. These statistics, however, are merely the tip of the iceberg as many women who suffer violence are reluctant to report their cases.

Nevertheless, there are some breakthroughs in the Code of Law in terms of Islamic law reform. These include definition of marriage, marriage registration, age requirement for marriage, agreement of both parties (bride and groom) in marriage, divorce valid only if done in court, and conditions (*taklik*) of divorce (Rangkuti 2003). The definition of marriage in the old-time

marriage reconciliation, religious donation, and other issues regarding the Indonesian Muslim community; and the Military Court handles military cases. Since the legal reform in 1999, the three courts were gradually put under the supervision of the Supreme Court, most recently the Religious Court in 2004.

jurisprudence books attaches too much importance to the biological needs, while the Code of Law emphasizes religious service and religious obligation. The books do not prescribe a certain age for marriage, but the law establishes a minimum age of 19 years for the groom and 16 years for the bride. Marriage registration is strongly recommended by the Code of Law, even though mainly for administrative reasons, while the jurisprudence books do not state anything about it. Islamic jurisprudence permits polygamy as long as the husband is fair, although the definition of 'fair' is always based on the men's perspective. The Code of Law, however, adds that aside from fairness, polygamy is only allowed with the first wife's consent and permission by court. Classical jurisprudence states that silence already means consent to a marriage, but the law says that there should be written or verbal consent from the wife. Jurisprudence allows husbands to divorce their wife (or wives) anytime and anywhere, but according to the Code of Law divorce is only valid if done in court. Islamic jurisprudence does not recognize divorce by *taklik* (an oath by the husband that he will provide his wife with maintenance), while the law requires it. In short, as compared to traditional jurisprudence the Islamic Code of Law has reduced male domination and authority, gives stronger protection to the rights and status of women, and has responded to the demands of society. The law reform endorsed by the Code of Law is apparently acceptable for the Indonesian Muslim community, which indicates that the reform has been successfully implemented.

The Counter Legal Draft of the Islamic Code of Law is formulated on the basis of research and a critical analysis of the Code of Law by the the Gender Mainstreaming Working Group established by the Religious Affairs Ministry in 2003. The Draft is similar to the Code of Law in covering marital, inheritance, and religious donation issues. It offers a family law reform for Indonesian Muslims, particularly with the aim of amending the Code of Law and Marital Law. The Draft formulates a new model of Islamic law and is based on the principles of Islamic teachings as stated in the Qur'an and *hadith*. At the same time, it puts an emphasis on human rights; it advocates gender equality and equity in the relations between men and women, and voices the humanistic, pluralistic, and democratic views of Islam.

Principles of Marriage in Islam

Muslims believe that Islam is the perfect religion because its teachings cover all aspects of life, including guidance for marriage. The purpose of this guidance is for humans to be safe and content physically and spiritually. Islamic

teachings can be categorized into basic principles and non-basic principles. The former are believed to have originated from God Almighty, and thus to be perpetual, unconditional, and absolute; they are unchanging themselves, and cannot be changed by humans for any reason whatsoever. The basic principles are none other than the Qur'an and *hadith*. The Qur'an is the Commandment of Allah, written in the original Arabic as conveyed to the Prophet Muhammad. The translation of the Qur'an into other languages, including Indonesian, is not a basic principle because it was a result of humans' efforts. The same is true of the interpretation and all implementations of the Qur'an in social life. The *hadith* included in the basic teachings are those believed to have originated from the Prophet.

Non-basic teachings have resulted from the efforts (*ijtihad*) of *ulama* since the times of the Prophet; they include translations, interpretations, and other implementations of the basic principles. Therefore, they are relative, comparative, and can change or be changed. Many of the non-basic principles can be found in Islamic books, some of them dating back to the classical period of Islam.

Islamic jurisprudence is the most-implemented non-basic teaching in Muslim communities. It is based on the understanding of Islam gained from studying the Qur'an and *hadith*. While it is a brilliant product of human thought, there is no guarantee that the views on jurisprudence are not erroneous or flawed. While we have to appreciate and honour the *ijtihad* of *ulama*, it has to be taken into account that any result of *ijtihad* is influenced by the sociocultural and sociohistorical situation prevalent at a given time. Therefore, no result of *ijtihad* is perpetually valid. It may be suitable in a certain period of time, but not in another period. It may be appropriate for a certain society, but not for another community with a different culture and different needs. All this implies that we can accept the results of *ijtihad*, but this should not keep us from being critical, nor unwilling to accept another result that is more suitable for our own good.

Islamic teachings have two important aspects: vertical and horizontal. The vertical aspect relates to humans' obligation to God (*hablun minallah*), while the horizontal aspect pertains to relations between humans (*hablun min al-nas*). With regard to the second aspect, it is deemed crucial that the Qur'an and *hadith* are filled with principles of humanitarian values, stating that all humans are equal regardless of their gender, ethnicity, race, social status, and even religion (sura 49:13). But more often than not, the vertical aspect is at the fore in religious life, and thus the humanitarian dimension, while actually reflecting the vertical aspect as well, receives less attention in

daily life, including marriage. As a consequence, marital regulations in Islam are too masculine, harsh, violent, and not favourable to women.

The Qur'an discusses marriage in detail in many verses. There are no less than 104 verses that either use the word 'marriage' (*berhimpun*), which occurs 23 times, or 'spouse' (*zauwi*, 80 occurrences). In order to understand the real meaning of marriage in Islam, one needs to unravel all verses containing statements about marriage, sort them out by theme, and see them as a whole before drawing conclusions on the essence of the verses. In-depth analysis of all verses on marriage reveals the following five basic principles of marriage: monogamy (sura 4:3, 129), love and affection, complementarity and protection (sura 2:187), civilized and well-mannered behaviour both in sexual and human relations (sura 4:19; sura 9:24; sura 22:13), and the principle of freedom for both men and women when it comes to seeking spouses. These basic principles, along with the aforementioned four paradigms, are the benchmarks of a critical analysis of articles of the Code of Law.

The Qur'an (sura 33:7; sura 4:21, 154) always describes the marital bond as *mitsaqan ghalidzan*, that is, a sacred and serious pact made with love and affection between two equal parties (men and women). Each party is obliged to maintain the sanctity and perpetuity of the pact. The Qur'an also stresses the egalitarian relationship between husband and wife in various verses.⁵ This emphasis is found in a number of *hadith* as well. All these verses and *hadith* strongly imply that marriage in Islam is more of a contract or agreement (sura 4:21; sura 2:231), as is indicated by the *ijab* (offer) and *qabul* (approval) in the marriage ceremony.

Alternative Draft Offers New Paradigm of Marriage

In accordance with Islamic teachings about marriage, the Counter Legal Draft of the Islamic Code of Law offers a new paradigm of marriage. First, 'marriage' is defined as a serious pact (*mitsaaqan ghaliidzan*) that is agreed upon deliberately by a man and a woman in order to establish a family and whose implementation is based on the willingness and consensus of both parties. Second, the principle of marriage is monogamy (*tawahhud al-zawj*). Third, marriage is based on six major tenets: willingness (*al-taraadi*), egalitarianism (*al-musaawah*), equity (*al-'adaalah*), benefit (*al-mashlahat*), pluralism (*al-ta'addudiyyah*), and democracy (*al-diimuqrathiyyah*). Fourth, the purpose of marriage is to achieve a blissful (*sa'adah*) and prosperous (*sakinah*) family life

⁵ Sura 51:49; sura 35:11; sura 78; sura 4:20; sura 36; sura 42:11; sura 43:12; sura 21:87; sura 53.

founded on affection (*mawaddah wa rahmah*), as well as to fulfil biological needs in a legal, healthy, safe, contented, and responsible manner. These four paradigms are the fundamentals of the Draft on the issues of guardianship, being a witness, registration, age requirement, dowry, interfaith marriages, polygamy, divorce and reconciliation, transitional period for women to remarry after divorce (*iddah*), mourning period (*ihdad*), financial matters, disobedience (*nusyuz*), position and status of husband and wife, and rights and obligations of husband and wife.

There are at least six reasons for conducting a critical analysis of the Islamic Code of Law, which resulted in the formulation of the Counter Legal Draft: first, to support the national programme that aims at eliminating violence against women, issued by the State Ministry of Women Empowerment in 2001. Known as the Zero Tolerance Policy, the programme reflects the commitment of the government to the elimination of all forms of violence, no matter how minor. The policy is based on Law No. 7/1984, which ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); it is also a response to the United Nations Declaration of 20 December 1994 on the elimination of violence against women. One of the important points raised in the national policy is the elimination of such violence in the socio-cultural domain by revising the Islamic Code of Law. Why the Code of Law? Because, some of its articles are deemed the roots of violence against women, in particular domestic violence. The national policy also states that one of the institutions that will hopefully do the revision is the Religious Affairs Ministry. As part of the commitment to the improvement of women's value and dignity and to the elimination of violence against women, the Gender Mainstreaming Working Group of the Religious Affairs Ministry thus undertakes a critical analysis of the Code of Law.

Second, the Draft is a response to a number of studies that have pointed to problems associated with the Code of Law; these problems have arisen because some of the Code's articles are in contradiction to several national laws, such as Law No. 7/1984 on the elimination of any form of discrimination against women, the law on children's rights issued in 2000, Law No. 39/1999 on human rights—particularly the protection and empowerment of women—, and even the amendment of the Constitution of 1945. The Code of Law also contradicts Law No. 22/1999 on regional administration, that is, the decentralization process under participation of people regardless of their gender, as well as Law No. 23/2004 on the elimination of domestic violence.

The Code of Law also conflicts with international policy that strongly supports the empowerment of women, such as the CEDAW and the Anti-Racial Discrimination Convention (1999). On the regional level, Islamic

countries united in the Islamic Conference Organization have issued the Cairo Declaration (1990) that defends women's reproductive rights. The Convention on Children's Rights (1990), which was ratified by the 2000 Presidential Decree on children's rights, clearly states that the maximum age of an individual defined as a child is 18 years. These conventions stress the importance of eliminating discrimination based on race, nationality, gender, child status, and religion.

Third, the Draft is a response to the suggestion of the Religious Affairs Ministry's directorate of the Religious Court, which in 2003 proposed a bill on marriage to replace the marital law in the Code of Law. Besides proposing the change of legal status from presidential instruction to law, the directorate also suggested the addition of new articles about sanctions for every violation, such as a jail sentence or fine for the failure to register a marriage. The proposal is based on the fact that 48 percent of marriages are not registered, which causes grave disadvantages for women and children.

Fourth, the Draft responds to the need to formalize Islamic *shari'a* in regions such as West Sumatra, South Sulawesi, Cianjur in West Java, and Madura in East Java, where the efforts to uphold Islamic law are not based on any clear concept regarding the *shari'a* to be applied. The alternative, then, is the implementation of the Counter Legal Draft of the Code of Law, which pays more attention to essential values of Islam such as equity, benefit, and equality, and better accommodates local wisdom and values.

Fifth, the Draft is a response to the emergence of family law reforms in Islamic countries such as Tunisia, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt. These countries have repeatedly reformed their family laws.

Sixth, the Draft takes into account the results of a survey conducted in West Sumatra, West Java, South Sulawesi, and West Nusa Tenggara. The survey shows that the respondents—judges of religious courts, heads of religious affairs offices, and religious figures—demand that the Code of Law be changed. They say the law has been imposed for 15 years without ever having been critically evaluated. The Code of Law also needs to be legally binding, work as a legal codification, and its content has to be completed and perfected to suit the needs of Indonesian Muslims. All respondents agree on the following issues: registration needs to be included in the marriage principles so that marriage is not valid without it; the minimum age requirement for women should be raised to 19 years, just like for men; *nusyuz* (disobedience, usually of wives and especially with regard to granting conjugal rights) can be applied to both husband and wife; reconciliation requires the wife's consent; and a clearer regulation is needed with regard to the rights and status of children born out of wedlock.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the household income during the *iddah* (transitional) period after divorce. The Code of Law states that the ex-husband must continue to pay maintenance to his ex-wife during the *iddah* period. In reality, however, that money is never paid if the wife does not file for divorce. The law must stipulate that the husband is obliged to pay for his wife's subsistence during the *iddah* period, regardless of whether or not she files for divorce. Judges cannot rule a verdict before the wife's rights are settled. The same applies to *khulu'*, which should only be required if the wife wants to divorce for no apparent reason. This should involve the obligation to pay *iwadh* to the husband.

*Stages in Formulating the Counter Legal Draft,
and the Burning Issues of the Draft*

The Draft was written in several stages. First, a number of studies on the Code of Law were evaluated.⁶ Second, a survey was carried out in five regions that want to formalize the Islamic *shari'a*: Aceh, West Sumatra, South Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara, and West Java. Third, a comparative analysis was conducted on family law in several Islamic countries such as Tunisia, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. Fourth, there was a critical analysis of the classical jurisprudence literature regarding marriage, inheritance, and religious donation. Fifth, the conclusions of the research and analyses were formatted in legal form to attract public attention. Sixth, five workshops were held to verify the early draft, particularly with regard to its theological, legal, sociological, and political argumentations. The workshops involved the participation of a number of religious and legal experts, sociologists, political scientists, and feminists. Seventh, some revisions were done based on the input from the workshops. Eighth, the official Draft was presented to raise awareness and inform the public in order to encourage the latter to criticize the current Code of Law and to push for changes. The event was attended by the religious affairs minister and the ministry's officials as well as

⁶ This evaluation was based on 11 theses, nine dissertations, and 23 articles that discuss the Islamic Code of Law. Despite the number of studies putting forth progressive ideas on Islamic law and recommending family law reform, there is hardly any significant response by society, *ulama*, and radical groups. The Religious Affairs Ministry's working group opts for a Counter Legal Draft to attract public attention and responses from *ulama* and Muslim scholars. These efforts were successful: The draft gained both supporters and opponents, and has sparked discourse about the dynamics of Islamic thoughts that so far tended to be stagnant, or were even considered final.

related parties, women activists, legal practitioners, and *ulema*. Ninth, several sensitive issues were revised, such as prenuptial agreement, which has been much misconceived as implying contract marriage or *mut'ah* marriage, while it is actually part of a divorce agreement already recognized by the Code of Law. The team then decided to eliminate these issues from the Draft, and later pronounced that the Counter Legal Draft of the Code of Law is now in public domain and no longer authorized by the working group of the Religious Affairs Ministry.

The Counter Legal Draft reforms several articles of the Islamic Code of Law, as they are considered not to be in accordance with the Islamic views that uphold humanity and democracy as stipulated in the Holy Qur'an and *hadith*, and in contradiction to the rules and regulations on the national and international levels.

There are 14 major issues in marital law that need to change: the definition of marriage, guardianship, being a witness, minimum age for brides, dowry, marriage registration, *nusyuz*, rights and obligations of husband and wife, income earning, polygamy, interfaith marriage, *iddah* (transitional period after divorce), *ihdad* (mourning period), and rights and status of children born out of wedlock. Inheritance law, meanwhile, has four crucial issues: inheritance regulations for people of different religions, inheritance share of daughters, inheritance for children born out of wedlock, as well as *'aul* and *radd*. There are also issues of religious donations pertaining to people of different religions, and intellectual rights donation. We will now discuss the abovementioned issues in some detail.

Definition of Marriage

Article 2 of the Islamic Code of Law stipulates that 'marriage according to Islamic law is a binding contract, or *mitsaqan ghalidzan*, that complies with the command of Allah, and performing it is an act of devotion'. Although the definition is more progressive than in classical jurisprudence, the Counter Legal Draft offers another definition:

Marriage is a binding contract (*mitsaaqan ghaliidzan*) between a man and a woman, with full awareness, in order to establish a family and based on the willingness and agreement of both parties.

The Draft thus stresses that matrimony is entered into consciously by the future spouses, and is based on the willingness and consent of both. Why was it necessary to drop the phrases 'act of devotion' and 'command of Allah'? Because their meanings have been distorted in the context of marriage; not

getting married came to be regarded as a sin. As a result, many women enter matrimony to get rid of that stigma, or to avoid another sin: disobedience to their parents. Such understanding of the two phrases has resulted in forced marriages, woman and child trafficking under the modus operandi of marriage, polygamy, unregistered marriages, and so on. The concept of devotion has a broad meaning in Islam, encompassing all activities solely intended to receive Allah's blessing. Even the daily meal is an act of devotion if it is aimed at getting Allah's blessing. What distinguishes an act of devotion from other acts is the intention or commitment involved. This is why many Qur'an verses and *hadith* advise Muslims to affirm their intention by doing certain things, including marriage, to get Allah's blessing. In other words, marriage is an act of devotion only if it is entered into willingly, voluntarily, and responsibly instead of being forced or based on lust.

Ulama have dissenting opinions about marriage as an obligation. A small percentage of *ulama* see it as an act of devotion, like the Zahiri school of thought that strongly abides by textual meaning. They base their argumentation on the Qur'an sura 4:3, which commands people to get married (*fankihu*), implying that marriage is an obligation. In Indonesian jurisprudence books,⁷ the instruction to enter into wedlock is based on suras 51:49, 16:72, and 30:21, as well as the *hadith* that advises young men to get married. But the majority of noted *ulama*, such as Imam Syafi'i, emphasize that marriage is not an act of devotion, but part of *mu'amalah* (relationship between humans). Using sura 4:25 as a reference, Imam Syafi'i concludes that marriage is not an obligation, but instead a recommendation (*mandub*).⁸ He even advises people who are able to maintain sexual abstinence to refrain from marriage.⁹ All jurisprudence books, both classical and contemporary, indeed place marriage in the chapter about *mu'amalah* instead of the chapter about acts of devotion, because marriage in Islam is a social contract, as is indicated by the *ijaba* (offer) and *qabul* (approval) in the marriage ceremony.

Many Muslims perceive marriage as a contract of possession, and thus marrying means owning. This perception engenders an unbalanced relationship between husband and wife, which is also expressed by common

⁷ The references to Indonesian Islamic jurisprudence books here and in the following are deliberate, as we have to assume that Islamic principles of marriage in Indonesia are based on these works. The views advanced in these books clearly refer to the jurisprudence books written in the Middle Ages, particularly by the Syafi'iyah school of thought.

⁸ Syafi'iyah mention this, including Al-Raziy (1995, Section 9:140).

⁹ See also Ibn Taimiyah (1951:22–25).

phrases that have emerged in society: the husband marries, the wife is being married; the husband pays for expenses, the wife is maintained; the husband reconciles, the wife is being reconciled; the husband practices polygamy, the wife is polygamized; the husband is the head of the family, the wife is a mere member, and so on. There is no equal partnership between husband and wife in a marriage, which leaves many women without any position whence to negotiate. Classical jurisprudence blatantly defines women as sexual objects, and as a possession to be enjoyed (*milk al-mut'ah*, *milk al-budh'*). This has resulted in the subordination of women, including the issue of sexual rights. The Hanafi school of thought even states that sex is the right of men, not of women. For that reason, the husband is allowed to force his wife to satisfy his sexual needs. Clearly, what is expected from women in marriage is the mere physical and sexual aspects.

The essence of marriage is wonderfully described in the Qur'an sura 7:189 as the process of returning to the most authentic humanity form of *nafsin wahidah* (one self). Allah deliberately uses *nafsin wahidah* to make a point that marriage is essentially a reunification between man and woman on the practical level, following their initial unification as humans. Another verse (30:21) stresses the essential unification, *min anfusikun*, or unification on the idealistic level, with the practical level (marriage) being peaceful and full of affection. Peace and affection will not exist if one spouse negates and subordinates the other. There should not be any domination in marriage, as it will lead to ignorance of the spouse's rights and existence. Removing domination from husband-and-wife relations will create relationships that are civil, well-mannered, equal, and full of affection (*mawaddah wa rahmah*).

It can be concluded that the Counter Legal Draft stresses marriage as a right, not an obligation, of every adult, both men and women, with certain requirements. People have the right to either get married or stay single. Getting married and having a family and children are non-derogable basic rights. The Counter Legal Draft also reemphasizes marriage as a social transaction or contract involving two equal parties: man and woman. This needs to be stressed anew, as marriage has usually been a contract between the groom and the bride's father/guardian instead of between the bride and groom. This may discourage women from taking more responsibility in marriage because they have barely any legal role in the first place. The emphasis on the social contract is necessary in order to eliminate the incorrect perception of marriage as something owned by the husband. Marriage should bind both parties to the legal imperative agreed upon.

Guardian for Women in the Wedding Ceremony

Article 19 of the Islamic Code of Law stipulates: 'The guardian in a wedding ceremony is required to marry off the bride'. The Counter Legal Draft, on the other hand, states: 'A guardian is required in a marriage ceremony only when the bride is under 21 years old'. The Draft thus does not rule out guardianship, and 21 years is a proper age to mark adulthood and the ability to decide for oneself as a legal subject. The dispensability of a male guardian in a marriage ceremony is not a new idea; Imam Abu Hanifah already advanced that view in the ninth century. A number of Qur'an verses and *hadith* also clearly confirm that women are fully fledged human beings, equal with men.

Islamic jurisprudence requires a guardian in a marriage ceremony only for the bride, and the guardian must be a man—a father, grandfather, brother by the same mother, brother by the same father, nephew from her brother, uncle from the father's side, and so on. There is hardly any opportunity for women to become guardians; while both man and woman are God's creatures, their ranks are different when it comes to guardianship. They are valued and honoured differently, with man being superordinate and woman being subordinate. Jurisprudence books in Indonesia generally require a guardian in marriage ceremonies.¹⁰ They refer to a number of *hadith*, such as '*Laa nikaha illa bi waliyyin wa syahiday adlin, wa maa kaana min nikahin ghairi zaalik fahuwa batil*' ('A marriage is illegal without the presence of a guardian and two fair witnesses. Any marriage that does not meet these requirements is not valid').¹¹

Ulama have different opinions about the necessity to have a guardian in marriage ceremonies. Imam Malik and Imam Syafi'i say that a guardian is required, and that a marriage ceremony without the presence of a guardian is not valid. Imam Abu Hanifah, Zafar, al-Sya'bi, and Al-Zuhri, however, state that if a woman gets married without her guardian's consent but her husband meets the requirement, then the marriage is valid. Imam Dawud Al-Zahiry, meanwhile, says that a guardian is only needed if the bride is single, not a widow. The dissenting opinions between *ulema* are due to the differences in interpreting the phrase '*la nikaha illa bi waliyyin*' ('no wedding without guardian') in *hadith*. Some *ulema* interpret this as meaning that a wedding is 'illegal' without a guardian, and that the presence of a guardian is a requirement for marriage ('*annaha min syurut al-shihhat la min syurut al-tamam*'). Yet other *ulama* say that a wedding ceremony without a guardian

¹⁰ These books include Rifa'i (1978:453–512) and Al-Jamal (1986).

¹¹ *Hadith* of Ibnu Hibban.

is 'imperfect' instead of 'illegal'. Abu Hanifah, for instance, states that a guardian is only a supplement, not a requirement, of marriage ceremonies (*'fa-ka-annaha 'indah min syurut al-tamam la min syurut al-shihhat'*).¹² Those who require a guardian in the marriage ceremony intend to maintain a good relationship between children and parents, as they hold that parents usually know best about suitable spouses for their children and that it is not appropriate in Islam for a daughter to freely befriend men (Rifa'i 1978:460–461). The Counter Legal Draft wants to settle these differences by requiring a guardian for women under 21, as those older than 21 are considered mature and independent, and able to take a legal decision. A guardian or parents can still make suggestions, offer advice, or give their views on the marriage, but they are not entitled to force or prohibit a marriage.

Witness in the Wedding Ceremony

Article 25 of the Islamic Code of Law stipulates: 'A person who is eligible to become witness in a marriage ceremony is a Muslim man who is fair, mature, mentally fit, and not deaf'. This requirement discriminates against non-Muslims, women, and disabled people. For that reason, article 11 of the Counter Legal Draft offers the following formulation:

- (1) The position of women and men as witnesses in wedding ceremonies is equal. (2) A marriage ceremony has to be witnessed by at least two women or two men or a woman and a man. (3) Those eligible to become witness are at least 21 years old, mentally fit, mature (*rasyid* or *rasyiidah*), and appointed consensually by the bride and the groom.

There need to be witnesses at a marriage ceremony to make sure that the wedding is actually performed. Yet in a modern society, a witness alone is not sufficient, as the marriage should be registered with an authorized institution such as the religious affairs office. Why does the Code of Law prohibit women to become witnesses? After all, women play major roles in preparing the whole procedure of marriage ceremonies. The prohibition from becoming witness is discriminatory, not just from the perspective of gender equality, but also in view of human rights in general. Besides women, non-Muslims as well as blind or deaf people are not allowed to be witnesses either, while

¹² *Ulama* who require a guardian in marriage ceremonies act in contradiction to sura 2:232 and 2:221. Verse 232 clearly asks the guardian not to prevent a divorced woman from marrying another man whom she considers suitable. The phrase '*fa-la ta'dhuluhunna*' refers to the authority of the guardian. Verse 221 prohibits a guardian to marry off his son/daughter to 'infidels' unless the latter become faithful.

the Qur'an condemns any acts of discrimination. Indeed, the Qur'an does not even require witnesses during marriage ceremonies, but instead on the occasion of divorce agreements (*thalaq*), as is pointed out in sura 65:2.

Age Requirement for Marriage

Article 15 of the Islamic Code of Law states:

(1) For the benefit of family and household, marriage can only be held if the bride and groom meet the age requirement stated by Article 7 of the Law No. 1/1974, which is 19 years for the groom and 16 years for the bride. (2) Any couple under 21 years is required to obtain permission as stipulated in Article 6 (2), (3), (4) and (5) of the Law No. 1/1974.

Article 7 of the Counter Legal Draft offers the following alternative formulation:

(1) Both the bride and groom have to be at least 19 years old. (2) A bride or a groom can marry off himself/herself as long as he/she is mentally fit, 21 years old, and mature. (3) For the bride and groom who do not meet the requirements in point (2), the one authorized to marry them off is a family member/relative or a person who acts on behalf of the family.

The Qur'an and *hadith* do not clearly stipulate the minimum age for getting married. From the Muslim point of view, marriageable age usually sets in when a girl has menarche and a boy his first sexual dreams. No wonder there are many 'under-age' marriages in society, which are simply cases of child abuse and violations of children's rights. The Prophet Muhammad himself got married when he was 25 years old, which should become a point of reference. The lower age limit for women in the Code of Law confirms their subordination. To set a minimum age of 16 years for women is a violation of Law No. 1/1979 on Child Welfare. Article 1(2) states: 'A child is a person not yet 21 years old and never married'. The requirement also violates the International Convention on Children's Rights ratified by Indonesia in 1990. The Convention stresses that individuals are children until they are 18 years old, just as stipulated by the 2003 Law on Children's Protection. Legalizing marriages of 16-year old brides means to legitimize underage marriage and the exploitation of children.

A study conducted by the department of women studies at the Jakarta State Islamic University in 2000 shows that the ideal marrying age for women is an average 19.9 years, and 23.4 years for men. At that time, they are ready for matrimony in terms of physical, economic, social, mental and spiritual, religious, and cultural maturity. The minimum age at marriage should thus

be no younger than 19 years for both men and women, when they have at least graduated from high school. Marriage at an early age not only increases biological risks for women, such as damaged reproductive organs and youth pregnancy, it also entails psychological burdens such as the inability to perform reproductive functions well. Family life demands a great deal of responsibility of both husband and wife, as well as an appropriate fulfilment of their roles.

Dowry

Article 30 of the Islamic Code of Law stipulates: 'The groom is obliged to provide dowry for the bride. The quantity and type of dowry are agreed upon by both parties'. Meanwhile, Article 16 of the Counter Legal Draft states: '(1) Both bride and groom must provide dowry for each other according to local custom. (2) The quantity and type of dowry are agreed upon by both parties according to their respective financial condition'. Jurisprudence books state that a dowry is required in the marriage ceremony, and thus is an obligation. The argumentation is based on sura 4:4: '*wa atu an-nisa'a sadukatihinna nihlatan*'. But the verse actually does not say 'dowry', but instead *sadukatihinna*, or 'alms'. Providing dowry also follows the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad who gave a dowry, or gift, to his bride. This was recorded in several *hadith*.¹³ Dowry is generally perceived as a gift bestowed by the groom on the bride during the marriage ceremony. Its form varies, ranging from cash to golden jewellery, a set of prayer equipments, a copy of the Qur'an, or property and land. In Indonesia, the most common dowry is golden jewellery. Arab societies of the Middle East usually provide highly valuable dowries, such as furnished houses.

Islam sees dowry as a symbol of respect for women, whose dignity is enhanced so that they become equal with men. However, dowry was later misunderstood as the price of a woman's body, the payment for sex. Once a man gives the dowry, he claims ownership of the woman's body and is entitled to have intercourse whenever he wants. This perception is not unfounded, as it refers to the view held by classical jurisprudence where marriage is always defined as '*akd li at-tamlik*' ('contract of the ownership over women's bodies') (see the beginning of this contribution). The issue of dowry has also been

¹³ *Hadith* mentioning dowry include the *hadith* of Anas (r.a.) recorded by Bukhari-Muslim; the *hadith* of Abu Dawud from Uqbah ibn Amir; the *hadith* of Tirmidzi from Abdillah ibn Umar; and the *hadith* of Hakim from Sahal ibn Sa'id.

related to *dukhul* (sexual intercourse); for example, when a couple is divorced before having had *dukhul*, the husband has the right to return only half of the dowry. If a couple divorces after having consummated the marriage, the husband has to return the entire dowry.

Although the word 'dowry' is not found in the Qur'an, there are several words with a similar meaning, such as *ujrah* (sura 4:25), *shadaq* (sura 4:4), and *faridhah* (sura 2:236–237). From the verses, we can conclude that the dowry is a gift bestowed by the husband on the wife during the marriage ceremony as a symbol of love and affection, as well as of responsibility and the sincere intention to carry out the mandate of marriage ruled by religion. Then what about the dowry practiced by the Prophet? A number of *hadith* describe it as follows: 'From Abdullah ibn Umar ibn Rabi'ah, from his father, he states: Prophet Muhammad allows a man to marry a woman with a pair of sandals as dowry' (*hadith* of Turmuzi). 'From Sahal ibn Sa'id r.a.¹⁴ He said Prophet Muhammad once married off a man to a woman with a steel ring as dowry' (*hadith* of Hakim). Another *hadith* states: 'From 'Uqbah ibn Amir, he said that Prophet Muhammad uttered that the best dowry was the easiest to obtain' (*hadith* of Abu Dawud). When the Prophet married Shafiyah, he did not provide dowry in the form of any material possessions, but instead freedom from slavery. The historical event is recorded in a *hadith* of Bukhari-Muslim: 'From Anas r.a., from Prophet Muhammad: He had freed Shafiyah and the freedom was the dowry'.

These *hadith* conclude that there is no strict rule with regard to dowry, its form, or quantity. The more important thing is that dowry should not become a burden. It is a symbol of respect, love, affection, sincerity, and responsibility. Its value does not lie in its contents or price, but in the intention or motivation of the person who gives it, and how he/she transforms the intention into good behaviour in family life. Dowry is thus not a monopoly of men, but women may give it as well. Isn't giving a wonderful thing?

Marriage Registration

Article 5 of the Code of Law states: 'To maintain the order, marriage among Muslims must be registered'. The registration is due to administrative reasons rather than being a requirement for marriage. Article 6 of the Counter

¹⁴ 'R.a.' is the abbreviation of '*radi'allahu anhu/anha*', which translates as 'may Allah be pleased with him/her'. Originally used for companions of the Prophet, this phrase of blessing has come to be applied to other pious Muslim individuals as well, both men and women.

Legal Draft offers the following alternative: 'Marriage is legal when meeting the requirements: bride, groom, *ijab* and *qabul*, witness and registration'. Article 12 of the Draft stresses: '(1) All marriages must be registered. (2) The government is obliged to record every marriage of every citizen'. Compared to the views of traditional jurisprudence regarding marriage registration, the Code of Law is actually more progressive as it stipulates registration in Articles 5, 6, and 7. The stipulations in the articles show the importance of such registration, but they do not sufficiently emphasize that it is a requirement for legal marriage. People in general still view registration through the lense of classical jurisprudence, and thus think that as long as the marriage ceremony has met the religious requirements, registration is not needed. As a result, cases of unregistered marriages are rampant.

The Counter Legal Draft includes registration as a requirement for legal marriage. The theological argumentation is based on sura 2:282, which stipulates that any debt transaction has to be recorded in a legal document. Marriage is basically an important transaction, far more important than other transactions in human life. If a mere debt agreement has to be recorded, then marriage contracts, being much more crucial, should be registered as well. Another argument is the *hadith* stating: '[...] never do prostitution, and never do unregistered marriage'.¹⁵ There are also a number of *hadith* that recommend the announcement of marriages,¹⁶ and other *hadith* that require witness(es) in any wedding ceremony to validate the marriage. Atsar Umar ibn Khattab does not recognize marriages that are only attended by one witness. However, registration is a more powerful legal device than the testimony of witnesses, especially when issued by an official institution of the state.

Unregistered marriages put the wife and children at a great disadvantage. The woman is not a legitimate wife before the law because she does not have a marriage certificate as an authentic document and proof. In case of divorce, she is not entitled to a share of the joint property because the marriage is considered non-existent. Upon divorce or at the death of her husband, she does not have any right to his income and inheritance. Besides such legal implications, unregistered marriage also entails social consequences for women, as society views them as mistresses. Children in an unregistered marriage face the consequence that their status becomes illegitimate, noted

¹⁵ See the Kitab An-Nikah, Sunan At-Tirmizi, *hadith* no. 1008; Kitab An-Nikah Sunan An-Nasai no. 3316–3317; Kitab An-Nikah Sunan Ibn Majah, *hadith* no. 1886.

¹⁶ See As-Sarakhsi, *al-Mabsut* V:31; Sunan At-Tirmidzi no. 1009; Sunan Ibn Majah no. 1885; and Musnad Ahmad no. 15545.

in their birth certificate as 'born out of wedlock'. The illegitimacy recorded in the birth certificate creates unfortunate social and psychological impacts for the children and their mothers. The unclear status of the children before the law also rules out their rights to financial support, inheritance, and other contributions from the father.

According to Abu Hasan Al-Mawardi and Ibn Taimiyah,¹⁷ Islamic law obliges the state to protect its citizens from any form of exploitation and other treatment that inflict loss, by issuing regulations that will create peace and harmony. The government has the function of *fi harasah al-din* (protecting religion) and *fi siyasah al-dunya* (arranging the worldly order). In performing these two functions, the government must be obeyed by society as long as it does not ask its citizens to do immoral things or anything else that causes disadvantages. The government is permitted to issue regulations or *siyasah asy-syar'iyyah*, or a set of regulations to support the teachings of Qur'an and *hadith*, although it has never been previously formulated by *ulama*.

Nusyuz within Marriage

Article 84(1) of the Code of Law says: 'A wife is considered *nusyuz* (disobedient) if she is unwilling to carry out obligations as stipulated in Article 83(1), except for legitimate reason'.

The Counter Legal Draft implies that 'disobedient' can also be applied to a husband, as stated in the Qur'an. Article 53 of the Draft stipulates:

(1) A husband or a wife is considered *nusyuz* if s/he is not performing his/her obligations or is violating the rights regulated in Articles 50 and 51. (2) The settlement of *nusyuz* is sought peacefully by means of discussion within the family. (3) When peaceful settlement fails, the party who suffers the loss can file suit with the court. (4) When violence or torture occurs because of *nusyuz*, then the harmed party can press criminal charges with the police.

Nusyuz means disobedience or violation of a command. Generally, society sees *nusyuz* as disobedience of the wife towards the husband, and not vice versa. *Nusyuz* creates domestic violence, and the fact that it is not imposed on the husband reveals double moral standards. As a normal human being, any man can potentially commit *nusyuz*, and even the Qur'an explicitly stipulates that *nusyuz* can be applied to men as well (sura 4:128). The verse about *nusyuz* (sura 4:34) was revealed to the Prophet in the context of seventh-century

¹⁷ See Ibn Taimiyah (1951:22–25).

Arab society where violence against women—most commonly by beating—was rampant. The revelation of the verse aimed at prohibiting wife-beating and any other forms of domestic violence.

The Rights and Obligations of Husband and Wife

Article 79 of the Code of Law states:

- (1) The husband is the head of the family and the wife is the homemaker.
- (2) The rights and position of a wife are balanced and equal with those of a husband in a household as well as in society.
- (3) Each party is entitled to conduct legal acts (*perbuatan hokum*).

It becomes immediately apparent that the content of Article 79 is inconsistent. How can the positions and rights of women and men be equal when the first sentence clearly states that the husband is the head of the family? Article 49 of the Counter Legal Draft offers the following formulation:

- (1) The position, rights, and obligations of husband and wife are equal within the family and society.
- (2) Husband and wife have the rights and obligation to establish a good family based on *mawaddah, rahmah, and mashlahah*.

As to the rights of the husband, Article 80 of the Code of Law stipulates:

- (1) The husband is the adviser of the wife and household, but important household matters are decided by husband and wife.
- (2) The husband is obliged to protect his wife and to satisfy the needs of the household according to his ability.
- (3) The husband is obliged to provide religious education for his wife, and to give her the opportunity to acquire the knowledge useful for religion, state and nation.

Article 83 of the Code of Law stipulates the rights of the wife as follows:

- (1) The main obligation of the wife is to serve her husband devotedly within the perimeters permitted by Islamic Law.
- (2) The wife manages and arranges the daily needs of a household as best as she can.

Meanwhile, Article 51 of the Counter Legal Draft sees the obligations of husband and wife as follows:

- (1) To love each other, to give respect, honour, and protection to one another, and to accept each other's differences.
- (2) To support each other and to satisfy the needs of the family according to their abilities.
- (3) Both husband and wife manage the household based on their agreement.
- (4) [The spouses] give one another the opportunity to improve their potential.
- (5) To look after, take care of, and educate the children. These obligations apply to both parties as long as the marriage lasts.

The phrase 'head of the family' implies power and authority. A husband can thus become so powerful that he obliges his wife to do all the domestic chores and to serve him devotedly. This perception contradicts the morals of Islam as stipulated in the Qur'an verse 2:187, where Allah stresses the equal position of husband and wife (*hunna libasun lakum wa antum libasun lahunna*, 'husband and wife give each other protection'). Positioning the husband as the head of the family negates social reality and only allows for one type of family, which consists of father (husband), mother (wife), and children. However, there are various forms of families or households: single mothers with children, orphans with the oldest daughter in charge, and so on. Many women are de facto the heads of their families, but are not recognized as such by law. Under conditions of war and natural disaster—, such as the tsunami in Aceh—, or when the husband works abroad, women are forced to be the heads of their families. These situations, as well as a number of international and national conventions,¹⁸ can become legal references when it comes to acknowledging the more egalitarian position of husband and wife. Every human being is basically a leader, at least for himself/herself. Each and every one of us will be asked for our responsibility upon Allah. A *hadith* states: 'Every one of you is a leader and each of you will be asked about your leadership. A servant is a leader for looking after his/her master's possessions, and will be asked for his/her work' (*hadith* of Bukhari-Muslim). This *hadith* implies the opportunity for anyone to become a leader, regardless of gender. Rather, leadership has to do with ability, self confidence, independence, maturity, courage, sense of responsibility, and devotion to Allah.

Financial Caretaker in Marriage

Article 80 (4 and 6) of the Code of Law stresses:

- (4) Based on his income, the husband is responsible for: a. financial matters, *kiswah* and residence of wife; b. household expenses, medical expenses for wife and children and childcare fund; c. tuition for the children's education. [...] (6) The wife can exempt her husband from the responsibilities stated in points (4) a and b.

The Counter Legal Draft states that earning an income is a collective responsibility of husband and wife. But it has to be taken into account that

¹⁸ DUHAM, CEDAW, Human Rights Convention in Kairo, Amendment of Article 28 of the 1945 Constitution, the 1999–2004 State's Guidelines, and Article 51 of Law No. 39/1999 on human rights.

reproductive duties (pregnancy, giving birth, breastfeeding, and childcare) are far more valuable than earning money. For that reason, wives who opt for reproductive duties must be released from the obligation to earn income, and must be given appreciation, such as moral support, nutritious food, medical treatment, and so on, according to their husband's ability and the benefit of the family. Article 52 of the Draft stipulates:

- (1) Pregnancy, giving birth, and breastfeeding are more valuable for wives than earning income. (2) The implication of point (1) is that the wife is entitled to a balanced reward based on the agreement between both parties. (3) If the agreement is not fulfilled, each party may ask for settlement in court.

There are no differences between husbands and wives in terms of earning income to satisfy the family's needs. A job that is suitable for a husband is also suitable for a wife, and vice versa. Domestic chores are not only woman's responsibility but the whole family's. A wife may also be involved in the public domain. There is no prohibition for women to have a career outside their home. Indeed, the Prophet's wife Khadijah and his daughter Fatimah are examples of wives who worked to earn family income.

Prohibition of Polygamy

Article 55 of the Code of Law stipulates:

- (1) Having more than one wife at a time is limited to four wives. (2) The main precondition for having more than one wife is for the husband to be fair to the wives and the children. (3) Failing to meet the precondition stated in point (2) means prohibition to have more than one wife.

Meanwhile, Article 3 of the Counter Legal Draft strongly emphasizes the prohibition of polygamy:

- (1) The essence of marriage is monogamy (*tawahhud al-zawj*). (2) The failure to comply with the precondition of point (1) means that the marriage is invalid before the law.

Polygamy had already been widely practised in many parts of the world for thousands of years before Islam appeared in the Arab Peninsula. There was no limitation as to the number of wives, nor was there a principle of justice. Then came Islam and it brought a radical reform by limiting the number of wives to four, and by demanding that the husbands guarantee fairness to all their wives.

The spirit of the reform is a strong commitment to the elimination of polygamy, as the latter goes against the principle of justice that is the core of

Islamic teachings. This spirit needs to guide future efforts to reform Islamic law regarding polygamy. The strong limitations already imposed on polygamy in Islam should be seen as a noble incentive to gradually abolish that practice altogether. Alcohol and slavery were not prohibited all at once either, but instead gradually until society was ready to accept these changes, as slavery and the consumption of alcohol were traditions deeply entrenched in Arab society. Every verse of the Qur'an uses phrases suitable for the conditions at the time when these teachings were revealed. But the morals of the Qur'an are not limited to any specific historical period. Verses on polygamy, slavery, and the consumption of alcohol aim at making humans realize their dignity as the most dignified creatures of God. Humans must respect themselves and others without distinction, and must not be self-destructive by drinking alcohol or harm others by practising polygamy and slavery.

The Prophet Muhammad lived and grew up in the tradition of polygamy, but opted for monogamy. He married Siti Khadijah, and they lived together happily for 28 years until she passed away. Their married bliss still inspires millions of Muslim couples, who will say a prayer referring to the Prophet and his wife in their marriage ceremony. Theoretically, there were enough reasons for the Prophet to practise polygamy: he was capable of being fair since he was a prophet; he was a descendant of a noted Quraishi figure, sympathetic and good looking, respected in society, a charismatic religious leader, and his wife Khadijah was not able to bear him a son. But he was undeterred. For the Prophet Muhammad, Khadijah was not a mere sleeping companion but a colleague, discussion partner, a shoulder to cry on, best friend, and soul mate. The death of Khadijah was such a huge ordeal for Muhammad that the year of her passing was immortalized in the history of Islam as *amul azmi* (the year of grief). For the rest of his life, the Prophet always continued to mention the kindheartedness and compassion of the woman he really loved. Three years after Khadijah passed away, Muhammad was faced with the huge responsibility of embarking on missionary endeavours in Yastrib and outside the Arab Peninsula. Society in those regions was divided into dozens of tribes, forcing Muhammad to forge alliances to gain support for his struggle, and marriage was a strategic marketing tool. This was the reason why he eventually married several women, but this historical perspective is often missing in the analysis of polygamy.

Compared to the view held in traditional jurisprudence, the Code of Law is more progressive by stating that polygamy can only be legal when permitted by court. Furthermore, permission is only granted under certain conditions: 1) if the wife is unable to carry out her obligations; 2) if the wife is disabled or incurably ill; 3) if the wife cannot bear children. Yet all these conditions

for polygamy only allow for the husband's perspective and do not consider the interests of women at all. What if the husband unable to carry out his obligations? What if the husband is disabled and ailing? Or what if the husband is infertile? Even the reasons go against Allah's guidance as stated in sura 4:19: '[...] and have a relationship with them [wives] appropriately. Then, if you don't like them, [be patient] because you may not like something, but Allah brings it for more goodness'. As a matter of fact, sura 4:3—the verse that has always been the theological foundation of polygamy—does not discuss marriage in the first place, but the protection of orphans. That verse thus requires thematic interpretation (*tafsir al-ma'udhu'iy*) whenever a polygamy law is formulated. Such a law cannot be based solely on one verse anyway—even though the verse seems to discourage polygamy rather than allow it—, but needs to consider every verse that regulates marriage, as has been mentioned earlier in this contribution in the section on the principles of Islam.

Interfaith Marriage

Article 40 of the Code of Law clearly prohibits marriage between people adhering to different religions. However, Article 54 of the Counter Legal Draft states:

- (1) Marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is allowed.
- (2) Marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims is based on the principle of respecting each other and of maintaining the freedom of each party to practise its religious teachings and faith.
- (3) Before the marriage ceremony is conducted, the government stipulates that directions be given to the couple about marriage between Muslims and non-Muslims so that each party is aware of every eventuality that may occur because of the marriage.

Article 55 gives more detail as follows:

- (1) In a marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, the children have the right to choose any religion freely.
- (2) When a child cannot pick his/her own religion, then s/he will have a temporary religion based on agreement between the parents.

The Code of Law's prohibition on interfaith marriages fully represents the view of traditional jurisprudence, such as put forth in Anshori Umar's book *Women fiqh* ('Women jurisprudence'), which forbids interfaith marriages for leadership reasons: a husband should guide his wife, and the latter should be obedient to him. According to Umar, it is wrong for infidels to own guardian rights or have power over Muslims (Umar 1981:368). The book *Ilmu fiqh Islam*

lengkap ('The complete Islamic jurisprudence studies') by Moh. H. Rifa'i prohibits interfaith marriage simply because all non-Muslims are considered infidels (Rifa'i 1978:472–473). Meanwhile, the Counter Legal Draft does not prohibit such marriages as long as the purpose of marriage is in line with the aforementioned definition. Interfaith marriage is still prohibited if it aims at religious conversion, is a modus operandi of women trafficking, or is motivated by any other condemnable intention. For that reason, interfaith weddings can only be performed on authorization and a thorough in-depth examination by court. The Draft refers to a number of views from *ulama* rarely mentioned in the jurisprudence books in Indonesia.¹⁹ Analysis of this issue also shows that dissenting opinions between *ulama* are due to different interpretations of three Qur'an verses most often referred to in the issue of interfaith marriage: suras 5:5, 2:221, and 60:10.

The Qur'an categorizes non Muslims into three groups. The first of these is the *ahl-al kitab*. There are various meanings of this phrase, some of them literal, some broader. Generally, this group comprises people who recognize the books of revelation passed by Allah to His prophets. Included in this category are Christians and Jews.²⁰ Muslim men may marry *ahl al-kitab* women, as is clearly stated in the Qur'an verse 5:5: 'And you are allowed to marry women who maintain their honours, *mukminah* or *ahl al-kitab* before you'. The history of Islam documents cases where apostles married *ahl al-kitab* women, for instance Utsman ibn 'Affan, Thalhah bin Abdullah, Hudzaifah bin al-Yaman, Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqash, and others.²¹ There is no single Qur'an verse that bars Muslim women from marrying *ahl al-kitab* men. Based on the principle of jurisprudence, '*adam al-dalil huwa al-dalil*' ('no reference indicates no prohibition'), Muslim women are thus allowed to marry *ahl al-kitab* men.

Second, there are the *musrikin*. *Musrik* means someone who denies the existence of one God, the prophets, and the afterlife. According to Ahmad bin Hanbal, *musyrik* in Arab society are those who worship statues (Katsir 1999:297). For that reason, everyone who believes in Allah and does not put something before God cannot be categorized as *musyrik*, regardless of his/her religion.²² There is a norm stating, '*man lan yakun lahu washf lam*

¹⁹ For an advanced discussion of interfaith marriage, see Mulia (2005b:52–80); Anshor (2004).

²⁰ Some *ulema* distinguish between *ahl al-kitab* and *syubhah al-kitab*. *Ahl al-kitab* comprises Christians and Jews, while *syubhah al-kitab* are followers of the Majusi and Wastani religions.

²¹ See Katsir (1999, Section I:297). Compare Al-Raziy (1995, Section III:63).

²² The Qur'an says that Muslims who are not willing to pay tithe can be called *musyrik*, as Allah says, '*wa waylum li al-musyrikin alladzina la yu'tuna al-zakat*' (Fushshilat [41], 7).

yusytaq 'anhu ism'. Syirik is also a very personal thing as it involves faith, and thus cannot be identified objectively. Devout men must not marry *musyrik* women and vice versa because according to the Qur'an, 'they will trick them to hell, while Allah invites people to heaven and gives mercy' (sura 2:221). Thus, it is not only *musyrik* people who cannot be married, but anyone with the intention or potential to hurl us into hell, such as corruptors, terrorists, robbers, and other criminals.

Third, there is the category of *kafir*. Generally, *kafir* means people outside Islam. This category is further subdivided into *kafir dzimmi*, *kafir harbi*, *kafir musta'min*, and *kafir mu'ahad*. Most classical *mufasir* prohibit marriage between Muslims and *kafir* based on sura 60:10: 'And do not hold into the knot (marriage) with those *kafir* people'. But a number of *ulema* explain that the verse, just as sura 2:221, has been *nasakh* by sura 5:5. In short, according to the views held by various *ulema* marriages between Muslims and non-Muslims are either permitted, completely prohibited, or allowed under certain conditions, that is, in cases where the non-Muslim is from the *ahl kitab* group.

Iddah (Transitional Period) in Marriage

Article 153 of the Code of Law states: 'A divorced wife has to undergo a transitional period or *iddah*, except when she is *qobla al dukhul*, and when the marriage contract is not broken due to the death of the husband'. *Qobla al dukhul* is the term for a divorced wife who has not had sexual intercourse with the husband. This implies that the regulation on *iddah* in the Code of Law relates to sexual activities or pregnancy. Islamic jurisprudence books in Indonesia say that *iddah* is important for women as it enables them to find out whether or not they are pregnant after their husband has passed away or divorced them (Rifa'i 1978:499). *Iddah* actually is well-intended, because besides the issues of sexuality and pregnancy it also considers psychological condition, tolerance, and solidarity with the children and the former spouse's family. *Iddah* is moreover a transitional period where one party (when the spouse has died) or the couple (in the case of divorce) can reflect clearly and wisely about the next step to be taken. For that reason, Article 88 of the Counter Legal Draft offers the following revision:

- (1) A transitional period or *iddah* is imposed on husband and wife whose marriage contract is declared broken by the religious court.
- (2) During the transitional period, the former husband or former wife are entitled to become reconciled with each other.

The Draft stresses that *iddah* is imposed on both husband and wife instead of only on the wife. The husband must also undergo an *iddah* period, whose duration is in accordance with local tradition or agreement, while the *iddah* period of the wife follows the stipulation of the Code of Law. There is not a single text that explicitly mentions the husband's *iddah*, but the moral obligation contained in the religious teachings about *iddah* applies to both husband and wife. Both parties must have empathy, tolerance, and solidarity for the family of the (former) spouse, and especially for the children born into the marriage.

Ihdad (Mourning Period) in Marriage

Article 170 of the Code of Law stipulates:

- (1) A wife whose husband dies must undergo a mourning period equal to *iddah*, as a sign of grief and to avoid slander. (2) A husband whose wife dies undergoes a mourning period appropriately.

The law thus rules that *ihdad* is not only imposed on the wife but also on the husband. This is such a progressive idea, but it still needs to be implemented in society as people continue to refer to jurisprudence stipulations according to which *ihdad* only applies to wives and not to husbands. Therefore, Article 112 of the Counter Legal Draft says:

The husband or wife whose spouse dies must undergo a mourning period equal to the transitional period.

Besides imposing *ihdad* on husbands, the Draft also erases the stereotype that a widow ought to mourn to avoid slander. Why should malicious gossip be solely associated with widows when it can actually hit anyone, including widowed men? Such a rule only stigmatizes women, suggesting that they are weak and easily seduced or fall for sexual diversion, and thus have to be kept at home.

The Draft offers an Islamic view that is humanistic and egalitarian. Islam stresses that all humans, both men and women, are God's creatures. The difference between them is the quality of devotion. Both are obliged to take care of themselves to avoid slander. Both must control their sexual desire to avoid sin. Both man and woman must become the moral pillars upon which a good society is built. A number of Qur'an verses explicitly explain this issue, and even stress the importance for men to control their sexual desires (suras 23:5; 24:30–31; 33:35; 70:29). *Ihdad* is highly recommendable for psychological reasons, not just for widows, but also for widowers, at least as a

statement of grief and a symbol of solidarity for the deceased spouse and the latter's family.

The Rights and Status of Children Born Out of Wedlock

Article 100 of the Islamic Code of Law states: 'Children born out of the wedlock only have a familial relationship with their mother and her family'. It is not fair to force these children to only have kinship bonds with their mother and her family; after all, they have biological fathers who must assume responsibility. Article 47 of the Counter Legal Draft therefore suggests:

- (1) The status of children born out of wedlock is that they are related to their mother and the man who impregnated her.
- (2) Any doubt about the status of children can be settled at the religious court.

The revision serves two purposes: first, to enable these children to find their biological fathers; and second, to grant them a status equal to that of children born in wedlock.²³ Islam makes it clear that children do not inherit the sins of their parents (sura 35:18). The children are entitled to be recognized, to have a relationship with their parents, and to be financially maintained, and they even have the right to be heirs to both their parents. The government is obliged to facilitate the identification process of their biological fathers. Many verses of the Qur'an and *hadith* state that the repute and treatment of human should not depend on the marital status of their parents, but on their own good deeds (see, for example, sura 49:13).

Conclusion

Islamic Law, including marital law, is developed and reformed in line with the dynamics of Muslim society in many regions. Islamic marital law, particularly in Indonesia, is an amalgamation of various factors: the results of *ijtihad* that in turn produce new *ijtihad* (*talfiq*), the creation of an administrative policy (*siyasah asy-syar'iyah*), the formulation of additional guidelines (*takhayyur*), and the reinterpretation of jurisprudence views that are no longer appropriate in the present situation and under contemporary conditions.

Family law reform in the form of Counter Legal Draft offers an ideal, just, and democratic marital law based on Islamic teachings that uphold

²³ This proposal is in line with the Convention of Children Rights and the Law on Children's Protection.

humanitarian values. The purpose is to establish blissful marriages filled with love and affection (*mawaddah wa rahmah*), civilized behaviour on the part of both husband and wife (*muasyarah bil ma'ruf*), mutual respect and understanding, as well as mutual completion of the couple. That way, husband and wife will attain happiness in life and afterlife. The Draft strives to eliminate domination, discrimination, exploitation, and violence committed within marriage by anyone and for whatsoever reason. It is hoped that there will be no more forced marriages, underage marriages, unregistered marriages, irresponsible contract marriages, and polygamy. As an alternative based on research and analysis, the Draft is not final nor has it to be accepted without objection. Instead, it has to be seen as an *ijtihad* to promote those Islamic teachings that emphasize love and respect for human beings and humanitarian values. The Draft is also an effort to seek solutions for a number of contemporary social problems faced by Indonesian society.

Lastly, the Draft aims at empowering women and at giving them full protection as human beings, as is stipulated in the Constitution and other regulations such as CEDAW. With the Draft, the Indonesian Muslim community will be able to promote Islamic teachings that are pro-women and a blessing for the whole universe. *In urîdu illa al-ishlâh mastatha'tu. Wa mâ tawfîqiy illâ billâh. Wa Allah a'lam bi as-shawab.*

MALAYSIA

'FAMILY VALUES' AND ISLAMIC REVIVAL:
GENDER, RIGHTS AND STATE MORAL PROJECTS IN MALAYSIA*

Maila Stivens

Introduction

The children should keep the values of Islam. I don't want the children to be branded as 'modern' [so that] they can't mix with my brothers' and sisters' children. (Middle-class Malaysian interviewee)

'As Asians', Fazlin Badri Alyeope [a reader who had written in to the *New Straits Times*, M.S.] puts it, 'we know that it is not family values that are to blame for the social ills in society. It is the lack of them. The rule is simple. Children put their whole-hearted trust in their parents to guide them. However, many household breadwinners, their spouses and children, deviate from spiritual values and create their own values [...] Family values give you principles. They give you a taste of how sweet life can be.' (Alyeope 1995:34)

The role of women in moulding happy families and their contribution in national economic and social development has always been recognized. The success of women in balancing this dual role cannot be denied and is indeed admirable. The responsibility of women in nurturing families based on My Home My Heaven [a recent 'family strengthening' initiative, M.S.], begins from the birth of a child till adulthood. (Budget speech 2004, former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad [Mahathir Mohamad 2003])

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This chapter explores the cultural politics of the state's 'family values' project in Islamizing Malaysia. Drawing on my research on gender, public and private, and modernity in the country, I examine some of the complex intersections among versions of local and global family values discourses and their place in nationalist, revivalist, Islamist, and modernist Muslim projects in the country; these versions include local and more global claims about family values, 'Asian family' values, and versions of 'Islamic' family values.

My middle-class Malay informants, like many in the region, have been living their everyday 'private' lives in a context where the 'family' and the domestic sphere are highly politicized, the 'Muslim family' especially so: the moral project of family values has assumed a central place in many of the cultural contests staged by state, religion and the media. Apocalyptic discourses of family crisis are omnipresent: a multitude of concerns are aired about families and marriages in trouble, divorce, children born out of wedlock, youthful sloth and transgressions, sexualities, crime and child abuse (see Mahathir bin Mohamad and Ishihara 1995). Family values discourses operate with a highly reified and overdetermined category of 'family', which is deployed within the contests for moral authority that have accompanied the mounting religiosity of a resacralized Malaysian modernity. Yet within many of these discourses, the idea of the 'family' is oddly indeterminate, vague and insubstantial: perhaps all mythologies are necessarily and intentionally thus. As I suggest, Malaysian versions of family values are also manifestly part of larger global structures of meaning, from which they draw further power: for example, the state has forged some highly significant global alliances with conservative religious forces, including the Christian Right, in order to promote 'family values' and further 'strengthen' families. I argue that the embeddedness of this state moral project in a number of versions of 'family values' and 'Islamic values' and in wider alliances has important implications not only for understanding family and gender relations, but also for understanding Malay(sian) nationalisms and their global contexts. The chapter ends with some key questions: how much popular/populist support does this moral project have? And what challenges does such support pose for those working for women's (human) rights within Malaysian families?

Islamic Modernity in the New Malaysia

Since the mid-1970s I have been researching the dramatic modernization of (Peninsular) Malaysia over the last few decades. State-promoted industrialization has produced high rates of economic growth (Jomo 1993; Kahn 1996b),

low unemployment, and extensive general improvements in life expectancy, infant mortality and literacy. A 'hypertrophic' public sector and global factory regime has been succeeded by a move from heavy involvement in public enterprises, concentrated in the financial and industrial sectors (Kahn 1996b), towards partnership between the state and the private economic sector, and a Singapore-style Second Industrial Revolution. According to the results of the 2010 census so far, the total population of Malaysia was 28.3 million, comprising 67.4 per cent 'Bumiputera', 24.6 per cent 'Chinese', 7.3 per cent 'Indians' and 0.7 per cent 'Others' (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2010:5). Malays constituted 53 per cent of the total population of Malaysia in the 2000 census (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2001) and 63.1 per cent of the population of Peninsular Malaysia in 2010 (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2010:5). Malays have seen particular improvements in their economic situation with the positive discrimination of the New Economic Policy (NEP), which was instituted in 1970. Many critics, however, have seen the NEP as a response to Malay business and intelligentsia demands for a more interventionist state that protected 'Malay' interests. Rather than alleviating poverty per se, they argue, the NEP has produced new middle classes, a shift of power to technocrats and bureaucrats (Khoo 1992:50), and growing class differentiation and ethnicization.¹

The same period has seen what many commentators describe as a period of dramatic Islamization. This process both derived from developments in Islam globally and the rise of many Islamic organizations, notably *dakwah* (missionary)² groups locally. But it was also strongly promoted within the state-driven modernizing project, with extensive mainstreaming through bureaucratization and (further) politicization of Islam, and what many see as an extensive Islamization of social institutions like education within society. The state founded a well-endowed Islamic think tank, the Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM, Malaysian Institute for Islamic Understanding), which was charged with shaping an Islamic work ethic (see Nagata 1994). National state-supported initiatives have included moves to develop Islamic banking and Islamic industrialization (see Aidit 1993). The ruling coalition, led by the 'Malay' party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), has

¹ See Crouch (1996) and Kahn for discussion of the rise of middle classes in Malaysia and Stevens (1998b) for a gendered discussion. See Mandal (2004) and Case (2000) for discussion of ethnicization.

² The main ones have been Pertubuhan Kebajikan Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Muslim Welfare Organisation), Jama'at Tabligh (Tabligh), and Darul Arqam (Dar Al-Arqam), often known as Al-Arqam, a more anti-establishment group (see Khoo 1992; Nagata 1984).

faced a complex juggling act: it has both embraced versions of a 'moderate' Islamic modernity and jockeyed with diverse revivalist forces to establish their respective Islamic credentials (compare Weiss 2004). Pressures for an Islamic state have been especially strong within Kelantan, where the opposition Islamist³ party, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS, Pan-Malayan Islamic Party), has had considerable electoral success⁴ (Malaysia is not an Islamic state but Islam is the official religion of the country and the constitution assumes all Malays are Muslim; Nagata 1994:69). The dismissal of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in 1998 played an important part in the development of a pro-democracy *Reformasi* (reform) movement, which was closely but ambiguously linked to sections of resurgent Malay Muslim forces—notably PAS. As Nagata notes, by joining the Reform movement PAS was forced to pick a path between its historic Malay Muslim constituency and the more universalistic ideals of Barisan Alternatif (BA, Alternative Front):

[The latter] came to include a previously unimagined union of ethnic Chinese and Malays, of socialist and business interests, of religious and secular elements and of Muslims and non-Muslims, in addition to assorted intellectuals, human rights and NGO activists of all faiths. (Nagata 2001:491)

Patricia Martinez suggests that while Malaysia has been widely lauded as a modern, moderate Muslim nation, a number of developments within the country's ongoing Islamization have caused some erosion of this image (Martinez 2005:2–3). Amid moves to introduce *shari'a* law, she sees 'increasing contestation between fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined in the Constitution and [that which] is mandated under the *shari'a*' (Martinez 2005:3). Of great concern has been a number of court cases involving charges of apostasy and custody issues revolving around the religious conversion of

³ A number of writers have argued for using the terms revivalism or resurgence, rather than fundamentalism. I follow Olivier Roy's (1994, 2004) terminology which distinguishes Islamism and Islamic (neo)-fundamentalism: 'Islamists consider that society will be Islamized only through social and political action. The Islamist movements intervene directly in political life' (1994:36). 'Islamists who were pushing for the creation of an Islamic state are giving way to neo-fundamentalists who tend to concentrate on individuals and shun purely political issues. The *ummah* they are addressing is a transnational one, or even a virtual one, through the Internet' (interview of Roy by Jean-Francois Mayer 2004).

⁴ PAS had broken away from the ruling Barisan Nasional in 1977, led by a younger and more radical leadership (Khoo 1992:37). The party has had close links with Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia), founded by the former deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim. Originally a more nationalist Malay youth movement, ABIM subsequently became more pan-Islamic and openly critical of the government's shortcomings, especially in relation to issues of Malay poverty and official corruption. The Partai Rakyat Sosialis Islam made an attempt to reconcile socialism with Islam.

children (see Whiting 2008). There have been controversial attempts in the northeastern states of Kelantan and Terengganu to introduce Muslim criminal law (*hudud*, see Othman 1994). Islamists have campaigned against forms of entertainment considered un-Islamic, including 'traditional' Malay song and dance forms, and there has also been the implementation of strict dress rules for Muslim women in the northeastern state of Kelantan, including fines of Rm20 and Rm50 for not covering their hair or following these strict dress codes (Hussain 2004:69).

Norani Othman sees the Malaysian state as ultimately both sponsor and beneficiary of a variety of Islamizing initiatives (Othman 1994:139). She argues that the state and revivalist projects within globalizing Islam are pursuing an Islamic modernity (Othman 1998:187; compare Stivens 1998b; see also Peletz 2002). Othman notes that the difference in the state and revivalist projects lay in the extent to which they sought to Islamize the state structure, the economy and the path to development (Othman 1998:186). She is critical of the Malaysian government's drive to legitimate itself as Islamic against neo-traditionalist Islamic alternatives: she sees it as constantly driven by this rivalry to adopt policies and strategies that have contradicted its own agenda of encouraging a Malaysian culture of modernity (Othman 1994).

Nonetheless, in spite of the ongoing competition between UMNO and PAS, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between state and revivalist postures towards Islamic renewal in the 1980s and the first half of the 1990s prior to the developing Reformasi crisis. Representing these struggles as an opposition between an undifferentiated bloc of neo-traditional, theocratic, conservative Islamic/Islamist forces and more 'moderate' modernizing governmental forces can overlook many of the complexities of the support for revivalism/Islamism in Malaysia.⁵ Moreover, Islam in its many versions in Malaysia is best characterized as plural (compare Hefner 2001). A number of writers, for example, make the point that support for radical Islam in the country has been the outcome of the long and complex development of Malay ethnicity (Nagata 1984; Weiss 2004) and of earlier modernist initiatives (Khoo Boo Teik 2004). Olivier Roy's (2004, see also Mayer 2004) arguments about radical neo-fundamentalism as a product of globalization, however, are also important here. In recent decades, the various *dakwah* organizations have found some of their strongest support among the state-sponsored middle classes of the hyper-modern urban conurbations. Thus around a quarter of my middle-class informants interviewed (from 100 households) in the

⁵ See Martinez (2004, 2005) for further discussion.

1990s expressed some degree of support for versions of Islamic revival, and this figure was representative of larger surveys.

Both Norani Othman (1998:186) and Aihwa Ong (1995) have suggested that rivalry among Islamization projects has resulted in an intensification of Malay gender difference, segregation, and inequality. This competition contradictorily produced an ideological convergence around gender issues, with an explicit linking of gender and family issues to ideas of a moral hierarchy in society. This linkage was overt within a number of neotraditionalist constructions of 'family', particularly the 'Asian family' within ideas of 'Asian values', and the Islamic family (Stivens 1998b).⁶ These constructs were closely linked to the idea of 'westoxification', in which ideas of gender and family are again central. Originating in Iran (Mir-Hosseini 1996), this global discourse presents western culture as poisoning the morality and culture of the rest of the world. Ideas of westoxification have featured strongly in Islamist pronouncements in Malaysia. Thus Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad, the leader of the Malaysian Al-Arqam Islamist organisation, published a virulent attack in 1992 on the mores of the West, *The West on the brink of death*:

[...] I am now convinced that they (Westerners) have literally debased themselves to inhumanistic [sic] levels. (Ashaari Muhammad 1992:x)

They indulge in free sex, nudity, homosexuality, lesbianism, wife swapping and the like [...] But we are not in the least concerned by their own choice. However, since the Westerners do have a strong influence on the life and culture of those people outside their continent, particularly the Asians, we have to be extra wary. It is heartening therefore, to hear some leaders in Asia today, speak of the dire need to protect their people from the intrusion of bad Western influences. They know that Westerners are morally corrupted and have plotted to corrupt the morals of other people outside their continent. Wilfully and daringly, they work untiringly to destroy the human integrity and civilization. They want the world to be an entertainment house where they are free to perpetrate their evil deeds.⁷ (Ashaari Muhammad 1992:xii)

While embracing economic globalization, the Malaysian state ran a strongly anti-western line which emphasized the need for 'Asian values'. This post-colonial project originated in the 1980s with former Prime Minister Mahathir

⁶ See Farish Noor's discussion of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's conservatism re gender: 'his "progressive" outlook on Islam did not mean that he was any less conservative than the *ulama* of PAS when it came to matters of traditional "Asian values", personal morality or ethics' (Noor 2004a:15).

⁷ See Stivens (1998b) for discussion of the gender dimensions of the 1994 banning of this group.

Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, and a number of public intellectuals in both countries. Asian values, which were represented as responsible for the Asian miracles of the 1990s, supposedly reflect a strongly communitarian collectivism; this privileges societal interests over the narrow, individual self-interest, order and harmony over personal freedom and values respect for authority and strong leadership, strong attachment to family, conventional authority patterns and loyalty within the family, 'traditional' (sic) gender relations, strong filial piety, discipline, hard work and thrift (see Milner 1998). Free from the excesses of anarchic, morally degenerate and declining Western 'culture' (Mahathir bin Mohamad and Ishihara 1995), it was argued that Malaysia would develop an alternative, Islamic modernity through such values. Inevitably, the character of Muslim family life and law has been a particular issue within Asian values discourse in Malaysia. In Singapore, on the other hand, neo-Confucianism dominated debates. But both sets of ideas have linked the national good explicitly to ideas of everyday family life lived according to the edicts of 'family values'. At the same time, Asian values, somewhat strangely perhaps, connected this national good to an imagined, supra-national 'Asia' (see Milner 1998; Stivens 1998b).

Islamization has been widely interpreted as a response to rapid and disruptive social change, and to the dislocation and alienation produced by modernization (see Ong 1995). Juan Cole (2003:771), with others, suggests that radical Islamism is a response both to what its adherents see as the 'incomplete' project of Islamization and to the inroads of 'liberal modernity'. Akbar Ahmed and Hastings Donnan suggest that ethno-revivalism can be seen as both cause and effect of postmodernism (Ahmed and Donnan 1994:13), a means to live in a world beset by radical doubt. As many writers on contemporary Islamic 'fundamentalisms' have argued, these are not to be understood as retrogressive social developments, a 'return' to some former version of religion. They should be seen rather as fully modern/late modern/postmodern developments that are enmeshed in Islamic responses to the West and its perceived versions(s) of modernity (Roy 2004; compare Ahmed 1992:236). Arguably, however, the contemporary Malay and national imaginaries do not pose 'modern' and 'Islamic' as opposing forces. Instead, these imaginings often link these terms in a mutually constitutive relationship. Thus the idea of Malaysia as a 'modern, moderate Muslim nation' has been promoted by the country's powers-that-be since 11 September 2001 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. Nonetheless, PAS claimed in 1999 that the country was an Islamic state, as did Prime Minister Mahathir in September 2001 (Martinez 2004, 2005:2), a claim that led to a public furore. Mahathir (and some of his

ministers including his Minister for International Trade and Industry) have repeatedly described themselves as 'Muslim Fundamentalists'.

Islam, Public and Private

A key claim made by some theorists of 'Islamic society' is that Islam provides a total model of society—in their view Islam allows no separation of social spheres and thus no differentiation of political and religious authority (Hefner 1998; Thompson 2003). An academic from the Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, Zeenath Kausar, exemplifies this view when she argues that 'Islam is a complete system of life and it perceives life as an integrated whole. For this reason, sexuality, reproduction and [the] family system are also parts of the whole Islamic system of life, not outside it' (Kausar 2001).

Feminist theorists in the last thirty or more years have produced a mass of writing about the ideas of public and private, mainly relating to the West, although there is also a sizeable body of anthropological work. These arguments have moved from explorations of a presumed universal divide between public and private spheres to proposals for restructuring these to bring about greater gender equity; to critical deconstructions arguing for seeing multiple links between shifting realms of the household and/or family and sexualities on the one hand and the market and state on the other; to a stress on the permeability of the divide; and, finally, to arguments for seeing a collapse of such divisions in the contemporary order in many parts of the world, if not globally. The housewife form, for example, would seem to be a relatively recent development in most places, and the domestic may well be a highly culture-bound modern concept. Anthropologists have counselled extreme caution in using the contested concepts of public and private, seeing them as products of liberal modernity in the West (see Landes 1998 and special edition of *Journal of Women's History* 15[1], Spring 2003, focusing on the private sphere). In a review of writing on public and private in the Middle East in the same issue of *Journal of Women's History*, Elizabeth Thompson has pointed out that while much of this writing has perhaps wisely eschewed the western categories of public and private, such avoidance can also undermine historical understanding (Thompson 2003:52). She suggests that dichotomous conceptions of public and private arising 'out of the colonial encounter have combined with older repertoires to create a volatile and complex reality for Middle Eastern women today' (Thompson 2003:53). She concludes that public and private gender boundaries in the contemporary Middle East are 'as much products of transnational discourses,

politics, and economies as they are of internal crises in state formation and class identity' (Thompson 2003:65); she advocates direct interrogation of the concepts in their local historical contexts (Thompson 2003:52).⁸

A special issue of *Social Research*, also in 2003, addressed the concepts of public and private in Islam. Juan Cole's article on 'The Taliban, women, and the Hegelian private sphere' in that issue argues that an idea of the private, as an inviolable domestic realm, existed in Islamic jurisprudence (Cole 2003:774, quoting Jindi 1993). He goes on to suggest that '[one] key to comprehending the somewhat strident bewilderment that the Taliban provoked in many observers is their reconfiguration of the public and the private in their quest for a pure Islamic countermodernity' or what Cole terms an alternative modernity (Cole 2003:771).⁹ He explores the workings of ideas of the private in Afghanistan, arguing that:

[T]he expansion of the public realm of power, religion, and morality by the Taliban had the effect [...] of shrinking the private sphere and so constraining women further. Some fundamentalists accomplish this project through thoroughgoing veiling, which is aimed at disguising women's presence in public. In essence, full veiling allows the private character of women to be made portable. (Cole 2003:802–803)

The proposal to explore the possibilities of very different understandings of these categories within 'Islam' is an interesting one. The points about *pardah*, women's embeddedness in the domestic and the portability of the private character of women through the wearing of the veil in public, however, had been made in various forms by a number of feminist scholars in the 1970s and 1980s. Haleh Afshar, too, has described in detail the construction of the Islamic private sphere in Iran after the revolution (Afshar 1998). Many of the articles in this issue of *Social Research* proceed as if the categories 'Islam', and 'Islamic society' were unproblematic.¹⁰ They do not acknowledge the contested character of the concepts of public and private in the contemporary

⁸ An example of the ongoing omission of serious consideration of the 'private' sphere in mainstream writing on Muslim majority societies is Armando Salvatore's book *The Public Sphere; Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, Islam* (2007), which almost completely ignores questions of gender and the feminist contributions to thinking about conceptualizations of the public/private divide.

⁹ I use the phrase countermodernity rather than antimodernism because the Taliban adopted some key motifs from high modernism and depended on modern techniques for their power (the state, radio, mass spectacle, tank corps, and machine guns mounted on Toyotas) (Cole 2003:771).

¹⁰ See Lazreg (1988) for a pioneering discussion of the problems of reification and essentialism inherent in the use of the category 'Islamic society' by scholars both within and outside societies so denoted, and also Thompson (2003).

world, including the 'Muslim' world, and the issues of female agency raised (compare Göle 1996). Nonetheless, the special claim made for a necessarily embedded 'private' sphere as the core of morality within 'Islam' is important within the politics of revivalism in many Muslim majority societies. This claim poses key challenges for those seeking to define women's human rights in such societies.

What of the Malaysian context? Malaysian women have entered 'modern' sector work in large numbers, especially white-collar work, and have made enormous advances in education: they increasingly outnumber men in many university courses, for example (see Stivens 2000). My middle-class women informants' everyday lives conformed in important ways to global patterns of middle-class life. Joel Kahn and I interviewed one hundred middle-class Malay households (in Seremban, Kuala Lumpur and Penang) as part of our research projects on Malaysian modernity (see Kahn 1996a). I interviewed forty of these households in Penang and Kuala Lumpur in greater depth. The relative affluence of my informants in the latter samples depended on being part of dual-income households and they were actively engaged in the labour market. They were also very much caught up in the juggling act of modern life. Only a minority overall of these study households employed servants to help them with their busy lives: most of the women were involved in paid work—which they enjoyed—as well as carrying out the major part of domestic management and work. Thus about a quarter of the Seremban study households had paid domestic help, about a half of the Penang sample, but over 80% of the Kuala Lumpur households.

Sociologically and historically speaking, a history of the idea of the private sphere in the Malaysian context could see this as a product of urbanization, and continuously reconfigured within late modernity. Throughout the periods for which we have historical records, rural women were extensively involved in 'public' agricultural work: there is little evidence of the kind of private sphere associated with western modernity. Elsewhere, I have argued against the idea that the family in Malaysia is in the 'crisis'—structural and moral—alleged by many of the 'social problems' discourses (Stivens 1996, 1998b). As I shall suggest, this is not to deny that there is widespread apprehension about changing gender and family relations. Ironically, some of this concern has itself been generated by active women's organization campaigns about child sexual abuse and other familial violence. Contemporary households in the vast urban spread of the Klang Valley to the west of Kuala Lumpur, for example, are clearly smaller than rural households historically. But we cannot simply assume an evolution towards a monolithic 'nuclear' family and household, and a 'modern' private sphere, or towards a 'collapsing' family.

As I argue elsewhere, wider kinship ties have demonstrably continuing force in spite of rhetoric to the contrary: extended families as both imagined and concrete networks operate powerfully across internal geographical distances in the country and beyond (Stivens 1996).

A key question here is how far various components of the Islamic ‘peoplehood’ (to adopt Joel Kahn’s term, personal communication) in the country accept uniform versions of the ideas of the moral project of family and of a private sphere in the country. It is not clear, for example, that the revivalist groups have posed a singular, unified conservative model of women’s place within the family. Some of these groups—and PAS leaders—have argued strongly that motherhood and child care are women’s true vocation. Islam, they say, unlike the West, upholds and values women’s full participation in society. But practice among such groups has been more diverse. For example, one supporter of revivalism, Khalijah Mohd Salleh, herself a physicist, argues that women should use the gifts given them by Allah, and not feel obliged to be housewives only (Mohd Salleh 1994). And as I show below, some of my female informants were similarly strong supporters of revivalist Islam while fully engaged in the workforce. Neotraditionalist constructions of ‘woman’s place’ by revivalists are found commonly in religious pamphlets and in some online resources, for example. But these not only fail to reflect the diverse lived realities of Malay and other Muslim women’s lives in Malaysia, but also the lives of many of the revivalists’ own followers.

The widespread adoption of the *tudung* veil by Malay Muslim women since the mid-1970s has been one of the most visible markers and symbols of the Islamization process. Contests over veiling do not appear to have been as developed in Malaya/Malaysia in the colonial period as in some other ‘Muslim’ countries. But, issues of polygamy and bodily covering in particular have been at the core of tensions within Malay politics between modernist and traditionalist Islam over the years (Ibrahim bin Abu Bakar 1994).¹¹ They continue to be so today, especially following the rulings about Kelantanese women being required to cover themselves, and in recent campaigns against polygamy by rights activists like the NGO Sisters in Islam.¹²

Nilüfer Göle, writing about Turkey, has argued that ‘women’s covered bodies reveal the centrality of the gender question and sexuality in critiques of Western modernity’ (Göle 1996:1). Like Leila Ahmed (1992), Göle (1996)

¹¹ See also Nagata (1984), Aihwa Ong (1990), and Norani Othman (1998, 1999) on Islamization, modernization and gender.

¹² See the Sisters in Islam website (www.sistersinislam.org.my) for full listings of their campaigns around polygamy and wider campaigns around rights within the Muslim family.

argues for an embeddedness of gender in the elaboration of Islamism on the one hand and modernism on the other, suggesting that women become important religious and political agents through the emergence of the veil as a symbol of politicized Islam within modernity. It is arguable, following such conceptualizations, that ideas about gender relations and 'the family' have been critical to reinventions of Islamic ideology in Malaysia. The family is presented as a critical site for producing new versions of a purer Islam, and parents, especially women, carry a large responsibility within it for securing an Islamic future through the rearing of children, especially the inculcation of correct values.

The Malaysian State and Family Values

There has been a highly developed national conversation about 'family' and 'family values' in contemporary Malaysia, in which the state has played a leading part. The tone has been frequently apocalyptic: it warns both of the drastic decline in family values, which is leading to or symptomatic of social ills, and of the need for family values to rescue society from social ills. As a number of writers in the West have argued, family values discourse can be seen as primarily a response to concerns about changing gender relations, family living and household composition (Jagger and Wright 1999; Mayer 2008), and to changing patterns of childhood and youth. The tone is readily apparent in just one of many examples which could be quoted: the prelude to a part of the website of the Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN, National Population and Family Development Board). This is a component of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, a ministry set up in 2001. In 2002 the LPPKN initiated a campaign, the 'Malaysia Nation of Character' (MNOC) programme:

In our world today we have war, murder, rape, illegal drug sale and use, robbery, violence of all kinds, exploitation, pollution, corruption, starvation, illiteracy, sexual immorality, addictions to various harmful substances, and many other social problems. Not only do these wrongs exist in our world, but these combined wrongs occur billions and billions of times every day. Who would not want a world without these horrors both great and small?¹³

The LPPKN's proposed solution to the many social problems it saw facing Malaysia, and the rest of the world, was a tool to inculcate 25 important

¹³ www.islamic-world.net/mnoc/conceptualindex.htm (accessed 22 January 2006, web page no longer available).

values it identified as crucial to the development of good character in the children of Malaysia, to produce 'Malaysia, A Nation of Character'. The Vision of MNOC was stated as aiming '[t]o strengthen families towards the realisation of a caring society, quality population and a progressive Malaysian nation'.¹⁴ LPPKN stated that it 'LPPKN is commit[t]ed to be the lead agency in making Malaysia a nation of character built by families that are resilient, ethical, healthy, knowledge and harmonies [sic]'. Its general objective was to 'contribute towards the development of quality population through strengthening and promotion of family well-being'.¹⁵ The website included many links to parenting advice and programmes, a project on the 'Khalifah Child' (and the address of a Khalifah Child shop in Kuala Lumpur where one can purchase the requisites for the instruction of children, for signalling that a Khalifah child¹⁶ is on board one's car, and for suitably covering one's children's bodies). The MNOC website contained some humour about families and links to sympathetic discussions of working women. But it also put forward clear ideas about women's most important task, couched in devout Islamic terms, calling for women's care of the home to be their *jihad* (best translated as 'struggle' or 'effort').¹⁷

Listen to the best Teacher and Guide for humanity, Prophet Muhammad, Sall-Allahu alayhi wa sallam. He elevated the women from their status as chattel to the dignity of being equal servants of Allah with men. Yet their status in society was not conditioned [sic] upon entering man's world. Their most important task is to take care of the home and children. 'Take care of your home for THAT is your Jihad' [...] (Musnad Ahmed, [quoting a hadith]). Jihad is the epitome of Islamic life. Declaring home-making as jihad for women is giving it the highest possible status in an Islamic society.¹⁸

¹⁴ See <http://islamic-world.net/mnoc/mainindex.htm> (accessed 22 January 2006, web page no longer available). In 2013, the slogan 'Malaysia a nation of character' remains on LPPKN's main policy section of its website (<http://www.lppkn.gov.my/index.php/en/2012-04-23--05-47-07/dasar-pkrs-kebangsaan/81-dasar>, accessed February 20 2013).

¹⁵ Text was available on <http://islamic-world.net/mnoc/lppkn-office/LPPKN-design.doc> (accessed 22 January 2006, but the web page is no longer available).

¹⁶ A number of Islamic groups promote the idea of a *khalifah* child, a child who will act as an emissary for the prophet Muhammad and Islam (see blog, 'The Caliph speaks', <http://caliph.wordpress.com/articles/the-khalifah-child/>, accessed 20 February 2013).

¹⁷ Similar Muslim 'motherhood' statements are also available on a number of online sites detailing Muslim women's duties as wives and mothers. See for example, <http://www.albalagh.net/women/Motherhood.shtml> (accessed 20 February 2013) and <http://www.onislam.net/english/ask-the-scholar/family/children-a-parenthood/175504-muslim-womans-role-as-a-mother.html?Parenthood=> (accessed 20 February 2013).

¹⁸ http://www.e_keluarga.com.my/lppkn/index.php?template=lppkn, on the website of Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN, National Population and Family Development Board, accessed 20 January 2006, web page no longer available). See

The key concept here is 'strengthening the family'. This slogan has featured globally in many sites, including UN fora. It has also been a key part of the recent Malaysian nationalist project. For a decade or more, the country has seen a series of lavish government-backed and funded campaigns: about happy (Asian-style) families building a happy nation, like the 'Keluarga Bahagia' ('Happy Family') campaign; constant exhortations to the population to observe family values in their everyday lives; large-scale initiatives to 'improve parenting', including workshops for civil servants; pre-marriage courses for couples run both by state agencies and religious organizations (compulsory for Muslims); and the declaration, following UN directives, of a National Family Day. Family values discourse endlessly enumerates the social ills to be addressed by attention to the family, and also within the family: these ills include, as noted, issues first raised by women's organizations, such as child sexual abuse and other familial violence. The reiteration of the slogan 'strengthening the family' speaks to the forces seeking to govern through the family. The present website of the National Population and Family Development Board in its philosophy explicitly links the family and citizenship:

The Family as the basic unit in society is the building block of our nation. The Family is [sic] first community every child relates to and it is within the care and protection of the Family that the child learns values and virtues as well as mores and practices in the context of his own culture. It is the Family that shapes characters and develop [sic] citizens in the Malaysian mould.¹⁹

The database of Malaysia's main English language newspaper, the *New Straits Times*, which is widely regarded as a government mouthpiece, lists 546 pieces since 1996 in which family values are mentioned; these are mainly items relating to government speeches and campaigns. (Interestingly, the Malaysia Nation of Character Initiative appears to have received no direct publicity at all in the *New Straits Times*.) Some representative quotes will illustrate some of the tone of the language of state agents. This is by turns persuasive, cajoling and hectoring: thus in Malaysia in 1994, Mohamad bin Hussein, director-general of social welfare, exhorted families to be 'resilient to face the onslaught of rapid changes and [to] be able to identify positive values' (Hussein 1994:4). He saw family instability and juvenile delinquency as greater dangers to society than poverty. In 1995:

same text reproduced in English on an Indonesian site <http://myquran.org/forum/index.php?topic=43054.0> (accessed 20 February 2013).

¹⁹ <http://www.lppkn.gov.my/BI/e-philosophy.asp> (accessed 26 September 2009, web page no longer available).

Parents must equip themselves with proper skills to deal with the changes in the family institution and the quality of life as a result of the country's rapid economic growth.

The Prime Minister's wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali said this today at the launch of National Family Day 1995.

She said families today were more concerned with material wealth and disregarded spiritual and moral development.

'The attitude and value system that a family holds is the basis of a strong and happy family' she said.

[...] Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail, in her speech [at the same event, M.S.], said the Government's efforts alone were not enough to combat the social problems that arose from the family.

'Commitment and co-operation from all parties, mainly the family itself is needed to curb the problems' she said.²⁰

Seven years on:

The Prime Minister [Mahathir Mohamad, M.S.] said the family institution and good values must be preserved and nurtured to act as a shield against the various social ills threatening the society.

'We must be resilient and hold on to our family values, which have been proven to be good for us,' he said at the launch of the 'Family First—Bring Your Heart Home' campaign at the Women's Affairs and Family Development Ministry here today.²¹

Similarly, in August 2004, the government announced a rebranding of TV2, to promote family values. 'TV2's new programming would give its viewers a mind relaxing, joyous and family bonding experience', the information minister told the country.²² There is an interesting convergence between this language of government discourse about family life and values and that of a further key player in these conversations, the corporate world: the idea of 'resilience', which is a core idea in neoliberal discourse, features in a number of government pronouncements, like those above. And, as I argue elsewhere, it also features in images of the satisfactory performance of work/life balance, a central concern of both the contemporary Malaysian state and the local business world. Both explicitly call for the managerial skills celebrated within the workplace to be applied to family life (Stivens 2007). More concretely, a number of businesses are represented

²⁰ "Parenting skills vital", says Siti Hasmah', *New Straits Times* (18 November 1995:5).

²¹ "Uphold our family values" urges Dr M', *New Straits Times* (1 August 2002:3).

²² 'New-look TV2 to promote family values', *New Straits Times* (21 August 2004:7).

as cooperating with the government in promoting family values, including sponsors at various events like a 'Wholesome Family Programme' in Ipoh 2003:

CELCOM (Malaysia) Berhad [subsidiary of Telekom Malaysia, the privatized subsidiary of the formerly state-owned Telekom, M.S.] has unveiled its latest post-paid package called Salam, which is targeted exclusively for Muslims who are also Tabung Haji²³ account-holders.

With an affordable access fee of RM30 per month, Salam provides a 'Muslim Info Service' through its Short Message Service (sms).

The service offers information on hadith, facts on Islam and tips to help subscribers maintain a happy family. (Salam is a result of a smart partnership initiative among Pilgrims' Fund Board, Department of Islamic Development Malaysia [Jakim] and Celcom).²⁴

Another example of corporate involvement is the association between Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) and the Malaysian branch of Focus on the Family in promoting the family values project. Focus on the Family is a prominent Christian organization in the US associated with the Christian Right. The founder of the organization, James Dobson, is one of America's most prominent evangelicals.

Focus on the Family Malaysia is concerned with the disintegration of the institution of the family and weakening of family values and relationships in Malaysia.

[...] Since 1998, Focus on the Family Malaysia has helped create an awareness of the importance of the family through various venues, including Dr. James Dobson's 90-second commentary, and in more than 300 supermarkets and 300 KFC outlets throughout the country. The largest English newspaper, The Star, also publishes Dr. Dobson's articles every two weeks.

[...] On the political front, Focus on the Family Malaysia is working closely with the government of Malaysia under the Ministry of Women and Family Development. The area of involvement includes the drafting of family policies, planning of a national family day and special events, developing programs and campaigns to strengthen families and translating resources into Malay.²⁵

In 2009, the organization's website also listed 'Pizza Hut and Supermarkets' as local avenues for spreading the word. In March 2009 DÔME cafés too were

²³ Tabung Haji is the pilgrims' fund board, which administers savings for the pilgrimage to Mecca through investment in *shari'a*-compliant vehicles.

²⁴ 'Celcom's new package for Muslim subscribers', *New Straits Times* (24 October 2003:3).

²⁵ <http://www.family.org/welcome/intl/malaysia/malaysia/a0022314.cfm> (accessed 20 January 2006, web page no longer available).

offering a 'Family Values Weekend' promotion, including a free junior item with every main dish ordered.²⁶

Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail's comments above—that the government's efforts alone were not enough to combat the social problems that arose from the family—are interesting. They suggest both a strong faith within the government in the efficacy of authoritarian governmentality of and through the family, and the possibility of other important agendas. In the West, sociological discussion of family values has argued that the current perception of crisis in the family has been largely brought about by those governments and international agencies seeking to redefine the boundaries between the state, the family and the market (see Buss and Herman 2003; Jagger and Wright 1999). This has been driven by a widespread rolling back of the state with privatizations, panics about aging populations, and increasing pressures on 'families' to take on the tasks of social reproduction formerly shared with welfare states. The Malaysian context, of course, is very different, with poorly developed welfare provision. The country also has not faced the dramatically falling birth rates affecting its neighbours Singapore and Thailand, where concerns about an aging population have become acute. But the Chinese Malaysian population—so-termed—has a birth-rate way below replacement levels (Subki, Yap and de Lima 2001), which will affect the ethnic balance by increasing Malay demographic leverage. Such outcomes may not be unwelcome to some among the growing Malay majority. It is arguable that the state family values project may be driven increasingly by such concerns as well as by ethno-nationalist and intra-Islamic competition.

Global Family Connections

The example of KFC's involvement also points to a further significant dimension of the Malaysian state family values project: the close links between the Malaysian state and international conservative religious forces.²⁷ The Malaysian government has been heavily involved in political coalitions both with a number of Muslim majority countries and with conservative

²⁶ <http://www.domecafe.com.my/promotions.php?id=100070>, a promotion site which is regularly updated and thus no longer reflects this offer (accessed 27 September 2009). A record of this promotion, however, is available to view on https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=5463821161 (accessed February 20 2013).

²⁷ See Buss and Herman (2003) for a discussion of their use of the 'Christian Right', a term they see as encompassing not only evangelical Protestants, but also conservative Catholic forces and the Mormons (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints).

Christians within international forums to 'defend' and 'strengthen' the family. These have included actions directed at induced abortion and homosexuality. For example, in October 2004, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (through the National Population and Family Development Board) cooperated with the World Policy Centre, Brigham Young University, Utah (the university of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints), to organize in Kuala Lumpur the Asia Pacific Family Dialogue (APFD, 11–13 October 2004). The Brigham Young centre is widely recognized as an ultra-conservative Christian think-tank. The APFD was a regional conference leading to the Qatar-sponsored Doha International Conference on the Family, held 29–30 November 2004. The latter presented itself as being part of the UN celebrations for the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. As such it represents one example of the growing interventions by conservative religious forces of various persuasions and in varying coalitions which aim to use UN forums to further their views of morality and the family against the perceived dangers of liberalism and feminism (see Buss and Herman 2003; Bounds 1996). It is noteworthy that the Doha Conference banner on its website reproduced article 16 (3) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 'The family is the natural and fundamental group unit for society and is entitled to protection by society and the state'.²⁸ This innocuous-seeming borrowing easily elides into the concept of the 'natural family' promulgated by the conservative Christian pro-family forces in the U.S.:

The Howard Centre for Family, Religion, and Society believes the natural family is the fundamental unit of society; that it is the basis of all healthy and progressive civilisations.

The best definition of the natural family we know of (we helped to craft it) comes from the second World Congress of Families [1999] gathering.

'The natural family is a man and woman bound in a lifelong covenant of marriage for the purposes of:

- the continuation of the human species,
- the rearing of children,
- the regulation of sexuality,
- the provision of mutual support and protection, the creation of an altruistic domestic economy, and
- the maintenance of bonds between the generations'.²⁹

²⁸ http://www.dicf.org.qa/english/media_center/media_center/article7.html (accessed 20 January 2006, web page no longer available). See the Doha declaration, <http://fsd.org.qa/about/doha-declaration> (accessed February 20 2013).

²⁹ Howard Centre, 'The natural family' (2004), http://www.profam.org/THC/xthc_tnf.htm

In their book *Globalizing family values*, Doris Buss and Didi Herman argue that the Christian Right's international ambitions have been very much underreported and underestimated: their greatest success within global alliances has come through the deployment of this 'natural family' discourse (Buss and Herman 2001:xiv–xv). Malaysia has been a willing member of such alliances since at least the 1994 Cairo conference on Population and Development, the Cairo review and the Beijing and Beijing + 5 Conferences. Thus, Malaysia joined the Holy See at Beijing in making a reservation to paragraph 96 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the basis that it did not endorse 'sexual promiscuity, [or] any form of sexual perversion that is synonymous with homosexuality or lesbianism' (Chappell 2004:16). It also joined countries like Iran, Libya, and Yemen as well as the Holy See in making reservations to the Cairo and Beijing documents about the rights of parents to limit and control adolescent sexual rights (see Cairo doc § 19 Reservations 1995 § 11, 14, 19; Chappell 2004:18). In addition, it has made reservations to CEDAW (Asian Development Bank 2002b).

It is significant that the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, was invited to be a keynote speaker at the 2004 Doha International Conference on the Family. This invitation underlined his global stature as a statesman from a 'moderate' Muslim nation, well on the way to successful development. It also presumably further cemented cooperation between Malaysian state Islamic forces and conservative Christians in global fora.

The Everyday Politics of Family Values

How much support does this state family values moral project have nationally? Eighty five per cent of my study sample informants described themselves as Muslims. But a small number disavowed this identity, not a minor matter in the Malay Muslim context, where such admissions invite apostasy charges. A portion were living the Islamic resurgence at a very intense level: over a quarter were overt supporters of versions of revivalism and many others stressed the absolute centrality of their Islamic belief in their lives. Some talked about the ways in which their identities as (modern) 'Muslims' had displaced their identities as 'Malay', a development observed in a number of other studies (compare Ong 1995). Those of our informants who supported

(accessed 20 November 2004). See Buss and Herman (2003) for discussion of the use of the natural family discourse by the Christian Right in the U.S. and internationally.

versions of Islamic revivalism were all most unwilling to countenance use of the term ‘fundamentalism’:

[I] believe and practise the teachings of Islam (Muslim). This term [fundamentalism] does not exist at all. If you want a meaning at all, it means a person who believes and practises the teaching of Islam. I don't believe this term exists.

When my research assistant and I asked interviewees about how they wished to bring up their children, more than half volunteered comments about how the children should hold Islamic/family values, or should be good people with good values. Some representative quotes:

Islamic values should be stressed in the children. They must have a good background and environment to practise Islam.

[Family values are] analogous to Islamic values. Religious values are uppermost, our only salvation for the future generation.

[You] should incorporate Islamic values when bringing up children. I feel that social problems come about because children are not exposed to these Islamic teachings.

They must have Islamic values but you cannot be too extreme [...] you must balance the spiritual and physical world.

To be decent human beings, not involved with social misfits; that they have a sound education plus Islamic and religious background. [I] would like them to go to university but not necessarily become doctors or lawyers.

To be what they are inclined to be, to be good, open-minded people with a well-balanced education, holding both Islamic and western values.

I would like the children to adhere to eastern values, people who have respect for their elders, have strong religious backgrounds. To have nice mannerisms [sic], be respectful of others, not go wild.

I would like her to be a professional woman, for example a doctor, professing and practising strong Islamic values and *solehah* [being a pious female].

When we also invited comments on perceived differences between Western and Malaysian family life, about two thirds of those interviewed told us they believed that familial relations in Malaysia are better than those in the West. Such sentiments, in answer to open-ended questions, were frequently phrased in terms of Islam and Islamic values: ‘Islam teaches Malay people to treat family with more respect’, was a common theme:

[In the] West, [there's] a lot of social problems, they've taken religion out of their system. So to them, they lack social values. For example, by high school age, everybody is not supposed to be a virgin in the U.S. They are quite loose in this aspect even though they may be Christian.

It's good here, moralistic [sic] here. [In the] West—materialistic.

In the West, *moral terlalu rendah* (morals are too low, debased) which is not good. But there's also some good like their [level of] development.

Tak ada rasa kekeluargaan (there is not so much family feeling) in the West as they have 'too much freedom' to look for partners of the opposite sex, they don't seem to know their role as parents. There is more *rasa kekeluargaan* here, and here, as a Muslim, the husband has the *tanggungjawab* (responsibility) as head of household and the wife also has her *tanggungjawab* (responsibilities)—and this is followed according to Islam[ic] teaching. But in the West, there is no such *panduan* (guidance) for the West. For a Muslim family, *anak* is an *amanah* from Tuhan (a child is entrusted to us by God) [...] [and] should be treasured and the success of a family can be seen from the way one raises a child. Here, we've learnt [from the Islamic viewpoint, M.S.] the purpose of marriage and maybe in the West, there is either no such *panduan* or there maybe [it exists] but it's not followed.

One supporter of revivalism directly cited Ashaari's westoxification text, which I quoted above: 'You can read all about this in the book *Barat di ambang maut* by Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad.³⁰ That's my view too'.

But there was also some manoeuvring around the idea of being free (*bebas*), which was given positive as well as negative readings. A number of informants, for example, invoked straightforwardly secular, universalist and modernist ideas about aspects of Malay life being constrictive, arguing that some Western models for living might be preferable:

In the West, families seem friendly with the children, even old couples still share the same bed, but here, old couples would not share the same bed, they sleep separately and the families seem more formal with their children.

It is significant that among this group there was an overt linking of comments about 'family' with versions of a 'free' modernity. I asked informants an open-ended question about comparing Western and Malaysian families, and about a fifth in fact favoured what they saw as Western forms of family. For example, one couple, an architect (male) and a stenographer (female), believed that Western families are 'better than Malay families, they are more understanding'. Yet, like both their parents, they categorized themselves as very 'strong' Muslims, and were PAS supporters: they might seem unlikely candidates for such thinking about families.

My middle-class informants' narratives present what is arguably evidence for a post-modernization of Muslim identity and of Islamic practices within the shifting complexes of meaning surrounding the idea of an Islamic modernity in Malaysia. They have been offered, taken up, and created a range of

³⁰ *The West on the brink of death* (Ashaari Muhammad 1992).

positionings within the recent Islamization of the country. These positionings have varied from adherence to revivalism, to reformist modernist Islam, to somewhat more secular modernism, and even in a couple of cases, to repudiation of religion altogether. Some of my informants' religious practices did provide evidence for arguments that radical Islam derives its support from those who feel dislocated; but their responses overall suggested much more complex scenarios. As noted, there was a substantial level of support for revivalism among these informants from the most 'modern' sector of the social structure, the new middle classes as a whole. I would emphasize the diversity of the ways in which my informants located themselves in relation to Islamic revival and modernity. I would also underline the important ways that Islam and modernity (and gender) were often mutually constitutive of each other in their narratives. For a sizeable number, becoming more Islamic was the way to be a more modern Malay; but they wanted to be 'modern' in ways that removed them from positioning as 'Western', a particular issue for women, who risk being seen as less 'moral' if they appear too Western.

Family Values, Islam and Rights Claims

The popular support for 'family' manifestly poses considerable problems for those involved in campaigns for women's rights, especially rights claims relating to the family. The role of the Malaysian state in championing a version of Islamic modernity has greatly complicated the engagements of reformist Muslim women with the state in working for women's (human) rights in families, and new forms of family. Part of this complication arises from the ways in which competing notions of the 'private' sphere/'family life' have become favoured sites in both mainstream political and cultural forums and in some dissident circles for a developed cultural politics. This politics includes struggles over ideas of the nation and citizenship, for the expression of general tensions and ambivalences about the costs of modernity and development, and for working through the very idea of how to live a modern Malay(sian) life (compare Stivens 1998a, 1998b).

The challenges posed for local women's activists by the developed state family values project and its global alliances, and by the level of popular support, are clearly substantial. Norani Othman (2006) describes the immense difficulties facing those seeking to engage with the Islamic authorities and the state around women's human rights in Malaysia. But it is also noteworthy that many women's organizations take a far less critical view of the implications of family relations for women's gender equity than do many Western

feminists. Instead they frequently share the view that the 'family' forms a central building block of society. As Rohana Ariffin, a prominent women's activist in Malaysia, notes, many women's NGOs in Malaysia articulate their claims within the parameters of support for the sanctity of the state, religion and family (Ariffin 1999). And indeed one could argue that there has often been little political space to make more adventurous claims about family, as homosexual rights activists have found on occasion. The careful, sophisticated campaigns by groups like the reformist group Sisters in Islam, which works to employ mediated concepts of women's rights, speak to the measures needed to construct political spaces in which to pursue issues of family law reform, one of their prime concerns.³¹ Recently, for example, Sisters in Islam has initiated a global campaign for justice within the Muslim family, Musawah. A Global Movement for Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family. This was launched in February 2009 at a Global Meeting in Kuala Lumpur.³²

Some of the issues involved in making political spaces for reforming family law were clearly illustrated by a 2004 intervention in the area of family values. Members of an important coalition of women's organizations, including Sisters in Islam, attended the Kuala Lumpur Asia Pacific Family Dialogue in October 2004 that I noted above. They were alarmed by the tone of the conference, and sent a letter to the *Sun* newspaper, listing their concerns: the failure to address the diversity of the Asian Family; the limited definition of the family offered (that is, the 'natural family', which featured strongly); the intolerance expressed; an excessive stress on keeping families together; the failure to recognize internal familial pressures; the question of the rights of women within marriage and the family; the impact of armed conflict on families; and a regression from international commitments on the family:

Government policies on the family should have as their focus the needs of families in their diverse forms. These policies should be based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination [...].

³¹ See Othman (1998, 1999), Lai Suat Yuan (1999), Martinez (2000), Maznah Mohamad (2002), Maznah Mohamad and Wong Soak Koon (1994), Ng Choon Sim and Chee Heng Leng (1996), and Stivens (2003) for accounts of the processes in claiming women's rights in Malaysia over the last decades.

³² See Sisters in Islam website http://www.sistersinislam.org.my/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=706&Itemid=273 (accessed 28 September 2009). Information on Musawah can be found on the Musawah website, <http://www.musawah.org/>. Musawah was initiated in March 2007 by Sisters in Islam and a 12-member international planning committee of activists and scholars from 11 countries.

We are extremely concerned that there has been no recognition of the role of the women's rights movement in strengthening the family through the creation of equal gender relations [...].

Instead, feminism has been unjustly targeted and blamed for the disintegration of the family.

The family can only be sustained through recognition of women's rights, and taking into account the changing realities impacting on this institution.

(Women's Development Collective [WDC] et al. 2004)

In fact the conference declaration did not use the Howard Centre's 'natural family', but only quoted the wording of Article 16 (3) of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says 'The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State'.³³ But the objectors correctly understood the essentially conservative tone of this phrase within the UN Declaration and the potential for its possible elision with the ideologically-driven 'natural family'. Nonetheless, their intervention was still couched—no doubt strategically—in terms of 'strengthening' the family through the women's rights movement.

Conclusion

Writers on Islam and gender have pointed to the ways in which, in recent years in a number of Muslim majority countries, issues of women, gender, family and household, women's bodies and sexualities have become major sites of cultural contest around the state's stance towards modernity, the nation's place in the world and Islamic revivalist projects of moral renewal in a late modern/postmodern world. Such issues have often been part of larger sites of contestation, both as sites of direct concern and as metaphors for debating wider cultural concerns about such issues as the desirability of changes brought by modernity. I have described some of the Malaysian state's extensive orchestration of family campaigns and the government's active cooperation with conservative religious voices both within the country and internationally. The embeddedness of the Malaysian state moral project in a number of versions of conservative 'Islamic values' and in wider alliances with conservative global forces clearly has important implications not only for family and gender relations, but also for understanding Malay(sian)

³³ Available online at <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a16> (accessed 13 November 2009).

nationalism and ethnonationalisms. As suggested, such activity can be understood as an exercise in governmentality of and through the family.

It will be clear, however, that family values discourse in the Malaysian context has operated as a multi-layered structure of meaning, which cannot be reduced simply to authoritarian governmentality. The significant level of popular support for family values in all their different forms within Malaysian society at large points to the complex relationships between this commitment to ideas of 'family' in Malaysia and the state orchestration of such support. If we assume that the interview households were representative, we can see some of the strength of this support among the new Malay middle classes, for example. While some informants might be judged to have been 'playing safe' with an interviewer by directly echoing some of the more conservative government and Islamic ideology about 'morals' and family, becoming modern was clearly an important moral project for a significant section. 'Family' was at the core of such projects, with Islamic values and family values often collapsed within their narratives. Such a conflation of family values and Islamic values, however, can obscure some important differences between family values and Islamic values. The latter clearly has a specifically ethnonationalist character in the present-day Malaysian context. Family values discourse, on the other hand, has the potential at least to invoke wider and possibly more universalistic, anti-ethnicizing or nationalist initiatives, which employ and deploy family values as a unified and unifying national metaphor. This can be seen in the invocations of the National Population and Family Development Board to develop Malaysian citizens which I noted above. It will also be apparent that some support for ideas of family values/Islamic values/the Asian family in the Malaysian context can have distinct postcolonial resonances, which are again multi-layered. I showed the ways in which anti-Western discourse configured many of the ideas about social ills and the proposed remedies. These ideas were enmeshed in diverse Islamic projects, which included state-driven moral projects, and more dissident versions looking both to Islamism and to social reform and justice, for example as part of Reformasi. It is arguable that such values can offer not only a refuge—a 'haven in the heartless world'—but also provide a form of protest against the alienation and stresses of such new orders. As Clive Kessler has argued for Kelantan, Islamic discourse can act as a powerful site of, and vehicle for, forms of social protest (compare Kessler 1978). As such, family values discourse has clearly resonated within support for the Islamist party PAS and its often conservative pronouncements about family and policies, which, as I noted, were often at variance with the lived experiences of its own supporters

The multi-layered structure of meaning of family values, then, clearly poses formidable challenges to those working for change in family relations. Would-be reformers confront deeply entrenched attachments to ideas of 'family' which normalize the everyday oppressions of women within households and wider family networks. At the same time the postcolonial ethnonationalist protest embedded in versions of family values makes critiques of 'family' peculiarly problematic: attempts to reshape family relations and laws do not simply threaten the gender order, they also threaten to undo religion, race and nation. But 'family values' may nonetheless offer spaces for working for such change. Groups like Sisters in Islam show well how careful campaigns can use local understandings of family to build important new political spaces.

PHILIPPINES

THE ROLE OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN
DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT, AND PEACE:
THE PHILIPPINE CASE

Amina Rasul-Bernardo

Introduction

My parents brought us up to appreciate the concepts of public service and democracy. My father, the late Ambassador Abraham Rasul, supported his three daughters' participation in school politics and other extra-curricular activities. My mother, former Senator Santanina T. Rasul, encouraged a strong streak of independence in her daughters. They both believed in equality between men and women, citing the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) and his wife, Khadija. They both also believed in the accountability of public servants, citing that Muslim rulers and leaders are held to standards higher than those created by man-made laws. I therefore grew up believing in my own capacity and responsibility to work for a better life for myself, my family, and my community. Today, I find it incredible that what my parents taught their daughters is under attack as un-Islamic by some leaders.

Muslim historians and analysts have been studying the stagnation of societies in many authoritarian Muslim countries. The critics of regimes such as Iraq under Saddam Hussein maintain that human liberty and freedom, which are enshrined within Islam, had been taken away. Thus, there is much support for democratization in countries like Iraq. However, the democratization process must be home-grown—witness the successes in Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia.

Although the Philippines is known as 'democratic', most Muslims there do not feel free. During the May 2004 national elections, at least two of the opposition parties documented the electoral fraud that took place in Muslim areas, reducing the pillar of democracy called free elections to so much rubble. In Maguindanao Province, for instance, an officer of the election monitoring group¹ informed me that they reported the elections to

¹ National Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL).

be generally peaceful and orderly. However, he also told me that their report on Maguindanao never said the elections were honest, only that they were relatively peaceful and orderly.

We are caught between a rock and a hard place. The rock is the state's militarization of Mindanao and the oppressive form it predominantly takes in securing the peace against terrorism. Ignorance about the Muslim faith makes many leaders tend to perceive religion itself as a threat. The hard place is the aggregation of fundamentalist groups who want to monopolize Islam. These groups accuse anyone talking of moderation, patience, legitimacy, reason, and pragmatic thinking of being un-Islamic or anti-Islam.

Lack of freedom in our communities has stifled our society. In the days before martial law, our community leaders could be openly critical about the policies or actions of our elected leaders. No longer: we are silenced by fear of retribution, which prevents any debate on what is wrong with our community today. Add to the lack of freedom, a loss of dignity, a sense of hopelessness and despair, and we have a fertile breeding ground for all kinds of extremism and violence. Clearly, the solution is to support the growth of democracy in Muslim communities, which implies a radical expansion of the freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of thought, and freedom to form independent organizations.

Some people claim that the Muslim world needs the rule of law, but not necessarily democracy. Yet it is impossible to separate the two; we cannot have rule of law without democracy. When the law comes from an illegitimate administration, it is illegitimate itself, and its enforcement, in the absence of independent branches of government, leads to dictatorship. The transition to democracy may take a few years. However, the transition must be real, sustained, and irreversible. Many governments or government officials have become adept at promising democratic reforms while delivering more oppression. This has created an environment of great disappointment and frustration.

What can we Muslim women do? Women in the Philippines have overcome tremendous hurdles to participate in politics and governance. We have had two women presidents: former President Corazon C. Aquino and former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Mrs Aquino, heralded as the leader who brought back democratic processes to the country and who initiated the peace process with separatist groups, still has a strong following among the so-called 'middle forces'. She has publicly called on Mrs Arroyo to step down from her office amidst allegations of corruption and manipulation of the 2004 presidential elections, among others. In this, she joins another woman leader, Mrs Susan Roces Poe, the widow of the opposition Presidential candidate

Fernando Poe Jr. (FPJ). Mrs Poe, although unwilling to take on a leadership role with the opposition, has become more visible in public forums calling on Mrs Arroyo to resign. The followers of FPJ and Mrs Poe contend that Mrs Arroyo stole the presidency from FPJ. Mrs Arroyo, who has the lowest opinion poll rating among all Philippine presidents after strongman Ferdinand Marcos, has survived the impeachment hearings against her in the Philippine Congress. However, the impeachment process was nationally regarded as flawed, marred by allegations of bribery using government funds.

Three women are at the heart of the national political struggles in the Philippines. Thus, it can be said that Filipino women have proven they can be as capable as men in governance as well as in dirty politics. What of Muslim women in the Philippines? Are we as involved as our Christian sisters in governance, politics, and development? Especially in today's world where rhetoric against terrorism and conservatism is reshaping our communities?

This contribution seeks to provide insights and observations on the participation of Muslim women in the democratic process and in development in the Philippines. How do we participate in the areas of welfare and development? Do women have a role in the development of the economic agenda vis-à-vis social policies? Are women's capabilities enhanced or undermined? In the field of governance, do we use our powers to make the government accountable and responsive to its constituents and our agenda? In the political arena, do we have a role to play? Do we have a constituency? Are women effectively represented in political parties and in national legislatures? Are we a political force? Lastly, as conservatism rises in the Islamic world, are our rights being suppressed? What do we do?

Women in Politics and Governance

As early as the 1960s, Muslim women had discovered the value of social mobilization; they empowered themselves and implemented literacy and livelihood training for marginalized and impoverished groups. The oldest registered Muslim women's organization in the Philippines is the Muslim Professional and Business Women's Association, established by former Senator Santanina T. Rasul in 1968. The association implemented a literacy programme nationally known as Magbassa Kita ('Let us Read'). The success of this initiative led to its adoption by the Department of Education as a national literacy programme. The Magbassa Kita success catapulted Mrs Rasul into the limelight, and was responsible for her being chosen by then President

Corazon Aquino as a senatorial candidate in 1987, eventually winning a seat. The first Muslim woman to be elected to the Senate by a Christian majority nation, Mrs Rasul was also the first Muslim to be re-elected to a second term. Unfortunately, she was also the last Muslim elected to the senate. Since then, several Muslim women leaders have organized in order to create a critical mass of supporters and to make themselves heard. This has been the immediate challenge to our sisters.

Muslim women's access to institutions of governance and their participation in the decision-making processes of their communities is still limited, despite the growing number of Muslim women holding public offices. In the heartland of Muslim Mindanao, a woman was elected Governor of Lanao del Sur in the 1960s: Governor Tarhata Lucman won in a hotly contested election over male competitors who belonged to strong political families. Today, we have two Muslim women in the House of Representatives.² The vice governor of Sulu is a woman, as is the president of the Basilan Mayors League.³ One critical factor is the belief (still held by many in the Muslim communities) that women's involvement in politics is forbidden in Islam. To counter this, there is need for greater advocacy of women's rights. To the extent that the Qur'an has been used to justify the argument against women's involvement, a closer look at the Qur'an and what it actually says about women's rights and their participation in public life is indispensable. A review of the *shari'a* is also needed to ensure gender-fair interpretations.

Another factor is the level of women's political skills and capabilities, which not only limits their chances to be elected into public offices but also affects their ability, when elected, to succeed as public servants. Muslim women must be provided more opportunities to develop their potential through capability-building and training programmes. Women's organizations can be mobilized towards this end. With the support of the donor community, capability-building programmes have already been initiated for Muslim women in Mindanao.⁴

Advocacy of women's rights remains a critical area of intervention inasmuch as gender discrimination is still a major obstacle to Muslim women's participation in peace building. Beyond this, there is a need to

² Fayzah Dumarpa is a second-term Congresswoman representing Lanao del Sur, and Congresswoman Dilangalen succeeds her husband to represent Maguindanao.

³ The author was the only Muslim woman to run for the Senate in May 2004, gathering one million more votes than the leading male Muslim candidate.

⁴ The NDI has implemented a training programme on campaigns and politics for Muslim women in. The Asia Foundation and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung similarly provide support for women's capacity-building programmes.

fully implement Republic Act 7192, or the 'Women in Nation Building Act'.⁵ Among the many interventions set out under RA 7192 is the provision for a substantial portion of official development assistance funds to be used by concerned agencies to support programmes and activities for women and to open the Philippine Military Academy to women.

Unfortunately, Muslim women's perceptions of their roles in society—outside of their traditional roles in the family—also act as a barrier to their active involvement in their communities. It is thus critical that awareness-raising on women's rights begin with the Muslim women themselves.

Muslim Women in Peace and Development

In Mindanao, ordinary women have discovered that they can be a potent force in any social, political, or economic undertaking. After the 1996 Peace Agreement,⁶ MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front) women were vocal about their exclusion from the process. They now welcome the chance to express their needs and hopes in community focus group discussions, but they feel they should be allowed to decide which projects to carry out, just as men do.

Today, more and more Muslim women are entering the realm of civil society. They have also become more vocal in expressing their disenchantment with the non-implementation of the 1996 Peace Agreement. Some women leaders in the communities of the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) even believe they need to persist in the armed struggle in order to attain their goals. Fortunately, more women have become active in conflict resolution programmes, in mass action to stop armed conflict, in establishing zones of peace, and they are some of the most active partners in interfaith dialogues.

After the signing of the 1996 Peace Agreement, The Bangsa Moro Women's Foundation (BMWF) was established.⁷ The BMWF became the leading partner of the MNLF and the ARMM (Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao) in the implementation of training as well as livelihood and micro-credit programmes for women. Up to 200 registered women's co-operatives and mutual benefit associations have been organized and federated with the

⁵ The principal author of RA 7192 is Senator Rasul, then Chair of the Senate Committee on Women.

⁶ The 1996 Peace Agreement was forged between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines and the Moro National Liberation Front headed by Chairman Nur Misuari.

⁷ The Bangsa Moro Women's Foundation (BMWF) was founded by Eleonora 'Rohayda' Tan Misuari, wife of the MNLF Chairman and former ARMM Governor Nur Misuari.

BMWF. On 9 July 1997, the ARMM Regional Legislative Assembly passed a law establishing the Regional Commission for Bangsa Moro Women (RCBW).⁸ The RCBW, with its meagre resources, has supported capacity-building for women. Although its programmes have been mostly in the area of livelihood training and economic empowerment, the commission has also supported programmes for conflict resolution and peace advocacy. On 23 January 2005, the RCBW collaborated with the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy to hold a conference on the Role of Muslim Women in Peace and Development.

In 2001, several Muslim women leaders organized a focus group discussion to find out if women could overcome the enmities that divided Muslims and Christians in the areas of conflict. Led by Senator Rasul, Muslim and Christian women directly involved in, or affected by, the armed conflict came together. They were unanimous in concluding that it was time to move beyond hostilities and recrimination to reclaim their communities. The discussions led to the publication in 2002 of a training manual for empowering women in conflict resolution. Since then, the group has moved forward, trying to reach out to other women leaders to form a network of peace advocates. In December 2003, the group organized a conference in Zamboanga City, which brought together over 30 Muslim women's organizations to develop a peace and development agenda. Experts came from the United States, Bangladesh, and Indonesia to share their experiences with the Muslim women of Mindanao. Calling themselves the Muslim Women Peace Advocates Network, women from the ARMM and from provinces affected by conflict have stepped up their interfaith and peace-building activities. In Sulu, they formed the Muslim Women Peace Advocates Council. Over the past one and a half years, the council has broadcast a radio programme called 'Women Talk Peace', and conducted more training programmes for capacity building in conflict resolution. In Lanao del Sur, two of the Muslim women leaders who participated in the Zamboanga conference organized their own Muslim Women Peace Council.

This emerging women's activism is a direct response to the double burden women bear: although they are the ones primarily responsible for the welfare of their families, they lack access to programmes and support. Moreover, while they are not responsible for the armed conflict that has reduced their communities to refugee status, they bear the brunt of keeping their families

⁸ Being the regional counterpart of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women, the RCBW is led by Chairperson Tarhata Maglangit, and its board is composed of representatives from the five provinces of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao.

and communities together. So much responsibility is laid on the shoulders of women, and yet women are not heard but only seen. When seen, they are relegated to a minor sector, together with children and youth, as if to say that they are intrinsically powerless. If they were given capabilities in accessing resources and in community organizing, many Muslim women's organizations could become effective partners of the government. However, they will need to form strategic alliances to define their roles and approaches in peace-building. Then they can join influential civil society groups such as the church, media, and academe at the forefront of promoting a culture of peace.

Problems Faced by Muslim Women Organizations

While women are eager to become active partners in government efforts to promote and sustain peace, they have legitimate concerns that need to be addressed and face barriers to the attainment of our goal of social transformation:

1. There are a sizable number of programmes and projects focused on communities in Mindanao. This focus is understandable given that direct experiences of the conflict and its effects are still largely confined to the South. However, the lion's share goes to infrastructure and education. Although there is strong support for the delivery of basic services—education, health, credit, and poverty alleviation—the support for women's capacity building is minute.
2. The effectiveness of women's organizing efforts in Mindanao is complicated by political alignments and ideologies as well as by competition for 'turf' and funding. The government and the donor community should directly support the peace-building activities of Muslim women's grassroots organizations by providing the means for diverse women's networks to coalesce into more potent and viable networks.
3. Many of the organizations, including women's, operate with very limited financial resources, which affects to a significant degree the sustainability and effectiveness of their programmes. More importantly, coordination and exchange between and among the various groups/networks are limited. There is thus little scope for the sharing of resources, technology, effective models, and success stories. There is also no comprehensive database of existing organizations and institutions, which further hampers coordination and networking between the various groups.

4. Due to the effects of conflict, especially on women and their children, peace advocacy with the participation of Muslim women is an urgent issue. Muslim women who have a keen understanding of the issues involved can make peace-building effective; and yet opportunities for the involvement of women in peacemaking initiatives are still limited. A major factor here is their lack of leadership, conflict-resolution, and negotiation skills. Providing opportunities for training and skill-building, particularly at the grassroots level, should be a priority.
5. Support and networking among women leaders, peace advocates, and organizations are also critical in effectively mobilizing the women's sector. It is therefore necessary to strengthen existing networks and to facilitate the establishment of links within the women's sector.
6. The growing conservatism among Muslim religious leaders has impinged on the development of Muslim women's organizations, especially when such organizations venture into the fields of politics and governance. For instance, an ordinance requiring women to veil has been imposed in Marawi City (Lanao del Sur) and some municipalities in the Maguindanao and Sulu provinces. However, elected women officials have been hesitant to file complaints, even though these ordinances violate Philippine laws. This hesitance of women officials is due to the growing influence of ultra-conservative religious groups such as the Tabligh.
7. As mentioned earlier, the implementation of *shari'a* in the Philippines, which was codified by an all-male group during the martial law years, has features that violate women's rights. For instance, a woman cannot exercise her profession or occupation, engage in business, or acquire property without the consent of her husband.

Conclusion

Globalization, mass education and mass communication are processes that are beginning to change perceptions of women in the Muslim world. Our Islamic world cannot exist behind the so-called divide described in the 'Clash of Civilizations.' We need access to education, training, and communication.

As we search for peace as equal partners, Muslim women face obstacles from within our own communities. Policymakers need to treat us as partners in the struggle for freedom, for dignity, for a better way of life. We need access to education, training, and communication. By grounding human and women's rights in Islamic cultural traditions and religious teachings, we hope

that own local religious leaders will accept our advocacies and not see these as unwelcome secular ideas. We need to refocus attention on the principles of *hurriya* (liberty), *adl* (justice), *shura* (consultation), and *ijtihad* (rational interpretation).

We would encourage a discourse among all Muslims in which informed critical reasoning and cultural mediation can take place. We need to challenge the claim by violent and militant Islamist forces that their interpretation of Islam is 'universal' and that theirs is the only legitimate view for all Muslims at all times. We need to exert sustained pressure on governments to grant more freedom, because it is in their own and in their constituents' interest, as well as in the interest of peace and stability in the world. It cannot be tolerated that repression, in the guise of a war on terrorism, silences all opposition or lumps all 'Islamists' together. Those who advocate violent extremism are the enemies of humankind and of Islam, and must be stopped before they bring havoc and mayhem to their own countries and to the world. However, real and genuine reforms are needed. Progressive, liberal, or moderate voices cannot be heard in an environment of fear and repression.

To promote peace and strengthen the voices of the silent majority, Muslim communities must gain experience with democratic institutions and practices. Years of military rule have blocked our democratic development, because that rule has supported authoritarianism in our communities. We need to restrengthen civil society. We need to foster respect for civilian authority and the rule of law, respect for the rights of all members of our communities to live according to our faith. We need to fight for our human rights, women's rights.

Not only must we Muslim women get the state elites involved, which usually consist largely of men who wish to retain the power they currently enjoy; we must also stand firmly against the predominant patriarchal values that continually oppress us. We must fight against our exclusion from the political and economic systems. Sura 49, Verse 13 of the Holy Qur'an states: 'O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other, not that ye may despise each other.' We Muslims are thus not only entitled to be part of a pluralistic society. Muslim men and women are equally recognized as fathers and mothers of all nations. Muslim men and women are therefore also equally recognized as members of society.

We women must join the war fought over our hearts and minds to defend our space here on earth. We must therefore fight with our hearts and minds. We Muslim women must not allow ourselves to be silenced.

FROM CATHOLIC TO MUSLIM:
CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER ROLES IN A
BALIK-ISLAM MOVEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES*

Vivienne S.M. Angeles

Introduction

Women wearing Islamic clothing have become a common sight in parts of the Philippines that have been traditionally and overwhelmingly Catholic. One explanation for this is the increasing number of Filipino Catholic women who have converted to Islam. These women, with their conversion, have adopted the Muslim way of dressing as well as new ways of looking at themselves and their roles. This contribution focuses on the conversion experiences of several Catholic women who are now part of the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG), which is one of the many groups of Muslim converts. These conversions constitute what is currently known as Balik Islam. I will describe Balik Islam in some detail as a backdrop for our discussion of the ISCAG women converts.

Studying and understanding the conversion of women is important because the experience of conversion is extraordinarily powerful in its effects on the lives of converts and on the lives of their families and friends (Gallagher 1990:1). I recognize that the transformative aspect of religion can help us understand how religion may promote or reinforce individual and social stability or to induce individual and social transformation (Gallagher 1990:5). Studying women's conversion can also help us comprehend specific social, cultural, personal, and religious issues pertaining to women and society.

To the best of my knowledge, only two studies have previously been conducted on Filipino conversion to Islam. The first, by Luis Lacar, includes male and female converts in Mindanao (Lacar 2001). The second is on Filipino

* An earlier version of this contribution was presented at the Seminar on Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia at the University of Passau. I appreciate the comments of Prof. Dr. Susanne Schröter. I am also thankful to Annette and Manolo Alcasabas who brought me to Dasmariñas, Cavite for the interviews.

women working as domestic helpers in Hong Kong whose conversion to Islam was precipitated by marriage to Pakistani Muslim men (Hawwa 2000). I have not found previous work, so far, that focuses on the Balik Islam women in the Philippines and how conversion has affected women's perception of their gender roles. This study hopes to make a contribution to the discourse on the subject.

The major premises of this research are: First, Islam gave women converts a new sense of identity and spiritual fulfilment that they did not find in their previous religion. This new sense of identity has been facilitated by the hundreds of thousands of Filipinos taking on employment in Middle Eastern countries. In 2002 alone, 240,000 Filipinos went to Saudi Arabia where job opportunities awaited them. Second, conversion brought about a new perception of women's roles as converts learned and delved into the teachings of Islam. Third, this new perception led to a new form of relationship between the women converts and their families and with the rest of Philippine society. As stated earlier, since the women are members of the Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG) that is in turn a part of the Balik Islam movement in the Philippines, I will first provide an introduction to the Balik Islam before turning to the ISCAG women converts. Doing so will also provide us an idea of the changing geographic distribution and composition of Philippine Muslims.

This study of women's conversion comes under several sub-topics. First, in the section 'On Becoming a Muslimah', I will look at the process of conversion to Islam and explore how life situations of women prior to their conversion may have led to the change in religion. I will discuss how the women first encountered Islam and how taking the *shahada*¹ to seal the conversion impacted on them. Second, in 'Family Responses', I will examine how family members responded to the fact of their daughter's conversion. Since the women believe that they have 'entered a new life', their identities, as they expressed, have also evolved so I will look at how this identity is manifested to others. This will be the concern of the third section on 'New Ways of Viewing Themselves'. The fourth part, 'Perceptions of Gender Roles', will examine how the women define their roles as Muslim women and whether they conform to or differ from prevailing views on women's roles in the predominantly Catholic Philippines. The last section on 'Religion and Transformation' will cover the question as to the effect of this new identity and definition of roles on the women's relationships, interaction with their own families and the

¹ Testimony of the faith: 'There is no god but God and Muhammad is the prophet of God.'

larger Philippine society. I will conclude with a discussion of some conversion motifs that emerge out of the women's stories and then with questions for future research.

The primary sources of information for this study are women members of ISCAG who shared their stories of conversion in the course of interviews. I rely on their oral histories due to the lack of written narratives on Filipino Muslim women's conversion. The women's personal stories provide us a glimpse on both the nature of religious experience in general and the women's own experiences as they crossed into another religion they hardly knew anything about prior to conversion. I interviewed eight women in the ISCAG compound which is located about an hour drive from Manila, in Dasmarinas Cavite. For privacy reasons, I refer to these women under different names in this contribution. The group of eight includes: Ruqqaya, Samiyya, Farida, Maysam, Sadiyya, Jehan, Nimah, and Sadiqa.² Their ages range from late 20s to late 40s. Six of the women live in the ISCAG apartments with their children who study in the ISCAG School within the ISCAG compound. All of their husbands are working in the Middle East, specifically in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Dubai. When I interviewed Sadiqa in 2004, her husband, who is from Dubai, was visiting, and was looking into the possibility of her settling in the ISCAG compound. All the women completed high school, with two having had some college education and one with a college degree. Two women, Sadiqa and Farida, had worked in the Middle East. Sadiqa met her husband in Dubai when she was there as an overseas Filipino contract worker. Farida worked in Kuwait, where she met and married a Kuwaiti. Two others have lived in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia for a time with their husbands. Six of the women used to be Roman Catholics and two were ethnic Muslims but did not practice their religion while growing up. They also claimed to have gone through a process of conversion.

Balik Islam in the Philippines

Prior to the 1970s, Islam and Muslims were largely confined to the southern part of the Philippines and limited to specific ethnic groups.³ Today, however, there are Muslim communities in various regions of the country, including the northernmost parts. This northward spread of Islam and Muslims is

² Ruqqaya, Samiyya, Maysam, Jehan, Sadiyya, Nimah, and Farida were interviewed on 9 August 2005. The interview with Sadiqa was conducted on 20 June 2004.

³ Like the Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug, Jama Mapun, and Kalibugan.

the result of internal migration of southern Muslims in the course of the war in the mid-1970s and the increasing number of Filipino Catholics in predominantly Christian provinces of the country who have converted to Islam. These converts, who are not ethnic Muslims, refer to themselves as 'returnees' (Lacar 2001:39), 'reverts', or 'Balik Islam'. Balik means 'return', and 'Balik Islam' means 'return to Islam'. This notion of return stems first from the belief that Islam, which means submission, is the first religion of man⁴ and second, from the fact that Islam was already a dominant religion in the Philippines before the coming of the Spanish colonizers in 1521. This fact led historian Antonio De Morga (Morga 1971:280 f.), who lived in the country in 1595 to 1603, to claim that had the Spaniards delayed their arrival, the Philippines might have been a Muslim country. The converts had been taught and are very well aware of this historical information. They understood therefore that being Balik Islam Muslims means taking part in this return to their original religion. The words Balik Islam, however, have three levels of meaning: first, the event of returning to Islam; second, a person who converted to Islam; and third, organizations of converts to Islam. In this third level, we are looking at various groups that are considered under the umbrella of Balik Islam. For consistency, I will use the terms 'Balik Islam' and 'converts' rather than 'returnees' or 'reverts'.

Balik Islam in the Philippines is not a recent phenomenon. It has been in existence in the last three decades. It was first noticed in the 1970s in Mindanao, during the height of the Muslim⁵-government military conflict and before the surge of Filipino migrant workers to the Middle East. By 1988, there were about 1,350 converts in Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur, and about 500 in Zamboanga del Sur and del Norte (Lacar 2001:40). The converts were Christians who either sympathized with the conditions of Muslims in the south during the war in the 1970s or took on Islam in order to avoid possible retribution from local Muslims and to facilitate their movement from one place to another in the affected areas. Converting to Islam, therefore, provided them with a safety net.

The active and explicit effort of converting others to Islam was not intensified in the Philippines until members of the Tablighi Jama'at⁶ came to the country in the 1980s from India and Pakistan. Tablighi Jama'at requires

⁴ Several Muslims I interviewed echoed this sentiment. There are also websites that write about how Islam was the religion God gave to Adam, among them, <http://www.islamforall.net/how%20islam%began.html> (accessed February 19, 2013).

⁵ The Muslims were represented by the Moro National Liberation Front.

⁶ Maulana Muhammad Ilyas started the Tablighi Jama'at in India. See Metcalf (1998).

each of its members to embark on a missionary journey in the country for three days a month, to a total of 40 days a year, walking from one town to another preaching and showing others the ritual practices of Islam. They emphasized spiritual renewal, following the *sunnah* of Muhammad and the goal of attaining life in paradise after death.⁷ Such missionary activities brought them to different parts of the country where they approached individuals on the streets, in malls, and other public places. The long Arab clothing, beard, and turban are Tablighi markers of identity and make them very visible amid a population that has been much influenced by western fashion. Many of those attracted to the Tabligh are individuals who have gone through difficulties in life. The vice president of the Maranao mosque in Tuguegarao, a Tablighi Jama'at member, admitted that their converts include, among others, former drug addicts who wanted to reform their lives and accepted the strict teachings of the Tablighi, such as the prohibition of drugs and gambling and the promise of eternal rewards. There are also 'ethnic' or 'born' Muslims who join the Tabligh. They do not refer to themselves as Balik Islam Muslims since they have been Muslims since birth, but instead speak about a heightened consciousness of their religion.

Another Balik Islam group is the Fi Sabilillah Da'wah and Media Foundation created in 1998 by former Filipino overseas workers in Saudi Arabia. Aside from missionary activities, they sought to establish a Muslim community in Pangasinan, a northern province.⁸ The place was later shut down after a raid where police discovered guns and ammunition. The police believed that the place was set up as a military training camp for Muslims which Fi Sabilillah members continue to deny. The group, however, carries on its missionary work and publication of Islamic materials at their headquarters in Quezon City. They have a weekly television show, 'Discover Islam', and a radio programme.⁹

The Darul Hijrah, Islamic Information Centre (IIC), Islamic Wisdom Worldwide (IWW), and Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG), to which the women we interviewed belong, are the other Balik Islam groups that are heavily involved in doing *dakwah* (missionary work). Their major activities

⁷ Interview with Yusuf Cosain, a member of the Tablighi Jami'at, in the Philippines, 16-6-2004.

⁸ <http://archives.newsbreak-knowledge.ph/2002/06/09/the-new-believers/> (accessed February 19, 2013).

⁹ 'Troubled return of the faithful', <http://www.pcij.org/imag/SpecialReport/balik-islam2.html>.

include promoting Islam through direct missionary activities, publication of Islamic materials, as well as radio and television programmes. Philippine news reports indicate that memberships in these groups overlap as many of them knew each other or shared similar experiences as overseas contract workers in the Middle East, particularly Saudi Arabia.¹⁰

Balik Islam in the Philippines is not a monolithic movement. Even if their activities and memberships overlap, each group has its own organizational structure, operational base, and approach to promoting Islam. Some of them, like the *Fi Sabilillah*, have been described as 'fundamentalist' and suspected by the government of having links to radical Muslim groups in Southeast Asia and the Middle East (ICG 2005). *Fi Sabilillah* members deny the linkage and indicate that they were only trying to establish a Muslim community.¹¹

Although converts believe that they were originally Muslims since their ancestors were Muslims prior to the arrival of the colonizing Spaniards, the term *Balik Islam* carries a distinction between them and the 'ethnic' or 'born' Muslims who trace their religious lineage to the fourteenth century when Arab traders introduced Islam to southern Philippines. To 'ethnic' or 'born' Muslims, the *Balik Islam* does not share in the historical experience of resisting colonialism and Christianity. Such historical experience has determined the course of Philippine Muslim-Christian relations through the centuries. This distinction between 'born Muslim' and *Balik Islam* and the emergence of several *Balik Islam* groups has also given rise to manifestations of Islamic pluralism in the Philippines.

The number of Filipino overseas workers, many of whom chose to work in Saudi Arabia,¹² due to higher wages, has accelerated not only the growing presence and visibility of Filipino Muslims in the kingdom but in the Philippines as well. Labour has become the major Philippine export and, with the increase in the number of workers to Saudi Arabia, more Filipinos learn about Islam and eventually, for various reasons, decide to convert. They offer varied rationales for converting—ranging from the more practical concerns of better pay to a genuine interest in Islam. A former male overseas contract worker in Saudi Arabia admitted that he became a

¹⁰ <http://archives.newsbreak-knowledge.ph/2002/06/09/the-new-believers/> (accessed February 19, 2013).

¹¹ <http://archives.newsbreak-knowledge.ph/2002/06/09/the-new-believers/> (accessed February 19, 2013).

¹² In 2011, 22.6 per cent of the 2.2 million Filipino overseas workers were in Saudi Arabia; 14.6 per cent in the United Arab Emirates and 6.9 per cent in Qatar. www.census.govph/content/2011-survey-overseas-filipinos-sof (accessed February 19, 2013).

Muslim when he realized that Muslim workers in Saudi Arabia were receiving higher wages than Catholics and much more so during the month of Ramadan. It was also easy to get referrals for other jobs or get their contracts renewed if they were Muslims. The same convert indicated that although he had practical reasons for converting, he later on became convinced of the truth of Islam and has been actively engaged in *dakwah*. Another person said that he converted to Islam after returning to the Philippines and recalled the impressive kindness of Muslims who took care of him when he was hospitalized in Saudi Arabia. After his conversion, his family followed suit and they are now all active Muslims. There are many other converts who come from diverse professions and socio-economic classes, but they are predominantly male¹³ and were Catholics before conversion.

Before the rush of migrant workers overseas, the only Filipinos who went to the Middle East were Muslims who either made the pilgrimage to Mecca or were recipients of scholarships from various universities in countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and the very small number of Catholics who visited Jerusalem. Now, Muslims and Catholics go to the Middle East as contract workers. In the process, Catholics are introduced to Islam while Muslims have the opportunity to experience Islam in the land of its birth. Recent estimates put the number of Balik Islam Muslims in the Philippines at 200,000 (ICG 2005:2), thus making them a minority within the Muslim minority that constitutes between 5 to 6% (4.2 to 5 million) of the 84 million estimated total Philippine population.¹⁴

Aside from the term Balik Islam, I need to clarify other words used in this study. 'Overseas contract workers' (OCW) refer to Filipinos who are working in other parts of the world and have a minimum contract of two years. In recent times, the government has been using the term 'overseas Filipino workers' (OFW). OCW and OFW refer to the same group of people. An additional term is 'conversion' which can be as problematic as defining religion. Lewis R. Rambo (1998) recognizes the difficulties involved and the biases brought out in various fields like religion and psychology. We have a

¹³ Lacar (2001:4–5) noted that generally, there were fewer female converts in the area studied and of the 3,700 known converts in Mindanao, only 23 were women. Conversion of Filipino Catholic women to Islam continues, especially in the Middle East as reported by newsletters, blogs, social media and even youtube used by Filipinos. The conversions reported are at different times of the year in different places and do not allow me to estimate the overall percentage of Filipino women conversions at this time.

¹⁴ 2005 estimate. The estimate for August 2007 was 88.57 million. www.census.gov.ph (accessed 3 September 2009).

sense of what it is and yet cannot really grasp it in a few words. While we normally understand this as the change from one religion to another, it can also refer to a deeper conviction of the presence of the sacred in one person's life, or an intensification of commitment to a religion—somehow similar to the experience of Malcolm X when he made the pilgrimage to Mecca (X and Haley, 1992). Conversion also means a change in the perception of the role and place of the sacred in one's life. It may indicate a change in the level of commitment to the religion¹⁵ or a more focused attention to the attainment of a state of being as in non-theistic religions. The common thread through these various understandings of conversion is change. As a result, when we study women's stories, we will look broadly on how this change affects women's views of themselves as well as their relationships with others.

There are several theories of conversion¹⁶ that we can examine in light of Filipino women's conversion, but I prefer to focus on the women's stories first and then, later on, see if they demonstrate some patterns or motifs of conversion brought out in previous studies.

The Islamic Studies Call and Guidance (ISCAG)

ISCAG, a Balik Islam group with branches in different parts of the Philippines, was registered as a non-profit organization with the Securities and Exchange Commission in the Philippines in 1991. They established their headquarters—a gated compound with a land area of 15,500 square meters—in Dasmarinas, Cavite, in 1995. It contains a school (pre-kindergarten to fourth year high school), a prayer hall, a medical clinic, an administrative office, and two apartment buildings where six of the women we interviewed live. In 2005, there were 36 families occupying the one- or two-bedroom apartments that rent for between 2,000 pesos and 4,500 pesos a month.¹⁷ There are also housing arrangements for bachelors living in the compound. According to Jamel Almarez, operations manager of ISCAG, the organization decided to create a gated community because its leaders knew that Muslim converts face tremendous difficulties in their interactions with non-Muslims. Some have

¹⁵ One of the conversion narratives compiled by ISCAG in Saudi Arabia speaks of a woman—a Tausug Muslim, who claimed that she did not really know much about Islam in spite of the fact that she was born one. For her, this is a form of conversion, a deepening of the faith that probably would not have happened if she had not become involved with ISCAG.

¹⁶ See James (1902); Lofland and Stark (1965); Lofland (1977); Rambo (1995).

¹⁷ The exchange rate in 2004 was 50 Philippine pesos to one US Dollar.

become victims of discrimination and persecution, which makes it better for them to live together in one community where they could be safer.¹⁸

Conscious of the tensions that continue to affect Muslim and non-Muslim relations in the Philippines, ISCAG considers it part of its mission to correct misconceptions about Islam. Such misconceptions resulted not only from Spanish colonization and the armed struggles in the south that started in 1969 but also of recent events such as the kidnapping and bombings carried out by members of the Abu Sayyaf.¹⁹ Through its missionary activities, ISCAG wants non-Muslims to understand that Islam rejects terrorism. Printed literature of ISCAG emphasizes the various goals of the organization: 1.) To bring the true message of Islam to the Filipino people; 2.) To help maintain the well-being of Muslims; 3.) To educate Muslims on Islam according to the Qur'an and *sunnah*; 4.) To uplift the Muslim community educationally, economically, and socially; 5.) To build, manage and maintain *masjids* (mosques); 6.) To provide scholarships for deserving Muslims to enter various professions, and 7.) To sponsor orphaned children so that they can pursue their education.

Towards the above goals, ISCAG has been actively distributing Islamic books, pamphlets, and audio/video tapes to those interested. By late 2002, they had distributed more than 2 million copies of books and materials authored by members of the centre both in the Philippines and in Saudi Arabia.²⁰ As of 2005, they have built seven mosques in different parts of the Philippines, and reported that 4,550 men and women have embraced Islam through the efforts of the centre from its inception until 2002. Recent ISCAG publications point out that numbers of converts have increased significantly although specific data were not available. It is obvious, however, that in a one-year period between our visits, there have been more people coming to the centre in Dasmariñas to worship, receive religious instruction, avail themselves of medical and social services offered there, or to settle and live at the compound. ISCAG anticipates that more will come to live there; hence, the construction of two more apartment buildings and in the future, a mosque. Although their facilities were built mainly for Muslims, they also accept non-Muslim children in their schools and extend the services of their health clinic, where they have a physician and a nurse, to families in the neighbourhood, regardless of religious affiliation.

¹⁸ Interview with Jamel Almarez, 20 June 2004.

¹⁹ The Abu Sayyaf is one of several Muslim groups that had been in armed struggle with the government. See Angeles (2003); International Crisis Group (2005); Banlaoi (2006).

²⁰ Islamic Studies Call and Guidance pamphlet.

On Becoming a Muslimah

ISCAG women's conversion stories tend to support studies in sociology and psychology which demonstrate that conversion is more likely to take place through personal contact. The conversion of a trusted friend, family member, or relative opens up the possibility of conversion for a person (Rambo 1998; Momen 1999:155). Furthermore, if a person has a close relationship with one who had just converted, the possibility increases. Although there are other factors that can influence conversion, there is a strong likelihood that if the new convert is happy, then the potential follow-up convert could possibly see herself in the same position. At the same time, we should be aware that if there is strong resistance among family and relatives to a potential conversion, then the conversion may not take place (Momen 1999:155). Yet, a key factor here is the nature of the relationship between the new convert and the potential convert which may transcend family objections.

Ruqayya, Maysam, Sadiqa, Sadiyya, and Jehan were introduced to Islam through their husbands, Nimah, through her brother, while two others, Samiyya and Farida, became interested in Islam prior to marriage. Farida and Sadiqa are 'ethnic Muslims' but did not practice their religion and claimed that they did not really know much about Islam while growing up. Samiyya, who finished college and attended a Catholic school, first interacted with Muslims in Virra Mall in Metro Manila where many shops are owned and run by Muslim women. This led to her interest in Islam and her decision to attend learning sessions at the Globo de Oro mosque in Quiapo, in the heart of Manila where there is a large community of ethnic Muslims. Farida, on the other hand, used to work in Kuwait where she became curious about Islam and started observing the lives of Muslims. She was initially discouraged with the ritual requirements of the religion and had many questions about Islam. However, on her own, she read ISCAG materials and decided to practice Islam after realizing that the religion had the answers to her questions. She added that everything else 'kind of flowed from then on'. In her case, although born a Muslim but not practicing, it was also a process of conversion. She then married a Kuwaiti who is still working there.

Apart from Nimah, who was introduced to Islam by her brother who converted in Saudi Arabia, Sadiyya, Ruqayya, Jehan and Sadiqa married either Muslims or men who converted first then brought the wives to the religion. Sadiyya married a Maranao²¹ Muslim; Jehan's husband converted

²¹ One of the traditionally Muslim ethnic groups of the southern Philippines. Maranao are originally from the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte in Mindanao.

while working in Saudi Arabia; Ruqayya met her Kuwaiti Muslim husband in Manila, and Sadiqa met her husband in Dubai where she was working. Although they all knew that strictly speaking, a woman who marries a Muslim must convert to Islam, none of them immediately did so. Their husbands brought home or sent ISCAG materials without asking the wives to convert. Sadiyya read materials on Islam and tried to do the rituals herself but later on went to the Office of Muslim Affairs (OMA)²² to inquire about instructions in Islam. Some personnel in the office thought that Sadiyya probably wanted to work in Saudi Arabia, but upon learning that she wanted to follow the religion of her husband, she was directed to ISCAG where women members taught her the proper way of praying and other requirements of the faith. Jehan's and Maysam's husbands converted while working in Saudi Arabia, and like the others sent materials on Islam to their wives soon after conversion. In their phone conversations, the husbands would occasionally inquire if they had read the materials. Maysam converted not long after but for Jehan, it took a while. Ruqayya's stay in Kuwait exposed her to the rituals of Islam and Muslims but she converted only after she returned to Manila. Her husband is a Kuwaiti Muslim, which automatically makes their children Muslims. As Ruqayya describes it, her children have 'Islam running through their veins'. It dawned upon her that while she could ask other Muslims to guide her children, it was her role as a mother to teach them about Islam, so she 'sacrificed' for them and 'took the *shahada*'. Nimah's brother Nur also sent materials on Islam to his family in the Philippines and Nimah started to read them. When her brother returned to the Philippines, he became involved with ISCAG where he is now an *imam*, and this drew not only Nimah but also other members of their birth family to Islam.

Without being specific, Jehan said that 'things' were explained to her at ISCAG and she eventually learned that there are similarities between the teachings of Islam and what we find in the Christian Bible, like the Virgin Mary, which facilitated the transition to Islam. She reprimanded her husband for not explaining things to her previously, and added that if she had 'died in the course of all those difficulties of our lives, I would not have encountered Islam and would have regretted it'.

The women emphasized that their husbands never forced them to convert but the subtle hints, coupled with materials provided by ISCAG, got them to think about Islam and eventually to convert. For Sadiyya, Maryam, Sadiqa, Jehan, and Ruqayya, it was their husbands who brought Islam home and

²² This is a government office directly under the office of the President of the Philippines. It was one of those offices created in response to the problems in southern Philippines.

played a major role in their conversion. This conversion through marriage parallels the case of Filipinas in Hong Kong who converted to Islam upon marriage to Pakistanis (Hawwa 1999:10). In both situations, respondents gave the impression they had the freedom to choose to become Muslim.

As Jamel Almarez noted in the 2004 interview, many conversions took place in the Philippines, and the husbands who had lived in the Middle East were largely responsible for that.²³ In his case, his wife and family followed him and, later on, members of their extended family. This pattern is repeated among many ISCAG members.

Six of the women were former Catholics, but experienced different life situations prior to conversion. Some of them went through marital conflicts, difficult home situations, and financial problems. Whenever Nimah had problems with her husband, she would go to ISCAG with her children and would talk with her brother who is an *imam*. Her children learned how to pray at ISCAG and when she saw them doing it, she realized that she should be the one teaching her children how to pray. Jehan claimed she lived the good life in the Philippines as a wife supported by her husband who was then working in Saudi Arabia. When her husband returned, he had difficulties finding a job in his own country that actually encourages overseas employment because the local economy cannot absorb the growing labour force (see DeParle 2007). That was the reason he went to Saudi Arabia in the first place. Without a job in the Philippines and away from Muslim communities, he became a lapsed Muslim and eventually, with Jehan, lived a life she described as 'without direction'. Forced to move in with her mother-in-law due to financial problems, their lives were marked with constant fighting and involved bouts with drugs and alcohol. Her mother-in-law's home was near the ISCAG compound and one day, in the midst of their multiple life crises, her husband decided to respond to the *adhan* (call to prayer) which could be heard from their home. He went to the ISCAG compound to attend the prayers and invited Jehan to come with him. This marked the first step of her husband's return to Islam and the beginning of Jehan's own conversion.

Ruqayya lived in Kuwait for a few years but claimed that she 'did not find Islam' there. She found it in Manila when she came back and after her husband had returned to Kuwait where he continues to work. It was difficult

²³ Nur Caparino, who is in charge of *dakwah* of ISCAG, spoke of the five Islamic centres in Saudi Arabia where one could see about 30–35 Filipinos in each of them on Fridays (Interview with Nur Caparino, 20 June 2004). ISCAG in Saudi Arabia is very much involved in the conversion of Filipinos working there.

to follow the ritual requirements of Islam as well as the dietary restrictions while living with her brother's family that chided them about their 'new found' religion. Tensions built up within the household but Ruqayya felt she had to persevere because she had no other place to go. Eventually, her husband arrived from Kuwait, settled the family in one of the apartments in the ISCAG compound, and not long after returned to Kuwait. Others, like Samiyya and Jehan, had doubts about their own religion that have, in some ways, figured in their decision to convert. Samiyya's questioning of her Roman Catholic religion started after interactions with Muslim women in Virra Mall and discussions that centred on the belief that God is the only one worthy of worship. When she was Catholic, she participated in various Marian devotions²⁴ throughout the years but then began to ask why Catholics seemed to be worshipping Mary more than God the Father. She wondered why the prayers of the rosary mention Mary more times than God when in reality God is the Supreme Being. Samiyya decided to stop praying the rosary. After she married a Muslim, she felt that she should follow the religion of her husband and with it, the decision to pray only to God. For Jehan, on the other hand, it was the search for something spiritually fulfilling. While her husband had converted in Saudi Arabia, she was home, being provided for by her husband's earnings. But Jehan felt something missing in her life. She tried other variations of Christianity, became a member of the *Iglesia ni Kristo*,²⁵ and then a born-again Christian. Yet, in spite of the many prayer meetings and rallies she attended, there was some emptiness unsatisfied by the religious rituals and teachings including those of the El Shaddai movement, a Christian evangelical group she was involved in.²⁶ Her husband's bringing her to ISCAG marked the beginning of her conversion that eventually gave her a sense of spiritual fulfilment never felt before.

From the women's narratives, it is obvious that half of them had experienced different types of individual crises: marital conflicts, financial issues, doubts about their religion—situations that previous conversion studies indicate can leave a person open to conversion (Momen 1999). When conversion did happen, the women no longer experienced their earlier problems. As Jehan said, she and her husband no longer fought, her husband does not

²⁴ Catholic Filipinos are generally known for Marian devotions, with a number of religious events honouring Mary throughout the year like the Flores de Mayo, the feast of the Immaculate Conception (8 December), feast of the Assumption (15 August), and month of the rosary (October, where an image of Mary is brought to different homes and neighbours pray the rosary together).

²⁵ Church of Christ, a Philippine Christian denomination.

²⁶ For a discussion on the El-Shaddai movement in the Philippines, see Wiegele (2007).

touch alcohol and cigarettes anymore, and their life is peaceful. Conversion, in a way, functioned like a crisis intervention.

Like any conversion, becoming a Muslim is sealed by a ritual, the recitation of the *shahada*. Islam requires a person reciting the *shahada* to believe it firmly, to express it correctly, and internalize the belief in one God and the prophecy of Muhammad. This recitation serves as a kind of public declaration of a convert's acceptance of the new religion. All the women were emotionally affected by this statement of the faith and after that, knowing that they have already become Muslims, there was an 'overwhelming sense of joy, and tears continued to flow'. There was also an indescribable feeling of being a different person, highlighted by a discovered love and fear of Allah. Samiyya felt that after her conversion, she has to work harder in order to attain paradise in the afterlife especially since she has to make up for time lost when she was in another religion. Jehan spoke of the beautiful feeling of attaining peace of mind. Her husband is now labouring in Dubai and they are working hard to build their future. All the women expressed a feeling of rebirth, of being a new person after the recitation of the *shahada*.

Throughout the interviews, ISCAG women reiterated the idea that their conversion was not an impulsive act but rather the result of careful thought and study. The reading materials and audio cassettes, which include publications of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth, writings of Mawdudi, parts of Sayyid Qutb's *In the shade of the Qur'an*, pamphlets on Islamic beliefs, duties and responsibilities of Muslims, among others, are their sources for understanding Islam. Not all of the women read the Qur'an every day but those who do often, like Samiyya and Farida, are very articulate about their understanding of Qur'anic verses. In many ways, their understanding of Islam is very much within the ISCAG interpretation and in a way reflects acceptance of what has already been interpreted and explained in ISCAG's brochures and its lectures and meetings. I am unable to determine whether the women, especially the two who read the Qur'an, engage in extensive *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) or basically view the Qur'an as confirming what is already being taught at ISCAG. Other materials on Islam available at the Dasmarias compound were written by male members and one of them, Khalid Evaristo, was mentioned several times by both male and female ISCAG members in the course of our interviews. Materials are also available online but since the women do not use computers, they are limited to resorting to print and audio materials.

These stories of ISCAG women on how they learned about Islam can be viewed in light of the intellectual motif of conversion that involves intensive study of the religion (Lofland and Skonovd 1981). Although only two of the

interviewed read the Qur'an regularly, the ISGAG books, pamphlets, devotional literature that their husbands brought or sent home, coupled with the lectures at ISGAG, provided them the opportunities to learn and think about Islam and to decide whether to convert or not. The women emphasize the point that they had the option to accept or reject Islam after learning about it. The element of choice, and therefore an exercise of their agency which is highly important, plus the fact that they studied the materials, distinguishes them from first, other Muslims who just accepted the religion they were born into and second, from those converts who were merely taken in by the emotional appeals of those converting them to Islam. For the women we interviewed, becoming a Muslim was a rational choice based on their understanding of the materials on the religion. It was not a random, impulsive act.

Family Responses

Reactions of the women's parents to their conversions were very negative. This is expected in the predominantly Catholic Philippines for two reasons. First, as historical records indicate, Spain embarked on a mission of Christianizing the country and in the process colonized the consciousness of the people²⁷ in a way that religion became an important component of a person's identity. Being a Christian was acceptable but keeping one's indigenous or Muslim religion was reason enough for discrimination and persecution. This situation resulted in centuries of mutual suspicion and negative perceptions between Muslims and Christians in the Philippines. Second, Muslim movements, especially those that developed from 1969 on (Majul 1985), that tried to establish an independent state in the southern Philippines were engaged in armed conflict with the Philippine military. This situation all the more gave reasons for parents to be extremely concerned about their daughters' choice of what they described as 'religion of the rebels'. The more recent activities of groups like the Abu Sayyaf that include kidnapping and beheading of hostages, resurrected old fears and stereotyped characterizations of Muslims that in turn affected Muslim-Christian relations.

Further complicating the above state of affairs are traditional values of family honour, *hiya* (shame) and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) (Lynch 1972). To have a daughter who opted to follow another religion that has been portrayed in bad light throughout history is considered a cause of family

²⁷ Here, I am employing 'colonization of consciousness' as used by Jean and John Comaroff in their work *Of Revelation and Revolution* (1991).

hiya and concern. As in the case of Filipino women converts in Hong Kong, becoming a Muslim is seen as deviant behaviour and led to ostracism by friends, neighbours, and family. The same appears to be the experience of ISCAG women. Conversion to a religion different from that of the family is also construed as rebellious behaviour on the part of the daughter, and by extension, indicative of the family's inability to rein in the 'erring' daughter even if she is of major age and married. This notion of *hiya* is also connected to the value of *utang na loob*. Children owe a debt of gratitude to their parents for the fact of having been born, raised, and educated. This debt can never be repaid but one should continue in attempting to do so throughout life. One way of repaying is to obey the parents and not to do anything that would hurt or displease them. Converting to Islam and rejecting parents' entreaties to come back to the family religion indicates non-recognition of, or setting aside, this debt of gratitude. The daughter then becomes *walang utang na loob* (one who does not have a debt of gratitude).

Several parents eventually recognized the fact that their daughters have become Muslims. This recognition, however, did not mean acceptance and conversion remains a sore topic of conversation when daughters visit their parents. Sadiyya recalled that every time she wanted to share something about Islam, her mother would right away interrupt and say, 'You can say that, but even if I die, I will never ever convert to Islam'. They therefore have to learn to negotiate around this negative response in order to maintain their relationships with parents and relatives. Sadiyya's efforts to make peace with her mother and be accepted as a Muslim were supported by several members of ISCAG who visited her family. This is in line with a Filipino practice of trying to settle differences within the family through the use of mediators. In a society that emphasizes the importance of family, Sadiyya's attempts at reconciliation are also a manifestation of another Philippine value—promoting and maintaining smooth interpersonal relationships which, again, is linked to the idea of *hiya*. It is shameful if members of the family do not get along, so elders come to help 'smoothen' the relationship before the misunderstandings get any bigger to the point of affecting family solidarity. Normally, in cases of family misunderstandings, family elders may be called upon to mediate. However, since this involved religion that puts the family on one side and the daughter on the other, Sadiyya and ISCAG members felt that their talking with the family would allay the latter's fears about Islam and Muslims. Since she is now a member of a religious community that is not acceptable to her family but where she feels a sense of belonging, she is careful to avoid further tension not just between her and her mother but also with other members of the family. Sadiyya's estrangement from the family is

further evidenced by the fact that she was not aware of a family reunion that was taking place when she and members of ISCAG came to visit. She found the situation a bit awkward (in so far as her new religion was concerned) since male members of her family were drinking beer and she had brought in Muslims who strictly observe the Islamic prohibition of alcohol. There were some tense discussions that followed and in the end, Sadiyya's brother summed it up as 'everyone has his or her own choice'—a statement that did not necessarily translate into acceptance of Sadiyya as a Muslim daughter.²⁸

While Sadiyya made efforts at reconciling with her family, other ISCAG women found it impossible to do so, with one woman saying that she is still not in speaking terms with her siblings because of her conversion. Another difficulty was the constant harassment from the family, as in the case of Ruqqaya, who lived with her brother and sister-in-law who are Christians. The sister-in-law would cook pork, which is *haram* (forbidden) in Islam, and at the dinner table would tempt her and her children to eat pork while questioning the dietary restrictions of Islam. Ruqqaya felt that her brother's family had no respect for her religion but she felt helpless. With her husband in the Middle East, and having no place of their own, her sister-in-law was actually doing her a favour by allowing her and her children to live with them. Hence, out of *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) to her brother and sister-in-law, she had to bear these difficulties while living in their home.

These kinds of family responses are very common in the Philippine setting. With religion as a salient feature of a person's identity and with Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism, considered as not just the dominant religion but the 'true' religion for most Filipinos, conversion to Islam has generated negative feedback from the women's families. Male converts speak of similar experiences, like Abdullah Yusuf Abu Bakr Ledesma, who comes from a prominent family and holds a PhD from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was made to leave home when his mother found out that he had become a Balik Islam Muslim. She accepted him back later but other relatives still refuse to come to terms with his conversion and continue to exclude him from family activities.²⁹ Such situations alienate the converts from their families and could be a major reason for the shift of their support system—from the family to the Muslim community to which the convert now belongs.

²⁸ Other women's conversion stories demonstrate the same reaction of the family. See Amway (2002) and Van Nieuwkerk (2006).

²⁹ 'Troubled return of the faithful', <http://www.pcij.org/imag/SpecialReport/balik-islam4.html>.

New Ways of Viewing Themselves

Conversion to Islam resulted in changes affecting the women's identity, their understanding of women's roles, the place of religion in their lives, and the way they relate to others. This new identity is visually expressed through the adoption of a new style of clothing that conforms to ISGAG's interpretation of Qur'anic passages on modesty, especially sura 24:31 which says:

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their adornments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their brother's sons [...].

ISGAG's rule on clothing for women, based on their interpretation of the above passage, is expressed simply as: 'long, not short, thick, not thin, loose, not tight and with a veil'. All ISGAG women, therefore, wear ankle-length loose clothes in beige or sombre colours like gray, black, and blue. All women are veiled but some wear the *hijab* (wrist-length head cover that exposes the face) and others the *niqab* (face veil). There is also a dress code for men which requires covering of the torso and upper legs, but the ISGAG interpretation of the verse on modesty appears to be stricter for women. Ruqqaya wears a *hijab* and sees wearing the *niqab* as an expression of deeper religiosity. She points out that while all are required to submit to God, there are those whose commitments are deeper than others. She hopes that over time, she herself would be able to wear the *niqab*.

The women concurred with Samiyya when she articulated that clothing does not just visually express their new identity as Muslims but also their commitment to God. Samiyya stressed that wearing an entirely new set of clothes involves responsibility, which she never felt before. When she was a Catholic, Samiyya dressed as she wished, like anybody else. But, as a Muslim she emphasized that 'one has to dress as a Muslim and carry oneself as a Muslim'. In spite of the warm tropical Philippine climate, a Muslim woman still has to fulfil the dress requirement of the religion because 'the way you dress, the way you talk, the way you carry yourself, you are presenting to others that you are a Muslim and one has to be very careful about that'. That kind of responsibility—of presenting oneself as a member of a religious group visually through clothing and internally through the responsibility dictated by the religion—was something Samiyya never experienced as a Catholic. Obviously, wearing the veil restricts their movements in some way but at the same time, they feel that they are shielded and are not objectified

by men. More importantly, it is a manifestation of accepting what is revealed in the Qur'an and ultimately of submission to Allah.

Wearing the veil makes the women stand out as different in the predominantly Christian country. As people become curious upon seeing them, ISCAG women have to respond at times to questions and comments about their veil and put up with comments like, 'when Muslim women are fully covered, they do not look like women anymore'. Others call them 'Ninja' or 'ghosts', or talk about the impracticality of being fully covered in a very hot and humid country. One of the ISCAG women replied that the fire of hell is hotter—a remark that other Muslim women wearing the veil had made previously (Fernea 1982). Several women admitted that they experience some form of discrimination while wearing the *hijab*, like Sadiyya who noted several instances when taxi drivers refused to let her ride in their cabs because of her outfit.

In explaining the use of the veil, Samiyya compares herself and other Muslim women similarly attired to jewellery:

The cheap ones, the trinkets, are sold on the sidewalk—you can hold them and throw them back. The expensive ones are in glass cases, watched by armed security guards, and not everyone can touch these jewels. Just like Muslim women—when they are dressed like this, she is telling the opposite sex that the woman in these clothes is not just an ordinary woman. She is a Muslim.

Being covered expresses freedom in a way, but Ruqqaya sees it as different from the kind of freedom without control that she enjoyed as a Catholic. A person can do whatever she wants but in their case now, as Muslims, they have a responsibility to themselves, to their community and most of all, to Allah. Although wearing the Islamic attire has brought them difficulties, the women see those situations as part of being tested by God and the idea that God does not give them more than what they could bear. Nimah spoke of other mothers in her children's public school who either refused or avoided speaking with her. Yet, as she eventually explained to the women the significance of covering her head, they began to understand the reasons and they have started to become friends. An important comment that Nimah heard after her explanations and her interaction with non-Muslim mothers was: 'So after all, Muslims are not bad'.

Perceptions of Gender Roles

In terms of gender roles, Ruqqaya acknowledged that many of the things that Muslim women do, like raising children, are also done by Catholic women. However, there is something different about it now that she finds difficult to

express. Muslim women experience greater challenges in living as Muslims with the major hurdle being raising children properly in a society where the influence of television is pervasive. They have to monitor closely their children's television viewing habits, and would frown upon shows that convey the message that power can come from sources other than God.³⁰ There are also fairy tales which can blur the difference between reality and fantasy. When asked if they would let their children read Harry Potter books, most were not aware of these books that are sold in Manila bookstores. Samiyya, however, was not sure. She emphasized instead that it is best to make their children read Islamic stories. As for television programmes, she observed that most of those who write stories for Philippine television are gays so the stories reflect gay culture, and this is not acceptable in Islam. Ruqqaya admits that there are programmes she allows her children to watch but regrets that she cannot do anything about violence which is present even in cartoons.

Since the women view raising children properly as their primary responsibility and because children need close guidance, they concede that the most ideal situation for a Muslim mother is for her to stay home. Samiyya is the only one who works outside the home. But her children are grown and no longer require as much attention as do younger children. She has her own business but keeps herself occupied at other times with volunteer work for orphans. The others who stay at home claim that there really is no need for them to work because their husbands, 'with the grace of God', are able to support them. This situation allows them to fulfil their primary roles as mothers and wives. However, Ruqqaya said that if absolutely necessary, they can also go out and work.

Family decisions are deferred to husbands who are always accessible by phone and text messaging. This view of the husband as head of household, in spite of his absence, and as the primary decision maker, is accepted by all the women. Maysam said that women should follow whatever their husbands say, and this is also the reason why Sadiqah waits while her husband decides when it is time to bring her to Dubai. Sadiqah added: 'Because in Islam, men make the decisions'. There seems to be a paradox here. The women highlighted the fact that they exercised their agency in becoming Muslims while risking marginalization from their birth families, but this agency appears to be muted in the family structure where the husband retains the right and authority as head of family, decision maker, and provider.

³⁰ A case in point here is the show 'Power Rangers', American superheroes but also a very popular television show for Philippine children.

When further asked to define her roles as a woman, Ruqqaya said that when she was a Catholic, '[...] it was just that. A woman was just a woman. I did not know the importance of being a woman then. But now, I have learned that a woman should really take care of the children for the husband. There are many things we have to do but we should also be concerned with how we treat our husbands'. She agrees that there are similarities with Catholics in so far as roles of women are concerned, but admits to feeling 'more of a woman in Islam because they [the community, V.A.] care about us'. She added:

The Catholics—if you are a housewife, you are a housewife. Now look at us, we are women, our husbands are far from us. I would be a hypocrite if I tell you that we do not look for the things that husbands and wives do. There are times when we look for that but because of our fear of Allah, we pray and our desires go away. And because of our extreme love for God and then for the husband, we express our love for our children, and turn our attention to other things. I cannot speak for Catholics because there are also many religious Catholics, but there are also many of them who, when their husbands are away, do not have this fear of God that we have and they act like single women.

Although Ruqqaya's assertions here are validated by my own observations of several transnational families in the Philippines, the prevailing view of women's roles in Philippine society reflects a double standard where males have relative freedom while women are expected to be caring, moral mothers, given to suffering and subservient behaviour regarding males (Mulder 1990–1991). In Islam, however, these same roles are linked to the notion of God's rewards and punishment, and as Samiyya said:

On the day of resurrection, everyone would be questioned on how they managed their time on earth. The husband will be questioned on how he provided for his family and the women will be asked how she used the resources entrusted to her—like the children, and properties or material things. It is therefore of utmost importance that we perform our roles as wives and mothers as defined in Islam.

These assertions of the women regarding the position of the husband actually tie in with prevailing views of gender roles in the predominantly Catholic country. Men are the primary breadwinners and decision makers of the family and women assume secondary roles.³¹

ISCAG women's understanding of their roles as wives and mothers comes from and is sustained by the lecture discussion sessions that they often

³¹ This view is changing in the larger Philippine society with more women entering not just the local workforce but becoming overseas contract workers themselves. The 2000 Census of Population and Housing of the Philippines indicates an almost equal number of male and female overseas workers. See Ericta et al. (2003:2).

have in the ISCAG compound. In addition, they learn from printed literature like the *Book for Muslim Women* where duties and responsibilities of wives towards their husbands are explained. The booklet is prefaced by how women are viewed in other religions such as Christianity and Judaism, and in earlier times—in Rome, India, China, Japan, and England—and during the *jahiliyya*³² period in Arabia. In these sections of the booklet, women are depicted in very negative terms in the countries mentioned and in pre-Islamic times. But for Muslims, the rights of women listed include the right to choose the husband, to refuse to marry a man not of her choice, and to ask for a divorce if living with the husband causes her harm. Women's responsibilities towards their husbands include preparing his food and drink, taking care of the house, nursing and caring for children, and caring for her properties and honour. It is also her responsibility to take care of herself, make herself beautiful and use make-up for the enjoyment of her husband. Included here are the use of ornaments and different kinds of beauty products. She has the right to wear the most beautiful clothes so long as they conform to the dress requirement of Islam (PHLP 2005). The emphasis in the *Book for Muslim Women* is on what women should do for their husbands, for their children and their families, which is then considered as a major part of a woman's preparation for judgment day when she will be judged by God according to how she fulfilled the roles of wife and mother and handled the resources entrusted to her. These ideas are reflected in the statements of the interviewed women, who put significant emphasis on the belief that this is what the Qur'an requires and is therefore what is expected of them as Muslim women. In this context, however the man fulfils his roles becomes irrelevant to the women; although it is assumed that as Muslims, men would be fulfilling their roles as good husbands, fathers, and providers.

Religion and Transformation

The ISCAG women's stories of conversion show that their new religion, Islam, provides a transformative experience for them. All expressed peace and contentment, as Ruqqaya had experienced and said that it is a kind of peace she never felt before. Some felt a sense of fulfilment that they did not find in their previous lives as Catholics. However, the roles of women that they describe are not new in the Philippine context. These roles seem to have been enhanced and given more emphasis through the materials given

³² The pre-Islamic period often referred to as the 'time of ignorance'.

to the women and the periodic lectures in the ISCAG compound. What is novel is the perception of how fulfilling these roles are to the women, their husbands and children and, more importantly, how God will reward the performance of their expected roles as women. There is a shift in focus in the sense that, while they live their lives according to the ISCAG teaching of Islam, they are now very conscious of the fact that in the end, they have a responsibility to God and have to prepare themselves to answer the questions they will be asked on judgment day. This demonstrates Rambo's (1998) assertion that acquiring a new perception of themselves and their roles is one of the things that happens to converts and this 'empowers them to do things, believe things and to feel things that they have not been able to prior to that time'. With the fulfilment of these roles as presented by the new religion, Islam, going to paradise in the afterlife becomes a real possibility. It is, however, a bit paradoxical that while there is the peace and calm with the feeling that recompense in the afterlife is possible, there is also some anxiety manifested as in Samiyya's concern about having to work harder at fulfilling her roles since so much time has elapsed between her own birth and the time she became a Muslim. There might not be enough time to do what is expected of her as a Muslimah between now and the time she dies.

In addition to the intellectual motif of conversion discussed earlier, the women's conversion stories also demonstrate the affectional motif. This involves a direct personal bond with members of the group over a period of time. Living in a compound with each other provides a strong link that Ruqqaya likened to 'a thick wall that can never be wrecked no matter how hard one tries to break it'. With their husbands in the Middle East, the whole compound becomes a surrogate family and the women develop strong links not only with other women but also with other ISCAG families. While Islam as a religion promotes the unity of the *ummah* (community), the linkage among the women, which we can consider as manifestation of *communitas* (Turner 1969), is heightened by their separation (in terms of living in a gated Muslim community) from their birth families, friends, and the larger predominantly Christian society, which generally has a negative view of Islam and Muslims. This *communitas* is what motivates them to look after each other and their children. Therefore, coupled with their nuanced view of the role of women and the anticipated reward after death, this *communitas* becomes a mechanism that sustains the women in the midst of discrimination and marginalization that they experience in the larger Philippine society and during their separation from their husbands who are working in the Middle East.

There is also evidence of the encapsulation motif (Greil and Rudy 1984) in the sense that converts are physically separated from old familiar settings such as families and friends, and find themselves in a new place that facilitates the development of new bonds and linkages. Nevertheless, this encapsulation is not total in the physical sense since there is no enforced restriction on the women's comings and goings. Being in one place provides the opportunity to build relationships with others but at the same time may foster an 'us and them' view of their place in the larger Philippine society.

The women feel that their priority is taking care of their children. For Ruqqaya, it means that she must stay at home. Her day consists of getting the children to school which is another building within the compound, preparing their lunch, waiting for them to come home, helping with homework, making dinner, and then the day is over. House chores are done while the children are in school. She shops for their needs but does not feel isolated at all because her responsibility to the children keeps her occupied the whole day. Samiyya admits that their social roles are limited, but then this is mainly because of their hierarchy of priorities that puts their children at the top. The encapsulation idea may hold to a certain extent—perhaps in the ideological sense where the purity of the new found religion is guarded against what is perceived as untruth or forces that could undermine the teachings of the religion. However, ISCAG members whom we interviewed, while pointing out the differences between their Catholic life and the present, are careful not to be combative against other religions.

The moral motif also emerges from the women's narratives. Samiyya's discourse on the meaning of the Islamic attire and its expectations convey two things: wearing of the Islamic dress defines a Muslim woman who is different from everyone else, morally speaking, and is at the same time an indicator of a woman's acceptance of her responsibility as defined in Islam. This moral motif ties in with our assertion that conversion brought about new perceptions of women's roles.

Although the idea of women as nurturers and caregivers is prevalent in Philippine society, the lectures, meetings, and ISCAG materials go beyond emphasizing the importance of this role. They additionally and constantly remind the women of their own worth and value as women. Performance of their prescribed roles is not just viewed as compliance with religious requirements but also puts the women in a respected position in the community. Most important, fulfilment of prescribed roles will eventually help them attain paradise in the afterlife. From the women's narratives, we can say that a major difference in their lives as Catholics and now as Muslims lies in the fact that Catholic churches in the Philippines do not

have those lectures and discussions that the ISCAG women have on women's roles. Discussions with members of the Parish Council in Morong, Rizal, gave me the impression that meetings of the parish councils have more to do with projects in the parish, programs on religious education, and supporting the parochial school. Some other parishes have 'Couples for Christ' groups but their focus is basically on spiritual renewal and deepening the personal relationship with Jesus. As their stories indicate, religious activities of the interviewed women in their former religion, Catholicism, had to do more with participation in rituals—going to church, doing their nine-day devotions to the Virgin Mary, praying the rosary—that really did not have anything to do with defining nor enhancing their roles as women. The Virgin Mary is always presented to Philippine Catholics as the ideal, the role model, but more in terms of being the *mater dolorosa*, the suffering mother, and the mother of God rather than the woman busy caring for her children and husband. It becomes understandable then that Ruqqaya said that while a Catholic, she was just that, a woman.

The ISCAG women's conversion stories support the earlier assertion above that Islam gave the women a new sense of identity and spiritual fulfilment that they did not experience in their previous religion—Roman Catholicism. In the case of the two women who were born Muslims, this 'discovery' of Islam as adults also brought spiritual fulfilment and gave a 'lived' sense of identity which was obscured during the time they did not practice the religion. This identity is expressed through the wearing of the Islamic dress and the women's acceptance of the teachings of Islam. To them, the Islamic dress represents much more than a marker of identity, it also affirms their commitment to Islam and a responsibility to behave and act as expected in Islam. In the larger context of Philippine society, this identity marker also presents a dividing boundary between Muslims and non-Muslims, with both sides finding ways of interacting with each other across the barrier, as in Nimah's case. This new identity, as brought about by their conversion, necessitated new ways of relating not just to their birth families but to the outside world, like having to constantly explain to others why they are veiled.

Relationships with the women's birth families and with the rest of Philippine society after conversion, however, need to be viewed within the larger context of Muslim-Christian relationship in the Philippines. The continuing conflict in southern Philippines, events in the Middle East, 11 September in New York, as well as centuries of negative mutual perceptions between Philippine Muslims and Christians continue to hamper harmonious Muslim-Christian relations, which in turn affects the relationship of the converts with their own families.

Admittedly, the research sample is small but I see parallels among the conversion experiences, women's perceptions of their roles as Muslimah, and the relationship with their families as shown in studies done in Hong Kong (Hawwa 1999, 2000), Germany (Wohlrab-Saar 2006), and the United States (Hermansen 2006). Although the data support the premises indicated at the beginning of this contribution, this research generated the question of whether experiences of Filipino women converts living in Saudi Arabia parallel or differ from those interviewed in the Philippines. In situations where it is the women workers who converted in the Middle East,³³ do their husbands who remain in the Philippines follow suit? Considering the changes taking place in Philippine society brought about by the increasing labour export, how would gender roles as defined by Muslims play out when the main provider is the wife and not the husband? ISGAG women emphasized the exercise of their agency when they converted, but to what extent has this been expressed and sustained after conversion? It would also be worthwhile to study women's conversion in other Balik Islam groups, as well as those who live within and outside of Muslim communities in the Philippines. The case of the two 'ethnic Muslim' women needs to be explored further. One can only speculate that their not having been practicing Muslims might have something to do with where they grew up, perhaps in a non-Muslim environment. Their 'rediscovery' of Islam and deeper commitment reflects a conversion process in itself and perhaps can, in some ways, approximate the claim of Malcolm X in his experience of the pilgrimage. This project offers some insights into the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of Filipino women converts in Islam. It also raises additional questions that, hopefully, we will be able to address in the future.

³³ There is a Philippine Association of Muslimah in Riyadh that is actively involved in *dakwah* for Filipino women.

MUSLIM WOMEN LEADERS IN THE PHILIPPINES*

Birte Brecht-Drouart

Introduction

In the debate in Islam between conservatives, moderates and progressives about whether women should take political leadership positions, there is no sign of consensus yet. Rafiq Zakaria, in his book *The Trial of Benazir* (1989), has compiled all relevant verses and statements from the Qur'an and *hadith* referred to by supporters and opponents of women in leading positions. Arguments against include, that men are superior to women, that the sexes have by nature differing roles, that women's salvation depends solely on fulfilling their marital and maternal duties and that a society led by a woman cannot grow and prosper, an assertion that religious leaders often equate with divine intervention and destiny. Supporters of the opinion that women may accept positions of leadership, though not in the highest levels, assert that in view of the merciful attitude of the Prophet and Islam, the Qur'an and *hadith* should be interpreted humanely. They also claim that the *sunnah* of the Prophet makes a case for women to be politically active.

The present contribution will investigate the course taken by the above-mentioned debate in the Philippine setting where Muslim women have a status as a minority group in an environment characterized by Christian dominance. In order to gain a better understanding of the situation of Moro¹ women, one first needs to grasp the underlying historical, social, and

* This contribution would not have been possible without the cooperation of Datu Norodin Alonto Lucman, who is an author himself, Monalinda Doro, Samira Gutoc, the MSU Royalties (an organized group of women and men with royal titles employed at the Mindanao State University [MSU]), as well as the support of Dr. Jamail Kamlian and his family.

¹ The name 'Moro' was given to the Muslims of the Philippines by the Spaniards, alluding to the Moors of Spain and North Africa. This ancient label, now widely used by media and in scholarly publications, does not necessarily reflect the self-designations of Muslims in Mindanao and Sulu. Besides the term 'Moro', which is, for example, used in the context of the independence movement as 'Bangsamoro', other designations exist: people may refer to themselves as Mindanawans, Bangsa Iranaon, Tausug, Maguindanaoan, and so on, or just as belonging to the Malay race at large (see also Blanchetti-Revelli 2003). Other categorizations such as 'Muslim Filipino' are rejected by some Muslim Mindanaoans because, according to

economic conditions. These will be summarized in the beginning, whereas the subsequent focus of this contribution is on the Moro rebellion. Within this context, those factors that have an impact on the political participation of women will be discussed in some detail, such as the rebellion, Muslim feminism, the national political system, *adat* (decorum), and clan politics. In particular the latter factors play a key role in granting women in Muslim Mindanao certain privileges that enable them to assume leadership positions within the national or the traditional system, or in both, as these systems are by no means mutually exclusive.

The main focus will be on the ethnic group of the Maranao in Lanao del Sur, where I conducted research from August 2007 to August 2008. Since the situation of instability did not allow a permanent stay on the countryside, most of the data were collected in the Islamic City of Marawi, in Iligan City, and in Manila. The majority of the interview partners were members of the educational, royal, or political elite.

The Moro Rebellion: An Historical Overview

The Muslim regions in Mindanao are heavily impacted by an ongoing Moro rebellion that aims at more self-determination, and was triggered chiefly by colonial and neo-colonial land and assimilation policies. The catalyst for insurgency in Muslim Mindanao was the 1967 Jabidah Massacre, committed by the Philippine Army on Muslims who had been recruited in a conspiracy that aimed at infiltrating Sabah and instigating a rebellion. The massacre evoked an outcry in Malaysia and Muslim Mindanao against President Ferdinand Marcos who was accused of being the mastermind behind the plot. It also gave rise to the formation of the Union of Islamic Forces and Organizations (UIFO), as well as of Ansar el Islam and its armed wing, the Bangsa Moro Liberation Organization (BMLO), which began to train guerrilla fighters in Malaysia. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) later split off from the BMLO and became the biggest Muslim rebel group. Part of the MNLF structure were the Bangsa Bai Women's Auxiliary Forces. These were first

them, they evoke memories of King Philip II of Spain, who ordered the extermination of Muslims in Spain and Mindanao in the sixteenth century. Rather than being a homogenous group, the Muslim Filipinos comprise 13 ethno-linguistic groups: Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug, Sama, Sangil, Iranun, Kalagan, Kalibugan, Yakan, Jama Mapun, Palawini, Molibog and Badjao. Rodil notes that the Badjao are not necessarily Muslims, and the Kalagan only to some extent. However, the Badjao are often considered part of the Muslim world because of their integration in the historical Sulu sultanate (Rodil 1993:9; Asian Development Bank 2002a).

organized, among others, by a Maranao woman named Bai Diamond Alonto Tanog, and a Yakan woman, Jean Intan Yassin of Basilan. They coordinated the organization of the Auxiliary Forces that eventually trained thousands of *mujahidat* (women freedom fighters) who assisted the combatants by providing first-aid treatment, food and ammunition supplies, intelligence work, and in many cases, shelter for wounded and recuperating Muslim fighters.

By 1972, an estimated 30,000 young Mindanao Muslims had been trained in guerrilla warfare (Lucman 2000). Individual Muslim ethnic groups joined forces politically, became united under the banner of Islam as 'Moros' and fought for one nation (*bangsa*), hence the term Bangsa Moro. After many years of fierce military confrontations, tough peace negotiations, and pressure from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Philippine government eventually made concessions to the main Muslim rebel front, the MNLF, and the parties signed a final peace agreement in 1996. The former rebels were integrated into the political structure of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).² But the Bangsa Moro idea, that is, the plan to form one nation for the Moros, was only partly put into action within the ARMM. Not all of the provinces included in the agreement were integrated; besides, the ARMM government had only little authority (Buendia 2006; Eder and McKenna 2004; Ferrer 2005). In addition reports about corruption, nepotism, patron-client relations and conflicts between elite groups were frequent (Gutierrez and Marites-Danguilan 2000; Kreuzer 2003; Rasul 2003a), and the economic situation of the Muslim provinces did not improve.³ On top of all this, the rebellion never ended but was continued, this time with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) at the forefront.

² The ARMM is made up of five provinces: Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu and Tawi-Tawi. The seat of government is in Cotabato City, which is situated outside the self-governed area. There was an additional province belonging to the ARMM, Shariff Kabunsuan, which was carved out of Maguindanao on 28 August 2006 (Art. 6, Sec. 19 of RA (Republic Act) No. 9054) by the ARMM Regional Assembly, on the basis of Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act No. 201. On 29 October 2006 the province's creation was ratified in a plebiscite held in Maguindanao. But on 17 July 2008 the Supreme Court declared Article 6, Section 19 of RA No. 9054 unconstitutional insofar as it grants to the Regional Assembly of the ARMM "the power to create provinces and cities" Consequently, it "declare[d] void Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act No. 201 that had created the Province of Shariff Kabunsuan" (Supreme Court, 16 July 2008).

³ The ARMM is one of the poorest regions of the Philippines (National Statistic Coordination Board 2005). Due to the resettlement programs and the uneven distribution of property rights by both the Americans and the post-colonial governments, Muslims were economically disadvantaged for a long time. In addition, Mindanao is dominated by the transfer of wealth partly by multinational companies such as Dole (Reese and Grabowski 2006; Eder

*The Rebellion as a Positive Factor with
Regard to Female Political Participation*

The fact that women took part in the rebellion of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), which campaigned for an independent but secular Moro state, deserves particular mention. According to Jacqueline Siapno (2002), the active participation of women in the struggle for independence was an exception; she asserts that nothing changed in the traditional roles of the sexes when they returned to everyday life after the rebellion. However, this is contradicted by the increasing number of women in leading political positions (Bamgbose 2003). Moreover, Vivienne Angeles (1998) has pointed out that due to taking part in the struggle for liberation, women began to be more politically aware and to discover their leadership qualities—attributes that led to the rise of women's organisations, such as the BangsaMoro Women's Professional and Employees Association, which campaigned for the empowerment of women in society. A 2008 interreligious women's conference on 'Political Power and Women: Vision and Values' (25–27 June 2008), sponsored by the Mindanao Commission on Women and held in Davao City, resulted, among other things, in the declaration of 'Popularization of the Right to Self-Determination' as an advocacy for the key role of Muslim and Christian women in the search for genuine peace in Mindanao.

Women in Traditional Leading Positions

During the time of the sultanates in the Southern Philippines, which were established in the fifteenth century, there was one sultana in Sulu, who probably lived in the seventeenth century (Majul 1999:17). But she is not mentioned in all available documents, which, according to Cesar Abid Majul, can be explained 'by the simple fact that she was a woman and that therefore the absence of her name was based on negative opinions regarding the qualifications of a woman to hold office—opinions which might have been adopted later' (Majul 1999:8). He adds that, in addition, she married an Iranun *datu* (chieftain) and that it 'might have been politically expedient to

and McKenna 2004) and partly by the Manila government. Lanao del Sur, one of the poorest provinces in the Philippines supplies 60% of Mindanao's energy through its lake and river systems (interview with Dr. Pasayud Macarambon, VP Napocor-Mindanao, 2008). But only one percent of the gross income of the power plants goes to the province as its annual share under the National Wealth Tax.

neglect this fact to prevent the Iranun from having a claim to the Sulu royal succession' (Majul 1999:8).

In Lanao del Sur, Islamization was mainly effected by Maguinanao in the sixteenth century and via intermarriages with Iranun *datu* (Majul 1999:76). According to Spanish missionary reports, the Maranao *datu*⁴ were Muslims by the seventeenth century, but 'not all of their followers were so' (Majul 1999:78). Only by the nineteenth century, when the Spaniards returned to Lanao, did they report that 'the people of the Lake had all become Muslim' (Majul 1999:78).

Maranao Muslims, especially young students, benefited regarding their Islamic education when Arab countries established scholarships for deserving Muslims from all over the world. As far as Lanao del Sur is concerned, the 1955 Bandung Conference needs to be mentioned: on that occasion, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who supported anti-colonial movements particularly in Africa (Aburis 2004:100), invited Philippine Senator Domocao Alonto and Congressman Rashid Lucman to Egypt. Later on, Egypt granted military and Islamic scholarships to qualified Moro students, filling the gap created by the Philippine educational institutions that did not provide any Islamic education at that time. In 1958, the first batch of young Moro students, including the Maranao Mahid Mutilan (see below), were studying Islamic theology at the prestigious Al-Azhar University (Lucman 2000).

With time and the support of Middle Eastern countries, Qur'anic schools and mosques proliferated in Lanao del Sur, Islamic missionaries came to the province, and scholarships were given to Mindanao Muslims enabling hundreds of qualified students to study at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo and other well-known Islamic institutions in the Middle East. Maranao women came back from Egypt and Saudi Arabia to Lanao introducing, among other things, the *niqab* (face-covering veil) and the *abaya* (outer garment that covers the whole body), which became popular in Lanao beginning in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵

To this day, however, the sultanate system in Lanao is strongly influenced by pre-Islamic features. These features provided Maranao women with a minor public share of power in the form of titles and their obligation to support the sultan. Their main function is usually the role of 'care givers' (Bamgbose 2003), which includes other responsibilities as well. Among

⁴ Members of the Maranao *datu* class will have a royal title, or a potential claim to such a title.

⁵ Interview with local women *alimat*, Marawi City, 3 July 2008.

other things, they are obliged to give contributions to festivities, and they can represent their clan in certain issues such as marriage, especially in cases where the women of their community are concerned. They are also responsible for peace negotiations to settle family feuds (*ridos*). The final decisions, however, are usually taken by men.

It is common within the Maranao royal system to bestow royal titles equally on men and women, every male title usually has a female counterpart. Furthermore, there are increasingly large numbers of people claiming titles, which has generated hundreds of royal female and male titles. Tawagon (1987:1) reports that '[t]he number of Sultans and Sultanates in Lanao far exceeds the over-all total of Sultans and Sultanates in the world'. Thus, titles often bestow status rather than authority. It is not the title itself that lends influence; the decisive point is whether someone who has a title can use the latter's potential, for example by donating money to the community, as is explained by a sultan:

The sultan's daughter: 'But who is the most legitimate one [sultan]? Can you find this in the *salsila* [genealogy]?'

Sultan: 'You can find this in the *salsila*. But even if you are the most legitimate [sultan], if you are not loved by the people, the people will not go to you, they will go to her [pointing to the interviewer]! In other words, [the most legitimate is the one] who is the most powerful, who is the most kind, and who has the means.'⁶

In addition, among title holders, a woman sometimes has to make sure that she will be consulted by men, as was explained to me by a Bai a Labi:⁷

Birte Brecht: 'For example, if there is an important decision to be made in the community. How does this work?'

Bai a Labi: 'There are consultations. Exchange [of] ideas.'

Birte Brecht: 'Men would not decide anything without consulting the women?'

Bai a Labi: 'No. But it depends upon the place. There are also guys who take [the women] for granted [do not consult them]. But if you are very assertive than you have to fight for your rights.'

Birte Brecht: 'And you can do this because you have the title?'

Bai a Labi: 'Yes, because you have the title.'⁸

⁶ Interview with a sultan and his daughter, Marantao, 7 February 2008.

⁷ Bai a Labi is the highest female royal title, the counterpart to sultan.

⁸ Interview with a Bai a Labi at MSU Marawi, 11 January 2008.

Women in National Leading Positions

With the introduction of a Western political system, the traditional order lost influence and women got the chance to become major public leaders. But not many Muslim women succeeded in taking such offices. Amina Rasul (this volume) points out that there has been only one female Muslim senator in the Philippines. In the history of politics in Lanao del Sur only one female governor, Princess Tarhata Alonto Lucman, was elected by the people in 1971. This leadership shift was largely due to the influence and power of the political clans that supported her candidacy. Governor Lucman is the daughter of Senator Sultan Alauya Alonto and wife of Congressman Sultan Rashid Lucman. Accused by President Ferdinand Marcos of abetting rebellion, Governor Lucman was forced to resign from her post in 1975 because she rejected martial law in her province.

With the creation of the ARMM,⁹ more Maranao women leaders served as elected officials, such as Representative Faysah RPM Dumarpa, the first Maranao congresswoman in the Philippine congress, who represented the First District of Lanao del Sur, and Assemblywomen Zenaida Bubong and Suhayla Salic, who were members of the ARMM Legislative Assembly. In 1998, when a limitation of terms was introduced, the number of female politicians increased. In Lanao del Sur six female mayors were popularly elected that year. In 2001 nine were elected, but in the following three elections the number of elected female mayors shrank again to four or five out of 39 municipalities in that province.

In the Philippine Muslim regions the situation of women changed most notably because of the national educational opportunities available since the 1950s (Angeles 1998; Lacar 1992; Maruhom and Allian 2005). Since then, women have publicly taken part in the new economic and political system, for example as university presidents, politicians, and founders of NGOs. Yet it is a moot point whether this is indeed a sign of increasing equality between men and women, which has been the declared goal of the Philippine constitution since 1987, or is rather an indicator of ongoing family politics. Especially in the field of state politics, women in leading positions frequently serve as so-called 'benchwarmers' (Hega 2003) for their male relatives, in order to sustain the family dynasties.

Moro women occupying political positions and campaigning for women's rights are not always as successful as Santanina Rasul, a member of the

⁹ The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) was founded in 1990.

Tausug ethnic group. As a senator she drew up Republic Act 7192 in 1992. This act aimed at achieving women's equality in the Philippines and contradicts the Code of Muslim Personal Laws in many spheres. A female senior board member of the ARMM in the Province of Lanao del Sur, on the other hand, explains that, as she is the only woman on a board consisting of ten members, topics like polygamy are either not issues to be discussed by the male majority, or she is outvoted.¹⁰

Muslim Feminism within NGOs

One factor aiming at an increase in female participation in public society is the worldwide feminist movement. Moro Muslim women activists, among others motivated by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 (Azarcon-dela Cruz 2005), began to campaign increasingly for women's rights with regard to their religion. This does not necessarily mean that they reject or reinterpret *shari'a* law. On the contrary, the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (CMPL) of the Philippines, which was amended into the constitution in 1977, is used by a Maranao women's organization as a legal device to counteract both their own *adat* laws and national law. The CMPL provides, among other things, solutions for issues concerning personal and family relations, such as divorce or, lays out the conditions under which men may remarry. The fact that the Code includes regulations that, compared to *adat* law, potentially weaken a woman's position—such as inheritance laws by which women only get one third of the inheritance, whereas *adat* law grants them the same share as their male relatives—led to discussions among Moro female activists (Fianza 2004:34 f.), and the most progressive of them called for a revision of the Code of Muslim Personal Laws (Rasul 2003b). Yet Muslim feminism in Lanao del Sur has a rather minor influence on Maranao society. The women's associations are able to survive partly because they are sponsored by international organizations. In Lanao del Sur it is helpful that Muslim activists interpret their agenda according to Islamic values in order to be accepted by the majority of Maranao society.

Muslim Feminism in Politics and the Power of the Traditional Elite

When looking at the literature on the region under discussion, it becomes apparent that apart from Islamic extremism, the biggest obstacles faced by

¹⁰ Interview with a female board member, Marawi City, 9 July 2008.

women aspiring to leading positions are poverty and the feudal structures (Rasul 2003b; Abubakar 1998). Especially the latter creates exclusive access to power and influence, which, however, can also serve to facilitate political participation for elite women. Thus, the question arises as to whether women who do not belong to the traditional elite but still wish to gain political influence tend to push for greater Islamic influence as a tactic to subvert the feudal structures. The authority of a religion, in which all people are said to be equal before God, is a factor that can potentially undermine the leadership claims of the traditional elite, which are based on heredity and wealth. Warina Sushil Jukuy illustrates how women apply Islamic values, in the sense that everyone is equal before Allah, to justify their participation in politics. As a Tausug who ran for the position of ARMM governor as an independent candidate in the Sulu region, she is a member of various organizations, such as the Jihad-al Akbar, that represent an Islamic point of view. Although she abstained from running an active political campaign, giving as reasons her wish to leave the decision to God and her disapproval of vote buying, she received 836 votes in 2005.¹¹ This is a relatively high number of votes for a person that did not campaign, but certainly it is almost negligible compared to the votes won by candidates being supported by their political families.

Political Islam alone will hardly give a sufficient ground for women to occupy political posts. However, it can provide women a platform to become politically active despite their family background. A woman leader without connections to powerful political clans has few chances of gaining access to the political circle of influence, given the dysfunctional democratic system that sustains the latter. Mindanao politics are in many cases corrupted by 'professional politicians' who are knowledgeable about manipulating the complex Filipino electoral system based in Manila. In a country plagued by chronic poverty and a deficient educational system, they use the Four Gs—guns, gold, goons, and genealogy—to their maximum advantage. The female members of the leading clans are able to use the current system to the advantage of their clan and family as it is expected in 'patron-client' relationships. The use of it for the general purpose of promoting women's rights, however, is rather difficult.

According to conversations with various NGO activists, Muslim women NGOs are insistent and put up candidates in elections anyway. A representative of the Bangsamoro Women's Solidarity Forum in Jolo City, for example,

¹¹ The winner of the election, Zaldy Ampatuan from Lakas-CMD, received 549,480 votes (Commission on Elections, Republic of the Philippines 2005).

stated that female politicians can effect a fundamental change in the political structure because they do not have the same social obligations towards politicians and the military as male politicians. Women thus rather concentrate on issues.¹² Yet, the question is whether a politician, male or female, can survive in the dysfunctional Philippine democratic system without having such social connections.

Apart from these attempts to base politics on religion, it has to be noted that the main religious parties, such as the Ompia¹³ Party and Ummah Party¹⁴ in Lanao del Sur, did not change the traditional political structure in the long run. The Ompia Party governed the province of Lanao del Sur for nine years from 1990–1999, and the Ummah Party has not won a single elective political position since its founding in the 1980s. Even though the Ompia Party won one term by using the religious angle in a Marawi City mayoral contest, people were not ready for ordinances subsequently passed, such as those that prescribed veils as part of the dress code and banned liquor and gambling or other laws intended to make Marawi City comply with *shari'a* law. Public acceptance of these laws is low and cannot be enforced, despite efforts by extremist groups to do so, for example by besmearing public billboards that show pictures of women, spraying women wearing un-Islamic dress with aerosol paint, and executing Maranao women who prostituted themselves in the cities of Marawi, Iligan, and Cagayan de Oro. Eventually, the Ompia Party got caught in the familiar Filipino maelstrom of money politics, and charges of corruption were filed at the Office of the Ombudsman against Dr. Mahid Mutilan (governor of Lanao del Sur from 1992–2001).¹⁵ Dr. Mutilan died in a car accident in 2007, leaving the ombudsman with an open warrant for his arrest. Another example is the case against the *Alim* and former governor

¹² Interview with a local female politician, Jolo City, 11 August 2005.

¹³ The Ompia Party was founded in 1986, after a meeting of a coalition of *ulama* organizations held at Maharlika Village in Taguig, Rizal. It was mostly comprised of Middle Eastern graduates and led by Dr. Mahid Mutilan, Dr. Majid Ansano and Uztaj Mohammed Amerodin Saranggani, the head of the Kuwait-backed Ummah Party. Mutilan ran for a Congress seat in 1986 but lost. He then stood for City Mayor in 1988 in Marawi and won. In 1992, he successfully ran for Governor of Lanao del Sur and remained in that position until 2001. There was a schism between the Ompia and Ummah parties in the 1990s local elections. Saranggani challenged Mutilan for governor, yet in vain. Thereafter, the disunity within the *ulama* group began to erode popular support as the rivals verbally attacked each other on the radio and local cable tv. Eventually, a shoot-out (*rido*), broke out between the two parties in 1996, resulting in serious injuries. The Ummah Party continued to accuse Mutilan of graft and corruption until his death in 2007.

¹⁴ The Kuwaiti-sponsored Ummah Party is led by Abu Mohammed Saranggani, a former Kuwaiti scholar.

¹⁵ Files, Office of the Ombudsman, Quezon City, Metro Manila 1997.

Bashir Mustaqbal Manalao of Lanao del Sur, who had to submit to a 90-day preventive suspension order issued by the Office of the Ombudsman. These malpractices eventually caused religious parties to lose political power in the ARMM region. Since 2000 the Ompia Party and Ummah Party have lost ARMM regional elections for every major political position available. Power reverted to clan and traditional politics, orchestrated by Filipino government officials in Manila. It is difficult to tell to what extent female Muslim NGO candidates will be able, or even willing, to distance themselves from these patron-client structures and the resulting corruption in order to achieve a different form of politics. This remains to be seen when one of them actually attains a position of power in the ARMM. It is clear that they can not avail themselves of the current system, as they would need the support of the traditional elites that usually prefer to patronize their own clan members.

The Political Elite and Islam

Representatives of Islamic-motivated movements have not yet broken the traditional elite structures. Most of the women who today hold political offices belong to, or are supported by, the traditional elite (Angeles 1998:230) that seems to attach more value to the perpetuation of its own dynasties than to an Islamic debate about women in leading positions. Carmelita Lacar (1997:202) reports that such women simply ignore the animosity of some *ulama* towards female claims to leadership. How do Maranao women justify their political leadership positions with regard to Islam? The answer of a female board member of the ARMM in the Province of Lanao del Sur, First District, provides an example:

In Islam, they [women] are not actually prohibited [to take part in politics], but they shy away, because a woman is not [supposed] to be exposed [in public]. But there is another saying in *hadith*, 'if there is one woman who can do better than a thousand men, then it's better to appoint that woman who is working better than the men.'¹⁶

When asked whether she feels supported by the religious sector, she commented:

Yes, I have also support from the *ulama*, because before I ran [for office], I already consulted some *ulama*. They are not against [women in politics]. Only those extreme believers, who killed that woman leader [Benazir Bhutto, B.B.] in Pakistan. Even though we are not allowed to hold the highest positions,

¹⁶ Interview with a female board member, Marawi City, 9 July 2008.

such as mayor or governor, we can still become vice governors, and also representatives, like us board members. We are allowed [to hold such positions], or [to be] in the Congress, to represent the women [...] Not like in Saudi Arabia where they [women] are not allowed to be employed except in schools and hospitals where women and men are separated.¹⁷

Female Clan Leaders

Maranao women can occupy influential positions, especially when they are from dominant clans. In fact, female clan leaders are nothing unusual within the Maranao context. The best known example is Princess Tarhata Alonto Lucman, whom her clan begged to become governor in 1971, because ‘she is 100 times better than the governor now’.¹⁸ But even before assuming that office she was able to settle family conflicts and once even physically punished an obstinate man to bring him into line. This incident was recalled by Tarhata Alonto Lucman and her son Norodin Alonto Lucman in an interview:

Norodin Alonto Lucman: ‘There was this one *rido* [family feud] that could not be pacified [settled] because of one man. So what she [Tarhata Alonto Lucman] did [is] she took that man and put him inside that room and punished him. Just the two of them. She manhandled that man who could not be pacified. That man [...] was a *datu* and he could not be pacified by society. So what she did [is] she took that man and put him in a room and [physically] punished him inside so nobody would know—it’s only between that man and her. [She did] not [want] to shame him in public. [...]’

Tarhata Alonto Lucman: ‘After[wards], I took him to my bathroom, I let him take a bath, very, very nicely, and after that I let him dress, very nice clothes, the clothes of my husband. I gave them to him, I dressed him very, very well, and then I gave him money. I gave him money because I was afraid that he might retaliate.’

Birte Brecht: ‘But he did not?’

Tarhata Alonto Lucman: ‘No. So I told him, “Now you are going out and you are going to declare that there is going to be peace, right now, because otherwise I will get my money back.” [...] He went out and said, “Okay, I agree.” “So why? Why do you?” [asked people outside]. “Because I can not say no to her”, [he replied]. He did not say that he was punished.’

Norodin Alonto Lucman: ‘He did not say that he was severely punished in the room because this is shameful and embarrassing.’

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Interview with Tarhata Alonto Lucman, Manila, 10 July 2008.

Tarhata Alonto Lucman: 'I said jokingly [that] a hard wood can be beaten by a banana trunk.'¹⁹

Another influential woman not in public office is the mother of the present governor of Lanao del Sur and the wife of the deceased former governor of that province. She uses her money and influence, gained through clan politics and her husband's position, to be a 'king maker' of her male kin and thus to become an influential clan leader.

Conclusion

Muslim women holding public leadership positions are no rarity in the Southern Philippines. In most cases, their clans are their most avid supporters. Due to the influence of the Muslim feminist movement, there have been some minor changes in the contemporary political environment of the ARMM with regard to the participation of women. Female politicians who take Islamic approaches have a certain authority and motivation that help them hold their own against the traditional politicians. However, women and men who hold offices generally belong to or are supported by the traditional elite, which is based on an intricate network of social relationships, wealth and/or heredity. They walk a tightrope between Islamic slogans and a dysfunctional political system, but are more successful in dealing with the latter because corruption in Filipino politics has become commonplace.

Some Muslim women's organizations present interpretations of the Qur'an from a female point of view that support women's claims to leading positions. However, this leads to conflicts with the traditional elite, which encourages women and men from its own ranks to run the family politics of the Philippines. It also offends some conservative *ulama* who argue against the participation of women in politics. Despite these obstacles, women can certainly draw on an Islamic moral basis as a stepping stone towards more political and social participation. As far as Lanao is concerned, however, it is obvious that women who hold political positions do not owe these to the use of Islamic slogans but rather to the support of their clans. Ultimately, one therefore has to conclude that Maranao women can occupy influential positions in their society, but generally only if they are supported by dominant clans. In this context, they are able to further consolidate their political position by using Qur'anic verses or the *hadith* to their advantage.

¹⁹ Interview with Tarhata Alonto Lucman and Norodin Alonto Lucman, Manila, 10 July 2008.

The above comparison between national and traditional power positions showed the following differences and similarities: while traditional positions of power often confer status rather than authority, there are nevertheless many women with royal titles because there exists a female counterpart to every traditional male position. National power positions can be more influential, but only few women are able to ascend to them. Women holding a traditional power position are ideally supposed to serve a male sultan. On a national level, they are ideally supposed to serve a potential female president. In both cases, the clan and the family play a key role when it comes to deciding who will run for a position. There have been only few exceptions where the president chose candidates in times of martial law, or where candidacies were due to the downfall of the former president, as was the case with Santanina Rasul and with Tarhata Alonto Lucman when she was elected governor for a second term.

The traditional system and the national system thus are both strongly influenced by family politics where clan leaders, be they men or women, make the decisions. The general question as to whether according to Islam women should take over public leadership positions is a point of debate within this context, for which so far there is no consensus on a definitive answer.

THAILAND

FEMALE MISSIONARIES AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SOUTHERN THAILAND'S CHAPTER OF THE TABLIGHI JAMA'AT

Alexander Horstmann

Introduction

In this contribution, I discuss the participation in, and support for, what is probably the largest global Islamic missionary movement in the world today, the Tablighi Jama'at. I argue that the Tablighi Jama'at not only provides opportunities for men, but also for women who join the Mastura Jama'at, or female unit of the Tablighi Jama'at. The community-building in the Mastura Jama'at provides an unusual space for the congregation of Muslim women in a secular society. While veiled women are still confronted with problems in Thai work places and Thai public colleges, the Mastura Jama'at provides an almost secluded space in which a thoroughly Islamic way of life can be realized, or at least imagined. Although fully veiled, the women are not supposed to be seen by strange men. At the same time, the veil is also a sign to other women encouraging them to don the veil. The veil thus serves the paradox function of making women invisible to men and more visible as Muslims to fellow females.

Women in the Mastura Jama'at are included in a common behavioural model of embodied Muslim dispositions of modesty as well as in a shared commitment to the spread of Islam (*tabligh*) (see also Metcalf 2000:50). Remodelling one's own habitus and daily actions after the model set by Fatima, the favourite daughter of the prophet Muhammad, gives purpose and meaning to everyday life, providing new and exciting transnational social venues and maximizing well-being for a self-chosen identity that prioritizes religion. Thus, participation in the Tablighi Jama'at brings Muslim women in Thailand closer to transnational Islamic networks. They perceive these transnational Muslim spheres as a space of modernity which they contrast with backward society at home. Secondly, I argue that in becoming self-reliant pious Muslim female subjects, the participation of Muslim women in the Tablighi Jama'at affects the relationship of these women with the Buddhist majority. The participation results in the withdrawal of women from multi-religious rituals and in the construction of cultural boundaries

between themselves and Buddhist women, who are either secular or espouse Buddhist nationalism.¹

Academic studies of the inner life, ideology, or dynamic of any type of Islamic revivalist or reformist movement are still very rare. The gendering of these movements, the specific goods and services they provide for women—certainly a crucial dimension of their development—have hardly been researched. This essay on the everyday politics of the Tablighi Jama'at should thus be seen as an initial study that does not claim to fully explore the subject. It should also be noted that the researcher, being white, male, and European, had obvious limitations in appearing before veiled female Tablighi preachers. The researcher was welcomed by the Tablighi Jama'at local unit to stay and travel with a male Jama'at in Tha Sala, Nakhonsrithammarat province, and to visit the Islamic centre (*markaz besar*) in the border town of Yala.²

I am interested in the ongoing debates in local society and in how Muslims discuss the presence of women in the public sphere and in the *dakwah* movement in particular. My thesis is as follows: Muslim communities are not just challenged and transformed by the growing impact of transnational movements such as the Tablighi Jama'at, but are increasingly divided into new disciples and their opponents who keep to the old ways. In everyday life, the new ideology and the new rituals thus coexist with the old ways and old beliefs. Tensions between the two belief systems grow whenever the Jama'at objects to the old rituals, for example if they involve the presence of ancestor spirits. At the same time, the Tablighi Jama'at exerts social pressure as the movement operates in Thai society where *shari'a* law is applied only to a very limited extent, or is only present as a discourse and normative order or guideline.

Women are heavily involved in this Islamization process as they construct cultural boundaries distinguishing themselves from the Buddhists. But the participation of women in the movement also has considerable impact on their relations with those Muslim women who keep to the old ways, because

¹ Farzana Haniffa (2006 und 2007) argues in the case of Sri Lanka that the manner in which piety is propagated among Muslims must be understood as located within Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict. By propagating piety, Muslim women actively draw boundaries between themselves and the Sinhalese Buddhist women, whose chauvinist Buddhism has strong anti-Muslim elements. Likewise, in Thailand the new visibility of Muslim women and veiling reflect the growing separation between the Buddhist and Muslim public sphere in Thailand and the growing ultra-nationalism and anti-Muslim feelings in the Thai Buddhist Sangha.

² Fieldwork on *dakwah* movements and the Tablighi Jama'at in Southern Thailand and in Northeast Malaysia was conducted in 1995–1996, 2001, and 2004–2007 (Horstmann 2007). In 2009 and 2010, fieldwork on the Tablighi Jama'at was also done in Northwestern Thailand.

they exert pressure on the latter to join the new movement. The active participation of women in the outings is also a subject of debate in local society. Traditionalists criticize the exposure of women to potentially hostile worlds in which the women are exposed to danger and the gaze of strange men. Even Muslims who are members of the Tablighi Jama'at are sometimes worried about the visibility of women in public spaces. But there has been a significant shift in the policy of the Tablighi Jama'at in recent decades as the movement's leadership seems to become aware of the crucial role played by women in the expansion of the movement on the ground and within families. This is why the leadership has decided to encourage women to go on female missionary travel tours, *mastura khuruj*.

The Theoretical Context

Barbara Metcalf argues that the main strategy and ideology of the Tablighi Jama'at is to put body and mind into the service of God. In order to be 'effective in the world', the body is shaped in ever new rounds of exercise to become a tool of missionary work.³ While the movement takes a quite neo-orthodox position regarding to the role of women, whose place is in the house, the participation of women in the Tablighi Jama'at is particularly interesting as women go on travels and join preaching tours for several days. This active participation of women beyond the traditional restrictions on their scope of action raises a debate inside and outside the Tablighi Jama'at about the place and safety of women in the movement. The new mobility of Malay-Muslim women in Southern Thailand should also be seen in the context of the booming civil society and entrepreneurial activities of increasingly self-confident women who are organizing themselves in religious and non-religious NGOs and civil-society groups.

The 'self-productive' aspect of veiling and embodiment of orthodox Muslim ideologies is emphasized by Brenner (1996). She argues that for her informants, donning the veil 'was a key moment in producing themselves as modern Muslim women and in producing a certain historical consciousness based in Islamist as well as modernist ideologies' (Brenner 1996:689). In Thailand, Muslim women and men actively campaigned for Muslim women to wear the veil in school and in work places against the resistance of the Thai government. They struggled for the veil not to be an issue of contestation, but as a symbol of religious obligation and the cultural rights of Muslim women

³ Compare Metcalf 1993:585 ff.

(Marddent 2007). The successful campaign for the veil following the forced removal of a veiled student from Yala Rachapat College⁴ was an emblem for the visibility of Muslims in the public sphere. However, Brenner also notes that by producing themselves through veiling, 'women produce certain ideologies and configurations of power that have effects that they have not intended or imagined'. I think that Brenner's discussion is insightful. Women in particular may be caught in the struggle between competing sources of power. Practices that are intended to increase their self-determination may also unintentionally be used against them or limit their agency. Yet, it is fairly clear that many of the mosque groups and Qur'an reading groups are composed of women (Mahmood 2001, 2005). Like the women in Egyptian mosque groups, the Thai Mastura Jama'at strives to integrate religiosity into their everyday life. They take the decline of religiosity in secular society as a point of departure, and endeavour to discipline their bodies for daily religious exercise and prayer, bringing all aspects of the daily routine under the aegis of religion

This approach to perfection of the self, spiritual development and heightened religiosity is also the topic addressed by Sylva Frisk in her study on Islamic practices and the learning processes of pious women within Kuala Lumpur's affluent Malay middle class (Frisk 2009). Frisk describes how Malay middle class women organize themselves in collective prayer circles to become 'true believers'. Malay women create and maintain a relationship through disciplining the body and mind in daily rituals and acts of worship, such as praying and fasting (Frisk 2009:137). The daily disciplining of body and mind is akin to the routine and ritual in the Tablighi Jama'at. According to Frisk, striving for the status of a true believer in a space dominated by men also creates a space for gender negotiation. Religious studies, along with the performance of religious duties and worship, were particularly important means through which women came to understand themselves as religious subjects. Frisk argues that the organization, initiation, and participation in Islamic education and worship had personal and structural consequences. Organizing religious classes in the mosque created female spaces in the mosque and brought about changes in the gendered space of the mosque.

Just like women in Kuala Lumpur, women in the Tablighi Jama'at go through various stages where their human quality created by God, their *akal*, is put to test and where they learn to control their desire, their *nafs*. Pious women thus view it as their responsibility to maintain the *akal* of

⁴ On the 'Yala Teacher's Training College Incident', see also Marddent, this volume.

their household, their husbands and children. Therefore, Frisk argues that women submit themselves and craft themselves in relation to the idea of a transcendental God, not to the arbitrary will of men (2009:189–190). Women take the view that females have their *akal*, that they can control their *nafs*, that they accumulate merit, and that women and men are equal before God. I agree with Frisk that reducing female Muslim agency to 'false consciousness' is not helpful. Instead, we should conceptualize their practices as a keen desire to become a perfect believer, a super-Muslima so to speak, to gain status and prestige through engagement in formal *dakwah* missionary organizations, and to use this status to contest male privileges and to negotiate gendered spaces in the household and in everyday life. The social processes in which the women involve themselves can be conceptualized as a transition from one subjectivity to another. By donning the veil and by visiting Muslim women elsewhere, Tablighi women contribute to the visibility of Muslim women in Thailand, who were formerly invisible, to the presence of women in public spaces, and to the establishment of a particular normative order in Muslim local society where the moral boundaries and religious duties are more intensely policed and where illicit sex, gambling, and alcohol are perceived as means of Satan and thus prohibited.

The Tablighi Jama'at

The Tablighi Jama'at Al-Da'wa, an Indian Muslim movement founded in the 1920s, has become active in more than 150 countries and today probably is present in every country where Muslims live (Horstmann 2007; Masud 2000; Metcalf 1998, 2000). It is devoted to the obligation to proselytize in order to win the hearts and minds of Muslims around the globe. Specifically conveying *shari'a*-based guidance, the conservative movement is nevertheless rooted in Sufism and tries to win the hearts and minds of Muslims by exhorting the spirituality of Islam and by a heavy emphasis on ritual. My argument is that the Tablighi Jama'at combines elements from Salafism as well as from Sufism into an original amalgam without one replacing the other.

The Tablighi Jama'at concentrates on strengthening the faith by refocusing people's life on bodily dispositions, behavioural rules, and ritual procedures, on constantly improving one's inner life and embarking on a journey to discover God and piety. The movement can be best described as a purification movement that emphasizes every aspect of everyday life as an opportunity to please and to obey Allah. By organizing a constant circulation of Jama'at in the local context as well as in the world, Tablighi believe that they revive

the tradition of the Prophet. The dedicated missionary work of its members and followers in every corner of the world brings millions of members into its fold. It is the grassroots character, flexibility and informal character of the movement that contributes to its strength.

However, the lack of formal procedures also contributes to the high fluctuation within the movement, with people constantly joining and dropping out. Formal procedures of control are exercised on the local leadership and on the followers on tour, but control on the followers in the periods between the outings is lax. Some Muslims will thus find the Tablighi Jama'at fashionable for some time, but may leave it as quickly as they joined it without having grown any roots in the movement. The movement does not attach much importance to traditional venues of Islamic education such as *madrasas*, but rather on learning and study sessions, particularly during the missionary outings. At the centre of the learning sessions is the study of the book *Faza'il-e A'maal* ('The merits/rewards of good deeds') or *Tabligh curriculum* by Maulana Zakaria, the nephew of Tablighi Jama'at's founder Maulana Mohammad Ilyas.⁵ As its message is simple enough to be accepted by anyone willing to volunteer, it also attracts Muslims with little or no Islamic education. Everybody is welcome to the Jama'at, and every newcomer will receive generous support from all sides for choosing the Tablighi way. Thus, even poor Muslims are entitled to the welfare and protection provided by the movement, and to the solidarity of their companions. This warmth of the community no doubt greatly contributes to its success.

By participating in the three-day outing, new members are also socialized within the Tablighi ideology. The socialization not only includes the adjustment to the uniform and habitus of the Jama'at, but also entails a subtle transformation of the member's personality in accordance with the rules of the Jama'at. Once the new member takes part, he or she has to follow the directives of the leader (called *amir*). The *amir* of a small group is selected by its members on the basis of his seniority for the period of the outing. One does not need to be a learned scholar to join the movement, nor does one need to have any educational credentials. In order to become a fully respected follower, it is enough to show one's commitment and piety. The main goal of the Jama'at is thus the constant attraction of sympathizers who then turn into potential missionaries, thus generating a snowball system.

According to the 'Rewards of good deeds', women will be rewarded just as men in return for their services to Allah. While the emphasis on women's

⁵ See Noor, this volume.

conduct and appearance seems to conceive a fairly passive role for women, the important role that women play within Tabligh suggests a different, more active role for women in public spaces more generally. There is an interesting reconfiguration of status roles in the context of the proselytizing tours.⁶ Tabligh as conceived by Ilyas was meant to do nothing less than reverse social hierarchy. He took the position that any Muslim, by going out to share his sincere feelings about Islam and offer guidance, undertakes what formerly had been the privilege of men distinguished by education, achievement, and birth in colonial British India. The equalization of relations is a radical innovation in the hierarchical societies of Southeast Asia and permits the poor and humble to join the movement on the same status as the rich and powerful.

Among those on tour, decisions are made through a process of consultation known as *mashwara*. The group itself chooses the *amir*. Ideally, he should be distinguished by the qualities of piety and experience, not worldly rank. During the mission, different roles are assigned to each member. Key to these roles is the concept of service. The focus on divine reward motivates this service, just as it does all else. Journeymen on tour learn to cook, to wash and repair clothes, to nurse the ill, to serve food, and so on—all these tasks are activities generally associated with women. However, at least in the case of South Thailand the gender reversal lasts only for the duration of the journey.

The Tablighi Jama'at in Southern Thailand

The egalitarian aspect addressed above has contributed greatly to the expansion of the Tablighi Jama'at in the marginal Muslim societies of Southern Thailand. As the investment in expensive rituals and communal meals is a serious problem for women who are not wealthy, *dakwah* work is a very attractive alternative for women, and moving in translocal networks can serve as a psychological boost. Therefore, it makes much sense to denigrate worldly life as a life full of decadence and vice, and positively emphasize *dakwah* activities as preparation and reward for afterlife. For other women—those who once occupied prominent places in ceremonial rites—there is much more at stake, and they consequently contest the entry of the Tablighi Jama'at. Lower-class women, however, attain social recognition and achieve a visible presence in public space, two things at risk due to the growing marginalization of Muslims in the imagined, predominantly Buddhist community of the Thai nation-state. While government service

⁶ Compare Metcalf (2000:46 ff.).

becomes an attractive option for Thai Buddhists, Muslims eagerly join the Islamic networks that have become available through the intensification of global networks and social ties in the Islamic world. Thus, my observation is that while Theravada Buddhism is nationalizing and is appropriated largely by the Thai Sangha, the Muslim networks are rapidly globalizing, thereby weakening the national representation of Muslims in Thailand.

Hence, the Tablighi Jama'at is part of the much broader globalization of Islam and the availability of different identity choices in Southeast Asia. Within this context, the Tablighi Jama'at is currently by far the most influential movement. In Thailand, it is able to establish a presence in every Muslim community and a *markaz* in every province where Muslims live. From Thailand, where missionaries are by and large not harassed by the police or the military, small groups of the Jama'at can venture into the neighbouring countries, visiting Muslims in Cambodia, Southern China and, increasingly, Myanmar. Although the Tablighi Jama'at has a strong emphasis on 'giving', engaging in *tabligh* is not an obstacle to more worldly enterprises. Many activists, male and female, use the Tablighi networks as a resource. This is especially true for traders of Indian descent. It is through the traders that the Tablighi Jama'at first entered the Muslim communities. These financial flows and the donations seem to sustain the Tablighi Jama'at, and women are just as involved as men in the trade networks.

The *markaz* symbolizes Islam as a totality of life in which mosque, house, and school are not separated. In Yala, the huge complex of the *markaz* is a city in itself. More than one hundred families live there permanently, the children being socialized with the Tabligh from an early age. Women staying in the *markaz* are expected to appear in full *purdah*. Women in the *markaz* engage in many pious activities, such as praying, reading Zakaria's book, studying the Qur'an, and listening to the sermons (*bayan*) of Tablighi male preachers who are separated from their female audience by a curtain.

For Muslims in Thailand, the Tablighi Jama'at presents opportunities to raise their status as Muslims. The Tablighi Jama'at, more than any other movement, is able to attract a large variety of people. Many of the men involved in Tabligh activities were encouraged by their wives to do so. For women, seeing their husbands socialized as good Muslims in a pious environment can be a very attractive option. Tabligh women hope that the movement's influence will encourage their husbands to abstain from alcohol, sexual promiscuity, or gambling. There are many famous narratives of conversion careers stating that men have given up vices, such as drug addiction, by joining the Tablighi Jama'at and have become the most dedicated missionaries.

At the same time, the practice of the Tablighi Jama'at represents a dramatic encroachment on the traditions of the communities. Decidedly based in Islamic ritual, the supporters of the movement attempt to stop Muslims' participation in traditional ritual life that often entails inter-religious components. Once a Muslim joins a Jama'at that person is gradually socialized within the movement. This involves a process of transformation, in which the rigid regimentation and discipline of everyday life and everyday propaganda call for youthful commitment and radical militancy. Step by step, the new member adapts to the Tablighi way, to dressing *dakwah*-style, to long prayer sessions and meetings and, last but not least, to long and regular periods of travelling. Not only does this transformation involve the questioning of specific local rituals, the new ideology also threatens the very premises and reproduction of the community. The Tablighi Jama'at presents itself as an apolitical movement 'with a radical outlook'. Its disregard for tradition makes it one of the most powerful engines of dissolution of the traditional belief system as well as of the logics of ritual exchange between the living and the dead that are associated with the traditional belief system. Women used to occupy prominent places both in ceremonial ritual and in the ritual communal meals that followed the ceremonies. However, some of the communal meals have become a sign of conspicuous consumption, and lower-class women are no longer able to afford the financial burden of these expensive rituals, since a failure to provide adequately sumptuous meals would cause them to lose face. The rituals favoured by the Tablighi Jama'at, on the other hand, are mostly free of cost and immediately accessible. They are associated with modernity and with the devaluation or even demonization of the traditional rituals.

This intervention has led to the contestation of religious authority within mosques. While the majority of mosques are registered under the authority of the central committee for Islamic affairs headed by the chief Islamic community leader (Chularatchamontri)⁷ in the capital of Bangkok, some are virtually conquered or overrun by Tablighi groups. The resulting polarization of neighbourhoods also affects women; first, because women joining the Tablighi Jama'at in full *purdah* tend to break their relations with other Muslim women, and second because women lay claim to the space of the mosque just as do men. These divisions create substantial tensions within the community, dividing families.

⁷ The Chularajamontri or Sheikh Ul-Islam was appointed by the king from among prominent Muslim scholars of the kingdom. He is responsible for overseeing the administration of Islamic religious life throughout the country.

The Tablighi Jama'at's negative discourse on ritual exchange and local knowledge also affects the relationship between women of different religions and the management of religious difference in a multi-religious setting. Until 30 years ago, Muslim and Buddhist women in the Songkhla Lake region in upper Southern Thailand looked very much alike. With Muslim lifestyles rapidly changing under the influence of *dakwah*, this is no longer the case. The formerly common belief in the spiritual force of the ancestors is a central issue in this regard. In the middle of Southern Thailand, it is not unusual for Muslim women to 'convert' to Buddhism after marrying a Buddhist partner. The Tablighi influence now leads women to break their social contacts with their Buddhist neighbours and kin. Women under the influence of transnational *dakwah* argue that the spirits are a false belief. They strongly disapprove of traditional ritual as it involves prayers before idols, a practice denounced (*shirk*) and strictly prohibited by the Jama'at. They believe that they have to assist other Muslim women and men to leave this barbaric world behind, and that they need to escort them to the civilized world of the Tablighi Jama'at. The questioning of tradition paves the way for stronger demarcations and sharper boundaries between Muslims and Buddhists.

The proliferation of Muslim lifestyles in Southern Thailand mirrors the identities already espoused by the Buddhist nationalisms, especially in the context of the fresh violence taking place in lower Southern Thailand at the border to Malaysia. The withdrawal of women from traditional ritual and exchange affects their relationship with Muslim sisters and Buddhist neighbours alike. Muslim women believe in the presence of ancestor spirits for whom they prepare ceremonial meals that are brought to the Muslim cemetery in April and every evening during Ramadan. These ceremonies are the first to be condemned by the visiting unit of the Tablighi Jama'at.

Furthermore, Muslim women have kinship relations in the Buddhist neighbourhood and are regularly invited to attend ceremonial events. While there is no problem in joining a marriage ceremony after the monks have left the compound, Muslim women in the Tablighi Jama'at do not show up at the Manora Rongkruu dance drama ritual and will decline an invitation by their Buddhist kin, because the main ritual tradition in Southern Thailand is a spirit possession performance in which Buddhist and Muslim ancestor spirits are summoned. Similarly, Muslim women either withdraw from the ritual of two religions in Tamot, Patthalung, or will not take part in the exchange of food and gestures of friendship.

Muslim women who keep to the old ways do not mind joining in Buddhist ceremonial functions, although they, too, tend to decline invitations to

attend multi-religious rituals because such rituals have become increasingly appropriated by Buddhists. Buddhist women and men have at times a very negative attitude towards the Islamic revival and especially towards the new lifestyles of Muslim women, which they associate with the new ideology. They think that these women have been brainwashed by religious teachers and are being exploited by their husbands. There is a growing feeling of uneasiness among Buddhists, who feel that the Muslim leaders of the reformist movements establish strong boundaries that threaten to dismantle secular society. They are concerned that Muslims are able to lobby the government for special privileges, and they see this as part of a trend by which society is becoming increasingly Islamized.

Muslim society in Southern Thailand is changing, a development linked to the 'cultural revolution' in the Muslim world. The Tablighi Jama'at contributes in no minor way to the visibility of Islam in the form of material culture. The availability of Muslim garments imported from the Middle East and South Asia is one indicator. Another important indicator is the presence of Muslim media, which are eagerly consumed by women and men.⁸ The increasing participation in the *hajj* has also contributed to the exposure of local Muslims to the global Muslim community. Media include magazines, audio cassettes and video-CDs. Members can buy Muslim garments, books, pamphlets, and cassettes readily available in the Muslim shopping centre in the *markaz*. Women and men participate in the Islamic consumer culture in which the *markaz* in Southern Thailand becomes one enclave of a global culture. As several authors have shown, media technologies have the ability to mediate the sensations and emotions of religious discourse.

Although the Tablighi Jama'at describes most of the media as tools of Satan, the movement has made increasing use of them itself. Sermons delivered by leading sheikhs at congregations are reproduced on cassettes and sold on Islamic markets. Blogs are available on the internet where women and men recount their experiences of their outings in foreign countries. The point to make here is that women are not restricted in their use of media. When staying in the secluded spaces of prepared housing during outings, they can moreover meet their sisters from abroad and make numerous new and exciting friendships. A trip to India on a faithful mission is both exciting and meaningful.

⁸ The participation of Muslims in media and patterns of mass consumption is now a topic of lively academic debate (Aydin and Hammer 2010; Eickelman and Anderson 2003).

Women and men find themselves in a borderless world in which local society is only one point of reference among many. Being with the Tablighi Jama'at is about discovering and mapping the Islamic world, especially neighbouring countries. The radius of movement and the perception of the world are broadening rapidly. Withdrawing from multi-religious spaces in Southern Thailand, women and men are thus encapsulated in globalizing Islamic spaces. Muslim women from Southern Thailand run their homes, and the food keeps its Southern Thai flavour, but the orientation is clearly towards a transnational movement. The post-modern shift and the new possibilities in transportation and the media have accelerated the expansion of the Tablighi Jama'at and their organization in travel teams.

Everyday Politics in Muslim Communities⁹

This demand for total commitment also engenders the most virulent critique against the Jama'at: this criticism holds that men abandon their families for long journeys, leaving their wives and children behind without any income to sustain the family. These 'fanatics' are said to abandon all worldly responsibilities for the sake of proselytizing among strangers. Even if their wives fell ill, if their child was abducted or their mothers were without a breadwinner, it would not matter to the Tablighi. More than any other topic, gender relations thus dominate the polemics of polarized villagers. Wives are left behind by husbands who all of a sudden leave the house and family in order to travel in the country or even abroad for long periods of time. In Northwestern Thailand, these long absences cause debates and rifts within families and even divorces in cases where only the wife or husband joins the activities of the Tablighi Jama'at and is not willing to reconcile his or her religious activities with other, more mundane responsibilities.

Not only do the Tablighi leave their wives and children behind, they also introduce new forms of segregation into local society. They discourage Muslim women from having friendships with Buddhist neighbours, because they believe that exposure to any religion other than Islam interferes with the focus of Muslims on Allah. Being a movement of religious purification,

⁹ The term everyday politics refers to the political character of establishing normative orders in the mundane activities of everyday life and, of course, creating gendered spaces (Piscatori and Eickelman 1996).

the Tablighi Jama'at vehemently forbids and sanctions ceremonial and ritual practices in the villages that are considered to be pre-Islamic and heretical. Women used to be dominant in many village ceremonies and life-cycle rituals. However, the Tablighi, who emphasize the virtues of a simpler life, strongly oppose lavish weddings or displays of wealth. The arts, music and dance are discouraged, including shadow puppet plays (Nang Talung) or Manoorā dance dramas.

During these Manoorā performances, attending family members may request a boon from powerful ancestor spirits, who are believed to be both Buddhist and Muslim. The Manoorā master is able to mediate between the living and the dead, and to entertain, feed and appease the ancestor spirits. Ancestor spirits are neither distinguished according to religion nor to gender. Hence they provide a common reference for all villagers, both Buddhist and Muslim. Given such a radical break with indigenous traditions that are so central to the cultivation of local social ties, it is no wonder that the Tablighi Jama'at polarizes villages. For many Muslims in Southern Thailand, it is rather painful to break with the ancestors, and many believe that the spirits will punish them. Villagers' belief in the vengeful presence of the ancestors is confirmed when they feel a loss of appetite or when their children fall ill. Given the importance of good relations with the ancestors for the well-being of all, conversion to Tablighi ideology (and hence the abandonment of the ancestors) often results in conflicts within the family, and in some cases youths will even break with their parents (see also Janson 2005:464–466). The older generation has the choice to either support the Tablighi movement (by joining the Jama'at) or to resist it, very much depending on the balance of power in a given community. By providing young Muslims with an opportunity to challenge the prevalent ideology, the Tablighi movement enables young Muslims in particular to boost their self-confidence by giving them responsibility and a mission.

There is an important gender dimension to this generational conflict as young women wearing the *burqa* drastically distinguish themselves from their mothers and grandmothers, whom they regard as being misguided by the old rituals. This painful antagonism is partly compensated by the solidarity of the 'surrogate family' that is made up of a woman's Tablighi 'sisters', who are not only from Thailand, but also from South Asia and even Europe (see also Janson 2005:466). The exciting prospect of going on a journey to India as part of a small group adds greatly to the appeal of the movement to women as well as to men. Curiously, while their place ought to be at home, many women enjoy their widest radius of mobility while on tour with the Tablighi movement.

Women as Participants in the Dakwah Movement

In addition to the preaching sessions, women eagerly participate in special learning sessions organized for women: *talim* (Janson 2005:471–473; Metcalf 1994, 2000; Sikand 2002). These sermons are delivered by male preachers who are concealed behind a curtain, and the women attend the event fully covered. And yet the *talim* provides a space for women to congregate to learn about ‘Islam’. The *talims* focus on the moral behaviour and religious duties of women and so inform the participants of the relevance of Islam in their everyday life. However, the special study sessions certainly provide only a reduced scope of Islamic education and are in no way as comprehensive as the syllabus in the *madrasas*. One reason for this is that the Tablighi Jama‘at do not see themselves as providers of Islamic education, but as openers of an Islamic way of life. The *talims* are therefore intended to only be complementary to formal Islamic education. Nevertheless, they impart knowledge of selected recitations from the Qur’an and Hadith.

In Thailand, women go out on *khuruj* in the company of their husbands or a close male relative. In Southern Thailand, women are allowed to accompany men on travels but have to dress in *purdah*. A woman’s role on these journeys is to support her husband while he is on tour. However, the fact that women are granted permission to participate in *khuruj* marks a relatively recent turning point in the history and strategy of the Tablighi Jama‘at. Older studies, such as those by Metcalf (1994, 2000), state that women’s participation in *khuruj* is the exception rather than the rule. Sikand, too, sees the role of women in the domestic sphere of the family (2002). Since then, however, the leadership seems to have become aware of the great potential and influence of women in the movement, such that it has become far more common.

The *ijtima* mass gatherings in Yala or Bangkok, where thousands of supporters congregate to listen to the sermons of visiting sheikhs or Islamic scholars (*maulana*), are again mainly for men. While men stay at local mosques, women stay in housing pre-arranged by local women for female visitors. There are Jama‘at for women at the large annual meetings, but these are held in the seclusion of pre-arranged housing. Women who reach out to other women fulfil a crucial part of the *dakwah*, investing in particular within their own sphere of women and family members.

The Tablighi dress code is part and parcel of the transformation of the body and the presentation of the body in the public. Donning the veil and eventually the *burqa* is a crucial transition in the awakening to becoming

'new-born' Muslims. Donning the *burqa* (that hides the entire body including the face) in particular is a significant marker of the rising awareness of becoming a true follower of the Tabligh. In Southern Thailand, women cover themselves by wearing batiks and veils in many colours, and women wearing full-length, body-covering black robes are a fairly recent phenomenon. However, the Tabligh dress code applies not only to women, but also to men. Men, too, have to be careful to present their bodies in public by donning long white robes and wearing turbans. Like women, men are easily recognizable as orthodox Muslims. Tablighi men and women 'on tour' are on constant display as they are walking the streets. Their presence is not unlike that of Buddhist monks who walk the streets as well, begging for alms. And like Buddhist monks, Tablighi activists are easily recognized in public.

After joining in the movement, women activists strengthen their belief in Allah by visiting and living in the Islamic centre, by listening to lectures, and by travelling with their husbands as part of a Jama'at. The purpose of proselytizing is to recite the Qur'an and *hadith*, to perform *dzikir* (remembrance of God), to teach people, and learn from them. While men go out to invite people to the mosque, women teach the women in their host compound how they should behave. By going from town to town, from village to village, and from house to house, the lay missionaries hope to win the hearts and minds of the people visited, to engage them in a debate on religion, and to facilitate a transformation from passive Muslims to active followers and members. The missionaries believe that Islam in most places has deteriorated or become corrupt. When I visited a community in Tha Sala, for example, one senior Tabligh activist made the point that the mosque of the village is neglected and the Muslims living in the village are pitiful. When the missionaries arrive, the people visited may be very sceptical about the intentions of the visitors. Slowly and gradually the missionaries, being trained in communication skills, invite the people visited to join them in prayer and to attend the meetings of the Tablighi chapter in the mosque. Women play a crucial role in facilitating this process behind the curtain. They operate behind the scenes by making the Tablighi movement familiar to the families visited and by addressing specific topics (see also Janson 2008, Janson, 2011). But even when they do not go on a Jama'at, women tend to play a crucial role in *tabligh* work by tolerating their husbands' absence and by supporting the family while the men are away. In doing so, women receive enormous blessings, which are counted like points that accumulate and are taken into account by God after a woman's death. By encouraging their husbands to perform prayers in the mosque women can earn even more points than men.

Gender Reversal and Local Conflicts

By joining *tabligh* work at all levels, women seem to enjoy a degree of social recognition in peer groups that they would have lost in the course of Thailand's transformation into a capitalist society. During the *khuruj*, a radical break allows for the temporary construction of ideal Muslim society, and some degree of class and gender reversal takes place. Marloes Janson takes the argument further and argues that the gender reversal during the outings has long-lasting impact on gender relations. The activities of men during the outings include practices such as cooking and washing clothes that are generally associated with women. Moreover, men sleep together in the mosque, show emotions associated with women, and sometimes 'weep' or 'hug each other'. They are criticized for this by men outside the Jama'at who believe that this kind of behaviour is 'gay'. At the same time, the outings involve the masculinisation of women who become the breadwinners and household heads during their husbands' absence (see Janson 2008, 2011).

In the Gambian case, there is an interesting detail that points to the strength of women in the movement: the women register their husbands for the outings and grant them permission to leave. Moreover, the gender reversal was not limited to the tours as men, after their return, increasingly took over household chores like cooking, washing clothes and childcare (Janson, 2011). However, in Southern Thailand, cooking and washing clothes was limited to the outings, and the reason given for the taking up of these feminine tasks was that the visitors did not want to be a burden on their hosts. But when women went along on missionary outings it was they who were to cook for the participating men, and the men were not involved in everyday household matters. Unlike in the Gambian case, men in Southern Thailand decided about their outings more or less independently from their wives who had to cope with the household during the absence of their husbands. Although women probably enjoyed the new freedom afforded by their husbands' absence, they were also faced with new responsibilities as they had to make up for the loss in salary that in order to continue to sustain the household. In the wider community the absence of Tabligh husbands was a major point of criticism as people would complain how men could venture into the wilderness without even thinking about the well-being of the children they left behind. A second point of debate and criticism in Southern Thailand were the outings of women, which often provoked controversy. Muslim authorities at the local level did not support the outings of women, as they believed that Muslim women only went on such journeys to travel and

enjoy the trip. I thus perceived the gender reversal taking place in Southern Thailand during the outings as being rather limited and ambiguous.

Conclusion

I argue that the organization of women in the Tablighi Jama'at and their visibility in public space provided the main impetus for women to participate in Tablighi activities. The Tablighi Jama'at, while subscribing to a very conservative image of female gender roles, opens up a very important door for women to actively participate in Tabligh. Thereby, they enable women to construct and cultivate their religious piety by regularly participating in the exciting activities of the transnational movement. The adoption of Tabligh ideology means that they do not invest their precious (and oftentimes scarce) resources in rituals as before, freeing them from such costly commitments. Most significantly, women can also go on *khuruj*; although to do so they must be married, go with their husbands or male relatives, and cannot stay in the mosque. However, even within these limits, the journeys open up new spaces for women and enable them to widen their networks as they participate in outings to India.

The tours that are a central part of Tablighi teaching are meant to transform participants in their fundamental relationship to other people. The quietist character of the Tablighi Jama'at invariably hides their fundamentally political character, as the inroads of the Tablighi Jama'at and other Muslim movements are accompanied by rather dramatic transformations in gender relations, but also social relations more generally. These concern the relations of new-born Muslims with other Muslim women who prefer to keep to the 'old ways' as well as the relations of new-born Muslims with non-Muslim women, such as Buddhist women, and the new boundaries established between them by Tablighi ideology.

Meanwhile, the meaning of kinship relations has changed as well: Muslim women in the Tablighi Jama'at emphasize their religious relations and express them by kinship terms ('sister'), while they de-emphasize their kinship relations with non-members or Buddhist women. Likewise, the meaning of friendship is transformed. While Muslim women formerly could have intimate trans-religious friendships with Buddhist women (conceptualized in Southern Thailand as 'twin' relations), friends are now sought in the increasingly global female Jama'at community from somewhere in the Islamic world. Relations with Buddhists are now viewed as a waste of time, as any contact to non-Muslim women implies less commitment to the transcendental world

and meditation. By joining the Tablighi Jama'at people thus cease to participate in a cultural microcosm where Muslims and Buddhists are part of a general socio-cultural system. However, Buddhists, too, draw boundaries between themselves and their Muslim neighbours, as they are increasingly drawn into Buddhist nationalisms in Thailand.

Ultimately, ardent followers of the Tablighi Jama'at believe that Muslims should live in an Islamic society for which the Jama'at provides the model. By turning to the individual improvement of the self, they also force a renegotiation of communal spaces at the societal level. Women are active actors in the shaping of their subjectivity; however, at the same time, they also become vulnerable to critique from the wider local community. Spaces of women are thus simultaneously limited and extended. Whereas the dynamics of globalisation within the Tablighi Jama'at work towards the extension of their networks and scope of action, the discouragement of relations to non-Muslims limit their contacts and participation in multi-religious, local contexts. The tours that form the core of Tabligh teaching are meant to transform participants in their fundamental relationship to other people. The quietist character of the Jama'at may invariably mask their political character as the advance of the Jama'at and other Muslim reformist grassroots organizations is accompanied by rather dramatic transformations in gender relations.

RELIGIOUS PIETY AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN THAILAND

Amporn Marddent

Introduction

One prominent feature of Islamic revivalism on the part of women in Thailand is Muslim women's active participation in the debate about veiling. There have been demonstrations calling for the right to wear the *hijab* (women's veil)—a campaign initiated by young Muslim activists in Yala, the southern province of the country, in 1987/88. This so-called 'Yala Teacher's Training College Incident' was a result of a greater self-awareness in the Muslim community. Many of the demonstrators involved were Muslim youth who demanded that the Thai authorities grant Muslim women the right to wear the veil at the college, eventually emerging successful. This spawned a *hijab* movement in Thailand, where various styles of veiling had already become fashionable among Muslim women in the course of the preceding decade.

In Thailand, the practice of voluntary veiling as an expression of commitment to Islamic values emerged among the cohort of women who took their undergraduate education both in Thailand and Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s. By then, women in the southernmost provinces of Thailand—Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat—had already been strongly influenced by the *dakwah* (propagation of the faith) movement, which had left its mark, in terms of visible religious activities, upon Muslim youth in various Islamic boarding schools (*pondok*). Besides, there are groups devoted to religious studies (*halqoh*) and small solidarity groups (*usrah*) in which women religious activists who graduated from Kelantan, Malaysia, have come together to continue their activities, keep up their networks, and teach the messages regarding Islamic women's dress and women's roles.

Among Muslim women in central Thailand, the headscarf is one of the most powerful symbols of identity, particularly after the Muslim Women Organization of Thailand (MWOT) joined efforts for Islamic revitalization at the state level. In the wake of the 'Yala Teacher's Training College Incident', MWOT became active. Cooperating closely with other Islamic organizations, women's organizations, and Muslim politicians, they strove to achieve

consensus between the Thai state authorities and the Muslim community with regard to a bill that would allow Muslim women to wear the *hijab* in public places of work and education, in official ceremonies, and on the pictures of their ID cards and passports.¹

It should be apparent that the *hijab* movement in Thailand provided a space that was conducive to the emergence of Muslim women's movements calling for religious freedom. At the same time, there were some trends towards re-Islamization among young women and men in central and southern Thailand, as well as a movement of Muslims against the Buddhist dominance that has existed in Thailand ever since the early modern era, a dominance that still continues today. In this context, the impact of modernization on the development of Thai society is of particular importance as well. The nation-building programme of King Vajiravudh (1910–1925) can be summarized by the essential slogan of loyalty to 'nation, religion and king'. He, the King, promoted the notion of nation through this slogan. For him, nationalism and the modernization programme were inseparable from Westernization. When a modern national identity was being promoted, it led to efforts to assimilate Thailand's ethnic minority groups. The confrontation between the first Muslim Women Organization of Thailand (MWOT) and other related Muslim groups, Muslim politicians, and activists on the one side and the Thai nation-state and traditional and religious authorities on the other gave rise to a huge Islamic movement in Thailand.

This contribution begins with a discussion of the historical background of Muslims in the Thai context, and then proceeds to the Muslim women's movement. The movement originated in Bangkok, in spite of the fact that Muslim women's issues, for example the *hijab* movement, first came up in the Deep South of Thailand. The last part of the essay analyses Muslim women's interpretations of Islam and gender, which have moved toward positions taken by a neo-orthodox Islamic group in Bangkok during the 2000s. In that context, I will discuss the case of Nahdatul Muslimat, the women's wing of Al Jama'at, a currently active *salafi*-based reformist movement. The members of this movement interact with other Muslims in public life, striving to develop a Muslim model of society. They have tried to develop a contemporary approach to Islam by undertaking a reappraisal of Islamic meaning. The majority of the new members recruited by Nahdatul Muslimat are young Muslim students who are facing difficulties in dealing with modern Thai society. They are impressed by the movement's style of debate with regard to

¹ Interview with Sawvane Jitmoud, 14 May 2009. See also, for example, Scupin (1998); Satha-Anand (1994); Jitmoud et al. (1994).

adaptation and resistance to modernity, as well as by the way it promotes modern Islamic interpretations of gender issues.

Muslims in Modern Thai Society

The position of Muslims in Thailand is due to the continuity of their communal identity and their role in Thai society. While Muslims are a minority, they are nevertheless the second largest population group after the Buddhists.² The appearance of Islamic movements in the country did not only demonstrate the effects of global religious revivalism and political Islam, but also a trend towards denationalization and tolerance. Omar Farouk Bajunid's (1999:210–234) description of the position of Muslims in the modern Thai state is based on the existing academic works that focus on the Malay Muslims of southern Thailand who reject the legitimacy of secularized Buddhist polity and Thai Buddhist political cultures. Meanwhile, the studies by Andrew Forbes (1988a, 1988b) and Raymond Scupin (1980) on the broader context of Muslims in Thailand made a valuable contribution to understanding the overall dynamic role of Muslims in the country, especially within the historical and political contexts of modern Thailand.

Historically, Muslims were the largest single minority in the kingdom prior to the onset of massive Chinese immigration. Muslims have been present in the traditional Thai polity since the thirteenth century (Sukhothai era, AD 1238–1438). During the Ayutthaya period (1351–1767), they successfully asserted claims to positions of political power; this coincided with the period of Muslim trade in Southeast Asia and Islamization in the region. Muslim society at large was composed of various ethnicities. Muslims were the largest 'foreign nationality' in Ayutthaya. Siamese who embraced Islam were even exempted from the personal service tax required of other subjects.³ Foreign Muslim states, encouraged by the special status Islam enjoyed in Ayutthaya and the presence of a large Muslim community, tried to persuade the Ayutthaya rulers to embrace Islam. Muslims and Islam came to Thailand

² Academics and Muslim authorities such as the Chularajamontri consider the official state statistics on the Muslim population, 4.5%, as being on the low side. For more information, see National Statistic Office of Thailand (2009); Bajunid (1999:210–234); Yusuf (1998:277–298).

³ The country's name was changed from Siam to Thailand during the tenure of the first Phibunsongkhram government (1938–1944). During this period, which coincided with World War II, the country was dominated by an energetic and aggressive brand of nationalism that influenced both domestic and foreign politics. The government subscribed to fascism, which was a global phenomenon at that time, by promoting the notion of the great Thai race and territory. A single Thai nation-state was created that included a modernization programme

from three main directions: first, from the South via traders between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; then, and for the largest part, in the fifteenth century through the Persian *shi'a* and Indian *sunni* traders, including Cham Muslims after the Champa kingdom collapsed in 1471, as well as Indonesian Macassar after the Dutch conquered their homeland (1666–1669); and, lastly, the Indian, Bengali, and Chinese Muslims who arrived in the North between the 1870s and 1890s (Yusuf 2007a:4–6).

One can also classify the heterogeneous agglomeration of Muslims in Thailand according to the locations where they live: ethnicized Malay-speaking Muslims in the Deep South; integrated, ethnically Malay, but Thai-speaking Muslims in the mid and upper South; and multi-ethnic Thai-speaking integrated Muslims in other parts of the country (Yusuf 2007b:319–339). These various ethnic groups, which are composed of Persian, Malay, Arab, Cham, Bengali, Indonesian, Indian, Pathan, and Chinese Muslims, who are all immigrants to Thailand, made the Muslims in the kingdom into a much more diverse community.

Bajunid (1988, 2005) distinguishes two types of Muslims in Thailand: the 'assimilated' and the 'unassimilated'. The former comprise a multitude of ethnic groups such as Arabs, Pathans, and Thai-Malays. The latter, 'unassimilated' group is made up of ethnically Malay Muslims in the southern border provinces. As far as the Malay living in central Thailand are concerned, they were brought there as prisoners of war and were retained as slaves of the king, even a few were members of the elite. They worked with the royal family, studied abroad to get a good Islamic education, and settled in villages near Bangkok.⁴ The relationship between Central Thai and Patani is marked by a chronic conflict at the southernmost boundaries of the nation-state over what Thongchai Winichakul has called the 'geobody' of the nation.⁵ Melayu Patani, a minority group that is mostly Muslim,

designed to do away with backward customs, and to implement uniformity in language and social behaviour according to western standards, for example by replacing customary ways of eating with the fingers and by prohibiting traditional clothing. In Muslim regions, the Friday holiday, for example, was banned. See, for example, McCargo (2009); Winichakul (1994).

⁴ People of the former Patani sultanate were usually referred to as Melayu (Malay), even during the reign of the modernizing king Chulalongkorn, who oversaw the abolition of the Patani sultanate and the definitive absorption of the territories of the former sultanate into the Thai state.

⁵ According to Satha-Anand (1992:32), the term 'Patani' is not to be understood geographically as the province of 'Patani', but rather as 'political geography', which is generally viewed as a space in which violence can arise easily. Consequently, several documents apply different terms to different conditions. The notion of 'Patani' can be described as a space associated with the continuous impact of violence on political power and identity. Patani is based on

is—like other minorities—struggling with the notion of Thai identity, because fervent Thai nationalism and the geo-body have resulted in a territorially and culturally unified nation-state of Siam with fixed borders. Malay ethnic identity, as expressed in terms of language, dress, education, history, and custom, was consistently discouraged by the state. Instead, the Thai state attempted to redefine this identity along religious lines as ‘Thai Muslim’, in the hope that this change would facilitate the assimilation of this Malay group. However, with the recent politicization of religion, the notion of an Islamic state of Patani, which is closely linked with the Patani Malay ethnic nationalist movement, has added fuel to the violent conflict in southern Thailand. Nevertheless, it is not religion that is the primary cause of the conflict, but rather politics, including the issue of how the Thai nation-state is constituted and the place of Muslims and Malays in the national order. There is general consensus that the issue regarding the identity of the kingdom’s subjects emerged when the state began to propagate ethnic and religious nationalism as essential components of state ideology during the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Consequently, Malay Muslims in Thailand view themselves differently in ethno-religious terms. Socio-political and cultural aspects of life are interpreted and perceived through the lens of ethnic identity. The Thai invasion in the region resulted in an unprecedented cultural confrontation between the local Malays and the new Thai bureaucrats sent from Bangkok to rule them. Moreover, the rise of Malay nationalism in Southeast Asia has further contributed to creating this ethnic divide in southern Thailand. In an effort to mitigate the tensions along this growing cleavage, the Thai state began to reformulate national identity to embrace religious plurality by using the terms ‘Thai Muslim’ or ‘Thai Islam’. Thai Muslims, however, contest the idea of a Thai Islam or Thai Muslims, insisting on the differences in ethnicity, language and religion. This has resulted in a situation of hardened fronts, in which

specific ethnic differences. However, the very nature of the Thai state and its bureaucratic set-up did not permit such royal policies to be fully put into practice. The bureaucracy was heavily dominated by Thai Buddhists, who were spurred by a sense of ‘ethnic Thai chauvinism’ and thus could not be expected to conscientiously implement state policies that would respect regional differences and preserve ethnic autonomy. As a matter of fact, the very order that special treatment be granted to the Malay Muslims of Patani contradicted the single most ideological contribution the king himself made to the Thai nation: nationalism. Among the two objectives—the cultivation of a Thai national identity (with the Thai language, Thai religion-Theravada Buddhism, and the Thai culture implied by these) on the one hand and the preservation of a minority’s separate identity on the other—, the former was always the priority for the Thai bureaucrats.

being Malay is considered to mean being necessarily and exclusively Muslim, just as being Thai is regarded as being necessarily and exclusively Buddhist.

Still today, Malay Muslims resist assimilation into Thai society, in spite of the fact that their identities are undergoing a great deal of transformation as well. When the political instability of the post-World War II era also threatened to undermine the political legitimacy of Thailand's authority in the region, the Malay Muslim elite tried to retain their power in issues related to religion and thus remain unchallengeable. The Malay Muslim elite therefore carved out spheres of authority in such areas as Muslim family law, educational policy, and the dress code. Nonetheless, other (non-Malay) Muslims in Thailand normally tend to be more positive about their identities as Thai citizens.

Muslims have tended to be represented in the political arena by the Democrat Party. Muslim politicians have, however, been active in other political parties as well. Many of them have withdrawn from the Democrat Party because they felt the party was not giving enough attention to specific concerns regarding matters of Islamic education, economic progress in the South, and religious freedom. This prompted them to form a faction called Wahdah (Unity), an independent political pressure group that pledged support to any political party which paid special attention to issues of Muslim concern. While Wahdah was initially spawned by dissatisfaction within the Democrat Party, its membership quickly came to include politicians active various political parties. Hence, since its establishment, Wahdah has also been closely associated with the New Aspiration Party (NAP) or Kuam Wang Mai (in Thai), also known as Harapan Baru (in Malay). The members of parliament from Wahdah are the first Muslims in Thailand to have obtained cabinet posts in the elected coalition government since 1992. The inclusion of Muslim politicians in the cabinet permitted a series of Muslim issues to be brought onto the national agenda. Hence, it was during this time that legal permission for Muslim women to wear the *hijab* in public places was won (Saniwa Bin Wan Mahmood 1998). Apart from this, Surin Pitsuwan, an assimilated Thai of Malay descent from the Democrat Party, became Minister of Foreign Affairs and, recently, Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The rise to influence of Muslim politicians has coincided with the making of significant concessions to Muslim culture; for example, prayer rooms have been created in public places such as international airports and in the house of parliament.⁶

⁶ There are other important factors that worked in favour of Islam and Muslims in

Muslims in Thailand have strongly expressed their identity by means of rituals, clothing, and religious events, vis-à-vis other ethno-religious groups in the country. Although a call for religious orthodoxy is found all over the Islamic world, how this orthodoxy becomes manifest varies from country to country. In Indonesia, for example, the focus has been on economic issues, while the movement in Malaysia seems to be more concerned with national identity (Muzaffar 1986:6–7). With regard to Thailand, Omar Farouk Bajunid, Imtiyaz Yusuf, Raymond Scupin, and Chaiwat Satha-Anand have pointed to the importance of understanding the local contents and various directions of the Islamic movements, which are basically related to identity.⁷

Involvement of Reformist Muslim Women

Basically, Islamic reformation in Thailand emerged in the urban communities, and was associated with the *salafiyya* movement marked in particular by the ideas of three thinkers: Muhammad ‘Abduh (1849–1905), Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani (1839–1897), and Rashid Rida (1865–1935). In the early 1900s, a political refugee from Minangkabau in Indonesia who had been exiled by the Dutch authorities, Ahmad Wahab, settled in Bangkok and began to teach reformist Islamic ideas that originated from the *salafiyya* movement. Having lived in Mecca for some time, he had become acquainted with modernist Islamic ideas. In Indonesia, Ahmad Wahab had been connected with the Muhammadiyah movement and its political counterpart. When his teachings attracted many followers and students in Bangkok, he set up informal study groups by establishing a reformed association known as Ansorisunnah at Bangkok-Noi, Bangkok. His influence spread rapidly, not only in various Muslim communities in Bangkok, but also in Nakhon Si Thammarat and Songkla, southern Thailand.⁸

Thailand: first, the huge numbers of Thai going to work abroad, especially in Middle-Eastern countries, who were exposed to Muslim cultures; second, the influx of Muslim tourists that did not only bring money and jobs to the kingdom, but also fostered a new sense of pride in Thai Muslims with regard to Muslim identity; and, finally, capital flows due to new Muslim investors. All this also fostered a new Muslim culture that has enhanced the role of Muslims in the modern Thai polity. See, for example, Bajunid (1999, 1989); Scupin (1998).

⁷ See Keyes (1987); Jory (2007); Bajunid (2005); Yusuf (2007a); Satha-Anand (1989, 2005).

⁸ It has been understood among Muslims in the country that the first community where Ahmad Wahab introduced a new Islamic tendency was Bangkok-Noi. Academics have examined the Islamic reformation of *sunnah* as well (see Scupin 1980). The establishment of *sunnah* Islamic reformation in Bangkok by Wahab included the formation of the Ansorisunnah Association in the 1930s and the Jamiyatul Islam in the 1950s. The religious influence of Ahmad Wahab’s reformist activities within Thai Islam extended to the north and south of Thailand.

At that time, Islamic movements tended to attract an urban-based intelligentsia. A modernized educational system based on western models led to the emergence of a new social group, which formed a new generation that began to direct the modernization of the Thai polity. It was this generation of educated and middle-class people who were influenced by Islamic reformist ideas. The reformist movement divided Muslim communities in Thailand in general into two groups: the reformists, or *khana mai* ('new group'), and the traditionalists, or *khana kau* ('old group').⁹ The *khana kau* (*kaum tua* in Malay) represent a syncretistic Islam whereas the *khana mai* (*kaum muda*) are associated with *salafi-wahhabi* reformism.¹⁰

In Thailand, the terms *wahhabi* and *salafi* are generally charged with the meaning of 'extreme *sunni*', especially since September 11, 2001 and the ensuing US-led war on terror, and the Kru Se incident in 2004 where the book titled *Berjihad di Pattani* was found on the body of a dead militant at the historic Kru Se Mosque in Patani.¹¹ Some scholars concluded that there is a connection between Wahhabism and *salafis* who wage *jihad*. According to the debates and arguments of other scholars however, the militant supporters of Osama bin Laden and the dead militant of the Kru Se incident were not influenced by the teachings of Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, and are not representative

⁹ Scupin (1980) has compared the situation and impact of Islamic reformation in Thailand with the case of Indonesia. His distinction between the groups parallels what Geertz called *santri* (reformist) and *abangan* (traditionalist) forces in Indonesia (see Geertz 1976).

¹⁰ Wahhabism is a religious reform movement associated with the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1792). He and his followers believed that they had a religious obligation to spread the call, or *dakwah* (literally 'winning others over to one's point of view'), for a restoration of pure monotheistic worship. *Wahhabi* joined hands with popular religious organizations, especially the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan Al-Muslimun), to consolidate the bastion of Islam against secular regimes, atheists, and western-style modernity. However, the term *wahhabi* was rejected by Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab and his followers, who preferred to call their movement *salafi*. Consequently, *salafi* or *salafiyya* is a term for the historical movement for Islamic reform marked by the ideas of three thinkers in particular, Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani (1839–1897), Muhammad 'Abduh (1849–1905) and Rashid Rida (1865–1935). Moreover, there are ambitions to revive the true practice of Islam via reference to the *salaf* as a movement. The term Salafism is often used interchangeably with Wahhabism. Followers, however, usually reject this term because it is considered derogatory and because they believe that Muhammad Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab did neither establish a new school of thought nor a new self-description. *Salafis* have embraced a forward-oriented doctrine centred on the pristine purity of Islam. For details and contemporary debates on Wahhabism and Islamic revivalism in the Muslim world and Thailand, see DeLong-Bas (2007); Commins (2006); Yusuf (2007b); Scupin (1980); Usman and Idris (2004).

¹¹ *Sunni* is the largest denomination of Islam in Thailand. It is referred to as Ahl As-Sunnah Wa'l-Jama'ah or Ahl As-Sunnah ('people of the tradition and the community'). On the Kru Se incident, see McCargo (2007).

of Wahhabism. Likewise, many *salafis* prefer to be called *ahl as-sunnah wa'l-jama'ah* or just, in short, *sunnah*, rather than *wahhabi*, *khana mai*, or *kaum muda*. However, among religious scholars and young reformists, the term *salafi* is widely accepted.

While male *salafi* leaders are generally graduates of universities in the Middle East, the educational background of women leaders and younger members of *salafi* movements is different. The majority of the women leaders were educated at the secular universities in the country. Salafism became another prominent Islamic movement in the country that has been inspiring youth and educated people for a decade. This neo-orthodox Muslim movement of *khana mai* is committed to drawing attention to an understanding of the teachings and interpretations of *salafi* scholars.

Remarkably, the relationship between political platforms and Islamic reformation in Thailand is associated with the proliferation of Islamic groups among student movements, including the organization representing the *khana mai* Muslims, the Peace Front political party, which was liberal-leftist in orientation and promoted legal rights and reformation.¹² The members of the Peace Party were not exclusively Muslim, but also came from other minority groups in Thailand. *Khana mai* political thought emerged as a prime source of conflict within Muslim communities when the party laid out the structure of its reformist agenda, which was heavily influenced by *khana mai* thinking. However, this agenda failed to get votes. The party leaders were largely unable to gain support by *khana kau* and to address the latter's concerns. There were even rumours that the reformist *khana mai* would call for the abolishment of the Chularajmontri¹³ office if politically successful, but the *khana mai* denied this.

At that stage, a small number of Muslim women were involved in political affairs at the authoritative level. The bureaucratic duties of Chularajamontri Tuan Suwannasart, for example, were in the hands of his daughter, Thanpuying Samorn Bhuminarong, President of the Chularajmontri Tuan Suwannasart Foundation, and her clientele. The status of these people rested on a Thai 'network' of traditional authority that is grounded in prestige. Among the *khana mai*, there were educated women from the lower and middle classes who were inspired by Islamic reformation activism. The most prominent organization, which was established in Bangkok in 1964 and

¹² In general, *khana mai* rejects communism, not considering it a legitimate social form. It is believed that communism is incompatible with Islamic principles.

¹³ The Chularajmontri, or Sheikh Ul-Islam, is the head of Thailand's Muslim community. He is appointed to the office for life by royal decree.

attracted many Muslims youths, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, was the Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT), or Samakom Yuwa Muslim Haeng Prated Thai (Yo Mo Tho). The organization was able to create an Islamic social network that included Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) and the Regional Islamic Da'wah Council of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (RISEP). YMAT has cooperated closely with the networks that link the older *khana mai* leaders to YMAT's leadership, and it coordinates activities with Muslim youth groups throughout the region and with global Muslim youth movements. Women in YMAT and other national Islamic reformist movements—such as the Thai Muslim Student Association (TMSA), the Council of Muslim Organizations of Thailand (CMOT) and the Word Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY,¹⁴ Thailand)—have worked on women's issues. The Muslim women's movement is considered as a wing of the major Islamic movements, with the men being responsible and accountable for teaching the women Islamic knowledge and practices. Women's wings were founded as a result of women's connections with each group, as they were wives, relatives, former students, and friends of the male leaders or members.

Apart from being organization-based, activism on the part of Muslim women often has its roots in the university education of the young *khana mai* generation. They have tried to establish autonomous organizations, yet still depend on male religious scholars and leaders in terms of theology and visions for their movement. A lack of sufficient Islamic knowledge and experience, which are both necessary when it comes to cooperating with other international Islamic movements, led Muslim women to attend training courses such as the *halqoh Muslimah*, or study circles of Muslim women. Moreover, numerous training camps for Muslim women are provided by Muslim student associations everywhere at universities in Thailand as part of the extracurricular programme. Every year, there are prominently advertised courses launched by the women's programmes of WAMY, YMAT, and TMSA to strengthen cooperation between Muslim women's leaders and the core leadership of each university and organization. The *halqoh Muslimah* and the Muslim women's leadership training camps aim at promoting the ideal Muslim woman, modelled after the major female figures mentioned in Qur'anic sources. Those Muslim women activists who were involved in

¹⁴ WAMY is an independent international organization and an Islamic forum that supports the work of Muslim organizations and needy communities all over the world. WAMY was established in 1972, and its headquarters are in Saudi Arabia. It has regional branches in 55 countries. The office of WAMY Thailand is located in Bangkok.

these movements therefore began to present themselves as extremely pious, striving to become *muminah* with *taqwa*, that is, 'righteous women with higher consciousness'.

Some male Muslim activists are intellectuals who play powerful roles within the community. They are the people who, by virtue of their particular characteristics, are viewed as being imbued with certain 'cultural values' and, as a result, represent the leadership of a cultural community. Such individuals fulfil a dual role as intellectuals and activists, either due to their capacity for criticism and rejection of the status quo, or to their commitment to activities that involve the reaffirmation and transmission of aspects of the existing culture (Esposito 2001:7). In the twentieth century, the modernist *shari'a*-minded reformist movements of the Middle East spread throughout Southeast Asia. The reformations tend to be responses to the global impact of colonialism and modernization. The local content and various directions of Islamization in Thailand led to the emergence of diverse groups and ideas aiming at the promotion of Islam, especially with regard to Muslim identity. Scores of young Muslim men study and earn degrees in Islamic disciplines in various Muslim countries and at various educational institutions that stresses the diverse characteristics of Islamic scholars (*ulama*), according to different Islamic schools of thought (Yusuf 2007b:326; Satha-Anand 2004:151–167). In Thailand, the Arab Universities Alumni Association, for example, has since the 1970s become an important group of *ulama*, alongside other Islamic reformist intellectuals, including the *ulama* of the official Islamic authority, the Chularajamontri office. The significant accomplishment of the Arab Universities Alumni Association is that it establishes a connection between Muslims in Thailand and the Arab world, and in particular provides opportunities for Muslim students to study at the prominent Islamic institutions in the Muslim world. The Thai government has sought contact with that association as well, striving to enhance cooperation with the Middle East, especially with regard to economic and educational issues.

The teachings of new Islamic movements have attracted young people and women, encouraging them to strengthen the identity aspect of the religion and to express that identity in public. This has coincided with the growth and diversification of the undergraduate Muslim students' movements. As mentioned above, the emergence of Thailand-based Islamic movements between the 1960s and 1980s did not only involve youth-focused groups like TMSA, YMAT, and WAMY that were established to promote and preserve the community and interests of the *ummah* in general and of educated young Muslims in particular. There were also the activities of the Tablighi Jama'at,

which originated in India and began to work in Thailand at the grass-roots level in the different provinces of the country. However, the spread of Islamic intellectual reformation was much more related to *salafi* local activism (Prapertchob 2005:105–108).

Women are represented by a small number of female religious leaders and activists in Thailand. Groups of educated Muslim women have taken the role of supporters and leaders in certain arenas. For example, selected books, essays, and sermons of the reformist thinkers, such as Hasan Al-Banna, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Sayyid Qutb, and Maulana Abul A'la Maududi, regarding the role of women and gender in Islam have been translated by Muslim men and women scholars, and are widely read among young activists. *Islam in theory and practice* (1967), written by Maryam Jameelah,¹⁵ became an important essay that was partially translated by TMSA activist Banjong bin Kasan.¹⁶ Titled *Kabuankarn feunfu Islam* ('Islamic Revitalization Movement') in Thai, this book is a 'must' on the reading list for Muslim activists in Thailand. The book promotes Islamic revitalization, calling upon the Muslim community in Thailand to endeavour to purify the faith.

Muslim women from *khana kau* and *khana mai* as well as their male leaderships interact both within their group and with members of the respective other group. For example, various *khana mai* scholars fervently discussed the authenticity of Islamic sources and religious interpretation. Local Muslim women in rural southern Thailand are currently involved in the Islamic educational development system, regardless of whether they are *khana mai* or *khana kau* followers. Meanwhile, *khana mai* in Thailand is mostly associated with an urban lifestyle, as is the case elsewhere in the world where orthodox, literalist religiosity goes hand in hand with urban life; perhaps not least because their rigorism requires literacy (Gellner 1981:147; Scupin 1980, 1998). In modern Thai society, women's roles that are in accord with a *khana mai* perspective go along with a strong sense of faithful duty and

¹⁵ Maryam Jameelah, born Margaret Marcus in the state of New York in 1934, became fascinated early on with the Orient and was critical of Western culture. Eventually she converted to Islam in 1961. At that time, she had already been involved with Islamic missions in New York for two years, and had corresponded with Abul A'la Maududi, a leader of Pakistan's Jama'at Islami. In 1962, she moved to Pakistan. For more information on her biography, see Esposito (2001:54–58).

¹⁶ Banjong bin Kasan has translated various Islamic essays and books, such as *Toward understanding Islam* by Maududi and *Milestones* by Sayyid Qutb. Banjong currently plays an important role as an instructor for Muslim converts at Santichon Foundation, a *salafi* institution.

responsibility for Islamic reformation, and with enthusiastically embracing their faith. Women are encouraged to study Islam for their own personal guidance, just as do men.

Young *khana mai* women are interested in learning Arabic, and in adopting Arab culture as a part of Islam. The headscarf thus is regarded as mandatory, both as a marker of Muslim femininity and as a sign of religious piety. Women who considered themselves Islamic activists refuse to be called 'feminists', because this sounds western and secular.¹⁷ There is an underlying fear that the influence of western feminism might prompt Muslim women to engage in un-Islamic practices. This is a crucial factor, as it is used by the neo-orthodox Muslim activists in Thailand as an argument against all kinds of feminist theories and ideologies, including the very term 'feminism' itself. They have promulgated and implemented a pattern of living modelled after that of women in Islamic history. Thus, 'back to fundamental Islam' and, along with that, 'fulfil the pious woman's role' are prominent calls from various groups.

Sawvane Jitmoud states that young Muslim women are attracted by such calls for reforming their faith amidst the rapid change and complexity of Thai society. She points to the fact that women are struggling for their space in the community. When they first enter the circle of Islamic revival, the latter presents itself as the collective liberation of the *ummah*, or community, from un-Islamic and Western hegemony (Jitmoud 2005). Nonetheless, she does not touch on the issue of overt leadership in Muslim women's movements, including the capacity and authority of the specific organizations to interpret Islam from a women's perspective. However, according to Jitmoud's study, a strengthening of ethical sensibility has emerged among reformist Muslim women and in their identities, a phenomenon that has been recognized as an element of piety.

It seems that in Thai society Muslim women are viewed as part of the men's movement. However, Muslim women's issues became the key to many of the most significant mass movements in modern Thai Muslim society. In the most recent past, women have become very aware of their crucial role in organizing and mobilizing the masses, especially when it came to demanding the right to wear the veil. According to Jitmoud, the Muslim women's movements in

¹⁷ The idea of feminism has been discussed extensively among many Muslim women who return to Islam in a purification process. My informal conversational interviews taken in March–May 2009 and April–June 2010 in Thailand show that these women view feminism as being in opposition to Islamic values. Muslim women in the Islamic reformation are generally middle class and began to adopt Islamic concepts rather than imitating the Western feminist model. This reflects the dominant modern socio-political situation in the Muslim world that demands a return to the religiously based model of the Islamic Golden Age.

Thailand were part of the mass reformism. Nevertheless, Muslim women insisted that their struggle on behalf of Islam was different from men's with regard to both the social and personal actions involved.¹⁸ In many cases, however, Muslim women came to the politics of identity and space as members of the minority within the Thai state. Meanwhile, the *hijab* is a women's identity marker, indicating the negotiation of space and the power of social identification for women.

The Case of the Hijab Movement

When I was a girl, there were only about five old women in the village who wore the cotton shawl loosely wrapped around their head, with their face and neck exposed. Women would wear the shawls occasionally during formal Islamic activities, but change into a *telekung*¹⁹ during prayer times. I encountered a different type of Islamic scarf in 1985 when I visited my cousin who studied at the traditional Islamic school (*pondok*) at Koh Yoa, an island located in Pang-nga next to my home town, Phuket. My cousin was the first woman who wore the *hijab* in the village. A few years later, women who performed the *hajj* came back to Thailand with the new fashion, covering their heads, shoulders and necks with tightly fitting scarves. At the same time, there was a trend among Muslims in the upper South of Thailand to encourage their children to continue secondary and pre-college levels at Islamic boarding schools in the Deep South. They expected that the young people would thus not only acquire knowledge for their future careers in the secular education system, but also learn how to properly practice Islam. People in my village and around Phuket have been inspired by the new patterns of Malay dress and *tudong* (Malay-type headscarf), as well as by the Iranian *hijab* style.

Since the 1970s, the Thai Muslim Student Association (TMSA), as a coordinator of Muslim Student Associations (MSA) from various universities, has organized yearly activities for the Muslim community, for example, providing youth summer camps and rural development volunteer camps. In the first stage of their community-based programme, the topics addressed in

¹⁸ Many Muslim women activists and university students said that women's activities are different from men's, but that it is nevertheless women's duty, too, to propagate the fundamental truths of Islam (informal conversations and interviews, March–May 2009 and April–June 2010).

¹⁹ *Telekung* is a Malay word for a white, round cloth that tightly frames the face and covers the head. In a way, it resembles the *burqa*, but is different in design and colour.

their activities were related to strengthening faith and social justice. The issues of gender, women's role, sexual segregation, and women's dress were never raised in the first decade of the Muslim student movement.²⁰ During every summer break, Muslim students from southern Thailand spend about a week in my village and organize an ethics- and practice-oriented camp for Muslim youths. Muslims in the village, local government organizations, and student affairs offices at universities have been cooperating to support this youth programme. The ideas, for example, that are propagated by the Muslim students in the course of these activities are similar to those spread by various international Islamic-based organizations and groups influenced by the reformist ideas of modernist Islam. They aim at recreating Islamic ethos and social order, guided by the Qur'an and *sunnah*. The implementation of these ideas is characterized by an increasing use of Arabic religious terminology, the wearing of Arabicized attire by males and the *hijab* by females, and segregation between the sexes. The *hijab* has become the new symbol of Islamic femininity, even though it is still largely confined to the segments of women in schools and colleges. Many Thai Muslim mothers who grew up without wearing veils and head coverings find their daughters and other young women in their communities adopting the *hijab*, which is similar to the situation in many Muslim communities of Thailand.

The discourse of the Muslim women's movement in Thailand, which initially was closely linked to the discourses of male activists, achieved a degree of autonomy when women began constructing their own image of womanhood. The increasing identification of Thai Muslim women with the spirit of exploring space in the public sphere eventually led to the foundation of the first Islamic women reformist association in Thailand, the Muslim Women Organization of Thailand (MWOT), whose founders had started out as activists of the women's wing of TMSA. The organization began to work on a *hijab* campaign, and combined forces with Muslim politicians and intellectuals to fight for the veil during the *hijab* crisis in 1990 (Jitmoud 1994:16–24). Before MWOT became active in this field, a situation that eventually triggered pro-*hijab* demonstrations had already arisen in southern Thailand.

The *hijab* demonstration in Yala increased pan-Islamist sentiments, yet it was also an expression of general political unrest in Thailand. The first particular conflict between the modern Thai state order and the protagonists of Muslim women's identity on the national level broke out in the particularly

²⁰ Interview with Sawvane Jitmoud, 14 May 2009.

antagonistic setting of the Deep South. The 'Yala Teacher's Training College Incident' in February 1987 was the first time that young Muslims arose to actively opposing government policy. They held the view that forced compliance of Muslim students with the mandatory student uniform at the universities might fuel religious violence and dissociate the ethnic minority of Malay Muslims both from God's law and Thai state law. TMSA united the group and coordinated demonstrations. They demanded from the college administrators that female students be granted the right to wear headscarves in secular academic institutions. This gave rise to mass demonstrations of ten thousand protesters from religious schools. And, when a member of parliament from the Democrat Party spoke out against the agreement eventually reached, and against the new regulation by the Ministry of Education that allowed women to wear the *hijab* with their university student uniform, this aroused anger among local Muslims.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand (1994:279–300) has argued that the *hijab* crisis made Muslim identity visible in a society where the majority of people are Buddhists, and where Buddhist rhetoric and symbolism are used extensively by the Thai state. According to his interpretation, the incident mounted in a crisis of state legitimacy, as Muslims appealed to religion as a form of legitimacy that superseded that of the state. Moreover, the *hijab* crisis received unusual attention from the press, not least because the state always regards incidents in southernmost Thailand as indicative of a sensitive security problem.²¹ The Southern Border Provinces Administration Centre (SBPAC) also weighed in on this crisis and offered a compromise, suggesting that the *hijab* be worn only on Fridays. Muslim students rejected that proposal for religious reasons, considering it an 'innovation' that departed from the original principles of Islam, or *bid'a*, and therefore deviant. In response to the incident, the college administration tried to implement the 'anti-*hijab*' regulation step by step: first, students were allowed to wear the *hijab* for a few more days. Then there

²¹ Prior to the *hijab* demonstration in Yala there had already been a prominent conflict between young activists and security forces in Patani during Thailand's democratic period (1973–1976). At that time, the protesters were also primarily led by students from various universities in central Thailand (see, for example, Ockey 2008:140; Surin 1985). The outrage in the face of incidents of state violence in major Muslim regions over the past six decades poses a challenge to the Thai nation-state and its power over its sovereign territory (Montesano and Jory 2008). This also contributed to strengthening the ethnic Malay-Muslim resistance. The separatist movements, such as PULO (Patani United Liberation Organization), one of the movements calling for a free Patani, also took advantage of the situation by demanding that Patani be released from Thai political control, because it was integrated into the Thai state during the Fifth Reign, with the deposition and imprisonment of its last sultan, Abdul Kedir (see, for example, Jory 2007; Davisakd 2008; Surin 1985).

would be three official warnings to those who refused to comply with college regulations. After that, students' parents would be called in, and finally the students would be asked not to come to college any more.

Even though this incident happened on the Thai-Malaysian border, its intensity was carried by the national Islamic mass movement to Muslim communities in central Thailand, and in particular among the various groups of the *khana mai*, where there were contending opinions about the interpretations of Islam by the national mass Islamic movement. After deliberating the issue on 27 January 1988, the National Security Council barred Muslim students who wore the *hijab* from going to class. Four days later, seven Muslim organizations, including the Muslim Lawyers' Association, the Thai Muslim Student Association (TMSA) and the Young Muslim Association of Thailand (YMAT), at a press conference in Yala voiced their support for those who wanted to uphold Islamic principles. Meanwhile, the office of the Chularajamontri decried the way the situation was handled, complaining that the SBPAC no longer sought their advice. A huge protest broke out in the south. The police and military were given orders to prevent Muslims from Bangkok and other provinces from joining the *hijab* protest in Yala. In February, however, ten thousand Muslims protested in front of the Yala Central Mosque, and the Thai authorities eventually allowed the students to wear the *hijab*. Still, there was some discrimination at the college against Muslim students who wore the *hijab* on the occasion of exams. Until May 1988, the new College Act allowed colleges to pass regulations concerning students' dress according to the local needs and culture (Sathanand 1994:287–289).

The strike in Yala eventually became part of a pattern of negotiating with various government agents in regarding both the content of policy and the means by which it was implemented. *Hijab* activists were mostly graduates of the secular education system. Some of them had studied Islam very thoroughly, which included strengthening their faith by joining Muslim students' activities at the respective educational institution. Only a small number of the activists were Muslim women, the majority of the protest leaders having been people who are now prominent scholars and activists in the south of Thailand, such as Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, the head of the Islamic Studies Department of Islamic College, Prince of Songkla University of Patani.²² The Muslim demonstrators at this incident became activists during the subsequent Islamic movement in the 1990s.

²² Interview with Ibrahim Narongraksakhet, 11 June 2010.

The historiography of Thai Muslim scholars does provide much detail about the local women's involvement in the incident.²³ It was viewed as a conflict between the Thai nation-state, represented by the college administration, and young Muslims, a minority group that was subject to state power and struggled for its right to behave in accordance with its faith. Local Muslim politicians became active in this situation in order to create political consciousness and responsibility.²⁴ The *hijab* became popular among Muslims throughout the country after a Muslim member of parliament from Narathiwat, Areepen Uttarasin, addressed this issue while he was Vice Minister of Education (Prapertchob 2005). The rule granted special permission to Muslim students who wished to put on the veil. When this prominent public figure spoke out in favour of the *hijab*, the *hijab* became part of the standard dress expressing Muslim women's religious identity. Ultimately, the *hijab* crisis led to a change in the attitude of the Thai people, who came to accept plurality. For Muslim women it became a successful act of symbolic resistance, an expression of their opposition to Thai authority in public policy. However, the *hijab* movement also came to symbolize a specific form of religiosity. It not only leads to a separation between Muslim and non-Muslim women, but also to a split among the Muslim women themselves, as those who decided not to wear the veil became isolated from the reformist movements. And last but not least, it rooted gender relations in religious power and political dedication.

The image conveyed by women's dress from the Islamic Revolution in Iran in the late 1970s became obviously used in an attempt to provide women with an identity and with types of activism that set them apart from the male Muslim leaders. The challenge for the Muslim women's movement in its first phase was not only the government, but also the official body of Islamic representatives headed by the Chularajmontri. As far as the political context is concerned, the incident happened under the

²³ See Prapertchob (2005:109); Din-a (2009); *Matichon Weekly*, 16 June 1988; Deep South Watch (2009).

²⁴ Marut Bunnag, Minister of Education, asked the Teachers' Training College to comply with the Muslim students' demands. But Sawai Pattano, Deputy Minister of Interior, was reported by the media to have voiced his disagreement with Minister Marut's accommodating order, saying that it violated regulations that should be applied to all without exception, and that it created a breach of national unity. Several Muslim members of the Democrat Party—Dhen Toh-Mena, Areepen Uttarasin, Wan Muhamad Noor Matha, and Somboon Sithimont, who were the representatives from Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala and Krabi, respectively—, resigned from the elections in 1988 protesting against Sawai's views. However, a member of parliament who vacated his position during the incident, Areepen Uttarasin, reentered the position under the new party alliance, New Aspiration Party (NAP).

government of the Democrat Party in 1990. Muslim politicians played a role in pushing the bill that would allow Muslim women to wear the veil in educational institutions. Meanwhile, the MWOT was active in mobilizing social support around Muslims leaders, striving for a regulation, borne by common consent among Muslim communities, to permit wearing the *hijab* in official ceremonies, at the workplace, and in photos on women's ID cards and passports. Unwelcome support by the Chularajamontri posed an obstacle when the group was mobilizing the campaign. In 1990/92, they organized several forums on the issue of rights and responsibility with regard to the *hijab* all around the country, but mostly in Bangkok. MWOT gained support from the prominent advisors in senior *khana mai* groups with regard to the issue of religious judgment in accordance with Islamic principles and practice. Muslim scholars of the Jama'at Al-Islam and the Council of Muslim Organizations of Thailand (CMOT) had continued to develop a legally binding position in support of the struggle of MWOT. At the same time, other prominent, younger *khana mai* movements, such as TMSA and YMAT, closed ranks to persuade the Chularajamontri to take action as an official Islamic leader of Thailand who is authorized to push the legislation (Jitmoud 1994:19–21). And yet, even after the bill was passed, MWOT continued to push the *hijab* issue. In that process, they even had access to domains usually closed to women: in orthodox Muslim society, it is uncommon for women to deliver speeches on Islam in *salafi* spaces, such as the Al-Atiq Mosque and The Foundation of Islamic Centre of Thailand, Bangkok.

The Rise of Neo-Orthodox Muslim Women

After the *hijab* crisis, MWOT became the national leader of Muslim women's groups, having established the precedent for Muslim women activism in Thailand. However, other groups of modernist Muslim women in the South and all around the country also emerged at the same time. New Muslim women's movements in the 1990s to 2000s tended to be critical of the discourses of the Islamic legislative system of action, which attaches more importance to *taqwa*, or religious piety, than to social relations. This emphasis on piety, however, was central to re-establishing the ties between the Islamic 'golden age' and modern society, and was therefore a central component of the utopian vision. Because the *salafi* utopia has a deep-seated hostility toward anything western and Jewish, it clings more tightly to Arab traditions and religious identity, which it associates with the purer version of Islam. As a result, the secular academic system and unsegregated sexual settings are

rejected. The neo-orthodox Islamic women's movement sought to emulate the lives of the Prophet's wives, and spoke out against all kinds of display of women's beauty. *Nisa*, the leading magazine for Muslim women in Thailand and a major medium for the display of *hijab* fashion, is an example of what is being rejected by these new and young Muslim women's movements. In the *salafi* conception, promoting the role and capacity of women requires the promotion of women's *taqwa*, which is at the core of re-Islamization for women who take pedagogical roles within the *ummah*.

As far as normative conceptions of personhood among new *salafi* men are concerned, the main issue that concerns them is *bid'a*, or innovation, in Islam. The *salafi* regard innovation in the Islamic creed as a potential cause of rifts amongst Muslims and future generations. They hold the view that *khana kau* Muslims are engaging in *bid'a*, such as when they celebrate the Prophet Muhammad's birthday (*maulid an-nabi*). Due to the influence of global Islamic intellectuals on Muslim communities in Thailand, new movements emerged among the diverse groups of *khana mai*. The path taken by the domestic Islamic movement from the 1990s until today is marked by the spread of a more rigorous Salafism in Thailand.

Nahdatul Muslimat, the most recently established association of neo-orthodox Muslim women, was set up in 2005 and is linked to the men's organization Al-Jama'at, headed by Salman (a pseudonym), or *Sheikh* Salman. He encouraged the formation of Nahdatul Muslimat, which started out as a small study group (*halqoh*) of three young women living in the same *salafi* community in Bangkok. The hosting of Muslim women's workshops, youth camps, and training courses, attracted further members, and it eventually grew into a mass movement of pious women. In terms of educational and social background, the Nahdatul Muslimat leaders are young, lower middle class women from modern families with university education and student activists from central Thailand.

Within the context of serious debates regarding Islamic ideologies and practices, *Sheikh* Salman is one of many well-known Islamic scholars who actively participate in these discussions among activists and scholars in different sects and groups. He is passionate about clarifying the religious standpoint on modern issues and critiquing contemporary social practices. The kind of Islamic activism promoted by *Sheikh* Salman has shaped the daily lives of many Muslim youth in modern Thai society. Young Muslim men and women, especially undergraduate students who are confronted with the realities of living in a secular society, are impressed by *Sheikh* Salman's teachings and interpretations. The powerful message of a reawakening Islamic society, spread by modern means of missionary work and communication

technologies, has contributed to an increase in young members and the establishment of new orthodox Islamic networks.

Nahdatul Muslimat has played a significant role in women's activities, and is loosely linked to Al-Jama'at. These groups take an active stance on gender issues in Islam from the orthodox ideological perspective. The activities of the group members aim at reviving the faith through self-reformation. They accuse others of perpetuating un-Islamic customs and household rituals, and view themselves as role models that provide guidance to future generations. Their efforts centre on cultivating spiritual virtues and finding the answers to legal questions, which are submitted to the *sheikh* so he will issue a judgment. Many members of the group have changed their formerly unveiled appearance, wearing the *hijab* and eventually even donning an *abaya* and the *niqab*, a face veil covering the lower part of the face (up to the eyes). In addition, they dissociate themselves from what they refer to as '*jahiliyya*'²⁵ and adopt a pious habitus that together form part of the strategic means of strengthening the Muslim community through the collective practice of embodied pious living.

These young middle class Muslims from secular, educated backgrounds who are active in modern Islamist movements,²⁶ such as in the Al-Jama'at and in the Nahdatul Muslimat, consider Islam to be a modern ideology that guides society as a whole. The group-defining lines of antagonism, however, are not solely anti-western and anti-Zionist. A certain degree of 'Islamic enmity' is also fostered, and modern Muslims are called upon to reject the *shi'a*.

Nahdatul Muslimat members have stated that the moral duties and social responsibilities rest on the belief that the sole basis for the superiority of any person over another is piety and righteousness.²⁷ In the context of the predominant patriarchal ideology that is prevalent within these Islamic

²⁵ Behaviour and cultural practices associated with the age of ignorance and barbarism in Arabia before the coming of Islam; more recently, this term came to be used to refer critically to western and other non-Muslim traditions.

²⁶ The term Islamism and its various definitions have been subject to much debate. In this study, Islamism is term to refer to a conception of Islam that constitutes a religious, moral, social, economic, and political system ascribed to by new Islamic movements. It emphasizes the enforcement of Islamic law and pan-Islamic political unity, including the elimination of non-Islamic influences from society. Islamism can be defined as a form of identity politics that aims at the revitalization of the Muslim community. Central figures of modern Islamism whose thinking continues to exert influence on the Islamic movement in Thailand is among others as mentioned before Sayyid Qutb (see Fuller 2003:21).

²⁷ They point to passages in the Qur'an that enjoin piety and refer to the wives of Prophet Muhammad and of His Companion as social role models.

revivalist movements, the neo-Orthodox ones in particular, women draw on these coexisting meritocratic discourses that link status to piety and righteousness. These women cultivate religiosity, modesty and piety as one way of raising their status in a community where other means are not available. Hence, the confluence of a patriarchal social environment with discourses on status and piety has encouraged their activism in their communities.

Although the visions of the women's movement and gender power relations appear rigid, the views of actors within organization are emancipatory, insisting that they are struggling to secure a space for women believers under the non-Muslim state power. The views and approaches towards Islam highlight the process and boundaries of women's piety. The value placed on outward markers of piety, especially the veil and, even more so, the *niqab*, is meaningful when it comes to cultivating a specific type of religiosity in the modern Muslim community. Piety is mostly performed in the role of women described as religious. Women perceive wearing the veil as a mandatory religious obligation, and donning it as a rite of passage that marks a transition to a fully committed religious life. Consequently, the outward appearance of this specific group of the Islamic social movement does not only indicate their pious aspects and roots, but also promotes the piety movements they belong to.

The discourses on gender piety in Islam among the first generation of *khana mai* women activists (such as those organized in MWOT) and the neo-orthodox *khana mai* of Nahdatul Muslimat have created a new framework for the role of Muslim women in contemporary Thailand. However, important differences exist. Hence, the young Nahdatul Muslimat members, in compliance with the strict agenda of their organization, have, unlike the older generation that underwent a secular generation, turned away from studying in the secular education system. The conception of Islam and the worldviews of these younger women are different from that of the older generation. Such generational differences even exist within the same organization, such as between younger and more senior Nahdatul Muslimat members. Some of them have opted to continue their education within the more recently established alternative education systems: at so-called 'home schools' and 'home universities', they manage their own curriculum and network with the new generation of pious Muslim women all around the globe.

The Islamic reformation movement and the mutual cooperation between Nahdatul Muslimat and Al-Jama'at contain important insights into understanding of why the current Muslim women's movement in Thailand operates against the secular legal system, liberal political economy, and especially

modern education system, in spite of the fact that earlier generations of the Muslim women's movement in the country emerged out of, and fought their battles within the secular educational system, the *hijab* movement in Yala being an example. The views of the neo-orthodox movement regarding women's productive role in the Islamic reformation contributes to the increasingly conservative interpretation of gender and religious identity in the lives of Muslim women both in Islamic countries and secular states. As Saba Mahmood (2005:139) has pointed out, the discourse of piety, oriented towards relearning ethical sensibilities and transforming the selves of women to create a new social and moral order, neither argues for gender equality, nor does it reinforce traditional gender roles. Instead, it attaches value to outward markers of piety, such as the veil, as a means for cultivating religiosity. Even though the movement does not specifically engage in politics, its actions still have political implications: its efforts to remodel aspects of social life, such as the family and education, at the same time fall under the aegis of the contemporary nation-state, and so necessarily entail political consequences.

Conclusion

The principal challenge for Muslims in the modern Thai nation-state, particularly in the face of the government's assimilationist policies pursued up until the 1990s, is how to sustain an Islamic identity in the context of modernization, secularism, and multiculturalism. Women became the crucial group for the maintenance and transmission of both faith and culture. The general idea held by Thai society about Muslim women was that they are subject to male dominance. The basic image of Muslim women in Thailand promoted by the government, press, and various Muslim authorities is regarded exclusively in terms of identity, an identity which is primarily marked by the veil. This emphasis on the veil was reinforced particularly by the symbolic representation of Muslim identity through women's scarf in the more general debate about the minority status of Muslims in Thailand vis-à-vis the modern state. The 'Yala Teacher's Training College Incident' was an event, in which the significance of the veil for Muslim identity politics in Thailand became particularly visible.

The Thai state has also utilized and manipulated the revitalization of Islam among women for purposes of consolidating its political power and ensuring its continued existence. Hence, different government bodies have created pro-Islamic laws and policies in order to gain votes and positions, especially in the Deep South where Muslims are dominant. For example,

the first Chuan government of the Democrat Party (1992–1995) pushed for the right of women and girls to wear the headscarf in public spaces to be guaranteed by Thai civil law, including the right to wear Islamic dress in ID card and passport pictures. Further conducive to the Islamic reawakening among Muslim women has been the impact of global Islamic revivalism in Thailand since the late 1970s, which (initially) involved young people with a predominantly secular and scientific education. Particular views on gender relations and women are energetically propagated by religious scholars and activists within a large and flourishing body of literature and by information resources in a global online neo-*salafi* network, such as Islamhouse.com and IslamQA.com.

Muslim women's relationship to piety in Thailand is changing as a consequence of transformations of their status, which also affects other women in Southeast Asia. Their religiosity has become more conspicuous, with headscarves and *niqab* as very visible markers. Piety has become a norm that is highly compatible with the lifestyle of the elite. When women enter into institutions of higher learning, they set upon a path to become better trained to compete with men in the labour market. Such social changes raise important questions about the correct norms—or rituals of intimacy—by which women can function in the public sphere (Turner 2008). Regardless of whether Muslim women choose to wear or discard the veil, they critically engage western feminism. Hence, the characteristic attitude of neo-orthodox Muslim women towards western liberal feminism informs how they view Islam as a way to accommodate Muslim women's rights. So wearing the veil is considered to be empowering, as it allows women to enter public spaces and also challenges the male *ulama's* exclusive claim to dominant status in the religious sphere. At the same time, discarding the veil is not a heresy in the eyes of many other Muslim women in Thailand, who are either syncretist or identify themselves as liberal young Thai Muslim women. Moreover, by discarding the veil they distance themselves from predominantly middle-class practices of gender segregation. Hence, displays of public piety are forms of distinction that mark identity and social class (Bourdieu 1984). In this regard, clothing and the involvement in group or community activities of the Islamic movement reveal how the middle-class habitus has been valued and judged among *khana mai* reformists.

The scarf does thus not only represent Muslim identity in Thai society and the right to practice one's belief, but also embodies commitment towards a particular ethic and towards the achievement of a new social order through personal transformation. Muslims are searching for ways of practicing, even living Islam that will strengthen their faith. The status accorded to Muslim

women in Thailand is based on their level of religious participation. If they are actively engaged enough in the practice of their faith they are regarded as *muminah*, that is, pious female believers. From the perspective of these women, those who do not wear the *abaya* and the *niqab* are not yet 'committed *salafiyya*' who are capable of being good Muslim women. Hence although neo-orthodox women emphasize the emancipatory power of their faith, the moral hierarchy they assert establishes unequal power relations along new lines of antagonism.

TRANSNATIONAL

WOMAN AS THE CONSTITUTIVE OTHER?
THE PLACE AND MEANING OF 'WOMAN' IN
THE WORLDVIEW OF THE TABLIGHI JAMA'AT

Farish A. Noor

Introduction

This paper looks at the place and role of women in the discursive economy and religious praxis of the Tablighi Jama'at in Indonesia, and addresses the issue of how this 'Other' is framed in the worldview of a homosocial Muslim religious movement. Much has already been written about the Tablighi Jama'at, which has to rank as one of the world's biggest lay missionary movements today, and certainly the biggest lay missionary movement in the Muslim world (Masud 2000; Metcalf 1982, 2002).¹ Most of the studies on the Tabligh have made mention of the fact that it began as an exclusively

¹ The origins of the Tablighi Jama'at go back to the late 1920s when it was formed by Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Kandhalawi (d. 1944), whose family was closely linked to the Deobandi leadership and its sister school, the Mazahirul-Ulum in Saharanpur. The Tablighi Jama'at was created at a time of intense rivalry between Muslims and Hindus in India. The movement sought to purify Indian Islam of Hindu and Christian influence, and tried to win back Muslims who had been converted by the Hindu revivalist movements in the country. Unlike the Deobandis, the members of the movement avoided direct confrontation with Hindu or Christian groups. Metcalf (2002) notes that the Tablighi Jama'at could be compared to the Western Alcoholics Anonymous movement that started around the same time: both organizations sought to reform their followers from within, and to improve their moral qualities while regulating their public behaviour. Rejecting politics and political activism of any kind, the movement emphasized its peaceful (*sukun*), passive and gradualist approach instead. Members of the movement were expected to take part in communal activities and join in their missionary efforts. The movement spread all over the world from Europe to Asia and was held together by its close internal linkages and networks. In time it penetrated into many guilds, business communities and elite networks as well. In most cases, however, its members were ordinary Muslim males from the lower levels of society. The movement has always been able to attract such followers thanks to its emphasis on the egalitarian ethos of Islam. By the end of the twentieth century the regular congregation of Tablighis in Raiwind, Pakistan and Tungi, Bangladesh, could attract several million followers, making it the second biggest gathering of Muslims after the annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Masud 2000; Metcalf 1982, 2002; Jones 1989).

male enterprise, inviting the support and active participation of Muslim men who were called upon to convert their fellow Muslims to return to the 'proper path' of Islam and Muslim religious praxis.

Though the Tabligh originated from South Asia, it has now become a global phenomenon and has established one of the biggest communication networks of any missionary movement in the world today. Yet the movement seems—on the surface at least—to be dominated entirely by Muslim men. This raises all sorts of questions related to the funding, support networks, logistical organization and ultimate political goals (if any) of the movement. Another question that is often overlooked is how this movement, dominated as it is by Muslim men, sees women in their lives. What role, if any, is there to be played by Muslim women in the revival of Islam? What is the ideal role and purpose of Muslim women as far as the Tabligh is concerned?

The aim of this paper is to focus on the Tablighi Jama'at in Southeast Asia, and on Indonesia in particular, and to ask if the arrival of the Tabligh to that country has in any way altered its views on women in Muslim society and religious praxis. This question is being also asked in the context of present-day developments in contemporary Indonesia where women have historically played a vital and visible role in the development of society. By the time of the Tabligh's arrival to Indonesia in the early 1950s, Indonesian Muslim women were already prominent in the fields of business, politics, and education—and thus it was the Tabligh that had to adapt to the norms and mores of Indonesia first. Today, as the status of Islam and Muslim women are being debated again against the wider backdrop of gradual Islamization and heated debates over issues like polygamy, where is the Tabligh's stand; and how does it frame the Muslim woman in the context of its long-term, gradualist missionary struggle?

We begin our enquiry by returning to the basics first: for before we address the question of the Tabligh's views of women in the present day, we ought to look closely at how it has framed the concept of the ideal Muslim woman of the past. In order to do this, we shall start by looking at the framing of women in the foundational texts of the Tablighi Jama'at itself.

*Differentiating between the Tabligh's View of
the Historical Muslim Woman and Women in the Here-and-Now*

*Sungguh, engkau adalah utusan Allah un-
tuk kaum laki-laki dan juga wanita*
Verily, you are God's messenger to men as
well as women.²

It goes without saying that the Tablighi Jama'at has been, and remains, a complex movement to study due to the simple fact that it has always been a mass movement made up of a myriad of subjectivities, and thus of very different life histories and personal narratives. Most scholars would concede that it is practically impossible to account for the Tabligh and its world view if we choose the path of analysing the micro-histories of each and every member; and even if such a thing was attempted we may still not get to the core of the movement's identity, for the movement has always been a dynamic one, adapting to local situations and contexts, and evolving in the process.

Nor do we suggest that there is such a thing as an 'essence' to the Tabligh that would account for its identity and constitution; for the likelihood is that the Tabligh, like all mass movements—be they religious or secular—has at best a nominal identity that is kept together by a number of key nodal points in its discourse.

As our focus here is on the Tablighi Jama'at in Southeast Asia, it is to the Tabligh in that region that we turn to, and to their texts that we look for the answers. Our argument will be that the Tablighi Jama'at—as a fundamentalist-literalist faith renewal movement—derives its ideas and understanding of women primary from textual sources, namely the foundational texts of the movement that were written by the pioneer-founders of the Tabligh itself.

It has been noted earlier that the Tablighi Jama'at is a transnational movement for faith renewal that originated from North India and only arrived in Southeast Asia in the early 1950s. This means that by the time the movement began to leave its mark on the Malaysian-Indonesian archipelago it had already developed for and by itself a sense of group identity that was shaped by the ideas of its pioneer-founders. In Southeast Asia, the primary texts of the Tablighi curriculum (*Tablighi Nisaab*)³ that contain the

² Saying attributed to Asma binti Yazid, quoted in Maulana Muhammad Zakaria Al-Khandalawi's 'Book of the Prophet and his Companions' (Al-Khandalawi [2003], Book V:557).

³ The foundational texts that are part of the *Tablighi Nisaab* are the *Hayatus Sahabah*, *Faza'il-e-A'maal*, *Fazail-e-Sadqaat* and the *Muntakhab-e-Ahadis*.

teachings of the founders of the movement have been translated in full by local members of the movement in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and other countries. These include the works of the Tablighis' founders Maulana Muhammad Ilyas Khandalawi, Maulana Yusuf Khandalawi and Maulana Muhammad Zakaria al-Khandalawi, such as the *Himpunan Fadhilah Amal; Hadits Pilihan: Dalil-Dali Enam Sifat Para Sahabat; Kehidupan Para Sahabat*; and the *Fadhilah Sedekah*.⁴ Among these, the *Himpunan Fadhilah Amal* is one of the most often referred to by the leaders and teachers of the Tabligh in the course of their sermons and missionary work; and happens to be one of the texts that is most often consulted in the learning (*tarbiyyah*) sessions we have witnessed and participated in during the course of our fieldwork in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

The *Himpunan Fadhilah Amal* by Maulana Muhammad Zakariya Al-Khandalawi has been translated in full by members of the Tabligh themselves, namely Ustaz Abdurrahman Ahmad, Ustaz Ali Mahfudzi and Ustaz Harun Ar-Rasyid.⁵ It is a hefty volume—and an expensive one by the standards of the ordinary Malaysian, Indonesian or Thai member of the Tabligh—and as such it was not surprising that few copies of it were found among the possessions of the Tablighis themselves.⁶

Himpunan Fadhilah Amal, edited and translated by Ahmad, Mahfudzi and Ar-Rasyid (Al-Khandalawi 2003) is a compilation of seven works by Maulana Muhammad Zakariya, namely the *Kitab Fadhilah al-Quran*, *Kitab Fadhilah Shalat*, *Kitab Fadhilah Dzikir*, *Kitab Fadhilah Tabligh*, *Kitab Kisah-kisah Sahabat*, *Kitab Keruntuhan Umat Islam dan Cara Mengatasinya*, and *Kitab Fadhilah Ramadhan*. The compilation begins with the *Kitab Fadhilah al-Quran* that brings together forty narrated traditions and sayings of the Prophet (*empat puluh Hadits*) alluding to the primacy of the Qur'an as the sacred foundational text of Islam. Having established the primacy of the Qur'an as the foundational text of Islam, the next book is the *Kitab Fadhilah Shalat*, which explains the necessity of prayer and worship. The tilting of interpretation and exegesis continues in the two following books, the *Kitab*

⁴ See Al-Khandalawi (2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c).

⁵ See Al-Khandalawi (2003). There are at least two versions of this complete compilation of the *Fadhilah Amal*, and though the contents are exactly similar, the only difference happens to be the size of the books themselves: one comes in the larger format of measuring 18 by 32 centimetres, while the smaller version measures 14 by 21 centimetres.

⁶ More often than not, bulky tomes like these would be kept in the *markaz* of the Tablighis and used for teaching purposes, rather than being carried by the Tablighis on their excursions into the outside world. They remain, however, among the foremost Tablighi texts that are studied dutifully.

Fadhilah Dzikir and the *Kitab Fadhilah Tabligh*, where the foregrounding of the Tabligh and its practices grows more evident: the third book, the *Kitab Fadhilah Dzikir*, emphasises the importance of *dzikir* as a ritual practice that is part of Muslim lived religious life. As in the case of the previous books, the exhortation to the virtues of *dzikir* is preceded by copious references to both the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet and the testimonies of his companions. The *Kitab Fadhilah Tabligh* is the fourth book in the compendium of the writings of Zakariya Al-Khandalawi and outlines the importance of the Tablighis' work in enjoining the good and forbidding whatever is evil. Typically, the first chapter of the book once again returns to the Qur'an and cites numerous *ayat* from the Qur'an that encourage the practice of *amr bil ma'ruf wannahyi 'an almunkar*.⁷

It can be seen that there is a progression and development of themes from the first to the fourth books in the compilation: the first and second books firmly embed the Tabligh and their practices in Qur'anic scripture and Muslim orthodoxy, while the third and fourth outline the duties and rituals of the Tablighis as they embark on the process of self-purification and the moral cleansing of society—ending with the call upon the individual Muslim to leave his worldly attachments behind him and to seek the company of the pious and the righteous. It is in the fifth book, the *Kitab Kisah-kisah Sahabat*, that this idealized community is described in detail, and it is none other than the founding Muslim community from the first instance of Islam's genesis in the world.

The *Kitab Kisah-kisah Sahabat* happens to be the longest book in the compilation of Zakariya al-Khandalawi's writings. In the introduction to the book, the Maulana notes that it was written when he was ill and convalescing at home.⁸ An illness had overcome him suddenly, and he took it upon himself to write what would later come to be regarded as one of the classic works of Tablighi literature, the 'Book of the Prophet's Companions' (*Kitab Kisah-kisah Sahabat*). It is by far the biggest book in the compilation, running for more than two hundred pages. The outline of the book is simple enough: its chapters look at the Prophet's life and the lives of his companions; outlines their ascetic way of life and the many benefits of asceticism; self-discipline; the values of brotherhood and solidarity among the community; the ephemeral nature of the world and its attractions; the virtues of

⁷ These include the *ayat* from the following suras of the Qur'an: sura Fushshilat:33; sura Adz-Dzariyat:55; sura Thaha:132; sura Luqman:17; sura Ali Imran:104, 110; and sura An-Nisaa:114 (Al-Khandalawi [2003], Book IV, chapter 1:380–384).

⁸ Al-Khandalawi (2003, Book V:417f.).

sacrifice, heroism and honesty; and, of course, the exemplary lives of the first Muslims, beginning with the Prophet himself.

Naturally, in the elaboration of these themes it is the Prophet Muhammad who comes first in the list of model Muslims to be emulated. The companions of the Prophet are likewise presented as model Muslims who emulated the Prophet in every way they could: the future Caliph Umar was said to have come late to the mosque one day because he was unable to leave his house on account of the fact that his robe was being washed, and it was the only item of clothing he owned.⁹ Umar is presented as the most righteous of caliphs, and the author notes that since his passing not a single Muslim leader has been able to match his reputation for honesty and piety.¹⁰ There is also the story of the future Caliph Abu Bakar, whose moral scruples were so great that he could not rest after doubting whether his prayer and *dzikir* were performed correctly.¹¹

The 'Book of the Prophet's Companions' is, of course, a work of reconstructed history. As in the case of the *Kitab Fadhilah al-Quran*, *Kitab Fadhilah Shalat*, *Kitab Fadhilah Dzikir* and the *Kitab Fadhilah Tabligh* it happens to be one of the foundational texts of the Tablighi Jama'at. But as a work of history, it also serves the discursive function of backdating the movement to the original moment of Islam's arrival, and by doing so lays claim to the past as a justification for Tablighi practices in the present and future as well. As we have noted above, the depiction of the Prophet and his companions is naturally a subjective one that portrays the Prophet as a man of great piety, humility, kindness and un-worldliness (as compared to the portrayal of the Prophet Muhammad as a warrior or ruler, for instance, that is often found in the histories written by more politically inclined Islamists). It has to be noted that in the context of the Tablighi Jama'at's universe the *Kitab Kisah-kisah Sahabat* is the definitive work that presents the Tablighis with their ideal model Muslim to be emulated. Interestingly, the work also touches upon the lives of the first exemplary Muslim women, who are likewise praised for their piety and self-sacrifice.

There is, in fact, an entire chapter devoted to Muslim women at the time of the Prophet (Chapter X), and Maulana Zakaria recounts in some detail the lives of the wives of the Prophet and some other prominent Muslim women: Fatimah (pp. 543–545); Aisyah (pp. 545–546, 547); Umi Salamah and her *hijra* (pp. 547–549); Umi Ziyad (pp. 549–550); Ummu Haram (pp. 550–551); Ummu

⁹ Ibid. Book V:461).

¹⁰ Ibid. Book V:440–442).

¹¹ Ibid. Book V:438f.).

Sulaim (p. 551); Ummu Habibah (pp. 552–553); Zainab (pp. 553–555); Khansa and her four children (pp. 555–556); Syafiyah and the Jew (pp. 556–557); Asma and the virtuous women (pp. 557–559); Ummu Amarah at war (pp. 559–561); Ummu Hakim (p. 561); the martyrdom of Sumayyah Ummu Ammar (p. 562); the poverty of Asma binti Abu Bakar (pp. 562–564), her pilgrimage with Abu Bakar (p. 564), and her charity to others (p. 565); the pilgrimage of Zainab (pp. 565–566); and the selfless devotion and faith of Rubayyi' Binti Mu'awidz (pp. 566–567). Though the rest of the compilation addresses other matters related to faith and religious praxis,¹² it is here in Chapter X of the 'Book of Companions' that women are brought into close focus.

Gendering Piety: The Exemplary Women of the Tablighi Jama'at

The women who are discussed in Chapter X of Zakariya Al-Khandalawi's 'Book of the Companions of the Prophet' come from a mixed range of backgrounds: Aisyah, Fatimah, Zainab, Khansa, Syafiyah, Asma, Umi Salamah, Umi Ziyad, Ummu Haram, Ummu Sulaim, Ummu Habibah, Ummu Amarah, Ummu Hakim, Ummu Ammar, Asma binti Abu Bakar, Rubayyi' binti Mu'awidz and Zainab were women who lived during the time of the Prophet and the first Muslim community of companions, and some of them were married or related to the Prophet himself.

In Maulana Zakaria's rendering of Aisyah, it is interesting to note that there is no mention of the incident where she was accused of betrayal and infidelity, which was the cause of so much intra-Muslim strife both during and after the time of the Prophet. Instead, Zakaria recounts several tales of Aisyah's piety and charity, recounting how on one occasion she was given a hundred thousand Dirhams by a donor and chose instead to divide the money and give the entire sum away to the needy among the community. So destitute was Aisyah as a result of her charity that she was forced to break her fast with bread and olive oil only, and could never afford to eat meat.¹³ Zakaria also recounts Aisyah's penance when she accidentally killed a snake, only to be told in her dream later that the serpent was a Muslim who had

¹² The sixth book in the compilation is the *Kitab Keruntuhan Umat Islam dan Cara Mengatasinya*, which discusses the state of the Muslim *ummah* (that is presented as weak, disunited, lost and aimless as a result of the worldliness of Muslims) and how the apparent flaws and shortcomings of the *ummah* are to be corrected through *dakwah* work within the community. And the final text in the compilation is the *Kitab Fadhilah Ramadhan*, a work that lauds the virtues of fasting and the holy month of Ramadhan.

¹³ Al-Khandalawi (2003), Book V:545.

come to her in *hijab*;¹⁴ and how on another occasion she was seen giving alms to the poor while she herself was dressed in the poorest of clothes, her robe in patches.¹⁵

Zakaria's depiction of Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet, parallels that of Aisyah: he recounts in detail the extreme poverty of her household and how she was forced to clean the walls and floor of her home with her own clothes that were later reduced to rags. Despite the abject poverty of Fatimah, Zakaria extols her virtues as a pious Muslim who did not beg for help and who even refused the assistance of the Prophet, on the grounds that a pious Muslim would have to submit to the will of God without hope for recompense or aid in the world.¹⁶

Charity is also the primary virtue of Zainab, another of the Prophet's wives, and in Zakaria's telling of the story of Zainab he notes that not only did she refuse all forms of wealth and luxury during her marriage to the Prophet, but she also refused to accept the money allocated by the Caliph Umar to the wives of the Prophet after his death.¹⁷ Zainab is portrayed by Zakaria as a woman of outstanding piety and the one who sought to pacify the jealousy of Aisyah, the most favoured among the wives of Muhammad.¹⁸ On the occasion of the Prophet's illness as he was lying on his deathbed, he was asked by his wives who among them would die first after him. The Prophet replied: 'She among you with the longest arm', by which he meant the most generous among his wives. Zakaria then duly notes that it was Zainab who was the first among the wives of the Prophet to die after him.¹⁹

¹⁴ Ibid. Book V:546.

¹⁵ Ibid. Book V:546.

¹⁶ Ibid. Book V:543–545.

¹⁷ Ibid. Book V:554.

¹⁸ Zainab is unique among the wives of the Prophet by virtue of the circumstances of her marriage to him. She was first the wife of Zaid ibn Harits, a freed slave who was favoured by Muhammad himself. The marriage between Zaid and Zainab did not last, however, and they eventually divorced. Zakaria notes (Al-Khandalawi [(2003), Book V:553] that Muhammad wished to make it clear that although Zaid was seen and claimed by Muhammad as his foster son, there were no blood links between them and they were not of the same family. The Prophet then asked for Zainab's hand in marriage, though she initially refused. Then Muhammad claimed that he had been ordained by God to marry Zainab, and their marriage was, literally, made in heaven, according to the Qur'anic verse Al-Ahzab:37. After this divinely appointed marriage, however, Zainab was forced to contend with the rivalry of Aisyah, though Zakaria notes that throughout her life it was Zainab who defended the honour of Aisyah. After the death of Muhammad the Caliph Umar offered twelve thousand Dirhams to each of the wives of the Prophet, which Zainab refused and gave away as charity instead (Book V:553–555).

¹⁹ Al-Khandalawi (2003), Book V:554.

The story of Asma binti Yazid is given some attention by Zakaria too. He recounts how one day she approached the Prophet on behalf of the Muslim women of the community and asked Muhammad what would be the reward for the women. Asma noted that, unlike the men of the community, they were not allowed to engage themselves fully in the public domain: Muslim women were not allowed to travel, preach Islam, defend Islam, go on pilgrimages, or join in the Friday Jamaah prayers. Instead, their tasks were menial and secondary: taking care of the children and families, mending clothes, cooking, and looking after the men. Zakaria notes that at that point Muhammad turned to his companions and asked them: 'Have you heard such a wonderful question on faith as this before?', to which they replied in the negative. Muhammad then tells Asma that the work of women is every bit as important as that of the men, and that they will consequently receive the same reward in heaven, provided that they obey the rules and abide by their roles as obedient wives and pious believers in God.²⁰

It is interesting to note that Zakaria also includes in his tenth chapter accounts of Muslim women who joined the Prophet and his companions in times of war, such as Shafiyah of the battle of Uhud, Ummu Umarah at the battles of Uhud and Hudaibiyah, Ummu Ziyad who took part in the battle of Khaibar, and Ummu Haram who took part in the battle of Bahrain. In both cases he notes that the women who joined the men as they fought the enemies of the Prophet did so only with the permission of their families and husbands; and their role was to serve as helpers to the column and to aid the men who were wounded on the battlefield.²¹ In only one case—that of Shafiyah, who fought at the battle of Uhud—do we read of a Muslim woman who actually kills an enemy herself without the assistance of a man.²² Zakaria's emphasis, however, is less on the martial skills of these Muslim women, but more on their willingness to sacrifice themselves and die for the sake of Islam: sacrifice here goes beyond the simple sacrifice of time (*tafrigh-e waqt*) and takes on the form of physical self-sacrifice and the will to martyrdom, as recounted in the stories of Muhammad's male companions

²⁰ Ibid. Book V:557–559).

²¹ Ibid. Book V:556 f., 559–561, 549 f., 550 f.).

²² Shafiyah at the battle of Uhud was said to have killed a Jewish spy who entered the camp of the Muslims, by herself. Chastising the feeble Hasan Ibn Tsabit who could not carry out the act himself, she then decapitates the fallen Jew and throws his head out of the camp compound, for others to see (Al-Khandalawi [2003], Book V:557).

Saidinna Ali,²³ Hanzhalah,²⁴ Amr ibn Jamuh,²⁵ Mush'ab ibn Umair,²⁶ Wahab ibn Qobus,²⁷ and others.

It should be noted that all of the women who are featured in Zakaria's tenth chapter are historical figures who lived during the time of Muhammad and the first *sahaba*. That Zakaria chose to place them in the same book as the other male companions of the Prophet indicates the extent to which he valued their contribution to Islam at its foundational moment, and how highly he ranked them among the model Muslims to be emulated today. Though their personal biographies are in many ways different, and each of them was a unique personality in her own respect, it is interesting to note the similar themes that Zakaria chose to foreground in his narrative treatment of the first Muslim women of the *ummah*.

Above all, the exceptional women found in Zakaria's account of the first Muslim community stand out by virtue of their piety, charity and willingness to sacrifice themselves entirely for the sake of the Prophet and Islam: from Aisyah and Fatimah who are reduced to dressing in tattered rags and whose meals consisted of little else than plain bread and water, to Zainab who even gave up all coloured cloth, jewellery and other luxuries for the sake of pleasing her husband, the Prophet. The women are also lauded for their moral courage in the face of danger, and their willingness to die for the Prophet and Islam in times of war. Repeatedly Zakaria makes use of the narrative device of 'piety lost' when he recounts these tales of wonder, and notes that the Muslim women of his own time (like Muslim men) have lost their way and are no longer able or willing to make such great sacrifices today, despite the bigger sacrifices made by others before them.

The other notable feature of all these women is how they have been thoroughly de-sexualized in Zakaria's depiction of them: Aisyah, Zainab, Fatimah, et al are presented as idealized models of moral and pious conduct; but there is little in terms of their womanhood or sexuality that comes across in the tales that are recounted. As noted earlier, Zakaria does not mention the incident of *fitna* involving Aisyah and the accusations of impropriety made against her, which were so disruptive to the moral order and discipline of the fledgling Muslim community then. Likewise no account is

²³ Al-Khandalawi (2003, Book V:500).

²⁴ Ibid. Book V:501).

²⁵ Ibid. Book V:501 f.).

²⁶ Ibid. Book V:503 f.).

²⁷ Ibid. Book V:505 ff.).

given at all of the private lives of these women or their marital relations with their respective husbands.

Exemplary moral conduct is here gendered in feminine terms—in the same way that aggressive missionary activism is gendered in the case of men, who have to fight in order to spread the faith, and kill if necessary. If missionary expansionism is seen as the duty of men, then pious observation and preservation of societal order is the duty of women. Women are thus idealized as the bearers of piety, order and wholesomeness: Zakaria applauds the role played by Zainab, for instance, who does not complicate matters in the Prophet's household by rising to the jealousy of Aisyah: instead she adopts a passive stance and maintains familial order by harmonizing the relationship between them, and this is presented as the ideal mode of conduct for pious women whose role it is to maintain the harmony of the family. The good, pious woman is thus the one who upholds the order of the family and society, defends the good name of her husband and father, and who above all obeys.

*From Foundational Texts to Living Praxis:
How Does the Tabligh View and Treat Muslim Women Today?*

Women are the Devil's trap for men.

(Fahim 2008:12)

Having looked at the foundational texts of the Tablighi Jama'at and how they present the image of the idealized Muslim woman in terms where piety is gendered, we need to ask: is there an economic loss of meaning or distortion when these foundational texts are interpreted and put to work in the context of the here-and-now?

The Tabligh, we need to remember, is a literalist-fundamentalist pietist movement that seeks the restoration of a moral-religious order that is cast as perfect in the past and lost in the present. Its aim, as has been noted by countless scholars of the Tabligh, is to bring Muslims today back to a state of pristine, perfected Islam as it was understood and embodied during the foundational moment of Islam's genesis. To this end, the foundational texts of the Tabligh are of crucial importance as they set the stage for what can be described as the moral and spiritual reconstruction of Muslim society—in a manner not entirely different from that of present-day Christian Reconstructionists who likewise adopt a literal interpretation of Old Testament scripture as a model for present-day Christian social and religious life.

Central to the reconstruction efforts of the Tabligh is the role played by the idealized Prophetic type that is found in the narratives and stories of Muhammad, who is presented time and again as the most perfect—and indeed, the *only*—model for Muslim religious behaviour and praxis. However, it has to be noted that the Prophetic model is limited to Muslim males who are better able to approximate the model behaviour of the Prophet through what can be termed Prophetic mimesis. The Tabligh's strong emphasis on literally modelling its members on the archetype of the Prophet can be seen in how its members choose to live, act, dress, eat, pray and carry out their religious devotions in a manner that resembles the Prophet's as closely as possible. But what then of Muslim women, who cannot come as close if they wish to model themselves on the Prophet, for obvious reasons that have less to do with piety and more with biology?

In the foundational texts of the Tablighis there are, as we have shown, examples of what can be described as feminine ideal types for Muslim women to emulate and mimic: these are the women at the time of the Prophet, who are seen as models for Muslim women to emulate today. But as the Tabligh has grown to become a world-wide phenomenon that is present in every country on the planet, we also need to take into account how it has adapted itself to the social norms and mores of those societies it now finds itself in; and so we return to Southeast Asia once again, and specifically to Indonesia.

Indonesian women, like their counterparts across the archipelago, have always been involved in the social arena and up to the nineteenth century were widely seen in the worlds of business, education, and later politics. It is hardly a surprise, then, that many of them were also the pioneers of Indonesia's nationalist movement and took part in the anti-colonial struggle that led to the departure of the Dutch and Indonesia's independence finally being won after the anti-colonial struggle of 1945–1949.

It has always been assumed that the spread of the Tablighi Jama'at worldwide was due almost exclusively to the efforts of Tablighi *men*, rather than women. In the case of the Tabligh's early arrival to Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand this seems to be the case as well, as the first delegations to the region in 1952 and 1955 were made up exclusively of men from the Indian subcontinent, who later worked with and through the Indian diaspora networks there to spread the message of the Tabligh during the first decade (Noor 2009).

However, recent work done on the Tabligh's activities in Africa and Asia by contemporary scholars has shown that more and more women have been attracted to the movement as well. Eva Fachrunissa Amrullah, for instance, has looked at how modern-day Muslim women in Indonesia have

begun to seek shelter under the wing of the Tabligh, perhaps as a gendered space where gender boundaries are regularly policed and where women are freer to explore and express their religiosity in an exclusively female domain (Amrullah 2008). But where does the Tabligh locate women in their worldview and the homosocial space of Tablighi activities?

We base our observations here on fieldwork that has been done on and among the Tablighi Jama'at across Indonesia since 2003.²⁸ Throughout our field research in Java, Madura, Sumatra, Sulawesi and West Papua, we were confined to an exclusively male environment where there was no contact whatsoever with any female members of the community (which underscores the importance of field research currently being carried out by female scholars on the Tabligh, for they alone can account for this under-researched area that cannot be studied by male scholars such as myself).

In almost all the cases we have studied, it was noted that the Tabligh's daily space was a homosocial one where the question of sexuality was, and remains, taboo.²⁹ And as the Tabligh revolves around men and their gendered mode of activist missionary work, women are seldom seen or spoken with/about. This does not, however, mean that women are entirely absent from the male domain of daily Tabligh life, for women do appear in the lectures, sermons, writings, and commentaries of present-day Tablighi scholars, in an albeit roundabout way: firstly, women are presented as sources of temptation that may lure men from their righteous path, and specifically from the missionary path of the Tablighis.

This is evident in the more popular writings of the Tablighis that come in the form of the pamphlets that are written, published and distributed by the Tablighis themselves, for internal consumption. One such work is the tract entitled *Bahayanya Jama'ah Tabligh Bagi Dunia Iblis dan Sekutunya*

²⁸ See Noor (2010, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2007, 2003).

²⁹ The questions of sex and sexuality have always been thorny subjects among the Tablighis we met and interviewed in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. Wary of their bodies and what their bodies may lead them to do, the Tablighis take considerable care of themselves so as to ensure that they remain fit enough to carry out their duties. While acts such as masturbation and homosexual relations are taboo, the body remains the first thing that comes under surveillance, control and care. Among the questions we attempted to raise while living with the Tablighis we met, the one on homosexuality proved to be one of the most thorny and complicated, as it was seen as a sensitive subject. However, it cannot be denied that in the exclusively homo-social space of the Tablighis, such acts were more than likely to happen, and it remains unclear what the Tablighis would do if such acts were discovered in their midst. Like many conservative Muslims the Tablighis regard homosexuality and masturbation as sinful acts, and we attended several discussions when the latter was brought up as an example of devilish practices that Muslims are meant to avoid.

(‘The danger posed by the Tabligh to the Devil and his works’, Fahim 2008) by Ustaz Abu Muhammad Fahim. There are several other tracts where the same theme is repeated, such as Ustaz Abu Salami’s *Dajjal vs Kerja Tabligh* (‘The Devil against the Tabligh’, Salami 2008) and Ustaz Aboe Istiqomah’s *Kerja Tabligh Kalahkan Iblis Syaitan dan Sekutu-Sekutunya* (‘The Tabligh’s work to destroy the Devil and his minions’, Istiqomah 2009).

Ustaz Fahim is one of the local Indonesian scholars and leaders of the Tablighi Jama‘at, and his tract is concerned primarily with the threat posed by the devil (*iblis*) and the plans that have been hatched by the devil to dominate the world and defeat the forces of good. The Ustaz notes that the devil is firmly rooted in the world that is also inhabited by humans and djinns, though allocated specific places, roles and spheres where his powers are at their strongest: the devil’s natural habitat is the toilet (Fahim 2008:10); his social circle is that of cinemas, nightclubs, discos and other places of entertainment (many of which, it has to be noted, had not even been invented yet at the foundational moment of Islam’s coming-into-the-world) (Fahim 2008:10); his scripture is in the form of stories, poetry and other forms of fictive art that lull the senses and dull the mind (Fahim 2008:11); his heralds and messengers are witches, soothsayers and fortune-tellers (Fahim 2008:11); his writing and scripture come in the form of lipstick, mascara, tattoos, piercings and other forms of bodily adornment (Fahim 2008:11); and *his trap for men is women* (Fahim 2008:11).

In this tract, as in many of the lectures and sermons we attended, women in general are presented as the root of temptation; but a *very specific form of temptation* in that they take men away from their missionary activism which is the basis of the Tabligh’s purpose. Here it has to be noted that the somewhat negative image of women among the Tabligh is not necessarily that of the tempting Jezebel, for she is not only seen as potentially dangerous thanks to her seductive powers. While Ustaz Fahim and many other Tablighi leaders bemoan the public visibility of women and the ‘dangers’ of modern fashion—including lipstick, mascara, tattoos and body-piercings—they also fear that even good women may be a problem for the Tablighis, as the latter are home-bound, and wish that their husbands would remain at home with them as well.

Here we see that the Tabligh’s view of women in the here-and-now is a complex one: on the one hand there is the now-familiar diatribe against seductive women who are the cause for the decline of faith and morals in men. But on the other hand the domesticated, home-bound woman equally poses a problem for them, for they represent the family and its static, sedentary ways. For a missionary movement that enjoins its members to go on the road

and stay on the road for as long as possible, the comfort of a stable, sedentary family life is seen as being equally dangerous as the perils of wild women with tattoos.

Ustaz Fahim underscores this point by reminding his fellow Tablighi readers that the devil may attack at any time and from all sides. Fahim praises the virtues of missionary *tashkil/khuru'j* as the greatest weapon in the arsenal of the good against the army of the devil, for it frees the individual from the world around him and sets him upon the path of pious contemplation and self-sacrifice. The martial virtues of hard work, bravery and stoicism are also lauded as the chivalric virtues of the Tablighis who are permanently engaged in this never-ending struggle to hold the forces of the evil at bay, and prevent the world from slipping into infernal darkness (Fahim 2008:62–66). But for this, the Tablighis must travel; and for them to travel, they need to break free from the debilitating clutches of domesticity and that feminine space called home.

It is interesting and important to note that it is upon this point that the Tablighi Jama'at differs from many other conservative fundamentalist movements in the world today: for while many Muslim conservatives (like their Christian and Hindu counterparts) would like to see women off the streets and back in the home, the Tablighis seem unsatisfied with that, for the home then becomes a gendered space that is feminine and signifies stasis. As an active minority group that needs to go out continually to change the world around them, the home is seen as anathema to the Tablighis for it stands for all that the movement resists: immobility and passivity. Domesticated women may be 'good' in the sense that they are not out in the world to tempt men in their work, but they remain 'bad' in the sense that they cling on to their men and prevent them from going out on the path of missionary activism.

This, then, brings us to the second dilemma faced by the Tablighis, which revolves around the question of marriage and its responsibilities upon Muslim men.

The Tablighis seem to be caught in a dilemma of their own making: on the one hand as conservative literalist-fundamentalists they are bound to their own literal interpretation of scripture and Prophetic history which is their only model for correct Muslim religious praxis. For them, the best example of Muslim normativity was set by the Prophet himself, and the only way to be a good Muslim is to approximate the model of the Prophet in the most literal mode of mimesis. However, on the other hand they are confronted with the obligation and necessity to marry, for that too is part of the Prophet's model (*sunnah*), and thus cannot be avoided (the Tablighis

therefore take a naturally dim view of celibacy as it is seen as un-Islamic and unnatural). However, marriage exposes the individual Tablighi to another sort of temptation altogether, which is the temptation to domesticity and the comforts of a homely life—which they decry as un-masculine, weak and ultimately morally corrupting. What, then, is to be done?

In keeping with other conservative-fundamentalist variants of normative Islam, the Tablighis openly support and defend polygamy as it is, in their eyes, based on the model mode of Muslim behaviour as set by the Prophet. Polygamy is not, however, seen as an excuse for wanton sexual excess or to serve other lustful ends, but is rather cast as something noble, pious and righteous—particularly when the women married are those who are themselves widows, orphaned or destitute.

On many occasions we attended lectures, sermons and classes where the practice of polygamy was staunchly defended by Tablighis who felt that it was and is a Prophetic exercise that is firmly rooted in Muslim normativity. One such defender of polygamy was Ustaz Talib Zulham of the Tablighi Jama'at *markaz* at Temboro, East Java, who was married to two women, and who intended to marry a third. Shortly after his own conversion to the Tabligh he settled in the Tabligh's Kampong Madinah of Temboro and married his two wives (who both came from Tablighi families). This, for him, was a conscious decision on his part to follow the *sunnah* of the Prophet to the letter. Though he admitted that there were occasionally problems between the two women, he was more irritated by the fact that liberal Islamic groups and NGOs in Indonesia were campaigning against polygamy, which for him constituted a direct attack on the ideal Prophetic type:

I tell you why I have two wives: I hate it when people attack our beloved Prophet, and make fun of the ways of the Prophet. All these liberals and Westerners, don't they understand that polygamy is part of Islam and it follows the model of the Prophet's own life? How can you make fun of polygamy, because that would be making fun of the Prophet's own life too? That would be insulting the Prophet, and insulting Islam as well.

No, I am proud to keep up the banner of Islam and I will raise the banner of polygamy too. Wherever I go, I bring both my wives with me, and I make them sit together in front of everyone, to show how we are a loving family. Even if they don't like each other, they have to do it for me. I keep telling them to share their food, to look after each other, to speak to each other when I am not there. Why? Because this is how I show the beauty of polygamy, so that everyone can see that polygamy is a wonderful thing. Polygamy is a beautiful thing, and is right for men.³⁰

³⁰ Interview with Ustaz Talib Zulham, Markaz Agung Tabligh Temboro Karas Magetan,

Ustaz Zulham's defence of polygamy has to be understood in the context of the Tablighi worldview that we have discussed earlier. It is important to note that his defence of polygamy is not couched on its permissibility for Muslim men. For what Ustaz Zulham is saying is that polygamy was a part of the Prophet's personal life history, and as such is also part of the *surah*, *sirah* and *sarirah* of the Prophetic ideal type. And as the Tablighis see the Prophet as the only model for Muslim behaviour, it also follows that polygamy is part of the *sunnah* of the Prophet. Hence for Ustaz Zulham rejecting or ridiculing the practice of polygamy is by extension a rejection or ridiculing of Islam itself, as it was lived and demonstrated by the only God-given model of Muslim behaviour.

Woman as the Constitutive Other to the Tablighi Jama'at:

Woman is therefore an integral part of the discursive universe of the Tablighi Jama'at; and despite the fact that in terms of its everyday normative praxis the Tabligh is seen as an exclusively male domain, the figure of the woman is there as its constitutive other. However, as much as the conservative leaders of the Tabligh may want to wish away the presence of women from this all-male space, they have been there from the beginning.

In the foundational texts of the Tabligh the model of the exemplary Muslim woman is there as a model for Muslim women today to emulate. In the present-day context of the Tablighis in Indonesia (as in the rest of the world) the living and visible presence of women in society is something that they cannot overcome, for the movement is one that seeks to engage with the world in order to change it, but in the course of doing so it has to confront the very real presence of real women who may not conform to their narrow and idealized notion of womanhood.

Even when the Tabligh succeeds in converting some Muslim women to their standard and norm of idealized Muslim female subjectivity, women remain a problem as they then come to represent the settled Muslim domesticity they reject as well. Thus whether in the home or in the streets, women mark the discursive boundary between the Tabligh's idealized sense of male missionary activism and all that is contrary to it—but like it or not, the one thing that the Tabligh *cannot do* is escape from women for they are,

August 29, 2008, and during the *khuruj* from Temboro to Surabaya via Malang, August 29–30, 2008.

by extension, the constitutive other that reminds men of their own identity and purpose as an active missionary movement.

We conclude this contribution with three caveats, however: the aim of this contribution was to seek an account of how the Tablighi Jama'at sees women in general, and to see if the textual sources of the movement can explain how and why women are seen as they are by the Tablighis themselves. Having said that, we would caution against any undue over-emphasis on the particularity or uniqueness of the Tablighi Jama'at, for our contention has always been that the Tablighis are part of the Muslim community as a whole and their ideas and beliefs ought to be located firmly at the centre of orthodox Muslim theology and praxis. The Tablighis *have not re-invented* Islam, nor have their invented rites and rituals that are new or deviationist. Furthermore, it has to be noted that as part of the wider Muslim community the Tabligh's views on women are hardly unique to them, and that Islam's views on women are not novel either: Christianity has had the same attitude to women, differentiating between the idealized (and non-sexual) woman who is seen as an eternal figure, and at the same time real women who are cast in decidedly opposite terms. And if some Muslim theologians have taken the somewhat narrow and dim view of women as the cause of Mankind's downfall, or cast women as contaminating elements that tempt men away from the path of righteous conduct, then it ought to be noted that a similarly disparaging view of women can be found in orthodox Judaism and Christianity as well, with scores of Jewish and Christian theologians debating over issues such as the question of the moral status of womankind in general. The Tablighi Jama'at's views on women therefore have to be located in this broader context of the debate over Woman that has been part and parcel of Abrahamic-Semitic history since the beginning.

Secondly, though we have turned to the foundational and supplementary texts of the Tablighis to account for their behaviour and perspective on women, we would also add the caveat that one ought not to overstate the primacy and importance of textuality over subjectivity. As noted earlier on in this contribution, we do not assume there to be an 'essence' that accounts for Tablighi identity and behaviour, and we are certainly not suggesting that the foundational texts of the Tablighi Jama'at possess such discursive power as to be able to fully determine the subjectivities of all its members. In the same way that members of a Communist party may consult the ideas of Marx, Hegel and Lenin for inspiration, so do the texts of the Tablighi Jama'at provide the wellspring of ideas, themes, tropes, metaphors and fundamental vocabulary for their religious praxis and collective identity. But it would be foolish to think that all Communists think alike simply because they have

read their copies of *Das Kapital*, and we would argue that it would be equally foolish to assume that all Tablighis think alike simply because they have read the works of the founders of the movement.

Thirdly, we note that we are still left with the crucial question as to whether a Muslim male converts to the Tabligh, or is *converted by* the Tabligh. In our small sampling of the conversion narratives of the Tablighis we have offered, the question is raised again: for it is difficult to ascertain if Tablighis choose to practice polygamy because they have been converted into thinking that it is a model way of life; or whether they were already inclined towards a polygamous relationship and found in the Tablighi Jama'at a convenient and appropriate discursive economy that would rationalise, justify and sanctify such an arrangement in pious garb. This is perhaps an impossible question to answer, and we do not offer any final solutions to a problem that is admittedly complicated. But it is important, nonetheless, to remember that in the conversion process of and among the Tablighis this question remains in attendance all the time as it does in the case of all missionary movements that seek to convert others to their way of thinking.

One conclusion that we can help ourselves to at this stage of our enquiry is this: That even in the case of an active missionary group like the Tablighi Jama'at that prides itself on the claim that it is an instance of masculine religious fervour, *the figure of the woman is not, and cannot, be radically exteriorized. 'Woman' does not occupy some Archimedean point that is radically exterior to the discursive economy of the Tabligh, but is rather firmly embedded in that discursive economy as something essential to it.* The figure of woman in the Tablighi perspective, however, is a complex one, which in turn mirrors the somewhat complex character of the Tablighi Jama'at as well. And if what we are left with is an ambivalent image of woman as the constitutive other to the Tabligh's sense of Muslim manhood, then this says as much about the ambivalent character of the Tablighis themselves as it does about the women whom they seek to convert, domesticate and yet escape from.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Vivienne S.M. Angeles is associate professor at the Department of Religion, La Salle University, Philadelphia. Her research focus is on Islam and gender, visual expressions of religion, religion and migration. Her publications include 'Visual Expressions of Islam in the Philippines' (in: Erich Kolig, Vivienne S.M. Angeles and Sam Wong [eds.], *Identity in Crossroad Civilizations; Ethnicity, Nationalism and Globalism in Asia*, pp. 195–218. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); 'Contested Vision of an Islamic State in Southern Philippines' (in: Santosh Saha and Thomas K. Carr [eds.], *Islamic, Hindu and Christian Fundamentalism; Public Policy in Global Perspectives*, pp. 79–110. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003); and 'Philippine Muslim Women; Tradition and Change' (in: John Esposito and Yvonne Haddad [eds.], *Islam, Gender and Social Change*, pp. 209–234. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Monika Arnez is assistant professor of Austronesian Studies at the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, University of Hamburg. Her research focus is on contemporary literature—in particular of Indonesia—and on Islam and gender. Her publications include 'Dakwah by the Pen' (*Indonesia and the Malay World* 37[107], 2009:45–64); 'Empowering Women through Islam; Fatayat NU between Tradition and Change' (*Oxford Journal of Islamic Studies* 28, 2009. doi:10.1093/jis/etp025); and 'Kunst, Kosmos, Kaste; Weibliche Körperinszenierungen, Tanz und Aspekte der Bewahrung balinesischer Kultur in Oka Rusminis Tarian Bumi' (*ASEAS—Austrian Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1[1], 2008:29–52).

Birte Brecht-Drouart holds a PhD. in anthropology at the Cluster of Excellence 'Formation of Normative Orders', University of Frankfurt. Her research interests include gender, Islam, and the Philippines, with a special focus in the sultanate (Pat a Pangampong) in Lanao del Sur and the question whether clan structures include and/or are conducive to the participation of women in society and politics. Her PhD-thesis is about "Gender, Clan and Maratabat: Mranao Women in a No-Peace, No-War Environment and the Influence of Islam". Her publications include 'Transformation durch globalen Diskurs; Islam als Referenzquelle für weibliche Identität bei den Maranao auf Mindanao' (Holger Warnk und Fritz Schule [eds.]: *Islam, Identität und Nicht-Muslime in Südostasien*, pp. 205–218. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008

[Frankfurter Forschungen zu Südostasien 4]) and ‘Philippinische Muslima; Frauen mit realen pluralen Möglichkeiten?’ (*Südostasien* 21[4], 2005:74–75).

Nelly van Doorn-Harder is Professor of Islamic Studies at Wake Forest University in Winston Salem, NC, USA. Her research straddles issues concerning women and religion and those concerning minorities, minority cultures, and human rights in Muslim countries. She did her main fieldwork in the Middle East and Southeast Asia, specializing in indigenous Christianity of Egypt and Muslim organizations in Indonesia. Her book *Women Shaping Islam; Reading the Qur’an in Indonesia* (2006) analyses the various religious strategies Indonesian Muslim feminists have developed to strengthen the position of women. Her publications further include *The Emergence of the Modern Coptic Papacy. The Egyptian Church and its Leadership from the Ottoman Period to the Present*. Co-authored with Magdi Guirguis. (Cairo: AUC Press, 2011); *Coping with Evil in Religion and Culture; Case Studies* (edited with Lourens Minnema. Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2007); and ‘Indonesian Women Activists; Spiritual Callings in Times of Change and Adversity’ (in: Zayn Kassam [ed.], *Muslim Women’s Spirituality*. Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010, pp. 245–262).

Alexander Horstmann is associate professor in Southeast Asian/Thai Studies at TORS, University of Copenhagen and advisor of the Multicultural Studies Programme at RILCA, Mahidol University in Thailand. In addition, he is senior research partner at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious Diversity in Goettingen, Germany.

His research interests cover anthropology of religion, ethnic minorities, conflict, mobility, and multiculturalism in modern Southeast Asia. He is currently running a project on humanitarianism and religion in Southeast Burma. Alexander is author of numerous books and journal articles, and just published (with Thomas A. Reuter): *Faith in the Future: Understanding the Revitalization of Religions and Cultural Traditions in Asia*, Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Nurul Ilmi Idrus is Professor of Anthropology at the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Hasanuddin University, Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Her research focuses on gender relations, sex and sexuality, marriage, homosexuality, migration, and social aspects of medicine. Her publications include “‘Makkunrai Passimokolo’; Bugis Migrant Workers in Malaysia’ (in: Michele Ford and Lyn Parker [eds.], *Women and Work in Indonesia*, pp. 155–172. London, 2008); and “‘It’s the Matter of a Piece of Paper’; Between Legitimation and Legalisation of Marriage

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Amporn Marddent is a lecturer in the Cultural Studies program at the Institute of Liberal Arts, Walailak University in Nakhon Si Thammarat, Thailand. She earned a master's degree in comparative religion at Mahidol University in Bangkok in 2001 and is currently writing her PhD on Muslim Women's Movements in Thailand. Previously, she conducted research on gender and sexuality at the Centre for Health Policy Studies (CHPS). She published the book *Sexual Culture Among Young Migrant Muslims In Bangkok* (2007) and the article 'Khao Khaek'. Interfaith Marriage between Muslims and Buddhists in Southern Thailand', in Garvin Jones, Chee Heng Lee and Maznah Mohamad (eds), *Muslim and Non-Muslim Marriage. Political and Cultural Contestation in Southeast Asia*, pp. 190–218. Singapore: ISEAS, 2009.

Siti Musdah Mulia has been Research Professor of the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) since 2003. She is also a lecturer on Islamic Political Thought of the School of Graduate Studies of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta, Indonesia. Since 2007 she has been the Chairperson of the Indonesian Conference for Religion and Peace, an NGO which actively promotes interfaith dialogues, pluralism and democracy. From 1999–2007 she was Senior Advisor of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and through that institution, in her capacity as the coordinator of the Team for Gender Mainstreaming in 2004 she launched the Counter Legal Draft of the Compilation of Islamic Law. From 2000–2005 she was the head of the Research Division of the Council of Indonesian Ulema (MUI). Her publications include *Islam and the Inspiration of Gender Equity* (2005), *Reformist Muslimah* (2004) and *Islam Criticizes Polygamy* (2004).

Farish A. Noor is Senior Fellow at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University; where he is part of the research cluster 'Transnational Religion in Southeast Asia'. His works include *The Madrasa in Asia: Political Activism and Transnational Linkages* (with Martin

van Bruinessen and Yoginder Sikand (eds.), University of Amsterdam Press, Amsterdam, 2008); *Islam Embedded: The Historical Development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS: 1951–2003*, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute (MSRI), Kuala Lumpur, 2004, and *New Voices of Islam*, International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, Leiden, Netherlands, 2002.

Amina Rasul-Bernardo is currently the Lead Convenor of the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID), a non-profit organization dedicated to the study of Islamic and democratic thought. She is also a Fellow of the Strategic Studies Group of the National Defence College of the Philippines (NDCP) and the Strategic Studies Council of the Local Government Development Foundation, Inc. (LOGODEF). She was previously a Visiting Professor at the University of Santo Tomas where she handled courses in conflict resolution. She specializes in research focusing on the compatibility of democratic ideals with Islam, women's rights in Islam, radicalization of Muslim communities, and the Mindanao peace processes. Rasul-Bernardo has written a book, *Broken Peace? Assessing the 1996 GRP-MNLF Final Peace Agreement* published in 2007, and was the editor of the books *The Road to Peace and Reconciliation; Muslim Perspectives on the Mindanao Conflict*, published by the Asian Institute of Management in 2002, and *The Radicalization of Muslim Communities in Southeast Asia* (2007). She received the Muslim Democrat of the Year Award in 2007 from the Washington-based Centre for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID).

Susanne Schröter is Professor of Anthropology of Colonial and Postcolonial Orders at the Goethe University Frankfurt and Adjunct Professor at the University of Indonesia Jakarta.

She is Principal Investigator of the Cluster of Excellence "Formation of Normative Orders" at the University of Frankfurt, board member of the German Orient-Institute and the European Association of Southeast Asian Studies, member of the Scientific Executive Committee of the German Science Foundation and Director of the Cornelia Goethe Centre for Women's and Gender Studies. Previously, she held the position of the Chair of Southeast Asian Studies at Passau University. Her research interests include gender and religious studies, anthropology of globalization, peace and conflict studies. She leads research projects on "Redefining Gender in Contemporary Indonesia. Muslim and Secular Women's Activists", "Political and Cultural Transformations in Post-Tsunami Aceh, Indonesia" and is head of the postgraduate program "Formation of Normative Orders in the Islamic World". Recent publications

include the edited volumes *Christianity in Indonesia. Perspectives of Power*. Berlin: Lit, 2010 and *Aceh. History, Politics, and Culture*. (with Arndt Graf and Edwin Wieringa). Singapore: ISEAS, 2010, and 'Female Leadership in Islamic Societies, Past and Present', in: Hellmann-Rajanayagam, Dagmar/Andrea Fleschenberg (eds), *Godesses, heroes, sacrifices. Female power in Asian politics*, 2008, pp. 52–73.

Maila Stevens is Principal Research Fellow at the Asia Institute, University of Melbourne.

She has carried out research on middle-class kinship in Sydney; on 'matriliny' in Malaysia; on modernity, work and family among the new Malay middle classes; 'public' and 'private' in Southeast Asia; Family Values East and West; and is currently working on an Australian Research Council project on 'New Asian Childhoods'. Previously Director of Gender Studies at the University of Melbourne, she also taught anthropology at University College, London, and has been a visiting fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore and at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. She has published widely, including *Malay peasant women and the land* (co-author, with Cecilia Ng and Jomo Kwame Sundaram (Zed Books, 1994); *Matriliny and Modernity; Sexual politics and social change in rural Malaysia* (Asian Studies Association of Australia/Allen and Unwin, 1996); and two co-edited volumes, *Gender and power in affluent Asia* (Routledge, 1998) and *Human rights and gender politics; Asia-Pacific perspectives* (Routledge, 2000).

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