ستوديا إسلاميا

مجلة **إندونيسية** للدراسات الإسلامية

السنة الحادي والثالثون، العدد ٣، ٢٠٢٤

Maintaining Life Under Neoliberal Capitalism: A Case Study of Muslimah Laborers in Solo Raya, Indonesia

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STUDIA ISLAMIKA

STUDIA ISLAMIKA

Indonesian Journal for Islamic Studies

Vol. 31, no. 3, 2024

STUDIA ISLAMIKA (ISSN 0215-0492; E-ISSN: 2355-6145) is an international journal published by the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Jakarta, INDONESIA. It specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies in particular, and Southeast Asian Islamic studies in general, and is intended to communicate original researches and current issues on the subject. This journal warmly welcomes contributions from scholars of related disciplines. All submitted papers are subject to double-blind review process.

STUDIA ISLAMIKA has been accredited by The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, Republic of Indonesia as an academic journal (Decree No. 32a/E/KPT/2017).

STUDIA ISLAMIKA has become a CrossRef Member since year 2014. Therefore, all articles published by STUDIA ISLAMIKA will have unique Digital Object Identifier (DOI) number.

STUDIA ISLAMIKA is indexed in Scopus since 30 May 2015.

Editorial Office:
STUDIA ISLAMIKA, Gedung Pusat Pengkajian
Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM) UIN Jakarta,
Jl. Kertamukti No. 5, Pisangan Barat, Cirendeu,
Ciputat 15419, Jakarta, Indonesia.
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E-mail: studia.islamika@uinjkt.ac.id
Website: http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika

Annual subscription rates from outside Indonesia, institution: US$ 75,00 and the cost of a single copy is US$ 25,00; individual: US$ 50,00 and the cost of a single copy is US$ 20,00. Rates do not include international postage and handling.

Please make all payment through bank transfer to: **PPIM, Bank Mandiri KCP Tangerang Graha Karnos, Indonesia,** account No. **101-00-0514550-1 (USD), Swift Code: bmriidja**

Harga berlangganan di Indonesia untuk satu tahun, lembaga: Rp. 150.000,-, harga satu edisi Rp. 50.000,-; individu: Rp. 100.000,-, harga satu edisi Rp. 40.000,-. Harga belum termasuk ongkos kirim.

Pembayaran melalui **PPIM, Bank Mandiri KCP Tangerang Graha Karnos, No. Rek: 128-00-0105080-3**

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Diatyka Widya Permata Yasih & Inaya Rakhmani

Maintaining Life Under Neoliberal Capitalism: A Case Study of Muslimah Laborers in Solo Raya, Indonesia

Abstract: *In the context of Muslim-majority Indonesia, we see the strengthening of Islamic piety as a response to the reorganization of people's daily lives under neoliberal imperatives. Our study investigates how the often-overlooked Muslimah laborers in the historical locality of Solo Raya navigate their public and domestic spaces to fulfil distinctive gendered roles. They resort to organized labor movements to fight for workers' rights and realize the imagination of working-class solidarity, while donning hijabs and negotiating curfews from their male guardians. They also play caregiving roles to parents, children, and husbands; filling the deficiency of basic social and health services they demand from the state, while ensuring security in the afterlife, which is not achievable in their material one. The pious common sense can impinge on the collective wills of the workers to challenge the neoliberal structures that shape experiences of marginalization. But it is no less meaningful in maintaining life (and being resilient) in an increasingly unfair socio-economic world.*

Keywords: Neoliberal Capitalism, Precarity, Common Sense, Muslimah Laborers, Micro-Politics.

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v31i3.40458

Abstrak: *Di Indonesia, yang mayoritas penduduknya beragama Islam, kami melihat penguatan kesalehan Islamis sebagai respon terhadap reorganisasi kehidupan sehari-hari di bawah tekanan neoliberalisme. Studi kami menginvestigasi bagaimana buruh Muslimah di lokalitas kesejarahan di Solo Raya, yang kerap tidak mendapat perhatian memadai dalam kajian sebelumnya, menavigasi ruang-ruang publik dan domestik dalam memenuhi peran gender yang spesifik. Lewat gerakan buruh, mereka memperjuangkan hak-hak sebagai pekerja, dan merealisasikan imajinasi solidaritas kelas pekerja; sembari mengenakan hijab dan menegosiasikan berbagai batasan dari wali laki-laki mereka. Mereka juga memainkan peranan memenuhi kebutuhan perawatan orang tua, anak dan suami; sambil menuntut negara meningkatkan pelayanan sosial dan kesehatan dasar. Ketika kepastian di alam material sulit tercapai, "akal sehat" yang saleh, membantu mereka mengupayakan kepastian di akhirat. Meskipun dapat menghambat pembentukan kehendak bersama di kalangan pekerja untuk menentang struktur neoliberal yang membentuk pengalaman marginalisasi mereka, kesalehan tersebut tetap bermakna dalam memelihara hidup (dan menjadi resilien) di dunia yang semakin timpang secara sosial dan ekonomi.*

Kata kunci: Kapitalisme Neoliberal, Prekaritas, "Akal Sehat", Buruh Muslim Perempuan, Politik Mikro

ملخص: باعتبارنا دولة ذات أغلبية مسلمة، نلاحظ تعزيز التقوى الإسلامية كاستجابة لإعادة تنظيم الحياة اليومية تحت ضغط النيوليبرالية في إندونيسيا. تستقصي دراستنا كيف تتنقل العاملات المسلمات في سولو رايا، اللاتي غالبًا ما يحظين باهتمام قليل في الدراسات السابقة، بين الفضاءات العامة والخاصة لتلبية أدوارهن الجندرية المحددة. من خلال الحركات العمالية، يناضلن من أجل حقوقهن كعاملات، ويحققن تصوراتهن عن تضامن الطبقة العاملة؛ مع ارتداء الحجاب والتفاوض حول مختلف القيود المفروضة عليهن من قبل أولياء أمورهن الذكور. كما يلعبن دورًا في تلبية احتياجات رعاية الوالدين والأطفال والأزواج؛ مع مطالبة الدولة بتحسين الخدمات الاجتماعية والصحية الأساسية. عندما يصعب تحقيق اليقين في العالم المادي، يساعدهن «العقل السليم» التقوي على السعي لتحقيق اليقين في الآخرة. على الرغم من أنه قد يعيق تكوين إرادة مشتركة بين العاملات لمقاومة الهيكل النيوليبرالي الذي يشكل تجاربهن الهامشية، إلا أن التقوى لا تزال ذات مغزى في الحفاظ على الحياة (والمرونة) في عالم متزايد التفاوت الاجتماعي والاقتصادي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرأسمالية الليبرالية الجديدة، عدم الاستقرار، العقل السليم، العاملات المسلمات، السياسة المحلية.

Neoliberal reorganization has transformed societies worldwide since roughly the 1980s. While scholars debate its precise definition, they generally agree that neoliberalism involves the state's gradual withdrawal from delivering basic health and social services to citizen (Harvey 2005). In developing countries, this state deregulation has opened doors to Foreign Direct Investments, allowing private sector's control over the provision of both essential services (water, food, electricity, housing) and caring needs to ensure quality of life (health, education, leisure).

In Muslim-majority Indonesia, this economic transformation promises greater prosperity, especially for the expanding middle classes. However, the country's relatively steady economic growth (interrupted only by the COVID-19 pandemic) has problematically widened social inequalities (Gibson 2017; Hill 2021). Access to secure, decent employment has steadily declined (Yasih forthcoming), suggesting that Indonesia's decades of economic growth has primarily benefitted the upper rather than the working classes.

Neoliberal transformations have coincided with growing Islamic conservatism among Indonesia's Muslim middle classes, with several studies identifying connections between Islamic values and market practices (Rakhmani 2016, 2019). This relationship emerges from what Sandıkcı and Rice (2013, 250) call "neoliberal economic restructuring programs", as middle- and working-class Muslims navigate an increasingly volatile and insecure social landscape. Yet the central problem is not simply about the Islamization of this neoliberal social world, but rather about reconciling Islamic principles with capitalist economic practices.

Islamic laws concerning *riba* (usury) exemplify this challenge in negotiating Islamism and capitalism (Madi 2014). On the one hand, to survive and live within a neoliberal capitalist system, Muslims must work within profit-maximizing labor processes. On the other hand, they are demanded by Islamic authorities and fellow Muslims to apply redistribution via *zakat* and *sadaqat* to ensure a better afterlife. This creates a discursive tension between socio-economic Islamic morality and neoliberal ideology (see Gramsci 1971). But while wealth and social inequalities are understood as failures of neoliberal capitalism, the proposed solutions remain largely technical—relying on legal frameworks, government regulation, and professionalism (Wills 2014)—rather than addressing the fundamental ideological conflict.

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v31i3.40458

In Indonesia, Islamic practices function as mechanisms to reduce and manage the ideological tension between Islamism and capitalism. This aligns with Madi's (2014, 145) analysis of Turkey, where this tension is regulated by introducing Islamic morality into capitalism while redefining Islam and capitalist practices (Wills 2014, 145). Similarly, Rudnyckyj (2010) demonstrates how Indonesian private enterprises have strategically invoked Islamic values to promote productivity among middle-class Muslim workers. Rather than challenging capitalist structurers, these practices have deepened modernity and capitalism by employing economic rationality to expand the space (see Bourdieu 1977) for Islamic values within the workings of neoliberal capitalism.

Within this intricate intersection of Islam and capitalism, this paper focuses on an often-overlooked group: Muslimah laborers working in factories in Solo Raya, Indonesia. This paper examines how women workers manage the discursive tension between Islamism and capitalism, paying specific attention to how pious common sense shapes their negotiation of gendered roles in both public and domestic spaces under neoliberal pressures. This focus addresses the literature gap which has largely neglected the experiences of working-class Muslimah women.

In what follows, we draw on Antonio Gramsci's theoretical framework, specifically his concept of common sense, to examine how *keluarga sakinah* (happy Muslim family) functions as a cultural framework shaping their experiences and choices. The following sections detail our methodology and research findings, illuminating how Muslimah workers negotiate their religious, economic, and gendered practices in neoliberal Indonesia.

Studying Working-Class Muslim Women

Scholarship has extensively discussed the Muslim middle class (Mujani et al. 2012; Nasr 2001; Rakhmani 2016; Sandıkcı and Rice 2013), but women's experiences remain under-studied. This gender blindness overlooks how Muslim women and men (and others) experience class in culturally specific ways, particularly in relation to their gendered roles and societal expectations. Among the few papers written about Muslim women, Rakhmani (2019) shows how the melding of Islamic morality and neoliberal values among middle class Muslim women facilitate the politicization of their domestic and

traditional roles, ultimately affecting democratic consolidation.

The gender-blind approach in the literature, whether directly or indirectly, reinforces the kinds of patriarchic ideologies that Islamic scholars have long criticized (Mahmood 2011). Firstly, the stories of women remain largely under-represented in the body of Islamic literature. Secondly, even less attention is being given to working-class Muslim women. This paper aims to address this gap by revealing how working-class Muslims resolve the discursive tension between Islamic and neoliberal ideologies in their everyday lives. As such, this paper aims to mainstream the feminist voice in Islamic studies (Jati et al. 2024; Rahman 1996), while maintaining connection to the body of work that unpacks working-class experience under neoliberal pressure.

We engage with scholarship that looks at women's experiences and their movement between "paid work and housework, paid work and childcare, and between production and reproduction" (Ford and Parker 2008, 1). We pay attention to how ideals of femininity, embedded in a specific locality (Silvey 2003), including the interpretation of religion and the practice or religiosity within a particular historical context, shape the meaning and experiences of work for women.

We return to the 1970s, when international competition in global production chains under neoliberal economic globalization started to prompt the growth of low-wage employment, which pays "individual" rather than "family" wages, thus inducing women's entry to the labor force (Standing 1999). In Indonesia, the hiring of more women in the manufacturing and service sector, since the 1970s and the early 1980s, has been encouraged by policy and legal reforms that promote family planning and education (Caraway 2007). As the early period of rapid industrialization transpired under the authoritarianism of the New Order regime (1966–1998), Islamic social and political organizations were not in a position to oppose the expansion of women's involvement in the manufacturing sector. This stands in contrast to the situation in many countries where Islam is the predominant religion and there are restrictions on female employment (Caraway 2007).

Amid increasing women's participation in the industrial sector in Indonesia, scholars examine tactics and strategies deployed by these workers to mediate their factory work experiences, which can range from everyday resistance to the factory labor process to overt strikes and protests (Saptari 1995; Smyth and Grijns 1997; Tjandraningsih

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v31i3.40458

2000; Wolf 1992). They also investigate the links between patriarchal structures in families, communities and factories (Hancock 2000; Mather 1983; Wolf 1992). In the analyses, households (along with factories), are situated as a site of struggle imbued with gendered hierarchies (Wolf 1992). We aim to expand the body of scholarship, by unpacking working-class Muslimah laborers' endeavors in navigating family dynamics and factory work experiences. In addition to that, we also seek to understand how Islamic values, linked to market mechanisms, shape female Muslimah laborers' experiences of working and living under neoliberal pressure.

Some of the studies, conducted in rural Java during the early period of rapid industrialization (1966–1998), suggested a link between Islamic values and patriarchal structures in families, communities, and factories. Mather (1983), for instance, shows how women workers' subordination under the factory labor process is made possible by certain interpretations and practices of Islam in village life before the arrival of the factories. Wolf (1992) demonstrates how parents invoked religious and cultural obligation of filial duties to justify control over their daughters' movements.

However, we are aware that, in today's world, religiosity for Muslims has been increasingly influenced by the interconnection between Islam and market mechanisms (Beta 2019; Rakhmani 2016). The interconnection is manifested in the circulation of halal goods and services, along with the growing prominence of new religious authorities, including Islamic preachers who employ digital platforms in their teachings (Akmaliah 2020; Nisa 2018). This means that rather than solely being transferred from village to factories, as observed by Mather (1983), today, certain interpretations of Islamic principles that legitimize women's subordination to patriarchal structure in the family and at the workplace are mainstreamed through various market mechanisms.

The *Sakinah* Family as Common Sense

To address our research questions, we unpack ideas associated with femininity (and religiosity) that shape Muslimah laborers' way of making sense and navigating the family dynamics and factory work experiences. We thus borrow Gramsci's notion of common sense which emphasizes subjectivity, and confrontation with external reality, but

also stresses contradictions, fluidity and opportunities for change. By common sense, Gramsci (1971) refers to an amalgamation of shared beliefs, which are accepted unquestioningly among broad sections of society. But it is, in fact, reliant on the configurations of social relationships of power throughout history.

Common sense provides easily available knowledge to those who experience socio-economic marginalization in ways that allow them to understand their place in the world (Crehan 2016). Formed within struggles over capitalist hegemony, common sense includes heterogeneous conceptions of the cultural world. Likewise, it is "fragmentary, incoherent and [at times] inconsequential" Gramsci (1971, 419). The fragmentation and heterogeneity of common sense pose a challenge to the shaping of collective wills to challenge a status quo (Filippini 2016, 110–11) that impinges on the emancipation of laborers.

As mentioned, there are no restrictions for Indonesian women to enter the workforce (Caraway 2007). In neoliberalizing Indonesia, however, we witness rising expectations for women to prioritize family over paid work responsibilities (Sakai and Fauzia 2016), despite increased demands for middle- and lower middle-class households to survive on double incomes (Naafs 2012; Utomo 2012). This can be traced back to the New Order's "*state ibuism*", or the propagation of women's obedience to husbands and the state to support nationwide modernization programs and economic growth (Suryakumusa 2011). Like so many gendered practices that are turned into norms under the New Order's state modernization projects (Eliyanah et al. 2023; Sen 2002), the element of double burden (*peran ganda*) or the notion of women's dual function in public and domestic space, persists today. Women are encouraged to participate in state organizations and/or in the workplace, on top of their supposedly primary responsibilities as wife, mother, and carer of the family.

While the authoritarian rule has ended, and a massive decentralization program has been put in place with hopes that it would strengthen the democratic agenda, the element of women's dual function has not dissipated; rather, it has mutated with rising Islamic expressions. State population control since the 2000s is framed in national campaigns as achieving the *sakinah* family, rooted in the 1980s and 1990s' "gender harmony" along the lines of *state ibuism* (Wieringa 2015). Women are

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expected to not only be obedient to authoritative male figures but also do so piously. We think that such ideas have socially reinforced the notion that women's domestic responsibilities are their natural roles in society (Sakai and Fauzia 2016). Certain interpretations of Islam thus shape the utilization of the notion of *kodrat*, or biological destiny of women, to justify the demands for women to place their responsibilities as wives and mothers above everything else in their lives (Nilan and Utari 2008).

We link the idea of the *sakinah* family with the Gramscian notion of common sense. By observing daily practices, we can unpack how everyday micro-politics (Ford and Piper 2001) against capitalist hegemony simultaneously benefits its sustaining. In light of that, in a contradictory and incoherent but no less meaningful way, this pious common sense helps Muslimah laborers making sense of marginalization at home and in the workplace; and it is also useful for them to organize daily responses to it. But, such a subjective understanding is very much connected to the external economic realities of neoliberal restructuring. After all, individualization is increasingly becoming the norm; which normalizes competition, casualization, and the overall attitude towards job insecurity. Gradually, laborers and their families, instead of the state and businesses, are rendered responsible for the improvement of their own well-being (Wakefield and Fleming 2009). And here, we see the function of Islamic values in managing social insecurities.

Such is especially important considering a broader phenomenon, some have called "religionization", which involves growing identification with religious orthodoxies, along with the institutionalization of religious governance, in place of more syncretic or customary ritual practices (Picard 2017). In Southeast Asia, religionization is often promoted by state authorities pressuring their populations to have a religion in the name of modernity and progress. In Indonesia, the term "conservative turn" is often used to explain the increasing influence of Islam in contemporary social, political, and cultural life (van Bruinessen 2013). This, to some extent, has encouraged the promotion of personal piety among working-class Muslims[1] which shapes their ways of making sense of the day-to-day working and living conditions under neoliberal pressures (Hadiz 2024; Rakhmani and Utomo 2023; Yasih and Hadiz 2023).

Research Method

We chose Solo Raya as a specific locality that portrays contradictions in post-authoritarian Indonesia. The region, academically overshadowed by Jakarta, has been the center of activities of Islamist organizations categorized as "radical",[2] which have paradoxically provided broader sections of the working class with Islamic ideas that shape their understanding of their socio-economic marginality. Historically, the growth of the working class in the region was triggered by its development as a site of light manufacturing production during the period of rapid industrialization under the New Order. The consolidation of political Islam in the region itself can be traced back to the organization of the pious Muslim traders who played a central role in the anti-colonial struggles in the early twentieth century (Hadiz 2011). For us, the site of the Solo Raya provides a specific meeting point between Islamic and working-class movements, that occurs within a moment in history where attempts to tame the discursive tensions between Islamism and capitalism are clearly enacted in public and domestic spaces (Rakhmani 2019).

Against such a historical background, we purposely selected major labor organizations and studied their contexts (see La Botz 2001). It was during the process this study that we noticed the ways Islamic rituals and gatherings are increasingly practiced in union activities to facilitate labor consolidations, and, at times, moderate collective grievances with narratives of the afterlife.[3] It was also made known to us how masculine these movements are (see Ford and Parker 2008), which made us curious about the role of women in these processes in micro-political settings. We selected a small group of nine research participants who permitted us into their daily lives and solidarity movements. We employed snowball sampling, relying on the role of a gatekeeper to help identify and recruit Muslimah laborers. The very small number of our research participants means that the claims made from the study should be taken as indicative rather than definitive. More research is required to confirm the findings presented in this paper.

The research participants, ranging from 19 to 41 years old, were employees and/or former employees of factories in the plastic sector in Solo Raya. Most of them were hired under temporary employment contracts.[4] They were part of a household that needed to combine "multiple sources of income so that their survival would not depend on their low wage" (Kusno 2020, 962). While working in the factory,

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some Muslimah laborers received payment from home-based food and garment production. Their family members undertook seasonal jobs like online motorcycle taxi driving and in the agricultural sector.

Every Muslimah laborer we talked to was responsible for the well-being of another family member. Those who were married were responsible for caring for their children and sometimes elderly parents. Those who were single were often involved in the care of their sickly parents and/or younger siblings. Significantly, all Muslimah laborers originated from villages and towns of relative proximity to their places of employment. Most of them lived in their places of origin and commuted for work. This stands in contrast to the situation in the greater Jakarta area, where workers have been traditionally migrants from other parts of Indonesia.

We were inspired by digital ethnography as planning praxis (Sandercock and Attili 2010) to address the nature of data collection within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the implementation of social distancing has also opened up new ways of using digital media for organizing public and domestic spaces (Rakhmani et al. 2020). As such, we gathered data from a combination of photo-journaling/photo-diary studies and unstructured interviews facilitated by messenger groups, and *hybrid* online meetings (see Phillips and Plesner 2013), which were carried out during the pandemic (November 2021 to March 2022).

In the photo-diary study, the Muslimah laborers were asked to report on the events of their daily lives, especially those related to paid work, household chores and caring responsibilities, as well as recreational activities. We focus on the kinds of Islamic practices that involve the circulation of halal goods and services in their social networks. Thus, we delve into the effects of such Islamic practices in diverting the expression of the laborers grievances away from class-based uprising. It is with this in mind that we unpack how ideas associated with the *sakinah* family helps the participants make sense of their responses to the failures of neoliberal work. When the worst of the pandemic was over, in September 2023, we conducted face-to-face interviews with the research participants. The interviews helped us to better make sense of the Muslimah laborers experiences.

Muslimah Laborers Material Grievances and Their Religious Solutions

We understood our research participants' navigation (and negotiation) of their distinctive gendered roles in the public and domestic space as a kind of micro-politics, involving power struggle in everyday social settings, at home and in the workplace. In what follows, we link our research participants' experiences of social and economic marginalization with their distinctive gendered roles. We then dissect social and personal meanings of Islamism as expressed by our research participants to unpack how Islamic values shape Muslimah laborers' understandings and responses to their marginalization. We then zoom into the notion of the *sakinah* family as common sense, which is fragmented, incoherent, and, at times, inconsequential; but provides ways for the Muslimah laborers to address the discursive tensions between Islamism and capitalism in the specific context of Solo Raya.

Social and Economic Marginalization under Neoliberalism

Our research participants shared their stories of having to contribute to the household income, while being the main bearers of responsibilities of unpaid household and care work. The latter lessens the cost of care, supports household economies, and often fills in for the lack of basic health and social services. The provisioning of caring needs may be wholly privatized within families and kinship networks or organized through state supports (Bakker 2007). However, historically, in Indonesia and elsewhere, the provision of caring needs has been cast as women's work, often performed without pay, although men have been involved in such work too (Fraser 2016). Globally, the increased privatization of social reproduction sectors (childcare, eldercare, and healthcare) under neoliberal rules further places the burden of care provision on many women.

We identified the double workload of paid work and family care that is inflicted on Muslimah laborers, which contributes to their material grievances. Those participants who were married, specifically, shared with us, their struggles in juggling paid work and unpaid care work. A Muslimah laborer told us, "Before I go to my factory work, I need to finish all the household chores. I wake up, shower directly, cooking, cleaning, feedings my kids. Otherwise, I will not get my husband *ridha* (blessing)" (M, in-person group interview, 21 September 2023). Another Muslimah laborer told us, "Often I get overwhelmed, I

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v31i3.40458

cannot finish the household chores" (LU, in-person group interview, 21 September 2023).

We also found nuances in the household dynamics of our research participants. A Muslimah laborer, for instance, mentioned her husband's involvement in the household chores: "My ex-husband often washed, sweeping and mopping the floor" (LA, in-person group interview, 21 September 2023). Meanwhile, another Muslimah laborer shared her attempts to negotiate a more equitable sharing of the burden of household tasks: "But my husband has started to change. Little by little. When I had my first kid, I was by myself. Now he started to help more. After I gave him some money to start his own business" (M, in-person group interview, 21 September 2023).

Another Muslimah laborer shared the way she and her husband attempted to equalize responsibilities for taking care of the home and the children, while both needed to contribute income to the household:

> When I was pregnant with my second child, my husband resigned from his work. At that time, he was hired as a contract worker. I was hired as a permanent worker. It was more beneficial for us if I remained at work. My husband took care of our kids and did household chores, while taking seasonal jobs. (D, in-person group interview, 19 September 2023)

Still, all of our research participants shared their believe that it is indeed a woman's duty to balance family and paid work responsibilities. They struggle with feelings of guilt for not spending enough time taking care of the household and the children. Such is revealed by one of our research participants: "If I can choose, I prefer to work at home. At home I do not lose time. I can sew, while looking after my kids" (D, in-person group interview, 19 September 2023).

At the same time, we identified increasing precarity in work and in life (Parfitt and Barnes 2020) as a major grievance among Muslimah laborers in our research. In Indonesia, neoliberal restructuring has promoted policies that make the labor market more flexible.[5] Such policies have contributed to the gradual rise of precarious employment practices in the formal sector, which is conventionally associated with stable working conditions. Amid the intensified precarity, working-class women's paid work is required to keep the family afloat.

As previously mentioned, some Muslimah laborers in our study were hired under temporary employment contracts. Temporary workers, in general, receive limited social security or other work benefits

(Primadytha 2022). Specifically, the enactment of the Omnibus Law on Job Creation in 2020 has reduced the cost of terminating permanent staff for companies (Syechbubakr 2020), which in turn legitimizes casualization. Several Muslimah laborers in our study mentioned that they were recently dismissed from their employment because of their involvement in collective organizing to demand better workplace safety. This shows how the enacting of the Omnibus Law made it easier for firms to fire their workers.

Furthermore, there appears to be a link between precarious work and precarious lives, as stated by our research participants:

> Whether a contractual worker is covered by BPJS [state-sponsored health care insurance] depends on the company. In 2012, I was still a contractual worker in [name redacted] company which participated in BPJS… When I resigned, we could liquidate [severance] at the BPJS office. In the company [I work in] now permanent employees are prioritized. Contractual workers whether acknowledged or not, I don't know. THR [annual laborer allowance] is also at the company's liking, not following duration of employment. (M, hybrid group interview, 19 December 2021)

> We were terminated unilaterally by the company, and I still have dependents, two parents: my father is 93 years old, and my mother is 84 years old, and my father has had a heart condition for five years now. (L, hybrid group interview, 28 November 2021)

Laborers rely largely on themselves and their families to navigate the lack of stability in their daily lives, amid the insecure nature of their job and the relative unreliability of the social protection system in Indonesia. Such can be attributed to the largely underdeveloped social welfare system in Indonesia, though some improvements were made in the system after the 1997–1998 crisis, (Rosser and Van Diermen 2016). To mitigate the impact of the recent pandemic, for instance, the government took the initiative to provide wage subsidy assistance (BSU, *Bantuan Subsidi Upah*) for laborers (Warsida et al. 2023). A Muslimah laborer in our study mentioned how BSU helped her to meet the needs of daily life. However, BSU's vulnerability to error and fraud in terms of its administration by the local government and officials means a lack of predictability, consistency, and transparency in its disbursement (A, photo-diary study, 12 December February 2021).

 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v31i3.40458

Figure 1. Liquidating social security insurance.
Source: A, photo-diary study, 2 December 2021.

Participant A (picture 1) is holding up her bank account book and ATM card she used to liquidate her wage subsidy assistance from her social security insurance. She mentioned, "I am very happy. During the pandemic I am not working, because of termination I receive assistance. I can use it to pay debt instalments, even if I don't know when it can be liquidated" (A, photo-diary study, 2 December 2021).

The sort of precarity that come with casual work are felt collectively, and our research participants learned about the benefits of social safety nets through labor unions. But not all of them were involved in unionizing, which is compounded by a general absence of effective unionism.[6]

The Muslimah laborers we talked to were very aware of the fact that labor protests and demonstrations are much less effective than they desire them to be. Reflecting on a series of protests organized by the unions against the implementation of the Omnibus Law, a Muslimah laborer commented that "even though there is no consequence, at least we express our opinions. Who knows, the government might change their minds. But it turns out not" (R, hybrid group interview, 19

December 2021). Despite this, our research participants regard trying to improve their rights through unionism as better than doing nothing. They also see joining the union as a good deed that will be rewarded in the afterlife (V and A, in-person group interview, 23 September 2023).

Figure 2. Participating in a labor demonstration about low minimum wage. Source: M, photo-diary study, 29 November 2021.

Although there are no formal regulations that restrict Muslimah laborers from participating in union activities, many of them are unable to obtain their husbands' blessings, to use their spare time to participate in union activities (D, in-person group interview, 23 September 2023). This presents barriers for Muslimah laborers to use unions as organizational vehicles to fight for their workplace rights. We also observed during fieldwork that Muslimah laborers tended to be less talkative when male co-workers were present. Indeed, in many places, including Indonesia, leadership positions in the manufacturing industry unions are predominated by men (ILO 2018).

Though labor unions offer potential support, many of the research participants face religious, patriarchic barriers to be involved. Despite these constraints, most research participants perceive union activities as a worthy social cause, and frame it as a good deed for the afterlife. Such illustrates the intricate intersection between Islamic morality, gender roles, and labor solidarity in the lives of working-class Muslimah.

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Finding Solace in Islamic Rituals

For the Muslimah laborers we talked to, Islamic rituals serve multiple functions: organizing daily life, providing a sense of community support, and offering spiritual meaning to respond to the material struggles of precarious employment and domestic unpaid work. Turning to religious activities and domestic duties help regulate workplace dissatisfaction. While experiencing disappointment and frustration towards not being heard during demonstrations, our research participants shared how they found distraction in their domestic roles. A Muslimah laborer recalled: "Participated in the [labor] action with seniors… Went home and directly put the child to sleep… Directly made time to iron some clothes." (M, photo-diary study, 29 November 2021). Along with engagement in domestic chores, participation in religious activities helps to eliminate work-related stress, while also moderating workplace anger. A Muslimah laborer expressed how happy she was after being unemployed, that there was "more time to get closer to God … more time to take care of the kids" (A, hybrid group interview, 28 November 2021).

Islamic rituals help organize time and space that assists Muslimah laborers to divide time and space between their domestic and public lives. One research participant noted using the call to prayer to help organise her time: "I hear the *Subuh* calling of prayers, woke up, and plugged the rice cooker and washed dishes … Woke up husband and asked him to take the child to school because [I] have a morning shift" (M, photo-diary study, 30 November 2021). Having Islamic rituals to cue the organization of domestic and public responsibilities under neoliberal settings is felt by other participants. Going to a local mosque at the end of the day, after they have finished their paid and unpaid work, is a daily relief they take solace in (picture 3).

Picture 3 is a personal view shared by Participant F, who noted, "after taking care of, teaching my younger sibling and cleaning my house I went to the mosque closest to home to participate in a routine Quranic recitation [*pengajian*] for young Muslims" (F, photo-diary study, 29 November 2021). Quranic recitations are social events that not only help organize the participants' days but also provide a space to self-regulate responses towards social frustrations. A Muslimah laborer told us that "[participating in Quranic recitations] I have done since I was a child. Father and mother taught me … I gained knowledge. Like

guidance. For everyday life. Consciousness, to always be grateful" (V, hybrid group discussion, 28 November 2021).

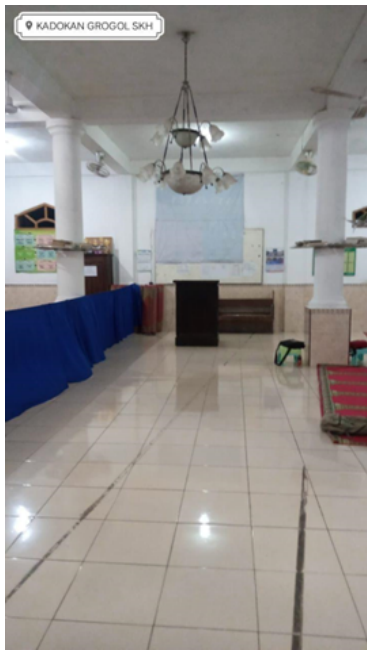

Figure 3. Self-soothing at a local mosque.
Source: F, photo-diary study, 29 November 2021.

These Islamic gatherings also serve as a space for socialization, some of them through the initiatives of village and neighborhoods-based Family Welfare Guidance (*Pembinaan Kesejahteraan* Keluarga, PKK). The PKK is widely considered as a government-run women's organization that plays a key role in the bureaucratic state's efforts to exercise control over society (Brenner 1999). Muslimah laborers participate in PKK activities and also organize *arisan* (rotating fund practice).

Arisan is a financing and social activity for women, predominantly in peri-urban and rural communities (Haryani and Dombroski 2022). It serves as a reason to meet regularly during which members put in an equal amount of money. At each meeting, the winner takes home the whole pot based on *kocokan* (draw); but at times, those needing the funds the most are prioritized. The PKK and *arisan* are both organized in the mosque yard, together with leisure activities (such as eating together). Importantly, the participants' belief in the rule of law

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(demanding social security and minimum wage from the state), saving money and future planning,[7] as well as leisure activities, indicate they are practicing middle class values. The embodiment of these values is enacted despite it contrasting sharply with their precarious working conditions.

Figure 4. Out for chicken steak.
Source: D, photo-diary study, 29 November 2021.

Picture 4 shows D, after having spent all day taking care of her younger sibling, enjoying her favorite meal (chicken steak) since she is free of her evening prayers due to menstruation; to which she expressed *alhamdulillah* (thank God). At other times she enjoys dinner while watching Korean drama on her smartphone over the Chinese streaming platform WeTV (D, photo-diary study, 30 November 2022). While working and living precariously, our research participants express their aspirations to live a middle-class life, sustained by the imagined lifestyles associated with the consuming class. This is characterized by increased consumption, improved household wellbeing and access to higher-quality services and leisure time (Simone and Fauzan 2013).

Among our research participants, we identify practices of purchasing goods and services in ways that are approved by Islamic principles, while at the same time addressing their desire to live a middle-class life. This particular mode of consumption contributes to reconciling the disjuncture between the ideas of a better life promised by neoliberalism and the lived realities of living precariously (Kravets and Sandikci

2014). This disjuncture is addressed with a negotiation between Islamic and traditional principles, through consumption practices.

Figure 5. Buying *jamu*. Source: H, photo-diary study, 30 November 2021.

Such a mode of consumption is demonstrated, among others, by our research participants' reliance on traditional remedies, such as *jamu* (an Indonesian traditional medicine, composed mainly from roots of plants) for their healthcare needs (Krier 2011). They also make Greco-Arab and Islamic herbal medicine, such as honey and black seeds, the first choice of treatment for an array of ailments. Traditional remedies are considered to be less invasive and less aggressive compared to modern medicines (Krier 2011). They also support Indonesian-Islamic beliefs and medical systems.

While the participants source *jamu* from street vendors, *jamu* is one of the key products promoted as part of the halal industry in Indonesia (Syifa 2022). As an illustration, Sariayu, a brand under one of the largest Indonesian cosmetic and *jamu* companies Martina Berto

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(which exports products to Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, the Philippines, Japan, Hong Kong as well as Greece and the Middle East) has, since 2012, gained a halal certificate that guarantees their products abide to Islamic law (Syifa 2022).

The consumption of *jamu*, like so many other natural products in the medicine and cosmetic industry, are gaining appeal as part of consumerist desires to retrieve an authentic life experience that, according to many, has been eroded by the industrialization of modern medicine (Dickstein et al. 2022). Thus, for Muslimah laborer's, buying *jamu* is a practice of health planning. It is a practice that allows the reconciliation between Islamic and traditional medicine, within a reality that healthcare and health insurance is unreliable (A, photo-diary study, 4 December 2021).

Figure 6. Honey and lime. Source: A, photo-diary study, 3 December 2021.

Picture 6 shows a glass of warm honey and lime, as Participant A takes care of her health while she looks after her ill child. Participant L too gives supplements to her younger sibling for better nutrition (L, photo-diary study, 3 December 2021), Participant T takes her mother to the clinic for monthly check up (T, photo-diary study, 4 December 2021),

and Participant F takes her husband to the hospital and waits for hours in line (F, photo-diary study, 4 December 2021). Health management for the family is undertaken by our research participants, and they are aware that this is unfair: "When my father and older siblings were sick, I was burdened. I am the only woman … From taking them to the doctor taking care of administration and everything" (L, hybrid group interview, 28 November 2021).

Here, we return to our conceptualization of the *sakinah* family as common sense. Taking care of the family, buying herbal medicine, giving supplements to manage family nutrition, are the everyday, micro-politics practices by Muslimah laborers as they take responsibility from the state and businesses (Wakefield and Fleming 2009) for not only their own wellbeing but also for the wellbeing of others in their direct and extended families. They link this lived experience with promises of the afterlife:

> Well, caring for parents is exhausting but there is a benefit [*faedah*], God willing [*insha Allah*] in the afterlife. There is definitely a benefit of taking care of parents today. (L, hybrid group interview, 28 November 2021)

> These make me happy. I turn them into a happy thing so that it has value as worship [*ibadah*], so that things that are exhausting, enjoy it so I am not tired. (A, hybrid group interview, 28 November 2021)

Our research found that the grievances experienced by Muslimah laborers are material. But we also identified that the ways they are addressed are Islamic. The nature of their working and living conditions is insecure, uncertain and unstable; and the Muslimah laborers take on household chores as well as care for and planning for the whole family. Whether in Solo Raya, Jakarta, or Indonesia, the Muslimah laborers hold dual functions in public and domestic spaces (Rakhmani 2019); and they do so piously.

In the locality of Solo Raya, the roles of Muslimah laborers, while historically significant, is overshadowed by the fact that most, if not all, working-class women have less resources to outsourced care work. If they do not take on domestic responsibilities no one will do it. So, it is less a form of reverence to patriarchy, than it is about the state's incapacity to acknowledge their unpaid work or provide a social safety net that takes that role away from them.

We also found that the ummah imagined, whether by the state and/or businesses, as part of the halal economy largely excludes Muslimah

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laborers. Despite Muslimah labourers comprising almost 17 percent of the total labor force, the circulation of halal goods and services does not reach their social contexts (Annur 2021). The consumption practices of Muslimah laborers involves predominantly the kinds of Islamic values that help them survive socio-economic marginalization.

The notional *sakinah* family is both an ideal, the research participants strive towards, and a practical solution, for the problem that is rooted in the inevitability of taking on unpaid work. Here, the calling of prayers five times a day, visiting the mosque at the end of a working day, gathering in the yard of the mosque help to organize and govern the domestic and public roles Muslimah laborers have to play. And, thus, their everyday experiences, show how Islamic moralities are, by practice, introduced into neoliberal capitalist structures, in micro-settings. Our analysis demonstrates the intricate entanglement between Islamic moralities and socio-economic subordination, while illuminating the inherent ambiguities and ambivalences within working-class women' experiences. Their practices reflect complex modes of engaging with and modifying certain interpretation of Islamic principles as a survival strategy under neoliberalism, which involve negotiation, rather than negation of social power (Chandra 2015). Islamic morality thus operates simultaneously as both resource and constraint, providing working-class women with material and cultural tools for navigating (and negotiating) exploitation, while often reinforcing the structural conditions that perpetuate marginalization.

Acknowledging these contradictions is crucial for incorporating Muslimah laborer's experiences into broader working-class movements. Such theoretical understanding, informed by lived experiences, can contribute to the development of new forms of common sense that expand academic and workers' imagination about the relationship between gender, religion, and capitalism.

Concluding Remarks

This article deals with rising Islamic piety as a response towards neoliberal restructuring in Indonesia. We depart from the assumption that neoliberal capitalism is hegemonic (though Gramsci (1971) reminds us that hegemony is never fully achieved and is inherently contested), and individuals and groups deploy Islamic values as a means to survive within this hegemony. We acknowledge that the body of

work this topic is overwhelmingly focused on the middle classes in metropolitan areas, ignoring other social groups, namely women and working classes in middle-sized cities. With that in mind, we took the case of Muslimah laborers in Solo Raya, a locality under specific historical conditions of being the center of radical Islamists activities.

Our research finds that despite that local specificity, Islamist movements that can facilitate the grassroot mobilization of working-class Muslim to counter the effect of neoliberal pressures, are much less powerful that the workings of neoliberal economic structures; let alone claiming that we are seeing an Islamization of the economy. This, in turn, connects Islamic values with market practices. Therefore, consumption practices are micro-politics: working- and middle-class Muslims try to survive an increasingly insecure social world by ensuring that they are able to introduce Islamic values—that help guide their responses to neoliberalism—into the capitalist economy.

The everyday decisions Muslimah laborer's make are located within a discursive tension between Islamic morality and neoliberal ideology. In many instances, this tension results in the reproduction of the notional *sakinah* family—where women play the dual roles of caregiver and wage worker. But we are not quick to assume that working-class Muslim women are obedient to authoritative male Muslims. Based on what they have shared with us, the double burden is taken on because they know the government is not providing the kinds of social and health care they deserve, and thus they take on that responsibility. This, we think, is learned through their social position as laborers who are either part of a union or interact with those who are. The pious ways with which Muslimah laborers manage the household is partly a response to the failures of organized labor, and broad-based societal movements, including the Islamist ones, to pressure the state to provide social and health security.

Muslimah laborers modify and fill in the absence of social and health security with micro-politics—using Islamic rituals as cues to self-organize—offers an "Islam as practice" rather than "Islam as doctrine". This is useful only with the awareness that it works within an unfair, if not exploitative, neoliberal capitalist system. This paper showed how Muslimah laborers are left without a choice other than taking on the load to care for those who are ignored by the social and health care systems. To aid them in doing the work they do, they reframe

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caregiving as Islamic worship (*ibadah)* and re-interpret unpaid work as being incentivized in the afterlife.

Returning to Gramsci (1971), this is the *sakinah* family common sense that works for Muslimah laborers but, of course, fundamentally benefits capitalist transformations. It provides practical knowledge for Muslimah laborers in dealing with their socio-economic marginalization and helps them understand their position in the world. It is a practice that is shaped within struggles over capitalist hegemony, and as mentioned, it is "fragmentary, incoherent, and inconsequential" (Gramsci 1971, 419). And while it impinges on the collective wills of the workers to challenge the neoliberal structures that underpin their precarity, it is no less meaningful in the everyday life of surviving an unfair socio-economic world.

Endnotes

• Research for this article was supported by the Asia Research Centre, Universitas Indonesia. Follow up research was made possible by Directorate of Research and Development, Universitas Indonesia under through Hibah PUTI 2023 (Grant No. NKB-346/UN2.RST/HKP.05.00/2023). The authors would like to thank to Vedi R. Hadiz, Andi R. Alamsyah, Hari Nugroho, Beni Setiawan, Nur Rafiza Putri, and Muhammad Asdullah Al Ghozi for their invaluable support during data collection and analysis. The arguments made in this article benefited from the workshop on "Emerging Muslim Lifestyles in Maritime Southeast Asia: Impact on Multicultural Societies" organized by ISEAS, Yusof Ishak Institute, in Singapore, in August 2022.

1. Today, the majority of female factory workers, who comprised the bulk of the labor force in the manufacturing industry, adopt styles of clothing that shows their religious piety. This stands in contrast to the early 1990s, when an independent organized labor movement started to arise against the New Order's coercive labor control. During that time, it was uncommon for female factory workers to don the *hijab* (Hadiz 2024).
2. The term "radical" is given to those who demonstrate rigid adherence to the idea of an Islamic state and resentment toward the process of democracy (Hadiz 2011).
3. The increased practice of religious rituals and gatherings as parts of union activities indicates the growing religious piety among sections of factory workers, especially compared to the situation in the 1990s (Hadiz 2024).
4. This is only allowed for a maximum period of two years and only extendable for a year (Manpower Law No 13 2003).
5. In 2003, the implementation of Manpower Law, led to the widespread practice of contract labour and outsourcing. In 2020, at the height of Covid-19 pandemic, the enactment of the Job Creation Law led to workers facing a more difficult and uncertain labour market (Yasih 2023).
6. In theory, unions could help working people push for substantial concessions from state and capital. But in Indonesia, labour and broader society movements were heavily repressed under the New Order authoritarian regime (Hadiz 1997). While the end of authoritarianism presented new opportunities for unions to consolidate their forces, they are struggling to remain relevant, especially after decades of repression under the New Order (Juliawan 2011). Most unions' activities have been directed mostly at regulatory reform, fitting with the workings of neoliberal professionalism, while inadvertently promoting animosity towards notions of class struggle (Yasih and Hadiz 2023). Street politics remains to be the organised labour movement main framework of action in the democratic era. But the strength of the street politics varies across different region. Solo Raya, specifically, are known to have very low incidences of labour protests, which pleases local politicians (Hadiz 2024).
7. A Muslimah labourer mentioned, "I dream of returning to school… now I have income" (A, hybrid group interview, 28 November 2021). Another Muslimah labourer explains how she raises goats for profit, as a way of saving money, needed to send her sons to Islamic boarding schools (N, hybrid group interview, 19 December 2021).

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 DOI: 10.36712/sdi.v31i3.40458

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5. Utriza, Ayang. 2008. "Mencari Model Kerukunan Antaragama." *Kompas*. March 19: 59.
6. Ms. *Undhang-Undhang Banten*, L.Or.5598, Leiden University.
7. Interview with K.H. Sahal Mahfudz, Kajen, Pati, June 11th, 2007.

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عنوان المراسلة:

Editorial Office:
STUDIA ISLAMIKA, Gedung Pusat Pengkajian
Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM) UIN Jakarta,
Jl. Kertamukti No. 5, Pisangan Barat, Cirendeu,
Ciputat 15419, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Phone: (62-21) 7423543, 7499272, Fax: (62-21) 7408633;
E-mail: studia.islamika@uinjkt.ac.id
Website: http://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/studia-islamika

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رقم الحساب:
خارج إندونيسيا (دولار أمريكي):
PPIM, Bank Mandiri KCP Tangerang Graha Karnos, Indonesia
account No. 101-00-0514550-1 (USD).

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PPIM, Bank Mandiri KCP Tangerang Graha Karnos, Indonesia
No Rek: 128-00-0105080-3 (Rp).

قيمة الاشتراك السنوي داخل إندونيسيا:
لسنة واحدة ١٥٠,٠٠٠ روبية (للمؤسسة) ونسخة واحدة قيمتها ٥٠,٠٠٠ روبية، ١٠٠,٠٠٠ روبية (للفرد) ونسخة واحدة قيمتها ٤٠,٠٠٠ روبية.
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INDONESIAN JOURNAL FOR ISLAMIC STUDIES

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ISSN: 0215-0492 E-ISSN: 2355-6145