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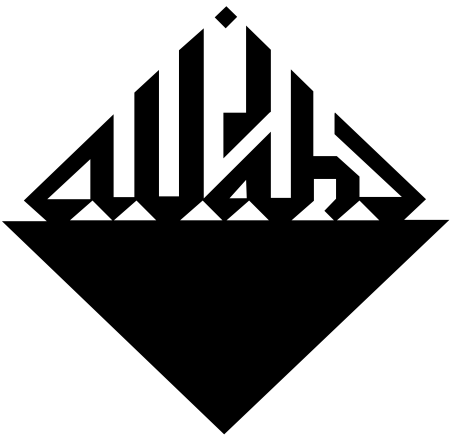

Gender and Islam in Indonesian Studies, A Retrospective

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Nancy J. Smith-Hefner

Gender and Islam in Indonesian Studies, A Retrospective

Abstract: *This essay considers continuities and discontinuities in the study of gender and Islam in Indonesia since the 1960s, tracing key themes that emerged early on and in many cases continue to animate contemporary scholarly discussion. Important themes include enduring patterns of matrifocality; the complementarity of gender roles; and the "essential bilateralism" of gender orders – which have led to assessments of the "relatively high status of Southeast Asian women." This essay will focus on the impact of the resurgent interest in Islam on Indonesian gender studies from the 1980s until today, emphasizing the evolving status and role of women in the context of recent social and political developments and the rise of a new Indonesian Muslim middle class. It argues for the continuing importance of local, on-the-ground case studies that speak to broader regional patterns but also to Indonesia's impressive ethnic and regional diversity.*

Keywords: Gender Orders, Matrifocality, Complementarity, Islamic Resurgence, New Muslim Middle-Class, Hijrah Youth Movement.

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Abstrak: *Esai ini menelaah kesinambungan dan diskontinuitas dalam studi gender dan Islam di Indonesia sejak tahun 1960-an seraya melacak tema-tema kunci yang muncul sejak awal, dan dalam banyak kasus terus mewarnai diskusi ilmiah kontemporer. Tema-tema penting mencakup pola-pola matrifokalitas yang bertahan, komplementaritas peran gender, dan "bilateralisme esensial" tatanan gender – yang mengarah pada penilaian tentang "status perempuan Asia Tenggara yang relatif tinggi". Esai ini akan berfokus pada dampak kebangkitan minat terhadap Islam pada studi gender di Indonesia dari tahun 1980-an hingga saat ini, menekankan evolusi status dan peran perempuan dalam konteks perkembangan sosial dan politik terkini, serta munculnya kelas menengah Muslim Indonesia yang baru. Tulisan ini berargumen tentang pentingnya studi kasus lokal berbasis lapangan yang terus berlanjut, yang tidak hanya berbicara tentang pola-pola regional yang lebih luas, melainkan juga tentang keanekaragaman etnis dan regional Indonesia yang mengesankan.*

Kata kunci: Tatanan Gender, Matrifokalitas, Komplementaritas, Kebangkitan Islam, Kelas Menengah Muslim Baru, Gerakan Pemuda Hijrah.

ملخص: تبحث هذه المقالة في أوجه الاستمرارية والانقطاع في دراسة النوع الاجتماعي والإسلام في إندونيسيا منذ الستينيات، متتبعة الموضوعات الرئيسية التي ظهرت مبكرًا والتي لا تزال في كثير من الحالات تحرك النقاش العلمي المعاصر. تشمل الموضوعات المهمة أنماط الأمومة المستمرة؛ وتكامل الأدوار بين الجنسين؛ و «الثنائية الأساسية» للنظام الجندري – التي أدت إلى تقييمات «للمكانة العالية نسبيًا للمرأة في جنوب شرق آسيا». ستركز هذه المقالة على تأثير الاهتمام المتجدد بالإسلام على الدراسات الإندونيسية حول النوع الاجتماعي من الثمانينيات وحتى اليوم، مع التأكيد على الوضع والدور المتطور للمرأة في سياق التطورات الاجتماعية والسياسية الأخيرة وظهور طبقة وسطى مسلمة إندونيسية جديدة. تجادل المقالة بالأهمية المستمرة لدراسات الحالة المحلية والميدانية التي تتحدث عن أنماط إقليمية أوسع ولكن أيضًا عن التنوع العرقي والإقليمي المثير للإعجاب في إندونيسيا.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النظم الجنسية، الأمومة، التكاملية، الصحوة الإسلامية، الطبقة الوسطى المسلمة الجديدة، حركة شباب الهجرة.

Studies devoted to women and the family constituted only a small portion of the field of Indonesian studies when it was first established in the 1950s and 1960s. The work of the anthropologist, Hildred Geertz, was a notable exception. Her early 1950s research in East Java, and later in Bali, explored aspects of kinship, socialization, and personhood that anticipated the gender and sexuality turn of the 1980s and 1990s in anthropology (Geertz 1961; Geertz and Geertz 1975). But other Indonesianists pioneered the exploration of these issues as well, if from slightly different angles – among them, Alice Dewey (1962), who viewed women's roles through an economic lens, and Claire Holt (1971, 1972; Holt and Bateson 1970), who studied gendered aspects of art and dance**.** The 1980s and, especially, the 1990s, however, saw a series of groundbreaking scholarly works taking as their focus women and gender in Indonesia (and Southeast Asia more broadly); these included important edited volumes by Atkinson and Errington (1990), Locher-Scholten and Niehof (1987), Ong and Peletz (1995), and Sears (1996).

Islam, as the religion of 87% of the Indonesian population, was a theme in many of these works, but the stream turned into a veritable flood of studies devoted specifically to Islam and gender in Indonesia beginning in the first years of the 2000s. Works by Bennett (2005), Boellstorf (2005), Davies (2010), van Doorn-Harder (2006), Rinaldo (2013), Robinson (2009), Schröter (2013), Smith and Woodward (2013), Smith-Hefner (2019), van Wichelen (2010), and Wilford and George (2005), are only a small sampling of these publications. This latter wave of research was also notable in that it included exciting new research by Southeast Asian scholars (Arnez and Budianta 2024; Blackburn, Smith, and Syamsiyatun 2008; Izharuddin 2017; Nurmila 2009; Roces 2022; Siapno 2013; Srimulyani 2012).

In this essay, I discuss the continuities and discontinuities in the study of gender and Islam in Indonesia since the early 1960s, tracing key themes that emerged early on and in many cases continue to animate contemporary scholarly discussion. I devote particular attention to the impact of the resurgent interest in Islam on Indonesian gender studies from the 1980s until today, emphasizing the evolving status and role of women in the context of recent social and political developments and the rise of a new Indonesian Muslim middle class. In surveying the available research, I argue for the continuing importance of local, on-

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the-ground case studies that speak to broader regional patterns but also to Indonesia's impressive ethnic and regional diversity.

Early Debates on the Status of Women

Gender studies in Indonesian studies in the 1950s and 1960s reflected the anthropological concerns of the time, in which gender themes were an occasional but largely secondary issue. If gender was a focus at all, the emphasis was on women's position within the family and their status relative to that of men. Southeast Asian women and Indonesian women in particular, have long been identified as having a "relatively high status." Scholars often make the comparison with the Middle Eastern societies where, historically, many women experienced seclusion (*purdah*), were required to cover themselves, and were otherwise restricted in their movements in the public sphere. In most areas of Southeast Asia by contrast, while a small percentage of higher status women experienced a curtailment of their movement in public spaces, women were prominent in ritual matters and in the market place as buyers and sellers and were notable for their roles as shopkeepers and petty traders (Andaya 2000; Schröter 2013). Not only were women able to move about freely, but they also inherited and owned houses and agricultural land. Moreover, unlike many Middle Eastern societies where kinship patterns are predominantly patrilineal and virilocal, Southeast Asian kinship systems are more often bilateral/cognatic, with a tendency for residence to be matrilocal (Karim 1995, Robinson 2009). Both bilateral kinship and matrilocal residence are associated with women's higher status and a higher value placed on daughters.

The existence of matrilineal groups in some areas of Indonesia led some scholars to take the idea of Indonesia's gender egalitarianism too far, emphasizing the historical record of women queens, rulers, and warriors (perhaps most famously in Aceh, as well as Majapahit and Singhasari) as evidence of historical "matriarchies" (Schröter 2013, 7 cf. Errington 1999).[1] But scholars like the historian Barbara Watson Andaya (2006) have pointed out that in the majority of cases women leaders were elites who achieved their status through their relatedness to a well-positioned male, typically a deceased husband or a son too young to assume a ruling or leadership position. Susanne Schröter (2013, 11) writes, "As a rule, […] a woman could only attain such a position when

acting on behalf of her husband or son. In such a case she acted as a proxy, so to speak, of a son or husband who had either died or was still too young to reign. Women's careers were always linked to those of men."[2]

Hildred Geertz played a central role in the early debates on the status of women by detailing the non-corporate nature of Javanese kinship, which gives significant freedom to the individual, and by identifying the Javanese family and household as the most important organizational units in society (Karim 1995, 49). Geertz (1961, 45) writes, "The position of women in Javanese society generally is very strong". The woman of the household "has a free field within to operate in the domestic domain. The wife makes most of the decisions; she controls all the family finances, and although she gives her husband formal deference and consults with him on major matters, it is usually she who is dominant. Strong-willed men may have a relationship of equal partnership with their wives, but families actually dominated by the man are exceedingly rare" (Geertz 1961, 46).

Geertz proposed the concept of "matrifocality" rather than matriarchy to describe gender patterns among Javanese; the term has since been applied to other Indonesian and Southeast Asian groups as well. Matrifocality refers to a gender order in which women are the affective and relational center of the family. It is associated with women's control over household earnings and decision making, kin networks that are established through women, and a high cultural evaluation of motherhood. In matrifocal societies, men are often absent or away from the home for extended periods of time. In the case of Javanese, this involved patterns of homosociality and avoidance; in other areas of Indonesia, men were expected to *merantau;* that is, to leave their rural communities in search of work (Blackwood 2000; cf. Siegel 1969). The recurring absence of males, whether as a result of avoidance or working abroad, reinforced women's position as household managers and decision-makers for their families.

Acehnese and Minangkabau offer particularly striking examples of this matrifocal pattern. Acehnese parents give their daughters houses and the surrounding land at the time of their marriage. If they are able, parents also give daughters rice land. Residence is traditionally matrilocal with Acehnese men becoming part of their wife's household, but spending most of their time elsewhere; wives expect their husbands

to contribute to the household by seeking employment abroad (Siegel 1969). A similar pattern is found among Minangkabau, where families and lineages are oriented around mothers and their children. Minangkabau women are lineal heirs and control village land and houses; they are also prominent in business (Blackwood 2000).[3] In both cases, men move to their wives' houses at marriage, but typically spend significant periods working away from home (*merantau*).[4] In the absence of men, women are the major decision-makers for their households; they manage family lands and the income from it. However, despite the powerful role of women in these societies, men (either husbands in the case of the Acehnese or the mother's bother in the case of the Minangkabau) are identified as ostensible family heads; and, in Aceh, Muslim rules of inheritance are applied to the division of property at the death of one's parents (Siegel 1969).[5]

The prominence of matrifocality and women's elevated status in the domestic sphere gave rise both in Indonesia and other world areas to debates surrounding the comparability of women's behind-the-scenes power and men's public prestige. Feminist anthropologists like Sherry Ortner (who conducted most of her ethnographic work in South Asia) argued that women's power in the domestic sphere – her position as the so-called "general in the back" – should not be seen as equivalent to men's publicly recognized status (Ortner 1997). Scholars like Ann Stoler however suggested that public and private may be understood differently in many Southeast Asian contexts, with the domestic extending into and imbricated with so-called "public" space (Stoler 1977, 85). Other researchers, like the anthropologist Shelly Errington, argue that power itself is understood and experienced differently in Southeast Asia. While power may be viewed in economic terms in Euro-American contexts, in many parts of Southeast Asia, power is conceived as spiritually- rather than economically-based (Bulbeck 1997, 22 cf. Errington 1990, 5-7; 42-3).

Notwithstanding these legacies of women's high standing and practical power, in much of Indonesia the idea of men's higher public status or their role as "heads of household" in name if not in full social practice is reinforced by cultural ideologies that emphasize men's greater reason, refinement, and emotional control compared to women. Suzanne Brenner (1995) has described a hegemonic gender discourse that identifies Javanese men as having greater rationality (*akal*) and

the ability to cultivate a calm, refined (*alus*) exterior through spiritual practices (see also Anderson 1972). In this hegemonic discourse, Javanese women, by contrast, are identified as prone to loss of control and vulnerability to their "passions," which are referred to with the Malay-Javanese term *nafsu* (desire, emotion). Women also lose prestige because they are involved in commercial activities that involving haggling over goods and money – actions considered to be crude and demeaning (*kasar*) (Suzanne A. Brenner 1995, 25–27). Moreover, in their role as the major caregivers of children, women may sacrifice respect and deference in modeling appropriate forms politeness for their offspring (Smith-Hefner 1988).

There exist alternative, everyday gender discourses, however, that undercut the hegemonic discourse of spiritual refinement and greater reason said to be associated with men. Many women (and men as well) argue that men have little self-control in matters of money and sex (Suzanne A. Brenner 1995, 37, Hobart 1995, 138 (on Bali)); what is more, men's withdrawal from the mundane world is not infrequently perceived as laziness (Michael G. Peletz 1994; Michæl G. Peletz 1996; Hobart 1995). Both Brenner and Michael Peletz in his work among Malays in Negeri Sembilan thus emphasize the importance of recognizing multiple and competing gender discourses and the critical role of context in considering the status of women relative to that of men.

The most consistent and enduring analytic framework offered for these gender dynamics, both in Indonesia and other parts of Southeast Asia, is that male-female relations are "complementary" rather than either egalitarian or, alternately, hierarchical. In other words, both male and female roles are recognized as important, even vital, to social functioning – but distinct one from the other. The Malaysian anthropologist Wazir Jahan Karim defines complementarity in the context of Southeast Asia in the following terms: "both sexes are valued for their ability to cultivate the roles of man and woman, husband and wife, and power is defined in the way so-called natural differences are cultivated to the optimum, to bring out the best in the person in relation to the other" (Karim 1995, 36). Karim identifies this widespread complementarity as at the core of what she posits as an "essential bilateralism" in gender roles exhibited across Southeast Asian societies – identified as "the composite meanings of ideas of

complementarity unaccompanied by statements of differential value, and the egocentricity of behavior allowing status differences to be reduced within and without local groupings" (Karim 1995, 37).

Over the course of the 19th century, longstanding patterns of gender complementarity were challenged as a result of European colonialism and a shift to a commercial economy in which women's roles were less critical (Bulbeck 1997, 22). In Indonesia, the Dutch introduced a Victorian European model of the middle-class, stay-at-home housewife and the "working" husband sometimes referred to as "housewifization." While widely recognized as an ideal, the influence of this model was most evident only among a relatively small group of urban elites (in Java, the *priyayi*).

A version of the complementary model was promoted by post-independence governments as well. Under Suharto (r. 1966–1998), a restricted model of gender complementarity became part of state ideology whereby women were defined first and foremost in terms of their roles as housewives and mothers, and as loyal supporters of their husbands (though women continued nonetheless to participate in economic developments underway). Julia Suryakusuma (2011, 98) has labelled Suharto's gender policy "state ibuism" -- which "defines women as appendages of their husbands and casts female dependency as ideal". She argues that under Suharto the policy of state ibuism reached multiple layers of society through its adoption by various women's organizations like *Darma Wanita* (the association of the wives of civil servants) and the *Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga* (the PKK or "Family Welfare Guidance" program for women in rural areas). These and other women's organizations took as their ideological foundation the "five precepts" or the *Panca Dharma Wanita* (Five Responsibilities of Women) which state that a wife is to: (1) support her husband's career and duties; (2) provide offspring; (3) care for and rear children; (4) be a good housekeeper; and (5) be a guardian of the community (Sunindyo 1996, 124–25). In these guidelines, emphasis is placed on duties rather than rights. Nothing is said about women's important economic role outside of the family nor her participation in politics beyond maintaining peaceful relations within the local community.

Despite this restrictive ideology, or perhaps in part because of it, women took on an increasingly important role in Muslim organizations, especially the Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Established

in 1912, Muhammadiyah is Indonesia's largest mass Islamic modernist/reformist organization; its women's branch, Aisyiyah, was established not long afterwards. Aisyiyah's mission was to expand the religious education of women. It did so through the establishment of a women's mosque, Qu'ranic reading groups, and the production of a variety of women's publications (Robinson 2009, 41). Aisyiyah reached out to the aspiring middle class for its membership and relied on *pengajian* (religious study groups) as a strategy for women's improvement and empowerment (Robinson 2009, 41).

The establishment of Muhammadiyah in 1912 was followed by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in 1926. NU is a traditionalist Muslim organization linked to a network of *pesantren* or Muslim boarding schools across Indonesia. NU is theologically "traditionalist" in that it promotes the study of classical Islamic jurisprudence, focusing in particular on classical texts known in Indonesia as the *kitab kuning* (lit., "yellow scriptures"). In contradistinction to the modernist/reformist Muhammadiyah, Nahdlatul Ulama embraces more Sufi elements of Islam and accommodates elements of local culture (Robinson 2009, 53). NU is now the largest mass Muslim organization in Indonesia – and in fact in the entire world. In 1946, Muslimat NU was established as a separate women's section of NU. In 1950, a second organization, Fatayat NU was established to represent younger women.

Although concerned about improving the situation of women through education and engagement in the public sphere, both Muhammadiyah's Aisyiyah and Fatayat NU positioned themselves against repeated draft versions of proposed secular marriage laws including the draft Marriage Law put forward in 1957. Kathryn Robinson writes that the question of polygamy[6] was particularly divisive; "Islamic women's groups could not be freed from the positions of their parent organizations and so they publicly supported the practice as a right guaranteed by religion" (Robinson 2009, 44). Privately, however, many women condemned polygyny as cruel and unfair. A revised Marriage Law (Law No. 1 of 1974) only passed in 1974 (with enabling legislation in 1975). It provided for a minimum age at marriage of 16 for women and 19 for men (Robinson 2009, 84).[7] It also allowed for protection against forced marriage and gave women rights to divorce equal to those of men. While the law does not outlaw polygamy/polygyny, it establishes a number of preconditions for such marriages, including the requirement that

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husbands obtain the permission of their existing wife or wives. Despite these gains for women, the Marriage Law left intact the notion that the husband is the head of the family and the wife is responsible for the household (Robinson 2009, 85).

Gender and Islam Post-New Order

The end of the Suharto regime in May 1998 led to significant changes in the gender order. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Women's Studies programs were established at universities and Islamic institutes. In these programs and in Indonesian women's organizations themselves, "gender mainstreaming" was embraced and promoted. Gender mainstreaming was understood to involve not just the study of gender realities, but the rejection of earlier state gender ideologies and the promotion of policies supporting gender equity. Overtly feminist groups also re-emerged after being severely curtailed under Suharto, taking up important issues of domestic violence and underage marriage.[8] At the same time there was evidence of a marked turn to greater piety and normativity in religious practice, especially among Muslim youth; in at least some of its variations, Muslim piety introduced greater conservatism in women's roles (Schröter 2013).

On college campuses, evidence of a Muslim resurgence was seen in the visible increase in mosque attendance and participation in Friday prayers, the expansion in *pengajian* religious study groups, and the expressed desire among youth to reject elements of belief deemed *musyrik* (polytheistic) (Hefner 2011; Smith-Hefner 2019). A resurgent interest in more normative forms of Islam had already been discernable in the 1980s, but the end of Suharto's New Order offered the space for its greater public expression. The headscarf, for example, which had been banned in schools and government offices during most of the New Order, was legalized by Suharto in 1990 in a bid to win the favor of Muslim organizations. By the early 2000s the headscarf was ubiquitous on college campuses, donned as a political statement and a symbol of Muslim piety (Suzanne April Brenner 1996; Smith-Hefner 2007). Many young women argued that veiling did not impede their movement in the public sphere, but in fact allowed them to move freely without fear of harassment. What is more, the majority of Indonesian women insisted that in order to be meaningful, the decision to veil had to be a personal one. Nonetheless, in a few regions in the post-

Suharto era, local officials and school administrators introduced top-down regulations that sought to make the wearing of the headscarf mandatory in schools and government offices.

The end of the Suharto regime also allowed for the expression of other, more radical, forms of religious expression and affiliation. Islamist groups with conservative gender platforms – among them, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia and the Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (Fealy 2010; Hefner 2011) -- have posed a challenge to social and religious organizations which propose a more flexible and gender-equitable variety of Islamic observance. In Aceh, where the regional government was allowed to bring politics and society in line with a rather conservative understanding of shari'a law, veiling is mandatory as is the wearing of loose clothing, and offences against the Islamic moral order may be severely punished. At the national level, conservative groups like the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) were also behind the introduction of the pornography law in 2008 and repeated campaigns to support societal acceptance of polygamy (Schröter 2013).

Conservative gender developments have received pushback from Muslim feminists such as Siti Musdah Mulia, Lies Marcoes, and Lily Munir. They and others have argued that interpretations of the Qu'an and hadith must be historically contextualized, and that discriminative practices arise from gender-biased interpretation of the sacred texts and are in direct contradiction to the essential gender-egalitarianism of Islam (Robinson 2009, 182). Muslim feminists have proposed reinterpretations of gender-biased interpretations of religious texts like the Sura al-Nisā' 4:34 which claims that men have authority over women (Van Doorn-Harder 2006). Yet other gender activists challenge discriminatory passages in secular terms, by relying on the discourse of human rights.

A result of the rise of conservative Muslim movements is that since the late 1990s and early 2000s, gender scholarship in Indonesian studies has shifted focus to questions of what effect the turn towards greater Muslim normativity will have for the status of women. Will contemporary trends lead to an acceptance of a plurality of lifestyles? Or will preference be given to the dissemination and imposition of a more restrictive system of gender values, one that is claimed to be scripturally-based and thus inalterable?

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A New Muslim Middle Class

These questions must be posed against the backdrop of the important socioeconomic and demographic changes that have taken place in Indonesia during and since the end of the Suharto regime. Over the past 25 years, Indonesia has seen dramatic urbanization, the rise of a significant Muslim middle class (estimated to constitute as much as 21.5% of the population),[9] and a significant reduction in family size. Initially spurred by an aggressive family planning program under Suharto, family size in Indonesia has continued to decrease in the years since his rule. In 2023 the fertility rate in Indonesia was 2.22 births per woman, a decline from 2022 (at 2.24 births per woman). The current fertility rate is 2.20 (Macrotrends 2024). In a pattern seen in many areas of the world, smaller family size has corresponded with the desire on the part of Indonesian parents to invest time and money in the education of their children. An expression in part of a long-standing pattern of the "relatively high status" of women, this emphasis on education has extended to daughters as well as sons. By 2015, according to World Bank statistics, women's gross enrollment[10] in tertiary institutions (at 32.8%) had overtaken that of men (at 29.4%)**.** In 2022, the last year for which the World Bank offers figures, those percentages rose to 47% for females compared to 39% for males.[11] The percentage of women in higher education has only continued to rise.

The focus on higher education -- linked to the promise of secure employment as well as personal betterment – not infrequently results in marriage delays. This pattern of putting off marriage in order to pursue a tertiary degree is in evidence across large portions of South, East, and Southeast Asia.[12] Marriage delays affect both men and women, but are most pronounced among women. Yogyakarta, a university town in south-central Java, has led the way, after Jakarta, in patterns of delayed marriage. In 1990, the mean age of first marriage among females in Yogyakarta was 24.1; by 2005, it had risen to 26.7 years (Jones and Gubhaju 2011, 51).[13] But while middle class youth in Indonesia may delay marriage, marriage is still widely anticipated with the expectation of the birth of a first child soon after. Women approaching the age of 25 often express anxieties over finding a suitable marital match and diminishing fertility (Smith-Hefner 2005; 1999). Men prefer to marry women who are younger and less well-educated, while women hope to marry men who are at least as well educated as themselves. The more

well-educated women become, however, and the longer they delay marriage, the more difficult it becomes to find appropriate matches (Smith-Hefner 2021).[14]

Young people in Indonesia overwhelmingly reject the idea of parentally-arranged matches, but at least some have resorted to marriages arranged by religious figures (*kiyai, ustadz*). These arrangements, called *ta'aruf,* are made on the basis of personal information (*biodata*) which is submitted to the religious authority by the candidates. Once a match has been arranged and agreed on, the marriage takes place quickly and involves little or no pre-marital familiarization. The ideal of marriage by religious arrangement is reinforced by a widely circulating anti-dating ideology. Conservative Muslim clerics declare bluntly that "there is no dating in Islam." The trend has been further popularized by "cool" youth preachers (*ustadz gaul*) who use social media to reach out to a large, overwhelmingly female, audience and preach abstention and early marriage as solutions to what they perceive as growing youth immorality (Akmaliah 2020; Hew 2018).

An early proponent of this anti-dating rhetoric is the Islamist polemicist, Felix Siauw. Siauw is an ultraconservative Islamist, but also a gifted speaker and celebrity preacher. He is often referred to as an *ustadz gaul*, or [hip, cool] religious teacher, despite having no formal education in Islamic Studies. Affiliated with the outlawed and now reconstituted HTI (*Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia*),[15] Siauw has been identified as the second most radical preacher in Indonesia. His background is unusual for an Indonesian celebrity preacher. He was born into an ethnic Chinese family in Palembang, South Sumatra, and was a Catholic before he converted to Islam (Hew 2018). His frequent invocation of Islamic scripture is an important method by which he establishes his religious authority. But his 'hip' or '*gaul*' personality is signaled to a significant degree by his ability to draw on trendy youth language and expressions which convey a friendly, cool persona.

Siauw has written multiple popular books for young people. These small, inexpensive pocketbooks take the form of guidebooks, self-improvement manuals, and religious tracts that offer advice and inspiration to confused youth. The books both draw on and serve as a source for Siauw's equally popular sermons and videos. One of the most widely circulating of his publications -- now in its third or fourth printing (and made into a movie with the same title in 2018) -- is his

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book *Udah Putusin Aja!* or *Go Ahead, Just Break Up!* (Siauw 2013). In this work Siauw's central message is to urge Indonesian youth to abstain from dating. "There is no dating in Islam" he warns his young readers. Even when just walking holding hands or chatting with a romantic partner on the phone, "Satan is always present." If a young person is already in a relationship, and if the couple is not yet prepared to marry, Siauw advises it is best to quickly break it off (*putusin*) to avoid the possibility of sinning. In all cases, he urges his followers to pursue God's divine love as a symbol of their pure intentions and desire to repent and change or (*berhijrah*).

The Hijrah Youth Movement

By 2015 many Muslim youth seeking to cultivate a more self-consciously normative form of Islam had begun to turn to what they described as the *hijrah* movement (Temby 2018). The movement has become a trend on social media, where multiple groups on Facebook and Instagram are dedicated to the promotion of religious transformation (Nisa 2018). The term *hijrah* originally refers to the journey of the prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in order to escape persecution, marking year 1 of the Muslim calendar. Today, *hijrah* is used more generally by Indonesian youth to refer to a transformation in one's degree of religiosity and is associated with a personal commitment to becoming more consistent in one's religious practice. This commitment is not infrequently expressed in a heightened emphasis on studying the Qur'an and wearing the headscarf and modest dress (for women) or growing a beard and wearing trousers cut above the ankle (for men). It also includes rejecting modern dating practices.

While for the most part *hijrah* is an orientation towards religious piety rather than an organized social movement or programmatic initiative, there are multiple popular young Muslim preachers in addition to Siauw who promote *hijrah* through social media (Akmaliah 2020; Temby 2018). Prominent among them is the pop preacher Hanan Attaki, who is based in Bandung, in West Java, and his associate Muzammil Hasballah. Attaki first appeared on the scene around 2015. Although Attaki attempts to distance himself from specific political affiliations, unofficial video circulated linking him to conservative politicians nominated by Islamist leaning Gerindra, PKS,

and PAN (Temby 2018). He now reportedly has 10 million followers in his Instagram group *pemuda hijrah* (hijrah youth) which goes by the brand name "Shift." A commercial as well as a religious brand, Attaki has expanded his enterprise to indie music, graphics and clothing production design, as well as event organizing, all under the slogan of "lots of play, lots of benefit, lots of merit…little sin" (Temby 2018).

Attaki's approach is more deliberately countercultural than that of Siauw – appealing to skateboarders, bikers, and musicians, as well as college students. His message is nonetheless about turning one's life around; that is, transforming oneself, leaving a life of sin behind in order to embrace a more pious lifestyle; that is, *hijrah*. Attaki is also different from Siauw in that he does in fact have serious religious credentials, having spent many years in a Muslim boarding school, and having gone on to pursue religious study at the prestigious Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Both preachers seem to appeal particularly to young people who come from nominally religious backgrounds and have had little formal religious training. Many among their followers seem to be in search of a means to change or shift gears, perhaps especially in the aftermath of a period of "immoral" behavior.

Youth preachers like Siauw and Attaki identify the expanded time between adolescence and first marriage, sometimes referred to as "waithood" (Inhorn & Smith-Hefner 2021), as providing young people the space to engage in these sinful behaviors -- and therefore as particularly dangerous. Their solution is to press for abstention ("no sex," "no dating") and/or early marriage. Young people engage with the movement to varying degrees, with many saying they are not members of any particular group, but follow regular postings and videos as reminders to remain on a pious path. But for those who are active members of campus *hijrah* groups, dedication and consistency in pious practices are carefully monitored and those who stray too far from the path may be asked to leave.

Challenging Gender Norms

The expanded space of time between adolescence and first marriage has not only facilitated various forms of self-development, it has also provided a productive space for the exploration of sex/gender alternatives. There is a long history of gender diversity in Indonesia and of tolerance towards gender transgressive individuals – "so long as they

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conform to the appropriate behavior for men and women who cross boundaries."[16] Transvestite and transgender ritual specialists were once common in many areas of Southeast Asia. With increasing Muslim conservatism, these specialists have seen their position challenged (Michael G. Peletz 2006; Ismoyo 2024). Some have responded by seeking social acceptance through demonstrations of Muslim piety. The first Islamic boarding school for transgender individuals (In. *waria*),[17] the *Pesantren Al-Fatah Waria,* was established in 2008 in the city of Yogyakarta in south-central Java. The stated intention of its founder, Ibu Shinta Ratri, a *waria* herself, was to provide a safe and supportive community where transgender women and other members of the LGBTQ community could practice their faith. The *Pesantren Al-Fatah* continues its work to offer space and security to the gay and transgender individuals despite repeated threats to its existence and the recent death of its founder (Powell 2023).

The younger generation of LGBTQ Indonesians are generally more diverse in their gender orientation and experience than earlier generations. They less often look to Islam for validation of their experience and many instead embrace a "everyday activism" focused on the normalization of queer identities (Fadhlina 2024). The younger generation is, for the most part, neither overtly religious nor insistently political, but seeks public acceptance through a low-key visibility on college campuses, as well as in bookstores, coffee shops, restaurants, and malls and in the mundane activities of quotidian life. This is not to say there are not outspoken LGBTQ activists and allies. But within the current context, more radical activism raises serious concerns about safety, and community members have reason to be cautious.

The rights of Indonesian sexual and gender minorities came under unprecedented attack beginning in early 2016 when public anti-LGBTQ statements by several government officials led to a series of threats and vitriol by militant Islamists and even some mainstream religious organizations. What began as public condemnation quickly grew to calls for criminalization and various "cures" including conversion therapy. Throughout 2017 and 2018, and coinciding with the run up to national elections in 2019, there were police raids of saunas, nightclubs, hotel rooms, hair salons, and private homes where suspected LGBTQ individuals were targeted for intimidation. Militant Islamists often tipped off police and accompanied them on

the raids. Anti-LGBTQ activities like these have continued in recent years, fueled by a government-driven moral panic about gender and sexuality (Human Rights Watch 2018; Knight 2016; Westcott 2018). Community members say they cannot trust police to protect them when they face intimidation or violence; pride and other events have either been cancelled or kept very much "on the downlow."

Continuities and Discontinuities in Gender Orders

Is there evidence that the recent rise in what is widely seen as a more scripturalist or normative Islam has had a negative effect on long-standing patterns of bilateralism and complementarity in Indonesian gender orders? Islamic values and practices have certainly been a key factor in recent gender shifts, some of which have involved a narrowing of the roles and freedoms previously associated with Indonesian women and sex/gender minorities. However, this heightened concern for scripturally-based and normative Islamic ideals has actually heightened rather than diminished debates over just what is truly "Islamic" when it comes to gender practice. Indonesia has a growing number of Muslim feminists as well as Salafist conservatives (Qibtiyah 2021). At the same time, and notwithstanding the continuing debate over what gender values are most truly Islamic, it is no less striking that important structural developments are continuing to reshape gender orders in contemporary Indonesia. Along with the growth of the middle class, women have seen dramatic improvements in opportunities for higher education and employment. The expanded space of time between adolescence and first marriage that is "waithood" has not only offered young people who may not be interested in marriage a convenient excuse to put off nuptials, but has raised the possibility of something previously unheard of – never marrying at all. Among those who do marry, at least some are questioning the social urgency attached to having children, allowing themselves to imagine the possibility of a "child free" lifestyle. At the same time, a new generation of educated and media savvy youth has seen the pluralization of gender forms and possible ways of expressing their sex/gender identity. These patterns are likely to continue, despite pushback from conservative religious groups.

Research that focuses more specifically on men's experience underscores that there is a pluralization of masculine gender styles underway as well.[18] The resurgence in Muslim piety has led at least

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some men to express stronger familial ideals. Young men as well as women express interest in finding a romantic partner who shares their vision and life goals, and establishing a marital union in which each one completes (and complements) the other (Smith-Hefner 2018). This ideal of a companionate relationship with the conjugal couple at its center includes a model of a father who is more involved and expressively engaged with his wife and children. These and related ideals have been embraced and amplified by the activist group *Aliansi Laki-Laki Baru* or "New Men's Alliance" which promotes women's rights and gender equity. Established in 2009, the organization partners with women's groups to address issues of violence against women including sexual harassment and rape . More generally, the ALB works to educate men on the importance of their taking on an expanded role within the family (Fahadi 2022; Hadjar 2025).

It should be underscored, however, that opportunities for new gender expressions and for challenges to received tradition are unevenly distributed across classes and provinces of Indonesia. Educated and urban women, for example, marry two to three years later than uneducated women and those living in rural areas. While increasing numbers of women are putting off marriage in order to pursue higher education and a career, Indonesian society still struggles to address a continuing incidence of child marriage (Marcoes and Fadilla 2019). Similarly, while the growth of the new Indonesian middle class has been remarkable, it should not obscure what are growing disparities in wealth and opportunities across social classes. In other words, just as elsewhere in the world, Indonesia is seeing growing gaps in income, education, and access to media and information, which together result in disparities in gender experience and possibilities.

Barbara Andaya has cautioned against broad comparative generalizations across world areas, and Indonesia is nothing if not a country of incredible diversity (Andaya 2007). The importance of local, on-the-ground case studies that speak to broader regional patterns cannot be understated. Emerging opportunities and disparities in gender patterns across contemporary Indonesia offer fertile ground for new scholarship.

Endnotes

1. But see Peggy Sanday's (2003) work on Minangkabau for a new interpretation of matriarchy.
2. For a more recent example of this pattern, see van Wichelen (2010) and van Doorn-Harder (2002) on the debate over the presidential election of Megawati Sukarnoputri.
3. The prominence and importance of women in Minangkabau society has led Sanday to propose a modern interpretation of the term "matriarchy" which emphasizes an interpretation of power as "women's ability to authenticate and regenerate or… nurture the social order" (in Blackwood 2000, 12).
4. Siegel (1969, 181–82) argues that staying in their wives' village and household for extended periods, diminishes a man's status to that of an indulged dependent and in the process diminishes their decision-making power.
5. Historically, local custom (*adat*) and Islam have accommodated one another in Aceh and among Minangkabau. However, with urbanization and economic development, increasing importance has been attached to the role of the husband, and inheritance and other laws have changed to conform to Islamic rules (Schröter 2013, 16).
6. Although the practice under contention is officially polygyny (a man taking a second or additional wife), the term polygamy (*poligami*) is more commonly used in Indonesia.
7. In 2019 the Marriage Act was amended to raise the minimum age of marriage for girls with parental permission from 16 to 19 years so as to be in line with boys. The age of marriage for both men and women without parental permission is 21.
8. Though it should be mentioned that women activists and women's organizations have been reluctant to use the term "feminist" which is associated by some with either leftist or liberal/western culture.
9. The size of the middle class reportedly dropped from 21.5% of the total population in 2019 to 17.1% in 2024, according to official data released in September of 2024. See https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/indonesias-dwindling-middle-class-seen-dimming-economic-outlook-2024-09-11/. Speculation is that the drop is an after-effect of the pandemic and related factory closings and layoffs. But others argue that although statistics from the BPS show that "the middle class (defined here as people who spend between 2 and 9 million rupiah per month) shrank by 9.5 million, the aspiring middle-class category increased by around 8.65 million. That means the total combined population of middle class and middle-class aspirants remained roughly unchanged from five years ago, only the distribution has shifted." See https://thediplomat.com/2024/09/is-indonesias-middle-class-really-shrinking/
10. Gross enrollment ratio is the ratio of total enrollment to the population of the age group that corresponds to the level of education in question (World Bank Statistics https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE?locations=ID accessed 6/28/2024)
11. World Bank Statistics https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR.FE?locations=ID accessed 6/28/2024.
12. Today, 89 percent of the world's population lives in a country with falling marriage rates as a result of a "package of demographic changes" including higher education, higher incomes, and lower rates of fertility (Smith-Hefner & InInhorn 2021:2).
13. According to World Bank statistics, in 2017, the mean age of first marriage for Indonesian females was is 22.4 https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sp-dyn-smam. This reflects the fact that there are areas of Indonesia where underage and forced marriage are still common.

14. Later age of marriage has also created challenges related to fertility with increasing numbers of Indonesian women seeking reproductive assistance through medical technologies.
15. Hizbut Tahrir (lit. 'Party of Liberation') is an international pan-Islamist and Islamic fundamentalist political organization whose stated aim is the re-establishment of the Islamic caliphate to unite the Muslim community and implement sharia globally (Fealy 2010).
16. Chilla Bulbeck (1997, 21) writes, "sex roles are fluid, allowing men and women to express themselves in the other's gender role so long as they conform to the appropriate behavior for men and women who cross boundaries," citing (cf. Suzanne A. Brenner 1995, 23–24; Errington and Atkinson 1990, 3–4; Karim 1995, 36, 49; Michael G. Peletz 1994, 81).
17. There is considerable disagreement among scholars regarding the appropriate terms to describe gender variant individuals. The situation is complicated by the fact that the queer community in Indonesia does not itself agree on terminology. The older generation is more comfortable using the Indonesian term *wa*ria and has not fully embraced the new term "transgender." Members of the younger generation who have much greater access to online media, seem to have fewer problems with English terms "transgender," "trans man," or "trans woman" (now sometimes rendered in Indonesian as *transpuan*).
18. On the pluralization of Indonesian masculinities, see works by Clark (2004), Ford and Lyons (2012), Hoestery and Clark (2012), Eliyanah (2019), Izharuddin (2017), Nilan (2009), Oetomo (2000), Smith-Hefner (2018), van Wichelen (2010).

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Guidelines

Submission of Articles

Studia Islamika, published three times a year since 1994, is a bilingual (English and Arabic), peer-reviewed journal, and specializes in Indonesian Islamic studies in particular and Southeast Asian Islamic studies in general. The aim is to provide readers with a better understanding of Indonesia and Southeast Asia's Muslim history and present developments through the publication of articles, research reports, and book reviews.

The journal invites scholars and experts working in all disciplines in the humanities and social sciences pertaining to Islam or Muslim societies. Articles should be original, research-based, unpublished and not under review for possible publication in other journals. All submitted papers are subject to review of the editors, editorial board, and blind reviewers. Submissions that violate our guidelines on formatting or length will be rejected without review.

Articles should be written in American English between approximately 10.000-15.000 words including text, all tables and figures, notes, references, and appendices intended for publication. All submission must include 150 words abstract and 5 keywords. Quotations, passages, and words in local or foreign languages should

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1. Hefner, Robert. 2009a. "Introduction: The Political Cultures of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia," in *Making Modern Muslims: The Politics of Islamic Education in Southeast Asia*, ed. Robert Hefner, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
2. Booth, Anne. 1988. "Living Standards and the Distribution of Income in Colonial Indonesia: A Review of the Evidence." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 19(2): 310–34.
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7. Interview with K.H. Sahal Mahfudz, Kajen, Pati, June 11th, 2007.

Arabic romanization should be written as follows:

Letters: *'*, *b*, *t*, *th*, *j*, *ḥ*, *kh*, *d*, *dh*, *r*, *z*, *s*, *sh*, *ṣ*, *ḍ*, *ṭ*, *ẓ*, *'*, *gh*, *f*, *q*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *h*, *w*, *y*. Short vowels: *a*, *i*, *u*. long vowels: *ā*, ī, ū. Diphthongs: *aw*, *ay*. *Tā marbūṭā*: *t*. Article: *al-*. For detail information on Arabic Romanization, please refer the transliteration system of the Library of Congress (LC) Guidelines.

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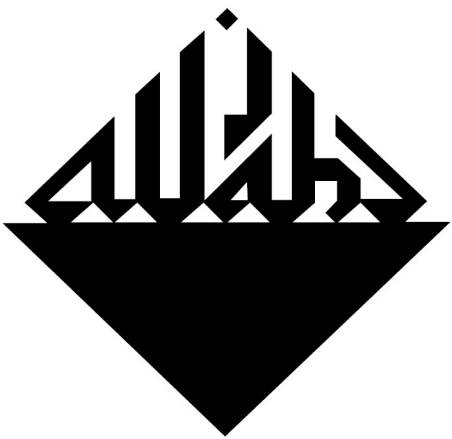

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