

Progressive Muslim Feminists in Indonesia from Pioneering to the Next Agendas

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Abstract

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In this paper, I explore some progressive Islamic feminist organizations and their contributions to popularizing Islamic reform movements in Indonesia through their popular pioneering agendas. Some pioneers of progressive Muslim feminists, such as P3M, FK3, PUAN Amal Hayati and Rahima have killed two birds with one stone. They made an important impact on reducing stigma against Islamic reform ideas and feminism. Many Indonesian Muslims often consider Islamic reform movements and feminism a Western conspiracy to destroy Islam. Progressive Muslim feminist groups' approaches to local Muslim scholars of *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding school) are vital in shifting these local leaders to be focal points of Islamic reform. With more popular issues of Islamic reform, such as reproductive rights and domestic violence, they create an efficient step to introduce Islamic reform movements to Muslims at the grassroots level.

The feminist organizations make a crucial follow-up activity by applying feminist perspectives in reinterpreting classical Islamic thoughts. They have produced a specific method of Quranic interpretation (*tafsir*) and consequently have created a particular Islamic thinking from the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's traditions (*hadith*). Indonesian Muslim feminists have developed their methods of *tafsir* through direct engagement with women's experiences of violence. This effort is vital in spreading both Islamic reform movements and feminism within Indonesian Muslims.

The growing number of progressive Muslim feminists and their crucial contributions to popularizing Islamic reform movements in Indonesia lead conservative Muslim groups' responses to attack the groups. Among other challenges for the progressive Muslim feminists are the growing Islamic shari'ah movements and the rise of conservative Islamic expression and the rise of polygamy practice within reformist and progressive Muslims. I make suggestions for how the progressive Islamic feminist movement can be strengthened in its struggle against conservative Muslims, including creating an accessible method of *tafsir* for more Muslim women's groups, introducing a multicultural approach to traditional women's groups like *majlis ta'lim*, and broadening networks by making cooperation with homosexual movement activists.

Approved _____

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Table of Content

	Page
Abstract	3
Acknowledgment	5
Chapter 1: Introduction	10
A. Background	10
B. Methodology	14
Chapter 2: Women and Islam: The Foundations of Progressive Islamic Feminism	20
A. Arabic Traditions and the Cultural Context of the Early Islam	20
B. The Progressive Values of the Theology of <i>Tawhid</i>	24
C. The Qur'an: Revolutionary Values and Rational Interpretation	28
D. Women in the History of Islam: Marginalization and Struggle	32
1. Khadijah and 'Aishah: Two Faces of Revolutionary Muslim Women	33
a. Khadijah: Being Revolutionary in the Domestic Sphere	34
b. 'Aishah: Woman's Participation in Public Roles	38
2. Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah: Sufi Spirituality	40
3. <i>Muhaddithat</i> : Women and the Tradition of <i>Hadith</i>	47
E. Women's Marginalization in Islamic History	53
F. Theorizing Progressive Islamic Feminism	59
Chapter 3: The Dynamics of the Progressive Muslim Feminist Movement in Indonesia from <i>Pesantren</i> Communities to Muslim Feminist Groups	68
A. Early Islamic Feminism in Indonesia	68
B. Feminism in Indonesia	71
C. From Islamic Renewal to Progressive Islamic Feminism	72
D. The 1998 Reform Movement: Blessing or Anathema?	75
E. Progressive Muslim Feminist Organizations	78
1. Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (P3M)	78
2. Forum Kajian Kitab Kuning (FK3).....	84
3. PUAN Amal Hayati: <i>Pesantren</i> as the Center of Women's Advocacy	90
4. Rahima: Providing Academic Spaces for Muslim Women	95

5. Grassroots Groups: Serving Local Communities with Women’s Advocacy Programs	99
Chapter 4: From Challenges to New Agendas	
Promoting Progressive Islamic Feminism in Indonesia	104
A. The Rise of Islamic Shari’ah Movements	104
B. Progressive Muslims and the Polygamy Debate	109
C. The Domestic Violence Act	114
D. The Challenge of NGO Activism and Project-Based Programs	116
E. Providing Space for Women as Interpreters of Islam (<i>Mufassir</i>)	119
F. A Multicultural Approach to Traditional Women’s Groups	122
G. Broadening Networks: Homosexual Movement as a Potential Partner	127
Chapter 5: Reflections on Progressive Islamic Feminism in Indonesia	132
A. Colonial Rule and Islamic Feminism: The Issue of the Veil	132
B. Education for Women: The Influence of the Islamic Reform Movement in Egypt..	136
C. Islamic Reform and the Involvement of Women in Politics	141
D. The New Order and a Return to Motherhood: Women Divided	146
E. Progressive Islamic Feminism in Indonesia Today: Accomplishments and Challenges	147
Bibliography	150

Chapter 1

Introduction

A. Background

In 1994, I enrolled in the Department of Islamic Theology and Philosophy (*Ushul al-Din*) at the State Islamic University (Universitas Islam Negeri) in Jakarta. This university is considered one of the most progressive Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Harun Nasution, the rector from 1973 to 1984 and a leader of the progressive Islamic movement in Indonesia, was noted for raising the status of the university and giving it a reputation for progressive leadership. In my classes I encountered a tradition of discussion and debate about Islamic theology (*'aqidah*), Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and the interpretation of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's sayings (*hadith*). This tradition had replaced the more authoritative method of teaching that had characterized the previous academic culture in the university. Students were now encouraged to use their rational capability in studying Islam. They founded their own discussion forums. They tried to apply what they learned from "secular academic disciplines," such as sociology, philosophy, and anthropology, in the study of Islam. They also discussed political issues.

This is the context in which I first encountered feminism and women's issues. In one forum we discussed women's issues as defined by feminist theories and tried to approach women's issues in Indonesian society with critical Islamic views. In these

student forums we discussed domestic violence, violence in dating, polygamy, sexual harassment, and women's participation in politics. We organized activities, such as training of activists, seminars, and workshops, to raise awareness of women's rights. I was among those who wanted to be involved in more practical action rather than just theoretical discussions. I recognize that teachings from the Qur'an, *hadith*, and the work of Muslim scholars have been used to justify or legitimate violence against women. But I believe that Islam has great potential to uphold women's rights in Indonesia.

In 1998 along with other students in the university, I organized a research project to observe the influence of Islamic views and the method of teaching in Islamic universities on female students' attitude toward women's issues. This research exposed how Islam was used to create gender biases and how Islamic educational institutions contributed to producing gender bias. This research led us to a search for critical tools to reconstruct understanding and interpretation of Islamic teachings in order to create more gender sensitive perspectives. I went to several activities conducted by feminist non-governmental organizations, such as Kalyanamitra and Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (P3M) or the Union for the Pesantren and Community Development. In 2001, six months after graduating from the university, I became more involved in the Islamic feminist agenda when I started working at PUAN Amal Hayati, an Islamic feminist organization.

At PUAN Amal Hayati I began to understand the different colors of progressive Muslim feminist groups in Indonesia. This interaction with Islam-based groups and individuals promoting women's rights sharpened my progressive religious vision and led

me to participate in several controversial issues for Muslims in Indonesia, including homosexuality, women's capability to lead multi-gender prayer, and criticism of polygamy and of religious leaders who use Islamic teachings to legitimate violence. I see Islam as a religion of justice and humanity and believe it is a distortion of Islam when Muslims refer to Islamic teaching to legitimize their violence.

I encountered many cases of violence against women, particularly domestic violence, when I worked at PUAN Amal Hayati. In some cases religious leaders justified this discrimination and violence using Islamic teachings. Some *kyai* (pesantren leaders) had no awareness of the gender biases they expressed in their teaching. At that time, I came to the conclusion that the problem was religious conservatism that leads Muslim to embrace traditional religious thinking without critical thought or awareness of actual social problems. I believe that religious conservatism has estranged Muslims from the tradition of critical and rational thought that made Islam the source of great civilizations in the past.

The critique of progressive Muslim feminist groups does not only apply to religious institutions, such as *'ulama* (Muslim clerics), but also to the Indonesian government, which does not take steps to eliminate violence and discrimination against women. For instance, the government of Indonesia issued Act No. 1/1974 on Marriage and Kompilasi Hukum Islam (KHI) or the Compilation of Islamic Law that formalizes religious misinterpretations which legitimate discrimination against women.

The Polygamy Award initiated in 2003 by Puspo Wardoyo, a restaurant businessman with four wives, really challenged my personal religious commitment to

progressive Islam and shifted my orientation toward more social activism. Wardoyo used Islam to legitimize his social insensitivity to the fact that polygamous marriages discriminate against women. Although Wardoyo does not have academic background in Islamic studies, he often refers to the Qur'an and *hadith*.

In 2004, when I was interviewed for the Ford Foundation scholarship, Mohammad Jacob from Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, challenged me with the question: "What is your opinion if a woman chooses to accept her husband's polygamy based on her belief in Islam? Will you still force her to divorce or let her follow her belief?" To be consistent I must acknowledge the freedom of people who have different religious views. I responded to his question by saying that first I have an obligation to convincingly explain to the woman that a polygamous marriage inevitably involves unequal treatment of the wives and generally causes violence. Second I would explain that religious justification of polygamy is based on a misinterpretation of Islam. If the woman still decides to accept her husband's polygamy, it is my obligation to honor her decision in the name of freedom of thought. Being a progressive Muslim requires effort to reconstruct religious teachings and respect for different religious understandings.

These experiences led me to write this thesis. Academic work on progressive Islamic feminism in Indonesia is still very limited. This thesis reflects both my academic efforts and field experience in progressive Islamic feminism.

B. Methodology

This research is based on my experience working with Islamic feminist organizations and my study of Islam. In my reflections on Islam and progressive Islamic feminism, I draw on the work of Nurcholish Madjid (1939-2005), popularly known as Cak Nur. He was educated in a traditional Islamic *pesantren* and went on to become a student of Fazlur Rahman at the University of Chicago. He returned to Indonesia and introduced a rational approach to the study of the Qur'an. I was fortunate to study under the influence of Nurcholish Madjid at the State Islamic University in Jakarta. Along with Harun Nasution, Madjid became the leader of a progressive Islamic renewal movement in Indonesia. He wrote several important books explicating the rich classical heritage of Islamic thought and showing how it could be applied to the context of contemporary society.

Madjid began elaborating his interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic thought with an exploration of the dynamics of Islamic intellectual history that concluded with the need to revitalize Islamic thinking by reviving the dynamic dialogue that had characterized it in the past. Only in this way would Islamic teachings remain relevant to contemporary social issues (see, for example, Madjid, 1997: 7-8). In his writing, Madjid combines the historical legacy of Islamic sciences with modern methodological approaches. He shows that it is important to consider the writings of both Islamic rationalists (*ahl al-'aql*), but the textualists (*ahl al-naql*) so that a Muslims have different perspectives to consider when they think how to apply the teachings of Islam to modern problems. To be a progressive Muslim scholar does not mean to turn always to rational

traditions, but to be aware of the need to contextualize the interpretation of Islamic sources by considering the social conditions in which an interpretation was put forth. It is important to emphasize that contemporary progressive interpretations of Islam are part of a dynamic tradition of interpretation conditioned by changes in society, because traditionalist Muslims claim that progressive Islamic thinking is an unacceptable innovation (*bid'ah*). They believe that progressive Islam has no basis in the Qur'an and constitutes a "rebellion" against the mainstream of Islamic thought and the majority of ulama (*jumhur 'ulama*).

In Islamic discourse, *ijtihad* (interpretation) and *taqlid* (conservatism/following the model established, as in praying like the Prophet) are central concepts. Madjid explains *taqlid* as "the accumulation of knowledge and experience" in the Islamic tradition that leads a Muslim to the ultimate truth (Madjid, 1994: 342). In this context, *taqlid* can be viewed as the intellectual resources that a scholar uses when he or she rests his or her argument on the work of earlier Muslim scholars. In the process of reflection on Islam, a Muslim with an understanding of *taqlid* (*muqallid*) also works to understand Islam from his or her intellectual perspective (*mujtahid*). *Ijtihad*, often defined as a rational approach to understanding Islam, must start from the Qur'an and *Hadith* so that the result will have legitimacy in the eyes of Muslims. According to Madjid, *taqlid* and *ijtihad* or the traditional and rational ways of approaching Islam are not oppositional, rather there is a dialectical process in the context of social and historical change. To reorient *taqlid* as a dynamic Islamic intellectual tradition, Madjid argues that *taqlid* must be an open method, not an ideology of absolute imitation, or *taqlidism*, that makes

ancient Islamic knowledge the only standard of truth and positions the classical Muslim scholars as absolute authorities (Madjid, 343).

Madjid highlights awareness of the historical context of every Islamic teaching in the Qur'an. He places understanding *asbab an-nuzul* (the occasion of a revelation [in the Qur'an]) of every verse in the Qur'an as essential to interpretation of the message of the Qur'an. Knowing the historical context of a Qur'anic verse and helps a Muslim understand the implication of the verse. *Asbab an-nuzul* is also important in applying the verse to different social situations (Madjid, 1994: 25). In emphasizing *asbab an-nuzul*, that is, the social issue important at the time of the revelation, as essential in the interpretation of the Qur'an, Madjid points out that all interpretations are part of a tradition of Islamic teaching relevant to different social-historical situations.

Madjid argues that the history of Islamic thought proves that the process of *ijtihad* is an open-ended, never-ending process. Earlier constructions of Islamic thought from classical scholars are important foundational knowledge as Islamic teachings are recontextualized for the contemporary world. Following Madjid's method, I view progressive Islamic feminism in Indonesia as situated in a context of intellectual continuity with Islamic traditions from the past. Islamic feminism in Indonesia does not exist in an historical vacuum. Muslim feminists have become aware of the need to reinterpret Islamic teaching in support of developing gender justice in contemporary Indonesian society. This is a result of social-academic interaction with heterogeneous historical currents within Islam and with currents in non-Islamic social-cultural entities.

Therefore, the diverse colors of Islamic feminisms emerge in Indonesia in response to historical and social change.

Madjid often says that we have to confidently believe in the validity of our interpretation of Islamic teachings, but we must realize that “our understanding may be true, but other opinions may be not wrong.” There is no need to make an absolute claim of truth. The belief that our knowledge is true does not mean to absolutely claim that the others’ interpretations are unacceptable innovation. Instead, Madjid calls for freedom of thought in Islamic discourse.

In this thesis, I question some interpretations of the Qur’an that Muslim groups have used to legitimate discrimination against women because they do not take the cultural and historical context into account in understanding these verses. Some progressive Muslim feminists in Indonesia that I will examine in this work have been developing arguments to justify a reinterpretation of classical Islamic teaching about women and interpretations of the Qur’an that enhance women’s rights. They have adopted Fazlur Rahman’s method of interpretation, which I also use in this thesis.

For Muslims, the Qur’an “is the divine word literally revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (between 710 and 732 CE) in a sense in which probably no other religious documents is held to be so” (Rahman, 1982: 2). However, it should be understood that the 22 years of revelation of the Qur’an and the prophethood of Muhammad was a period when “all kinds of decisions on policy in peace and in war, on legal and moral issues in private and public life were made in the face of actual situations; thus the Qur’an had from the time of its revelation a practical and political application” (Ibid). In this context

Rahman emphasizes that “Muhammad’s prophetic career was likewise geared toward the moral improvement” (Ibid). I conclude that the text of the Qur’an is absolutely divine, but its application to Muslim society must be considered in the context of the dynamics of social and historical change. Rahman calls this method of interpretation “the method of Qur’anic hermeneutics” (Rahman, 1982: 4).

In this hermeneutic method, interpretation consists of two movements, “from the present to Qur’anic times, then back to the present” (Rahman, 5). In this regard, instead of focusing on the text of the Qur’an, social context should be at the center of the interpretation. Social context changes so a dynamic interpretation of relevant passages in the Qur’an is necessary. Interpretation of the Qur’an should be an open dialogical process in which many Muslims can participate in various ways. The gates of *ijtihad* should always be open. Then Islamic history will be guided by a process of deliberation, a never-ending effort toward the highest Truth that only belongs to God.

Rahman emphasizes that “Every critique or modification of a tradition involves a consciousness of what is being criticized or rejected and hence, to that extent, self awareness” (Rahman 1982, 10). Progressive exploration of Islamic teachings is not simply the application of a rational approach to interpretation, but, more importantly, it involves self awareness in the process of implementing the Divine mission of justice and humanity. The standard of validity of Qur’anic interpretation is not only its “accuracy” in understanding the text of the Qur’an, but also the ability of an interpretation to support the needs of social justice and humanity. The various paths of interpretation of the Qur’an

share the goal of seeking ultimate Truth (*al-haqq*), but none is a final determination of Truth, rather the dialogical process renews each generation in their search for Truth.

Chapter 2

Women and Islam: The Foundations of Progressive Islamic Feminism

In this chapter I begin by describing the patriarchal culture of Arabia at the time of the Prophet. I then show how the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad reformed the social-cultural conditions that determined women's existence within society. I show that Islamic theology provides core concepts for a progressive Islamic feminism, but in the centuries following the death of the Prophet, women were marginalized by patriarchal Islamic institutions that were established. Nevertheless, remarkable Muslim women emerged who have been an inspiration to modern Muslim feminists.

A. Arabic Traditions and the Cultural Context of the Early Islam

Arabic societies have been stereotyped as barbarian, inward-looking, oppressive and conservative. These stereotypes shaped the thinking of some Orientalists, who claimed the same attributes for Muslims. Some Orientalists did not make a clear distinction between Arabic culture and Islamic traditions. This notion can be found, for example, in Gustav Le Bon's works *The World of Islamic Civilization* written in 1884. Understanding Arab traditions before the revelation of Islam is important to show the role of this religion in carrying progressive ideas, including the liberation of women from any type of oppression. Arab societies have inherited several high traditions of the world

civilization. However, in this context, I want to delve into certain Arab cultural characteristics that have had great influence in coloring the tenets of Islam on women. My emphasis on very specific Arab customs is not meant to devalue Arab traditions, but rather to elucidate the dynamics and continuity of ideas within Arab society where Islam was first developed.

In Arab societies patriarchal and male-oriented values and tribalism were reinforced by war and conflict as powerful men played strategic roles, such as commanders and soldiers while women and children were often victims. Women were regarded as the property of conflicting groups. The losing group had to provide women from their tribe as war prisoners, and the winners would use the women prisoners as sexual slaves. Thus, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab, one of the closest companions of the Prophet Muhammad and the second Caliph, killed his daughter in order to prevent her capture and enslavement. The tradition of tribal war in Arabic societies also perpetuated the phenomena of polygamy and concubines.

Ancient Arab society had a rich poetry tradition. Poems were used to express honor and beauty, and *karamah* (hospitality, graciousness) was a core idea in the poetry tradition of Arabs. But contests of honor were waged through poetry (Hourani, 1991: 12). Montgomery Watt (1953: 24 as quoted by Brown, 2004: 14) describes some ideals as expressed in the poetry of early Arabs, such as “*Muruwwa[h]*, manliness, which encompasses all that will display and protect a man’s honor: courage, loyalty, generosity, sexual prowess.” This can be traced in *al-mu’allaqat* (suspended poems) that were hung in the Ka’bah (the House of God) to show one’s power over others.

The social structure of the Arab society was a system of tribes or clans (*shu'ubiyyah*), which vied for honor and status. “All over Arabia the various tribes had their own sanctuaries, idols and sacred stones” (Hawting, 1999: 24). A leader of a tribe was “a heroic figure whose life and teachings would establish law” (Sowell, 2004: 17). Living in a desert environment, the Arabs were a pastoral and nomadic people. This frequently led to clashes and warfare. According to Sowell, without a communal justice system to keep order, individuals were entirely dependent upon their tribe. “A man without a tribe could be killed or enslaved with impunity” (Sowell, 2004: 15). In the Qur'an God's voice is not revealed in a vacuum. God supports His followers and urges them to counter-attack those who terrorize them and cause fear (see, for example, al-Baqarah (2): 190–194, al-Hajj (22): 39-40, and al-Shura (42): 39-42). However, God also says, “*O mankind! We created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes* (al-Hujurat (49): 13), and this verse is followed by the words *lita'arafu* (“So you may know and honor each other”). With these words, God encouraged people toward dialogue and mutual understanding. This is just one example of how early Islam interacted with and dealt with problems caused by the traditions of Arab societies. There are many passages in the Qur'an and *hadith* directing Muslims to prioritize dialogue. In a *hadith* transmitted by al-Bukhari and Muslim, it is told that the Prophet said, “Help your brothers who become victims of violence and your brothers who perpetrate violence.” His companions asked, “How can we help perpetrators of violence?” The Prophet answered, “Help them to stop their behavior.”

The tradition of warfare led to people placing a high value on masculinity and patriarchal values. Islamic teachings in the early period followed Arab societies in glorifying and magnifying masculine and patriarchal values. Nevertheless, women's rights are treated in the Qur'an. For instance, polygamy was limited to four wives and a man was required to treat all his wives justly (al-Nisa' (4): 3). The Qur'an includes a chapter called *al-Nisa'* (The Women). The discourse on leadership (*qiwamah*) in this chapter (al-Nisa' (4): 4) acknowledges that women have a voice in political discussions (*mushawarah*) along with men. The Qur'an is not meant as a complete document with concrete directions; but rather, the Qur'an displays examples and symbols that require rational and contextual approaches in order to achieve its progressive and revolutionary meanings for the purpose of upholding women's rights. This is another example of the importance of cultural context in the teachings of the Qur'an and the direction given for the development of a better and more just social order.

With this insight, we can view Islamic teachings as a part of cultural transformation instead of a religious teaching that had no relationship with the existing social situation. As Farid Essack asserts, the Qur'an was revealed based on the demands of a real social situations as a proposed framework of social change (Essack, 1997: 54). He continues, "[the Qur'an] portrays a picture of a Deity actively engaged in the affairs of this world of humankind" and "God would thus not speak into a vacuum nor would He convey a message in one" (Essack, 2002: 121 and 122). As a cultural transformation, Islamic teaching is not final, but rather requires a never-ending cultural process toward the most appropriation application of the teaching in a particular social situation. The

Islamic response to Arab society is best viewed as an early initiative instead of a final unchangeable teaching. Through the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's *hadith* God gives particular teachings as a theological foundation leading human beings toward the "final destination" (*husn al-khatimah*). Islamic teachings are contextual, historical, and express a grand vision of social reform. Hence, it is necessary to actively renew our religious and spiritual understanding in order to develop Islamic teachings that contribute to the needs of society. In this way, we can maintain the progressive and revolutionary values of Islam.

Tadrij, literally the principle of gradualism, means that the Qur'an was proposed in a step-by-step basis instead of a frontal confrontation with established social traditions. With *tadrij*, God means the Qur'an as having no final dogmas about a subject of discourse; rather, it is open to every renewal endeavor.

B. The Progressive Values of the Theology of *Tawhid*

Tawhid is the most basic principle of Islamic theology. Literally, *tawhid*, from *wahhada yuwahhidu*, means "an action of declaring God (Allah) to be one" (Davutoglu, 1994: 47) or "the belief that God is one inalienable divinity" ('Abduh, 1966: 29). With *tawhid*, a Muslim declares her or himself free from believing in any form of divine power other than Allah: there is no god, but Allah (*La ilaha illa Allah*). Furthermore, 'Abduh explains that embracing *tawhid*, Muslims believe that "from Him alone all being derives and in Him alone every purpose comes to its term." Hence, "unity was the great aim of the mission of the Prophet Muhammad" ('Abduh, *Ibid.*, 1). This implies that

egalitarianism, justice and solidarity are important values in Islamic theology. It is impossible to build unity among people and establish the best society (*khayru ummah*) without upholding the values of equality, justice and solidarity.

The theological concept of *tawhid* was a moral value that unified all members of society in one belief as an important foundation for social solidarity. In Mecca, Lapidus points out, monotheism was a radical idea since Mecca was one of the most complex and heterogeneous places in Arabia (Lapidus, 2002: 17). The Arab people were polytheistic and believed in paganism, dynamism and animism (Lapidus, 15). Since the Arab people defined their gods in terms of the power they had, in the society there was a tendency toward authoritarianism and individualism. Hence, *tawhid* was a revolutionary theology. *Tawhid* became a crucial prophetic tool in criticizing common social behavior in Arab societies, particularly individualism, hedonism, authoritarianism, and violence.

In addition to engendering the concept of human unity, *tawhid* also includes the concept of resurrection and that each person will be held responsible for their '*amal*' (behaviors) in their life. Those who spent their lifetime with *tawhid* and good behavior (*al-ladzina amanu wa 'amilu al-salihah*) will be rewarded by heaven, and those who passed their lives with bad behavior (*al-'amal al-sayyiah*) will be punished by hellfire. In this context, the idea of *tawhid* played a vital role in developing social order within Arabic societies. With the belief that Allah is the only God who will hold people responsible, people will be more disciplined to control their lives. On one hand, *tawhid* discouraged powerful groups to control their power, and on the other hand, *tawhid* empowered weak groups of people who lived under the control of others. Instead of

being a stagnant theological construction, it is more appropriate to view *tawhid* as a tool of social critiques. Following the path of *tawhid* fanatically contradicts its substantial meaning as the theological foundation of justice and egalitarianism. In such a stagnant traditionalist point of view, instead of inspiring Muslims to honor the existence of other beings, *tawhid* becomes a source of anti-pluralism.

An important value illuminated by *tawhid* is human freedom or free will. There has been much debate whether embracing *tawhid* leads to fatalism or rationalism. Generally speaking, there were two extreme views. The first is the Mu`tazali school of Islamic theology (*kalam*), which takes a rationalist position that tends to give more room for human free will. The second group is the Jabari school, the fatalist view that emphasizes human submission to destiny. I highlight this subject to show how Islam provides space for the application of human reason (*al-`aql*) to religious concepts.

Freedom of thought is vital to developing a just and egalitarian society. In contrast, fanatic imitation (*taqlid*) in following a single authoritative source of thought is an obstruction to justice. Instead of viewing every human being as having the same potentials to explore God's teachings, those who follow *taqlid* often view their leaders as representatives of God whose arguments and opinions are always true and undebatable. In this regard, the tradition of *taqlid* is said to be contrary to the spirit of *tawhid*. Just as *tawhid* means that only God can hold every person responsible for their actions during their lives, it means that every person has the same opportunity to express religious opinions and only God can judge their thinking. In the context of Indonesia, Harun Nasution, a prominent progressive Muslim scholar in the country, campaigned for

reawakening the Mu'tazali view of *al-'aql* (reason) in interpreting Islamic teachings (Nasution, 1994: 97). Nasution concluded that social backwardness within the country was due in part to the theological position that emphasized human submission to fate. In his mind, the Mu'tazali School celebrated human free will instead of human negative submission.

In this context it is important to introduce the concept of *tawakkal*. In *Ihya 'Ulum al-Din* al-Ghazali says that "The knowledge about *tawakkal* (reliance on God) is very subtle and the cause of it is that if one looks at the causes and ingredients of an action, he sets up partnership with God. In other words, if a man believes that anything has got power over the actions of a man, he can't be counted as a true monotheist" (1978: 67). I argue that *tawakkal* is a concept that restrains human beings from claiming absolute understanding of the world and God. With *tawakkal*, Muslims realize that God holds power over all human beings, but *tawakkal* does not prevent Muslims from using their reason to develop religious understanding. Because the highest level of the truth belongs to God, one cannot claim to have the truest opinion. This means that those who claim their view as the truest argument and do not reflect on God's superior power and knowledge are not following *tawhid* (*muwahhid*). According to *hadith*, when Mu'adz ibn Jabal asked the Prophet how he was to decide difficult cases brought before him in the new Islamic territory of Yemen, the Prophet Muhammad placed *tawakkal* as the closing step after understanding the Qur'an and *hadith* and applying human reason to these teachings.

Since “power tends to corrupt,” *tawhid* limits human power over other human beings because the ultimate power belongs to God. Therefore, it is contrary to *tawhid*, if Muslim view non-Muslims’ religious paths as wrong and claim theirs as the only true belief. It contradicts *tawhid* if scholars claim their understanding as true and insist that others must follow their understanding. From this contextual understanding of *tawhid*, the patriarchal perspective that the views of men must rule over women contradicts the spirit of *tawhid*. *Tawhid* requires a more egalitarian perspective. Since *tawhid* assumes that only God knows truth, it is open for every person to figure out her or his understanding of a religious doctrine. This point of view invites women to develop more woman-friendly religious understandings.

C. The Qur’an: Revolutionary Values and Rational Interpretation

With one word, *iqra’*, the first word in the Qur’an (al-‘Alaq (96): 1), God began His teachings for civilizing the world. Literally, *iqra’* is an imperative form of the word *recite* or *read*. With *iqra’*, the Qur’an wants to replace the use of violence to establish order within Arab society. Arab society was called *jahiliyyah*, which literally means stupidity. This did not indicate intellectual backwardness; rather it referred to moral attitudes that underlay clan conflicts, individualism, and domination through power and violence. The Arabs viewed non-Arab people (*‘a’jamiyy*) as having no value compared to the Arab people (*‘arabiyy*). Yet it was very rare to find social solidarity within Arab society, and the Arabs did not open their arms for collaboration with others. The word *iqra’* in the Qur’an is followed by “in the name of your God who created (all human

beings)” (al-‘Alaq (96): 1). It is important to emphasize the progressive meaning of *iqra*’ as a criticism of the closed, authoritarian nature of Arab society. This applies also to the authoritarianism of Muslims who claim to know religious truth and justify discrimination and attacks against others in the name of God.

Asbab al-nuzul (occasion of revelation) means that every ayah in the Qur’an was revealed in a specific situation. Consequently, it is inappropriate to apply the ayah as a general social principle. Therefore, creative approaches and a contextual method in interpreting the Qur’an are necessary. Indeed, as Abou El Fadl suggests, “closing the interpretive process is a despotic act. If a reader attempts to ‘lock’ the text into specific meaning, this act risks violating the integrity of the author and text” (Abou El Fadl, 2001: 92). The Arabic language has words with multiple meanings. This is an important sign that the Qur’an requires multiple interpretations. It does not fit the spirit of the Qur’an to claim a single understanding as the only true interpretation and judge others’ interpretations as wrong.

According to Umar (1999: 277-288), the Arabic language used by Allah to transmit His teachings has a gender-bias in its structure. Even though the Arabic language is grammatically divided into feminine (*muannath*) and masculine (*mudzakkar*) genders, God uses words that refer only to the male when the intention of the passage applies also to females. For instance, in the passage about the obligation of prayer, He says, “*Aqimu al-salat wa atu al-zakat*” (And be constant in prayer (*salat*) and render the purifying dues (*zakat*)) (al-Baqarah (2): 110). The words *aqimu* and *atu* are masculine forms, though the obligation of *salat* and *zakat* are for Muslim males and females. Applying the same

principle to the verse, “*Fankihu ma thaba lakum min al-nisa’ mathna wa thulatha wa ruba’*” (Then marry from among (other) women such as are lawful to you [even] two, or three or four) (the Qur’an, Chapter al-Nisa’ (4): 3), one could argue the word “*fankihu*” (marry!) in the masculine form also allows for the possibility that women can marry more than one man.

Another example of a context sensitive interpretation can be derived from the passage in the Qur’an that is usually interpreted as allowing a husband to beat (*wadhribu hunna*) a recalcitrant (*nusyuz*) or disobedient wife: “*Wa al-lati takhafuna nusyuzahunna fa’idhuhunna wahjuruhunna fi al-madhaji’ wadhribu hunn*” (And as for those women whose ill-will (*nusyuz*) you have reason to fear, admonish them (first); then leave them alone in bed; then beat them) (Chapter al-Nisa’(4): 34). The word *wadhribu* literally means beating. At that time, physical punishment was used to educate and warn people. In this context the word “*wadhribu*” can be taken to mean “to educate.”

The Qur’an appears to be dominated by men’s interpretation. Major Muslim scholars (*jumhur ‘ulama*) came up with the method of *tahlili* or *tajzi’i*. *Tahlili* and *tajzi* refer to a method of interpreting the Qur’an that is literal and does not consider the social context in which the revelation was given to the Prophet (*asbab al-nuzul*) (Umar, 2002: 74 quoted from al-‘Almai, 1984: 18 and al-Sadr, 7-9). Such methods of Qur’anic exegesis distort the meaning of the text because the interpreters highlight only particular parts of the Qur’an. This method does not connect and relate one ayah with other ayahs. For example, the traditionalist *mufassir* showed their agreement to polygamy based on “Then marry from among (other) women such as are lawful to you [even] two, or three or four”

(al-Nisa' (4): 3) but ignore the continuation of this verse, "If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them) then only one." Finally, in another part of the Qur'an, God says, "You are never able to be fair and just between women even if that were your ardent desire" (al-Nisa' (4):129).

A contextual feminist interpretation of the Qur'an is based on the Qur'anic vision of equality. The method of verifying a feminist interpretation is grounded on accordance with this vision of equality, particularly in the relationships between women and men. For example, Badawi interprets Qur'an verse 60 (al-Mumtahanah/the Examined One) verse 8 that emphasizes the value of *al-birr* (kindness, but more than kindness) and *al-qist* (just, but more than just) (Badawi, 2008). With this idea, Qur'anic interpretation can be seen as a kind of academic *ijtihad* in which the interpreter must show appreciation for other opinions without blaming them as invalid one, yet show that their own interpretation is more contextual and relevant to the vision of religious justice. I view that andocentric model of interpretation as problematic since it seems not to fulfill the needs of establishing equality in the relationship of women and men, particularly in a contemporary context. The academic effort or struggle toward Truth (*al-Haqq*) should be based on freedom of thought, which requires appreciation of other opinions. Discussion and dialog is crucial in the search for truth, while the patriarchal tradition of interpretation simply requires submission to God and the tradition. *Ijma'* (interpretation) addresses the dialogical situation in which no one can absolutely claim her or his own truth.

D. Women in the History of Islam: Marginalization and Struggle

The patriarchal powers that dominated society during the early centuries of Islamic history marginalized women, particularly revolutionary women. They imposed gender-based segregation in the public space and restricted women to the “apolitical” realm of domestic affairs. They emphasized values of morality, modesty and privacy and constructed a discourse on sexuality that defined Muslim women who openly expressed sexual interests as bad Muslims. Finally they rejected change and as a foundation of religious thought asked Muslims to go back to the basis of Islam and the traditions of the early followers of the Prophet (*al-salaf al-salih*).

We can see the patriarchal structure of society in traditions such as the veiling of women, harems, and a theology that positioned Muslim women always behind the men. Although there were women who were involved in the process of producing Islamic knowledge as interpreters (*mufassirat*) or *hadith* transmitters (*muhaddithat*), the patriarchal powers tried to hide the evidence. They constructed an exclusively male “academic tradition” that hampered women. For instance, the traditionalists developed a methodology of interpreting the Koran that insisted upon high standards of education that were impossible for Muslim women who had been bared for a long time from study of the Qur’an and other Islamic writings. They restricted Muslim women from being imams and preachers (*khatib*) at Friday prayer and stereotyped them solely as sexual providers for their husbands.

Nevertheless there were Muslim women who were influential contributors to developing Islamic civilization They are Khadijah bint al-Kuwaylid, Aishah bint Abu

Bakr, Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah, and women *hadith* scholars or *muhaddithat*, such as Zaynab bint al-Kamal and 'Aishah bint Muhammad.

Leila Ahmed in *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992) explores Arab women's roles, including Muslim women, in various periods of history. Her research is essential in showing the changes in the role of women in Islamic tradition. While Ahmed show how Muslim women were marginalized as Islam spread to the patriarchal culture of neighboring societies, like Persia, she also shows even during the most patriarchal periods, there were a few Muslim women who stood out when compared to their male Muslim fellows in terms of their social and religious accomplishments. In this thesis I emphasize the historical evidence that shows the role women played in Islamic societies.

1. Khadijah and 'Aishah: Two Faces of Revolutionary Muslim Women

The biographies of two of Prophet Muhammad's wives, Khadijah and 'Aishah, show that strong women played a role in the foundation of Islam. Khadijah represents a revolutionary conception of women's domestic role while 'Aishah represents a revolutionary conception of women's public role. Usually, the term revolutionary is associated with wars, politics, and knowledge or law production. However, revolutionary women within Islamic society are not only women who took public roles but also those who worked in the domestic domain as mothers and housewives. While Khadijah and 'Aishah may not seem revolutionary, but if we look back through the lens of 20th century feminism they appear to have revolutionary values.

a. Khadijah: Being Revolutionary in the Domestic Sphere

Khadijah was born in Mecca. She was the daughter of al-Khuwaylid ibn ‘Asad bin ‘Abd al- ‘Uzza ibn Qusayy. Her familial line connected to Muhammad’s line as Muhammad was the son of Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-Muthalib ibn Hashim ibn ‘Abd Manaf ibn Qusayy (Razwy, 1990: 6). Khadijah came from a tradition of trade and merchandise. Her tribe, the Quraish, was one of the biggest clans within Arabic society, and Khadijah was one of the most successful traders at that time.

Khadijah (A.D. 555-619) was the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad. She married him about A.D. 595. Most historians, especially those from the Sunni tradition, note that Muhammad was 25 years old and Khadijah was 40 at the time they married. They say that prior to her marriage to Muhammad, she had had two previous husbands; Hala al-Taminia and Otayyik (see, for example Ibn Hisham in *Sirah* and Ibn Sa’d in *Tabaqat* as quoted by Watt and McDonald, 1988: 47). However, the Shiite historians claim that Khadijah was married only to Muhammad.¹ They also say that she was only a few years older than Muhammad, not 40. For example, Razwy, a Shiite historian, states, “The figure 40 is only an estimate, and it is an over-estimate. Whereas it

¹Sunni and Shia Muslims have differing view of Khadijah and ‘Aishah. Khadijah was the mother of Fatimah who married ‘Ali ibn Abi Thalib, the Shiite Wali. Hence, Shiites associate Khadijah with their tradition and view ‘Aishah as an opponent of the Shia group in the schism that followed the death of the Prophet. Thus while major Islamic historians say that Khadijah married Muhammad after the death of her two previous husbands, Shia historians believe that her marriage to Muhammad was her only marriage. One of the most significant implications of these different versions is in term of the images and portraits of the ideal wife in the minds of Muslims. However, I will not go further in discussing different ideas of Shiite and Sunnite since my focus of comparison is mainly on the role of Muslim women in the history of early Islam who best represents the ideal Muslim woman, Khadijah who preferred to play a domestic role or Aishah who was more actively involved in public life.

is true that Khadijah was older than Muhammad, she was not 15 years older as claimed by most of the historians, but only a few years older than him” (Razwy, 1990: 177).

The first important fact about Khadijah was that she was an upper-class woman among the Quraish. Why then did she want to marry to Muhammad? In my point of view, Khadijah’s wish to marry Muhammad was influenced by the discourse of sexuality within the Arabic society of that time. It was common at that time for women to freely express their sexual interests, and they controlled sexual relationships with men. In this context, the marital relationship was also one in which women played a dominant role. Evidence of the role of women in initiating sexual relationships comes from poems written by Arabic women around that time that express a somewhat vulgar and “open” interest in sexuality (see al-Udhari, 1999). This evidence contradicts traditional Muslim scholars’ picture of women as passive, modest, and closed.

In addition, it is said that ancient Arabic society was more matrilineal at the time when Khadijah lived. A woman might have sexual relationships with a number of males, and she was responsible to care for and feed the babies resulting from her sexual relationships. In this tradition, women might take the “lead” in proposing and asking a male to marry her.

Watt claims that the basis of familial structure shifted from matrilineal to patrilineal after the Battle of Uhud, March 23, 625. This battle claimed many Muslim lives in the small community of followers of the Prophet and created many orphans and widows. In this context, God revealed the ayah of polygamy in the Qur’an, Chapter al-Nisa’ (4): 34. However, the majority of Muslim men interpreted the ayah to support their

interests in polygamy and patriarchal values. The shift in family structure from matrilineal to patrilineal strengthened patriarchal views within Islamic society (Watt, 1956).

Although it was common among women at that period to freely express their sexual interest, Khadijah was revolutionary because she chose Muhammad who had no powerful position in the society. Armstrong states that at that time Muhammad was “a relatively obscure figure, and nobody thought it worthwhile to make note of his activities” (Armstrong, 2006: 16). Social, economic and political positions were key factors in establishing a man’s status (*karamah*). In choosing Muhammad as her husband, Khadijah showed a great deal of freedom of choice and demonstrated her ability to be independent of the influence of the dominant view in her society. Instead of referring to social, political and economic status as the basis for proposing to Muhammad, Khadijah valued his personal characteristics. Muhammad’s truthfulness, reliability, and nobility of character impressed Khadijah (al-Tabari, Vol. VI, 1988: 48). As Razwy describes it, “Muhammad’s efficient work performance and excellent business ability when he worked with Khadijah’s trading company were actually one the main reasons Khadijah was attracted to him” (Razwy, 1990). He was known as the trusted one (*al-Amin*), an acknowledgement of his trustworthy personality (for deeper description of Muhammad’s high personality, see Lings, 1983 especially chapters XI and XIII). Muhammad’s altruistic personality traits were different from typical Arabic behavior. Khadijah’s choice was revolutionary since it was unpopular for an upper class, rich Arab woman in that era to value inner personality traits as reasons to develop a marital relationship. In addition,

although the familial structure was matrilineal, patriarchal views dominated broader social, political and economic relationships. For instance, a father might even kill his daughter in order to avoid a disgrace to the family as we can see from the story of 'Umar ibn Khattab before he converted to Islam.

Khadijah's second revolutionary act was that she was the first person to convert to Islam after the Prophet Muhammad. Again she went against the mainstream beliefs of Arabic society. In fact, it was extremely difficult to be the first believer. Khadijah had to face threats from the members of society. The new belief not only contradicted traditional beliefs, it challenged the political and economic order. Under Islamic teachings, political, social and economic profits were beneficial only if they were dedicated for justice, equality and humanity among people. This directly challenged the positions of powerful members of the society and inspired their anger against anyone who worked to expand Islamic belief.

The third significant thing about Khadijah was that during her 25-year marriage to Muhammad, she was the only wife, and he remained a widower for three years after Khadijah's death. The death of Khadijah caused the greatest sorrow in Muhammad's life and was known as the year of grief (*'am al-huzn*).

During Muhammad's years with Khadijah, she had a great and powerful influence on him. Evidence of how important Khadijah was for Muhammad's psychological stability comes from the time when Muhammad received the first revelation. It is said that Muhammad was very frightened and was sick for several days. At that time, Khadijah tenderly cared for Muhammad and supported him. She consoled him when he

worried about what would happen to him if the Quraish knew about the event of the revelation. Indeed, she convinced Muhammad to be confident, and she declared herself a follower of Muhammad's belief (*mu'minah*).

In addition, Khadijah gave Muhammad and his *da'wah* movement (Islamic preaching) strong financial support. She did not care that her contributions might provoke the anger of the Quraish. Under these conditions, Muhammad rejected polygamy although it was permitted in his society. In her role as the Prophet Muhammad's wife Khadijah maintained an equal position face-to-face relationship with her husband. She could be said to have been aware that the domestic was also political. In feminist perspectives, this is expressed in the slogan, "the personal is political." According to this concept, ordinary relationships in daily life are a significant part of politics in terms of strengthening the bargaining position of women vis-à-vis men or other patriarchal powers. In this way Khadijah provides an inspiring model for the empowerment of women in the domestic realm.

b. 'Aishah: Woman's Participation in Public Roles

'Aishah, born in Mecca in about A.D. 614, was the daughter of one of Muhammad's closest companions, Abdullah ibn Abi Quhafah, known more commonly as Abu Bakar al-Siddiq (Abbott, 1985: 1). She was married to Muhammad when she was six (or seven) years old and began to live with him when she was nine. At that time, the Prophet was about 50 years old. It was three years before the *Hijrah* (emigration) to Medina that the Prophet married 'Aishah and consummated the marriage in May-June

623 (al-Tabari, Vol. VII, 1987: 6). This marriage has scandalized many Western scholars. In my view, it is not appropriate to view practices that were common at the time of the Prophet through the lens of contemporary standards. Additionally, according to Razwy, “Arabia is a very hot country, and Arab girls reach maturity much more rapidly than girls do in cold or temperate climates” (Razwy, 1990). (For a deeper discussion on the subject of ‘Aisha’s age, see Ali, 2006: Chapter 8, 135-150. For the story of ‘Aishah’s marriage, see also Abbott, 1985: Chapter I).

Unlike Khadijah, ‘Aishah played a more public role during her marriage to Muhammad. ‘Aishah represented herself as having an equal position and capabilities as Muslim males. Her greatest accomplishment was to be one of the most credible *hadith* transmitters (*muhaddithat*) (discussed below). To some extent, ‘Aishah’s intellectual capability exceeded that of a majority of Muslim males. The Prophet acknowledged ‘Aisha’s intellectual position. He said, “Don’t trouble me about ‘Aishah. She is the only one of my wives in whose house I receive revelation” (Fernea and Bazirgan, 1977: 28 quoted from Ibn Hambal, *Musnad*, 6: 293). Indeed, the Prophet himself was never heard to utter a restriction against ‘Aishah’s involvements in any field of such Islamic knowledge.

The Prophet’s respect for Aisha is shown in an incident recorded in the Qur’an. When the Prophet and his companions returned from the battle against Mustaliq, ‘Aishah who accompanied him was separated from the group. After some time she was found by Shafwan ibn Mu’aththal, one of the Prophet’s companion, who took her to the place where the Prophet was resting. This incident provoked rumors. This inspired a revelation

in the Qur'an: God says, "Verily! They who spread the slander are a gang among you..." (Chapter al-Nur (14): 11), which is taken as a rebuke of those who slandered 'Aishah. According to Asad, "this historical event is primarily meant to bring an ethical proposition valid for all times and all social circumstances" (Asad, nd: 535).

According to Spellberg (1991: 47), 'Aishah's marriage to the Prophet was politically important for the Prophet and her father, Abu Bakr. The marriage confirmed the tie between two strong men in a family relationship. Aisha realized the political importance of her marriage and used it when confronted by the Prophet's companions. Her role in leading opposition to 'Ali ibn Abi Thalib, one of the closest Prophet's companion, in the Battle of the Camel shows that he believed she had a strong political position as a result of her marriage to the Prophet.

The Battle of the Camel, as an internal dispute among Muslims, was one of the bloodiest events in Islamic history and inspired other strong conflicts. Although male companions of the Prophet, such as Ali ibn Abi Thalib, were also involved, 'Aishah was blamed. Thereafter Muslim male authorities restricted women's participation in politics. Nevertheless, 'Aishah demonstrated that women could play a role as political leaders.

2. Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah: Sufi Spirituality

The importance of the life story of Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah for a progressive, modern, Islamic feminism rests on three points. First is the high regard for Islamic mysticism or Sufi practices within Muslim societies. In this context, Rabi'ah's spiritual life story can inspire feminists among Muslims with Sufi traditions. Second is Rabi'ah's

paramount accomplishment as a Sufi. Muslims honor her even though they are not followers of the Sufi path. Third is her choice of celibacy. In this regard, I want to emphasize Rabi'ah's independence and autonomy which can be a model for progressive feminists. The life story of Rabi'ah has been a source of inspiration for Muslim women searching for a revolutionary way to change the established unequal gender relationships within Muslim societies. In Sufism Muslim women could reach the highest level of religiosity and spirituality. Muslim women's participation in Islamic mysticism challenged the dominance of Muslim men and the views of Muslim scholars and societies who viewed women as a source of sexual desire (*fitnah*). Therefore, the life of Rabi'ah is an important foundation for the reconstruction of progressive Islamic feminism.

In this discussion, I use the term Sufi for Islamic mysticism or Islamic esoterism, although some scholars differentiate these terms. Generally speaking, Sufism is a spiritual effort of Sufis or Saints to pursue the highest spiritual relationship with God. Gibb, as quoted by Chittick, describes Sufism as equivalent to “authentic religious experience” (Chittick, 2000: 3). Sufis seek direct personal spiritual experience of God rather than focusing on other Muslim scholars' teachings. Only the Qur'an and the *hadith* are used as a guide to the path to God. According to Sufis, who emphasize individual spiritual freedom, each individual within a Muslim society can reach the ultimate spiritual level regardless economic and social status as well as gender. Margaret Smith, referring to al-Hujwiri, writes, “It was the development of mysticism (Sufism) within Islam which gave women their great opportunity to attain the rank of sainthood” (1994:1).

Sufism gives a wider opportunity for women to develop spiritually since this mystic-oriented religious activity emphasizes the involvement of souls or *al-bathin*, the esoteric side of Muslims, rather than bodies or *al-dhahir*, the exoteric part. Rather than separating humans into women and men, Sufis prefer to represent souls as the essence of all human beings (Smith, 3). In the spiritual life of Sufism, as Smith says, there can be neither male nor female; the relationship between Sufis and their God “left no room for the distinction of sex”. The Sufi path leads Sufis to unity with their God. Shabistari, as quoted by Smith, says that “In God there is no duality. In that Presence ‘I’ and ‘we’ and ‘thou’ do not exist, ‘I’ and ‘we’ and ‘thou’ and ‘he’ become one.... Since in the Unity there is no distinction... the Quest and the Way and the Seeker become one” (Ibid., 1).

Rabi’ah was not the only female Sufi. In his work, *Dhikr al-Niswa al-Muta’abbidat al-Sufiyyat*, (translated by Rkia E. Cornell), al-Sulami has an important list of distinguished female Sufis. Besides Rabi’ah, his list includes Lubaba al-Muta’abbidah, Maryam al-Bashriyyah, ‘Ubaydah bin Abi Kilab al-Bashriyyah, and Fatimah bint Ahmad Ibn Hani al-Naysaburiyyah. Ruth Roded makes an interesting observation about the list of women Saints in Islam: most of them are not named. Almost half of the women in Ibn al-Jawzi’s hagiography have no names (1994: 93-97). As a consequence, Muslims living in a more contemporary period cannot learn more about them.

Rabi’ah’s life story provides a glimpse of how Sufism gives Muslim women a larger opportunity to participate in Islamic discourse. In this discussion of Rabi’ah, I mainly refer to the writings of Margaret Smith, *Rabi’ah the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints* and Farid al-Din ‘Attar who lived four hundred years after Rabi’ah and wrote a

biography of Rabi'ah in *Tadhkirat al-Awliya'* (Memoir of the Saints). Smith's work is an important source for studying Rabi'ah because Smith refers to several classical works on this subject.

Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyah al-Qaysiyah al-Bashriyyah was born around A.D. 717 or A.H. 95 in the city of Basra, Iraq (Smith, 5, Heath, 2004: 171). Quoting from al-Munawi, Smith describes Rabi'ah as the leader of women disciples and the chief of women ascetics. Following 'Attar, Smith mentions that Rabi'ah was born from poor parents, although, she notes that more recent scholars, such as M. Zihni, assert that "she belonged to one noble family of Bashra" (Ibid., 5). Her father named her Rabi'ah, the "fourth," since he already had three daughters. In the night when Rabi'ah was born, the home was dark, and there was no oil for the lamp. Her mother asked her husband to get oil for the lamp from a neighbor, but he had promised not to depend on anyone except God. After getting very distressed, he fell asleep and dreamt that the Prophet Muhammad appeared to him and said, "Do not be sorrowful for this daughter who is born as a great Saint, who is intercession will be desired by seventy thousand of my community" ('Attar quoted by Smith, Ibid., 5).

Smith describes how Rabi'ah finally became a Sufi. The misfortunes of her family continued; when Rabi'ah was still young, her mother and father died, and she became an orphan. At this time, there was a shortage of food in Basra, and poor people faced starvation (Smith, Ibid, 6). Smith says that "when [Rabi'ah] was walking abroad, an evil-minded man saw her and seized upon her and sold her as a slave ... the man who bought her made her work hard" (Ibid., 6). The story continues, "one day a stranger (one

who might not look at her unveiled) approached her. Rabi'ah fled to avoid him and slipped on the road and dislocated her wrist. She bowed her face in the dust, and said, 'O Lord, I am a stranger and without mother and father, and an orphan and a slave and I have fallen into bondage and my wrist is injured, (yet) I am not grieved by this, only (I desire) to satisfy Thee. I would fain know if Thou art satisfied (with me) or not'. She heard a voice saying, 'Be not sorrowful, for on the day of Resurrection thy rank shall be such that those who are nearest to God in Heaven shall envy thee'" (Smith, *Ibid.*, 6).

Citing 'Attar (1993: 21), Smith says that later on one night her master awoke from sleep and saw Rabi'ah in worship, saying, "O my Lord, Thou knowest that the desire of my heart is to obey Thee, and that the light of my eye is in the service of Thy court. If the matter rested with me, I should not cease for one hour from Thy service, but Thou hast made me subject to a creature." Smith continues, "while she was still praying, he saw a lamp above her head, suspended without a chain, and the whole house was illuminated by the rays from the light. Seeing that strange sight, her master felt afraid and went back to his own place." Finally, "when the day dawned, he called Rabi'ah and spoke kindly to her and set her free" (Smith, *Ibid.*, 7)

The spiritual power of Rabi'ah is said to have been exhibited in several *karamah* (lesser miracles or acts of divine grace). *Karamah* symbolize the most virtuous spirituality of a Saint and demonstrate their intimate unity with God. In the case of Rabi'ah, the story of the mystical experience that released her from slavery is told as a *karamah*. This is significant because traditional Muslim societies, such as Indonesia, like to refer to legendary stories for Islamic teachings. Although Rabi'ah was a slave who had

to work hard for her master, she was still able to achieve a personal spiritual relationship with God. She could actualize her potential self and achieve spiritual freedom despite her terrible life of slavery.

The accomplishment of Rabi'ah as a Sufi can be contrasted with the gender-biased point of view within Muslim societies where women are generally stereotyped as a source of *fitnah*. Roded quotes Annemarie Schimmel, who explains that “early Islamic ascetics identified the ‘lower self that incites to evil’ (mentioned in the Qur’an) with women, because the word *nafs* is feminine” (p. 97). Consequently, “the temptations of this world are also personified as a woman” (Ibid., 9 and 7). Women were said to cause sexual lust that tempts Muslim men away from a religious and spiritual life. This view of women was shared not only by traditional Muslim scholars (*fuqaha'*) who were involved in the process of Islamic law production, but also by male Sufis who also viewed women as a source of temptation that could hamper their esoteric efforts toward God. In terms of sexual relationships, several male Sufis, such as Abu Nawwas, preferred to have a relationship with boys rather than women, because they thought that sexual interactions with boys would not lead them to spiritual decadence.

The patriarchal attitude of Sufis is also found in Attar's words when he says “When a woman walks in the way of God like a man, she cannot be called a woman. For ‘Attar the Islamic mystical path was for men. Sufi women were intruding in men's space. As women who moved in men's space, Sufi women constructed themselves as men. As women, in ‘Attar's mind, they had a subordinate position below men. This helps to explain why Rabi'ah rejected all offers of marriage and chose celibacy. She was not

simply a woman who walked in men's path; she was a powerful woman who was not tempted by sexuality and could reject proposals of marriage from important men, such as Hasan al-Basri, and seek only love of God (*al-hubb*).

It is told that Rabi'ah received many offers of marriage but she refused all of them. 'Abd al-Wahid bin Zayd, Muhammad bin Sulayman al-Hashimi, and Hasan al-Basri were among other great names who proposed Rabi'ah. According to Smith, 'Abd al-Wahid bin Zayd (d. A.D. 793) was "renowned for his asceticism and the sanctity of his life, a theologian and a preacher and an advocate of solitude for those who sought the way to God" (Ibid., 10). Like Rabi'ah, 'Abd al-Wahid came from a lineage of Sufis. Furthermore, Smith mentions also that he was the founder of one of the first monastic communities near Basra (Ibid., 5). Rabi'ah did not accept 'Abd al-Wahid's offer and answered, "O sensual one, seek another sensual like thyself. Hast thou seen any sign of desire in me?" (Ibid., 5). Muhammad bin Sulayman al-Hashimi (d. A.H. 172) was the 'Abbasid Amir of Basra from A.H. 145. Quoting from al-Munawi, Smith writes, "al-Hashimi offered a dowry of a hundred thousand *dinars* and wrote to Rabi'ah that he had an income of ten thousand *dinars* a month and that he would bestow it all on her." Rabi'ah did not welcome his offer and replied, "It does not please me that you should be my slave and that all you possess should be mine, or that you should distract me from God for a single moment" (Ibid., 5).

The way Rabi'ah responded to these two offers of marriage is different, and these differences provide important insights for developing progressive Islamic feminism. To 'Abd al-Wahid, Rabi'ah emphasized her control of sexual needs as an expression of her

spiritual development since he was a member of Islamic Sufi community. This suggests that Rabi'ah' is superior to him since 'Abd al-Wahid could not control his sexual needs. In her response to al-Hashimi's proposal Rabi'ah focused more her suitor's material wealth, which meant nothing to her. She chose poverty as a spiritual discipline. Rabi'ah was certainly aware of the powerful positions of 'Abd al-Wahid and al-Hashimi, and she wanted to maintain her autonomy by rejecting these offers.

The story of Rabi'ah's refusal of Hasan al-Basri is one of the most famous Sufi stories among Muslims. Hasan al-Basri (d. A.D. 728) was known as one of the greatest Sufis, a "leader of extreme asceticism" (Marvelly, 2005: 106). According to 'Attar, Hasan al-Basri once said, "I passed a whole day and night with Rabi'ah speaking of the Way and the Truth and it never passed through my mind that I was a man nor did it occur to her that she was a woman, and at the end when I look at her, I saw myself a bankrupt (spiritually worth nothing) and Rabi'ah as truly sincere" (Marvelly, Ibid., 106). Rabi'ah's refusal of the proposals of marriage is a crucial foundation for transforming gender relationships in Islam and upholding women's potential for a spiritual life within Muslim societies because Rabi'ah demonstrated that women are not less spiritual than men.

3. *Muhaddithat*: Women and the Tradition of *Hadith*

Hadith are stories about the life and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. A *muhaddith* is a Muslim who serves as a *hadith* transmitter, and *muhaddithat* refer to female *muhaddith*. Muslim scholars who study the transmission of *hadith* have played a

core role in presenting the portrait of the Prophet and his teachings. His wives and companions who lived close to the Prophet were among the earliest *muhaddith*.

It is believed that the Prophet's life is a model for all Muslims to aspire to. The Prophet was a leader involved in the process of social reform. Therefore the documentation and the reports about his life are a great source for Muslims promoting social change. As Fazlur Rahman (1993: 220-232) explains, *hadith* transmitted by several *muhaddith* are an inspiration for Muslim working for social reform based on the Prophet's tenets.

For many centuries, the discourse of *hadith* was exclusively a Muslim male activity. There was no available space for women's involvement. Muslim male scholars led in the process of developing patriarchal Islamic laws. They domesticated Muslim women and limited women's space to the household. Muslim women rarely had access to sources of Islamic knowledge (*rihlah fi thalab al-'ilm*), and gradually they were said to have no capacity as intellectuals. As a consequence, it was difficult for a Muslim woman to become a thinker (*faqih*), jurist (*qadhi'*), or *muhaddith*.

The recovery of the role of early Muslim women in the transmission of *hadith* is important for progressive feminist movements. First, knowledge of female *muhaddith* can play an important role in changing the stereotypical view of women among Muslims. Secondly, it is important to note women's involvement in the transmission and study of *hadith* since for Muslims *hadith* are the second highest source of Islamic law. Those who were involved in the process of collecting and spreading *hadith* hold an honorable position in all Muslim societies. Muslims recognize and trust *hadith* scholars as models

of Islamic intellectuality and modesty (*al' - 'ilm wa al-muru'a*). They had to have a high capability of memorizing and show honesty and speak good words. These personal qualities determine the level of validity and accuracy of a *hadith*. The fact that women were involvement in *hadith* science demonstrates their intellectual capabilities and qualities of piety, modesty and morality.

In *Thabaqat al-Nisa' al-Muhaddithat* (Biography of Women *Hadith* Scholars) (1981) 'Abd al-'Aziz Sayyid al-Ahl compiled a list of hundreds *muhaddithat* from early Islamic history in the period of the companions to the seventh period. Mohammad Akram Nadwi, a *hadith* scholar from India and a fellow at the Oxford Center for Islamic Studies has extended this research, documenting some eight thousand Muslim women scholars of *hadith* science. He begins his observation with the Prophet's wives, such as 'Aishah who was one of the most productive *hadith* transmitters and *Thabi'in* who lived after the era of the companions. Nadwi also mentions Imam Malik's daughter who, according to Zubayr, "had memorized the whole of her father's *al-Muwatta'*" (Nadwi, 2007: 6). Another *muhaddith* who learned *hadith* science in the home was Sitt al-'Arab bint Muhammad bin Fakhr ad-Din Abi Hasan 'Ali bin Muhammad bin Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Wahid al-Bukhari, the granddaughter of the celebrated *muhaddith* Ibn al-Bukhari (Nadwi, *Ibid.*, 7). Nadwi's attention to Muslim women scholars from the families of famous Muslim scholars makes the point that when women were given the opportunity of education they often became great scholars.

Muhamamd Zubyr Siddiqi is another contemporary expert on *hadith* science who works on acknowledging and respecting Muslim women *hadith* scholars. In an important

article, “Women Scholars of Hadith,” an excerpt from his book, *Hadith Literature: Its Origins, Development and Special Features* (1993), he introduces *muhaddithat* starting with the Prophet’s wives to more contemporary examples. For example, ‘Abidah al-Madaniyyah “started life as a slave owned by Muhammad bin Yazid and learned a large number of *hadiths* from the teachers in Medina.” Another example is Zaynab bint Sulayman, a princess by birth. Citing Wustenfeld who studied history of *hadith* transmitters, Siddiqi says that Zaynab’s father was a cousin of al-Saffah, the founder of the ‘Abbasid dynasty and a governor of Basra, Oman, and Bahrain during the caliphate of al-Mansur (Ibid., 3). Asma Sayeed’s discussion of classical biographies also includes information about hundreds of women *hadith* scholars (Sayeed, 2003: 71-94). Sayeed mentions, *al-Durar al-Kaminah* of Ibn Hajar al-Asqallani (d. A.D. 1449), *al-Daw al-Lami’* of al-Sakhawi (d. A.D. 1497), *Kitab al-Wafi bi’l Wafayat* of al-Safadi (d. A.D. 1362) and *Shadarat al-Dhahab* of Ibn al-‘Imad (d. A.D. 1679) (2002: 71).

Hadith science rests on the system of *ijaza* (certification). Berkey, as quoted by Sayeed, describes the *ijazah* system as certifying the “transmission of knowledge.” A characteristic of *hadith* studies, according to Sayeed, is that this field did not require a higher educational degree. This field was available to Muslim of all ages. For example, “at elementary school, even lay people could memorize short, popular *hadith* collections” (Ibid., 75). Indeed, memorization (*tahfidzat*) is central to *hadith* studies. In the history of Islam the tradition of memorization played a significant role in maintaining rich collection of Islamic oral teachings.

Unlike studies of Islamic theology and law that seem to be more individually reflective, the system of *ijaza* in the context of *hadith* science “allowed students and teachers to exchange religious knowledge without a lengthy period of individual tutelage” (Ibid., 74). Training in *hadith* science began at a very young age and “permitted the transfer of authority from teacher to student well before these students (sometimes young children) actually studied the work(s) with the understanding that the student would learn the material at an appropriate age” (Ibid, 74).

According to Sayeed, the life stories of Zaynab bint al-Kamal (A.D. 1248-1339) and ‘Aishah bint Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Hadi (A.D. 1323-1413), two *muhaddithat* from Mamluk, Damascus, show how women became hadith scholars. The rise of educational institutions, such as *madrasa*, *dur al-hadith* (college of hadith), *zawiya* (study circle), and *halaqat al-‘ilm* (forum discussion), provided more opportunity for women’s participation in seeking Islamic knowledge through *hadith* science (Sayeed, 72-73). Mosques opened the doors for women to express not only their religious piety, but also their intellectual interests. Zaynab and ‘Aishah were important examples of Muslim women’s interests in living in and interacting with wider social milieus.

Zaynab is said to have gained several *ijaza* from excellent *hadith* masters or sheikhs when she was only five-years old. When she was twelve, most of the masters in her *hadith* lineage died. Zaynab’s prominence derives partly from being among the last surviving students (Ibid., 82). She became a new link in the tradition of the *hadith* teachers. Female and male students came to her *majlis* or assembly. According to Sayeed, “a certificate describes an assembly of a little of a little over a hundred students in the

large congregational mosque al-Jami' al-Muzaffari ... [and] Zaynab was among ten authorities, most of them male, presiding over this assembly” (Ibid., 81).

‘Aishah bint Muhammad was not born from a lineage of Islamic scholars; her father was a Market inspector (*muhtasib*), yet in this position he had connections with the leading scholars in Damascus. Her father taught ‘Aishah *hadith* traditions. (Sayeed, Ibid., 83). ‘Aishah’s vital position in *hadith* science is her link to al-Hajjar (d. A.D. 1329), who had a distinguished reputation as being able to narrate the *Sahih* of al-Bukhari (A.D 810-870) no less than seventy times (Ibid., 83). Indeed up to the present, al-Bukhary’s Book of *Sahih* is valued as “the most important of all *Musannaf* works (thematic-based *hadith* collections of all the *hadith* collections” (Siddiqi, 1993: p. 53). As Sayeed explains, “since ‘Aishah outlived all of those who transmitted al-Bukhari’s *Sahih* from al-Hajjar, she became a coveted authority for those seeking his name in their chain of transmission” (Ibid., 83). In this scholarly lineage, ‘Aishah held an outstanding position as a master of *hadith* transmission with numerous disciples. Among her distinguished students was Ibn al-Hajar al-‘Asqallani, the author of the phenomenal classical *hadith* book, *Fath al-Bari bi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari*.

The story of ‘Aishah suggests that the Muslim community at that time was characterized by a more fair gender perspective. ‘Aishah’s father was free to introduce her *hadith* study, and she became a respected authority. Furthermore, ‘Aishah demonstrated the capacity of women to achieve authoritative knowledge through their own efforts. The wider opportunity for *muhaddithat*, like Zaynab and ‘Aishah, was due to the educational system in Mamluk Damascus. The process of learning and studying in

this system did not discriminate among students and teachers based on gender. Women had more opportunity to be involved in the process of seeking Islamic knowledge and also more opportunity for the interactions with men. Men did not view women stereotypically as a source of *fitnah* and sexual desire that had to be forced to stay inside the home.

However, it is important to say that the involvement of Muslim women in *hadith* science and transmission did not guarantee that the *hadith* traditions would be more women-friendly. There are hundreds of *hadith*—both invalid and unauthorized *hadith* (*dha'if*) and valid ones (*sahih*)—that maintain male superiority over women within Muslim societies. There are *hadith* that religiously legitimate discrimination against women. Such *hadith* are one of the main sources of misogynist views in Muslim societies.

The involvement of Muslim women in *hadith* transmission is important as historical evidence of the fact that in at least one period of history women were given the opportunity to participate in Islamic learning and they demonstrated their capacity as Islamic intellectuals. They participated in the process of disseminating Islamic knowledge and developing Islamic law.

E. Women's Marginalization in Islamic History

Looking at the discussion above, it might seem that Islam opens the door for Muslim women's empowerment. Here I explore traditional religious thinking that has limited the lives of Muslim women. Traditionalism refers to religious thinking that derives from the ideas and practices of first believers, *al-salaf al-salih*, the first followers

of the Prophet, known as his companions (*sahabah*) and followers (*tabi'in*). According to tradition, the era of *al-salaf al-salih* is viewed as a model of ideal Islamic society since people lived with the Prophet, the spokesman of God. The companions of the Prophet and his first followers are thought to have had the most accurate understanding of the Qur'an and *hadiths*. Therefore, the model of an ideal Islamic society is complete; there is no need for change or development. Traditionalists preferred to blindly imitate (*taqlid 'a'ma*) the way of *al-salaf al-salih* rather than contextualizing Islamic teachings to fit new conditions. Therefore, in some periods of Islamic history, these traditionalist *fuqaha'* called for closing the doors of *ijtihad* (interpretation).²

Traditionalists generally view 'Aishah's involvement in political disputes that led to conflict within Muslim society as an example of how women's involvement in the public sphere and their rejection of their "obligations" as a woman or wife leads to trouble. A good woman (*al-mar'ah al-salihah*) should be modest and retiring in the public domain.

Al-Ghazali is a good example of religious traditionalism as applied to issues related to women. Al-Ghazali was born in 1058, four hundred and fifty years after the migration (*hijrah*) of the Prophet from Mecca to Medina, in the town or district of Tus in north-east Persia. His name, as Watt explains, was Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Muhammad and he also had an honorific title of Abu Hamid. However, he is best-known

²See Wael B Hallaq (1984) "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" where he criticizes the assumption of modern scholars that the door of *ijtihad* was closed at the beginning of the 4th century of hijrah (about AD. 900). I agree with Hallaq's notion that the door of *ijtihad* was not totally closed; however, in this discussion, I want to emphasize the impact of the traditional way of thinking that suppressed the spirit of critical and rational *ijtihad* among Muslims.

as al-Ghazali, the Ghazalite, after a village in the region of Tus. He is also sometimes called al-Tusi, the Tusite. He had a brother, Ahmad, who became a distinguished scholar and mystic and several other brothers (Watt, 1963: 19-20). Al-Ghazali wrote one of the most important classical texts for Muslims. It is entitled *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)*. The term revival refers to a return to the values and thoughts of the companions of the Prophet. According to Watt, "clearly any attempt to assess al-Ghazali's achievement must pay considerable attention to this work" (Ibid., 151).

In the *Kitab Adab al-Nikah* (The Book of Marriage), a chapter of the second book of *The Revival*, al-Ghazali gives his views on women. Al-Ghazali's view of the relationship between men and women is patriarchal. He says that a wife should take care of her husband and respect him in his presence and absence and seek to satisfy him in every way. A wife is not allowed to leave her house without her husband's permission, and even if he gives his permission, she must leave secretly to avoid her from other males' eyes (Ibid., 68). Al-Ghazali describes husbands as the center of the marital relationship, as "*qawwamun 'ala al-nisa'*" which means the head of the household (Ibid., 49). Women should accept and obey all of their husband's instructions, and a husband has unlimited power and authority over his wife, including the power to give sanctions and punishment. Indeed, al-Ghazali calls women the prisoners (*'uwan*) of men. For example, in the case of *nusyuz* (a rebellion against male authority or a recalcitrance toward a husband), which could be a sexual refusal or other disobediences, referring to

the Qur'an, al-Ghazali suggests that when it was conducted by a wife, husband has adequate power to advise, separate and hit her respectively (Ibid., 49).

Al-Ghazali considers women to be a dangerous source of sexual desire. In *The Book of Marriage*, he says that “if a man’s penis is erect, two third of his mind is gone.” According to Kecia Ali, a professor of Islamic studies in Boston University, “Al-Ghazali frames his discussion of the sexual act in terms of a husband’s responsibility for keeping his wife satisfied; it is a matter of the husband’s duty, rather than the wife’s right” (Ali, 2006: 7). Al-Ghazali interprets literally the verse “Your wives are your fields, so you can visit them whenever you are interested” [Chapter II (al-Baqara): 223] as meaning that a husband can ask his wife for sexual intercourse anytime, even, if she is having her period, and a husband can ask his wife to’ masturbate him (Ibid., 50). When he comments on the verse that says a man must treat all his wives justly (*al-‘adalah*), al-Ghazali interprets it as referring to a man’s responsibility to fulfill their sexual desires, rather than to his responsibility to respect his wife’s rights (Ibid., 48).

Another example of a traditionalist from a more recent period is Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, a 19th century Muslim scholar from Indonesia, who had served as a religious master³ in the mosque of al-Haram in Mecca. He wrote a classic book, *‘Uqud al-Lujjain fi Bayan Huquq al-Zawjain* (Binding Two Waves: An Explanation of the Rights of Husbands and Wives) in which he follows al-Ghazali in his view of women. Al-Bantani also describes women as “prisoners” of their husbands (al-Bantani, 2002: 22). He says that women are not allowed to go out from their homes without their husbands’

³Religious master (*sheikh*) is a call for an authoritative scholar to whom other scholars refer their arguments and some disciples learned Islamic studies.

permission, even if, for example, their father has died (Ibid). Like al-Ghazali, Al-Bantani interprets *nusyuz* as referring to “wives who neglect their obligation as wives, such as leaving the house without their husbands’ permission or arrogantly opposing their husbands” (Ibid., 39). He quotes a *hadith* to support his argument that “Every woman who dies under the blessing of her husband will enter Heaven” (Ibid., 42). Thus, the value of a wife depends on her husband’s decision. A woman’s own virtue and piety will have no value if her husband does not respect her. Al-Bantani also views women as a source of sexual temptation, so women must cover themselves by wearing *hijab*, and he recommends that they should avoid going out into public, including even participating in religious activities in mosques. In Indonesia, one finds the influence of al-Bantami today in a book entitled *Wanita Tiang Agama dan Masyarakat* (Women are Pillars of Religion and Society) published by the Department of Religious Affairs. Recently some local governments have issued regulations restricting women from going out at night as described by the Wahid Institute’s research report (Nisa’, 2007).

Conservative Muslim groups generally view the family as the foundation on which to build a religious younger generation. The problem arises when this leads conservatives to place responsibility for family-based education of the next generations on mothers. They say that women are the foundation of religion, state, and society (*al-mar’ah ‘imad al-bilad*). This is an expression of patriarchal domination. Control of women is easier when family issues are emphasized.

Mahram refers to a group of women whom a Muslim may not marry because of their familial relation (the Qur’an, Chapter al-Nisa’ (4): 23-24). Traditionalist Muslim

scholars understand these verses as restricting women from having public interaction unless they are accompanied by a trusted relative. They use a *hadith* transmitted by Imam al-Bukhary and Imam Muslim to support their argument. The Prophet Muhammad said, “It is not allowed to a female believer to travel further than three-days without her *mahram*.” His companion responded, “My wife went for pilgrimage while I had to go for jihad.” The Prophet answered, “Go with her.” Conservative Muslims emphasize the importance of women being accompanied, but this *hadith* could also be understood as emphasizing the importance of guaranteeing the safety, not only of women but of anyone who cannot protect her or himself. In contemporary society, institutional security such as the police department has replaced personal security. Nevertheless, since the patriarchal motivation influences the thinking of Muslims, the traditionalist understanding of *mahram* is still common.

As a farther impact of domestication against women, Muslim women had very limited chance in the process of seeking knowledge. On one hand, Muslim women were left in the process of the production of Islamic knowledge. Therefore, they became less intellectual than Muslim male. In this situation, it is very rare to find women Muslim scholars within Muslim societies. On the other hand, as a result of the lack of opportunity in seeking knowledge, Muslim women were left in the process of Islamic law creation. Their less involved was used as a legitimacy of women’s less intellectual than men. Many Muslims also referred to this situation to blame women as less religious and less pious than men.

Since Muslim women's involvement in the Islamic law construction was very limited, Islamic knowledge and Islamic law often ignored women's interests, whether political, economic, and academic, among others. Patriarchal and misogynic perspectives in Islamic knowledge and Islamic law became more overwhelmingly influential.

The process of marginalization against women in Islamic knowledge and Islamic law extended to political and economic fields. Stereotypical view to value women as less intellectual and less pious inspired an opinion that only male scholars who were trusted as a source of power and authority. *Amir* or king would authorize them as a partner in maintaining their political and economic power. Their appearance in political fields gave them a bigger access to political and economic power. In broader social life, this extended power of Muslim male scholars could be found in the fact that they dominated religious roles of leader of prayers (*imam*) and preacher of the Friday prayer (*khatib*). Muslim women were not accommodated in that political development; they became less involved in politics. This was the background of political situation that led Muslim women's less participated in politics and other public roles.

F. Theorizing Progressive Islamic Feminism

If progressive refers to reforms to change an unjust social situation and make it more just (*al-'adalah wa al-musawah*), Islam is one of the most progressive religions in its origins. For example, the Prophet introduced the idea of *tawhid* as a foundation of liberating Arabic society from the abuse of power by the ruling tribe. Women prospered in Muslim societies in a period of history when gender differences were not considered in

the transmission of Islamic knowledge. Islam has been a progressive force in the past during certain historical periods.

However some classical scholars, such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Hajj restricted the use of critical thinking (*ijtihad*). Innovation and renewal were considered *bid'a* (innovation without precedence). Examples of this kind of traditionalism include al-Ghazali's views in *The Revival*, and *al-Madkhal ila Tanmiyyat al-'A'maal bi Tahsin al-Niyyat* written by Ibn al-Hajj (d. 737/1336-1337), a traditionalist of Egyptian Mamluk (Lutfi, 1991: 99-119). Under the domination of this traditionalist Islam, freedom of thought died and the dynamic evolution of Islamic knowledge faded away step-by-step (al-Hallaq, 2005).

In the history of Islamic thought there has been a dialectical movement between progressivism and traditionalism. This can be seen in the polemical debate between Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (AD. 980-1037), al-Ghazali and Ibn Rusyd (Averroes) (AD. 1126-1198). Avicenna and Averroes represented progressive groups, while al-Ghazali was from the traditionalist wing of Islam. A tradition of philosophical debate among Muslim scholars developed when Greek philosophical texts were translated into Arabic.⁴ Ya'qub ibn Ishaq al-Sabah al-Kindi (AD. 795-866) became the first Muslim philosopher (Fakhry, 1999: 273). Abu Nasr al-Farabi (AD. 878-950) led the way in developing logical traditions within Islam based on the logical of Greek philosophers (Ibid, 271, 274).

⁴ The first three parts of Aristotle's *Organon: Categories, Hermenetica, and Prior Analytics* was first translated into Arabic during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur (AD. 754-775).

Avicenna brought Hellenistic philosophical traditions more popular within Muslim societies when he wrote commentaries on Aristotle's logic. His writings called for one of the most perpetual polemics within the history of Islam. Al-Ghazali wrote *Tahafut al-Falalasifah* (The Incoherence of Philosophy) to criticize the philosophical ideas of Avicenna. Later on, Averroes wrote *Tahafut at-Tahafut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), "to defend the philosophers from the charge of heresy which with they are stigmatized by al-Ghazali in his *Tahafut*."⁵ Progressive Islamic scholars supported freedom of thought and believed in plural, dynamic, and relative truths. To some extent, they also accepted religious pluralism as a consequence of freedom of religious thought.

Interestingly, rather than exploring the sources of progressive Islamic idea within Muslim history, contemporary scholars have preferred to refer to the Western concepts of liberalism that were introduced during the colonial period. For instance, Albert Hourani (1970: 69), a Lebanon-born English historian and author of several books on Middle Eastern history describes how Bonaparte's Institut d'Egypte and the thought of the French Enlightenment left an important mark on liberal thinkers, such as the Egyptian Rifa'a Badawi Rafi' al-Tahtawi (A.D. 1801-1873). According to Safi, "feminist movements in the Muslim world ... have drawn inspiration largely from secular sources" (Safi, 2003: 11). For example, an important feminist movements in Egypt was led by Qasim Amin, who wrote two important books, *Liberation of Women* (Tahrir al-Mar'ah) in 1889 and *The New Women* (al-Mar'ah al-Jadidah) a year later. Amin's progressive

⁵Bello, 1989: 15, see also Yohanna Qamir, *Ibn Rush wa al-Ghazali: Al-Tahafutan* [Ibn Rush and al-Ghazali: Two Fallacies], and for another important example of the polemic between Ibn Rush and al-Ghazali, see A. Hanafi, 1966: 8-29.

feminist ideas were grounded in his opinion that “freedom is a source of good for human beings and is fundamental to progress. Freedom is the basis of moral maturity, and the independence of human will has been the most important moral factor in the advancement of men. Therefore, obviously, freedom would have a similar effect on women” (Amin, 1995: 31). His emphasis on eliminating women’s seclusion caused Muslims to accuse him of having been influenced by Western colonial ideas (Amin, 1995: 68). He was accused of endangering Islam. Another early feminist pioneer in Indonesia, Raden Ajeng Kartini, also promoted female education. However some Muslims have viewed her as promoting the agenda of the Dutch colonial administration.

The dynamic debates between progressive and traditionalist Muslim intellectuals provide a better basis for feminism as an idea of progressive Islam. On one hand, rationalism and philosophical thought of progressive Muslim scholars open the doors of *ijtihad* (interpretation) and support a feminism that refers to upholding women’s rights, including protecting women from any form of violence and discrimination. On the other hand, traditionalist Muslim scholars support patriarchal and misogynic Islamic attitudes, as we can see in al-Ghazali’s *The Revival*. In this context, feminism continues the critical traditions of rationalism and philosophy of earlier Muslim scholars and feminism clarifies and revises patriarchal perspectives of traditionalist Islamic thinking. Feminism seeks to extend the methods of critical, logical inquiry first explored by the Mu’taziliyyah. Furthermore, Islamic feminism plays a substantial role in applying the tradition of critical thinking of rationalism and philosophy to more practical conditions of justice within Muslim societies.

I argue that the distinction between liberal and progressive Muslim ideas is based on a difference in the sources used for developing one's political perspective. Liberal Islamic movements refer to the Western ideology of liberalism and modernization (Kurzman, 1998: 25), while progressive Islamic groups, as Safi explains, take a more critical view of Western liberalism and modernism (Safi, 2003: 4-5). The similarities in the views of liberal and progressive Muslim views can be seen by looking at Charles Kurzman's *Liberal Islam* and Omid Safi's *Progressive Muslim*. Both liberal Islam and progressive Islam emphasize efforts toward gender equality.

Kurzman lists six issues as the focus of liberal Islam: anti-theocracy, democracy, rights of women, the rights of non-Muslims, freedom of thought, and human progress (1998: 19-23). On the rights of women, Kurzman notes that Muslims "have to contend with a number of statements in the Koran and *sunna* that appear to run in direct contradiction," such as verses in the Koran on male polygamy, men's absolute rights to divorce, and men's greater rights in inheritance (*utrid*) (Ibid., 21). Muslim feminists have to "reexamine the statements and find them less hostile to women's rights than previously supposed" (Ibid., 21). Kurzman gives the example of Aminah Wadud's efforts. In *Qur'an and Women*, Wadud shows how a feminist interpretation can correct misinterpretation of the Qur'an and lead to a more woman-friendly perspective in Islam (Wadud, 1992: 31-32).

According to Safi, progressive Muslims are concerned with Islamic tradition, social justice, gender justice, and pluralism (Safi, Ibid., 7-13). He highlights the importance of gender justice for progressive Islamic movement, arguing that "the Muslim

community as a whole cannot achieve justice unless justice is guaranteed for Muslim women” and “there can be no progressive interpretation of Islam without gender justice” (Safi, *Ibid.*, 10). Safi takes gender equality as a “measuring stick of the broader concerns for social justice and pluralism” (Safi, *Ibid.*, 11).

Progressive Muslim feminists have been critical of Western feminism. For example, Laila Ahmed is critical of Western feminists’ viewpoints on veiling and harems as symbolizing the oppression of women in Muslim societies (Ahmed, 1992: 144-168). Both Ahmed’s and Moghissi’s critical view of Western feminist understanding of women’s issues in the Muslim world have inspired feminist groups to think about bringing about new insights that are free from Western influence.

Saba Mahmood’s anthropological study, *The Politic of Piety*, describes a progressive- traditionalist Islamic feminist movement. Mahmood observed that in the context of a patriarchal society, the women’s mosque movement as a part of the Islamic Revival can be seen as an important progressive movement. The women organize themselves and participate in religious education in their homes and the mosque (Mahmood, 2005: 1-3). I value the experience of the women’s mosque movement for the effort to create a space in which women are empowered and can obtain experience with leadership and media, which will enable them to later confront the authority of men.

It is important for Muslim feminists to approach organizations like the women’s mosque movement. If such movements are ignored or excluded from the concern of feminists, conservative Islamic movements controlled by men will use these organizations to reinforce the subjugation of women to traditional norms. All women

share certain concerns, such as domestic violence and neglect, the pain of polygamous marriage, concern for education and treatment of girl children. Including traditional women in feminist agendas will possibly open the door to gradually transforming the awareness of women who live under patriarchal control. Additionally, feminists can learn how to better consolidate their movement by joining with women in the women's mosque movement, which has a solid organization. Indeed, in Indonesian context, there are many traditional Muslim women's groups, such as women *majlis ta'lim*, that have been ignored by Muslim feminists.

However, I would argue that this is not a truly progressive Muslim feminist movement. Progressive feminism is defined not only by involvement in women's organizations but also requires an endeavor to challenge the exclusivity of male-domination in the public realm and a struggle against conservatism and traditionalism. A progressive vision would liberate women from any form of oppression and authoritarianism, including oppression from textual and literal oriented perspectives. I would also argue that progressive Islamic feminism requires more gender-sensitive interpretation of Islamic teachings whether from the Qur'an or the *hadith*. This means that scholars must revive the tradition of critical philosophical rationalism in Islamic thought. This freedom of interpretation must be tied to the goals of social justice and an end to oppression and violence. This kind of Islamic feminism liberates Muslim societies from traditionalist authoritarianism based in patriarchy and misunderstandings of Islamic teachings that led Muslims to victimize women. Other feminisms target women's rights and do not have the broader goal of social justice for all. In this regard, I do not accept

Mahmood's argument that we must leave open the question of what it means to live a full, meaningful life as woman. I argue that even though women in the mosque movement have freedom to express their opinions, it is necessary to introduce them with progressive feminist values because they live under the domination of male members of the mosque movement.

This kind of Islamic feminism also requires religious pluralism. This is a consequence of the traditional ban in Islam on cross-religious marriages. Progressive Muslim feminists use feminist concepts in interpreting verses to find understandings that legalize this kind of marriage. For instance, citing Ridha and Abduh, Mulia proposes a new understanding of the term *mushrik* (one who worships Allah and others) in Chapter al-Baqarah (2): 221 regulating cross-religious marriage. Traditionalists often generalize this term as referring to all non-Muslim. Progressive feminists argue that the term only means *mushrik* woman in ancient Arabic society. Therefore, in contemporary life, the restriction of marrying *mushrik* woman cannot be applied (Mulia, 2004: 124).

The progressive Muslim feminist movement is a response to inequality and violence against women in Muslim countries due to polygamy, marital rape, and marginalization in education that is religiously justified. For example, Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani interprets the *hadith* "If a wife seems to be reluctant to her husband's request of sexual intercourse, the angel will blame her until the dawn" to mean that a woman is to provide sexual services to her husband. This is used to justify violence against wives in Muslim families in Indonesia. Progressive Muslim feminists use emancipative *ijtihad* not only to criticize patriarchal misinterpretation, but also to emancipate women from

religiously justified violence and discrimination. Progressive Muslim feminism is not simply due to the views of Western feminists, but is a response to the problem of violence. The idea of social equality, when there is power balance and power sharing between women and men, is the ultimate purpose of the movement as an illumination of the spirit of Islam (Safi, 2003: 11 and Nuriyah, 2005: 2). Progressive Muslim feminists demonstrate that that gender-biased interpretation of several verses in the Koran has led to Islam being viewed as a violent religion, rather than a religion upholding social justice.

Within the movement of progressive Islam focused on democracy and development, women-friendly views often appear only as theoretical rhetoric rather than as a reflection of women's problems. Muslim feminists organized independently are necessary to pressure the movement to apply its principles to the actual lives of women and bring humanism and justice down to the earth. In this regard, progressive Muslim feminism has historical continuity with earlier reform movements within Muslim societies that dreamed of implementing ideal Islam within contemporary lives.

Unlike other progressive groups who often position women as an object of discourse, progressive Muslim feminists emphasize the importance of women's participation in the process of change and reflecting a vision of women not only as objects of discrimination, but also as subjects of a creative process. The reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in the Qur'an is necessary not only to clarify misogynic perspectives, but also to raise Muslim women's awareness of the problem of marginalization that has prevented Muslim women from becoming scholars (*faqih*), imams of mix-gender prayer meetings, and *khatib* of the Friday prayers.

Chapter 3

The Dynamics of the Progressive Muslim Feminist Movement in Indonesia From *Pesantren* Communities to Muslim Feminist Groups

A. Early Islamic Feminism in Indonesia

Indonesian feminism is passed down from one generation to the next. Each generation has its own feminist perspective that inspires the next generation to think about women's role in society and women's rights. Studies of women in Indonesia generally take the writings of RA Kartini in the late 19th Century as the beginning of the first women's movement. The government of Indonesia has formally declared Kartini to be a national heroine and April 21, her birthday, is celebrated as Kartini Day. Kartini (1879-1904) inspired a struggle for women's rights with her call for education of girls and women in her correspondence with Dutch colleagues, which was compiled in *Letters of a Javanese Princess* (1976: 91). Kartini was influenced by her Dutch friends who helped her break out of cultural-religious traditionalism that limited women's experience. Kartini wanted the Qur'an to be translated into Javanese so that it would be accessible to women. This inspired a later generation of Muslim women, such as Aisyah Dahlan (Aisyah Dahlan, 1979: 53).

Siti Roehana Koeddoes (1884-1972) was another important leader of the movement for women's education. She was known as a pious Muslim woman with a background of Islamic education (Fitriyani, 2001: 89). In 1911, she built *Kerajinan Amai*

Setia, a school for women in Minangkabau, West Sumatra, with various subjects, including handicrafts, reading and writing in Arabic and Malay (Fitriyanti, 2001: 57-58). As a journalist, Siti Roehana Koeddoes also wrote promoting the idea of women's empowerment and encouraging women to read (Fitriyanti, Ibid. 67 and 79-80). The Minangkabau society where she lived was known for the strength of its commitment to local culture (*adat*) and Islam. Koeddoes had to deal with powerful traditional leaders. She often cited Islamic concepts to support her progressive views. For instance, she argued that Islam had never restricted Muslim women from achieving the highest level of knowledge and education (Arivia, 2001: x).

The first Indonesian Women's Congress (Kongres Perempuan Indonesia) was organized in Yogyakarta on December 22, 1928. This led to the establishment of the Indonesian Women's Coalition (Perikatan Perkumpulan Perempuan) which focused on marriage issues, as well as struggle against colonialism (Dewan Pimpinan Kowani, 1975: 1-2). The Coalition was concerned with women's role in the family and especially the education of the next generation. Women's groups, such as Persatuan Wanita Republik Indonesia (Perwari), criticized Sukarno for practicing polygamy which caused family disharmony.

During the New Order of Suharto (1966-1998) the patriarchal structure of the nuclear family and the nation was solidified by the Marriage Act No. 1/1974, the Compilation of Islamic Law of 1991, and the establishment of Dharma Wanita (Women's Duty), an organization for the wives of government officials. In both the Marriage Act and the Compilation, Islam is used to justify the sexual division of labor in the family and

polygamy. Chapter Three of the Marriage Act states that the national court can give approval for a husband to marry more than one wife. Chapter Four give the reasons that polygamy may be approved: a) the wife cannot fulfill her obligations as a housewife, b) she has a disability or suffers from an incurable disease, or c) she cannot get pregnant.

Dharma Wanita established what has been called an ideology of *ibuism*. The Indonesian word *ibu* refers to a biological mother. However, in the political construction of the New Order *ibu* refers to a mature woman who has “reproductive responsibilities and duties.” According to Suryakusuma, state *ibuism* constructs women as a good wife and mother in a process of “creating mediating vehicles which serve the purpose of disseminating state’s interests.” Suryakusuma concludes that “politically, socially, and psychologically, state *ibuism* has the effect of not recognizing women’s autonomy as women: women as subjects rather than as objects” (Suryakusuma, Op.cit, 188). Suryakusuma writes, “there is an idolatry of *keibuan* (motherhood), of the ‘traditional’ role women, of women as ‘pillars of the nation’” (Suryakusuma, 2004: 167). In this way women were given a bigger responsibility for the problem of moral decline.⁶ Dharma

⁶ The ideology of state *ibuism* was constructed to counteract Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Gerwani), the Women’s Movement of the Indonesian Communist Party, which had hundreds of community-based branches. Gerwani members were presented as a “cruel evil women’s group” of political activists. The New Order held the Communist Party as responsible for the bloody 1965 *coup de ate* that claimed seven generals’ lives. In the New Order regime’s version of this coup, Gerwani women tortured these generals, mutilated their corpses and danced around their bodies by firelight. This imagery is found in history textbooks and a film prepared by the Indonesian military. Soeharto also emphasized that Communists were atheists. As a result of this propaganda, Indonesian women were afraid to participate in organizations critical of the government that would be considered similar to Gerwani.

Wanita, as Suryakusuma also points out, “established an *ikut suami* (follow the husband) culture” (Suryakusuma, 1996: 100).

Patriarchal Islamic views of women also contributed to the ideology of *ibuism*. These views were conveyed in works by Muslim scholars, such as Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani’s, ‘*Uqud al-Lujjaynfi Bayan Huquq az-Zawjayn* (Book of Marriage), which is studied in *pesantren* communities. In this context, there was great resistance to feminist ideas. Nevertheless there were Muslim feminist groups striving to uphold women’s rights, such as Muslimat NU, Aisiyah Muhammadiyah.

B. Feminism in Indonesia

In Indonesia, feminism is generally viewed as a western and secular idea that is contrary to Islamic teachings and local culture. For this reason Muslim communities were suspicious of feminist activists. Wahid Maryanto, a *kyai* from Pesantren Al-Kinaniyah in Jakarta, recalled how a number of secular women activists began to seek Muslim activists’ assistance in introducing feminism in *pesantren* communities. At the time women’s groups were viewed as outsiders who would have a negative influence on Muslims. Feminism has also been associated with Zionism. On one occasion I heard a traditionalist *kyai* in Jember, East Java, argued that feminism was part of Zionist political agendas to destroy Islam.⁷

⁷ A valuable contribution of progressive Muslim feminists in combating the association of feminism with Zionism appeared when a progressive *kyai* from Pesantren Nurul Islam, Jember, East Java, *Kyai* Muhyiddin Abdussomad, who had for several years been involved in supporting women’s rights within *pesantren* communities, convincingly demonstrated that feminism could be rooted in Islamic traditions.

Due to these factors, secular feminist organizations, such as Kalyanamitra, Rifka Annisa, LBH APIK, and Mitra Perempuan, could make little impact on the major patriarchal structures in Indonesian society. However these organizations were important in introducing feminist ideas to progressive Muslim organizations, such as Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (P3M) or the Union for Pesantren and Community Development. A number of progressive Muslims apprenticed in secular women organizations. The involvement of progressive Muslims in feminist discourse undermined the claims of New Order *ibuisism*. Progressive Muslims produced interpretations of Islam that were not patriarchal. Progressive Muslim feminists undermined the idea that women's activism was equivalent to communism and atheism. Finally, these "insiders" could be more effective and persuasive in dialogue with traditional Muslim leaders, as the progressive Muslim Ciciek Farha has often emphasized in her work.

C. From Islamic Renewal to Progressive Islamic Feminism

Although the Islamic Renewal Movement (or Progressive Islam) seldom mentioned women's rights, it laid the foundations for Islamic feminism. Figures as Ahmad Wahib, Nurcholish Madjid, Abdurrahman Wahid, Harun Nasution, Munawwir Sadzali, and Masdar Faried Mas'udi, Ahmad Wahib introduced the idea of critical interpretation of Islamic texts. Ahmad Wahib wrote an inspiring work published under the title *Pergolakan Islam: Catatan Harian Ahmad Wahib* (Islamic Turbulence: Ahmad Wahib's Diary) that contains critical views on many issues, including his interest in

liberal and progressive Islam. For example, Wahib wrote that every Muslim has freedom of *ijtihad* (critical analysis of Islamic teachings) and must utilize this freedom. Wahib even claimed that Frederick Engels and Karl Marx were good Muslims. Wahid wrote, “Engels’ and Marx’s excellent ideas and their great dedication to humanity were convincing factors to include them as the number one residents of the Heaven along with beloved Prophets and Saints” (Wahib, 1982: 98). Nurcholish Madjid, who wrote numerous books and articles on Islamic renewal, also founded Paramadina Foundation and Paramadina University in Jakarta to encourage progressive Islamic thought among Muslims in Indonesia, especially in urban areas. He introduced the slogan, “Islam yes, Islamic party no” to express his objection to Islamic political parties. Harun Nasution, who served as president at the State Institute for Islamic Studies Syarif Hidayatullah in Jakarta, wrote a number of books and articles on the importance of a rational approach to Islamic teachings. He revived interests in the Mu’taziliite School of Islamic theology (*kalam*), a rationalist Islamic philosophy. In his mind, the Ash’ariite traditionalist way of thinking had led Indonesian Muslims to devalue rationality. Consequently Islamic knowledge and science declined leading to less progress in economic development in Indonesia (Nasution, 1995: 145-146). Munawwir Sjadzali contributed to the reinterpretation of Qur’anic teaching on inheritance (*warits*), arguing for equality between women and men. In contrast to the traditional view that males should receive double the benefit of females, Sjadzali argued that inheritance should be based on the needs and expenses of the beneficiaries, and he pointed out that women often had more burdens in life than men (Nafis et al (ed.), 1995).

Abdurrahman Wahid and Masdar Faried Mas'udi are progressive thinkers from the traditionalist organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or the Ulama Awakening, the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. Abdurrahman Wahid, famously called Gus Dur, developed the idea of *pribumisasi* Islam or creating Islam appropriate to Indonesia. He has opposed fundamentalist groups that use Islam to justify violence. Gus Dur has said that God does not need any defense by human beings (Abdurrahman Wahid, 1999: p. 124). Masdar F. Mas'udi interprets *zakat* (tithe) as an Islamic contribution to relief of poverty. Another of Mas'udi's controversial liberal Islamic ideas is his interpretation of the pilgrimage. Traditionally, the pilgrimage to Mecca is made only at one particular time. Mas'udi argues that this threatens Muslims' lives because there are millions of Muslims in one place at one time. If the pilgrimage occurred at several times, it would be safer (Mas'udi, interview, 2004). Masudi uses the network of *pesantren* to spread emancipative Islamic ideas. With his colleagues Mansour Fakhri, Lies Marcous Natsir, and Syafiq Hasyim, he has conducted discussions on *fiqh al-nisa'* (Islamic jurisprudence on women). Finally, we can include Lakpesdam NU (the Institute of Human Resources Studies and Empowerment), a network of organizations consisting of a younger generation of NU leaders, in the roster of liberal Islam groups.

Muslim Abdurrahman and Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif are important progressive leaders from Muhammadiyah, the second largest Islamic organization in Indonesia. Muslim Abdurrahman wrote an inspiring book, *Islam Transformatif* (Transformative Islam) in which he criticizes some traditions as being only symbolic Islam. Abdurrahman wants Islam to be transformative of people's lives and he believes that Islamic theology

could provide solutions for social problems like poverty and illiteracy (Abdurrahman, 1995). Ahmad Syafi'i Ma'arif, a former chairman of Muhammadiyah, argues that Islam is useless if it is not applied to solve social or political problem and Muslims only focus on formal and symbolic issues like *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). He criticizes traditionalists' conservative way of thinking that excludes the potential of logical and rational thought, and he claims that traditionalism is responsible for the backwardness of societies in the Muslim world (Ma'arif, 1995: 38).

Only Sjadzali and Mas'udi address the issue of women's rights. Mas'udi's marriage to a second wife brought the issue of women's place in the Islamic renewal to the forefront and triggered Muslim feminist groups to found an independent feminist organization. Other liberal Muslim leaders, like Ade Armando, have also chosen to practice polygamy. This has renewed the commitment of feminist Muslim organizations to promoting women's rights. This could be said to have been a blessing in disguise for Muslim feminists because it has drawn attention to their cause. The other issue that has been a focus of Muslim feminists is advocacy programs for victims of domestic violence.

D. The 1998 Reform Movement: Blessing or Anathema?

In 1998 a reform movement (*Gerakan Reformasi*) brought down the repressive New Order regime of President Soeharto. This was an important political turning point that opened the possibility of freedom of expression for the progressive Muslim feminist movement. The appearance of the Voice of Concerned Mothers (*Suara Ibu Peduli* or SIP) at the beginning of the reform movement was significant. This group had a revolutionary

political feminist view of *ibuism*. SIP's first protest action targeted increases in the price of people's basic needs, such as oil and food on the day when the government applied a public warning for securing the 1998 General Assembly of the House of Representatives (Arivia, 1998: 6-14). Karlina Leksono and Gadis Arivia from the University of Indonesia, the intellectual-activists who founded SIP, attracted support from thousands mothers at the grassroots level. SIP helped to shift the political foundation of Indonesian society from state power toward people power (Budianta, 1999). This new paradigm of revolutionary motherhood was a critical symbolic challenge to President Soeharto's ideology of State motherhood (Wieringa, 2003: Chapter 7).

The reform movement confronted terror actions mounted by the Indonesian army, including student assassinations, provocation of riots and mass rape, especially of Chinese women (TRK, 1998: 46). The violence targeting women aroused feminists to become more involved in political change. The mass-rape became a rallying point for establishing a more women-friendly political situation in Indonesia.

Under Soeharto's New Order regime, as Ali quotes McVey, "Political stability and economic development were seen as two sides of the same coin, and, accordingly, diversity was discouraged and even repressed ... Most of the Islamic movements were purely cultural or religious, rather than political" (Ali, 2005: 2). The fall of Soeharto allowed Islam-based radical organizations to strengthen their networks. Ulil Abshar Abdalla from the Liberal Islam Network (*Jaringan Islam Liberal* or JIL) said of the post-reform movement, "We've seen radical Islam grow militant, systematic and organized" (Ali, 2006: 4). The founding of JIL in March 2001 was influenced by religious-political

dynamics in the early reform period, especially the emergence of radical fundamentalist Islamic organizations (Ali, 2006: 2). Like other progressive Muslim organizations, JIL supported women's liberation, addressing the interpretation of texts in the Qur'an and hadiths addressing issues such as veiling (*hijab* or *jibab*), polygamy, women political leaders and other women's rights issues (Ali, 2006:13-14). Unlike other progressive Islamic organizations, however, JIL identified its liberal missions in its name. The audience it address is well-educated young Muslims. This meant progressive Muslim feminists had to target broader Muslim groups, including local and rural communities.

Progressive women's organizations were supported by the democracy movement of the reform era (Arivia, 1999: 44). A progressive Muslim leader, Gus Dur, became President of Indonesia, and Khofifah Indar Parawansa, a progressive Muslim woman, was appointed minister of women's empowerment (Rahayu, 2002: 89). Sinta Nuriyah, a progressive Muslim feminist and the wife of President Gus Dur, in talks in *pesantren* called Muslims' attention to the issue of women's exclusion from power in Islamic institutions. The 2001 Polygamy Award of Puspo Wardoyo also helped to galvanize progressive Muslim feminists. This businessman offered the award to honor Muslim males who were polygamous. The Polygamy Award was hailed by Forum Betawi Rempug (FBR) or the Betawi Brotherhood Forum, a notoriously violent organization. FBR, along with police, came to the award ceremony supposedly to control a small protest by around 50 women activists.

Progressive Muslim feminists tended to name their programs in Arabic. For example, P3M organized *fiqh al-nisa'* (the study of Islamic law regarding women's rights)

and *halaqah* (study circle) and PUAN Amal Hayati (PUAN) organized *al-Liqa' al-Ilmiyya* (academic gathering). This associated progressive Islamic feminism with Arabic tradition. According to Marcoes-Natsir, “The deliberate use of religious (Arabic) language is to attract the *pesantren* communities, the target of the programs” (Marcoes-Natsir, 2000: 208). Muslim feminists even tried to translate feminist terminology into Arabic, for example using *nisaiyya* for gender or feminism. At the same time progressive Muslim feminists argued that Islam is not the same as Arab culture.

The progressive feminists approached *pesantren* communities and traditional male leaders (*kyai*), female leaders (*nyai*), female teachers (*ustadzah*) and students (*santri*). As Marcoes-Natsir explains, *kyais*, the leaders of *pesantrens*, “hold an important role in issuing *fatwa*, ... a verdict-like issuance that related to religious truth or ‘dogma’” (Marcoes-Natsir, 2000: 2000). For this reason the New Order regime often used *kyais* to support development projects. Again as Marcoes-Natsir explains, “the *pesantren* is therefore more than a place where one studies the Islamic religion, *pesantren* and *kyai* play an important role in the process of society.” *Pesantren* have potential power for those who “want to augment their status and authority through association with the *pesantren* and *kyai*” (Ibid., 200).

E. Progressive Muslim Feminist Organizations

1. Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat P3M

Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat (P3M) or the Union for Pesantren and Community Development was established in 1983; it was among the first

NGOs in Indonesia. The founders were *kyai* and NGO activists who were concerned about social, economic, political, and religious problems at the grass-root level of society. During the New Order, most villagers faced terrible difficulties as a result of centralized development policies (P3M's Profile, 2004). The goal of P3M was to empower villagers through local development. P3M was a progressive and even revolutionary organization in the context of the New Order.

P3M developed new critical and contextual interpretations of Islamic texts based on a critical-emancipative perspective as a theological foundation of liberation. In the words of an activist, Marcoes-Natsir, "P3M's main objective was to question theological truths that are considered unchangeable" (Marcoes-Natsir, 2000: 201). P3M criticized conservative and traditional cultural-religious beliefs that tended to legitimize the social-political-religious status-quo. For P3M activists, Islam embodied a struggle for social justice and it should not be used to support violence and oppression. P3M promoted social change by supplying local communities with critical consciousness and self-empowerment vision. The mission of P3M was carried out through forums (*halaqah*) with local Islamic leaders and training programs for a younger generation of local community leaders (P3M's Profile, 2004). P3M programs provided a model for the progressive Muslim feminists who emerged in the following decades. P3M also cooperated with non-Islamic women's organizations, such as Kalyanamitra, bridging the divide between Islamic and secular women's groups. However, P3M's relationship with secular women's organizations sometimes raised suspicion in traditional Muslim leaders.

Masdar F. Mas'udi, the chairman of P3M popularized feminist issues and connected women's rights with the Islamic renewal movement. For example, he defined women's reproductive rights as "those rights that, for the sake of humanity and justice, must be secured because of the reproductive role that they protect," and he went on to argue, "Some of these rights are not purely necessitated by the need to protect women's reproductive rights, rather they are born of humanitarian concerns" (Mas'udi, 2000: 5). Mas'udi used passages from the Qur'an to support his views, citing, for example, "We have enjoined on men kindness to their parents: in pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give them birth. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is a period of thirty months" (Chapter 46: 15). Additionally, he cites the hadith, "A woman in carrying, giving birth, and suckling her baby, is like a dedicated soldier of Allah [*shahid* or martyr]; if she dies in carrying out this duty, she is the *shahid* [martyr]" (Mas'udi, 2005:5). Mas'udi also discussed women's rights regarding inheritance (*warits*), dowry (*mahr*), choosing a spouse, enjoying or refusing sex, and well being (*nafaqah*), among others (Ibid., 6-10). However feminists were disappointed when Mas'udi married a second wife.

In 1994, younger P3M leaders, such as Syafiq Hasyim and Lies Marcoes-Natsir, started introducing women's issues to *pesantren* communities in Java and Madura. Following their initial successes, P3M created a program called *fiqh al-nisa'* (Islamic jurisprudence regarding women's rights). *Fiqh al-nisa'* aimed to build gender awareness within *pesantren* communities. According to Marcoes-Natsir, who for many years acted as a trainer of the program, "A serious examination of the possibility of revising some

aspects of *fiqh* and an active interaction with *pesantren* schools and NU are the pillars of P3M's [*fiqh al-nisa'*] programs" (Ibid., 208). P3M's motto is "to enhance women's rights" (*fiqh al-nisa' fi al-huquq al-ummahat* (Ibid., 208). P3M tried to "transform the pattern of unfair relationships between women and men by giving women a chance to speak and to interpret for themselves some aspects of *fiqh*" (Ibid., 9). The program shifted the patriarchal view that Islamic knowledge is reserved for Muslim men. In this way P3M created important foundations for the later progressive Muslim feminists. However, the success of the P3M program depended on the involvement of male leaders in the process of change and transformation.

Husein Muhammad, a *kyai* of Pesantren Daruttauhid in Cirebon West Java, played an important role in introducing feminism in *pesantren* communities. He studied at the Institute of Advanced Qur'anic Studies (*Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu al-Quran* or PTIQ) in Jakarta from 1973 to 1979 (Husein Muhammad, email to author, August 31, 2007). He then continued his education at Cairo University in Egypt. There he spent much time reading books by Middle Eastern Muslim intellectuals, such as Thaha Husen, 'Abbas, Mahmud 'Aqqad, 'Abdul Halim Mahmud, Muhammad 'Abduh, Taufiq al-Hakim, and Musthafa Mahmud, along with works by traditionalist scholars such as Sayed Quthb, Muhammad Quthb, Said Hawa, Hasan al-Nadwi and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*). After three years in Cairo, Husein Muhammad returned home to teach conservative Islamic traditions in his *pesantren*. He began to adopt more progressive and critical views due to his involvement in P3M's *halaqah* activities. He said that first time he encountered P3M programs discussing *fiqh* by

classical Muslim scholars, he suspected P3M of having a hidden agenda of delivering secular Western and Jewish ideas. He said that P3M's method of open discussion where participants shared their opinions "brought a different environment of Islamic intellectual traditions. Generally Muslim study groups centered on someone viewed as an authoritative scholar. In contrast P3M's programs encouraged dialogue and rational debate. When *fiqh al-nisa'* was created, Husein Muhammad became involved in the issue of Islam and women's rights. As Husein Muhammad became aware of the problem of gender biases in the sources, P3M encouraged him to write and present papers for discussions and seminars (Husein Muhammad, email to author, August 31, 2007).

His progressive opinions on women's issues are compiled in his books, including *Fikih Perempuan: Refleksi Kyai atas Wacana Agama dan Gender (Islamic Jurisprudence on Women: A Kyai's Reflection on Women and Religion)* and *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan: Pembelaan Kyai (Islam Is a Women-Friendly Religion: A Kyai's Defense)*. In the first book, he discusses *fiqh* regarding women, issues such as women leaders (*imam*) in mixed-gender prayer, women's dress, women's rights in marriage (*munakahah*), and female circumcision (*khitan*). On the subject of *khitan*, Husein Muhammad says, "It is an irony that classical *fiqh* gave only men opportunities to achieve sexual enjoyment while women had to control, hide and oppress theirs... as we can find in the issue of female *khitan*" (Husein Muhammad, 2001: 39). He also criticizes the traditional view of *fitnah* or source of sexual desire that hampers women's chance to be imam in mix-gender prayer. He points out that it is unfair if *fiqh* applies the idea of *fitnah* only to women as if women have inherent factors that arouse men's sexual desires

(*mazhinnah al-fitnah*) and not vice versa. He suggests that considering cultural context in regard to *fitnah* would lead to less biased interpretation of *fitnah* (Ibid., 37-38). In his book, *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan: Pembelaan Kyai*, Husein Muhammad argues that the concept of *tawhid* as the fundamental basis of Islamic theology provides the basis for developing equal gender relationships because it insists upon the equality of all human beings (Ibid., 12-17). Since *tawhid* requires Muslims to believe in that there is no god except Allah, the absolute Power Holder, a Muslim cannot use her or his power to oppress other Muslims. Husein Muhammad cites an ayah from the Qur'an, "Be just: that is Next to Piety: and fear Allah" (Chapter al-Ma'idah (5): 8). The spirit of social justice (*al-'adalah*) is derived from this passage. The success of *kyais* such as Husein Muhammad in promoting P3M's *fiqh al-nisa'* and critical perspectives on women's rights encouraged later progressive Muslim feminists.

Husein Muhammad also promoted his views to secular feminist activists who come from a Muslim background, such as Kamala Chandra Kirana, chair of the National Commission on Violence against Women, who felt uneasy that their religion was often distorted into a source of violence and discrimination. With Fahmina Institute, a women's organization, he conducted workshops on *Islam and Gender* introducing critical and contextual approaches to women's issues in Islam. Husein Muhammad denounced using religious teachings as tools of injustice against women (2004: IX).

2. Forum Kajian Kitab Kuning (FK3)

Forum Kajian Kitab Kuning is a Jakarta-based Forum for the Study of Classical Islamic Commentaries that was established in 1997. *Kitab Kuning* (literally “yellow books” because of the paper they were written on) are written in Arabic script although the language may be Javanese, Malay, Madurese, or Arabic. They are the main sources for the study of Islam in *pesantren*. The commentaries in Arabic language are considered to be more important than those in Javanese or Malay.

When Husein Muhammad first thought of the idea of establishing study circles to discuss patriarchal values in classical Islamic texts, he went to the P3M office in Jakarta. Conversations with progressive Muslims there, including Sinta Nuriyah and Masdar F. Mas’udi, led to the formation of FK3. The goal of FK3 was to develop a serious, organized, and academic challenge to the patriarchal way of thinking of Muslim groups on women’s issues. The forum includes *pesantren* leaders and Islamic-studies authorities, who are viewed as insiders in Muslim society rather than foreign outsiders with possible hidden political and economic interests. Participants from diverse Muslim perspectives and academic backgrounds give the forum authority and reduce resistance to progressive Islam.

Traditional Muslims in Indonesia still do not see women in feminist movements as good women (*al-mar’ah al-salihah*). But *pesantren*-based Muslim groups have undermined the view that feminists are less religious or less Islamic. In a Muslim society involvement of men was vital in changing people’s view of feminism.

The main program of FK3 is the reinterpretation of classical Islamic texts. This is a revolutionary and strategic program of promoting women's rights. It is conceived as a program of Islamic renewal, reflecting modernist thinking, tolerance of other faiths and sensitivity to gender rights (Raslan, 2002: 77). Interpreting classical Islamic texts in this way requires contextual and critical methods of thought. In Abshar's words, "In exploring these values [tolerance, gender sensitivity, modernist thinking], we [progressive Muslims] are drawn to the spirit of criticism and questioning that is a hallmark of centuries of Islamic discourse" (Ibid., 77).

FK3 focuses on shifting Muslims' approach to various sources of Islamic teaching, mainly the Qur'an and the Prophet's *hadith*, from a literal traditionalist perspective toward more contextual and critical viewpoints. The forum promotes change by emphasizing a shift from imitative *taqlid* (following) to creative *ijtihad* (interpretation). It is not the goal of FK3 to insist that *pesantrien* communities leave the tradition of using classical Islamic texts as sources of Islamic knowledge, but rather to propose feminist perspectives and a critical approach in understanding these sources. Those who reject the idea of an Islamic reform movement see the forum's progressive *ijtihad* as endangering Islamic law. They argue that the forum leaders undermine people's religious way of thinking.

FK3 published three important books resulting from its studies. *Ta'liq wa Takhrij 'ala Sharkh Kitab 'Uqud al-Lujjayn* (Critical Analysis of the Book 'Uqud al-Lujjayn) is an interpretation of the writings of Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani, *Uqud al-Lujjayn fi Bayan Huquq al-Zawjayn* (Binding Two Waves: An Explanation of the Rights of Husbands and

Wives). Abu Abdul Mu'thi Muhammad Nawawi bin Umar bin 'Arabi, popularly called Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani al-Shafi'i, (A.D. 1813-1897) was born in Banten, Indonesia. At the age of 15, he went to Mecca to study with Muslim scholars in the mosque of al-Haram. He later studied in Egypt and Syria as well (FK3, 2005: 19). His accomplishments in Islamic studies earned him a position as a Muslim scholar (sheik) with the honorific titles Leader of Arabic Ulama (*Sayyid 'Ulama al-Hijaj*), Leader of the *Haramain* Ulama (*Imam al'Ulama al-Haramayn*) and Last Scholar (*Khatim al-Fuqaha'*) (Ibid., 6). He wrote works on Islamic jurisprudence (Chaidar, 1975: 5-6). His writings are studied in *pesantren* communities in Indonesia. Among these works are *Tafsir al-Munir* (The Interpretation of the Lighthouse [a metaphor for the Qur'an]), *Nasaih al-'Ibad* (Advice to Worshippers), *Minhaj al-Raghibin* (Guidance of Love Seekers), and *Nur al-Dzalam* (The Light of Darkness). According to Mustofa Bisri, an Indonesian Muslim scholar, al-Bantani finished writing *'Uqud al-Lujjayn* in 1887. This work influenced the views of Indonesian Muslims on the subject of the husband-wife relationship (Nuriyah, et al., 2003: 207-209). *'Uqud al-Lujjayn* expresses a traditional Islam-based gender view that subordinates women to men, particularly in marital life. Bisri notes that al-Bantani taught several important Indonesian ulama (Bisri, 2003: IX, Chaidar, 6).

FK3 applied two methods, *takhrij* and *ta'liq* to reinterpreting *Uqud al-Lujjayn* (Nuriyah, et al., xv). *Takhrij* is a research method that evaluates the quality of a *hadith* used as a source in al-Batani's text. The quality of a *hadith* determines the validity of the author's arguments. FK3 showed that more than 60 out of some 120 *hadith* used by al-Batani are invalid for a variety of reasons. For instance, the *hadith* "Allah created seventy

angels to blame every single woman who misappropriates her husband's financial means" is an invalid *hadith* (*mawdhu'*) (Nuriyah, 90). The *hadith* "Women asking for a divorce and primping women are considered hypocrites" is also invalid (Ibid., 120). FK3 did not blame al-Bantani for using these *hadith*, but rather shows that his argument is based on invalid *hadith*.

Ta'liq refers to critical and contextual comments on al-Bantani's point of view. FK3 shows how his opinions reflect contemporary social life. FK3 shows several of al-Bantani's insights on women to be out of date and not appropriate to building contemporary relationships between husbands and wives. The *ta'liq* method was also applied to biographical information about Islamic authorities cited by al-Batani. An example of the application of *ta'liq* in analysis of '*Uqud al-Lujjayn* is FK3's commentary on al-Bantani's interpretation of the verse "*Al-rijal qawwamun 'ala al-nisa'*" (literally "Men are leaders over women"). One view is that the ranking of men over women is based on men's greater intellectual capacity, competence as scholars and ability as social-political leaders. Another view is that it rests on their capabilities in fulfilling the religious obligation to provide dowries and family income. FK3 argues that in contemporary life al-Bantani's views on men's superiority do not represent a social fact. In education, for example, a number of women have outperformed men (Nuriyah, Ibid., 45-46). Although FK3's commentary seems like simple truth, it is revolutionary. According to Husein Muhammad, the analysis of '*Uqud al-Lujjayn* was a major accomplishment of the pioneers of FK3 (Husein Muhammad, email to author, Wednesday, 8 August 2007).

FK3's study of al-Bantani's *'Uqud al-Lujjayn* was produced in three different editions. The first Arabic-edition is a reference work for *pesantren* communities. Using Arabic is strategic since traditionalist *pesantren* communities view Arab culture as more authentically religious. Writing in Arabic demonstrates the Islamic authority of the scholars in the forum. *Wajah Baru Relasi Suami-Istri: Telaah Kitab 'Uqud al-Lujjayn* (A New Vision of Marriage: Critical Analyses of Sheikh Nawawi's *'Uqud al-Lujjayn*) is written in Indonesian to disseminate the feminist perspectives of FK3's commentary on *'Uqud al-Lujjayn* to a broader range of Indonesian Muslim groups. This edition targets Muslims with no academic background of *pesantren* tradition. The religious life of these mainly urban Muslims is free of the influence of a traditionalist way of Islamic thinking. *Terjemah Uquduljain: Etika Berumah Tangga* (The Translation of *'Uqud al-Lujjayn: The Ethics of Marital Relationships*) was translated into Indonesian by Ikhwan Afif Bustomi. The third version, *Kembang Setaman Perkawinan* (The Garden of Marriage), is similar to the two previous books but is specifically meant for academicians. This "academic edition" is aimed at educated Muslims and contains more comprehensive theoretical analyses to support the critique of al-Bantani's arguments. In its first three chapters, *Kembang Setaman Perkawinan* presents a comprehensive theoretical discussions of the methodology used, a biography of al-Bantani including his socio-cultural and religious background, and discusses various problems of using such a text-based approach to Islamic thinking (FK3, Chapter I-III).

The feminist perspective presented in these FK3 books stresses three important points. First is the idea that seeking knowledge and public roles is not exclusive to

Muslim men. This deconstructs al-Bantani's view that women are restricted from participating in contributing to Islamic knowledge and Islamic law. Secondly, FK3 deconstructs the idealized portrait of good women and good wives. According to the traditionalist patriarchal Muslim concept of good women (*al-marrah al-salihah*), women must always stay behind men and hide themselves from public view. FK3 presents a new model of good women based on women's freedom to define and determine for themselves how to contribute to society. Thirdly, FK3's study of al-Bantani's '*Uqud al-Lujjayn*' deconstructs popular discourse about wives' and husbands' obligations in the marital relationship, shifting from a male-dominant toward a more equal relationship.

FK3 also studied another influential classical Islamic text, *Matn Taqrib* (The Primary Texts of the Book of *Taqrib*) by Sheikh Abi Suja' al-Isfahani. This book is viewed as an essential text on Islamic jurisprudence. In *pesantren* it is taught at the elementary level and greatly influences basic understanding of and thinking about Islamic law. The book's influence was seen when Kartosuwiryo proposed the idea of the Indonesian Islamic State (Negara Islam Indonesia), by arguing for an Islamic Constitution (*Qanun*). In contemporary Indonesia, the book is one of the main resources for the Compilation of Islamic Law (FK3, Minutes of Discussion, Jakarta, May 23-24, 2007).

Publication of these books was followed by facilitating discussion forums in *pesantren* and public dialogues. This exposed local religious leaders to feminism-based critical and rational perspectives on Islamic texts. In 2001, following the establishment of

PUAN Amal Hayati, FK3 was integrated into this new foundation to facilitate training in feminist methods of interpretation in the study of Islamic texts in *pesantren* communities.

3. PUAN Amal Hayati: *Pesantren* as the Center of Women's Advocacy

From mid-2001 through early 2006, I worked in PUAN. This involvement gave me insight into the dynamics of the Indonesian Muslim women's movement.

PUAN Amal Hayati (PUAN) was established on July 3, 2000 in Jakarta. PUAN is an acronym for *Pesantren untuk Pemberdayaan Perempuan*, (*Pesantren* for Women's Empowerment). *Amal* and *Hayati* are Arabic terms that mean hope and my life. The group's name, PUAN Amal Hayati, refers to its main purpose, which is to provide a *pesantren*-based advocacy system for women facing violence and to give them hope of a better life.

Sinta Nuriyah, the wife of the former Indonesian President, Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur), is the main founder and chair of the organization. Sinta Nuriyah's position as Gus Dur's wife gives her power and authority in promoting Islam-based feminism and decreasing resistance among traditionalist Muslims to the idea of women's rights. Just as a *nyai* (wife of a *kyai*) can utilize her position to support her husband, Sinta Nuriyah has used her position to support Islam-based women's rights. Most *nyai* have no interest in feminist issues. They live within the structure of patriarchal values and can be described as "domesticated women" (*konco wingking*), a Javanese term meaning wives who walk behind their husbands.

Other defenders of women's rights who joined Sinta Nuriyah in establishing PUAN include Mohammad Sobari, a writer and columnist who served as a director of the Indonesian National Broadcast Company *Antara*, Mansour Fakih, a human's rights activist devoted to empowering minority groups, Bunda Sri Sugiri, a lecturer at the University of Indonesian and an expert on social welfare issues, and Badriyah Fayumi, a lecturer on *tafsir* at the State Islamic University in Jakarta and a famous female preacher (*muballighah*).

Sinta Nuriyah wanted to create an Islam-based institution that would oppose violence against women. She realized, however, that Islamic organizations seemed to be the basis of such violence and discrimination. For example, during the anti-Suharto riots in 1998 when many (Chinese) women were raped, rather than showing concern or providing shelter, Muslims were suspected of being involved in the rapes. The goal of PUAN, based on moral, humanitarian and religious principals, is to liberate societies from any form of violence. This places secular values of humanity and morality on a par with religion as a foundation for a violence-free society.

Sinta Nuriyah realized that *pesantren* could serve as a base for opposing violence against women. *Pesantren* are an Islamic social-educational institution found throughout Indonesia, especially in rural areas. Since Indonesian women's organizations are generally based in cities, getting *pesantren* involved in women's advocacy programs would overcome the lack of women's advocacy programs in rural areas. *Pesantren* have close connections with governmental and non-governmental institutions. Besides the influence of *kyai*, the intimate social relationships of *pesantren* alumni could play a role

in implementing a program of women's advocacy. Women's organizations often face serious difficulties in working with legal and governmental institutions, such as the police. Instead of helping victims, police often blame them or see violence against women as insignificant. Since *pesantren* usually have good relationships with the police department in their areas, *pesantren*-based women's advocacy programs would benefit. The structural organization of *pesantren* is modeled on familial relationships which position *kyai* and *nyai* as fathers and mothers for *santri* (students of Islamic studies) and other *pesantren* community members. Women who sought help from a *pesantren* would not feel as strange or isolated as they might if they sought help from the police. *Pesantren* have a wealth of infrastructural facilities. Homes of *kyai* and teachers (*ustadz*) as well as students' rooms could be used as shelters. Survivors and their children could be involved in the educational process in *pesantren*. Children could continue their education in study programs during their mothers' advocacy program. PUAN programs could also be integrated with other basic daily *pesantren* activities, such as *pengajian* or *majlis ta'lim* (learning groups of Islamic knowledge).

PUAN views *pesantren* as an Islamic institution with the potential to foster women's empowerment. PUAN tries to work from the inside, changing a polygamous *kyai* tradition into a feminist *kyai tradition* open to helping and protecting women. Involvement in the program would develop *nyai's* awareness of women's rights issues; teachers could be provided with lessons about women's rights. *Santri* would learn about women's rights and reject the use of violence toward women. PUAN has developed *Pusat Perlindungan bagi Wanita (PUSPITA)*, a *pesantren*-based women's crisis center

(WCC). PUSPITA builds gender sensitivity training programs and teaches women's advocacy methods. PUSPITA also provides services helping women facing violence to pursue legal remedies and to regain their human dignity. PUSPITA tries to establish a situation in which a survivor can feel secure from later violence and gain physical and psychological health services.

A founder of PUAN, Badriyah Fayumi (2002: 4-5) has described the principles that PUAN advocacy programs are based on. The first is not to victimize women survivors, but to provide a comfortable situation for them. To support this principle, Fayumi refers to the Qur'anic verse, "But force not your maids to prostitution when they desire chastity, in order that ye may make a gain in the goods of this life. But if anyone compels them, yet, after such compulsion, is Allah oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (to them)" (Chapter al-Nur (24): 33). The second principle is to change the attitudes of perpetrators. Most women's organizations in Indonesia focus on assistance to victims. In a *hadith* transmitted by two famous *hadith* transmitters, Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim, it is told that the Prophet said, "Help your brothers who become victims of violence and your brothers who perpetrate violence". His companions asked, "How can we help perpetrators of violence?" The Prophet answered, "Help them to stop their behavior." The third principle is to guarantee women's safety. Fayumi tells the story of Ummu Habibah bint Abi Sufyan, one of the first of the Prophet's female companions, who was terrorized by her family when she first converted to Islam. The Prophet guaranteed her security from any kind of abuse. PUAN also tries to empower family and *wali* (proxy) structure. *Wali* have a ceremonial function in a marriage speaking on behalf

of a bride. Referring to Chapter al-Nisa' (4): 35 of the Qur'an, Fayumi proposes expanding the *wali*'s function to protecting a wife from violence by her husband. The last principle is that a women's advocacy program has to provide solutions based on the woman's hopes and interests. Fayumi cites a *hadith* about Zaynab bint Zahsy, one of the Prophet's female companions, who appealed for *khulu'* or divorce from her husband, Zayd bin Harithah. It is told that the Prophet honored Zaynab's *khulu'* in order to protect her from possible domestic harm if she remained in her marriage. According to traditional Islamic views, women are not allowed to divorce their husbands; rather, that prerogative is given to husbands even when staying in the relationship would be harmful for a woman.

Among the most valuable of PUAN's innovative programs to support women who have experienced violence is Islamic spiritual-based counseling. PUAN employs various Islamic spiritual legacies, such as God remembrance (*dzikir*), prayer (*du'a* and *shalat*) along with psychological therapies, such as counseling and peer group sessions. PUAN believes that the rituals of *dzikir* and prayer help survivors heal from the trauma of violence.

Combining a feminist perspective with religious pluralism highlights PUAN's vision that every woman has the right to be free from violence and discrimination regardless her religion, race, social-economic status, political affiliation, etc. *Pesantren* are important because they are a familiar and accessible institution for Muslim women who face a lack of advocacy services. PUAN encourages *pesantren* communities to open

their arms to help women without any consideration of religion. This pluralist perspective is a radical change within *pesantren* communities.

According to Sinta Nuriyah, feminism in Indonesia means giving women the same access to power and an equal bargaining position with men in order to achieve justice. It is impossible to free women from violence without eliminating Islam-based gender bias. Since people are more impressed by “seen practical efforts” than theoretical discourse on feminism, PUAN can claim revolutionary accomplishments both for feminists and for a progressive Islamic movement.

The greatest resistance to PUAN’s program is found in attitudes toward polygamy. For example, in Pesantren Darussalam Indramayu, West Java, participants objected to PUAN’s feminist approach to the Qur’an and *hadith* on the issue of polygamy. However, by using logical argument to oppose polygamy, PUAN taught participants from the *pesantren* to search for logical reasons in support of polygamy rather than only citing texts (Muttaqin, 2004: 18). Thus, PUAN not only introduces feminist discourse in *pesantren* communities and helps to develop gender sensitivity, it also opens the way to critical and rational interpretation of Islamic teachings.

4. Rahima: Providing Academic Spaces for Muslim Women

Rahima was established by P3M activists who worked in the Division of *Fiqh al-Nisa’* when the director of P3M, Masdar f. Mas’udi, took a second wife. It was a disappointment for the *Fiqh al-Nisa’* staff and a blow to the campaign to uphold women’s rights since polygamy appears to be an important factor in violence against women.

Mas'udi was a prominent defender of women's rights and progressive Islam but he succumbed to the pervasive influence of patriarchal perspectives. Mas'udi pointed out that there is no verse in the Qur'an that forbids taking a second wife. Another recent example of a progressive Muslim leader taking a second wife is Ade Armando, a frequent contributor to the on-line discussions of the Liberal Islam Network (JIL). When progressive Muslims like Mas'udi and Armando justify polygamy by a text-based appeal to the Qur'an, they ignore the importance of context in interpretation that is a foundation of progressive Islam and its mission of liberation.

In August 2000, the staff of *Fiqh al-Nisa'* established a new organization to counter the impact of using the Qur'an to legitimize polygamy and discrimination against women (Rinaldo, 2007: 204). The name of Rahima was taken from the word *rahim* meaning womb or uterus, an Indonesian word derived from Arabic. It also refers to *Rahim*, one of the God's ninety nine names (*al-asma al-husna'*), which means the Merciful. The name Rahima is meant to celebrate human life in a spirit of love and compassion (Rahima's Profile). Rahima began operating programs in February 2001 (Rahima's Profile).

According to Rinaldo, in her dissertation on Rahima, "A few of these founding activists had personal links to the NU and were considered part of a rising generation of young NU activists. They invited progressive NU *kyais* to serve on Rahima's board and as a result, the communities and schools in which Rahima works are usually NU affiliated" (2007: 162). The founders of Rahima cited four reasons for establishing the organization. First was the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalist organizations promoting

a conservative and traditional Islamic view of women. Second were state policies which supported conservative cultural and religious views of women. The founders of Rahima were also concerned about the worsening social-economic situation after the 1998 economic crisis hit Indonesia, which particularly affected women. Finally, Rahima aims to bring Islamic mission of justice and humanity down to earth to support women's liberation (Eridani, 2007).

Rahima initially began with programs disseminating information about women's issues in *pesantren*, but soon thereafter Rahima took a vital step of taking progressive Islamic feminism beyond a few *pesantren* communities. The program was extended to *madrasah* (modern Islamic schools), teachers of Islamic studies in secular schools, *majlis ta'lim* (public gatherings for Islamic studies), and student organizations (Rahima's Profile). Marcoes-Natsir has described this as "seeking for larger companions and unifying multi-elements in struggling for enhancing women's rights" (Marcoes-Natsir, 2004). Other Rahima activities include establishing centers for information about Islam and women's rights, resisting the implementation of shari'a where this discriminates against women, conducting training and workshops for gender awareness in Muslim communities, and organizing public dialogues and campaigns on Islam and women's rights. Rahima reaches out to men as well as women. They make the point that men are not enemies of the women's movement. They emphasize establishing gender-based equality (*al-'adalah*) to counter suspicion that feminism is an attempt to pre-empt men's authority and replace it with women's domination.

After the fall of Soeharto, political reforms gave local governments new powers. In some districts Islamic shari'a was implemented in *peraturan daerah* (Perda) or local regulations. These regulations reinforced religious conservatism and marginalized women. For instance, Chapter XIII of the Perda No. 11/ 2002 of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province on the Implementation of Islamic shari'a says every Muslim must wear Islamic dress. This was used to force Muslim women to wear the *jilbab* (head-covering). Rahima organized to protect women from the negative social-political influence of such Perda. It facilitated discussion forums to criticize the patriarchal and gender-biased contents of the regulations. Rahima argued that the Perda subordinated women by using patriarchal interpretations of Islam. Rahima encouraged women to participate in the discussion and criticism of the contents of the Perda. In this way Rahima provided a model of participatory dialogue that acknowledged the intellectual ability of Muslim women and challenged traditionalists' subordination of women's capacities.

Rahima is also training female ulama who can play a key role in promoting women's rights within Muslim societies. In contemporary Indonesia, various Islamic educational institutions, such as *pesantren* and Islamic universities (UIN), have increased the number of educated Muslim women who have access to primary sources of Islamic knowledge, but these women still lack the opportunity to speak with authority about Islam. The discourse of ulama or Muslim scholars is dominated by men. Rahima's program aids female ulama in using their Islamic scholarship to advocate for women's rights.

Through publication and documentation, Rahima has established itself as an education and information center on Islam and women's rights. Rahima has built a library, published books and bulletins, and aired an online information service. Through the *Swara Rahima* (The Voice of Rahima), the group delivers information about feminism and feminist leaders in popular terms. This bulletin has been important in building an audience of readers newly aware of women's issues and potential activists. For example, *Swara Rahima* published an interview with Musdah Mulia, a prominent progressive Muslim feminist, expressing a critical view of Islamic shari'ah implementation: "Every state that intends to implement Islamic shari'ah will promote an agenda to deny women's rights and is reluctant to focus on social-economic development. In fact, when the Prophet Muhammad moved to Medina, he first dealt with economic improvement. He built a public market and regulated trade and economic transactions. The Prophet focused on improving economic conditions and establishing social tolerance" (*Swara Rahima*, No. 2, August 2001). As a result of Rahima's activities *kyai* who participate in promoting women's rights and are concerned with women's issues, such as polygamy, human trafficking, women in politics and women's jihad, are now known as *kyai feminis* (feminist *kyai*).

5. Grassroots Groups: Serving Local Communities with Women's Advocacy Programs

Grassroots groups involved in campaigning for feminism at the local level in Muslim communities have emerged inspired by progressive Muslim feminist organizations at the national level. Progressive Muslim feminists from P3M, FK3, PUAN

and RAHIMA realized that they had to find ways to work with local people to make change happen. Local groups focus on practical activities. Many are associated with the *pesantren*-based women's crisis centers and educational programs. They organized discussions, seminars, TV and radio programs, and public dialogues on women's issues and rights.

Local progressive feminist groups have to deal with the everyday lives of people in their community, including those who do not like them. I was involved in setting up a number of PUSPITA and saw the first-hand the challenges these groups faced. For example, Kyai Affandi is a respected leader in kampong Eretan in Indramayu, West Java. He was the head of Pesantren Darussalam where traditional Islam was taught. PUAN invited him to participate in a workshop introducing ideas about women's rights in Islam. At the workshop, the *kyai* became aware of the social-cultural-political context that created problems for women, such as trafficking, sex workers, migrant workers and domestic violence. He became the first *kyai* in Indramayu to introduce a *pesantren*-based women's advocacy program and to establish a women's crisis center. He had to face criticism for these innovations, but his authority smoothed the way to disseminating awareness of women's issues and developing women's programs.

Enung Nursaidah of Pesantren Cipasung, Tasikmalaya, West Java, is the daughter of Ilyas Ruhiyat, a famous *kyai* who was a leader of NU. She grew up in traditional *pesantren* culture, but also received a modern education, earning a Master degree in education from a university in Bandung, West Java. Nevertheless, she was limited to teaching as an *ustadzah* in her *pesantren*. In 2004 PUAN approached Enung Nursaidah.

At first she worried that PUAN's program was a threat to the *pesantren* since their goal was to change Islamic traditions, but as her concern about violence and discrimination against women increased, she became aware of how Islamic teaching was used to legitimate violence against women. She accepted a month-long apprenticeship in a leading women's crisis center in Yogyakarta. After a year of involvement in the program, she committed herself as coordinator of PUSPITA in Pesantren Cipasung and became a spiritual-psychological consultant for women survivors. By providing aid to women victims of abuse, PUSPITA in her *pesantren* is building social sensitivity and social solidarity among women in the community. In an interview Enung Nursaidah explained, "This program highlights the importance of reinterpreting Islamic teachings as the basis of women's rights" (<http://www.wahidinstitute.org/indonesia/content/view/536/52/>).

At the end of 2004, after an eight-year struggle, Act No. /2004 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence became law in Indonesia. This is a legal umbrella for programs to eliminate domestic violence and protect victims of domestic violence. There is much resistance to this Act among Indonesian Muslims who still accept gender-biased Islamic views. According to the 2005 LBH Apik Annual Report, local *pesantren*-based women's organizations have played a vital role in popularizing the Act to their local communities. Women's organizations in Jakarta, including secular feminist groups, such as Kalyanamitra, LBH Apik, and Mitra Perempuan, have established ties with *pesantren*-based groups. Their aim is to improve voluntary public support of advocacy programs to guarantee sustainability of the programs so that dependence on donor institutions can be reduced. Siti Ruqoyyah Ma'shum, a *nyai* of Pesantren Al-Ma'shumi, Bondowoso in East

Java, a well known Muslim educational establishment, played a key role in the establishment of this network linking national and local women's organizations.

Ruqoyyah is a preacher (*muballighah*) who leads Islamic studies groups (*pengajian*) in her hometown. She was a victim of domestic violence. Her husband was a member of the national parliament (DPR). When her cases was taken up by a number of women's organizations, including P3M's Division of *Fiqh al-Nisa'*, Kalyanamitra, Rahima, and PUAN Amal Hayati, her plight was reported in the news and became a symbol of the struggle for women's rights. She was quoted in *Swara Rahima* as saying, "The level of education, the degree of religious piety, and social status do not guarantee a man will not perpetrate violence against women. I achieved such an understanding based on my own experience. This is true and we cannot ignore this fact. It has to be published and people have a right to know." She went on, "It is crucial to declare our struggle against domestic violence to awaken silent women, particularly Muslim women around *pesantren* who cannot speak out about their cases of violence. I hope my experience can be an inspiration to other women in exposing their cases of violence and defending their rights" (*Swara Rahima*, No. 2, August 2001).

Ruqoyyah was concerned that her husband retain his seat in Parliament and not be jailed, although he was guilty of violence. But she criticized the use of religion to legitimate the subordination of women as seen, for example, in the *fatwa* (religious decree) to reject the idea of a woman president (Letter to the Editor, *Swara Rahima*, No. 11, November 2004) Ruqoyyah was able to transform her experience into constructive criticism of broader political interests and patriarchal religious structures. As two

researcher from Leiden University, Bruinessen and Wadjidi, have written, “It has been Ruqoyyah’s accomplishment to redraw the boundaries separating the private from the public sphere and to break the silence over oppressive practices, bringing them out into the open and fighting for the empowerment of victims and the shaming or punishment of perpetrators. There can hardly be a more telling example to illustrate the feminist dictum that the personal is political than Ruqoyyah’s very public private life and her present life as a preacher-teacher-activist” (Bruinessen and Wajdi, 2004: 39).

As I have shown, the progressive Muslim feminist movement in Indonesia has deep historical roots in the nationalist movement against colonialism and the Islamic renewal movement. Muslim feminists succeed in showing that Islam was an important tool to advocate women’s rights. Nevertheless, progressive feminist groups are too small to deal with the enormous challenge of spreading feminism among contemporary Indonesian Muslims.

Chapter 4

From Challenges to New Agendas Promoting Progressive Islamic Feminism in Indonesia

In this chapter, I will explore some challenges to promoting progressive Islamic feminism and the necessity of building networks to strengthen the movement. The challenges are related to growing religious conservatism among traditional Muslims as well as the state's policy of adopting a fundamentalist perspective in order to increase political support. Additionally, I address the challenges faced by Muslim feminist groups in building strong organizations. Family-related issues are among the important subjects conservative Muslim groups see as challenges to progressive Muslim feminist movements in Indonesia. I also make suggestions for how the progressive Islamic feminist movement can be strengthened in its struggle against conservative Muslims.

A. The Rise of Islamic Shari'ah Movements

The Reform Movement in 1998 brought freedom of expression to Indonesia. Conservative religious groups have benefitted from this situation to propose the implementation of Islamic shari'ah. In a recent paper on Islamic shari'ah in Indonesia Elizabeth Collins describes Muslim organizations supporting the implementation of shari'ah, including the Party of Liberation or Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Islamic

Defender Front (FPI), and the Justice and Welfare Party or Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) (Collins, 2007: 8-9).

The movement to pass Islamic shari'ah laws is most successful at the level of local government (*Pemerintah Daerah*). Laws based on shari'ah are called *Perda Syariat Islam*. At the national level there was also an effort by conservative Muslim organizations to pass an anti-pornography bill (RUU APP). RUU APP would authorize government at both national and local levels to control “the discourse” of pornography, that is to determine what action or behavior is in violation of the law (RUU APP, 2007: Chapter 19). Both *perda* and the pornography bill limit the rights and freedoms of women and are opposed by the feminist movement.

In the view of conservative Muslim groups and political leaders the rise of freedom of expression following the Reform Movement has led to serious moral decline. Musdah Mulia, from the Institute for Religion and Gender Studies (LKAJ), describes the movement to implement the Islamic shari'ah as a “regime of morality” (*rejim kesusilaan*). The shari'ah movement is a conservative effort to control freedom of thought and expression among Indonesian Muslims. Since progressive Islamic feminist movements promote Islamic renewal and reform, they are directly affected by the Islamic shari'ah movement.

The focus on moral decline gives the Islamic conservatives authority to define morality and pornography to mainstream society. In the RUU APP, pornography is defined subjectively as “every human creation containing sexual materials, including pictures, vignettes, illustrations, photography, writing, voice, sound, motion pictures,

animation, cartoons, lyrics, conversation or other forms of communication in media for public consumption that can invite sexual desires and violate moral values and create the rise of ‘porn-action’ within society” (Chapter 1). The conservatives blame progressive groups, including Muslim feminists, as the source of moral decadence because they defend freedom of expression. This presents a dilemma to feminist Muslim organization. They are given a choice between accepting anti-pornography laws in order to be included with all like-minded people as moral and religious Muslims or rejecting the law and being seen as immoral.

The traditionalist Islamic perspective expressed in *perda* and RUU APP positions women as the source of moral problems. For instance, one target of the supporters of shari’ah was Inul Daratista, a *dangdut*⁸ singer, who was accused of performing an erotic dance. The FPI, the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), and Rhoma Irama, a popular *dangdut* singer, said that Daratista’s performance was vulgar eroticism and they demanded that she be banned from performing on television, film, or traditional art shows. They even said her dance inspired sexual violence such as rape (Diane Mulligan, 2005: 128-129). Roma Irama, a staunch supporter of RUU APP, cited Islamic traditionalist values, such as covering women’s *aurat* (part of bodies that must be covered)

⁸ Dangdut, combining *dang* and *dut* the sounds of a traditional percussion form called *gendang*, the main *dangdut* instrument, is an Indonesian music style often associated with the lower class. This association is based on the social perception of the way the singer performs as sensual and sexually tempting. *Dangdut* is an important media for women, particularly from villages, to get both popularity and money. Some political parties use *dangdut* singers’ popularity to increase their political support. (For an important study of *dangdut* and its implication for gender construction, see Susan Browne, 2000. For discussion on conservative responses to Inul Daratista’s dance, see Diane Mulligan, “The Discourse of Dangdut: Gender and Civil Society in Indonesia”, 2005).

so that men's sexual desire not be aroused. He pointed to erotic words and physical movements in Daratista's performance (*Pikiran Rakyat*, January 19, 2006). This way of thinking ignores the males who perpetrate rape and blames the woman (Musdah Mulia, 2006). In the campaign for the anti-pornography bill fundamentalists have framed women as the source of the problem and labeled the women's movement as immoral and irreligious, while emphasizing their own morality and religious piety.

Both *perda* and the anti-pornography bill position women as the source of moral decadence. Prostitution is also blamed on women. In Tangerang district, an industrial suburb of Jakarta, Perda No. 8/2005 authorizes the arrest of women suspected of being prostitutes. In one case security guards (*Dinas Ketentraman dan Ketertiban Kota*) seized a woman waiting for a taxi at night (Cholil, 2006) assuming she was a prostituted. She was just a poor woman who had to work at night with no connection to prostitution, but the local government jailed her (Mulia, *Ibid.*). Following traditionalist perspectives the government of Tangerang views it as morally inappropriate for a woman to be in the street after dark.

The Islamic shari'ah movement emerged in the context of political reforms adopted after the 1998 reform movement. Decentralization and regional autonomy give local government greater power to manage their resources. Local leaders have associated themselves with the conservative Muslim groups and use Islam-based discrimination against women as a vehicle to increase their support. With *Perda Syariat Islam*, the number of groups opposing feminist organizations has increased due to decentralization and regional autonomy adopted after the 1998 reform movement. In the past, political

challenge to feminist organizations was centralized in the national government (*pemerintah pusat*). This situation is more problematic for women due to the lack of experience of local women's groups. Feminist groups have limited opportunities to sit together in one forum to consolidate their efforts. Shari'ah politics also distracts feminists from other projects to empower local women. Feminists have less time to devote to state gender budgeting or other political efforts to support women's movements. With *Perda Syariat Islam* the state apparatus, such as police and security guards (*hansip*), are used to enforce patriarchal restrictions on the activities of women.

The Islamic shari'ah movement also creates a counter-productive situation for the implementation of Election Act No. 12/2003 which sets a quota of 30% for women representatives in parliament. For instance, in training for women's participation in politics in which I was involved, many female participants showed little motivation since the Islamic shari'ah movement affected their chances of success.

The movement to implement shari'ah also popularizes the idea of an Islamic state of Indonesia. Some progressive Muslims warn that fundamentalists are leading Indonesia toward rule modeled on the Afghani Taliban, which discriminated against women. A survey by the Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI) showed "strong support for forms of shari'ah with extreme punishments: 65% of respondents believed that Muslim women should not marry non-Muslim men" (Collins, 2007: 9). Finally, the Islamic shari'ah movement focuses on nonstrategic issues rather than real social problems, such as poverty. This marginalizes the agenda of women's empowerment in economics, education, and politics, leaving women marginalized in subordinated positions.

B. Progressive Muslims and the Polygamy Debate

It is clear among feminists that polygamy developed from a patriarchal interpretation of the Qur'an. Opposition to polygamy is central to an Islamic feminist ideology, but it is also a contentious issue among progressive Muslims. A person's attitude toward polygamy can be a measure of the degree of a Muslim's progressive Islam. I will use the online group discussion within JIL members, <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/islamliberal/>, as a source in elaborating polygamy debates among progressive Muslims. Masdar F. Mas'udi, Ade Armando, and Abdullah Gymnastiar, who were involved in modern Islamic discussions, took second wives. Since they are well-known Islamic leaders in Indonesia, I will mainly direct my discussion to their experiences.

Mas'udi was among the first pioneers of progressive Islamic feminism in Indonesia. He was involved in encouraging *pesantren* communities' participation in Islamic feminist programs. His works, including *Hak-hak Reproduksi Perempuan* (Women's Reproductive Rights), was influential in introducing critical views of Islamic conservatism on women's issues. However after he took a second wife, feminist groups declared that he had abrogated his intellectual and moral authority to speak on women's rights. They excluded him from feminist discourse.

Armando is a prominent participant in Liberal Islam Network (JIL) discussions. He expresses critical views of conservative Islam, particularly regarding the use of violence and restrictions on freedom of thought, as in writing on the protests against

Amina Wadud's leadership of Friday prayer in a mixed-gender congregation (*Republika*, March 26, 2005). He wrote two articles expressing strong objections to Puspo Wardoyo's 2003 Polygamy Award, pointing out that the Polygamy Award "would strengthen the misunderstanding about Islamic support of violence" since not only wives but also children experience negative the impacts of polygamy. He cites the Qur'an (Chapter al-Nisa': 3) and the importance of a contextual approach to scripture in support of his argument against polygamy (*Republika*, July 19, 2003). He also quotes 'Abduh, the Egyptian Islamic reformist, who said that it is unusual to find a polygamous Muslim who can free himself from prohibited actions. He cites the statement of Tuti Alawiyah, an Indonesian female Muslim scholar, who said that the award hurts women's feelings and is a deviation from Islamic shari'ah (*Republika*, August 9, 2003). Then, in early 2007, Armando decided to take a second wife.

Gymanstiar is a popular Islamic preacher (*muballigh*) and leader of Pesantren Dar at-Tauhid in Bandung. He is a tolerant and moderate Muslim who teaches peace and harmony with his idea of "heart management" (*Manajemen Qalbu*). He has several business services under the Manajemen Qalbu Corporation. In 2006, he decided to take a second wife. Although his decision decreased his popularity, it also showed that patriarchal tendencies still lurk within modern Muslim leaders. In a TV talk show, Gymanstiar defended his decision to take a second wife, saying, "This is God's way to give me much spare time to care for my family. This is a legal way (*halal*) and is allowed by Islam." He believes that polygamy is not contrary to Islamic teaching (<http://www.kickandy.com/pretopik.asp>). Muslim women who put their trust in

Gymnastiar, whose slogan of heart management promised not to hurt women's feelings, felt that he violated their trust by opting for polygamy. In 2001 Gymanstiar was awarded by Puspo Wardoyo's Polygamy Award as one of the most successful polygamous Muslims in Indonesia and he did not refuse it.

Armando says that he cannot find any reason in the Qur'an to prohibit a Muslim from taking a second wife. He also argues that he is free to interpret the Qur'an in his own way, and others should honor his choice in the name of freedom of thought. He says that Muslim feminists cannot claim their interpretation of the Qur'an is the only truth: "This is a kind of absolutism that betrays the Islamic notion of freedom of thought" (email, February 23, 2007). Iones Rachmat, a progressive Christian theologian who is involved in the online group discussion, lists ten reasons to legitimate polygamy. One of them is the principle that every individual has a right to choose the type of her or his marital arrangement, polygamous, polyandrous, or monogamous (email, November 22, 2007). Armando agrees with Rahmat's list of reasons. To rest the defense of polygamy on individual freedom is to display misunderstanding about the facts of gender-based subordination of women. It is hard for women demand individual freedom in unequal gender relationships. This debate over polygamy proves that the need for broader exposure to feminist ideas is still great.

Armando points out that while slavery was totally prohibited before the death of the Prophet, polygamy was still practiced by Muslims (email, November 21, 2007). Like Armando, Mas'udi argues it is a religious deviation to restrict polygamy based on an interpretation of the Qur'an since the Qur'an does not include any verse prohibiting

(*haram*) polygamy. Both these Islamic progressives here adopt a conservative literal way of reading the Qur'an and ignore the need for contextual understanding.

An attempt by women activists to exclude Armando from the network of progressive Muslims was opposed by the predominantly male members in the name of freedom of thought. A polygamy-neutral stance has been adopted by the progressive Muslim network. They point out that the critical responses come mostly from female members of progressive Muslim groups and a very few males. For example, the JIL coordinator, Luthfi Assyaukanie, addressed polygamy not in terms of feminist principles but as an issue of "self-control": "Polygamy by [progressive Muslim] activists and intellectuals is a terrible misfortune for those who lose control" (email, December 6, 2007). Many members involved in JIL's online debate on polygamy also say that the choice of polygamy is the right of an individual. They believe that while monogamy is the ideal marital institution, a Muslim's choice of polygamy must be respected and no one should object to his decision (Loulembah, email, November 28, 2007).

Based on this, I note the necessity of developing a new formula of Qur'anic interpretation that develops justice insights among progressive Muslims. If freedom of thought and equality cannot be achieved together, equality must be prioritized. Justice is the final goal of the progressive Islamic movement. The feminist critique of polygamy is not only based on the social-historical context of the revelation (*asbab al-nuzul*) in the Qur'an but also on the fact that polygamy is an important factor in creating violence and inequality. Since the ultimate goal of Islam is equality, we cannot simply suggest that polyandry be allowed as well as polygamy as proposed by some male members of the JIL

online discussion (see for example, Ade Armando, email, August 3, 2007 and Ioanes Rakhmat, email, November 25, 2007). The male critiques of feminist views are insensitive to the emotional violence and inequality that polygamy involves. My work at PUAN Amal Hayati brought me face-to-face with the traumatic physical and emotional pain women experience in a polygamous marriage.

In the JIL online discussion, some progressive Muslims do not understand the patriarchal context of polygamy. Only a very few people connect polygamy with gender inequality (for example, Achmad Chodjim, email, November 30, 2007). Instead of comparing polygamy to other forms of gender-based violence against women, such as domestic violence, marital rape, and sexual harassment, Armando responds to feminist critics that polygamy is not a form of violence, and if it is a crime it is more like corruption. Armando often assumes that feminists' critiques against polygamy are based on their arguments that polygamy is violence and a form of crime. As a crime, polygamy is similar to corruption and murder (email, December 11, 2007). Ignorance of gender-based inequality in society leads to progressive Muslims' failure to develop a more gender-sensitive interpretation of the Qur'anic teaching and *hadith*. Rahmat's ten reasons favoring polygamy, with which Armando agrees, exhibit clear proof of the insensitivity of some progressive Muslims to gender inequality. For example, the fourth reason—psychological support of the first wife—is viewed as an important factor in building a successful polygamous marriage. This ignores the fact that many wives give their husbands permission to take a second wife in a situation where they have no better choices. Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) told a story about how some husbands

manipulate their wives to grant permission for polygamy (*Buletin Amal Hayati*, No. 1, August 2001).

C. The Domestic Violence Act

In 2004, the Indonesian Parliament (DPR) issued Act No. 23 on the Elimination of Domestic Violence. This law marks important achievements of feminist movements in Indonesia. The Act recognizes domestic violence as a real problem. Patriarchal interpretation, as seen in various classical works of al-Ghazali and al-Bantani, considers many forms of violence against wives in domestic relationships as a way for wives to achieve spiritual growth. In training session on Islam and feminism, I heard testimonies from Muslim women about polygamy as a religious path to gain the Prophet's blessing in the afterlife. Many husbands treat their wives as merely sexual providers and say it is a religious obligation for the wives to fulfill their husbands' sexual needs regardless of their psychological and physical conditions. They believe marital rape is not a form of violence.

The Act also acknowledges that the domestic sphere is as important as the public domain. This gives "the outsiders" a chance to intervene in a case of violence in a marital relationship. Traditionalist Muslims often view domestic violence as a personal matter that the state and "the outsiders" should not interfere with. A woman who reports her husband is considered a disrespectful woman (*al-mar'ah al-sayyiah*) who opens a family disgrace to public scrutiny. This makes it safe for a man to perpetrate domestic violence.

However, the Act has not stopped domestic violence because it does not deal with the stereotypical Islamic view of a woman as the property of her husband. Traditionalist Muslim scholars typically define marriage as a contract of belonging (*'aqd al-tamlik*). This leads to domestic violence since men tend to view their wives as property. My six-years of work at PUAN Amal Hayati showed me the impact of patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings on domestic violence which legitimate Muslim men's control over their wives.

The Act also did not revise patriarchal principles in the Marriage Act of 1974 and the Compilation of Islamic Law (KHI). Both accommodate polygamy and both maintain patriarchal perspectives on sex-based segregation that restricts women to a powerless domestic sphere. Legal institutions such as the village-based Office of Religious Affairs (*Kantor Urusan Agama* or KUA) and the Islamic Court (*Pengadilan Agama* or PA) refer more to the Marriage Act and the KHI than to the Domestic Violence Act. With weak law enforcement and a lack of concern on the part of the police department, domestic violence is still a haunting problem for women in Indonesia.

The struggle for the Domestic Violence Act unified different groups of feminists in Indonesia. I remember that at that time a feminist coalition called Jangka-PKTP (Advocacy Network for Policy on Violence Against Women) was formed and the members gathered to discuss every single action in support of the Act. This coalition consolidated the feminist movement, not just for the struggle in support of the Act. Unfortunately, after the Act was passed by Parliament, the coalition faltered and became less solid and less motivated. Yet enforcement of the Act is paramount. Ignoring this will

lead Indonesians to view the Act as just a formality, a symbolic law that will not reduce the high incidence of domestic violence. This would make it possible for the government to represent itself as supporting legislation against domestic violence while doing little in fact.

D. The Challenge of NGO Activism and Project-Based Programs

Although the focus on women's rights brought feminist groups of progressive Muslims into a more solid Muslim feminist organization, it often isolated the feminist groups from a wider discussion of progressive Islamic ideas. This meant that many progressive Muslims were not made aware of the issue of women's rights. For instance, a male member of JIL responded to a female who protested men's domination in sexual relationships:

“I am angry [with feminists] because my wife has her own opinion about (sexual) relationships with men. Her view is not represented by the feminists. I am angry because the feminists claim their disappointment as belonging to all women. Indeed, sexuality is a personal affair” (Loulembah, email, November 28, 2007).

This response shows that progressive Muslims' knowledge about gender relationships is still based on patriarchal values. The feminists' view is seen as a challenge to male dominance. This opinion reveals a lack of understanding by progressive Muslims of the importance of gender analyses so they fail to see that in a patriarchal society all women experience gender inequality in their relationships with men. Therefore it is not relevant to criticize feminist arguments as generalizations that do not apply to particular individuals. Finally this opinion shows that male progressive

Muslims view feminists as a new enemy, instead of supporting them as a group that can accelerate the progressive Islamic movements in Indonesia.

The separation of Rahima from P3M due to the polygamy of the P3M director says a lot about how women's rights issues are still a secondary issue for progressive Muslims. Unfortunately progressive Muslim feminists often waste their energy on internal conflicts over various trivial matters rather than focusing on the task of communicating their ideas to others and developing effective collaborations for change. This can be seen in the relationships between PUAN Amal Hayati and Rahima, which have the similar target group of *pesantren* communities. Rather than go hand-in-hand to approach the target groups, PUAN and Rahima are often involved in internal debates on priority programs. The situation in Pesantren Cipasung, Tasikmalaya, illustrates the problem. Both Rahima and PUAN approached Pesantren Cipasung as a local counterpart, as did other NGOs, such as LP3ES and P3M. Local-based organization was a crucial result of the work of previous NGOs in Pesantren Cipasung. However, instead of reorganizing the local groups, Rahima and PUAN set about establishing new local organizations. This fueled conflicts and conflicted with the idea of continuity in progressive Islam. Although PUAN and Rahima have programs in both Pesantren Cipasung and Pesantren Nurul Islam, Jember, they rarely develop a cooperative communication about their programs. Rather, they competed for influence.

Another problem of progressive Muslim feminist organizations is the emphasis on project-based funding. They focus on a project instead of building more sustainable programs. Project-based programs are generally developed in collaboration with

international financial donors, such as The Asia Foundation, the Ford Foundation, USAID, AUSAID, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Financial dependence creates the problem of sustainability. NGOs have to meet the donors' preference in order to get financial support. This orientation to time-limited projects and the financial dependence on international donors creates competition among progressive Muslim feminist NGOs. In addition fundamentalist groups such as FPI, HTI and MMI accuse progressive Muslim groups that have a financial support from international donors of being agents of liberalism and the West, which makes it difficult for progressive Muslims to approach their target groups.

Because of focusing on project-based activities, progressive Muslim feminists often ignore the importance of establishing a voluntary spirit within their target groups. Sometimes the extra money is the only reason *pesantren* communities participate in NGO programs. A popular joke within *pesantren* communities when an NGO offers a program is “*modal dulu baru modul (modal [capital] first then modul [handbook or program])*.” *Pesantren* communities have a strong tradition of tithing (*zakat*) and donation (*shadawah*). Traditionally, *zakat* and *shadaqah* are meant to support poor people (*faqir*) or help in improving facilities, such as mosques and schools. *Zakat* and *shadaqah* could be linked to women's empowerment programs. It is important for progressive Muslim feminists to work on showing *pesantren* communities that *zakat* and *shadaqah* could support women's advocacy programs.

E. Providing Space for Women as Interpreters of Islam (*Mufassir*)

Muslim feminists must not only revise the patriarchal understandings of the Qur'an, they must also encourage women to participate in the process of interpretation. Indeed, education and knowledge are the keys to women's liberation from religion-based oppression and discrimination. There must be a way for women to participate in the public sphere and demonstrate their intellectual achievements. The difficulty is that women must acquire the credentials of Islamic knowledge, such as a knowledge of Arabic, *usul al-fiqh* (the principles of Islamic jurisprudence), and *tarikh* (the history of Islam). They must also acquire an understanding of feminist principles.

The initiative to reinterpret misogynic traditionalist views on subjects in the Qur'an is motivated not only by a theoretical concern about textual methods of *tafsir*, but also by insights from women facing violence. However, the progressive Muslim feminists' *tafsir* methods do not provide space for these women survivors to speak out about their experiences. I see it as very important to invite broader participation of women, including women survivors, in Qur'anic interpretation. A way to do this is to create a simpler methodology of interpretation. This is necessary to reach Muslim women who have been marginalized intellectually.

Understanding sex and gender concepts is fundamental to having more equal gender relations. In feminist analyses, sex refers to the biological construction of female and males characteristics. As a divinely-taken-for-granted construction, sexual roles cannot be changed. Female characteristics include having a vagina, pregnancy, child bearing, breast feeding, menstruation, and menopause. Male qualities are impregnating,

having a penis and an adam's apple. These sexual characteristics distinguish females from males. Gender refers to the socio-cultural construction of female and male roles. As a socio-cultural construction, human beings are involved in producing gender roles and characteristics. As creations of human beings, gender roles and characteristics can be changed, depending on the cultural situation and social context. It is possible for women and men to develop an agreement on the most appropriate roles for themselves. As socio-cultural creations, gender roles differ in every society. For instance, Muslims commonly define man as a *breadwinner* and woman as a *homemaker* in the domestic domain. Since *breadwinner* and *homemaker* are social creations, these roles can be changed to woman as *breadwinner* and man as *homemaker*. How can we apply this analysis to the process of interpretation of Islamic teachings toward more equal gender-based interpretations?

First of all, we have to keep in mind a clear differentiation of sexual roles from gender roles. For example, Chapter al-Nisa' (4): 34 of the Qur'an, states that "*Al-rijal qawwamun 'ala al-nisa'*" (literally, "Men are leaders over women"). I want to focus on the term *qawwamun*. Some classical scholars interpret this word as leader or imam, so that the meaning of the verse is "The men are *leaders* for women." Under sex and gender analyses of feminism, we can question this meaning: Is leadership a sexual or gender role? Based on our feminist understanding, we answer that leadership is a gender role. As a gender construction, it is possible for both women and men to play the role. Therefore, we counter the patriarchal interpretation that only men can play the role of leader.

Islamic scholars insist upon excellent knowledge of Islam for those who intend to become interpreters of the Qur'an (*mufassir*), including extensive knowledge of Arabic,

history of Islam, and principles of Islamic jurisprudence (*usul al-fiqh*). This requirement seemed to close the gate to women's participation. How can Muslim women participate in the process of interpretation with all the required knowledge when they have no access to that knowledge?

To create a space for women's participation in the interpretation process we have to reconstruct the paradigm of knowledge of interpretation. We have to view interpretation as a process of understanding which every individual has the right to undertake. Every believer has a right to voice a critical question, feel dissatisfied, and then rebuild "the most appropriate belief and teaching" according to her or his own understanding. To deal with the lack of Arabic proficiency, women can benefit from translations to access these sources of knowledge along with the works of classical scholars (*fuqaha'*). We understand that a lot of translations are gender biased. In this case, we can insert our own gender perspectives and gender awareness into these translations as in the example above concerning leadership. We can even revise the translations by presenting new perspectives. For example in contemporary Indonesia, there are many Muslim scholars who are fluent in Arabic with access to Arabic sources of Islamic teachings. Most of them are male and tend to be patriarchal. However, Muslim women can ask the scholars to read and translate these sources. After that, the women apply a gender perspective to digest what the Muslim scholars translated from the Arabic sources. In this spirit, we can abrogate the culture of traditionalism in Muslim thinking and reawaken a search for understanding of Islam that is based on justice and "replace" the gender bias and patriarchal views through which Islam has been interpreted.

Progressive Muslim feminists still work only on limited women's issues in the Qur'an. A more complete *tafsir* of the Qur'an will be an important source of reference for Indonesian Muslim women. Of course, this will require hard work, including intensive study and facing critical opposition from conservative Muslim groups. Nevertheless, by focusing on this work, progressive Muslim feminists will be recognized not only as feminist activists, but also as feminist scholars.

F. A Multicultural Approach to Traditional Women's Groups

Multicultural feminism opens spaces for any women's group to freely build their own definition of women's emancipation. Freedom to choose social identities is based on the belief that every society or individual has the right to practice its own traditions. Multicultural feminists emphasize the perspective of pluralism in the following ways: (1) "integration about multicultural issue and diversity and (2) prejudice reduction efforts" (Enn and Forrest, 2002: 4). Multicultural feminists acknowledge the diversity of women's concerns as feminist issues. It is contrary to a multicultural perspective, for feminist groups to force one definition of women's emancipation and exclude others. From a multicultural feminist perspective, definitions of oppression, discrimination, revolution, violence, and equality are constructed contextually depending on the traditional values of each society. Feminist groups that force their own definitions in the process of creating women's social identities take a colonial stance that is an aspect of post-colonialism (Narayan, 1997: 46-80).

From a multicultural feminist perspective, traditionalist women's organizations such as *majlis ta'lim* and the Islamic Prosperous Justice party (PKS) are spaces in which women organize themselves to express their interests and opinions. From a multicultural feminist perspective, it is more important to provide space where women have freedom to express themselves and form their own social identity than to convert them to a feminist point of view.

Saba Mahmood's insights into the women's mosque movement in Egypt suggest a way to include traditional women's groups in Indonesia as a part of the struggle for women's rights based on Islamic teachings. Traditional Islamic women's groups accept polygamy based on a belief that it is a tradition accepted by the Prophet Muhammad (*sunnah*). By following this *sunnah*, they will harvest a reward in heaven. They see polygamy as a part of their spiritual achievements. Feminist groups view polygamy as a form of violence against women, a sign of the subordination of women. Feminist organizations in Indonesia view these traditional women's groups as having no significant contribution to make to the women's movements. These feminists even accuse traditional women's groups of being against women's emancipation. A multicultural feminist perspective would lead them to understand the important contributions of these traditional women's groups in strengthening women's movements.

Traditional Islamic women's groups believe that Islam has introduced teachings and doctrines that support women's empowerment. However, traditional women's groups generally define women's gender roles as women's duty and do not differentiate gender roles from biological roles. Hence, they claim child rearing, serving their husbands'

sexual needs and household work are women's duty. As Rachel Rinaldo in her recent dissertation from the University of Chicago notes:

“Biological differences are categorized as *kodrat*, a Javanese term meaning nature or natural destiny, while socio-cultural differences are considered gender. According to this manual [on gender and women's issues], while giving birth and breastfeeding are related to *kodrat*, raising a child and housework are related to gender, and are thus tasks that can be done by men or women. Participants then go on to discuss issues related to gender inequality such as domestic violence and women's representation in politics” (2007: 176-177).

Progressive Muslim feminist can guide traditional women's groups toward a more revolutionary stance. It is important for progressive groups to initiate dialogue with traditional groups by adopting a multicultural perspective on Islam.

Women's *majlis ta'lim* are one place to introduce such feminist perspectives to traditional Muslim women. Women's *majlis ta'lim* groups are among the largest religious-based women's groups in Indonesia. *Majlis ta'lim*, an Arabic term for study group, is a traditional form of religious community gathering. In *majlis ta'lim*, people gather, usually in a mosque or Islamic school (*madrasah*) to learn Islamic knowledge. *Majlis ta'lim* is a kind of informal Islamic education in which a lot of people participate (Amidan, 1993: 19). Participants believe *majlis ta'lim* builds harmonious relationships among human beings (*habl min al-nas*) and a spiritual relationship with God (*habl min Allah*) (Amidan, Ibid., 20).

Almost every Muslim woman participates in one or more groups of *majlis ta'lim*. Generally, a religious teacher (*ustadz*) or preacher (*muballigh*) delivers a talk on some aspect of Islam. Attendees (*jama'ah*) are passive participants who only listen to the lessons from the *ustadz* or *muballigh*. In women's *majlis ta'lim*, the *ustadz* or *muballigh*

can be either female or male. Loyalty of the *jama'ah* to the *ustadz* or *muballigh* maintains continuity of this group. Loyalty to the *ustadz* is not limited only to the learning situation in *majlis ta'lim*. The *ustadz* will have an important position in the society.

In *majlis ta'lim* women can gain much Islamic knowledge and participate in the public domain. *Majlis ta'lim* provide a forum where the tradition of sex-based segregation can be challenged and women can gain experience in articulating their views and experience. Although the traditional views expressed by *ustadz* or *muballigh* treat Muslim women as a subordinate group in society and support many forms of discrimination against women, in the *majlis ta'lim* women can challenge these views. *Majlis ta'lim* provides a space for dialogue. Dialogue leads to the development of multicultural understanding and provides an opportunity for transformation of self-consciousnesses and self-awareness. Through dialogue, we can show and share our feminist perspective, what we believe is “the best and the truest feminism”. We also open our own minds to other perspectives. We do not easily judge an action or point of view as a form of discrimination or violence against women. We will not fall into generalizations when we value the views of other women. Freedom of choice can emerge through dialogue when these forums give equal positions to those with different views. For instance, those who disagree with polygamy can argue for freedom of choice and show those who accept polygamy how polygamy is a form of violence against women. First, feminist groups should inform prop-polygamy women that polygamy is a great source of violence against women. Second, after giving the explanation, feminist groups should give the pro-polygamy women freedom of choice whether the pro-polygamy women will

continue their choice or change their minds. Multicultural feminist perspectives emphasize freedom of choice in the process of developing women's identities or roles although women's choices seem to be a form of inequality or violence.

PKS is an Islamic political party that campaigns for the implementation of shari'ah in Indonesia. PKS views shari'ah as a prerequisite for the development of Islamic civilization (PKS Profile, 2002). For this reason Rickleft, as cited by Rasyida, identifies PKS as a fundamentalist group (Rasyida, 2004: 6). PKS is an important political force since it won significant votes in the 2004 parliament election. PKS is a cadre-based political party. The combination of Islam-based ideology and cadre-based recruitment make PKS the political party in contemporary Indonesian politics of which people expect the most.

In PKS women members outnumber men (Damanik, 2002: 269). According to Rohana from the Advisory Council of PKS, the larger number of women members is because "women are more religious than men" (Rasyida: 2004, 28). However, in the view of feminist groups the definition of women as more religious than men refers to traditional gender stereotyping that defines women as the defenders of morality. Women members of PKS accept the practice of polygamy. Based on Chapter al-Nisa' (4): 3, acceptance of polygamy is a sign of a good woman (*al-mar'ah al-shalihah*) who make her husband happy although she has to sacrifice herself. Because women members of PKS uphold traditionalist Islamic views, some feminist groups in Indonesia see them as irrelevant to Indonesian women's emancipation. Through a multicultural feminist

perspective, we see PKS and *majlis ta'lim* as women's space to develop identities and roles and include them in the Indonesian women's movements.

G. Broadening Networks: Homosexual Movement as a Potential Partner

It is important for progressive Muslim feminists to build networks with other groups which share their vision of building a more progressive Islam. Gay and lesbian communities are potentially important allies in strengthening progressive Islamic feminism. Gay and lesbian movements are a lot like feminist movements in terms of facing conservative social and religious groups. They are minority groups that often experience human rights violations from the state and religious groups.

The discourse on sexuality is a key element through which conservative and patriarchal Muslims maintain their power and domination. Conservatives connect sexuality to morality and insist upon the responsibility of women to keep society moral. They consider homosexuality a sin. As with polygamy, sexuality is a sensitive issue that can be used as a measure of the degree of progressive Islam, even within feminist groups. Some progressive Muslim feminists reject homosexual relationships as contrary to Islamic teachings. Sometimes they even taunt and isolate feminist lesbians. A progressive Muslim feminist alliance with homosexual groups to revise the conservatives' view of sexuality would be an important foundation on which to build more solid movements to transform Islamic conservatism. A new perspective on sexuality can facilitate both feminist and homosexual movements to empower women and homosexuals.

Like the conservatives, some male progressive Muslims view homosexual relationships as *haram* in Islam without paying attention to the importance of exploring the context behind stories of same-sex relationships in the Qur'an. Some examples of male progressive Muslims' opinions on homosexual relationships can be found in the JIL online discussion. Some progressive Muslims refer to the story of the people of Lot in the Qur'an as a main source for restricting homosexuality in Islam (email, November 23, 2006). Feminist contextual *tafsir* exploring the social context of a verse on women can be applied to verses in the Qur'an on homosexuality. I will offer a feminist method of *tafsir* to discuss same-sex relationships in the Qur'an.

Several verses in the Qur'an tell the story of the people of Lot, including *al-Anbiya'* (the Prophets): 74-75, *al-Shu'ara'* (the Poets) (26): 160-175, *Hud* (the Prophet Hud) (11): 77-83, *al-Qamar* (the Moon) (54): 33-39, and *al-Tahrim* (Prohibition): 10. I argue that contextual elaboration of these verses indicates an Islamic confirmation of the custom of same-sex relationships in societies at that time. These verses cannot be separated from the Qur'anic purpose of offering an Islamic ethics, so Islam can be viewed as leading to a better society. In the case of same-sex relationships in the Lot story, the Qur'an's target is not homosexuals, but sexual abuse and fornication, part of the life style of the people of Lot along with other criminal behaviors. The Qur'an intends to teach new social-religious moral and ethical standards to overcome the social disorder in Lot. Verse 10 of Chapter *al-Tahrim* in the Qur'an tells a story about Lot's and Noah's wives who refused to obey the Divine order. This is important proof that the story of Lot does not target homosexuals, but rather the people's rejection of 'God's order' as

conveyed by the Prophet Lot. Unlike the conservative Muslim scholars who interpret the word “*al-khabais*” (abomination) in Chapter *al-Anbiya*: 74 as referring to homosexual experiences (see for example *Al-Qur’an dan Terjemahannya* (Al-Qur’an and Its Translation, nd), I view this as applying to the people’s rebellion against Lot as indicated by the word “*fasiqin*” (the rebellious people) at the end of this verse.

Conservative scholars also interpret the word *al-‘alamin* in Chapter *al-Shu’ara* (26): 165 as “human beings”, so they understand this verse as a prohibition against male-male sexual relationships. This verse can be an important theological foundation to recognize homosexual rights based on Islamic teaching. I agree with the interpretation of the word “*al-‘alamin*” as “all creatures in the world” (see for example ‘Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of The Holy Qur’an*, 2001). Therefore I think the verse does not talk about gay and lesbian relationships among human beings; but, rather, it is about how Lot’s people included the sexual style of homosexuality in their rituals. I argue that the Qur’an wanted to identify Islam as a new religion that had a different model of worship and wanted to purify the way people worshiped from any sexuality. Hence, it is in contrast to conservative religious assumptions that often view homosexual relationships as a part of a hedonistic lifestyle. The Qur’anic wants to replace the way people perform their rituals with Islamic traditions. Hence, the story of the people of Lot in the Qur’an is not meant as a prohibition of homosexual relationships.

In ancient Greek society homosexuality was a common sexual behavior. Islam strongly discouraged its believers from following practices of other societies so that early Islamic believers were clearly distinguished from non-Muslims. The Islamic restriction

against homosexuality is related to this concern. The sources of rejection of homosexuality in Islam are (1) patriarchal tradition in interpreting Islamic sources and (2) the political situation in early Islam that “required” the absence of homosexuals.

One of the most influential traditions in Islam is the patriarchy of ancient Arabic society. People accepted the idea that only a man could be a leader. Having a daughter embarrassed parents, and female infanticide was a common practice to save a family from disgrace. Having several wives or concubines was a measure of male power. The Prophet Muhammad introduced Islamic teachings into this patriarchal Arabic society. Thus, it is possible that the patriarchal views of Arabic society were in tension with Islamic teachings. Ancient Arabic society objected to homosexuality because it was considered feminine. Effeminate males were contrary to tribal interests in conflicts which required the masculine virtues of bravery, courage, strength, boldness and dominance. Homosexuality could lead to losing tribal wars. Religious wars with non-Muslim societies were common in the early history of Islam. Jihad interpreted as a defense of Islam was an important factor in winning these wars. Thus jihad came to be associated with “masculine values” under the patriarchal influence of Arabic society, and the first group of Muslims prohibited homosexuality as a violation of jihad (Wafer, 1997:92). The verses of the Qur’an on homosexuality are more concerned with male homosexual experience than female homosexuality because patriarchal society did not count females as significant.

In times of peace that required “feminine values,” such as beauty, love and compassion, rather than “masculine values”, it is not difficult to find homosexual

experiences in Islamic societies. Some great Islamic scholars experienced same-sex relationships. Abu Nawas, the greatest Arab poet, was homosexual. It was common among male Sufis to practice homosexuality in correlation with the belief that sexual lust or *nafs* (desire) toward women would lead them to spiritual decadence (Schimmel, 1979:124). These realities are crucial evidence that in some contexts homosexuality has not been a major problem within Islamic society.

Homosexuality has also been common in recent Islamic societies, including Iran, Turkey, Morocco, Syria and Pakistan (Schmitt and Sofer, 1992). Among Muslims in Indonesia, homosexual experiences are common in *pesantren*, or Islamic boarding schools. However, patriarchal views still dominate Islamic teaching and interpretation of the Qur'an, including on homosexuality. Thus, Islamic societies tend to accept the socially-constructed religious belief that homosexuality is a major sin.

Because stereotypes and discrimination against homosexuals have a correlation with the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings on homosexuality, it is important to create an agenda for the recognition of homosexual rights by presenting a new interpretation of these teachings. Recognition of homosexual rights is relevant to other progressive Islamic agendas, including ending violence against women. Progressive Muslim feminist groups have to be aware that discriminating against homosexuals in the name of Islam encourages other forms of discrimination and even violence. The progressive Muslim feminist method of *tafsir* can make an important contribution to reinterpreting Qur'anic teachings on same-sex relationships, which will help to build an alliance with gay and lesbian groups.

Chapter 5

Reflections on Progressive Islamic Feminism in Indonesia

Laila Ahmed's works, *Women and Gender in Islam* (1992), particularly Chapter 9, "The First Feminist" and Chapter 11, "Struggle for the Future," provides a model for assessing progressive Islamic feminism in Indonesia. In this concluding chapter, I will use Ahmed's works as a model for my reflections on the accomplishments of progressive Muslim feminists in Indonesia in empowering Indonesian women and introducing feminism to Indonesian society. These accomplishments are a result of the collective efforts of progressive Islamic activists, Muslim feminists and secular feminist groups.

A. Colonial Rule and Islamic Feminism: The Issue of the Veil

Ahmed shows that colonial rule had an enormous impact on the development of feminism in Egypt. She describes how feminism passed from British colonials to elite Egyptians. However, I argue that in Indonesia there was a reverse process of cultural transformation from Indonesians to Dutch women.

In Egypt, Qasim Amin's discussion of women's rights in his two books, *Al-Mar'ah Al-Jadidah* (The New Women) and *Tahrir Al-Mar'ah* (Women's Liberation) reflected the influence of a British perspective resulting from his interaction with foreigners. His ideas about women's liberation do not emerge from his views on the situation of Egyptian women. Amin's friendship with his British colleague, Lord Cromer,

and his experiences studying in French awakened concern about women's seclusion and inspired him to promote women's education (Ahmed, 155). Ahmed documents the importance of women's clothing as an issue in the emergence of feminist movements in Egypt. Western feminists concluded that veiling was a way to marginalize women in Muslim countries and to exclude them from participation in public life. Qasim Amin followed this Western way of thinking and began to campaign against the veil. Unveiling became a symbol of liberation.

Others in Egypt viewed veiling as an expression of cultural identity. They protested that to force women to take off the veil was another form of colonial oppression. For example, Hifni Nassef, whose father was an intellectual and friend of the Islamic reformer Muhammad 'Abduh, drew upon Islam in developing her ideas of feminism (Ahmed, 182). Ahmed comments, "Malak Hifni Nassef was articulating the basis of a feminism that did not automatically affiliate itself with westernization (179). Doria Shafik and Zeynab al-Ghazali also objected to the internalization of Western values and encouraged using the indigenous culture of Egypt to support women's rights. The choice between Western nationalism and Islamic resistance to colonialism led to a complex debate about the role of women in society.

The late 1800s and the early 1900s were also a period when the idea of women's liberation emerged in Indonesia. Women, such as RA Kartini, Roehana Koeddoes, Rahmah al-Yunusiah, Rangkayo Rasuna Said, Nyai Hajjah Ahmad Dahlan, Nyai Hajjah Siti Sholehah and Dewi Sartika expressed concern about condition of Indonesian women and women's rights. It is important to note that there was no discourse that connected

women's dress to seclusion as happened in Egypt. Even though they had intimate interactions with Dutch women, Javanese women did not adopt Dutch dress, and the Dutch did not criticize the dress of Muslim women in Indonesia.⁹ In some parts of Indonesia (especially in Bali), women at this time did not cover the upper part of their bodies (Gouda, 187) but no Indonesian feminists spoke about this.

R.A Kartini (1879-1904) wore Javanese dress which is sarong and *kebaya*.¹⁰

Victoria Cattoni, who studies the *kebaya* explains that the *kebaya* “has long come to symbolize the emancipation of women in Indonesia through a representation linking the *kebaya* to the 19th century “proto-feminist” figure of Kartini” (2004: 2). Even in strongly Islamic areas, like Aceh, we see that women like Cut Nyak Dien did not cover their hair.¹¹ The *jilbab* (head covering) that is now associated with a strong commitment to Islam only entered Aceh in the 1980s through the establishment of an Islamic university (Kamaruzzaman, 2008).

Indonesian Muslim women activists, such as Rahmah al-Yunusiah, Nyai Hajjah Ahmad Dahlan and Nyai Hajjah Sholihah, adopted the *jilbab* due to the influence of Arab

⁹ In her letters to her Dutch feminist compatriot, Mrs. Abendanon, collected in *The Letters of Javanese Princess*, Kartini does not mention the topic of dress.

¹⁰ Cattoni (2004: 3) explains that the word *kebaya* is “derived from the Arabic word *kaba* meaning “clothing,” introduced via the Portuguese language. The term *kebaya* has come to refer to a garment whose origins appear to be a blouse first worn in Indonesia at some time during the 15th and 16th centuries (Lombard 1996). This garment was likely to be similar to what is described as a “long, fitted, flared *kebaya* known as *kebaya panjang*,” worn in the 16th century by Portuguese women arriving on the south-western coast of Malaysia (Centre for Korean Studies 1996), situated across the Malacca Straits from Sumatra. Many sources also cite Chinese influence on clothing of the time, one source comparing the *kebaya* to an open-fronted long-sleeved tunic worn by women of the Ming Dynasty (Hoon).”

¹¹ Cut Nyak Dien was born into a religious family and pursued Islamic knowledge from her family and from lessons in the mosque (Ibrahim, 2001: 19).

Muslim traditions in Islamic schools. However, in Indonesia the style of head covering was combined with local Javanese or Minangkabau traditions. No one wore *yashmak*, which only left the eyes uncovered, as is seen among Arab women. Some wore only a small piece of cloth called *kerudung* or *kudung* that does not cover all the hair. Only the upper middle class women *priyayi* were influenced by European customs. Even those who married a Dutch man still wore Javanese clothing (Gouda, 169). Women's dress only became an issue in the discourse of Islamic feminism in Indonesia in the late 20th century.

In *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942* (2000), Elizabeth Locher-Scholten studies Dutch women's clothing styles in Indonesia. Instead of influencing native women, many Dutch women adopted local clothing customs by wearing sarong and *kebaya*. Later they adopted “*bebe* dress: wide, white, shapeless, and long-sleeved, with frills and ruches” (2000: 129-130). The reason for rejecting sarong and *kebaya* was “its ‘indigenous’ nature” (Ibid, 129). I assume that the rise of the nationalist movement led to this change. Locher-Scholten says that after 1920s Dutch women began to wear more fashionable blouses, skirts, gloves and hats in European fashion. They now considered *bebe* dresses “uglier than decently embroidered night-gowns” (Ibid, 130). However native Indonesian women, including those from the upper-middle class, did not adopt Dutch dress. In *Dutch Culture Overseas*, Franchise Gouda says that “colonial culture became obsessively concerned with making visible the palpable difference between ruler and ruled, and did so increasingly through spectacular pomp and circumstance; women's acceptance of

more rigid sexual boundaries between the “European” community and native society was essential” (1995:191).

The discussion of women’s dress is often connected to a discourse on women’s bodies and control of women’s sexuality. Early Muslim feminists in Indonesia did not see a problem about women’s bodies, including controlling them, as commonly happened elsewhere in Muslim world. Indeed, folk arts in Indonesian (Javanese) society include performances that express women’s eroticism, such as *tayub* and *ronggeng*. Muslim leaders did not object to these arts. I conclude that the debate about control over women’s bodies, a never-ending subject of debate in Islamic feminism elsewhere, did not happen in early Indonesian Muslim feminism.

If we look at the importance of male dress in Islamic reform movements in Indonesia, we find a striking difference. The pioneers of Islamic reform, such as Sheikh Abdullah and Sheikh Abdul Karim Amrullah from the *Kaum Muda* (Youth Faction) in Minangkabau in West Sumatera, saw adopting Western male clothing as an important step in modernizing Islamic religious traditions. They dressed like European males, exchanging the sarong for pants and tie (Hamka, 13).

Muslim women activists seem to have had more cultural independence from the influence of Dutch culture. In the social-political context, women’s dress became an expression of native cultural identity. Instead Muslim women activists were concerned with substantial goals, such as women’s liberation through education.

B. Education for Women: The Influence of the Islamic Reform Movement in Egypt

RA Kartini, a female Javanese aristocrat, first called for education for women. Some scholars argue that Kartini was inspired by her interaction and correspondence with Dutch compatriots, especially Rosita Abendanon-Mandri. There are parallels here with the connection between Qasim Amin and Lord Cromer in Egypt. As in Egypt, education for women was an issue that brought together indigenous women activists and colonial feminists. The demand for education for women was also supported by leaders of the emerging nationalist movement, most of whom were educated in Dutch schools.

Locher-Scholten identifies Kartini's call for education of girls and the end of polygamous marriage as the emergence of Indonesian feminism (Ibid. 21). Kartini established a school for girls in her home. After Kartini's premature death in childbirth, her feminist sisters, Roekmini, Kardinah, Kartinah and Soematri, continued her work.¹² Inspired by Kartini's ideas Zainuddin Labay al-Yunusy established the Diniyah School Putri (Islamic School for Girls) in West Sumatra in 1916 as a part of the Islamic reform movement (Hamka, 13). Nine months after the establishment of the school, Zainuddin passed away, and his sister Rahmah al-Yunusiah (1900-1969) continued his work.¹³

Rahmah was the first Indonesian woman to study at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. Sheikh Abdurrahman Tadj, the rector of Al-Azhar University awarded Rahmah the

¹² Roekmini sent Abendanon-Mandri a letter about Kartini's school, "Our little school is going very well, although it is a pity that once again at the moment the children often have to stay at home. We now have a total of nine pupils, ten counting the married one. It is such a pleasure to see the children working so earnestly. But among them are those whose parents are not well off enough to provide for their children what is required at school" (published in *Realizing the Dreams of R.A Kartini*, see Cote, 2008: 83).

¹³ The first group of her students included 71 women who were mainly young mothers. These students found *Persatuan Murid-murid Diniyah School* (the Diniyah School Student Union) (Abuddin Nata, 2001: 226).

highest honorary title, sheikh; the first woman to be given that title in the history of the university. Unlike Kartini who was influenced by Dutch ideas, Rahmah developed her ideas as she studied with Muslim scholars at Al-Azhar University and lived in Egypt. She also visited other Middle Eastern countries, including Syria, Iraq, and Jordan, and she established collaboration between her school in Indonesia and Al-Azhar University and other centers of learning in the Middle East. Alumni from her school were given scholarships to study at Al-Azhar University.¹⁴ The government of Kuwait also awarded scholarships for the alumni of Diniyah School Putri to study in universities there (Munawaroh, 29).

We do not know whether Rahmah encountered Egyptian feminists, such as Malak Hifni Nassef, Huda Sh'arawi, Doria Shafik, and Mai Ziyada, who lived in the period when she studied in Egypt. However Ramah's connection with Egyptian Muslim scholars gave her prestige at home, and her work associated women's rights with Islamic renewal ideas from Egypt. Rahmah changed the model of Islamic schools from traditional *pesantren* to modern schools. In the modern system of Islamic education Rahmah initiated, the *kyai*, the leader of the *pesantren*, shared authority and responsibility with others. Following Rahmah's model of Islamic education for girls, many *pesantren* in Java began to build special educational programs for girls and some even built girl's *pesantren* (*pesantren utrid*). Even though many *pesantren utrid* retained patriarchal academic traditions, these institutions provided greater access to education for women.

¹⁴ The first delegation included eight women who went to Al-Azhar in 1958 (29). One was asked to teach in the Department of Letters at Al-Azhar.

The Dutch tried to intervene in Islamic education by restricting courses that would develop critical skills that might lead Indonesians toward rebellion (Hamka, 8). Rahmah was offered a financial subsidy by the Dutch colonial government, but she rejected this offer in order to maintain the independence of her school. In 1905, the Dutch administration issued a regulation requiring Islamic teachers (*guru agama*) to receive permission to teach from a local ruler (Machnun Husein, 1983: 5-6). Rahmah established the Committee to Reject the Regulation of Unregistered Schools (*Komite Penolakan Ordonansi Sekolah Liar*) (Munawaroh, 23). Rahmah's resistance to Dutch views of women's education was even more significant. She described her mission as "to educate girls who have Islamic spirit and capable women teachers who have responsibility for social wealth and nationalism based on the devotion to God" (Munawaroh, 13). The policy of the Dutch colonial government was based on the view that women had a primary obligation to care for their families and their children and education for girls be oriented to develop skills for motherhood. (Since many Indonesian children went to Dutch schools, mothers had to learn Dutch to communicate with their children.) According to Dutch policy, education to produce female teachers was unnecessary (S. L. van der Wal, 23-25). Rahmah wanted to train Muslim women with awareness of women's rights who could be teachers in Islamic schools (*guru agama*). Rahmah's vision of education for girls also differed from that of Roehana Koeddoes, another early pioneer of education for girls in Padang, West Sumatra. Koeddoes focused on skills like sewing and cooking, while Rahmah emphasized building the intellectual capacities of women.

Rahmah also resisted the intervention of male Muslim scholars in her school. When Rahmah was asked to affiliate her school with Muhammadiyah, she resisted. Later Mahmud Yunus, who was among the first Indonesian graduates from the University of Cairo, Egypt, called for all Islamic schools to be organized in a single unified educational system in order to improve the quality of education. He established *Panitia Ishlah al-Madaris al-Islamiyah* (Committee for Unification of Islamic Schools) (Munawaroh, 2002: 21-22). Rahmah argued that it was easier to improve Islamic schools if the management was held by each school.

Rahmah's Minangkabau colleague, Rangkayo Rasuna Said, maintained that it was important to encourage the students to be involved in the nationalist struggle against colonial oppression. Rahmah did not restrict women's participation in political movements, but she argued that female students should "love their country based on strong belief in Islam (*iman*)," not through participation in a political movement (Munawaroh, 21). Women had to be well educated so they could be leaders when they were involved in politics. In 1933, Ramah led a gathering of mothers in Padang, West Sumatera to protest against the Dutch. She joined *Sarikat Kaum Ibu Sumatra* (Union of Sumatran Mothers) who fought against colonial rule in the monthly women's publication (Munawaroh, 24).

Rahmah sent the alumni of her school to Jakarta, where they worked to establish branches of the Diniyah School Putri. Among the most important alumni is Suryani Thaher, the leader of Pesantren At-Thahiriyah As-Suryaniyyah in Jakarta, who led a *majlis ta'lim* with thousands of women participants. Although Rahmah has been

recognized as being among the twenty greatest Muslim scholars of West Sumatra (Munawaroh, 2002: 31), she has received little recognition for her contribution to Islamic feminism in Indonesia.

In conclusion, although the idea of education for women first appeared in the context of Dutch influence in the writings of RA. Kartini, in Indonesia education for girls developed within an Islamic context. In my view during the colonial period, Indonesian Muslim women realized that education was the best way to promote women's rights. This is no longer true among contemporary Indonesian feminists.

C. Islamic Reform and the Involvement of Women in Politics

The emergence of the Islamic reform movement Muhammadiyah greatly contributed to Islamic feminism in Indonesia. For example, Nyai Hajjah Ahmad Dahlan, the wife of Kyai Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of the modernist Muhammadiyah, founded the Muslim women's organization 'Aisyiyah, and 'Aisyiyah expanded Muhammadiyah's goals to include providing education for girls and enhancing women's rights.¹⁵

Kyai Ahmad Dahlan went on pilgrimage to Mecca where he studied with outstanding 'ulama, such as Sheikh Djambek. However, he was most influenced by Muhammad 'Abduh and his student Rasyid Ridha. When he returned to Indonesia, he founded the Muhammadiyah in 1912 in Yogyakarta. Ahmad Dahlan believed that the

¹⁵ Siti Walidah, the wife of Kyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan, was born in Yogyakarta in 1872. Her father, Kyai Pengulu Haji Muhammad Fadhil, was a distinguished 'ulama in Kauman, Yogyakarta. Her father allowed her to study Islam, mainly reading the Qur'an and textbooks written in *Arab-pegon* (Wahyudi, Ibid). Additionally, he gave her a chance to apply her Islamic knowledge by being a teacher for younger female students in her parents' house (Suratmin, Ibid, 19).

political and economic backwardness of Indonesian Muslims was due to the theology of *taqlid* (absolute imitation) (Abdullah Puar, 1989: 32-33). Although Dutch colonial rule contributed to this backwardness, he noted that the Dutch often relied on the authority of Islamic leaders. According to Stenberg (as quoted by Ismail 2003: 11) the schools that Muhammadiyah established “presented academic subjects and taught Islam not merely by recital and exegesis but also as a basic system of religious, ethical and social belief.” Ahmad Dahlan supported Nyai Hajjah Ahmad Dahlan’s efforts to promote the education of Muslim girls.¹⁶ ‘Aisyiyah was founded in 1917, just five years after the establishment of the Muhammadiyah.

‘Aisyiyah played an important role in changing Indonesian Muslims’ view of women’s role by encouraging women to participate in social activities. In 1919, ‘Aisyiyah began implementing its programs to improve education for children by building kindergartens called ‘Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal (Pimpinan Pusat ‘Aisyiyah, 30). In 1922, ‘Aisyiyah built a small mosque (*mushalla*), and members used the mosque as a center to improve their knowledge of Islam and society. This was radical because most Muslims viewed the mosque as only a place for worship. Indeed, in many cases, only men used the mosque. In 1923, ‘Aisyiyah initiated a program to reduce illiteracy among women. Women were taught both the Arabic and Latin alphabets (Ibid, 30). In 1926, ‘Aisyiyah began publishing *Suara ‘Aisyiyah* (the Voice of ‘Aisyiyah) in order to communicate its programs and ideas (Ibid., 30).

¹⁶ The first program of education was followed by 13 Muslim girls under 15 years old. Some of them had familial relationships with Ahmad Dahlan.

Although Ahmad Dahlan died in 1923 (Suratmin, 1990: 36), Nyai Hajjah Ahmad Dahlan continued her struggle for women's rights and became a key figure in organizing the first Indonesian women's congress in 1928. This national congress was a response to the Sumpah Pemuda (Youth Declaration) of October 28, 1928 which called on all elements of the nationalist movement to unify. Thirty one women's groups, including 'Aisyiah, Wanita Katholik (Catholic Women), and Putri Indonesia (Indonesian Girls) participated in the Congress (Sutjiatiningsih, 1991: 10; the Department of Information, 1968: 11). The women's organizations hoped to show that Indonesian women's rights were a crucial element in the nationalist struggle. At the congress, the Union of Indonesian Women's Associations (Perikatan Perkumpulan Perempuan Indonesia or PPPI) was established as an umbrella organization for fundraising to improve education for girls and to campaign against under-age marriage. The PPPI also called on the Dutch colonial government to increase the number of schools for girls, to require divorced husbands to provide for their ex-wives and to protect widows and orphans.

The importance of the Islamic reform movement in promoting women's participation in politics is illustrated by the life story of Rangkyo Rasuna Said. Rasuna Said was born in Maninjau, West Sumatra in 1910 into a religious merchant family. Unlike her siblings who went to Dutch schools, Rasuna Said attended Islamic schools. After finishing elementary school, she was sent to Padangpanjang to continue her education in Zainuddin Labay al-Yunusy's Diniyah School. When the school established

a special program of education for women (initiated by Rahmah al-Yunusiyah), Rasuna Said encouraged students to attend political discussions and meetings.¹⁷

In 1926, she joined Sarekat Rakyat (People's Association) and with colleagues she established the Indonesian Muslim Union (Persatuan Muslimin Indonesia or Permi), which was made a political party two years later.¹⁸ She was asked to design political propaganda, and she became known as a powerful orator. After moving to Medan, North Sumatra, she founded Perguruan Putri (Education for Girls) and published the magazine, "Menara Putri" (The Girls' Tower) with the slogan "This is my power, where is your power" (*Ini dadaku, mana dadamu!*).

For women who belonged to the more traditional Islamic community of NU, the importance of education for women and support for Masyumi, an Islamic political party, contributed to the emergence of feminist consciousness. NU was founded in 1926. In 1929, NU established a program called Ma'arif NU to organize the educational institutions belonging to the organization, and in 1932, NU established a Youth Association (Persatuan Pemuda NU), later known as Gerakan Pemuda Ansor (1949). The idea of starting a women's organization emerged in 1938, when the Association of Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah Women (Perkumpulan Ibu Ahl as-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah) mobilized a thousand women to attend the 13th Congress of NU in Banten. In that congress, for the first time women members of NU participated as speakers; R. Djunaisih

¹⁷ Rasuna Said was influenced by Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah from the Kaum Muda and Hajji Udin Rachmany, a member of Muhammadiyah and a political activist.

¹⁸ When the Dutch issued a regulation banning double membership, Rasuna Said resigned from Sarekat Rakyat as she viewed that Permi as more progressive (Jahroni, 2002: 77).

and Sitti Syarah emphasized the importance of women's access to Islamic knowledge (Ibid, 42). Kiyai Wahab Chasbullah also delivered a speech to the women on the importance of women's role in society. At the next congress in 1939 in Magelang, Central Java the women organized a special public forum (*rapat umum*), which some male participants also attended.¹⁹ At the 15th congress of NU in 1940 in Surabaya, East Java, women organized a special meeting to discuss the establishment of an official NU women's organization and set up a national council of the association of women members of the NU. Finally at the 16th NU Congress in Purwokerto, Central Java in 1946 by acclamation NU members accepted the proposal to establish Nahdhatul Ulama Muslimat (NUM), later shortened to Muslimat NU (Ismail, 37). *Muslimat* is an Arabic term for Muslim women. According to Faisal Ismail, NU's decision to join the Indonesian Muslim Consultative Council (Majlis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia or Masyumi) that year led to new developments in NU (2003: 1). Masyumi was to be an Islamic political party to implement the aspirations of Indonesian Muslims.

After the Revolution when Soekarno had become president of the new Republic of Indonesia, the traditionalist women of Muslimat NU joined other women's organizations in protesting when Soekarno decided to take a second wife.

¹⁹ A curtain separated the men from the women. R. Djuasih led the meeting; Saodah from Bandung, West Java, talked about the importance of a Muslim women's organization; Gan Atang presented examples of Muslim women's activism in her hometown, and Sulimah from Banyumas, Central Java, highlighted women's role as key factor in education of their children. Istiqomah even introduced a Qur'anic interpretation on women's issues (Ibid, 42).

D. The New Order and a Return to Motherhood: Women Divided

In the New Order of Soeharto (1966-1998) traditional motherhood was idealized as the primary duty of all women. This ideology was promoted by Dharma Wanita, a women's organization that the wives of all government employees were required to join. The government also established the Program Kesejahteraan Keluarga (PKK) in every village to promote family welfare. The PKK emphasized the traditional role of wives as *konco wingking* (submissive followers) of their husbands and as mothers responsible for caring for their children.

The New Order emphasis on traditional motherhood divided women. Some feminist groups became critics of the government's campaign and of women's organizations, such as Muslimat NU, which accepted traditional ideas about the importance of motherhood. The New Order sought to use Muslim women's organization like 'Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU to mobilize women in support of government programs, like family planning and children's health clinics. During the New Order, Muslim women's organizations largely abandoned their feminist agenda. As a result, feminism came to be viewed as "Western" and secular.

During the New Order feminists formed non-governmental organizations (NGO), which were dependent on financial support from international donor organizations. These NGOs were not based on grass-roots participation, and these NGOs did not view Muslim women's organizations as their allies.

As described in this thesis, however, a progressive Muslim feminist agenda based on critical and feminist interpretations of the Qur'an and classical Islamic thought was

emerging in Muslim women's organization. Since the end of the New Order greater freedom has brought women's issues into the open and Muslim feminists and NGO feminists have begun to work together.

E. Progressive Islamic Feminism in Indonesia Today: Accomplishments and Challenges

Today there are many articles and resources in bookstores bringing feminist perspectives into Islamic thinking. Islamic feminists are bringing sensitive issues, such as polygamy and domestic violence into public discussion. Feminist NGOs, progressive Islamic groups and Muslim women's organizations, such as P3M, FK3, Rahima, PUAN Amal Hayati, Fatayat NU, and LKAJ, are working together to eliminate violence against women and to pressure the Indonesian government to support Act No. 23/2004 on Domestic Violence.

The 1998 reform movement has given Muslim feminists a greater opportunity to participate in the political arena. Maria Ulfah Anshor, the chairperson of Fatayat NU, and Badriyah Fayumi, who sits on the board of PUAN Amal Hayati, are among the Muslim feminists in the Indonesian parliament. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, the Minister of Women's Empowerment, is another important progressive Islamic feminist. Ratu Atut Chosyiah is the first woman to be elected as a governor. She serves in Banten Province where the majority of the population holds traditional Muslim views of the role of women. As the number of Muslim women running for office as governors or mayors increases, objections to women's leadership have been silenced.

Education of girls continues to be important. While illiteracy is not a big problem in Indonesia, girls often do not continue their studies because of the cost. It is also important to ensure that feminist ideas are introduced in *pesantren* and other Islamic educational institutions in order to build gender awareness among Muslim students.

The work of progressive Muslim feminists has been important in countering the campaign targeting women with the requirement that they adopt veiling (*jilbab*) that transnational Islamic movements brought to Indonesia in the 1980s. Nowadays, Muslim women have greater freedom of choice to express themselves in their style of dress and through other social activities. However conservative Islamic groups have mounted a campaign to implement shari'ah law at the local level. They have also campaigned for a national law banning pornography. This law targets women and artists, by defining women's bodies as sexual and traditional artistic performances, such as *dangdut*, as pornographic. Some political leaders have given their support to these anti-feminist Islamic movements. However progressive Muslim feminists joined forces with artists and the leaders of feminist NGOs to block the pornography law, at least temporarily. Formerly such an alliance would have been impossible. Progressive Muslim feminists have also tried to defend religious freedom and pluralism by defending members of Ahmadiyah, a minority Muslim sect in Indonesia that has been attacked by militant conservative Islamic groups. Progressive Muslim feminists will continue to face a challenge resisting the pressure of such conservative Islamic groups in the political arena.

Progressive Muslim feminists also face a challenge in improving women's economic condition. Many Muslim women in villages, the targets of Muslim feminist

programs, still live in conditions of poverty. Women's participations in labor markets will bring about a more equal relationship between wives and husbands and raise the status of women in the family. But the exploitation of women by employers, be they the owners of factories or plantations or employers of domestic help, is also a significant problem. Thus far, progressive Muslim feminists have not made a significant contribution in addressing the economic problems of women in Indonesia. I suggest that the elite feminist activists who hold important political and government positions work on this very important matter. Muslim feminists have to broaden their agenda beyond reconstructing religious thinking to providing concrete solutions for social-economic problems.

Progressive Muslim feminists are in a position to change the traditional Islamic construction of motherhood and womanhood and to reawaken the ideal of revolutionary motherhood in which women and men struggled together in the nationalist movement. They can do this through the medium of *majlis ta'lim* (Islamic public education). Many TV stations have programs of Islamic public education where women's issues are discussed. For example, the Muslim feminist Badriyah Fayumi leads an on-air *majlis ta'lim* on TPI, a national TV station. In addition, Muslim magazines, such as *Kartini* and *Femina* report on the leaders and activities of Islamic feminist organizations. These Islamic media provide progressive Muslim feminists with a strong foundation to improve the lives of women in the future.

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