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RELIGION AND THE POLITICS OF MORALITY: MUSLIM WOMEN ACTIVISTS AND THE PORNOGRAPHY DEBATE IN INDONESIA¹

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In late 2008, Indonesia's parliament passed a law against pornography. The debate was short, because the bill had already been thoroughly discussed and revised in committees and a majority of legislators had agreed to support it. Prior to the vote, however, nearly a hundred legislators opposed to the bill stormed out of parliament in protest. The ratification of the legislation *Rancangan Undang-Undang Pornografi*, or *RUU Pornografi* as it is commonly known, marks the end of one of the many bitter public controversies that have preoccupied Indonesians since the collapse of the authoritarian Soeharto regime in 1998.

At a time when Indonesia is still in the process of political and social flux, the recent debates over issues such as pornography entail competing ideas about how Islam should be incorporated into the nation-state.

Arguments about the pornography bill, for example, revolved around whether the state should regulate the media to prevent it from disseminating images that offend Islamic norms of modesty. In this way, the debate over the role of the state in regulating images or behaviour was also a debate about the extent to which the state's actions should be guided by religious, in this case Islamic, ideologies. These controversies are moral debates, in that they involve arguments about individual or collective rights vis-à-vis the state, as well as struggles over what constitutes an ideal society, which are often informed by religion.

Gender ideologies are a profound, but often underappreciated aspect of moral debates. The Indonesian debates about pornography not only involve competing ideas about rights and freedoms, but also about how bodies, particularly those of women, should be seen in public. Feminist scholars have argued that moral debates such as the one over pornography reflect attempts to define collective identities and to shape the gender structure of society (Yuval-Davis 1997). And in the case of Indonesia, such debates are also part of a continuing process of struggle over the relationship between religion and public life (Brenner 2011; Rinaldo 2011).

Gender, then, has clear significance for moral debates. But women do not figure only as symbols in these debates. Increasingly in Indonesia, women activists from all sides of the political spectrum raise their voices in these controversies. The rapidly growing social science literature on Islam and gender has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of Muslim women's agency as culturally contingent and not necessarily oriented towards liberation (Deeb 2006; Mahmood 2005). Yet within this literature there is a tendency to treat Islam as monolithic. For example, Gole (2002) argues that pious Islam's gender practices and conceptions of the self pose a stark challenge to secular public spheres. This argument seems to suggest that pious Islam is a unitary subjectivity. One might therefore expect pious Indonesian Muslim women activists to take similar positions on the pornography legislation, but this did not happen.

In this article, I examine how women from two Muslim organizations, Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama (hereafter Fatayat) and the Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS), took different sides in the pornography debate. These activists' political positions drew on different approaches to understanding Islam, and expressed markedly different visions for Indonesia's future. While Fatayat women opposed the bill as part of their struggle for a more egalitarian society, PKS women supported it as a first step towards what they hope will be a more pious Islamic society. Their

political stances reflect Indonesia's varied heritage of Islamic thought, different conceptions of the relationship between the subject and the state, as well as the contemporary lack of consensus over the future of Indonesia. Investigating these women activists' public interventions reveals the ways in which the pornography debate was gendered, and also illuminates the intermingling of religion and politics in contemporary Indonesia.² While Indonesia is far from being an Islamic state, ideas about the nation's future are increasingly articulated within Islamic frameworks.

INDONESIAN CONTEXT AND RESEARCH METHODS

The pornography debate must be understood against the background of Indonesia's transition away from authoritarian rule and the emergence of a public sphere constituted by a free mass media, NGOs and civil society groups, students and academic intellectuals, and religious organizations. Indonesia was governed by a military regime, led by General Soeharto, from 1965 to 1998. The 1997 Asian economic crisis helped stimulate a popular democratic movement, and Soeharto stepped down from power in May 1998.

In the years after 1998, Indonesia was plagued by violence, including a number of bombings linked to Islamic jihadist groups. Yet there were also significant changes, including democratic elections, the ending of laws restricting the media, and the lifting of regulations that once criminalized demonstrations and other forms of collective action. In recent years, stability and economic growth have returned, but many Indonesians feel that reforms have not gone far enough. They cite the country's notorious corruption and cronyism records, as well as problems related to the political decentralization undertaken in the early 2000s. Under the rubric of regional autonomy, provincial legislatures have used their new authority to pass laws requiring women to wear Islamic headscarves, imposing nightly curfews on women or requiring Qur'anic study for students. Some scholars argue that such laws are mostly symbolic, but opponents claim that they are inspired by Islamic *shari'ah* law,³ and that they impinge on the constitutional rights of women and religious minorities (Bush 2008). The central government has refused to review the laws.

Islamization is not new to Indonesia. Islam arrived in Indonesia in the 1400s and today nearly 90 per cent of Indonesians are Muslim. Historically, religion and politics in the Indonesian archipelago have often (but not always) been intertwined, and Islam has frequently been a source of

opposition to authoritarian rule, especially during the colonial era (Ricklefs 2008). Islamic practice in the country has diverse local variants, with varying relationships to Middle Eastern Islam. Starting in the late 1970s, transnational flows of Islam helped to produce a resurgence of Islamic thought and a turn to more orthodox Islamic practices. This process was aided by growing numbers of Indonesians studying in the Middle East and returning to establish organizations and schools to disseminate new ways of thinking about Islam (Machmudi 2008). By the early 1990s, women of the expanding middle classes were adopting headscarves and new mosques were being built around the country. This revival has deepened in recent years, with increasing numbers of Indonesians studying Arabic and practicing Islam in a more visibly pious manner (Brenner 2005, 1996; Doorn-Harder 2005). In the 1990s, Indonesian Muslims became more politicized, as well as active in civil society (Hefner 2000). Muslim student organizations became a central part of the opposition to Soeharto. Yet the pornography debate reveals that a decade after Soeharto stepped down, there are profound divisions among Muslim activists.

Although this article is mainly an analysis of the pornography debate, I draw on my ethnographic research with women activists in Indonesia between 2002 and 2008, as well as analysis of secondary sources such as newspapers, magazines, and websites. I discuss the activism of women in the Jakarta headquarters of Fatayat and PKS.⁴ At the national level, the women in these organizations are demographically similar.⁵ I seek to understand the role of religion in their political differences.

Fatayat is part of one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which was founded in 1926, and estimated to have 45 million members. Along with the mass organization Muhammadiyah, NU is often considered to represent the mainstream of Indonesian Islam. Both emerged in central Java, but have chapters across the country.

Fatayat is for women between the ages of 25 and 45. Most of the staff and volunteers I met were university educated and worked as teachers or lecturers.⁶ Many grew up in urban areas and came from families affiliated with NU. Fatayat leaders take an interpretive and often historicized approach to Islamic texts, emphasizing what they view to be the substance of the religion — equality and justice. This distinctive approach is influenced both by NU, which long emphasized *fiqh*, the science of Islamic jurisprudence, as well as by both religious and secular discourses of gender equality (Rinaldo 2008; Doorn-Harder 2006). Coming from the NU milieu,

many Fatayat members attended traditional Muslim boarding schools and, in many cases, Islamic state universities, where they were schooled in *fiqh*. Since the 1990s, revisionist interpretations of *fiqh* have become central to the work of Fatayat activists in disseminating understandings of Islam that emphasize women's equality. Some scholars have argued that the science of *fiqh* lends itself to feminist and other reformist Muslim projects. For example, Muslim feminist scholar Mir-Hosseini (2006) distinguishes between *shari'ah* as God's law, and *fiqh* as human law:

It is essential, I maintain, to highlight this distinction and to draw attention to its epistemological and political ramifications. It underlies the emergence of various schools of Islamic law and within them a multiplicity of positions and opinions and also enables me — as a Muslim — to argue for gender justice within the framework of my faith. (Mir-Hosseini 2006, p. 633)

Indeed, Mir-Hosseini describes similar projects of reinterpretation of *fiqh* among Iranian Muslim feminists.

Although Fatayat was originally more of a service organization, its leaders have been directly influenced by global discourses of gender equality and Islamic feminism via their work with NGOs and international donors. This development was part of a more general liberalization of the NU that took place in the 1980s. As scholars have recounted, during this period, prominent NU figures began to argue for reconciling Islam with ideas of democracy, human rights, and pluralism (Hefner 2000). In the 1990s, translations of books and articles by Islamic reformist figures such as Fatima Mernissi and Ali Asghar Engineer became popular with NU activists. Fatayat leaders now see the promotion of women's rights and empowerment as a key part of their mission as pious Muslims.

The PKS was founded in 1998 as a Muslim political party as the political arena was liberalized following the resignation of Soeharto. In its initial incarnation as the Justice Party, it called for an Islamic state. In 2002, after poor electoral showings, it was reconstituted as the Prosperous Justice Party. While PKS does not call for an Islamic state, it does advocate making Islamic values the source of law and policy. PKS received approximately 7 per cent of the national vote in the 2004 elections and about 8 per cent of the vote in the 2009 elections. PKS boasts numerous women cadres, though it has just 3 female representatives out of 57 seats in the national legislature. The PKS women I met were also university-educated, married

with children, and many also worked as teachers or lecturers. Like Fatayat women, most grew up in families of modest means in urban areas, with parents who also worked as civil servants or small business people. However, an important difference is that most PKS women I met were educated in secular schools and state universities and did not have strong connections to the NU milieu.

PKS represents a somewhat different and newer approach to Islam in Indonesia. It draws on the heritage of Muslim modernism, a movement that originated in Egypt in the late nineteenth century and which sought to integrate Islam with Western science. Modernism was critical of traditions such as *fiqh*, which required specialized education, and instead emphasized individuals being able to read the Qur'an (Moaddel 2005). Modernism was influential in Indonesia, inspiring the establishment of the mass organization Muhammadiyah in 1912. Many of the founders of PKS were influenced by the ideas of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, through study abroad or as part of an Islamic study group while at university (Machmudi 2008). The Muslim Brotherhood was in many ways an outgrowth of the modernist movement. However, the Brotherhood diverged from the early modernists with its stronger rejection of traditional Islamic jurisprudence, its emphasis on a close reading of Islamic texts, its opposition to nationalism, communism, and democracy, and its insistence on strict separation of genders (Moaddel 2005). The Brotherhood has gone through many shifts, such as embracing electoral democracy in the 1990s, and remains an important ideological influence for PKS (Machmudi 2008). The party does not necessarily adopt a literalist approach, but it tends to foreclose interpretation, with members frequently arguing that the text of the Qur'an must be followed as it is written. PKS members are often labelled as conservatives or Islamists, but they see themselves as moderates, attempting to hold fast to the rules of Islam while also living in a modern society.

The women of Fatayat and PKS emerged from different Islamic backgrounds. Indonesians sometimes use the term *aliran* (streams) to describe religious networks that map on to class differences and political worldviews (Sidel 2006; Geertz 1963). According to this framework, Fatayat and PKS women simply represent the traditional and modernist *aliran* respectively, which account for their differences.⁷ Yet in significant ways, the women in these organizations are quite similar. Their leaders are usually from the emerging urban middle class. As part of a generation that has been shaped by the global Islamic revival, they have in common a

commitment to practising Islam in their own lives and society. But for these two groups of women, the notion of a more Islamic society holds different meanings and is associated with diverse political projects (see Rinaldo 2008 for a more thorough comparison of Fatayat and PKS). Women's political positions cannot simply be deduced from their *aliran*. After all, the NU contains deeply conservative tendencies, some of which are hostile to ideas of gender equality. Moreover, PKS has recruited people from many different kinds of backgrounds. Instead, I argue that Muslim women activists' political positions are shaped by their different religious interpretations, which are influenced but not determined by their relationships to various Islamic traditions. Religion has often been a key source of ideas about what constitutes an ideal society. The complex intersections between Islam and social movement activism demonstrate how deeply intertwined religion and politics are in the contemporary Indonesian context.

MORAL DEBATES, GENDER, AND THE NATION

Scholars of Indonesian politics first drew attention in the 1990s to increasing debates over gender and religion. Brenner (1999) and Sen (1998) argued that the media coverage of "career women" and discussions of veiling reflected tensions over economic changes that were drawing women into universities and the formal workforce. In these debates, women were often accused of neglecting their responsibilities and thereby risking the nation's future.

Rather than dying down after the regime transition in 1998, these kinds of debates became a prominent feature of Indonesia's newly open public sphere. Pornography, especially between 2005 and 2008, was one of the most contentious. The main participants in the controversy were, as might be expected, mostly members of the urban middle classes. Nevertheless, the issue of pornography attracted great popular interest, and women activists were especially vocal about expressing their opinions on the proposed legislation. The controversy about pornography in Indonesia is a debate with real consequences for how the state regulates media and creative production, and with implications for how the state governs its subjects. Moreover, the debate has been intimately connected with ideas about proper womanhood.

Debates like pornography are often viewed as a clash of "values", especially religious versus secular. For example, the *New York Times* reported that the trial of the editor of *Playboy Indonesia* on indecency

charges, “highlighted growing divisions here between a rising conservative movement and the moderate Muslims who make up the majority of the population” (Gelling 2007). In a more scholarly vein, Allen (2007) pushes further to argue that the pornography debate is a struggle over the future of the Indonesian nation, between religious diversity and religious hegemony. While these framings are certainly accurate, I think they underestimate the centrality of discourses of gender to struggles over nationhood. Feminist scholars argue that gender ideologies are critical to nationalism and state-making. Not only do state policies constrain gender relations, but “ideas about the differences between men and women shape the ways in which states are imagined, constituted, and legitimated” (Gal and Kligman 2000, p. 4). Because of their reproductive capacities, women in many societies are seen as the embodiment of the community’s traditions. Gender ideologies help to construct the symbolic boundaries of the community, whether that community is an ethnic group or a nation. In times of social change, as the boundaries of the community are threatened or identities are shifting, women’s bodies and behaviour often become a focus of attention (Yuval-Davis 1997, Moghadam 1994). Communities in such times often seek to define themselves through regulation of women’s behaviour or through ideologies of proper manhood and womanhood. I suggest this social phenomenon is at the heart of the current moral debates in Indonesia.

Brenner (1999) makes a similar argument in her article about media discourses on gender in 1990s Indonesia, noting that widespread social changes involving women have produced a strong counter-reaction. But what is different after 1998 is that the Indonesian nation-state has been engaged in a process of redefinition. In the last decade, Indonesia has gone through substantial social and economic change. Not only has the government changed, but control over state resources and power came up for grabs, new social actors like pious Muslims have entered the public sphere, processes like rural to urban migration have continued, and family life is shifting as the marriage age rises and more women enter higher education (Smith-Hefner 2007; Sidel 2006; Jones 2005; Hadiz and Robison 2004). In such a time of national shifts, many of the moral debates in Indonesia revolve around women’s bodies and roles in the nation.

Gender, therefore, is often a crucial feature of moral debates because it is an arena for struggles over national identity. But what is also intriguing about gender in Indonesian public debates is how women activists are able to intervene in them. While the feminist scholars who study gender and

the nation-state often see women as symbols or victims of these processes, I suggest here that it is this gendered nature of moral debates which can also help to sanction women's participation in those debates and in the public sphere more generally.

I now turn to a brief discussion of the pornography debate in Indonesia in order to examine how women activists from Fatayat and PKS intervened on different sides of this moral debate, and how their activism drew on different approaches to religious texts.

WOMEN ACTIVISTS AND MORAL DEBATES: THE CASE OF THE PORNOGRAPHY BILL

The recently passed pornography bill spurred angry demonstrations on both sides between 2005 and 2008, as well as myriad newspaper and magazine articles and op-eds, not to mention heated debates in parliament.

Concern about pornography emerged in Indonesia following the rise of a freewheeling popular media after 1998. Older laws providing censorship of sexual imagery remained on the books. But many Indonesians also became concerned about television shows and magazines that they felt were featuring increasingly racy subject matter. Pornographic images also became more accessible with the advent of the Internet, as well as with a flood of pirated VCDs and DVDs that were easy to buy on the street. The furore that erupted over the popular singer Inul Daratista's eroticized dance style in 2002 and 2003 was an early indication of a backlash from pious Muslims. Indeed, while some of my woman activist informants defended Inul, even attending a raucous demonstration in support of her in 2003, others saw Inul as heralding a more sexualized society. One young activist lamented the example Inul was setting for young women. Certainly, the perception that pornography was becoming mainstream seemed to be widespread. For example, in an article published in the popular newsweekly *Tempo*, Syamsul Muarif, the Minister for Communications and Information, said that 60 per cent of Indonesians were accessing porn on the Internet and beyond. "So, because that's what they like, the shows are also being allowed on television", he warned (*Tempo*, 14 May 2003).

Although a previous attempt to promulgate a new pornography law was shelved in the 1990s, according to Allen (2007), the momentum for new legislation on pornography in the post-Soeharto era came especially from PKS. During my fieldwork in Jakarta in 2003, I attended a seminar

and demonstration against pornography which was held by the women's division of the party. The speakers included a representative from the Indonesian Council of Ulamas (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI), a quasi-governmental body that rules on matters of Islamic law.

At the seminar, pornography was consistently depicted as a threat to the nation. The head of the party's women's division introduced the event with the statement: "We face the challenge of building an Indonesia which is moral." Later, a PKS legislator argued that Indonesia was under threat from "American cultural exports", including pornography. "We should not be afraid to express the desire of the majority", she said, "we have a responsibility to the next generation to make a better Indonesia."

Several of the speakers defined pornography very broadly, as showing a woman without covering her *aurat* (a term from Arabic meaning the parts of a woman's body that should be forbidden from public view — for many Indonesian Muslims, *aurat* stretches from a woman's upper chest to her ankles). At this time, although it was not discussed in the seminar, a bill to outlaw pornography was already being written.

In late 2005, representatives including PKS members introduced into parliament a draft legislation, written in collaboration with religious authorities such as the MUI. As originally written, the bill was extremely broad, and under the rubric of banning "porno action", which pertained to actions that exploited sex, obscenity, or erotica, would have outlawed kissing in public and bikinis on beaches (Harvey 2006). Public outcry forced its return to parliament for revision and it remained stalled there for over a year.

During this period, the hullabaloo over the launching of an Indonesian edition of *Playboy* magazine also energized the pornography debate. Premiering in April 2006, it was the first *Playboy* to be published in a Muslim country since a Turkish edition was discontinued in the 1990s (Perlez 2006). It had no nudity, featuring only fully clothed models, but provoked a strong reaction. NU's leader Hasyim Muzadi called for an anti-pornography movement as a reaction to its publication, and the MUI put out a fatwa demanding that the pornography bill be passed (Guerin 2006). Violent protests outside the magazine's offices by hard-line groups such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) caused the building's owner to evict the media company. The magazine relocated its headquarters to Bali and continued to publish, but its editor-in-chief, Erwin Arnada went on trial for violating the indecency provisions of the criminal code. Arnada

was acquitted of all charges in April 2007 (Gelling 2007), but by that time, the magazine was defunct due to the inability to attract advertisers.

Finally, in November 2008, a somewhat liberalized version of the *RUU Pornografi* was passed which made exceptions for “sexual materials” as part of traditional culture and fine arts.⁸ This reflects the fact that the bill was strongly opposed by artists and by the Balinese, who argued that erotic and sensual expression is intrinsic to their traditional culture. The bill dropped references to “porno action” and defined pornography as coital acts, foreplay and sexual diversions pertaining to intercourse, sexual violence, masturbation or onanism, nudity or illusions/allusions to nudity, and genitalia. A further clarification in the bill’s text defines nudity as appearance or reference to nude bodies. It exempts from the regulations clothing and behaviour associated with religious or spiritual rituals, as well as artistic productions or sports, if conducted in the proper arenas. Legislators who supported the bill also insisted that bikinis at the beach would not fall under its rubric.

Nevertheless, the bill expressly declares the aim of cultivating morality and ethics and of protecting the dignity of women and children from pornography. The goal of cultivating a moral community omits questions about how morality should be defined, assuming that it is universal. This objective also echoes the assessment of PKS made by Machmudi, that cultivating religious piety is as important as political reform:

Since there is no separation of the religious and the political in the party, the activists of the PKS prefer to consider it merely an extension of the field of *dakwah* [religious call].... The effectiveness of the *dakwah* programme lies in its contribution to political, cultural and religious change in society as well as within the state. Such changes are needed to ensure that society and the state are always under the guidance of the teachings of Islam. (Machmudi 2008, pp. 178–79)

Finally, the bill’s injunction to protect women and children by ensuring that their bodies are properly covered resonates with conventional Islamic discourses that position women’s sexuality as disruptive, easily arousing men, whose gaze must therefore be circumscribed (Mahmood 2005; Mernissi 1987).

Women activists in Indonesia’s public sphere found themselves on very different sides of the pornography debate. While those who saw themselves as part of the women’s rights movement strongly opposed

it, women in Muslim political parties like PKS supported it. Yet both thought that they had the broader interests of Indonesian women in mind. Interestingly, while pornography was a very divisive issue for the American and Australian feminist movements in the 1980s, this was not the case for women's rights proponents in Indonesia. Many religious and secular women's rights activists in Indonesia opposed the bill because of concerns about censorship and effects on gender equality. They felt that the bill criminalized women's bodies, while doing little to apply sanctions to men who control the sex industry. And after years of government censorship, they were profoundly concerned about freedom of speech. Concerns about preserving local cultures, many of which feature dances with erotic movements, also emerged as a significant aspect of the opposition. Allen (2007, p. 109) also notes that some opponents of the bill saw as degrading its apparent assumption that men cannot contain their sexuality. While few Indonesian women have advanced the kind of "pro-pornography" or "sex positive" positions that have emerged in the United States and other contexts, support for freedom of expression within women's rights organizations led even those who have expressed concern about pornography and public morality in the past to oppose the bill.

Demonstrations against the pornography bill were initiated by women's rights organizations, but it was at first unclear whether Muslim women's organizations would oppose or support the legislation. Indeed, some leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah were strongly in favour of the bill. In March 2006, however, Fatayat leaders weighed in with a carefully worded statement opposing the bill because it failed to provide protection for women and children victimized by the sex industry, and arguing that pre-existing legislation could be more effectively implemented. This statement was reprinted in the national media and especially on the blogs that sprang up as part of the opposition to the bill. Former president and NU leader Abdurrahman Wahid and his wife also opposed the bill, earning them the ire of conservative groups. Wahid argued that the definition of pornography is highly subjective (Allen 2007, p. 105).

At demonstrations and other events, individual Fatayat leaders expressed more scathing views on the bill. One activist linked it to recent attempts to pass legislation inspired by Islamic law, noting:

The phenomena of the anti-pornography bill started with the appearance of by-laws in some of the regions. Although not explicitly packaged

as anti-pornography, they have put in place of anti-prostitution laws, morality laws and even Islamic Shariah laws. All these laws attempt to force women back into their homes. (Koesoemawiria 2006)

For most of 2007, the bill was being revised in a parliamentary committee. Fatayat members who I spoke to about the bill in early 2008 wanted to make it clear to me that they supported laws against pornography in general, but they felt that the proposed law was harmful to women. One Fatayat activist argued:

I think that the responsibility for pornography should be on the individual. If there is a problem related to the media or whatever, then there must be clearer laws for the media. But the pornography issue, as Fatayat sees it, the laws must be rational, and must not harm others.

She went on to question why pornography had become such a big issue and blamed PKS for trying to impose its thinking on others.

Fatayat women's criticisms of the bill reflect their broader concern for gender equality, which they felt was threatened by the legislation. But their opposition was also shaped by their approach to religious texts. Fatayat women understand Islamic *shari'ah* as a guide to life, one that is open to interpretation and discussion, but that should not be a source of national legislation (Rinaldo 2008; Doorn-Harder 2006). They are wary of the state becoming overly involved in setting moral standards, because they believe that this would privilege certain religious interpretations over others. One Fatayat leader told me, speaking in early 2008, that she viewed efforts such as the pornography bill and regional regulations inspired by *shari'ah*, as examples of "Wahhabism."⁹ References to the eighteenth century Saudi purification movement are common among Indonesians who wish to distinguish a more flexible Islam from what they consider to be a strict Arabicized version. My informant argued:

Fatayat itself is making an effort against Wahhabism. Since its birth, NU has been a counter to Wahhabism. The Shariah regulations are an effort toward Wahhabism or Arabicization of women. And because of this Arabicization, Fatayat is always trying to show that Islam must be contextualized within the society in which it exists, and Indonesia is not an Arab country, but a Pancasila state, which is actually also secular.¹⁰

Not all Fatayat activists would agree with her labelling of Indonesia as secular, as many seek a major role for Islam in civil society, partly as a counter to secular influences. But there seems to be consensus among

many Fatayat women that the state itself should not be too involved in regulating moral and/or religious behaviour.

I also asked women from PKS about their support for the bill and why they thought it has proved so controversial. They did not think the bill was too extreme, but blamed the difficulties on the power of media interests as well as on supporters of the bill who had not explained it well enough so that people would understand it. A typical response came from a woman cadre who was confident that it would soon pass:

I think it may be because of the communication factor, which isn't always easy. Sometimes there are obstacles, debates on various sides, which are not clearly communicated and so we don't understand each other ... are not open with each other. But the main thing is that we supported it because it protects society from the bad effects of pornography and porno activity.... In terms of our position, we have already been very clear that our support for it is related to how the next generation of children can be protected, so that our society will be morally better, because morality is very important for improving ourselves.

Here, the woman cadre feels that pornography is a threat to the future of the nation because of its deleterious effects on children. Many PKS women also brought up the theme of protecting future generations. They saw the bill as an easy choice between fostering immorality and safeguarding children. As another PKS woman explained:

I look at it this way, we are an Eastern culture. Maybe we can absorb all kinds of knowledge and technology, but we should not leave behind the special characteristics of Indonesia, those things that are the unique image of Indonesia. We must think positively together about the pornography laws, which are meant to prevent bad things from happening.

Her answer is tinged with nationalist sentiment, in that she sees legislation as a way to protect not only Indonesia's children, but the nation itself. She differentiates Indonesia from the West, insisting that it is an Eastern culture. As Allen (2007, p. 103) suggests, and as I observed at the PKS pornography seminar, PKS support for the bill was often couched in terms of protecting Indonesia from immoral Western influences.

PKS women's support for the pornography bill was therefore linked to concerns about protecting women and children, as well as fears for the more general state of morality in Indonesia, which was seen as under threat from foreign influences. Yet it was also shaped by their party's

distinctive approach to Islam. PKS promotes a reading of religious texts that leaves little room for interpretation. For example, my informants often argued that religious practices like polygamy or veiling had to be accepted by believers, because they are in the Qur'an, even though Islamic scholars have for centuries voiced quite varied interpretations of the verses in question.

Machmudi (2008) argues that the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood remains strong within PKS and that it is particularly visible in their conception of religion and politics as inseparable. PKS women argue that the state should have a role in regulating moral behaviour, and they see this as compatible with democracy. Indeed, many PKS women see the regional *shari'ah*-inspired regulations as a matter of the democratic rights of provinces to govern themselves. As one woman told me, speaking of regulations that impose night-time curfews for women:

Maybe you have to look at the conditions. For example, maybe the conditions in that province are indeed unsafe for women, so maybe it's good they enacted that regulation.

Similarly, while PKS women often downplayed Islam when they spoke to me about the bill, it was clear that religious interpretations influenced their ideas about how bodies should be displayed. For example, while they maintain that women should not be forced to wear the headscarf, they also view the full covering of a woman's body as obligatory under Islamic law. For PKS women, moral behaviour is a very public issue. They see their party as a vehicle for instilling Islamic values in society, especially through influencing families to become better Muslims. As a woman legislator told me:

PKS is a *dakwah* (religious call) party, and the family should be the first to be called before anyone else. It's meaningless to persuade others to righteousness if our own family is not doing it.... We cannot deny the fact that the future generation lies in the hands of our children, and if we fail to bear this in mind, there will not be much to expect from Indonesia's future development.

Thus, during the course of the pornography debate, virtue became linked to concerns for national progress. Women in PKS maintained that images they consider risqué harm women and children, and thereby threaten the future of the nation. They saw the bill as a way to build national morality. Interestingly, men were rarely mentioned in the discourse about morality

and nationalism. While this partly reflects the fact that I was asking PKS women questions about women, it also is indicative of how discourses on family and morality are often tied to ideologies of gender that position women as primarily responsible for children, and as requiring moral protection and/or guidance. It suggests that women are more likely to be the focus of public moral regulation. Meanwhile opponents of the bill argued that the bill went too far in restricting creative expression and that it would contravene progress towards women's empowerment. In particular, women in Fatayat wielded discourses of individual freedom and women's rights to contend that greater state regulation of expression and behaviour is not the way to achieve gender equality.

What is remarkable here is that not only did women activists intervene on very different sides of the pornography debate, but that their engagement in this debate helped thrust them into the national spotlight. While activists worried that the legislation would set back progress towards gender equality, the controversy propelled increasing numbers of women into the public sphere to participate in a controversy that was at the centre of national attention, and also brought differences in ideologies of gender and Islam to the fore. Muslim women activists' different political positions reflected important differences in their approaches to Islam and their relationship with the state as gendered subjects. Fatayat women's opposition was shaped by their emphasis on equality and rights, which draws on an interpretive and contextualized approach to Islam and also positions morality as independent of the state. PKS women's support was based on their concern for national morality, which draws on a less interpretive approach to Islam and emphasizes public regulation of morality. The debate may eventually be seen as a defining event in the ongoing process of reworking the relationship between religion, the state, and public life in Indonesia.

RELIGION, GENDER, AND MORALITY IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

This chapter has sought to investigate how gender is central to the moral debates that have become such a deep-rooted feature of the Indonesian public sphere in recent years. The controversy over pornography involves a struggle between different conceptions of Islam, gender, and rights, and also hints at significant differences among Indonesians in conceptualizing the relationship between the subject and the state. Supporters of the

pornography bill argue that it is necessary to combat national moral degradation and promote more appropriately Islamic values, while opponents claim that it is detrimental to freedom of expression and erodes women's rights by criminalizing women's appearances and behaviours.

The gendered aspect of the controversy was inescapable, though often overlooked in the popular media's framing of it as a debate over free expression versus protection. The pornography bill allows the state to regulate not only the ways bodies are depicted in media, but also how they appear in public spaces. The concept of modesty inherent to this legislation is not gender neutral, for it is nearly always the female body that is considered disruptive and must be covered. And while many religions urge modesty for women, I suggest that the bill institutionalizes an Islamic ethic of modesty in its injunctions against nudity, or the allusion to nudity, and its stated purpose of cultivating a moral and ethical community as well as protecting women and children.

Why are women's behaviours and rights such a subject of debate in contemporary Indonesia? Feminist scholarship on gender and the nation-state provides an important framework for understanding this. The events of 1998 and the decade since have been a period of tremendous social and political change in Indonesia. Islam has become a major force in politics and public life, the state no longer provides many important social programmes, the ranks of the middle class continue to expand, and the country continues to urbanize (Sidel 2006). Many of these shifts have direct consequences for gender relations. The rising age of marriage and growing numbers of women attending higher education and joining the formal workforce have certainly produced anxieties around family and reproduction, as well as resulted in some women seeking more egalitarian marriages (Jones 2005). And because women often symbolize the maintenance of tradition and community identity, gender easily becomes the focus of moral debates in the public sphere (Yuval-Davis 1997).

The global Islamic revival since the late 1970s has called into question norms of citizenship and the relationship between religion and state (Mahmood 2005; Roy 2004). In Indonesia, as we have seen, women have been key participants in the Indonesian pornography debate. In the course of the controversy, women activists from Fatayat and PKS drew on different approaches to understanding Islam, as well as different ideas about women's rights and moral behaviour, and in so doing they expressed their own visions for Indonesia's future. While Fatayat women seek what they see as a more egalitarian society in which women are empowered, rather

than dominated by a patriarchal state or society, PKS women are working towards what they understand to be a more pious Islamic society. Their activism is also linked to rather different conceptions of the relationship between the subject and the state. For Fatayat, morality is not tied to the state, but is an individual obligation. While PKS women would not disagree that morality is an individual obligation, they see a greater role for state regulation of morality. Ultimately, in their view, all citizens, but especially women, are moral subjects of the public sphere. Yet both groups of women consider their goal to be a more moral society, and Islam is an essential source for their ideals. These differences among pious Muslims indicate that the global Islamic revival is multifaceted and its consequences for politics are complex. In any case, the rival ideals of morality, subjecthood, and the nation-state that have emerged in many parts of the world should be understood as part of modernity rather than a holdover from the past (Roy 2004). Indeed, such competition and lack of consensus over what constitutes an ideal society is characteristic of modernity, according to classical sociologists like Weber, as well as for recent theorists who argue that modernity is multiple (Eisenstadt 2003).

We should also remember that the women activists in the leadership of Fatayat and PKS are a relatively empowered group, if not necessarily the ruling elite. Despite their different political ideologies, they share middle-class lifestyles. While the expansion of education and communications technologies have facilitated the participation of middle-class women in vital national debates, women of the lower classes face much greater barriers to having their voices heard in mainstream politics, let alone achieving legitimacy in the public sphere. Nevertheless, the Indonesian controversy over pornography reveals the complex and unexpected ways in which gender is implicated in contemporary moral debates. Moreover, examining these moral debates more closely demonstrates how gender ideologies play into competing visions of religion and the nation-state. Indeed, in the current era, gender remains one of the most significant arenas for struggles over broader social and political change.

Notes

1. The original draft of this article was written while the author was a Kiriayama Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for the Pacific Rim, University of San Francisco. The author also wishes to thank the Asia Research Institute,

National University of Singapore, for funding follow-up research in Indonesia during a postdoctoral fellowship in 2008–09. This article also benefited from comments by participants at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies conference on “Religion in Southeast Asian Politics: Resistance, Negotiation and Transcendence” (2008), and from feedback during the University of San Francisco’s conference on Religion and Globalization in Asia (2009).

2. I use a broad definition of women’s activism to refer to women organizing other women for purposes thought to benefit women more generally. This includes activism by women oriented towards equality or rights (which I call women’s rights activism), as well as activism by women oriented towards the goal of building an Islamic society.
3. *Shari’ah* law is the body of law in the Islamic tradition, which is based on the Qur’an and the Sunnah. There are different schools of interpretation of *shari’ah* law. *Shari’ah* law encompasses both religious practices as well as matters addressed by secular law, including crime and economics.
4. Some of the data and quotes in this article are also used in a longer work-in-progress which examines the debates about pornography and polygamy and their relationship to globalization.
5. This article is based on an ethnographic study of women in four organizations, including PKS and Fatayat, which I undertook between 2002 and 2008. The research was centred in Jakarta at the headquarters of the organizations. However, I also spent time with women from smaller Jakarta branch offices of PKS and Fatayat, and visited their offices in a smaller city in East Java. The organizations in this study have encouraged me to use their real names. All individual names have been changed.
6. Fatayat has chapters in nearly every town and city in the country. While the leaders of urban branches of Fatayat often are university graduates, the majority of women in the organization are lower class and are not university educated. My research is thus most generalizable to leaders of Fatayat in other Indonesian cities.
7. Geertz (1963) delineated four *aliran*: traditionalist (NU), modernist, nationalist, communist. Most Indonesians would categorize PKS as part of the modernist camp. There is an ongoing debate among scholars of Indonesia about the relevance of *aliran* in contemporary Indonesia. I find the concept to be overly deterministic. Moreover, not only does PKS attract members who are from the broader NU milieu, but for a variety of reasons the category of traditionalist no longer seems appropriate for many NU members. What I wish to emphasize is the demographic similarity of the women leaders of PKS and Fatayat — I see their middle class *habitus* as a major force in shaping their subjectivities, while their educational and activist trajectories help to account for their

- ideological differences. See also Machmudi (2008) for an argument that the traditionalist/modern divide in Indonesian Islam has lessened in importance in recent years.
8. See <<http://www.library.ohiou.edu/sea/blog/wp-content/uploads/2008/10/ruu-pornografi-4-september-2008.pdf>> for the text of the bill. An English translation is available at <<http://www.indonesiamatters.com/2474/porn-laws/>> (accessed 19 May 2010).
 9. Wahhabism is the name for an eighteenth century movement for the purification of Islam in what is now Saudi Arabia. The sect advocated a return to the practices of early Islam, rejecting innovations. The term is often used to describe a puritanical or extremely conservative form of Islam.
 10. Pancasila is the official philosophy of the Indonesian state, which stipulates belief in one God, as well as democracy and social justice as the foundations of the nation. Following this philosophy, Indonesia recognizes six official religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. As such, by referring to the notion of "Pancasila State", my informant is invoking inclusiveness and tolerance with regard to religion.

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