Engaging Indonesia:
Critical Dialogues on Culture and Society

Monika Arnez
Melani Budianta *Editors*

Gender, Islam and Sexuality in Contemporary Indonesia

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Monika Arnez · Melani Budianta
Editors

Gender, Islam and Sexuality in Contemporary Indonesia

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Preface

In a world marked by increasing polarization, ideas about gender and the role of religions diverge widely. This book delves into the dynamic landscape of gender discourse and practices in contemporary Indonesia, examining how they manifest across various cultural expressions, such as contemporary literature, cosmetics, modest fashion or an online app. With sexual violence issues gaining more attention, the book explores how social norms impact on it, based on empirical investigation. It examines how individuals navigate the challenges of shame and self-determination in the pursuit of gender equality.

Bringing together scholars from Indonesia and international scholars, this book explores how different actors navigate the complex interplay between gender, Islam, and sexuality. It offers insights into how global trends are negotiated at the local level, for example how locally produced modest fashion from Indonesia is addressed through the fashion shows of Indonesian designers on the Western stage in New York.

The book is recommended reading for readers interested in how different actors engage with the challenges of the dynamics of gender, Islam and sexuality in contemporary Indonesia.

Olomouc, Czech Republic — Monika Arnez
Depok, Indonesia — Melani Budianta

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Praise for *Gender, Islam and Sexuality in Contemporary Indonesia*

"This book will be of great value to scholars and observers of Indonesia's changing social landscape. The chapters provide insight both into causes of changes within the socio-political sphere—such as new laws criminalising forms of sexuality—and into understanding the impact such conservative changes have on a range of people. The volume is a must-read for anyone wanting to get up to speed on changes in Indonesia's gender, sexuality and Islamic landscape".

—Professor Sharyn Graham Davies, *Director of the Herb Feith Indonesia Engagement Centre, Monash University, Australia*

"A showcase of excellent research, this book is of appeal to Indonesian studies scholars, and to readers in the field of Asian cultural studies. It is also of relevance to the field of Asian gender and sexuality studies, and to scholars in Islamic studies".

—Professor Pamela Nilan, *University of Newcastle, Australia*

"The articles in this anthology discuss and analyse a wide range of gender and sexuality issues in an Indonesia that lives with the "regulatory zeal" of conservative Islamists. Significantly, however, various agencies are also considered, as well as the creative resistance of regulated people and communities. This book should definitely be on the reading list for the study of Indonesian gender and sexuality".

—Dr. Dede Oetomo, *Founder and Trustee of GAYa NUSANTARA Foundation*

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published in *Shakespeare's Asian Journeys—Critical Encounters, Cultural Geographies, and the Politics of Travel*, edited by Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, Judy Celine Ick, and Poonam Trivedi (2016), "The Dragon Dance: Shifting Meaning of Chineseness in Indonesia" in *Asian and Pacific Cosmopolitans—Self and Subject in Motion* (2007), edited by Kathryn Robinson and "Smart Kampung: Doing Cultural Studies in the Global South" (2019), published in the journal *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. She coedited with Sylvia Tiwon, *Trajectories of Memory; Excavating the Past in Indonesia*, published by Palgrave (2023), and with Manneke Budiman, *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* Vol. 24, Reclaiming Women's Space (1) and (2), 2023.

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Abbreviations

AILA	*Aliansi Cinta Keluarga* (Family Love Alliance)
BADILAG	*Badan Peradilan Agama* (Religious Judicature Body)
DPR	*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat* (Indonesian Parliament)
FJI	*Front Jihad Islam* (Islamic Jihad Front)
GAM	*Gerakan Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh Movement)
GBV	Gender-Based Violence (GBV)
KNEKS	*Komite Nasional Ekonomi dan Keuangan Syariah* (National Islamic Economy and Finance Committee)
KPAI	*Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia* (Indonesian Child Protection Commission)
KPI	Komisi Perempuan Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Coalition)
KUPI	*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (Congress of Indonesian Gender-Just Ulama)
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Gay
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer and/or Queer
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and/or Queer with a "+" sign to acknowledge the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of the community
MEKSI	*Masterplan Ekonomi Sharia Indonesia* (Indonesia's Sharia Economy Masterplan)
MCOE	Unilever Muslim Center of Excellence
MJF	Muslim Journalists Forum
MOFP	Muslim Fashion Project
MUI	*Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Ulama Council)
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama
PDSKJI	*Perhimpunan Dokter Spesialis Kedokteran Jiwa Indonesia* (Indonesian Psychiatrists Association)
PKS	*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Social Justice Party)
RKUHP	*Rancangan Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana* (Draft Criminal Code)
SAFEnet	Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network

SGRC	Support Group and Resource Center on Sexuality Studies
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
RUU TPKS	*Rancangan Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual* (Draft Law on Sexual Violence)
UU TPKS	*Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual* (Sexual Violence Bill)
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls

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Chapter 1
Gender, Islam and Sexuality in Contemporary Indonesia: An Overview

Monika Arnez

Abstract This chapter introduces the aim of this book, which is to explore how gender, Islam, and sexuality are navigated in contemporary Indonesia. Taking the regulatory zeal that has manifested in legal interventions since the e*ra reformasi* (era of reforms) as the point of departure, it proceeds to present the book's three main thematic parts: Sexuality and Violence, *Halal* lifestyle, and Shame and Self-determination. Moreover, it provides the theoretical framework for the contributions to this book in three domains: Criminalisation and Care, Modesty and Commodification, and the *Janda* and Shame. It introduces the chapters of this volume that mainly draw on various cultural productions, narratives, films, online apps, commercials, and YouTube videos as research material.

Keywords Gender · Indonesia · Islam · Regulatory zeal · Sexuality

1.1 Regulatory Zeal

Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, where 87 per cent of the population identifyies as Muslim, is a diverse nation with a rich cultural heritage and a complex social fabric. The diversity of sexualities, gender relations, and their expressions across the Indonesian archipelago has been the subject of research in academic studies. For example, the notion of five genders among Buginese people (Davies 2006) and queer sexualities (Blackwood 2010; Boellstorff, 2005; Davies 2010), are among the areas of focus.

However, this diversity is increasingly under threat due to what is referred to here as regulatory zeal. Policy makers, since the *era reformasi* (era of reforms), have exhibited a strong regulatory zeal, leading to a rapid pace of legislation and intervention aimed at protecting, controlling, and enforcing sexual morality at all levels, from national to regional. This regulatory zeal has been driven by the growing

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influence of conservative forces that emphasise Islamic norms and use their power to enforce them.

Following President Soeharto's stepdown in 1998, voices demanding increased regulation of women's conduct and physical expression have grown louder. Since the enactment of Law 22/1999 on regional autonomy, the regions gained more power and influence. This law allows provincial and district parliaments to pass their *peraturan daerah* (*perda*, regional bylaws). Many of them restrict women's rights. According to data collected by Komnas Perempuan (*Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan*, National Commission on Violence against Women), an independent state body, 421 regional policies discriminated against women in 2018. Of these directives, 62 were issued between 2000 and 2015 on clothing regulations (Komnas Perempuan 2021). At the end of 2021 Komnas Perempuan documented 441 discriminatory policies with 305 still being in effect. Moreover, they noted that "20 discriminatory policies were issued that still use the same regulatory patterns, namely criminalisation, control over women's bodies through restrictions on the rights to expression and belief, restrictions on religious rights, and restrictions on rights through the regulation of religious life" (...) (Komnas Perempuan 2022b).

A case of strict control of the female body is Aceh, a province at the northern tip of Sumatra. This is the only region in Indonesia where the *Qanun Jinayat* (Islamic Criminal Code) was introduced in September 2014, when the Criminal Code that had been in place since 2001 was extended to non-Muslims. As a result, Muslims and non-Muslims fall under Sharia law that criminalises same-sex sexual acts and *zina*, adultery. North Aceh Regency passed new regulations in 2015 prohibiting unmarried couples from riding together on a motorbike and banning women from dancing in public and straddling motorcycles, as both are considered indecent acts.

The Anti-Pornography Bill (*Rancangan Undang-Undang Antipornografi dan Pornoaksi*, RUU APP), which was passed in October 2008 after years of debate in parliament, was enacted to curb pornography and indecent acts. The law attracted criticism because, while supporters say it protects youth from pornographic material and the deterioration of morals, especially children, it also includes the term *pornoaksi* ("pornographic acts"), which includes "acts considered indecent." Since everything from bikinis and miniskirts to traditional dances and gay clubs can be considered indecent under this bill, the law has created new opportunities for persecuting groups with little political influence, such as LGBTQ + people.[1] Fearing repercussions for those who do not conform to Islamic norms, human rights activists, feminists, artists, and ethnic minority representatives have opposed it (Allen 2007; Arnez 2010).

Years of regulatory zeal recently turned into tangible legislation, with two major legislative interventions: the Sexual Violence Bill (*Undang-undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual,* UU TPKS), adopted on 12 April 2022, and the revision of the Criminal Code (*Revisi Kitab Undang-undang Hukum Pidana*, RKUHP) on 06 December 2022. Both have in common that they have gone through several versions over the years, and stakeholders, including government authorities, legal experts, human rights activists, women's rights activists, religious groups, and LGBTQ + rights advocates, are divided about them.

Attempts to introduce a law against sexual violence were made ten years ago by members of Komnas Perempuan, founded after the May riots of 1998, during which many women of the Chinese minority became victims of sexual violence. According to Article 4 of the Sexual Violence Bill, the crime of sexual violence applies to sexual harassment, both physical and non-physical, forced contraception, sterilisation, and marriage, sexual exploitation, torture, and slavery, and electronic-based sexual violence.[2]

Proponents of the Sexual Violence Bill have argued that there was an urgent need to protect victims of sexual violence better and to have better recourse against perpetrators and that this could best be done in the form of a law. They hope for a greater willingness of victims to report sexual violence and a greater willingness of preventive measures on the part of the government (see Chap. 2). Opponents, members of the *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (Prosperous Justice Party, PKS), and the *Aliansi Cinta Keluarga* (Family Love Alliance, AILA), for example, lobbied hard to prevent the law from being passed and kept on blocking it in parliament. They argued that it did not cover the problem of adultery, *zina*, and homosexuality, which are prohibited in Islam.[3]

Such voices who demanded a regulation of sexuality[4] by law, prevailed because *zina* is now covered by the revised Criminal Code RKUHP[5] which has made international headlines for criminalising sex outside marriage and cohabitation of unmarried couples. Among the key aspects of the discourses around the RKUHP, which will come into effect in three years from the time of writing, are colonial legacy, sexual morality, freedom of the press and assembly, and social and economic class. As regards the first, decision-makers justified the RKUHP as a step to discard the Dutch colonial legacy finally. "Dutch products are no longer relevant to Indonesia. Meanwhile, the Criminal Code Bill is very reformative, progressive, and responsive to the situation in Indonesia," stated Yasonna Laoly, Minister of Law and Human Rights (Darmawan 2022).

Yet, according to critical voices, the opposite is the case. They argue that the RKUHP or its previous draft still have colonial tendencies (Chaterine and Santosa 2022), recolonise Indonesian law (Kusnan 2022), or even "go backwards from what the colonial government had created." (Editorial Tempo.co 2022). They have criticised Articles 218 and 219 of the new Penal Code as colonial provisions, for example, which criminalise insulting the president and the vice-president and provide for prison sentences of up to four years (Chaterine and Santosa 2022, Editorial Tempo.co 2022, Kusnan 2022). Also included is Article 240, which provides that persons who publicly, orally, or in writing insult the government or a state institution are liable to a penalty payment or prison sentence of up to 18 months (Kusnan 2022).

Sexuality has been a controversial topic of the debates about the RKUHP. Article 411 punishes sex outside marriage with imprisonment for up to one year.[6] This mainly affects young people whose parents or close relatives do not agree with their choice of partner and who have new control possibilities now. Only when they press charges against their child, for example, can they be arrested under the clause. Opponents of the RKUHP have argued that this opens the door to snitching, spying, and defamation practices.

Some observers have noted that the revised Penal Code does not yet adequately protect women from sexual violence. For example, according to Komnas Perempuan, the Draft Criminal Code should be enhanced by classifying criminal acts of sexual violence as an offence against the body, not an offence against morality (Tardi et al, 2022).

Another contested issue is abortion regulation. The revision of the criminal code takes a clear anti-abortion stance here. According to Article 463, "each woman who carries out an abortion will be punished by imprisonment of up to four years."[7] Exceptions apply if the woman is a victim of rape or other sexual violence that led to conception, up to the 14th week of pregnancy, or in medical emergencies. This can increase women's vulnerability as they are likely to increase their efforts to obtain an unsafe abortion. Restrictive abortion laws do not lead to lower case numbers but only increase the likelihood of unsafe abortions (Saraswati 2022, p. 2).

As a response to the RKUHP, UN human rights experts sent a letter to the Indonesian government in November 2022, voicing the following criticism and concern:

> The current legal framework relating to women's and girls' access to essential reproductive health services is not in line with international standards. We regret that the opportunity has not been seized for the reform process to bring the country's domestic legal framework into compliance with Indonesia's international human rights obligations in terms of women's and girls' sexual and reproductive rights.[8]

In addition to concerns about a lack of reproductive rights for women, restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, demonstration, and the press in the revised criminal code have raised concerns. In addition to Articles 218 and 2019 which regulate potential insult of the president and vice-president, articles on broadcasting and distributing false news (Articles 263 and 264), the crime of defamation (Article 440), and crimes against public power and state institutions (Articles 351–352) are referred to among those that are deemed to threaten the freedom of the press (Nolan 2022). Article 256 stipulates that any person who, without prior notice to the authorised person, organises a march, rally, or demonstration in a public area that results in a disturbance of the public interest and causes disorder or riot is liable to imprisonment for up to 6 months. This intervention is considered a step backwards for civil rights.[9]

Perhaps a less obvious connection regarding the RKUHP is that it is deemed to increase vulnerabilities by exacerbating existing socioeconomic class differences and social inequalities. According to the environmental organisation Walhi (*Wacana Lingkungan Hidup*, Indonesian Forum for Environment), cases in point are articles on corporate criminal offences in Articles 46, 47, and 48 that make it difficult to punish corporations that commit crimes. These articles, they argue, give leniency to corruptors, which is tantamount to perpetuating corruption in Indonesia. "The rules in the Criminal Code tend to be sharp downwards, blunt upwards because they make it difficult to catch bad corporations that commit crimes," Puspa Dewy, Head of Anti-Extractive Industry Campaign Division, National Executive of Walhi, wrote in a statement (Wicaksono 2022).

In an interview with interlocutors on the impact of the RKUHP on their personal lives in Indonesia, concerns were raised that the law has unequal consequences for the rich and the poor:

> It will, in practice, all come down to how much money people have: if you're rich, you can cohabit with your partner in an apartment block and have privacy, whereas in poor neighbourhoods houses are very tightly crammed together, gossip is very big, and people always know what's going on with their neighbour. It's hard to hide anything there. (Otte 2022).

The contestations around the RKUHP have also had an impact in the sense that people have protested it in the streets. People in Jakarta took to the streets before it came into force (Fig. 1.1).

This was not the first time that there were demonstrations against the RKUHP; there have been protests about it before. Large demonstrations took place in Jakarta in September 2019, where students and human rights activists took to the streets. However, police cracked down on the protesters, and some of them died. State forces' harsh treatment of protesters certainly contributed to the fact that far fewer people dared to participate in the November 2022 protests. As Jaffrey and Warburton (2022) point out:

> Additional provisions in the new code that increase criminal penalties for organising protests without prior notice to authorities are likely to reinforce these trends.

There are several reasons regulatory zeal was selected as an entry point to this book. One apparent reason is its topicality, with both the revision of the Criminal Code and the Sexual Violence Bill passed in 2022, when most of the chapters for

Fig. 1.1 Protests against the revised criminal code (RKUHP), Jakarta, 27 November 2022. The protest banner reads: "Criminalisation is eased by the arbitrary rules of those in power." Photo credit: Muhamad Isnur

this book had already been drafted. However, as I hope to show, this topicality does not translate into "novelty"; regulatory zeal cannot be seen as an entirely new development in Indonesia. Instead, it has been ongoing for many years so we can speak of continuity rather than an abrupt change in this context. Moreover, regulatory zeal cannot be seen as something isolated; it is linked to discourses, people, capital, and power from which it ultimately feeds. The second and therefore more important reason is that the negotiations around the RKUHP are only the tip of the iceberg of much more complex contestations around discourses and practices of gender, Islam, and sexuality in Indonesia, which we unravel with this book.

Before presenting the three thematic parts of this book, their theoretical contribution, and the authors' chapters, let us engage with the academic works that have particularly influenced this book.

1.2 Where We Step In

The complexity of sexuality, gender, and Islam in Indonesia has been widely reflected in the scholarly literature. The first collective effort to tackle the issue across Southeast Asia is Susanne Schröter's edited volume *Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia: Women's Rights Movements, Religious Resurgence and Local Traditions* (2013). The introduction provides a remarkably detailed insight into the issue's complexity in Southeast Asia, with particular attention to the historical and geographical characteristics that have shaped gender relations in Southeast Asia, including their good conditions for trade and exchange with people of different religions and the influence of Islam since several centuries (Schröter 2013).

I would also like to highlight two more key works here: *Sex and Sexualities in Contemporary Indonesia* (2015), edited by Sharyn Graham Davies and Linda Rae Bennett, and Nancy Smith-Hefner's *Islamizing Intimacies: Youth, Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Indonesia* (2019). The former contributes to a better understanding of the multiple expressions of sexuality in Indonesia in the four main themes of their volume: sexual politics, health, diversity, and representation. The impetus for writing this book was not to curtail or compress the variety of gender expression in Indonesia but to explore this diversity in depth. Davies and Bennett were treading new ground, including the introduction of new concepts such as Sharyn Graham Davies' "kinships of shame," which embraces the idea that shame falls not only on the individuals who have not acted according to shared social norms, but also on the members of the extended family (Davies 2015, p. 32). She insightfully reveals how shame and sexual surveillance interact and how, given the "evidence that morality is increasingly being surveilled," "respond in a creative way, for instance when same-sex couples behave like heterosexual couples as not to attract unwanted attention" (Davies 2015, pp. 32, 46, 47). Drawing on Scott (2011), she highlights the difference between the meaning of morality in the West and Indonesia. While moral conformity does not play a significant role in the former because the growing number of self-directed inclinations align the subjects, controlling bodies through

morality is important (Davies 2015, p. 46). *Islamizing Intimacies* helps to explore the fluid nature of gender and sexuality among middle-class Muslim youth. The book reveals how young Muslims negotiate their identities, and it addresses the influences Indonesian youth are exposed to, including texts designed as advice books, a popular genre in Indonesia. In doing so, Nancy Smith-Hefner refers to texts such as *Gaul tapi Shar'i* (Sociable but Shari'a-minded) by Muhapi (2006), which proposes a "principled sociability" for youth that is grounded in Islamic normativity and does not embrace self-expressive individuality. She points out that while such texts promote a Sharia-compliant lifestyle for young people, they also want to continue contact with the West, as it is crucial to keep up to date and keep in touch (Smith-Hefner 2019, p. 139).

We take the ambivalence observed by Smith-Hefner (2019) between the desire to increase the Sharia-compliant influence of conservative forces and the intention not to lose contact with the West as an impetus to explore local-global landscapes of gender and sexuality against an Islamic background. Inspired by Davies (2015), we see conceptual innovations on shame as an opportunity to examine divorce, shame, and desire, focusing primarily on cultural productions.

Since the publication of these two books, the regulation of bodies and the focus on sexuality and gender has continued to grow in Indonesia. As Bennett and Davies' book was written several years ago, the question is how intersections between gender, Islam, and sexuality have developed since then.

1.3 *Gender, Sexuality and Islam in Contemporary Indonesia*: An Overview

Navigating the shoals of gender, Islam and sexuality requires a delicate balance between social norms, and the rights, aspirations, and scope of action of individuals. The contributions in this book help to show what these navigations looks like, where they succeed and fail and why. By shedding light on how gender, sexuality, and Islam are navigated outside and inside Indonesian borders, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of their complex interrelationships. The research material we draw on are cultural productions that are rarely addressed in academic publications about Indonesia, primarily literary works, and not only films but also commercials, YouTube videos, and an online dating rating platform. In addition, some of our authors have also carried out qualitative data collection.

The contributions in this volume range from exploring female Muslim fashion designers in New York to examining how vulnerable groups exercise their power. How does the capitalist fashion industry use the former in America, how do the fashion designers themselves do business, and how do they serve as role models for young women in Indonesia who will always be denied a luxurious lifestyle? How do vulnerable people cope when modesty and adherence to prescribed gender roles are emphasised?

The different objects of investigation manifest in the disciplinary diversity of the participating authors, including Indonesian Studies, Indonesian Philology, Socio-Legal Studies, and Social and Cultural Anthropology. In line with our multidisciplinary approach, we look at multiple manifestations of gender, Islam, and sexuality. These are explored in our chapters on advocacy for the Sexual Violence Bill (Chap. 2); the positioning towards LGBTQ + people in Muhammadiyah (Chap. 3); modest fashion by Indonesian designers in New York (see Chap. 4); the app AyoPoligami (Let's do polygamy) (Chap. 5); *halal* cosmetics and beauty (see Chap. 6); the figure of the *janda* (widow, divorcee) in popular literature (Chap. 7); migrant literature in Hong Kong and Taiwan (Chap. 8); the appropriation of Kartini in the pop novel *Kembang Kertas Ijinkan aku menjadi lesbian* (Paper Flowers; Allow me to be lesbian) (2007) by Eni Martini (Chap. 9); and stories published in Sundanese in the tabloid *Galura* (Chap. 10). In the afterword, Melani Budianta reflects on how artists have responded to the conservative wave in Indonesia and how vulnerability and tenacity matter for our volume (Chap. 11).

In designing the book, we aimed to involve both junior and senior scholars and an equal number of researchers from Indonesia and international scholars. Of our fourteen authors, including the editors, seven are scholars from Indonesia, and seven are international authors. We started working with some of the authors at the 2019 Inusharts conference in Jakarta and later conducted conceptual workshops in Jakarta via Zoom during COVID-19; others came on board through our international contacts and previous collaborations. During our cooperation, three overarching themes emerged that now form the backbone of this book: Sexuality and Violence, *Halal* Lifestyle, and Shame and Self-determination.

1.3.1 Part I: Sexuality and Violence

Gender-based violence is assuming frightening proportions around the globe, and COVID-19 has exacerbated this trend, particularly in the realm of domestic violence. According to UN Women data, which excludes sexual harassment, "an estimated 736 million women—almost one in three—have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (30% of women aged 15 and older)" (UN Women 2022).

According to the Annual Record (CATAHU) of Komnas Perempuan 2022, which records complaints to their organisation, service agencies, and Badilag (*Badan Peradilan Agama*, Religious Judicature Body), 338,496 cases of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) against women were collected in Indonesia (Komnas Perempuan 2022). These included complaints to Komnas Perempuan (3,838 cases), service providers (7,029 cases), and BADILAG, 327,629 cases (Perempuan 2022). Thus, GBV cases against women have significantly increased, from 225,062 in 2020 to 338,496 in 2021 (Ibid.).

In this report, Komnas Perempuan identified two key concerns: GBV committed by civil servants, military personnel, and the police and cases of torture and ill-treatment against women in conflict with the law. The organisation denounces that gender-based violence against women is carried out by the very people who are supposed to protect them, a total of 9% of the total number of perpetrators. They criticise that women were tortured or treated inhumanely during the pre-trial process, explicitly mentioning sexual torture such as stripping and rape, and sexual harassment.

The contribution by Monika Arnez and Eva Nisa takes the media headlines that have been repeatedly filled with reports of sexual violence over the past two years as a starting point. In June 2021, news reports surfaced that Herry Wirawan, a teacher and an owner of the Madani religious boarding school in Bandung, West Java, had raped 13 girls aged 12–16 and fathered eight babies from those rapes. This case, thus the authors contend, has sped up the long, arduous journey towards adopting the Sexual Violence Act (Chap. 2). This chapter provides a better understanding of the cultural and institutional factors underlying sexual violence in Indonesia in the context of global debates around this issue. It sets out to build on and further develop the insights from two strands of scholarly literature, a) on how cultural and institutional factors foster sexual violence, both in Indonesia and in Western contexts, and b) on normative values, Islam, gender, and power relations in Indonesia. It sheds light on how activists and progressive religious scholars (*ulama*), including members of the *Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (Congress of Indonesian Gender-Just Ulama, KUPI):[10] have supported the RUU TPKS,[11] the draft law on sexual violence, and have counteracted sexual violence.

According to a survey by the Statista Research Department in 2017 (Statista Research Department 2023), nearly 90% of the respondents in Indonesia believed that the LGBTQ+ population threatens society. 46.2% said in December 2017 that they see them as “quite threatening,” and 41.4% believed they are “very threatening.” One could now argue that this rejection was related to the hatred that swept Indonesia in 2016. Rejection of LGBTQ + people seems to have increased (see also Oetomo’s 2022 statement below), but as scholars noted many years ago, the negative perception of LGBTQ + people in Indonesia is no new trend.

For example, Tom Boellstorff, Dede Oetomo (2005, pp. 182–183) wrote that when asked about same-sex relations, most Indonesians say Islam “disapproves of sex between men or between women.” Oetomo (2001, p. 75), a scholar and LGBTQ + activist who founded the organisation GAYa NUSANTARA, remarked more than two decades ago that many people in Indonesia regard homosexuality as “something unnatural, a deviation, disorder, disease, even a sin.” With his book, he wanted to contribute to showing complex expressions of sex and gender that do not correspond to the behaviour desired by mainstream society (Ibid.). In 2022, just a couple of months before the RKUHP was passed, he expressed concern about the backlash for LGBTQ + rights in Indonesia and that “in international forums Indonesia will become a pariah state, like Iran and Egypt” (Amindoni 2022).

The second contribution to Part I is about LGBTQ + people, who face significant difficulties in everyday life in Indonesia. It uses the 2016 anti-LGBTQ +

panic as a starting point. It revolves around the Waria al-Fatah Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) in Yogyakarta, which closed due to an attack by the *Front Jihad Islam* (FJI, Islamic Jihad Front) on 19 February 2016. The author examines how the construction of dualities influences how the Islamic mass organisation Muhammadiyah and its affiliated women's organisation Aisyiyah position themselves towards LGBTQ + people.

1.4 Criminalisation and Care

Part I provides a new theoretical contribution to the interplay between criminalisation and care. This part of the book shows how criminalisation affecting women, LGBTQ + people, and children is deeply rooted in cultural and institutional factors. We agree with recent research showing that social structural forces, gendered power asymmetries, and access to resources are at the heart of women's criminalisation (Jeffries and Jefferson 2022, p. 6). Zooming in on sexual violence in religious schools, for example, we argue that "the opacity of secluded spaces," the "tendency of some institutions to facilitate and sustain spatially and ideologically relatively closed systems to which the outside world has no or only minimal access," is an important institutional factor of sexual violence (Chap. 2).

We further complicate the link between criminalisation and care in several ways. We reveal how perpetrator-victim relationships are reversed, for example by viewing victims of sexual violence as perpetrators of *zina*, sex outside of marriage, which is prohibited in Islam and criminalised by the RKUHP, and how activists have aimed to change this and better protect victims of sexual violence (Chap. 2). Moreover, Monika Arnez and Eva Nisa show how this attempt at caring collides with realities on the ground by highlighting the difficulties that victims are often facing. Sexual violence often happens in the family or in institutions; it is difficult for minors to report sexual assaults against them because they fear that the police will not believe them or that they will be stigmatised. As a result, shame prevents them from bringing their case to the police, blaming by family members and institutions, and a general lack of care for the emotional needs of parents towards their children.

Another contribution of this part is to elaborate on the ambivalence between caregiving and criminalisation, including by showing how caregiving is conditioned by criminalisation. A case in point is the Muslim mass organisations Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, where LGBTQ + people tend to be viewed as practitioners of deviant sexuality who need to be rehabilitated. By criminalising LGBTQ + , elites in these organisations create the conditions for grassroots members who are closer to the people to feel a moral obligation to care for them, to act on their behalf (Chap. 3). This chapter also shows how care practices towards LGBTQ + people, for example in the healthcare sector, arise from genuine compassion and are maintained, for example by grassroots members of the women's organisation Aisyiyah, which is associated with Muhammadiyah.

1.4.1 *Part II* Halal *Lifestyle*

While most scholarly work on a *halal* lifestyle has focused on food, this section fleshes out how the desire for a *sharia*-compliant life takes shape in three areas: online *halal* dating, cosmetics, and modest fashion, both within and beyond Indonesia's boundaries. It is innovative in revealing (i) how modest fashion by female designers from Indonesia, shown on the New York catwalks, becomes a political statement; (ii) how the gendered construction of the term *halal* (permissible) used by Islamic male preachers and beauty cosmetics manufacturers manifests itself in their video clips on the global YouTube stage; (iii) how the online dating app AyoPoligami becomes a platform where women's desire for self-affirmation and men's desire to use it more for sex and travel are negotiated.

Asri Saraswati explores how Indonesian modest fashion meets New York City during ex-President Donald Trump's Muslim ban, and how the discourses on freedom and spectacle of travel have shaped the modest fashion industry in Indonesia (Chap. 4). She zooms in on how the presentation of modest fashion on the New York catwalk can be understood against the background of a capitalist-driven desire to make a profit from this fashion, the spectacle of travel, freedom, and women's empowerment.

In her contribution, Annalisa Manzo discusses cosmetic advertising in the context of the market forces of consumer capitalism that impact contemporary Muslim femininities (Chap. 5). The chapter explores how *halal* cosmetics advertising creates new benchmarks for a gendered Indonesian *halal* lifestyle in which women become virtuous consumers, for example, in the case of the Sunsilk and Citra brands belonging to Unilever Indonesia. It identifies the elements used in commercials for *halal* cosmetics by relevant brands and how the *halal* label is taken up by Islamic male preachers in their public appearances on YouTube about cosmetics in Islam.

The subsequent contribution by Lilawati Kurnia and Nurbaity places the dating app AyoPoligami in the context of other online dating apps, for example Salams (Chap. 6). AyoPoligami was launched in 2017 to meet the needs of Muslims, mostly men, who want to marry a second, third, or fourth wife in Indonesia. They reveal how AyoPoligami is part of a commodification process during which irregular and regular polygamous marriages are arranged, often at the expense of women.

1.5 Modesty and Commodification

The theoretical contribution in this part is to uncover the links between modesty and commodification in the modest fashion industry, *halal* cosmetics, and an online app that facilitates polygamous marriages. As Gökariksel and Larney (2010) have pointed out, it is the "images, narratives, and knowledges about Muslim womanhood constructed in the marketplace" that help defining what being a Muslim woman should entail. This applies to all three areas considered in this part of the book,

fashion, cosmetics, and digital products. What is valuable is not only in the eye of the beholder, but is influenced by many factors, including market forces, the social environment, and religious norms, of which consumers are not necessarily aware. This also includes modesty. As Mahmood (2005) has shown in her work on the mosque movement in Egypt, the virtue of modesty has been interpreted differently by Muslim women; for some it is closely linked to the wearing of the veil, for others it is simply a human quality; still others see it as a way of avoiding the gaze of men.

The three contributions in Part II explore the different ways in which modesty and commodification interact. The article on modest fashion on the New York catwalks shows how Muslim fashion designers and their consumers are seduced by the New York catwalk. It identifies travel as crucial, especially travel from Indonesia to the US, as it fuels dreams of liberty and success. It also illuminates how modesty has become a political statement against his efforts to keep Muslims out of the country against the backdrop of Donald Trump's policies (Chap. 4).

As good business can be done with modesty and Islamic beauty ideals, several companies operating in Indonesia have invested in online commercials that show how women can achieve their beauty ideals, such as long-lasting scented hair and cool, fresh skin, while enjoying the benefit of a *halal* product. It is the laws of the market, determined by consumption, and a canon of beauty that follows a certain Muslim ideal that shape femininity in contemporary Indonesia (Chap. 5).

Not only can tangible commodities such as fashion or cosmetics be commercialised, but also non-tangible services such as online dating apps. While dating is highly contested in Islam—in the past, couples were usually selected and married by their families—online dating has become an option many Muslims around the globe have pursued. The chapter on the AyoPoligami app is innovative by revealing the ambivalences of modesty and commercialization. It shows how men maintain the appearence of living a life according to the Quran while using the app to disguise their desire to gain affordable access to sex services (Chap. 6).

1.5.1 Part III Shame and Self-Determination

The discussion of shame revolves around social norms and expectations, especially concerning women. Our authors contribute to a better understanding of the portrayal of shame in contemporary Indonesian literature. They have drawn on various texts to illuminate this theme, from *sastra buruh migran* (migrant literature) (Chap. 8) to popular culture and the discussion of the *janda* therein (Chap. 7). The feeling of shame often arises when a woman does not conform to the social expectations of how a good woman should behave: being pious, living an Islamic lifestyle, and—if married with children—a caring wife and mother. If women do not live up to these ideals of womanhood, they can fall from grace. In contrast to the notion of "kinships of shame" (Davies 2015), our authors reveal individual ways of dealing with shame, for example by showing how female protagonists negotiate their lack of social status and their stigmatisation, and their desire for self-realisation and freedom.

Shame is particularly explored from the perspective of female protagonists, migrant women working abroad in Taiwan, Singapore, and Hongkong, widows, divorcees, and LGBTQ + persons. Despite their differences, the consideration of these groups of people in the selected literature has something essential in common: the fact that society sees them as a threat to national morality. The *janda*, for example, is stereotyped because of her supposed sexual desire, which could lead to taking away other men, LGBTQ + people are accused of immorality and seduction, and domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Taiwan are blamed for sexual availability. Shame is a feeling with which the protagonists react to this stigmatisation. In stories about *janda* in popular culture, thus Monika Swasti Winarnita, Petra Mahy, and Nicholas Herriman contend, it manifests in concealment around their status, for instance. Awareness of the stigma of being a *janda* can lead to concealing the fact; when it comes out, rejecting the potential future husband can be even more pronounced (Chap. 7).

The tension around restrictions on sexual morals is strongly pronounced in the chapters on the novel *Paper Flowers* (Chap. 9) and on migrant domestic workers (Chap. 8). In the case of the former, the protagonist Kartini resumes her intimate relationship with her partner outside the borders of Indonesia, in the USA, where she finds restrictions on sexual morals less pronounced than in Indonesia. In contrast, in the wake of the non-acceptance of lesbian relationships in Indonesia, she is confronted with shame, which leads to a rupture with her family. Carlos Piocos' text addresses how female protagonists working as migrant workers in Hong Kong and Singapore are encouraged to take the path of moral virtue after deciding to enter a same-sex relationship. He shows how returning to the moral rectitude of heterosexuality is not only restrictive but, worse, can have tragic consequences, revealing that both "reformed" women ended up dying.

Narratives in which shame plays an important role often negotiate the desire for self-determination, manifesting in the expression of sexual orientation, including homosexuality. However, in several texts, openly expressing lesbian love is only described as an experiment from which the protagonist abandons to return to a lifestyle that is in harmony with Islam (Chaps. 8 and 9). Divorce can also be a form of self-determination, as Conrad William Watson reveals in his chapter on Sundanese narratives in the weekly tabloid *Galura* when he reveals how comparatively easy it is for women to divorce, which contrasts with other parts of Indonesia (Chap. 10). This is a way female protagonists react to the shameful behaviour of their husbands; another is violent, angry, and vengeful practices by wives.

1.6 The *Janda* and Shame

The contributions in Part II can be seen as conceptual innovations to understanding the figure of the *janda* and the sense of shame in contemporary Indonesian cultural productions. Unlike in English, where there are two separate terms for a divorced woman and a widow, this is not the case in Indonesian, where it is used for both.

Monika Winarnita, Petra Mahy, and Nicholas Herriman explore the figure of the *janda* in the context of other female symbolic figures such as the *ibu* (mother), *gadis* (maiden), and the male counterpart *duda* (widower/divorcee), based on selected popular literature, film, and music (Chap. 7). One lens through which they reflect these figures is the perceived availability of *janda*, *ibu,* and *gadis* for men. While the maiden should not be available as she is under the aegis of her family, the mother is her husband's "property," and the female widower/divorcee is there for everyone. Because of the stereotype of the *janda* being lecherous, acting based on their sexual desires, other women see her as a possible threat. Thus, the stereotype results in pitting women against one another. Society, thus they reveal, imposes a sense of shame on the *janda* because she is seen as a seductress, single and desired but lonely. For example, selected *dangdut* music is shown to portray the widow as someone who must be ashamed of her supposed role as a seductress and therefore chooses to conceal her status.

The contributions of Carlos Piocos, Edwin Wieringa, and Conrad William Watson (Chaps. 8, 9 and 10) draw our attention to the figure of the *janda* in the sense of its second word meaning of the term, the divorcee. The chapters by Carlos Piocos and Edwin Wieringa raise divorce in the context of same-sex relationships. In Piocos's contribution (Chap. 8) about migrant workers' literature, divorce is an intermediate step for the protagonist, who had humiliating experiences with her father and husband on her escape to Taipei, where she becomes a migrant worker. Through disassociation from men due to previous trauma, symbolically illustrated by the divorce, the protagonist turns to lesbian love. The protagonists struggle together to express their sexuality despite constant shaming from the outside, developing a more intimate relationship and a deeper bond with each other.

In Edwin Wieringa's chapter about the novel *Kembang Kertas* by Eni Martini, divorce becomes a man's means of drawing a line under his relationship when he convinces himself with his own eyes of his wife's intimate relationship with another woman. This circumstance destroys Kartini's family relationships, as her relatives perceive her lesbian relationship as shameful and expel her from the house. Ultimately, she is left with the flight from the social constraints in her home country and the hope of fulfilling her love with her partner in the USA. This can lead to "shame flight," a circumstance in which the social pressure to conform and the impression of not being able to live up to it and live out one's dreams become so strong that people decide to flee abroad, such as in Herlinatiens' novel *Garis Tepi Seorang Lesbian* (A Lesbian on the Margins 2003), where a possible reunification of the lesbian lovers seems to be only possible outside Indonesia's border, in Paris (Arnez 2013). In this book, Edwin Wieringa's analysis of the novel *Kembang Kertas* also reveals that a lesbian Filipino American and Indonesian couple can only express their love outside the borders of Indonesia because the protagonist is afraid that her family will be ashamed of her and her lover (Chap. 9).

Conrad William Watson's contribution (Chap. 10) draws our attention to the culturally determined differences in divorce practices. In contrast to other regions in Indonesia, it is comparatively easy for Sundanese women to get a divorce. Asking to be sent home (*diserahkeun*) is a strategy for how female protagonists react to the

shameful behaviour of their husbands in Sundanese narratives. It also deals with the issue of polygamous marriages and the reactions of the first wife to the husband's desire for a second wife, which do not necessarily correspond to the ideal of a patient wife but can also culminate in sheer rage.

Gender, Islam, and Sexuality in Contemporary Indonesia offers an in-depth analysis of gender, sexuality, and Islam in the context of Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim population. It delves into the intricacies of gender diversity and the interplay of Islam and sexuality within the Indonesian society, across different social and geographical boundaries navigate the constraints and challenges during a drive for stronger regulation of sexual morality and corresponding normative values in society by becoming creative in exploring spaces for action, including the limits of such creativity. On the other hand, it shows how different pious female actors exert and expand their influence by acting as role models for modest clothing or consumers of *halal* cosmetics.

I would like to conclude these introductory words with a personal, albeit sad, note. It is not far-fetched to say that the burden of COVID-19 and death weighs on this book. Some authors have lost relatives or acquaintances. One of the authors initially supposed to contribute to the book, Christina Suprihatin, who had been suffering from health problems for a long time, has died. I want to take this opportunity to silently remember her death, the COVID-19 victims, and all the people who must live with their loss.

Notes

1. In this chapter, I use LGBTQ+ to refer to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and/or Queer community, where the + sign acknowledges the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of the community, as an inclusive umbrella term. Indonesian media have frequently used the term LGBT to refer to this community as the foreign, anti-Islamic "other." See, for example, Ewing (2020). However, the term LGBT is used by our authors if the interlocutors have referred to themselves as LGBT (see Chap. 3). Melani Budianta (see Chap. 11) rightfully points out that terms such as LGBTQ+ , LGBTQ, and LGBT are borrowed terms, and it would be preferable to strengthen the use of locally used terms instead.
2. https://www.hukumonline.com/pusatdata/detail/lt5d9c15868bb76/rancanganundang-undang-tahun-2022/document/lt63c64ddaeeb7d, p. 6. Accessed 13 January 2024.
3. While gender and sexuality may carry variegated meanings and have been defined in various ways, I rely on the definition of gender as "a person's own sense of being male, female, some combination of male and female, or neither male nor female" and "the ways of thinking, behaving, etc. that are typically or traditionally associated with one sex" and of sexuality as "sexual habits and desires of a person" (The Britannica Dictionary 2023). Our authors may further clarify how they use these terms in their contributions.
4. See: https://www.hukumonline.com/pusatdata/detail/17797/rancangan-undang-undang-2022. Accessed 08 January 2024. Access to Hukumonline's content has changed, and users now need to pay a fee to access documents that were previously available for free. This applies to links 6, 7, and 9 as well. Hukumonline is a comprehensive legal analysis platform that provides legal analysis, a collection of the latest regulations and court decisions, a regulatory compliance and document management system. The platform provides access to an extensive

database of Indonesian laws, regulations, and court decisions. However, with the recent change in accessibility, users need to consider alternative sources to access this information.
5. See: https://www.hukumonline.com/pusatdata/detail/17797/rancangan-undang-undang-2022. Accessed 08 January 2024.
6. See: https://www.hukumonline.com/pusatdata/detail/17797/rancangan-undang-undang-2022. Accessed 08 January 2024.
7. See: https://www.hukumonline.com/klinik/a/being-told-to-have-an-abortion-by-your-future-in-laws-this-is-the-regulation-lt6423d636726d5. Accessed 13 January 2024.
8. See: https://www.hukumonline.com/pusatdata/detail/17797/rancangan-undang-undang-2022. Accessed 08 January 2024.
9. RUU TPKS is the abbreviation of *Rancangan Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana* (Draft Law on Sexual Violence).
10. KUPI has often been referred to as Indonesian Women's Ulama Congress. However, as both women and men are involved in KUPI and gender justice is one of their aims, the term "Congress of Indonesian Gender-Just Ulama" is used here.

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Part I
Sexuality and Violence

Chapter 2
Advocating for Change: Cultural and Institutional Factors of Sexual Violence in Indonesia

Monika Arnez and Eva Nisa

Abstract Recent years have seen a disturbing surge in media reports of sexual violence in Indonesia. Notably, in June 2021, news emerged of Herry Wirawan, a teacher and owner of the Madani religious boarding school in Bandung, West Java, who had perpetrated heinous acts of sexual violence. This chapter examines how cultural and institutional factors in Indonesia have reinforced sexual violence from the perspective of advocates and supporters of the Sexual Violence Bill (UU TPKS) and how they advocate for change. The activists and ulama we zoom in on are from Komnas Perempuan (*Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan*) National Commission on Violence against Women), KPAI (*Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia*; Indonesian Child Protection Commission), the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet), KPI (*Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia*, Indonesian Women's Coalition) and KUPI (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, Congress of Indonesian Gender-Just Ulama). Within the broader global discourse on this issue, we introduce the concept of 'the opacity of secluded spaces' to capture the tendency of some institutions to facilitate and sustain spatially and ideologically closed systems to which the outside world has minimal access. This concept encapsulates the lack of transparency and the tangible nature of events within physically segregated spaces, particularly in religious schools, where unequal gender and asymmetrical power relations can fuel sexual violence. We argue that the interplay of violence and gender, the opacity of secluded spaces, unequal gender dynamics, asymmetrical power relations, and a lack of oversight all significantly contribute to the perpetuation of sexual violence in such institutions. Methodologically, our analysis draws from discussions with ten activists and *ulama*, as well as an examination of documents coded using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, including legal documents, news articles, and reports.

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Keywords Activism · Advocacy · Gender Justice Activists · Indonesia · Indonesian Women Ulama · Opacity of Secluded Spaces · Sexual Violence Bill · Ulama

2.1 Introduction

Over the past two years, media headlines in Indonesia have been repeatedly filled with reports of sexual violence. In June 2021, news reports surfaced that Herry Wirawan, a teacher and an owner of the Madani religious boarding school in Bandung, West Java, had raped 13 girls aged 12 to 16 and fathered eight babies from those rapes.[1]

The case came to light when one of the victims showed visible signs of pregnancy. After several days of not wanting to eat or drink due to her trauma, the victim confided. A family member reported the case to the West Java Regional Police, accompanied by a lawyer friend from Garut (Lestari 2022). Due to the seriousness of the issue, it soon became apparent that Herry Wirawan could expect severe punishment. On 15 February 2022, the Bandung High Court sentenced Herry Wirawan to life imprisonment. However, the victims' families were not satisfied with this sentence because they considered it too lenient. They, instead, demanded the death verdict for the offender. When the decision was taken on 04 April 2022 to increase Herry Wirawan's sentence to the death penalty, these families were relieved. Yudi Kurnia, a lawyer representing the victim's families at the Bandung High Court said, "This is in accordance with the expectations of the victims' families because it has fulfilled their sense of justice and exploited the maximum scope of the rules" (Rezkisari 2022).

Herry Wirawan's case has accelerated the long rocky road to the approval of the Sexual Violence Bill (*Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual*, UU TPKS),[2] which comprises 93 paragraphs and recognises the following forms of sexual violence: sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, forced contraception, forced abortion, rape, forced marriage, forced prostitution, sexual slavery and/or sexual torture. Following the case reports, Indonesian President, Joko Widodo, spoke out in January 2022, demanding that the Indonesian Parliament (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, DPR) now pass the Sexual Violence Bill. This demand reflects regulatory zeal[3] expressed in the President's determination to show his political will to crack down more severely than before on sex offenders in Indonesia and to end the ten-year delay of the Sexual Violence Bill.

A significant reason why it took ten years from the initial efforts of the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) for the law to take effect on 09 May 2022 was the influence of conservative forces. The Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS) played a key role because it blocked the law until 14 April 2022, when the parliament finally passed it. Their main argument was that it fails to punish adultery, free sex and LGBTQ +,[4] which are forbidden in Islam and thus do not comply with Islamic norms.

This chapter is innovative in the following ways. First, it sets out to build on and further develop the insights from two strands of scholarly literature, (a) on

how cultural and institutional factors foster sexual violence, (Buchwald et al. 2005; Harding 2015; Mack et al. 2018; Troost 2008), paying particular attention to Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and (b) on normative values, Islam, gender and power relations in Indonesia (Bennett 2007; Schröter 2013; Parker 2008; Bennett and Davies 2015).

Second, it provides new insights into the following: How have cultural and institutional factors in Indonesia reinforced sexual violence from the perspective of advocates and supporters of the Sexual Violence Bill? How have gender justice activists and progressive religious scholars (*ulama*) advocated for the Sexual Violence Bill? The activists and *ulama* we zoom in on are from Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence against Women), KPAI (*Komisi Perlindungan Anak Indonesia*; Indonesian Child Protection Commission, the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet), KPI (*Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia*, Indonesian Women's Coalition) and KUPI (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, Congress of Indonesian Gender-Just Ulama). Methodologically, we base our analysis on interviews with ten gender justice activists and women *ulama* we carried out in May and June 2022, based on prior informed consent, and an analysis of documents coded with the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA, including legal documents, news articles, and reports.[5]

2.2 Sexual Violence and Rape

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a serious global issue. In the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Girls (1993), article 1 frames VAWG as, "Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (UN General Assembly 1993). An estimated 736 million women have endured physical and/or sexual violence, and nearly one in four adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 have "experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or husband" (UN Women 2022). COVID-19, with its months-long lockdowns, confined families to their four walls, exacerbating domestic violence against women and girls (UN Women 2021).

A vital factor promoting sexual violence is the so-called "rape culture," which academic texts have discussed in the wake of U.S. sexual violence cases. Buchwald et al. (2005, p. xi) frame it as follows, "A rape culture condones physical and emotional terrorism against women and presents it as the norm." While terrorism may seem like an exaggerated term here, the quote suggests that sexual violence against women is possible at any time, as perpetrators strike suddenly, and women can therefore never feel completely safe. When alone in public after dark, women prepare for any attacks, armed with pepper spray due to the unpredictability of physical and sexual violence. However, sexual violence is by no means limited to ominous foreign perpetrators because the majority of perpetrators come from the family environment.

Even the husband, father or uncle can carry out "physical and emotional terrorism," in the words of Buchwald et al. (2005, p. xi), by striking abruptly.

Harding (2015), who writes on sexual violence in a US-American context, points out how rape culture feeds the desire in people to investigate victim accounts for their wrongdoing that invited the violence instead of blaming the perpetrator. She shows that if faced with a media report about sexual violence against women, people will surely ask questions about the type of clothing the woman was wearing, how much alcohol she had been consuming, or if she was lying (Harding 2015, p. 4). As an essential part of rape culture, she shows that the victim is always forced to justify being accused of immoral acts or other wrong behaviour. At the same time, perpetrators tend to be protected.

Scholars have identified that oppression and control of the body as other key elements of rape culture. Toss (2008) points out that rape culture is permeated by oppression based on the idea of owning and subjugating the body of the other person:

> Though the form and intensity vary, any oppression you care to name works at least in part by controlling or claiming ownership of the bodies of those oppressed—slavery and the prison-industrial complex being only the most extreme examples. In this sense, rape culture works by restricting a person's control of hir[6] body, limiting hir sense of ownership of it, and granting others a sense of entitlement to it (Toss 2008, p. 171)

For a rape culture to be sustained, several conditions must be met, among others the creation, proliferation and perpetuation of rape myths. Rape myths, also referred to as the "engine of rape culture" (Harding 2015, p. 23), are identified as crucial in sustaining women's exposure to sexual violence in the USA. To illustrate her point Harding draws on the classification of rape myths by Payne et al. (1999). According to this, rape is excused by the fact that the victim asked for it or wanted it or perpetrators deny that it was rape. In addition, it is claimed that the perpetrator did not mean any harm, that the victim lied, or that rape is either a trivial or deviant event. Harding reveals that such weakening of the victim stems from the firm belief in a just world where a woman attracts rape due to her own wrongdoing or misbehaviour; otherwise, nothing would have happened. Rape myths thrive on the fact that people who are recognised as authorities circulate them, that traditional and digital media pick them up, legitimise and spread them.

We agree with the above scholars that the factors of entitlement to one's own body and the trivialisation of the problem of sexual violence that they have highlighted are elements that promote sexual violence worldwide. However, we the term "rape culture" can seem catchy and exaggerated and we therefore prefer to speak of factors that promote rape. When looking at such factors more closely, as we show in the Islamic context in Indonesia, we also must consider religious classifications of "rape" and sexual deviance. We assume that the widespread idea that *zina* (adultery and fornication) and rape are conflated, as both are often seen as a form of sexual intercourse forbidden by Islam, has led to disputes over the understanding of sexual violence. This has prompted progressive *ulama* (religious scholars) to distinguish the terms sexual violence and *zina* from each other. A case in point is KUPI, which issued a *fatwa* against sexual violence, declaring that *zina* and rape are not the same,

even though both are prohibited in Islam. Before examining KUPI's perspective on the issue in more detail, it is crucial to shed light on the cultural and institutional factors contributing to the persistence of sexual violence in Indonesia.

2.3 Cultural Factors of Sexual Violence in Indonesia

Sexual violence is a serious problem in Indonesia. According to Komnas Perempuan, which launched an initial initiative to introduce the law 10 years ago, 338.496 cases were reported in 2021, a 50% increase from 2020 (Komnas Perempuan 2022). Ellen Kusuma, head of the Digital At-Risks sub-division at the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFEnet), pointed out that these are not just numbers, but behind them are suffering people because protection has been minimal. She emphasised that often the victim's perspective was not taken into account and power structures were not considered, which makes the handling of cases in Indonesia very complicated.[7]

To better understand the phenomenon of sexual violence in Indonesian religious schools, it is helpful to look at the role of cultural factors as Titiek Kartika pointed out. A Bengkulu-based gender studies scholar and long-time activist with the *Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia* (KPI), who was a member of the KPI national board from 2004 to 2009, she is now involved in a task force against sexual violence on campus. The creation of task forces on campus for the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Violence (PPKS) was prompted by the *Permendikbud* Regulation (Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture) 30/2021. It requires higher education institutions to form campus task forces to counter sexual harassment among students, lecturers and administrative employees. She pointed out the dynamic nature of the culture surrounding sexual violence in Indonesia, indicating that progressive religious leaders should increase their efforts to address the problem. However, she also clarified that Indonesia is not a country that allows sexual violence, but that there are local cultures that sanction unwanted behaviour by men toward women:

> There are many very good cultural examples, for example there are many cultures that have rules or local wisdom on how to respect, yes, family relationships, how to respect the families of their women, how to respect their partners. For example, if Monika has gone to Bali, for example, there is a village that is very clean, including being rated the world's cleanest village, Penglipuran, for example. It's funny that in that area there is a culture that if a man marries more than one woman, he is placed in a separate location from the community. So, actually there is a very specific local culture that has explicitly made a rule that if you commit violence or discrimination against women, you will get social sanctions.[8]

Penglipuran village, a traditional village in Bali, is rooted in Hindu traditions where polygamy is allowed, similar to Islam. Yet, according to their *adat* (local traditions), polygamy is prohibited. Titiek Kartika's reference to this example reveals what Suartika (2018, p. 11) has referred to as the feminist position that "(…) conformance to monogamy may be seen as some recognition and protection to women

from all kinds of domestic abuse," while also pointing to the function of the practice to exert social control, among others.

This example shows that there are attempts to curb polygamy, but the connection to sexual violence can only be made indirectly at best. However, an important cultural factor that fosters sexual violence is the fact that talking openly about sexuality is taboo. It is not common to openly talk about sexuality in a school or family context, and sexual education is lacking in both. Khaerul Umam Noer, a lecturer at the Social and Lecturer at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences at Muhammadiyah University Jakarta (UMJ), whose family manages many educational institutions, including *pesantren*, addresses the tabooing of sexual violence along with other cultural concepts. According to him, these are *hormat* (respect), *berkah* (blessing) and *kualat* (getting disasters, for instance, for being unkind to parents or teachers):

> If a *kiai* or *ustadz* in a *pesantren* calls you as a *santri*–if we assume I am a *kiai* and I then I am calling my *santri*–we have a concept of *hormat*, we have a concept of *berkah*. If I refuse my *kiai*'s or *ustadz*'s request, there is another concept that is called *kualat*, to be afraid of *kualat*. There is the concern one's life will not be blessed, the knowledge will not be useful. Why? Because I broke the teacher's command. Now, this is one of the problems. When we talk about sexual violence in religious educational institutions, the concept is still very much ingrained. So, if for example a person - there are some cases that I heard. For example, sexual violence, so for example oral sex. That's requested. There are some cases where a teacher asked his student to have oral sex with him. But then people can say: there's no rape, it's not anal sex, it's just oral. It's also a challenge that some people then tend to dismiss it: ah, it's just that. Not something important to talk about. Or taboo. It's taboo to talk about it.[9]

The downplaying of sexual services because they are not sexual intercourse is symptomatic of the trivialisation of non-consent to sex, as several of our interlocutors pointed out. The tabooing Khaerul Umam Noer has addressed in the context of *pesantren* also applies to the family environment. It is considered shameful (*memalukan*) to discuss sexual issues in the family openly, and sexuality has a negative connotation. For example, "free sexuality" (*seks bebas*), which is thought to emanate from Western countries and putting pubertal adolescents at risk, is considered sinful. Most notably, families and schools should protect minors from these negative influences by exercising authority and giving clear guidelines. Sex before marriage is considered a sin, as well as *zina*. In the wake of Indonesian heteronormativity, marriage is a central component of stable co-habitation between the sexes, the maintenance of morality and the guarantee of offspring.

According to prevailing norms, adolescent boys and girls should live a heterosexual life in marriage. As numerous scholars have observed, heterosexuality is the norm (Bennett 2007; Blackwood 2007; Parker 2008; Arnez 2013; Schröter 2013; Bennett and Davies 2015 for Indonesian citizens. Parker (2008), for example, speaks of a "sacred triangle of hetero-sexuality, marriage and reproduction," the "ideal and the norm to which adolescents in Indonesia should aspire." The ideal for adult women is to have a husband, live a morally good life and produce offspring. The foundations for the intense focus on heterosexuality were laid during the Soeharto government (1966–1998). The regime heavily regulated sexuality and propagated an ideology of "state ibuism" (state mothering), a term coined by Julia Suryakusuma (1988), which

reduced women's roles to children, the hearth and their husbands. The proselytising (*da'wa*) movement, which has spread from Arabic countries to Indonesia since the 1960s, increased the Islamization of everyday life, further promoting heteronormativity. However, the hegemony of heteronormativity does not mean there is no contestation about these norms in Indonesia. These norms have been challenged, for example, in local cultures where gender-crossing has been facilitated, such as *bissu* in Sulawesi (Davies 2007) or *tombois* and their girlfriends (Blackwood 2010). However, in line with "moral panic" discourses over "free sex" and sexual expression and identity, LGBTQ + or *bissu* have been considered "deviant."

Instead, morally good behaviour for women and adolescent girls entails covering the intimate parts of the female body (*aurat*), dressing modestly and donning the veil (*jilbab*). "Moral panic" discourses have portrayed the adolescent female body as constantly at risk of being seduced due to potentially harmful Western influences and inviting male advances through inappropriate behaviour or dress. Teenage boys are supposed to know how to behave and not need to discuss emotional concerns, including those dealing with sexuality. Rita Pranawati, the Deputy Chairwoman of the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI), when talking about the prevalence of sexual violence against boys, puts it like this: "Our cultural construction, our cultural norms will say that our boys are strong. For example, they do not need any information about reproductive health, but they become victims of sexual violence."[10]

She also points out that this is due to a "low cultural expression" that is encouraged in families and the parents' lacking concern for the emotional needs of their children. She attributes this to the unwillingness of parents to ask children about their emotional state after school; for example, the focus is on practical questions about grades and lunch rather than on emotional tensions at school.

2.4 Institutional Factors of Sexual Violence: Opacity of Secluded Spaces

Sexual violence persists in institutions, including religious schools, the military, the police and workplaces, both globally and locally (Armstrong et al. 2018; Smith and Freyd 2014). In recent years, many cases of sexual abuse in religious institutions around the world have come to light, despite those in charge trying to conceal the cases. A recent report suggested that priests and others associated with the church in France, for example, sexually abused 330,000 children, both boys and girls, over the last 70 years (Corbet 2021). In recent years, nuns and priests have increasingly reported sexual abuse cases, especially since Pope Francis issued a new church law in 2019 aimed at curbing the sex abuse crisis.

It has been stated that sexual violence is perpetuated in such institutions because of gender norms that justify the subjugation of supposedly weaker members of the population, women, indigenous peoples and minors of both sexes. In this context, Mack

et al. point out that gender and violence as “mutually constituting forces” “institutionalise colonialism through the ongoing production of colonised subjectivity” (Mack et al. 2018, p. 96). We argue that the co-constitution of violence and gender is facilitated by a combination of the “opacity of secluded spaces,” unequal gender relations, asymmetrical power relations—for example, between students and teachers—and lacking institutional monitoring of sexual violence in religious schools.

By “the opacity of secluded spaces,” we intend to capture the tendency of some institutions to facilitate and sustain spatially and ideologically relatively closed systems to which the outside world has no or only minimal access. In contrast to recent research on sexualised violence in the church context in Germany, which uses the concept of “separate worlds” (“Separatwelten”) (Wirth et al. 2022), we favour “opacity of secluded spaces.” The concept of “separate worlds” as proposed by Wirth et al. emphasises the strict separation of different realms, in particular law and morality. They refer to the fact that church leaders in Germany have attempted to deal with cases of sexual abuse in accordance with applicable church law without publicising this. However, we are not concerned with the distinction between law and morality but with how these systems conceal what is happening within them. The term “opacity” emphasises the concealment of what occurs within these spaces created by systems such as religious boarding schools. It underscores the challenge of gaining insights into the occurrences within them, which can perpetuate conditions condusive to sexual violence. “Secluded spaces” highlights the physically and ideologically closed nature of these environments, where uneqal gender relations and asymmetrical power relations can foster sexual violence. Therefore, “the opacity of secluded spaces” encapsulates the lack of transparency and concrete character of what happens in these physically and ideologically closed systems, providing an enhanced understanding of the institutional factors contributing to sexual violence.

Unequal gender relations and asymmetrical power relations matter in religious schools where sexual violence cases have been reported. The power asymmetry in such religious schools is based on the hierarchy between religious authorities and children. Religious teachers have tremendous power because their instructions are not questioned and children are expected to obey them unconditionally. The position of children can be further weakened if parents do not support them. This is especially the case when parents send their children to such schools when they have rebelled and are to be brought to heel through a combination of religious instruction and school discipline. A recent incident of sexual abuse at a Christian school in Missouri, a US-American Mid-Western state, is a case in point. In 2007, a 14-year-old girl was sent to the Circle of Hope Girls’ Ranch because her father wanted a strict Christian education for his daughter. However, she was sexually abused by the school’s founding father and left with permanent damage (Salter 2022).

This case also illustrates the lack of monitoring that fosters sexual abuse cases in religious boarding schools. The school was opened after a 1982 state law had been passed that did not give the state any opportunity to monitor the religious schools but instead gave them many liberties. This lack of monitoring was also raised in the context of the sexual assault by Herry Wirawan on 13 girls at the

Islamic boarding school in Bandung. According to information provided by Rita Pranawati,[18] many *pesantren* are not registered and have, therefore, so far evaded the responsible Ministry of Religion.

2.5 Sexual Violence in Indonesian Institutions

Although most of Indonesia's 278 million inhabitants are Muslim, Islam is not a state religion under the 1945 Constitution. Nevertheless, the tenet of the first pillar of Indonesian state philosophy, the Pancasila, is "belief in the one almighty God." This importance of religion in daily life is also reflected in research findings. According to Tamir et al. (2020), Indonesians are among the most religious people in the world, with 96 percent of respondents saying that belief in God is crucial for morality and good values.

We have argued above that violence and gender are co-constituted and that a combination of the opacity of secluded spaces, unequal gender relations, asymmetrical power relations and lack of monitoring facilitate sexual violence in institutions. We now go on to show how these aspects matter for *pesantren*. These institutions are usually cut off in several ways: parents do not have access to it, except for visiting hours, and they can only talk to their children through a teacher. The spaces where classes are held, where prayers are recited and where students sleep are generally not visible to the outside world. Unequal gender and power relations apply in several respects. Most *pesantren* are male-dominated institutions where what male authorities say counts, even though there are also *pesantren* led by *nyai* (female leaders of *pesantren*), who are persons of respect. One of these elements is the control over the appearance of the santri. As Nancy Smith-Hefner (2019, p. 107) writes: "(…) female santri continue to be taught that they must be careful not to dress or behave in a way that would attract the male gaze and lead men to sinful thoughts."

Patterns of sexual violence between teachers and students tend to be reproduced at the inter-student level. While sexual violence against male *pesantren* leaders and teachers have been reported, the factors mentioned above that encourage sexual violence also lead students to force fellow students into unwanted sexual practices. For example, rooms that are reliably empty at certain times because students are praying at the time are used for such purposes, often between boys. Unequal power relations based on the different social economic statuses of the students also promote sexual exploitation.[11]

Andy Yentriani, the chairwoman of Komnas Perempuan, said in an interview on 06 May 2022 that 70 percent of the victims do not report their cases: "Based on the Komnas Perempuan study in 2020 regarding rape, as a form of sexual violence, 70 percent of these victims did not report the case. They may be embarrassed, or they did not report out of fear."[12] In an interview carried out with Rita Pranawati, she confirmed the low willingness of sexual violence victims to report cases. She sees the blaming and stigmatisation of victims by the family and institutions as an

Fig. 2.1 Interview with Rita Pranawati, 19 May 2022. Photo credit: Monika Arnez

essential reason for this. She says that it is often the representatives of institutions as well as the parents who are protected and the victims who are blamed:

> They think in the best interest of the parents, in the best interest of the institution, not in the best interest of the victim. The best interests of the victim, in this case, they are children. They are victims. We need to help them, not blame them. We need to process these cases because if we don't, the criminals will do the same thing to other victims.[13]

Moreover, according to her, many cases of sexual violence happen in the family environment. Thus, the family, which should be a place of protection and care, can become a place of threat, while those perpetrators of violence often go unpunished. The desire to address such distorted criminalisation-care relationships (see also Arnez 2023, Chap. 1), has prompted advocacy for the RUU TPKS calling for a criminalisation of sexually violent offenders (Fig. 2.1).

2.6 The Long Road to the Sexual Violence Bill

Due to the severity of the case, Herry Wirawan's case referred to at the beginning of this contribution has led to accelerating the long rocky road to the Sexual Violence Bill. Yet, from the initial efforts of the National Commission on Violence against Women, it took 10 years for the law to take effect on 09 May 2022. Women's rights activists criticised that those conservative forces had been accommodated too much as they had been given too much space by linking the criminalisation of *zina* and LGBTQ + with sexual violence. This, they argued, contributed to considerable delays in ratifying the bill.

In June 2017, the Family Love Alliance (*Aliansi Cinta Keluarga*, AILA) pushed for legislation to criminalise same-sex relationships outside of marriage. They wanted this to be included in the revision of the Criminal Code (RKUHP) (see Arnez 2023, chapter 1). The Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS) had blocked the Sexual Violence Bill until the very end. Their main argument was that it fails to punish adultery, and LGBTQ + , which is *harām* (forbidden) in Islam. Al

Muzzammil Yusuf, a member of the PKS faction in parliament, stated on 10 April 2022:

> If this bill stands alone and without the expansion of adultery (Article 284 of the Criminal Code) and the prohibition of LGBTQ+ (Article 292 of the Criminal Code), then the content of the TPKS Bill contains the norm of sexual consent, meaning that if there is no violence, sexual relations are allowed (Humas Fraksi PKS DPR RI 2022).

In other words, the accusation here is that the law does not criminalise *zina* and LGBTQ + as it should, according to the PKS faction. This revealed a fundamental difference in understanding between the supporters of the bill, for whom sexual violence has nothing to do with *zina* and LGBTQ + , and the members of the PKS faction, for whom all three are on the same level, in the sense that they imply forms of sexual intercourse that are forbidden in Islam. For the PKS, as for other conservative forces in Indonesia, LGBTQ + is considered an evil to be fought because they equate it with sexual permissiveness, which tends to be seen as a consequence of the negative influence of lax sexual morality from the West. In 2016, the "LGBTQ + panic," as it was sometimes referred to in the media, reached new heights. In January 2016, a leaflet on sexual consultation went viral and its authors were accused of providing LGBTQ + "group protection." In 2017, anti-LGBTQ + smear campaigns increased; in 2018, conservative groups, including the PKS, brought an anti-LGBTQ + campaign to parliament and sought amendments to the penal code.

Such advances led to the Indonesian Criminal Code KUHP eventually being revised. On 06 December, legislation was passed that extensively interferes with privacy and criminalises sex outside marriage. People found guilty of sex outside marriage under this law can be jailed for up to three years. This further restricts people's privacy and ostracises minorities such as LGBTQ + persons who cannot get married in Indonesia and are therefore criminalised per se if they live together as a couple.

2.7 The Expected Impact of the Sexual Violence Bill

"The ratification of the RUU TPKS[14] into law is a gift for all women in Indonesia." These were the words of Puan Maharani, the chairwoman of the Indonesian Parliament (DPR) after passing the new Sexual Violence Bill on 12 April 2012. Through the signature of the Indonesian president, who has recently tried to accelerate the ratification of the UU TPKS on 09 May 2022, it was turned into law. Several interlocutors talked about the Sexual Violence Bill along similar lines. Ellen Kusuma of SAFEnet, for example, contended that its sheer presence is an achievement because victims of sexual violence can now be better protected.[15] Titiek Kartika[16]of KPI also highlighted that the bill is a gift for people in Indonesia.

The Sexual Violence Bill is expected to have a significant impact in several ways. From the point of view of victims of sexual violence, it is undoubtedly clear that the law is a historic step towards better protection against sexual violence. From the

perspective of promoters of the law, one expectation is related to the reporting of the cases. Andy Yentriyani sees one of the benefits of the Sexual Violence Bill in an increasing willingness of victims and their families to report cases of violence to the respective authorities. She expressed the hope that "the Law on Sexual Violence can be a solution to the stagnation faced by victims so far, including to increase the confidence of victims to report. If we look at other laws, such as the Law on the Elimination of Domestic Violence or the Law on Trafficking in Persons, the presence of this law will usually encourage victims to report their cases."[17] Moreover, there are new initiatives, i.e. via SAFEnet, encouraging victims to report online, i.e. without the reporting being directly linked to a person in a way that is visible to others.

The Sexual Violence Bill will likely increase the government's willingness to invest in preventive measures. Concerning the latter, Rita Pranawati recently said in an interview that the law has led to decision-makers developing ideas for a better monitoring system of Islamic boarding schools, which have been accused of being hotbeds of sexual violence, fueled by the Herry Wirawan rape scandal.[18] The new law will not abruptly change the problem of sexual violence in Indonesia. However, apart from the points mentioned so far, interlocutors also pointed out that it will bring greater awareness of sexual violence to the public in Indonesia. Yet, as the law was only recently passed, it is too early to say how effectively it will be implemented. It is also an open question whether the Indonesian penal code KUHP and the criminalisation of extramarital sex will not make people more inclined to report extramarital sex than cases of sexual violence.

2.8 Voices of Muslims on RUU TPKS

Issues of sexuality and sexual violence in Muslim-majority countries are always hotly debated (Mir-Hosseini 2011). The conservative turns in many Muslim-majority countries and the resurgence of piety have boosted the confidence of conservatives to criminalise sexuality and introduce certain norms and laws to police Muslim sexuality. This, for example, can be seen in the revival of *zina* laws in some Muslim countries (Mir-Hosseini 2011, p. 8). Central to the inability of conservative Muslims to understand sexual violence is their failure to differentiate between Sharia and *fiqh*. Sharia is God's will and, therefore, it is infallible, sacred and flawless (Abou El- Fadl 2004, p. 31). The prevailing law in Muslim-majority contexts is *fiqh* (jurisprudence). It refers to the product of human endeavour to understand and apply legal and ethical rulings mentioned in the sacred texts, especially the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Thus, as Mir-Hosseini elaborates:

> The distinction between Sharia and fiqh is crucial, from a critical feminist perspective, because it both engages with the past and enables action in the present; it enables the separation of the legal from the sacred, and to reclaim the diversity and pluralism that was part of Islamic legal tradition (Mir-Hosseini 2011, p. 9).

Indeed, Mir-Hosseini's position is resonant with those of progressive Muslims and Muslim and Islamic feminists in Indonesia, supporting the RUU TPKS.

From the moment it was initiated, one of the benefits of the bill has been how the discourse of sexual violence is being discussed openly in public. Muslim women's organisations, activists and Muslim feminists are among parties within civil society that have been active in sharing their concerns and voices to support the RUU TPKS. Their voices and importance are not surprising given that Indonesia is the largest Muslim-majority country with a long and significant presence of progressive Muslims with gender-just perspectives. Many of them have been inspired by modernist, progressive thinkers and Islamic and Muslim feminists across the globe (Arnez 2010; Schröter 2017; Nisa 2021). The subsequent section will focus mainly on the voices of KUPI and its networks in their struggle to support RUU TPKS.

2.8.1 KUPI and Its Networks Struggling for RUU TPKS

The first KUPI, the Indonesian Gender-Just *Ulama* Congress, was held from 25 to 27 April 2017 at the Kebon Jambu al-Islamy Islamic Boarding School, Cirebon. It is the Muslim world's first congress of gender-just *ulama*. The congress was initiated by gender-just *ulama* (men and women, see Nisa and Saenong 2022), intellectuals, Muslim and Islamic feminists, women's activists, human right's activists and social movement activists (Nisa 2019, p. 435). More than 1,500 people attended it. A collaboration of the three main NGOs, Rahima, Fahmina and Alimat runs KUPI. Each of these NGOs has robust connections with the largest moderate Muslim organisation in Indonesia, Nahdlatul Ulama; hence, they all can be regarded as NGOs with progressive understandings of Islam and gender equality (Nisa 2019, p. 437). The foundation of KUPI signifies that women in Indonesia have been leading religious authority and playing a significant role in developments in Islam throughout the history's archipelago.

Why is KUPI important in our discussion of RUU TPKS? Many factors make KUPI a vital actor in the passing of RUU TPKS into law. Early in its establishment, during its first congress in 2017, KUPI positioned issues of sexual violence as its primary concern. During the congress, KUPI emphasised the need for a particular law covering victim perspectives in Indonesia. According to KUPI, this law is important to protect human beings from sexual violence which degrades human dignity. It can be a pathway to realise *maqashid as-sharia* (the objectives of Sharia), focusing especially on protecting honour, descent and the soul (*hifdz al 'irdh*, *an-nasl* wa *an-nafs*) (Fayumi in Kodir et al. 2020, p. iv).

In the congress sexual violence was one of three *fatwa* (a legal-theological opinion) issued by KUPI, in addition to a *fatwa* on child marriage and environmental destruction (Nisa, 2019, pp. 439–440). Through its sexual violence *fatwa,* KUPI declares two things: First, sexual violence, whether committed outside or inside marriage (marital rape), is *harām* (forbidden under Islamic law). Second, KUPI also stresses that *zina* (adultery and fornication) and rape are different, despite both being a form

of sexual intercourse Islam prohibits. KUPI explains the difference between the two, stating that rape is *hirāba* in which the perpetrator forces the victim to have sex, the sexual intercourse is against the victim's will or the sexual intercourse is without the victim's consent. The perpetrator commits two prohibited acts at once, adultery and coercion. Unfortunately, in other countries, like Pakistan, some conservatives proclaim the crime of rape as *zina-bil-jabr* (*zina* by force) which has been criticised by progressive Muslims (Quraishi 1997, p. 289).

KUPI is firm in its position that rape is not a subset or subcategory of *zina* nor *zina-bil-jabr.* Rather it is *hirāba,* which is defined by *fuqaha* (Muslim jurists or experts in Islamic jurisprudence) like Sayyid Sabiq as "a single person or group of people causing public disruption, killing, forcibly taking property or money, attacking or raping women ("*hatk al 'arad*'"), killing cattle, or disrupting agriculture (quoted in Quraishi 1997, p. 315). KUPI's classification of rape as *hirāba* is resonant with Asifa Quraishi's argument that:

> (…) classification of rape under hiraba promotes the principle of honoring women's sexual dignity established in the Quranic verses on zina. Rape as hiraba is a separate violent crime which uses sexual intercourse as a weapon. The focus in a hiraba prosecution would thus be the accused rapist and his intent and physical actions (…) (Quraishi 1997, p. 317)

KUPI also holds the firm position that victims of rape should not be equated with perpetrators of *zina.* Victims of rape must receive proper psychological, physical and social support (Nisa 2019, p. 439).

KUPI bases its *harām* fatwa on sexual violence by rereading of religious texts. KUPI's approach resonates with that of Islamic feminists, to borrow Margot Badran's (2001) concept in other countries (Nisa 2021, p. 159). Badran emphasises that Islamic feminism refers to a new approach that reinterprets Islamic religious texts in a gender-sensitive way (2001, p. 50). In addition to such an interpretation of Islamic texts, the KUPI also bases its *fatwa* on a human rights perspective that includes a social and cultural analysis (2001, p. 50). In addition to its gender-just rereading of Islamic texts, KUPI also bases their *fatwa* on a human rights point of view, which covers social and cultural analysis. Thus, KUPI applies contextualist approaches to religious texts. In doing this, KUPI's *ulama perempuan* (gender-just *ulama*) collaborates with other women's rights activists, women's organisations, Islamic feminists and Muslim feminists to counter the narratives of those who oppose the RUU TPKS. This reminds us of Mir-Hosseini's article which asks, "Can Islamic and human rights frameworks coexist, or in other words, how can an overlapping consensus be built?" (2011, p. 22). Mir-Hosseini argues this in contexts "where religious discourse is paramount, where religious identity has become politicised, and where the Islamists set the terms of sexual and moral discourses." He claims that to be effective in such contexts, human rights norms and values must be articulated in a language that can engage with local cultures, practices and religious traditions" (Mir-Hosseini 2011, p. 22). KUPI's initiative to collaborate with human rights activists in fighting against sexual violence resonates with Mir-Hosseini's suggestion, given that Indonesia has also witnessed a conservative turn. This is also evident from the well-known Islamist party *Partai*

Keadilan Sejahtera's (PKS, the Prosperous Justice Party) position that does not support RUU TPKS.

As explained above, one of the often-mentioned objections of the PKS is the absence of criminalising consensual sexual acts between a man and woman, including any *zina*. Their main agenda is criminalising consensual sex, arguing that this can help the nation fight against rampant moral decadence. KUPI certainly believes that the act of fornication and adultery is forbidden in Islam. However, KUPI and its network emphasise that although RUU TPKS does not mention *zina*, this does not mean that KUPI approves it. Abdul Kodir et al. (2020) state that those aspects are not mentioned because "the main focus of this final bill is all forms of sexual violence, which are forced on victims, both outside and inside marriage. This final bill does not talk about sexual relations that are forbidden in Islam, but only acts of sexual violence…" (2020, pp. 54–55). One of the focuses of RUU TPKS, for example, is on dealing with the unequal power relations between a husband and wife, between the strong and the weak.

Although Muslim women's NGOs have long been present in Indonesia, KUPI is unique because it actively "recruits" human rights and women's rights activists to become part of the KUPI family. The elites of KUPI are gender-just *ulama* who have strong Islamic studies backgrounds, including Islamic legal tradition backgrounds. This is vital because the staunch opponents of KUPI are conservatives with patriarchal interpretations of Islam's sacred texts. KUPI is also not anti-feminist. Feminists of various backgrounds attended the first congress of KUPI. KUPI also believes that RUU TPKS takes its inspiration from the spirit of feminism and gender justice, which is not against Islamic teaching. Feminism in this context, in particular, refers to "an awareness of the reality of injustice and violence that befalls women" (Abdul Kodir et al. 2020, p. 70). This is aligned with the way feminists define feminism. Bronwyn Winter, for example, contends that feminism is "essentially about the fight to end domination, the key element of this being male domination, and about empowering women…" (2008, p. 315).

2.8.2 KUPI: Women as Victims?

Last year, a scandal regarding a female lecturer from a state Islamic university teaching about Islamic family law, polygamy and writing about *Hukum Perkawinan Islam in Indonesia* (Islamic Marriage Law in Indonesia) was revealed among certain elites of KUPI. The lecturer wanted to collaborate with KUPI to organise a gender-related event in which she would be one of the main speakers. The KUPI network had to refuse her request, knowing that she had conducted *siri* (unregistered) marriage and polygamous marriage twice, including becoming the second wife of an elite within the campus. One of the KUPI elites was even invited to be the witness for her *siri* polygamous marriage, which he refused because it was against his ideals as a progressive and gender-just *ulama*. Additionally, before the lecturer's third husband's death, she had already conducted extramarital relations with a married man.

This short vignette signifies the complexity of gender-based violence against women and the perpetrators of gender-based violence, including abusive relationships, family violence, domestic violence and sexual violence, which can be perpetrated by men and women, with or without knowledge of gender discourses. It also testifies that some well-educated women who speak publicly about gender and have strong religious understandings often do not understand the essence of gender-based violence and lack sensitivity to gender-just perspectives. This abusive attitude, lack of sensitivity, and attitudes of disrespect and gender inequality are born out of society's failure to discuss gender-based violence and sexual violence in public.

Most victims of sexual violence are women and girls, based on a report issued by Komnas Perempuan, as mentioned above. It is noteworthy that during 2015–2020, there were 51 complaints of sexual violence in the educational environment received by Komnas Perempuan*,* according to their report. Most cases of sexual violence occurred in universities, at a rate of 27%. In second place, unfortunately, were Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) and Islamic schools, which accounted for 19% of the reported cases. This report was confronting given that *pesantren* are known as "sacred" places to produce *ulama* "religious leaders" in Indonesia. KUPI and its *pesantren*-based *ulama* networks believe this phenomenon is a warning bell for *pesantren* and other Islamic institutions, highlighting that they must fight against sexual violence. Leaders and teachers of *pesantren* need sound gender-just perspectives in understanding religious texts that might lead to sexual violence.

Nyai Afwah Mumtazah, the female *pesantren* leader of Pondok Pesantren Kempek in Cirebon, understands the challenges many *pesantren* face in Indonesia face. Unfortunately, she recounted, "this can be seen clearly from the fact that some *kyai* (male leader of *pesantren*) are doing polygamous marriage without the knowledge of their first wives. This then has resulted in various forms of sexual violence."[19] To the polygamous marriages of *kyai* ((Nisa 2019, p. 442); see also Wirasti and van Huis 2021), there have been incidents of *kyai* marrying their students or conducting early or child marriage.

Many teachers of *pesantren* do not have gender-just perspectives in reading religious texts. When they teach their *santri* (students of *pesantren*) sex education based on religious texts, many of them fail to explain the context in which a certain Qur'anic verse or *hadith* was revealed. This then leads to patriarchal interpretations that strengthen the inequality of power relations between men and women. Nyai Afwah has even made her *pesantren* an institution conducive to victims of sexual violence. She recounts, "For my *santri,* I am their place to ask for marital and sexual advice. *Santri* who are married often ask for advice on marital relations and unfortunately, many of them must continue to be provided with sexual education and husband and wife relationships that are in accordance with Islamic values that do not demean women, and even elevate their status and dignity."[20] Unfortunately, not many *nyai* have this kind of approach to their *santri* like Nyai Afwah. As part of KUPI *ulama perempuan,* Nyai Afwah was invited to speak to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia, together other KUPI *ulama perempuan.* This meeting related to the polemic when the Ministry of Education issued regulations on

preventing and handling sexual violence in higher education institutions in 2021—which was opposed by Muhammadiyah, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesia Ulama Council, MUI) and PKS. Nyai Afwah says, "I was very vocal and I told them that it was indeed necessary to make a similar regulation for the *pesantren* environment."[21]

For KUPI and its *ulama perempuan* such as Nyai Afwah and Nyai Nur Afiyah, the struggle to pass RUU TPKS into law is in line with the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. One of the most often-mentioned references of KUPI elites is a *hadith* (saying of the Prophet Muhammad) emphasising that he gave special attention to women. On his deathbed, the Prophet sent a strong message to the community to ensure goodness for women because they are often marginalised and forgotten. He said "I urge you to treat women kindly. They are a trust in your hands. Fear God in His trust" (quoted in al-Hibri 1982, 213).

2.8.3 KUPI and Marital Violence

Marital violence is one of the rampant forms of violence and sensitive issues experienced during marital life in Indonesia. RUU TPKS is complementary to Articles 5 and 8 of law number 23 2004 of the Republic of Indonesia regarding eliminating violence in the household. Article 5 states, "Anyone shall be prohibited to carry out violence in the household against an individual within the scope of the household, using: a. physical violence; b. psychic violence; c. sexual violence; or the negligence of the household." Article 8 elaborates what sexual violence means in article 5: "The sexual violence referred to in Article 5 letter c shall include: a. forcing sexual intercourse carried out against an individual living within the scope of the household; b. forcing sexual intercourse against one of the individuals within the scope of the household for commercial purpose and/or a certain purpose." The RUU TPKS reinforces this in article 11. It states that (1) Everyone is prohibited from committing sexual violence and (3) that sexual violence, as referred to in paragraph 5, includes incidents of sexual violence in the scope of personal relations, the household, work relations, public relations and other special situations.

Many women's activists and organisations have long waited for this move to criminalise rape in marriage and domestic violence (Idrus and Bennett 2003, p. 45). Marital violence is a severe concern in both regulations because of the common assumption that men have unlimited sexual access to the bodies of their wives. Husbands consider their wives their property (Bennett and Manderson 2003, p. 10). This is common in Indonesia, regardless of the socio-cultural background including religious affiliations, as Bennett and Manderson argue:

> …the institution of marriage is interpreted in many Asian societies in a manner that denies women's right to bodily integrity and upholds men's entitlement to sexual access to their wives, regardless of whether women consent to sexual relations (Bennett and Manderson 2003, p. 10).

Unfortunately, in Indonesia, a Muslim-majority country like Indonesia, some individuals use religious narratives or patriarchal readings of sacred texts to support their arguments. Kiai Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, known as Kyai Faqih, one of the most well-known Indonesian male Muslim feminists and KUPI intellectuals, introduced *qira'ah mubadalah* (reciprocal reading) to counter patriarchal understandings and interpretations of religious texts. Through *qiraah mubadalah*, Kyai Faqih emphasises that Islamic texts, the Qur' an and *hadith*, are not patriarchal texts. At the same time, the introduction of *qira'ah mubadalah* serves to counter patriarchal understandings and interpretations of religious texts. Kyai Faqih introduced *qira'ah mubadalah* in 2017, and published his book *Qira'ah Mubadalah: Tafsir Progressive untuk Keadilan Gender dalam Islam* (Reciprocal Reading: Progressive Interpretation for Gender Justice in Islam) as a guide for approaching religious texts as a basis for gender justice.

Kyai Faqih's *qira'ah mubadalah* approach has been adopted by KUPI gender-just *ulama.* In 2020, KUPI, Alimat and Komnas Perempuan published *Tanya Jawab Seputar RUU Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual: Dari Pandangan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (KUPI) (Questions and Answers Regarding the Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence: From the Viewpoint of the Indonesian Women's Ulama Congress [KUPI]) (Abdul Kodir et al. 2020). In this book, Kyai Faqih collaborated with two other *KUPI ulama perempuan,* Pera Soparianti and Yulianti Muthmainnah, to demonstrate how *qira'ah mubadalah* works to prevent sexual violence. This book also aims to present Islamic views on sexual violence and to counter those who believe that Islam does not have a clear and firm view on how to eliminate sexual violence. The book reflects KUPI's broader agenda to showcase Islam's inherent gender-egalitarian nature.

An example of the use of *qira'ah mubadalah* to prevent sexual violence is set out in the *Tanya Jawab Seputar RUU Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual*. The KUPI network's justification for adopting RUU TPKS is the widespread belief that Islam grants husbands sexual rights, including the obligation to have sexual relations with their wives, and not vice versa. *Qira'ah mubadalah* considers this as sexual violence—the forcing of sexual relations in marriage, either by husband to wife or vice versa. Through the *qira'ah mubadalah* approach, Kyai Faqih and his networks refer to what is outlined in the Qur'an and *hadith,* i.e. that husband and wife must have sexual relations in the principle of doing good to each other (*mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf*). This *mu'asyarah bil ma'ruf* in *qira'ah mubadalah* means that both parties have to please the other during their sexual relations and must avoid coercion. Citing verses in the Qur'an, like al-Baqarah, 2: 187, "*hunna libasun lakum wa antum libasun lahun*" (the husband is clothing for the wife, and the wife is clothing for the husband), Kyai Faqih and KUPI *ulama perempuan* emphasise that "If clothing is something that gives comfort to the wearer in navigating life, then the sexual activity must be something that gives comfort to each" (Kodir et al. 2020, p. 31). This forms the foundation for KUPI networks, namely, by introducing *qira'ah mubadalah* it can be understood that married couples must avoid sexual violence and marital rape by ensuring that both the husband and the wife have the right to enjoy each other's bodies during sexual relations. This spirit of *qira'ah mubadalah* has long been introduced by many scholars, including Muslim feminist lawyer and philosopher Azizah

al-Hibri. In her argument about how Islam has introduced better living conditions for women, al-Hibri emphasises that women should be treated with dignity, and healthy reciprocity in sexual interaction is a part of Islamic teaching. Al-Hibri, for instance, emphasises the importance of foreplay in sexual intercourse for married couples. She cites a *hadith* from al-Ghazali's work in *ihya ulum al-Din*: "Don't fall upon your wife like an animal does. Send a messenger between you first." His listeners asked, "What messengers?" He answered, 'Kisses and words'" (quoted in al-Hibri 1982, p. 213). This reciprocal spirit is vital in the discussion of RUU TPKS, mainly because most victims of sexual violence, as mentioned above, are women.

2.9 Conclusion

Trivialising violence and blaming victims because they "did something wrong" to become victims of sexual violence are widespread patterns and factors across the globe that encourage rape—something that several scholars like Buchwald et al. (2005), Toss (2008) and Harding (2015) have called "rape culture."

For the Indonesian context, we have shown that the magnitude of the Herry Wirawan case accelerated the process of passing the Sexual Violence Bill, a legal instrument to protect victims of sexual violence better. We have revealed the cultural and institutional factors its advocates and supporters have identified in lobbying for it. One crucial factor is the tabooing of sexual violence, not only in educational institutions but also in the family, leading to inadequate sexual education. The fear of being criminalised as a victim of sexual violence if the respective case is openly addressed is well-founded, because there is a tendency to protect the institutions and their representatives who blame the victim instead of helping him or her. Several of our collaborators have confirmed that victims are hesitant to report cases of sexual violence to the police due to the potential stigma for the victim and their family, the length of time it takes to process cases, and the uncertainty of whether the case will be pursued.

As far as sexual violence in institutions is concerned, we have built on the idea of gender and violence and "mutually constituting forces" (Mack et al. 2018) and argued that the co-constitution of violence and gender, the opacity of secluded spaces, unequal gender relations, asymmetrical power relations and lack of monitoring are all significant in facilitating sexual violence in institutions. *Pesantren* are a case in point because the interaction between *santri*, their parents or other related persons outside the *pesantren*, is minimal, and their wellbeing depends on the goodwill of the teaching personnel and the head of the institution. The unconditional obedience of students to teachers promotes sexual violence and the existence of unequal gender and power structures and their reproduction among students.

The deep roots of sexual violence have prompted supporters of the Sexual Violence Bill to advocate for its implementation. Komnas Perempuan proposed it ten years ago, convinced that it will have a great benefit in better protecting victims from sexual

violence and will also have a positive impact on victims' willingness to report their cases.

However, advocacy for this bill came not only from women's rights organisations, but also from progressive Islamic circles who argued for the law from an Islamic perspective. We have zoomed in on KUPI to show how *ulama perempuan* have justified their support for the Sexual Violence Bill by saying they want to establish more gender justice in Islamic circles. To this end, they have issued a *fatwa* against sexual violence, which primarily opposes the conflation of the terms *zina* and rape common among conservatives, including members of the PKS who have blocked the Sexual Violence Bill until the very end. Instead, they have emphasised the difference between *zina* (adultery and fornication) and rape. Specifically, they have highlighted that rape is *hirāba*, where the perpetrator forces the victim to have sexual intercourse, sexual intercourse takes place against the victim's will, or sexual intercourse takes place without the victim's consent. This *qira'ah mubadalah*, which is aimed at emphasising equality between wives and husbands, and their collaboration with other women's activists and organisations are important given that gender inequality leading to sexual violence has grown roots in the country.

In closing, based on our findings, we contend that although the Sexual Violence Bill is a significant step forward in tackling sexual violence in Indonesia, judicial punishment is insufficient to bring about sustainable change. Preventing sexual violence requires creating an environment where families, neighbours, religious institutions and government agencies do not abuse, isolate or blame sexual violence victims but work together to develop a spirit of openness, caring and repair.

Notes

1. Another case involved the suicide of 23-year-old Novia Widyasari in early December 2021 in Mojokerto, East Java, after her partner Randy Bagus Sosongkho had sexually abused and forced her to abort the baby.
2. Before being passed into law it was referred to as Rancangan *Undang-undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual (RUU TPKS).*
3. On regulatory zeal see Arnez, this volume.
4. In this chapter, we use LGBTQ + to refer to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and/or Queer community, where the + sign referring to other non-heterosexual identifies not specifically mentioned, as an inclusive umbrella term. Indonesian media have frequently used the term LGBT to refer to this community as the foreign, anti-Islamic 'other.' See, for example, Ewing 2020.
5. If not otherwise mentioned, the interviews we carried out were conducted in Indonesian, either by Monika Arnez or Eva Nisa, via Zoom.
6. Gender-neutral pronoun Toss uses to replace "her" and "him".
7. Interview with Ellen Kusuma, carried out by Monika Arnez on 08 June 2022.
8. Interview with Titiek Kartika, carried out by Monika Arnez on 24 May 2022.
9. Interview with Khaerul Umam Noer, carried out by Monika Arnez on 09 June 2022.
10. Interview with Rita Pranawati, carried out by Monika Arnez in English on 19 May 2022.
11. Interview with Khaerul Umam Noer, carried out by Monika Arnez on 09 June 2022.
12. Interview with Andy Yentriyani, recorded by *Kompas* TV, 06 May 2022, and transcribed from Indonesian to English by Monika Arnez.

13. Interview with Rita Pranawati, carried out by Monika Arnez on 19 May 2022.
14. *Rancangan Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana* (Draft Law on Sexual Violence). This draft law was passed into law (UU TPKS) in April 2022.
15. Interview with Ellen Kusuma, carried out by Monika Arnez on 08 June 2022.
16. Interview with Titiek Kartika, carried out by Monika Arnez on 24 May 2022.
17. Interview with Andy Yentriyani, recorded by *Kompas* TV, 06 May 2022, and transcribed from Indonesian to English by Monika Arnez.
18. Interview with Rita Pranawati, carried out by Monika Arnez on 19 May 2022.
19. Interview with Nyai Nur Afiyah, carried out by Eva F. Nisa on 29 May 2022.
20. Interview with Nyai Afwah Mumtazah, carried out by Eva F. Nisa on 28 May 2022.
21. Interview with Nyai Afwah Mumtazah, carried out by Eva F. Nisa on 28 May 2022.

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Chapter 3
Criminalisation and Care: Indonesian Muslim Mass Organisations' Perspectives on LGBT People

Anwar Kholid

Abstract This chapter examines the attitudes of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama toward LGBT people who have been facing growing hostility from the country's predominantly Muslim society since 2016. My analysis draws on insights from the discourse of criminalisation and care that has characterized the debate over sexual and gender minorities in Indonesia. This chapter, drawing on interviews and desktop research, demonstrates that the Muslim mass organisations Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama display ambivalent attitudes between criminalisation and care towards LGBT people. Focusing on Muhammadiyah and their autonomous women's organisation Aisyiyah it argues that the organisations' leaders at the national level are more inclined to criminalise sexual and gender minorities, while at the regional level they are more likely to practice care for minorities, through equal cooperation and interpersonal relations. One reason for this difference is the distance or proximity to the people concerned. Those in charge at the national level are far away from the grassroots, while those at the regional level work more closely with the people.

Keywords Care · Criminalisation · LGBT · Indonesia · Muhammadiyah · Nahdlatul ulama

3.1 Introduction

On a sunny day in December 2018, I visited the *Pesantren Waria* al-Fatah in Yogyakarta. Among many *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia, *Pesantren Waria* al-Fatah is unique because its students are all *waria* (male-bodied individuals who identify themselves as women). *Waria* in Indonesia face challenges in everyday life as many of them are socially excluded (see Fitriah

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2020), even though there is historically a diverse transgender heritage in Indonesia, such as the *bissu*, androgynous shamans who are neither male nor female (Davies 2010). State agencies exclude them in several ways. For example, only two genders are possible on the identity card, male and female. The decisive factor for this differentiation is the sex at birth; transgender people must also carry this after their gender transition. Organisations with the name “waria” in their title have been forced to change their name, such as the Waria Association of Surabaya, which had to change its name to Surabaya Organisation for Diversity (Fitriyah 2020).

At the *pesantren* I met Ibu Shinta Ratri, one of its founders.[1] Established in 2008, the *pesantren* has two primary objectives. First, it serves as a space for *waria* to learn about Islam. The more than 40 students usually meet once a week on Sundays at 3 pm to recite the Quran, discuss religious and social issues and pray together under the guidance of an *ustadz* (male Islamic teacher). Second, *Pesantren* al-Fatah aims to become a platform for the *waria* to advocate for themselves. Besides building discourses for their spiritual peace, the *pesantren* also become a place to educate the surrounding community about *waria*. It serves as a social sign to counter assumptions and stigmas that put transgender people at odds with Islam.

This *pesantren* is a thorn in the side of Islamist forces, which became particularly clear when the Islamic extremist organisation Front Jihad Islam (FJI) attacked on 19th February 2016. Due to the attack, the police and village apparatus forcibly

Fig. 3.1 *Pesantren* Waria Al-Fatah Yogyakarta. Photo credit: Anwar Kholid, 27 November 2022

closed the *pesantren* to avoid further unrest. When I met Ibu Shinta, she told me about the closure of her *pesantren*:

> The FJI once raided us in February 2016. They forced us to close because, according to them, God only created men and women. If *waria* want to worship, we must first repent (*bertobat*), back to our nature as a man, and then we may pray. That is what they wanted … of course, we reported this case to the police, but they did not investigate the incident. It seems like the government and the police just let it go. Then 2 or 3 days after the incident, we were brought to the village hall. Community leaders were invited, including *Pak RT*, *Pak RW*, and several representatives of Muhammadiyah. Maybe because this is a Muhammadiyah village, they were invited to witness the closure of our pesantren. At that time, I could only come with my *ustadz* to the meeting. That is where we were tried morally. There is no written evidence that we were closed, but in essence, the Pesantren al-Fatah was declared closed that night by FJI, the police, and the village apparatus.[2]

The closure of *Pesantren* al-Fatah was a result of the criminalisation of LGBT people.[3] In early 2016, a wave of hatred against gender and sexual minorities swept Indonesia. Many scholars describe this event as a sexual moral panic (Hegarty 2022; Rodríguez and Murtagh 2022; Thajib 2022; Wijaya 2022; Wieringa 2019). All forms of non-normative gender and sexuality were framed under the acronym of LGBT and then portrayed as a threat to the state, nation and religion. Various parties, including politicians, religious leaders, academics, and journalists, constructed and disseminated this wave of hatred and stigma.

Anti-LGBT sentiment in Indonesia has been cultivated primarily through the construction of dualities that pit them against Indonesia and Islam. Through these constructions, the power relationship between the majority (Muslim and heterosexuals) and the minority (LGBT people) is established. They create a hierarchy in which the majority becomes superior to the minority, leading to the marginalisation and dehumanisation of the disadvantaged group, which is evident in the context of LGBT people in Indonesia.

Islamic organisations take an active role in the criminalisation campaign of LGBT. Their main argument is that homosexuality and transgender identity are against Islamic norms and threatens the morality of the nation and future generations. In addition to being campaigners, these organisations also provide religious legitimacy in the discourse on LGBT criminalisation. However, their intolerance is often accompanied by affective care and concern. They openly criticise reactions that violate civil rights and show cruelty to LGBT people, such as violence by police or fundamentalist groups. Referring to the character of Islam as a religion of peace, Islamic organisations prohibit violence and discrimination against LGBT people. They argue that the behaviour is condemned, not the person (Muhammadiyah.or.id 2022). More than that, some foster equal dialogue and cooperation with LGBT communities.

Scholarly literature specifically addressing the stance of Islamic organisations on LGBT issues in Indonesia is scarce. This chapter, therefore, makes a contribution to this issue. It addresses the following question: How have Indonesia's most influential Muslim mass organisations Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama displayed an ambivalent attitude towards LGBT people between criminalisation and caring? To examine this ambivalence, I draw on insights from the discourse of criminalisation of non-normative gender and sexuality in Indonesia (Hegarty 2022; Wieringa

2019) and the discourse of affection and care to soften the violence against gender and sexual minorities (Thajib 2022; Rodríguez 2022). Methodologically, I base my analysis on interviews and desktop research. I conducted interviews with activists of Muhammadiyah and NU and members of the LGBT community in 2018 and 2019. I collected the grassroots data in Yogyakarta.

3.2 Making Sense of LGBT in the Indonesian Context

In this article, I employ the term LGBT as a political term to describe a group of people with non-normative genders and sexualities who are often discriminated against and persecuted in Indonesia. Nonetheless, it is necessary to understand more deeply how this term is used in popular discourse in Indonesia.

The term LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. It includes both sexual orientation and gender identity. Lesbian and gay refer to individuals who are romantically, emotionally and sexually attracted to the same sex and gender. Bisexual refers to individuals who are romantically, emotionally and sexually attracted to multiple sexes or genders. Meanwhile, transgender refers to an individual whose gender identity or expression differs from that typically associated with their assigned sex at birth. Thus, most simply, LGBT is a term for individuals based on their sexual orientation (LGB) and gender identity (T).

While the terms to identify non-normative genders and sexualities, such as *wadam* (hermaphrodite, transvestite), which then changed to *waria*, gay, *lesbi* and *tomboi*, have been used in Indonesia since the 1980s (Boellstorff 2007; Blackwood 2010), the specific use of the acronym LGBT is relatively new for many Indonesians. It began to appear in public discussions around 2014.[4] Afterward, the sexual moral panic that engulfed Indonesia in 2016 popularised the term LGBT in the country.

Due to its foreign origin, there has been confusion and vagueness among many Indonesians in understanding the term LGBT. Instead of its complexity, LGBT has been viewed as deviant sexual behaviour primarily associated with same-sex sexual relationships (i.e. anal intercourse between men). Moreover, LGBT is also often equalised to *zina* (adultery). As Arnez and Nisa (2023, this volume, chapter 2) explain, *zina* is considered a severe sexual offense in Indonesia. Therefore, in this light, LGBT is perceived as a gross violation of religious and social norms. Because LGBT is understood as deviant behaviour, many believe it should be disciplined, changed and corrected. Thus, many Indonesians believe being LGBT is not a problem if it is not expressed and practiced. In other words, LGBT, as discussed within the Indonesian mainstream discourse, is not about *being* but about *doing*.

LGBT is not only interpreted as deviant sexual behaviour, but also with political movements to promote same-sex marriage, which is associated with Western culture. Anti-LGBT sentiment is usually based on fear of attempts to legalise same-sex marriage in Indonesia. In this context, there are two lines of arguments to denounce LGBT. The first line serves to cater to nationalist sentiments by portraying LGBT as a proxy of Western culture that seeks to destroy Indonesian culture and morality. In

this narrative, rejecting LGBT means protecting the integrity of the Indonesian social order from Western domination. The second line is to appeal to personal emotion by stoking the fear that LGBT poses a threat to families and children. In this way, LGBT rejection is seen as an effort to maintain the sanctity of heterosexual marriages and to protect children from sexual perversion.

3.3 Criminalisation and Care

Ali (2016, p. xxi) highlights that in Muslim communities the acceptance of a particular faith or practice, especially concerning women, gender and family, depends on whether they are "legitimately Islamic." In the Indonesian context, Ali's observation is precise. Islam has become the most influential religion in Indonesia, permeating Indonesian social and political affairs in every possible way. As part of the social order, it sets the standards for how people interact and perceive one another. Therefore, it is seen as rightful, and its principles are a foundation of the social order that must not be shaken.

In LGBT discourse, Islam has become the most crucial factor in shaping public opinion. The 1998 political reforms that overthrew the authoritarian government of the New Order opened the floodgates for the re-emergence of political Islam, which had previously been suppressed. The vital agenda of political Islam is to uphold the ideology of religious morality, creating a sense of nationhood and moral citizenship based on the ideology of the heterosexual nuclear family (Platt et al. 2018; Boellstorff 2007). In other words, gender, sexuality and family are deeply rooted in the Indonesian political agenda. Where heterosexuality is the central concept that organises the morality of Indonesian life (Arnez 2013; Davies 2010; Blackwood 2010; Boellstorff 2007), LGBT becomes foreign and beyond imagination. It is classified as a form of transgression and, therefore, a target for criminalisation and punishment.

According to Hart, criminalisation of an act or omission is "to announce to society that these actions are not to be done and to secure that fewer of them are done" (Hart 1968, p. 6). Criminalisation targets individuals or groups who, because of their background or profession, must face a forced legal process, which includes discrimination, excessive force and deliberate efforts to stall their legal cases (Kontras et al. 2016). When the state uses its legislative apparatus and condemns people, it can have very serious consequences. By criminalising various acts and making them criminal offenses, the state exercises its ultimate power over its citizens by taking away some of their fundamental rights. For example, when the state arrests a person, that person loses the right to liberty, the right to work, or the right to hold a position in the government if they are classified as a suspect. When people are criminalised, depending on the circumstances, this can be a form of discrimination and oppression of citizens by the state.

Since the *era reformasi* (era of reforms) a strong "regulatory zeal" can be observed, an eagerness to increasingly "protect, control and enforce sexual morality at all levels, from national to regional" (see Arnez 2023, this volume, chapter 1). While there is

no national law that explicitly criminalises homosexual acts in Indonesia, there are other laws that are used for this purpose. For example, police and state prosecutors have used Law 44/2008 concerning Pornography to prosecute men and women who engage in a same-sex relationship.[5] Although this law regulates pornography, the explanation of article four on deviant sexual acts includes a prohibition on homosexuality.[6] According to Human Rights Watch n.d., nearly all 300 LGBT Indonesians arrested in 2017 were charged under this law (Harsono and Knight 2018). In addition, several regional regulations target same-sex sexual relationships, such as in Aceh, Banten and Palembang.[7] They include provisions to eradicate prostitution and the sin of engaging in same-sex sexuality and expressing non-normative gender identity (Wieringa 2019). Moral standards in these laws are used to enforce moral standards set according to Islamic rules. No real crimes are being fought, but LGBT people are being criminalised. As Islam sets the standard of morality in Indonesia, it is safe to argue that Islamic morality underlies these laws.

Such laws are not developed in a vacuum but are also underpinned by Islamic regulations. A case in point is *fatwa* (legal opinions) No. 57 against homosexuality, sodomy and obscenity, issued by the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Ulama Council, MUI), in 2014. The *Front Pembela Islam* (Islamic Defenders Front, FPI), for example, used it to justify acts of violence against LGBT people.

To understand the desire to criminalise LGBT in Indonesia, we might refer to the "dual process of prejudice" (Sibley and Duckitt 2013). Certain social groups in society are identified based on perceptions of the threat they pose, and the stereotypes associated with them. In the Indonesian context, condemnation of LGBT people is politically fostered through efforts to associate them as a threat to the nation. For example, by focusing on criminal cases involving the exploitation of minors, news and television programmes present LGBT as threats to the family and potential perpetrators of child sexual abuse (Hegarty 2022). At the same time, stereotypes that portray LGBT as a disease, both psychologically and sexually, continue to be perpetuated (Thajib 2022).

Even though the new Criminal Code, which was passed on 6th December 2022,[8] outlaws all forms of extramarital sexual relationships, it does not specifically criminalise LGBT people. Nonetheless, the anti-LGBT campaign in Indonesia has been successful. For example, Hegarty (2022) demonstrates how the criminalisation of LGBT takes place through the media and becomes an entertainment show. He illustrates how the state is driving the public discourse on the perception of same-sex sexuality as a crime. By broadcasting images of police raids on private events claimed to be gay parties, the state positions itself as the protagonist in a drama against evil homosexuals. Images depicting immorality and sexually motivated crimes, Hegarty says, pique the public's interest and spark speculation about who "the criminal" was. If the purpose of criminalisation is to tell society that certain actions should not be done (Hart 1968), the media spectacle of LGBT works successfully and in a harmful way. In addition to exacerbating the fear, hatred and dehumanisation of LGBT people in society, the drama of police raids also forces them to hide further in silence without being able to do much to defend themselves.

Because violence is morally unacceptable, perpetrators need justification for their actions to be socially approved. In this context, criminalisation becomes a justification for violence against certain groups (Daskin 2016). This is particularly evident in the case of violence against LGBT people in Indonesia. Hegarty's (2022) study reveals that the nationally broadcasted images of police raids on gay parties become a source of justification for violence and discrimination against sexual and gender minorities across the country. More explicitly, Listiorini (2020) points out that the increasingly negative coverage of LGBT in the media corresponds with the growing discrimination and violence experienced by this minority group.

In addition to the criminalisation of LGBT people in Indonesia, which is taken up in the above studies and becomes a legitimising tool for violence against gender and sexual minorities, there is another discourse, not as strong, that revolves around care. Care is more than an affective concept; it involves ethicopolitical practices and obligations. Santos (2020, p. 128) defines care as "a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible." Citing Joan C. Tronto, Santos elaborates that what he means by the world encompasses "our bodies, ourselves, and our environment;" thus, caring necessitates defending ourselves and others against "extraordinary incursions of violence or other forms of disruption into our daily lives." According to Carol Gilligan (as cited in Tronto 1987), care has three fundamental characteristics. First, the ethic of care is based on moral concepts of responsibility for the wellbeing of others and interpersonal relationships. Second, this morality is grounded in concrete circumstances and is not formal and abstract. Third, this morality is best expressed as an activity rather than a set of principles.

The exercise of care in relation to LGBT issues in Indonesia is not straightforward. For example, Thajib (2022) elucidates how caring is used to justify the criminalisation and oppression of LGBT people. He shows how AILA, in their petition to outlaw LGBT before the Constitutional Court in 2016, claimed that criminalising same-sex relationships was a form of care to protect children and the nation from a potential public health crisis and moral decay." In his study, we see an unethical practice of care by AILA, who instrumentalise it to justify and legitimise their oppressive interests and views. They utilise care as a political tool to appeal to public sympathy, but at the same time, create a hierarchy separating the deserving and undeserving individuals. They work to save those considered innocent (e.g. children and society at large), but in so doing, they criminalise those considered a threat (LGBT people). In this sense, AILA's care practice has nurtured the paternalistic culture that decides whose lives are worthy of consideration and whose are not.

This chapter sheds light on some genuine and ethical care practices in response to LGBT in Indonesia. To this end, I refer to Rodríguez's (2022) study, which looks at several Indonesian progressive Muslim organisations and discusses how virtues like social justice, compassion and liberation have motivated them to embrace queer people. The emphasis on those moral virtues, combined with the understanding that Islam is a source of social support and connectedness, according to Rodríguez, leads these Muslim actors to be more concerned with orthopraxy than orthodoxy in their efforts to build a functioning and peaceful society. Drawing on the characteristics

of care outlined by Carol Gilligan, we can safely argue that the actors observed by Rodríguez have practiced an ethic of care. They have prioritised responsibility, solidarity and concern for supporting and building equal relationships with Indonesian gender and sexual minorities.

3.4 Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)

Muhammadiyah was founded in 1912 in Yogyakarta by Ahmad Dahlan. It can be seen as a reflection of religious awakening in the history of Islam in Java. Muhammadiyah, which means "followers of Muhammad," portrays the process of Islamisation of Java at a time when many Muslims were dissatisfied with the existing religious situations. Muhammadiyah, according to Nakamura (2017), was a type of corrective action that sought to return Islamic teachings, whether in terms of rituals, morality and ethics, to what they imagined to be the standard of Islamic orthodoxy. Its mission was to modernise and purify the Islamic practices in Java from *Kejawen*, a Javanese religious tradition resulting from a blending of animistic, Buddhist and Hindu traditions (Beck 2019). Because it emphasises the importance of modernisation and purification of Islam from *Kejawen*, Muhammadiyah is often labelled a modernist and puritan movement.

Nahdlatul Ulama, which means "Awakening of the Ulama," was founded by Hasyim Asy'ari in 1926 in East Java. It was founded primarily to defend traditionalist Islamic practices that allow for incorporating local culture into religious rituals. In other words, NU arose in response to modern Islamic movements in Indonesia, such as Muhammadiyah, which opposed the incorporation of local Javanese cultural traditions influenced by Hindu and Buddhist traditions into Islamic practices. Deliar Noer elucidates that NU was established because "the traditionalist in Java felt as if they had been attacked from two different directions: in the cradle of Islam by a new regime that had come to power, imbued with ideas which they could not tolerate; at home by reformist ideas, which they considered to be similar to Wahabism and which had gained substantial ground" (Noer 1973, p. 228).

Based on the history of the two organisations, many scholars argue that NU and Muhammadiyah represent two distinct groups in Indonesian Islam. NU represents the traditionalist group that defends acculturation between Islam and local cultural traditions, and Muhammadiyah represents the modernist and reformist group that calls for puritanism and Islamic orthodoxy (Sila 2020; Suwarno 2019; Hasbullah 2014; Barton 2014). However, despite these differences, these two organisations have quite fundamental similarities. Apart from the fact that they are social and intellectual movements driven by philanthropic ideas based on educational initiatives and school networks, NU and Muhammadiyah embrace the values of moderation in Islam. Despite their paradoxical character, which is "compatible with democracy but also with certain types of authoritarianism" (Menchik 2019, p. 419), NU and Muhammadiyah continue to uphold Indonesia's commitment to religious pluralism, reproduce democratic norms, reject the idea of an Islamic state based on sharia law

and forge a political compromise between liberalism and religious conservatism in Indonesia (Hefner 2019; Menchik 2019; Brown 2019). Even though they value diversity and tolerance, they reject liberalism because they do not want to separate the public sphere from religion because, for them, religion is integral to peaceful coexistence (Menchik 2016).

Both organisations have a very heteronormative family ideology. Muhammadiyah calls its family ideology *Keluarga Sakinah*, which means a family that is formed based on legal marriage between a man and a woman, has the blessing of God, and can foster feelings of love among its members so that they have a feeling of security, calm, peaceful and happy in trying to achieve prosperity in this world and the hereafter (PP Aisyiyah 2017). Meanwhile, the family ideology of the NU is called *Keluarga Maslahah*, which means that the family is beneficial and always brings good to the environment by following the will of God (Mujiburrahman 2017). A *keluarga maslahah* has five foundations that must be maintained: the need to protect *al-din* (religion), *al-nafs* (soul/self), *al-nasl* (lineage/offspring), *al'aql* (reason) and *al-maal* (property) (Salim 2017).

In general, both ideologies emphasize the heteronormative family with an asymmetrical division of roles between husband and wife, where the husband acts as the head of the family and a caring, loving, responsible breadwinner and the wife as a mother who is obedient and loyal to her husband. Therefore, pervasive heteronormativity in NU and Muhammadiyah means rejection of the existence of LGBT, thus following the narrative of LGBT as a sin and an illness.

3.5 Muhammadiyah's Non-Confrontational Approach Toward LGBT

During the 2016 sexual moral panic, Muhammadiyah issued no official statements concerning LGBT people. According to the Secretary-General, Abdul Mu'ti, Muhammadiyah wishes to promote dialogue to avoid "unproductive public arguments" because theological edicts will not resolve the controversy (The Jakarta Post 2016). Despite this decision, many prominent Muhamamdiyah figures have publicly condemned LGBT people. For example, Haedar Nashir, the General Chairman of Muhammadiyah, stated that LGBT people violate the Pancasila (Indonesian ideology), religious values and human nature (Suara Muhammadiyah 2018). He called for the government to outlaw LGBT in Indonesia. In August 2022, Anwar Abbas, a member of Muhammadiyah's central leadership board, stated that LGBT is a disease that can be cured if there is a will (Republika.co.id 2022). On the same occasion, he also said that LGBT contradicts religion and the Indonesian Constitution Article 29 (1), which states that Indonesia is based on one true God. He declared that those who try to legalise LGBT are tantamount to going against their religious teachings and the Indonesian Constitution.

The public condemnation of LGBT people by Muhammadiyah elites contradicts the organisation's original intention to engage in productive dialogue on the issue. How did this contradiction come about? According to *Bapak* Hikam, a member of *Majelis Tarjih and Tajdid* Muhammadiyah, a council that tackles Islamic legal issues in the organisation, Muhammadiyah's decision not to issue a statement was pragmatic. He acknowledged that the LGBT is a sensitive issue and that there are various points of view within Muhammadiyah. As a result, an official statement may spark unnecessary conflict and division within the organisation. He said:

> Muhammadiyah cannot be a proponent or opposer of such sensitive issues, but Muhammadiyah will let its members take any stance. It is the strategy. It is how I read the situation. For sensitive issues, Muhammadiyah will not take an official position. Why? Because Muhammadiyah's members have diverse opinions. If Muhammadiyah takes a firm stance that is different from the views that exist among its members, these members may terminate their memberships. However, as a member of Muhammadiyah, one may take his/her stance, and they are encouraged to do so. If one is a proponent of the issue, he/she may defend it. It is how Muhammadiyah maintains its existence.[9]

Bapak Hikam's view above is in line with Latief's (2017) observation which highlights the contestation of official and unofficial opinions within the organisation. The official opinion reflects Muhammadiyah‘s perspective that has been issued in writing and signed by the general chairman, whereas an unofficial opinion is a personal perspective of a Muhammadiyah member. Even though unofficial, personal perspectives may significantly influence opinions within the organisation. Despite this distinction, in practice, multiple but similar personal opinions expressed by Muhammadiyah‘s prominent figures and relayed by the media could easily be misinterpreted by the public as the organisation's official position.

3.6 Aisyiyah's Press Release: LGBT Disapproval

While Muhammadiyah did not issue an official statement, its autonomous women's organisation, Aisyiyah, issued a press release considering the LGBT controversy in 2016. The press release, titled *Pernyataan Sikap Pimpinan Pusat Aisyiyah tentang LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Biseksual, Transgender)* [(The Official Statement of Aisyiyah's Central Leadership regarding LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender)], was published in the magazine Suara Aisyiyah page 16, 4th edition, April 2016. As an official document, the press release was signed by the Chairwoman of Aisyiyah, Siti Noordjanah Djohantini.

Aisyiyah's statement contains four essential points. None of these four points explicitly condemn or propose punishment for LGBT people, but they only express disapproval. First, by referring to heterosexual marriage as a basis of sexual behaviour that is "correct, good, and healthy religiously, socially, legally, and biologically," Aisiyah implies that LGBT is wrong, evil and unhealthy. Therefore, although this phrase does not directly condemn LGBT, it clearly conveys to the public that people should not engage in same-sex relationships and transgender expressions. According

to Aisyiyah, the Marriage Law 1/1974, which prescribes heterosexual marriage, and Islamic norms contained in the Quran, including Quran (29: 31–35), which refers to the story of the Prophet Lot, are the rules for social and sexual relations of Muslim communities in Indonesia. Second, Aisyiyah's rejection of LGBT is inextricably linked to heteronormativity, which is the foundation of its gender and family norms. Aisyiyah suggests that within the ideology of *Keluarga Sakinah*, the family is the central pillar in providing sexual education for children. Thus, the family is the main bulwark to protect children from LGBT influence. Third, Aisyiyah's opposition to LGBT is motivated by its concern about the movement seeking to legalise same-sex marriage. However, several studies have refuted this fear, pointing out that the LGBT movement in Indonesia has never sought to legalise same-sex marriage (see, for example, Wijaya 2022; Thajib 2022). Fourth, without explicitly mentioning it, Aisyiyah's press release indicates that although they consider non-normative gender and sexuality wrong, it is human. Therefore, Aisyiyah insists that sexual orientation should not be used as a basis for discrimination or violence. Aisyiyah cites the Quran (21: 107), which speaks of Islam as a religion of mercy. Moreover, it refers to the Quran (2: 183), which speaks of Islam as a religion that guides and enlightens humanity.

Aisyiyah's press release adds to the complexity of examining Muhammadiyah's response to LGBT. While it is an official statement, it is issued by an autonomous organisation, so its power within the Muhammadiyah association is not entirely clear. According to *Bapak* Hikam, Aisyiyah's official statement can be considered to represent Muhammadiyah's views because, during its formulation, a representative from Muhammadiyah was involved. However, *Ibu* Alimatul Qibtiyah—a member of *Majelis Tarjih and Tajdid* Muhammadiyah and the Chairwoman of the Research and Development Unit (LPP) Aisyiyah—expressed a different opinion. She said that Aisyiyah's statement was only an appeal specifically aimed at Aisyiyah's members, even though Muhammadiyah's members, in general, may also read it.[10] As an appeal, she continued, this statement was not organisationally binding, so members are free to follow it or not without consequences. Furthermore, because this statement was formulated and signed by the Chairwoman of Aisyiyah, *Ibu* Alimatul suggests that it only represents Aisiyiah's opinion and may not be assumed to represent the perspective of Muhammadiyah as a whole.

3.7 NU's Religious Edict: Condemning LGBT

During the 2016 anti-LGBT moral panic, NU became Indonesia's most influential Islamic organisation to issue an official statement condemning LGBT. The religious edict of the organisation advocates for the criminalisation of LGBT people, urging the government to criminalise any LGBT-related activities or campaigns. The statement, titled *Sikap dan taushiyah PBNU tentang perilaku seksual menyimpang dan penanganannya* (PBNU's attitude and message regarding deviant sexual behaviour and

its handling), was delivered to the public by the deputy chairman, *Kyai*[11] Miftakhul Akhyar, on 25th February 2016 in Jakarta (NU Online 2016).

The statement begins by affirming that Islam protects reproduction rights as an essential factor in human survival and that these rights can only be exercised through the institution of legal heterosexual marriage. Therefore, NU proposes that all sexual relations outside legal marriage should be considered a crime against humanity. In this context, NU condemns LGBT as a deviant behaviour that violates human dignity and human reproductive rights. This condemnation extends to all parties in Indonesia who promote and support the existence of LGBT people.

NU conveys three important messages in its statement. First, they reject any ideas and movements that allow or recognise the existence of LGBT. This rejection is based on their understanding that LGBT is a deviant "behaviour that violates human nature" that should be "rehabilitated." This suggestion leads to the second message, where NU calls for the government to make rehabilitation mandatory for LGBT people. These rehabilitation efforts, according to NU, should be a shared responsibility between the government and society. Finally, NU's third message calls for punishment against any effort and campaign that seeks to normalise "LGBT activities." In seeking to criminalise LGBT, NU emphasises two crucial points: NU proposes to the government to ban all forms of LGBT propaganda, including foreign intervention and financial assistance supporting LGBT activities, and NU advises the parliament (DPR), especially the members who come from the organisation, to draft a law that classifies LGBT as a crime, recommends rehabilitation for LGBT people and prescribes punishments for those who propagate the normalisation of it.

3.8 Aisyiyah Yogyakarta: Mutual Respect Through a Healthcare Programme

In Muhammadiyah, there is a different approach between the central and regional leadership in addressing LGBT issues. This difference was revealed during my conversations in Yogyakarta. At the suggestion of the regional board of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta that gender, sexuality and family issues are Aisyiyah's areas of expertise, I visited the regional board of Aisyiyah Yogyakarta. During my visit, it became apparent that they keep religious beliefs separate in their social programme. While they believe same-sex sexual relationships and transgender expression violate Islamic norms, they employ the ethics of care in their discursive practice.

Aisyiyah Yogyakarta has a public health programme that integrates the LGBT community. In the TB-HIV care programme,[12] Aisyiyah Yogyakarta works closely with other HIV prevention organisations, such as Yayasan Kebaya dan Yayasan Victory Plus, where many transgender women and gay men work. This cooperation is primarily in screening and assisting patients with TB and HIV. *Ibu* Zulaikha Ajron, the Chairwoman of Aisyiyah Yogyakarta, explained the programme as follows:

> The collaboration through the HIV program is only a few years old. We used to work specifically on TB issues. However, we found that people with TB, if their sexual behaviour is not healthy, may get infected with HIV. So, we assist TB and HIV patients at the same time. If those whom we assist are from the poor, we accompany them to the health center or hospital, find a shelter house and help them with nutrition from the donations of Aisyiyah women, such as eggs and milk, and other nutritious foods.[13]

When asked how this cooperation may foster dialogue with the LGBT community, *Ibu* Zulaikha proposed a separation of religious beliefs from human values. Despite her belief that LGBT people should return to their *fitrah* (nature), i.e. heterosexuality, she insists that as part of a society that needs support in health care, LGBT people deserve to be treated as such with respect and compassion. She argues that Islam's universal values of equality, kindness and compassion should be the impetus in fighting for humanity. Thus, for her, religious belief on a specific issue should not interfere with the humanitarian mission. If requested, she says, Aisyiyah will provide religious assistance such as *pengajian* or religious counselling, but otherwise, they focus on treating TB and HIV patients without judgment. She then narrated her personal experience of socialising with her transgender neighbour:

> For me, they are human beings just like us, created equally by God. Therefore, I do not look at them based on their behaviour or social class. If it is a matter of humanity, I have no problem with it. I have a neighbour who is like that (transgender). When she gets sick, I visit her. When she is in trouble, I help her. I invite her to return to her fitrah, but whether or not she does is not my concern.[14]

For Aisyiyah Yogyakarta, the collaboration with other HIV prevention organisations also provides a learning opportunity for their members and cadres. For example, Aisyiyah University of Yogyakarta collaborates with the Yayasan Kebaya, Kebaya Foundation.[15] Yayasan Kebaya (*Keluarga Besar Waria* Yogyakarta or Yogyakarta Transgender Family) is an NGO that provides free shelter and assistance to *waria* and people with HIV/AIDS. With an MoU which took effect in 2015 and ran until 2021, Yayasan Kebaya provided lectures and a place for internship for the university's nursing students regarding HIV/AIDS patient care. Through such cooperation, the students should learn to accept and respect differences that go against the existing societal norms.

Yan Michael, my interlocutor at Yayasan Victory Plus, confirmed *Ibu* Zulaikha's statement and said there have never been any problems working with Aisyiyah. He emphasised that his staff, whether gay men or transgender people, can easily mingle and cooperate with members of Aisyiyah Yogyakarta. He narrated how they can work together without difficulties:

> Our staff is 80% HIV positive. They are from different backgrounds; many are gay men and transgender people. Yet, Aisyiyah remains open and tolerant of them. There is no discrimination. Even in every activity, such as training for their cadre, they also involve us. Whomever we send to join in their events, they receive them well. Whomever it is. There have never been any complaints. So far, they have been open and never restrictive.[16]

3.9 NU Yogyakarta: Religious Advocacy for Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah

NU Yogyakarta also uses an ethic of care in its discursive practices related to LGBT issues. For example, at the beginning of this chapter I referred to the *Pesantren Waria* al-Fatah in my introductory vignette. *Kyai* Hamroeli Harun, an *ulama* (religious scholar) from NU, was instrumental in supporting the establishment of this *pesantren* in 2008. He encouraged the establishment of the *pesantren* and provided protection and teaching assistance. This support continues until today. Moreover, in 2020, Fatayat, NU's women's organisation, established an official partnership with the *pesantren* to provide *ustadzah* (female Islamic teacher). *Ibu* Shinta shared her experience with NU Yogyakarta:

> Throughout the journey of this *pesantren*, ulama who approached us and wanted to guide us were from NU. In my view, they are very open. They embrace us because they believe that waria are human beings with the right to religion and worship. We studied the Quran together. We studied the verse (Quran 24:31) that indicates the acceptance of waria in Islam …. We also have activities together with Fatayat. Waria is socially regarded as a woman. The National Commission of Women has decided this since 2012. Therefore, Fatayat includes us in their activities because we are part of women's issues.[17]

In 2015, the University of NU Jepara and the State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta teamed up to offer *Pesantren* al-Fatah to develop a *fiqh*[18] *waria*. The aim was to clarify the position of *waria* in Islam, particularly concerning prayer procedures. This offer, however, became a source of contention for the *pesantren*, leading to its closure in 2016 by the FJI and the police. Concerning this controversy, I spoke with *Ustadz* Arif Nuh Safri, one of the teachers at the *pesantren* who has been teaching since 2010.

Ustadz Arif's decision to teach at *Pesantren* al-Fatah was initially motivated by curiosity. However, as he got to know his students better, realised the stigma and discrimination they faced, and saw how serious they were about learning and praying, he was moved and became more fervent in supporting and defending them. Concerning the *fiqh waria* controversy, *Ustadz* Arif argued that the most profound human rights for a human being are the right to religion and the right to worship because God created every human being equal. Thus, the offer of *fiqh waria* is a form of recognition of this equality. *Fiqh waria,* accrding to him*,* is necessary because it will provide clear guidance for people with non-binary gender identities in religious matters, particularly in congregational prayers. Thereby, he was disappointed that this plan was politicised.

> The public finds it difficult to accept the presence of waria in the mosque. There is confusion regarding the procedure of prayer for waria; which row should they be in? Should they be in the male's or female's row? This is where we need to formulate this fiqh. We need to provide clarity. That is precisely the point of the fiqh waria. This kind of clarity (in prayer procedures) is what they need. When FJI raided *the pesantren* in 2016, it was because of the issue of fiqh waria. Well, the proposal to formulate the fiqh was actually not from us (*Pesantren* al-Fatah), but it was an offer from the sharia faculty UIN Sunan Kalijaga in collaboration with the University of NU.[19]

Ustadz Arif suggested that Muslims should be honest (*jujur*) in responding to LGBT issues. He gave an example that there are differences in the classical *fiqh* in viewing same-sex sexual acts according to which they are viewed as a transgression on the one hand but often overlooked on the other. He also emphasised that this classical *fiqh* was a product of the understanding of the jurists, influenced by the realities of life in their time, and that these legal products must therefore be constantly adapted to social developments. Finally, *Ustadz* Arif suggested not only giving due consideration to the history of classical *fiqh*, but also being open to the development of modern science, even if it comes from the West, which accepts homosexuality and transgender identity as part of human diversity. As he discussed the Muslim attitude towards LGBT, *Ustadz* Arif underlined the concept of Islam as *rahmatan lil alamin*, which means a blessing for the entire universe; he insisted that Islam does not create barriers that discriminate. Because Islam requires Muslims to engage in *da'wah* (proselytisation), he said, these efforts must carry the values of mercy, which means that, Muslims must not force and dominate in *da'wah*. He argued that "our job as Muslims is only to remind each other in goodness, whether or not someone changes after we remind them is no longer our business, but God's."

Carol Gilligan's (in Tronto 1987) characteristics of care are helpful to explain how central and regional leaders in Muhammadiyah and NU approach LGBT differently. The regional leaders in both organisations practice an ethic of care because they are closer to the grassroots reality. Therefore, their experiences are grounded and connected to the concrete circumstances of daily life in their communities. Their views are also based on the realities and problems of the people they encounter daily. In contrast, the central leadership might live in a bubble detached from the reality of grassroots society. Hence, they operate on a more abstract, universal and formal level guided by principles of rights and rules. As they view LGBT from a prejudiced and stereotyped perspective and see them as a transgression and a threat to society, their desire to criminalise is an attempt to ensure that the guilty are punished, the innocent protected and the societal balance is preserved from the intrusion of evil.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the ambivalent attitude of Indonesia's most influential Muslim mass organisations, Muhammadiyah and NU, towards LGBT people. This ambivalence is reflected in the discrepancy in approaches between those at the national level, who condemn and advocate for the criminalisation of LGBT people, and those at the regional level in Yogyakarta, who embrace this minority group through interpersonal relationships and equal cooperation. This chapter has also discussed how Islam contributes to this disparity. On the one hand, the idea of God's law and sin becomes the basis for the desire to criminalise LGBT people; on the other hand, the Islamic values of mercy and equality become the driving force in care practices.

Islam is a dominant source of social norms that should not be violated in Indonesia. The Islamic heteronormativity that governs Indonesian sexual culture allows sexual relations only within the framework of legal marriage; so same-sex relationships are foreign and incomprehensible. Non-heterosexual people are seen as outside the norm, which invites them to be referred to as sinful. The concept of sin enters the criminal justice system and serves as a justification for the criminalisation of LGBT people. In addition to religious narratives, the health narrative is also used in the anti-LGBT campaign. Homosexual acts are portrayed as contributing to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, which reinforces the perception that LGBT people are a public health risk. Furthermore, they are presented as potential sexual child sex offenders. When religious and health narratives are combined, they provide a powerful justification for the criminalisation of LGBT people, which in turn justifies violence and discrimination directed at them.

I have found that the desire to criminalise LGBT people in Muhammadiyah and NU comes from the central leadership of the organisations. Unlike the NU leadership, which strongly opposes, condemns and campaigns for LGBT criminalisation, Muhammadiyah takes a more diplomatic approach. Organisationally, Muhammadiyah did not express religious condemnation of LGBT people; instead, the organisation encouraged open discussions to avoid sustained and counterproductive controversies. However, personal comments from its elites that uniformly condemn and call for the criminalisation of LGBT people reflect the dominant stance in Muhammadiyah. According to the official statement of Aisyiyah, while Aisyiyah does not explicitly condemn same-sex sexual relations, it considers them to be antithetical to heterosexuality. This implies that LGBT violates religious, legal, social and health norms. Nonetheless, these Muslim organisations' denunciation of LGBT is always accompanied by calls to avoid violence and prohibit discrimination. They argue that Islam only prohibits the act; thus, the perpetrator must be embraced and rehabilitated.

As I have argued, the authorities at the regional level practice care as they are closer to the realities of grassroots life. Their perceptions are grounded and tied to their concrete experiences and interactions with LGBT people. This allows them to better understand the reality and problems that LGBT people face daily. The same may not be said for members of the central leadership boards, who live in a bubble disconnected from grassroots realities. As a result, their views on LGBT people are primarily based on abstract ideas and shaped by prejudice and stereotypes.

In conclusion, based on my findings, I contend that while religious norms are often difficult to negotiate, Muslims must confront realities that are often at odds with the norms they believe in. Instead of condemning and marginalising, Muslim organisations could be the main actors in initiating an honest dialogue in a spirit of openness, equality and mutual respect with the stigmatised LGBT people. When specific religious norms cannot withstand differences, Muslims can always rely on universal Islamic values centred on compassionate humanity.

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Notes

1. She transitioned as a teenager.
2. Interview with Ibu Shinta Ratri, co-founder of *Pesantren* Waria al-Fatah, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 12 December 2018, in Yogyakarta. As Ibu Shinta Ratri passed away in February 2023, the future of the *pesantren* is unclear.
3. As Ewing (2020) has rightfully pointed out, the term LGBT often carries a negative connotation in Indonesia. However, I use the term LGBT here—because it was used by my interlocutors.
4. Interview with Dédé Oetomo, a scholar and human rights activist, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 1st November 2019, in Surabaya.
5. In Law 44/2008, Pornography is defined as images, sketches, illustrations, photographs, writings, sounds, moving images, animations, cartoons, conversations, gestures or other forms of messages through various forms of communication media and/or public performances, which contain obscenity or sexual exploitation that violate the norms of decency in society.
6. Article four Law 44/2008 mentions various elements of pornography, one of which explicitly includes deviant sexual relation. The elucidation section of this article goes into more detail stating that what is meant by “deviant sexual relation” includes intercourse or other sexual activities with corpses, animals, oral sex, anal sex, lesbians and homosexuals.
7. Local regulations targeting LGBT are among others: a) in Aceh, article 63 (1) and 64 (1) of Qanun Aceh 06/2014 concerning the *Jinayat* (acts prohibited by Sharia) Law punishes the perpetrators of *liwat* (anal intercourse) and *musahaqah* (lesbianism) with a maximum of 100 flogging, or a maximum fine of 1000 g of pure gold, or a maximum imprisonment of 100 months; b) in Banten, article 5 (4) of Serang district regulation 02/2020 concerning HIV and AIDS states that homosexual partners and “*waria* and transgender” as key populations in the spread of HIV/AIDS; c.). in Palembang, article 8 (2) of Palembang City Regional Regulation No. 02/2004 on the Eradication of Prostitution includes “homo sex,” “lesbian” and “sodomy” as acts of prostitution that are punishable by up to 5 years imprisonment and or a fine of up to Rp 5,000,000.00.
8. At the time of writing this article, the official document of the new Criminal Code has not yet been published. However, according to the final draft submitted to parliament by the government, article 415 (1) states that anyone who engages in sexual relationships with someone who is not his wife, or her husband shall be punished for adultery with imprisonment up to one year or a fine up to Rp 10,000,000.00. The final draft of the new criminal code is available at https://bphn.go.id/data/documents/draft_ruu_kuhp_final.pdf. Accessed 12 December 2023.
9. Interview with Bapak Hikam (not a real name as he wished to be anonymized), a member of Majelis Tarjih Muhammadiyah, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 16th January 2019, in UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta.
10. Interview with Ibu Alimatul Qibtiyah, a member of Majelis Tarjih Muhamamdiyah and the Chairwoman of the Research and Development Unit Aisyiyah, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 10th November 2019, in UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta.
11. Leader of a *pesantren*
12. TB-HIV care is a nationwide programme pioneered by the central leadership of Aisyiyah since 2003. It is a community-based movement for the prevention and mitigation of the spread of tuberculosis and HIV. In this context, Aisyiyah prepares their cadres for educating the public about these two infectious diseases, and to find patients and provide them with counseling and assistance in undergoing therapy.
13. Interview with Ibu Zulaikha Ajron, the Chairwoman of the Regional Board of Asyiyah Yogyakarta, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 7th October 2019 in the office of Aisyiyah Yogyakarta.
14. Interview with Ibu Zulaikha Ajron, the Chairwoman of the Regional Board of Asyiyah Yogyakarta, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 7th October 2019 in office of Aisyiyah Yogyakarta.
15. Universitas Aisyiyah Yogyakarta lists Yayasan Kebaya as one of its local networks at https://green.unisayogya.ac.id/local-network/. Accessed 12 December 2023.

16. Interview with Yan Michael, the Manager of Victory Plus, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 29th October 2019 in Yogyakarta.
17. Interview with Ibu Shinta Ratri, co-founder of *Pesantren* Waria al-Fatah Yogyakarta, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 12th December 2018 in Yogyakarta.
18. *Fiqh* is the codification of principles of conduct that religious scholars extract from the Qur'an and Traditions, an analogy of these two and a consensus of legal specialists. See Federspiel 1995, pp. 59–60.
19. Interview with *ustadz* Arif Nuh Safri, a teacher at *Pesantren* Waria al-Fatah Yogyakarta, carried out by Anwar Kholid on 8th January 2019 in Yogyakarta.

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Part II
Halal Lifestyle

Chapter 4
Fraught Relations: Indonesian Modest Fashion, New York Catwalks, and the Spectacle of Travel

Asri Saraswati

Abstract This chapter examines the rise of Indonesian Muslim fashion, or "modest fashion," and its connection to the New York catwalks. It seeks to uncover the interplay between the narratives of freedom and travel in creating the global capitalist pull for modest fashion in Indonesia. Thus, it contributes to one of the aims of this volume to "explore the different ways in which modesty and commodification interact" (see Arnez 2023, this volume, Chap. 1). Contributing to studies examining political statements of designers of Islamic clothing for women, this chapter discusses the popularity of Indonesian modest fashion on the New York catwalks in the context of the Western world's feelings of guilt towards Muslims, prompted by anti-Muslim sentiment. Displays of fashion by Indonesian designers on catwalks and the designers trotting New York City were used as political statements and marketing tools. Particular attention will be paid to Indonesian designers' engagement with the New York Fashion Week and the Couture Fashion Week, and the images of travel displayed. This article sheds light on the problematic relationship between Indonesian Muslim fashion and narratives of travel, specifically considering the highly politically contentious moment when refugees from Islamic countries were denied entry into the U.S. This created a platform for Indonesians to promote equality and stand against the racist travel ban posed upon Muslims, yet it also produced the myth that the freedom to travel is guaranteed.

Keywords Capitalism · Designers · Modest fashion · Neoliberalism · Travel · Veiling

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4.1 Introduction

On an afternoon in 2012 in Gandaria City Mall, a luxurious shopping center newly opened in South Jakarta, Indonesia, I sat at a café with a French-sounding name with three young college-age young women. They wore either 4-inch stilettos or platform shoes, and two of them donned turban-inspired veils in festive colors. Their attire ranged from a bohemian poncho, skinny-cut pants paired with a hip-length cardigan, to grey harem pants. Sat on the table was a Furla glitter candy bag, prized for around USD 198 at Macy's and could only be bought abroad. At one moment, one of the girls reached over to her friend's veil, correcting it as she saw her poncho slide, slightly revealing her neck. Their colorful clothing, combining Middle East-inspired style depicts a middle to upper-class "cosmopolitan outlook" (Beta 2014) representing the flourishing Muslim fashion in Indonesia in the early 2010s, which, among others, was popularized by the social media, blogs, Instagram, Twitter, and magazines such as *Aquila Asia* which introduced Muslim fashion from abroad to Indonesian readers. This vibrant Muslim fashion was also popularized by a group called Hijabers Community,[1] which was founded by a group of young Muslim women in urban Jakarta and quickly established chapters in other big cities in the country such as Solo, Bandung, and Aceh. Each chapter had a group of organizers who diligently held social events, workshops on veiling and makeup, religious discussions, as well as entrepreneurial-themed seminars. Its followers engaged with the community for various reasons, starting from seeking inspiration on how to fashion the veil, to seeking empowerment and building self-esteem as young Muslim women (Novitasari 2014; Widjajanta et al. 2018). The rise of the Hijabers Community went alongside the rise of Muslim fashion brands of that era.

My respondents' attire showed their creative take on global fashion. They used clothing as a medium for self-expression and adapting styles to their personalities. Their turban, ponchos, and harem pants, which at the time were not common in Indonesia, show engagement with styles from various corners of the world. The imported branded bag, attractive colors, and interesting styles mark a cosmopolitan look, that is creative, bold, and transcultural. In between pastries, pasta, and lemon tea, they shared how they came to don the *hijab* and their take on the current fashion of Indonesian women. They discussed a few figures of the Hijabers Community, who at that time, was known to put their OOTD (Outfit Of The Day) on display on their blog and Twitter, showcasing their attractive outfits and bags while trotting the city. Several of the group's cofounders, such as Dian Pelangi and Jenahara, became well-known fashion designers. In her blog, dianrainbow.blogspot.com, Pelangi displayed her attire during her daily activities and travels, showing pictures of her "globe-trotting adventures" and building a representation of Indonesian Muslims as "travel savvy women" (Beta 2014).

I met my respondents in 2012 when donning the veil among youth in colorful style was an emerging trend in urban cities in Indonesia, one which Beta acutely explains as "putting obvious symbols of religiousness at the service of a decidedly cosmopolitan outlook" (Beta 2014, p. 386). In today's Indonesia, Furla bags have

become available in major malls in Jakarta for 3–10 million IDR per piece. Another important development in the current decades is the easing of boundaries between nations afforded by low-cost carriers or budget flights which developed rapidly in Indonesia and Southeast Asia began in 2005. This had led to what experts called "a boom of passenger growth-rate" in the period 2005–2012 (see Damuri and Anas 2005; Nuryakin et al. 2019). Travelling and fashion become two modes of lifestyle that are intertwined as fashion bloggers, such as Dian Pelangi, show their trips abroad and the clothing they wore on social media. With mainstream media outlets using social media posts as content, photos of fashion, and public figures trotting the globe reach the wide public. One news article shows Pelangi's attire during her trip to Europe, titling the piece "*Dian Pelangi dan Foto-foto Inspirasi Hijab untuk Traveling ke Daerah Dingin*" ("Dian Pelangi and Inspirational Photos for Hijab Styles to Travel to Cold Countries") (Santoso 2016). While my respondents in 2012 could only buy Furla bags abroad and be familiar with non-Indonesian fashion bloggers to look for inspiration, expressions of religiosity through fashion and traveling today have become more accessible for the Indonesian middle-class.

This chapter views the transnational contexts that helped the rise of Indonesian modest fashion and examines how the promises of going global and ideas of travel supported the popularity of modest fashion. The cosmopolitan look of Indonesian modest fashion as displayed by the respondents in 2012 shows that the references to global spaces and the promises of going abroad and buying imported goods have supported the popularity of Indonesian modest fashion in the early 2010s. This chapter focuses on the modernist notion of travel, which communicates the promises of success and being able to "arrive" abroad. This chapter observes the success of Indonesian modest fashion as being propelled by what Caren Kaplan terms the "modernist myth of travel" (Kaplan 1996). It argues that the narrations about traveling have become a technology for the global capitalist industry that preys upon Indonesian Muslims as consumers.

4.2 Methods

Applying textual analysis, this chapter analyzes the depictions of and engagement between Indonesian modest fashion and New York City as a landscape to argue for the interplay between the spectacle of traveling and human right's discourse of liberty as those that create the global capitalist pull for the modest fashion industry in Indonesia. I connect the rise of Muslim fashion or modest fashion in Indonesia and the transnational contexts that helped catalyze its success. By viewing the connection between Indonesian modest fashion and New York City catwalks, this chapter observes what Lowe (2015) calls "intimacies" between colonialism and capitalism, and between racism within the U.S and the U.S. imperialism abroad, as all rely upon "genealogies of liberty" to repress minorities both in the north and the global south.

This chapter analyzes advertisements, media coverage, and interviews about Indonesian modest fashion that were shown on New York catwalks. My findings

are drawn from preliminary research conducted in 2012 when the Hijabers Community was recently established and colorful youthful style in veiling became part of Indonesian popular culture. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, we analyzed the connection between youth, Islam, and popular culture, as reflected in the emergence of a youthful and contemporary representation of religiosity, depicted through fashion and media. I then re-explore Indonesian modest fashion and its transnationality with American landscapes, specifically in New York City, through observing media reports about the participation of Indonesian modest fashion designers on the New York catwalks and the designers' political statements as well as engagement with ideas of travel. For this discussion, I begin with the year 2015 when Indonesian modest fashion was displayed at Couture Fashion Week and end with 2018 when one of the designers conducted fraud through one of her businesses.

I begin with a textual analysis of ads and media while situating the engagement of Indonesian designers with New York catwalks within larger American politics towards Muslims. I then assess the interplay between the language of liberty with capitalism and modest fashion to understand how ideas and images of "arriving in America" and "traveling to America" are used to represent individual and communal liberty and success, which is necessary to create "modern subjects" out of minorities.[2] This finding ultimately helps to analyze the ubiquity of ideas of travel among Indonesian Muslims. This chapter does not intend to undermine the success of modest fashion as a force in activism against Islamophobia, nor does it undermine the designers' hard work to advocate for Muslims and local culture on the global stage. Rather it aims to look at the complex web of power behind these successes and scrutinizes how the idea of 'freedom to travel' serves as a technology for U.S. imperialism, strategically creating cross points between religiosity and materiality.

4.3 Modest Fashion and the Minority Identity

In 2019 alone, the global Muslim fashion market was valued at up to 327 billion dollars. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Industry pointed out that the export value of the Indonesian Muslim fashion industry reached USD 7.18 billion in 2017, making the country the third-largest Muslim fashion exporter, following Bangladesh (USD 22 billion) and Turkey (USD 14 billion) (Ridwan 2017). As Reina Lewis puts it, "Modest fashion and Muslim fashion are no longer on the periphery of the industry" (Singh 2016). The global market has embraced Muslim fashion, calling it 'modest' fashion, and it is now a global commodity to which governments and the business communities readily catered. The veil and modest fashion are so common that major global apparel brands such as H&M, Zara, Uniqlo, DKNY, Dolce & Gabbana, and Tommy Hilfiger have developed modest fashion within their lines, and Marks & Spencer developed a line of burkini swimwear in 2016 (Singh 2016).

In Indonesia, the baggy pants, long sleeve shirts, harem pants, and tunics are now staples in stores and no longer specifically bear a specific religious identity as models

would display them with or without the veil. Uniqlo stores in Indonesia developed its modest line as a specific category, while hijup.com, the first Islamic fashion e-commerce established in Indonesia in 2011, is now an international platform serving up to seven million consumers (Susilo 2019). The attractive and playful modest fashion has become a dominant part of the everyday culture as well as a marker of self-expression, rejection of conservatism, and a medium to vocalize political views. Scholars have viewed the rise of the Hijaber Community and their displays of style and high-end products on social media as conspicuous consumption (Widjajanta et al. 2018) which define their identity as modern Muslim women who have to navigate between piety, and responsibility as Muslims while maintaining an individual style (Novitasari 2014). Others have moved away from viewing the trend as mere tension between piety and commercialization, such as Jones (2007) and Beta (2014, 2019) who both analyze modest fashion as the arena where politics, religiosity, and materiality intertwine and are at play. Beta analyzes young Muslim women who are fashionistas in the modest fashion landscape and are active on social media to share their political views, thus playing a significant role in post-*reformasi* Indonesia. The creative take on modest fashion in Indonesia also serves as a gateway to understanding society's control over the female body, and how women are engaging with democracy, class dynamics, national identity, and global consumerism (van Wichelen 2010; Widjajanta et al. 2018).

Assessing how the countries in the Global North are embracing modest fashion, scholars have come to view the relationship between fashion and minority identity. Lewis asserts that the global popularity of Muslim fashion reflects how Muslims are "attempting to assert place" in the modern world (in Singh 2016). Yet, the inclusion of modest fashion in the global market also means stripping down the political identity that was attached to it. In a website aimed to explain American foreign policy worldwide, the U.S. Department of State explains modest fashion as "comfortable, fairly loose-fitting clothing that is less revealing than many contemporary styles" often worn by "some Muslim, Christian, and Jewish people—as well as people who prefer covered styles for aesthetic reasons" (Monsen 2021). The article explains how the modest fashion business is growing, developed by entrepreneurs regardless of their religious and cultural background, and worn by those who then define modesty in their terms. Muslim American athlete and Olympic medalist, Ibtihaj Muhammad, states, "Modesty is not just a trend—it's a way of life" (in Monsen 2021). Muhammad has since created a modest fashion line herself, selling loose-cut clothing that can be worn by anyone regardless of religion and cultural background. The modest fashion is no longer marketed for its religious references, but pragmatism and the flexibility of its easy-to-wear designs as well as loose cuts. The global fashion industry's embrace of Muslim fashion creates an image that the industry is open and tolerant while simultaneously denying its religious reference for the sake of attracting a wider market. This speaks to the cooptation of minority identities in the industry, not for inclusion, but to capitalize. It is these paradoxical relations that the global market has toward Muslim fashion that this chapter aims to examine.

The cooptation of minority identities in the fashion industry has been widely researched by scholars of various contexts. Tu (2011) discloses the operation of the

fashion industry in coopting and draining minorities in her research on the popularity of "oriental" Asian designs in American fashion that was marked by the popularity of the "Asian chic" style and the surge and successes of Asian American designers. In her analysis of the rise of young Asian American designers in New York City, who among others survived and thrived through familial ties with Asian American seamstresses, Nguyen finds how the market sinisterly turned its back on the designers during the 2008 economic crisis. The market merely preys upon the minorities, creating styles inspired by their ethnic culture and creativity, while the designers and their seamstresses remained at the margin. The commodification of Asian culture and Asianness in the U.S. fashion industry did not translate to a structural change in the lives of minorities. Nguyen's work serves as a model for this chapter as it scrutinizes the inclusivity of Indonesian fashion designers and modest fashion at the New York catwalks, and how the catwalks lure and make use of Indonesian modest fashion.

4.4 Discourses of Travel

Postcolonial scholars have discussed travel as a colonial practice, and to travel is to colonize. Orientalist travel literature reveals the role of traveling in imperialism, both as imperialists traveled to the colony and as the colonized visited the metropolis. For English women, the colony became landscapes of freedom and a reminder that they have the freedom while the colonized did not. White colonizers would use their surroundings and traveling functions as a mechanism to sustain the "us" versus "them," "colonizer" and "colonized" dichotomy.

Through traveling, ideas of liberty are manifested to create myths of liberty or what Kaplan (1996) calls "mythologized narrativizations of displacement." This narration is created by occidental travelers with little knowledge about the places they arrived at, as well as by tourists and travel writers. This chapter extends the discussion by shedding light on how the "modernist myth of travel" (Kaplan 1996) operates not only in narratives about traveling or white people's experience in the orient but also in today's well-curated social media posts, both by westerners and non-westerners. These narratives too, display traveling as a superficial marker of success and liberties that disregard the material conditions behind the act of traveling nor address disparities that are created through traveling and migration. Just as travel had played an important tool during European colonization, by examining Indonesian modest fashion traveling to New York, this chapter proposes that travel is now serving as a neoliberal technology by creating (uneven) capital flow and the imagination that liberty and global success are achievable for all. This chapter will show how the idea of liberty works in tandem with the myth of travel, convincing women of the global south that traveling is a mark of success and need to be pursued at whatever cost.

Ideas of travel are also pertinent in Islamic teaching and often communicate the good purposes behind the act of moving. The word "*hijra*" for instance, which means "to abandon," "to break ties with someone," and "to migrate," (Masud 2013) is used in

the Quran to explain Prophet Muhammad's journey from Mecca to Medina to seek security when threat towards Muslims in Mecca had escalated. Within this story, to *hijra* means to seek safety, to "the physical movement away from the unbelief" (Masud 2013) to worship and remain in God's way. The Prophet moving to Medina was also marked by the start of the first year of the Islamic calendar, signifying the migration as a start of a new life. The Arabic word *hijra* interestingly has been reified in the 2010s by young middle-class Indonesians who now use the word to describe the journey of becoming more pious. This can be marked by the effort to learn the Quran together with friends, join a religious discussion, and learn from *ulamas*, and for the women, often it is signified by veiling and donning modest clothing. The call to *hijra* spreads through social media, such as Instagram @beranihijrah and @pemudahijrah (Musahadah and Triyono 2019). Addini (2019) argues that today's practice of *hijra* has driven the term away from its religious meaning, and instead has come to represent "a mission of reform in every aspect of social, economic and political life." To *hijra* in this perspective, is to become a better individual, not just in terms of piety, but in all aspects of societal and personal lives, even becoming financially stable. Addini opines that for Indonesians, *hijra* has become a social mode that demystifies religious rituals as only belonging to the older generation. With hashtag #hijrah becoming popular on social media and public figures sharing their *hijra* by donning modest attires and sharing their journey in vlogs, religiosity becomes appealing to the youth. This fits with Eickelman and Piscatori's assertion that travel should be viewed as "specific forms of social action within Muslim religious traditions" (2013, p. 42). I see the popularity of *hijra* and its reification by middle-class Indonesians as indicative of how "traveling" is exceedingly serving as a locus in the lives of young Muslims. It communicates the modern belief that to be a good Muslim is not to remain stationary, but to rather move ahead, progress, and engage in the society, much like the modern society's notion of progress.

4.5 Arriving in New York City

My first subject of research is a series of ads by Wardah, an Indonesian cosmetic brand that uses religiosity as its center niche by branding itself as the first halal cosmetic. Since 2002, Wardah has been using celebrity figures who wear the *hijab* as brand ambassadors, starting with the seasoned actress Inneke Koesherawaty, followed by the actress and singer, Dewi Sandra in 2013. At that time, Sandra was particularly well-known for recently choosing to wear the veil, and the public saw a contrast from her image in the early 2000s when she was known as a pop singer who often dances in her music videos. Sandra's choice to veil represents the act of becoming more pious, of conducting what the young people would call *hijra*. During the rise of the Hijabers Community, Wardah appointed Dian Pelangi to become the face of the brand. When college students held workshops and events about veiling and fashioning the veil, Wardah often took part either to hold make-up workshops or as a sponsoring partner. The brand became synonymous with the trend of fashioning the *hijab* in Indonesia.

As Indonesian modest fashion blazed the global stage, Wardah was closely on its side. The brand supported three Indonesian designers, Dian Pelangi, Barly Asmara, and Zaskia Sungkar, to showcase their designs at the Couture Fashion Week in 2015 held at The Crowne Plaza Times Square, Manhattan, New York City. The three designers were set to display pieces that used traditional cloth from Lombok, Nusa Tenggara Barat, and accessorizing with pearls from the region. Before their departure to the U.S., the Indonesian Ministry of Tourism held a press conference coining the session "From Lombok to New York," thereby highlighting how Indonesian modest fashion and local culture were successfully accessing the global stage.

Following The Couture Fashion Week, Wardah released an ad showing the three designers trotting tourist sites in New York City during wintertime. In the ads, Sungkar and Pelangi, who both wear the *hijab*, emulate New York City elites with beautiful clothing. Pelangi wears a white turban and feathered pink outer and long skirt, while Sungkar dons a dark red veil covered by a wide sun hat. The camera closes to show them both wearing Wardah's makeup and follow the designers visiting famous tourist sites, such as Wall Street, Central Park, and Times Square and showing iconic New York City yellow cabs and the city's gothic architecture. The edits go back and forth between the designers touring New York City and glimpses of their show at The Couture Fashion Week, applauded by the audience. The ad is narrated by three voices, representing each designer:

Rasanya seperti mimpi./This feels like a dream.

Ini adalah passion kami./This is our passion.

Sebuah kebanggaan./It is an honor.

Dari sebuah coretan menjadi karya yang tampil di panggung dunia./From sketches to masterpieces on a world stage.

Suara tepuk tangan dari semua yang hadir adalah buah penghargaan yang tak ternilai./ Applause from everyone was the ultimate award.

Di saat karya kami bisa mempengaruhi kehidupan seseorang menjadi lebih baik/When our work created better lives for others.

Bersama Wardah kami ingin karya kami bisa menginspirasi wanita Indonesia/With Wardah, we hope to inspire Indonesian women (WardahBeauty, 2015).

The ad concludes with the tagline "Wardah inspiring beauty" hinting at how Wardah is set to inspire Indonesian women to reach their dream just as the designers have managed to reach theirs. The ad presents New York City as a metropolis in which the designers have "arrived." The designers who are spectacularly dressed mimic high-class elites in fashion magazines, trotting New York City, with colors that stood in contrast to the grey and brown hues of the gothic architecture of the metropole. The designers are travelers who have finally reached their dream of global recognition. In one scene, Sungkar walks on the steel-structured Brooklyn Bridge. She glances upward to the sky and pulls out her gloved hand outward to catch the snow, her deep red lips smiling. She is a tourist, a foreigner, in a seemingly magical place. Through the figure of the designers as tourists and elites, the ad

communicates ideas of success and the ability to transgress boundaries by arriving at the ‘metropolitan’ where the global stage is within grasp.

Images of women traveling abroad, specifically to the west, were an important theme in Wardah’s campaign. In the early 2010s, Wardah’s ads showcase Dewi Sandra and Dian Pelangi traveling to France and Italy. The two women wear modest fashion and *hijab* as tourists in Europe, visiting galleries and gardens, riding an air balloon, drinking a cup of coffee in a café, and enjoying the view. The ads display the beauty of the foreign landscape, the modest fashion, and the confident women with perfect makeup who are enjoying their time abroad. The ads depict the adventure and beauty that come with traveling abroad, thus building an idea that traveling is achievable and that Muslim women can and should tour the world. This type of message is widely accepted in the cosmetics industry; it is also used by other companies specializing in beauty products, such as Procter & Gamble (see Manzo 2023, this volume, Chap. 5).

This same message is directed to non-Indonesians and non-Muslims who have stereotyped the *hijab* as oppressive. At a 2017 show which again took place in New York and with different collaborators, Pelangi stated it best, “We are not oppressed and we just want to show the world we can still be beautiful and stylish with our hijabs on” (Sayyed 2017). Images of success of young Muslim designers in New York also function as a protest against the conservative religious views that limit women to the domestic realm. Simultaneously, it is also a resistance to the patriarchal, racist neoliberalist system of the western world that has long excluded women and people of color from ideas of success.

In Wardah advertisements, traveling is a signifier and neoliberalist technology that props the Indonesian modest fashion. The act of journeying around the globe is communicated through western materialist ideas that demand images of luxury, and New York City is depicted as a metropole and center of businesses. The ad does not show class diversity and poverty in New York subways and the boroughs, but rather provides a “sterile” image of arriving at the metropolitan city, with ideas of success, luxury, and wealth. This is a stark contrast to the profile of most Wardah consumers whom Wulandari and Agustini (2019) have discovered to be below the age of 31 and with a general monthly income of less than IDR 2.5 million (approx. USD 174). Wardah, therefore, does not depict the true lifestyle of its consumers, but as the tagline “Wardah Inspiring Beauty” hints, they offer to ‘inspire’ women to become those they see on screen.

The connection between Indonesian modest fashion and the New York catwalks became more prominent through time. In 2017, Pelangi and Asmara returned to New York with three other designers, this time taking part in a pre-event at the prestigious New York Fashion Week. The event compiles Indonesian designers on one stage under the theme “Indonesian Diversity.” This time, Pelangi explained how New York City inspires her design, explaining to the press that embellishments and jewels in her dresses “symbolize the buildings in New York” (Rukmananda 2017). She finds inspiration in the well-known book and Facebook page *Humans of New York*, which present a bricolage of people in New York City and their stories. The City’s architecture and colors are embedded in the designs and become a bridge

between Indonesian modest clothing to its non-Muslims audience. As Tu notes, the success of Asian designers in the west "requires a delicate balance between an ability to internationalize and a capacity to represent the national" (Tu 2011, p. 14–15). Only when the Asian designers commit such skillful compromise that they become intelligible to the western audience and can claim a space on the world stage.

The skill to balance various values and expectations is fundamental for the designers of Indonesian modest fashion on their way to the New York catwalks. In a talk show interview, Asmara, Pelangi, and Sungkar explained the chain of events that led to them presenting Lombok textile (Sechan 2015). When submitting proposals and seeking support for the show, the designers met with Erica Majdi, the wife of the 2015 Lombok Governor, and the designers were assigned to become cultural ambassadors to present Lombok woven clothing (*tenun*) abroad. Each designer focused on different nuances and colors of *tenun* Lombok, with Pelangi focusing on bold colors, Sungkar using all pastel tones, and Asmara highlighting edgy designs with dark color schemes. Though Asmara did not exclusively specialize in Muslim fashion, all three designers chose to focus on modest fashion because of the request of the organizers in New York. Reaching the New York catwalk was, therefore, a result of a series of strategic decisions, made to fit with the needs of the audience and organizers in New York, local sponsors in Indonesia, as well as private and government sectors. The designers also delicately navigated between carrying a cultural mission to represent Lombok and responding to the market needs. Displaying *tenun* Lombok was also in line with the Nusa Tenggara Barat's government mission to develop "Sharia tourism." Lombok has a long history of Islamic kingdoms, setting itself apart from the Hindu-dominant Bali, and Sharia tourism became a brand that the local government developed from 2015 to 2016.

The Indonesian designers also have to find a niche to access the Couture Fashion Week. The event is named after the term "haute couture," a style in French dress fashion that is classic and original in its designs in Europe and the Americas, through which fashion becomes a clear marker of social status (Latter et al. 2010; Stewart 2008). In the interwar period, the couture style faced tension with the popularity of casual clothing. Today, the term "couture" is popularly used to infer classic styles that are custom-made and handmade, requiring highly trained individuals and months for its preparation, therefore only accessible by the "ultra-rich" (Latter et al. 2010). While the term couture is defined and dominated by big fashion houses and renown designers in Europe and the U.S., Dian Pelangi was ready to respond to those who might doubt that their designs are not couture. In an interview, Pelangi explained that the *tenun* was created manually and a piece of fabric alone could take up to six months to finish, and such labor would allow their clothing to be considered couture (Sechan 2015). Through the *tenun*'s intricate craftmanship, the three designers reclaim the term "couture." While designers can reify *couture* to include Indonesian artistry, media coverage of spectacle of traveling, and the luxurious images of high fashion led to a limited representation of the Indonesian *tenun* itself. Their focus on the luxurious fashion event in New York, the designers, and the spectacle of them arriving in New York neither overlooked the role of the

Lombok weavers in the clothes, nor did it discuss the lack of appreciation and the unjust monthly pay that most weavers received that generally reach IDR 500.000 (approximately USD 35) (Sri Lestari 2015).

4.6 The Political Stance of Modest Fashion

In February 2017, merely one week following his inauguration, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order which halted the resettlement of refugees from seven predominantly Muslim countries who wished to enter the U.S. for 90 days ahead. Even more specifically, the Order suspended the incoming of Syrian refugees and other countries for more than 120 days. This Order was quickly coined by the public as "Muslim Ban," which was presumably created to appease anti-immigrant supporters and can very well intensify anti-Islamic sentiments that have already been rampant in the U.S. following 9/11. Trump has been campaigning for the presidency since 2016 and among others, used the anti-immigrant rhetoric as represented by his slogan "America First." This opens the way to my second discussion, which is the story of Anniesa Desvitasari Hasibuan, the first Indonesian designer who joined the New York Fashion Week in September 2016 at a solo show at Moynihan Station, one of the venues of the NYFW.

A new and upcoming designer who also runs a traveling agency with her husband, Hasibuan shocked many by becoming the first Indonesian designer to join the prestigious New York Fashion Week in 2016. She had only begun her line one year prior, and her achievement was considered a success story and an incredible feat. Western media celebrated Hasibuan as the first designer in New York Fashion Week to include a *hijab* in all the outfits, and this became meaningful as her show was held at a time when the U.S. was holding a presidential campaign and anti-immigrant views rising. Read against the political landscape of 2016, Hasibuan's collection was celebrated by western media. Elle calls Hasibuan the "First Designer To Present NYFW Collection With Hijabs" and represents a "win for the modest fashion movement" (Rodulfo 2016). The media also rejoices Anniesa Hasibuan's success as a newly arriving designer, writing, "Hasibuan was given a standing ovation–a rare sight at fashion week. Not bad for a one-year-old brand" (Rodulfo 2016). The media revealed its amazement at how she opened her first boutique in Jakarta in 2015 and not long after, established shops in Abu Dhabi and Istanbul (Beech 2018) News coverage by the Voice of America (Rukmananda and Umar 2016) shows behind-the-scenes footage, showing the hustle backstage and models ready to take on the catwalk. One model shared that it would be her first time wearing the veil and she was excited, while other critics mentioned that high fashion had "never seen hijab like this before" and its positive impact on Muslim culture. Meanwhile, *Forbes Indonesia* hailed Hasibuan as one of the Inspiring Women in 2017, specifying her expertise in design and fashion. Her pictures of traveling the world including New York city were displayed

on her social media and were mainstreamed by entertainment television programs and gossip magazines alike. The public admired the success of her travel company and boutique.

Hasibuan also revealed that her motivation in joining the New York Fashion Week was not mere materiality but also nationalism. The 2016 show was titled "De Jayakarta," named as such to represent Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. During the show, the audience could see a small Indonesian flag on the runway, and Special Broadcasting System (SBS) Australia focuses on how Hasibuan "wanted to make her mark on the fashion world and put her home country on the map" (Chang 2016). Hasibuan shared that the small Indonesian flag helped "calm her nerves," reminding her of the bigger picture of why she was there: to represent her country (Nugent 2016). Through fashion, Hasibuan wanted to bring Indonesia to the New York audience and "introduce people to the different and diverse parts of Indonesia" (Chang 2016).

Mingling fashion with politics and social issues remained to be Hasibuan's approach when she returned to New York Fashion Week in 2017, mere months after President Trump released an Executive Order barring refugees from Muslim dominated countries to enter the U.S. Americans responded to this "Muslim Ban" with protests and gathering funds for non-profits which provided legal assistance to refugees. Protests were held at the airports where refugees would enter, and the Democratic Party senators and politicians came out to criticize the executive order as an anti-immigrant ultra-right-wing policy. In its article, Elle reported Hasibuan's show as a response to Trump's anti-immigrant policies. Hasibuan hired all-immigrant and second-generation immigrants to walk the runway, and the Elle article discussed how the casting process included inquiring about the models' view on immigration. In an audition video, a Swiss-American model talked about her Muslim mother and her view that "religion shouldn't be an issue to immigrate" (Rodulfo 2017). Her audition video included a call to those who were fighting against anti-Muslim hate, stating, "It's really important that we come together. That we fight for the good" (Rodulfo 2017). Models took part in the political statement that Hasibuan was communicating, and some were very aware of the role that they played and understood the cultural and political significance of the show. Hasibuan used her show to send messages of tolerance and equality. She explained how fashion and diversity are two sides of the same coin, "For me, fashion is an open world. I don't want to discriminate [...] The ability to express diversity in this business is a value that I hold on to," she asserted (Rodulfo 2017).

Also at the New York Fashion Week 2017, five Indonesian designers collaborated in a show titled "Indonesia Diversity." When talking to the press, Zubedi, one of the designers at the show, sent a message to the then-President Trump, "Mr. President, I love your country and also I love your people, and we will not (do) anything to you or your people. We are all the same, it's about humanity" (Sayyed 2017). Zubedi's designs include patches with names of cities where Muslims conducted pilgrimage, Mecca, Madinah, as well as the word *jannah*, which means "heaven." The designs and the names of cities can be understood as a plight of Muslims everywhere, and a calling for camaraderie among Muslims to take stance. Zubedi also addressed

broader issues of difference and race as her other clothing included a patch that says "All colors matter."

While fashion has long been discussed as a political tool that can "enhance a person's sense of agency" (Crane 2012), Hasibuan and Zubedi's along with the western media's perspective of Indonesian Muslim fashion reaching the New York catwalks helped create the notion that high fashion, which often identified as exclusive and elitist, could be grounded and in conversation with urgent political issues. Indonesian modest fashion on the New York catwalk was used to depict the fashion industry as open and political, even supportive of the plight of immigrants.

As the Indonesian modest fashion was serving a political purpose to protest for the Muslim-ban and anti-refugee sentiment, which was overtaking the western countries, we see the narratives about traveling taking shape in several ways. Indonesian modest fashion designers were welcomed to New York City. In their appreciation of the designs, the western public framed their shows as a political statement and a sign that Indonesian modest fashion has successfully transgressed geographical borders and able to present a teachable moment for high fashion and the western audience. Yet at the same time, the show highlights how traveling is a privilege and not available to all. While high-end designs reached the catwalks, possibly creating a niche for modest fashion and generating profits for clothing businesses, viewers were reminded of the many Muslim refugees and immigrants who were barred from crossing the border. This shows that the liberty to travel remains a myth. Seeking connection to Kaplan's ideas of the "modernist myth of travel" (1996), in the case of Indonesian modest fashion in New York, we see traveling as technology for modernism in creating a classist capital-oriented society that made way for elites and businesses to pass borders. Meanwhile, immigrants and refugees were left in a state of precarity, and their mobility is contingent upon arbitrary policies and political agendas. Power relishes travel only when it supports modernist ideas of success and materialism, such as that represented by Hasibuan's instant success and the possible capital that modest fashion would generate for the industry.

4.7 Traveling: The False Promise

One year following her New York Fashion Week show, Anniesa Hasibuan and her husband Andika Surachman were convicted for embezzlement and money laundering. Hasibuan was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment, Surachman received 20 years, and both were required to pay a total of IDR 10 billion. First Travel, the travel company which Hasibuan and Surachman had established, provided services for umrah, a religious pilgrimage to Mecca that is shorter and more flexible than the haj. Costumers reported First Travel to the authorities for not providing the services which they had paid for and continuously delaying their trip to Mecca. During the trials, the prosecutors maintained that First Travel has defrauded approximately USD 65 million from more than 60,000 paying customers (Setiawan 2018).

First Travel began to market umrah trips in 2011 and is known for offering umrah tour packages cheaper than other companies. It set a price of IDR 14,3 million for an umrah trip to Mecca at a time when the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs established that an umrah trip would cost IDR 21 million. Their marketing strategy included establishing offices in big cities in Indonesia and building partnerships with more than 800 agents who worked to market the travel packages and seek customers. Some of the agents have used First Travel for the umrah themselves and were willing to vouch for the company's credibility (Movanita 2018b). The company also paid celebrities and sent them or their family for free umrah to market their products (Rahmadi 2017). Their trips and accommodation at luxurious hotels were carefully documented and shared through the media to attract new clients. The company also decorated their office with glamorous European style architecture and furniture, which according to a former employee, served as a facade to convince customers of the company's success (Movanita 2017). The former employee explained that the company used social media, such as Facebook, to show that the company is doing well, and comments and complains from clients would directly be deleted and their account blocked. Facades of success were also created through Hasibuan and Surachman's posts on Instagram which would show them travelling to foreign countries and their opulent lifestyle. These images were used to communicate to customers that they would journey to Mecca in a style that Hasibuan, Surachman, and the celebrities they hired for promos have presented in the media.

During the trials, the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (INTRAC) reported that the company owners had used customer's money for other business investment as well as personal needs. First Travel bought shares of a restaurant in London, funded Hasibuan's fashion business and the shows in New York, as well paid for the couple's luxurious lifestyle, branded accessories, imported bags, and jewelry (Erdianto 2017a, b; Movanita 2018a).

The case of First Media not only revealed the case of how a company took advantage of the crossings between religiosity with capital and conducted crime, but it also revealed the society that had trusted and relied on the company, disregarding their apprehension on why first Travel was able to offer such low-price trips. Some of the agents were becoming suspicious with the low price, but the company were not willing to reveal their strategy and simply explained that "it was a company secret." They instead gave an explanation that the low price was possible because customers paid for their trip up to one year prior to the trip (Movanita 2018b). As Hasibuan and Surachman were in trials, the media began to present stories of the customers who lost their money to the promises of First Travel, revealing the emotional toll the company has caused them. When appealing to the House of Representatives, travel agents also shared the stress they felt, feeling responsible for the clients who are often their relatives and acquaintances.

When it was clear that the company's finance was in shambles, a number of agents were invited for a meeting during which Hasibuan asked them to find new investors to provide money to make down payment for an airline company because the company did not have money to do so (Movanita 2018). An agent who served as a witness during the trial noted that Hasibuan remained confident that they would be

able to send the customers to Mecca, while the agents were pessimistic, having heard numerous false promises in the past (Movanita 2018). Customers were also asked to pay more to charter a new commercial jet, but even after they had made that payment, they were not sent for their umrah. Up to the trial, Hasibuan and Surachman's lawyers still maintained that First Travel intended to send their customers for the umrah that they had paid for. When their license was revoked, they planned out a strategy to send customers through the services of other travel companies. The company's relentless tone of optimism, promising that customers would be able to reach Mecca no matter what resonates with the ubiquitous false belief that everyone could travel in this modern world. The huge number of people scammed by First Travel did not only represent how people were motivated to worship and become better Muslims, but it also hinted at the impact of the false promise that everyone could travel.

A New York Times article summarizes its report on Hasibuan's case by stating "Indonesia's most celebrated Islamic fashion designer, made her living at the intersection of faith and commerce. Her downfall came at the same crossroads" (Beech 2018). This statement speaks of the fraught relations between faith and commerce, which applies not just for the umrah tour business and how First Travel was run, but also to Hasibuan's modest fashion brand that was established through her travel business and was sustained by the spectacle of traveling. The narrative of Muslims being able to travel and go abroad easily is also ubiquitous throughout this case, and it functioned to feed First Travel in its operation as well as Hasibuan's fashion line that was previously celebrated by the western media.

4.8 Conclusion

As this chapter has exhibited, the spectacle of traveling is a dominant signifier that supported the commodification of Indonesian Muslim fashion in both the global and local markets. With Indonesian modest fashion on New York City catwalks used by American media as a statement against the Trump government's Muslim ban, it becomes clear that the spectacle of travel is also rooted in the human rights discourse of liberty, to which many middle-class Indonesian Muslim women sought inspiration. Missing from these depictions of success and going global is the discussion of materiality, the capitalist motivation of the fashion industry to gain profit through modest fashion, and the communities denied from transgressing borders due to geopolitical and social conditions all while businesses are given the freedom to travel.

Displays of Indonesian Muslim women be it modest fashion designers or celebrity Instagram (*celebgram*) traveling and arriving in New York City can be viewed as an expression of empowerment that goes against conservative patriarchal views that limit women in the domestic realm. As this research unravels, however, the connection between ideas of going global, travel, and freedom is convoluted and has created a modern-day "mythologized narrativizations of displacement" (Kaplan 1996). Successes lauded in New York catwalks and images of Muslim women trotting the globe in opulent lifestyle are far from the realities of most Muslim women

in Indonesia, and in many ways, are tools of the capital-oriented structures that prey on them.

Notes

1. On the hijabers identity and the industry of Islamic culture see Manzo 2023, this volume.
2. The same idea that underpins "American dream," the myth that success as achievable by migrants only to include them within the larger capitalist structure. For refugees in particular, this mechanism works through labor, or the practice what Nguyen (2012) points out as an act of paying back "the debt of freedom".

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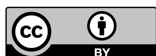

Chapter 5
On Certification and Beauty: Representations of *Halal* Cosmetics on YouTube in Indonesia

Annalisa Manzo

Abstract With the world's largest Muslim population, Indonesia is one of the world's most prospering Islamic economies, with a leading role in many *halal market* sectors. Since 2018, food and cosmetics have been certified by the Indonesia Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia; MUI), which is the body for issuing *fatwas* (religious edicts) in Indonesia. This has opened more opportunities for the sales market of *halal*-certified (permitted, legal) cosmetics. The potential of *halal* products has prompted Incumbent Indonesian Vice President K.H. Ma'ruf Amin to announce in June 2021 that Indonesia aims to become the largest producer and exporter of *halal* goods globally. This paper examines the interplay between certification and beauty, using the example of *halal-labelled* cosmetics on YouTube. The first objective of this chapter is to analyze how commercials on *halal cosmetics* combine notions of Islamic identity and beauty, and thus set new standards for a gendered Indonesian *halal* lifestyle. The second objective is to strengthen an understanding of how Islamic male preachers discuss *halal cosmetics* on YouTube. The analysis reveals how *halal* commercials, on the one hand, and Islamic male preachers, on the other, pursue the same objective to funnel the *halal* label into concrete instructions.

Keywords Beauty · Certification · Cosmetics · *Halal* lifestyle · YouTube

5.1 On the Way to Leading the Global Islamic Economy

According to recent estimates, the 1.9 billion Muslims in the world spent $2 trillion in 2021 on items related to food, medicine, cosmetics, fashion, travel, and media/recreation (DinarStandard 2022, p. 3). This spending reflects a growth of 8.9% year-on-year over 2020. The top 1 place on the Global Islamic Economy Indicator is Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, holds the second position, and the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia follow (Ibid).

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Indonesia continues to rise in overall rankings. On the *halal* food indicator, Indonesia moved up eight places due to its exports to OIC countries, 47 places to fifth place in the “media and recreation” indicator, and 19 places to rank six in the “pharma and cosmetics” indicator. Within Islamic finance, Indonesia has seen an increase in the value of *sukuk* (sharia-compliant bonds used in Islamic finance) and the value of Islamic funds. Awareness of and demand for Islamic finance is also strong, with Indonesia holding the largest number of events on the topic and ranking second in the number of research papers. In the area of media and recreation, Indonesia held 20 related events in 2019, significantly increasing its ranking in the media and recreation indicator. An impetus for the growth of the Islamic economy was the Halal Product Assurance Law No. 13/2014 that came into effect in October 2019, requiring mandatory *halal* certification for all *halal* products. The entry into force of this law has led to significant growth in the *halal* food, pharma, and cosmetics sectors—a trend that is expected to continue.

Indonesia’s focus on the growth of the Islamic economy is also evident in their Halal Economy Master Plan 2019–2024 (MEKSI, *Masterplan Ekonomi Sharia Indonesia*), which was released through its National Shariah Finance Activity. Its key objective is to boost Islamic finance as an engine of economic growth. This plan reinforces cumulative efforts to strengthen the country’s position in *halal* tourism and develop a stable environment for businesses involved in *halal* food and products, modest fashion, and Islamic finance. The declared aim of the Masterplan is to turn Indonesia into the ‘center of the world’s leading Islamic economy’ (Indonesian Ministry of National Development Planning 2019, p. xv). Notable initiatives that fall within the plan’s scope include the launch of the *halal* Lifestyle District, a 21,000 m^2 industrial park with an investment of $18 million. The Muslim Fashion Project (MOFP) includes competitions and incubation programs for fashion startups and provides a road map for the development of the Muslim fashion industry. An estimated 656 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and 60 designers are involved (State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2019, p. 99). The potential of *halal* products has prompted Incumbent Indonesian Vice President K.H. Ma’ruf Amin to announce in June 2021 that Indonesia aims to become the largest producer and exporter of *halal* goods globally (Silaban 2021). The decision to gradually introduce mandatory *halal* certification for all products placed on the market will further boost the development of this sector and improve the market’s perception of the significant commercial opportunities for *halal* cosmetics.

5.2 The *Halal* Cosmetics Market in Indonesia

As demand for cosmetics that cater to consumer preferences increases, *halal* cosmetics are set for solid growth. Muslim spending on cosmetics is estimated at US$70 billion in 2021; according to recent projections, US$93 billion will be spent on *halal* cosmetics by 2025 (DinarStandard 2022, p. 29). *Halal* cosmetics sales have grown faster in East Asia than in any other market, driven by Indonesian brands of all

shapes and sizes, from small independent startups to established players expanding their market presence. Such growth in a challenging environment created by the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the growth potential of *halal* cosmetics. Major ingredient manufacturers like Hourglass Cosmetics and Unilever, for instance, have their portfolios *halal* certified. Indonesia's large Muslim population, an estimated 225 million people, is a crucial driver of the growth of *halal* cosmetics, driven by its young population and the country's strategic moves to develop an Islamic economy. Indonesian brands also want to establish themselves more globally, and there are efforts to expand *halal* cosmetics ranges beyond women to men. For example, the Indonesian enterprise Paragon, which owns the nation's top *halal* brand, Wardah, has introduced Kahf, a line with self-care products for men (State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2020, p. 29).

5.3 The New *Hijaber* Identity

The growth of this sector is intertwined with the new identity of young Muslim women who wear *hijabs*—also known as *hijabers*; a combination of the words *hijab* and users—who become the perfect consumers of a market created specifically for them. In fact, from the beginning of the new century, "newly articulated and contextually different manifestations of 'Islamic capitalism' have emerged. A new market for commodities, media, advertising, businesses, and consumer segments identified as 'Islamic' has contributed to the creation of a new culture industry" (Gökariksel and McLarney 2010, p. 1). This new industry of Islamic culture is increasingly focused on the production, packaging, and distribution of religious products, as is clearly visible through several commodity sectors: television programming with Ramadan television specials, home furnishings, and Islamic housing complexes, popular music and Koranic *clubs*, *hajj* trips, banks, and clothing. Being Muslim very quickly became something that could be consumed and proclaimed. In the new media, Islam is represented from advertisements ranging from cosmetics to living, in fashion, lifestyles, celebrities, Islamic soap operas, spiritual experiences to Islamic books (Noorhaidi 2009).[1] In this context, companies marketed a range of images and products specifically for Muslim women, who were identified as a niche market with special needs and desires.

The market forces of consumer capitalism increasingly mediate contemporary Muslim femininities, which affects Muslim women's identities, lifestyles, and sense of belonging in complex ways. What it means to be a Muslim woman is constantly negotiated, defined, and redefined through or in response to the images, narratives and information about Muslim womanhood constructed by the market. The veil simultaneously embodies the challenge and replication of stereotypes, as it becomes an indicator of action, self-expression, and power (Gökariksel and McLarney 2010, p. 2). In this context, the identity of the *hijaber* is built around young women who wear the veil and express a colorful vision of Islam. They are active users of social networks

(Instagram, Facebook, Twitter) and fashion blogs, which are considered good references for clothing choices and the construction of their identities (Beta 2014). The *hijaber* identity, therefore, has nothing to do with the stereotypical concepts related to Muslim women, especially those about the lack of freedom and agency. In her influential study of women in the mosque movement in Egypt, Saba Mahmood (2011) has shown that by donning the veil, Muslim women in Egypt asserted themselves—without staging resistance. She refers to what she regards as one of the key tropes of patriarchal violence, the veil, as symbolic "evidence of the violence Islam has inflicted upon women" (Mahmood 2011, p. 194). Instead of embracing this trope, she underlines that the veil should rather be perceived to cultivate virtue. Women do so through veiling and teaching themselves about their religion and how to pray correctly or be a good person. These misunderstood concepts about Muslim women's agency are further strengthened by Abu-Lughod (2002, p. 3):

> First, we have to resist the reductive interpretation of veiling as the quintessential sign of women's unfreedom (…) Second, we shouldn't reduce the diverse situations and attitudes of millions of Muslim women to a single item of clothing. Perhaps it is time to give up the black and white Western obsession with the veil and focus on some serious issues that feminists and others concerned with women's lives should indeed be concerned with.

As argued by Smith-Hefner (2007), for reasons of piety and protection, modesty, and mobility, by the early 2000s, veiling had become increasingly common among middle-class Javanese women, resulting in *a* de facto requirement for women attending university. Several new, more explicitly "Muslim" enterprises—including banks, restaurants, nursery schools, bookstores, and food stores—have also made veiling mandatory for female employees. One consequence of this rapidly expanding market for headscarves has been the proliferation of stores and boutiques offering *Islami* clothing and a wide array of Muslim-style fashions. Modern pluralism needs to be considered: "*Jilbab, kerudung, cadar, fongki*—the different forms that Javanese veiling takes represent different visions of Islam, different constructions of community, and different ways of engaging modern pluralism. Hardly a symbol of domestic seclusion, for many middle-class Javanese, the "new veil" or *jilbab* is a symbol of modern Muslim womanhood as expressed in varied modern environments: university campuses, government offices, big cities, and employment markets" (Smith-Hefner 2007, p. 414).

Hijabers express modern Muslim femininity as dynamic and independent women wearing the veil. They want to maintain the use of the *hijab* and encourage greater empathy towards Islam through fashion, making it increasingly popular in Indonesia. The *Hijabers* Community, a group founded by young Muslim women in Jakarta that quickly spread to other cities in Java, is linked to the rise of Muslim fashion brands (see Saraswati 2023, this volume, Chap. 4). They shaped the image of the beautiful, modest Muslim woman through their social media outfits; some founders became fashion designers. The veil, in various colors and styles, has become a natural means of affirming the identity of young Indonesian Muslim women.

Furthermore, the growing increase in the use of *hijab* has had a very positive impact on the Indonesian Muslim fashion industry (the so-called *modest fashion*). Indonesia

is expected to become the world capital of Muslim fashion by 2025. All these new dynamics come together to form the new identity of veiled young Indonesians in the urban context: "the popular *Hijaber* notion illustrates a successful strategy for a Muslim woman in Indonesia's big cities: putting obvious symbols of religiousness at the service of a decidedly cosmopolitan outlook. She is a consumer, but within the confines of a virtuous appearance as defined by religion" (Beta 2014, p. 386).

5.4 Methods

The chapter focuses on the images of Indonesian young Muslim women wearing a *hijab* (*hijabers*) to reveal how the *halal* label is used and funneled into concrete instructions. Religiosity is built into their characters, conveying "the view that a veiled woman is always a good person" (Wardhana 2007, in Subijanto 2011, p. 247). Based on a text analysis, this chapter will describe the images of Muslim women through the lens of *halal* cosmetics commercials. Specifically, the core elements of this research are three Indonesian *halal* commercials of cosmetic brands posted on their YouTube channel. YouTube is a widely used social network in Indonesia, with 88% of users (Hootsuite 2019, p. 33).

Within the field of *halal* cosmetics, scholars have paid attention to how consumers make their purchasing decisions (Handriana et al. 2021; Haro 2018) and attitudes toward *halal* cosmetics. This chapter's novelty lies in the analysis of how *halal* cosmetics are represented by *halal* brands on the one hand and Islamic male preachers on the other, funneling the *halal* label into concrete instructions. By looking at how Islamic male preachers discuss *halal* cosmetics in their video clips on YouTube, we can better understand how they frame such cosmetics in legal terms. Moreover, we learn how these instructions highlight the values and dynamics of the Indonesian Islamic lifestyle. In both types of videos, Islam is made to be easily understandable, to make religious practice within everyone's reach.

5.5 The Representation of the Muslim Woman in Cosmetics Commercials

Cosmetics commercials make it possible to read Indonesian Muslim women's identity transformations through new, complex dynamics. But before doing this, they reveal the brand image through the advertised product. "Brand image is an antecedent of consumer trust in *halal* cosmetic products. Brand image on *halal* cosmetic products is generally associated by consumers with product content in accordance with Islamic religious norms. This indicates that consumers will have high trust in *halal* cosmetic products when they assume that the cosmetic brand has a good image" (Handriana et al. 2021, p. 1305). In line with that, the three brands have been specially selected for

their very popular, positive, and *hijaber*-friendly image. This influences the choices of this category of consumers, which translates into sales and views successes.

The first two commercials represent two brands (Sunsilk and Citra) that Unilever Indonesia owns. Founded on 5 December 1933, Unilever Indonesia has developed into one of Indonesia's leading Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) companies. It is present in Indonesians' daily lives through more than 40 owned brands, such as Pepsodent, Lux, Lifebuoy, Dove, Sunsilk, Clear, Rexona, Vaseline, Rinso, Molto, Sunlight, Wall's. Unilever Indonesia's shares have been listed on the Indonesia Stock Exchange since 11 January 1982. Its head office is in Tangerang, with nine factories located in the industrial areas of Jababeka, Cikarang, and Rungkut, Surabaya. Its factories and products have also received *halal* certification from the *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). In May 2021, Unilever Indonesia launched its Unilever Muslim Center of Excellence (MCOE). The MCOE works as a research hub for *halal* products and innovations in line with the needs of Muslim consumers in Indonesia and abroad. With the launch of Unilever MCOE, Unilever has further strengthened its commitment to implementing a comprehensive *halal* assurance system from upstream to downstream. The development of the MCOE is supported by the Indonesian government's National Islamic Economy and Finance Committee (KNEKS), the key agency for Indonesia's Shariah Economy Masterplan 2019–2024 (MEKSI).

The third commercial represents a Procter & Gamble-owned brand (Rejoice) instead. P&G, founded in Indonesia 30 years ago, is now one of the key global markets and home to a world-class, multi-category manufacturing plant in Karawang, creating products for not only the local market but also for consumers globally. It has sold many top brands, including Pantene, Head & Shoulders, Rejoice, Downy, Gillette, Pampers, SK-II, Olay, and Vicks.

(1) **Sunsilk *Hijab* Shampoo**

Posted on Sunsilk Indonesia YouTube profile[2]—which has more than 57 thousand subscribers—on 30th April 2019, this commercial was specially designed to advertise Sunsilk Hijab shampoo during the month of Ramadan. The video hit more than one million views. Sunsilk is a brand known all over the world. In Indonesia it is one of the favorite brands, thanks to its long tradition in this market (more than 63 years), its choice of very popular Indonesian brand ambassadors, and the distribution of products that meet the needs of local women. Specifically, Sunsilk Hijab Shampoo is one of the pioneers of shampoo for *hijab* which Unilever Indonesia produces. However, Sunsilk products are being pushed by increasing competitors such as Pantene and Clear and Clean (Andini 2022, p. 1). The brand's philosophy urges Indonesian women to be proud of their naturally dark hair and emphasizes the beauty of women who wear *hijab*. The company has long focused on this mission, as demonstrated by the launch in 2012 of the annual "Sunsilk Hijab Hunt," whose popularity is growing yearly. The competition, which is televised to a huge rating success, aims to find Indonesia's most talented Muslim woman (*muslimah berbekat*), also aiming to provide role models for Muslim women and explore their potential. Since the first edition, this highly successful initiative has generated many talented figures who are a source of inspiration for Indonesian women. In 2016 several Sunsilk

shampoos changed their name and packaging precisely to be targeted at women who wear *hijab*; for example, "Lively Strong" is now "Hijab Recharge Lively Strong" and other products include the "Hijab Recharge Anti-Dandruff" range. Other communication campaigns include festivals, such as "Kilau Fest" or "Shine Fest", organized in many Indonesian cities, often presented by Indonesian stars as brand ambassadors.

The title of this video ad is "*Ramadhan Adem dan Harum bersama Sunsilk Hijab*" which means "Cool and Fragrant Ramadan with Sunsilk *Hijab*." It describes a typical day of a Muslim girl during the holy month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer, reflection, and community. The superimposed timeline underlines the principal moments of the day during Ramadan month: *sahur* (breakfast at sunrise before starting fasting all day), *buka bersama* (breaking the fast at sunset when Muslims are allowed to eat), *mudik* (returning to one's hometown where one's family and relatives usually live, to celebrate Ramadan together). This video ad aims to show that Ramadan is made more enjoyable and unique by the benefits of this shampoo, which is specially designed for Muslim women who wear the *hijab*. The opening scene of this video ad is a close-up of the shampoo bottle and the young girl wearing *hijab* as the main character. Below are the expressions spoken by the narrator, translated from Indonesian to English.

> My Ramadan with Sunsilk Hijab. From morning to evening, (my hair) is still cool and fragrant.

Here it is evident how ads further strengthen "the beauty myth and the pressure felt by *hijabers* to manage a fashionable look and to take care of their beauty in every moment" (Madeleine and Sarwono 2018, p. 207). Women's hair should be always perfumed and cool as long as possible. This is also applied to Muslim women: "the media put pressure on them to have a perfect appearance while wearing *hijab*" (Latiff and Alam 2013, in Madeleine and Sarwono 2018, p. 207).

The visual aspect is very effective. In the scene set on the train showing the protagonist's journey to her hometown, while the other girls in the train coach are sweating and uncomfortable, the protagonist who uses the Sunsilk Shampoo is portrayed smiling, flawless and with roses in ice cubes coming out of her *hijab* to stress the most important benefit of this shampoo, which is that the hair stays cool and fragrant for 48 h: "Mudik becomes comfortable, (my hair) stays cool and fragrant for 48 h, from Jakarta to the hometown." The video ends with the scene of the girl arriving at home and is welcomed by her whole family, but she just says "*Assalamualaikum Ibu* (mother)." In addition, to highlighting the importance of the traditional Muslim greeting, this is a marketing strategy aimed at highlighting Muslim female figures as likely buyers of Sunsilk *Hijab* shampoo. In line with this principle, almost all the characters in this video ad are women. For marketing reasons, it should also be noted that Sunsilk logo is always present throughout the video, clearly visible in the upper right corner.

"Sunsilk Hijab: number one *Hijab* Shampoo in Indonesia" is the last text of the video, which is used as an efficient and impressive slogan to make people buy the advertised product because it is the best shampoo, namely the "number

one" in Indonesia. This is an overt example of consumer interests and trends, as it shows consumerist femininity. This text is marked with the Indonesian Ulema Council symbol (*Majelis Ulama Indonesia*, MUI) to indicate that Sunsilk *Hijab* is a *halal* shampoo. As Indonesia's highest Muslim independent clerical body, one of the MUI's most important tasks is the *halal* certification of products, including but not limited to foods, cosmetics, medicines, and clothing. A girl who decides to buy and use the Sunsilk shampoo for the *hijab* is represented as a good Muslim woman who respects Islamic rules, for example, by highlighting that the advertised product can enhance Ramadan celebrations. In that sense, *sahur, berbuka, mudik, Assalamualaikum* are all symbols of the observance of Islam to set a good example of a Muslim woman, especially for the young generation of *hijabers*. The "good Muslim young woman" depicted in this video is beautiful, attractive, and stylish in her accurate make-up and trendy outfit.

It conveys an authentic modern and urban womanhood with a lifestyle that follows contemporary trends: the girl acts as a model in a photo shoot, then meets her friends to break the fast and take selfies together. These aspects can also be considered as an expression of an affluent middle class, to which is added the image of travelling to the hometown on an "exclusive" train, which is undoubtedly more expensive than a regular train. As argued by Sakai and Fauzia (2016, p. 230), "the increasing need for money to support a consumer-based lifestyle, coupled with their desire to be good Muslims, has put pressure on women to generate an income to meet these needs."

(2) **Citra Wakame body cream**

Citra is a Unilever-owned brand specializing in the production of body lotion, face care, and body wash. The title of the video *#CitraCantikIndonesia: Merawat Anugerah-Nya Adalah Ibadah* ("Taking care of His gifts is a religious obligation") illustrates the close connection between beauty canons and religion that the cosmetics industry creates with the *halal* label.

Citra shapes a specific aesthetic canon (clear and radiant skin): Islamic values are reaffirmed in the process. Muslim women will buy Citra cream because caring for their bodies as a gift from God is an Islamic obligation. In addition, the video's main character acts as a driving force for consumers: "Don't forget to use Citra Wakame to make your skin glow, just like Bella did"; she is a role model to follow. This video chooses a famous testimonial to encourage consumers to buy the product.

Laudya Cynthia Bella is an Indonesian star, pop singer, film, and successful soap opera actress. Bella also founded her brand of *hijab*, clothing, and accessories for Muslim women. Her work is also featured in the commercial. Posted on 12th June 2015,[3] this commercial can be considered a video diary in which Laudya uses an intimate and confidential tone of voice. It reached over 2 million views, and the Cantik Citra YouTube profile has over 37 thousand subscribers. This video begins with a common dilemma for many Muslim girls in today's Indonesia: "To wear *hijab* or not to wear *hijab*? That used to be my dilemma. What will people say later?" This dilemma underlines the intense pressure Muslim women feel due to the conservative paradigm in Islam, which holds that women who do not wear *hijab* are not devout Muslims, nor are they "good women." Subijanto (2011, p. 246) frames this

as follows: "While the women are moralized, their identities (and thus stereotypes) are reaffirmed, the good and the veil; the wicked and the sexy and the vulgar. Hidden in the representation is, thus, the old patriarchal ideology regulating women's bodies, masked in the name of religious reification."

In the video diary, the "good and the veil" is embodied in Bella's careful linking of God's gifts with her *hijab*-wearing practices: "But I realise that everything one has is a gift from Allah. I wear *hijab* because of my gratitude; taking care of all His gifts is part of worship." Bella's message was eloquent. Although she felt strong doubt at first, she understood that everything around her was a gift from Allah. There was a strong affirmation of the greatness of God: "I treat my entire body with Citra Wakame, which brightens my skin without the sticky feeling. Its gel texture makes my skin fresh all day, even though my whole body is covered." With this last sentence another very important Islamic obligation is highlighted, that of covering the *aurat*, those parts of the body that have to be covered. Bella is then shown designing her clothing line and having the models try on the garments. "I feel at ease to continue working."

The commercial is not only meant to present the example of a successful Indonesian and Muslim woman, but also the figure of a Muslim entrepreneur running her own business. According to Bella, "the image of Indonesian beauty" is to not be afraid to change for the better and to be grateful for what Allah has given: "For me, the beautiful image of Indonesia is to never be afraid to change into our better selves and to be grateful for what Allah has given us. How about you?" This video offers a clear representation of "spiritual beauty" (Jones 2010), again to express and funnel concrete religious instructions.

(3) **Rejoice *Hijab* Shampoo**

As the first hair care shampoo on the market with a 2-in-1 formula (shampoo with conditioner), Rejoice is one of the best-selling hair care brands in Indonesia. The brand focuses on meeting every need of women, as shown by the prominent tagline "Perempuan Rejoice" (Woman Rejoice) on the official Rejoice Indonesia website. Since the beginning, Rejoice has been innovating by launching the first "2-in-1" shampoo and bringing the concept of "hair care like going to an expensive salon" into an affordable shampoo product. In 2018, Rejoice launched the Rejoice Perfume Collection—the first perfume shampoo in Indonesia which provides the fragrance of expensive perfumes formulated by international perfume experts. In 2019, Rejoice launched the Rejoice Hijab Perfection Series, which was specifically created to solve hair problems faced by *hijabers*. Rejoice Hijab already has four types of products on the market (Farisa 2021).

With more than 800.5 thousand views, this is a music video promoting the Rejoice *Hijab* Shampoo. It was posted on 22nd August 2017 on Rejoice Indonesia[4] YouTube channel, which currently has 23.5 thousand subscribers. All the main characters are young, veiled women, as the advertised product is a specific shampoo for *hijabers*. The green-colored *hijab* runs like a red thread throughout the video: (1) all the girls wear a green *hijab*, precisely to draw attention to (2) the green color of the shampoo bottle packaging, also because (3) the woman represented on the shampoo bottle

is wearing a green *hijab*. *#Hijabisa* is the hashtag properly created to advertise the product with a solid inner meaning. "*Hijabisa*"—a combination of two words, *hijab*, the Arabic noun for the veil, and the Indonesian verb *bisa*—could be translated as "*hijab* can." *Hijabisa* is stressed in the title and in the title and chorus of the song. This emphasizes that *hijabers* should feel free to express themselves because *hijab* does not restrict their freedom. Below are the lyrics of the song lyrics, translated from Indonesian to English:

I don't need to choose, I have everything

In one Rejoice I get three benefits

Because I Hijabisa

Rejoice has three benefits

For me Hijabisa

First, my hair becomes fresher

Second, its softness is always felt

Third, the dandruff is gone

Rejoice 3 in 1

Hijabisa I Hijabisa

Because Rejoice Hijabisa we Hijabisa

The opening scene of this video ad shows the female singer Fatin walking out from a beautiful western-styled house with the text "Rejoice x Fatin," while the text is superimposed over the screen as colorful, large, and eye-catching lettering. Here, it is crucial to consider the choice of singer who is certainly no ordinary singer. She is Fatin Shidqia, an Indonesian singer and actress who won the first season of the Indonesian version of The X Factor in May 2013. This choice is intentionally a marketing strategy to get the Rejoice *Hijab* Shampoo sponsored by a very famous Indonesian artist. Furthermore, this also means that the woman's image shown by this ad is a woman wearing a *hijab*, young, beautiful, charming in her well-chosen make-up and elegant outfit, which is usually a successful woman. Sakai and Fauzia (2016, p. 231) noted that "working Muslim women are creating an appropriate and acceptable alternative Islamic womanhood, which runs counter to the narrowly defined role of Muslim women as domesticated and subordinated." They further explain that globalization and modernization brought a wave of Middle Eastern Islamism to Indonesia, which affected the perception of Islamic womanhood, especially among middle-class Muslims, by highlighting women's domestic responsibilities. "Women may have careers as long as they prioritise domestic work. To achieve this, working Muslim women employ a strategy: wearing headscarves (*jilbab*) in public. By wearing *jilbab*, they publicly show that they prioritize piety, including the commitment to act appropriately in a woman's role" (Sakai and Fauzia 2016, p. 231).

Then, the following scene represents two girls doing outdoor sport activities: one is skateboarding, and the other one is biking. There is an apparent reference to an urban environment, with graffiti on the building walls as outdoor sports background. In the following scenes, some girls practice hip-hop dance in a ballroom while others play basketball on an outdoor basketball court. All these scenes serve to contextualize the urban and contemporary setting. At this point, a big, green-colored text *#Hijabisa* appears on the screen, below the singer's image, as it stands for the title and the refrain of the song used to promote the shampoo.

The hashtag (#) is clearly created to match the language of the young generation on social media, as the ad aims precisely to appeal to young *hijabers* with hashtags and elements of Western culture (skateboarding, basket, graffiti, hip-hop dance) to increase their buy-in. Western culture is explicitly reflected in all the sports and activities shown, skateboarding, playing basketball, dancing hip-hop and playing music like a band. This shows that (1) *hijabers* can express themselves freely, also using western culture; (2) they can maintain their good looks even in activities that are normally considered masculine and do not reflect the delicate attitude expected of women.

In the next scene, some other girls interrupt their activities (playing basketball and dancing hip hop) and join Fatin to walk with her. In this scene, the Rejoice logo, shampoo bottle, and sachet packaging are shown in large dimensions to draw attention to the advertised product. Then all the women start dancing while Fatin sings the song, highlighting the three essential benefits of Rejoice shampoo for *hijab*: fresh, soft, and dandruff-free hair. One by one, these benefits are displayed in a large, colorful text together with the image #Hijabisa. This song part is repeated a second time to emphasize the benefits and convince the customer with a pleasant sound and catchy words. The song ends with the following expression: "*Karena Rejoice Hijabisa kita Hijabisa,*" *which means* "Because Rejoice *Hijabisa* we *Hijabisa* ("*Hijab* can"). The expression *Hijabisa* is coined to communicate in a direct, immediate, and impressive way that *hijab* has a positive meaning. The Rejoice logo is always present throughout the video, clearly visible in the top right corner. In doing so, the advertiser makes the product recognizable and customary by recalling the brand through the logo and its shapes, colors, and images.

5.6 *Halal*, *Hijab*, and Happiness

Islam is perfectly capable of adapting to the emerging consumer culture, and advertising is creating an infinite flow of representations in which the advertised products, Islam, and the veil, are transformed into positive experiences. The three *halal* cosmetics commercials analyzed above emphasize that religion—Islam—allows people to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil. Through the *halal* label, these commercials are designed both to sell and to educate consumers, especially the younger generation of *hijabers*, on how to be "good Muslims," giving them concrete instructions.

Islam assumes a positive and friendly image, but at the same time, it is essential to the life of every "good Muslim" in Indonesia. In these ads, parts of what Safira (2017) calls a whole "Islamic package" convey a positive image of Islam and a good example of a Muslim woman wearing the *hijab*. Moreover, the ads cleverly incorporate the cycle of the Islamic calendar year. Many Islamic advertisements are seasonal, especially during the most important moments of the Islamic calendar, such as the holy month of Ramadan or the *Idul Fitri*, when the selling power of Islamic products is particularly growing (Nef-Saluz 2007, p. 50). In this analysis, the Sunsilk *Hijab* Shampoo video ad is explicitly created for Ramadan. In Indonesia, Islam is closely linked to existing local traditions; therefore, Ramadan is a month of religious observance, also mixing cultural traditions. Fasting is presented within the Indonesian cultural context, representing, for example, the "*buka bersama*" moment.

The three ads set new standards for a gendered Indonesian *halal* lifestyle by showing how Islamic identity and beauty are interconnected. By watching these commercials, Indonesian Muslims expect the products to be *halal*. The *halal* status implies compliance with Islamic law, purity, integrity, transparency, and the ability to do something good for their health. These characteristics must be present to gain and maintain consumer confidence. The only indicator that ascertains and guarantees the *halal* status of a product is the certification issued by *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). With certification, manufacturers and companies that own the brands can use the *halal* logo on their packaging and communication channels. The absence of the *halal* logo raises doubts about whether it is approved for Muslims. Therefore, the *halal* logo makes purchasing easier for Muslim consumers (Safira 2017). From the commercials analyzed, brands emphasize *halal* status through the appearance of the *halal* logo in the video and the narrative voice to encourage Muslim consumers to purchase their *halal* products.

The *hijab* is the lynchpin of the three videos examined. All the main characters, and most of the other women represented, wear *hijabs*. The *hijab* demonstrates the current process in Indonesian Islam that maintains the value of the *hijab* as an essential Islamic attribute for Muslim women but makes it popular and fashionable. The commercials express the good image of the veil as a desirable object to be a fashionable Muslim. They work as a channel that conveys Islamic principles and the "good example" of a Muslim woman. The image of a woman presented by the commercials aims to communicate a good example of a Muslim woman, especially for the younger generation of *hijabers*. Wearing the veil not only means being devoted but also being an independent, working, fashionable woman with a modern Islamic lifestyle. The "positive power" of the veil also emphasized an expression of female beauty. The commercials analyzed represent the image of the veil as a fundamental Islamic attribute but also a conscious and free choice. The goal is to let *hijabers* understand that they can feel free to express themselves while wearing *hijab*.

In line with the gender stereotypes that dictate the myth of beauty, beautiful and devoted Muslim women must wear *hijab*. Messages on social media perpetuate such a one-sided representation of female beauty. They urge Muslim women always to keep their hair well-groomed, even if the *hijab* covers them. Shampoo commercials reiterate that hair must always be perfect and perfumed as long as possible. As a

result, women want to make their hair look like those portrayed in these videos or on social media. In Indonesia, it is also quite common for a woman to be evaluated by her hair, as if the female identity must be centralized in a specific part of the body (Arimbi 2017). Hair represents beauty, identity, and self-esteem. Buying unique products for *hijab* is configured as a forced choice by the recurring images proposed by the commercials of shampoos, conditioners, lotions, and special fragrances for the hair care of Muslim women.

In some commercials, it is also noted that the perception of one's identity as a Muslim woman is currently conditioned by a dilemma relating to the choice of wearing the *hijab* or not. Covering the *aurat* is a must for every Muslim woman, but many women today are reluctant to wear the *hijab* for various reasons. This issue, explicitly addressed by the Citra brand, highlights the strong pressure felt Muslim women feel due to a conservative Islamic paradigm, according to which a woman who does not wear a *hijab* is neither a devout Muslim nor a good woman.

The makers behind the commercials use different strategies to get the message across that their products make young women happy and successful and, at the same time, encourage them in their Islamic faith. One strategy is to recruit Indonesian stars as brand ambassadors, as Rejoice and Citra do. These public figures can be classified as "celebrities with an Islamic image" (Safira 2017, p. 54). Choosing a famous person familiar to Indonesian consumers as the protagonist of the commercial has a double meaning: (1) it is a marketing strategy that will guarantee the video millions of views and, therefore, maximum results in terms of product purchase; (2) in turn, the famous testimonial is an example to follow, both her religious image and for her role as a successful Muslim woman.

Another strategy is to show that being a happy, young, beautiful, successful modern Muslim woman who plays Western sports and travels to Western countries does not have to be a contradiction. Self-determined, independent, and professional representations of Muslim women conform to imaginations of the ideal consumer. The main characters of the commercials represent modern Muslim women with a genuinely Muslim lifestyle that is both urban and consumerist. Sakai and Fauzia (2016, p. 231) stated that "working Muslim women are creating an appropriate and acceptable alternative Islamic womanhood, which runs counter to the narrowly defined role of Muslim women as domesticated and subordinated."

In the second part of this chapter, I examine how Islamic male preachers (*ustadz*) approach *halal* cosmetics and how they present them in their video clips against the background of *halal* certification. This way, we can better understand how they legally classify these cosmetics, offering advice and instructions to their audience. Although in different ways, it will be apparent to which extent these videos share with the commercials the same objective.

5.7 Make-Up and Cosmetics from Islamic Male Preachers' Point of View

The first two videos have been selected as they share the same Q&A format, target (especially Muslim women older than *hijabers*), and the same objective to offer advice to their vast audience (more than 20 thousand views each). The third video is instead excerpted from a religious meeting, but it also conveys concrete instructions like the other two videos. The first video is about skincare or cosmetics that contain alcohol by Adi Yusuf and Alwi Yusuf. This video has been published on NET. official YouTube channel, as part of the *Saliha* program.

NET. (Net Mediatama Television) is an Indonesian free-to-air television network that was launched on 26 May 2013. It provides television entertainment with quality program content for all levels of audiences in Indonesia. The content presented—especially favored by young Indonesians—provides positive and inspiring value, inspires, and continues to grow in innovation. Its programs include news, infotainment, breakout music, comedy, and talk shows. Religious programs (like *Saliha*) are only broadcast during the holy month of Ramadan. More specifically, *Saliha* is an inspirational program for Muslim women through content that can increase open-mindedness and self-confidence. The program was aired during the holy month of Ramadan every Saturday and Sunday at 05.30 AM, with a duration of 30 min. However, it remained on schedule during the other months sharing inspiration and knowledge about the Muslim world. Unlike other Islamic programs, each episode of Saliha presents a different broadcast segmentation. The first segment is about lifestyle and reading of the Qur'an during Ramadan, the second is about lifestyle as well, regarding cats in Islam (*keistimewaan kucing dalam Islam*), and the third is the #tanyaUstad segment with ustadz Alwi Yusuf and Adi Yusuf (Ustadz Kembar, twins). Apart from lifestyle and #tanyaUstadz, Saliha NET also contains culinary references, inspirational stories, and traveling.

In each segment, Islamic elements are in accordance with the Qur'an and *hadith*. Because the target of the *Saliha* program is millennials, the background displayed is colorful and bright so that the broadcast is not monotonous, and the message can be easily understood. The inspirational story segment is a story based on someone's personal experience that can inspire others. For example, it can explain how a *hijrah* journey shares inspirational stories from various backgrounds, such as artists, celebrities, or communities who actively use social media.

The video analyzed is taken from *#TanyaUstadz* segment program, which is particularly interesting because Saliha viewers are given the opportunity to ask questions about the Islamic world to twin *ustadz* through the Instagram social media account @salihanet (Apriyanti 2019). It was posted on 12th August 2018 and reached more than 47 thousand views.[5] For example, the user @afitera asked: "Ustadz, I want to ask, is it okay for a Muslimah to use skin care or make-up that contains alcohol?".

They responded by saying:

> So, if for example we use perfume, cosmetics that contain alcohol, what is the law? Let's see first, what is alcohol made of? So, alcohol is usually what we know; alcohol is intoxicating.

> It turns out that there are many types of alcohol, not just intoxicating. Anyway, there are names for chemical formulas. So, if, for example, there is an alcohol called ethanol, there is one called methanol, different chemical formulas. So different types of alcohol give rise to different laws. Anyway, if the use of alcohol is for drinking, it is haram. Any intoxicant is categorised as khamr (alcoholic beverages), and any intoxicant is haram. If alcohol is made from vegetable elements, then the substance is pure, like fermented grapes of all kinds, corn and so on, it is permissible but anything that is subhat (in Arabic shubha means obscurity, or unfounded conceit) is better left out. There are a lot of things that are halal. The important thing is to know that this does not contain animal elements because usually the animal elements fall crying, especially if we know exactly that it does not contain pork oil, for example, yes, it is absolutely impossible, and we should just avoid it. What is lawful is clear and what is unlawful is clear, and the matter in the middle is subhat. And subhat is better to avoid.

The second video is produced by Dr. Musyaffa Ad Dariny on the YouTube channel called "*Halo Ustadz*", a multichannel[6] service that connects worshipers with *Ustadz*. It is available through downloading the App, phone calling, and social media profiles on YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook. The YouTube channel has more than 85 thousand subscribers and millions of views.[7] In the selected video clip, the preacher answers the following question: "Which is the ruling if a Muslim woman uses a face whitening cream? Is that allowed?".

Below is his answer, translated into English:

> All beauty medicines were originally permitted except those which were prohibited. [...] What is included in the treatment is allowed, what is not included in the treatment, for example, if it is something that changes Allah's creation, it is not allowed.

The third video is shorter but refers to an important concept that is also mentioned in the commercials: inner beauty, which *Ustadz* Abdul Somad considers more important than outer beauty. In this video clip—posted on 25th October 2017 on his personal YouTube channel, named "*Tanya Ustadz Somad"*, with more than 44 thousand views[8]—the Ustadz responds to a believer's question about whether a Muslim woman can use make-up.

> The important thing is not makeup but inner beauty, beauty from within, because of your dhikr, because of the traces of ablution water, because of the traces reading the Quran.

In a few years, Abdul Somad transformed from a small-town lecturer (from Asahan, North Sumatra) to a highly notable digital preacher in Indonesia, with over 9.6 million Instagram followers. Somad graduated from two prestigious Islamic universities: Al-Azhar University in Egypt and Dar al-Hadits al-Hasaniyyah Institute in Morocco. His popularity is based on his exceptional use of the Arabic language, Islamic texts, and his knowledge of Islamic history. Somad's preaching style incorporates a Q&A format, which allows him to personalize his sermons through a more intimate two-way dialogue. This allows him to address an array of questions to demonstrate that Islam has an answer for everything from everyday life topics to Islamic law. However, he is involved in severe controversies and accuses, most notably because he referred to the Christian cross "an element of the devil" during one of his sermons (The Jakarta Post 2019).

First, these videos show a different audience than the commercials. They are aimed at a female audience of older age, who recognize the local *ustadz* among the most authoritative references. They turn to them to resolve any doubts in everyday life, as also the format of the video generally question-and-answer demonstrates. There is also an informal linguistic register, also aligned with the video clips format.

5.8 Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, Islam seems to be perfectly capable of to align with the needs determined by consumer culture, proposing a positive image, but at the same time, essential to the life of every "good Muslim" in Indonesia. This is expressed—in different ways—both by the commercials and by the male preachers' videos. In combining ideas of Islamic identity and beauty, all the commercials tend to shape a gendered *halal* lifestyle in which women are virtuous consumers. The same virtue that is emphasized by the Islamic male preachers, who place themselves in direct and persistent contact with the worshipers through the most accessible and instantaneous means to influence as well as educate. Although they have been targeted to different audiences, they have the same purpose: both aim to funnel concrete instructions and serve as a religious and life guide. Whether it is implicitly expressed by the images reproduced in the commercials or explicitly said by the voice of the *ustadz*, this *halal* lifestyle is built and rebuilt through what is allowed and not allowed to do or buy.

Femininity is reshaped by combining two forces: the laws of the market imposed by consumerism, and the definition of an ideal and stereotyped Muslim canon of beauty. The female image recurrently represented by *halal* cosmetics commercials establishes that a Muslim woman can be independent, successful, beautiful, fashionable, if she wears the veil.

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Notes

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Chapter 6
Online *Halal* Dating: AyoPoligami and the Contestations of Polygamy as the "New Normal" in Indonesia

Lilawati Kurnia and Nurbaity

Abstract This chapter explores how the online dating app AyoPoligami expresses a *halal* lifestyle that has become increasingly popular in Indonesia in recent years. While it is desirable for many middle-class Muslims, both women and men, to live a Sharia-compliant life and to document this in public, it is questionable to what extent corresponding online services want to be associated with the *halal* label that delivers on this promise. It compares AyoPoligami with other dating apps, particularly Salams (previously Minder), a popular dating app for Muslims whose slogan is to "find love or friends the *halal* way." While scholars have explored Islamic branding and *halal* products as well as online dating in Indonesia, an analysis of online dating in the context of polygamy in Indonesia is under explored. We break new ground with this research by using interviews with users and an analysis of app features to explore how the online app AyoPoligami uses the *halal* label to make polygamy socially acceptable, to make it the "new normal," the more visible popular polygamous marriage.

Keywords AyoPoligami · *Halal* lifestyle · Marriage · Matchmaking · Polygamy

In recent years, there has been an increasing tendency of Muslim businesspeople to use Islamic terms to sell their commodities. These are both traditional ones associated with Islam and non-Islamic ones originating from the West. For instance, in the realm of banking, several Islamic or Sharia banking and finance services are promoted with a free of *riba* (interest guarantee), as taking interest is *haram* (prohibited) in Islam. In other sectors, goods such as refrigerators, washing machines, and even cosmetics are also certified *halal* (permitted). To maximise profit, Muslim businesspeople have labelled many commodities *halal*, from books, skincare products,

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fashion items, household appliances to online matchmaking apps. Hasyim (2022, p. 1) writes, for example, "Because *halal* and haram have doctrinal positions in Islam, all Muslims are committed to upholding that difference in their daily life. Other than taking part in mandatory prayers, Muslims are regulated in what is permissible and impermissible in eating, drinking and other behaviours. Those who do not obey are categorised as sinful Muslims." In Indonesia, based on State Law No. 33/2014, products that circulate, enter, and are traded in Indonesia must be *halal*-certified unless they are originating from materials prohibited under Islam (*haram*). This development has led Shirazi (2016) to introduce the idea of a "brand Islam" (Shirazi 2016), the idea that Islam has become a commodity brand where economic interests are paramount. She has pointed out that Islamic branding has been used as a marketing strategy that exploits the religious practice exclusively associated with Islam. In accordance with Hasyim's research (2022), the regulation of the lifestyle of Indonesian Muslims in production and consumption is influenced by the concepts of *halal* and commodification and the Sharia docrine, shaping their daily needs.

An important consumer group of *halal* goods and services are married couples. Marriage is a core institution in Islam; it is the cornerstone of the family. In terms of gender roles, the man is considered the head of the family, while the woman is assigned an important role in caring for the family and producing offspring. For marriage to take place between a Muslim man and a Muslim woman, however, suitable matchmaking is required, in accordance with Islamic rules. According to these, dating between men and women is not provided for in Islam, and physical contact between them is forbidden. A couple wishing to meet before marriage must therefore be accompanied either by their families or by an elder to ensure compliance with this prohibition; flirting is also forbidden. Therefore, Muslims have traditionally relied on social events around them to find a partner. It was mainly relatives, parents, aunts, and uncles who looked for a suitable partner at weddings, dinner parties or religious events.

Although most marriages are monogamous in Indonesia, not all Muslim men want to marry only one woman. In Islam, according to the Qur'an, Surah An-Nisa 3, it is permissible to marry up to four women. There are no current figures on the prevalence of polygamy in Indonesia. Historically, scholars have observed relatively low incidences of polygamy in Indonesia but have claimed that the actual number of polygamous associations in Indonesia is significant. Nurmila and Bennett (2015, p. 70) estimated the number of polygamous marriages at 4,800,000.

This chapter tackles online matchmaking, specifically the app AyoPoligami. It discusses why this app was of interest to Muslims, how it served different needs of men and women, and how it used the *halal* label to disguise immoral ambitions. In doing so, it contributes to one of the aims of this volume, to show how the aspirations for a Sharia-compliant life manifest themselves in online *halal* dating (see also Arnez 2023, this volume, Chap. 1).

It is structured as follows. The first section, drawing on prevalent scholarship on polygamy in Indonesia, reveals how contestations around polygamy have manifested in Indonesia from the pre-independence to the present. The subsequent part goes on to explore online Muslim matchmaking, looking at Muzmatch, Tinder, Minder, and its

predecessor Salams and how applications such as nikahsirri.com or Aisha Wedding have blurred the line between *halal* and *haram*. We then zoom in on AyoPoligami and situate the app in online dating before we present the results of an experiment by the online magazine Magdalene.co. Subsequently, we will cover the registration process, app functions, user motivations, and the impact of commodification. Finally, we will conclude with a summary of our findings.

6.1 Polygamy Twists

Polygamy has long been a controversial, much-debated issue in Indonesia. Long before independence, nationalist women had demanded that polygamy be curbed, at their first congress in 1928, but they were cautious in their approach, to the point of avoiding the issue at the Federation of Indonesian Women's Associations (PPII) meeting in 1930 so as not to antagonise Muslim groups (Feillard 1999).

Soekarno, Indonesia's first president, who had promised to enforce women's rights once Indonesia gained independence, threw these intentions overboard when he became president; he had four official wives. He thus became the epitome of masculinity and a role model for many men in Indonesia. During the regime of his successor Soeharto "progress was made toward limiting, although not entirely eliminating, multiple marriages" (Brenner 2007, p. 30), due to lobbying from women's groups. In contrast, during the *reformasi* (reform) period, a pro-polygamy narrative resurfaced as a demarcation and counter to the former rejection of corresponding practices under Soeharto (Nurmila and Bennett 2015, p. 72). Many books on polygamy filled bookshelves in bookstores, and polygamy became increasingly popular among middle-class men and the upsurge of discourse was reflected in "polycelebrity," which focuses on the polygamous activities of celebrities (van Wichelen 2010, p. 74). Polygamy was propagated by people like Puspo Wardoyo, a successful businessman who married four women himself and held two polygamy award events in 2003. One was organised by the Muslim Journalists Forum (MJF), which propagated polygamy as a defence against criticism from women activists (Nurmila 2007).

The controversy over what form of sexual morality would matter in Indonesia in the future manifests itself in the long-running debate over the Sexual Violence Bill and the revised criminal code (RKUHP) (see Arnez 2023; Nisa 2021, this volume, Chap. 2). During the disputes between advocates of the need for better protection of victims of sexual violence, feminists, human rights activists, and conservative forces, who mainly pushed for a ban on sex outside marriage, polygamy again became a bone of contention. Nurmila refers to this when she writes in October 2017, only 6 months after the protests of *Aksi Bela Islam* (Action for Defending Islam), where former Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), a Christian of Chinese origin, was accused of blasphemy, and crackdowns on minorities by Islamist groups were in full swing that she has started receiving pictures promoting polygamy. She interprets this as a response of Islamist groups to feminist action (Lamb 2017).

Those desiring to enter into a polygamous marriage often cite the practice of polygamy of the Prophet Muhammad and refer to the legitimization and continuation of polygamy based on the Qur'an. Here, the Qur'anic verse 4:3 is often quoted: "If you fear that you will not deal fairly with orphan girls, you may marry whichever [other] women seem good to you, two, three, or four (…)." However, as critical voices of polygamy among Muslim circles, for example, women in the Muslim women's organisation Fatayat NU have argued, this verse should be read in context with the following verse "If you fear that you cannot be equitable [to them], then marry only one, or your slave(s): that is more likely to make you avoid bias." (Arnez 2010, p. 83). They combine revisionist readings of Islam with discourses on gender equality and women's rights to argue against polygamy, while members of the Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*, PKS), proponents of polygamy, practice a straightforward reading of the Qur'an and take the text literally (Rinaldo 2011).[1]

The legal ground for polygamy in Indonesia is Law Number 1 of 1974, Article 3, paragraph 2, which reads "the court can give permission to a husband to take more than one wife, providing that it is approved by all parties concerned" (UU Perkawinan No. 1 1974). According to Indonesia's Marriage Law (UU Perkawinan), a husband should only marry one wife. But the court can give permission to a husband to marry more than one wife if desired by the parties concerned (cf. UU Perkawinan, article 3, paragraph 1, 2).

It stipulates that a man is considered to practice legal polygamy if his wife is unable to fulfil her obligations as a wife, physically disabled or has an incurable disease or is unable to bear offspring (cf. UU Perkawinan, article 3, paragraphs 2a–c).[2] In addition, before marrying a second wife, the man must undergo a trial in court with the consent of the first wife, be able to provide for his wives and children and act fairly to them (cf. UU Perkawinan, article 5 1a–b). The marriage law also specifies that a man cannot marry more than four women. According to the Compilation of Islamic Law [(*Undang-Undang* Nomor 1 Tahun 1974 Tentang *Perkawinan* dan *Kompilasi Hukum Islam* (*KHI*)], the husband is obliged to obtain court approval, may not marry more than four wives, ensure the welfare of his wives, and guarantee equal treatment of all his wives. He must obtain the consent of his wife for a polygamous marriage to be valid. If the wife's consent is not present, the marriage cannot be considered valid. *Nikah siri*, an official, secret marriage, is therefore not tenable before the law; this also applies to the revised criminal code, which will come into force three years after its enactment (see Arnez 2023).

In daily life, however, many polygamous families do not abide by the applicable legal and religious regulations, making polygamous marriage a highly problematic issue to this day. Indonesian men who do not comply with state legislation on polygamy continue to enter polygamous marriages, even without the consent of their first wives, and do not meet the material and emotional requirements to provide for their wives. The launch of AyoPoligami.com further heightened the controversy over polygamy in Indonesia.

6.2 Muslim Matchmaking in the Digital Era

Matchmaking applications have become an important vehicle for Muslims in the Middle East, North Africa, and America to meet their soulmates (Sotoudeh et al. 2017). Online matchmaking applications can provide a space to support polygamy, and some men use it for hooking up or having casual sex (Ranzini and Lutz 2017). As digitalisation has increased, traditional practices such as going to local dating agencies have declined in popularity. In recent years, therefore, a variety of websites and apps have developed to address these needs and facilitate online dating for Muslims. Cases in point are Muslim matchmaking apps such as Muzmatch, Tinder and Minder, launched 2014, 2012, and 2015, respectively. These apps claim to be exclusively for Muslims to marry and offer a marriage service for practising Muslims. They aim to provide clients with a partner for life in a *halal* way.

MuslimMatch is a matchmaking app only for Muslims, which advertises finding men and women a partner who share their cultural and faith beliefs. For the Indonesian context, Indonesianmuslimmatch.com has been developed which offers "a wide range of Single Muslim profiles from all major sects, both progressive and traditional.[3]" Typically, matchmaking apps are designed for singles but a match-finding app for polygamists was launched in Indonesia in 2017.

Tinder, a dating app created in 2012 by Sean Rad and Jonathan Badeen, also caters to online matchmaking demands. Dubbed the world's most popular matchmaking app, the dating app is used in 196 countries, with Indonesia being one of the active markets (Bachdar 2018). The emergence of dating apps has transformed the dynamics of partner-searching activities, which traditionally begin with face-to-face meetings, romantic approaches, getting to know each other, and dates. Why women use matchmaking apps like Tinder is because they are looking for friendship, self-affirmation, and a spouse (Ranzini and Lutz 2017).

Once the perfect partner has been found, the couple can decide to enter marriage. Tinder can also be used to find a temporary partner instantly. In a concise amount of time, the app, with its location-based system, can "match" two different individuals, thus enabling them to have physical and emotional contact. Tinder does not promise a happy ending (i.e., actual marriage); it is more accurate to say that it provides an opportunity for single people to meet each other and have a date. This is different from the concept of the romantic match in Islam which must end with a legitimate marriage because premarital sex is considered a grave sin. To better meet the needs of online-savvy Muslims, the online dating app launched Minder or Muslim Tinder in March 2015. Muslim Tinder was explicitly designed for Muslims who want to find a partner and seal the relationship with marriage. Both its functions and the procedure are like Tinder. After downloading the app and signing up for an account, a user can browse the profiles of fellow Muslims. If the user found someone who happens to have similar interests, they can swipe the screen to the right, which signals an interest.

Now, if the other party happens to do the same, the app will show the chat room feature, in which they can perform a *ta'aruf* (introduce themselves). One difference

between Tinder and Minder is that Muslims use Minder to be able to marry shortly or not to have long history of dating before marriage. According to Minder, expressing this interest can change the Muslim community's negative stigma against online apps and prove that it can serve as a suitable medium for finding an ideal husband or wife (Dean 2022). Muslim Tinder first appeared in non-Islamic countries with a significant number of Muslim people wanting an app to help them find a serious partner and marry properly. However, the need to find a perfect soulmate is also present in Muslim countries, so Muslim Tinder is rapidly developing and spreading in Muslim countries. Users find and get to know their future spouse without having to date. There has been a bit of a shift among users because both parties can now get to know each other through the app.

Minder changed its name to Salams in October 2020 for the following reason: as a company, we asked ourselves if the name "Minder" fit with our purpose and mission which is to help connect and get Muslims married in a *halal* way. And the truth to that answer is that Minder was not the best name for that. We didn't want to be known as Muslim Tinder. We wanted people to respect the app and use it properly. Therefore, despite us being a household name our entire company had to make the very tough decision on changing our name. We went through tons of surveys to come up with another name. We asked thousands of people for their opinions. Then one day, we suggested the name Salams. It was short, simple, and beautiful. Salams—to spread peace and a phrase used to open a conversation (Yalla Lets Talk 2021).

The new name Salams, therefore, should reflect the aim of making it easier for Muslims to marry a spouse in a *halal* way. This distinguished it from the name Minder, which, as can be seen from the quotation, had not correspond to this goal. From the customers' point of view using Salams is an effective way to meet like-minded Muslim for marriage or practising Muslim men looking to meet practicing Muslim women (Dean 2022).

Halal and *haram* are used as differentiators between conventional online-offline matchmaking and non-*halal* platforms (see Nisa 2021). However, the line between *halal* and *haram* may be blurred, as such services are sometimes abused to satisfy personal needs. One example is the application nikahsirri.com, which was linked to the Partai Ponsel offering "*halal*" virginity auctions through secret marriages in Indonesia in 2017 (Darmajati 2017). Another example is the platform Aisha Wedding,[4] which was established in 2021. It offers services for polygamy, young marriages, secret marriages, and child marriages. These two applications aim to help Muslims find their soulmate and become a movement for the "halalisation" of the Muslim lifestyle. Their aim is to use the *halal* brand to strengthen their position while still addressing specific needs of Muslims, such as polygamous marriage. The platform that is the focus of this chapter is AyoPoligami, which has facilitated polygamous marriages online ahead of the Aisha Wedding platform in 2021.

6.3 AyoPoligami

Due to the success of dating apps and online websites, Muslim entrepreneurs have tried to target specific groups that have not yet been covered by the market. Secondwife.com, for example, created by Azad Chaiwala, who lives in the UK and is of Pakistani origin, was launched as "the first and only online Muslim Polygamy matchmaking service." In the UK, unlike Indonesia, polygamy is not allowed; therefore, Chaiwala encouraged men to sign up for marriage ceremonies that are not legally recognised. Any woman registered with Secondwife.com is open to the idea of becoming a second wife, and this website is still in operation (Azeez 2016). In April 2021, they launched a mobile app that can be downloaded through PlayStore. Secondwife.com was downloaded by more than 100 K users. However, it received a 1.9 rating with corresponding negative comments. One of the users said that this application is a waste of money and time, because even after the user has deleted the account, he is still charged for the subscription. Other users said to beware of fake profiles and scammers.

A few years later an Islamic alternative marriage app to connect Muslim singles and Muslim married men with second, third and fourth wives emerged in Indonesia: AyoPoligami, "Let's do Polygamy." Pandu Solusi, a startup from Indonesia, launched this app in April 2017. AyoPoligami uses the image of a man surrounded by four women wearing *hijabs* (representing his many wives) and three children as a promotion. AyoPoligami differs from Tinder mainly in its target audience: users with the intention of entering a polygamous marriage. In terms of technical affordances, however, Tinder and Ayopoligami are very similar. Like Tinder, AyoPoligami allows users to filter their potential partners by age, location, and status. Tinder uses four communicative affordances: portability, availability, locatability and multimediality (Ranzini and Lutz 2017, p. 82). Thanks to portability, users can use Tinder in private and public spaces, unlike traditional desktop-based dating sites. The availability of mobile media allows for spontaneous and versatile use of the app. Locatability makes it easier to connect with users near one's location. Texting and photo sharing are part of the app's multimedia capabilities (Ibid). Similarly, AyoPoligami assures portability in communication practices; users can employ it while commuting, waiting, at work and at home. Availability is given by immediacy. Users can chat or text their "soulmate" or "date" at high frequency. On Tinder, the user's location is shown in the profile, whereas on AyoPoligami this is not the case. Screen sharing and image production in Tinder are obviously driven by the first impression of viewing the photo. When users have a potential match, they swipe right. In AyoPoligami, however, such a "swipe right" concept is not available so that multimediality is restricted.

Language can be both a facilitating and a hindering factor when using online dating services. The apps Minder or Salams are in English, and they offer their users partners from abroad. As most Indonesians do not speak English, it is less attractive for them to join these global matchmaking apps. Ayopoligami.com is in the Indonesian language and specifically targets Muslims living in Indonesia. It does not only facilitate communication among users but also makes it easier for

Indonesians to find a spouse within the country. Users could download this app on an Android device through the Play Store app. Below is the visual representations of the AyoPoligami app, which could be downloaded on a smartphone.

The picture shows a man with four women and three children and a mosque in the background.[5] This illustration clearly invites men to install the app on their smartphones; it suggests to them the possibility of having more than one wife. For women, it promises the possibility of financial security through polygamous marriage.

In terms of app accessibility and usage, it was very easy to open an account on this app. An email address and password were the only things required to register for membership on Ayopoligami.com. After providing an email address and password, users had to enter their date of birth and status. Members were not required to agree to or fulfil any binding conditions during registration. In other words, membership of ayopoligami.com was open to virtually anyone.

As for the visual design of the app, the background is a silhouette of a mosque, and four veiled women are shown with a man in the middle and two children (Fig. 6.1).

Lindu Cipta Pranayama, the owner and founder of this app, developed the concept based on his personal experience with online dating platforms and met his current wife through his own app. Initially, he developed a dating website for singles, but during the development period, the issue of polygamy came up. He wanted to create a trusted online dating site for Muslim men seeking multiple wives and provide them with a *halal* source for polygamy. As the app's popularity increased, various misuses began to emerge, such as inviting female users to practice *nikah siri*, (Adisya 2017). A huge wave of negative reactions against Ayopoligami.com led to a temporary suspension of the app in September 2017, with a promise of "improvement."

The improvement came in the form of additional requirements for becoming a member. The original version did not include ID card numbers as part of the requirements, which may prompt someone to use fake names and pictures. Following

Fig. 6.1 Ayopoligami.com signup page. Photo credit Lila Kurnia. Private documentation

the upgrade, aspiring members had to fill in their ID card numbers and upload their accurate photos to maintain validity. Besides that, there were additional status options for (1) a married man who has obtained a permission from a religious office to marry again and (2) a married man who has not obtained such permission. However, the permission was not given before the marriage ceremony with a subsequent wife.

After selecting one of the options, the user had to wait for 3 days for the verification process and submit a certified letter from the local neighbourhood association where the user lived. Once verification was completed and the user found a suitable partner, a moderator from AyoPoligami created a private group to mediate between the users. At this point, the couple entered the realm of offline matchmaking, and this required an additional service fee around Rp 75.000. When interviewed about this, the founder of AyoPoligami said, "Three days for registration. They can look at the ID card. If it's ugly, just find another. There're a lot of free online matchmaking services out there" (KumparanTech 2017).

The app was taken off the market after it was criticized for using religion for profit, for sexual harassment against female users and for men using religious teachings to satisfy their sexual needs. The founder, Lindu, countered the criticism by saying that he wanted to evaluate and improve the registration format with strict criteria, presentation of an ID card and consent of the first wife. However, in the end, this bore no fruit. The application was permanently shut down on October 5, 2017 (Menur 2017).

6.4 An AyoPoligami Experiment

Our research is inspired by an experiment the bilingual online magazine Magdalene.co conducted in 2017 on the AyoPoligami app. According to its self-description, the magazine aims to "educate, empower and promote an equal society through solution-oriented journalism."[6] The magazine, which promotes women's and minority rights, and is inclusive, critical, empowering, and entertaining. The website channels the voices of feminists, pluralists, and progressive groups. In August 2017, Elma Adisya, a reporter from Magdalene.co who had signed up as a user of the AyoPoligami app, tested the reaction of men who were reportedly seeking polygamous marriage. In her report, she describes how she was initially taken aback by the high number of registrations from men compared to women. At that time, there were 114 female accounts and nearly 600 male accounts registered. After wondering if she had come across a dating app for gay and bisexual men under the guise of Sharia because there were so many men, she first tried creating a male account, but she did not receive a response. She goes on to depict how she created a female account, complemented by a religious quote and a photo and how she suddenly had a lot of friends. One of the men who contacted her was looking for second wife because he was as "strong as ever" in bed but his wife was not. When Adisya asked him whether his wife knew about the man's intention to take a second wife, he replied that he

did not know but he respected his wife's feelings. Another went further, asking her whether she agreed to practice *nikah siri*.

From the experiment, it emerged that AyoPoligami becomes a commercial medium by mainly exploiting men's needs or gratification, resulting in legal prostitution and objectification of women (Adisya 2017). It should be noted here that the article published by Adisya, since digital attacks against Magdalene.co that began in May 2020, was temporarily deleted from its website. Amnesty International drew attention to the digital attacks against Magdalene.co, stating that the website had published numerous articles on prostitution and misogyny. Therefore, they argued, this online magazine, together with the media outlet *konde.com*, had become a target of harassment, threats and digital attacks that targeted critical voices, including activists and students, with the aim of silencing them (Amnesty International 2020).

6.5 AyoPoligami Revisited

Magdalene.co's experiment prompted us to engage in our research on the AyoPoligami app. We were curious to what extent our results would resemble or differ from the Magdalene.co experiment. We interviewed several users about the app who preferred to stay anonymous. We found that gendered inequalities of the app are visible in different areas. In the following paragraphs, we present our findings according to the following categories: registration and functions and users, their motivations to use the app, and commodification.

6.6 Registration and Functions

On AyoPoligami, men could create profiles that contained various personal details such as occupation, characteristics, and the purpose of using this app. Here, male users could also provide the characteristics of the woman they were looking for and request photos from their female chat partners showing their faces, according to our female respondent A, aged 41. Interestingly, some profiles suggested seemingly opposing characteristics. For instance, the profile of one male user indicated that he observed *salah* (the five daily prayers) and was a *makmum* (engaging in congregational prayers). However, there were also references to sexual intercourse and breasts.

After signing up, the app displayed different functions such as "Profile," "Meet," "Gift" and "Chat." However, these functions differ depending on whether the registration is for a man or a woman. M (aged 35), a male user, commented on notable gender asymmetry in this regard: "On this app, as far as I know, only men can become active users. In fact, most of the accounts belong to men, because, here, only men can search and 'invite' women users to be 'friends.'".

Male members could see female members, "choose" them, and "invite" them to have a chat after filling in their profile. As for female members, their profile was seen by male members, who would then choose them and invite them to have a chat, or just "like" their profile picture. If someone signed up as a woman and uploaded an exciting profile picture, male members could give a "thumbs up," meaning that he only liked the picture, without inviting her to chat. He could also give her a gift in the form of a "ring." Another respondent of ours (L, 38 years old) said in an interview that when she clicked on the photos of the men she had "liked," she saw a description saying that he was looking for a lover.

As the app offered more functions for men than for women, gender bias was already built into AyoPoligami's user functions. Men could invite women and give them a sign that they liked the way they looked, while women could only make a choice by accepting offers.

6.7 Users and Their Motivation to Use the App

Our observations are consistent with those of Magdalene.co in that most users of AyoPoligami were male. According to one of our respondents (S, aged 29), three types of male users engaged in a chat on the AyoPoligami app. She pointed out that the contents of their conversation indicated which of the three categories they fell into. Within the first group, she said, users employed Islamic forms of address such as "*ukhti*" and "*akhi*," brother and sister, to indicate their compliance with Sharia law, which is derived from the Quran, Islam's holy book, as well as the Sunnah and Hadith—the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad. Secondly, some directly stated their intention to take a second or third wife. Lastly, as she pointed out, some contacted her using sexually suggestive, vulgar language.

Our male interlocutor M, fell into the second group. He told us that after 5 years of marriage he had decided to find a second wife with the help of AyoPoligami. He bemoaned the fact that his wife has not given him any children, and, therefore, hopefully, the use of the app will make him find a wife who is physically able to create offspring. He considered the inability to have children his wife's fault.

In line with Islamic norms, he stated that "matchmaking must be performed with the assistance of a cleric or religious teacher and in accordance with the parents' decision." Before using the app, M therefore asked his parents' trusted clergyman to help him find a suitable wife. Although M used to follow traditional Sharia matchmaking procedures, he eventually resorted to an online app because social construction requires that a marriage must produce biological offspring. This prompted M to find a second wife through AyoPoligami. M realised that this app did not originally comply with Sharia law. However, the fact that the new version of the app has required the submission of a first wife's permission letter convinced him to find a wife using AyoPoligami.

The main reason female respondents installed AyoPoligami on their devices was to find a potential life partner to fulfil the obligation to marry based on Islamic

teachings. In addition, it was also important to them that family and community members be involved in the selection of a marriage partner. The second motive for using AyoPoligami was various forms of social expectations such as to marry at a certain age and lead an economically stable life. "I think that it's difficult to find a husband when you're already 40 years old" (L, aged 35). L's parents wanted her to marry at the right age, so L decided to use AyoPoligami.

One respondent also referred to financial issues when addressing her motivation to use the app. S (aged 41), a widow, said that her parents pushed her to remarry because they wanted her to have a prosperous life in the future. S explained: "My parents want me to marry again after my husband passed away, because I now have to raise two children." After marrying and having two children, S's husband passed away, and S was required to marry again to gain financial support. S eventually decided to become an AyoPoligami user to become somebody's second wife.

S felt that AyoPoligami had helped her get a husband, although she now has to be somebody's second wife. The decision to use an online app was due to her failure to find a reliable or trustworthy husband offline or through the agency of her parents. S had not succeeded to get a husband with the assistance of her family members and neighbours, and she expressed her frustration at not finding a potential husband: "The suitors who came to me simply didn't meet my criteria, because I was already 41. That's why I prefer becoming a second wife via AyoPoligami to being married to someone who is—sorry—crippled."

S was not the only one who were concerned about social expectations; four of our respondents expressed their frustration at facing the pressure of having to produce children, marry at an ideal age, and meeting their economic needs through marriage. One responent, who works as a teacher, contended that Ayopoligami exploits the concept of Sharia. Nevertheless, she created an account on the application because she wanted to meet she social expectation that a woman must marry before she is 30 years old.

Our last example is the AyoPoligami user A (41 years). She told us that she had decided to become a second wife by entering into a religious marriage without the consent of her husband's first wife. She explained her decision by saying that she wanted to meet the social expectation that women must marry and have children.

The following can be deduced from this. The male user M was a classic user in that he was looking for a second wife because his first wife had not given him any children after 5 years of marriage. He was therefore within the bounds of what was legally permissible. The comment of one of our respondents that she had received sexually suggestive comments is worrying. Like Nikah Siri's immoral offer mentioned in the Magdalene.co experiment above, it confirms critical voices accusing the app of exploiting women and camouflaging immoral sexual practices. As A's case reveals, the consent of the first wife is not necessarily obtained so that AyoPoligami has fostered the thriving of illegal marriage practices.

Our female interlocutors' statements have revealed another aspect that has not yet appeared in the discussions of this app: responses to age-related pressures on women or that they have become widows. They reveal that the respective female users would probably not have been interested in a polygamous marriage, but that their families

pushed them to do so, due to social expectations. The app gives them the prospect of quick relief from their problematic status within the family. Our interlocutor S, for example, felt burdened by the prospect of living alone as a *janda* (widow or divorcee) and by the negative stigma held against a woman with a shaky source of income.

It could be argued that the use of the AyoPoligami app was a way for this user to avoid the social pressure and shame that Davies posits affects not only the individual person but also the wider family (Davies 2015, p. 32). It also ties in with observations by Winarta, Mahy and Herriman (2023, Chap. 7, this volume) that *janda* are often stigmatised in Indonesian society, while the male counterpart *duda* (widower) is not.

6.8 Online-Dating Commodified

Unlike traditional dating practices, such as those arranged through lengthy family negotiations, AyoPoligami uses the element of speed and efficiency. Users can access the app directly from home and pursue their project immediately, so people in their environment can be largely unaware of the app's use.

AyoPoligami has contributed not only to the commodification of polygamous marriages but also to the commodification of irregular marriages and gratification of sexual desire under the cloak of a Sharia-compliant lifestyle. Based on our conversations with users, it turned out that the new AyoPoligami version can be seen as a money-oriented platform that has commercialised romance and religion. The original version did not have any requirements for prospective members, such as uploading consent for another marriage by the first wife for male members. This shows that the app only pretended to be Sharia-compliant but was built with the understanding that it would do business with irregular marriages and condone the exploitation of women.

This brings us back to Shirazi and her concept of "brand Islam," which, as she argues, is profit-driven, "exploiting the rise of a new Islamic economic paradigm, and not necessarily created with the aim of honouring religious practice and sentiment" (Shirazi 2016, 1). She has also pointed out that marketers tend to make use of the fact "that a consumer's purchasing decisions, when intentional and linked to religious identity, are unusually predictable; therefore, these consumers are highly subject to manipulation" (Shirazi 2016, p. 4). While she was referring primarily to the food industry, toys, cosmetics, and fashion, this also applies to apps like AyoPoligami.

The fact that women were automatically offered fewer options than male users could be seen as "manipulation" of the users. The founder of the app assumed that they would accept this because of the persistent gender inequalities in society. Since it was also assumed that men would want to make full use of the app's features, male members had to pay extra for these services. In this case, AyoPoligami managed to sell its "product" by using the narrative of polygamy as a religious practice.

6.9 Conclusion

The contestations around the AyoPoligami app cannot be seen in isolation from what we have called "polygamy twists" in this chapter. These, as relevant scholarly literature has shown, have shaped the history of polygamy from before independence to the present, albeit to different degrees, intensities and with different groups involved. In the 2010s, especially in the context of *Aksi Bela Islam* (2016 and 2017), the issue of polygamy became a subject of heated debate again in the context of legitimising the power of conservative forces, also in order to curb the influence of feminists who criticise and reject polygamy. A case in point is the attempt during hacker attacks on the feminist online magazine Magdalene.co in 2020 to delete critical articles on polygamy, including on the AyoPoligami app, so that the respective report by Adisya (2017) experiment is no longer available on their website to this day.

The AyoPoligami app can be seen in the context of efforts to establish polygamy as the "new normal" in Indonesia. As we have shown in the article, it is comparable to other dating apps for Muslims on the market. However, there are a few exceptions as the app only worked in Indonesian and targeted a particular group of users, people who wanted to (allegedly) conclude a polygamous marriage. As far as the technical affordance's portability, availability, locatability and multimediality are concerned (cf. Ranzini and Lutz 2017), AyoPoligami is not as versatile as other apps.

Drawing on interviews with several female and male respondents we have shown that the online app AyoPoligami has used the *halal* label to make polygamy socially acceptable by commodifying both polygamous and irregular or secretive marriages. Male users have both subverted the rules involved in entering a polygamous marriage and also used the app for sexual affairs.

AyoPoligami can be viewed as a product of a capitalist system that prioritizes profit, where the pursuit of financial gain often takes precedence, even if there is only a semblance of compliance with Sharia law. The societal constraints that continue to affect women, such as the pressure to marry at a young age or to remarry after widowhood, have been integrated into the AyoPoligami app's business model, as they are part of the user groups it serves. The removal of the AyoPoligami app from the market does not diminish the significance of the issue. Instead of the app, online workshops on polygamy have gained prominence. However, these workshops come at a high cost with participants being charged over 3 million rupiah (equivalent to 200 US dollars). Thus, the commodification of irregular marriages can now continue within the confines of these online workshops.

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Notes

1. A machine-generated summary based on the work of Rinaldo, Rachel 2011 in *Qualitative Sociology*.
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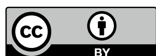

Part III
Shame and Self-Determination

Chapter 7
Fate, Desire, and Shame: *Janda* in Indonesian Pop Culture

Monika Swasti Winarnita, Petra Mahy, and Nicholas Herriman

Abstract Research on images of femininity in Indonesia has largely focused on either the image of femininity produced by the state or, relatively, high-brow cultural forms of femininity. However, popular culture produces images of females that often stand in contrast to such symbolism. This article contends that the *janda*, the divorcee or widow, one of the foremost images of femininity in popular music, drama, and literature, has been, for the most part, overlooked. Seen as sexually available and lascivious, the *janda* represents the "fallen woman"; an object of both fascination and pity. This article analyses the *janda* image as one of the foremost symbols in Indonesian popular culture. It is argued that the *janda* image must be analysed in relation to maiden and mother images. Furthermore, culturally specific ideas of desire, fate, and shame contextualise the *janda* image. As will become apparent, Indonesian popular culture is patriarchal, and a heterosexual male perspective frames much of the symbolism. This means that actual women live with the very real stigma of being a divorcee or a widow in Indonesia. In this study, we focus on the *janda* image and include discussion of how its representation has evolved to include a cosmopolitan ideal.

Keywords Divorcees · Indonesia · Popular culture · Widows · Women

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7.1 Introduction: Images of Women

Various female images and symbols pervade Indonesian popular culture and artistic genres, including that of the *janda* (widow/divorcee). The *janda* stereotype encompasses several interrelated and somewhat conflicting aspects. She occupies a position of shame for having divorced her husband or, to a somewhat lesser extent, been left as a widow due to unfortunate fate. A *janda* is to be pitied for this state which is likely to include straightened economic circumstances. At the same time, a *janda* is also assumed to have heightened sexual libido and to be on the hunt for a new man, and due to these "presumptions of promiscuity" (Mahy et al. 2016, p. 47) she is also widely desired by men. Other (presumably more virtuous women) feel threatened by the lure that a *janda* may present to their husbands.

The *janda* image must be situated and understood in relation to other symbols of females in Indonesian culture. Depending on the cultural genre and the historical period, certain images of women appear so frequently that we could call them "tropes" or "stereotypes." For example, in the imagination of the 1950s Indonesian literary elite, the figure of the prostitute was popular. Along with her male counterpart, the pedicab (*becak*) driver, the prostitute was a symbol of the downtrodden and oppressed (Herriman 2010). Other stereotypes have been predominantly promoted by the state. These include the national hero Kartini (Coté 2005; Rutherford 1993; Mahy 2012); the communist woman/maniacs or models (Tiwon 1996); the model mother (Suryakusuma 1996; Tiwon 1996; Wieringa 2012); and the young female virgin (*gadis* or *perawan*) (Heryanto 1999; Winarnita 2013). Other symbols are more commonly found in popular culture. Among these are the *tante girang* ("sugar mamma") (Hatley 2008a, b; Winarnita 2014); the conniving stepmother in soap operas; the high school virgin or maiden *perawan* such as in the 2002 popular movie called *Ada Apa dengan Cinta?* or What's Up with Love? (cf. Hanan 2008); a female ghost commonly appearing in low-budget horror movies (cf. Siddique 2002); martial arts fighting women in fantasy soap operas; women in polygamous marriages such as in the popular 2008 movie called *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* or Verses of Love (cf. Hariyadi 2010 and Widodo 2008) and the 2006 movie *Berbagi Suami* or Sharing a Husband (cf. Kurnia 2009); a rape victim, concubine and prostitute, for example, in the epic Chinese Indonesian movie *Ca Bau Kan* (Budiman 2011; Sen 2007); and the professional, modern women in a genre of literary female pop novels dubbed *Sastrawangi* (Aveling 2007; Budiman 2011). Women in the *Sastrawangi* genre of novels (for example Ayu Utami's Saman, 1998), as well as popular movies such as *Arisan* and *Dewi Ucok,* are depicted in what is perceived to be a lurid fashion: as lesbians and as married women who get away with having affairs.

Sen (2007) argues that although Indonesia now has female directors who make popular films about women's roles, they may not necessarily revolutionise gender codes. It is only in non-commercial media:

> in films, shown to tiny audiences in kine-clubs, cafes and college common rooms, [that] we find everything from the bizarre to the poetic, and the most gut-wrenchingly realistic documentaries on women political prisoners; where one can discover the potential cinema holds for women's emancipation on screen and off (Sen 2007).

Congruent arguments have been made by various scholars (Aveling 2007; Budiman 2011; Imanjaya and Citra 2013) about the *Sastrawangi* novels by female authors. These novels challenged gender and sexuality in the post-*Reformasi* period (1998), depicting women in roles other than "mother" and "wife." These novels, however, straddle genres; in-between literature and popular fiction. This is even though some titles in this genre have sold copies in equal numbers to that of popular fiction (Aveling 2007). *Sastrawangi*, as well as popular fiction and films, also includes stories of Indonesian *jandas* in places like New York and Melbourne with cosmopolitan lifestyles that challenge historical depictions and earlier stereotypical images of this gendered identity. Compared with literary, state-endorsed, and popular symbolic female stereotypes, the image of the *janda* has obtained far greater significance.

We argue that the links between the pop world and the real world (Mahy et al 2016; Parker and Creese 2016) are difficult to trace exactly, but most likely they reinforce one another. The *janda* image can be found in different expressions of popular culture, including popular literature (see Watson 2023 and Wieringa 2023, this volume) and *dangdut* music lyrics. The *janda* image also crosses time, as shown in media scholar Yusuf's (2020) lists of films and *dangdut* songs with *janda* in the title spanning from the 1950s through to the present day (Yusuf 2020). While the *janda* image certainly has a long history of endurance through Indonesian popular cultural products, our chapter shows that the *janda* image has also evolved more recently to indicate a more cosmopolitan and global aspect that affects this local Indonesian gendered identity construction. We also demonstrate the relational ways that the *janda* figure is posed in contrast to other symbols of femininity in Indonesian pop culture, particularly that of the *ibu* (wife/mother) and the *gadis* (girl/virgin). All translations used in this Chapter are our own.

7.2 *Janda* in Film, Literature, and Music

7.2.1 Films

To analyse the image of the *janda* compared to the honoured *ibu* (wife/mother), two films are first used here. One is a titillating 2011 comedy entitled *Mati Muda di Pelukan Janda* (Dying Young in a Janda's Embrace). The hero is a parentless boy, raised by a transsexual "mother." At 21, he falls in love with a young widow; the "good *janda*." Modest and hardworking, she cares for the boy's injured arm. She is, in the young man's words, "beautiful, friendly and good." The "bad *janda*" is another local woman who has her own roadside food stall, but also entertains men

at her home at night. In fact, she is not a *janda*, but only pretends to be one to attract more clients. The "bad *janda*" falls in love with the hero and uses dirty tricks to attract him. The plot is based on things not being as they seem; the transsexual "fake" mother has the properties of a real mother—loving the child s/he has adopted; the parentless youngster has all the properties of being her real child; the bad *janda* has all the qualities of a real *janda*; the good *janda* will be eventually restored to her rightful status as a wife. Superficially, the movie is light-hearted if not crude; the advertising poster warns that "male virgins are banned from watching" (*perjaka ting ting dilarang nonton*), implying that the movie might arouse such viewers.

A comparatively more recent 2021 comedy-drama film, in *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens* (Ali & the Queens of Queens), distributed by the globally popular Netflix streaming platform, the Indonesian *janda* are portrayed more subtly and sympathetically. The plot involves 17-year-old Ali travelling from Jakarta to New York in search of his long-lost mother. She had gone to New York many years before to pursue her dreams of becoming a successful singer. In doing so, she split from Ali's father (who accused her of not being a proper wife and mother for not returning to Indonesia). The early scenes of the film clearly show a young Ali and his father's domestic struggles without a mother/wife. While in New York, Ali finds refuge in a flat in Queens with four single Indonesian women—at least one of whom is clearly a widow, one mentions having had a string of lovers, while the history of the other two is left unclear. These four women provide Ali with a safe place to stay and emotional support as he reunites with his mother. Ali's mother eventually appears to find some redemption after initially wanting to hide Ali from her current husband and children, to whom she finally confesses his existence.

The five Indonesian women in New York are juxtaposed in the film with Ali's aunt in Jakarta—a *jilbab* (veil)-wearing woman of obvious Islamic piety who explicitly disapproves of Ali's mother's choices and is visibly unsettled by the freely behaved four "queens of Queens." Therefore, the contrast with the *Ibu* figure is quite clear in this film. *Ali & Ratu-Ratu Queens* is sympathetic, but still contains a juxtaposition of life choices between *ibu* and *janda* figures.

7.2.2 MetroPop Novels

A different popular culture text are the novels belonging to the 'MetroPop' genre. This recently popular literary genre grew out of the international trend in female-focused audiences and narratives. Suri (2013) describes MetroPop as a genre born from the "Chick-Lit" phenomenon in Western literature. With best-sellers such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Confessions of a Shopaholic*, Chick-Lit was popular in English-speaking countries from the mid-90s to the early-2000s. By 2003, such titles were also clearing the shelves of Indonesian booksellers. In response, Gramedia, one of Indonesia's largest publishers and retailers, wanted to promote what it called "MetroPop."

The first MetroPop novel, *Jodoh Monica* by Alberthiene Endah (2004) was "about a 34-year-old woman, who has a successful career in advertising but encounters difficulties in finding a romantic match" (Suri 2013). MetroPop characters inhabit a cosmopolitan world of malls, cafés, and boutiques, take overseas trips, speak with interspersed English words, have drivers, work in offices and use Blackberry mobile phones (the mobile communications device of choice during the MetroPop years). Such novels soon began to chart the lives of *janda*. Thus, in the novel entitled *Divortiare* by Ika Natassa (2008) the narrator Alex is a divorcée who was educated in Australia. She spends most of her time in malls, offices, or hotels, or being driven between them by her personal driver. She watches American dramas and eats at international franchise outlets. But her life is not perfect. As she reflects, in English, "the dating game is a bit tricky for a divorcée like me," as she is, "after all a damaged good" [sic.] (Natassa 2008). Although Alex worked hard to prove she could survive independently, she ended up remarrying and "embracing her traditional feminine role as a good wife." Her storyline depicts her being happier as a married woman than remaining single as a *janda* even with a successful career (Atmaja et. al n.d.).

The MetroPop novel considered most closely here is *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan* a MetroPop novel Aksana (2010). This narrative was serialised in *Kompas* (a major national newspaper) and then published as a complete novel by Gramedia. The novel's structure mirrors the popular 1998–2004 US television series *Sex and the City*, based around the romantic lives and struggles of four single professional women in New York. The series frequently portrayed scenes involving a relationship with a man, which is followed by a scene where "the girls" discuss the previous events. The novel *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan* mirrors this structure. In fact, *Sex and the City* is even mentioned in the novel.

The story centres on a mother called Rossa. A young divorcée in the capital, Jakarta, Rossa owns her own fashion boutique and is raising her daughter. Her two closest friends Inge and Dilla are also *janda*. She hires a new maid Nunung, another *janda*, and a friendship between employer and maid quickly develops. We follow both Rossa and her maid in their search for love. Throughout the novel, their romantic journeys mirror each other. Both Rossa and Nunung did not end up remarrying, as described further in the later section of this chapter, as their *janda* status continues to determine their lives throughout the book and ultimately their failed romances.

7.2.3 Dangdut *Music*

Regarding music, several songs from an Indonesian dance-music genre, *dangdut*, are examined. *Dangdut* is a popular hybrid music form that emerged in the 1970s. It combines rock lead guitar with Indian-style drumming, melodic flutes, disco, violin, and a style of singing vaguely reminiscent of Arabic chanting. The style has evolved over the decades, through the addition of electronic beats ("house" music style) and other effects. Over the years, it has also become more erotic (Bader 2011). In tandem with this evolution, the lyrics, initially heavily pious and Islamic, became

increasingly sensual. In live performances, especially those played in the villages, female singers often wear sexy clothes and perform provocative dance moves while young men dance (*joget*). In the early-to mid-2000s, a *dangdut* singer named Inul Daratista attracted a lot of attention for her "fast gyrating of the hips and bottom in a sensual way" (Bader 2011, p. 342). In particular, she was associated with a move known as the *ngebor*, which resembled a bore or a drill, causing a sensation dubbed "Inulmania." Some Muslim clerics denounced Inul's performances. The King of *Dangdut*, the man who played a large role in the development of *dangdut*, Rhoma Irama, apparently issued a religious ruling against Inul (Bader 2009). The scandal of Inul, along with the publication of Indonesian Playboy, is thought to have been a driving force behind the proposed Anti-pornography Law of the mid-2000s, which was eventually passed in 2008, and upheld by the Constitutional Court in 2010.

Dangdut has an ambiguous status in Indonesian popular culture. The back cover of *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan* carries a blurb indicating this ambiguity: "Can two worlds be united? Boss and maid? City and village? Pop and *dangdut*?" These cultural dichotomies epitomise the idea of *dangdut* being a village (and hence lower-class), rural, music form. Although the genre seems to have attained mainstream acceptance as an Indonesian national music genre, many Indonesians find its often overt sexuality difficult to reconcile with their religious perspective (Bader 2011; Pioquinto 1995; Weintraub 2006; Winarnita 2011). For some fundamentalists and modernists, the sexual element to *dangdut* is offensive to Islam, while many non-Muslims consider *dangdut* to be music specifically for Muslims (Weintraub 2006; Pioquinto 1995).

Several *dangdut* songs are analysed here. Two share the same title, "*Nasib Janda*." To differentiate for the purposes of this paper, one is translated as "Fate of the *Janda*" and the other as "The *Janda*'s Fate." Another song is simply called "*Janda*." This, apparently, was based on an earlier song "*Duda*" (widower/divorcé), in which the speaker, a widower who has just lost his wife, bemoans the difficulties of his life. This was re-released as a song called *Janda*, performed by a female singer narrating as a widow, and it became wildly popular. These and the other *dangdut* songs examined for this chapter are considered to be among the classics of the genre. As in the novels and the films discussed previously, in these songs, humour underlies this apparently serious topic. However, this humour-in-severity is, for the most part, heavily dependent on context and thus difficult to convey to people unfamiliar with the cultural context. Nevertheless, it is through these popular media examples that we can analyse the image of the *janda*.

7.3 The *Janda* Symbol in Popular Culture

To understand what the *janda* represents in the symbolic world of popular culture, we might first consider how the *janda* is inevitably understood in relation to two other female images—the virgin/maiden and the wife/mother. Once a female child reaches puberty, she should become the shy and retiring object of desire, that is, the *gadis*. *Gadis* means "girl" or "maiden," although sometimes the word *perawan*,

which means literally "virgin," is used to refer to her. Generally, the *gadis* is portrayed as being modest and guarding her virginity, although she might flirt with the local boys and might fall in love with one. The *gadis* must secure a husband quickly. If she is already in her mid-twenties and not married, she clearly is not attractive and "*tidak laku*" (an expression used to describe, among other things, produce which does not sell at the market). If she waits much longer, she will become a *perawan tua* (old virgin). This is perhaps the worst fate of all. A *janda* is pitied, but at least she was once an *ibu*. Ideally, the *gadis* will marry young, thus transforming her into the ultimate ideal of femininity, the *ibu*, the devoted mother and loyal wife.

The *ibu* is portrayed as soft and gentle, devoted, and affectionate. They work hard at keeping their family together and raising their children, all for the good of the entire Indonesian nation (Suryakusuma 1996). Marriage is the ticket to adulthood, but, for a woman, adulthood (and, in a sense, civic life) should be limited to being a wife and mother. The *ibu* is sexualised, but only in a limited sense. Her sexuality is creative (making a family) and binding (keeping her husband loyal). The *ibu* is desirable to her husband, but absolutely not to anyone else. The only exceptions are some soap operas, in which a woman who is apparently an *ibu* commits adultery, and is discovered, with the result that the family unit is torn apart with devastating consequences, and she becomes a *janda* through divorce.

Some narratives in pop culture depict *janda* as being desirable and beautiful, especially if her husband died or left her while she was still a "young *janda*" (*janda muda*), sometimes referred to as "flower *janda*" (*janda kembang*). Here "flower" implies beauty. This symbol of the desirable *janda*—the topic of this chapter—is to be distinguished from older, undesirable *janda*. For example, in the *dangdut* song "The *Janda*'s Fate," the singer laments:

> What's worse is if the *janda* is still young,
>
> Many come to tempt her,
>
> And what's strange is that those who tempt,
>
> Do it just to satisfy their *nafsu* (lust).

If the *janda* is lucky, she will be saved from this clearly forlorn state; an honest man with good intentions will marry her, perhaps as a second wife, and will undoubtedly receive heavenly rewards (*pahala*) for his generosity.

We thus have three sexualised female categories: *gadis*, *ibu*, and *janda,* which indicate availability to nobody, availability only to their husband, and availability to everybody, respectively. Accordingly, a woman should either be an unmarried virgin (property of the family), or a married non-virgin (property of the husband). The *janda* symbol does not fit into these established categories.

Being female and being no longer married carries a stigma that is not shared by males in the same situation. In comparison, the stud–slut distinction in English cultures reflects the idea that a male who is sexually promiscuous is more positively valued than a female engaging in the same practices (Flood 2013, p. 97; Holland et al. 1996). Similarly, for ostensibly possessing the same characteristics,

the *janda* is subject to disapproval where a *duda* is not. For instance, the narrator in the novel *Divortiare* observes, "While 'cool *duda*' sounds really cool, '*janda kembang*' actually sounds really deprecating" (Natassa 2008). We also see this double standard in the novel *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan.* As a friend of the heroine reflects:

> 'If a *janda* has children, her status is even more embarrassing (*memalukan*)!' hissed Inge fiercely. 'Yet if a *duda* has children he will be worshipped. He'll be considered as a responsible man, who shoulders his children's fate. He'll even be called a gentleman because he has a heart and morals (Aksana 2010, pp. 255–256).

The mention of "worship" might be exaggerated here, but it is an otherwise accurate appraisal of the symbolism of *duda* in contrast to *janda.* To summarise, each female symbol is defined primarily by its relationship to and distinction from other female symbols; the main distinction between these symbols being the level of sexual availability to men. Of these sexualised stages, a *gadis* is sexually unavailable, an *ibu* is only available to her husband and a *janda* is available for extra-marital sex. The *janda* is sexualised because she is presumed to be available to all men. Unique ideas of desire and fate contextualise these symbols, as discussed in the following sections.

*7.3.1 Desire (***Nafsu***)*

Janda must be understood in terms of *nafsu* as it is construed in Indonesian popular culture. *Nafsu* can be glossed as desire or lust, particularly for food, drink, and sex. *Nafsu* is essential. Without hunger (*nafsu* for food), we would not eat. Without thirst, we would not drink. Without sexual desire, men would not marry a *gadis* and produce children. Moreover, in Indonesian pop culture, to be lacking desire ("*kurang nafsu*") is a lamentable state—it usually means that you do not want to have sex but could also imply you do not want to eat, sleep, or do anything that is useful to existence and procreation. Desire, therefore, sustains existence.

It is commonly interpreted that "God gives us desire," but "we must control it," because as useful and good as desire is, it can also be dangerous. The danger is that it can lead to sin: in particular, sex outside of marriage. So *nafsu* needs to be directed. The wife bears responsibility for directing her husband's desire. The *ibu* (the ads for herbal treatments remind us) must maintain her husband's sexual interest and must be concerned with serving and pleasing him. This stops healthy desire leading him to sin, most likely in the form of contact with a *janda.* If the husband loses interest in the wife and divorces her (or he dies) the *ibu* herself will become a *janda.*

Once a *janda*, she becomes the object of other men's desire. Sex with a woman outside of marriage is a great sin (*dosa*). Sex with a *janda* constitutes, if not a loophole to the rule, at least not as grave a sin. After all, the *janda* was once married, so she is not a *gadis*; and she is not anybody's wife, so she is not an *ibu.* The implied reasoning here is not thoroughly convincing, but it at least allows for sufficient ambiguity to permit the expression of desire.

However, the *janda* is not only the object of desire, but she also possesses ample *nafsu* herself. In *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan,* the *janda* characters have desires which stem from their loneliness. One of the heroine's friends, a *janda* called Dilla, is caught in bed with the heroine's boyfriend. The narrator describes:

> Dilla's body was shaking because she felt in the wrong 'I'm just a normal woman…' she sighed hoarsely, 'who needs to be close, who needs to be touched…by a man…I'm lonely…there aren't any women who are steadfast enough to live alone, there aren't any women who can live without a man' (Aksana 2010, p. 417).

The likely majority female readers are supposed to pity her, while a heterosexual male reader may be aroused.

Desire stemming from loneliness is also apparent in the *dangdut* song "*Janda.*" The singer addresses a man who is seducing her. "I can't resist, please leave me be… [so I can] avoid the temptation of Satan," she sings, "I'm only a human without strength." Thus, when she sings about their desire to "pour it out," with reference to the feeling of "longing and love," the significance is not lost on the audience. She is lascivious and immodest in spite of herself; she cannot control her natural desire. Thus, the *janda* is both desired and desiring.

*7.3.2 Fate (*Nasib*)*

We also cannot understand the *janda* symbol without relating it to *nasib* (fate). *Nasib* is a powerful explanatory tool in Indonesian culture. "*Nasib*," Hay suggests, "indicates that God indeed dictated the event to turn out as it did…It does not place blame on others [or anyone for that matter, and] …is used to explain a negative event, not a positive one" (Hay 2005, p. 35). If a woman's husband dies or leaves her, in Indonesian pop culture, blame or responsibility seems muted, one says it is *nasib* or rather her bad fate (*nasib buruk*). The actions of the *janda* might be no better or worse than the *ibu.* What matters is *nasib*—if it is bad, an *ibu* becomes a *janda.*

This relates to a crucial semantic point. While English language, for example, distinguishes between widow and divorcee, Indonesian language possesses no such distinction. In English culture, unless she murdered her husband, a woman has no say in whether she becomes a widow. If she becomes a divorcee, she may have had a role. In Indonesian language and pop culture, however, the woman's actions and motivations are of secondary concern, if not wholly irrelevant. What is relevant is her fate.

The idea of fate recurs in *dangdut* representations of *janda.* In the song "Fate of the *Janda*" the singer reflects:

> Hey, everything's messed up if you're a *janda*…
>
> The fate (*nasib*), yes the fate (*nasib*),
>
> This is the fate (*nasib*) of a *janda.*

Aside from "*nasib*," the word "*takdir*" also denotes fate. In the song "*Janda*," the singer relates that she was "fated ("*ditakdirkan*") to become a *janda*." The song lyrics of "Young *Janda*" take a similar line on being a *janda*; "That's the Almighty's fate (*takdir*) for me."

This is what makes her a threat to the *ibu* and the harmonious family ideal: she has been fated to both attract, and be attracted to men, including those who are married. This is through no fault of the *janda*; unlike the idealised Western damsel, God has equipped her with a healthy sexual appetite. But since her husband has left her (possibly for another *janda*) just as she was getting accustomed to fulfilling her ample desire, now she is left hungry and single, so she cannot really be blamed, only pitied and desired. Similarly, the husband cannot be blamed for his desires or actions either. So, as much as the *ibu* is the cornerstone of the nation's moral health, the *janda* represents a threat to it.

7.3.3 The **Janda** *as a Threat*

The threat posed by a *janda* to other women is portrayed in the song "Drunk on *Janda*." The singer, an *ibu*, recounts:

> The signs are clear; my husband is drunk on *janda*,
>
> He forgets to give me affection,
>
> Seduced by *janda kembang* (a young, beautiful janda),
>
> Makes his wife miserable.

The singer/wife in "Drunk on *Janda*" may complain about her husband succumbing, but it is implied that she should also accept that it is natural that he should. In this song, no one is to blame really. In any case, underneath the superficial lamentations (the wife complaining she is "miserable") the song is really about the pleasures of gambling and canoodling. A Youtube clip available at the time of writing[1] shows young male dancers enjoying this song too much and the usual brawl that accompanies live *dangdut* performances eventuating.

This idea of *janda* as a threat is ostensibly criticised in the novel *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan*. Two women, Sisil and Siti, disagree about the *janda* maid, Nunung. Sisil asserts:

> A rebel like her can destroy national morality.
>
> How could it be that Nunung would destroy the nation?' asked Siti ingenuously. 'Nunung said the she was a *janda*, she didn't cover it up.
>
> If you know about it, why are you defending her?' Sisil continued pointedly. 'Just be careful she doesn't take your man! (Aksana 2010, p. 372).

Although the author, Andrei Aksana, is ostensibly defending *janda* from such aspersions, in fact he ends up reinforcing the stereotype.

7.3.4 Shame

According to the popular culture portrayals, for being the seductress and for being both lonely and desired, God has fated that the *janda* naturally occupies a low status. For this, the *janda* should feel ashamed. We see this *dangdut* in *dangdut song lyrics.* In "*Gadis* or *Janda*," the male seducer/singer asks:

> Are you a *gadis* or a *janda?*
>
> Just tell me, don't be embarrassed.

Of course, the seducer expects that she might be a *janda* and would be embarrassed to have this known. Similarly in *"The Fate of the Janda"*, the woman singer bemoans, "It's the most difficult thing being a *janda,* because many guys look down on you." And in "*Janda 7 Times*" the singer presents a figure of a seven-time divorced woman in pitiable terms—most recently she was fooled by a sweet-talking man who left her. At the same time, she remarks "I'm ashamed (…) of becoming a *janda* again." Low status and shame go together for the *janda.*

As if to underscore the ignominy of *janda*, a male who is divorced or widowed (a *duda*), does not carry the same shameful status. We see this when the *janda* characters in *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan* reflect on their status at multiple moments within the novel:

> In the eyes of men, *janda* are like second hand goods...there isn't anyone who wants to marry a *janda.*
>
> *Janda* aren't appropriate for marriage...' muttered Rossa sadly. 'Because we are not of the same level...
>
> 'Divorced women are considered incapable, considered to be failed wives...' added Dilla...
>
> "If an unmarried man wants to marry a *janda*, his family will oppose it no end," responded Inge excitedly. "Let alone the sneering community. They will think it was the *janda* who tempted him."
>
> "It's different for a *duda*," continued an exasperated Dilla. "The community will care for them. [He'll] be considered a victim because he's been betrayed and neglected."
>
> If the *janda* has a child, her status will be even more embarrassing.
>
> 'An unmarried young man marrying a *janda* is considered a scandal,' Dilla reflected angrily. 'But a *duda* can easily marry any unmarried lady!'
>
> "We have to rid the community of this spectre!" was Inge's passionate cry. "We have to show that becoming a *janda* is respectable."
>
> "Women should be proud to be a *janda*," sighed Rossa, confused. "Look at us. We have the means to provide ourselves with a living..."
>
> "We can exist without men," continued Dilla with conviction. "We can make our own decisions to get on top of life." (Aksana 2010, pp. 255–257).

These *janda* in *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan* are portrayed as constantly struggling with the stigma of their status.

The shame of being a *janda* is reinforced in the plot of the novel. The heroine, Rossa, has been dating Marco, but concealing her status as a *janda*. When Rossa finally reveals that she has a child, Marco rejects her, not ostensibly because she has a child, but rather because she has obviously been previously married. Her two friends, Dilla and Inge, talk it over. “Maybe Rossa didn’t have the heart to hurt Marco by telling him [earlier] about her status [as a *janda*],” says Dilla defending Rossa. Inge is more pointed: “That’s the peril (*risiko*) of being a *janda*” (Aksana 2010, p. 246). In other words, if the man finds out, he might leave the *janda*, so the *janda* tries to hide the fact. But then when the man does find out, he is aghast that he was not told earlier. As the narrator reflects: “Rossa’s experience did not just hurt Rossa, but also made Inge and Dilla aware, as *janda*, how much *janda* have been marginalised” (Aksana 2010).

7.3.5 Redeemed by Men

Redemption through marriage is promised in *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan*. Initially, it seems that the maid, Nunung (Nung), is fortunate. When she confesses “I’m a *janda*,” Karim, a very charitable fellow, says, “I…I accept you, Nung… whoever you are” (Aksana 2010, p. 181). This is consistent with the author’s portrayal of Karim as a good man: just as he helps his fellow Indonesian workers in Jeddah, so he proposes to Nung, a *janda*. It makes the story even more romantic that even though she is a *janda*, Karim will nonetheless accept her. After the proposal, Rossa states to her, “it’s a shame to be a *janda* …but the main thing is that you have passed this test. You’ll get back your whole [*utuh*] status as a woman with a husband” (Aksana 2010, p. 127). However, Karim, it turns out, wants her to be his polygamous second wife. Rejecting this proposal, she is back where she started—a pitiable *janda*.

A similar play on the idea of shame and redemption emerges in the film *Mati Muda di Pelukan Janda* (Dying Young in a Janda’s Embrace) (EduNitas 2011). The good *janda* asks the young man, “Aren’t you embarrassed (*malu*) to go out with me? I’m a *janda*.” He responds, “For me, the status isn’t important, whether you’re a *janda*, whether you’re a maiden, the important thing is that you’re not a criminal suspect or an accused person.” This is, of course, exactly what she is—but what makes the scene romantic is that he denies it, and the next moment he kisses her.

7.3.6 Pretext

Depictions of *janda* often operate on the pretext of defending *janda* from scurrilous rumours, entreating the audience not to believe the stereotype. In other words, they take the line that owing to their loneliness and insatiable appetite for sex many

janda threaten other women's husbands' fidelity, but there are some exceptions. This reinforces the stereotype. What makes this even more pleasing, from a local male heterosexual perspective, is that when female *dangdut* singers perform live, and entreat people to not believe that *janda* are sexually voracious, they cavort and canoodle with male audience members on stage. Music industry releases for these songs are also highly sexual, although not to the point of simulating sex, which one might find at a circumcision or wedding ceremony in the villages. If the audience takes the songs seriously, these performances will appear to mock the women in the real world who are labelled "*janda.*"

We see this pretext of concern in many forms. In "*Fate of the Janda*," the singer reflects:

> Hey, *janda* are indeed lonely,
>
> But don't suppose that they are cheap women…

The singer thus affirms one part of the stereotype, their loneliness, in order to negate another—their availability for free or cheap sex. Similarly, in "*Young Janda*," the singer poses a rhetorical question, regarding *janda,* to the listener:

> Is what they say true?
>
> Don't you believe it,
>
> Maybe there are *janda* like that,
>
> But I've never felt like that…

Again, this concedes the possibility of the existence of *janda* such as has been described.

The *janda* themselves are portrayed as taking advantage of that pity. In a 2013 film *Dying Young in a Janda's Embrace*, the "bad *janda*" attempts to woo the hero, Mat, telling him: "my status is *janda.* Frequently people flirt with me Mat. I'm a lonely, downtrodden woman." This gets to the heart of the matter. The concern for the *janda* and their pitiable status is used as a pretext (for *janda* and those men who chase them) for desire.

But possibly the greatest exponent of this pretext occurs at the end of movie. After 80 min of close-up shots of breasts, with animal sound effects to boot, at its end the following important reminder is written on a blank screen:

> Don't presuppose that a *janda* is something negative. There are many *janda* who maintain honesty and virtue.

One would never say "there are many *ibu* who maintain honesty and virtue" because that would imply that some *ibu* do not. However, for a *janda*, the point is always that "even though she is a *janda* she might still be a good person." The movie's final words thus reinforce the stereotype under the pretext of challenging it.

Desire is also dressed up as pity in the *dangdut* song, *Janda 7 Times*. The singer states she has been "fooled" by sweet-talk and is now "ashamed" (*malu diri*) about becoming a *janda* for the seventh time. What makes this sexually arousing is that it

implies that seven men have managed to trick her, and "have their way with her". She thus cuts a pitiable, but tantalising, figure. The male listener is encouraged to feel desire as much as pity in songs like *Janda 7 Times*. Here the speaker bemoans her fate as her husband died only a month into their marriage. The *janda* pleads to God to save her from a temptation to which we suspect she will succumb. This is supposed to evoke pity (*kasihan*). Under the convenient disguise of sympathising with the woman who is struggling to resist temptation, the heterosexual desire of men is heightened.

For the *dangdut* singers, the movie producers, the Metropop authors, their respective audiences, the treatment, and fate of *janda* is pitiable. It is a common perception that these women must deal with the prejudice as well, making things unenviably worse. Almost everyone agrees that the *janda* suffers, yet so pervasive and gripping is the image that no one seems to get past the stereotype. So, the attitude towards the *janda*—the way people bemoan her fate—represents an element of the emotional repertoire of contemporary Indonesians, in as much as they are engaged in popular culture.

7.3.7 The **Janda** *of the Cosmopolitan World*

The *janda* image in Indonesia's popular culture, while it largely retains the deeply ingrained aspects described above, nevertheless has also evolved to some extent in interaction with cosmopolitan identity and lifestyles. Most notably, we see this in the "MetroPop" novel *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan* which as noted above was inspired by the *Sex & the City* popular TV show based in New York, the novel *Divortaire* and its sequels *Twivortiare* (one & two) set in the "cosmopolitan centres" of Jakarta and New York, as well as in the film *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens* which was set in New York itself. Two American scholars of the Indonesian *Sastrawangi* novels, Sears (2007) and Bodden (2016) traced a cosmopolitan presentation of Indonesian female sexuality through the story of four women who went to New York in Ayu Utami's ground-breaking internationally acclaimed novels *Saman* and *Larung*. But what do they mean by "cosmopolitanism" and how does this differ from the depiction of *Janda-Janda Kosmopolitans?* Sears saw the women in Ayu Utami's novels, none of whom are *jandas* but are either *ibu* (wife/mother) or a virgin, though they took part in transgressive sexuality, specifically "inhabiting a Kantian subjectivity through their ability to travel, move between Indonesia and New York and exists beyond the nation." (Sears 2007, p. 61–62). Bodden (2016, p. 426) however analysed cosmopolitanism beyond just ideas of being a "citizen of the world" that is feeling at home in Jakarta or New York but also about the tension between the universal ideal of rights and the local struggle for democracy. He also argues that cosmopolitanism exists in the juxtaposition of temporal spaces of global urban and rural local inherent in Ayu Utami's storyline set in the late 1990s during Indonesia's struggle for democracy against the authoritarian Suharto regime.

Janda-Janda Kosmopolitan a MetroPop novel (Aksana 2010) also juxtaposes the urban-rural spaces through the story of *jandas* Rossa, Inge and Dilla who live in Jakarta, a city that is portrayed as worldly, international, and global in outlook and Rossa's *janda* maid Nunung who comes from the village yet is able to have an open mind and helps Rossa who is also a mother with her street smart. The genre itself as "metro" speaks to this very cosmopolitan tension of women who may have a gendered identity as a *janda* but living an economically independent metro urban and worldly cosmopolitan lifestyle, even as a rebel *janda* maid from the village, seeking true love. The MetroPop novel *Divortiare* is argued as having a cosmopolitan worldview in its Latin title for divorce, and its sequels *Twivortiare*'s connection with the global social media (Arimbi 2017). She also argues that the urban metro setting of Jakarta and New York where the main character Alex and her husband Beno, whom she was remarried to later in the series, visited to evoke their illusory romantic feelings is a specifically middle upper-class space. Quoting Homi Bhabha, Arimbi further argues that these MetroPop novels should also be read as a critique of cosmopolitan spaces that represent a "separation of totalised culture, unsullied by intertextuality of historical location, utopianism of a mythic memory of unique collective identity" (Arimbi 2017, p. 252). In other words, these urban metro centres are a mythical city for the privileged section of society and an object of aspiration to those who aspire to live the cosmopolitan dream.

The movie 2021 film *Ali & Ratu Ratu Queens* also caters to the middle upper-class audience with a storyline about Ali's mother, who travels to New York to launch her international singing career but became a *janda*, divorced for choosing this cosmopolitan lifestyle over returning home to her husband and child in Indonesia. The four other Indonesian women who took care of Ali in his journey to New York in search of his mother, some of whom are *jandas,* also struggle on in a city that Bodden calls the "space of the cosmopolitan" (Bodden 2016, p. 428), where their dream of opening up an Indonesian restaurant will be achieved. In a global-local way, their national identity as Indonesian is what enables them to become internationally successful in New York. It is also in this "space of the cosmopolitan" (Bodden 2016, p. 428) that Ali's mother come to terms with her *janda* status and was able to have a second chance at a successful new life (with an American husband and daughter) free from the associated stigma of being a *janda* back in Indonesia, and eventually redeemed herself as a mother to Ali.

7.4 Conclusion

In summary, the *janda* of Indonesian popular culture must be understood in relation to other important symbols of femininity—the mother (*ibu*) and the maiden (*gadis*). The three could also be seen as potential stages in a woman's life span, defined in terms of masculine desire. The stereotyped *janda* image can also be understood as occupying a shamefully low status, fated by God to desire and be desired by men.

Because of this, she is a threat to the *ibu* and thus to the cohesion of the family. The heterosexual male is expected to gaze at her with desire dressed up as pity.

The object of this chapter was to initially describe how the image of the *janda* had become the object of male heterosexual desire in popular culture. However, like all symbols, it dominates our imagination and perception. We fit reality into these pre-existing categories. This means women are perceived according to these a priori categories. Indeed, millions of real-life women who are without a husband, either through divorce or death, contend with this popular image; a challenge which might be equal to or above the other challenges they might face in real life. Nevertheless, the *janda* image has evolved over time through popular culture to include a more cosmopolitan and global outlook to this local discourse of Indonesian gendered identity construction.

Note

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q6zH0t9sEUE> (at 2:45).

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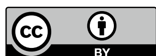

Chapter 8
Sexuality, Shame and Subversions in Indonesian Migrant Women's Fiction

Carlos M. Piocos III

Abstract This contribution examines *malu* (shame) as an effect of Indonesian women's migration, illustrating how gendered moral discourses shape the problematic politics of labour migration in the country. It argues that shame not only reinforces several problematic gender and moral discourses imposed on Indonesian migrant women but also heightens their precarious role and place in their home and host countries.

This essay probes into the possibilities opened by Indonesian migrant domestic workers themselves as they write, publish and circulate their own stories in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan as part of the emerging cultural production of *Sastra Buruh Migran Indonesia*, Indonesian Migrant Workers' Literature. It makes an innovative contribution to this collection by analysing how, in five short fiction anthologies of Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, instances of shame and shaming matter in the representation of their daily lives and how they narrate their encounters and practices of queer sexual identities and interracial intimacies in transnational spaces. Through migrant women's understanding of what counts as *malu*, I argue that their stories present a more complex negotiation of their precariousness, as they exhibit instances of agency and mobility that go beyond traditional gender discourses upheld back home.

Keywords Hong Kong · Indonesia · Migrant women's fiction · Sexuality · Shame · Subversions

The continuous rise of the number of women leaving Indonesia to work as domestic workers in their richer Asian neighbours like Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan has not only revived the economy and propelled the development of the country; these women's apparent upward social mobility has also brought about crucial shifts in the ways relations of gender and sexuality are perceived and discussed back home. The Indonesian government hails them as *pahlawan devisa* or *wira kiriman wang*

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(foreign exchange heroes; remittance heroes) as part of their official state rhetoric. However, this recognition is always haunted by anxieties surrounding gender ideologies that interrogate the government's optimistic projections towards their citizen-breadwinners. These tensions are manifested in how their migrant women are also potential sources of shame in the Indonesian public sphere when they are represented as vulnerable victims or morally compromised women abroad in mainstream media and public discourse. During COVID-19, many Indonesian domestic workers abroad were particularly vulnerable and faced challenges such as discrimination and verbal abuse in Taiwan (Mulyanto 2022).

The contested images of Indonesian women abroad reflect the anxieties on their mobility, particularly heightened by expressions of *malu* (shame) according to the codes of morality and sexuality dominant in the Indonesian state and society. In this chapter, I examine how *malu* illustrates how gendered moral discourses shape the problematic politics of labour migration in the country. By analysing the Indonesian state rhetoric in news reports, mass media portrayals and Indonesian migrant women's own social practices, I argue that shame not only reinforces several problematic gender and moral discourses imposed on Indonesian migrant women but also heightens their precarious role and place in their home and host countries. To counter these dominant narratives of shame and shaming, I probe into the possibilities opened by Indonesian migrant domestic workers themselves as they write, publish and circulate their own stories in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan as part of the emerging cultural production of *Sastra Buruh Migran Indonesia* (*Sastra BMI*), Indonesian Migrant Workers' Literature.

Writing fiction provides an avenue for Indonesian migrant women to narrate and negotiate questions about morality and sexuality in ways that offer spaces to reflect on and resist *malu* and being made *malu* through their stories. In these ways, migrant Indonesian women's "fictions" are no longer just a "literary genre" but also a "narrative strategy," as Visweswaran (1994, p. 62) argues, that can represent moments of mediation, contestation and even "disruption" within their subjectivity through the complex process of finding their own voice and portraying their social worlds through their own forays into literature. This chapter analyses selected stories culled from five short fiction anthologies of Indonesian migrant domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan: Forum Lingkar Pena Hong Kong's *Menaklukkan Ketakutan di Ranah Rantau* (Overcoming Fear in Foreign Shores, 2013) and *Penjajah Di Rumahku: Kumpulan Cerpen* (Intruders at My Home: Short Story Collection, 2010), KUNCI Cultural Studies Center and Para Site's *Bacaan Selepas Kerja* (Afterwork Readings, 2016), Grup BMI Singapura's *Ketika Pena BMI Menari* (When Indonesian Migrant Workers' Pens Dance, 2012) and Kwek Li Na's *Imaji Air: Kumpulan Cerpen BMI di Taiwan* (Images of Water: Short Stories of an Indonesian Migrant Worker from Taiwan, 2014).

These short stories illustrate how Indonesian domestic workers receive, mediate and transgress the meanings of shame and the operations of shaming in their practice of sexuality in their everyday lives abroad. Through these literary works, I analyse the themes of subscription and subversions of *malu* in how they deal with instances of shame and shaming in their portrayal of their daily lives in these stories and in

how they express through fiction their resistance to moral impositions of their body by narrating their encounter and practice of queer sexual identities and interracial intimacies in transnational spaces.

8.1 Sastra Buruh Migran Indonesia

One of the interesting effects of the Indonesian diaspora in recent years is the emergence of *Sastra BMI*. In just a short span of a decade, there have been a considerable number of novels, short story and poetry anthologies written by Indonesian domestic workers that were published and disseminated within their community in their host countries. The authors of these literary works only started writing and publishing after they became migrant workers (Suryomenggolo 2012, p. 198). There is a continuous literary production and circulation of domestic workers' writings in Hong Kong, although more and more domestic worker-writers have also started emerging in Singapore and Taiwan in the last few years.

Some claim that the emergence of *Sastra BMI* could be because of the receiving state's relatively "hospitable" conditions that are seen as conducive for many of the helpers to pursue other persuasions outside their work in employers' households (Murniati 2014). But it is also primarily due to the growing organising work and community building that Indonesian women in these host countries (Lestari 2013). *Forum Lingkar Pena Hong Kong* is a literary community of mostly domestic workers who meet every other Sunday at Victoria Park to read and give constructive feedback on each other's works. The group has already published a handful of not only short story collections but also the novels and poetry of its members (Helvy 2007). Some of their works have also been part of more canonical fiction anthologies and included in collaborative projects of established artists' collectives, one example of which is the *Afterwork Readings* of the Para Site and KUNCI Cultural Studies Center. *Grup BMI Singapura* started as an online community of Indonesian helpers in Singapore. Kwek Li Na, the author of *Imaji Air*, is a migrant wife who worked in Brunei as a domestic worker before transferring to Taiwan. Her inclusion in the group *Forum Lingkar Pena Taiwan* and her friendship with Indonesian domestics inspired her stories about household helpers and marriage migrants in Taiwan (Huang 2018).

Many of these writers first publish their stories in Indonesian community magazines in destination countries (Cummins 2013). Some of the authors actively maintain blogs where they post their stories for others to read and comment on, and there are online Indonesian writing communities which include profiles and writings of some of their more prolific writers. Independent publishing houses in Jakarta, Yogyakarta and Bandung then pick up and publish their manuscripts; some are distributed in local bookstores, but most go back to where the novels, stories and poems were written (Murniati 2012).In Hong Kong, for example, members of the writing group circulate and distribute their books at Victoria Park during their days off. Some of their books are also available in many of the *perpustakaan mobil* (mobile libraries)

scattered all over the park, where their fellow domestics can borrow and read their works (Ginger 2015).

These writing groups of Indonesian migrant women would hold weekly writing sessions and workshops. Since most of these migrant women are new to the craft and have no prior training in creative writing, they only learn the conventions of the craft through their community whose members are, like them, mostly initiates to the literary world. They learn to write by self-practice and by studiously revising their works with the help of their community. They also hold their own writing competitions and literary festivals where they recruit new authors and showcase their publications to their fellow domestics and other Indonesian readers (Grundy 2014).

Indonesian authors and literary critics acknowledge the novelty of this emerging genre, but *Sastra BMI*'s place in the Indonesian literary canon is still in question. As Suryomenggolo (2012, p. 216) observes: "Indonesian domestic workers' writings are often left out from discussions within established literary circles, and their works are not even listed in the catalogues of public and university libraries in the country." While some of Indonesia's established middle-class authors find problems with their works' literariness, many of them sympathise with the difficulties and challenges these women had to go through just to be able to write and share their stories (Iswandono 2010). Though many of these domestic worker-writers have relative freedom and support from their employers for this kind of creative pursuit, others have to steal time or hide their writing from their bosses' attention.

For many Indonesian domestic workers, writing and publishing literary works are important avenues where they develop new skills and knowledge, thereby creating new identities beyond their designations as mere household workers. Their thriving literary culture has given them an opportunity to challenge stereotypes about their illiteracy and even ignorance (Winarti 2011). Most importantly, creative writing offers them the irreducible freedom of finding their own voice, which is otherwise stifled and repressed in their everyday lives.

In many ways, the dominant aesthetics of their published work resonates with some of the characteristics of testimonial writing. Another element that contributed to the development of testimonial writing among migrants, particularly of foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, is the outreach and community activities of non-profit and migrant advocacy groups in these host countries. Community organisers and support groups have always encouraged foreign domestic workers to keep a diary and document their daily lives as these writings could then be used as evidence, just in case they file cases of abuse and labour complaints later (Mission for Migrant Workers 2013).

These traditions and social practices filter through their writings as most of the published stories have retained their autobiographical quality. Most of these fictions are written from the first-person point of view, revolving around the authors' own everyday experiences while inviting readers to peek into their private lives as women labourers in the intimate spaces of the household (Sawai 2010). However,

as fiction bordering on the testimonial, the phenomenon of Indonesian migrant literature is itself contradictory. Even though many of these short stories are confessional, exposing very personal experiences, writing them as "fiction" has allowed these domestic worker-writers to employ the dis-identification effects of the genre in shaping their narratives. Most of their stories revolve around their trauma from their previous humiliating experiences with employers and personal tales about the racial, class and sexual discrimination they encounter on a daily basis in a foreign land. However, framing them as fiction has given them a creative space to detach themselves from these very intimate experiences, allowing them to render these real-life incidents imaginatively as short stories.

This "distancing" effect is important because it provides them with a space to mediate, contemplate and interpret their own everyday encounters of issues of class, race, gender and sexuality abroad from their perspective as both domestic workers and literary writers. As Antariksa of the KUNCI Collective states: "If we look a bit further beyond the surface of their works, we can see these written narratives as their attempts to engage with other forms of subjectivity as they continuously expose themselves to the distancing effects of the act of writing fiction" (KUNCI 2016, p. 22). In these ways, the literary aesthetics of taking on a new persona, imagining novel identities and weaving different life stories are very much connected to how many of the aspiring writers among Indonesian migrant women embrace a new subjectivity and enact their agency.

The majority of their short stories recount their experiences of abuse and exploitation, reproducing the clichéd narratives of the misery and victimisation of domestic workers present in their mass media and popular culture. The oversaturation of victim narratives can also constrain how their works are received, as most of their fiction tends to be taken merely for their value as ethnographic and social documentary texts. However, sifting through their anthologies proves that their literary themes and tropes have become much more nuanced and complex. There are a lot of short stories that have delved into seeing the difficulties of their labour through the daily and monotonous grind of household chores, as their writers explore the various facets of looking at how their time and space are structured by domestic work. Many stories have also shown the many-sided dimensions of living and surviving abroad, like finding their own community, adapting into a new culture, forging friendships, resolving conflict and tension with other fellow domestics, and coping with other problems like homesickness and isolation. While there are *kisah inspiratif* (inspirational stories) that are moral how-to's of practising Islam and being a good Muslim woman even while working alone abroad, there are also love and romance stories that sometimes portray interracial and lesbian relationships that challenge normative ideas of ethno-nationalism and heterosexism.

The wide array of the themes, tropes, characters, narrative strategies and perspectives of *Sastra BMI* attest to the multiplicity of experiences and interpretations of their social practices in migration. While there are authors who constantly break down patriarchal and heteronormative gender ideologies when they write about stories about homosexual relationships and cross-racial desires, there are also those who hold on to traditional and hegemonic dictates of being a good Indonesian woman

abroad by writing didactic inspirational tales. Even though migration has opened their world and challenged the worldviews they previously held back home, some of their short stories are still largely haunted by assertions of religious and cultural norms prevalent in their homeland. In these ways, the literary writings of Indonesian domestic worker-writers reflect complex negotiations of ideas of Indonesian morality and sexuality, where their various experiences of border crossings, on the one hand, do not necessarily translate as transgressions but, on the other hand, do not merely reiterate problematic ideas of what it means to be a good woman on foreign shores.

8.2 *Malu*, Morality and Mobility

The rise of Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan is not only a product of the increasingly feminised global labour market. It is also a consequence of the Indonesian state's labour export policy and its active reconfiguration of its official ideologies on gender to align with the country's development agenda. Since the colonial period, Indonesian men were viewed as the more suitable *perantau* (migrant) (Elmhirst 2007; Hugo 2006). This only changed in the 1980s as the New Order regime sought to take advantage of a growing demand for female domestic workers in the Gulf and Malay Straits regions (Hugo 2008). After the period of authoritarian rule, the succeeding *reformasi*-era (era of reforms) administrations have only become more and more aggressive in their deployment of workers abroad by pursuing familiar pathways in the Middle East, Malaysia and Singapore, but have also filled new demands in East Asia, as the Indonesian state responded to the increasing feminisation of the international global labour demand for foreign domestic workers (Hugo 2005, p. 57). And, with the 1997 Asian financial crisis leaving a trail of growing poverty in Indonesia, migration became a more permanent answer to the country's dwindling economic prospects, with more and more Indonesian women, especially from the country's poorer rural areas, can participate participating in rituals of *merantau* (migrating).

Statistics from mid-2020 on Indonesian migration show that 44% of the 4.6 million Indonesian documented migrants are women (Migration Data Portal 2022). At the end of 2021, the largest number of domestic foreign helpers in Hong Kong came from the Philippines, with a total of 191,783, followed by Indonesia, with 140,057 domestic helpers (Data.Gov.HK 2022). Figures from the end of 2020 showed that only 1.5% of the foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong were male (Women's Commission 2021, p. 3).

Besides the state policies that created this gendered mobility, the Indonesian government had also actively realigned its official gender ideologies to encourage more women to go abroad for work. Silvey (2004) refers to this process as "transnational domestication" where state body politics are realigned to address the rural and lower-income class women targeted for transnational domestic work. The Indonesian government actively marshalled conservative Islamic beliefs on gender to merge with the state's moral and economic ideology on women (Suryakusuma 2004; Blackburn

2004). As part of the state programme, women are legislated to take on economic roles to maintain both the nuclear and "national families." The New Order's "woman and development" programmes were used to highlight women's economic roles through the concept of *peran ganda wanita* (women's dual roles) in both the salary-earning and domestic fields (Sunidyo 1996, p. 125). This encouraged the growth of middle-class women, who, while earning incomes for the household, also maintain their domestic obligations as mothers and wives.

These gender ideologies were then reoriented in later decades to meet the needs of the state's changing local relations to its women and the growing demand for transnational feminised work. Overseas work offers them a chance to become a different kind of *wanita karir* (career women): they can be a *tenaga kerja wanita* (overseas domestic worker), whose income might even surpass the salaries of middle-class women back home. While the likelihood of their long absence in their own domains of "home and hearth" could prove contradictory to their traditional functions, the state rhetoric sutures this by extending the social meaning of family into *national family*: "the state's dominant vision of idealised femininity was translated into a migratory income-earning woman for the sake of the 'national family's' goals of economic development" (Silvey 2004, p. 253).

The complex process of the Indonesian state's transnational domestication would find affirmation in how the government celebrated their economic impact in the development of not only their own households but also their *tanah air* (homeland). In the period between 2015 and 2019, Indonesia received US$9.8 billion average remittances from Indonesian migrant workers annually, according to Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto (The Sun Daily 2022).

It is within the context of the upsurge of Indonesian women leaving the country and the expanding influx of capital from their remittances that the discourse of pride in the name of *pahlawan devisa* was coined by the state.

However, the pride accorded to migrant women workers as economic heroes is always haunted by the possibilities of *malu* (shame). Outside the optics of the state, community and even one's own family, the Indonesian domestic workers' absence in their traditional social spaces has shored up moral panic back home. Representations of migrant women in mass media and popular culture as *wanita jalang* (bad woman) or *wanita tuna susila* (woman without morals)—terms that are used to label prostitutes and single mothers—cast them as dodgy and disgraceful women who forsake the values of their family and nation once they get out of their *kampung* (home/village) and *tanah air* (homeland) (Constable 2014, p. 9; Ford 2003; Silvey 2013, p. 153).Perceiving Indonesian transnational women as heroic and, at the same time, dishonourable is possible in a culture of migration because both pride and shame are affects and effects of living up against a particular set of moral ideals. As Sarah Ahmed (2004, p. 109) argues, "shame and pride have a similar affective role in judging the success or failure of subject to live up to ideals, though they make different judgments."

Shame is a particularly powerful affect in the Indonesian context. Classic ethnographic studies on "shame-embarrassment" show that the associated feelings of shyness and humiliation in the colloquial terms of the Balinese *isin* or the Javanese

lek show how Indonesians are subjected to vulnerability in social interactions and the performance of public etiquettes set by cultural and moral norms in Indonesian society (Geertz 1983; Rosaldo 1983). However, the term *malu,* a Malay word that has become part of the Indonesian *lingua franca*, exceeds these abovementioned feelings as it goes beyond the tropes of performance anxieties to describe a sense of "failure" to live up to gendered norms of the Indonesian nation. Collins and Ernaldi (2000, p. 42) state that shame is intimately linked to sexuality, as the idiom of "private parts" in Indonesia (*kemaluan*) has the word *malu* in it, denoting how sensitive and easily shame-inducing the topic of sexuality can be. Furthermore, reactions to *malu* are highly gendered, as Indonesian males respond to shame through "aggression" while women respond through "self-restraint, reticence and withdrawal" (Ibid, p. 43).

Malu's effect becomes even more pronounced as Indonesian women cross national borders. In transnational spaces, the feeling of shame does not just describe particular bodily responses to social situations for them but also prescribes them to follow social norms. As Johan Lindquist (2009, p. 59) claims, "*malu* connotes not only shame or embarrassment, but also piety and modesty." This suggests how being a subject or a possible subject of *malu* can have a more lasting and enduring effect because it is an ongoing engagement with a social ideal. This is why a woman must always be on guard and follow and obey norms because she may easily fall into disgrace. In the case of a *tenaga kerja wanita*, the woman is always constantly bound to the ideals of womanhood that are drawn by cultural, national and moral scripts of being a good woman even if and precisely because she is not around. In this way, she does not need to be subjected to the gaze of the state and its moral norms. These ideals that produce the affective border demarcating pride from shame constantly regulate her subjectivity and body.

8.3 Shame, Submission and Subversion

Malu as an effect of mobility can be seen in many of the stories of Indonesian migrant women in anthologies set in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan. For example, in Dik Meme Love's *Uncle Kurang Ajar* (Brash Uncle), an Indonesian helper in Singapore recounts her experience when a stranger tries to sexually harass her inside the elevator when they were left alone. She fights back and escapes the assault. Towards the end, as if addressing her fellow Indonesian domestics reading her narrative, the protagonist declares: "Don't be like me!" (Capriconidas 2012, p. 53).

The impression that one is "easy" just because she is all by herself can also be read in Erfa Handayani's story *Sopir Taxi* (Taxi Driver). Here, the protagonist developed an almost paternal friendship with a Singaporean taxi driver. On one of her days off, she was left alone by her Indonesian friend who went out with her boyfriend. When the taxi driver texted and casually invited her to eat somewhere, she readily agreed. Because she completely trusts the old man, it took her some time to realise that the man was taking her to a shady guesthouse in Pasir Panjang. Once she realises this, she immediately protested and confronted the man, asserting that: "I am not that

kind of girl!" (p. 71). As she was being brought back to MRT to go home, she was suddenly subjected to the complex feeling of *malu*, which she describes as mixed emotions of "trauma, sadness, frustration and fear of losing the purity that I have been so fastidiously protecting" (p. 72).

These narratives attest to how they have already ascribed *malu* on their bodies even if they got out of possible instances of shame. In Handayani's short story, the woman was traumatised for being treated as a prostitute, being brought to a hotel and being offered money, which she threw back in the driver's face at the story's end. This anxious identification of possibly being immoral threatens her and she knows that her statement "I am not *that kind of girl*" is unstable because she could easily be perceived as such even by the person she trusts. The trauma of this sexual harassment then comes from the recognition that her *kesucian* (purity) is already contaminated by the possibility of losing it just as easily as she can slip into being a *wanita tuna susila.*

In Dik Meme Love's story, the protagonist realised that, just because she is a foreigner and probably alone and single, the man could do anything to her. Although nothing in her story suggests that she actually encouraged the stranger to come and kiss her, her last words and moral warning to her friends—"Don't be like me!"—is puzzling. If being a foreigner alone in an elevator is what made her morally suspect, how can her friends, Indonesian women themselves and vulnerably isolated in their places of work, *not* be like her? This demonstrates how shame can be internalised and how it bears insidious effects on how Indonesian migrant women act and react under its shadows.

Malu in these stories can then be seen as the moral boundary demarcating who are the "right" and "righteous" subjects of migration and who are not. The possibility of a woman slipping onto the other side is heightened as that moral border becomes permeable, particularly in spaces where domestic workers and sex workers abound and encounter each other. The anxieties of misidentification among women who are out of place in migrant spaces transform the affect of *malu* both as a discourse and as a discipline that they have to subscribe to or transgress.

To understand the complexity of how shame works among Indonesian women in transnational spaces, one can look into Lindquist's ethnography of Indonesian migrant women applicants and sex workers on Batam Island. Here, he portrays how *malu* is negotiated through veiling. For the migrant workers, "wearing a *jilbab* protects women from being approached by men, or of running the risk of being identified as a *lontong* or prostitute" (Lindquist 2009, p. 57). In this sense, the practice of veiling is not so much a form of one's religiosity but a performance of piety to separate her from being a *lontong* (prostitute) and shelter her from the social encounters of being misidentified as such. The strategies of moral distinction—from wearing a veil to openly claiming that one is not that kind of girl—reveal the power of *malu* as a consolidation of moral and national codes on Indonesian women's migration.

The fear of falling into a life of disgrace as a *tenaga kerja wanita* becomes a way of both subjecting them to control and discipline according to gender ideologies of their homeland and making their experience of vulnerability their own personal dilemma

while they are in their host countries. More than this, these ideas and practices also validate the stigmatisation, and sometimes even criminalisation, of sex work, which nullifies the female sex workers' suffering and victimhood as migrant women workers themselves. After all, a lot of the women who ended up becoming prostitutes are former domestic workers who were, like them, victims of abuse and exploitation. Both domestic work and prostitution function as sexual labour, except that the latter falls out of the frames of what is moral and legitimate. And as in the case of how local economies operate, sex work only becomes a possibility when legal and "decent" work is impossible to secure. In this sense, both kinds of women share the same fate of displacement in their transnational context. As one of the authors of *Forum Lingkar Pena Hong Kong*, Pandan Arun, provocatively claimed in a writer's forum, "Domestic workers and prostitutes are similar in that pride and poverty forced them to make tough decisions" (Arun in Grundy 2014).

Seen in this way, transnational prostitution is just a result of *merantau*'s promises going awry, and migrant women still have to live up to those promises even if or precisely because they failed them. We can see how, in Tiwi's story *Sebuah Surat di Penghujung April* (A Letter at the End of April), Indonesian sex workers in Hong Kong mediate *malu* by keeping up with their economic duties to their families in *kampung,* even if they have no means to. Here, the main character is writing a letter to her husband to confess her bitter experiences. She became a *kabur* (runaway) and stayed at a shelter where there were many other runaways like her who could no longer apply to be a domestic worker in Hong Kong.

In her letter, she shares how her other Indonesian fellows in the halfway house earn their living even after their job contracts were terminated: "Prostitution, that was their chosen path, my fellow domestics, my countrywomen who have the same burden as me. Almost everyone I know there has to support her family. And they could not afford to just stop sending money, even for a month" (Megawati 2013, p. 23). Later on, she admits to her husband how she has also joined them, "There were times when I joined them in the disco where they hang out to wait for customers" (p. 23). This letter not only reveals the protagonist's shame to her husband but also exposes how binding migration's social ideals and promises are, even to individuals who failed them. For women in Tiwi's story, remitting money to their family who are unaware of their source of income is a taking on of both their economic and moral responsibilities; they are still the breadwinners and the money that they send is the proof that they have not yet gone over to the "other side."

Finally, shame's cruellest effects take place in instances of sexual victimhood. *Malu* can affectively deform one's body and distort the ways in which a migrant woman understands her victimhood in the experience of sexual assault or rape. Because the anxiety of being *malu* is such a violent condition, women are forced to fight in the name of pride just to stay away from falling out of it. Take, for example, Ukhti Fia's *Demi Sebuah Kehormatan* (For the Sake of Honour), where the female protagonist has to somehow "entrap" her Singaporean male employer to be able to not just put a stop on his advances but also convince herself that his boss was really sexually assaulting her by pretending to be asleep as her employer approaches her,

"By reflex, I grabbed my small alarm clock on top of the headboard and then banged it into his face with all the force I could muster" (Capriconidas 2012, p. 90).

Fighting back for one's pride is subtler in the case of the main character in Nano Iyank Febriyana's story "Trauma." In the story, after the heroine overcame her shock after that her male employer's mobile phone was deliberately left inside the bathroom to record her taking a bath, she "took a bucket, filled it with hot water and sank his iPhone in it. I let it drown there until I finished my bath. I dressed up, and then I took my boss' iPhone from the bucket and placed it back in its place on the floor. Then I went straight to my room" (p. 56).

These responses could be seen as rightfully claiming one's body against the threats of sexual assault and harassment. These women's actions demonstrate how they craft certain forms of agency even in their isolated and precarious circumstances. Both the characters' strategies of confronting the sexual predator or eluding the predatory gaze and technology effectively highlight their resistance even in such conditions of vulnerability. However, both of these women's responses also reflect the dread of failing to live up to social and moral ideals and their fear of potentially becoming shameful subjects of migration. In "Trauma," the main character felt angered and isolated, feeling her rage from her own helplessness (p. 56) while in Fia's story, the protagonist has to second guess whether she welcomed such advances: "It was stupid of me not to think anything was wrong with what he was doing" (p. 89). *Malu* and its possibilities, most of the time, perversely transform the understanding of victimhood. As with most victims of sexual trauma and threats, "in experiences of shame, the 'bad feeling' is attributed to oneself, rather than to an object or the other" (Ahmed 2004, p. 104). While these women may have overcome their assailant, the 'bad feelings' come to them alone, which they have to negotiate and deal with themselves.

This is why stories of sexual victimisation of migrant women sometimes end up becoming cautionary moral tales of what happens when one gives in to *majikan genit* (naughty/flirty bosses), *uncle kurang ajar* (brash uncles) or foreign boyfriends for the people back in the *kampung*. Indicative of this is the casual but also ritual warning of sponsors and recruiters to prospective migrant women to never give in to the flirtations of male employers and strangers even if they like it, which is sometimes how many stories of sexual abuse are interpreted.

As Chan (2014, p. 6956) argues, "The dangers of physical or sexual abuse of female migrant domestic workers, most of whom are required by laws in destination countries to live with their employers, are represented mostly in terms of female promiscuity and moral weakness, in allowing themselves to be tempted or seduced." This is how *malu* constructs what Chan describes as *gendered moral hierarchies* in the representation of Indonesian migrant victims. According to her, "The moral privileging of 'successful,' or 'pitiable' female migrants who is innocent, vulnerable, heroic, and/or selfless, produces their negative gender subordinates: immoral and ill-fated women who fall short of the ideal expectations of a mother, daughter, sister and wife" (Chan 2014, p. 6959). In this schema, the moral distinction that pride and shame create among migrant women victims polarises their narratives of victimhood in terms of who is innocent and worthy of justice against those who are to be blamed, and thus, deserving of their ill fates. *Malu* corrupts both types of victims. On the one

hand, those who are innocent deserve social justice not because it is their fundamental right but because it is their moral qualities that make it so. On the other hand, those who are perceived to be immoral get to be doubly persecuted not just because they are seen to be deserving of their suffering but because they are also effectively marginalised, if not completely pushed out, from the discourses and mechanisms of rights and justice claims both at home and abroad.

This vicious system of victim blaming and shaming is what Kwek Li Na portrayed in her story *Bunga Mimpi Luruh di Formosa* (Dream Falls in Formosa). Anya, an Indonesian migrant wife and the protagonist in this story, describes her friendship with Ayu, an Indonesian domestic worker who works in the same neighbourhood as her in Taipei. However, they started to drift apart when she saw Ayu being dragged and pinned down by a man inside the apartment where she works. While she is able to stop the incident by coming into the scene and pretending not to have witnessed what was taking place, she starts to feel hesitant when talking to Ayu about it afterwards: "I did not dare ask her directly, I'm afraid she might be afraid of being shamed or just feel hurt if we talked about it" (Li Na 2014, p. 22). This leads to her estrangement to her friend, lessening her visits just to avoid feeling discomfort at broaching on the topic.

Even if she tries to actively forget about the incident, what she witnessed troubled her. By the time she overcame her hesitation by finally going over to Ayu and talking to her, it was too late. She sees Ayu being arrested and escorted by police out of her employer's house. The mutual silence between the two friends is only broken months after when Ayu sent her a letter from prison explaining what Anya had seen "on that day she lost (her) honour" (Li Na 2014, p. 27). She was raped by the family driver and when the man tried to sexually assail her again, she grabbed a pair of scissors and stabbed him. At the start of her letter, Ayu gave the reason why she kept her sufferings to herself, "It's been a long time since I wanted to tell you what happened, but I could not. I was so embarrassed and scared" (ibid). And towards the end, she is asking for Anya's forgiveness, "Forgive me for making you anxious, for staying away from you, for not being honest with you… forgive my stupidity. Forgive me, Kak" (p. 28).

What is striking in both of these women characters is how *malu* has effectively subjected them both into the space of silence. This reveals the vicious power of shame in both women's bodies. Anya, who has seen the sexual violence, was numbed into inaction. It is as if what she witnessed infused her with so much guilt that it made her reluctant and incapable of confronting the violence herself. It is as if her very act of witnessing has compelled her to share Ayu's *malu*, making her feel ashamed of herself and also unwittingly taking part in shaming Ayu by making her know that she has seen it but does not know what to make of it. Ayu, the main victim of sexual violence here, was so violently subjected to *malu* that she no longer knows what to do and where to seek help. Even if she knew that she has a witness and her witness is someone she can trust, shame has already dominated her body such that the only way to fight is to take justice into her own hands.

This is *malu* in its most insidious affective form. Because it not only blames the victim and even its witness but also intensifies the guilt, and overpowers and

victimises migrant women's bodies again and again. *Malu* not only makes them turn away from themselves but also pushes them to fault themselves and make their suffering their sole culpability. Finally, *malu* relegates them to subaltern spaces of silence where they punish themselves by repeatedly asking for forgiveness for sins they did not commit.

The vicious consequence of cultivating shame for Indonesian domestic workers is in its capacity to make them feel that their vulnerability is theirs alone to manage and deal with. With the nation-state's active reiteration of gendered moral discourses, shame becomes a discursive strategy of disciplining their migrant women to follow moral scripts even and especially when they are out of its gaze and monitoring. These moral scripts instruct women that their success as *tenaga kerja wanita* depends upon the upkeep of their own bodies' dignity and morality on foreign shores. Yet, in reality, their living and working conditions as mostly isolated household helpers in households overseas make their bodies susceptible to shame, regardless of how much they follow and subscribe to these gendered moral norms. In these ways, the nation-state and its instruments of exporting female labour are free from responsibility and accountability when their women are trapped in experiences of abuse and exploitation. And it becomes up to these Indonesian women to deal with their own vulnerability as part of their destiny as displaced citizens and women in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan.

These short stories, however, illustrate the contradictory ways in which Indonesian domestic workers respond to these moral dictates in instances where the threat of shame looms large upon their daily lives. On the one hand, there are stories that defer to these gendered norms as these women guard their bodies from the moral panic of *malu*. The fear of being shamed compels them to protect what they think is their moral integrity, compromised by their vulnerability by subscribing to these social ideals. Some of them reiterate these problematic gendered notions of keeping their pride against the possibility of being shamed through practices that distinguish them as moral subjects of gendered migration. While such practices reiterate problematic gendered moral distinctions that separate them from the precariousness of other migrant women like sex workers, it allows them a sense of agency that move them to protect their bodies from social threats, physical harm and sexual abuse. In these ways, avoiding shame can also be a way of actively negotiating their own vulnerability against the structural precarity of labour migration.

On the other hand, there are also narratives that engage with these gendered moral dictates more critically, particularly those of Pandan Arun's statements and Tiwi's short story. In looking at how their bodies are conflated with sex work, they show how shame operates much in the same ways to blame both of them, domestic workers and prostitutes, for their own vulnerability. In these ways, they also offer counter-narratives to the dominant discourses that illustrate how shame and being ashamed affect them as displaced women. By looking at the forces that both compel them to make "tough decisions" (in Arun's words) or confessing to shame only to make their loved ones understand how they arrive at that fate, as Tiwi's story shows, these narratives point to how shame and its discursive effects can lead not to an iteration of moral scripts but to an understanding of their precarious lives as migrant women.

8.4 Desire, Deference and Defiance

Out of senses of isolation, homesickness and also a newfound freedom to explore their sexuality, Indonesian household helpers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan, who are most of the time confined to their employers' homes throughout the week, find comfort and solace in romantic and sexual relationships with fellow migrant women or foreign male workers of other nationalities during their days off in public. According to Sim (2009), 40% of Indonesian migrant women in Hong Kong engage in diverse forms of lesbian relationships with fellow Indonesian domestic workers while many others have romantic interracial affairs with migrant men, particularly those from South Asia. These forms of intimacy "become 'imaginable' and popular among some Indonesian women migrants because it also provided a means of bonding under their unusual circumstances" (Sim 2009, p. 15). Ueno (2013) also points this out in her study of dominant patterns of either homosexual affairs or cross-cultural sexual relationships that are also present among Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore. Ueno claims that these forms of intimate relationships provide a "massage effect" for an Indonesian domestic worker, where affection, comfort and love from fellow migrant men and women contrast "sharply against the harsh treatment she might suffer from her employers or her own family back home" (Ueno 2013, p. 45).

Even with the prevalence of these forms of intimacy, a *tenaga kerja wanita*'s public performance of her sexuality, be it within the context of a heterosexual or homosexual relationship, remains a source of shame due to the conservative Indonesian norms. Thus, "it is precisely their sexuality and the potentially transformative spaces they create in their physical dislocation from home that causes unease to sending countries" (Sim 2009, p. 4). In other words, it is the visibility of her sexuality and her openness about it in public that sparks anxieties for people back home. One such example was when Indonesian diplomats visited Hong Kong in 2006 only to be shocked when witnessing the "casual lifestyles" their women have been flagrantly displaying in Victoria Park. As one Indonesian consul claims, "If you go to Victoria Park on Sunday, you can see that some can be quite intimate. Some were turning to other women for comfort. Others were developing casual relationships with men from other races… There was a worry that it would reflect poorly on the country's reputation among foreigners" (Bok 2013). These alternative sexualities, for the Indonesian consulate, have become a cause of "national shame," compelling them to conduct a 5-h "briefing" to guide their domestic workers about matters of morality and to stop their public displays of intimacy. The Indonesian diplomats' reaction reflects the moral panic back home about the kind of sexual lives that their women are leading now that they are miles away from their country, and the public-ness of Indonesian migrant women's sexual practices has obliged them to re-orient them back to the conservative gender values of their *tanah air* through public seminars.

These ambivalent feelings of being shamed or made ashamed by acts of lesbianism and interracial affairs set against the transformative possibilities that Indonesian domestic workers experience in their sexual practices are reflected and negotiated in their fiction. Take, for example, Juwanna's short story *Kerudung Turki* ("Turkish

Veil"), which portrays how Arda, an Indonesian household worker in Hong Kong, undergoes various sexual identities and enacts changing sexual desires, first to settle in but eventually to find love on foreign shores. In this story, the main character, whose real name is Anna Ayatul Nisa, packages herself as a butch lesbian, dressing up and performing masculinity each day to get by in a foreign city. She describes her *bricoleur* fashion in the following words:

> I put on a long and thick T-shirt and ragged jeans torn at the knees, a trendy fashion in Hong Kong. Then, I added accents to my hair that was like a bird's nest, a rusty yellow dye, European style. I did not forget to put on earrings at my left eyebrow and chin that made me look like an American… (Junaedi 2010, p. 153).

This get-up gives Arda a sense of confidence and a feeling of pride because, as she says: "At least people will not look at me as some *kung yan*, an employer's usual term for maids. My rank rises up dressed like this. I am like a thug lost in the metropolitan land" (p. 154). Arda's performance of her sexuality through her fashion allows her to transform into someone who is very much adapted to a cosmopolitan space, thereby also circumventing the effects of shame attached to being a migrant domestic worker from a poor country. Dressing up butch is not just a sign of sexual transgression but also a mark of modernity and upward social mobility.

But being a *tomboi* (masculinised lesbian) is more than just fashion for the protagonist. She also plays up her ritualised masculinity to be desired by her fellow Indonesian maids. For example, Arda becomes aware of the power of her performed sexuality as she openly flirts with another Indonesian woman on the train:

> She was standing right in front of a bustling crowd in the metro. Her long flowing hair and her face immediately caught my attention. She is looking at me seductively. I guess my 165-meter height exuding with macho charm has made me a dream guy, despite being a fellow woman. (p. 154)

According to Amy Sim, there are two dominant kinds of lesbians that can be seen in Hong Kong: the *sentul* (butch) and the *kantil* (*femmes*). These sexual identities are distinguished by their fashion and social behaviour. Arda can be considered as a *sentul* or "masculinised lesbian or *tomboi*" who "dress up to capture a sense of carelessness, with what seems to be little attention to the attractiveness of their physical attire because it is 'hip' to be a 'mess,' underscoring their contrast with feminine women" or the *kantil* types. "Their appearances are self-consciously constructed as an integral part of the performance of a role, newly developed and deeply implicated in an emergent sense of self and agency" (Sim 2009, p. 17). Ueno observes a similar pattern in Singapore as many Indonesian women "who behave like men" can be seen openly displaying their intimacy with a more "feminine partner." Ueno also sees that these kinds of alternative lifestyle and sexuality have become more visible because most of the Indonesian domestic workers can only find time to be intimate with their partners during their days off in public view. As a result, their "sexuality becomes not only of physical relationships in the private sphere but also has a performative nature in [the] public sphere" (Ueno 2013, p. 56).

In these ways, the meaning of *malu* in same-sex relationships is continually negotiated and challenged. While lesbian intimacy remains a source of shame and is

frowned upon by the more conservative members of their community, the prevalence and visibility of this kind of romantic relationship constantly challenge the traditional gender ideologies upheld back home. Their public enclaves in parks have become sites of possibilities where they can enact, explore and practice new sexual identities that would continually contest the shame ascribed to alternative relationships. Furthermore, the public performance of alternative sexuality, through fashion and open displays of affection, offer ways for Indonesian migrant women to gain a sense of agency, where they can claim their own bodies and create new identities that will help them circumvent the effects of displacement and marginality in a foreign territory. As Sim argues, "The enactment of sexual choice in the direction of same-sex relations among Indonesian women can be read as 'powerful' because such practices 'resist, reshape and re-appropriate for women their own bodies" (Sim 2009, p. 14).

However, the apparent sexual empowerment that Arda enjoys as a lesbian suddenly changes when she meets a man whom she would fall in love with. The protagonist was set up by her aunt working as a domestic worker in Jordan to meet the latter's former ward, Ammar, in the guise of picking up a package which she sent to Arda through Ammar. Arda was at first struck by the handsome young Jordanian man who greeted her by brushing his cheeks against hers. This "unexpected gift" ("*hadiah tak terduga*"), which is a traditional greeting among Middle Eastern men, "sent electric waves to [her] brain and body" (p. 155). This innocent gesture would leave such an impression on Arda that it developed into a foreign attraction to the Middle Eastern guy that would make her question her own sexual identity:

> I glanced again at Ammar's face, who was standing right in front of me. I felt his strong charm. I like his jaw, chin, eyes, and all of his face. Ah, am I still sane? All my life, I have never fallen in love with an Adam! I'm a genuine lesbian with a manly spirit... I am a male spirit trapped in a female's body. (p. 156)

The sudden transformation of her sexual desire would continue in the story, as the main character ponders on this newfound feeling, "Why am I feeling this… I paused for a moment as I touched my cheek. Somehow I imagined what if we kissed, maybe his rough face would feel messy and weird against mine" (p. 159).

Here, the fantasy of the liberated lesbian woman, with her fashion, demeanour and control of her body, would be replaced by the fantasy of heterosexual attraction that would render her passive to this alien desire. The very foreignness of Ammar's maleness overpowered Arda's ritualised machismo and transformed, or rather reformed, her back into heteronormative femininity. And to make her transformation into a "proper" woman complete, the protagonist discovers that her aunt has sent her, via Ammar, three Turkish veils. True enough, the main character started throwing away her street-thug *sentul* looks and reverted to being a good Muslim woman in the hope of attracting and pleasing Ammar in their next meeting:

> I no longer have the earrings on [my] eyebrow and chin. There was no longer necklace a with jagged bike pendant. All of these I had put away. My clothes have been changed to a blue floral Turkish veil covering my head. Miraculously, I was transformed into a graceful figure. I no longer looked like a mental hospital patient with my long tunic and baggy trousers,

which I purposely bought for this new life. All seemed odd, but I wore them beautifully (p. 162).

In the end, Arda chose to become Anna Ayatul Nisa again, leaving behind her *femme* flings and butch friends and changing back to performing the image of traditional Indonesian femininity for the love of a man she has just met. She plays up her womanhood, wearing a veil, a loose tunic and a long skirt, even though she is constantly chastised and called out for looking like she has "just been circumcised" ("*habis disunat*") by her fellow Indonesian maids who have always known her as a *sentul*: "But despite all their laughter, harassment, humiliation, cornering, and embarrassing of me, I'm sure… Allah is not laughing" (p. 163).

In the story's conclusion, the reader senses the protagonist's determination to lead a new life as a changed woman. Her will, despite being shamed by her friends, is comforted by the religious certainty of her choice, something that she seems to have immediately adopted in her process of reforming back to being a morally upright Muslim woman. The didactic notion of morality has also transformed Arda's motivation to being a proper lady: what was initially driven by a desire for a foreign male has changed into her submission to the morally sanctioned ideals of Indonesian womanhood.

The theme of "fake men" reforming into 'proper women' in Indonesian domestic workers' fiction runs through Susana Nisa's *Tuhan, Aku Pulang* ("God, I've Come Home"). Like the imagery of veiling, the author used the idea of "home" or "returning home" as a metaphor of feminine re-domestication for those who have "walked astray." In this story, home is neither the literal repatriation nor coming back from one's own "place" in society but a religious metaphor for the moral reformation of women who have engaged in *haram* ("forbidden") relationships.

The story is told from the perspective of Kienan or Kie, a straight Indonesian woman, who professes to be "normal," someone who has "never been attracted to anyone of the same sex" and whose desires are exclusively directed to "men and not fake men" (KUNCI 2016, p. 163). However, she became fascinated with one of her *tomboi* friends, Regha or Gha, a fellow domestic worker herself, who performs masculinity just like Arda in the previous story:

> You were just an ordinary woman. But your situation transformed you into a male woman. A tomboy, that's the cool name for your kind. Your trademark look was torn faded jeans, a long chain hanging from your front pocket to your back pocket. And a white, long-sleeved man's shirt, not forgetting your close-cropped shiny hair that smelled of Gatsby hair oil. Plus the red Nike shoes with colourful shoelaces. That really finished your look. (p. 164)

Kie and Gha's deep companionship blossomed and transitioned into love. The protagonist later realises that the kind of solace she feels when she is with Gha is something akin to her previous heterosexual relationship: "Only a month after we were introduced, I felt so comfortable spending my day off with you. It was a feeling that I had felt only when I was with my former boyfriend" (p. 165). Kie later narrates her own transformation from a plain, prim and proper woman into a *kantil* partner for Gha, while also detailing how their relationship has flourished in their performance of their respective sexual roles:

> Ever since that night we became lovers. We changed what we called each other. It was no longer Kie and Gha, but ‘papa’ and ‘mama.’ We were like two infatuated young people. The world was ours, too. I no longer cared about the cynical looks from our fellow migrant workers who saw us displaying our affection in public. My appearance also changed totally. I, who had never dyed my hair, began to cut and dye my hair *in the style* of Hong Kong celebrities to please you. I even changed my clothes and make-up. In short, I transformed myself from a simple girl into a modern city chic. (p. 167)

This account reflects how in same-sex relationships, it is not just the *sentul* or the butch lover, like Arda and Regha, who can gain the mark of modernity in their performance of lesbianism but also their *kantil* or *femme* partner. Kie’s engagement in alternative sexuality also converted her into a trendy woman who has adapted well to the cosmopolitan lifestyle of Hong Kong. In addition, even though they are in a homosexual relationship, they have also enacted the familiar rituals of intimacy and endearment seen in heterosexual relationships. In these ways, their transgressive emotional bond has given her and Gha a sense of power to defy, or at least disregard, the imposition of *malu* and the acts of shaming from their own community.

No matter how empowering this relationship is for both Kienan and Regha, their queer transgression is repressed and later recuperated back into heteronormative conventions. Midway through the narrative, Gha suddenly dies from a mysterious illness. Kie, who is grieving alone in her room, found a letter from Gha addressed to her, hidden in one of her pants, which the latter had supposedly written a few days before her sudden death. In this letter, Gha explained to Kie why she chose to become a lesbian:

> I was born Sulastri. I am a widow with a nine-year-old son. I changed my identity and fully pretended to be a man because I wanted to forget the hurt I felt when my ex-husband ran away with my neighbour. I wanted to prove that I could live without men. This is why I plunged into this world for so long. (p. 172)

The disillusionment with men or their experience of abuse has driven Regha, just like many other Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong and Singapore, into the direction of same-sex relationships because it provided for their sexual and emotional needs without the pain and danger of falling into the trap of the violence and oppression embedded in the patriarchal culture and values of heteronormative relationships (Sim 2009, p. 19; Ueno 2013, p. 55).

In Regha’s letter, however, her conscience and guilt have overpowered her choice. She shared with Kienan how she has been dreaming about her dead father and her left-behind son telling her to “come home” (*pulang*). Her constant dreams of becoming both a disgraceful daughter and a negligent mother have made her “feel guilty” about her relationship with Kienan (p. 172). To be able to “come home,” she decided to end her immoral acts, but as the story shows, she died before breaking up with her lover. Towards the end of the letter, she also advises Kienan to “go home,” just like what she had set out to do before her untimely death: “Go back to being Kienan again, before you met me… Forget Regha. I want you to remember me as Ms. Lastri. May God still grant us forgiveness and bless us with a chance to return to Him.” (p. 173).

Here, “coming home” assumes different meanings underwritten by gendered moral ideology. The conscience of the hearth here is embodied by Regha’s father

and her son, both figures of her left-behind duties, her gendered economic and moral obligations as a dutiful daughter and responsible mother that she strayed so far from when she became engaged in her alternative lifestyle abroad. Her idea of coming home, then, is shaped by the moral dictates of going back to what she used to be, the good Ms. Lastri. This is so even though transforming into a butch lesbian allowed her to escape things about that "home" that hurt her—her former husband's infidelity. Finally, the morality of this decision in Regha's mind is reinforced in her last words in the letter: this homecoming is also about gaining "forgiveness" and a "chance to return to God."

However, as the story shows, death came upon Regha the moment she decided to come home and reform her "immoral" ways towards the story's resolution. Kienan has been haunted by Regha's last words in the letter, asking her to "come home" and forget their *haram* affair. Fresh from her grief, she decided to abandon her friends in the middle of their partying inside a disco, and leave all their aimless drinking and immoral coddling in public. The moment she stepped outside the place of "sin," she started to feel dizzy and weak. She ran away from the red-light district until she arrived at a mosque nearby. She freezes and falls to the floor at the entrance after hearing the *muezzin* being chanted:

> I spun like a windmill. My stomach rose, spewing the dirty food and drinks from the folds of my intestines. I stumbled, swayed helplessly as though my bones and joints were hit by a sledgehammer. Tears welled unstoppably. I crawled begging for mercy. Then total darkness enveloped me. I surrender if this is the end of my life... I felt the breeze caressing my face. I opened my eyes. Everything looked white. (p. 174)

While the story is obviously moralising, demonstrating how homosexuality makes one become out of touch from one's home or moral grounding, the tragedy that ensues in both of the characters' decisions to reform their immoral ways potentially contradicts the didacticism of the story. Death becomes the result of both their resolutions to leave their alternative lifestyle and go back to following the moral norms of a good Indonesian woman. In some ways, the death of the characters destabilises the moral certainty of Kienan and Regha's homecoming, portraying it as a tragic fate for leaving behind their 'immoral' ways to be at peace with their conscience. This text that, on the one hand, intends to inspire morally compromised women to tread the path of good also, on the other hand, shows how returning to the moral righteousness of their patriarchal and heterosexist 'home' is not just constraining but, worse, can also have tragic consequences by showing that both of these reformed women ended up dying.

Juwanna's *Kerudung Turki* and Susana Nisa's *Tuhan, Aku Pulang* show the dimension of morality, through *malu*, in configuring and reconstructing Indonesian domestic workers' sexuality, especially by the protagonists who directly engage in transgressive sexual relationships. In contrast, Kwek Li Na's *Mochi Kehidupan* ('Mochi Life') offers a different perspective in looking at and understanding this kind of intimacy through the perspective of Lautin, a morally upright woman who ended up befriending a lesbian couple.

In this story, the main character is a domestic worker in Taipei who decided to break her contract and run away from her employer because she was about to be

forcibly repatriated by her recruitment agency due to some minor health issues. With nothing and nowhere to run to, she approaches two fellow Indonesian women in a public park in the hope that they could help her. She later learns their names, Sabita and Angani, when the two decided to help her by letting her stay in their flat. It took her a while to discover that her saviours are a lesbian couple. Although they were busy embracing in public the first time she met them, neither Sabita nor Angani dressed up as stereotypical lesbians. Sabita was "a woman in yellow sporting a hairstyle similar to Lady Diana" while Angani "the other woman [was] wearing a short skirt and white T-shirt" (Li Na 2014, p. 33).

After Lautin realises that her newfound companions are "sexually-deviant," she tries her best to defer her own moral judgment and suspend her thinking about acquiring *malu* in involving herself in this *haram* relationship. "At first I was amused to see both of their behaviours, but I tried to be as casual about it as possible. Slowly, they both started to respect me and do not become too touchy with each other whenever I'm around" (p. 34). Lautin finds herself incapable of morally judging Sabita and Angani because, after all, it was the two women who helped her in her time of need and, later on, paved the way for her to be able to find work in the mochi factory where the couple is also working.

Even though the protagonist tries to impress and gently influence her lesbian housemates and rescuers, Sabita and Angani's kindness and generosity to her have also undermined and disrupted Lautin's moral certainty and judgment about their sexuality:

> I did not forbid what they're doing but I also did not support it. I just did not want to interfere with their affairs... I'm just trying to give them an example without asking them to imitate me. Now they have begun to pray diligently, even fast. Allah may have sent me to them. Although I know that this reasoning is blurring what was right from wrong, I started to think that there must be a reason for everything. This was what I was thinking with Sabita and Angani. They must also have their reasons. (p. 35)

The protagonist realises that she is not the only one who has influenced the lesbian couple; Sabita and Angani have also made her question her own notions of goodness and moral virtues that she has been comfortably holding onto. Here, the reader sees how Lautin's ideas on morality and sexuality have started to be challenged as she reflects upon the cultural and moral norms that she is so familiar with against the reality of support and comfort that her housemates have been providing for each other and for her.

After a few months of living and working with Sabita and Angani, Lautin has started to get to know the couple more intimately. They shared with her how they ended up in Taiwan. Sabita was raped by her brother and she hid this *shameful* secret from everyone because she neither wanted to cause trouble at home nor hurt her mother. To get away from her traumatic past, she decided to work abroad as a domestic worker. Angani, on the other hand, had constantly been let down by men which led her to feel disillusioned in heterosexual relationships. She grew up seeing her father ruthlessly beat her mother almost every day, then her husband cheated on her, leading her to divorce then migrate abroad to get away from her troubled home. Their traumas brought them together:

> Sabita and Angani, having been equally disappointed by men, finally chose each other. At first they were just ordinary friends, but being together and their concern for one another eventually turned into love. What could not be accepted by other people have slowly rebuilt their devastated hearts in their own way. I could only be silent, listen to all their stories. I started to understand why they came to be like that. To me, whoever they are, they have kind hearts, and they love like everyone else. (p. 42)

From Sabita and Angani's painful experiences, Lautin has started to make sense of their love for each other. Her silence translates into a deeper understanding, empathy and realisation their sexuality does not contradict their goodness. This wiped out the protagonist's prejudices and perceptions of the *malu* that has been ascribed to Sabita and Angani's relationship. Her friendship with the lesbian couple has transformed her profoundly, and she begins to see them as sisters, where her own past experiences connect to Sabita and Angani's struggles to fight for their love. In a gesture of solidarity, she shares a piece of mochi that she has just made:

> I wanted to eat this tiny mochi in my hand but, by some reflex, I put it down first. I pinched it into three parts. The first I handed to Sabita, the second to Angani, and the remaining portion I ate myself… I just wish they knew that I will forever be their friend, even if everyone would stay away from them when they discovered who they are. (p. 43)

Kwek Li Na's story opens a new way of mediating and eventually challenging the impositions of *malu* on the alternative sexualities of Indonesian migrant women. Unlike the symbolism of the veiling in *Kerudung Turki* or the metaphor of home-coming in *Tuhan, Aku Pulang*, which both impart religious and cultural ideas in which shame reforms transgressive women's bodies back to propriety, *Mochi Kehidupan* employs the imagery of sharing mochi to convey a message of openness, profound compassion, and a deeper alliance to the shared struggles of women who are constantly shamed.

8.5 Conclusion

While *malu* is a powerful affect that is constantly imposed on Indonesian women to discipline their bodies in transnational spaces, their everyday practices show that they do not just assume and receive this feeling and the discourses that inform it. As their real life and fictional narratives attest, they also constantly mediate, challenge and sometimes subvert shame and shaming in their daily lives. The short stories that have been analysed here reflect that negotiating *malu* is a complex process, one in which they constantly negotiate the gendered ideas of morality attached to their body and sexuality while also living up to the many demands and pressures of being a foreigner and a woman abroad. Finally, the very fact that they are telling their own stories and publishing them reflects a deeper transgression of the class- and gender-based shame ascribed to them both for being a lowly domestic worker and for having these kinds of narratives that can potentially bring them shame. In this sense, *Sastra BMI* becomes an important arena where impositions of morality and sexuality are continually contested.

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Chapter 9
Can Kartini Be Lesbian? Identity, Gender, and Sexual Orientation in a Post-Suharto Pop Novel

Edwin Wieringa

Abstract The British author Martin Amis once remarked that "the way a writer names his characters provides a good index to the way he sees the world—to his reality-level, his responsiveness to the accidental humour and freakish poetry of life" (Amis Amis, The moronic inferno and other visits to America, Penguin, London, 1987, p. 13). If this is so, what, then, does the choice of the name Kartini for the protagonist in the 2007 pop novel *Kembang Kertas* (Paper Flowers) by the Indonesian woman writer Eni Martini with the provocative subtitle *Ijinkan aku menjadi lesbian* (Allow me to be lesbian) tell us about the way she appropriates the iconic feminist figure of Kartini who lived from 1879 to 1904? This essay explores how the Kartini image as a model of the ideal Indonesian woman is creatively refigured in this 21st-century expression of Indonesian popular culture and how the new post-colonial avatar is deployed to address problematics of gender, shame, and sexual orientation. The question arises as to the analogy between the emblematic Kartini, revered in Indonesia as the epitome of perfect heterosexual femininity, and the new-fangled Kartini figure in fictional form.

Keywords Heterosexuality · Indonesian literature · Java · Kartini · Lesbian · USA

9.1 What's in a Name?

Can Kartini really be lesbian? The short answer in the 2007 novel *Kembang Kertas—Ijinkan Aku Menjadi Lesbian* (Paper Flowers; Allow me to be Lesbian) by Eni Martini is no, at least not in her own country where she finds herself, in consequence, persona non grata. As several surveys and studies show, Indonesia belongs to the least tolerant countries in the world regarding attitudes towards sexual and gender minorities. The surface message of Martini's novel is that lesbianism is abnormal, a kind of pitiable defect. The story stresses the difficulties that the lesbian Kartini encounters in an

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intolerant society. However, while discussing this remarkable transformation of the Kartini role model, I will argue that rather than promoting a queer-positive agenda, lesbianism in Martini's novel functions as a *chiffre* for a self-defined life for a woman. The 21st-century embodiment of the Kartini icon recounts a contemporary instalment of the old debate on modernity versus tradition which is dramatically played out in all permutations of the Kartini masterplot by way of the conflict between a modern woman's wish for self-determination and the prevailing traditional norms and ideals of society from which she is alienated.[1]

9.2 Judging by the Cover

How should we read Martini's book? Let me start with some preliminaries first: as is quite usual for literary fiction in Indonesia, the novel was released, in April 2007, as a "paperback original" (dimensions 17 × 11 cm). It never seems to have been reprinted. Counting ix + 144 pages, the retail price at the time was IDR 22,500 (about USD 2.50). This price may look like a steal, but it should be remembered that wages in Indonesia rank among the lowest in Asia: in 2006, the minimum wage per month in Jakarta was merely IDR 819,100 (about USD 89) (Gross and Connor 2006).

The first visual encounter that the curious browser likely would have with it would be the front cover. The words on the cover tell us that we are dealing with "a novel" (*sebuah novel*) and provide basic information on the title, subtitle, author's name, publisher, and year of publication. The eye-catch, however, is a photograph of two festive young women dancing what looks like a close embrace tango in a romantically lit environment. The woman in front of the viewer's eyes has a very décolleté dress and nude shoulders and arms, whereas her partner, who is shown from the back, is wearing a dress with spaghetti straps which expose her shoulders and upper back. The subtitle of the novel, "Allow me to be lesbian," could easily be taken as a caption, thereby turning the intimate dancing scene into a possibly sexually suggestive pose.

The back cover features the same picture at the top, though in a thumbnail format, and the blurb engages the potential buyer by introducing the novel's protagonist Kartini as an attractive person. The first two opening sentences seem to point to a pop novel set in the romanticised world of campus life:

> Kartini is a young woman, beautiful, blue-blooded, attracting attention from anyone of the opposite sex. Kartini is the flower among college girls, possessing everything that both men and women want.[2]

As Teeuw (1979, p. 164) has pointed out in his by-now classic history of modern Indonesian literature (last updated in the 1970s), 'lady-authors' (to borrow Teeuw's terminology) in the genre of 'the ladies' novel' treat mainly "sentimental themes of love and marriage, often with a tragic and always with a moralistic tinge." Today, this type of women's fiction is sold under the name of *metropop* novels, referring to "stories exclusively set in metropolitan locations and focusing on the life of a

girl or a woman in her daily activities" (Arimbi 2017, p. 248). The basic formula remains unchanged, however, revolving around "a female protagonist in her search for everlasting love" with the more modern addition of "her attempts to balance between her private and public affairs (love, life, and career)" (Arimbi 2017, p. 248). Centring on mundane everyday details of women's lives and obsessed with choosing a partner for life, this kind of lowbrow 'lady lit' can be compared to 'chick lit' in the Anglophone world.[3]

Hence, when we read in the next sentence of the blurb that "Kartini leaves all that she loves behind in order to follow her inner voice which she had firmly repressed all the time,"[4] what else can we expect other than another story about "women's weal and woe" (Teeuw 1979, p. 164)? Reading on for more details, however, the punch line involves a remarkable turn, one that was already hinted at in the subtitle: "In all boldness she says: allow me to be lesbian."[5] After this shocking utterance, at least by mainstream Indonesian standards, the layout separates the next paragraph by a substantial gap and a line of four asterisks. This graphical pause creates a necessary break for the intended readership, which may well be expected to need to get its breath back first.[6] The next section of the blurb provides a commentary on this in-your-face statement, apparently intended to accommodate a putatively heteronormative audience[7]:

> This novel does not wish to legalise lesbianism, but is rather about telling the inner struggle of a human being coming to grips with changes in herself. We may find them [i.e. lesbians, EPW] repellent, disgusting or consider them as trash, but we have to give them a place, too, as they are also humans, just like us. Because there is not a single woman who wishes to be born as a lesbian. What do you think???

The third section of the blurb provides a brief biography and bibliography of Eni Martini (born in 1977 in Jakarta), accompanied by a small black and white photo of the author. However, I am not sure whether this illustration perhaps contains a subliminal message. Looking the viewer in the eye, Martini appears to be grabbing a phallic object, but it would surely be an over-interpretation to suggest sexual innuendo or some symbolic stance against women's subordination. But at any rate, regardless of what the photo may possibly mean, it does not reflect the way in which the author wishes to show herself nowadays. Newer images on the internet more often than not cast her in the role of a mother with small children, always wearing the by-now ubiquitous Indonesian Muslim women's uniform of the veil together with a loose-fitting, long-sleeved blouse and ankle-length skirt.[8] The thumbnail photo of her younger self on the back cover which exposes her *'aurat* (the Islamic term for those parts of the body which should be covered in public) is still from the pre-*hijab* period. In the years 2007–2009 of this stage in her life, she was contracted to write all kinds of pulpy genres (horror, comedy, teen lit), merely for the sake of money, to be sold in minimarkets belonging to Indonesia's largest chains, *IndoMart* and *AlfaMart*.[9]

Opening the book, the front matter, which is numbered in lower-case Roman numerals (pp. i–ix), provides us with information on how the book is marketed. Pages i–iii are merely technical, comprising the title page (p. i), copyright statement

(p. ii), and title page with copyright and publisher information (p. iii), while a table of contents can be found on p. viii; a poorly reproduced black and white photograph of the cover is featured on p. ix. In the foreword by the publisher (pp. iv–v), P. Sri Fajar of 1st Trust Publishing informs us that she had only recently come to know Eni Martini, but had learned from her novels that this young writer was most familiar with the "world of women" (*dunia perempuan*, p. iv) and that she was "able to terrorise the inner-self of her readers" (*mampu meneror batin pembacanya*, p. iv). In the novel *Paper Flowers,* the publisher comments[10]:

> Paper Flowers (2007)–a novel about the inner struggle of a woman searching for and finding her identity in the midst of cosmopolitan life– is her fifth novel that is very captivating. This novel, which apparently is based upon a real-life story, seems to wish to share this story with us all, about the way a woman must overcome herself. Following the words of her own heart, no matter how bitter the stigma that she has to accept. In the name of inner honesty and her own original self, she must decide to become a lesbian. Truly a beautiful and fascinating work….

The preface by Eni Martini (p. vi–vii) contains acknowledgments of those who contributed to the creation of the book, and we learn that the draft of the novel already existed in 2000, but there is no mention of a real-life story as inspiration. She merely thanks an anonymous fellow student at university for having provided her with the idea for the novel in 1999 (p. vi). Due to technical problems with computers, printers and viruses, the book could only appear in 2007.

As the plot forms the essence of popular romance, what the literary scholar Brooks (1984, p. 37) has called the "organising line and intention of narrative," let us now take a closer look at this most basic feature of the narrative.

9.3 Love and Marriage

Heterosexual marriage and resulting motherhood constitute the social nightmare with which the plot of *Paper Flowers* begins, something that will haunt the leading character Kartini until the last page. The opening sentences about a welcoming party in Yogyakarta set the scene[11]:

> It had been a long time since Kartini had been with her family, relatives, and friends in a festive situation ruled by Javanese customs, its etiquette, and proper social conduct. And so mom had organised a small-scale party, or what is more commonly called a selamatan by Javanese. A party in order to welcome her arrival from Boston and also a thanksgiving for the completion of her study.

In this opening episode, the main oppositions are immediately introduced: Boston (US) versus Yogyakarta (Java/Indonesia) and modern university education vs. traditional customs. In the next scene, this initial boundary drawing extends to eating habits: Kartini's older siblings, relatives, and friends tease her by saying that such Western foods as hotdogs, pizzas, and hamburgers must have "poisoned her tongue," but in fact, she still delights in eating *serabi, nogosari, cenil, lemper, klepon* and all

other kinds of Javanese delicacies.[12] On a deeper level, one could argue that because of the fact that 'food' is such a well-known conceptual metaphor for "ideas," Kartini's Javanese environment wants to find out whether her Javanese identity is still intact: does she still share the same ideas as them or has her experience overseas transformed her into an outsider?

At this initial point of the story, Kartini is 25 years old and has come back home to Yogyakarta, having finished her university study in economics in Boston where she has been for five years.[13] Her family is aristocratic, related to the Yogyakarta Sultanate, and her parents proudly uphold traditional Javanese culture. The appropriate Javanese norms translate into rules and expectations around gender and sexuality: Kartini's parents want to marry her off to a man of their choice, but as a closeted lesbian, she carries a disturbing secret. It is highly tormenting for her that her friends at the party keep jokingly asking her about the American fiancé whom she surely must have, saying that they now understand why she formerly constantly rejected local boys: apparently, she always fancied Western men.

Some of her female friends are already married and have babies. When one of Kartini's female friends reminds her that Kartini used to be the beautiful 'flower' of her school, Kartini remembers a comment which her American female lover called Juliet Johnson once made in Washington DC. Enjoying the beauty of cherry blossoms in a park, a man passing by had remarked, "Beautiful, like you both!" Thereupon Juliet had giggled and said to Kartini, "Look, that damned man looked more intently at us than at a Washington cherry blossom. Suppose people knew that we are in fact more like paper flowers, his gazing would not be so wild…"[14]When Kartini asked what Juliet meant by the term "paper flower," her girlfriend explained: "Well, paper, something which is dead but looks attractive because it's made into flowers," pointing to all kinds of paper flowers—lilies, tulips, cherry blossoms–which were being sold by sidewalk vendors.[15]

There is no further explanation in the story of this imagery, but the reader may get the point. Like in so many languages, the Indonesian word for flower can be a symbol of female beauty.[16] Moreover, "flowers have always been emblematic of women, and particularly of their genital region, as is indicated by the use of the word defloration" (Jones 1951, in Vinken 2014, p. 15).[17] Paper flowers, however, are artificial artefacts and not a part of the natural world of living and reproducing things, so the implicit message of *Paper Flowers* seems to be that lesbianism is an unnatural phenomenon and a biological dead end.

At the party, Kartini is informed that Imam, who is a doctor with his own practice, is still waiting for her to become his wife and Hendro, an engineer, has also been asking about her. Kartini can hardly stand these one-topic conversations about male–female relations. She hates not being a 'normal' woman. But what is a woman, anyway? "Beauty and a vagina caused her to be called a woman."[18] One month later, Kartini is still in Yogya and keeps thinking about Juliet. For twenty years, Kartini had been bridling her same-sex feelings until she met Juliet in Boston. Juliet is an attractive Filipino-American and although Kartini and Juliet were lovers in America, Kartini did not want Juliet to accompany her to Indonesia, because, as she expresses it, "I'm still unable to get away from the traditions and religious

bans which are still strongly rooted in my family. I don't want to make my family ashamed of me…."[19] Kartini explains that in Indonesia, people like Juliet and herself are considered to be disgusting because "we are people who are abnormal."[20]

At first, Kartini had studied three semesters at Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, but because of her amorous feelings for Sinta, a girlfriend she had known since junior highschool, she had fled to Boston. Now back in Yogya, Kartini is puzzled by the amatory emotions which Sinta still stirs in her, while she still cannot forget Juliet, but all this should remain secret, because she wants to emulate the heterosexual example of her two older siblings. Her father had selected the spouses for them and now he introduces Kartini to the successful and attractive businessman Romi, whereas Doctor Imam is still waiting in the wings.

In America, Kartini and Juliet had planned to get married in the Netherlands, because same-sex marriage was legal there. They had wanted to adopt a child and live together forever. This love-dream once more underlines the narration's thrust that lesbians are "just like heterosexuals except in their sexual object choice" (Jagose 1996, p. 31). Kartini, however, had taken leave of Juliet and had chosen to return to her family, who did not accept an "abnormal sexual orientation."[21] Nevertheless, "Juliet was the candle in her life, the medicine for all her wounds from Sinta."[22] Back in Java, Kartini behaves like an iceberg towards men and is constantly daydreaming (*melamun*), i.e. trying to avoid the unpleasant realities of life at home.

Together with Romi, her father's favourite, Kartini goes to the wedding of her friend Sinta, but, overwhelmed by her own feelings, she has to leave early, literally sick from seeing the woman she still fancies entering into a heterosexual marriage. Kartini hates herself for not having been able to constrain her "sentimental and childish feelings."[23] Her parents pressure her into marriage and after a propitious day has been chosen for her marriage with Romi, Kartini is "put in seclusion" (*dipingit*) for two weeks. This is said to be part of Javanese aristocratic tradition: her mother was secluded for forty days, while her grandmother had to stay at home for hundreds of days.

The tradition of "stabling" or "caging" (*pingitan*) could perhaps be seen here as a palimpsestic allusion to the plight of the real-life Kartini who had to spend her adolescent years in seclusion until the time of her arranged marriage. In fact, however, as any informed reader knows, 'seclusion' is nowadays a faint echo of former times and hardly can be called a tragic and sad affair: generally, future brides gladly stay at home to avoid the sun in order to have the much-coveted lighter skin colour.[24]

During this period of seclusion, Kartini makes a secret phone call to Juliet, telling her about the marriage, and arguing that she had to obey her parents. Juliet is dumb-struck and cannot understand why a highly educated grown-up woman of 26 years should be so afraid of her parents, but as the omniscient narrator comments[25]:

> The problems facing Kartini made her lost for words, because these problems had to do with the feudal culture in Kartini's country, to which her family still strongly stuck. A culture which she herself did not understand very well, never yet having been to Indonesia.

Disappointed and sad, Juliet articulates Kartini's own heartfelt wish that Kartini may become a "normal woman."[26] Nevertheless, Juliet tells her that she will accept her again, whenever that may be.

Kartini undergoes all kinds of traditional preparations for the wedding, such as fasting by eating only white rice and drinking only water (*puasa putih*) for seven days. The night before the wedding, the bride needs to stay awake in order to receive a blessing for her future married life. A virgin will look like a *widodari* or heavenly nymph on her wedding day, hence the name of this ritual, *midodareni*.[27] The wedding ceremony itself is executed, of course, in accordance with Javanese customs.

9.4 Conversion to Heterosexuality?

Kartini is the stereotypical femme of popular fiction, i.e. "weak, ditzy and whining" (Mitchell 2012, p. 129) and her 'conversion' to heterosexuality is no happy ending (cf. Mitchell 2012, p. 129 for such a stereotypical closure of 1950s US lesbian pulp fiction, particularly for femmes). The consummation of the marriage proves to be a most difficult affair, because Kartini retains her icy demeanour and Romi grows increasingly weary of her constant daydreaming. He suspects that her odd behaviour may have been caused by some trauma and suggests seeking psychiatric help. Kartini adamantly refuses and even allows Romi to find sexual gratification out of wedlock. However, Romi is a "good husband" (*suami yang baik*) and a "normal man" (*laki-laki normal*), but in his opinion Kartini is a "frigid wife" (*istri yang vrigit* [sic], p. 75). One day, after several months of non-consummation of the marriage, the couple argues once again about the issue. However, after Kartini has brought up the idea of divorce, because she cannot make her husband happy and Romi's idea of psychiatric help is once again turned down, the situation suddenly turns intimate[28]:

> 'Ok, if you don't want to go to a psychiatrist, it's alright. It's alright, Kartini. We'll try to make things right in private. Just the two of us.' Romi gave in, tightly embracing Kartini and kissing her lips.
>
> 'I don't want to lose you, Kartini….' he said, kissing his wife again. 'I love you.'
>
> Kartini was grinning inside. She returned her husband's kiss out of feelings of guilt. Perhaps I shouldn't separate from him, it's uncertain whether all my problems will be over after a divorce. I better learn to develop lust for men, that should be it for now...

Immediately following this scene, there is a pause in the narration marked by asterisks and white lines, after which, on the next page, a new chapter begins.[29] The narrative gap should be filled in by the reader, but the very first sentence informs us about the profound consequences of what must have occurred in the untold continuation of the episode with its rare moment of conjugal felicity[30]:

> After this event, Romi did not bring the problem up for discussion again and on top of that, much to Kartini's surprise, she was pregnant.

After much waiting, finally, the marriage has been properly 'completed' and, from then on, things seem to go 'normally' in Kartini's life[31]:

> Only this one time in her life, Kartini felt that God had been so good as to make her feel like a real woman. The feelings of a true woman. She was a woman, but would she [also] have the feelings of a normal woman after this?

She gives birth to a beautiful daughter called Diva. She is most happy and is devoted to her daughter. Romi's career involves a lot of overtime work, but Kartini does not complain, because this means that she does not have to "serve" (*melayani*) her husband –sexually, that is–, which is "a wonderful coincidence."[32]

When Diva is two years old, Kartini accepts a job offer from a renowned bank. However, she can only work there for four months due to an affair at the office involving a lesbian colleague called Nadia. Against Fifi, another colleague who was "disgusted" (*muak*) by Nadia's attentions, Kartini defended Nadia by saying[33]:

> 'Nobody wants to be born with a defect. Was it Nadia's wish to be born as a lesbian? If possible, she would have given instructions beforehand, wanting to be born as a normal woman like you who would have an honourable position and who could love men…'

When they are alone, Nadia thanks Kartini for defending her, telling her that "in fact, people seldom want to understand this condition, apart from those sharing the same fate."[34] Nadia understands her own "mistake:"[35]

> However, I was indeed wrong. I could not withhold myself and accept the fact that Fifi is a normal woman who likes men; of course, she would be angry or disgusted because of me. I really love her too much….

Things threaten to get out of hand when Nadia begins touching Kartini, thereby awakening the slumbering lesbian feelings that Kartini had also had for Sinta and Juliet. Although Kartini coarsely rejects Nadia, both women instinctively feel attracted to each other. Henceforth, Kartini quits her job at the bank with the excuse that she misses her daughter Diva.

One day, Ramly, a friend of Romi, visits Kartini when she is alone at home, telling her that her husband has a secret lover. Ramly subsequently offers to be Kartini's lover, but she refuses. After four years of marriage, Kartini knows that her husband would not have committed adultery if she had been able to satisfy him. Coincidentally, shortly thereafter, Kartini meets with Nadia on the street. They have not seen each other for two years and Kartini invites Nadia to visit her sometime or other. Although Kartini knows that "Nadia has an abnormal sexual orientation,"[36] she also knows that Nadia will "guard her feelings,"[37] because Nadia still will be under the impression that Kartini is a "normal woman"[38] and thus off-limits for her. The two women become friends, and one day Nadia asks Kartini why she is so sad. Looking at Nadia, Kartini thinks[39]:

> Oh, God. In fact, they were not just friends, but also two creatures of God, having the same fate of loving the same sex. She and Nadia were patients who really needed each other.

When the two lovingly embrace, Romi suddenly enters the room, reacting hysterically, being both angry and sad, shocked to discover that his wife is a lesbian. He wants an immediate divorce and claims custody of their daughter Diva, because Kartini "has an abnormal sexual orientation."[40] As he puts it, "I want my daughter

to grow up like a normal human being."[41] Kartini feels unable to say anything about her husband's adultery, as she had been unable to satisfy him sexually, being a frigid woman (the text on p. 126 reads "*frigip*," one of many misprints in this book).

9.5 The Socially Dead Lesbian

A week after this fateful incident, Romi has started the divorce procedure. He informs the mutual families, but merely blames constant conflicts for the marital break-up. In return for concealing the real ground for divorce, he demands from Kartini the custody of their daughter. As Kartini is well aware, a divorce will not be the end of her problems[42]:

> However, she would surely find new problems. Yes, yes, both her parents would not allow her to be alone. They would find other husbands for her again. She was still young and very pretty. As soon as Ramly had heard that Romi wanted a divorce, he had already phoned Kartini several times.

Juliet enters Kartini's mind again and Kartini wants to phone her, saying "I have failed to become a normal woman. I don't have anyone anymore."[43] After five years of silence, she phones Juliet to pour out her heart. Juliet advises her to come out of the closet, but Kartini is too afraid that she will lose everything as a result. Juliet repeats that she is willing to accept Kartini again, at any time.

Kartini's love for her daughter Diva, who has become the subject of a bitter child custody dispute, makes Kartini visit her parents in order to explain why her marriage did not work out. As her parents do not understand her vague and woolly talk, nor the metaphor of the paper flowers, she finally confesses (still heavily camouflaged in the high Javanese speech level): "I really don't love men."[44] Her parents are shocked and find this abnormality crazy and shameful, throwing her out of their house.

After having reached the bleak nadir of her existence, the story of Kartini's life only has two more pages to go. How will it end? Will Kartini perhaps commit suicide? The solution of killing queer female characters is so popular in the reigning entertainment media of film and television that there is even a name for it: the "all-devouring pop-culture wiki" *TV Tropes* (tvtropes.org) calls it "Dead Lesbian Syndrome." Other closures popular in pulp fiction are that the lesbian characters finally end up "miserable, alcoholic, suicidal or insane" (Mitchell 2012, 129; cf. Smith 2012, 155).

However, a twist at the end happily provides a future for the ostracised protagonist. After all, the quest for the right partner constitutes a controlling feature of the category of romances to which *Paper Flowers* belongs. The wrap-up is a variation upon the genre formula of the Happy Ending, namely that the true lovers find each other at the end (cf. Altman 2008, p. 87, for a discussion of love stories ending with the "right" matches). This is how it goes: after the divorce, Kartini wins custody of her daughter despite fierce resistance from Romi and her own family. The novel ends

with a teary-eyed Kartini and her daughter at Jakarta airport, ready for departure to America. The attentive reader knows that Kartini shall finally be reunited with Juliet.

Kaye Mitchell (2012, p. 137) writes that:

> Popular fiction has always sought to accomplish apparently contradictory tasks in its treatment of gender and sexuality: to explore and yet contain – even suppress – anxieties about changing gender roles and taboo or 'deviant' sexual proclivities; to titillate readers who are simultaneously conservative and prurient, without offending or alienating them; to entertain and divert a 'mass' audience, ensuring accessibility, whilst speaking to quite personal, private and idiosyncratic desires and fears; to emphasise its grounding in reality, whilst offering fantasy, escapism.

Martini's novel is neither straightforwardly "pro" nor "anti" lesbian. It is women-centred and dominated by a love story between two lesbian women with an optimistic conclusion of sorts, suggesting the possibility of happiness in a lesbian relationship in a non-Indonesian context, whilst still stressing the impossibility of this option for lesbians in intolerant Indonesia.

Perhaps unexpected and certainly melodramatic, the bittersweet finale about building a new life in a new country brings the plot to a narratively logical conclusion, answering the story's central question of whether Kartini can be lesbian. Not so in Indonesia. However, she can take her life in her own hands and progress forwards. While the lesbian character gets her happily-ever-after, the novel does not really resist the dominant culture. The positive ending is only possible by an escape from Indonesia to the West where the "lesbian possibility" (Rich 1994) exists, reserved for a woman who belongs to the affluent upper class. However, what about the 'deviant' passions of the lower orders? Apparently, not only hamburgers and hotdogs are alien to Indonesian culture, but so is lesbianism.

9.6 Readers' Responses

One might have expected that a novel about lesbianism, which is still very much a taboo topic in Indonesia, would have caused something of a stir. For example, in 2003, Herlinatiens (the pseudonym of Herlina Tien Suhesti, born in Ngawi, East Java, in 1982) published her debut novel *Garis tepi seorang lesbian* (The margins of a lesbian) describing the desires of a woman for other women, which became an instant bestseller and the subject of analysis in academic articles. Another novel, entitled *Suara perih seorang perempuan: Lesbian dan kawin bule* (A pained woman's voice: Lesbian and marrying a white man), published in 2003 and reprinted in 2006, which "portrays a woman's struggle for subjectivity as a woman" (Arnez 2013, p. 84), has also been subjected to scholarly analysis (see Arnez 2013, p. 84ff.).

Hardly anything is known about the author of the latter novel, but her use of the pen name Putri Kartini is worthy of note here. The pseudonym can be translated as Daughter of Kartini or Miss Kartini. It is usual to select a Miss Kartini in beauty pageants on or around Kartini Day (21 April), but in this case, the author obviously views herself in a more feminist way as a true Daughter of Kartini, considering that

her book was published with the explicit goal of participating in "women's liberation and empowerment as well as in a process of raising awareness" (Arnez 2013, p. 85).

By contrast, Martini's novel has hitherto only been footnoted once in academic literature, where it is mentioned in a brief list together with a few other post-Suharto examples that address "the topic of relationships among women" (Arnez 2013, p. 76 n. 4). Googling the name of Eni Martini and the title of her pop novel will only produce a few results and not bring up much information. When the Indonesian author Ratih Kumala (born in Jakarta in 1980) in 2010 drew up a survey of Indonesian literary works that deal with lesbianism or have lesbians as main characters, Eni Martini's work was not included. This omission is even more glaring considering the compiler's conclusion that the number of lesbian-related books is "not even enough to fill a single bookshelf—if Indonesian libraries had such a section."[45]

Did Ratih Kumala perhaps not deem *Paper Flowers* worthy of admission due to a lack of literary merit? If so, it would be a judgment for which something may be said. The *Goodreads* website gives the novel an unimpressive rating of 3.1 out of 5 stars. Although this unenthusiastic assessment may be based upon merely 29 estimations, it is noteworthy that the good people of *Goodreads* are not random readers but belong to a "self-selected, inclined-to-like-it group" (Yagoda 2018). Intriguingly, Eni Martini is among the 29 respondents, but she rated her own novel (on 14 May 2013) with only two stars, which can hardly count as a glowing recommendation because this at best implies that "it was ok" but still below average.[46]

Although two reviews are listed on *Goodreads*, in fact, there is only one, written by the novelist, poet, columnist, and blogger A. J. Susmana (born in Klaten in 1971), which first appeared on the website *Bekasinews* in 2008.[47] It is an extensive one-star assault which is both aesthetic and moral. The only positive thing Susmana can muster is that the story is not difficult to understand, because the language and vocabulary are quite simple. This is a backhanded compliment of sorts and he mentions in the same breath that the reading pleasure is severely hampered due to a lack of editing, as the text is marred with grammatical errors, spelling mistakes, and typos. Although I agree with this, the same complaint could easily be made against any other Indonesian pop novel. More important for our purposes is Susmana's main gripe with the novel, which concerns the figure of Kartini. Put simply, she does not live up to Susmana's expectations. His damning critique has directly to do with the way Kartini is imprinted on the collective cultural psyche from umpteen former adaptations.

As the reader-response theory posits, every interpreter brings a horizon of expectations to a text. In the words of the literary critic (Abrams 1999, pp. 262–263): "The response of a particular reader, which constitutes for that reader the meaning and aesthetic qualities of a text, is the joint product of the reader's own 'horizon of expectations' and the confirmation, disappointments, refutations, and reformulations of these expectations when they are "challenged" by the features of the text itself." Measuring Martini's re-creation of the Kartini figure against the imposing stature of Kartini in Indonesian cultural memory, a huge disappointment is pre-programmed.

Hence, in comparing the fictional Kartini to the historical example set by Indonesia's long-familiar and treasured heroine Kartini, Susmana predictably finds

the discrepancy most pronounced. In contrast to the courageous icon who fought for the liberation of outdated traditions, Susmana views Martini's Kartini as merely fatalistic, naïve, and childish. Instead of taking the struggle for democratic rights of the LGBT community in her own hands (which is something a "real" Kartini worthy of her name would do), this Kartini cowardly acquiesced in subordination, too afraid to oppose her parents and their old-fashioned ways of thinking. With the protagonist's background as someone who had studied at an American university and had lived as a lesbian there, Susmana would have expected and liked a self-conscious and militant character, but in his opinion, the subtitle of the novel already underscores her weak stance. This submissive woman can only humbly ask for permission to be a lesbian. However, as Susmana rhetorically asks: "Why does she have to ask for permission? And who is entitled to grant the permission?"[48] Rather than demanding full recognition of same-sex relationships, the narrative makes a humble plea for greater tolerance of this "abnormal" form of sexuality, merely out of pity.

What are the literary expectations of Indonesia's middle- and high-brow circles? In the 2010 introduction of a literary anthology of twelve Indonesian lesbian-themed short stories, each written by a different author, Oka Rusmini (born in Jakarta in 1967) remarks that the contents are more than just "whiny, sentimental love stories" Kumala (2010). I cite Ratih Kumala's English translation to convey Rusmini's message: "Indonesian writers dealing with lesbianism should attempt to make bold ideas and language jump from the pages if they want to truly represent the lesbian community's long and brutal struggle to gain acceptance in the country" (Kumala 2010).

Rusmini voices here a deeply rooted idea in Indonesian literature about the didactic role of the writer as a moralist who takes part in the struggle to tell right from wrong and good conduct from bad (cf. Wieringa 2017). Contrary to the anthologised stories of Rusmini and her ilk on lesbian themes, which were all written by prominent members of Indonesia's literary premier league, Martini's rather trashy novelistic labour strikes as nothing more than a "whiny, sentimental love story." However, I wish to argue that this admittedly lachrymose second-rate or popular work of literature shares the moralistic-didactic impulse. But in what way? At least so much is clear that Martini is not personally involved in the LGBT movement. She self-identifies as heterosexual and has no special agenda as a gay rights activist. In fact, the constant emphasis in her novel on the idea of lesbianism as abnormal and a repugnant pathological affliction is not exactly gay-friendly. Kartini's lascivious colleague Nadia is even depicted as a hypersexualised character who is on the prowl for other lesbians. This characterisation perpetuates the negative stereotype that lesbians tend to be hypersexual and are hardly able to control their carnal desires (cf. Mitchell 2012, pp. 129, 131); even Kartini is not free of this.

Conversely, the self-portrait of Martini could not be further removed from the lesbian predator, as is evidenced in her succinct biography on *Goodreads* in which Martini stresses her role as wife and mother. She writes that she "ended her period as a spinster on 7 February 2005 after meeting and falling in love with a man called Budi Suharjiyanto."[49] She also devotes a large portion of the short bio to the birth of her four children (the third of which died prematurely). The final sentence once more sums up how she likes to present herself: "Now filling the days with being a

wife and mother, writing, and also from time to time interconnecting with nature and life itself."[50] The photos that she posts of herself nowadays on several social media platforms also emphasise traditional female gender roles, whereas, on the front page of her Instagram, Twitter and Facebook accounts, she introduces herself first and foremost as "Mom 4 kids" (in English in the original).

Martini's novel *Paper Flowers* is listed on *Goodreads* among "Indonesian LGBT Books," of which 31 in total are quoted (dated 2012).[51] However, I doubt whether that moniker is particularly apt. Although the protagonist is undeniably lesbian, the narrative remains deeply imbued with homophobia, viewing lesbianism as a deviation from the heterosexual paradigm, which is described as a pitiful phenomenon that has no place in Indonesia. Rather than an Indonesian LGBT book, I would like to argue that *Paper Flowers* is part of another list, i.e. a slew of Indonesian novels about the struggle for liberation from oppressive tradition. The vision of "proper womanhood" is terrifying for Kartini because it violates her freedom. Martini's novel points to something beyond a tale about a woman in search of love and a struggle with her sexual identity: the issue of lesbianism and the contested concept of "proper womanhood" functions as a prism through which the broader question of the quest for self-definition is refracted. As Mabry (2006, p. 200) has observed in the comparable case of contemporary Anglophone "chick" novels, "sex becomes a way for the woman to explore her own identity and express her own desires, rather than merely part of a single romance narrative that emphasises traditional gender roles." Although lesbianism is depicted in *Paper Flowers* as unnatural and abnormal, it is not condemned as a sin or fault but viewed as an unfortunate condition. The common point between the canonical Kartini storyline and Martini's lesbian variation upon it lies in the identity struggle and the fight for the right to digress from entrenched and essentialist role models prescribed by society. As such, despite its rather uncommon protagonist, *Paper Flowers* is fully in accordance with the broader "new narrative of personal and self-development" (Smith-Hefner 2007, p. 412) that so many middle-class women in Indonesia have come to embrace in the post-Suharto era.

9.7 No Country for Lesbians

The novel *Paper Flowers* seems to tell a pretty straightforward interpretation of the trope that East is East and West is West. It is a tale of two cities, symbolising two clearly demarcated separate worlds, as the following chart (Table 9.1) shows:

Java is no country for lesbians, which also is clear when we look at a graphical representation of Kartini's life story (Table 9.2).

Kartini's fictional life story shares key similarities with the real-life Kartini as the latter is known in Indonesia from her famous potted biography. Both Kartinis are born into the *priyayi* (noble) world of the Javanese aristocracy, which is specifically identified with age-old traditional Javanese court culture. Both find the fetters of custom frustrating and have a strong wish for individual liberty. However, both finally succumb to traditional gender roles, accepting the forced marriage and resulting

Table 9.1 Dichotomy between East (Yogyakarta) and West (Boston)

Yogyakarta	Boston
Java; Indonesia	US; Western world
Family	Individual
Heteronormativity	Sexual freedom ("anything goes")
"feudal"	"land of the free"
Home; fatherland	Dreamworld
Customs and traditions (*adat*)	Modern, academic knowledge and learning

Table 9.2 Kartini's life story as lesbian

0–20	20–25	25–30	30–
Java	US	Java	US
Closeted lesbian	Openly lesbian	Closeted lesbian; forced heterosexual marriage which ends in divorce	Openly lesbian

motherhood. Their lives in Java end tragically, reaching the end with biological death in childbirth for the historical Kartini, whereas the fictional Kartini has to face social death, such that she is unable to continue her life in Java, completely ostracised from her own family and society.

As the historian Heather (Sutherland 1979, p. 48) notes, "[o]ne of the most interesting aspects of Kartini's brief career" is "the conflict between her own aspirations and the expectations of society." I would even go further and say that this conflict constitutes a defining element of the Kartini template. There is a long genealogy in modern Indonesian literature of novels in which the main protagonists are "not just individuals with personal desires who have all sorts of adventures; they are also representations of some more abstract phenomena which are usually referred to in sociological or culturological terms, like 'tradition', 'feudalism', 'capitalism', 'modernity', 'static', 'dynamic'" (Maier 1996, p. 135). As the literary scholar (Maier 1996, pp. 135–136) further points out, many Indonesian novels can be read as national allegories, in which the clash of personalities represents a symbolic battle between tradition and modernity. It could well be argued that *Paper Flowers* is a "continuation of these explorations into the conflict between modernity and tradition" (Maier 1996, p. 136). Kartini is shorthand for female 'modernity personified,' and Martini's 21st-century mutation of the Kartini icon may come as a surprise and even as a disappointment to Indonesians who hitherto were only used to applauding heterosexual Kartini who conform to social consensus and mainstream taste. However, essential traits of the Kartini figure as known since its inception are still reproduced in Martini's alternative post-colonial incarnation, still grappling with questions about identity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Notes

1. I follow Abbot's use (2008, p. 46–49) of the term masterplot, i.e. a recurrent skeletal story "belonging to cultures and individuals that play a powerful role in questions of identity, values, and the understanding of life" (Abbot 2008, p. 236). The Kartini masterplot featuring a young heroine fighting for women's rights is strongly connected with the ideas of progress and modernity.
2. *Kartini perempuan muda, cantik, berdarah biru, dikagumi setiap lawan jenisnya. Kartini kembang kampus, semua yang diinginkan setiap lelaki maupun perempuan ada pada dirinya.*
3. For comparative purposes, Martini's novel may also be likened to American 1950s lesbian pulp fiction with its condemnation of lesbianism, sexual stereotyping, and lowbrow aesthetic (see Mitchell 2012, p. 128–134).
4. *Kartini meninggalkan semua yang ia cintai, untuk mengikuti kata hati yang selama ini ia pendam rapi.*
5. *Dengan segala keberanian ia katakan: ijinkan aku menjadi lesbi.*
6. This graphic device is quite similar to the 'gutter' in comics (see Abbott 2008, p. 122–3; 234). See also below (note 30) for its use as a narrative gap in the story.
7. *Bukan ingin melegalkan Lesbianisme, Novel ini lebih menceritakan tentang pergolakan batin seorang anak manusia dalam memahami perubahan dalam dirinya. Kita boleh menolak, jijik, atau menganggap mereka sampah tapi kita juga harus memberi tempat, bahwa mereka juga manusia, sama seperti kita. Karena tak seorang perempuan pun ingin dilahirkan sebagai Lesbian. Bagaimana dengan Anda???*
8. Eni Martini is active on several social media platforms where she also posts images of herself and her family: Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/duniaeni), Instagram (https://www.instagram.com/duniaeni/), Twitter (https://twitter.com/duniaeni) and a website (http://www.duniaeni.com/). The older weblog (http://cahyakayangan.blogspot.com/), which she started in January 2010, does not exist anymore.
9. *Be a Writer Indonesia.* 2013. Author of the month: Eni Martini. https://bawindonesia.blogspot.com/2013/11/author-of-month-eni-martini.html. Accessed 13 December 2023.
10. *Kembang Kertas (2007)–sebuah novel yang berisi tentang pergulatan batin seorang wanita dalam mencari dan menemukan jati dirinya di tengah kehidupan kosmopolit- merupakan novel kelimanya yang sangat menawan. Novel yang tampaknya berangkat dari kisah nyata ini, sepertinya ingin berbagi cerita dengan kita semua tentang bagaimana seorang wanita harus memenangkan dirinya. Meingikuti kata hatinya, bagaimanapun pahit stigma yang harus diterimanya. Atas nama kejujuran hati dan orisinalitas diri, dia harus memutuskan menjadi seorang lesbi. Sungguh sebuah karya yang indah dan mempesona….*
11. *Sudah lama Kartini tidak berbaur dengan keluarga, famili dan teman-temannya dalam suasana pesta adapt Jawa yang penuh ung[g]ah-ungguh, tata krama. Maka saat Si'Bu mengadakan pesta kecil-kecilan, atau lebih sering disebut selamatan oleh masyarakat Jawa. Pesta dalam rangka menyambut kedatangannya dari Boston, serta syukuran atas selesainya studi dia.* (p. 1).
12. *Sering kakak, famili dan teman-temannya di Yogya meledek, hotdog, pizza, hamburger, dan sejenis makanan khas Barat itu telah meracuni indera persasa-nya* [sic] (p. 1).
13. Only on p. 24 is it revealed that she has studied economics at Boston College.
14. *'Lihat, laki-laki sialan itu menatap kita lebih dalam dari sekuntum sakura Washington. Seandainya mereka tahu kita lebih tepat seperti bunga kertas, pasti tatapannya tidak seliar itu…'* (p. 7).
15. *'Iya, Kertas, benda mati yang tampak menarik hanya karena dibuat bunga atau kembang'* (p. 7).
16. Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings (2004, p. 475) explain *kembang* as (1) flower and (2) flower as a symbol of female beauty.
17. In traditional Malay love-poetry, the flower (*bunga*) is "the maiden" that is "sought by the 'bee' (*kumbang*) or lover" (see Wilkinson 1959, p. 166). For a discussion of specimens of this

kind of literature, see Wieringa (1998). Several sayings also use the metaphor of bees (men) that buzz around flowers (girls), e.g. "a flower assaulted by a bee" (*bunga diserang kumbang*) is used for a deflowered girl (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings 2004, p. 534). In "the flower is plucked, the plant is trampled under foot (*bunga dipetik, perdu ditendang*) and "the flower is worn, the plant is kicked aside" (*bunga disunting, perdu disepak buang*), which both refer to a bad son-in-law, the wife is typified by the flower and her mother by the plant (see Brown 1951, p. 13). In old-fashioned language, the expression "flower of the body" (*bunga tubuh*) denotes virginity (see Wilkinson 1959, p. 166), but it is not listed anymore in modern Indonesian and Malaysian dictionaries.

18. *Kecantikan dan vagina yang menyebabkan dia disebut perempuan* (p. 10).
19. *'Aku belum bisa mengelak adat dan larangan agama yang masih mengakar kuat dalam keluargaku. Aku tidak dapat mempermalukan keluarga…'* (p. 18).
20. *kita orang-orang yang tidak wajar* (p. 16).
21. *orientasi seksual yang tak lazim* (p. 32).
22. *Juliet adalah lilin dalam kehidupannya, pengobat segala lukanya terhadap Sinta.* (p. 44).
23. *perasaannya yang sentimental dan kekanak-kanakkan* (p. 52).
24. Bratawidjaja (1988, p. 17) discusses this ritual, stating that the bride-to-be may not leave the house for about seven days prior to the wedding, nor meet her future husband during this period. During these days of seclusion, her body should be covered with a yellow rice-powder cosmetic (*lulur*).
25. *Permasalahan yang dihadapi Kartini membuatnya kehilangan kata, sebab permasalahan itu menyangkut budaya feodal di negara Kartini yang masih bertahan kuat dalam keluarganya. Budaya yang dia sendiri tidak begitu paham, ke Indonesiasaja dia belum pernah* (p. 61–62).
26. *wanita biasa* (p. 62).
27. See p. 34–35, 66. On this particular ritual, see Bratawidjaja (1988, p. 39–43).
28. *'Oke, jika kamu tidak mau ke psikiater, tidak apa-apa. Tidak apa-apa, Kartini. Kita coba memperbaiki berdua. Hanya kita berdua.' Romi menyerah, didekapnya Kartini erat dan diciumi bibirnya. 'Aku tidak mau kehilanganmu, Kartini….', katanya lalu menciumi istrinya lagi. 'Aku mencintaimu.' Kartini meringis dalam hati. Membalas ciuman suaminya karena perasaan bersalah. Barangkali aku tidak harus bercerai darinya, belum tentu setelah penceraian semua masalahku selesai. Sebaiknya aku belajar untuk membangun birahi pada laki-laki, itu saja dulu* (p. 78).
29. On this narrative device, see also note 7.
30. *Setelah peristiwa itu, Romi tidak mengungkit-ungkit lagi, apa lagi di luar dugaan Kartini sendiri, dia hamil* (p. 79).
31. *Dalam hidupnya baru kali ini Kartini merasa Tuhan demikian baik memberinya rasa sebagai perempuan yang sesungguhnya. Perasaan seorang perempuan hakiki. Dia seorang perempuan, lalu akankah setelah ini ia akan memiliki perasaan seorang perempuan yang normal?* (p. 79).
32. As the excellent dictionary of Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings (2004:565) explains, the verb *melayani*, among other things, can mean "to serve someone sexually, to satisfy/meet someone's needs/desires," which clearly fits this context. The official monolingual Indonesian dictionary is much too prudish to mention this meaning; see Sugono (2008, p. 797) under *melayani* and also Sugono (2008, p. 770) under the (Javanese) synonym*meladeni*.
33. *'Siapapun orangnya tidak mau dilahirkan cacat. Apakah ini keinginan Nadia untuk terlahir sebagai lesbi? Kalau bias dia memesan lebih dahulu, dia pun ingin dilahirkan menjadi wanita biasa seperti kamu, yang memiliki kedudukan mulia, dan bisa mencintai laki-laki…'* (p. 83).
34. *'Padahal jarang orang yang mau mengerti keadaan ini, kecuali sama-sama senasib'* (p. 84).
35. *Tapi, memang aku yang salah. Tidak bias menahan diri dan menerima kenyataan bahwa Fifi itu wanita biasa yang menyukai pria, pantas jika dia marah atau muak padaku. Aku memang terlalu mencintai dia…'* (p. 84).
36. *Nadia memilik orientasi seksual yang tak lazim itu* (p. 118).
37. *menjaga perasaannya* (p. 118).
38. *wanita biasa* (p. 119).

39. *Oh, Tuhan. Sebenarnya mereka bukan saja sekedar sahabat tapi juga dua makhluk Tuhan yang memiliki nasib sama-sama mencintai sesame jenis. Dia dan Nadia adalah pesakit yang sesungguhnya* (p. 120).
40. *memiliki orientasi seksual yang tak lazim* (p. 123).
41. *aku menginginkan anakku tumbuh menjadi manusia normal* (p. 125).
42. *Tetapi dia pasti akan mendapatkan persoalan baru. Ya, ya, kedua orangtuanya tak akan membiarkan kesendiriannya. Mereka akan menjodoh-jodohkan dia lagi. Dia masih muda dan sangat cantik. Ramly saja yang mendengar Romi akan cerai, berkali-kali menelepon Kartini* (p. 131).
43. *Aku telah gagal menjadi wanita biasa. Aku tidak memiliki siapa-siapa lagi* (p. 132).
44. *Kulo estunipun mboten remen kaliyan tiang jaler* (p. 141).
45. See Kumala (2010), which first appeared on 27 September 2010 in the English-language online daily Jakarta Globe.
46. *Goodreads.com*, s.v. Kembang kertas (ijinkan aku menjadi lesbian), https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7301351-kembang-kertas. Accessed 14 December 2023.
47. *Goodreads.com*, s.v. Kembang kertas (ijinkan aku menjadi lesbian): Community reviews. https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/7301351-kembang-kertas#other_reviews. Accessed 12 December 2023.
48. *Mengapa harus minta ijin? dan siapa yang berhak dan harus mengijinkan?*
49. *Melepas masa lajang 7 Februari 2005 setelah bertemu dan jatuh cinta dengan seorang lelaki bernama Budi Suharjiyanto.*
50. *Kini terus mengisi hari-harinya dengan menjadi istri dan ibu, menulis dan juga sesekali mengakrabi alam dan hidup itu sendiri.*
51. *Goodreads.com*, s.v. Indonesian lgbt books. https://www.goodreads.com/list/show/20560.Indonesian_LGBT_Books. Accessed 16 December 2023.

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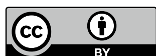

Chapter 10
Satukangeun Lalangsé: Sundanese Sexuality From *Behind the Curtain*

C. W. Watson

Abstract The weekly popular tabloid newspaper *Galura* is published in Sundanese in Bandung and has a circulation of 9,000. It is part of the *Pikiran Rakyat*, the daily Bandung Indonesian language newspaper group. It contains news items and features about West Javanese society past and present and is clearly designed to stimulate a sense of local pride in Sundanese achievements and Sundanese cultural artefacts and performances. One regular feature of the newspaper since 2008 is a page entitled *Satukangeun Lalangsé* (Behind the Curtain). This page relates what are said to be true stories about the trials and tribulations of married couples and families, always described from a first-person perspective. The aim of this contribution is twofold. First, it aims at shedding light on how the stories endorse the opinion that Sundanese women are often deceived in their hopes of what marriage will bring and that their hopes are frustrated by the hand of fate, the arbitrariness of their husband's behaviour, or the ingratitude of their children. Second, it adds to our understanding of how the description of polygamy, adultery, and unexpected family misfortunes correspond to what people would understand to be plausible and possible within the institutions of the family and marriage.

Keywords Divorce · Marriage · Polygamy · Sexuality · Sundanese women

10.1 The *Satukangeun Lalangsé* Rubric and the Role of Aam Amilia

One regular feature of the newspaper since 2008 is a page entitled *Satukangeun Lalangsé* (Behind the Curtain or Indonesian *Di Balik Tirai*). This page relates what are said to be true stories about the trials and tribulations of married couples and families, always described from a first-person perspective. The stories employ pseudonyms for the individuals described and for the town where the story is located, Kota S.

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or Kota B., for example, which can be taken to represent Sukabumi and Bandung. Apparently, *Satukangeun Lalangsé* grew out of a similar feature in the Sunday edition of *Pikiran Rakyat,* infoot which a column entitled *Sekelumit Romantika Kehidupan* (A Bit of Life's Romance) is included.[1]

This column is written by Aam Amilia, a very well-known and prolific Sundanese writer who has written numerous novels and short stories over the last forty years[2] and was, until recently, a full-time journalist with a strong following among women readers in West Java who often seek her advice. Every week S*ekelumit Romantika* tells the story, this time in the third person of individuals who have suffered a setback. In addition to the main story, there are one or two other brief descriptions of people who have fallen in hard times. The column appeals to interested readers touched by these accounts to make a small contribution to the individual's welfare.

In her introduction to an anthology collecting some of these stories (Amilia 1998), Aam Amilia outlines the genesis of the column in 1984 when a decision was made to bring out a Sunday edition of *Pikiran Rakyat*:

> It was hoped that this column would be able to meet the needs of ordinary readers in relation to problems they faced so that their worries could be given expression. I suggested the column be called 'Sekelumit Romantika Kehidupan'. The contents would be about everyday household problems and would be personal subjective accounts. The identities of the 'guest' personalities of the column would be kept secret (1998, p. v).

She goes on to narrate how she wrote fictional stories for the first two columns but then moved on to collecting material directly from the religious courts, where the backgrounds of divorce proceedings provided ample material. Subsequently, in the second year of the column's appearance, she decided to rely entirely on written submissions that were sent to her.[3] She describes (1998, p. vi) briefly how the "guests" were initially largely women between the ages of 35–60, but by the end of the fifth year number of men and women were the same. She provides the following figures relating to the content of the accounts: 10% were about teenage romance ("including problems relating to the loss of virginity" (*kehilangan kegadisan*); 30% family problems: arguments between husband and wife, step-children, parents-in-law and children-in-law; marriages which endured despite arguments, and divorce; 40% financial problems: "debts, being ensnared by money-lenders, being defrauded, unemployment, children's education expenses;" 5% legal matters: fraud, encroachments on property; 10% psychological problems: 2% sexual deviation, homosexuality, lesbianism, mental depression:" 5% religious problems: "converting to another religion, inter-religious marriage."

The list gives a good picture of the stories appearing in the column that are still going strong today. A 1,000-word story published in 2016, for example, entitled *Duka yang Beruntun* (*A Succession of Misfortunes*), describes in the first person how a young girl lost her virginity and became pregnant before marriage and then her boyfriend deserted her. She then met a good man who married her, but they went through hard times financially. Just as they were recovering, they were cheated out of their funds and had to sell their sewing machine, the use of which provided their

livelihood. The final paragraph, which has now become a feature of the column, is a direct appeal by Aam for funds to help the unfortunate woman buy a new sewing machine.

Before going on to discuss the contents of these stories and various linguistic and stylistic features which are common to them, we need to note the way in which the stories are shaped before publication so that we can see them in context.[4] Originally, there had been an attempt to simply reproduce the written text which had been sent to *Galura*. However, readers complained that the level of competence in the use of Sundanese in these original versions was very low and that they should be rewritten to conform to higher linguistic standards, which Aam, with her experience, was very able to do. In the second place, in terms of the contents of the narratives, Aam deliberately played down and softened the elements which she found too *kasar* (crude) and offensive to public taste. My impression was that such phrasings were related to descriptions of domestic violence. The one example Aam provided, twice, referred to a mother who had apparently been expelled from her child's house, which Aam and she thought her readers would find too uncomfortable if it was mentioned in the published story.

The weekly *Galura* mailbox usually comprises letters from readers that contain autobiographical accounts which they hope will merit publication and I was shown manuscript letters of several pages of neat handwriting containing these stories. All stories which are to be considered for publication are followed up, usually by telephone calls and sometimes by direct interviews, apart from anything else, to check their authenticity. Because many of the stories concern sensitive issues, care is taken to disguise the identity of the individual writer, by, for example, changing the number of children the 'I' figure is alleged to have. There is always a risk that writers will be seriously threatened by those who recognise themselves in the stories –the Sundanese expression is *diarah*, i.e., threaten someone's life– and so this disguising is essential.

There is little financial reward for the publication of stories and clearly, this is not what motivates individuals to write. Aam believed that writing the story and seeing it eventually in print brought cathartic satisfaction to individuals who had had to suppress their feelings about their marriage and its outcomes for so long. Sometimes, she said, the story was an instrument of revenge. Once or twice, she had the impression that the individuals she interviewed were temporarily venting their anger by talking to her. She had thought that, on reflection, these individuals would regret it if their stories were published. She usually waited a week or two before going ahead with the publication of a story to allow a cooling down period. She recalled a recent experience in which she had received a phone call a day or two after the initial interviews in which the individual concerned asked her specifically not to proceed with publication. What had apparently prompted Aam to think that the individual would regret her action was the fact that she mentioned that she was jealous, *cemburu*, an emotion which she could only feel if she still felt attached to her husband.

In their way, Aam said, all these stories were peculiar, unusual–she used the word *aneh*–in terms of the events described the behaviour of individuals. The events were

aneh simply because they involved unexpected circumstances, such as the sudden appearance of women claiming to be the second wives of the husband of the writer, or the discovery that an individual was not the child of the couple whom she or he had grown up calling mother and father, but was adopted. Behaviour that was deemed strange was something like the discovery after years of marriage that one's partner was gay, as described below. But, Aam insisted, in terms of general human they were no more peculiar or deviant than what occurred in all societies within the institution of the family. She gave as an example of peculiarity, a feature of one story which I had questioned her about, published in *Galura*, fourth Wednesday of November 2011. In this story, two former friends, both of whom had lost their spouses—one, the woman, the *kuring* ('I') of the story, through the death of her husband, the other, the man, through divorce—met again in later life and agreed to get married. One line of the story struck me. It described how the man, before proposing, had asked permission to do so from his former wife–*Malah geus meunang idin ti popotongan rek mileuleuheungkeun kuring* (In fact, he obtained the permission of his ex-wife before proposing to me). I had thought this odd and asked whether it was a customary practice. Aam, too, said she found it odd, but understood the action as an excess of polite behaviour designed to pre-empt any ill feeling or nastiness which might arise. She argued that acting to mitigate potential unpleasantness was a typical Sundanese trait.

Another story that was topical during the week of the interview was about a widowed mother who decides she no longer wants to live with her married children, who beg her to stay with them, but who then becomes like Lear and makes her uncomfortable. In discussing this story, I noted that the events described, e.g., the mother being criticised for spoiling her grandchild, seemed very familiar to the British, whereupon Aam readily acknowledged the universality of such scenarios.

At the same time, however, she said that the argument originally put forward by the children that the mother should stay in the family home in the Sumatra area where the family lived at the time and not move back to West Java, namely that moving back and leaving behind the grave of her husband, her father, was a betrayal, was exaggerated but understandable given the influence that adult children have on widowed parents.

A further example of a "typical" peculiarity was a story about a husband's bisexuality which came to light when the wife discovered that her husband was having a sexual relationship with a young man who was staying with the couple and who had been introduced to the wife as a distant relative of the husband who wanted to pursue his education in the big city. I remarked that I found the story almost too much like what I might read in an American short story collection –I was thinking of Raymond Carver and T. C. Boyle–but Aam assured me that the story was genuine; that in fact the woman had come to see her accompanied by a man and had told her story. When Aam had asked her where her husband was now, she had pointed to the man beside her, much to Aam's embarrassment. His response was to admit the truth of what had been said but added that he thought his attraction to men was an illness he wanted to cure, hence the visit to her.

10.2 The Structure and Plots of the Stories

The stories all have a human edge where unusual circumstances and quirks of personality lead to unexpected outcomes. Many of the stories have very similar themes, even though they deal with the specifics of individual cases. Without doing a count, my impression from reading these stories over the last few years is that the most common themes relate to polygamy –caused often by the infertility of the first wife, often the '*kuring*' of the story–adultery, taking up again with old flames, the consequences of marrying for love or based on appearances, the desertion of parents by children, the decline from riches to poverty, sudden unexpected deaths and the regret which comes through experience. Some stories, however, fall outside this range and bring up fewer common issues. The story about the bisexual husband is one such example. Incidentally, I suspect this storyline has been used more than once. I found it in a story entitled *Boro Jongjon Mikaheman* (II March 2009; So much for love and tenderness), in which the wife catches her husband in flagrante with a male friend in a scene that she describes as like something out of a Tom Hanks film (*Breh wae salahsahiji film Tom Hank dina wangwangan,* i.e., "Suddenly it seemed to me like a scene in a Tom Hanks film"). This expression added to my suspicion that this story line owes something to American influence.[5] Another early story *Panto Hidayah Dibukakeun Deui* (the Door of God's Grace is Opened Once More) of the first week of September 2008, describes the consequence of what turns out to be a mixed religious marriage–when the husband who converts from Christianity to Islam converts back again to Christianity–which is resolved happily in the end. All the stories plot the progress from high expectations of marriage to disillusionment and then some resolution. Some end on a tragic note, some end happily and most end with quiet resignation. The *kuring* in about three-quarters of the stories are women; of these, almost all are middle-aged, between 35 and 55.

To give a flavour of the linguistic style and thematic direction of the stories, let me summarise one at length. The story *Nu Rek Males Nyeri* (Wanting to Return Pain) of the second week of October 2011 begins as usual with a saying. This one is *Paingan ceuk kolot, dunya téh anu lalaki* (It's true what old people say: the world belongs to men). And it adds *Kabuktian dina hirup kumbuh, carang naker aya lalaki dudaan lila. Sanajan kakumaha kakalotanana sok terus karawin deui, lamun ditinggalkeun maot ku pamajikanana téh. Sabalikna tara loba kabéjakeun awéwé nu karawin deui saditinggalkeun ku salakina.... Kitu deui salingkuh. Lalaki salingkuh henteu ieu jadi bukur catur salembur. Sabalikna mun awéwé nu ku peta, éar sajajagat kabasanakeunana gé.* (The proof of this is in everyday life: it's rare that a man is widowed for long. However old they may be, they go ahead and get married again if their wife has died. It's the opposite for women, it's seldom heard that a woman remarries if she has been widowed. … It's the same with adultery. If a man has an affair, it is hardly mentioned by people but on the other hand, if it's a woman, who does it then the whole world talks about it.)

The story describes how the *kuring* of the story—identified at the end of the piece as Ny. Bandy, 35 years old, (pseudonym) from the city of S.–found after visits to

several doctors that she was unable to bear children (*gabug*). She accepts that as fate. Her husband, and this is a common theme in several stories, asks her permission to take a second wife so that he can have heirs. After thinking about it, she decides that she can accept this since, as she puts it, the proverb says *kalah bisa karena biasa* (you can put up with it because you become used to it)–"like poison taken over a long period" (*racun gé lila-lila mah teu méntal ari ku remen mah).* But she then describes her feelings on the evening of her husband's wedding with the second wife: *Enyaan basa peuting munggaran mah, kuring adug lajer luar biasa* (That first night I writhed in extraordinary pain). And then later, when her husband does not return for 24 h, she goes wild with anger and smashes up her room and their wedding photograph. Her husband, though, still shows affection towards her.

A turning point comes when she attends the wedding reception of the child of an old school boyfriend who has just been widowed. They fall in love again, and she visits him secretly, but they decide that things cannot go on in this way and that she must ask her husband for a divorce. Her husband, not knowing about the affair but seeing her changed attitude towards him—they have separate rooms now—asks her what he can do to win back her affection and even goes as far as to say that he will divorce his second wife but will not abandon his child. She thinks about this and discusses the matter with her lover, and eventually decides that she will be faithful to her husband, who does divorce his second wife. The lover, in his turn, marries another woman. *Kuring* finds it difficult to face her husband as before since she still thinks of her lover, but the latter counsels her to be faithful and says that their union was "not meant to be" (*lain jodo*). He, in turn, marries again, and she, when she hears of this, "seethes with anger" (*haté mani nyongkab, panas*).

On impulse, she goes to see the house of her husband's second wife and, to her surprise, sees her husband's car outside. At first, she thinks that he has come to visit the child she is unperturbed, but then she hears from the nursemaid looking after the child when she knocks on the door that her husband is in the bedroom with the second wife; she bangs her way into the room and indeed finds them together in bed. She is furious, and when her husband returns to their house, she flies into a rage, throws things at him, and asks for a divorce. *Kuring* was angry, she puts it, not because he had returned to his second wife, but because he had lied to her. If she had known his true feelings, she would have gone along with her request to ask for a divorce and then married her lover. In tears, she rings her lover, but he says he can do nothing. If she got divorced now, all he could do was to "marry her as a secret, unofficial wife" (*…ngan paling gé kudu siap jadi pamjikan siri).* And the story ends "*Kadongdora ceuk haté. Kuring neruskeun rumahtangga jeung nu ayeuna, ngan saendeng-endeng pista. Ayeuna geus rék lima tahun misah sagala-galana* ("Wonderful, I don't think, I said to myself. I continued to live with the husband I had, but from then on, I avoided sex with him. Now it has been five years that I have broken entirely with him").

This story is very similar to many others, turning as it does on issues such as a husband's desire to take a second wife because of a wish for an heir while still allegedly being fond of the first wife; deception practiced by the man, and the truth eventually coming out and the wife having to decide whether to forgive the husband or not.

One point to note here incidentally is how easy it is for a woman to initiate divorce in Sundanese society, which may surprise those familiar with the practice of Islamic law in other Muslim communities, including other Muslim ethnic groups in Indonesia. Among the Sundanese, the woman asks to be returned to her family (*diserahkeun.*) However, one slightly unusual feature of this story is the wife's violent response. In most of the other stories, the wife, although not happy with what she must put up with, accepts it or reacts non-violently. In this story, however, we get a graphic description of the wife's jealousy and the violent anger it leads to.

Here, then, every week on page 5 of *Galura*, readers will find an entertaining true life story wrapped in a proverb or saying which, like Aesop's fable tries to draw a simple moral and instruct and entertain the reader. As examples of stories that form part of contemporary Sundanese popular culture, they provide an insight into what some people in West Java find enjoyable light reading and an academic study of this literature would undoubtedly show, in the same way as other excellent studies of Sundanese popular forms of Islamic practice (Millie 2009) and of popular songs and television (Jurriens 2004) have done, the significance of story-telling genres in the lives of readers of the paper and their immediate families. However, we can, I think, push further than this and argue that a closer analysis of the stories, looking less at the explicit content and more at the language. The framing of narratives helps us to identify specific critically significant ways in which contemporary Sundanese, even those who may not necessarily be readers of *Galura*, regard their society and take up positions for rapid changes in the shaping of society which they witness in their everyday lives.

This means we should consider the stories as something other than directly reflecting what is happening in Sundanese society, a sort of ethnographic record. More than one critic has argued how dangerous it is to see literature, even documentary literature intended to be a historical record, such as the novels of Zola or Upton Sinclair, as a transparent mirror of society. I would accept those arguments.[6] At the same time, I argue that there is a peripheral place for such literature as repositories of historical evidence which need to be checked against other sources we have. So, in the case of *Satukangeun Lalangsé,* we cannot say, although it is tempting to do so, that there is evidence of high divorce rates as well as high rates of polygamy in contemporary society. We would have to conduct proper sociological and statistical studies before reliably reaching such a conclusion. Nonetheless, it would be perverse to say that what we find in the stories bears no relation to what is currently happening in Sundanese society: the letters alone on which the stories are based would refute that. There is a relationship, then, but we need to be careful in identifying what it is precisely.

10.3 Fiction and Reality

The problem of whether we can read the fiction as a reflection of reality can perhaps best be approached by looking at another popular genre of Sundanese feature fiction, namely ghost stories relating to *hantu, siluman, and jurig* (see the entry in *Ensiklopedia Sunda* for the latter word), of which a well-known exponent was Umbara (1986). These are a regular feature of journals and newspapers that carry Sundanese fiction, such as *Manglé* and the daily *Tribun Jabar* (West Java Tribune), which runs a short story in Sundanese over three pages mid-week. Do these stories indicate the widespread occurrence of preternatural phenomena in Sundanese society? Most people would say not. On the other hand, do they show a fondness for such stories of the supernatural and horror? Most people would, I think, agree that they did, though the fondness is not confined to the Sundanese, as the current popularity of Indonesian horror films would attest. Do the stories also reveal a widespread belief in supernatural forces among Sundanese readers? Here the answer is not so simple. We know that readers can enjoy ghost stories without necessarily believing in ghosts and superstitions, and may it not be the case that this is true in Sundanese society too? Anecdotal evidence and the stories that one hears in passing about supernatural phenomena would, however, appear to suggest that the stories are consistent with a widespread belief in the supernatural. Still, this casual evidence is unreliable, and we would have to do more systematic research to reach any conclusive judgments.

However, analysing the structure and elements of the supernatural stories would reveal the specific particulars of beliefs underpinning many of the stories. These particulars make the narrative at least fictionally plausible in their terms to Sundanese readers in a way that might, in some cases, be alien or strange or inherently implausible for readers outside a Sundanese universe of discourse. An analysis, then, of these ghost stories would then try to identify the logic of the narratives and compare them to the general phenomena of stories of the supernatural or, say, to examples of beliefs derived from other sources such as ritual practices which are also underpinned by a similar rationality. One way of proceeding has already been ably demonstrated by Endicott (1970) in his book *The Analysis of Malay Magic*. The structuralist model he employs is simply one way of going about the task, other ways might be to look at keywords in the repertory of the supernatural and show their significance and relationship and changing meanings over time, and another might be to link the themes of the story to the metaphorical structures of the narratives in so far as the stories are never just about the supernatural but are often intended as prompts for reflection on the natural world.

The same assumptions of the relationship between fiction and reality should inform our analysis of the stories in *Satukangeun Lalangsé*. We cannot assume that their descriptions of polygamy, adultery, and unexpected family misfortunes represent the frequency of the events in actual Sundanese society. However, what we can say is that in their logic–the assumptions of rationality in cause and effect of the plotting of the stories, the descriptions of states of mind, and the appeals to religious ideals–they correspond to what people would understand to be plausible and

possible within the institutions of the family and marriage. And this holds, even if we acknowledge the large part played by Aam Amilia in representing these accounts in a language, form, style, and structure which she knows to appeal to her readers at the risk of slightly distorting the story. The argument is not that these stories are true to life and are autobiographical accounts but that their framing and their purport reflect ways of looking at the world, which is common in contemporary Sundanese society. With this stricture in mind, it is not the apparent events in the plot that we are attending to but the common structuring of the stories, the recurrence of thematic imperatives, and the phrasing of the descriptions of emotions and attitudes; what might we conclude? To begin with, very much in line with the summarised story above, we can see that we are frequently, though not exclusively since there are male-centred stories, presented with a woman's perspective on contemporary family mores. This may be a direct consequence of the fact that Aam Amilia is responsible for the rubric and is shaping it to give expression to her perceptions of the position of women in Sundanese society and to champion their desire for greater equality, something which she hinted was her intention in much of her writing, or on the other hand, it may simply be a function of the more significant number of women who send in their letters to *Galura*. Whatever the case, what we find in the stories is time and again an endorsement of the opinion that Sundanese women are often deceived in their hopes of what marriage will bring and that the frustration of their hopes is caused, as they see it, by the hand of fate or the arbitrariness of their husband's behaviour or the ingratitude of children. What their hopes are is beautifully captured by the expression *hayang awet nepi ka pakotrek iteuk, rumahtangga akur sauyunan pinuh ku kabagjaan* (to want the marriage to last until old age when our walking sticks will knock together, and our household will be a harmonious one full of happiness; *Galura* V (fifth week) September 2011), that is, they hope that they will grow old together in harmony with their spouses, to whom in the course of their married life they will become increasingly attached in mutual affection. The fact that this does not happen in the stories, for whatever reason, is what constitutes the frame of the narrative and is always a source of regret. In this respect, although there is frequent discussion of the difference between arranged marriage (*dirérémohkeun*) and romantic marriage, it is not that one or the other is preferred, since both can end unfortunately. The misfortunes are caused by the waywardness of husbands, or sometimes through material greed, and occasionally by the unreasonableness of the ambition of women themselves (see *Adean ku Kuda Beureum* or Bragging about One's Family in *Galura* III October 2011).

However, very often the misfortune is a result of accident, often an unexpected sudden death. The response to many of the events, particularly unexpected deaths, is a resignation to fate and the frequent reiteration in a number of stories that there are four things that are beyond the control of humans and lie in the power of God: happiness (*bagja*) and tragedy (*kasangsaraan*), marriage with the one for whom one is intended (*jodoh*) and death (*pati*). This reference comes up time and time again. We can of course attribute it to Aam's desire to offer readers an accepted religious platitude, but there is more to it than that. The platitude would not be acceptable unless it found some resonance in the way in which Sundanese men

and women today tried to make sense of the world today and the misfortunes they encounter there. One can see the point if one contrasts these stories with the same type of popular literature in most Anglophone societies today. The expression of that sentiment, a willing submission of oneself to the will of God, would simply not be acceptable to readers because they do not share that vision of the world which ascribes so much importance to the intervention or action of a deity. One might argue that in the eighteenth century in England there was such a devotional literature which in its autobiographical foundation and its frequent reference to God's judgment and mercy and grace, one finds, if not an exact counterpart of, at least some similarity with, the Sundanese example.

10.4 The Role of a Wife and the Institution of Polygamy

At the same time, in those stories where the element of fate, what is "written" (*disurat*), is not stressed, what we encounter, in addition to the negative portrayals of the behaviour of men, which is admitted frequently by men themselves in the stories in which they are the *kuring* figure, is the strength and assertiveness of the women. In one conventional Sundanese proverbial reference to wives, they are referred to as the *Dulang Tinandé*, i.e., the serving dish, meaning that the role is that of being the servant of the husband and family, doing all that is requested of them to the best of their ability, submissive and never complaining, the ideal woman: an excellent example, if ever there was one, of false consciousness resulting from a male-imposed ideology of marriage. The expression is frequently discussed in *Satukangeun Lalangsé* and the Sundanese media. However, I have yet to see it referred to positively in contemporary debates. It is almost always introduced as a term from the past, which if ever it was acceptable as a model for female behaviour is now entirely inappropriate for current circumstances. In that respect, the stories completely concur: wives and women, in general, are not the passive help-mates of, and subservient to, men. On the contrary, they are actively engaged in entrepreneurial activities outside the household, which in several stories are seen as the mainstay of the household economy. In addition, they guide, encourage, and provide for the children's education. (But see for comparison an exception, the story *Teu Sanggup Hirup Nyorangan* (Not Willing to Live Alone), *Galura* I May 2010 which begins: *Sanajan cenah jaman awéwé dulang tinandé téh geus ditinggalkeun, tapi dina kanyataan loba kénéh kaum Hawa nu gejed heureut léngkah pondok panenjo.* (Although they say that the days of women being the *dulang tinandé* are long past, many of Eve's kind are still confined in their habits, with their movements restricted and their vision limited.)

There is, however, one institution that continues to hamper their efforts to achieve the status they desire for themselves, and that is the continuing prevalence of polygamy which does not so much threaten the financial stability of the household—because the women can often earn sufficient themselves—but undermines women psychologically as well as being seen to affect the welfare of children. The frequency with which this theme recurs in the stories reflects at least the concern

and anxiety of women about polygamy, even though we cannot draw any conclusions about whether it has been statistically increasing in frequency or not in the last decade. From casual observation, there has been an increase in the institution, most easily visible the institution of illegal marriage, *nikah siri*, a term hardly used ten years ago. I have written elsewhere (Watson 2005) about literary representations of polygamy and tried to set them against the evidence of social science research and current feminist discourse in Indonesia. Indeed, the stories confirm what I wrote there, that polygamy continues to be regarded as a significant threat to the welfare and stability of households, which women are constantly and uneasily aware of.

10.5 Conclusion

There is much more to be said about what we can derive from these stories. Apart from anything else, the conspicuous absence of some elements allows us to take a very different perspective on Indonesian society from that which can be gathered from other examples of popular women's fiction written in Indonesian. Here in the Sundanese stories, there is no reference to the extravagant lifestyles which are so prominent in the Indonesian stories of the urban elite, as found in written texts and ubiquitous TV soaps. The two are worlds away from each other. The *Satukangeun Lalangsé* stories rarely discuss or describe affluent lifestyles, the houses, the cars, and the trips abroad, so common in the other. And yet the same people who read the stories watch with interest the television serials. The lack of reference to affluence in the stories is in some measure attributable to the fact that the protagonists are drawn mainly from the lower middle class, for whom a luxurious lifestyle is not something they aspire. And in this respect, because the stories are drawn from this group's daily lives—and not fantasies—it would be unrealistic to portray them as hankering after luxury when what they aspire to is modest stability. But more needs to be said about this contrast between how they live and the entertainment they consume and how their experience of each affects their perception of the other. This is not, however, the place to develop that discussion.

Another apparent omission from the universe of these stories is any significant reference to Islam. Anyone familiar with contemporary Indonesian fiction, especially popular fiction, is very well aware of how large a part is played by characters who are described as having received a strongly religion-oriented educational background and whose actions in the course of romantic attachments are guided by reflections on proper conduct as instructed by religious teachers. Such fiction is now usually labelled *Islami* and has received some good critical attention, for example, Hellwig (2011). As a surprise, it might come to see how small a role Islam plays in Sundanese fiction, given that West Java has a reputation for being a particularly "religious" province. Some Sundanese stories take religious institutions as their background—for example, the novel of Romli (2007) and short stories of RAF (1998)—but they are few and far between. Contemporary Sundanese fiction, novels, and short stories, or faction as

found in the *Galura* stories, is not concerned with religious issues. Islam is a taken-for-granted aspect of the social background with occasional explicit reference to the observance of Islamic ritual practice, mosques and *tajug* (small prayer houses), and the call to prayer featuring as descriptive elements in a narrative. Still, religion is rarely central to the theme of a story. The accounts in *Galura* are no exception.

This should perhaps give us pause for thought, a matter of "the dog that did not bark in the night," as described in the famous Sherlock Homes story, *Silver Blaze*. What does the omission signify? This is not the place for an extensive analysis. Still, one could perhaps speculate that the universe of discourse found in these accounts in *Galura* and contemporary Sundanese fiction offers us a perception, different from what comes across from the social science literature, of how the Sundanese respond to the everyday events in their lives, a response in which religious prescriptions are not so definitive in determining the conduct of their behaviour as the pragmatic measures needed to cope with life's struggles in a Sundanese context. This may come as a surprise to political scientists who sometimes, at least in the context of Indonesia, seem to over-emphasise the control Islam exerts over the imagination and everyday conduct of individuals.

A reading of the stories of *Satukangeun Lalangsé*, which looks behind the "curtain" of the plots to catch something of how Sundanese try to position themselves in a changing world, as a strategy for understanding the nature of contemporary Sundanese society, may not, at first sight, seem very promising. The closer one peers, however, the more that is revealed about what, borrowing from Raymond Williams, we might call a Sundanese "structure of feeling." The stories convey a way of thinking about the world, one which is not confined to an individual writer or even to a coterie of readers. Still, one which ranges more extensively into the fears, hopes, and values of a whole society, their construction of the world, to which, through the mediation of the stories, the privileged reader is offered unique access.

Notes

1. An earlier unpublished version of this paper was presented at the *Second International Conference on Sundanese Culture,* 19-22 December 2011, Bandung. The examples of stories discussed were all written for the weekly paper *Galura* before that date but having continued to read all the stories published since then I see no reason to change any of my arguments.
2. Her most recent novel which appeared earlier in serial form in the long-established Sundanese weekly *Manglé* is entitled *Kembang-Kembang Anten* and came out in (2014), and is centred on what is a frequently rehearsed topic in contemporary Sundanese literature, namely the meeting of former lovers after a long separation and the attraction they still feel for each other. Another novel in serial form written in Sundanese *Kalangkang Japati* has just been completed. It appeared in *Pikiran Rakyat* towards the end of 2015 and also deals partly with ongoing relationships between formerly engaged couples.

3. This tradition of asking readers to submit true-life stories seems quite common. In my recent reading, for example, I came across a feature of the weekly magazine *Manglé* in the 1990s entitled *Tragedi.* Readers' submissions were invited as follows: "Have you ever had a tragedy in your life? Tell us about in this *Tragedi* feature. Whoever wants can send in their experience of a real personal tragedy…Published writing will receive a small monetary compensation." The story I read (*Manglé* No. 1257, 19–25 July 1990, pp. 32–34, 41) describes the experience of a man who caught his wife *in flagrante* with a lover and killed the couple and was sentenced to 16 years of imprisonment. When he came out, he was harried by the relatives of the murdered pair.
4. The following description is based on a long interview with Aam which took place in the *Galura* office on Thursday 1 December 2011.
5. Subsequently I have discovered that this theme of disguised homosexuality –among both men and women– is relatively common in contemporary Sundanese literature. See, for example, the story by Héna Sumarni found in Watson (2014) translated as *Decided by a Stroke of Fate* in Watson (2015).
6. For further comment on this issue of the reliability of fiction as historical evidence readers may care to look at two essays of mine, "Anthropology and Literature" (Watson 2012) and "Novels as ethnographies: the challenge for the anthropologist as reader" (Watson 2021).

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Chapter 11
Afterthought: Vulnerability and Tenacity

Melani Budianta

It is through being affected—being vulnerable—that we are able to develop myriad capacities for action (*Gilson* 2016, p. 76)

Abstract This closing chapter reflects on the global-local context for the conservative rise in Indonesia, examining artists' and women activists' creative strategies in dealing with the return of patriarchies in public and private spheres. The chapter argues that the interface between gender, sexuality, and Islam occurs in a terrain mediated by digital transformation, affected by complicated legal battles and global markets, which can both enlarge and limit women's space for expression. The battleground is filled with ambiguities and complexities, with no linear direction. Referencing, among others, the activism of KUPI (Congress of Indonesian Female Ulama), the chapter captures the core theme of this edited volume: the tenacity of the collectives and individuals in continuously transcending women's vulnerability in Indonesia.

Keywords Ambiguity · Arts and Islamic dress · Conservative rise · Creative strategies · Indonesian Women Ulama

This quote from Gilson (2016) speaks to the dynamics related to gender, Islam, and sexuality in Indonesia, as discussed in the ten chapters of this book. Juxtaposing these three keywords, one can directly imagine how Islam, the dominant religion in Indonesia, serves as the hegemonic context for constructing gender and sexuality. Given the prevalent general notion (read: stereotype) of Islamic values, their relation to gender and sexuality tends to be perceived or predicted as morally and normatively restricting. The transformation of public and daily life after the 1999 *era reformasi* (era of reforms)—which accelerated with global capitalism—complicates this binary. The socio-cultural dynamics expose a contentious arena of diverse voices in dealing

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with rising conservativism and navigation strategies of relating and synchronizing to Islam and gendered/ sexual identity.

Women's Islamic dress codes are one arena to observe this tension and complexity. In the opening of her book, *Islamizing Intimacies* (2019), Nancy J. Smith-Hefner shares her observation about the ubiquitous spread of female Islamic wear in Yogyakarta. Other scholars (Beta 2020; Rodríguez 2020; Davies 2010) have examined the history and context in which various conservative readings of Islamic doctrine began penetrating public space and everyday life in Indonesia. At the same time, these regulatory values are also mediated, refracted, and embedded in diverse local and social contexts, creating what Smith-Hefner terms as "plural culture, ambivalent selves" (Smith-Hefner 2019, p. 176).

11.1 Artists's Engagements with Islamic Dress

Artists have found different ways to engage with Islamic dress. Mujahidin Nurrachman, a Bandung-based artist,[1] has expressed his critique against violence in the name of religion in several exhibitions. He was intrigued by the biography of Leila Khaled, a female airplane hijacker supporting the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) –"a woman who fought when the culture of patriarchy was strong–as though she was two times a victim on the same land" (Mujahiddin 2018). His work included below represents a burqa-clad face of a woman in delicate and beautifully carved decorations, her eyes staring at the viewers (see Fig. 11.1). The ornamentation that decorates the eye area, even the eyes themselves, simultaneously embellishes and veils, complicating notions of visibility and identity.

In a personal communication, Mujahidin Nurrachman said that he was raised in a conservative Islamic family with patriarchal values and clear regulations about the mandatory covering of a woman's *aurat*.[2] Now, apart from his critical stance against the patriarchal use of a woman's body to support violence, he, as a male artist, opts a middle ground in respecting women's personal choices, thus teasing out layers of ambivalence (Swastika 2021). His partially covered women images show a mixture of mystery, respect, beauty, and resistance, which are coloured with a potentially insidious atmosphere.

Female artists and writers have differing positions about this matter. In a personal communication, Alia Swastika, a feminist curator of contemporary art, offers two observations about *hijab* normalization.[3] On the one hand, she notices how her female colleagues, contemporary artists, in their daily activities, among others as mothers picking up their children in schools with a mandatory *hijab* regulation, feel increasing social pressure to follow the norms. On the other hand, Alia contends that while decades ago, the world of contemporary art was seen as a secular world removed from the religious sphere, now the lines between the two are blurred. Women with strict adherence to Islamic wear mingle and feel at ease participating in the contemporary art scene, which can be ideologically critical and progressive. In a way, the *jilbab* is

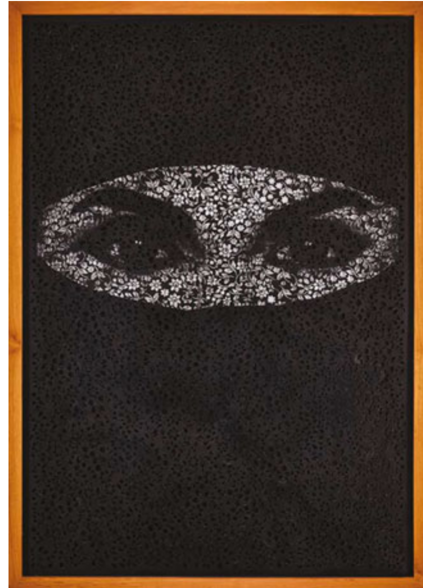

Fig. 11.1 "Faith" by Mujahidin Nurrachman from his Solo Exhibition "Your Silence Will Not Protect You." Photo Credit: Mujahidin Nurrachman

embodied and naturalized as one's choice of clothing that is close to one's religious identity.

Short story writer Feby Indriani has shown both in her work and in a personal conversation how such an embodiment manifests itself. She has observed how, at a young age, she begins the practice of parents donning *hijabs* on their female kindergarten children.[4] In a story entitled "Perempuan yang kehilangan wajahnya" (A Woman Who Lost Her Face), she is also unequivocal about her protagonist's loss of identity. In this surrealistic story, a woman wakes up one day to discover she has lost an important part of her face, her nose. In the story, her panic when she must make do with her current state in completing her daily tasks is mixed with a flashback that tells of her marriage to her husband, who ordered her to wear a *niqab* instead of a simple head covering.[5] The story ends with the following grim statement:

> She only hopes that she will still be the most beautiful jewellery for her husband, although her face has been partially erased, and it will probably, gradually disappear (Indriani 2017).[6]

The face also features prominently in Restu Ratnaningtyas's artwork. In her series of works called "Hidayah" (2016), she features faceless dolls, a trend in the Islamic business world, a way to market children's toys in compliance with Islamic norms that prohibit facial representations (see Fig. 11.2).

Here, Restu comments on the one hand on how religious values are flowing into business—often under the leadership of businesswomen. On the other hand, the trend also imposes "homogenization which can be used to judge those who do not follow the norms. Thus, wearing a *hijab* is no longer a personal choice, but a social pressure." (Ratnaningtyas 2016, p. 1).

Fig. 11.2 Artwork "Faceless doll" in the "Hidayah" artwork series on the Islamic doll. Photo credit: Restu Ratnaningtyas

Annisa Beta (2020) examines the vast scale of this coupling between business and da'wa activism or "proselytization activities to establish an identity as better Muslims" (…). It urges Muslims, particularly women, to do *hijrah*, a "transformative moment" to be "more devout, living a proper Islamic life." *Da'wa* business, which includes the sale and promotion of *hijab syahri*[7] is distributed through digital networks and social media. Given the high number of social media users in Indonesia (150 million social media users and 350 million mobile phone subscribers), this is a promising business.

11.2 Exploring the Interface Between Gender, Islam, and Sexuality

The digital revolution is one of the many transformations that inform and shape the interface between gender, sexuality, and religion. Travel (migration, business trips), the cultural flow of popular culture, and the digital media connect different spaces, the rural and the cosmopolitan, New York and Jakarta, and the global-local interface impacts how individuals perform and represent their identities.

The state as a regulating body with its legal products, such as the UU TPKS and RKUHP, is also central in this book (see Chaps. 1–3). The contributions reveal that

the state is not a neutral body but a site of contestation of political and ideological interests. However, even within the nation-state, Islam is complex, multiple, and fragmented, from progressive, moderate, or blended groups to the hardcore.[8] The ten chapters examine various actors, for example, representatives of Islamic mass organizations such as the traditionalist NU and the modernist Muhammadiyah. The activism of Islamic women's groups collaborating with human rights and pro-democracy activists is no less crucial.

The writers in this volume discuss the issue of gender, sexuality, and Islam from various angles, conceptually and methodologically, but in their writings, an intersecting pattern emerges. Islamic "modest" fashion and the designers' global promotion, female migrant workers' popular novels about their experience abroad, *dangdut* and metro pop music on the fate of widows, and online Islamic dating apps encouraging polygamy all point to the "complex web of power …. creating cross points between religiosity and materiality" (Saraswati, this volume, Chap. 4). Indeed, as Watson rightfully points out, stories, writings, and other cultural products cannot be seen as a direct way of accessing empirical, unmediated reality (Chap. 10). However, as Winarnita, Mahy, and Herriman state (Chap. 7), the cultural texts serve as a "pre-existing category" into which people fit reality. An example is one of the migrant novelists in Carlos M. Piocos's contribution (Chap. 8), who writes about her life in the mode of a "Tom Hanks movie."

In Edwin Wieringa's words, these cultural representations of women—wives, mothers, single women, widows, victims of violence, third gendersare "grappling with questions about identity, gender, and sexual identity" while negotiating with the local and global currents (Chap. 9). The Indonesian fashion designers promoting *hijab* globally (Chap. 4), the *halal* cosmetics on Youtube in Manzo's (Chap. 5) and the founder of the A*yo Poligami* online dating app (Chap. 6) were riding on the waves of global and local market demands. Similarly, the migrant workers' love relations with Southeast Asian migrant workers discussed in Chap. 8 would not have happened outside the global capitalist system of transnational work migration.

However, it is not only this system that sets people in motion. The 2020s are a time of great crisis, with refugees and displaced people coming from areas of conflict and war, seeking new homes in safer places. UNHCR "estimates that there will be 103 million displaced persons by 2022, including 32.5 million refugees and 4.9 asylum seekers (UNHCR 2022). Indonesia is not on the list of countries of origin, but the global impact of the crisis, i.e., the rise of right-wing fanaticism, has spread worldwide. (It is interesting to learn in Chap. 4 how Indonesian Islamic modest fashion has benefited from both capitalism and the rise of local *hijab* culture to stand up to Islamophobic regimes in the US and Europe).

11.3 The Conservative Wave

Within the nation, the conservative wave is not to be taken lightly. Komnas Perempuan notes that "the number of discriminatory policies increased almost threefold from 154 in 2009 to 421 bylaws in 2016, there were still 305 discriminatory bylaws. Almost 40 percent are targeting women .... Among the 305 discriminatory bylaws, 62 are regulating the obligation of the veil" (Yentriyani, 2022, p.10). Such discriminatory and restrictive control does not affect women only but also sexual minorities. In 2016, KPI (Indonesian Broadcasting Commission) issued a formal letter forbidding men to appear on TV wearing feminine clothes (Erdiansyah 2016). Even after protests and criticism, the circular has not been revoked. In fact, in May 2023, Didik Nini Thowok, a famous transgender dancer, had to refuse an invitation to be interviewed on a national TV station upon learning that he was to dress as male to abide by the content of the 2016 circular.[9]

2016 was indeed a year marked by persecution against sexual minorities. The crisis started with a controversy over a poster by the SGRCSS (Support Group and Resource Center on Sexuality Studies) at Universitas Indonesia. When the poster was made viral on social media, the assault towards sexual minorities in the name of morality and religion came from all directions. State actors, Islamic religious institutions, and conservative intellectuals voiced their concern about the threat of "moral corruption" among the young generation (Boellstorff 2016). The repressive atmosphere was intimidating and depressing for progressive students and lecturers alike. Dede Oetomo, an LGBTQ activist, and a long-time friend, giving personal advice, said that the best thing to do in such a situation is to temporarily "duck the bullets."[10] As a cultural studies scholar and feminist, this was a demoralizing moment for me.

The moralistic and normative regime seeps into popular music, novels, and writings, which become the tools for socializing and internalizing the norms of piety, disciplining women with the categories of good women versus bad, sinful ones with rigid heteronormative grids. This regime psychologically manifests in effect: shame, guilt, and anxiety. Sharon Lamb, quoted in Gilson (2016, p. 77), explains that "it is shameful to be a victim in our culture" because there is a shame "associated with being overpowered or vulnerable or hurt or unable to come to one's defence." The negative effect, especially concerning sexual violence, is a part of the victim-blaming culture that Arnez elaborates on in her introduction (Chap. 1). One problem is that vulnerability is seen as a condition of passivity and weakness, lacking agency and effort to resist. The whole social construction of power and its operation needs to be interrogated in the first place, which imposes a sense of vulnerability on individuals, women, widows, singles, and sexual minorities.

Tenacity in dealing with vulnerability

The book's contribution lies in complicating vulnerability by showing how the subjects of their chapters, female fashion designers, lesbians, women activists,

widows and divorcees, wives, and migrant workers with love lost or regained–creatively face their adverse conditions. They try to find loopholes, collaborating and corroborating with other agents, negotiating, subverting, and finding strategies to deal with the power relations around them, be it their family, the law, the police, or the law.

In Edwin Wieringa's chapter (Chap. 9), we read about Eni Martini's bold literary initiative to use the name Kartini, the national hero of women's empowerment, as the name of her lesbian protagonist in her novel. The cosmopolitan widows in the novel discussed by Winarnita, Mahy, and Herriman in Chap. 6 convince each other that they could "exist without men." The confession stories in the Sundanese tabloid *Galura* in Watson's chapter (Chap. 10) convey "women's expressions and strategies to cope with the husband's infidelity." In Arnez and Nisa's contribution (Chap. 2), we follow the struggles of Indonesian women *ulama* as they hold their annual congress to transform the existing male-centric understanding of Islamic teachings with a feminist perspective.

These actors are presented in their complexity and ambiguity, not as mere rebels who can transcend the world they live in. Like Anniesa Hasibuan in Chap. 4, some are winners and losers in their game, or like Sisyphus, in constant uphill and downhill struggle asserting their identity. Anwar Kholid's Chap. 3 showcases how two major Islamic mass organizations, nationalist and moderate, manoeuvre their standing on the LGBTQ + issue, not tacitly condemning but diplomatically refraining from defending. These actors are not beyond but part of the very social structures that have made them who they are, the structures that uphold patriarchal values. They are interdependent and interconnected with them. The stories, lyrics, and actions of the subjects in the chapters are transgressions of the homophobic and sexist culture, which still bears some imprints in their articulation.

Put together. These chapters construct diverse initiatives, activism, and expressions of Indonesian people grappling with issues of gender and sexuality within their cultural contexts, in which Islam occupies a central position. Or is the position of Islam too much taken for granted here? Interestingly, Islamic morality is not evident in the Sundanese women's confession letters in Watson's chapter. Whether this absence relates to their lower-middle-class world or that they are already so ingrained in it that it is no longer an issue–is still open to discussion. Anwar Kholid brings about another compelling issue of diversity (Chap. 3) in his observation about the different strategies adopted by the Yogyakarta branch of the same Islamic organizations compared to the national ones. Grounded in local realities and having daily interaction with the LGBT communities in their neighborhood, these "regional" branches opted for the practice of care towards sexual others rather than holding on to dogmatic norms to judge them.

Further reflections are needed to evaluate the implications of this finding. We need to examine how distance and affinity from local grounding affect policymaking and what we can learn from this to educate the public about tolerance and care. The chapter recalls Rodríguez work (2020), which underlines the importance of contexts in queer religious identity, albeit differently. Rodriquez connects queer identity positioning

with space and place, thus showing the flexibility of performing queerness through "commuting" and "integrating" between spaces and places.

Still connected with local grounding, we must interrogate the global–local interplay in using terms like LGBTQ + , LGBTQ, and LGBT in the public discourse. These terms directly connote a cultural import, which alienates them from local history. Throughout Indonesia, different locally grounded terms are known to refer to gender diversity, such as the five genders of the Bugis society (*makunrai* or woman, *oroane* or man, *calabai* or feminine man, *calalai* or masculine women, and *bissu,* the androgyngist with a spiritual role).[11] In Java, terms such as *banci, wandu* (manly women) global and universalised English terms, a cultural distance is established.

The chapters of this book allow the readers to have a close encounter with textual and cultural expressions, as well as empirical assessments of gender, sexuality, and Islamic religion in differing contexts in Indonesia. Given the right-wing direction of the global-local pendulum, the issues raised in the book are bound to be relevant in the coming future, although hopefully, the right-wing swing will not prevail too long. While normative and homophobic policies and praxis are still robust, emergent activism among various actors like KUPI (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*/ Congress of Indonesian Female Ulama) is gaining momentum (Rohmaniah et al. 2022).

KUPI is a significant breakthrough in dealing with the conservative turn towards gender and sexuality in the name of Islam. While many constraining structures such as bylaws and regulations come from state actors and institutions, the women Islamic leaders work from the bottom-up, reaching local communities. They strategically chose an Islamic university and *pesantren* (a boarding school for Islamic teachings) as the location for their congress and involved Islamic youth from various local groups. The first and second congresses have gathered over 1000 women (Badriyah 2022). What is most promising, the congresses issued *fatwas* (decrees established by religious authorities) which gained the approval of the Indonesian Islamic Council. The *fatwas* include critical issues on gender and sexuality, such as female circumcision, child marriage, and sexual violence.[12] The process is democratic, with dialogues involving diverse groups, informed also by perspectives from religious leaders from other Islamic countries. Concerned about the way Indonesian politics and state actors have been using identity politics to gain votes in anticipating the presidential election of 2024, progressive activists put their hopes not on the State institutions and actors but on the bottom-up, grounded, and democratic processes initiated by KUPI to navigate the waves of repressive conservativism.[13] Certainly, KUPI is not a cure-all for the challenges against the rising conservativism, which impinges on the rights of women and sexual minorities. This is not a linear struggle, but a tug of war complicated by multi-dimensional global-local factors such as national and local politics, the pandemic, and ecological crisis.[14]

At this point, a word is due on what we have not covered in this book. We have not covered in the book the cultural and geographical areas of Indonesia where Islam is not a major religion. Instead of Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, or a combination of major and minor religions could be the reference for morality in these areas, each with their normative perspectives on gender and sexual minorities. Nor have we illuminated how COVID-19 has been reflected in cultural productions within our subject area, a topic that deserves further research.

Finally, this book can be considered a reference for further discussions on the dynamics of power relations and the expression of gender and sexuality in contemporary Indonesia.

Notes

1. I thank Monika Arnez for alerting me to his work.
2. Personal communication with Mujahidin Nurrachman, May 28, 2023.
3. Personal communication with Alia Swastika, May 27, 2023.
4. Personal communication with Feby Indriani, May 28, 2023.
5. Different terms are used here for head coverings. *Niqab* refers to clothing that covers the whole body, including the face, except for the eyes; *hijab* and *jilbab* are often used interchangeably today in Indonesia, although *hijab* refers to clothing that covers the *aurat* or genitalia and parts not to be seen in public, including hair. In contrast, jilbab refers to loose clothes that do not show body shape; the burqa covers all body parts, including the eyes, with some transparent fabric over the eyes that enable women to see through. See Generasi Milenial (2021).
6. See: https://indonesienlesen.com/2020/10/25/perempuan-yang-kehilangan-wajahnya/. Accessed 18 December 2023
7. *Hijab syahri* is a term that has been used to refer to the kind of clothing, which is in accordance with Islamic law, Sharia. It refers to clothing which does not show a woman's body shape, and covers all parts of a woman's body, except for the face, and hands. See note no 2.
8. Diversity of Islam in Indonesia is not limited to ideological position but also to other factors, such as transnational influences, schools, syncretic groundings, and others. See Kersten C (2017).
9. Didik Nini Thowok, personal communication, May 27, 2023.
10. Dede Oetomo, personal communication, January 2016. See Boellstorff (2016) and Ferdiansyah, T (2018) on the LGBT controversy in 2016.
11. See Davies, SG (2010) and Kersten, C (2017).
12. See the results and process of the KUPI congress at https://kupipedia.id/index.php/Hasil_Kongres. Accessed 18 December 2023.
13. Kamala Chandrakirana, personal communication, May 27, 2023.
14. The KUPI congress also issued a decree on environmental degradation. See: https://kupipedia.id/index.php. Accessed 17 December 2023.

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Dragon Dance: Shifting Meaning of Chineseness in Indonesia" in *Asian and Pacific Cosmopolitans - Self and Subject in Motion* (2007), edited by Kathryn Robinson and "Smart Kampung: Doing Cultural Studies in the Global South" (2019), published in the journal *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. She coedited with Sylvia Tiwon, *Trajectories of Memory; Excavating the Past in Indonesia*, published by Palgrave (2023), and with Manneke Budiman, *Wacana, Journal of the Humanities of Indonesia* Vol. 24, Reclaiming Women's Space (1) and (2), 2023.

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