



GENDER AND POWER IN INDONESIAN ISLAM

Leaders, feminists, Sufis and *pesantren* selves

Edited by Bianca J. Smith and Mark Woodward

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7 Women's negotiation of status and space in a Muslim fundamentalist movement

Inayah Rohmaniyah

This chapter explores how members of one of Indonesia's most prominent Muslim fundamentalist organizations, *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI), or Indonesian Jihad Fighter's Council, respond to women's and gender issues in religious texts the organization publishes on its internet website. It contrasts the views of male and female members and argues that men are more willing to accept guidance from Saudi Arabian Wahhabi scholars than women. MMI is one of the fundamentalist groups that emerged following the fall of the New Order and the establishment of democracy in Indonesia in 1998. It was founded in 2002 as an umbrella organization bringing together groups and individuals seeking to establish Indonesia as a *shari'ah*-based Islamic state. One of the organization's founders and first *emir* (leader) was Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, who is generally considered to have been the spiritual leader of the terrorist organization *Jama'ah Islamiyah*. Ba'asyir was also among the founders of Pesantren al-Mukmin in Ngruki near Surakarta in Central Java that the International Crisis Group (2005a) identified as the centre of a small network of *pesantren* (a traditional Islamic boarding school for the study of the Qur'an, Hadith and other classical Islamic texts) in which radical Islamist teachings, rather than *kitab kuning* (classical Islamic texts), are the core of the curriculum. MMI has a Salafi religious orientation, combined with Muslim Brotherhood activism. Members interviewed in 2012 stated emphatically that only they understood Islamic truth, and that they were entitled to serve as moral police and to oppose sin and heresy by any means necessary.

MMI's paramilitary wing, *Laskar Mujahidin*, has been involved in a series of violent incidents directed against groups it believes to be socially or theologically deviant. There are no women in *Laskar Mujahidin*, but women do take part in non-violent demonstrations. In May 2012, MMI coordinated a violent attack on a seminar featuring a Canadian feminist activist, Irshad Manji.¹ Fliers distributed at the time of the attack described feminists as enemies of Islam and the Indonesian state. They also link feminism with liberalism and homosexuality. The fliers and MMI cadre interviewed at the time described Manji as an especially dangerous feminist because she is not afraid of going to hell and accused her of promoting the religion of lesbianism. The depiction

of feminists as religious deviants and lesbians is an increasingly common element of Indonesian fundamentalist discourse.

MMI promotes ideas of gender segregation common among conservative Indonesian Muslims but takes them to extremes. The organization's official positions are influenced by the writings of Saudi Arabian Wahhabi scholars. Some of the data presented here show that for the male leadership of MMI, women in general, and female sexuality in particular, are considered to be dangerous and potentially destructive forces if not contained by boundaries of *shari'ah* based domesticity.

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which women in MMI negotiate and construct their identities and subjectivities, their status and space, and confront issues of feminism and women's emancipation in the context of this fundamentalist ideological complex. Due to the exclusivity and secrecy of MMI members, it is very difficult to conduct interviews and therefore I rely primarily on religious texts written or translated by MMI leaders and compare these with texts written by male and female MMI authors. This analysis problematizes conventional Western thinking according to which Islamist women are considered to be submissive, powerless, non-thinkers and merely the objects and symbols of Islamist ideology. It is argued that theories ignoring the subjectivity and agency of Islamist women do not adequately explain the perspectives of women who are actively involved in promoting MMI religious, social and political agendas.

Global and national contexts

Islamic fundamentalism has a long history in Indonesia. It has become increasingly visible and challenging in the post-New Order period. Indonesia has never described itself as a religious or Islamic state and officially recognizes six major religions. The acceptance of *Pancasila*² as the ideological basis for the nation, points to the preference for a secular state rather than a religious one. There have, however, always been groups with an alternative vision, who would define Indonesia as an Islamic state.

The Reformation movement that led to the downfall of the Suharto regime ushered in a reform era in which all individuals and organizations celebrated freedom and competed to redefine national identity. This development, on the one hand, enhanced the process of democratization, but, on the other hand, brought about the resurgence of radical or fundamentalist organizations that had previously gone underground. Support for Islamic radicalism or fundamentalism has increased substantially and the most vivid and enduring images after the Suharto era have been those of radical Islam (Fealy 2004). In line with the re-emergence of fundamentalist movements, gender and women's issues have emerged as some of the most debated and deeply contested issues in political and religious discourse over the last two decades.

In the period after 1985, a discourse concerning feminist theory and gender analysis and their relevance to processes of social and political development

emerged among scholars, women activists and non-government organizations (Fakih 1996). At the same time, numerous translations of books written by internationally known progressive and liberal Muslim writers into Indonesian facilitated efforts by Indonesian scholars to rethink and reshape their theological and cultural positions, particularly those concerning classical religious teachings on the relations between men and women. Patriarchal understandings of religion and of the existential qualities of concepts of 'Muslim man' and 'Muslim woman' have been subjected to deconstruction and fundamental criticism.

Women's issues have also become one of the major political and theological agendas of MMI. They have written many books on women's issues and translated others from Arabic into Indonesian. Like other Indonesian mass organizations, MMI has a women's division, *an-Nisa Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia*, more commonly known as *an-Nisa*,³ which is the primary place for women who are involved in the organization. Organizationally, *an-Nisa* is under 'Leader I'⁴ whose responsibility is to implement policy.⁵ The members of the Division consist of all MMI women. Many of them are wives or relatives of male members. The Division is always led by a woman. Some of these women have studied in *pesantren* and/or Islamic universities. Itsna Wiqayati, for example, is a former leader of the Yogyakarta branch. She is a graduate of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Yogyakarta.

Exploring MMI's teachings about the status and role of women is significant for understanding the persistence of patriarchal culture in a society where gender relationships have changed fundamentally in part as a result of the emergence of feminist movements led by women with both secular and Islamic educations. For example, in 2004, the Ministry of Religious Affairs introduced legislation which would have prohibited polygamy and promoted gender equality. The draft was compiled by a team which consisted of highly educated female and male scholars and was led by an Indonesian Muslim woman gender expert, Siti Musdah Mulia (Sri Saraswati 2004). This action immediately sparked strong resistance from the majority of Muslims, especially traditionalists and radicals, including MMI. Led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, radical organizations opposed the reforms, claiming that they deviated from the principles of Islam. The emergence of MMI and its positions on gender issues can be understood in part as a response to the presence of reform-oriented feminist voices in the public sphere.

Questions concerning religious fundamentalism have become even more salient since the tragedy of 11 September 2001. In post-9/11 Western discourse, Islam, or more particularly Islamic fundamentalism, is very often the primary object of attention and discussion: it immediately turns out to be the accused. The massive outpouring of anti-Islamic sentiment that immediately followed the event, and the assumed association of Islamic movements and terrorism, has served to further reaffirm their status as agents of dangerous irrationality (Mahmood 2005).

Control of women and maintaining the patriarchal system are central to fundamentalism. Wahhabism has come to symbolize Muslim fundamentalism because it is the official Islam of the ultra-conservative Saudi Arabian state. It is a major force in global Muslim discourse because of the efforts of the Saudi state and wealthy individuals who promote it worldwide. According to Wahhabi teachings, women should be segregated from men, have no access to public space and are inferior to men (DeLong-Bas 2004). In Afghanistan under the Taliban, women were kept under house arrest, banned from attending school and prohibited from working outside the house (Moghissi 1999). They could not step outside their houses except in the company of a male relative. There are many other examples. MMI promotes an only slightly less restrictive variant of this ideology, elements of which are contested by the organization's female members.

Theorizing fundamentalism and feminism

Fundamentalisms and feminisms are among a growing number of ideological forces that attempt to deal with both individual and communal identities in global and local conditions, following the expansion of a global culture and the forces opposing it in the aftermath of decolonization (Moallem 2001). Islamic fundamentalism and Western feminism have become important discursive sites for the construction of new forms of global oppositions perpetuating the binary distinction between a barbaric, oppressive and patriarchal Muslim world and a civilized, tolerant and liberated West that was central to colonial discourse.

Bruce Lawrence (1989) characterizes fundamentalism as the affirmation of religious authority as the only holistic and absolute framework, admitting neither criticism nor reduction. It is expressed through the collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced (Lawrence 1989: 27). Fundamentalists embrace scriptural authority as self-conscious advocates of anti-modernist values, in opposition to individuals and institutions that advocate Enlightenment values and wave the banner of secularism or modernism. Manning Nash (1991: 732–33) identifies eight features of fundamentalism in Southeast Asia:

1. Arguments based on literalist readings of scripture with little theological debate or interpretation;
2. Glorification and idealization of the past which it sees as the golden age of purity and as a model of contemporary society;
3. Attempts to create an ideal society based on Islamic tenets in the context of contemporary social realities;
4. Hierarchical networks whose leaders spread their ideologies and monitor the behaviour of their followers;
5. Opposition to modernity and the West, particularly its concepts of hedonism, materialism, secularism and self-indulgence;

6. A combination of anti-modernism with defense of ethnic identity;
7. Reliance on charismatic leaders to mobilize mass support; and
8. Their ideologies include theodicies that explain 'unjust suffering' that fundamentalists must endure.

It is essential to add opposition of local and global feminisms to this list. Fundamentalism is an instrumentally rational response to perceived grievances about the failure of modernity to meet religious needs. Islamic fundamentalism is a byproduct of modernity. It is a reaction against modernity, but more profoundly it is also an expression of modernity (Euben 1999). Fundamentalism can lead to violence in response to what are perceived existential threats posed by modernism, including symbolic violence such as discrimination against women, as well as physical violence. This is especially true when the state is weak and unable to establish effective administrative-legal structures to contain potentially violent political-religious actors (Hefner 2004).

Accordingly, many Western feminists theorize that women under fundamentalist orders are submissive, oppressed and used to uphold multiple forms of political, economic and cultural power. They are theorized as being powerless, secluded, merely objects, and the ultimate example of male fundamentalist oppression and exploitation (Metcalf 1990). Female fundamentalists are seen as pawns in a grand patriarchal plan who, if freed from bondage, would express their abhorrence for the traditional Islamic mores used to enchain them (Mahmood 2005). Women are segregated, excluded from paid employment and from most interaction with the outside world, at least if not accompanied by an adult male (Peach 2002).

Maryam Rajavi (2008) argues that for fundamentalists physiological traits are determining factors in the construction of value systems. Gender-based differences are used to justify discrimination and inevitably lead to enmity towards women. She believes that in the fundamentalists' view women are second-class citizens, cannot and must not have any place in leadership, governance, judicial affairs, and in general should be excluded from participation in the regulation of social life. She concludes that the fundamentalist perspective on gender relations is that women must be kept uninformed to make sure they are obedient (Rajavi 2008).

The project of Islamic fundamentalism imposes an exclusionary definition of the Muslim community. 'Proper' female behaviour is used to signify the difference between those who are members of the community and those who are not. Women are also seen as the cultural carriers of the group, who transmit its culture to future generations (Sahgal and Yuval-Davis 1992). In this framework, interpretations of religious texts (mainly of the Qur'an) regarding women function not only to regulate women's lives but also to order Islamic society as a whole through categories based on gender (Peach 2002).

Fundamentalists, including those of MMI, view feminism as an anti-Islamic Western ideology. They are convinced that feminists aim to obliterate true Islamic values and teachings, and will inevitably degrade women's status and

dignity. From the fundamentalists' perspective, feminism has led women to rebel against their natural tendencies as well as against religious norms. It causes them to revolt against the boundaries defining their status and role, neglect their primary responsibilities in the domestic sphere and eventually create *fitnah* or interpersonal and social disorder.

Feminism, according to one female member of MMI, spreads the misguided idea that traditional female roles subordinate women, promotes male domination and condemns Islamic *shari'ah* (Karimah 2005). The male editor of the MMI website explains that feminism is a jargon of extreme freedom and equality, which invites conflict about men's roles as leaders of their families. This leads to conflict as to whether the woman or the man should lead the family when women gain financial and managerial capacities. The conflict, according to the editor, leads to single parenthood, free sex, abortion and adoption. Islam, he believes, requires that the man be a leader (*qawwam*) for his woman or women (his wife or wives).

According to Minno Moallem (2001), fundamentalism is a regime of truth based on discourses identified with, or ordained by, God (taken metaphorically or literally) and binds its observers. It is characterized by an orientation to the past and the negation of modernity, democracy, progress and development. Meanwhile, Western egalitarian feminism came into existence claiming a subject position within the pervasive masculinism of modern liberal discourse and its paradigm of equality. Both are concerned with women's subjectivity and participation, and reject a feminine ideal characterized by passivity and powerlessness. They nevertheless came to very different conclusions as well as different solutions to problems that women face. For feminists, women's subjectivity and participation exists in women's individuality in a liberatory process of change and uncertainty. Fundamentalists understand women's subjectivity as devotion to the consolidation of a God-given community.

Conventional descriptions (Moghissi 1999) of women living under fundamentalist orders as voiceless and powerless do not capture the complexity of *an-Nisa*. Women under this fundamentalist order are in fact publicly active and have developed bargaining strategies that make them relatively powerful. Fundamentalist women also use feminist language in efforts to deconstruct, negotiate and eventually reconstruct their identities as Muslim women. There is, therefore, a hybridity combining fundamentalist and feminist thought and belief. The women of *an-Nisa* promote a fundamentalist-feminism emphasizing female agency in the fundamentalist transformative agenda.

A portrait of *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* and *an-Nisa*

Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia was officially established in August 2002 in Yogyakarta. Historically, MMI is rooted in the Darul Islam movement, which was founded during the revolutionary struggle against the Dutch in the 1940s. Unlike the secular nationalists who came to dominate the new Indonesian state, it recognized no legislation but the *shari'ah* (International Crisis Group

2005b). MMI became prominent in national and international political discourse almost immediately, because of reported links with Al-Qaeda and *Jama'ah Islamiyah*. MMI has been linked to the 'Christmas Bombs' in 2002, which were set off serially in Medan, Jakarta, Bandung, Ciamis and Mataram.

MMI's vision is the establishment of *shari'ah* (*tathbiq al-Shari'ah*) comprehensively within the life of Muslim society. Its mission is to struggle for the formal establishment of *shari'ah* in its entirety and without compromise (*kaffah*) at the level of the individual, family, society and nation (Awwas 2003). Methodologically, this group emphasizes literal and textual approaches to Islam. They believe that the authority of human reason or rationality in the structure of Islamic thought must be subordinated to *wahyu* (divine revelation) because of the limitation of human reason. Human reason should surrender to the authority of *wahyu* that comes from and embodies ultimate truth (Al-Anshari 2005).

An-Nisa's mission is to determine women's roles in the establishment of Islamic *shari'ah*, to build networks, and to plan and carry out activities in various regions (Markaz Pusat Majelis Mujahidin 2001). In doing so, *an-Nisa* conducts its own women-only meetings. All divisions of MMI hold their meetings separately according to their own needs, functions and responsibilities. Plenary meetings are held only when needed with an agreement from the general chairman and divisional chairs.

In 2005, *an-Nisa* had its own website and independently formulated strategies to spread its ideas online as well as through conventional media. The 2012 version of MMI's website (<http://majelismujahidin.com/>) no longer includes a section for *an-Nisa*, indicating that gender issues remain sensitive in the organization. The former *an-Nisa* website was informative and provocative. It enabled a broad audience to follow *an-Nisa's* activities and learn about its ideology and beliefs. The website also published articles concerning women's issues, gender and feminism. Male members of MMI wrote most of them. Later, I analyze the contribution of a female member to the website. The exclusivity of this group protects the identities of female members, thus I am restricted to interpreting this female member's ideas through her writing, without having access to knowledge about her background, age, education, ethnicity or influence in the organization.

According to a 2004 report by the *an-Nisa* Human Resources Commission (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia 2005c) the group's objectives include:

- 1 Preparing and developing high-quality human resources for Muslim women devoted to the establishment of *shari'ah*;
- 2 Building strong faith (*akidah*) among Muslim women along with the continual improvement of the quality of belief (*iman*), knowledge and deeds;
- 3 Building a strong mentality of *Mujahidah* (woman warriors) which includes integrity, discipline, self confidence, commitment, courage to speak the truth and professionalism; and
- 4 Building Muslim women's work ethics in the name of Allah.

This list is written in very general language. It assumes, but does not explicate, the MMI positions on patriarchy and gender segregation. There are many Indonesian Muslim women who would not find the list of goals objectionable, but would strenuously object to MMI's more general positions.

Encountering feminist issues

MMI members are seriously concerned about women and gender issues. They publish books on women's issues (all written by men), the contents of which counter those written by progressive/modernist Muslims. A number of articles about women's issues used to be available on the *an-Nisa* website. Of seven articles, women wrote only two. In addition, other articles related partly to women's issues are accessible on the MMI website. Men wrote all of them. This is a discourse *about* women; it is not a women's discourse.

Dealing with the issue of emancipation, Shiddiq Al-Jawi (2006) explains that emancipation entails the concept of women's absolute freedom. His article was posted on the MMI website in 2006. He argues that emancipation promotes gender equality, which defines women and men as having exactly the same rights and responsibilities without any distinction or exception in clear opposition to Islamic principles. Irfan Awwas (1999: v), the General Chair of *Majelis Tanfidziyah*, further alleges that every time women demand emancipation and gender equity they engage in pornographic activities, because women do not have persuasive or attractive powers other than their bodies.

Awwas links career women with pornography and unrestrained sexual activity. He also describes career women as defiant, alienated from Islamic values, and suggests that they may suffer from psychological disorders. He states (1999: v):

- 1 They like to work outside their homes and become involved in male work;
- 2 They focus more on their careers than on family in order to obtain social status and personal achievement;
- 3 They do not like household roles or following their husbands' lead; and
- 4 They are melancholy people.

MMI consistently misrepresents Indonesian social realities to promote its own agenda.

Muhammad Thalib (1999), who replaced Abu Bakar Ba'asyir as *Amir Mujahidin* in 2008, argues that current global discourses about emancipation based on gender equality and equity are mistaken. In the name of emancipation, Thalib claims that some Muslims accuse Islam of limiting women's potential for improvement and freedom and for promoting gender discrimination. Thalib also believes that emancipation promotes a new idea, namely feminism, which is merely an illusion, and has terrible effects on women. The mission of feminism, according to him, is to give women limitless freedom and lead them to abandon their natural tendencies (Thalib 1999: 36). Feminism, Thalib

argues, has revolutionized the structure of women's thought and led them to abandon their natural roles as mothers and to become sexually ambiguous people.

Those who promote emancipation, according to Thalib (1999: 12), raise deceptively spectacular issues that could easily induce the spirit of rebellion. Thalib believes that feminists continually and systematically incite women to fight against their natural tendencies, jump over their boundaries, eradicate moral barriers and break religious demarcations and God's laws. He understands feminism as a force that marginalizes faithful women, depriving them of their rights as human beings (Thalib 1999: 12).

Thalib argues that feminists spread the idea that stay-at-home women are those whose existence and life are so fettered that their personalities will never develop so that they accept oppression by men. He also tries to show that a stay-at-home woman is not in the terrible state described by those who promote emancipation. He believes that the home is the best and safest place for women. Thalib and other MMI members use expressions such as 'a woman is a queen of her family' to stress women's important roles in domestic affairs and support their contention that women's roles in society should be restricted to the domestic sphere. To support his view on the supposedly dreadful effects of emancipation, Thalib (1999: 16-17) describes how career or professional women have created long-lasting dilemmas for themselves and society. They, in Thalib's view, have to accept a double burden, since they have to go outside their homes, become breadwinners, struggle and compete with men in the workplace and at the same time have to take care of their household. He constructs his argument against a nearly non-existent stereotype, because almost all middle-class Indonesian women have household help.

Thalib is also critical of women who, he claims, take men's opportunities in the workplace. These women, according to Thalib, are responsible for the high percentage of jobless men, creating competition between men and women. In this situation, he argues, the job and responsibility mechanism in both the family and the society have become confused. Jobless adult men do not have the courage to get married due to their lack of material capacity to maintain the family and, consequently, turn to adulterous lifestyles to fulfil their biological needs. At the same time, career women, who prefer not to get married, choose to have their sexual needs met outside marriage. Thalib does not provide any evidence to support his claims. This fundamentalist critique of modernity and women's emancipation is not particularly relevant for Indonesia, where the idea of the 'working woman' is not a recent development. Women have traditionally played major roles in commerce, especially in traditional markets, and agriculture. Among upper-class Javanese (the largest ethnic group in Indonesia), it is often considered to be the woman's duty to make money and the man's to maintain family honour. This is a gender-based division of labour, but one quite different from the ones MMI caricatures or from the Islamic alternative it advocates.

The MMI webmaster argues that in the name of gender equality the Indonesian government uses women as commodities and economic resources

through prostitution and entertainment businesses and by sending them abroad as workers. This, the webmaster declares, results in the destruction of family structure and the mushrooming of serial marriage and divorce, of living together without getting married, and of lesbianism and homosexuality. These lifestyles, the webmaster asserts, are trendy and legally accepted. Again, the webmaster provides no data to support his contentions.

MMI presents its understanding of Islam as the only possible solution to dire social problems and moral decline that are the result of the absence of women in the family, their participation in the public arena and the spread of the idea of emancipation and other types of feminist ideas. Like other MMI members, a female contributor to the website, Intishorul Karimah (2005) believes that *sharia'h*, as an ideology, has the capacity to solve all social problems including those of women, men, family, society and the state. The establishment of *shari'ah*, according to her, will fulfil human needs, establish security and dignity, and at the same time will eliminate all kinds of injustice, social gaps and boundless freedom.

The author of *Nasehat Praktis untuk Muslimah Shalihah* (Practical Advice for Pious Muslim Women) (Jarillah 2002: 28) declares that Islam devotes intense attention to women's roles in every sphere of life and gives women the most respectful position before God and human beings. This book explains that only Islam can save women from their ignorant behaviour and raise them above tendencies to glorify worldly life and sexual display. Emancipation, feminism, gender equality and partnership, thus, are against Islam and should not be attached to it, because Muslim women are obligated to follow Islam in a totalistic way. For MMI, Islam presumes a binary distinction between female and male roles and spheres of action and agency that is essential for the maintenance of morality and social order. *Shari'ah* defines and preserves these boundaries.

Division of labour and women's natural tendencies and functions

It is evident through her writing that Karimah (2005) believes that Islam bestows women and men the same rights and responsibilities. This concept of equality, however, recognizes particular differentiations between the two sexes that she believes are supported by *dalil* (proof texts) from the Qur'an and Hadith. Karimah takes it for granted that God has established natural laws defining different roles and functions for men and women. Natural law, for example, regulates women's maternal functions. These include maternity, pregnancy, giving birth, breastfeeding and child-care functions. Menstruation is also another natural consequence of being female that cannot be altered.

Thalib (1999: 14–15) argues that these sociological differences are rooted in biology as well as religion and that MMI's understanding of *shari'ah* recognizes basic biological conditions. Women are different from men because of menstruation that disturbs their health and mental states and, therefore, during this period they are not able to work as well as in their normal condition.

Women, he adds, have to give birth to children, and the days during and following delivery are the most critical times for women both physiologically and psychologically. After the delivery, he argues, women have to breastfeed their babies and this task can only be accomplished by a stay-at-home mother. Instant milk, babysitters and household helpers cannot replace the function of breastfeeding. Men have no such troubles or barriers. This discourse blurs the distinction between the social and the biological. Based on their understanding of women's natural biological functions, MMI members, both female and male, share the idea that these natural functions result in the fundamental distinction between men's and women's roles. Women's primary place is in their homes and their major roles relate to domestic affairs.

According to Fauzan al-Anshari (2005), the coordinator of the Data and Information Division of MMI, women's location in the domestic sphere reflects the natural condition of being a wife and mother, and of softness, great compassion and serenity. It does not, therefore, have any relation to the issues of discrimination. Likewise, Thalib (1999: 112) affirms that women and men are naturally, physiologically and psychologically very different. Women, according to him, are physiologically softer, more tender and milder than men, so that they are able to control their emotions and be patient enough to take care of and educate children. Karimah (2005) similarly believes that women's role in the domestic sphere is associated intimately with her natural functions that result from the consequence of getting married: a woman's role is that of wife and mother.

Anshari shares with Thalib and other MMI members the view that men are physically stronger and nimbler than women, which makes them able to act quicker and effectively compete and struggle to solve life's difficulties and problems. Man, with his physical power, is capable of defending himself and his family from all kinds of threats and dangers. Similarly, Karimah maintains that women and men naturally have particular distinctions and that ignoring them will abolish women's potencies, capabilities and specific roles and, thus, is against human nature.

MMI members believe that women's prestige and status derive from their roles as mothers and wives and that a married woman is the 'queen' and manager of her husband's household. MMI books describe a woman as a queen who manages the household, which is also a school in which children come to know the world. MMI books claim that women will be asked in the hereafter about how they performed their responsibilities of taking care of their family and children, not about their careers or university degrees. This suggests that those who do not conform to MMI behavioural norms will burn in hell.

MMI relies on the writings of the Saudi Arabian Wahhabi scholar Shalih bin Fauzan bin Abdullah Al-Fauzan to support these positions. He argues that women's participation in building society is manifested through their responsibilities inside the closed home, which is suitable for their natural characteristics and wherein women are protected from destruction. Domestic

work, ranging from getting pregnant to cleaning the floor, is equal to being a breadwinner (Al-Fauzan 2005: 144). From this point of view, MMI members seem to conclude that women will lose their dignity and religion once they go outside their home to work.

Abdullah bin Jarillah Al Jarillah (2002: 19–35), another Saudi Arabian scholar whose works have been translated from Arabic into Indonesian by MMI members, describes the rights of a husband over his wife or wives as follows:

- 1 She must obey him;
- 2 She must give her entire body to the husband anytime he wishes;
- 3 She must educate her children well; and
- 4 She must never say bad words and get angry with the children, particularly in front of the husband, because it could hurt his feelings.

A woman's rights in the family include receiving economic support from her husband, which includes clothing, food and shelter, and to receive education about Islamic teachings, especially those concerning proper female comportment from her husband who should order his wife/wives and children to faithfully perform their prayers. Husbands must not permit their wives to buy pornographic magazines, read porno stories or make friends with immoral women. In this scheme, the concept of men's and women's rights is seemingly deduced from the concept of male superiority: men as the controllers and decision-makers.

MMI authors (Jarillah 2002: 20; Thalib 1999: 49–50) argue that the Qur'an delineates the command for women to stay home by referring to *al-Ahzab*, verses 32 and 33:

O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any other women. If you keep your duty (to Allah), then be not soft in speech, lest he in whose heart is a disease (of hypocrisy, or evil desire for adultery, etc.) should be moved with desire, but speak in an honourable manner.

And stay in your houses, and do not display yourselves like that of the times of ignorance, and perform *As-Salat* (*Iqamat-as-Salat*), and give *Zakat* and obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah wishes only to remove *Ar-Rijs* (evil deeds and sins, etc.) from you.

Thalib argues that these verses were directed to the Prophet Muhammad's wives, but he also states that the Prophet's wives are the best role models for Muslim women, indicating that the commands in fact apply to all Muslim women, and not just the Prophet's wives. Based on these verses, both Jarillah and Thalib proclaim that women are obligated to stay at their husband's home, never leaving the home without his permission. This interpretation contradicts those of progressive Muslims who perceive the words 'O ye wives of the Prophet! *Ye are not like any other women*' (my emphasis) as a clear indicator that the verse is not for all Muslims. It also demonstrates the

inconsistencies of MMI interpretations of the Qur'an. If MMI members were consistent in employing their method and firmly believe that the highest rank of *tafsir* (interpretation) is *tafsir ayah bi al-ayah* (interpreting verse by verse), they could not come to the conclusion that the verse bans every woman from stepping outside their homes. This interpretation would, however, contradict the binary thinking characteristic of MMI.

Referring to this simple pattern, MMI rejects totally the idea of woman's emancipation, feminism or gender equality, delineating a clear-cut 'Islamic' division of labour for women and men. Some MMI female members, however, seem not to accept the concept of women's domestication in its entirety, even though they accept the home as their primary place. By advocating even limited feminine agency outside the domestic sphere, they blur the binary opposition central to MMI's worldview.

Women's different roles and responsibilities, Karimah (2005) believes, do not lead to the diminishing of their dignity because it is *taqwa* (piety) which differentiates humans. The differentiation of roles and duties does not indicate the distinction of dignity, but rather because of man's abilities to take greater responsibilities. Thus, Karimah, as well as her male colleagues, believes that Islam perfectly regulates human relations in a very understandable and balancing way. It limits women's rights in the family but at the same time forbids men from doing physical violence. Yet, a man is still allowed to beat his wife, as they believe that the law regulates it, as long it is not on her face or vital parts of her body, in order to educate her so that she will not disobey him. In cases when men do not treat their wives well and quarrels cannot be resolved, Karimah argues that the wife may propose a divorce.

MMI members believe that Islam – as they understand it – has regulated the division of labour between man and woman perfectly, indisputably and unchangeably, and in balance so as to create a blissful family and society. The man is the breadwinner, al-Anshari (2005) argues, who has responsibility to provide both material and immaterial needs of his family, and the woman is the householder whose responsibility is to prepare the children to become a strong and prestigious generation.

Negotiating space and authority in public life

Discourse about women in public life is very challenging for MMI members, particularly because women in Indonesia have relatively the same access as men do to enter the workforce and occupy strategic positions. MMI members perceive that women in Indonesia merely imitate a Western way of life by entering the workforce. Thalib (1999: 114) states that adopting Western lifestyles and admitting that women can work side by side with men in every workplace and job position is against the Qur'an and against *shari'ah*. It also annihilates, he contends, the concept of man's leadership over woman, which, he explains, derives its legitimacy from the Qur'an. Thalib also argues that men's leadership or men's responsibility over women is based on two factors.

First, men are naturally more capable of working outside the home than women.⁶ Second, men are obligated to fulfil the family needs.

Shalih bin Fauzan bin Abdullah al-Fauzan (2005) asserts that in the family the husband is the leader and the wife is the leader of her husband's children. Inside her home, a woman has right to lead, give orders, forbid and become the 'queen' who has to be obeyed by the children. The concept of a woman as leader and queen in the mind of MMI members apparently refers to women's relationship with children. Women are the managers of the children in the family, which is under men's control. Thalib further affirms that the verse cited above also guarantees that women do not need to work.

Al-Fauzan (2005: 23) claims that only sick Westernized Muslims persist in persuading women to leave their homes to be men's partners in business, working side by side with them. They convince women to leave their primary tasks at home and, then, their husbands find helpers to educate their children and manage their households. In the end, it will create slandering, criminality and other social problems. He shares the idea that a woman, however, can work outside her home under certain conditions. The first of these is that the work is extremely important and must be performed by a woman and that it is not to be done together with a man – examples include being a kindergarten teacher, a teacher at a special school for women or a nurse for female patients. The second is that her husband, father or brothers cannot meet their responsibilities of fulfilling the family's needs. The third is that the work is part-time and will not interfere with the woman's primary obligation that is to take care of her household. The fourth is that a woman gets permission from her husband, father or brothers, and finally, that she must work separately from men in order to protect her dignity and save her and the society from moral deprivation (Thalib 1999: 108–109). Jarillah (2002: 32) proclaims that woman can only step outside her home when she has an urgent need and wears appropriate clothing: thick, non-colourful, loose and long clothing, covering her feet, together with a long veil covering her neck and bosom, and the *cadar* (a face cover with an opening for the eyes).

Karimah (2005), however, has a different point of view from her male colleagues and their Saudi mentors: she confidently announces that the law recognizes the equality between men and women. She highlights that human beings, both women and men, are created as God's representatives on earth and that the only regulation that can save humanity is *shari'ah*. She argues that women, therefore, have to work hand in hand with men in the society, because society neither solely consists of women or men, but is rather a human society. Men and women are religiously obligated to participate actively in building the society by doing good deeds and avoiding infidelity. She believes this is mandated in the following Qur'anic verses:

And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and they pay the poor-due, and they obey Allah and His messenger. As

for these, Allah will have mercy on them. Lo! Allah is Mighty, Wise (At-Taubah [9]: 71).

O ye who believe! Profane not Allah's monuments nor the Sacred Month nor the offerings nor the garlands, nor those repairing to the Sacred House, seeking the grace and pleasure of their Lord. But when ye have left the sacred territory, then go hunting (if ye will). And let not your hatred of a folk who (once) stopped your going to the inviolable place of worship to seduce you to transgress; but help ye one another unto righteousness and pious duty. Help not one another unto sin and transgression, but keep your duty to Allah. Lo! Allah is severe in punishment (Al-Maa'idah [5]: 2).

Karimah maintains that God creates human beings and gives them human potencies regardless of gender differentiation. She refers to the Qur'an (Al-Hujuraat [49]: 13):

O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware (Al-Hujuraat [49]: 13).

Women and men as human beings, Karimah (2005) insists, share similarities. Many verses in the Qur'an and Hadith, she believes, point to the equality of men and women. In an attempt to bring MMI's mission to establish *shari'ah* as a reality, Karimah further argues that women also have to search for knowledge in order to understand God's laws. Karimah, however, explicates that acquiring religious knowledge is an individual obligation, but acquiring worldly knowledge is not. Karimah shows that female Muslim thinkers have been well known since the early days of Islam both in the field of religious and worldly studies.

Tracing the history of women in the early years of Islam, Karimah demonstrates that Aisyah, the daughter of the first *khalifa* (a title for one who holds the highest authoritative position in Islam, including in Sufi orders), Abu Bakar, and the mother of all Muslims, is a transmitter of Hadith who became incredibly famous. She collected 2,220 Hadith from the Prophet. Hafsa, the daughter of the second *khalifa*, Umar bin Khattab, she argues, was renowned for her intelligence and reading and writing skills at a time when most Muslims were illiterate. In the field of politics, Karimah believes that several Muslim women's names were also prominent. Among them were Fatimah, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, Aisyah, the daughter of Abu Bakar, and Atikah, the daughter of Yazid bin Muawiyah. There were also Muslim women eye doctors such as Zaenab and Ummul Hasan, the daughter al Qadli Abi Ja'far.

Contrary to the men's perspective, Karimah insists that a woman can choose whatever work she wants to do. Similarly, Karimah believes that

women can relatively easily enter all working places that men are able to enter. Yet working for women is permissible (*mubah*) and is not obligatory (*wajib*), as it is for men, because the man is the breadwinner of the family. She, however, has to give her primary duties precedence over other things and firmly maintain the laws regarding how she dresses (veiling), communicates with men, obtains her husband's permission and other required laws.

Karimah also argues that women have the same role as men in the political arena, especially when the politics is intended to maintain the Islamic society. They are obligated to be informed and struggle for society's wellbeing, and are compelled to be activists in political parties, to criticize and correct rulers who deviate from God's laws and to struggle for a better society and better lives for women. This political perspective, Karimah believes, is essentially different from the liberal one that merely aims to achieve high worldly positions without any attempt to take responsibilities to God.

Karimah, nonetheless, acknowledges that there is no question that women and men are different; that difference is determined by God and is regulated by *shari'ah*. She agrees with Anshar's view that male leadership is an inevitable social fact that must be accepted, because one of the requirements for being a leader is to be male. Woman in this schema, according to Karimah and MMI ideology, can never be a leader both in domestic and public spheres. The laws have made it clear that female leaders will never be successful, and that societies under a female ruler will never be fortunate. Karimah believes that the proper role for women in public life is advocating for leaders and struggling for the realization of social wellbeing and prosperity. In line with MMI's political agenda, particularly the goal of establishing *shari'ah*, which calls for the replacement of existing secular laws and democratization with theocracy, MMI did not accept Megawati Sukarnoputri (the daughter of Sukarno) as the first female president of Indonesia (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia 2005a).

An *an-Nisa* workshop conducted in 2004 supported Karimah's views concerning women's participation in the public arena. The workshop recommended that Muslim women be involved actively in society both in its narrow and wider meanings (Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia 2005b). Society in its narrow meaning includes the family and neighbourhood. In this context women's role is to promulgate Islamic teachings through study clubs. Women's role in the society in its wider scope is to develop support for the establishment of *shari'ah*, to respond to current social issues and to occupy strategic positions in existing social organizations. At the political level, Muslim women must support MMI in their struggle for reinstating the 'Jakarta Charter' (*Piagam Jakarta*) and work to counter those who oppose this goal. The struggle for the Jakarta Charter has been one of the defining characteristics of political Islam in Indonesia since the 1940s. It added the clause 'with the obligation, for its adherents to practise the *Shari'ah* (*dengan kewajiban menjalankan Shari'ah bagi pemeluknya*)' to the first of *Pancasila's* five principles. It was originally included, but subsequently dropped from,

Pancasila because of objections by religious minorities and politically secular Muslims.

Karimah's standpoints, as well other *an-Nisa* members', as illustrated in the results of their workshop, endorse freedom for women in the public arena in opposition to the male members' convictions. All of the members share the concept of leadership, but for women members the concept does not lead to the seclusion of women. Women accept the position that they cannot be leaders but insist that they can participate *freely* (my emphasis) in workplaces and in political organizations and activities.

Karimah's reasoning, however, falls into inconsistency. She assertively proclaims women's freedom: a woman can choose her own work and the places she wants to go because she is obligated to be God's vicegerent. Conversely, she declares that a woman must focus on her primary duties and must obtain her husband's permission to do anything. It seems that Karimah stands in a dilemma: she wishes to declare and prove that Islam gives women freedom, but her belief in textual literalism and limited understanding of Islam drives her to define freedom in a limited and restricted sense: freedom under men's control.

Conclusion

Karimah and her female colleagues' perceptions of women's role present a portrait of women under fundamentalist orders and *pesantren* associated with them that contrasts with prevailing views of such women as powerless, secluded and objectified by men. The women in *an-Nisa Majelis Mujahidin* are, in fact, relatively powerful in the sense that they negotiate their space in the public arena. They accept the concept of male leadership but define their status as advisers to male leaders and create roles for themselves in society and the public domain. They are not secluded and play significant roles in society and in the struggle to create what they believe to be a better future for Indonesia. In this sense they reject the Saudi Arabian-inspired models provided by the male leadership.

They use feminist language to deconstruct, negotiate and eventually reconstruct their identities as Muslim women. They employ the language, concepts and ideas of equality, freedom and patriarchy, but at the same time deconstruct them and negotiate their place in society based on their perceptions that women, as God's vicegerents, share the responsibility to be present in public space as well as in their houses, and their concept of equality in difference.

Both fundamentalism and feminism are regimes of truth, as Moallem (2001) states. Fundamentalists promote God's 'single truth' to revolt against modernity, democracy, progress and development, and Western egalitarian feminism claims a subject position within the pervasive masculinism of modern liberal discourse and its paradigm of equality. They both are reacting against modernity. There is, therefore, a hybridity of fundamentalism and feminism.

This chapter has supported Lawrence's (1989) and Moallem's (2001) views that fundamentalism is a byproduct of modernity. Fundamentalisms and feminisms attempt to deal with both individual and communal identities in global and local conditions, and criticize the failure of modernity. Like post-modernism, fundamentalists' paradoxical relationship to modernity represents an attempt to move beyond what they perceive as uncivilized modernity, in a way that it is simultaneously parasitic upon it. Fundamentalists and feminists are two competing powers criticizing modernity and the dark side of modern rationalism.

Notes

- 1 Manji is a controversial figure. She is a strident critic of fundamentalism and an acknowledged lesbian. In May 2012 she toured Indonesia promoting her most recent book, *Allah, Liberty and Love: the courage to reconcile faith and freedom*. Public appearances were cancelled in several locations because of security concerns.
- 2 It consists of two Sanskrit words, *panca* (five) and *sila* (principle), as it comprises five inseparable and interrelated principles: (1) belief in the one and only God (*Ketuhanan yang Maha Esa*); (2) a just and civilized humanity (*Kemanusiaan yang Adil dan Beradab*); (3) the unity of Indonesia (*Persatuan Indonesia*); (4) democracy guided by the inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations amongst representatives (*Kerakyatan yang Dipimpin oleh Hikmat Kebijaksanaan dalam Permusyawaratan/Perwakilan*); and (5) social justice for the whole of the people of Indonesia (*Keadilan Sosial bagi Seluruh Rakyat Indonesia*).
- 3 *An-Nisa* is an Arabic term that literally means 'women', but here refers to one of the departments under the structure of the MMI organization.
- 4 MMI is divided into two divisions, *Ahul Halli Wal 'Aqdi* (AHWA, or the Righteous Decision Makers) and *Lajnah Tanfidziyah*. The responsibility of AHWA, formerly led by Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, is to carry out the decisions of the congress (the highest division) and decide the general policy of the MMI, including the programmes, while the main job description of the *Lajnah Tanfidziyah* is to implement AHWA's decisions. The *Lajnah* is divided into several Divisions, which are structurally under three different leaders: Leader I, Leader II and Leader III.
- 5 Under Leader I are the Division of Economics and Finance (*Qism Iqtishadiyah was Tamwil*) and the Division of Women (*Qism an-Nisa*).
- 6 According to Thalib (1999), women have many physical and psychological obstacles due to the effects of naturally having menstruation, of pregnancy, of giving birth and of breast-feeding and taking care of babies.

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