



# GENDER AND POWER IN INDONESIAN ISLAM

Leaders, feminists, Sufis and *pesantren* selves

Edited by Bianca J. Smith and Mark Woodward

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## Part IV

# Sexuality, *shari'ah* and power

Mark Woodward and Leanne Behnamgoh

This chapter examines the practice of and discourse surrounding marriage and polygamy in contemporary Indonesia and the religious, social and political contexts in which they are located. It focuses on the case of Yogyakarta (Diyogyakarta), which is particularly relevant for this study and has rich local (Van Man Luffson 2011) and regional (Marsigit 2011) Indonesian media for more than a year (2011-12). We argue that mainstream Indonesian media across its various platforms (print, radio, television) has not only been a powerful presence in the island of Java, but also a central site for the study of the *shari'ah*. In doing this, we offer a critical analysis of the gendered and ethnic discourses that surround the construction of the *shari'ah* as a political project in an Islamic Indonesia, which is seen as an important step in the symbolic negotiation of power through social and religious discourses. We argue that the *shari'ah* is a political project that is being negotiated in the public sphere.

This study is rooted in the concept of 'the *shari'ah*' – a concept that has been widely debated. It has been defined as 'the Islamic law that governs the life of Muslims' (Khalid 2002: 10) and is seen as a source of moral and political authority. It is also seen as a source of law and the fact that its enforcement, particularly in the case of the *shari'ah*, is a political project that is being negotiated in the public sphere.

Woodward and Luffson see Islam as a political project that is being negotiated in the public sphere. They argue that the *shari'ah* is a political project that is being negotiated in the public sphere. They argue that the *shari'ah* is a political project that is being negotiated in the public sphere. They argue that the *shari'ah* is a political project that is being negotiated in the public sphere.

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## 8 The tawdry tale of 'Syech' Puji and Luftiana

### Child marriage and polygamy on the boundary of the *pesantren* world

*Mark Woodward and Inayah Rohmaniyah*

This chapter concerns the practice of, and discourses concerning, child marriage and polygamy in contemporary Indonesia and the religious, social and political contexts in which they are located. It focuses on the tale of Pujiono Cahyo Widayanto, who is more commonly known as Widayanto, and his child bride, Umi Hani Luftiana Ulfa, that reverberated through the Indonesian media for more than a year (2008–9). Widayanto is a wealthy businessman from a traditional *santri* (a pious Muslim student who studies or lives in a *pesantren*), but not *pesantren* (a traditional Islamic boarding school for the study of the Qur'an, Hadith and other classical Islamic texts), background. As one element of a strategy to transform wealth into cultural and religious prestige or, in Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) terms, to exchange financial for symbolic capital, he began calling himself Syech and established a *pesantren*. Vocal support for and practice of child marriage and polygamy were also elements of this failed strategy. Widayanto's flagrant disregard and contempt for the judicial system led to his arrest and conviction on child abuse charges in 2009.

This story is located on the fringes of the *pesantren* world. Widayanto did not study in a *pesantren*. He has neither the educational qualifications nor the ancestry to be considered a *kyai* (male Muslim leader). Until recently, both early marriage and polygamy were common in *pesantren*. Both are still practised, but have come under increasing criticism, especially from younger members of *kyai* families as well as from the public at large.

Widayanto and Luftiana are icons in a high-stakes symbolic and legal drama pitting socially and religiously conservative groups against progressive Muslims advocating reform of Islamic Family Law, the empowerment of women and modernity. Widayanto is an iconic figure in this struggle for three reasons: his flamboyant style, his defiant disregard and contempt for Indonesian civil law and the fact that he combined polygamy and child marriage in a single package.

At the time of their marriage on 8 August 2008, Widayanto, a successful businessman and erstwhile political and religious leader, was aged 43. Luftiana, who had only recently graduated from primary school, was 11 years old. Widayanto was married at the time to a woman who was then aged 25. He subsequently announced plans to marry two even younger girls, aged 7 and 9



years. This tale attracted nationwide attention because Widayanto sought out and courted the media. For many observers it is a lurid, grotesque tale of outrageous, perverted criminal behaviour. Others see it as a tale of the valiant defence of Islamic principles against the onslaught of secularism, modernity and liberalism. Progressive Muslims see 'Syech' as a paedophile and Luftiana as a victim of child abuse. Widayanto's supporters see her as the victim of overzealous police who have torn a young bride from her husband. Their story became a cause célèbre for Islamists and other supporters of traditional *shari'ah*-based family law, as well as for women's groups, some of which are *pesantren*-based, and other progressive Muslims who support efforts to bring family law matters under uniform national jurisdiction, strictly enforcing laws prohibiting child marriage and restricting or outlawing polygamy.

Islamist organizations, especially Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS), Indonesia's largest and most influential Islamist political party (Hasan 2009; Woodward 2008), were caught in the middle because they advocate both conservative understandings of *shari'ah* and modernity, and because they appeal to an urban middle-class constituency that generally opposes polygamy and child marriage. Religiously conservative but politically progressive Muslim organizations including Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) recognize the religious legitimacy of the marriage, but hold that in Indonesia civil law predominates in domains other than ritual performance. They have also challenged Widayanto's religious credentials and his right to use the honorific 'Syech'.

Much of the rhetoric surrounding the Widayanto case is hyperbolic and emotionally charged. His detractors describe him as a narcissistic paedophile and claim that cases such as this one are among the consequences of increasing Saudi Arabian Wahhabi influence on Indonesian Islam. His defenders claim that his actions are in accordance with Islamic Law and in keeping with the practice of the Prophet Muhammad. In this chapter we locate the Widayanto case in the contexts of Indonesian, and more specifically Javanese, history and culture, and locate the issues it turns on in the larger transnational Muslim discourse about modernity, women's empowerment and family law. We begin with a discussion of what is known about Luftiana and Widayanto. We move from there to a brief account of the place of polygamy and child marriage in Islam and contemporary Muslim discourse and from there to a discussion of the Indonesian, and more specifically Javanese, cultural contexts in which the tale of Widayanto and Luftiana is located. We conclude with an assessment of the significance of the case in contemporary Indonesian cultural politics, in which social practices including polygamy and child marriage, and symbolic representations of them, have become significant elements of Islamist ideology and identity.

In contemporary Indonesia, unlike that of either the early republican period (1945–66) or the New Order (1966–98), women's organizations and other socially progressive Muslim groups opposing polygamy and child marriage face new challenges. In the past, those supporting these practices were primarily supporters of socially and/or religiously conservative positions. While

these groups continue to oppose efforts to reform Islamic Family Law, contemporary Islamists support polygamy and child marriage as elements of a much larger transformative agenda. Their goal is to establish Indonesia as an Islamic state and/or society in which all aspects of social life are regulated by a narrow, literalist understanding of *shari'ah*. Polygamy has also come to figure significantly in media discourse concerning the construction of modern Muslim identities in which the manipulation and articulation of publicly visible symbols is an overriding concern. For some Indonesians associated with this movement, polygamy has become a symbol of male power (in both the social and spiritual senses), the Islamic family and of personal piety. For women located in these social contexts, accepting polygamous marriages is understood as one way of accepting *shari'ah*.

We conclude with the observation that child marriage and polygamy are symbolically significant because they are both uncommon and generally unpopular and because adopting them as symbols of Muslim identity establishes clear social and symbolic boundaries between culturally, if not politically, radical Islamist groups and the Indonesian Muslim majority, whom Islamists define as being, at least, somewhat less than fully Muslim (see Rohmaniyah, this volume). To oppose polygamy and child marriage is now, almost by definition, to oppose this larger agenda. The reverse is, however, not the case, because both were accepted practices in some segments of Indonesian society prior to the advent of contemporary Islamist social movements.

The case of Widayanto and Luftiana is one element of a much larger struggle concerning the meaning and ownership of the concepts 'Islam' and 'Muslim' in contemporary Indonesia. It is also an example of a rearguard defence of pre-modern cultural practices against the onslaught of elements of modernity that are at most tangentially related to religion. Delayed marriage is one element of the demographic transition that has accompanied modernity, urbanization and industrialization wherever it has occurred (Jones *et al.* 1998; Kirk 1996). In almost all pre-modern societies, women are typically married in their early to mid-teens, shortly after the onset of puberty. Increased participation in the formal sector labour force, and the need and desire for formal education seem to lead almost inevitably to increases in the average age of first marriages and falling birth rates. The Indonesian case clearly demonstrates that there can be a significant lag between social practice and cultural norms. Over the past several decades the average age of marriage has risen and birth rates fallen substantially (Jones and Gubhaju 2008). There are, however, many who consider early marriage and large families to be desirable for cultural as well as religious reasons. In this respect, Widayanto and his supporters are clearly reactionaries, in the literal sense of the term.

### **Widayanto and Luftiana**

Widayanto is a self-made man (Tempo 2008). He comes from a poor village family in Central Java. He showed signs of ambition at an early age, attended

a local college and is a certified elementary school teacher. After completing his education he moved to Jakarta, because he was unable to find suitable employment. Initially he worked as a bus conductor. This is a poorly paid, menial job. In the late 1980s he began a successful career selling and later publishing Islamic books.

In 1991 he returned to his home village and established *PT Sinar Lendoh Terang* (Silenter), a publishing firm that specializes in Arabic Calligraphy. This venture was hugely successful and now exports prints and Islamic art works to other Southeast Asian countries and the Middle East. Widayanto is extremely wealthy, especially by Indonesian standards. His net worth is said to be approximately £6.5 million (US\$10 million). He has attempted to use wealth to establish himself as a political and religious leader. In the late 1990s, he became the head of his native village. In 2005, he ran unsuccessfully for Bupati (District Head) of Semarang, the capital of the province of Central Java as the candidate of Partai Amanat Nasional, the Muslim-based political party founded by Muhammadiyah leader Amien Rais.<sup>1</sup> He staged demonstrations when his bid was unsuccessful.

He also established a *pesantren* that he named Pesantren Miftahul Jannah Pujiono (Pujiono's Key to Heaven Islamic School). The name 'Miftahul Jannah Pujiono' is more than somewhat presumptuous. It suggests that attending the school is a way to secure a place in paradise and that Widayanto is the *juru kunci* (keeper of the keys) of Heaven. In 2008, he claimed to have approximately 1,000 students, despite his limited religious credentials. The school is unusual in that there is no tuition, and room and board are provided without cost for all students.<sup>2</sup> At approximately the same time he began to refer to himself as Syech Puji, despite the fact that he has only a basic religious education.

Widayanto's positions on polygamy, early marriage, and his view that only *shari'ah* should be applied in family law matters, resemble those of many Indonesian Islamists, but also resonate with those of traditional conservative Muslims (see Rohmaniyah and Rahayu, both this volume). In other respects his religious views are very different from those of neo-Wahhabi Islamists who figure significantly in Indonesian politics. He engages in a variety of devotional practices characteristic of popular Sufism, the purpose of which is to secure worldly benefits. He attributes his business success to religious practices that Indonesian Islamists influenced by Saudi Arabian Wahhabi teachings consider to be *shirk* (the association of other beings and powers with God) and *kufarat* (unbelief). He justifies his marriage to Luftiana by reference to this same set of religious beliefs and practices as well as to Islamic law.

In a 2008 interview, Widayanto stated that before opening his business in 1991, he performed austerities and ritual devotions for eighteen months (SciForums 2008). He explained,

Because I wanted to be successful in my business I performed *Wirid* and recited *Salawat Nariyah* starting at midnight and continued without

sleeping until dawn for eighteen months. I did this following the advice of Mbah Mad (KH. Achmad Abdul Haq) of Pesantren Watucongol in Mutilan.

*Wirid* is the practice of reciting verses from the Qur'an in the hope that God will grant a request. *Salawat Nariyah* is a prayer of intercession that refers to the ways in which God blessed the Prophet Muhammad and removed difficulties from his path. It requests similar types of blessing for those performing it. It is widely believed that those who recite this text 4,444 times will realize their desires. Wahhabi- and Salafi-oriented Islamists consider both practices to be *shirk*.

Founded in 1879, Pesantren Watucongol is among the oldest in Java. It is known as a centre for the teaching and practice of Sufism. KH. Achmad Abdul Haq (1932–2010) was a charismatic figure known for his healing and other spiritual powers. He was a spiritual adviser to cabinet ministers, business and political leaders, including former Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri. It is clear from Widayanto's reference to this school that he has strong ties to the mystical variant of Islam, and to a sub-variant of that tradition concerned with the use of mystical practice for worldly purposes. Wahhabi- and Salafi-oriented Muslims reject this interpretation of Islam on theological grounds. Many traditionalist Muslims consider it to be unethical and a sign that those who practise it are consumed by *nafsu* (passion).

Widayanto explained that he balanced this devotional programme with hard work and by making substantial charitable donations. While he was building his business he periodically conducted a type of voluntary fast called *nglempus*. This is to refrain from eating, drinking and sleeping for a period of days, with the intent of attaining a particular goal. Widayanto stated that he periodically conducted this fast for periods ranging from three to eleven days. This practice is common among traditional Javanese Muslims at all levels of society. Villagers, university students, politicians and businesspeople, as well as *pesantren* students, engage in it. He also claims to have performed even more strenuous austerities that he would not discuss. Taken together, this evidence points to the conclusion that the quest for *kesaktian* (spiritual power) is an important element of his religious life.

Prior to her marriage to Widayanto, Luftiana was an entirely anonymous primary school student. She is said to be very intelligent and, according to her teachers, to have been the best student in her class. Judging from photographs she is physiologically mature for her age. She is precisely the sort of young girl who some elite Javanese men have traditionally sought as wives or concubines. Before her marriage to Widayanto she is said to have mentioned obtaining a higher education and making enough money to send her parents on the *Haji* (pilgrimage to Mecca) as being her goals in life. Many young, ambitious Indonesian Muslims have similar goals. After marrying Widayanto she stopped attending school. One of her teachers described her as being mentally and spiritually broken (Misterionline 2008a).

### Polygamy and child marriage: global and Islamic contexts

Questions concerning family law are central issues in religious, social and political discourse in many contemporary Muslim societies (Abou el Fadl 2002; An-Na'im 2002; Esposito 2002; Lawrence 2000). Family law was one of the few aspects of *shari'ah* that was not abrogated by colonial states and also the one that touches the lives of most Muslims most directly. For both of these reasons it has become a potent source of Muslim identity and, consequently, an often bitterly contested issue in post-colonial Muslim societies. Abdullahi An-Na'im (2002: xi–xii) puts it this way:

IFL (Islamic Family Law) has become for most Muslims the symbol of their Muslim identity, the hard irreducible core of what it means to be a Muslim today. This is precisely because IFL is the main aspect of *Shari'ah* that is believed to have successfully resisted displacement by European codes during the colonial period and survived various degrees or forms of secularization of the state and its institutions in many Islamic countries.

Debates concerning family law are rooted in more general controversies about how the Qur'an and Hadith (traditions concerning the words and acts of the Prophet Muhammad) are to be interpreted. Kalid Abdou el Fadl (2002) suggests that two general hermeneutic strategies inform a wide range of theological and political debates, including those concerning family law, in the contemporary Muslim world. One views the scriptural corpus of Islam as an 'open text' that encourages, and indeed requires, creative exegesis. The other understands this same body of materials as a 'closed text' that limits the creativity and agency of readers and interpreters. Those who think of Islam as a body of closed texts also tend to have revivalist worldviews and to think in terms of what Mircea Eliade (1954) terms the myth of the eternal return. They see the texts as being a historically accurate representation of the life in the 'golden age' of Islam and as archetypes that contemporary Muslims are obligated to replicate. Their arguments rely heavily on *dalil* or 'proof texts' that are often quoted without reference to the scriptural and historical contexts within which they are located. For these people, to be a Muslim is to use specific textual precedents as models for individual and social life. Those who understand Islam as an 'open text' are more inclined to seek out what Fazlur Rahman (2009) called 'major themes' in the scriptural corpus and to use them as guides for constructing forward looking visions of personal and collective identity. To put things very simply, those who choose revivalist hermeneutics maintain that because the Prophet Muhammad had many wives, some of whom were quite young when he married them, 'proper' Muslims should do the same. Many of those who choose what may be termed 'thematic hermeneutics' maintain that because the guiding principle in the Prophet's domestic life was justice, this is the principle that should guide contemporary

Muslims. This leads many to conclude that in the modern world polygamy should be outlawed because it is inherently unjust.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that this is not a binary distinction. The 'open'- and 'closed'-text hermeneutical positions are rather the two terminal points on a continuum of interpretative strategies. There are a virtually infinite number of intermediary points. One of the consequences of this is that participants in these debates cannot be divided into neat, mutually exclusive camps. Shifting coalitions rather than fixed alliances are the natural features of this discourse. As is clear from the preceding discussion of Widayanto's religious views and behaviour, agreement on one contested issue does not necessarily imply a convergence of opinion on others of equal significance. Islamists find themselves in agreement with Widayanto on family law matters and at the same time could not disagree more strongly with his choice of devotional practices. Similarly, there are many who find his devotional practice to be normative who are repulsed by his personal and social behaviour.

The differences between the two basic modes of understanding Islam are fundamental, and not likely to change. Partisans of either position are not likely to be swayed by arguments rooted in the other. The question of which general understandings of Islam, and derivative questions such as those of the status of polygamy and child marriage in Muslim societies, will turn not so much on ascertaining 'God's Truth,' but again, as An-Na'im (2002) observes, on human agency and the political inclinations and will of the nation-states in which Muslim life is located. What is certain is that questions concerning polygamy and child marriage, and other family law issues, are unlikely to be definitively resolved, because they are significant elements of Qur'anic discourse and are also the subject of a substantial body of Hadith. On this, if little else, all parties to these debates can agree.

Among the most important and probably most frequently cited passages from the Qur'an concerning polygamy is:

And if you fear that you cannot act equitably towards orphans, marry such women as seem good to you, two and three and four; but if you fear that you will not do justice between them, then marry only one.

(4:3)

The Qur'an does not deal directly with the issue of child marriage, though it was a common practice in Muslim and most other societies prior to the advent of modernity. There are Hadith that refer to the Prophet Muhammad's marriage with Aisyah when she was still a young child. Among them is:

Aisyah (Allah be pleased with her) reported that Allah's Apostle (may peace be upon him) married her when she was seven years old, and she was taken to his house as a bride when she was nine, and her dolls

were with her; and when he (the Holy Prophet) died she was eighteen years old.

(Sahih Muslim Book 8, Number 3311)

Both of these texts are authoritative and both have been subject to numerous and divergent interpretations. In the case of the Qur'anic passage authorizing polygamy, the critical concept is justice. The Hadith concerning Aisyah's marriage to the Prophet Muhammad is often cited in defence of child marriage. Muslims who oppose the practice also cite an extensive body of Hadith scholarship according to which Aisyah must have been 17 or 18 when her marriage with the Prophet was consummated (Engineer 1992: 110). Throughout the Muslim world proponents of and apologists for child marriage mention this Hadith as a proof text for their views, but generally do not mention the controversy surrounding it. Widayanto is among them. In 2009, he was quoted by the *Jakarta Globe* as stating:

I'm not just doing what I like, it's based in religion. It's in accordance with the Prophet's teaching. You can marry a 7-year-old if you like but you can't have relations with her until she starts menstruating.

(Jakarta Globe 2009)

The ambiguous nature of these texts is such that conflicting interpretations are nearly inevitable. This, together with differences concerning the appropriate exegetical strategies, makes the prospect for definitive solutions to problems concerning polygamy and child marriage exceedingly dim. It is likely that controversies such as that surrounding the marriage of Widayanto and Luftiana will continue for the foreseeable future and that nation-states will determine which interpretations are actualized in specific local contexts.

### **Polygamy and child marriage in Indonesia: historical and cultural backgrounds**

Widayanto's behaviour is not a culturally or historically isolated or unique event; polygamy and child marriage figure significantly in Javanese history and culture. These are the local contexts within which the tale of Widayanto and Luftiana are located. During and before the colonial era, questions concerning marriage, divorce, inheritance and other family law issues were regulated by a combination of Islamic (*shari'ah*) and customary (*adat*) law. Polygamy was an accepted practice, though limited primarily to political and clerical elites (Jones 1997; Nurmila 2008). It was most common, and indeed nearly universal, in royal and aristocratic families. It was not uncommon for sultans and other royals to have large numbers of concubines (*selir*) in addition to the four wives allowed by Islamic law and to father fifty or more children. As late as the 1940s, local authorities were required to scour the Javanese countryside for attractive young girls who, in exchange for as little as

a few sacks of rice or small coins, were given as *selir* to elite men.<sup>3</sup> This practice was so common that some parents kept their daughters in virtual seclusion to avoid the roving eyes of local officials. Others actively sought out such unions in the hope of securing social, economic and religious rewards. As late as the 1980s, the practice of polygamy by political elites did not evoke public criticism. The fact that Indonesia's first president Sukarno, and Yogyakarta Sultan and Vice President Hamengkubuwono IX, had four wives was widely known and attracted little public commentary.

Widayanto's marriage with Luftiana fits this pattern, though with a modern twist. With his first wife's knowledge and consent, he very publicly searched for a second. His reason was that his first wife was not willing to join him in the strenuous ascetic religious practices he believed to be responsible for his financial success. She was also not interested in playing an active role in his business and indicated that her main interests were memorizing and reciting the Qur'an. Widayanto wanted a wife who would join him in his religious devotions and become general manager of his company. It would appear that the Syech was searching not only for a wife with a *pesantren* self but also for the magical woman with whom marriage would ensure worldly wellbeing. He seems to have seen marriage with Luftiana as a way to establish himself as the dominant half of what is referred to as the power couple of Javanese culture.

Luftiana's parents were very poor prior to their daughter's marriage. They now have a large new house. Her father is reported to have commented that he had known that Luftiana would bring good fortune to the family since before she was born and that he expected that her marriage to a religious leader would bring the family good fortune in this world and the hereafter (Misterionline 2008a). His expectations were not unusual for Javanese parents who find themselves in his situation and indicate that his evaluation of his daughter's character was similar to Widayanto's.

Early marriage was common in Java only a few decades ago. Girls from all social strata were frequently married at, or even before the onset of puberty (Blackburn 2004; Jones and Gubhaju 2008). Islamic law and Javanese custom allow such unions but prohibit the consummation of marriage before the onset of menstruation. This practice is known as *nikah* or *kawin gantung*. It was, and is, especially common when the union is believed to be economically, religiously or politically advantageous for one or both families. The practice of early marriage is in no way unique to Java or to Islam. It is the norm in many pre-industrial, agrarian societies. Delayed marriage is one of the hallmarks of modernity. It is strongly associated with female, formal sector labour force participation and the associated need and desire for education. In Indonesia, both have been strongly associated with modernization since the early twentieth century.

In Java child marriage and polygamy were, and in some communities still are, justified or excused by religious concerns about fornication and adultery. It is often stated that early marriage discourages such behaviour among women, and polygamy and marriage with much younger women keeps men



away from these sins. These practices are also sometimes understood as ways of emulating the social practice of the Prophet Muhammad. For many Muslims the Prophet's behaviour is seen as a model for all aspects of personal, ritual and social behaviour. Living in accord with the Prophetic model is seen as the most certain way to obtain God's blessing in this world and the rewards of paradise in the next. For religiously observant Muslims these are very serious issues. It is for this reason that progressive Muslims have turned increasingly to the language of Islam and away from the secular language of human rights to combat Widayanto and his compatriots.

Fornication and adultery are very serious sins. They are also understood as sins that are difficult to resist because of the power of desire arising from *nafsu*. In Indonesian and other Muslim societies, social life is structured in ways that are thought to make them less likely. Early marriage is only one of a number of strategies designed to protect girls and young women from falling prey to this type of *nafsu*. In the early twentieth century many conservative religious leaders opposed female education, even at the level of basic literacy, because they feared that girls and young women would be drawn into temptation by love letters. It is likely that concerns voiced by some Islamist preachers about the propriety of Facebook and other social networking internet sites are motivated by similar concerns. There are other restrictions on female behaviour that were motivated by these same concerns. Prior to the 1930s girls and unmarried women living in the Yogyakarta *kauman* (neighbourhoods populated by *ulama* and other *santri* families found in older Indonesian cities) were not allowed to wear shoes, leave their homes after the evening prayer, or wear makeup to discourage romantic liaisons. Today the idea of young women going about barefoot would be absurd, but many conservative families and educational institutions continue to insist that young women remain home after dark (see Rahayu, this volume).

Early marriage is also a common theme in Indonesian literature and especially in the writings of Indonesia's most famous novelist Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1996, 2003). The early marriages of the two heroines frames the tale of the tension between tradition and modernity that is the overarching theme of *Bumi Manusia (This Earth of Mankind)* (1996), the first volume of his classic Buru Quartet. It is the primary theme of his subsequent *Gadis Pantai (The Girl from the Coast)* (2003); that is, the story of Pramoedya's maternal grandmother's early marriage. In both cases parents agree to give their young daughters to powerful men, a Dutch factory manager in *Bumi Manusia* and a Javanese Regent in *Gadis Pantai*, in hope of gaining economic advantage.

The promotion of educational opportunities for girls and delayed marriage were prominent themes in early Indonesian nationalism. Raden Adjeng Kartini (1879–1904) was a Javanese aristocrat and Indonesia's first feminist heroine. She is known for critiques of polygamy and early marriage and for advocacy of educational opportunities for girls and women (Taylor 1989). Kyai Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of the Muslim modernist organization Muhammadiyah, also advocated education for girls and young women as a

necessary component of his strategy for the modernization of both Islam and Indonesian society. Restricting or banning child marriages and polygamy and other family law issues have been core issues for secular and Muslim women's organizations throughout independent Indonesia's history (Blackburn 2004; Martyn 2005).

In Indonesia today opinion is divided about both early marriage and polygamy. The modern educated middle classes overwhelmingly oppose both. Among rural populations, religious and cultural conservatives, both are common and widely accepted. In many villages girls are typically married at, or below, the legal minimum age of 16. In some instances the girl's age is overstated on marriage registration documents. What is called *siri* or secret marriage is also common. In such cases a religiously valid marriage is not legally registered. The view that early marriage is both natural and desirable is widespread. Many Indonesian men feel that to marry a woman beyond her early twenties is not acceptable. It is often said that once they pass this age, women will become too interested in their careers and will not be good wives or mothers. These views remain common even among young men who are themselves highly educated. Marriage often crosses generational lines. It is not uncommon for men to be of approximately the same age as their wife/wives' parents.

Early and polygamous marriages are particularly acceptable when they bring financial, social and religious benefit to the bride's family. Poor parents are often willing to give young daughters to wealthy men, even as second, third or fourth wives, for financial gain and to acquire high-status sons-in-law. Giving a daughter to an esteemed religious figure such as a *kyai* is also thought to be a source of God's grace and blessing. Conversely, among the traditional religious elite it is common for parents to seek young daughters of especially esteemed figures as brides for their sons because these girls are believed to be sources of blessing as well as social status. Early and polygamous marriage is often thought to be desirable because it is in conformity with the *sunnah* (social and religious practice of the Prophet Muhammad, his family and companions).

Early and polygamous marriage also resonates with Javanese cultural assumptions concerning sexuality and spiritual power. These intersect with *shar'iah*-based concerns with gender segregation and prevention of sexual sin in complex ways. Gender segregation in either its traditional forms, or those described in chapters in this volume by Rohmaniyah and Rahayu, are strategies for containing sexuality by bringing it under the control of *shari'ah*. Early marriage is another.

### Resurgent polygamy and democratic change

Public advocacy of polygamy and child marriage are more common today than was the case prior to the democratic transition of 1998. This is especially true about polygamy. Numerous books have been published on the subject and it is often the topic of television talk shows. Some politicians, especially

those from PKS, openly endorse it. To have more than one wife has become something of a status symbol for successful men concerned with presenting an Islamic image (Feillard 1999). This is largely the result of the easing of the hegemonic cultural policies of the New Order regime of Indonesia's second president, Suharto, who ruled the country with an iron hand for thirty-three years (1965–98). The New Order regime was culturally as well as politically authoritarian. While it championed Indonesia's cultural diversity, it simultaneously sought to define the limits of diversity and stifled dissenting voices. Unlike his predecessor Sukarno, and most historical Indonesian leaders, Suharto was a committed monogamist. He not only practised monogamy, he encouraged and tried to enforce it. The monogamist family in which a loyal, subservient wife established harmony and tranquillity was the New Order paradigm for both the family and the nation (Artha 2007; Woodward 2010). Polygamy was restricted, and prohibited for Indonesia's millions of civil servants. It could be practised quietly, but could not be openly discussed or advocated.

As Suzanne Brenner (2007) has noted, the era of free speech that accompanied the fall of the New Order and the democratic transition of 1998 removed these restrictions. Many topics, ranging from the idea of an Islamic State to the anti-communist politicicide and blood bath that accompanied the founding of the New Order that could not be talked about for decades, are now openly and enthusiastically debated. Polygamy is no exception. Advocacy of polygamy has become an important part of the political and cultural agendas of Indonesia's resurgent Islamist movement. Islamist political parties, including PKS, and militant groups operating outside the electoral system, including *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI) (Indonesian Council of Jihad Fighters), support polygamy as a means of increasing the size of their organizations because polygamous marriages produce more children and hence more party cadres, or martyrs in the case of MMI (see Rohmaniyah, this volume). It is also supported by apolitical fundamentalist social movements widely referred to as Salafi that understand polygamy as an element of the genuinely Islamic way of life. For many people associated with these groups, living in a polygamous family is part of what it means to be Muslim.

Indonesian Islamists are concerned as much with cultural as they are with overtly political issues. The transformation of Indonesian cultures on the basis of what they understand to be Prophetic models is among the most prominent themes in Islamist discourse. Polygamy and, to a lesser degree, child marriage now figure significantly in public ideological as well as religious debates. They are not only discussed but also advocated as Islamic practice. In general, people with this orientation look to Islamic scripture for concrete behavioural models, not for more complex abstract conceptual models.

Many of the new polygamists are wealthy businessmen. Some claim that polygamy is good for women because they marry their boyfriends instead of engaging in adulterous relationships with them. Some polygamy advocates go so far as to claim that the practice is obligatory for men who can afford it, and who can treat multiple wives justly in accordance with the *shari'ah*

requirement requiring equal treatment. They rarely reflect on what justice in the context of a polygamous family might entail or how women, including their wives, might define it. It is not possible to support the position that polygamy is obligatory on the basis of Islamic law. The claim is an assertion rooted in ideological conviction and theological ignorance.

To denounce these practices, and especially to denounce them in the language of Islam, can be understood as a mode of counter-radical discourse. Muslim feminists and other opponents of polygamy argue that it is impossible to treat multiple wives and their children equally and that for this reason polygamy constitutes domestic violence. They consider child marriage to be child abuse, no matter what its status in traditional Islamic law may be. Many are convinced that the legal age for marriage is too low and that marriage at less than 21 years of age endangers the physical and emotional health of young women.

Widayanto's marriage to Luftiana is not the first polygamy case to become a media sensation. Puspito Wardoyo, a successful businessman who operates a chain of grilled chicken restaurants, began flaunting and promoting polygamy in 2000 (Van Wichelen 2009). He was awarded a polygamy prize in a competition sponsored by the Indonesian Polygamy Society (Masyarakat Poligami Indonesia), a group he founded. He was subsequently featured in numerous magazine and newspaper articles and appeared on popular television talk shows. Wardoyo attributes his business success to his adherence to polygamy and other Islamic practices. He has also stated that the fact that he has more than one religiously acceptable sexual partner enables him to avoid the sins of fornication and adultery. Feminist and other progressive Muslim groups were outraged by Wardoyo's statements and staged demonstrations in response. He is, however, generally considered to be something of a buffoon and not a serious political actor.

### **Polygamy and child marriage in Indonesian religious and political discourse**

Polygamy and child marriage remain common and, for a small, but significant, segment of the population, are culturally and religiously acceptable in contemporary Indonesia. They are, however, generally located in local and private social and cultural space. Even when they are not concealed, they are rarely discussed or displayed publicly. Men do not generally advertise the fact that they are marrying a young girl. Rather they treat it as normal and unexceptionable social behaviour or alternatively seek to hide it, even, and perhaps especially, from their wives. It is likely that Widayanto could have privately married Luftiana and even the two other younger girls he planned to marry and not have attracted public, much less national, attention. This is an example of what Peter Berger (1967) and Thomas Luckmann (1967) have described as the privatization of religion. The practice of polygamy and child marriage has not vanished in modern Indonesia, but it has, until recently, rarely been the topic of public discourse.

Widayanto chose to make child and polygamous marriage part of his public persona and bid for celebrity, in effect deprivatizing them. In so doing he set the stage for a social drama and highly contested public discourse with much wider implications. By placing early marriage in the public square he added a new dimension to debates concerning relationships between normative and religious law and drew secular and religious authorities into a public discourse which appears to be moving in the direction of a zero-sum game. He could have chosen to locate his marriages in the ambiguous space of *siri* as religiously valid but legally unrecognized. He chose instead to provoke a public debate in which such ad hoc compromises are impossible. Widayanto's public performance made it impossible for many other Indonesian political and religious leaders to remain silent. It also pulled the issue of child marriage into the larger discourse concerning state-religion relations.

Today, advocacy of child marriage and polygamy is associated with other, more overtly political aspects of an increasingly radical Islamist agenda. It is perhaps for this reason that Indonesian Islamists, including PKS, came to Widayanto's defence, even though they utterly reject his more general religious orientation. According to a report on SciForums (2008), PKS leader Hilman Rosyad Syihab described Widayanto's marriage to Luftiana as being not only religiously valid, but also normal practice. He also stated that the Indonesian law establishing 16 as the legal age of marriage for young women was only a suggestion and that it is not obligatory. PKS stood nearly alone in its defence of Widayanto. Not surprisingly, Puspo Wardoyo, who now heads *Masyarakat Poligami Indonesia* (Indonesian Polygamy Society) also pledged to support Widayanto (Misterionline 2008b).

Umar Shihab, of the normally conservative *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars, MUI), condemned Widayanto and expressed his personal sympathy for Luftiana. As reported in *Jakarta Globe* (2009), he said: 'Men should marry adults; there are a lot of other prospective brides around. Why has he married a 12 year old? The poor girl.'

A very significant MUI *fatwa* (non-legally binding opinions based on Islamic legal norms) stated that marriages under the ages specified by Indonesian civil law are prohibited (Platzdasch 2009). According to a report in *Detiknews* (2009), MUI stated that, as long as Widayanto had not had sexual relations with Luftiana prior to the time she began menstruating, he had not sinned, but that Indonesian law must be enforced. Prosecutors filed charges of violating the Marriage Act of 1974, exploiting a child and illegally employing a child. This is a concerted effort not only to bring a suspected paedophile and child abuser to justice, but also to reassert the supremacy of civil law and the sovereignty of the Indonesian state.

Widayanto was jailed in connection with child abuse charges in March 2009. He was held for thirteen days, and released subject to the proviso that he report regularly to police headquarters. He was arrested again in July for failing to comply with the conditions of his release. The outcome of the case remained uncertain for months, in part because Luftiana refused to cooperate

with police investigations. Widayanto's lawyer explained to Jakarta Globe (2009):

Ulfa has menstruated, which means she's an adult who can think for herself. She has never filed a complaint to the police. She is happy with her husband, but now her husband has been arrested. So tell me, who's the victim here?

It is also the case that victims of sexual abuse are often unwilling or unable to name their abusers, much less file police reports, until they are certain of their safety.

A group of *ulama* (Muslim scholars) associated with the *pesantren* tradition of Nadhlatul Ulama have lent their support to efforts to deny Widayanto the religious legitimacy he claims. In particular, they questioned his right to use the Islamic title 'Syech'. They expressed concern that he used the title despite having never studied in a *pesantren* or addressed a religious gathering. Kyai Hajji Suyono explained that, while it is not a matter of law, the title 'Syech' is customarily reserved for people with deep understanding of Islam and exemplary behaviour. He also expressed concern about Widayanto's arrogance and fear that his behaviour and use of the title 'Syech' would tarnish the image of Islam. He very pointedly referred to Widayanto as *saudara* (brother) and not *Bapak* (father), which would normally be appropriate for a man of his age. This was a very powerful symbolic rebuke. The *ulama* also stated very clearly that, despite the fact the 'brother' Puji's marriage to Luftiana is legal in *shari'ah* terms that he should be prosecuted for violating Indonesian civil and criminal statutes. They promised to cooperate fully with the police investigation (Nadhlatul Ulama 2009). Coming from representatives of the *pesantren* community and tradition in which Widayanto has used to establish his Islamic credentials, a more devastating critique is hard to imagine.

## Conclusion

The case of Widayanto and Luftiana is different from other high-profile polygamy cases, for two reasons. The first is that it involves child marriage. The second is that, because it has become embroiled in the legal system it has led to a direct confrontation between political forces with entirely different views of the relationship between civil and religious views of family law. One group advocates the rule of positive law; the other, the rule of religious law. This has led to an unlikely alliance between traditional conservative Muslims, including Widayanto, and Islamists, including PKS. Widayanto and Luftiana are now at the centre of a controversy of much greater significance than their own tawdry tale, the resolution of which may prove to be difficult, and which has significant implications for the future of Islam-State relations in Indonesia. This is a zero-sum political, legal and religious game in which compromise on basic issues seems impossible. The game is not just about Widayanto's guilt or

innocence. It is also about Muslim identity and how Islamic teachings should be put into practice in *pesantren* and the wider society. That may be why the legal cases against Widayanto drag on at a snail's pace. On 24 November 2010, he was sentenced to four years in prison for child sexual abuse.

Ultimately the rule of normative law triumphed. This does not, however, resolve the underlying legal, religious and cultural questions. Nevertheless, comparative demographic studies indicate that time is on the side of the progressives and that, as the course of modernization continues, so will the demographic transition. As the practice of child marriage declines and collective memory of it grows dimmer tales like that of Widayanto and Luftiana will seem even more outrageous than they do today. If delayed marriage is the social norm, religious arguments in favour of child marriage will fall on increasingly deaf ears. In Peter Berger's (1967) terms, it would seem that at least as far as these issues are concerned, progressive Islam is the emerging sacred canopy for Indonesia in the twenty-first century.

### Notes

- 1 Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN) is a nominally secular party whose base of support is almost entirely drawn from the modernist Muslim organization Muhammadiyah.
- 2 Most *pesantren* do not charge fixed tuition. Fees are usually made on a sliding scale determined by the student's financial status. Typically, room and board cost approximately 200,000 Indonesian Rupiah (£13/US\$20) per month, per student.
- 3 *Selir* were legally the property, not wives, of their husbands. The number of *selir* nobles could have been limited only by their ability to provide for them.

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## 9 Constructing sexuality in a panopticon *pesantren*

*Mustaghfiroh Rahayu*

The traditional image of the *pesantren* (a traditional Islamic boarding school for the study of the Qur'an, Hadith and other classical Islamic texts) is that of a gender-segregated Islamic educational institution in which all aspects of life, including sexuality, are governed by *shari'ah*-based regulations. Because governing and limiting the expression of sexuality is an important aspect of *shari'ah*, it is also a basic element of *pesantren* culture. There has almost certainly always been tension between these ideals and the actual discourse about and practice of sexuality among *pesantren* students. This chapter concerns the discourse and practice of sexuality in a new type of *pesantren* that has developed in Yogyakarta and other Indonesian university communities in recent years. In these communities, some *pesantren* are no longer autonomous Islamic educational institutions but, rather, function primarily as secure dormitories and modern regulators of sexuality.

As Indonesian society modernizes and negotiates with the influx of competing discourses on sexuality, Indonesian youth are faced with new opportunities for sexual practice with new sets of meanings. These social changes in youth culture have influenced Indonesian Muslim parents' preference for *pesantren* as living places for their children when they leave home to study. These preferences are especially pronounced among parents of female students. Living arrangements in *pesantren* regulate and enforce Qur'anic teachings in order to protect female students from premarital sexual activity. A report based on research in Yogyakarta in 2003 horrified Indonesian parents by revealing that 97 per cent of female students at one private university were no longer virgins. The absence of supervision in dormitories and a lack of social control were reasons cited for the students' sexual activity (Wijayanto 2004). Although the validity of this research was debated, it sounded a warning bell for parents.

This chapter analyzes the dynamic negotiations between *santri* (a pious Muslim student who studies or lives in a *pesantren*), *nyai* (a wife or daughter of a *kyai* – a male Muslim leader) and teachers in the construction of discourses on sexuality in a *pesantren* for female university students. It addresses questions concerning the nature of sexual discourse in *pesantren*, how *pesantren* discourse and gendered structures affect sexuality and how students negotiate with these discourses through practice. The discussion focuses

primarily on a *pesantren* complex I will refer to as Gedung Santriwati, a residential facility for Muslim female students in Yogyakarta.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Pesantren*: a subculture?**

*Pesantren* education is socially and physically located within a boarding house complex with the house of the *kyai* at the centre. This spatial arrangement means that interaction between students and the teacher persists twenty-four hours a day, leading to the construction of strong social bonds between them (Dhofier 1990: 8). These residential schools are dedicated to the transmission of classical Islamic texts, including study of the Qur'an and Hadith (traditions concerning the words and acts of the Prophet Muhammad), legal texts (*fiqh*), mysticism (*tasawwuf*) and Arabic grammar (*alat*). The defining characteristics of a *pesantren* include the mosque, the *santri*, the *kyai* and the teaching of classical texts. A typical *pesantren* complex consists of a mosque, study rooms (which in early times were located in the *kyai's* residence, but today are usually in a separate classroom complex), dormitories and the *kyai's* house (Hefner and Zaman 2007).

*Pesantren* life has distinctive social norms, which are very different from those of the wider society. Some attitudes, including those about sexuality that are tolerated in society, are generally unacceptable in the *pesantren*. The *pesantren* world is a distinct subculture, but is one that is nonetheless linked to society in general. Abdurrahman Wahid (2001: 2) describes six basic features of *pesantren*-society relations. First, *pesantren* lifestyles are defined as being different from the common pattern of social life. Second, *pesantren* are financially and socially supported by the larger society. Third, character-building and the acquisition of knowledge are the twin pillars of *pesantren* education. Fourth, the distinction between *pesantren* life and normal life is marked by clearly visible symbols. Fifth, the popular perception, among the *santri* population, is that *pesantren* life is a social and religious ideal. Sixth, there are attempts to use *pesantren* values as the foundation for the establishment of a new, universal value system in the wider society.

Although the identification of the *pesantren* as a subculture is debatable, the reality that *pesantren* has its own distinct norms is undeniable. *Pesantren* are known as traditional institutions of Islamic education for understanding, comprehending and practising Islamic teaching (*tafquh fiddin*) and stressing Islamic morality as a guide for daily life. Because of the weight of religious values within the *pesantren* curriculum, most Indonesian parents feel secure sending their children to them. *Pesantren* education is seen as a guarantee that their children's future lives are safe, especially now, when modernization and globalization are perceived to contribute to moral decay. The promise of enhanced religious knowledge and personal security for children leads parents to send their children to *pesantren*. Parental expectations are heightened when the children are female and approaching college age. Traditionally, parents sent their children to *pesantren* for junior and senior high school, but it is

becoming more common for parents to send their children to *pesantren* while they are studying in university. Again, in addition to the benefits of enhanced religious knowledge, parents think that *pesantren* are morally secure places.

Gedung Santriwati's founding was somewhat accidental. In 1991, three students from Medan, East Sumatra, graduated from senior high school in Yogyakarta. They were accepted at universities in Yogyakarta and needed a place to live. They approached their Qur'anic teacher, Nyai Widyasari, and she opened her door to them and they became the first *santri* of what was to become a *pesantren* for university students. Soon, she started building rooms and other facilities for the new *pesantren*, stressing the need for a special *pesantren* for university students. In an interview she explained, 'There should be a *pesantren* which is specifically for university students in this area. At this [college] age students are so vulnerable, and they need special treatment that differs from the senior or junior high school level.'<sup>2</sup> Since then, Nyai Widyasari and her husband have operated their own *pesantren*. Because the students of this *pesantren* are all female, with the agreement of her family, Nyai Widyasari was given the responsibility of heading this *pesantren*.

Only select students can study and live in this *pesantren*. Nyai Widyasari screens most students who apply to enter her *pesantren*, but she does not screen *santri* who graduate from *pesantren* schools known to have strong moral training. She stresses that morality is the basic criterion in accepting a student. The new students and their parents are obliged to meet with Nyai Widyasari, at which time parents formally hand the responsibility of their children over to her as the head of the *pesantren*.

When I conducted research in the *pesantren* in 2005, there were sixty-two *santri* living in the fifteen rooms of Gedung Santriwati. Most of the students were enrolled at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Yogyakarta. The others were students at secular universities in the city. The *santri* at this *pesantren* came from middle and upper class families. Thirty-seven possessed motorcycles, fifty-five had cell phones, thirty-six had both and only six possessed neither. Gedung Santriwati's neighbours could easily identify the *santri* because of their relatively stylish and expensive clothes. The way these students spent their leisure time was also different from *santri* in other *pesantren*. Many of them spent their weekends in shopping malls, hotel swimming pools near the *pesantren*, tourist areas and spas. These activities marked the class differences between these more wealthy *santri* and those of *santri* from ordinary *pesantren* in the area who could not afford such luxuries.

### ***Pesantren* activities: a form of discipline**

No matter where they spend their day, *santri* are obliged to be at the *pesantren* by *magrib* (the sunset prayer at around 6.00 p.m.). *Santri* begin their *pesantren* lives at this time of the day. Nyai Widyasari usually leads the prayer and continues with *wirid* (recitation of selected Qur'anic/Arabic texts). She then leaves the prayer hall and is replaced by another teacher, who teaches Islamic

texts until *isya'* (evening prayer time at around 7.00 p.m.). After *isya'* comes the most important part of the *santri* schedule: reading the Qur'an in front of Nyai Widyasari, one by one. *Santri* always try their best to come to this session. They can be absent from *magrib* prayers and study, but they try hard not to miss this class. It is at the end of these *pesantren* activities that *santri* can continue their personal activities in the *pesantren* building. Their *pesantren* life starts again in the early morning, at around 4.30 a.m., by performing *subuh* (the morning prayer) and reciting one special chapter of the Qur'an, *Yasin*, together. They maintain this schedule every day, except for Saturday and Sunday mornings, when they have classes after the morning prayer.

The *santri* study five books. One of them is a book about prayer that includes instructions for praying in specific life situations; two books discuss mysticism; one book relates to women's behaviour; and another focuses on Qur'anic exegesis.<sup>3</sup> All of the teachers are men. Thus, one of the *pesantren* regulations is that *santri* in-class behaviour must be modest. Modesty in this *pesantren* means covering the hair properly and wearing a skirt or sarong. Most female *santri* choose to wear a *mukena* (prayer robe) over their regular attire. Indonesian and other Malay Muslim women wear this robe for praying, even when praying alone. There are two types of *mukena* – a one-piece variety and a two-piece variant that includes a top and bottom. In either case, the robe should be very loose, to cover the whole body except face and palms. White is the traditional colour, although now there are many other choices of colour and pattern, as *mukena* have entered the realm of Muslim fashion. The *mukena* establishes an envelope of purity and holiness around the female body and is sometimes said to have protective powers.

The requirement to dress modestly while attending class is not the only form of sexual discourse in the *pesantren*. There are multiple lists of regulations, which are considered as 'sexuality' regulations. One is a list of regulations regarding *santri* relations with males; included are the prohibition on leaving the *pesantren* building after the sunset prayer, regulations for meeting male guests, prohibition of visiting male boarding houses in the neighbourhood of the *pesantren* and a prohibition on riding with a male on a motorcycle. Another list of regulations concerns proper clothing both outside and inside the *pesantren*. *Santri* are not allowed to wear tight blouses, shirts and trousers. Blouses must be long enough to cover the bottom, the headscarf must cover the bosom and whatever they choose to wear must cover their arms completely. Inside the *pesantren* they must wear a skirt or sarong that covers their ankles, and they are prohibited from wearing transparent skirts. Among those regulations, the stiffest punishments are applied to *santri* who break the regulations regarding relationships with males. *Santri* who break the rules on modesty are called before the *santri* body, and those who break rules related to male relationships are called before Nyai Widyasari directly.

Friday is usually a holiday for Islamic institutions, including in this *pesantren*. To welcome it, there are no classes on Thursday night, which is

considered a joyful night because they perform singing/chanting of *shalawat* (poems to praise God and the Prophet Muhammad) as well as hold their weekly meeting. It is also a time for *santri* who break the rules to receive punishment from the student body or, in the case of more serious infractions, from Nyai Widayarsi.

### Heteronormativity rules

From the way this *pesantren* highlights relationships with males as a serious threat to *santri* morality, it is clear that it fully supports heteronormativity. The aim of the regulations on sexuality is to prevent male–female relationships that could lead to sexual activities including same-sex sexual relationships. *Santri* commented that the regulations of the *pesantren* actually provide them with an easy way to go out and meet anyone they want during the day, which eliminates any interest in same-sex sexual activities in the *pesantren*. In contrast, in many *pesantren* that prohibit their *santri* from having contact with the opposite sex, same-sex sexual relationships of various forms are common. Heteronormativity is also prevalent in aspects of *santri* daily life in relation to sexuality. Their relations with the opposite sex become the main topic of discussion when it comes to sexuality issues. Much of their chit-chat, the way they treat their bodies and their ideas about beauty and dating reflect focus on relationships with males. They stated that same-sex sexual relationships have no appeal.

Sexuality is a challenging topic for *santri*. It is challenging in part because it is one of the reasons they live in the *pesantren*; to guard against the moral decadence that is the result of sexual acts. Another reason is because a strong taboo surrounds this topic. There are many factors that contribute to discourses on sexuality. These include religious teachings, family backgrounds, the power of *pesantren* through its regulations, the media they read/watch, peer-group pressure and the very architecture of the *pesantren*.

Among these, the last three strongly influence *santri* sexual discourse most strongly. *Santri* obtain a great deal of information about sexuality from television. One *santri* admitted that she learned how to kiss from watching soap-opera dramas. When watching, she commented, ‘They can do that because “their world” is different from ours.’ What she means by ‘their world’ is the worldview which constructs ideas about what is considered permissible and prohibited. Interestingly, most of the *santri* I interviewed confessed that they have watched ‘blue films’ (pornographic movies) with their university colleagues in their boarding houses (not in the *pesantren*). They describe such films as ‘movies from the period of ignorance’, a reference to Arab social practice at the time of the Prophet Muhammad. However, almost all of them asserted that they had not finished watching any of these films because they felt uncomfortable, even disgusted, with what the actors were doing.

Peer groups contribute to young people’s constructions of sexuality. Because these students live away from their families, friends are inevitably the

first people they talk with about any matter, including sexuality. They often, for example, approach a student studying nursing when they encounter problems related to sexual and reproductive health. Their relationships with university colleagues also shape their sexuality. The university campus, which does not segregate male and female students, gives them the freedom to have contact with their male counterparts. *Santri* who are active in social clubs and other student organizations have even more opportunities to have relationships with males.

The architecture of the *pesantren* also contributes to the sexual discourse. The location of *santri* rooms at the back of the complex does not allow them to get in/out of the complex without passing Nyai Widyasari's house. Moreover, the only gateway is located precisely beside Nyai Widyasari's room, which incorporates a huge pane of one-way glass through which the people inside the room can see outside, but outsiders cannot see in. This 'panopticon' like space arrangement, arguably, enables Nyai to monitor what clothes the *santri* wear, the way they wear their veils, with whom they go and so forth. Whether the Nyai actually monitors them is questionable; however, all the *santri* believe that Nyai always sees whatever they do from her room.

The most common sexual practice in this *pesantren* is dating boyfriends. Boyfriends are an open topic of conversation. Everybody knows who is whose boyfriend. It is commonly understood that whenever a *santri* starts returning late to the *pesantren*, it means that she has a boyfriend. The time restrictions under which they live encourage them to attempt to spend much of the day with their boyfriends. However, they insist that their way of dating is 'Islamic' dating, which does not involve any physical contact. The common activity on a date is extended conversation with one's boyfriend after class and having lunch together. Some of the *santri* do not even allow their boyfriends to shake their hands, much less hold hands.

### **Which/whose powers are exercised here?**

To identify who has what kind and how much power, what is considered to be power and what the sources of power are, is not easy in a *pesantren*. It would be simple to say that in this *pesantren* the Nyai possesses the power, but as a matter of fact, regulations, which are agreed to by *santri* in a democratic process, also have power. On the other hand, when we are tempted to think that power is embodied in regulations, we must be reminded of the fact that ultimately, decisions regarding regulations are in the hands of the Nyai. Power in this *pesantren* is omnipresent; it permeates *santri* daily life. Applying Foucault's (1980) understanding of the concept of power to *pesantren* life we can conclude that power in the *pesantren* is not centred in a place or position but it exists everywhere. In this *pesantren*, power operates locally; it circulates in the capillaries of the social body, and emanates from every point in the social field. It tries to control its targets effectively through discipline, training, surveillance and documentation, hence its panopticon features (Foucault 1995).

Discipline is one mechanism for the operation of power (Foucault 1980). The relationship between knowledge and power creates discipline. It might be said that disciplines are techniques for assuring the ordering of human multiplicities. The heterogeneity of the members of this *pesantren* is subjected to the mechanisms of discipline. Discipline in Gedung Santriwati is expressed through the distribution of space and the timetable which the students live by.

The distribution of rooms in a *pesantren* gives individual *santri* no private space. Everyone easily accesses all the space, with the single exception of the shower room, which they are allowed to use for short periods only, because other *santri* always need it, too. This more or less effectively prevents *santri* from practising, or even coming to desire to practise, masturbation or same-sex relationships. The fact that their dormitory rooms are closed only when they go to bed limits the *santri* from doing anything that violates established convention. Due to the location of rooms, precise documentation of the number of *santri* assigned to each of them and the rigid timetable, the apparatus of power can monitor the presence and absence of *santri* easily.

In his explication of disciplinary mechanisms, Foucault uses the term *l'examen* (the examination). The examination has the features of a ceremony of power and the form of an experiment. It involves the deployment of force and the establishment of truth. *L'examen* occurs at *santri* weekly meetings. At this time, *santri* who have broken any rules are judged and punished. The harshest punishment for a 'rule breaker' is to be evicted from the *pesantren*. It is applied when a *santri* breaks a rule related to having a relationship with a male, such as spending time in a male's room on more than one occasion. Less serious violations of rules lead to punishments including cleaning the shower rooms, toilets and kitchen and helping prepare meals.

In this examination, power is used to classify *santri* as either obedient or rebellious. The examination is in Foucault's (1995: 192) terms, 'at the centre of the procedures that constitute the individual as an effect of power, as both effect and object of knowledge'. However, different from Foucault's use of *l'examen*, which classifies people in hierarchical strata, the examination in Gedung Santriwati is not intended to create hierarchy.

The *santri* claim that examinations do not affect them much because they are another part of the weekly routine. At first, they felt embarrassed when they were punished, but after a time it became a simple matter of whether or not they were following regulations. For one of the *santri*, Dahlia, however, enduring the examination is the consequence of her decision to live in Gedung Santriwati. Dahlia is a student at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Yogyakarta. She is very active in student organizations and became a prominent female leader in activist circles. To support her activities on campus, she rents a room in a dormitory near the campus. When the activities require her to stay late at night on campus, instead of returning to the *pesantren* she stays at her rented room. As a consequence she is regularly punished by other *santri* in Gedung Santriwati. Being punished for absence from *pesantren* classes is simply one of the consequences of being a university



activist. *Pesantren* punishment is part of her weekly menu and it is no big deal for her. She is accepted as a part of *pesantren* social life despite the punishment she regularly receives.

The examination in Gedung Santriwati serves as a mechanism of power and demonstrates the reality, presence and location of power. It is not so much aimed at giving a lesson to *santri* on what is bad or good, as it is simply a part of the weekly routine. The examination reinforces the distribution of power, and serves as a reminder about the locus of power in the *pesantren* as a way of supporting a complex social function. For *santri* who do not break the rules, the examination is commonly understood as a technique to warn rule-breakers about their attitudes. Whether that warning affects them or not is beyond control of the rule-abiding. All Muslims are obliged to remind and admonish those who violate Islamic norms. So, the *pesantren's* set of rules is seen as an extension of Muslim sisterhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*).

### **Power and resistance: *nyai* and *santri* in negotiation**

Power is not power if there is no resistance (Foucault 1980: 386). The resistance process takes place in a dynamic set of relations among all participants. As a result, power relations are embedded strategic situations. Resistance can be possible, necessary or improbable. Resistance can be spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, violent, quick to compromise, self-interested or sacrificial. These points of resistance are present everywhere in power networks, including those of *pesantren* (Suyono 2002: 482–83).

No matter how hard the representatives of the student body and *Nyai Widyasari* try to keep *santri* in their 'true discourse' about sexuality, *santri* are bio-psychosocial. Their sexual activities are responses to hormonal balances, nervous systems, emotional needs as well as to Islamic moral values they have been taught. *Pesantren* assume that they have provided students with a true discourse on sexuality, but *santri* always have their own definition of true discourse.

The regulation requiring *santri* to return to the *pesantren* before *magrib*, for example, is not important for some students. They think it is acceptable not to attend *magrib* prayers as well as the classes that follow, so long as they attend the *isyah* prayer and recite the Qur'an for *Nyai Widyasari*. In this case, *santri* try to resist powers of regulation (enforced by the student body representatives) and yet obey the higher power of the leader of the *pesantren* because it is easier to negotiate with the student organization than with *Nyai Widyasari*.

Power is not always repressive; it can sometimes be negotiated. Confession is another strategy for maintaining power. As part of her method of teaching the Qur'an in the evening the students have to come before *Nyai Widyasari* one by one, in an application of *l'examen*. This method enables her to identify *santri* who come back to the *pesantren* on time or late.

Through the presence and absence of *santri*, *Nyai Widyasari* determines the true and false discourse related to sexuality in the *pesantren*. A *santri's*

presence at night is an indicator that she maintains her morality, whereas absence suggests immorality. Thus, presence is not merely related to the question of attendance, but it is related to the way power differentiates true from false discourse. Wati told me during a discussion about the many live music concerts held in Yogyakarta that, 'Fortunately, I live in a *pesantren*, so I have a reason not to go to those concerts.' In her opinion, if she went to music concerts, she would go there with her boyfriend, which she could not even think about doing, because, for her, going out with her boyfriend at night would be a huge sin.

With regard to this basic assumption we can see that the confession supports heteronormative ideologies and the preservation of virginity. Nyai Widyasari stated that preventing *santri* from having heterosexual relationships is more important than preventing same-sex sexual relationships. In other words, with this confession 'ritual' she defines the true discourse on sexuality as a heterosexual one (Foucault 1980: 123).

The confession that is held at the Qur'an reading class is also a witness to a *santri's* menstruation cycle because traditional Islamic law prohibits a menstruating woman from reading or even touching the Qur'an. Menstruation which is a private bodily function thus becomes a public matter, because a woman who is menstruating is prohibited from joining this class and is therefore a non-verbal confession. The menstrual taboo, which is itself a social construction,<sup>4</sup> is strengthened through this confession. This confession provides *santri* with the alternative concept that menstruation is not strictly a private matter, but that it could also be a public matter in specific situations. The positive effect of this is that *santri* can talk about menstruation more openly. Some *santri* admitted that gradually they were able to talk about menstruation more openly with their male friends after seeing a friend talk about it in the *pesantren*.

Another way for *santri* to negotiate with *pesantren* regulations is by renting a room in a boarding house outside the *pesantren*. In the boarding house, they can meet their male friends at any time during the day. In these spaces prohibitions related to relationships with males do not apply or at least they are a matter of personal choice.

In addition to the regulations, power relations in Gedung Santriwati can also be interpreted through the design of its architecture. The space arrangement in this *pesantren* is an example of Foucault's panopticism. The location of Nyai Widyasari's room, with its one-way glass, is a mechanism for Nyai Widyasari to control *santri* activities. This architecture convinces *santri* that they are under surveillance, even when they are not, thereby inducing them to monitor themselves constantly.

The panoptic mechanism is further extended in Gedung Santriwati practice. Nyai Widyasari has a group of senior *santri* who help her to monitor younger *santri* behaviour outside the *pesantren*. This group usually consists of *santri* who have learned the Qur'an by heart and have, in Nyai Widyasari's judgement, an excellent record of morality. When members of this group witness

another *santri* violate the *pesantren*'s 'true discourse' on sexuality, they are required to report it to Nyai Widiasari directly.<sup>5</sup> When *santri* break a regulation on sexual relationships, they have to stand before the *santri* body. From this treatment, we can see that the violation of the norms of sexuality is regarded as more threatening to overall morality than the other transgressions. Responses to cases involving the violation of norms of sexuality indicate that the power relations in this *pesantren* are deployed to control *santri*'s sexuality, including behaviour that outsiders consider to be personal issues.

### Constructing meanings

The relationship between power and knowledge in *pesantren* makes *santri* realize the nature of their existence and relationships with the world. The combination of knowledge and power on which *pesantren* life is predicated enables them to create meaning and construct personal realities. The types of knowledge found in *pesantren* are resources that can be used for the development of reflexivity and understanding of their own behaviour as well as providing models for personal behaviour, including sexual behaviour. Power relations inherent in *pesantren* life provide external control mechanisms. According to Peter Berger (1967), the provision of meaning is particularly important for an understanding of religion because of the ways in which meaning links the individual with the larger social group. Meaning is not inherent in a situation but is bestowed in the context of power relations.

As Berger (1967: 20–33) points out, the meaning system is both explanatory and normative, that is, it explains why things are and prescribes how they should be. This is a dialectic process of externalization, objectification and internalization. Through externalization, *santri* try to understand their lives, inside and outside of *pesantren*. Externalization is the process *santri* activate to understand and respond to the complexity of power and knowledge relations in their lives. By comprehending actual life experience, *santri* create material and cultural objects and internalize them in the context social life.

Regulation is the example of *santri*'s material object product. It is a result of *santri* apprehension of power and knowledge relationships in their daily lives. In another sense, *santri* also create cultural objects as a response to material objects. They create special languages and symbols for their own consumption. The statement about pornographic films from 'the period of ignorance' establishes a symbolic link between moral impropriety in contemporary Yogyakarta and pre-Islamic Arabia. This is an example of the construction of a private linguistic/cultural product that, in this case, refers to pornographic movies. *Santri* are not comfortable with the terms 'blue' or 'porn' and construct alternatives based on *pesantren* discursive conventions. However, their encounters with the world outside *pesantren* spark their curiosity. Thus, 'the movie from the period of ignorance' is a product of their 'shy' society.

As soon as one speaks of externalized products, however, one implies that *santri* attain a degree of distinctiveness against their producer. Regulation as a

product of *santri*'s externalization of their reality becomes a strange product for them. Regulation is, apparently, something 'out there'. As a result, *santri* sometimes resist regulation when they are unable to comprehend the realities it refers to. Resistance is the *santri* objectification of their reality.

The process of externalization and objectification lead *santri* to form new understandings of their realities. In this phase, *santri* come to internalize their reality by acknowledging that 'here (in the *pesantren*) is the right place'. Gedung Santriwati, with its complete facilities and regulations, is a better place for them than any other. Gedung Santriwati is a place in between other *pesantren* that have tight regulations and the boarding houses that have no regulations to preserve morality. Bunga, who has lived in the *pesantren* for three years, sums up women's *pesantren* experience well:

I enjoy living here; it is the right choice for me. I know the environment of other *pesantren* in the area, and I think Gedung Santriwati is the best place for me. The rule about returning to the *pesantren* before *magrib* prayers prevents me from doing bad things that I might otherwise do. At least, it is a mechanism to control my relationship with my boyfriend. The free time in the day is enough for me. At night it is a place to study religious teachings.

## Conclusion

Sexuality in Gedung Santriwati is not repressed, but rather it is controlled through a discursive truth regime. The *pesantren*'s truth regime on the subject of sexuality is congruent with *shari'ah*-based Islamic teachings. The main goal in controlling this discourse is protecting the *santri* from immorality as the panoptic design of the *pesantren* demonstrates. We may conclude that, in this *pesantren*, discourse on sexuality is predicated on the assumption that sexual activity, whatever form it may take, is not appropriate for *santri* of university age. This combination of discourse, discipline and practice is congruent with those intended to cultivate moral behaviour. Both play important roles in guiding the construction of *pesantren* selves and the constitution of the *pesantren* as a moral community.

## Notes

- 1 Pseudonyms for places and persons are used throughout this chapter because of the sensitive nature of some of the topics considered.
- 2 Interview with Nyai Widyasari at Gedung Santriwati Hall during my fieldwork in 2005.
- 3 The Gedung Santriwati complex applies a democratic way of selecting books for *santri* to study. Most of time, the student committee proposes books, which are then subject to approval by Nyai Widyasari and other teachers. Examples of such books include *al adzkar al Muntakhabah min kalami Sayyidul Abrar sallallahu alaihi wa alihi wasallam* by Muhyiddin Abi Zakariya Yahya bin Sarif Nawawi; *Mukasyafatul Qulub* by al-Ghazali; *Mukhtasyar Ihya' 'Ulumuddin* by Imam

al-Ghazali; *Fatawa Mu'asyirah li al-Mar'ati al-Muslimah fi ad-Din wa al-Hayat* by Ibrahim Muhammad al-Jamil; and *Shifatu Tafasir: Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Kariim Jami'il Ma'tsur wa al Ma'qul* by Muhammad Ali ash Shobuni.

- 4 Religious teachings prohibit menstruating women from touching the Qur'an. Although this belief is based on debatable interpretations of the Qur'an, *pesantren* have made a 'true' discourse about it and there is no space for other interpretations.
- 5 Included in this violation of sexuality is the example of a *santri* who received a computer as a gift from her parents. Rules in the *pesantren* prohibit *santri* from possessing computers. When Nyai Widyasari found out from a senior *santri* that the computer was stored in the girl's boyfriend's boarding house, which caused to her visit him more often, the *santri* was asked to choose between living in the *pesantren* without meeting her boyfriend and moving out. Nyai Widyasari told me that there had been other cases like this.

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## Glossary

Indonesian (In.), Acehnese (Aceh.) and Arabic (Ar.) words are indicated with italics in the glossary and throughout the text. The glossary includes foreign terms that appear routinely, while other terms have been translated in the text.

*Adab* Works on manners and comportment

*Adat* Customary laws and practices

*Aliran kepercayaan/kebatinan* Mystical groups (also known as 'belief movements')

*Balee beuet* (Aceh.) A place for religious instruction

*Dayah* (Aceh.) Acehnese Muslim school (similar to *pesantren* and/or *madrasah*)

*Dhikr* Remembrance of God

*Feminisme* Feminism

*Fatwa* Non-legally binding opinions based on Islamic legal norms

*Fiqh* Legal texts

*Gus* A title given to the son of a *kyai* in *pesantren* and *tarekat* institutions

*Hadith* Traditions concerning the words and acts of the Prophet Muhammad

*Ilmu* Knowledge; also refers to esoteric knowledge and 'spiritual power'

*Ijazah* Authorization/certification

*Inong* (Aceh.) Woman or wife

*Khalifa* A title for one who holds the highest authoritative position in Islam, including in Sufi orders

*Kitab kuning* Classical Islamic texts (literally, 'yellow books')

*Kitab Jawi* Malay language texts written in Arabic script

*Kyai* Male Muslim leader (of a *pesantren* or *madrasah*)

- Madrasah** An Islamic school that combines religious and secular curricula
- Magrib** Prayer time at dusk
- Mazhab** School(s) of Islamic law
- Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI)** The Indonesian Council of Jihad Fighters
- Majelis Taklim** Religious study group
- Muhammadiyah** Indonesia's second largest Islamic organization, founded in 1912
- Mukena** Muslim prayer robe for women
- Murshid** A title given to a male leader, usually in *tarekat*
- Murshida** A title given to a female leader, usually in *tarekat*
- Mushawarah** Discussion
- Musholla** Prayer room
- Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)** Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, founded in 1926
- Nahdlatul Wathan (NW)** Lombok's largest local Islamic organization, founded in 1953
- Ning** A title sometimes given to daughters of *kyai* in Javanese *pesantren* (literally, 'young woman')
- Nyai** A title given to wives and daughters of *kyai*; and to Muslim women specialists
- Pengajian** Religious instruction
- Pesantren** A traditional Islamic boarding school for the study of the Qur'an, Hadith and other classical Islamic texts
- Pondok** Hut
- Sakti** Spiritual power; supernatural power; magic power
- Salafism** The strain of Muslim thought located in the interpretative tradition of the thirteenth-century Hanbalite jurist Ibn Tamiyyah. Ibn Tamiyyah advocated literal, rather than metaphorical or contextual, readings of the Qur'an and Hadith, uncompromising monotheism and strict enforcement of criminal provisions of *shari'ah*
- Sapta Darma** A Javanese mystical group
- Santri** A pious Muslim student who studies or lives in a *pesantren*
- Shalawat** Poems to praise God and the Prophet Muhammad

- Shari'ah** God's given law
- Sheikh** A title for an older Muslim male leader
- Shirk** The association of other beings or power with God
- Silsilah** A spiritual chain of transmission that links Sufi initiates to the Prophet Muhammad; spiritual genealogies linking *tarekat* to the Prophet Muhammad
- Subud** (An abbreviation of *Susila Budhi Dharma*) A Javanese mystical group with branches around the world
- Sunnah** Social and religious practice of the Prophet Muhammad, his family and companions
- Syafi'i mazhab** The Syafi'i school of law (followed by the majority of Muslims in Indonesia and Southeast Asia)
- Tahlil** A line from the Qur'an ('There is No God but God')
- Tahlilan** A ritual practice where the chanting of *tahlil* is performed
- Tarekat** (Ar. *Tariqa*) Sufi order
- Tauhid** The Unity of God
- Teungku** (Aceh.) Religious scholar/teacher
- Teungku inong** (Aceh.) Female religious scholar/teacher
- Tuan guru** A pan-Malay title used in Lombok to refer to a male Muslim leader, scholar or preacher (otherwise known as *kyai*)
- Ulama** Muslim scholar(s)
- Ummah** Muslim community
- Ummi** (Ar.) Mother
- Wahhabism** The variant of Salafism founded by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahab (1703-92). Its central doctrinal positions include the absolute sovereignty of God, the definition of any belief or practice affirming the possibility of intercession with God as idolatry, and the denunciation of Muslims who reject these messages as unbelievers
- Wahyu** Divine revelation
- Wali** Saint
- Wirid** Recitation of selected Qur'anic/Arabic texts; practice of reciting verses from the Qur'an in hopes that God will grant a request



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