

Thawngmung has, with her many gifts, the potential to produce more insightful studies in the future that will be warmly welcomed by all interested academics.

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Religion, Politics and Gender in Indonesia: Disputing the Muslim Body

SONJA VAN WICHELEN

New York: Routledge, 2010, xxvi+154p.

Democratization and Islamization are the two most important developments that are shaping and influencing the socio-political landscape of Post-Suharto Indonesia. As the biggest Muslim majority country in the world, Indonesia is considered by many to have undergone a successful transition from authoritarian to democratic governance despite some limitations. A new democratic process has also witnessed the growth of Islam in Indonesia. It is generally understood that contemporary Indonesian Islam in the post-Suharto era has shown a decline in political Islam (as indicated by the weakening of Islamic political parties). However, to borrow a term, “social Islamization” is showing signs of progression (Ota *et al.* 2010, 5). This is clearly indicated by an increase in the publication of Islamic books, the popularity of veiling, a lively discussion of Muslim women’s rights, the emergence of a new generation of Islamic preachers, the growing attention accorded to the Islamic banking system, and the commodification of Islam.

This book was written in the context of the progressively changing democratization and Islamization, in which Islam has gradually moved to the center stage of Indonesian society and shaped its public sphere. Sonja van Wichelen notes how these two important developments, along with globalization (pp. xiii–xv), have enabled vibrant debates on social-cultural issues, Islam, gender, and politics to flourish and subsequently involve various actors with different ideologies. This book originated from a PhD thesis submitted to the Amsterdam School for Social Science Research (ASSR), the Netherlands, and builds on the author’s criticism of the current state of

scholarship on Islam and democracy, which she believes has mainly dealt with a debate on the compatibility of Islam with liberal democracy. Sonja tries to go beyond the classical debate. By using gender politics as a tool of analysis, she investigates how Muslims are *making* Islam compatible with democracy and negotiating their religiosity in the public sphere and within the nation-state (p. xiii). Although media analysis is the main research method used, she has also gathered data through fieldwork and interviews with more than 60 Muslims and women's organization activists collected over three periods (2003, 2004, 2005) adding up to a total of 12 months, mostly in Java (p. xxiii).

Media analysis is an important research method in this book. Sonja presents an empirical analysis of public debates on Islam and gender, focusing on four cases in post-Suharto Indonesia (all mass-mediated through print and electronic media). These were the female presidency, the manifestation of new veiling practices, the pro-polygamy campaign, and the contestation over public sexualities. Discourse analysis encompasses three analytical levels, namely, representation, discursive context, and social practices. These are used in this book to understand and analyze the four cases (p. xxiv). Throughout the six chapters, the book develops the argument that "public debates on Islam and gender in contemporary Indonesia only partially concern religion and more often refer to shifting moral conceptions of the masculine and feminine body in its intersections with new class dynamics, national identity and global consumerism" (p. xv).

While the book presents interesting facts on, and assessments of, the public debates on gender and Islam in contemporary Indonesia, it would have been better if the author had also addressed the following points. First, in delineating the context of the study in Chapter 1's democratization "Muslim Politics and Democratization," it would have been more useful if the author had clearly and thoroughly mentioned some fundamental socio-political features earlier on in the book. For example, the book did not adequately address the phenomenon of the growing practice of veiling among Muslim female high school and university student followers of the *Tarbiyah* (education) movement as an example of the explicit impact of *Tarbiyah* movement that emerged on university campuses since 1970s (p. 4). Here, in fact, this phenomenon is too interesting to be overlooked, as it provides an important clue to understand the changes in the relationships and identities of young middle class Muslim women vis-à-vis Islam and the nation-state in late New Order Indonesia. The growing adoption of veiling among Muslim female high school and university students mainly based in Java since 1980s serves as one of the important stages in the relationship between Javanese women and Islam as part of the identity formation of becoming Javanese Muslim women (Kurniawati 2012). The adoption of veiling does not simply indicate the elevation of individual's status, but also reflects a collective action to engage in the identity politics of Muslim women. This is in response to Suharto's strong grip on political Islam, and its strong control over Indonesian women, including Muslim women, through its dominant narrative of politically defeated women during the New Order (*ibid.*, 126–127). This point is crucial to understanding the pros and cons of

the growing adoption of the veil by high school and university students in 1980s. It fleshes out some of the detailed stories concerning Suharto's resistance and a shifting policy toward Muslim organizations and movements in 1991 (see Alwi and Fifrida 2002). Although veiling is one of the cases investigated in the book, the author makes only cursory references to and analysis of veiling practices in the 1980s, and skips the earlier periods to focus on cases after the 1990s (p. 45).

Second, while the author discusses the socio-political and historical context, Chapter 1 could have been rewritten more effectively to prevent confusion. For example, following the history of socio-political changes in Indonesia from the New Order to the post-Suharto period, the section "Exposure of liberal Islam" (p. 7) should have come after the section of "The Islamic turn" (p. 9). This is because historically, the emergence of liberal Islam is a new phenomenon in the 2000s; thus, it is not appropriate to be positioned so early after the section "Fluidity of Islamist movement" (p. 4). It would have been more effective if the order of the socio-political changes were revised in the following order: "Fluidity of Islamist movements," "Islamization and new publicness of Islam," and "The Islamic turn," followed by "Exposure of liberal Islam." This would not only help the general reader gain an understanding of the Indonesian socio-political changes in proper historical sequence, but also reduce the redundancy of repeated mentions of some points (such as the *Tarbiyah* movement and the *pembaruan* [renewal], etc).

Third, in explaining the features of the New Order gender ideology in the section on "Gendered interventions" (p. 15), the author cites Julia Suryakusuma's work in depicting the New Order gender ideology as State *Ibuisism* ("state motherism") (p. 16). However, it would be more meaningful if the author could provide a comprehensive explanation as early as possible in the book on how this ideology actually worked in practice, for example, for urban middle class women via *Dharma Wanita*, and for lower-class women via Family Welfare Programs (Pembinaan Kesejahteraan Keluarga, PKK) (see for instance Blackburn 1994; Robinson 2000). The author's explanatory note, I feel, comes a bit too late on page 39 under the section "Desexing Megawati" in Chapter 2 ("The Debate on Female Leadership").

Fourth, the discussion in Chapter 3 ("Formation of Public Piety") of the spread of the practice of veiling in Post-Suharto Indonesia, I was surprised by the author's statement on page 48 that "Traditionalist women wore the loose *kerudung*, which most often came in different colors. Modernist women, on the other hand, often rejected the head-covering, regarding it as a custom of traditionalist Islam" (p. 48). This is an unusual statement because it differs from the common understanding of the different practices of veiling between traditionalist Islam (*Nahdlatul Ulama*) and modernist Islam (*Muhammadiyah*). As far as I know, *Muhammadiyah* especially its women's wing ('Aisyiyah) is well known for its pioneering work to introduce veiling since 1920s as part of its effort to promote new a Islamic identity of *wanita sholehah* (pious women in Islam), though initially limited among Javanese Muslim women in Kauman Yogyakarta (see Lin 1952; Kurniawati 2007, 39–42). In contrast, women in *Nahdlatul Ulama* adopted the veil much later, albeit in a more

tolerant manner, since they believed that an “open *kudung*” was the rule, and they did not talk about the *jilbab* (a tighter *kudung*) prior to the 1980s (see Feillard 1999). Interestingly, we can see on page 67 that the author’s early statement contradicts with the author’s later assessment obtained from an interview with an informant from Naswiatul ‘Aisyiyah (women youth wing of *Muhammadiyah*). To some extent, this narrative reflects an interesting notion, yet there is ambiguity in how the author understands the basic differences in veiling practice between *Muhammadiyah* and *Nahdlatul Ulama*.

Fifth, while there is a good analysis of public debates in the four cases on gender and Islam, I expected to read more in terms of interview results—with the more than 60 respondents mentioned earlier in this book (p. xxiii) to support the narrative developed from the discourse analysis. I found only a few of the author’s original interviews presented in this book. It would have been far better if the narrative developed through discourse analysis had been accompanied by firsthand interviews with the related figures. This would have been central in the case of Puspo Wardoyo and the polygamy campaign, AA Gym, Inul Daratista, etc. A clearer presentation that highlighted the voice and agency of respondents involved in the debates would have helped generate deeper insights into related public figures. This could have facilitated the analysis while reducing the likelihood of misinterpreting the phenomenon, given that some media present certain ideologies or narratives that steer public opinion in response to some sensitive cases, such as female leadership or polygamy.

Despite the above limitations, this book is quite successful in giving us snapshots of the current developments of gender, Islam, and politics and their relation to globalization and consumerism in post-Suharto Indonesia. This book provides an interesting discussion of the vibrant discourse in the four important cases, not only between secular and Islamist players but also among Muslims themselves. This in turn underscores the greater role of Islam and Muslims in shaping the public sphere and contributing to the making of the nation-state in post-Suharto Indonesia. This book is able to present interesting data on the making of modern Indonesian citizens. It does so by presenting new images of a rising Muslim middle class made up of modern Muslim women and men, while tracking the shifting notions of masculinity and femininity in the new images of manhood and womanhood developing in post-Suharto Indonesia. This book is recommended for students or those who are interested in Islam, politics, gender, and Southeast Asian studies, and provides a general preliminary understanding of the current developments of Islam, gender, politics, and democratization in post-Suharto Indonesia, the biggest Muslim-majority country in Southeast Asia and in the world.

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Mapping the Acehese Past

R. MICHAEL FEENER, PATRICK DALY, and ANTHONY REID, eds.
Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011, xvi+292p.

One of the underlying themes in this edited volume on Aceh is that “a fresh look at the . . . archives suggests that new histories can be created” (J. G. Taylor, p. 234), so each of the articles presents a new history, a new production of knowledge, a new way of representing and looking at Aceh using old archival, historical sources that have previously already been written about from other angles. These include ancient history archaeological findings and investigations of ceramics and Muslim tombstones; the Ottoman Empire's archives on the friendship and collaboration between Acehese sultans and the Ottoman Empire; close readings from a fresh perspective of traditional Malay-Acehnese hikayat and indigenous oral traditions on *prang sabil*; the art of royal letter writing by three Acehese sultans from different periods; a very brief look at Portuguese archives; the close reading and analyses of Dutch letters, VOC correspondence, notes, and gift exchanges with the Acehese sultans and the *orang kaya*, and KITLV photographs. This book highlights the cosmopolitanism and richness of Aceh's connections to the outside world and is, according to the editors, a book about Aceh as seen from the “outsider's perspectives.” But there is an inconsistency: if it