Islamic Women's Organisations in the Indonesian Women's Movement

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Islamic women's organisations in Indonesia

- Different relationships to the women's movement
- Some Islamic women's organistions oppose the women's movement
- Others are part of the women's movement: focus of my talk
- Why are Islamic women's organisations important to the women's movement?
- Because Islamic women's organisations give legitimacy to women's rights based on theology, with reference to the Quran and Hadith.
- Why is theological legitimacy important for women's rights now?
- Because fundamentalists are saying: women's rights are Western, non-Islamic.
- Therefore, important to show that women's rights exist in Islam.

Key issues debated between fundamentalists & progressive Muslims

What fundamentalists say	What progressive Muslims say
Reject women's leadership, especially in the domestic sphere	Promote women's leadership in the public sphere (including religious sphere); tolerate it in the domestic sphere
A daughter get half of son's inheritance	Equal shares in inheritance
Support polygamy	Reject polygamy
Parents arrange marriage for daughter	Women's right to choose who to marry
No use of contraceptive	Family planning
Interpretations of religion are dominated by men	Women have the right to interpret religion
Women not supposed to go out at night	Women can go anywhere anytime

How did progressive Muslims emerge?

- 1984: Ratification of CEDAW – result of pressure of the women's movement
- Government passed by-law No. 7/1984, recognizing women's rights as human rights, including right to education and political participation.
- 1990s: widespread opposition to repressive Suharto regime (1965-1998).
- Suharto used ideology of compulsory motherhood for political control – women de-politicised as housewives and mothers, losing citizenship rights.
- Progressive Muslims emerged, in alliance with the women's movement, to counter Suharto's ideology of compulsory motherhood.
- In alliance with other women's groups, some Islamic women's organizations tried to promote women's rights at the grassroots – e.g. Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama (5 million members)

How did Islamic women's organizations contribute to the growth of the Indonesian women's movement?

- Islamic women's organisations provided theological basis to counter Suharto's ideology of compulsory motherhood.
- Inspired by translations of key works by progressive Muslim writers – e.g. Fatima Mernissi, Asghar Ali Engineer, Amina Wadud, etc.
- Topics: reinterpretation of theology, reformation of Islamic laws, etc.
- At the same time, progressive Muslims in Indonesia also wrote on Islam and gender.
- Local discourse connected with international discourse.
- Many Muslim scholars in Indonesia developed new methods of interpreting al-Qur'an and Hadith, as well as Islamic laws.
- Result: new interpretations on women's leadership in the family and in public, monogamy, inheritance, choice of marriage partner, and reproductive rights.
- This was before Suharto fell in 1998 and before the fundamentalists became so strong.
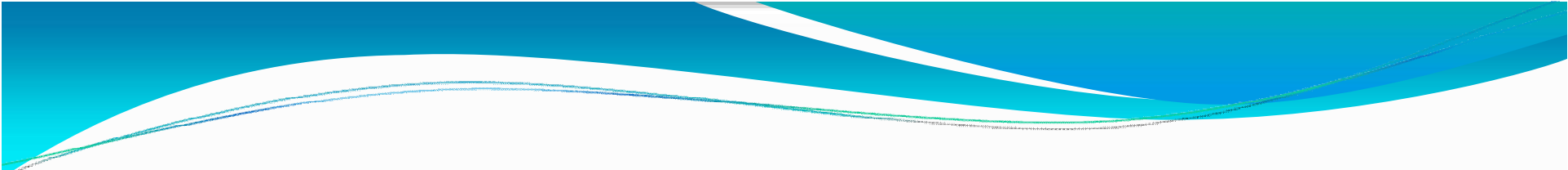
Strategies used by Islamic women's organizations

- Re-discussing and re-interpreting al-Qur'an and Hadith with new perspectives and new paradigms
- Examining Islamic values and looking for alternative interpretations which support equity among women and men
- Producing Islamic discourses based on real life conditions
- Inviting male ulamas to share ideas on gender equity

Changes from 1990s up to now in civil society

1. Increased sensitivity about gender issues by women religious leaders at the grassroots – e.g. Islamic boarding schools, village prayer groups
2. Higher awareness and knowledge about women's rights in some Islamic organizations – e.g. Muslimat, Fatayat, etc.
3. More progressive Islamic women's organizations – e.g. P3M, Rahima, Fahmina, Nahdina, etc.
4. Gender training of religious leaders: more preachers convey the importance of gender equality including the rejection of polygamy
5. Increased awareness of gender justice in religious laws and the Indonesian Constitution

Changes at state level by the women's movement, together with Islamic women's organisations

- Establishment of National Commission for Violence Against Women (1998)
- Policy on gender mainstreaming (2000)
- Anti Domestic Violence Act (2004)
- Anti Trafficking Act (2006)

Rise of politicised Islam in post-Suharto Indonesia (1998 – now)

- Democratisation gave space to political Islamists.
- Many local governments (province, district, village) captured by political Islamists.
- Many local by-laws passed that discriminate against women.
- 27 discriminatory local by-laws in different areas: e.g. all women forced to cover their heads, nightly curfew on women (not to be out after 9 pm), whipping for perceived sexual misconduct, etc.
- National level: 30 Oct 2008, Anti-Pornography Bill was passed in the Indonesian Parliament. Discourse of pornography used to advance politicised Islam. In the name of protecting women and children, women are hindered from work.
- Those opposing the Anti-Pornography Bill are called 'bad Muslims' – said to support pornography.

How are Islamic women's organisations, as part of the women's movement, facing fundamentalist challenges?

- Strengthening alliances to refuse fundamentalism and affirm Indonesia as a secular state
- Alliances between Islamic women's organizations and:
  1. Other women's groups in the women's movement
  2. Other progressive Islamic organizations
  3. Organisations in the democracy movement
  4. International networks, e.g. Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Women's Empowerment in Muslim Contexts, Coalition on Bodily and Sexual Rights in Muslim Societies, etc.
- Methods: publications, training, public debate, media strategy, advocacy, etc.

Gender training of religious leaders

Preachers
convey the
importance
of gender
equality

Local by-laws in some areas force women to cover their heads

Demonstrating against the Anti-Pornography Bill

Thank you