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Title: Representation and beyond : female victims in Post-Suharto media

Date: 2012-06-12

Women in Veils: Victims, Fighters and Celebrities

The commodification of Islamic dress in urban Indonesia has not been a straightforward process, but rather is an arena for Indonesian Muslims to think about the relationship among faith, gender, and Materiality (Jones 2007: 211-212).

During the initial period of my field research in Indonesia between August 2002 and January 2003, feminists in Muslim circles, as well as the mainstream mass media vigorously discussed the implementation of sharia. In these discussions, the position of Muslim women vis-à-vis sharia was often the focus of attention. Most of the questions concerned the marginalised position of women in the regions where sharia was about to be implemented. While women's appearances often became the focus of the Islamic movement—through the enforcement of veiling and other regulations—women's positions in the decision-making process were, for the most part, denied.

One organisation that frequently conducts workshops and discussions that concern Muslim women in Indonesia is Rahima, an Islamic women's organisation based in Jakarta (see Introduction of Rahima in Chapter Three). One of the workshops held by Rahima that I attended, *Penguatan Hak-hak Perempuan dalam Konteks Syari'at Islam dan Otonomi Daerah* (The Strengthening of Women's Rights in the Context of Islamic Sharia and Regional Autonomy)¹ provided me with an entry to the discussion circle among the members of this organisation. It also provided access to other Muslim activists and academics outside this organisation. The participants of the workshop were open-minded Muslim women and men. Although they were undoubtedly devout Muslims, they relentlessly and daringly created a space for thorough, sometimes risky, discussion of topics that concerned primarily Muslim women.

¹ Held in Bogor, West Java, 10-12 September 2002.

While working closely with some members from this feminist Muslim circle, I found that discussion of female victimisation in post-Suharto Indonesia has also transpired among Muslim women and in Islamic discourses. Among the many concerns regarding female victimisation—from veiling to women’s leadership, from domestic violence to polygamy, and from jihad to sexuality—this chapter will probe how the discourse of female victimhood relates to the debate about veiling. While those who promote Islamisation through appearances consider the proliferation of women wearing veils to be a success, the enforcement of veiling upon Muslim women has been opposed by others in the circles of progressive Islamic (women’s) groups.

In order to situate the discussion of veiling and female victimisation following reformasi, this chapter takes into account the veiling movement in the 1980s-1990s among high school students. The state’s strong rejection of this movement and the banning of veils at schools elicited a strong reaction by the female students who considered veiling a part of their religious statement at that time. The inspiration that drove these students to wear the *jilbab* (Ar., veil) may have been “simultaneously personal, religious, and political” (Brenner 1996: 676). A book entitled, *Revolusi Jilbab: Kasus Pelarangan Jilbab di SMA Negeri se-Jabotabek, 1982-1991* (Veiling Revolution: Cases of Banning Veils in High Schools in Jakarta, Bogor, Tangerang and Bekasi, hence *Revolusi Jilbab*, Alatas and Desliyanti 2002) describes some of the cases and highlights the sense of victimisation that these students experienced.

However, much has changed since then. As Suharto stepped down and the central government lost its all-encompassing control over the society, regions across the country demanded more local autonomy. Amongst the many things that surfaced along with the strengthening of the regions was the appeal to formalise Islamic sharia in local regulations. In these regions, among the first things to be regulated are women’s bodies through the act of veiling. In reaction to this, more progressive Muslims, including those at Rahima with their journal, *Swara Rahima*, voice their concerns by creatively criticising these impositions on women through cartoons.

Meanwhile, the proliferation of Muslim clothing, or its popular Indonesian term, *busana Muslim*, in urban Indonesia in the 1990s has complicated the Islamic landscape. Celebrities donning Islamic dresses that fill both print and electronic media presentations, particularly during the fasting month, with increasing accentuation on fashion, are often criticised as simultaneously tarnishing the intentions of veiling and becoming victims of consumerism. However, this “commoditisation of Islamic dress” indicates a more complex “relationship among faith, gender and materiality” and cannot be understood in separate terms of “either religion or consumerism” (Jones 2007: 211-212). As it

will be discussed in this chapter, these various voices about veiling and women's authority shift the discourse on victimisation to a more fragmented and complex map.

Veiling in Indonesia and Women's Position

Since the late 1970s, people in Indonesia witnessed the phenomenon of the 'Islamic resurgence' around the globe. Due to the proliferation of mass communication that bridges the distance between countries, the Islamic movement in Indonesia during this period cannot be disentangled from similar movements in other parts of the Muslim world (Brenner 1996: 678). The circulation of images of pan-Muslim 'brotherhood' in Indonesia has been greatly facilitated by the development in print and audio-visual media. As Suzanne Brenner notes (*ibid.*), the availability of "a photograph of a smiling young Indonesian journalist in jilbab, on site in Tehran, holding a poster of Ayatollah Khomeini and flanked by three Iranian women in long black cloaks and veils" in the Indonesian news magazine, *Tempo* (1992), might help bridge the distance between Muslims in Indonesia and the rest of the world, and contribute to encouraging a sense of solidarity with other parts of the Islamic world. The rising popularity of Muslims' adherence to particular symbols of religion, such as busana Muslim, is significant in this regard.² In the 1980s, informal discussion groups among Muslim students, veiling among female students, and the publication of Islamic books began to flourish in big cities in Indonesia (Brenner 1996, Feillard 1999, Alatas and Desliyanti 2002).³ As such, we can see that the smooth, global flow of Islamic teaching was made possible by the distribution of translated print materials that served as models of redefinition of Muslim-ness amongst Indonesian Muslims.⁴

Jilbab: Context and Images

The debates about veiling have currently transcended the 'orientalist' perspective that perceives veiling as a symbol of Muslim women's submission in the face of patriarchal religious teachings and practises. The practise of

² This is for both female and male Muslims. While a tight fitting veil has become popular among women, there has also been rising popularity of Muslim male fashion, such as *baju koko* (long-sleeved shirt sometimes worn with loose pants).

³ The prevalence of print publications for Muslim feminists in a number of Islamic countries in the 1980s was also noted by Fatima Mernissi, a Moroccan Muslim feminist, including a feminist magazine called *The Eight of March*, that appeared in Morocco in 1983, and a magazine called *Nissa* (Ar., women) in Tunisia in 1985. See Mernissi 1996.

⁴ For an eloquent scrutiny of the domestic reasons for the flourishing of the predication movement (*dakwah*) as part of the Islamic resurgence in the 1980s, see Hefner 2000, especially Chapter Five, 'The Modernist Travail'.

veiling must be understood through a multidimensional approach (Guindi 1999).⁵ Guindi notes that both women and men in Arabia wore the veil since pre-Islamic times and, as such, veiling cannot be interpreted as originally Islamic or characteristically female (1999:7). Guindi rejects the “uni-dimensional approach” that sees veiling as having been “passed from one area to another area in ‘relay’ style”, but considers the aspects of “innovation”, “assimilation and syncretism that come into play” during the time of “encounter” (1999: 3).

During the period of the Prophet, married women wore veils to differentiate themselves from slaves. The veil was worn by “lowering the headscarf to the front part of the torso” (Muhammad 2001: 39-40). To some, this style of veiling, believed to be modelled on the veils originally worn by the wives of the Prophet, represented the standard of propriety for a new style of veiling. Veiling was seen as a way to approach the moral/religious piety of the Prophet’s wives. This shows the internalisation of the ‘fetish’ about the veil, that is, a desire to be like the Prophet’s wives, who were symbols of purity.⁶

In Indonesia, since veiling has no “deep roots” in the local clothing tradition (Brenner 1996), it has always been understood to be related to Islam and to women. Brenner (1996) finds that the decision to veil among women in Java has become the cause and symbol of self-transformation, which is “informed by, and in turn contributes to, larger processes of social change occurring in contemporary Indonesia” (1996: 673).

Feillard notes three reasons why women in contemporary Indonesia accept or reject veils: a perception that it is required by their religion, a personal desire to be pious, and a buffer of protection from sexual harassment (1999: 11-14). Both Feillard (1999: 14) and Brenner (1996: 675), however, question the reason for veiling as a claim that it provides protection for women who want to go outside their homes, as Indonesian women in general have always been granted access to the public sphere.

Since the 1970s, or even earlier, veiling in Indonesia has gone through manifold transformations that coalesce religious, cultural, political, and aesthetic aspects. Currently, there are several types of head coverings that Muslim women in Indonesia wear or are familiar with: *kerudung* (long scarf that loosely covers the hair), *jilbab* (tight covering of the hair and head, except for the face) and *burka* (also known as *niqab*, loose covering of the entire body,

⁵ Criticism of such an orientalist perspective, for example, is proposed by el Guindi (1999).

⁶ Jones finds that the fetish theory can be applied to the wearing of a jilbab if the wearer believes that the moment she buys and dons it will be followed by some sort of “personal and social transformation” declaring her as “pious and fashionable” (2007: 218).

including face and hands, with the face covered by a *cadar*, or sheer veil).⁷ While the *kerudung*, which is loosely wrapped around the head and neck, has been worn in Indonesia since as early as the 1920s, the *jilbab* and the *burka* are relatively recent, and initially—or in the case of *burka*, are still—considered to be extreme.⁸ It has been only since the 1990s that wearing a *jilbab*, or tight-veiling, has been popular as part of the complete *busana Muslim*,⁹ which consists of a long-sleeved blouse, ankle-length loose skirt or pants, and a head covering. To some Muslim women in Java, wearing the tight veil before the 1990s was considered “fanatical” (Brenner 1996: 675). For some Javanese Muslim women the *kerudung* was often worn together with the traditional “tightly wrapped batik sarong and close-fitting blouse (*kebaya*), often low-cut and of sheer material [that] tended to accentuate rather than hide the shape of a woman’s body” (Brenner 1996: 674). This combination of what is supposed to be Islamic and what is conventionally Javanese underlines the ‘imported’ aspect of Muslim dress for local women whose traditional clothing does not always comply with the newly adopted style.

Prior to the 1980s, Muslim women in Indonesia were considered to be lenient about their Islamic clothing style (Brenner 1996, Feillard 1999). In Java in 1930s, the addition of the *kerudung* to women’s traditional dress signified a changing style, and the women who wore this new style were commonly identified as *santri*, students at a *pesantren* (Feillard 1999: 9). The tight veil was introduced by the reformist Muslims of Muhammadiyah of West Sumatra in the 1920s, who ironically also introduced a westernised style of clothing for Muslim men that consisted of jackets and ties (*ibid.*). In Padang of West Sumatera, the contemporary Muslim school, *diniyah* (Ar., Islamic school), uniform was inspired by the local, traditional Minang dress in which a tight veil is worn with a loose tunic and long sarong (Whalley 1993: 218). However, the introduction of tight veils by the younger generation of reformist female Muslims did not proceed smoothly. Tensions arose between Muslim women and other mass organisations when the older generation considered the *jilbab* to be “the result of influences from the Middle East” and in universities where the introduction of tight veils was accompanied with new ways of socialising, such as refusing to shake hands across gender lines (Feillard 1999: 14-16).

⁷ Guindi writes that one way to classify the types of veils is by applying a “three-part typology”, that is “head cover, face cover and body cover”, based on which part of the body is covered (1999: 9).

⁸ Some of my Muslim friends still consider the use of the *cadar*, the cloth that covers the face, among (fundamentalist) Muslim women in Indonesia as too excessive. Sometimes they relate this style of clothing with the wives of convicted ‘terrorists’ who wear a *cadar* during investigations, as can be seen in the print media and on television.

⁹ Some may call it *busana Muslimah*, particularly when referring to Muslim women’s dress. In this chapter I will use both *busana Muslim* and *busana Muslimah* interchangeably.

Veiling among Indonesian Muslim women in Java is “neither deeply rooted in local tradition nor encouraged by a majority of the population” (Brenner 1996: 673). Although the majority of Indonesian people are Muslims, the state has never configured itself as an Islamic country. As veiling does not have any roots in Indonesian society, it can symbolise dissociation from the “local past”. If modernity is interpreted as an oscillation between detachment from the past and engagement with the present, then veiling in Java can be regarded as an “alternative modernity”, that is, as a modernity that keeps a distance from Western secularisation (Brenner 1996: 674). In this sense, veiling among Indonesian Muslims resonates the dynamism of the interplay between the personal and the social in the face of an uncertain modernity, thus symbolising “deliberate dissociation” of oneself from the “local past” and “marks a significant shift in historical consciousness and a conceptualisation of the present as sharply distinct from the past—an alternative modernity” (Brenner 1996: 673).

When veiling is used as an alternative for westernised modernity, while at the same time modernity is abridged at the surface of material conditions, such as lifestyle and fashion, then what veiling offers sometimes represents more of an alternative “to the Westernized consumer-oriented lifestyle” (Brenner 1999: 20). Brenner juxtaposes the images of women on the covers of two different magazines—*Tiara* (a popular, secular women’s magazine) and *Amanah* (an Islamic family magazine that focuses more on women than the rest of the family): the first features the usual “sexualized images of women from the Western mass media” wearing “silky black pants and a very low-cut, pale green bodysuit”, while the second magazine cover shows a “devout Muslim mother and child” donned in “a long-sleeved, loose, demure blue dress or tunic trimmed with white embroidery, her head, hair and neck completely covered with close-fitting cap and headscarf in modest Islamic style” (Brenner 1999: 20). Brenner finds that although the two pictures are starkly different, they both represent “a relatively new way of life for Indonesian women” (ibid.). Muslim clothing, as well as Western fashion, shows the global impact on how “a modern woman should look and behave”. In the late 1990s, Muslim clothing was an important element of the fashion trends embraced by urban Indonesian women. Two decades earlier, the situation was very different.

In the 1980s, there was resistance to the wearing of jilbab. Cases of schools forbidding their female students to wear veils received broad news coverage. As will be clear later, the prohibition resulted in stern resistance by the students who instead responded by wearing the veil, to be precise the jilbab, as a symbol of their struggle to defend their convictions. As such, wearing the veil became a symbolic statement of their “personal, religious and political”

bearings (Brenner 1996: 676). A Muslim friend of mine who veiled in her early college life in the mid-1990s, said that her mother, who did not wear a veil at that time, would criticise her, but she insisted on wearing it. However, when she decided to take off her jilbab, her mother became interested in veiling. When her mother asked why she took her veil off, she responded that it was no longer a necessity since so many others had adopted the practise. The symbolic sense of rebellion, she said, was lost when more women began to wear a veil.¹⁰ As one of the students who originally veiled to express rebellion, she was desperately dissatisfied when the movement became popular and then turned to reject the movement's authority. It is to the discussion of veiling and the religious politics of the New Order that we now turn our attention.

The State Facing the Veil

The New Order regime failed to understand the strength of the Islamic movement in the 1980s, and chose to react in a repressive manner in an attempt to downsize the movement, especially in regards to veiling among female students in high schools in Jakarta and its surroundings. Facing growing resistance among female students who insisted on veiling, the state issued Decree (*Surat Keputusan, SK*) No. 52 in 1982, which regulated the national uniform for all public schools—from elementary to senior high—and outlawed veiling. The manoeuvre was far from effective. In response to the implementation of this decision, many female students chose to be expelled from their schools rather than give up their veils. Reports on the disputes between students and teachers—in which the students were sympathetically referred to as “*korban-korban* (victims) of state violence”, and at the same time as “fighters for Islam”—or between Islamic institutions, such as the Council of Indonesian Ulama (MUI), and the state Department of Education, dominated media presentations from the late 1980s through the early 1990s (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002: 62-63). In 1991, the government finally rescinded SK No.52/1982 and issued a replacement, SK No. 100/1991 that allowed veiling for female students (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002: 74). However, the state was reluctant to use the term “jilbab” in this decree, and instead used the term “*seragam khas*” (specific uniform) (*ibid.*). Due to the increasing popularity of veiling, the period of 1980s was generally referred to as the “*dekade jilbab*” (decade of the jilbab).

It was in the 1990s, that the New Order began to realise that the impact of Muslim groups was too strong to ignore. Suharto's striking the mosque drum (*bedug*) to open the first national conference of the Association of Indonesian

¹⁰ Personal discussion with LS, July 2003.

Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, ICMI) in December 1990 symbolically represented the genesis of the New Order's concession towards Islamic power (Hefner 2000: 128).¹¹ In the 1990s, government policies, such as "the establishment of an Islamic bank, expansion of the authority of Muslim courts, an end to the prohibition on the wearing of the veil in schools, the founding of an Islamic newspaper, abolition of the state lottery, expanded Muslim programming on television, increased funding for Muslim schools, and the appointment of armed forces leaders sympathetic to (conservative) Islam", gave privileges to (parts of) Muslim communities—namely the "regimist Islam" who were unruffled by Suharto's authority (Hefner 2000: 18-19). Islamic symbols began to proliferate in this period, as evident in the rising popularity of middle-class Muslims attending religious meetings or discussion groups, often in big hotels, and female Muslim public figures taking up the veil.¹²

The establishment of ICMI was a milestone in the New Order's concession towards Islam and the ascent of the Islamic movement in the following years. After the establishment of ICMI, Suharto's cabinet, as well as the House of Representatives, was filled with, for the most part, members of this newly established institution. The term "*kabinet ijo royo-royo*" (green cabinet) referred to this new cabinet, as green is the colour associated with Islam in general and with the only Islamic political party, *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (PPP), during the New Order (Heryanto 2008: 14; Hefner 2000). Suharto and government officials began engaging in more Islamic activities, such as *safari Ramadhan* (visits to community groups by government officials during the fasting month which were widely broadcasted by the state television station, TVRI) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*haj*). Suharto's haj in 1991 set a new trend among the elite. On March 22, 1996, Suharto, after hosting a *silaturahmi* (informal meeting) with MUI, introduced the *pesantren kilat* (brief intensive Islamic study course) programme for students in elementary to senior high schools that would augment their moral and spiritual training. These *pesantren kilat* were conducted at the schools and they invited noted *kiais* (Islamic teachers) to teach. These courses were usually conducted during

¹¹ Detailed discussion of ICMI and its influence through the end of the New Order period in 1998 can be found in Hefner's book *Civil Islam*, especially Chapters Six and Seven.

¹² In the mid-1990s, for example, the veiling style called "*jilbab mbak Tutut*" (Ms. Tutut's jilbab) became very popular. This style referred to then President Suharto's eldest daughter, Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, whose style of veiling—basically a kerudung wrapped loosely around her head with her bangs still exposed—was soon both copied by many Muslim women and criticised by others because women's hair is one of the woman's *aurat* (parts of the body that should be covered when one is outside the house; the *aurat* are different for men and women) and should not be exposed.

the Ramadhan fasting month school vacation, and lasted from a few days to a few weeks.¹³ The visible result of this kind of training was that more female students began to wear veils.

Fighting Victims: when the Jilbab was banned

The writing of this book has been a lengthy struggle in realising a long-held dream. The authors are graduates of a state high school in Central Jakarta who were repeatedly forbidden to wear veils. Although at the time they entered the school “the hot *jilbab* decade” was nearing its end, the heroic stories of the alumnae of *Rohani Islam* were passed down to succeeding classes of students like an oral tradition that was heavily impregnated with magical values or tremendous power. Those stories were in nature doctrines or dogmas, but of no less historical value (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002: 1).

The trend of veiling among female Muslim students cannot be disentangled from developments in other Islamic countries. From a series of events during the global Islamic resurgence the 1970s, the Iranian revolution in 1979 is often quoted as having the most significant role in shaping Islamisation in Indonesia in the 1980s, and strengthening the symbolic politics of Muslim women’s clothing (Brenner 1996; Alatas and Desliyanti 2002). A book such as *Revolusi Jilbab* considered the prohibition of veiling in high schools in Indonesia in the 1980s to be triggered by the New Order’s fear that the Islamic movement, paralleled to the fundamentalist movement in Iran in the late 1970s, would challenge its power (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002; c.f. Brenner 1996: 676). It states that books and printed materials with images of “beautiful” Iranian women in veils impressed Indonesian Muslim females (c.f. Brenner 1996: 678; Alatas and Desliyanti 2002: 22).

Revolusi Jilbab, compiled an impressive archive of formal correspondence between institutions, such as the principals of a number of high schools, an Indonesian Islamic Students group (*Pelajar Islam Indonesia*, PII), MUI, and the Department of Education and Culture (Depdikbud). Through these letters that provide detailed and chronological descriptions of cases of veil banning we can witness the urgency of the issue at that time, and how the jilbab had become a matter of concern, not so much for the female students who wore them, but

¹³ Suharto’s idea of the pesantren kilat was soon adopted by various institutions including formal schools, *pondok pesantren*, universities, and other Islamic groups. The same form of pesantren kilat was used by an organisation working on the reconciliation efforts in Maluku, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), that was held on 2 July 2003, and “aimed to create a better religious generation, and also as [a] reconciliation space”. (Reported by JRS Mlc in JRS Moluccas, Report No 12, 16 July 2003) (<http://www.jrs.or.id/en/archives/news/000061.php>, accessed 10 May 2005).

more so for the men in power at the schools and the state and religious institutions concerned.

The veiling movement in Indonesia started with the increase in the number of students wearing jilbabs at non-Islamic state high schools in Jakarta in the 1980s.¹⁴ These female students began to veil after they attended extracurricular programmes on Islamic training (*pelatihan keislaman*) conducted by PII and other Muslim youth organisations that started their programmes in 1980. This kind of Islamic training was a forerunner to the previously mentioned *pesantren kilat*, which was sanctioned by Suharto in the mid-1990s. These training programmes were conducted during the school holidays. Although the female trainees were not required to veil during these programmes, the instructors' edification that veiling was a requirement for female Muslims served to inspire them. Other important sources encouraging the "awareness" to veil among these students were the translated Arabic language materials that were used as references for the PII cadets.¹⁵

Returning to school with eagerness to veil, these students faced the school regulation that forbade veiling. At first, those students still wore skirts that were slightly longer than the regular uniforms, knee-length socks, long-sleeved blouses, and short Islamic headscarves. They were usually asked to take off their jilbabs once they were in the school compounds; otherwise they were not allowed to enter the classrooms. Most of the students had to compromise by wearing their jilbabs only from (sometimes outside) their homes to their schools' entrances and the reverse route home. Besides the school regulation, these students often also faced opposition from their parents, especially those who worked as civil servants and in the military, who were worried that their children's actions would affect their positions at work. Considering that wearing a jilbab at that time was still associated, to some extent, with fanaticism, these parents were also worried about the social stigma that they would face for allowing their daughters to veil. Many of them were civil servants with limited financial resources and were worried that if their daughters were expelled from the state schools, they would have to enrol them in private schools, which were usually much more expensive. Stories of *kakak kelas* (older students)—as the crusading *jilbabers*¹⁶—that had been passed down through the years inspired the younger generation of students.

¹⁴ The following account is culled from the book, *Revolusi Jilbab* (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002).

¹⁵ Alatas and Desliyanti (2002) mention, among others, Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian Islamist theorist, and Hassan al-Banna, also Egyptian, an imam, as two authors whose texts were widely translated and circulated (p. 26).

¹⁶ *Jilbaber* referred not only to those who wore the jilbab, but more significantly to jilbab activists.

Younger students (*adik kelas*) were envious seeing their kakak kelas wearing long, billowing veils, which they referred to as “*jilbab yang melambai-lambai*” (lit., waving jilbab) and full-length skirts. This shift from the short headscarf to the full-length jilbab nonetheless shifted again in a later development of veiling style, which was celebrated by many more, mostly new, ‘converts’, but was lamented by the early generation of jilbabers. Starting in the late 1990s, the long veils were replaced by smaller headscarves that were usually wrapped tightly around the face and neck, while the tips of the rectangular cloth were inserted into the necklines of the blouses.¹⁷

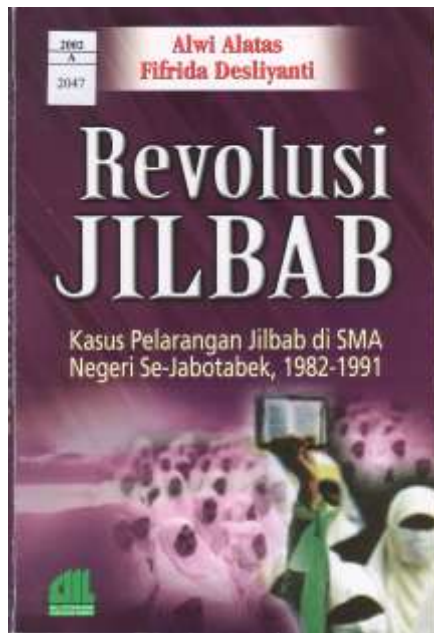


Figure 6.1: Cover, *Revolusi Jilbab*

Revolusi Jilbab includes testimonial letters written by five former students who were involved in the 1980-1990s *jilbabisasi* (jilbabisation) movement. One of the students expressed feeling “*malu pada diri[ku]*” (shame for oneself) because she did not veil, and based on that consciousness decided to become the pioneer to veil in her class (Alatas and Desliyanti, 2002: 78). If piety is supposed to be expressed and attained by wearing a veil, those who do not

¹⁷ This phenomenon of expanding and shrinking of the size of the headscarf, as well as accentuating or concealing it within the dress style, is also documented in the development of Muslim fashion in Turkey during the 1980s-1990s. Notes taken during the International workshop, “Muslim Fashions, Fashionable Muslims”, ISIM-ASSR Workshop, Amsterdam, 13-15 April 2005.

wear them are then considered to be impious. One of the stories also reveals how the Muslim youth activists distributed free jilbabs, and the female activists or older generation of jilbabers helped the new ones to don the veil (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002: 83). For those students, wearing the appropriate veil then became part of the attempt to make it into a *habit-habitus*, comparable to the 17th century English monarchs who solemnly wore “robes and gloves” in memory of their ancestors as “the inward habit of virtue is first materialised through the outward habit” (Stallybrass and Jones 2001: 116) or, in Carla Jones’ words, “one’s inner life is shaped if not determined by surface performances” (Jones 2003: 197). So, the veil does not automatically make the wearers pious, as the women in Jones’ study assert, but facilitates their desire to become pious (Jones 2007: 220).

The increase in the number of students wearing jilbabs in the early 1980s resulted in stronger reactions from some high schools in Jakarta. In 1982, the government issued a decree, SK 052/82 concerning uniforms for school students, which are regulated nationally to encourage a feeling of national unity (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002: 31). The book argues that the state’s politicisation of the jilbab corresponded to the fact that jilbabisasi could not be separated from the political movement among revivalist Muslims in Indonesia that was modelled on the Iranian revolution. While the New Order administration perceived this Islamic movement as a political threat, veiling was adopted as an effective symbol in the identity struggle among Muslims against the corrupt and *kafir* (Ar., disbeliever) state.

Religious fighters who defend Islamic truth often associate their activism with victimisation. As such, the positioning of the female students as victims is highlighted in the book in the following quote:

Victims fell. Female students who veiled were repressed by the school authorities on the basis that [veiling was] against the regulation; many more were expelled from schools (Alatas and Desliyanti 2002: Back Cover).

The repression of veiling students by school authorities heightened the nature of the students’ struggle. The victims’ pain was more widely recognised. It was within this framework in which the identification of women as victims oscillated with their association as militant activists that the veiling movement intensified.

As discussed above, the positioning as victim/fighter can be related to the political situation at that time. Under the New Order in the 1980s, when the Islamic movement was condemned, female students who took up veils were symbolised as victims and fighters at the same time: victims of the *kafir* state

and fighters for Islamic truth, as expressed in the following e-mail message from a friend of mine, LS, who participated in this student movement.

In the early 1990s, when the jilbab was still banned, the wearers (at least me, at that time) thought of ourselves as both victims and fighters, because [we] were the victims of the *kafir* state and [we] struggled against the *zalim* (tyrannical) system. If necessary [we] would become martyrs. If we died at that time, we were sure that we would die a holy death and be blessed by God (*mardhotillah*) (E-mail correspondence with LS, 1 May 2005).

This situation changed after the New Order revised its repressive attitude towards Muslims with the formation of ICMI, which signalled a change in Suharto's power support, and then further after the resignation of Suharto in 1998. As state control weakened in the reformasi period, the projection of the *lawan* (enemy) shifted away from domestic figures towards the United States or the *Barat* (Western countries).¹⁸ Despite this shift of enemies, the positions of Muslim activists who have continued their movement remain as both victims and fighters. However, as LS continues:

The definition of the state as the enemy [by the students] has relatively decreased. At least now they have [political] parties and play in politics. However, the long-term dream is still the establishment of an Islamic state. In my opinion, at this point, they [the students] are considered more to be fighters (E-mail correspondence with LS, 1 May 2005).

LS represents those female students who chose to veil because of both personal reasons and group aspirations for broader social transformation.¹⁹ The decision to veil, despite opposition from parents, schools and society, was believed to be the only way to distance themselves from the impure (local) past and corrupt state, and to realise their dream of a religious and just society. However, as Brenner reminds us, the "women's agency" that those students seem to show is bound to "social and political constraints and pressures", which in turn "may limit or guide their choices" and cause "unintended personal and social effects" (1996: 691).

Following the state's recognition of the demand for more autonomy in the regions, the pressure on local governments to implement sharia increased.²⁰

¹⁸ E-mail correspondence with LS, 1 May 2005.

¹⁹ The common term used to refer to Muslim women converting to wearing a jilbab is *hijrah* (Ar., transformation for betterment; historically refers to the prophet Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina).

²⁰ These include, among others, the provinces of Aceh, South Sumatra, and Banten, and the regions of Tasikmalaya, Garut, and Cianjur in the province of West Java.

However, more often, the focus of these demands went to the 'symbolic regulations', i.e., issues concerning women's piety through appearance and controlled access to public spaces, rather than the substantial content of the proposed local regulations (*peraturan daerah*, or *perda*), such as the issues of corruption or violence against women. News clippings regarding the enforcement of veiling for Muslim women since the late 1990s show a stark contrast to the events of the 1980s. While in the 1980s, female students' demands to veil at schools were faced with sanctions, in the late 1990s, state schools instructed their female Muslim students to veil (*Gatra* 1998(c)). Five mayors in Jakarta, for example, ordered female students to veil at state schools (*Jawa Pos* 2002(a); *Jawa Pos* 2002 (b)). While the regulation was meant for female Muslim students, one study in Padang of West Sumatera found that even non-Muslim students had to veil (Romli 2008).²¹ The section below discusses the issues of local autonomy and the demand for the implementation of sharia in several regions.

Regional Autonomy and the Debate on the Formalisation of Sharia

Following the fall of the centrist regime of the New Order in May 1998, the demand for more authority for local governments intensified. Some districts have eagerly embraced the state-granted autonomy that the new law on regional autonomy (UU 22/1999) affords them. This local autonomy has been interpreted differently in the regions, but has been implemented quite uniformly as a stamp of power for regional administrations to control and organise their regions independently from the central state.²² In some regions where religion, specifically Islam, has been strongly identified with the local culture, Islamic political parties and other groups have been demanding formal implementation sharia (*Kompas* 2002(a) and 2002(f); *Koran Tempo* 2002(c); *Republika* 2002(a); *Pelita* 2002(a); *Republika* 2002(b)). Some propose that the implementation of sharia may help to solve the myriad of problems faced by Indonesians during the transition period (*Media Indonesia* 2002(c); *Pikiran Rakyat* 2002). However, sentiment about the formalisation of sharia has been divided. Those who do not consider sharia relevant to the country's challenges argue that since Indonesia is not an Islamic country, upholding the national

²¹ This volume of *Jurnal Perempuan* focuses specifically on the issue of discriminative *perda*, under the theme, *Awak Perda Diskriminatif*.

²² Local autonomy is manifested at the level of districts (*kabupaten*) and provinces (*propinsi*). Its basic concept was originally meant to maximise public service from the local government to fill the lack, if not absence, of service from the distant, central government for the regions, and thus requires the local government to provide more public services. However, in the implementation, the economic sector dominates other sectors, and public service is usually interpreted as authority (Ida 2002).

ideological principle, *Pancasila*,²³ is the most suitable path because sharia can be interpreted differently by followers of different schools of Islamic teachings (*Media Indonesia* 2002(a)). For those who claim to be pro-minority, the issue of the implementation of sharia has raised questions concerning whether minority groups will be put at a social, cultural, economic, or political disadvantage (*Media Indonesia* 2002(e); Misrawi 2002; Wahid 2002).

Aceh was the first province to formally implement sharia as decreed by the Presidential Decision (*Keputusan Presiden*, Keppres) No. 11 (2003), issued on 3 March 2003. Aceh is allowed to establish the Sharia Court (*Mahkamah Syariah*), which is supported by a sharia police force (*Koran Tempo* 2002(b); *Media Indonesia* 2002(f)). As mentioned previously, the demands to implement sharia in other regions have received diverse reactions. While Aceh has long been associated with Islam in Indonesia (see among others Aspinall and Crouch 2003; Aspinall 2009), many of the other regions planning on formalising sharia must still work on strengthening their Islamic identity.²⁴ Often, it is hoped that the implementation of sharia will serve as a means to achieving a stronger *islami* (Islamic) character. Correspondingly, in Cianjur, West Java, in order to Islamise the region's appearance, the civil servants in this region are required to "wear jilbab every day for *muslimah* (female Muslims) while the *muslim* (male Muslims) wear *baju koko* or *baju taqwa* (long-sleeved shirts or loose tunics) and *kopiah* (Muslim hat) every Friday" (*Kompas* 2002(a)).

In another case, the *islami* character is expressed with the creation of an Islamic logo for the region. In the province of Banten, for example, there was a heightened debate in the local government's *Panitia Khusus* (*Pansus*, Special Committee) regarding the new logo for their province and whether or not to insert the word "*Darussalam*" (Ar., welfare nation), as Aceh had. The planned logo, *Nagari Rahayu Jaya Santika*, used Sanskrit words (*Pelita* 2002(b)).²⁵ The use and adaptation of Sanskrit words in Indonesian logos has long been popular and can be found in the national slogan, *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

Together with the developments in local policies, the national political landscape during the post-Suharto period has also been (again) coloured by the

²³ Pancasila is the national creed consisting of five basic principles: belief in the one God; a just and civilised humanity; the unity of Indonesia; democracy guided by the wisdom of deliberations of representatives; and social justice for all Indonesian people.

²⁴ Aceh has been to some extent treated as the model for other regions in implementing sharia. Then vice president Hamzah Haz once reminded many of the regions that were demanding the implementation of sharia Islam in their quest for regional autonomy to first wait and see how it worked in Aceh. See *Media Indonesia* 2002(b).

²⁵ *Nagari Rahayu Jaya Santika* means a prosperous and civilised place that is famous all over the universe because it has reliable human resources (<http://www.mail-archive.com/wongbanten@yahoo.com/msg04417.html>, accessed 11 June 2011).

revival of many Islamic political parties. Compared to the number of Islamic political parties that participated in the 1955 general election, the number of parties in the 1999 election might not be strikingly different.²⁶ However, the proliferation and intensification of Islamic symbols and representations in 1999 was significant. Parallel with the transformation of the Islamic political landscape at the national level vis-à-vis the weakening of the central state, there arose a demand to amend the 1945 Constitution (UUD 45) Article 29 on religion by inserting “seven words” that read, “*dengan menjalankan Syariat Islam sepenuhnya bagi pemeluknya*” (with the obligation for adherents of the faith to carry out Islamic sharia). These seven crucial words were adopted from the *Piagam Jakarta* (Jakarta Pledge) and demanded that the state acknowledge the special rights of Muslims in Indonesia by formalising the Islamic sharia in the constitution.²⁷ During the 2002 annual session of the Indonesian People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), three Islamic political factions supported the demand to insert these seven words into the Constitution.²⁸ Secular factions, Christian parties,²⁹ and also the two largest Islamic social organisations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, all rejected the proposal (*Pelita* 2001; *Koran Tempo* 2002(a); *Kompas* 2002(e); *Media Indonesia* 2002(d); *Republika* 2002(c)). The late Abdurrahman Wahid, the leader of NU at that time, for example, insisted on the upholding of the Article 29 of 1945 Constitution on the grounds that “it was the creation of the founding fathers of the Indonesian nation state” (Ichwan 2003: 24). Meanwhile, Nurcholish Madjid, a prominent liberal Islamic intellectual, argued that such an

²⁶ However, despite their massive and highly visible appearance in the political sphere, these Islamic political parties lost vis-à-vis non-religious parties. They lost again in the 2004 election, resulting in a reformulation of the Islamic parties (Purwanto 2009).

²⁷ The seven words of the Jakarta Charter were originally issued on 22 June 1945. They were then amended following protests from “the people of the eastern part of Indonesia”. The debate about the implementation of Islamic sharia occurred initially during the Constituent Assembly in 1956-1959, but was vanquished after Sukarno released a Presidential Decree in 1959, which upheld Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Discussion on Islamic sharia resurfaced during the New Order, but it was also soon shelved by Suharto who instead issued Law No. 8 (1985) concerning mass organisations. The issue of this law disapproved of sharia and other non-Pancasila ideologies as the bases of organisations. Soon after Suharto resigned, the Law No. 8 was abandoned. Under the leadership of his successor, B.J. Habibie, political parties were no longer obliged to espouse Pancasila as their official ideology, although Pancasila remains the state ideology. Some political parties embraced Islam as their official ideology, while others combined Pancasila with Islam. See Ichwan 2003.

²⁸ The three political factions were the United Development Party (PPP), the Crescent Star Party (PBB) and the Daulatul Ummah faction (PDU). Support also came from various Islamic groups, such as the Indonesian Council for Islamic Predication (*Dewan Dakwah Islam Indonesia*, DDII). For more on the process of the annual session and the anticipated deadlock, see Ichwan 2003.

²⁹ Partai Damai Sejahtera, a Christian party, the West Java faction, for example, openly rejected the demand for the insertion of the seven words on their website released 19 January 2002, (<http://pds-jabar.blogspot.com/2009/01/menolak-dimasukkannya-tujuh-kata-yang.html> (retrieved September 1, 2011)).

amendment would give the state the right to intervene into religious space. Both NU and Muhammadiyah supported these arguments (ibid.).

However, in most cases in those regions and provinces striving to adopt Islamic sharia, to accomplish the dream of the islami, fashioning a dress code for women and controlling their access to public areas have been considered to be important in the interpretation of what is idealised as Islamic. As they are marginalised from the decision-making process, in this case in delineating sharia, the women in these regions usually become the first target of regulating physical presence by the enforcement to veil and regulation of access to public spaces (*Pelita* 2002(c); *Media Indonesia* 2002(g)).

Apart from the groups that are adamant about women wearing jilbabs, there have also been voices that acknowledge and even advocate the rights of Muslim women who choose not to veil. Aside from arguing that veiling is contextually detached from Indonesia, these voices also propose that piety and morality should be valued not only on the basis of physical appearances. This group of Muslims, citing incidents in Aceh after the implementation of sharia in which unveiled women were arrested by sharia police and had their heads shaven, argue that veiling should not be imposed upon individuals, but should be practised as a personal choice.³⁰

Alternatives to Faithfulness: against Enforcement

Questions regarding the absence of women in the process of *ijtihad* (Ar., interpretation) of sharia that were forwarded by feminist Muslim activists have inevitably challenged the authority of the male *ulamas* (scholars of Islam). These questions lead to subsequent queries on whether or not veiling is compulsory according to the Koran. If so, the next question concerns what kind of veil is required. The answers to these questions could be diverse. However, for those who support women's freedom to choose whether or not to veil, it is the enforcement of veiling that concerns them the most.

Accommodating the Unveiled: Swara Rahima and Cartoons

Swara Rahima (SR) has been consistent in voicing their opinion about the freedom of choice to veil. For example, in SR, Volume Two, kiai Hussein

³⁰ The formation of the sharia police in Aceh was meant to "control the implementation of Shari'a Islam, for example when there are cases of adultery". It was also established to assure that the implementation of the *kawasan wajib tutup aurat* (zone where covering the aurat is required), which began on 15 March 2002, would proceed smoothly. See SR, Vol.1, May 2001, p. 23; *Koran Tempo* 2002(b).

Muhammad wrote about the contextual association of veiling at the time of the Prophet Muhammad, and its function to differentiate between slaves and the wives of the Prophet (page 39-40). He points out that as slavery has been abolished, wearing the jilbab has lost its contextual and historical urgency, and as such should not be forced upon women. However, he adds, neither should the jilbab be forbidden.³¹

The freedom to choose to veil was acknowledged by another *SR* contributor as it symbolises Muslim women's sovereignty. Wearing a veil, she claims, helps women to become closer to God, the source of goodness.

[...] for me, the *jilbab* is a [symbol] of sovereignty. With a *jilbab* I can free myself from the 'isms' that are enforced upon me by my society. With a *jilbab* I can free myself from egoism and devote myself entirely to God. And I am sure that is also the reason why millions of women in this country and other parts of the world wear a *jilbab*.³²

However, she disagrees if veiling is forced upon women and she rejects the enforcement of veiling in the implementation of sharia in Aceh. She continues:

I consider the punishment of shaving the head of women who do not wear *jilbab* in Aceh as a transgression of human rights. Also, blaming the moral degradation of the society in West Sumatera on women who go out at night degrades women.³³

One of the "millions of women who veil" that the contributor mentioned in the above quote expressed a similar reason for veiling in the rubric, *Tanya Jawab* (Questions & Answers), in the same volume. This rubric is a more analytical version of the *Letters to the Editor* section and discusses specific cases that require lengthier and more detailed analyses. In this issue, a woman named Dania (from Bogor) questioned the requirement for a male family member to accompany a woman who leaves her house at night as related to the implementation of sharia in some regions. She explains that as an employee of a construction company, she is often required to work in the field until late at night, while her only *mahram* (Ar., member of the opposite sex but are considered to be ineligible for one to marry, e.g., a close relative) who could fill the role as her escort is her elderly father.³⁴ At the end of her letter she

³¹ *SR*, Vol. 2, August 2001, pp. 39-40.

³² *SR*, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 26. See Viviani 2001. Viviani was the editor of *Swara Rahima*, Volumes One through Three. This article appeared under the rubric, *Dunia Perempuan* (Women's World).

³³ *SR*, Vol. 2, 2001, p. 26.

³⁴ Three categories of *mahrams* are of blood related, in-laws, and milk-suckling *mahrams*.

identifies herself as one who conscientiously wears a jilbab and wants to be a pious *muslimah* (female Muslim).³⁵

In *SR*, Volume Ten, Mahrus el_Mawa, another member of Rahima, expresses a similar opinion about veiling—that it should be a personal choice. He also highlights that the requirement to veil was “temporal ... during the time of the Prophet”. He concludes that wearing a jilbab is a “woman’s choice” based on a variety of reasons, whether it be “self-identity, solidarity, expression of discontent, or belief that it is inscribed by the Koran”.³⁶ In *SR*, Volume 13, a writer compares veiling in Indonesia with veiling in Holland, by taking into account the issue of terrorism and the post 9/11 bombing. Based on her research about the practise of wearing a cadar in Holland, the writer, Eva Fachrunissa Amrullah, states that the allegation that women who wear a cadar are involved with terrorism is unproven. She found that women wore cadars more as social and cultural expressions than theological or ideological ones, and that they did not consider it as an obligation, but rather as an expression of solidarity. While she personally “disagrees” with the practise of wearing a cadar, she stresses that there should never be any prohibitions for those who wish to wear it.³⁷

When I conducted my research at Rahima, this Muslim women’s organisation was undertaking a study on the functioning of regional autonomy and the implementation of sharia in Tasikmalaya and Garut, two regencies in West Java. The main aim of the project was to study whether the implementation of regional autonomy in both of these regions that had demanded the formalisation of sharia supported women’s rights as citizens. Their initial assumption was that often, in the context of local government and Islamic praxis, women’s rights were endangered. This project became the focus of the second edition of *SR*. The theme of this edition is *Kontroversi Posisi Perempuan dalam Syari’at Islam* (Controversy concerning the Position of Women in Islamic Sharia).

³⁵ *SR*, Vol. 2, August 2001, p. 32.

³⁶ *SR*, Vol. 10, April 2004, p. 21.

³⁷ *SR*, Vol. 11, July 2004, p. 23.



Figure 6.2: Cover, *Swara Rahima* Vol. 2, August 2001 “Controversy concerning the Position of Women in Islamic Sharia”

The cover shows a cartoon of a veiled woman struggling to release herself from chains that tightly bind her (Figure 6.2). Her right fist is clenched and her mouth is open as if she is shouting. Making meaning of the picture must take into account the title of the volume and the topics listed above and on the left side of the image. In fact, the text and image are complementary as they combine to build the meaning. The title, *The Controversy concerning the Position of Women in Islamic Sharia*, juxtaposed with the image of the woman shackled in chains can only lead to an understanding that the implementation of sharia has strong consequences for women. The chain symbolises the sharia rules and regulations that restrain women. Combining the picture and the text, we come to understand that the formalisation of sharia in the regions restrains women’s position in society.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, *Rahima* intentionally uses cartoons and illustrations as part of their communication strategy. During the assessment workshop held in Bogor on 10-12 September 2002, to share the results of the above-mentioned project to a broader audience of academics and activists, the cartoonist documented the sessions with a series of illustrations. *Rahima* considers “pictures, caricatures, and cartoons” as a language style that captures social reality.

Language expression has many styles. Similarly, there are many ways to capture social realities. One of the ways to capture social reality is through pictures, caricatures, and cartoons. [...] Although graphics are not complete in themselves to fully express the developments of this forum, at least the global message in the context of 'Islamic Sharia and the Strengthening of Women's Rights' can be read through Mufid's pictorial dialogue. [...] The pictures, like the texts, can be interpreted in various ways, and for that reason it is left up to the readers. Hopefully, if anything, [it] can pass on the idea that Islam is gender-just and useful for all humankind. Amen. (Kartun Workshop, Rahima, 2001, Introduction).

The cover of the cartoon drawn during the workshop shows a woman asking a bald woman if her head was shaven because of the implementation of sharia (Figure 6.3).



Figure 6.3: Cover, *Kartun: Workshop Penguatan Hak-hak Perempuan dalam Konteks Syari'at Islam dan Otonomi Daerah*

The picture shows a woman asking a bald woman: "Are you bald because of the sharia?"

Meanwhile, a cartoon criticising the discriminative sharia regulation that forbids women to go outside at night also appears in one of the *SR* articles (Vol. 2, August 2001, p.10).



Figure 6.4: Inside Illustration *Swara Rahima* Vol. 2, August 2001, p. 10
 The picture shows a man scolding a woman: "Going outside at night, huh? I'll shave your head!"

Veiled women appear on the covers of *SR*, Volumes One through Four, while the covers of Volumes Six through Nine feature women without veils. I will return to this change later. For example, the theme of *SR*, Volume One, is the Islamic women's movement in Indonesia, and the cover portrays several veiled women at a demonstration. With raised fists, they appear to be tearing a curtain and shouting out in protest. The curtain denotes the "old history" of the women's movement as referred to in the text, "*mengukir sejarah baru*" (carving a new history). Below the illustration, a text reads, "Erase Discrimination against Women" (*Hapuskan Diskriminasi Thd. Perempuan*). This visualisation is in accordance with the development of the Islamic women's movement in Indonesia in recent years, as is represented in other print media.



Figure 6.5: Cover, *Swara Rahima* Vol. 1, May 2001

Starting with Volume Six (December 2002) through Volume Nine (August 2003), *SR* covers no longer feature veiled women.³⁸ While no precise explanation has been given for the change, it appears to have been intended. It is noticeable, though, that the unveiled women on these covers are usually positioned as ‘victims’ of certain conditions that put women at a disadvantage. In Volume Six, the unveiled woman is ill with the fatal HIV/Aids virus. One wonders if it is because she does not wear a veil that she is suspected of having a ‘freer’ lifestyle than those who do veil, and thus more susceptible to the virus. The image of a mother wearing a kebaya without a veil, together with her son and daughter, clutched in a supposedly male hand, appears on the cover of Volume Eight, which focuses on the issue of incest. Another portrayal of an unveiled mother appears on the cover of *SR* Volume Nine. A pregnant mother with three daughters standing behind her is haunted by *maut* (death), while the text reads, “maternal mortality, *syahid* (holy death) or disaster?”

Responding to my query about the portrayals of unveiled women on the covers and pictures of later editions of *SR*, Farha Ciciek explained that the images of the unveiled women were not meant to imply that unveiled Muslim women are more susceptible to victimisation, but are meant to emphasise

³⁸ In *SR*, Vol. 5 (July 2002), the head of the woman pictured on the cover is hidden behind a poster, which has the text, “*sexualitas yang berdaulat*” (sovereign sexuality), written on it.

Rahima's inclusive acceptance of those women, considering that not all Muslim women choose to veil.³⁹ She referred to an example, *SR*, Vol. 11, *Menjalin Ukuwah Nissaiyah*, whose cover features several women, both veiled and not, holding hands in front of a globe. The images of more unveiled women on the covers of *SR*, however they are portrayed, indicate the inclusive nature of this journal and organisation. In other words, *SR* wants to show that although not all Muslim women veil, their problems still need attention and solutions.

A cartoon of a female also appears on the back cover of *SR* in the comic strip, *Celoteh Ima* (Ima's Chatter), in which the main character, Ima, personifying Rahima, questions and challenges the authority of men. Ima's jilbab identifies the organisation as Islamic, but she speaks as a Muslim about issues that concern not only Muslim women. The projection of her identity as a Muslim through her veiling does not necessarily exclude those who do not veil. By maintaining this identity, *Swara Rahima*, through the image of the veiled Ima, speaks in the language of Islam, but sees the 'plurality' of the world where not every woman must be veiled.

In the first edition of *SR*, the comic strip is titled, *Rahima*, but starting with the second edition the title was changed to *Celoteh Ima*. Ima is a nickname of Rahima, as a person's name is often shortened into one or, at most, two syllables. It is not clear if Ima is married; neither do we have any information about her occupation and educational background. It is certain that Ima is a Muslim who is concerned about women's—Muslim and non-Muslim—problems. The cartoonist, Mufid Aziz, explained that the inspirations behind the figures in the cartoon sometimes just "pop up" or are based on Rahima personnel, but "*yang penting berjilbab*", veiling is important.⁴⁰ The creative process for the comic strip starts after Aziz reads the theme and articles of the *SR* issue or following a discussion with the editor-in-chief.⁴¹

In the second edition of *Celoteh Ima*, Ima questions the authoritative interpretation of sharia by Muslim men, here represented by the popular iconographic images of, among others, Pak Haji (Mr. Haji), Pak Hansip (Mr. Security Officer), and Pak Lurah (Mr. Village Head). The dialogue reads as follows:

³⁹ In personal correspondence with Ciciek Farha, I was told that this inclusive attitude transcends religious boundaries as this Islamic women's organisation is also concerned about non-Muslim women in general. E-mail correspondence with Ciciek Farha (3 February 2005).

⁴⁰ I saw only one female staff member at Rahima who did not wear a veil. However, as far as I know, there seemed to be no debate about it between her and the other staff members.

⁴¹ E-mail correspondence with Mufid Aziz, 11 February 2005.

Pak Haji [reading a petition]: “The penalty for women who do not wear jilbab and go outside the house without their *muhrim* at night is to shave their heads.”⁴²

Ima [very shocked, looking at the readers]: “God forbid!... Who interprets Islamic sharia that way? Are women asked about their opinions about interpreting Islamic sharia? Aren't they already so greatly disadvantaged?” (figure 6.6)



Figure 6.6: Comic strip, ‘Celoteh Ima’, *Swara Rahima* Vol. 2, August 2002

In most of the stories, Ima substitutes for the male kiai as the authority who asks questions, thinks and speaks on behalf of other women. While the issues that *SR* brings up are varied, Ima’s position in this comic strip is unchallenged. The comic strips question the norms, facts and rules that are considered to be unjust towards women. For example, in the first edition of *SR*, Rahima/Ima questions the absence of women in a group meeting that is, ironically, discussing women’s problems. Even though women are present, they are supposed to remain silent. Ima, with her conviction that women should have the right to become involved in the reading of sharia, represents progressive Muslims’ attempts to compete with more conservative Muslims by providing

⁴² Although the meaning of *muhrim* is ‘those who are conducting *ihram*’ (that is, performing the clansing rituals and wearing the prescribed attire before *Hajj* and *Umrah* pilgrimages), in Indonesia people often use the word *muhrim* to refer to *mahram* (see f.n. 34 of this chapter). (See <http://www.konsultasisyariah.com/muhrim-dan-mahram/>, accessed 4 May 2012).

alternative interpretations of their religion. Many conservative “imported materials” written in Arabic flooded into the country and only male kiais had access to these interpretations so women often had no choice other than to accede to these male-oriented interpretations (Feillard 1999: 17). Rahima, through Ima, offers an alternative and advocates for women’s rights to know and interpret Islamic texts themselves. Ima truly personifies Rahima’s concerns and represents the female staff members of Rahima who veil, yet are learned and empathetic.⁴³ Ima, literally speaking, is a fighter for women’s rights.

Starting in the 1990s, wearing a jilbab became even more popular, not so much as a political statement, as the state discourse had shifted towards an acceptance of Islam, but in a commercial sense. As more women started to wear jilbabs, more markets for Muslim clothing opened. By end of the 1990s, busana Muslim had become an important part of the Indonesian fashion landscape.

Further Fragmentations: Celebrities and the Fashionable Jilbab

By the late 1990s, the images of veiling in Indonesia had many varieties. During reformasi, when the question of identity had become more problematic than ever, the meaning and practise of veiling became even more inundated

⁴³ The liberal Muslim perspective in Indonesia is not exclusively Rahima’s. Although not directly connected to Rahima, a liberal Muslim group in Jakarta, *Jaringan Islam Liberal* (JIL, Liberal Islam Network) has also expressed similar concerns about liberality in veiling. This group, consisting of highbrow, Muslim youth and academics, chooses the adjective ‘liberal’ to describe Islam, as they believe this religion to be both ‘liberal’ and ‘liberating’. JIL was formed in 2001, not long after the New Order government collapsed and demands for local autonomy had just started to surface. Although its founder, Ulil Abshar Abdhalla was born and raised in the orthodox pesantren tradition, his exposure to ‘liberal’ Muslim profiles and books inspired him to believe that religion should be open for *ijtihad* (interpretation) and should never be understood only literally. A group of religious scholars called the *Forum Ulama Umat Indonesia* (FUUI) in Bandung, West Java issued a *fatwa mati* (death edict) on Ulil Abshar Abdhalla after he published an article in *Kompas* newspaper on November 18, 2002, entitled, “Freshening Up Islamic Understanding” (*Menyegarkan Kembali Pemahaman Islam*) concerning the need to reinterpret the Koran. (<http://www.seasite.niu.edu/fjin/Liberal-Islam/Is-There-a-Rainbow.html>). He was also involved in a dispute with *Front Pembela Islam* (FPI, Defenders of Islam) and the *Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia* (MMI, Indonesian Mujahideen Council) after his Public Announcement Service (*Iklan Layanan Masyarakat*) for “*Islam Warna-Warni*” (Colourful Islam) was cancelled by the two television stations that had aired the ad. The cancellation was due to pressure from both fundamentalist groups. See Burhanuddin 2002. JIL dedicates generous space for discussions concerning women, whose issues are deemed as important as other issues, such as democracy in Muslim society. In regards to the regional demands for the implementation of sharia, Moeslim Abdurrahman, an Islamic intellectual and activist, in an interview with JIL, argued that if sharia is implemented in the regions that demand it, women are the first subjects of regulations that control their bodies and access to public spaces (see *Jaringan Islam Liberal Website* 2001(a)). Similarly, Siti Musdah Mulia, a prominent Muslim female activist and academic, also observes that such implementation harms women the most. She further questions the proposed rule on the phrase, *kemaksiatan* (sins) that targets women. Interpretation of this phrase has been gender-biased, as it is the woman who is subjected to a tight curfew and required to veil. While having no objections against veiling, Mulia strongly rejects any imposition thereof (see *Jaringan Islam Liberal Website* 2003).

with multidimensional factors. Regardless of the fact that the veil still holds a significant meaning politically, through my observations on popular media presentations, print as well as audio-visual, during this period the discourse of veiling was adopted by the media no longer merely as symbols of sanctimony and resistance (as such shown by the female students in the 1980s), but also as expressions of class status and fashion consciousness. Although the standardisation of the jilbab still matters for some—where the aurat must be covered—for others it exceeds the standard and expresses personal choices of fashion style (Jones 2007). This period shows “the rise of Islamic piety and consumerism” (Jones 2007: 211).

Compared to those in the Middle-Eastern Muslim countries, where the style, colour and material of the veils are relatively standardised, Muslim women in Indonesia have many options of Islamic clothing from which they can choose. Fashion designers specialising in Muslim dress, for example, believe that they are still allowed to add aspects of *tren* (trend) to their designs, including using various fabrics and accessories, and modifying styles to attract younger people.⁴⁴ Celebrities donning the jilbab only on occasions related to Islamic events are also increasingly common. Sometimes, the style that they wear becomes a trend, such as in the phenomenon of *kerudung Kris Dayanti* (Kris Dayanti’s shawl). Kris Dayanti is one of the most popular singers in Indonesia, and the *kerudung* she wore when she appeared as a pious, disabled Muslim woman in a *sinetron* (electronic cinema, television drama), *Doa dan Anugerah* (2002-2003), that was broadcast during Ramadhan became a popular style. Meanwhile, a well-known television presenter who converted to Islam, Dewi Hughes,⁴⁵ is confident that her jilbab style that is in the form of head wrap—as she acknowledged is similar to the one worn by the popular Afro-American R&B singer, Erykah Badu—is still appropriate in the Muslim dress code (*Kompas* 2002[g]).

The increase of the number of women wearing jilbabs has led to a booming of the Muslim clothing industry (Brenner 1999; Jones 2007) as indicated by the

⁴⁴ See ‘Busana Muslim di Tangan Perancang Muda’, *FemaleKompas.com*.

<http://female.kompas.com/read/2011/09/06/18273119/Busana.Muslim.di.Tangan.Perancang.Muda>, accessed 2 November 2011.

⁴⁵ In April 2005, Hughes’ marriage became the focus of the media, especially television infotainment, when she filed for a divorce from her husband, Achmad Desfianti Arifin, known also as Afin. In the early stage of the controversy, Hughes mentioned that the reason she filed for a divorce was Afin’s over-protectiveness, however, later she admitted that she was a victim of domestic violence. With tears in her eyes, Hughes made a public statement to infotainment journalists that as Afin’s wife, she was restricted in practising her religion, such as *mengaji* (reading the Koran), and was denied male leadership since her husband was not willing to be her *imam*. The incorporation of religious repression not only sentimentalised her story, but also positioned Afin as the most immoral husband deserving of public condemnation, more than as a perpetrator of domestic violence (various sources).

increase of Islamic clothing stores (Champagne 2004). The most current trend is for female and male celebrities wearing Muslim clothes to be featured in popular print media and audiovisual programmes during the fasting month. Inul Daratista, a 'controversially-famous' dangdut singer (see Chapter Eight), for example, was featured on the cover of a popular infotainment tabloid, *Cek & Ricek* (Check and Recheck) wearing a stunning gold and pink kebaya with matching headscarf adorned with corsages, that was wrapped tightly around her head and neck, while she posed piously holding her hands together in front of her chest (Cek & Ricek 2003(g)). She was quoted as saying, "*puasa ngebor selama bulan puasa*" (fasting from drilling—referring to her dancing style—during the fasting month). For Inul, one who veils should also act and behave virtuously.

A collection of busana Muslim has now become a 'must' for most Muslim celebrities' wardrobes, although their utility is seasonal. The number of busana Muslim outfits the celebrities own has become an important reflection of how they practise their faith. Reza Artamevia,⁴⁶ a singer, claims to have "ten sets at the most"; Alya Rohali, a presenter and *sinetron* actress also has "ten sets"; meanwhile, Iis Dahlia, a *dangdut* singer, has "more than 20 sets" (*Kompas* 2003(i)). The pious style of Islamic dress has been adopted and adapted by the glittering world of celebrities who no longer find the jilbab to be restrictive, since they can still appear 'beautiful' in veils.

For the first time ever, a veiled woman, Andina Agustina, the representative from the province of Aceh, participated in the *Pemilihan Putri Indonesia* (PPI, Miss Indonesia Contest) in August 2004. She was selected as the *Putri Favorit Pilihan Pemirsa* (Audience's Favourite). Beginning in 2004, the PPI committee made changes in the evaluation criteria: participants who wore veils were evaluated not on the beauty of their hair, but on "how she arranged her veil" (*Jawa Pos* 2004; *Kompas* 2004(d); *Tempo* 2004). Meanwhile, the regional brand, Sunsilk Clean and Fresh Shampoo, was launched as the first new product for veiled women in Indonesia in October 2004, following its marketing success

⁴⁶ During the final months of 2004 and in early 2005, Reza Artamevia, more popularly known as Reza, became the focus of media and infotainment presentations in relation to her divorce from (late) Adji Pangestu, who was an artist and member of the House of Representatives. While the causes of the conflict in their marriage shifted over the course of time—from domestic violence to adultery—Reza's choice to hide in an Islamic *padepokan* (religious compound) owned by a fashionable kiai, Gatot Brajamusti, who always appears charmingly, in clean mostly white turbans and long tunics, imbued the case with a nuance of a religious escapee. Toward the end of the media-saturated controversy around the married life of this popular couple, Reza reappeared in public transformed, wearing a jilbab and long dresses, apologising to the public for the unrest that might have been caused by her disappearance, expressing her 'brand-new' feelings following a series of spiritual healings at the padepokan, and finally, singing in a television programme accompanied by her spiritual guru, Gatot Brajamusti (various sources).

in neighbouring Malaysia since 2002 (Gatra 2004). As a model and spokesperson for this brand, the popular film actress and presenter, Inneke Koesharawati⁴⁷ does not remove her veil, but just “shakes her (veiled) head to show that my hair is healthy even though I veil” (Suara Merdeka Cybernews). Some of my Muslim female friends also casually referred to Koesharawati’s veiling style and mentioned that their jilbabs cannot be folded as neatly as hers because they are made of a very different quality of material. While Koesharawati’s jilbab seems to be made of a very fine fabric that may cost a fortune for them, theirs are made from cheaper and less fine fabrics that are easily obtained from street vendors. Koesharawati’s jilbab is seen not so much as a symbol of pioussness as a fashion trend and class difference.⁴⁸ However, more than a few of the latest designs of busana Muslim have become the target of criticism for being not ‘islami’ and for inappropriately mixing Islamic and Western styles. The phenomenon of *jilbab gaul* (trendy jilbab) is not only popular among celebrities, but also among the general populace. For example, at an Islamic university in Yogyakarta, some female students wear their jilbabs with a combination of short tight shirts and low-hipped pants that expose part of their midriff (Bernas 2002).

Conclusion

The phenomenon of veiling among Indonesian Muslim women is distinctive. The students advocating other women to veil in the 1980s veiling movement position women as equals to their male fellows in the struggle to fight against the *kafir* state, just as in other situations of women’s involvement in struggles of independence. In such romanticism, how stories and images of veiled Iranian women became involved in their revolution, and how they ostensibly had equal access to politics and the public sphere as the Iranian men did, inspired many of those students becomes pertinent. However, it should be remembered that it was the female students who wore veils despite the school restrictions and

⁴⁷ Inneke Koesharawati was popularly known as a ‘sex symbol’ in the Indonesian film industry in the second half of the 1990s. In 1999, she posed (almost) topless—crossing her hands in front of her chest—on the cover of a men’s magazine, *Matra* (see Chapter Four). However, since 2001, she has taken up the veil and since then has been popularly referred to the “*artis berbusana muslimah*” (celebrity with Muslim dress) (see Ensiklopedi Tokoh Indonesia, <http://www.tokoh-indonesia.com/selebri/artis/inneke/index.shtml>, accessed 23 July 2010). On 10 January 2002, during the second *Anugerah Syiar Ramadhan*, MUI nominated her as *Pembawa Acara Ramadhan Terpuji versi MUI* (Best Presenter for [Television] Programmes on Ramadhan) for her television Ramadhan programme, *Q-pas*, which was broadcasted on the private television station Metro TV. It has been noted that although she has successfully adopted the practise of wearing veils, she has been able to maintain her attractiveness (Gatra 2002).

⁴⁸ Field notes during my research at Rahima.

were even expelled from schools, and not their male friends. In addition to this, most of the high-ranking positions in the Islamic institutions, schools and religious institutions concerned, i.e., those with the decision-making authority, were filled by men. Thus, we might speculate on the gender disparity in this veiling movement where the recognition of women as fighters/heroines was attained only via the discourse on female victimisation.

Meanwhile, in the case of progressive Islamic women's organisations advocating the freedom for female Muslims to choose whether or not to veil, the struggle is twofold. While they attack the state's imposition to veil, at the same time they criticise the male-centrist interpretation of the sharia. For those advocating women's freedom of choice whether or not to veil, women's authority is being rejected once their freedom to clothe their bodies is denied or directed by others. Here, these female activists speak on behalf of the victims. The incorporation of popular media presentations, that is, the comic genre, such as the one used by *Swara Rahima*, alleviates the representations of female victims and tones down the image of the woman fighter in a parody and in a playful manner, in line with the nature of this organisation (see Chapter Three).

By looking at the positioning of women as victims, the political import of the issue of the jilbab can be highlighted. Whether veiling was banned or imposed, it has been interpreted as the primary marker of 'being Muslim'. However, what is most important is how the entire phenomenon of both the prohibition and enforcement of veiling, and female victimisation has shown that women have been positioned in the middle of the Islamic discourse in Indonesia throughout the last three decades.

Meanwhile, veils are also increasingly popular among female Muslim celebrities. On the one hand, these women donning the jilbab show a certain level of self-agency in which their wearing and choosing a particular style of jilbab suggests their freedom to choose. On the other hand, their choices of certain styles may be considered to be outside the religious norm, thereby exposing them to the risk of being criticised as not 'islami' and as 'slaves of fashion'. However, this phenomenon of fashionable Muslim clothing disturbs the juxtaposition of veiled women as victims/fighters and shows that the jilbab cannot be seen separately as either religious or political, but that it involves a multifaceted "relationship among faith, gender and materiality" (Jones 2007: 211-212).