Polygamy Talk and the Politics of Feminism: Contestations over Masculinity in a New Muslim Indonesia

Sonja van Wichelen [1]

Abstract

The political downfall of the Suharto administration in 1998 marked the end of the "New Order", which was characterized by a 32-year period of authoritarian rule. Opening the way for democracy, it included the unlocking of Indonesian politics for the influence and participation of political Islam, which the New Order discouraged or banned. This shift led to a proliferation of Islamic issues in the public and political sphere. Many of them concerned issues of gender and have triggered profound debates about women's rights and gender equality. This article examines one of these public concerns over "Islam and gender", namely polygamy. It assesses how the issue of polygamy is debated in post-authoritarian Indonesia and scrutinizes the ways in which women's groups, organizations, and different forms of feminism have played an active role in these debates. As my analysis will demonstrate, the contestations between the different women's groups show a far more multifaceted picture of "polygamy talk" which cannot solely be reduced to issues of Islam and gender. Rather, the case study showed that their perspectives intersected with identity politics informed by postcoloniality, modernity, religion, nationality, and globalization. It is through these specters that this article aims to understand the complexity of a transiting Indonesia greatly affected by processes of Islamization and democratization.

Keywords: Gender, Indonesia, Discourse Analysis

Introduction

In March 2003, the popular Indonesian daily *Media Indonesia* announced the following headline: "Polygamy Juice Ordered by the Megawati Family" (*Media Indonesia*, 16 March 2003). The newspaper reported about the famous restaurant franchise called "Solonese Man" (*Wong Solo*) owned by the entrepreneur Puspo Wardoyo. The restaurant, known for its roasted chicken marinated in Javanese spices, launched its new fruit shake called polygamy juice made out of avocado, mango, soursop, and papaya, and apparently a favorite order for President Megawati's delegation at the restaurant. When asked why Puspo Wardoyo – a polygamous man himself and married to four women – named his new drink product polygamy juice, he replied that he wanted to make the practice of polygamy more visible and more acceptable. His ambition was to make people proud, rather than blush, when they would introduce their second or third wife.

---

[1] Sonja van Wichelen is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Pembroke Center at Brown University. Before that she held a Postdoctoral Fellowship with the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale University (2007-2009). Her research focuses on cultural politics in the age of globalization and engages with issues of religion, gender, transnational adoption, ethnicity, and multiculturalism. sonja_vanwichelen@brown.edu

Since then, Puspo Wardoyo involved himself in many activities surrounding the topic of polygamy. He published several books and frequently talked on national television about the virtues of practicing multiple marriages simultaneously. Especially during the Ramadan fasting month he and his wives were a much featured topic on radio and television. Most noted, however, was the Polygamy Award which was set up by Wardoyo to award men who were regarded to have successful polygamous marriages. Although a relatively small event, the contest attracted nationwide attention. Amply covered by mass media, it caused a public outcry in different factions of Indonesian society. A public debate on polygamy came into effect with arguments in favor or against the practice.

This article examines the pro-polygamy campaign, but instead of describing the occurrence of polygamy as such, my concern is to examine what's "at stake" in defending, justifying, or defying polygamy as promoted by the campaign. Through which frameworks were arguments defined and formulated? And in what ways do gender, sexuality, and religiosity feed into these discussions? My analysis suggests that the resurgence of polygamy served as a lightening rod for debate among Islamists and feminists. Rather than reflecting a more doctrinal return to Islam, it exemplified contestations over ideas of manhood and masculinity. While new forms of masculinities are reconfigured, Islamization and democratization processes alter the hegemonic status of nominal Muslim masculinity. I explore how these new manifestations relate to responses from feminist and Islamist women's groups and assess their implications for a feminist politics in Indonesia.

Marginal Practice, Ubiquitous Discourse

While the idea of polygamy is widespread and not uncommon, its prevalence within different cultures and religious societies is comparatively uncommon (Altman and Ginat 1996: 40). This is also the case in Indonesia, where, in general, polygamy has been infrequently practiced.[2] The debate on polygamy, however, has been fierce and anything but new in Indonesian public discourse.[3] Polygamy in particular and the Family Law in general have long been debated which in certain historical periods resulted in legal reforms. On the one hand, attempts to ban polygamy have often failed especially because of "the symbolic importance of the Qur'anic passage that allows it" (Lev 1996: 193). Although there were times where polygamy was limited to strict conditions, the practice of polygamy as such was never prohibited or criminalized. On the other hand, polygamy was never institutionalized in such a way that men could easily obtain the court's

[2] Figures from the 1930 census showed that only 2.6 percent of all Indonesian men in the Netherlands-Indies practiced polygamy. The data in the most densely populated Java was even lower, namely 1.9 percent. In the outer islands, the percentages were higher, ranging from 3.1 in Sulawesi to 13.5 in Sumba (Jones 1994: 269). After an increase during the Sukarno's Old Order, the New Order indicated a slight decrease as specified by the 1973 Fertility-Mortality survey. See especially table 7.1 in Jones 1994: 269. Here the data was divided in regions: Java 1.9 percent, Sumatra 4.4 percent; Sulawesi 3.1 percent, Maluku 4.2 percent; Bali and Lombok 4.0 percent; Timor and vicinity 8.1 percent (with Sumba having the highest score, namely 13.5 percent). See also Locher Scholten 2000: 212, footnote 9, for a discussion on the figures in this period.

[3] Although the correct English term here is polygyny and the Indonesian word for polygyny is *permaduan* (*madu* means honey), I chose to use the emic term *polygami* which was used in everyday language and media coverage in Indonesia.

permission to marry another wife. Women's groups and secularist groups successfully deployed restrictions on the legal feasibilities of polygamy.

The new political organization of post-Suharto Indonesia brought about significant changes in the socio-legal make-up of polygamy. In light of Islamic demands to lift prohibition of Islamic practices, the Muslim Unity Organization (persatuan Islam or persis) demanded a retraction of a decree in the Indonesian Marriage Law that prohibited civil servants and state officials from having more than one wife (the so-called PP10 regulation). In September 2000, the parliament under the administration of President Abdurrahman Wahid agreed to annul the controversial regulation. After seventeen years of relative silence on the issue of polygamy, the fall of Suharto brought about a re-opening of the controversial topic. Administrations under Wahid and Megawati loosened or dropped legal restrictions on polygamy not so much because these administrations were unified in their approval of the practice, but because they needed to accommodate Islamic demands for various socio-political reasons.

The discourse of polygamy became increasingly visible and also promoted through various public manifestations. Politicians became increasingly more open about their polygamous marriages (Asmarani 2002) and polygamy became fashionable among men of the upper middle classes (Feillard 1999: 20). Books about polygamy mushroomed in mainstream bookstores with titles such as *The Beauty of Polygamy*, *The Wives of the Prophet* and *Polygamy from the Perspective of Islam* (Gatra 2003a) and the popular magazine *Polygam* emerged in 2000 which included sections called "firstpolygamy", illustrating stories of first wives, or "polycelebrity", depicting polygamous practices of celebrities (Gatra 2003b). These discursive shifts in representations of polygamy were also reflected in people's attitudes toward the practice. According to a study based on opinion polls 37 percent of the population agrees with the view that men can have more than one wife (Liddle and Mujani 2004: 115).

Perceptions on polygamy were strongly shaped by symbolic figures and icons of polygamy or anti-polygamy. Important polygamy icons in the past included the former president Sukarno but also the images of reigning kings of the central Javanese Surakarta that shaped common thoughts on polygamy as being reserved for the wealthy. The phenomenon of Puspo Wardoyo should be set against this background. Increasing images of prominent polygamous men, increasing propagation of books on polygamy, and the polygamy promoting campaigns of the notorious entrepreneur all contributed to a belief that a resurgence of polygamy is taking place in Indonesia today. The heated debate on polygamy had begun, and took to a climax with the (in)famous event of the Polygamy Award (explained below).

The Pro-Polygamy Campaign

Puspo Wardoyo's secret to success – he claims – is polygamy. "Many women, many children, and much fortune" is his slogan (Suryono 2003a: 44). Because he wants to share the secret to his success with others he organizes events and gatherings to socialize the idea and virtues of polygamy. Journalists and the public take an eager interest in his activities. Local and national media amply covered his events and gatherings while celebrities like the television preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar supported Wardoyo's endeavor publicly. He was on numerous discussion panels for programs on national television and had his own radio talk show in Bandung called *Puspolygamy*. In

all of these events and activities, Wardoyo and his wives would explain the why, how, and what of polygamy.

The most talked about event was the so-called Polygamy Award. In July 2003, together with the Indonesian Polygamy Society (Masyarakat Poligami Indonesia), which he himself had founded, Wardoyo organized, sponsored, and hosted the Polygamy Award event. This contest took place in the chic Aryaduta hotel in central Jakarta and its intention was to award men who were regarded to have successful polygamous marriages. Among the dozens of nominees was also the vice president Hamzah Haz. Approximately a thousand people attended the event. Among them were prominent celebrities, politicians, and religious leaders who supported and celebrated the event. Angry activists were also present, and protested the ceremony. In the end, thirty-seven men received trophies for winning the polygamy award.

Sexual Potency, Wealth, and Status

In *Polygamy: The Secret of Success to Having Many Wives*, Wardoyo reflects on the topic of impotence which he regards as a myth kept alive to sustain the system of monogamy:

> [T]here is no such thing as a man being impotent. Men desire polygamy because of their sexual drive, but it is not because of [the woman's] neck, breasts, or private parts. The drive is triggered by her smile, her smell, her beauty and softness. This is what is given by God (*disunnahkan*) and many wives do not have this anymore because they do not have rivals. In the meantime, the practice of prostitution that is selling the [womanly] features described above is increasing. That is why many men, who have a weak faith, choose to buy the *sateh* [meat snack] rather than the goat. In the end the wife too takes the directive: "let it [the bottle] be empty, as long as the bottle returns" (Wardoyo 2003a: 42).

Man's stamina, hyper-sexuality, and sex as a biological drive were recurring arguments. This "libido" argument, based on the thought that men have a stronger biological urge for sexual intercourse than women, underscores the naturalness of men's hyper sexuality. While this claim is neither new nor uncommon in other parts of the world, the "libido" argument is here linked to polygamy. Because of the normalized public discourse that "men-need-more-sex-than-women", women marginally allow or (grudgingly) accept their husbands' affairs with other women. Women do sometimes argue that men need more sexual intercourse but they do not want their husbands to marry another woman. They "prefer" instead that their husbands "snack" outside of the house and don't bring the "goat" home (Brenner 1996: 152, Suryakusuma 1996: 115). Having an affair outside of wedlock (secretive) is preferable to having them marry their mistresses.

Men's sexual desire is related to the Indonesian concept *nafsu*. Placed in Javanese tradition, it concerns desire as a whole: as a passion relating to love, sex, money or work. When excessively present and uncontrolled, especially when involving money, *nafsu* can become an irrational emotion that excludes rational reasoning that is potentially dangerous to the individual, the family and society (Brenner 1996: 150). However, as Brenner further observes:

> Many Javanese men and women seem to take as a given that this desire is extremely difficult for them to suppress. Although this notion runs counter to both Javanese and Islamic ideologies that hold males to have greater control of their instincts and emotions than females, I encountered it often enough to be convinced that it was not just the idiosyncratic opinion of a few individuals. The degree to which it actually contradicts the ideology of male potency is debateable, however, since it reaffirms male sexual potency – a concomitant of male spiritual potency (Anderson 1990) – even as it challenges men's ability to master their passions (1996: 150).

In contrast to the cultural value of men's ability to master their passions, in Puspo Wardoyo's terms, these passions should not be controlled or withheld. Wardoyo warns that the way of the "emergency backdoor" (*pintu darurat*), which includes adultery (*perzinaan*) or visits to a prostitute, is the wrong way. It does not follow Islamic teachings and should be avoided at any costs. The right way is polygamy and when practiced in an Islamic way, it can solve the problem of man's "excess" of sexual potency. Instead of going to prostitutes or mistresses, which leave these women with no material security, men should take their responsibility and marry the women to whom they feel attracted. In this respect, it is not so much the sexual drive that can be held against men, but of not properly taking the consequences of wanting to act upon these biological urges. Man's sexual desire, however, is not scrutinized.

Male sexual potency, status, and virility is emphasized as interrelated to Javanese political thought (Anderson 1990: 32). Virility without fertility indicates a personal indulgence in sexuality and greed (*pamrih*), which lowers one's status rather than increases it (Anderson 1990: 51). Because Wardoyo's form of polygamy connects virility with fertility, his *nafsu* is not a form of personal indulgence, but a masculine act that coincides with notions of power and status in Javanese thought. Interlocking with *nafsu* is money and wealth. Wardoyo claims that his business only started to flourish after he started to practice polygamy. He sees polygamy, then, as belonging to one of his Islamic business ethics.

Javanese ornaments decorate his restaurants, betraying an ethnic Javanese dominance in his choices of marketing. The connection of polygamy with social status echoes back to images of a Javanese past. Aristocratic wealth and status was associated with the luxury of having many women. An iconic image of polygamy involves the images of wealthy polygamous men from Javanese royal courts. Royal kings were known to have multiple wives (besides their numerous mistresses) reaching sometimes fifty women. Although seen as (material) excess, the Javanese kings were also regarded as having great sexual potency which acted as legitimacy for men and women to endorse the practice. This legitimacy was reserved for elite and wealthy men only who could afford to maintain the costs of having multiple households.

Translating this imagery back onto Puspo Wardoyo, the "Soloneseness" of Wardoyo plays a crucial part in turning him into an icon of polygamy. In contemporary discourse, the city Solo is still recognized as the origin of Javanese culture and ethics. To refer to a "wong Solo", implies the typification of a Solonese "man" as an archetype of Javanese culture and religion. The self-acclaimed wong Solo Puspo Wardoyo, taps into this cultural archetype by feeding into cultural stereotypes and images of the Javanese past.

Modernity and Piety

The manner, style, and language in which Wardoyo conveys his message resemble modern (western) talk show-styles or self-help books that overflow the western (and increasingly the non-western) book market. They supply in a demand of men and women searching for answers on how to improve their body and their Self, how to improve their marriage, how to live their life (more) spiritually, and ultimately, how to reach a more fulfilling life. In more ways than one, these programs and books replace earlier tasks of the church where the local priest would advice on personal, familial, or life problems. In the pro-polygamy campaign, religion is not replaced by modernity, but is produced by it.

Puspo Wardoyo conveyed the message that polygamy is not old-fashioned but modern. He does not, for instance, oppose working women, which he regards as an idea of modernity. By marrying a career woman she can continue to do her work while other wives take care of the children. This perspective is most clearly propagated by one of his fervent woman supporters Sitoresmi Prabuningrat, the third wife of a famous band player and ex-wife of the well-known former Indonesian poet Rendra. At the event of the Polygamy award, she was one of the main speakers. In her answer to someone from the audience who commented that polygamy did not appeal to career women, Sitoresmi answered that she considered herself to be a career woman and that polygamy helps her with this (Yuningsih 2003). By practicing polygamy, she can divide the household and childrearing tasks with the co-wives, thus, leaving her with enough time to devote her attention to her career.

Of great effect was the deployment of women's own narratives. Wardoyo's wives often accompanied him and talked about the virtues of polygamy. All argued that they would rather see their husband re-marry than commit adultery or seek prostitutes. Acknowledging that they are hurt when their husband seeks his pleasure elsewhere, they nevertheless prefer that their family stays intact in an "Islamic way". As Rini Purwanti, Wardoyo's first wife argues:

> When that happened, I felt very dejected. But because this has turned into destiny, I could accept it with a breath of happiness. I always pray: "Oh Allah, if this is indeed Your truth, please make my heart accept this without any hesitation" (Suryono 2003b: 56).

Purwanti, who is a lecturer at a university in northern Sumatra, follows a narrative that is exemplary of "first wife" narratives. Feelings of hurt and betrayal were well-known to accompany narratives of women who experienced their husbands marrying another woman. Often, these narratives of victimization provoked sympathy for the first wife and a justification of the wife distancing, leaving, divorcing, or even mistreating their polygamous husband. Although Purwanti acknowledged that she felt dejected, this was not because of her husband's wrong-doings. It was her that needed to reconcile with a destiny that she did not foresee. Although it took her a while, with the help of God, she could finally accept her husband's marriage to another woman. Purwanti's ultimate strength in overcoming her sense of betrayal lies not, however, in the actions or promises of her husband. It is not the way in which he is just or kind to her and all of the other wives. Her framework to justify and accept her polygamous marriage with Wardoyo is Islam.

In contrast, Wardoyo's fourth wife Intan Tri Laksmi does not only refer to Islam to justify her choice for polygamy. The young law-graduate points out that the dominant reason for women to agree to polygamy lies not so much in them being materially dependent on their (future) husband. At present, she observes that the women are pretty, highly educated, and have good careers. Nevertheless, Laksmi argues, these women are left with no husband. It appears difficult for them to find an eligible husband. Out of fear of not finding a husband in time, polygamy can be an alternative (Suryono 2003c: 70), a solution for modern career women to "still" get married.

The new take on polygamy was increasingly voiced by single and successful women, arguing they would not rule out a polygamous marriage as an option. Because of their careers, they were not able to take care of their husbands or children full time (Koran Tempo, 10 August 2003; Soegiharto 2006). For some, polygamy is a (last) option when it is the only remaining way for them to "still" get married (Rahmawati 2004). "Singleness" in general, but female singleness in particular is on the increase in the major cities and is often regarded as the accompanying ills of modernity. Single-hood, however, has not been valued much and women feel the pressure of getting married as soon as they hit the age of twenty-five. Wardoyo appealed to this problem. While supporting the idea of working women, he claims that they should not remain single.

Reconfiguring Masculinity

In his much appraised work *Masculinities* (1995), the sociologist Raewyn Connell outlined different categories of masculinities that operate within the sphere of masculine power: hegemonic, complicit, marginalized, and subordinated masculinities. They should not to be conflated with identities or personalities, but should be understood as gender practices through which individuals can access social legitimacy and power. In critiquing Connel's concept of "hegemonic masculinity," Demetriou argues that the concept reproduces a dualism of hegemonic and non- hegemonic masculinities "as two distinct and clearly differentiated configurations of practice" (2001: 347). Rather than seeing hegemonic masculinity as a closed and unified totality which incorporated no otherness" (347), the production of hegemonic masculinity should be understood as working through a process of negotiation, translation, hybridization, and reconfiguration (2001: 349). With this understanding, the increase of masculinist representations could be viewed as negotiating or reconfiguring masculinity in post-authoritarian times. Occurring with and not against cultural ideals, they reproduce new realms of masculine power next to earlier hegemonic masculinities of New Order gender ideology.[4]

When we look at hegemonic (male) masculinity or at the prevalent notion of manhood during the Old Order or the New Order, there are three different interrelating factors that contribute to shaping a hegemonic masculinity in Indonesia, first a notion of "fatherism" (*bapakism*), second the strong dominance of Javanese-centric ethnicity, and third a loyalty to the nation. Fatherism adheres to paternal, feudal, and authoritative qualities of Indonesian manhood in their relationships with other men, with women, and with children (Suryakusuma 1987, 1996: 95, 102). Javanism is central to shaping this fatherism. The centrality of Javanese-centric ideas, beliefs, and philosophies in

[4] The few works focusing on masculinity in the Old Order (1945-1965) and New Order Indonesia (1965-1998) emphasize a strong Javaneseness in the construction of hegemonic masculinity in Indonesia in which mysticism rather than Islam is emphasized (See Anderson 1990, Boellstorf 2004, and Sunindyo 1998).

Indonesian nation-building has been illuminated by Benedict Anderson's study into the workings of power in Javanese culture and how this contributes to mechanisms in Indonesian politics (1972; 1990). Here, the association of Javaneseness and masculinity played an important role in affirming and obtaining status or spiritual power. Finally, the mechanisms of masculinity in the workings of nationalism worked constitutively since the beginning of nationalism's struggle against colonialism. It was not Islam, or culture, race, or ethnicity that fought the Dutch, but the "modern" sense of nationhood, which was partly influenced by ideas of nationalism from the West. It is therefore not an "Islamic masculinity" that formed and shaped a hegemonic masculinity, but Javanese fatherism and "Indonesianness".

The anthropologist Richard Howard argued: "A rich and powerful man may exude a kind of sexual power and virility and may have sexual relationships with many women, but his identity as a 'normal male' is only achieved within the structure of the family unit" (1996: 253). Hence, within the national framework, the ideal man was primarily defined through frameworks of marriage and family, for instance by remaining monogamous and by being a responsible breadwinner for the family (Heider 1991; Howard 1996). Moreover, the New Order in particular conveyed a strong heteronormative ideology, which played an important role in imagining the nation and modern citizen-family (Boellstorff 2004: 470). Considering the stringent measures that the New Order administration took to prohibit polygamy, the ideology extended to a monogamous heteronormative ideology, which most resembled western constructions. "Islamic masculinity," understood as a construction of masculinity in which religious identity is emphasized, was not part of the dominant discourse on Indonesian manhood and can therefore be identified as being marginalized.

But with socio-political and religious changes becoming visible in late New Order and expanding in post Suharto times, notions of masculinity are shifting, and evidently challenging hegemonic positions. The pro-polygamy and masculinist discourse of Puspo Wardoyo needs to be set against this background, in which the dominant Indonesian idea of manhood seems to be in a crisis for it competes with alternative, especially Islamic, definitions that are getting stronger and receiving more legitimacy. But besides Islamization, another historical development of the past few decades deeply influenced Indonesians' perceptions of manhood, namely women's emancipation. Combined with processes of Islamization, it led to a significant rupture in common ideas of Indonesian masculinity.

Crisis and "Backlash"

News surfaced in 2006 that Ade Armando, a well-known public intellectual who vehemently opposed polygamy, had started practicing polygamy. Moreover, the popular Islamic preacher Aa Gym, who communicated widely that it was better not to practice polygamy, similarly announced that he married another woman (Diani and Suwarni 2006).[5] These details are significant in so far that they articulate masculinist desires and involve men with a new religious background. Men like Puspo Wardoyo, Rhoma Irama, and Ade Armando, are not men coming from mainstream Islamic organizations such as

[5] As soon as the news about Aa Gym's second marriage came out, the attendance to his sermons dropped considerably. His decision angered many Muslims, especially women (Suwarni 2006).

Nahdlatul Ulama or Muhammadiyah. Instead, they come from nominal (secular or cultural) backgrounds.

This is also true for a new generation of young Islamic preachers. Among them is the prominent Islamic media preacher Abdullah Gymnastiar, the "hip" and popular young preacher (ustad) Jeffry Al-Buchori (also known as Uje), and Ustad Arifin Illham. All three have in common that they did not enjoy a classic Islamic upbringing. Some of them have "re-born" narratives, such as Ustad Jeffry Al-Buchori, who before becoming an Islamic preacher was an actor in Indonesian films and drama. After a downhill career in which he eventually resorted to drugs and gambling he converted to becoming a pious Muslim and started to work for God rather than for money and fame. Much of the new, young, and "hip" male Muslim narratives adhere to these "re-born" narratives comparable to narratives of reborn Christians in the United States. In the public sphere, these new Islamic-identified men are producing new constructions of manhood. With respect to polygamy, they all are (still) monogamous, but share the conviction that polygamy is a legitimate Islamic practice (Bakri, Sawariyanto, and Yuniardi 2005; Watson 2005). The masculinist discourse should be set against this background of "new-born" Muslims.

Literature on gender relations in the New Order explicated that New Order's ideology concerning women was contradictory (Brenner 1999, Hatley 1999, Sen 1998). While promoting women to become modern career women, the ideology also warned these same women not to go "too far". Women in the long run should not forget their family and they should not take away men's jobs. As Brenner's analysis of New Order women's magazines inform us, the message conveyed is not so much that women should not work, but rather that they should not prioritize their careers over family and marriage. When they do give priority to their careers, they could become a threat to men. She could run the risk of emasculating men, driving them "into the arms of other women in order to rescue his manhood" (Brenner 1999: 28). The new masculinist discourse affirms this belief. Especially in light of the Asian economic crisis, in which men became increasingly unemployed, the thrift catching-up development of women in the workforce often implied a threat to men who lost confidence in finding a job.

The pro-polygamy debate should be understood as signaling a "crisis of masculinity". Confrontations to hegemonic understandings of the Indonesian family, gender relations, and sexuality correlated with the collapse of the highly patriarchal Suharto regime. According to Marshall Clark, Indonesian masculinity is undergoing a period of uncertainty (2004: 131). Reading the film *Kuldesak*, he argues that the Indonesian male is torn between outdated and archetypal images of the man (such as illustrated in Javanese mythology) and new, alternative, images of the man that are more ambiguous and hybrid. Clark further indicates: "With the fall of Suharto, and the disappointment of leaders such as Gus Dur and Megawati, it appears that the days of a unifying, all conquering, male hero à la Sukarno – who often likened himself to the heroic Bima or Gatotkaca of the Wayang – are long gone" (Ibid.). Clark optimistically indicates that the opening up of democratic spaces in Indonesia will contribute to a less conservative patriarchal stereotype of masculinity. In light of the new pro-polygamy discourse, I am reluctant in asserting this optimism. Although the pro- polygamy discourse does suggest a crisis of hegemonic masculinity, it does not seek less patriarchal or less conservative definitions of Indonesian manhood. Instead, discourses of

hypermasculinity and (Javanese) paternalism are reaffirmed – albeit enveloped in an Islamic framework.

Women Debating Polygamy

In general, the public approached the Puspo Wardoyo phenomenon as a display of social status and cultural capital, dismissing his plea for a polygamous society as an act of hypocrisy (Ihsan 2003). Although highly mediatized and vastly exposed, the masculinist advocacy of polygamy did not carry much empathy in the Muslim public. Mainstream Muslim groups did not approve of Puspo Wardoyo's campaign. He did not, for instance, draw much official support from the Islamic mainstream organizations such as the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama or the modernist Muhammadiyah, nor did he draw support from official governmental institutions such as the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI). Even the more neo-fundamentalist groups, such as Hizbut Tahrir and the militant Laskar Jihad were against the so called *socialization of polygamy*: "polygamy is the doctrine of Islam, not of Puspo Wardoyo" (Gatra 2003a).[6] The negative reaction toward Puspo Wardoyo's pro-polygamy campaign, however, did not mean they were against polygamy as such. While mainstream modernists, traditionalists, and Islamists dismissed Wardoyo's campaign, they clearly justified the practice of polygamy in general by centering their arguments on verses in the Qur'an, the *hadith* (traditions), and the fiqh (jurisprudence).[7] The campaigns contributed to triggering a more profound debate on polygamy. It especially did not go unchallenged by feminist groups. Whereas male secularists hesitated in fully critiquing polygamy, women's opposition was very vocal. Although they formed a united front in the public's opinion, the discourses of the women's groups that opposed polygamy varied according to secular and (liberal) Muslim frameworks. Polygamy appeared to be one of the most salient issues in stressing the distinctive features of a fragmented and at times divided Indonesian feminism. While secular feminists regarded polygamy as a form of violence against women, Muslim feminists pointed toward misogynist readings of Qur'anic verses and the *hadith*.[8]

---

[6] Unofficially, however, there were individuals from these same organizations who have supported him and have used his credentials to give their view legitimacy.

[7] Bluntly formulated these included the justification "It is in the Qur'an" and the justification "The prophet Muhammad performed it too". The first argument, which follows the justification of polygamy on the grounds of textual evidence in the Qur'an, is based on the fourth chapter (*surat*) An-Nisa, verse three, which reads: "And if ye fear that ye will not deal fairly by the orphans, marry of the women, who seem good to you, two or three or four (Qur'an 4: 3)". A second theological argument that was prevalent believed polygamy was allowed because it followed Islamic law based on the teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad. This argument followed the narrative of Muhammad's life who after the death of Khadija, his first wife with whom he led a monogamous life, married Sawda bint Zama, Aisha and Hafsa. Later he married more wives until a total of eleven. By referring to the practices of the prophet himself, polygamy is regarded as something that is halal, following the "Islamic way".

[8] Muslim and Islamic feminists argue for instance that the verse does not only mention that polygamy is allowed: the verse also states clear limitations. While literally the teachings of the Qur'an allow polygamy, the text also explicitly explains that there are strict conditions appended. They point out the necessity not to dismiss the verses that accompany the An-Nisa verse 4:3, namely, "[…] and if ye fear that ye cannot do justice (to so many) then one (only) or (the captives) that your right hands possess. Thus it is more likely that ye will not do injustice." (Qur'an 4:3), or from verse 129, "Ye will not be able to deal equally between (your) wives, however much ye wish (to do so). […]" (Qur'an 4: 129). These verses actually point out that it is rather difficult to be polygamous in a just way.

Feminist Opposition

The secular feminist discourse against polygamy was dominant when looking at the way in which this discourse was articulated in newspapers, magazines or in talk shows on television and radio. One of the women's groups that used this secular discourse was the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH-APIK). Responding to the event of the polygamy award, this women's association issued an official press statement in which they declared their reasons for their struggle against polygamy. Summarizing their points, they argued that polygamy should be seen as a form of discrimination, which goes against laws of gender equality in the Indonesian constitution and international agreements such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).[9] They also argued that polygamy is a form of domestic violence, pointing out to physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence of the women and children involved (LBH- APIK 2003: 119). Hence, secular feminists depended on the framework of national and international law. Religion or Islam as such was not scrutinized or made explicit in the overall statement. No direct references were made to Qur'anic verses to support arguments or to highlight the usage of certain textual quotations for legitimacy. In their views, polygamy is not something that should be discussed: it should be eradicated. It should be banned and monogamy should be institutionalized. In such a way, secular feminists approach polygamy as a practice and belief corresponding to a masculinist discourse.

In his pro-polygamy campaign, Wardoyo verbalizes his concerns about contemporary feminism and expands on the "serious threat" of the "gender movement" (Suryono 2003b):

> In my opinion, the gender movement strongly violates Islamic ethics and law. Especially considering that the gender movement enthusiastically depicts the struggle of women against men. (...) Subsequently, these wrong and biased understandings of women's emancipation unconsciously influence Muslim women's way of thinking greatly, leading Muslim women to ignore their function and duties as women in the way that Islam has destined for them (Suryono 2003b: 46).

Set in this background, Wardoyo and secular feminists seem to be tied up in a discursive fight on the question, not of what really defines women's rights, but whether or not polygamy is good/bad for women. On the one side, Wardoyo claims that feminist ideas are brainwashing Muslim women's minds with ideas that lead these women to divorce their men when they want to marry again, which is a sign of these women distancing themselves from Islam. On the other side, feminists claim that polygamy depends on a "phallocentric" logic (LBH-APIK 2003: 118) ingrained in a belief system, which tricks women into accepting polygamy while in fact it causes women pain and suffering.

The group Indonesian Women's Conscience that protested against the polygamy award consisted of Muslim women's groups such as Rahima, Puan Amal Hayati, and Fatayat. These are women's groups that, in contrast to other Muslim women's groups, call themselves at times "feminist" or consider themselves to be part of a larger "gender movement". Muslim feminism seemed to be at the forefront of developing a critique against polygamy in contemporary Indonesia by advocating a religious and cultural re-

[9] They refer here to the UUD 1945, the UUHAM, and the UU No. 1/84 GBHN 1999.

interpretation and appropriation of different kinds of feminisms and Islamic text. In a relatively short period, Muslim feminist voices have succeeded in organizing themselves, establishing information centres and publishing journals devoted to gender issues in Islamic thought. They have reacted strongly to the radicalization of Islamic groups and the strong influence of conservative religious scholars (*ulama*) in media discourses. Whereas the more secular groups oppose polygamy from a legalist and internationalist framework, the Islamic groups oppose polygamy from a theological perspective, bringing textual evidence that the Qur'an does not proclaim polygamy as an Islamic duty. Moreover, they call for the establishment of an anti- polygamy movement that runs through Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) (Muttaqin 2003).

Muslim feminists clearly opposed polygamy and were very vocal and visible in the public sphere. During a national meeting of the Nahdlatul Ulama in Solo on November 28, 2004, Wardoyo's restaurant Solonese Man was designated to do the catering. Women, especially from the Fatayat, were furious to hear about this. They had set up an alternative stand with food. Participants of the meeting were welcome to come to the "anti-polygamy" food-stand that they had provided for them (*Tempointeraktif*, 28 November 2004).[10]

Although acknowledging that the practice is described in the Qur'an and *hadith*, they illustrate and argue that this literal fact does not necessarily justify the practice. They point out to the contextualization of the verses, to contradictory verses, and the strict conditions attached to the practice. They also critique men's justification of imitating the prophet's practice of polygamy. Muslim feminists depended heavily on alternative theological knowledge. This was, for instance, provided for them by the prominent Muslim feminist Siti Musdah Mulia. However, they were often dependent on male Islamic scholars to support their cause with their knowledge on the Qur'an and the *hadith*. These religious scholars often came from the so-called liberal Islamic schools that are relatively marginal in terms of mass appeal (they are not like the traditionalist or modernist mass organizations) but are quite vocal in terms of intellectual discourse.[11]

Islamist Women

New in the debate is the position of Islamist women, represented by the women's faction of the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). Most of these women allow polygamy although only a few would promote it as such. While critical in the way it was sometimes practiced, these women would never openly oppose the practice. Aisyah Amini from the Prosperous Justice Party argued for instance that strict requirements should be implemented instead of completely rejecting the practice (Junaidi 2004). They

[10] Fatayat is part of the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama. I distinctly categorize them here as belonging to the Muslim feminist discourse because in their actions they distance themselves from the larger (male) group and their older sister group, Muslimat. Moreover, important figures in Fatayat are now also part of newly formed Muslim feminist NGO's such as Rahima or Puan Amal Hayati – or even secular feminist NGOs such as the Indonesian Women's Coalition.

[11] Representatives such as Ulil Abshar-Abdalla, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, Hussein Muhammad, Acep ZamzamNoor, and Hilaly Basya – played an important role in the progressive Islamic women's/feminist movement. Often, because of their authority, they functioned as the spokespersons for many Islamic feminist issues. Most of the people in this movement are also part of the Liberal Islam Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal).

share the conservative opinion that it is allowed by Islam – also in relation to the "hypersex" thesis. Nursanita Nasution from the same party states:

> For people who have a condition of *hypersex*[12], and those people do exist, one wife is not sufficient. Islam takes care of this. Instead of people practicing *free sex* with many other people – which Islam already foresaw – he has to have a legal wife, that's far more healthy, he won't risk AIDS etcetera. Or for instance the man wants a child but the woman is not able to bear his children. Islam gives a solution for that. Not from the backdoor, there is nothing wrong with him marrying again if the wife can accept that. It is even more respectful when the woman is able to give the opportunity to her husband … That's fairer, right?[13]

Indirectly, the parliament member for the Prosperous Justice Party, argues here that she finds polygamy to be a "respectful" duty of women, not of men per se: Men can not help it when they are biologically shaped in a way that necessitates them to look for more sexual satisfaction. Their wanting to marry another woman officially is therefore something that needs to be applauded, for that is the option that Islam has formulated for these cases.

Another spokesperson for the Prosperous Justice Party and Member of Parliament Nursanitah Nasution, also gives women full responsibility for their own marriage. She points toward women giving permission and toward possibilities of divorce if women do not agree with the proposition of her husband. She does not plead for women to passively "undergo" polygamy, but she points out the rights of women in Islam:

> For instance, if my husband would want to marry again, but I would not be able to, I have the right to ask for a divorce. Sometimes this is not being socialized, as if only men have the right to divorce. In Islam women can ask for a divorce, that's her right, it is not forbidden. Sometimes we blow things out of proportion because we have not read enough.[14]

By claiming women's rights in the matter of polygamy, Nasution positions herself in the same league as secular feminists. However, whereas secular feminists claim that polygamy goes against the spirit of universal women's rights, the Islamist Member of Parliament argues that Islam protects women's rights in such a way that polygamy does not have to clash with them. She posits therefore, another set of norms and values under the rubric of women's rights. It is here that different understandings of women's rights come into play. Questions of women's rights, gender equality, or gender justice are differently defined and understood.

Conclusion

Is polygamy changing Indonesian hegemonic masculinity in the same way as veiling is changing perceptions of Indonesian femininity? Usually, images of women are deployed to denote the transition from tradition to modernity (Brenner 1999). The question is here

[12] The uses of Asterixes designate English words used in the article otherwise made in Indonesian and presented here in translation.
[13] Nursanita Nasution, my interview, tape recording, Jakarta, 10 June 2005.
[14] Ibid.

whether new images of polygamous men are contributing to new definitions of modern and post-authoritarian manhood. To a certain extent men are increasingly defining themselves as Muslim, and polygamy can be seen as one way for these men to link their masculinity to an Islamic identity. However, Wardoyo's masculinist pro-polygamy discourse is more masculine than it is Muslim or Islamic. Although he does use Islamic symbols and theological reasoning to justify his practices, some of his statements go against prevalent (even conservative) Islamic interpretations on polygamy. He dismisses for instance the thought that a man needs to have legitimate reasons to re-marry or that he has to ask for the wife's permission. Wardoyo's argument that polygamy is an Islamic right and duty for all Muslim men closes off dialogue or interpretation. This rhetoric does not engage with theological inquiries. It affirms masculinity, not Islamic masculinity as such.

The pro-polygamy discourse of Puspo Wardoyo contributed to reaffirming an Indonesian hegemonic masculinity that felt threatened by changes in society. These masculinist representations worked through modes of commodification, linking Islamic symbols with masculinity and modern consumer culture. In the mediatized public spaces of urban centers, these representations combined male sexual potency with a new image of the modern Muslim men.

Besides representing a shift in Indonesian masculinity, the figure of Puspo Wardoyo became a popular reference in debating the place of polygamy in Indonesian society today. A more subtle theological and socio-political debate lay underneath the hyped up controversy of Wardoyo's pro-polygamy campaign. These discussions among Islamic clerks, secular intellectuals, and representatives from various Islamic organizations went beyond the masculinist and consumerist rhetoric of Puspo Wardoyo's endeavor and contributed to bringing into focus the role of religion in public life and politics. In the midst of these discussions, feminists were very vocal. Drawing on different paradigms they publicly opposed polygamy, attempting to persuade men and women of the violence implicated in polygamy. While secular women activists depended on national and international paradigms of gender equality, Muslim feminists adhered to Islamic frameworks of gender equality.

The debate emphasized and made visible the different positions of various Islamic groups in society. It also signaled the ambiguous and contradictory positions of progressive movements that earlier did not adhere to religious principles. I have proposed to view the debate on polygamy in general, and Wardoyo's pro-polygamy discourse in particular, in terms of negotiating hegemonic masculinities of the New Order; in terms of the politics of status and class; as a response to the increasing emancipation of women; as a reaction to global discourses of neo-liberal economies; and as a mode of thinking through religion and nation in the new Indonesia. The crux of the article, therefore, was not simply the constellation that with the emergence of political Islam in Indonesia, polygamy is once again a desired practice. Rather it aimed to show how Indonesian citizens are re-imagining Muslim identities between processes of Islamization and democratization.

References

Altman, Irwin and Ginat, Joseph (1996) *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Anderson, Benedict (1990) *Language and Power: Exploring Cultures in Indonesia*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Asmarani, Devi (2002) 'Top Indonesian Officials Practicing Polygamy', *The Straits Times Interactive*, 3 May, Available at http://straitstimes.asiaone.com/ (24 November 2003).

Bakri, Kholis Bahtiar, Sawariyanto and Yuniardi, Imung (2005) 'Dakwah Generasi Layar Kaca', *Gatra*, 50 (24 October).

Boellstorff, Tom (2004) 'The Emergence of Political Homophobia in Indonesia: Masculinity and National Belonging', *Ethnos*, 69 (4): 445-464.

Brenner, Suzanne (1999) 'On the Public Intimacy of the New Order', *Indonesia*, 76 (April): 13-37.

Clark, Marshall (2004) 'Men, Masculinities and Symbolic Violence in Recent Indonesian Cinema', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 35 (1): 113-131.

Connel, Robert W. (1995) *Masculinities*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Demetriou, Demetrakis Z. (2001) 'Connel's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique', *Theory and Society*, 30: 337-361.

Diani, Hera and Suwarni, Yuli Tri (2006) 'Cleric Aa Gym rekindles polygamy debate', *The Jakarta Post*, 4 December.

Feillard, Andrée (1999) 'The Veil and Polygamy: Current Debates on Women and Islam in Indonesia', *Moussons*, 99 (December): 5-28.

Gatra (2003a) 'Kampanye Poligamor Presiden Poligami', *Gatra*, 23 (21 April).

Gatra (2003b) '*Polygam* yang Kandas', *Gatra*, 23 (21 April).

Hatley, Barbara (1999) 'Cultural expression and social tranformation in Indonesia', in Arief Budiman, Barbara Hatley and Damien Kingsbury (eds) *Reformasi: Crisis and Change in Indonesia*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, pp. 267-286.

Heider, Karl G. (1991) *Landscapes of emotion: mapping three cultures of emotion in Indonesia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Howard, Richard Stephen (1996) 'Falling into the Gay World: Manhood, Marriage, and Family in Indonesia', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, United States.

Ihsan, Moch Musofta (2003) 'Polygamy Award dan Wajah Seksualitas Kita', *Kompas*, 4 Augustus 2003, p. 48.

Jones, Gavin W. (1994) Marriage and Divorce in Islamic South-East Asia, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford, Singapore, New York: Oxford University Press.

Junaidi, A. (2004) 'Islamic candidates mum on polygamy', *The Jakarta Post*, 25 March.

Lev, Daniel S. (1996) 'On the Other Hand?' in Laurie J. Sears (ed) *Fantasizing the feminine in Indonesia*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, pp. 191-206.

Locher Scholten, Elsbeth (2000) *Women and the Colonial State: Essays on Gender and Modernity in the Netherlands Indies, 1900-1942*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press

Liddle, William R. and Mujani, Saiful (2004) 'Politics, Islam, and Public Opinion: Indonesia's Approaching Elections', *Journal of Democracy*, 15 (1): 109-123.

LBH-APIK (2003) 'Poligami Sebagai Bentuk Kekerasan yang Paling Nyata atas Harkat dan Martabat Perempuan sebagai Manusia di Dalam Hukum, Sosial Budaya dan Agama', *Jurnal Perempuan*, 31 (September), pp. 117-119.

Media Indonesia (2003) '"Juice Poligami" itu Dipesan Keluarga Megawati', 16 March, p. 3.

Martyn, Elizabeth (2005) *The women's movement in postcolonial Indonesia gender and nation in a new democracy*, London: RoutledgeCurzon.

Muttaqin, Farid (2003) 'Membangun Gerakan Anti Poligami Melalui Pesantren', *Kompas,* 4 May.

Nurjanah, Nunung (2003) 'Piala Poligami: Untuk Ade Armando', *Republika*, 30 July.

Sen, Krishna (1998) 'Indonesian women at work: Reframing the subject' in Krishna Sen and Maila Stivens (eds) *Gender and Power in Affluent Asia*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 35-62.

Sunindyo, Saraswati (1998) 'When the Earth is Female and the Nation is Mother: Gender, the Armed Forces and Nationalism in Indonesia' *Feminist Review*, 58 (Spring 1998): 1-21.

Suryono, Eko (2003a) 'Banyak Istri, Banyak Rejeki', in Eko Suryono (ed.) *Poligami: Kiat Sukses Beristri Banyak*, Solo: Bumi Wacana, pp. 43-44.

Suryono, Eka (2003b) 'Gender Sesat, Ancaman yang Serius' in Eko Suryono (ed.) *Poligami: Kiat Sukses Beristri Banyak*, Solo: Bumi Wacana, pp. 46-47.

Tempointeraktif.com (2004) 'Megawati Jenguk Kiai Abdullah Faqih', 31 July, Available at http://www.tempointeraktif.com/hg/nasional/2004/07/31/brk,20040731-05,id.html (13 April 2005).

Watson, C. W. (2005) 'A Popular Indonesian Preacher: The Significance of AA Gymnastiar', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,* 11 (4): 773-792.