

Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia

Women's Rights Movements,
Religious Resurgence and Local Traditions

Edited by
Susanne Schröter



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GENDER AND ISLAM IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: AN OVERVIEW

Susanne Schröter

Introduction

Compared to South Asia or the Middle East, Islam in Southeast Asia is considered to be moderate, especially with regard to its gender orders. There are an unusually large number of documented cases from the past where women ruled as sultans and queens, or participated in battles as resistance fighters or even as leaders of guerrilla movements. Southeast Asian women traditionally work as artisans and traders, have an income of their own, and are not subject to the laws of *purdah*.¹ In many local communities they are land and home owners and occupy respected positions in the clan hierarchies. Due to the existence of female-centred kinship systems in some societies, women may even be granted special rank higher than that of men.

This high status is a result of traditional social structures prevailing in Southeast Asia, which have repeatedly given rise to euphoric appraisals in the social and cultural sciences. In her groundbreaking introductory contribution to the anthology *Power and Difference; Gender in Island Southeast Asia*, Shelly Errington wrote that western observers are impressed by the 'complementarity of men's and women's work and the relative lack of ritual and social differentiation between men and women' (Errington 1990:1). Penny van Esterik had already commented along a similar line in 1982. In light of the ethnographical gender studies conducted since then, many of these assumptions no longer seem tenable today, and theses postulated at that time—such as Geertz's claim that Hindu Bali is a 'unisex society' (Geertz 1973:417–418)—could not be substantiated by more recent research. Nonetheless, weakly pronounced gender hierarchies are an evident feature of many Southeast Asian societies.

Neither has the UN-Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women² (CEDAW), which had been ratified by all Southeast

¹ This word derives from the Urdu language and means 'veil' or 'curtain'. It refers to the separation of the sexes through women's spatial seclusion and the covering of their bodies in public.

² CEDAW was adopted in December 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly. It

Asian countries, been fully implemented in a single country, yet, nor is the women's domestic sphere of power in any way complementary to the male-dominated public sphere, as some feminist scholars have argued.³

It must also be kept in mind that Southeast Asia is by no means a self-contained space where social and political systems have survived through the ages without being affected by outside influences. The contrary is the case. Southeast Asia has been the destination and hub of activity of traders and mercantile companies for many centuries; it was exposed to the influence of Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and Muslim missionaries; and it had to ward off Portuguese, Spanish, British, French, and Dutch colonial powers.⁴ All these forces had an effect on the local gender orders. In the most recent past, social changes were primarily triggered by the gender concepts of the colonial powers and the Christian missionary societies.⁵ However, the spread of Islam had an impact as well.

Islam probably arrived in Southeast Asia as early as in the eighth century, and was not only spread by Indian traders who established themselves along the coasts, but also by missionaries of Sufi orders (*tarekat*). It blended with local traditions and beliefs, which led to the emergence of systems that were for the most part syncretistic, and compatible with the existing social structures. Since the nineteenth century, so-called modernist Islam in particular has presented itself as a decided opponent of traditional local social structures and gender relations. This constellation continues to the present day, as Salafi and Wahabi varieties of Islam still exert a strong

defines 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field [...] The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life—including the right to vote and to stand for election—as well as education, health and employment. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms' (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>).

³ See for example Ilse Lenz and Ute Luig who introduced the term gender symmetry, or non-patriarchal societies, into the scholarly debate. They suggested to view several spheres—economy, symbolic order, reproduction, politics, and sexuality—as equal, and to exemplarily add up spheres of power. They argue that we are dealing with gender symmetry whenever there is equilibrium between the possible positions of power, even if some sphere is dominated by one gender.

⁴ Compare Reed (1993), among others.

⁵ Compare Schröter (2010).

influence on the Islamic communities of Southeast Asia. In all societies discussed in this anthology, one encounters polarizing discourses in which representatives of a scripturalist variety of Islam, orthodox conservatives, and liberals argue over the prerogative of theological interpretation, as well as over an adequate interpretation of the Qur'an and *sunnah*. At the same time, ideas of democracy, emancipation, and liberalism are taken up and tested for applicability to local conditions. Southeast Asia is in flux, and the same is true for Southeast Asian Islam and the gender relations in societies shaped by Islam.⁶ Both the front pages of the daily press and the talk shows on television are dominated by major debates about family law reforms, public morals, and the access of women to leading positions, reproductive rights, polygyny, and marital violence. Female activists, politicians, women scholars, and religious experts discuss the current social developments in the media and in parliamentary sessions, in national planning commissions, at demonstrations and conferences. In that process, the future relevance of religion is negotiated; the point at issue is whether there will be acceptance for a plurality of lifestyles, or whether preference will be given to the stabilization of an orthodox system of values that is viewed as unalterable. Gender is a central issue in that context.

Islamic Queens, Female Military Leaders, and Anti-Colonial Fighters

In the Indonesian province of Aceh, which calls itself the 'Veranda of Mecca' and to this day takes pride in being the region in the Indonesian archipelago where Islamization began, people still proudly remember several female military and political leaders. An epitaph near Minye Tujuh refers to a queen named Nur Ilah who is said to have ruled over Pasai and Kedah in the fourteenth century.⁷ A female admiral, Laksamana Keumalahayati, reportedly lived in the sixteenth century; she is said to have recruited an Armada Inong Bale, a fleet of widowed women. Even though verifiable historical facts about her life are scanty, Malahayati—as she is popularly called—ranks among the generally accepted folk heroines.⁸ There is empirical proof of the existence of four women who successively ruled as sultanas and controlled the fate of the then powerful mercantile nation: Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1641–1675), Sultanah Nur Alam Naqiatuddin Syah (1675–1678), Sultanah

⁶ Compare, for example, Liow and Hosen (2009); Nathan and Kamali (2005); Rabasa (2003).

⁷ Compare Molen (2007).

⁸ On the body of source material and the emergence of the myths surrounding Laksamana Keumalahayati, compare Clavé-Çelik (2008).

Inayat Zakiatuddin Syah (1678–1688), and Sultanah Kamalat Zainatuddin Syah (1688–1699). Their regencies were quite obviously no exception in that region. In the neighbouring sultanate of Patani, which was situated on the Southeast Asian mainland and vied with Aceh for territorial influence, four successive queens are also said to have ruled even 60 years earlier (1584–1688). In popular historiography they are referred to as Ratu Hijau (Green Queen), Ratu Biru (Blue Queen), Ratu Ungu (Violet Queen), and Ratu Kuning (Yellow Queen). There are narratives about an Islamic queen in the southern Philippines as well, yet these records are even vaguer than those from Patani.⁹

With regard to more recent history, the evidence is sounder. There is material that refers to female fighters and political leaders in Indonesia and the Philippines. In Aceh, women fought in the anticolonial liberation army, and some of them even became commanders. Cut Meutia and, most notably, Cut Nyak Dhien are prominent examples. After their husbands died, they succeeded them in their positions and led the fight against the Dutch colonial army, militarily and politically. Emmy Saelan, who was one of the activists in an uprising in South Sulawesi organized by Wolter Monginsidi, also acted in support of her husband, as did Martha Tiahua, who accompanied her husband Pattimura in the Moluccas, and Roro Gusik, who played a prominent part in the revolt of Untung Suropati in Java.¹⁰ In Mindanao there are reports about an army commander named Panglima Fatima of Tandubas, an island of the Tawi Tawi group. After her husband's death, she succeeded him in leading an uprising against the Americans. She was not the only female local leader who caused astonishment among the colonial officials and generals. In fact, it seems to have been quite common for courageous women to become the military and political successors of their slain husbands.¹¹ And what is more: even during the lifetimes of male sultans and clan leaders, ambitious women succeeded in exerting considerable political influence. With regard to the pre-American period in the Philippines, Vivienne Angeles writes: 'Some women were reputed to be powers behind the sultans' (Angeles 1998:211).

At first glance, the considerable number of women in political and military positions of power seems surprising, because many Muslim leaders to this day oppose female leadership, referring to verse 4:34 and the *hadith* according to which 'a people who entrust power to a woman will never prosper'. Despite this disapproval, there is evidence of numerous female rulers in the history of

⁹ Compare Majul (1999:8).

¹⁰ Compare Wieringa (1988:71f.).

¹¹ Compare Abubakar (2005b:120f.).

the Islamic world. In pre-Islamic Arabia and in Muhammad's time, women were active as traders, fighters, and politicians (Schröter 2008). Later, in dynastic times, they distinguished themselves as regents (Mernissi 1993). As a rule, however, a woman could only attain such a position when acting on behalf of her husband or son. In such a case she acted as proxy, so to speak, of a son or husband who had either died or who was still too young to reign. Women's careers were always linked to those of men. For that reason, female historical figures, be they fighters or politicians, should not be equated with female leaders in the modern sense of the concept. We must also beware of another misconception: the mere fact that women did participate in military conflicts, or were members of guerrilla movements, cannot per se be interpreted as indicating an egalitarian gender order. In order to appraise any concrete case a thorough analysis is necessary. In that context, a distinction needs to be made between women of the elite—that is, women who indeed held leading positions—and common female fighters or supporters of combatants. Elsa Clavé-Çelik rightfully criticizes that official Aceh historiography primarily commemorates female resistance fighters who conform to the 'archetypal frame of the noble, beautiful and successful elite warrior woman' (Clavé-Çelik 2008:10). We do not know anything about women fighters who did not belong to the elite; the names of peasant women and female commoners who were involved in battles were not recorded and have not been passed down.

The historical and sociological evidence is better with regard to warlike conflicts that ended just recently, such as the war of Aceh's independence movement against the Indonesian army, or the still ongoing conflict between guerrilla organizations in the southern Philippines. Women have been organized within the Philippine Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) since the 1970s.¹² Angeles notes, however, that their function rather conformed to traditional ideas about female work: 'Their main task on the battlefield [...] is to provide moral support to the men and to take care of wounded fighters' (Angeles 1996:139). Since the late 1980s women have repeatedly made efforts to organize themselves within the MNLF and to effect a change in their role. 'A turning point in the women's involvement in the MNLF at this stage was the organization of the Bangsa Moro Women's Professional and Employees Association in 1986' (Angeles 1996:142). This organization at first pursued the goal of providing the MNLF with financial means; later, the women also used the setting to discuss the empowerment of women and Muslim women's

¹² Siapno mentions a 'military sub-organization of women, the Bangsa Bai' (Siapno 1994:192).

rights. They lobbied to further the interests and needs of widows and orphans and committed themselves to economic capacity building for women. 'In this sense', Angeles believes, 'the MNLF has functioned as an agent of change for the women' (Angeles 1996:145).

This does not apply to the Acehnese women fighters, the Inong Bale. Inong Bale are defined as widows—ideally, of fighters or at least of men who died at the hands of the Indonesian army. In addition, official Acehnese propaganda usually portrays them as rape victims. This is illustrated by the following text from the internet magazine *Achehtimes*, which introduces female armed fighters of the independence movement Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM, Free Aceh Movement):

This widow has been raped by the Indonesia military and abused physically, spiritually and mentally, and she is not alone; a lot more of other Acehnese women experienced the same thing. Now they need to defend themselves for self-worth and freedom.¹³

Suraiya Kamaruzzaman, a women's rights activist with the NGO Flower Aceh, who in an essay published in 2000 claimed that 'women want to silence all the guns, whether Indonesian or Acehnese', also believes that Acehnese women fighters were not primarily prompted to take up arms by patriotism, inner persuasion or any other political motivations. According to Kamaruzzaman, they chose that path because they did not have any other choice. Their husbands were dead and their honour was violated. If they wanted to survive and to be protected from further assaults by the enemy soldiers, joining the guerrilla was their last resort. Now that the war has ended, nothing remains of the Inong Bale but the shadow of a gruesome past. They symbolize the suffering of the Acehnese people, and not the latter's widely celebrated heroic courage and adamancy. Unlike Cut Nyak Dhienh, the raped Inong Bale is nameless and has disappeared as quietly as she first appeared on the scene. It is doubtful whether Acehnese women will be more honoured in the future than they were in the past, and whether maybe even a new type of heroine, the human rights activist, will make her appearance on the public stage, as is supposed by Paul Zeccola.¹⁴

Nowadays significant changes are underway; these are due to new debates, spurred by the pressure to implement CEDAW, about women in leading

¹³ Compare www.achehtimes.com/photos/gam/gam01/index.htm (accessed 11 February 2010).

¹⁴ Zeccola wrote in *Inside Indonesia*: 'Heroes and heroines in today's Aceh are people who tirelessly risk their lives fighting for truth and justice, speaking out against hypocrisy, and defending the human rights of others, often without reward' (Zeccola 2007).

positions. However, these changes provoke controversies, as is illustrated by the example of Indonesia where Megawati Sukarnoputri was the first woman ever to be nominated to run for presidential office. Muslim clerics and politicians were aghast, insisting that it was incompatible with Islam to have a woman as the head of the nation.¹⁵ This rigorous attitude mobilized the democratic-emancipatory opposition. On 22 June 1999, civic women's organizations went public with a declaration countering that the exclusion of a woman from the presidential office was in fact an abuse of Islam. They argued that the granting of fundamental political rights to women also entails the right to access to the highest office. Despite these interventions, Megawati first only became vice president. Only when the elected president, Abdurrahman Wahid, was forced to resign in 2001 was she elected to the highest public office, which she held until October 2004.¹⁶

However, spirited speeches held by feminists were not the primary reason why Megawati Sukarnoputri was elected to the highest public office. Just as in former cases of female rule in the history of the Islamic world, dynastic factors played a decisive role as well. She was identified with the aura of her late father, Sukarno, the charismatic first president.¹⁷ In post-colonial Asia, there have been several instances where women became appointed presidents due to this type of identification of women with deceased male leaders.¹⁸

Matrifocal Societies and Islam

The concentration of matrifocal societies in the region of western Indonesia and eastern Malaysia is one of the most interesting phenomena found

¹⁵ This debate was not a particularity of Indonesia; it surges up whenever women are aspiring for leading positions in nations dominated by Islam. With regard to the traditions and the Qur'an, it is possible to come up with arguments supporting the positions of both objectors and supporters. For an overview of this topic, see Mernissi (1993).

¹⁶ For the role of Megawati in the most recent development of Indonesia, compare Robinson (2009:159 f.); Sen (2002).

¹⁷ Such attributions often pose an obstacle to individual independent action, with the result that the female politicians will give the impression of being weak and incompetent. Sometimes, however, they will themselves toy with such 'markers' to conceal their own ambitions and to achieve their political and personal goals. On this topic, compare Fleschenberg (2008); Hellmann-Rajanayagam and Fleschenberg (2008); Thompson and Derichs (2005).

¹⁸ For example, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, Khaleda Zia and Hasina Wajed in Bangladesh, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Corazon Cojuangco Aquino in the Philippines.

in Southeast Asia. The social conditions have frequently been termed 'matriarchal' by Western observers,¹⁹ a term that suggests a reversal of male-dominated, asymmetrical balance of power and ignores the realities of actual gender relations.²⁰ Thus, some basic features of these societies will be discussed in the following. Two Indonesian societies, the Minangkabau and the Acehnese, will serve as examples.²¹

While only experts on the region are familiar with the social structures of the Acehnese, rudimentary knowledge about the Minangkabau is widespread even among a non-scholarly public. The myth of a matriarchy on Sumatra has sparked many people's imagination, and locally relations between men and woman are indeed unusual. The social organization structure is based on a kinship organization consisting of so-called *suku*, matrilineal clans that claim descent from common ancestors. The most important socio-political unit within the village is the matrilineage,²² which is called *sabuah paruik*, 'fruit of one womb'. As a rule, it includes five or six generations of an ancestral mother's descendants, and forms corporative groups that jointly own property, mainly houses, wet-rice fields, dry fields, fallow land, fish ponds, and ceremonial titles. In the village council and in external relations, the lineage is represented by a male head who is usually the brother or uncle of the eldest woman.

¹⁹ Even the anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday, who has published the most recent monograph on the Minangkabau based on her own fieldwork (Sanday 2002), uses the term 'modern matriarchy'.

²⁰ This term, which has its origin in the cultural studies' theory of evolution of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and enjoyed a revival in women's studies in the 1970s, is highly problematic due to its scholarly vagueness and its ideological implications. It is associated with 'women's rule', a situation that cannot be verified empirically and thus is merely a fiction. The terms used today to refer to the social situation in these societies are matrilineality, matrilocality or uxorilocality, and matricentrality. Matrilineality means the kinship affiliation of an individual with the kin group of his or her mother. Matrilocality and uxorilocality are rules of residence according to which a married couple either moves to the home of the wife's mother or lives in the wife's home. Matricentrality refers to a tendential social and/or economic insignificance of men to the family, which is centred on the mother. Matricentrality is often characterized by unstable partnerships or long absences of men for economic reasons.

²¹ The Ngada in East Indonesia are another, less well known matricentric ethnic group (compare Schröter 2005). They are not mentioned in this anthology because they profess Catholicism.

²² A lineage is a kin group that traces its descent directly to a real or fictitious male or female ancestor. Membership in such a genealogically constructed group goes along with specific rights (such as land rights) and obligations. A distinction is made between descent traced through one's mother (matrilineality), one's father (patrilineality), or both parents (bilineality). On matrilineality among the Minangkabau, see also Blackwood 1999.

The lineage is subdivided into several houses (*rumah*) where several matrilineal generations live together: the eldest woman, her daughters, and the latter's children. In external relations, the house is again represented by a man, most commonly the brother of the eldest woman (*mamak*). Married women get rooms of their own in the large communal houses. After marriage they continue to live with their group of origin and can safely rely on access to its resources. The continuity of the kin group is based on female succession, and thus on women and their reproductive power. Their importance for the physical continuity of the lineage also implies a special appreciation of daughters as the guarantors of the social order.

While girls continue to live at their mothers' house, where they are integrated into a network of obligations and rights, boys are considered to be associated with their family in a comparatively loose manner. Sons sleep outside the house from a very early age, either on the porch or in the mosque. They often travel around, sometimes due to seasonal or temporary work contracts, or they migrate to other islands. Marriage effects hardly any change in their marginal existence. Even today so-called 'visitor marriage' is still widespread, where a man does not move into his wife's house after marriage, but continues to live with his mother and only visits his wife at night.²³ It is mainly his own descent group that benefits from his labour in the fields or in the house; however, when he is with his wife he shares his income with her as well. Basically, the function of the husband in traditional society can be characterized as being quite marginal, or even precarious. A proverb states: 'Like ashes on a burnt tree stump husbands blow away with the wind' (Sanday 2002:9). According to traditional gender norms, a man's loyalty, just as his labour, is supposed to be first and foremost for his own family of origin: his mother, his sisters, as well as his nephews and nieces. He exerts responsibility and authority primarily in his own descent group, that is, towards his sister's children. With regard to his own children and his wife, his formal responsibilities are minimal.²⁴ According to Sanday (2002:9), men are torn between both families even when living in good and stable marriages. As a result of the great autonomy of both sexes, marriages are unstable, divorces frequent and uncomplicated.

Against the background of Qur'anic verses that emphasize man's authority in the house and his primary role as the provider, the conditions outlined above seem hardly compatible with Islam, yet the Minangkabau have always viewed tradition (*adat*) and religion (*agama*) as equal-ranking, essential

²³ Compare Kato (1982:51).

²⁴ Compare Kato (1982:58).

pillars of their society. All attempts by religious zealots to change the traditions, and the gender relations along with them, have failed in the past.²⁵ Yet today there are imminent erosions due to changes in economic conditions that are conducive to the implementation of Islamic legal agendas. The more important money becomes as compared to rural self-sufficiency, the more importance is attached to the role of the husband. Moreover, many young families move to the cities and leave the context of the matrifocal village. The urban space the rules of the game are different and other ownership structures become more relevant. For example, if a family buys real estate in a city, this is usually the husband's property; he uses his income to raise the necessary money and to pay the price. The wife becomes subject to a double dependency: she now lives in her husband's house (virilocal), and he provides for the family financially. Due to this shift, matrilineal inheritance laws are put under particular pressure. Previously, men were able to freely dispose over the assets they had acquired and pass them on to their children. Yet in the second half of the twentieth century this customary law was changed to conform to Islamic rules. Thus male offspring today are entitled to a two-thirds greater share than female heirs. In general, there is also a tendency towards the strengthening of the nuclear family as opposed to the matrilineal clan, and a shift within families in the primary role from the wife towards the husband.

Acehnese society, too, formerly integrated Islam into a matrifocal social structure. The province of Aceh is situated in the northernmost corner of Indonesia. Its inhabitants consider themselves the most orthodox Muslims of all Indonesia and view their culture as being thoroughly shaped by Islam.²⁶ In the past, this avowal to orthodox Islam did not prevent them from granting women high-ranking positions in state and society. The four sultanas mentioned in the beginning, as well as the resistance fighter Cut Nyak Dhien, who commanded a battalion unveiled and wearing trousers,

²⁵ Islam arrived in West Sumatra as a tolerant Sufi variant, but subsequently underwent several modernizations provoked by Wahhabi ideas from the Middle East (compare Kraus 1984). An Islamic rebellion early in the eighteenth century, initiated by pilgrims who had been to Mecca, was of particular importance. In the course of their *hajj*, the pilgrims came into contact with the ideas of the radical reformer Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab who conquered Mecca in 1803. Upon their return to Sumatra they agitated against the matricentric *adat*, the use of drugs and luxury foodstuffs, the *pencak silat* (an indigenous tradition of martial arts), but also against traditional authorities. A large part of the aristocracy fell victim to their *jihad*. In 1838 the insurgents were defeated by the Dutch army. On the background of this so-called Padri Rebellion, compare Dobbin (1983).

²⁶ Nevertheless, Acehnese culture includes elements of local beliefs and manifests local and ethnic variations.

are not only remembered with pride, but are also cited as indicators of the distinctiveness of Acehese culture.

Yet, in the past, women played an extraordinary role beyond the heroic sphere, as is illustrated by the works of the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, who published an ethnographic study on the Acehese in 1906. Snouck Hurgronje outlines basic aspects of Acehese culture as being women-centred: according to him, women were the proprietors of houses and land, dwelled in so-called uxorilocal clusters, and lived on subsistence production. After marriage, the husband would move to his wife's home. Yet husbands did not permanently live under the same roof with their wives, because the men—much like those among the Minangkabau—strove to earn money as migrant workers on plantations or as traders. They returned to their families for a brief time each year, only to leave again once their earnings were used up. Snouck Hurgronje writes that they were merely guests at their wives' homes,²⁷ and adds that they were regarded as well-nigh dispensable due to their almost permanent absence. James Siegel, an anthropologist from the U.S. who conducted fieldwork in Aceh in the 1960s, concludes that men are more or less powerless in many respects (Siegel 1969).

The religious institutions—the Islamic boarding schools (*dayah*)—constitute a counter-world to this female-dominated local society. At the *dayah*, boys get away from the village permanently and move to a modern and at the same time patriarchal ideological space. Islamic preachers and religious experts distance themselves from the rural population, accusing the latter of deviating from the true Qur'anic teachings and practising pagan customs. They are also the ones who for many years called for the introduction of the *shari'a*. And more recently, following the implementation of the *shari'a* in 2002, they have been advocating compliance with rigid Islamic morals.

Graduates of Islamic schools also form the core of the urban middle class. Much as among the Minangkabau in West Sumatra, a social system that differs from that in the villages is effective in modern urban space. Whenever houses are bought in the city, it is the men who are the owners; it is also they who earn the family's income and dominate the public sphere. During my own research in August 2005, female street vendors and male casual labourers would affirm the existence of a matrifocal village structure, whereas my educated interlocutors—both male and female—denied the existence of such structures.²⁸ Instead, the family model of the Qur'an was cited to

²⁷ Compare Snouck Hurgronje (1906, I:339).

²⁸ Anthropological research on the more recent social structure of the rural areas still needs to be done.

me. I was told that the man is the head of the family and provides for its sustenance; that a woman moves to her husband's place after marriage; that girls inherit only half as much as do their brothers; that a woman's voice counts half as much as a man's, and so on.²⁹

Not only are processes of Islamic proselytizing conducive to a patriarchalization of society in Aceh, but also—and most importantly—political changes that have taken place since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Aceh is the only province of Indonesia where criminal law is based on *shari'a*. This dubious privilege is the product of a war between the Indonesian army and the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) that lasted for thirty years.³⁰ Tensions between Jakarta and Aceh go back to the first days of the independent Republic of Indonesia, and did not least result from differences in ideas regarding the role of Islam in state and society.³¹ After independence, representatives of Islamic organizations—among them the influential Acehnese politician Daud Beureueh³²—called for the constitution of Indonesia as an Islamic State, or at least for a pronounced emphasis on Islam. In view of the multi-religious composition of the population, Sukarno, the first president of the republic, refused to implement such ideas. Instead, he developed a multi-religious state philosophy, *Pancasila*, which neither accorded Muslims a particularly privileged status, nor did it permit any Islamic legislation that went beyond family law. Daud Beureueh and his followers refused to accept Sukarno's concept of the state. For ten years they were able to realize their vision of an Acehnese Islamic state, until they were defeated in 1963. Despite the military defeat, however, the province never came to rest. The frustration of young Acehnese eventually led to the formation of the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka), which from 1976 to 2005 was involved in a bloody civil war with the Indonesian military. The region was only pacified after the tsunami of 2004, thanks to the commitment of an independent group of mediators in the course of the international redevelopment mission.

Among other things, the leaders of the movement demanded that regional legislation conform to *shari'a*. The government had already made initial concessions in 1999 when it issued a decree to the effect that the organization

²⁹ However, when I asked young men from the urban lower class about post-marital residence practices or inheritance rules, it became apparent that these hardly differed from the rural customs outlined here.

³⁰ On this topic, compare Aspinall (2009).

³¹ Compare Kell (1995).

³² Daud Beureueh was the head of the Persatuan Ulama Aceh (All Aceh Ulama Association).

of politics and society was to be brought in line with *shari'a*. The implementation of *shari'a* was further pushed by a special autonomy law that became effective in 2002. Since then, Islamization has progressed steadily, month-by-month, manifesting itself in new regulations, public staging of Islamic jurisdiction, and the operations of a new *shari'a* police force (Wilayatul Hisbah). This development has been particularly dramatic with regard to gender relations.³³ Veiling is mandatory for girls and women, and no one can refuse to comply with this new dress code without facing massive repression. Self-appointed male juvenile moral guardians shore the heads of women who went unveiled in public. But that is not all. Hardliners condemn the colourful, often skin-tight Acehnese dresses worn by fashion-conscious women, whose headscarf (*jilbab*) always matches with the colours of their handbag and high heels. They demand that women wear loose-fitting garments and thick fabrics so that the contours of the feminine remain hidden.³⁴ They are increasingly successful with their demands, and have at the same time gradually increased the normative pressure. As of 1 October 2010, for example, women in West Aceh will no longer be allowed to wear trousers. According to a statement released by the district regent, women will 'be forced to wear loose-fitting attire' (*Jakarta Post* 28 Oct. 2009). The *shari'a* police are authorized to enforce this regulation, and to cut off the pants of women who do not comply with it.

As there are convictions of offences against 'the Islamic moral order' (*khalwat*) that even deems it morally questionable if a woman is in a room alone together with a man unrelated to her, and as there are rigid regimentations of women in public, it is to be expected that women's scope of action will become further restricted. Punishments for infringements of Islamic law are drastic. Since 2005 there have been several spectacular whippings, and in September 2005 the parliament passed a law according to which adultery can now be punished by stoning. Decisions about an individual's lifestyle are no longer a matter of conscience—as was formerly stipulated by the more liberal interpretation of Islam—or something to be discussed with those in one's immediate social environment. In case

³³ Compare Kamaruzzaman (2004).

³⁴ Interestingly, these strict dress rules are not justified by referring to tradition, but exclusively by theological reasoning. This is remarkable because the Acehnese usually employ an explicitly cultural-historical discourse in other issues related to the shaping of their society. Yet the new rules can hardly be deduced from past usage, as photographs document that the dress code in colonial times did not conform to today's laws. As already mentioned, the folk hero Cut Nyak Dhien, for example, wore clothing that was practical and suited for the rigours of guerrilla warfare, yet she did not cover her head and body.

of doubt, people must be prepared to defend decisions regarding their personal behaviour before members of the *shari'a* police or before *shari'a* courts.

Even though there has been hardly any protest against this development because no one wishes to risk being accused of turning his or her back on the foundations of Islam, that does not mean that women necessarily approve. Many Acehnese women think that religion should be free of coercion and that the state would be well advised to pay more attention to the rampant corruption rather than to the private affairs of its citizens.³⁵ Moreover, they wish that efforts be made towards improving the situation of women in line with the CEDAW. Even strictly religious parents send their daughters to universities to provide them with optimal chances for the future, and gainful employment of women is not a taboo. On the contrary: Acehnese women are successful as business women and scholars, and they are active in politics. They have called for a quota system in elections,³⁶ campaigned against gender-based domestic violence and for leading positions for women in the political parties, and they have committed themselves to microcredit programmes and marketing training for poor women.³⁷ In 2008 they even succeeded—in cooperation with the German Gesellschaft fuer Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ)—to pass a Women's Charta that guarantees special rights to women. With regard to the implementation of *shari'a*, which requires the revision of many local laws (*qanun*), women's rights organizations have tried establish a gender-sensitive exegesis of Islamic law. Given the inroads made by Islamic strategists, however, it is doubtful whether this endeavour has yielded much success.

Clan Societies, Islam, and Women's Empowerment in the Southern Philippines

In the Philippines there are tensions as well, involving local orders that grant women participation in social and political affairs on the one hand, and decidedly Islamic agendas on the other. In addition, women's status and kinship ties play a role that is often underestimated.

³⁵ Personal communication (2005, 2006).

³⁶ This is advocated by, amongst others, the Caucus Politik Perempuan, an amalgamation of the seven most important political parties: PAN, Golkar, PPP, PKS, PBP, PBR, and PK.

³⁷ This goal is pursued, for example, by the association Ikatan Wanita Perusaban Indonesia.

Everywhere in Southeast Asia, the hierarchical order of the respective local communities and the affiliation of women with a social group used to be the key determinants of their scope of action.³⁸ While peasant women everywhere enjoyed a large measure of freedom, because their participation in agricultural production was of vital importance for survival, elite women were subject to various restrictions and sometimes even to complete seclusion. This is particularly evident in societies that closely associate gender norms with concepts of honour and shame, such as the Maranao, Taussug, and Maguindanao in the southern Philippines. Women of the upper class were traditionally subject to a multitude of rules and prohibitions, including gender-related seclusion, which are uncommon in Southeast Asia and reminiscent of the South Asian *purdah* system. Labi Hadji Sarip writes in the journal *Dansalan Quarterly*: 'Traditionally, Maranao women, especially the single, were never allowed to go out of their respective homes. They were placed in a small room called *lamin* and could only be seen during important occasions' (Sarip 1986:68).³⁹ However, it is debatable whether this circumstance necessarily implies that women were per se powerless. Women of the nobility used female slaves to cultivate contacts and to engage in economic activities, and they were by no means devoid of influence in the clans. Both genders were equally represented within the local status systems, as becomes apparent from the fact that women appeared as title holders, just as did men.⁴⁰

These conditions changed at the beginning of the twentieth century. Slavery was abolished; the political structures in Mindanao underwent profound changes due to colonization and—above all—integration into the postcolonial Philippine state dominated by Catholics (Abinales 2000). Today, a woman's clan affiliation and her family background are still relevant, and the value of traditional titles has survived undiminished. Yet ancestry is no longer the decisive factor determining the kind of life a woman can lead. Education is gaining in importance, and the discussion of universal values, such as the equality of men and women, is growing more intense. Although marriage and motherhood continue to be the 'primary goal' (Hilsdon 2003:23), even of well educated women, as is pointed out by the Australian researcher Anne-Marie Hilsdon, this does not imply that women's ambitions do not also go beyond this role. There is no doubt that female scopes of action have

³⁸ As Mina Roces puts it, 'the parameters of women's power are defined by the dynamics of kinship politics' (Roces 1998:292).

³⁹ Compare also Usodan-Sumagayan (1987).

⁴⁰ Compare Brecht (this volume).

broadened considerably in the course of the past 100 years.⁴¹ Today, girls attend schools and sometimes even universities; an increasing number of women pursue gainful employment outside their homes⁴² and participate in community activities. On the one hand, this is the result of reforms passed by the government,⁴³ which promoted girls' education nationwide and created employment opportunities for women. On the other hand, this change also owes a lot to the activities of indigenous and international NGOs that monitored the actual implementation of measures against the discrimination of women.⁴⁴ The Bangsa Moro Women's Professional and Employees Association and the Bangsa Moro Women's Foundation—an umbrella organization uniting 60 individual organizations—are presently particularly active in promoting women's influence in politics and society.⁴⁵ This development is viewed as a big step towards women's empowerment in Mindanao. Local newspapers proudly refer to women in leading positions, and Moro women present themselves in a self-confident and modern manner.

Just as in Aceh and West Sumatra, however, Islamist organizations have a detrimental effect on women's newly-won freedom in Mindanao. Since the 1970s, female Muslims who returned from Arab states have been propagating a type of Islam modelled on Middle Eastern standards; various transnational Islamist organizations, such as the Tablighi Jama'at and Markaz al-Shabab, have gained a foothold; and Islamist terrorist groups such as Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah have been operating in the region. Islamization usually manifests itself in the public space by changes in the dress code. While women in the 1970s could wear 'tight pants and backless tops' (Hilsdon 2003:29), today they must dress in conformity with Islamic prescriptions. Just as in Aceh, there have been several instances in which women who did not comply with the rigid regulations were subject to physical abuse. If they did not wear a veil, their heads were shorn, and rotten fruits and vegetables were

⁴¹ Compare Lacar (1992); Maglangit (1975, 1980); Sarip (1986:68); Usodan-Sumagayan (1987:206 f.).

⁴² Women initially worked chiefly in family enterprises, but since the 1980s the majority of working women have been employed in communal institutions. Their occupational profiles have changed as well. At first only extensions of traditional female occupations were considered appropriate, and women became teachers and nurses. Today they can also become engineers and lawyers. Compare Abubakar (2005a:53).

⁴³ CEDAW was ratified by the Philippines in 1981.

⁴⁴ CEDAW Watch-Philippines, for example, is by its own account 'engaged in information and education advocacy campaigns to make national laws and policies consistent with CEDAW', <http://www.cedaw-watch.org>.

⁴⁵ Compare the contributions by Brecht-Drouart and Rasul (this volume).

thrown at them if they showed any bare skin.⁴⁶ However, compared to the introduction of an Islamic dress code, the introduction of a *shari'a*-oriented Code of Muslim Personal Law by the then president Ferdinand Marcos in 1977 had more serious and far-reaching consequences.⁴⁷ The impact of these laws on women is an issue of controversy among Philippine Muslims. The activist and former senator Amina Rasul criticizes: 'Unfortunately, the codification was conducted by men, with no inputs whatsoever from women experts [...] the separate set of personal laws that govern the Muslim population in the Philippines constrict women's freedom and rights' (Rasul 2003b:198). Maruhom and Allian, in contrast, argue that the establishment of *shari'a* courts also has certain advantages for women: 'Records of the courts show that the majority of those who filed cases were women who demanded support from their irresponsible husbands. Expectedly, they also petitioned for divorce. Most of the cases thus far were decided in their favour' (Maruhom and Allian 2005:150).

The new orientation towards an orthodox or scriptualist Islam, and the acceptance of—and indeed the call for—an implementation of Islamic law is also a result of the political conflict between Muslim actors and the government in Manila. The Muslim population is suffering under various repressive measures, a civil war that has been going on for decades, states of violence that in some cases are anarchic, and cultural discrimination. The reasons for this reach back to Spanish colonial times. Islamization in the Philippines began at the end of the ninth century, when Arab traders established themselves in the Sulu Archipelago and married indigenous women. The Sultanate of Sulu rapidly developed into a hub of maritime trade; from there, Islam began to spread to Mindanao and subsequently to Mindoro and southern Luzon in the fourteenth century. In the sixteenth century, the Spaniards claimed the Philippines as a colony and set out to counter-proselytize the population. In the southern Philippines, unlike in Luzon, they met with bitter resistance⁴⁸ which withstood the firepower of all the weapons available. Sultans and Muslim communities called for the defence of the *dar al-Islam*, and the holy war (*perang sabil*) continued even after parts of the archipelago were occupied by Spanish troops in the nineteenth century.⁴⁹ The USA, which purchased the Philippines from Spain in 1898/99,

⁴⁶ Compare Hilsdon (2003:30).

⁴⁷ This was the Presidential Decree 1083.

⁴⁸ The Spaniards, who felt reminded of their own battle against the 'Moors', thereupon called the Muslims of the South 'Moros'.

⁴⁹ Sometimes only armed with swords or knives, assassins would attack Spaniards or

continued the military subjugation of the South. The sultanates were not able to withstand the military pressure of the Americans, who after an almost ten-year-long war successfully occupied the so-called Moro Province they had established. In order to pacify the Muslims, they undertook large-scale resettlement projects and allocated arable lands in Mindanao to landless Christians from Luzon and the Visayas. These sorts of policies continued even after independence. Hence, the 1950s witnessed the beginning of a new surge of state-sponsored relocations that brought Christians to Mindanao.⁵⁰ The consequences were dramatic. While the proportion of Muslims on the island of Mindanao amounted to 98 % in 1913, it has dropped to a mere 30 % today. Muslims own less than 15 % of the arable land, and 80 % of them are eking out a scanty living as landless tenants. The land-grab sparked conflicts between resident Muslims and newly resettled Christians, clashes between Christian and Muslim militias, and constant interventions by the military.⁵¹ The tensions intensified during the government of Ferdinand Marcos.⁵² The separatist organization Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) called for independence, and Marcos reacted by dispatching a large contingent of troops. Even though new efforts were made to settle the conflict after his downfall, and partial autonomy was granted in several provinces in 1996, a final solution has not yet been found.⁵³ Today, in 2009, the MNLF has lost its claim of exclusive representation of the interests of Mindanao's Muslims. The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), a more explicitly Islam-oriented organization, now faces off with the government in the name of Moro interests. Catholics dominate the government, and Christians from

Christian Filipinos, trying to slay as many of them as possible before being killed themselves. Through such acts they became martyrs and could hope to be forgiven for grave sins.

⁵⁰ Yet the policy of the Philippine government not only aimed at Christianizing the Muslims, but also at exploiting the region economically. One hundred thousand hectares of land were leased to international agro-industrial companies such as Del Monte. In that respect, Mindanao shows several parallels to Aceh. In both cases the central government discredited itself by exploiting the respective region without allowing any benefits for the indigenous population. In Aceh, it was rich gas and oil deposits that whetted Jakarta's economic appetite.

⁵¹ Not only the Muslims, but also the animist Lumad people were affected by the inner colonization of Mindanao.

⁵² Marcos, the tenth president of the Philippines, was in office from 1965 until 1986. In 1971 he imposed martial law, which was in force until 1981. He also disempowered large parts of the political elite. In 1986 a national opposition movement, which had been joined by large parts of the former elite, forced him to resign from office, and he fled to Guam. He was succeeded by Corazon Aquino, the widow of the politician Benigno Aquino who was murdered under Marcos.

⁵³ On the genesis and analysis of the conflict, compare McKenna (1998) and Yegar (2002). On Islam in southern Thailand, see also Scupin (1998).

the Northern Philippines have immigrated in the course of the last century and now constitute the majority of the population; Islam thus presents itself as a natural oppositional reference system in Mindanao. The cultivation of a decidedly Islamic collective identity helps Muslims to assert themselves against the superior strength of the aggressors. In that context, a clear and visible commitment to the values and norms of Islam—including the latter's symbolic level—suggests itself, rather than a less expressive form of piety. This also applies to women who reject Christian-Philippine fashion, instead preferring to dress according to veiling regulations from the Arab world. One has to agree with Siapno, who writes that 'women's involvement in the struggle for independence in Mindanao involves symbolic forms of resistance, of which veiling is perhaps the most important' (Siapno 1994:193). Within the context of marginalization and discrimination, the neo-orthodox Islamic order is primarily used as an ideology of resistance against the dominance of the Catholic state, and as a means of ethnic-religious avowal. In the face of the ongoing political and military oppression, the concern about women's rights is of secondary importance to most people.

Muslim Women in Southern Thailand

In several respects, the situation in Thailand's Muslim South resembles that in Mindanao. In Thailand, however, the role of the colonial power fell to the Siamese royal dynasty. The Islamic Sultanate of Patani and a number of Malayan sultanates were subjugated by the kingdom of Siam as early as in the thirteenth century. Yet Siam was primarily interested in the establishment of tributary relationships, and contented itself with regular payments of the *bunga mas dan perak* (golden and silver flowers).⁵⁴ The Malay rulers retained a semi-autonomous status. It was not until the rule of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) that the South was annexed, a centralist administration was established, and a 'Thaiization programme' implemented. The Education Act of 1921, for example, made it compulsory for every child to attend a state-run school for four years and to learn the Thai language. Many teachers were Buddhist monks and instructed the pupils in Buddhist ethics.⁵⁵ In 1939, the name 'Siam' was replaced by 'Thailand', use of the Malay language became

⁵⁴ These payments of tribute only flowed regularly at times when Siam could enforce its claims by military means. The history of Patani (Thai: Pattani) can be summarized as a sequence of revolts and defeats, with alternating periods of subjugation and autonomy. Compare Yegar (2002:74).

⁵⁵ Compare Yegar (2002:89).

banned in government agencies, and traditional Malay-Islamic clothing was prohibited. These acts of discrimination resulted in a radical rejection of the Thai state and Thai culture on the part of Muslims.

After World War II, Muslims hoped to join 'British Malaya' with the help of Great Britain. Yet their expectations came to naught, and the territory inhabited by Malays continued to be part of Thailand. Hence, today there exist four provinces in the southern region bordering on Malaysia where Muslim Malays constitute the majority of the population:⁵⁶ Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala, and Satun.⁵⁷ They speak a Malay dialect, feel that they belong to Malaysia in terms of culture of religion, and consider the regions they inhabit to be part of the *dar al-Islam*, whereas the remainder of Thailand is referred to as *dar al-harb*, the House of War. For fear of culture loss, but also due to the government-driven dichotomization between Thai-Buddhist and Malay-Muslim culture, governmental educational and development programmes were rejected, and sabotage and rebellions were frequent occurrences. Beginning in the 1960s, the Malay Muslims in Thailand organized themselves politically, with two organizations playing a particularly prominent part: the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN), founded in 1963 by the cleric Ustaz Haji Abdul Karim Hassan and influenced by the ideas of Pan-Arabism; and the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO), which was established by the Islamic scholar Kabir Abdul Rahman in 1968. Even though both organizations employed Islamic rhetoric, their activities were for the most part secular and nationalist.⁵⁸

This changed in the 1980s. As the graduates of Arab universities returned home, they initiated an Islamic revival in Thailand, just as they did everywhere in Southeast Asia. Guided by the ideas of puritan and Salafist Islam, young Muslims challenged traditionalists and orthodox conservatives, using Islamic schools—the *pondoks*—for their purpose.⁵⁹ This did not fail to affect

⁵⁶ Due to the politically explosive nature of demographic data and their instrumentalization by both the government and Muslim organizations, the numbers are very contradictory (compare Marddient 2009:192). In a report dating from 2004, Anthony Smith states that there are about four million Muslims in Thailand, 80 % of whom are living in the southern provinces mentioned above plus the province of Songkhla. According to Smith, Thailand has a total of 62 million inhabitants. Compare Smith (2004).

⁵⁷ The territory of today's administrative district of Pattani is not identical with that of the former sultanate of Patani, which split up into smaller units in the course of history. At a later time, these units were reorganized to again form larger entities, namely, Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala. Satun originally was part of the Sultanate of Kedah, which today belongs to Malaysia.

⁵⁸ Compare Abuza (2006).

⁵⁹ For a detailed analysis of the changes in Southern Thailand's Islamic educational system, see Liow (2009).

political visions and cultural self-conceptions. As Patrick Jory noted in an article, the self-designation 'Patani Melayu' became transformed into 'Thai Muslim'. Religion—that is, Islam—became the marker of identity, replacing the dimension of ethnicity. The centres of the new organizations are found in mosques and Islamic schools, which are also the most important sites of recruitment. The BRN eventually split up and what remained took on an Islamist image. However, the PULO, too, reorganized itself in 1995 with a decidedly Islamist agenda.

As Horstmann and Marddient point out in in this volume, however, the resurgence of Islam in Thailand cannot be solely regarded as an ideology of resistance. Pious Muslims aspire to a life that is pleasing to God, and it is not primarily worldly but rather religious values and norms that are decisive to the meaningfulness of an Islamic way of life. Women in the 'deep South' of Thailand traditionally used to wear a headscarf, but they did not observe the strict Islamic dress code already fashionable on the other side of the border in Malaysia.⁶⁰ This has begun to change recently. Over the course of the past years, many women have joined Islamic associations and are supporters of modern *dakwah* movements such as the Tablighi Jama'at or the women's organization Nahdatul Muslimat. They meet in prayer circles, attend courses of religious instruction, and wear garments that at first sight identify them as pious Muslimas. In the past, this very perceptible and even ostensive display of an Islamic identity in the public space has repeatedly sparked conflicts with representatives of the administration. In 1986 there were even mass protests in response to a series of events: a female teacher was expelled from a school north of Bangkok for wearing a veil; shortly afterwards, there was a similar incident involving a female civil servant in Pattani; and one year later an entire group of *hijab*-attired female students at the Yala Teacher's Training College was suspended from school.⁶¹ At the beginning of 1988, thousands of protesters assembled at the Central Mosque in Yala to voice their opposition to the repression. The government gave in, and the strict regulations prohibiting Muslim clothing were relaxed.⁶² According to Chaiwat Satha-Anand, a professor of political science at the Thammasat University in Thailand, the so-called '*hijab* crisis' is on the one hand a result of

⁶⁰ Compare Liow (2009). In his book, Liow argues that Muslims in Thailand practice a not very rule-abiding type of Islam anyway. He writes: 'The Muslims sometimes eat food generally deemed to be prohibited in Islam, and they do not necessarily observe obligations of prayer and fasting very strictly' (Liow 2009:16).

⁶¹ Compare Satha-Anand (1994:285).

⁶² Compare Prapertchob (2001:109).

worldwide Islamic resurgence; on the other hand, he interprets it within the context of the Thai state's 'legitimation deficit' (Satha-Anand 1994:296) vis-à-vis the Muslim border population. Interestingly, Satha-Anand emphasizes the gender aspect, as expressed by wearing *hijab*, of Muslim criticism of the Buddhist Thai nation. 'Some analysts', he writes, 'argue that the *hijab* must be viewed in relation to the desire of ethnic groups to reassert their autonomy through a gendered discourse. Because "masculinization" represents a claim to full humanity, the minority group asserts themselves by insisting on female conformity to a restricted dress code' (Satha-Anand 1994:299).

Yet the new orthodoxy is not only directed against the Buddhist Thai nation, but also—and decidedly—against a modernity often denounced as 'Western'. People oppose so-called 'Westoxification'⁶³—the poisoning of an idealized autochthonous way of life by corruptive influences from the outside. This toxification supposedly manifests itself in a neglect of religious norms, increasing individualism, and a liberal gender order. In a synthesis of religious and traditional local rationales, an order is constructed that is not only characterized by a fundamental difference between men and women, but also by an exactly defined complementarity of social roles. According to the preaching of the Islamic teachers and activists, a woman's place is first and foremost in the house, where she has to tend to her husband, her children, and the older members of the family. While this propaganda definitely falls on fertile ground, the realization of these noble goals is hampered by quite trivial circumstances. Many rural households in the southern provinces are poor, and women have no choice but to contribute to the economic sustenance of the family. Just as everywhere in Southeast Asia, women work in the fields and sell surplus produce on local markets. On top of that, quite a few of them migrate to Malaysia to work in rubber plantations or rice fields. The men who stay in the village have an ambivalent attitude towards this situation. On the one hand, they appreciate the women's earnings; on the other, they complain about the shortage of female labour in the house. Nisakorn Klanarong, who has done empirical research in the four border provinces in the context of her dissertation project on 'Female international labour migration from Southern Thailand', writes:

Female out migration did not create labour shortages in the village, but it was viewed as problematic for households. Members of female-migrant household gave the following negative impacts concerning the absence of women: lack of people to do housework, lack of people to look after children and the elderly in the household, and no one to take care of the husband. In addition, female

⁶³ Scupin (1998:254); Scupin used a term originally invented by Al-E Ahmad.

migration was viewed as creating family problems such as children being left behind with grandparents or relatives, family members living separately, and children lacking the love and warmth of their mother. Some parents indicated that they worried when daughters worked far away from home.

(Klanarong 2009:81)

Within the Islamic movements, women also occupy roles that have little to do with the proclaimed ideal of the housewife. This is not only due to the fact that because of the gender segregation women must play an active part in the *dakwah*. It is first and foremost a result of the civil war between Islamist militias and government soldiers, which has been shaking the region since the beginning of the new millennium, claiming thousands of lives. Just as in Mindanao, the conflict has entailed a virtual economy of violence and a proliferation of armed organizations in Southern Thailand. These days, it has become almost impossible to tell whether the latter's protagonists give priority to political or economic goals. They include the Patani Liberation Fighters (Pejuang Kemerdekaan Patani), who according to Human Rights Watch are terrorizing villages in the region bordering on Malaysia; they prohibit any cooperation between the local population and the authorities, and forbid the acceptance of monetary and food aid. Those who do not obey these orders are denounced as *munafiq* (hypocrites), which is tantamount to a death sentence.⁶⁴

Malaysia in the Process of Becoming an Islamic State

In Malaysia, too, Islam is 'not only a "religious factor" [...] but also an "identity marker", especially in the ethnic sense' (Shamsul 1994:113), but under conditions where Malaysian Muslims are culturally and politically dominant and hold exclusive rights. Fifty-three percent of all Malaysians are considered ethnic Malays. Along with about 12 % of the population who are members of indigenous groups, they enjoy special privileges as *bumiputera*, 'sons of the soil'. Twenty-six percent of Malaysia's population are of Chinese descent, and 8 % have their origins in India and Sri Lanka.

Even though the links between ethnicity and Islam are emphasized by the state and appear to be clear cut, they are in fact are not. In principle, all Malays are presumed to be Muslims, but in reality this is not always the case. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which has been ruling in varying coalitions since independence, sees itself as the original

⁶⁴ Compare Human Rights Watch (2009).

representative of these Malaysian Muslims, and its statutes stipulate that only Malays may become party members.⁶⁵ In fact, however, its claim to sole representation is contested by the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS, Islamic Party of Pan-Malaysia), which was founded as early as in 1951 under the name of Persatuan Islam Sa-Malaya (Pan-Malayan Islamic Association).⁶⁶ In the 1999 elections the PAS won sweeping victories in the federal states of Kelantan and Terengganu where Malays constitute the majority of the population. The UMNO responded to this development by using a more pronounced Islamic rhetoric, and complying with the demands of orthodox Muslims in many respects. This turned out to be a successful strategy, and the parliamentary success of the PAS came to an end in the 2004 elections.

In contrast to the UMNO, the PAS is considered Islamist, and aims at establishing *shari'a* as the basis of criminal law. However, attempts to implement *hudud* punishments⁶⁷—such as stoning and the amputation of limbs—in the federal states governed by the PAS have so far been thwarted by the constitution and by the fact that such changes are rejected by all non-Muslims. Yet because the ruling UMNO adopted a more strongly Islamic profile, Malaysian society as a whole became Islamized. During the government of Mahathir bin Mohamad, who was a member of the UMNO and held the office of Prime Minister from 1981 until 2003, the National Islamic Religions Affair Council, renamed 'Pusat Islam', was put under the direct control of the prime minister, and Islamic religious classes were introduced at schools and universities. An Islamic bank was founded in 1982, and the International Islamic University opened in 1983. In 2003, the PAS made the next move by publishing the 'Dokumen Negara Islam', a draft for a future Islamic Malaysian state.⁶⁸ Today there are Islamic insurance companies, an Islamic economy foundation, and a governmental certification agency for products that are in conformity with Islam. Offences against Islamic morals are increasingly punished. Adolescents are arrested and accused of sexual offences for showing themselves publicly in mixed-gender groups, and in 2009 an Islamic court for the first time sentenced a young woman to caning for having consumed alcohol in a bar.

⁶⁵ Shamsul (1994:99) points out, however, that this does not necessarily need to be the case in reality.

⁶⁶ On the history of the PAS, compare Noor (2004b).

⁶⁷ Hudud punishments are imposed for so-called offences against God, such as theft, adultery, the consumption of alcohol and apostasy.

⁶⁸ PAS leaders such as Yusof Rawa at times propagated an Islamic revolution modelled after that in Iran, and battled secularization and materialism as alleged ills of modernity.

Measures strengthening Islamization in politics, law, and the public sphere meet with broad approval among the Malay population.⁶⁹ This is due—amongst other things—to the surge of Islamization mentioned above and the popularity of *da'wa* movements, which led to the emergence of a multitude of Islamic organizations. These included the Al-Arqam movement that combined Sufi spirituality, an orientation towards the *shari'a*, and a modest way of life. Al-Arqam's strongest competitor was the Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement), set up in 1971 under the leadership of Anwar Ibrahim who later on was to become prime minister. Besides these socio-critical Islamic organizations of civil society, there also emerged violence-prone or violent groups such as Kumpulan Militan Malaysia and the Al-Ma'unah brotherhood.⁷⁰ The government successfully took police and legal measures against many of these groups.⁷¹

While this part of the political Islamist opposition was eliminated, the popularity of 'Islam as a way of life' (Abu Bakar 2001:64) remained unbroken. An Islamization of the public sphere was, and still is, the most conspicuous evidence of this. Bars have been replaced by *halal* restaurants, and many women dress in an Arab style. They cover their hair, neck, shoulders and chest with a *tudung* instead of the Malay shawl (*selendang*),⁷² and conceal their bodies beneath a long-sleeved *baju kurung*. Women who want to express their religious convictions still more explicitly wear black robes, socks, gloves, and a face veil—all garments that are foreign to Malay traditions.

Islamization not only causes changes in politics and society, but also fundamentally affects the structure of the gender order. The traditional *adat* system of values and laws, which treated men and women as equals in many respects, has gradually been replaced by Islamic norms and Islamic law. Inequality in inheritance law became legalized, just as did polygyny and domestic violence.

Aihwa Ong and other Malaysian women scholars have interpreted the dramatic changes of the Malaysian gender order within the context of

⁶⁹ According to Ufen, many members of the elite nonetheless continue to insist on a 'laicist consensus' (Ufen 2009).

⁷⁰ In the 1980s, Malaysia was also the refuge of the Islamist ideologists Abdullah Sungkar and Abu Bakar Ba'ashir, both of whom were exiled from Indonesia. While in Malaysia, they laid the foundations for the terrorist network Jemaah Islamiyah, which is held responsible for a number of assaults, such as the attacks on two Balinese discotheques in 2002.

⁷¹ The Internal Security Act, which provides for up to two years of imprisonment without charges, and other laws enabled the government to completely shatter groups that had fallen out of favour. Al-Arqam was prohibited on 21 November 1994; its leader Asha'ari was arrested in southern Thailand and extradited to Malaysia.

⁷² Young girls often wear the *mini-telekung*, which is a bit smaller.

the rapid economic and social changes undergone by Malaysia since the end of the twentieth century. In 1991, President Mahathir launched the ambitious development project 'Vision 2020', which aimed at the complete modernization and industrialization of the country within thirty years. Free trade zones were established, a national automobile industry was created, the educational level of schools and universities was improved, and government funds were invested in technology and cutting-edge research. New jobs were created, explicitly including jobs for women. Beginning in the 1970s, tens of thousands of unskilled women migrated from the rural regions to the urban free-trade zones where there was a demand for cheap labour by transnational companies.⁷³ In that urban environment, the strict rules of gender separation which characterized village life did not exist. Women worked together with men—even with men who were not Muslims. They began to dress stylishly, and entered sexual relationships with partners of their own choice, including non-Muslims. *Minah karan*,⁷⁴ 'electric girl', is the term for a 'young, attractive, sexually uninhibited Malay factory woman' who, according to Ackerman, is 'expressing her independence with heavily applied cosmetics and tight-fitting Western-style clothing' (Ackerman 1991:199).

Yet women not only jumped at the chance to become labourers. Many young women used the new opportunities to educate themselves, taking university degrees and aspiring to some academic profession. It is likely that men felt threatened by this entire process. Ong writes that 'the new class of female workers and college students induced in their male peers a widespread fear of female competition in the changing society' (Ong 1990:265). In a way, she perceives Islamization as a response to women's awakening on the part of men who feel disadvantaged: 'For Malay revivalists, the *umma* had been unmade by the influx of women into modern schools and offices, a new "sacred architecture" of sexuality had to be created, through everyday practises inventing "Islamic" traditions that would redraw boundaries between Malay men and women, Muslims and non-Muslims' (Ong 1990:267).

Not all women scholars agree with Ong's thesis. Sylva Frisk, who conducted a study on pious Muslim women in Malaysia, criticizes that Ong 'has produced an image of Malay women as victims of patriarchal structures and practices' (Frisk 2004:7), and suggests to redefine the concept of agency within the academic debate on gender. The anthropologist Judith Nagata already pointed out in 1994 that

⁷³ Compare Ong (1987).

⁷⁴ *Minah* is a common women's name and is used as a generic term for young women in this context.

[...] the image of the 'oppressed' Muslim woman has taken on a new and perplexing cast, particularly for the apparent voluntariness of women's participation in veiling and other highly visible religious activities, which seem to reduce their educational, career and other opportunities. The apparent contradiction in the fact of many of these much-publicised 'veiled' women, whether in Egypt or Malaysia, are also often prominent in the middle class seems to escape the attention of many outside commentators. They are highly-educated, and foreign-exposed, and actively involved in their career development.

(Nagata 1994:104)

One has absolutely to agree with this statement. Malaysian women engage in Islamization as actively as their male counterparts. They even make an effort to export values that have been contested by feminist activists for years. A bizarre example of this is the Global Ikhwan Polygamy Club headed by Hatijah Binti Am, who advocates polygyny as a good way to overcome jealousy and as an exemplary way to establish a happy Muslim family. When she opened a branch in the Indonesian city of Bandung in 2009, she found herself confronted with protests by women's rights activists and liberal Muslim women who disapproved of men's right to marry several women as they considered this practice unjust and discriminatory.

Indonesian Women's Movements with a Long Tradition

Among the women's movements in Islamic Southeast Asia, the Indonesian women's movement is particularly important. It can look back on a long tradition, is comparatively well organized, and has some prominent spokeswomen. Its beginnings are linked to the reform ideas of the Javanese princess Raden Ajeng Kartini (1879–1904), who was a very close friend of the Dutch feminist Estelle Zeehandelaar, and lobbied for women's education and the abolition of polygynous marriages. Unfortunately, Kartini herself ended up as the fourth wife of the Regency Chief of Rembang, Raden Adipati Joyodiningrat, and died in 1904, aged twenty-five, during the birth of her first child.⁷⁵

After Kartini's death, education continued to be the central concern of women's rights activists in the early twentieth century, along with the struggle for independence. A multitude of nationalist secular and religious organizations emerged, and all of them established special women's wings. Just one year after Kartini's death, the Budi Utomo (Noble Endeavour),

⁷⁵ Overviews of her life and work are given by Coté (2002) and Bouman (1954). Hildred Geertz (1985) publication of Kartini's letters includes a comprehensive biographical sketch.

which was mainly supported by intellectuals, founded the organization Putri Mardika (Free Women). Jong Java (Young Javanese), which constituted itself in 1918 and counted the future president Sukarno among its members, established the group Putri Indonesia (Women of Indonesia). The Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, which was inspired by the writings of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, organized female members in the 'Aisyiyah in 1917, and the conservative Nahdlatul Ulama (Revival of the Ulama), in which Islamic preachers (*kyai*) united in 1926 as a response to reformist Islam, created the women's organization Muslimat in 1946.⁷⁶ On 22 December 1928, the first congress of the Indonesian women's movement was held; it was attended by more than 1,000 delegates from 30 organizations, and a Federation of Indonesian Women's Associations (Perikatan Perempuan Indonesia, PPI) was founded.⁷⁷ The goals of the movement included national independence and the commitment to social issues (family law, education, health, social work).

Sukarno, the first president of the independent Republic of Indonesia, used to demonstrate his sympathy for the goals of the women's movement at public events. Above all, he sympathized with the socialist organization Isteri Sedar (Conscious Wives), which not only campaigned for education and social improvements in women's living conditions, but also for greater participation of women in politics; on one occasion, Sukarno titled himself the 'supreme shepherd of the revolutionary women's movement'. However, according to gender scholar Saskia Wieringa, this attitude was pure lip service, because the president only lent support to the goals of the female activists half-heartedly after independence.⁷⁸ In 1960, Sukarno declared that there was no need for feminist struggle and that the abolition of polygyny was no longer on the agenda,⁷⁹ in 1954 he himself made use of that privilege by marrying a second wife.

The women's movement was divided on such issues. Already in colonial times it had split into different wings that were primarily characterized by discordances between Muslim groups on the one side and secular-socialist ones on the other. Polygyny was the most controversial issue. While secular

⁷⁶ Abida Samiuddin and Rashida Khanam (2002:4) note that the general pattern of female organizations was to form groups that were complementary to exclusively male associations, and that their heads were frequently recruited from amongst the ranks of the wives of the male organizations' leaders.

⁷⁷ On the history of the Indonesian women's movements, compare Martyn (2005), among others.

⁷⁸ Compare Wieringa (1988:76).

⁷⁹ Compare Wieringa (1992:101).

women activists called for a complete proscription of polygamy, the female members of Islamic organizations viewed such radical views as incompatible with the Qur'an.

Tensions between the two camps steadily grew in the course of the first years of independence. This reflected a power struggle going on between communist, nationalist, and religious fractions of the elite. When a coup d'état of the Communist Party failed in 1965, this resulted in a violent catastrophe and a deep national crisis. The retaliation by the military and various Islamic organizations claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of communists and socialists,⁸⁰ and the largest Indonesian women's organization, GERWANI,⁸¹ which sympathized with the Communist Party of Indonesia and counted 1.5 million members in its heyday, became a target of the anti-communist mob as well and was crushed. The massacres, in which young men from Islamic organizations took a particularly prominent part, certainly had a lasting daunting effect on women. Many women were raped before being murdered, and sexual torture was practiced everywhere in the country.⁸²

Following the ban on the most radical women's organization with the largest number of members, the state took charge of the regulation of women's activities. In this context two important organizations were created: Dharma Wanita, in which membership was obligatory for all wives of civil governmental servants, and Dharma Pertiwi, Dharma Wanita's counterpart for the wives of army members. The activities of the women thus compulsorily organized amounted to little more than charitable undertakings and participation in the organization of national festivities where, amongst other things, cooking contests were held.

Despite a state ideology that basically attempted to define women in terms of their role as housewives, mothers, and supporters of their husbands, women increasingly succeeded in participating in the economic development already under Suharto. Today women are working in the low-wage sector of the budding new industries;⁸³ they have transferred wages earned as migrant domestic servants in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the countries of the Middle East;⁸⁴ and have step by step moved into positions

⁸⁰ The ultimate reasons behind these events have never been elucidated, because the new rulers—and in particular the military, which found itself enormously gaining in power—profited from the myths surrounding communist activities and a supposed chronology of events. Compare Cribb (1990), among others.

⁸¹ GERWANI: Gerakan Wanita Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Movement).

⁸² Compare Wieringa (2002:300 f.).

⁸³ Compare, for example, Benjamin (1996); Tjandraningsih (2000); Wolf (1992).

⁸⁴ Compare Silvey (2004); Surtee (2003).

in the upper levels of the service sector.⁸⁵ Employment and a new consumer culture have effected changes in the gender order just as much as political developments. Robinson points to the 'growing importance of prostitution' (Robinson 2009:131), but also to the fact that young women, often pupils or students, enter sexual relationships with older men in order to get access to money or to sought-after consumer goods, such as mobile phones.⁸⁶ Against the background of an increasing commodification of society, the bodies of women and girls turn into objects of market-based exchange as well.

Even though independent forms of political organization were oppressed in Indonesia under its second president, Suharto (1966–1998), and a national cult of motherhood⁸⁷ that basically limited women's role to servicing and nurturing activities was fostered, female activists began to reorganize themselves in the 1980s. They demanded rights equal to those of men, and denounced the rampant sexual violence. Despite the difficult circumstances, things slowly progressed, and Indonesia signed the CEDAW in 1984.

Women's organizations such as the Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia (Indonesian Women's Coalition), which was founded in May 1998, played a substantial role in the downfall of the dictator Suharto, and female activists used the ensuing phase of social transformation to call attention to their grievances, and in particular to campaign against gender violence.⁸⁸ The female ideal (*kodrat wanita*) dictated by the state, according to which a woman's social role amounts to nothing more than her duties as a housewife, spouse, and mother, was criticized, and there was a call for equal access to professional and political positions. Part of the country's female elite publicly avowed themselves to the new emancipatory values. Siti Nuriyah, for example, the wife of the former president Abdurrahman Wahid, declared that the mere role of first lady did not satisfy her, and she developed a public persona of her own. She is a member of the National Commission on Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan), and has been involved in the reinterpretation of teaching materials for use in Islamic schools.

Since the end of the Suharto regime, female Indonesian activists have been able to achieve some remarkable successes. Centres for women studies were established at universities and Islamic institutes, programmes for

⁸⁵ On the new female middle class, compare Gerke (2000); Sen (1998).

⁸⁶ Compare Robinson (2009:132 f.).

⁸⁷ Compare Suryakusuma (2004).

⁸⁸ On the developments of the gender discourse during the reform era, compare Blackburn (2004); Robinson and Bessell (2002).

women's empowerment were implemented in governmental and non-governmental institutions, and gender relationships were challenged. All over the archipelago, women's organizations have founded legal advice centres and shelters for battered women, and launched a nationwide campaign against domestic violence.⁸⁹ In Indonesian women's organizations, 'gender mainstreaming' is identified as part of the current transformation process, which is characterized by a renunciation of the order established by an orthodox Islam and former gender ideologies, and combines women's activism with democratization, pluralism, and a liberal type of Islam that is gender equitable.⁹⁰

Just as in other Southeast Asian countries, however, the upsurge of neo-orthodox Islam poses a threat to such developments. Islam has had an eventful history in Indonesia's more recent past. As already mentioned, Islamic organizations played a prominent part in the anti-colonial struggle against the Dutch, and many of their leaders strove for the building of a postcolonial Islamic state. Sukarno, the first president of the republic, first made concessions to the representatives of political Islam, but then gave preference to a multi-religious type of state. As a consequence of this decision, there were violent uprisings and proclamations of autonomous Muslim regions, which in some cases existed for several years. All these conflicts were eventually resolved with the use of troops, and after that the forces of political Islam could lead little more than a niche existence. Moreover, Islam was thenceforth under general suspicion in the largest Islamic nation, and any markedly Islamic behaviour could easily be interpreted as an act of subversion. Yet the repressive climate towards Islam changed when Indonesia's second president, former general Suharto—who had come into power after the course of the events of 1965–1966 and remained in office thanks to support by the military—felt that he was losing his power base in the army, and turned to Muslim organizations in search of ways to diversify his political support base. He undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca, founded an association of Islamic intellectuals,⁹¹ surrounded himself with Islamic symbolism; and his daughter Tutut popularized the veil (*jilbab*). Since 1990 female pupils have been allowed to wear the *jilbab* at school, and cloaked women have become an increasingly common sight in the streets of large

⁸⁹ The focus of the campaign is on raising awareness about domestic violence and trafficking in women and children. Compare Mulia (2005a), among others.

⁹⁰ Compare Affiah (2009); Arnez (2009); Blackburn, Smith and Syamsiyatun (2009); Robinson and Bessel (2002).

⁹¹ This was the Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim se-Indonesia (ICMI).

Indonesian cities. Islamic television programmes enjoy great popularity, Islamic clothing has made a triumphant entry into Indonesian haute couture, and Islamic morals are a topic of discussions in the media.

Sexuality and Female Bodies as a Topic of Public Debate

The regulation of sexuality and control over the female body are central topics of these moral discourses. In the post-Suharto era, sexuality in Indonesia not only acquired a new meaning in the private or semi-clandestine space of bars, clubs, and discotheques, but also began to be negotiated anew in the public space. Young female authors such as Ayu Utami, Djenar Maesa Ayu, and Dinar Rahayu are winning fame for writing provocative and often pornographic texts, picking out incest, violence, and homosexuality as central themes.⁹² This new genre is called *sastra wangi*, 'fragrant literature'. Female artists such as Arahmaiani also transcend the boundaries of middle-class Indonesian sexual morals, staging the naked body—sometimes even their own—as a medium, as a surface on which meanings are encoded.

The state-decreed heteronormativity, which contrasts with the manifold models of gender-role crossing in local cultures,⁹³ has recently been challenged by the formation of the organization Arus Pelangi (Rainbow Flow), which views itself as the 'legal representation of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) communities'.⁹⁴ In November 2006, Arus Pelangi invited legal experts, human rights activists, and academics to an international conference in Yogyakarta, where the 'Yogyakarta Principles on the Application of International Human Rights Laws in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity' were subsequently passed, being the first Magna Charta of homosexual rights in the world. Another conference organized by Arus Pelangi focussed on Indonesia itself and was a great success, too. For the first time, several Muslim public intellectuals publicly argued in favour of the full acceptance of homosexuality. An article in the *Jakarta Post* quoted Siti Musdah Mulia as saying: 'There is no difference between lesbians and non-lesbians. In the eyes of God, people are valued based on their piety' (Khalik 2008). Nurofiah, a representative of the Muslim mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), even espouses a constructivist view of gender orders and attributes the prevailing gender order exclusively to the balance of power

⁹² Compare also Arnez (this volume).

⁹³ Compare, for example, Boellstorff (2005); Peletz (2009).

⁹⁴ See <http://aruspelangi.pbworks.com>.

in society: 'Like gender bias or patriarchy heterogeneity bias is socially constructed. It would be totally different if the ruling group was homosexuals' (Khalik 2008). The participants emphasize that Indonesian culture is in principle not homophobic, but has always integrated homosexuality on the local level.

However, such positions are not undisputed. In March 2010, controversies were sparked by the upcoming fourth regional meeting of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA), which previously had been held in Chiang Mai, Cebu, and Mumbai. The eastern Javanese wing of the Indonesian Muslim council proclaimed that the event was an offence against religion and culture. The local police thereupon prohibited the meeting, and eventually goon squads of the Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders' Front) marched up in front of the hotel in Surabaya, where some LGBT activists who had already come to the city were staying. Before, conservative Muslims had used a beauty contest of Acehnese transsexuals as an occasion to stir up public indignation about supposedly indecent behaviour. Many religious leaders, as well as a large portion of the population, definitely have a negative attitude towards sexual liberalism and a new gender order. Women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming are viewed as unwelcome innovations. Both orthodox and neo-orthodox clerics even perceive these phenomena as transgressions of Islamic rules and values, and argue in favour of a return to conservative gender models. To achieve their goal, they use the modern media, in particular television, to spread moral teachings. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century they have also been able to functionalize a number of scandals where supposedly immoral behaviour was pilloried for their purposes.

This scandalization of alleged immorality did not only yield profit for conservative clerics, but functioned in general as a catalyst of virulent social controversies about the role of Islam in modern Indonesia. One of these debates was sparked when an Indonesian edition of *Playboy* magazine was about to be published in 2006.⁹⁵ There was an agreement between the authorities and the editors that religious reservations were to be respected, and that the magazine would not publish pictures showing undressed women. Yet many people nevertheless viewed the event as a scandal. During the run-up phase of the project, the attempt to place the magazine on the Indonesian market had already prompted heated discussions. Irfan Awwas, the chairman of the Majelis Mujahideen Indonesia (MMI, Indonesian

⁹⁵ After Japan, this would make Indonesia the second Asian country with its own, national-language edition of that magazine.

Mujaheddin Council), believed that the result would be disastrous. The infamous Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Islamic Defender Front) did not stop at verbal condemnations; feeling called to take direct action; it devastated the lobby of the office tower that hosted the editorial office.⁹⁶ The group's leader, Habib Riziq, told the press that the FPI was ready to wage war should *Playboy* magazine actually be produced and sold in Indonesia.⁹⁷ The staff of the local office in Jakarta was terrified by the militant protests, and Erwin Armado, the magazine's editor-in-chief, fled to the more liberal island of Bali, whose population is predominantly Hindu. When he was reported to the authorities and put on trial in March 2007, this once again caused a big stir. While the public prosecution 'merely' pleaded for a jail sentence, radical Muslims—who used the courtroom as a stage for agitation—went as far as to demand death penalty. One of these agitators was Abu Bakar Ba'ashir, the ideologist of the Jemaah Islamiyah, who was just released from prison at that time. Yet Erwin Armada was found not guilty on all charges, and the first issue of *Playboy* made it to the magazine stands.

Another nationwide controversy was ignited by the young female dancer Inul Daratista, who managed to make a national career for herself as a pop star.⁹⁸ Inul, who was a so-called Dangdut performer, became famous for an erotic dance she created, in which she rotated her hips. Dangdut is a type of popular folk music that was even awarded the status of Indonesian national music by the first president of the republic.⁹⁹ A more sophisticated version of this type of music was later even used by Islamic interpreters to spread religious ideas. The Dangdut of the poorer sections of the population, however, was not so much characterized by piety as by a certain degree of suggestiveness. The female singers copy the style of dress of their role models on the international pop music scene, trying to radiate sex appeal. Every once in a while this will spark minor debates which, however, always ebb away after a short time. Yet when a private television station broadcasted Inul's dance in January 2003, making her an instant celebrity, Dangdut became an issue of national controversy. All of a sudden Islamic clerics and politicians became indignant about the 'pornography' performed, and demanded that the dancer be immediately banned from appearing on stage. The scandal

⁹⁶ For background information on FPI, see Jahroni (2008).

⁹⁷ Meanwhile, however, several issues of the magazine have appeared in print.

⁹⁸ On the controversy over Inul Daratista, see also Astuti (2003).

⁹⁹ Sukarno pursued a strictly anti-western course in politics and culture. He prohibited western music, including the very popular Beatles, and promoted domestic interpreters instead.

reached another climax when Taufik Kiemas, the husband of then president Megawati Sukarnoputri, appeared dancing side by side with Inul in another television programme.

Another sparsely dressed female body spurred the FPI to take further action in 2006, when they filed charges against the Indonesian candidate participating in the Miss Universe beauty contest held in Los Angeles. According to the group's lawyer and spokesman, the presentation of the candidate—who had appeared in swimwear—was an insult to the women of Indonesia. He referred to an older law already passed under the former dictator Suharto, which prohibited beauty contests. And indeed, a similar debate had already taken place in 1935 in the Javanese city of Semarang. Back then, a fashion show intended to promote clothing made in Indonesia and to support the domestic textile industry had roused feelings. Just like their epigones in the twenty-first century, male and female critics condemned the event as an insult on the honour of the Indonesian woman, and interpreted it as an assault on Indonesian culture and society because of the symbolic linkage between women and the nation.¹⁰⁰

The greatest controversy, which also attracted the most attention among foreign media, was sparked by the proposal, brought forth by several Islamic female politicians, to pass a law against pornography and pornographic acts. Particularly the newly created term *pornoaksi*,¹⁰¹ 'porno action', caused some irritation. What was this supposed to mean? Conservative male and female Muslims took the view that penalties should be inflicted for a whole parcel of supposedly indecent actions, such as kissing in public, wearing bikinis, strapless t-shirts and traditional Javanese and Balinese women's garb, erotic literature, portrayals of naked or sparsely clad bodies in art and photography, as well as all movie scenes showing any kind of erotic activity. Whoever is found guilty of a pornographic crime thus defined may be punished with fines or even several years in jail.

Harsh penalties are also to be imposed for adultery and the cohabitation of unmarried couples. There were various reasons why an issue was made of such a law at that specific time. Balkan Kaplale, for example, the head of the parliamentary committee in charge of drafting the bill, invoked a divine defence strategy to justify the law. He announced that the disastrous tsunami of 2004 had shown Indonesia that God takes issue with people's sinful lives. But the new law—he added—can help to avert such catastrophes in the

¹⁰⁰ For a detailed account of these events, see Locher-Scholten (2000:41–46).

¹⁰¹ The term was invented by the Majelis Ulama Indonesia.

future. The population of the non-Muslim majority regions of Indonesia rightfully felt that this pointed emphasis on a Muslim discussion on morals was an act of cultural discrimination. Balinese moreover feared a breakdown of tourism, and threatened to secede. Special concessions were hurriedly made to them and to the Papua, who have a proclivity for separatist ideas anyway. The feminist Nursyahbani Katjasungkana criticized the cultural blindness of those who support the law, but a member of the Majelis Ulama Islam, (MUI, Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars) commented that culture should be banished into museums if it is not compatible with Islam.¹⁰² The controversial law was passed in parliament on 30 October 2008; yet its definition of pornography is still open to interpretation, and some exceptions are already codified. On the island of Bali, for example, women are still allowed to wear bikinis.

Women and the Resurgence of Islam

As was shown above, the Islamization of politics and society in the countries of Southeast Asia, which began in the 1980s, has had a serious impact on gender relations.¹⁰³ Apart from the new importance of Islamic parties and the adoption of Islamic rhetoric by representatives of other parties, and apart from some changes in criminal and family law, this impact is first and foremost felt in the cultural sphere. The Islamization of culture is visible in the public space, which has become increasingly dominated by religion. Restaurants identify themselves as *halal*. Places that used to serve alcohol have given way to juice bars. Shops highlight Islamic mobile phones in their advertisements, book shops are selling guidebooks for an Islamic way of life, and religious videos are sold at booths in the streets. Women embody the new orientation towards Islam through veiling and covering the *aurat*—those parts of the body that are considered dangerous because they arouse sexual desires in men. These include not only the hair, but also the entire body except the face, feet, and hands. According to a strict interpretation of the Islamic law of veiling, even these parts of the body are covered with socks, gloves, and a face veil (*niqab*), leaving visible only the eyes. While many *ulama* disdain outer beauty—preferring to emphasize inner Islamic virtues (such as piety, humility, devotion to God, fulfilment of one's duties)—and point to it as one of the reasons justifying the law of veiling, many women

¹⁰² Compare Commins (2006).

¹⁰³ Compare Appleby and Marty (1994); Almond, Appleby and Sivan (2003).

still just want to be beautiful. The cultivation of female attractiveness figures prominently in guidebooks for good Muslim wives, and women assume quite correctly that the stability of a marriage does not least depend on such factors. It is easy for men to divorce under *shari'a* law,¹⁰⁴ and it is legal to marry up to four women. An appeal by Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the leader of the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, which was published in December 2009, clearly reveals that wives are chosen for their physical attractiveness rather than for their religious devotion. In a public statement about the promotion of polygyny, Nik Aziz criticized that the *ulama* discredit this type of marriage by their own behaviour. On 11 December 2009, he told the newspaper *The Strait Times*: 'Normally, when a man likes a beautiful woman, he will take her as his second wife. But after they have children, he will divorce the woman. This is the bad image that I meant which should be cleaned up.' It is not surprising that such conditions have given rise to an Islamic consumer culture that focuses in particular on feminine beauty. On the one hand, Islamization contributes to the flourishing of a female beauty industry that includes body care products, women's magazines, and an Islamic fashion industry; yet on the other hand, it condemns that industry for being too materialistic.

The balancing act between work and family is likewise fraught with ambivalence, because a woman's role is primarily defined as that of a housewife and mother. Only when she either fulfils these tasks herself or delegates them to relatives or domestic servants can she turn to the 'less important activities', that is, a professional career or politics. Modern Muslim women try—often successfully—to bring these duties into line with their career aspirations or their social, political, and religious activities. In August 2005, I had the opportunity to personally query female leaders of the Islamist Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, Justice and Welfare Party) in Yogyakarta about the compatibility of family and professional life, and I was amazed to learn that they regarded the reconciliation of these two spheres as a solvable problem. Each of the women I interviewed had several children, an academic full-time job, and was committed to activism.¹⁰⁵ Yet it is doubtful whether these academic exemplary biographies are also representative of the mass of women targeted by Islamist agitation.

¹⁰⁴ According to Islamic law, it is sufficient to say the repudiation formula *talaq*, which translates as 'I divorce you', three times. In Malaysia, there are even authenticated cases where husbands separated from their wives by sending them an SMS with the divorce formula.

¹⁰⁵ Yet these model careers, with which Asian women never fail to impress Western women, are only understandable if we consider that each academic household is run by badly paid domestic servants who take care of all routine duties such as cleaning, doing the laundry, shopping, cooking, and looking after the small children.

Islamist women's organizations have been studied by female anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists since the 1990s, and Zainah Anwar wrote about female Islamist students as early as in 1987. Some studies focus on a functionalist perspective, analyzing reasons why women benefit from Islamism. Especially scholars who have done research in Egypt will recur to an argument that is often brought forth but is largely unsubstantiated: they argue that covering the body prevents sexual assaults in the public space, and thus makes it easier for women to pursue activities outside the home, enabling them to attend schools or universities or to practise a profession. According to these writers, a woman who demonstrates, through her *habitus* and outward appearance, her subordination to the norms and values of Islam is respected as a human being, and not subject to discrimination as a sexual object.¹⁰⁶ They conclude that Islamism thus is conducive to women's empowerment. This logic is supported by the fact that female Islamists indeed are frequently members of the educated middle class who work and sometimes even hold prominent positions in Islamist organizations. A further counter-argument is that women work their way up exclusively in the women's wings, which, however, are invariably subordinate to the top leadership levels dominated by men. As far as lower-class women are concerned, such arguments do not apply anyway. The majority of Southeast Asian women have always worked, be it as peasants, craftswomen, traders, maids or, since the onset of industrialization, as factory workers. The implementation of Islamic gender concepts has by no means made life easier for these women. Since the introduction of *shari'a* bylaws in Indonesia, for example, women who return home after nightfall have on numerous occasions been assaulted by Islamist militias for allegedly being prostitutes. A woman who is seen on the streets unaccompanied by her husband or other male relatives arouses suspicion, and runs the risk of being arrested or maltreated.

Another functionalist explanation why women nevertheless join Islamist groups has been put forth by Susan Brenner.¹⁰⁷ She argues that young female Islamists are in search of an alternative modernity of their own, beyond the Western way that is rejected as being too materialist, immoral, and profane. Researchers have found the same motivation among Turkish, Malaysian, and Egyptian female Islamists.¹⁰⁸ In that process, they consciously accept breaking with their parents. The young female Islamists negate the older generation's position of power, overrule intergenerational power structures,

¹⁰⁶ Compare El Guindi (1981); Werner (1997).

¹⁰⁷ Compare Brenner (1996).

¹⁰⁸ Compare Frisk (2004); Göle (1996); Mahmood (2004); Werner (1997).

and demand to be accepted as individuals with religious and moral leadership qualifications. When interviewing female students who had joined the radical Islamist group Hizbut Tahrir, I found empirical evidence supporting this thesis. With great self-confidence the activists declared themselves leaders of their families, and stated that even their fathers had accepted them as ultimate moral authorities. In other cases, however, the self-appointed religious women teachers meet with less acceptance by their parents; instead, they have to face the latter's criticism, or are even expelled from their parental home. In a certain way, all these various processes can be regarded as the same type of post-adolescent rebellion that is common in Western societies as well, where it is considered an essential strategy of individualization employed by adolescents and young adults.¹⁰⁹ Confrontation with the social environment has a strengthening effect on the community of renegades, and provides for the emergence of a *communitas* whose members relate closely, and exclusively, to each other.¹¹⁰ Yet the intense relationships between the group members also have their drawbacks: there is permanent control, as well as latent or even open repression directed at those who have doubts or wish to leave the common path. Both Brenner and Karin Werner, who has done research on female Islamist students in Egypt,¹¹¹ describe the tight moral restrictions imposed by the respective group, and in particular the indoctrination that instils feelings of guilt in those who do not conform, or even fear of punishment in the hereafter if they cannot obey God's commands as demanded.

Even though the decision to commit to a radical Islamic way of life is made self-determinedly by women, and even though this enables them to strengthen their personality, Islamism is ultimately a system on which people cannot easily turn their backs if their high expectations are not fulfilled. Joining the milieu of political Islamism is much easier than withdrawing from it, particularly if people have burned their bridges to families and friends. In those cases where female Islamists' calls for an implementation of *shari'a*—which is an indispensable issue on the agenda of the organizations—

¹⁰⁹ On the universality and cultural contextualization of so-called 'rituals of rebellion', compare Schröter (2004).

¹¹⁰ The system of *communitas* within rebelling groups has been exemplarily outlined by Victor Turner. It is an integral component of the three-phase ritual process, whose first step consists of a separation of the adepts from society. The second step, where the rebellious group constitutes itself, is characterized by predominantly egalitarian structures and a democratic discourse. In the third step, there is a reincorporation into society, either on an individual level or by means of an integration of the whole group. Compare Turner (1969).

¹¹¹ Compare Werner (1997).

are successful, the last vestiges of voluntariness disappear: *imams* and *shari'a* policemen are then in charge of defining moral and religious action, and see to it that the proper sanctions are imposed for non-conformist behaviour.

Fighting against Patriarchy within an Islamic Frame of Reference

Moderate female Muslims, Islamic feminists, and liberal male Muslims oppose both the implementation of rigid Islamic norms and *shari'a*. They criticize the changes envisioned or implemented by the neo-orthodox conservatives and fundamentalists as being misogynous, and advocate a gender-sensitive Islam that emphasizes the equality of men and women. Furthermore, they view these changes as imports from the Middle East,¹¹² as an Arab custom that is inconsistent with local traditions. They believe that Allah has created all humans, both men and women, as equals, that Islam does not imply inequality but equality of the sexes, and that Islam and women's emancipation are mutually compatible. They try to lend legitimacy to their views by reinterpreting the Qur'an and the traditions, referring to the principle of *ijtihad*, or independent reasoning, which permits every Muslim to read the holy texts of the Qur'an and *sunnah* and to draw his or her own conclusions from that reading. While male and female proponents of this hermeneutic school do not question the divine origin of Qur'anic texts, they nevertheless view these as time-bound documents that require permanent contextual interpretation. The Indian scholar Asghar Ali Engineer, for example, writes that the verses are divine but understanding them is human.¹¹³ He adds that the arguments put forth in the Holy Scripture are ambiguous, particularly with regard to women's rights. He argues that the equality of the sexes is explicitly stated in many central passages of the text but obscured in others, because acceptance of the book would otherwise have been at risk in seventh-century patriarchal Arabic society. Just like Engineer, scholars such as Khaled Abou El-Fadl (2002), Farid Esack (1997), Riffat Hassan (2004a, 2004b),¹¹⁴ and Asma Barlas (2002)—to name just a few—believe in the divine origin of the central texts of Islam, yet also see the necessity for incessant reinterpretation. This liberal branch of the Muslim community has found followers mainly in Southeast Asia.

¹¹² Compare Brenner (1996); Ong (1995).

¹¹³ Compare Engineer (2004:5).

¹¹⁴ Compare also Grob, Hassan and Gordon (1991).

The first place where such an interpretative approach began to spread was Malaysia, where it was picked up by a group of women who wanted to counteract the increasing fundamentalization of society and who later named themselves Sisters in Islam. Zainah Anwar, one of the group's founders, described its motives in an essay:

We felt powerless in the face of complaints by women that have to suffer in silence because it was said that Islam demands wives be obedient to their husbands, or Islam grants men the right to beat their wives or to take second wives. We felt powerless in the face of seminars on radio, on television, and in religious departments and in *shari'a* courts where women heard that men are superior to women, that a woman must obey the husband, that the evidence of two women equals that of one man, that a wife has no right to say no to sex with her husband, that hell is full of women because they leave their heads uncovered and are disobedient to their husbands. (Anwar 2001:228)

Being devout Muslims, Anwar says, they could not imagine that Allah approves of such injustice; they thus began to study the Qur'an in their group to find out whether oppression and violence against women are indeed substantiated by passages in the text. Their undertaking of reading the Qur'an in a new light was supported by the African American convert Amina Wadud, who had just completed a dissertation on 'The Qur'an and Woman' and was teaching at the Department of Revealed Knowledge and Comparative Religion of the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur. As a theologian with a doctoral degree, Amina Wadud not only had the authority needed to view critical passages in the text in a new light; she was also able to provide credible substantiation for this perspective from the religious sources. Anwar writes:

Our reading opened a world of Islam that we could recognize, a world for women that was filled with love and mercy and with equality and justice [...] We were more convinced that it is not Islam that oppressed women, but the interpretations of the Qur'an influenced by the cultural practises and values of a patriarchal society. (Anwar 2001:229)

Methodically, Sisters in Islam work with two types of text exegesis: on the one hand, texts cited to justify inequality are compared with such that emphasize gender equality; on the other, the meanings of individual terms are critically analyzed. Like other feminist 're-interpreters', the Sisters of Islam place particular emphasis on verse 4:34, which says:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one (more strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard (in the husband's absence) what Allah would have them guard. As to these women

on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them, refuse to share their beds, chastise them.

In their brochure 'Are men and women equal before Allah?' they contrast the text of this verse with other verses; these are used to infer that men and women are equal and of equal value, and to interpret the Qur'an ultimately as propagating a religion that espouses gender equality. Yet such a comparison alone cannot invalidate the quite explicit words of verse 4:3. Here begins the difficult sphere of philology and the definition of Arabic terms. In this context, for example, the term *nushuz*, which in orthodox reading is translated as 'disobedience', is of key importance. Referring to the Egyptian theologian Sayyed Qutb and quoting him as an authority, the Sisters in Islam present an interpretation that also pertains to the husband, and define *nushuz* as 'a state of disorder between [a] married couple'.¹¹⁵

In Indonesia, the movement calling for a reinterpretation of the Qur'an is by no means limited to a small group of female activists.¹¹⁶ Both men and women who support a liberal reform of Islam and participate actively in the democratic reform of the country comment on basic issues of gender equality. Nasaruddin Umar, a professor of theology at the Islamic University in Jakarta, contextualizes the Qur'an historically and geographically/culturally, and views it as a product of the conditions prevailing in seventh-century Arabia. Nevertheless, he states that among the holy scriptures of the world religions the Qur'an has the largest potential of achieving gender equality; it merely needs to be modernized, and its exegeses adapted to present-day conditions.¹¹⁷ Ulil Abshar Abdalla, the founder of the Liberal Islamic Network (Jaringan Islam Liberal), also views new exegeses of the scriptures as an adequate way to establish gender justice and objects to the imposition of 'alien concepts on gender equality' on the theological matrix of Muslim societies.¹¹⁸ Lily Zakiah Munir, the former director of the Centre for Pesantren and Democracy Studies, made a distinction between present-day Muslim societies, in which women oftentimes experience discrimination, and Islam, which codifies gender equality.¹¹⁹ In an interview given to the internet magazine *Qantara*, she said that unlike in Christianity, where woman was created from man's rib, women and men in Islam emerged together from

¹¹⁵ www.sistersinislam.org.my/publications/beatwives.htm.

¹¹⁶ Compare Van Doorn-Harder (2005), among others.

¹¹⁷ Compare Umar (2004).

¹¹⁸ Compare Abshar Abdalla (2003).

¹¹⁹ Compare Munir (2002a, 2002b).

one soul. According to her, there is not a single verse that points to the inferiority of women. The Qur'an also does not distinguish whether a sin is committed by a man or a woman, further corroborating a fundamental ethic of gender equality. Moreover, both sexes have equal rights with regard to education and participation in social activities. Munir thus argues that women's discrimination is the result of incorrect exegesis of the scriptures by patriarchally biased readers. Although patriarchal-ideological hegemony is propagated by the media, amongst others, the spread of that ideology is also due to the attitude of influential women. According to Munir, women's rights must be asserted first of all by men, because 'it is them (sic!) who have the power to newly define freedom, to give it a new structure, and to implement it' (Munir 2003a).

Liberal Muslim Women's Activism

In Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, female Muslim activists have tried to put an Islam into practice that is pro-women and fair in terms of gender. The goals, strategies, and results vary widely.

As far as Indonesia is concerned, activists call for a reform of the current family law¹²⁰ and a prohibition of polygyny. They argue that rather than being a male prerogative, as is claimed by conservatives, polygyny is inconsistent with the principle of equality laid down in the Qur'an. According to Lily Munir and Siti Musdah Mulia, the fact that the Qur'an permits men to marry up to four women is due to a specific historical context: in the Prophet's day, there was a shortage of men on account of war. The rule was introduced to provide for the widows and orphans. Yet Munir stresses that there were definite limitations to that rule: verse 4:3 lays down that a man should only take one wife if he cannot guarantee that he will be fair to all spouses. Moreover, the Qur'an states in verse 33:4: 'Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his body'. Munir says that a pragmatic tolerance of polygyny has become untenable today, which needs to be reflected in legislation as well.¹²¹ Following the enactment of a law against domestic violence in Indonesia in 2004, this topic has been at the top of the agenda as well. Women further call for the introduction of a quota system, both in the registers of voters and in the parliaments; they fight

¹²⁰ Compare Mulia (this volume).

¹²¹ Compare Munir (2003b). On the current debate over polygyny in Indonesia, also compare Nurmila (2009).

human trafficking, and advocate women's education and reproductive health. They are monitoring the measures taken to implement CEDAW, give recommendations to the government in that regard, and are active in the sphere of poverty reduction. Women studies centres, which are also committed to promoting equality in the gender order, have been established both at secular and Islamic universities. In short: the catalogue of topics and measures is long in Indonesia, and the programmes are supported by public authorities. In spite of all this, there is a serious risk that such initiatives will not prevail, because conservative Muslim forces are mobilizing resistance to them, and find plenty of supporters even among younger, well educated men and women.

The situation is different in Malaysia, as both the most important political parties and the state have taken the lead in the Islamization movement. Female activists—first and foremost the Sisters in Islam (SIS)—have taken action against these developments; using their own reinterpretations of the Qur'an and *sunnah*, and promoting a type of Islam that is pro-women. SIS intervene in all issues that have to do with the legal discrimination of women. They demand, for example, that women be appointed judges in *shari'a* courts, and they participate in a transnational debate on family rights reforms in the Islamic world. For that purpose, they run an internet portal, distribute brochures, and host workshops and public lectures. In 2007 they initiated the international Musawah network, in which activists and NGOs from 48 countries¹²² joined forces to implement women's rights within an Islamic framework. The influence of SIS in Malaysia is due to the fact that its members are almost exclusively academics from influential families; being scholars, lawyers, and journalists, they are well connected to key actors in politics, administration, and the media. And yet, they are not completely untroubled by state repression legitimized by Islam. The board of censors keeps banning books that are distributed by SIS. *Fiqh Wanita: Pendangan Ulama Terhadap Wacana Agama dan Gender*, for example, written by KH Husein Muhammad, was banned in 2007. *Qur'an and Women: Rereading the Sacred Text From A Woman's Perspective* by Amina Wadud was banned in 2008. On 14 August 2008, the Ministry of Home Affairs proclaimed a ban on the book *Muslim Women and the Challenge of Islamic Extremism* edited by SIS-founder Norani Othman, one of the group's founders. The principal assistant secretary of the Publications and Quranic Texts Control Division, Abdul Razak Abdul Latif, said that the book was banned for

¹²² As of December 2009.

‘containing twisted facts on Islam that could undermine the faith of Muslims’. It came with a prohibition order under Section 7(1) of the Printing Presses and Publications Act 1984, and if any individuals are found to be in possession, to make reprints, or distribute the publications, they are to be jailed not more than three years or subject to a fine of not more than RM 20,000 or both (Sisters in Islam 2008).

In Thailand, activists from all sides are involved in the conflict that, in turn, dictates the conditions for any type of activism. In the course of this conflict, women have stood up for their jailed sons, fathers, and husbands; they negotiated on their own with the authorities and were able to achieve some significant successes. But they are also active in NGOs that criticize the violence of militant Islamists, hence placing themselves at risk to become victims of violence. One case in point is the well-known Muslim peace activist Laila Paaitae Daoh, who campaigned for the peaceful coexistence of Buddhists and Muslims and was shot in Yala province on 12 March 2009.¹²³

The lack of safety defines women’s lives in Mindanao as well. They are exposed to rampant poverty, state repression, and clan feuds. Upper-class women, however, enjoy remarkable freedom of action. An outstanding example is Amina Rasul, a feminist Muslim activist who incessantly looks for new ways to strengthen both Muslim rights within the predominantly Catholic Philippine state and women’s rights within the Muslim communities. Her latest project is a national organization of Philippine Islamic Leaders, the National Ulama Conference of the Philippines. Two organizations are behind this project: the Philippine Council for Democracy and Peace, of which Amina is president, and the highly respected Magbassa Kita Foundation, founded by Amina’s mother, former Senator Santanina Rasul. The birth of the organization went smoothly, involving a two-year process of workshops and consultations. An agenda was ratified that reflects a strong influence of Islamic feminism. The *ulama* organization is complemented by an *aleema* organization, that is, a council of female Islamic experts. Political routine business has since then been transferred to board of trustees composed of 15 members, with representatives from various areas. Two seats are reserved for representatives of the *aleema* group, and a third has been given to Santanina Rasul, the grand old lady of Muslim activism, who is now in her eighties.

¹²³ Lailas eldest son was murdered by Islamists in 2004, and her second son and her husband were assassinated in 2006.

Conclusion

Gender relations in contemporary Southeast Asia are a subject of controversy these days. Moderate and liberal female activists and intellectuals are campaigning for an implementation of the CEDAW, and for a gender-egalitarian Islam. Neo-orthodox conservatives and Islamists, on the other hand, are fighting for an order of difference that is based on the supposedly God-given inequality between the genders. Many individuals, be they activists, politicians, authors, scholars, members of religious communities, or common citizens, cannot be explicitly classified as adhering to either of these two views. Their positions are shaped by specific local, regional, and national conditions, by the opportunities or lack of opportunities to participate in the economic upturn, by their belonging to ethnic or social groups and by these groups' specific relations with the state or the ruling elite, or just by the opportunities they do or do not enjoy as individuals.

In spite of many throwbacks in the implementation of measures against the discrimination of women, and in spite of the fact that conservative ideas about the gender order are accepted by large segments of the population, it is unlikely that the clock will be set back, and that women will content themselves with being reduced to the position of mothers and wives. Southeast Asia has a long history of female participation in society and politics. Women activists are much more self-confident in that region than in other parts of the Islamic world, and even many men advocate a just order that is compatible with the principles of the United Nations. For that reason, it is likely that, even in regions where Islamic actors exert considerable influence, women will find ways to successfully assert their interests.