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# Beyond Religious Interpretations Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Sexuality and Gender (An Indonesian Perspective)

***Abstract** This paper discusses the rising phenomenon of deploying sexuality and gender by Islamic fundamentalist groups in contemporary political situations. Rather than contextualizing the case as a form of patriarchal and heteronormative approaches in interpreting Islamic teachings, this article addresses a more systematic Islamic political agenda that roots in the history of sexuality in the Islamic context. This paper elaborates and traces the influential impacts of the construction and production of the discourse of marriage, homosexuality, controlling women's body and sexuality, and the authority of male clerics (ulama) in Islamic knowledge and law production to the revival of contemporary politics of gender and sexuality among Islamic fundamentalist groups both in Indonesia and beyond. Examining current social and political dynamics, both in Indonesia and at global level, this article offers a new analytical framework beyond academic interpretation (tafsir) in understanding the politics of gender and sexuality in the context of emerging Islamic fundamentalism.*

## **Keywords**

*Politics of sexuality and gender; history of sexuality in Islam; political Islam; Islamic fundamentalism*

## **I. Introduction: Contexts and Methodology**

In March 26, 2010, the Defender of Islamic Front (Front Pembela Islam or FPI) attacked a number of participants of the 4<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Asia) in Surabaya, Indonesia. At the same day, the Islamic Community Forum (Forum Umat Islam or FUI) occupied the office of GAYa Nusantara, the oldest Indonesian LGBT organization appointed to be the organizational committee of the ILGA conference. In April 4, 2010 FPI also attacked a seminar and training forum on human rights for transgender people in Depok, southern Jakarta, facilitated by the National Commission of Human Rights (Komnas HAM). In

May 4 2012, FPI also attacked and boycotted a discussion forum and a book launching attended by its author Irshad Manji, a Canadian Muslim lesbian. FPI members boycotted a concert of an American pop singer, Lady Gaga, to be held in Jakarta in late May 2012 under the reason that the singer was actively involved in LGBT rights campaigns. And, in April 2013, FPI mobilized public protest against Dede Oetomo, a prominent LGBT rights activist, who was running for being a commissioner of Komnas HAM.

The Anti-Pornography Law was made in 2008. The making of this national law cannot be separated from the powerful demand by such Islamic traditionalist groups expressing a great concern about the emerging “pornography and porn-action” in the democratic post-Soeharto regime since 1998. The law categorizes same-sex relations as abnormal. Wieringa (2001) points out, “While it does not formally penalize homosexuality, this law paves the way for so-called community action against gay and lesbian people.” She addresses the attacks of FPI, FUI and other Islamic fundamentalist groups against LGBT are meant “to cleanse society from what members consider to be a social evil” as a direct consequence of the adoption of the Anti-Pornography Law.

These attacks of FPI and FUI against LGBT communities as well as the making of the Anti-Porn Act in 2008 –along with the emergence of local legislation based on Islamic sharia-- that stipulate the regulation and control of sexuality provide some examples of the rising phenomena of how particular Muslim groups use sexuality and gender as an integral component of their socio-political agendas in contemporary Indonesian politics. This political realm related to Islamic fundamentalist movements and their political struggle by being engaged in the “debates” and “contestation” around the issues of sexuality and gender in recent Indonesian politics is the main source of inspiration that attracts my interest in writing this research subject.

The post-Soeharto Indonesia since 1998 appears to be overwhelmed by “terrorist actions,” including suicidal bombings. I view that it is important to observe the facts of how some Muslim men accused of being involved in the terrorist attacks in Indonesia appeared to have wives in some areas in the country. It seems that building marital relationship with a local woman was chosen by a male “terrorist” as a strategy of social “acculturation” to protect them from the public surveillance. An example of this situation was found in the case of Nurdin M Top who married a number of women from an area where he was hiding. The same notion of applying marriage for political purpose can also be found in the case of an Islamic traditionalism based Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) when its members are involved in polygamous marriage as a way of expanding the number of political supporters. Is the strategy of marrying local women part of the politics of sexuality of an Islamic “fundamentalist” group?

I will discuss the “deployment of sexuality” (Foucault, 1978), gender, and religion in the political arena by Islamic fundamentalist groups. This exploration aims to address and analyze the dynamics and complexities surrounding the application of the politics of sexuality and gender by a fundamentalist religious group. By contextualizing the discussion of sexuality and gender within the “politics of religion” or more specifically the “political Islam,” I suggest applying a broader perspective in seeing gender and sexuality “discourses” in a religious context. In other words, this paper considers political struggles as a site of political negotiation. Therefore, in this discussion, I take into serious account a view that the politics of sexuality and gender within Islamic fundamentalist groups does not take merely in the form of violence or violation against “human rights, gender, and sexual rights.

The emphasis on the political aspect of sexuality and gender reflects the objective of this paper to provide an important additional approach to the debate and controversy around sexuality and gender within an Islamic context. Earlier observation and analysis on this subject focuses dominantly on the different approaches among Muslim groups toward religious texts, including the Qur’an and the Prophet Muhammad’s living tradition (hadith) as the main sources of different perspective in seeing sexuality and gender. Such an approach can be discovered in some studies such as Wadud’s (1992) *Women and Qur’an*, Muhammad’s (2001) *Islamic Jurisprudence of Women*, and Hasyim’s (2006) *Understanding Women in Islam*. These studies usually ignore to elaborate the political dimension behind Muslim groups’ engagement in sexuality and gender “discourses.” Based on my experiences of working with some feminist organizations in Indonesia, such a dominant approach on religious texts can also be found in the extensive demands among Muslim feminists activists toward the so-called “positive texts,” religious resources from the Qur’an and hadith that are viewed to support gender equality and sexual rights.

Since the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq and the Afghanistan War, there have been growing efforts, both within feminist “scholars” and feminist “activists” to begin thinking about the political dimension of Islamic fundamentalist groups’ engagement in gender and sexuality issues. An important example of this approach is a study on the emerging phenomena of the revival of adultery (*zina*) law in some Islamic countries (Mir-Hosseini and Hamzic, 2010). In this analysis, this phenomena is seen as a critical response among Islamic fundamentalist groups to the “failure” of the Western concept and idea of human rights and women’s rights as they accused some Western countries, particularly the United States of being involved in the military (and violent actions) in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Mir-Hosseini and Hamzic point out in their study, some Islamic fundamentalist groups even use the issue to start campaigning for the development of “an *authentic* Islamic feminism” derived from the rich traditions of Islam. Therefore, the increasing voices toward the

revival of *zina* law provide an important argument to observe the growing phenomena of the deployment of gender and sexuality as a political tool among contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups, including some cases within Indonesian Islamic context.

In the specific Indonesian context, the notion that the engagement of Islamic fundamentalist groups in gender and sexuality issues under the banner of the enactment of Islamic sharia law appears in a very recent survey of the Pew Research Center (2013) that reveals the great eagerness toward and interest in among (the majority of) Indonesian Muslims having Islamic law as the national law to replace the existing secular law. Interestingly, the survey addressed several popular issues related to gender, sexuality and women's status within Islamic contexts, including women's status in family and domestic sphere and women's veiling, prostitution, homosexuality, and abortion. Despite a lot of critical responses to the survey, including the methodology (Timur, 2013, Shofia and Stanig, 2013), this survey importantly reflects the potential "political awareness" even among broader Muslim communities in the country about the issues of gender, sexuality, and women's "rights." This political awareness cannot be separated from the growing concerns toward the recent Indonesian social and political situation showing worse "moral crisis" as found in the increasing number of corruption cases, sex outside marriages, and "homosexuality." Some members of Muslim societies, particularly from the fundamentalist and conservative groups, blame women the main source behind this "moral crisis;" and Islamic sharia law is offered as "a formal political and legal solution for this situation.

Another important academic orientation in building a scholarship foundation for understanding the political dimension in looking at the involvement of Islamic fundamentalist groups in gender and sexuality issues in recent years is intellectual works that focus on elaborating the "power" behind religious interpretation as a site of Islamic knowledge production. This academic orientation address "people" behind the knowledge production to understand how this intellectual site offer an important media for the Muslim scholar to build and maintain their "claim of authority" within Islamic intellectual processes. In addition, this kind of study also considers the importance of analyzing legal structures in Islamic contexts to understand how the implementation of Islamic knowledge in Islamic legislation is not free from political interests of the "peoples" involved in both Islamic knowledge and law production. Some important works elaborating the political dimension of religious interpretation include Wheeler (1996), *Applying the Canon in Islam* discussing how the notion of "canon" applied to build the claim of authority in Islamic knowledge and law, Abou El Fadl's (2001) *Speaking in God's Name* analyzing the structures of Islamic legal system, Barlas's (2008) *Believing Women in Islam* studying the history of religious authority in Islamic knowledge and

law, and among many others. These works are very useful to understand the debates and contestations around the issues of gender and sexuality involving Islamic fundamentalist groups beyond textual approach that often fails to understand the possibility of deploying gender and sexuality for a political struggle.

Some earlier studies of the politics of gender and sexuality mainly center their analysis in the state's politics. Examples of such studies include Kligman's (1998) research on the politics of reproduction and population in Rumania, Charrad's (2001) study on the different impacts of the implementation Islamic legal code to women's status in three Islamic countries: Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, Zippel's (2006) comparative study of the politics of sexual harassment in the United States, the European Union, and Germany, and many other works. In the Indonesian case, Suryakusuma (1996) and Wieringa (2002, 2003) extensively study the politics of gender and sexuality by the New Order regime under Soeharto (1966-1998). Wieringa (2003) observes that President Soeharto took the presidential position and maintained his power by "destroying" the Communist Party of Indonesia, including its largest women's organization, Indonesian Women's Movement (Gerwani). The politics of sexual morality was applied when Soeharto labeled women members of Gerwani as immoral, as "communist whores" (Wieringa, 2003:70), accused of getting involved in the murder of the "seven generals" and to mutilate the generals' genitalia. By punishing women Gerwani, Soeharto, who claimed himself as the Father of the Nation, made another political claim based on the politics of sexual morality as the savior of the nation's morality. Focusing on non-state "actor" this paper examines the key difference of the politics of sexuality and gender between state and non-state "actors," particularly within Islamic contexts.

## **II. Methodology: From Contemporary to History**

While I draw the sources of inspiration in writing this article mainly from some phenomena and cases in the national context of the Indonesian Islam, particularly in the post-Soeharto's New Order administration (since 1998), in building the arguments of how the politics of sexuality and gender really exists and works –and even become an integral part of broader political agenda-- within Islamic fundamentalist groups in the recent time, I will observe the historical development of Islamic knowledge and legal system that speaks about issues related to gender and sexuality. This historical observation aims to show how the production of Islamic knowledge as the source of Islamic laws had facilitated the initial construction of the deployment of gender and sexuality for the sake of political purposes. I will discuss certain issues that appear to have a close link with the issues of sexuality and gender including marriage, "homosexuality," the production of Islamic knowledge and Islamic

law, and women's leadership in which male Muslim scholars, as the "actors" behind this process, often use the discussion around these topics as religious and theological references in claiming religious, intellectual, and political authority and powers. Marriage, homosexuality, public and political leadership, and authority in Islamic knowledge and law also appear to be "hot topics" within contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups that enable them to employ their engagement in these topics as a strategy of their politics of sexuality and gender.

### III. Contextual and Conceptual Frameworks

#### a. The Politics of Sexuality and Gender

The politics of gender and sexuality is in fact not newly found in contemporary societies. Nevertheless, feminist scholarship plays a significant role in the construction of both academic and "public" awareness about and interest in the "conversations" about sexuality and gender in a political context. In other words, feminist scholarship significantly contributes to the construction of systematic analysis toward the politics of sexuality and gender in some social and cultural contexts. Sexual and gender politics is among the topics discussed and analyzed the most within feminist movements both within and outside the academy. Some important feminist contributions include their examination of the intersection of gender, sexuality, and "nationalism" in the development of a nation-state (see for instance, Yuval-Davis, 1997 and Stoler, 1989). In the case of Indonesia, as Stoler points out, the politics of sexuality was applied by Dutch colonial rulers in the East Indies, now Indonesia, to build a "racial distinction" between the colonizer and the colonized. Stoler (2005:635) suggests that "the very categories of 'colonizer' and 'colonized' were secured through form of sexual control which defined the domestic arrangement of European and the cultural investment by which they identified themselves." This politics of sexuality during the Dutch colonial period was applied as a way of the colonial politics of inclusion to clearly and distinctly separate between the colonizer and the colonized. Stoler observes that "[i]nclusion and exclusion required regulating the sexual, conjugal, and domestic life of *both* European in the colonies and their colonized subjects" (1989:635). The Dutch colonial ruler formed certain policies and regulations, such as the restriction of European women's entering East Indies as a form of sexual control to prohibit their sexual relationship with native men, who were labeled as "innocent but immoral" (Stoler, 1989:639) in terms of their sexual behaviors.

How the politics of gender and sexuality was applied in the colonial period and became a political legitimacy for the Western

colonialism and domination over non-Western societies can be found also in some feminist works using post-colonial analysis that underline the idea of how Western societies applied gender and sexual stigmas against non-Western societies, including Muslim communities. Studies about European women travelers' travel documentation on the status and situation of women in some colonized countries conclude about how feminism was constructed through the imperial eyes that made it White feminism. In the travel documentation of these women we basically find stereotypical views against women within colonized countries as backward, in an absolute oppression, uncivilized, ignorant, incapable for rational knowledge and 'the Others' who needed help the hand of colonial power for liberation and emancipation from the backwardness and oppression (see Ahmed, 1982: 523; Moghissi, 1999). This post-colonial approach is important in writing this paper in analyzing the political relationship of the "West" and "Islam" in the post-9/11 attacks, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to observe how such a colonial political relationship continue in our recent time. After the 9/11 attacks, the Western governments and societies -represented by mass media-- often blame Muslims behind any "terrorist actions." This politics constructs stigmas and stereotype based on gender and sexuality depicting male Muslims as "terrorist, violent, cruel, and extremist" that re-create the notion of (new) Islamic masculinities and female Muslims as being subordinate, voiceless, and victims of their "men." This is to legitimize the universalization of Western concepts of human rights, women's rights, and other gender and sexual rights and freedom, particularly in the Islamic worlds. On the other hand, considering the military intervention of the Western countries, especially the US in the Iraq and Afghanistan war, some Islamic countries begin valuing the failure of the Western concepts of rights and freedom and start voicing the importance of re-constructing Islamic feminism derived from the original Islamic traditions. Based on the post-colonial approach, we can understand this recent political dynamic of the West vs. Islam as a political and social context of the emerging development of "new forms of Islamic feminism" that pure from the influences of Western colonialism, unlike "old form of Islamic feminism seen as a product of the colonial encounter.

Another important feminist contribution in understanding the politics of sexuality (and gender) is Pateman's (1998) *Sexual Contract* that critically responds to the dominant views within the Western countries of the importance of social contract in the development of the desire toward freedoms and rights and ignore the importance of seeing sexual contract. As a result, Pateman suggests, the "discourse" of freedom and

rights in the Western societies appears to be predominantly patriarchal. Through this analytical approach, we gain understanding of how and why problem of gender discrimination against women as found in the policies and regulation of labor markets has historical, philosophical, and “political” roots.

Blackwood’s (2010) work about sexual and gender relationships of tomboys and femmes in Padang, Indonesia, is very important for developing my analysis and argument in this paper. This study on “local” tomboys and their girlfriend called femmes display an important insight of how the politics of gender and sexuality gives impacts to non-normative gender and sexual minority groups like tomboys and femmes. This study addresses how this situation creates new gender and sexual subjectivity as a result of their attempt to manipulate and respond to the politics of sexuality and gender.

Blackwood (2010) observes multiple ways of the politics of sexuality and gender in contemporary Indonesian contexts. By multiple ways mean that the politics of gender and sexuality to both construct and maintain traditional gender and sexual norms of Indonesian societies does involve not only the state, but also some non-state institutions, including Muslim scholars (*ulama*), education, and mass-media following. Blackwood (2010, 36) argues that “the deployment that occurred [in Indonesian context] was one of gender as much as sexuality” that “produced ‘women’ and ‘men’ who were said to act and dress like the other ‘sex’ in violation of their gender”. Blackwood (2010, 38) suggests that in the context of Indonesia (and Southeast Asia), “a deployment of gender produces different forms of gender transgression in relation to dominant religious, cultural, and social discourses of particular historical era”.

Blackwood thus elaborates the “intersection” between the state’s gender and sexuality ideology during the New Order era and Islamist interpretation on “women” and “men” in producing “dominant gender discourses” or “normative gender and sexuality discourses” in Indonesia. In the case of tomboys, “regional ethnic leaders” are involved in that intersection. This “intersection” influences the way tomboys and their femme partners construct their relationship based on binary gender relationship of men and women. These “dominant gender discourses” are produced by the State through “education agenda, development policies, and civic programs and through Islamic clerics and their national organizations” (Blackwood, 2010: 39). The New Order administration under President Soeharto (1966-1998) created the discourses that “were not directed at sexuality per se but at the creation of properly gendered, reproductive citizens situated heterosexual



nuclear families” (Blackwood, 2010: 40). In other words, this period of New Order, Blackwood highlights, is a period of consolidation of “a rigid gender binary that situated women in the home and men as household heads and workers”; “the state enshrined mother and wife as women’s primary role and duty,” articulating “a vision of women’s nature (*kodrat*) that emphasized women’s maternal role and responsibility for their children’s health, care, and education (2010: 41).

Similar gender discourses are introduced and strengthened dominantly through Islamist interpretations of women’s duties of “wearing the *jilbab* and covering [their] *aurat*, getting married and being a housewife.” In short, these interpretations highlight women’s position “solely as wives and mothers.” Blackwood observes that these Islamic interpretations (and practices) are reflected in tombois’ descriptions of marriage and domestic tasks (2010: 44). Islamist interpretation “draws strict boundaries between men and women”; though Islamic clerics “agree with modernist idea of men’s and women’s equality, but they find incontrovertible the ‘fact’ that men and women by nature are different” (Blackwood, 2010: 45). This creates different realms for women and men within traditional “norms of masculinity”; while women’s realm is believed to be the family and household, men’s realm is the nation and religious community, in public spheres. Blackwood mentions that despite the process of developing dominant gender discourses under the State’s control, “alternative discourses continue to appear” through the production of “gender as subjectivity” that is “more complex than the simple binary that state and Islamist leaders present” and the relationship of tombois and their girlfriends displays a process of the production of such alternative discourses of gender as subjective.

Based on the elaboration of these feminist works, I will conceptualize the politics of gender and sexuality in this paper as follow. First, the politics of gender and sexuality reflects both academic and political awareness about the importance of gender and sexuality as political subjects that can be exploited for political struggle and strategy. Here, the politics of sexuality and gender is made possible based on intellectual analyses and understanding that gender and sexuality issues display political resources and, therefore, offer political powers in a political struggle (Carver and Mottier, 1998) both to state and non-state institutions.

Second, the politics of gender and sexuality is a political strategy of using the issues of gender and sexuality for certain political goals. It means that gender and sexuality are deployed in a political struggle that cannot be separated from the broader political goals of state or non-state parties involved in this politics of gender and sexuality. In this context, I

address two major political goals of the politics of sexuality and gender: (1) the subjugation of non-normative gender and sexual identities and norms for the sake of political stability, including the political stability of those in power positions, and (2), in the context of Islamic fundamentalist groups, discrimination and violence against non-normative gender and sexual minorities for the purpose of political movement of building Islamic social order and Islamic state.

Third, the politics of gender and sexuality include the political actions of enhancing gender and sexual rights. In the context of the state, this politics of sexuality and gender take in the form of the so-called state's feminism in which state institutions are actively involved in the promotion of gender and sexual justice through the implementation of policies they make. In the level of non-state, this politics of gender and sexuality can be found when social and religious groups are intensely engaged in social-political movements to promote gender and sexual justice. In Indonesian contexts, an example of non-state's politics of gender and sexuality in this conceptual framework can be found when some Muslim leaders and activists developed non-government organizations as an institutional media of campaigning gender and sexual rights based on Islamic tradition.

While feminist scholarship has been influential in the analytical development of the political importance of gender and sexuality, as this paper focuses on Islamic fundamentalist groups that are often categorized as an "enemy" of feminist and women's rights movements, it is very important to examine how such religious groups gain an understanding of the important of the deployment of gender and sexuality for a political purpose. While the subject of how contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups get influences from feminist scholarship and theory in using the politics of sexuality and gender needs further research, as an initial analysis, I argue that the wider access to knowledge and information along with the growing information technology as an important factor in leading "non-feminist" groups to feminist scholarship, including by manipulating feminist thoughts for their political goals. Based on my experiences of working with some feminist organization, I observe that in some education programs on women's issues within "right-wing" Muslim groups like the United Actions of Indonesian Muslim Students (KAMMI), the participants use some feminist concepts and terms such as "gender," "sexuality," "patriarchy," "women's rights," "sexual rights," and "gender equality;" they approach these concept to re-create their own "concept" of (Islamic feminism): gender equality means also when women's obedience contribute to maintaining harmonious relationship in domestic sphere.

**b. Islamic Fundamentalism**

Islamic fundamentalism has been a controversial issue within contemporary political conversations. The controversy cannot be separated from public perception about its connection to violence in the name of Islam, the religion believed as voicing universal peace and love. Therefore, it is important to discuss some questions: how Islamic fundamentalism links to violence? Is Islamic fundamentalists' engagement in political violence a reflection of its intellectual perspective? In other words, is the Islamic fundamentalists' association to violence a contemporary (political) phenomenon? How issues of gender and sexuality appear in the conversation of Islamic fundamentalists' involvement in violence?

Fazlur Rahman's (2000) study of the history of fundamentalism within Islamic context importantly discovers an understanding of the body of knowledge and scholarship aspect of Islamic fundamentalism. This study therefore suggests that Islamic fundamentalism, particularly in its historically intellectual and philosophical development is far from being associated with and engaged in any form of violence. Here, instead of framing the conversation around Islamic fundamentalism within the context of "violent" and "radical" political Islam, Rahman conceptualizes Islamic fundamentalism as a historical dynamic of Islamic scholarship that rested in the different intellectual approach to religious resources: the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's traditions and life experiences.

It is worth observing the historical period when the tradition of critical Islamic thinking (*ijtihad*) gained a serious challenge. Some classical scholars, such as al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Hajj restricted the use of critical thinking. Innovation and renewal were considered *bid'a* (innovation without precedence). Examples of this kind of traditionalism include al-Ghazali's views in *The Revival*, and *al-Madkhal* written by Ibn al-Hajj, a traditionalist of Egyptian Mamluk.

In the history of Islamic thought there has been a dialectical movement between progressivism and traditionalism. This can be seen in the polemical debate between Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Ghazali and Ibn Rusyd (Averroes). Avicenna and Averroes represented progressive groups, while al-Ghazali was from the traditionalist wing of Islam. A tradition of philosophical debate among Muslim scholars developed when Greek philosophical texts were translated into Arabic. Al-Kindi became the first Muslim philosopher and Abu Nasr al-Farabi led the way in developing logical traditions within Islam based on the logical of Greek philosophers (Fakhry, 1999: 271, 273-274).

Avicenna brought Hellenistic philosophical traditions more popular within Muslim societies when he wrote commentaries on Aristotle's logic. His writings called for one of the most perpetual polemics within the history of Islam. Al-Ghazali wrote *The Incoherence of Philosophy* to criticize the philosophical ideas of Avicenna. Later on, Averroes wrote *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, "to defend the philosophers from the charge of heresy which they are stigmatized by al-Ghazali in his work." Progressive Islamic scholars supported freedom of religious thoughts and believed in plural, dynamic, and relative truths. To some extent, they also accepted religious pluralism as a consequence of freedom of religious thoughts.

Al-Ghazali is a good example of religious traditionalism as applied to issues related to women. Al-Ghazali wrote one of the most important classical texts for Muslims. It is entitled *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. The term revival refers to a return to the values and thoughts of the companions of the Prophet. According to Watt, "clearly any attempt to assess al-Ghazali's achievement must pay considerable attention to this work" (Watt, 151).

In the *The Book of Marriage*, a chapter of the second book of *The Revival*, al-Ghazali gives his views on women. Al-Ghazali's view of the relationship between men and women is patriarchal. He says that a wife should take care of her husband and respect him in his presence and absence and seek to satisfy him in every way. A wife is not allowed to leave her house without her husband's permission, and even if he gives his permission, she must leave secretly to avoid her from other males' eyes. Al-Ghazali describes husbands as the center of the marital relationship, as "*qawwamun 'ala al-nisa'*" which means the head of the household. Women should accept and obey all of their husband's instructions, and a husband has unlimited power and authority over his wife, including the power to give sanctions and punishment. Indeed, al-Ghazali calls women the prisoners of men. In the case of *nusyuz* (a rebellion against male authority or a recalcitrance toward a husband), which could be a sexual refusal or other disobediences, referring to the Qur'an, al-Ghazali suggests that when it was conducted by a wife, husband has adequate power to advice, separate and bit her respectively.

Al-Ghazali considers women to be a dangerous source of sexual desire. In *The Book of Marriage*, he says that "if a man's penis is erect, two thirds of his mind is gone." According to Kecia Ali (2006: 7), "Al-Ghazali frames his discussion of the sexual act in terms of a husband's responsibility for keeping his wife satisfied; it is a matter of the husband's duty, rather than the wife's right." Al-Ghazali interprets literally the verse "Your wives are your fields, so you can visit them whenever you are

interested” as meaning that a husband can ask his wife for sexual intercourse anytime, even, if she is having her period, and a husband can ask his wife to’ masturbate him. When he comments on the verse that says a man must treat all his wives justly, al-Ghazali interprets it as referring to a man’s responsibility to fulfill their sexual desires, rather than to his responsibility to respect his wife’s rights. Al-Ghazali’s conservative and traditionalist approach on marriage indicates the Islamic fundamentalist fundamental conceptualization on women’s issues that is always conservative (Skaine, 2002: 9).

The fundamentalist eagerness to reawaken and revive religious knowledge and Islamic tradition cannot be separated from the dream of sending Islam to its early historical development during the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his close companions. This early Islamic period is often called the era of *as-Salaf as-Shalih*, the best and the most pious Muslim communities, the Muslim group with “strong” Islamic religious and political identity, when the Prophet Muhammad became the center of knowledge.

Based on the description above, Islamic fundamentalism in its scholarship dimension in the history of Islamic was merely an intellectual dynamic that was far from becoming a religious legitimacy for violent actions. How and when, then, was Islamic fundamentalism closely associated with political, social, and religious violence and “radicalism”?

Milton-Edwards (2005) addresses the end of the World War in 1945 as the point of departure for the development of Islamic fundamentalism as a category of political movement. The Muslim communities’ encounters with colonial experiences and neo-liberal development projects play an influential role in creating a political situation of the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist (political) movement. In this context, Islamic fundamentalism exists as a critical response of Muslim societies against the Western political economy both during and after the World War.

The notion of political radicalism of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism has been emerging since the Iranian Revolution in 1979. While on the one hand this political movement directly opposed the power of the Shah supported by the Western countries, by voicing the establishment of the Islamic state of Iran under Mullahs or Islamic authority, the Iranian Revolution gave influential impacts to inspiring the “Islamic revolution” in some Islamic countries. Interestingly, since the Iranian Revolution was the Shiah revolutionary movement, some Muslim countries with mainstream Sunni Islamic school reacted by developing “Islamic revolution” that glorified the revivalism of Islamic tradition practiced by the early Muslim communities and began calling for the

establishment of Islamic Empire (*Khilafah Islamiyah*) (see for instance Collins, 2003).

Nevertheless, both forms of Islamic “revolutionary” movements became the political foundation to employ Islamic fundamentalism as the politics against the West. It is within this context the sense and image of radicalism of Islamic fundamentalist movements was developed, including when the Western society both through academic, political, and popular media constructed images of violence and radicalism over Islamic fundamentalist groups.

The encounter with neo-liberal development projects gave impact when this development projects introduced in some Muslim countries created a problem of poverty both in rural and urban areas. Olivier Roy (1993) observes how the problem of poverty that created social-psychological crisis among younger Muslim generations was approached by the Islamic fundamentalist movement to mobilize political supporters since 1970s to 1980s. In the context of Indonesia, this observation is useful to understand how the religious group like FPI and FUI involved in violent Islamic fundamentalist movements; the members of both Islamic organizations in fact come from lower economic and social class with serious economic and financial difficulties. A further research of how their movements, therefore, is a form of political criticism against the Western neo-liberal development that created poverty in the Islamic worlds will be very useful to build deeper understanding of the relation between their attacks against non-normative gender and sexual communities with their broader political goal of the establishment of Islamic state that can oppose the Western political power.

#### **IV. Indonesian Islam as an Example of Analysis**

As a country with the biggest number of Muslim population, Indonesia provides a rich example of how Islam intersects with various aspects of life, beyond religiosity and spirituality. As the major population of the country, it is undeniable that Muslim communities have powerful position in Indonesian politics. Many legal products were made by taking into account this “political position” of Muslim communities, including policies that address the issues of gender and sexuality. For instance, in 1974, the New Order Administration under President Soeharto (1966-1998), issued the Marriage Law, a national family derived from Islamic interpretation of gender and sexuality norms. The Law acknowledges only a heterosexual marriage; the Law formally transforms the traditional gender norm positioning men (husbands) as the breadwinner and women (wives) as housewife; the Law also includes provision on the

ability of taking a polygamous relationship for a (capable) man. In political aspect, how state must follow public interest of Muslim majority.

The Reform Movement in 1998 brought freedom of expression to Indonesia. Conservative religious groups including Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Islamic Defender Front (FPI), and the Justice and Welfare Party (PKS) have benefitted from this situation to propose the implementation of Islamic sharia law (Collins, 2007: 8-9). In addition to these Islamic groups, the Government of Indonesia often includes Jamaah Islamiyah Indonesia (JAI) associated with Al-Qaidah as the religious hard-liner group behind some terrorist attacks in the recent Indonesia. In this period, these non-state Islamic organizations appear to play more active roles in the "Islamization of Indonesian law and politics."

Beside an effort by conservative and fundamentalist Muslim groups to formulate the Anti-Pornography Law to control "the discourse" of pornography by determining what action or behavior is in violation of the law, the Islamic movement to pass Islamic shariah law is most successfully voiced and demanded by conservative and fundamentalist groups at the level of local governments, called *Perda Syariat*. The central issues of both the Anti-Pornography Law and *Perda Syariat* are to make a regulation to limit the rights and freedoms of women, as part of the political movement of leading Indonesian nation-state more morally "Islamic."

In the view of conservative Muslim groups and political leaders the rise of freedom of expression following the Reform Movement has led to serious moral decline. The shariah movement is a conservative effort to control freedom of thought and expression among Indonesian Muslims. Since progressive Islamic feminist movements promote Islamic renewal and reform, they are directly affected by the Islamic shariah movement.

The focus on moral decline gives the Islamic conservatives authority to define morality and pornography to mainstream society. The Anti-Pornography Law defined pornography as "every human creation containing sexual materials, including pictures, vignettes, illustrations, photography, writing, voice, sound, motion pictures, animation, cartoons, lyrics, conversation or other forms of communication in media for public consumption that can invite sexual desires and violate moral values and create the rise of 'porn-action' within society." The conservatives blame progressive groups, including Muslim feminists, as the source of moral decadence because they defend freedom of expression. This presents a dilemma to feminist Muslim organization.

They are given a choice between accepting anti-pornography laws in order to be included with all like-minded people as moral and religious Muslims or rejecting the law and being seen as immoral. The traditionalist Islamic perspective expressed in *Perda Syariat* and the Anti-Pornography Law

positions women as the source of moral decadence. Prostitution is also blamed on women. In Tangerang district, an industrial suburb of Jakarta, Perda No. 8/2005 authorizes the arrest of women suspected of being prostitutes. In one case security guards arrested a woman waiting for a taxi at night assuming she was a prostituted. She was in fact a poor woman who had to work at night with no connection to prostitution, but the local government jailed her. Following traditionalist perspectives the government of Tangerang views it as morally inappropriate for a woman to be in the street after dark.

The Islamic shariah movement emerged in the context of political reforms adopted after the 1998 reform movement. Decentralization and regional autonomy give local governments greater power to manage their resources. Local leaders have associated themselves with the conservative Muslim groups and use Islam-based discrimination against women as a vehicle to increase their support. With *Perda Syariat*, the number of groups opposing feminist organizations has increased due to decentralization and regional autonomy adopted after the 1998 reform movement. In the past, political challenge to feminist organizations was centralized in the national government. This situation is more problematic for women due to the lack of experience of local women's groups. Feminist groups have limited opportunities to sit together in one forum to consolidate their efforts. The politics of shariah law also distracts feminists from other projects to empower local women. Feminists have less time to devote to state gender budgeting or other political efforts to support women's movements. With *Perda Syariat* the state apparatus, such as police and security guards, are used to enforce patriarchal restrictions on the activities of women.

## **V. An Analytical Approach: a Return to History of Islam**

In this section, I will discuss a number of issues that appear to provide important analysis in developing arguments about the (existing) politics of sexuality and gender within Islamic fundamentalist groups. These topics include marriage, homosexuality, Islamic knowledge and law production, and women's public appearance and leadership. These are the topics some Islamic fundamentalist and "radical" groups in the contemporary era, particularly in the recent political context of Indonesia, are engaged the most in their deployment of sexuality and gender in a political arena.

### **a. Marriage and the Constriction of Islamic Political Subjectivity**

Analyzing and understanding marriage as a political tool is not new within feminist, gender, and sexuality studies. For instance, Heath's (2009) study on a marriage promotion program in the US offers an analytical approach of how this program turn to be a (political) medium of promoting heteronormativity through heterosexual marriage promotion. Wieringa



(2011) uses her experience in same-sex marriage to a Muslim woman as a political medium to challenge the mainstream Quranic interpretation on marriage that acknowledges only heterosexual marriage. I will follow this kind of analysis to build an argument of how marriage in Islamic context is also employed as a political medium even since the early history of Islam.

It is not historical to say that marriage in Islamic contexts is often deployed as a form of political action. It is worth addressing the marriage experiences of the Prophet Muhammad, especially to his most “famous” wives: Khadijah and Aisyah as an entry point in discussing and understanding the various notions of politics of marriage practices does work in the Islamic context.

Khadijah (A.D. 555-619) was the daughter of al-Khuwaylid ibn ‘Asad bin ‘Abd al- ‘Uzza ibn Qusayy. Her familial line connected to Muhammad’s line as Muhammad was the son of Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-Muthalib ibn Hashim ibn ‘Abd Manaf ibn Qusayy (Razwy, 1990: 6). Khadijah came from a tradition of trade and merchandise. Her tribe, the Quraish, was one of the biggest clans within Arabic society, and Khadijah was one of the most successful traders at that time.

Khadijah was the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad. Most historians, especially those from the Sunni tradition, note that Muhammad was 25 years old and Khadijah was 40 at the time they married. Prior to her marriage to Muhammad, she had had two previous husbands; Hala al-Taminia and Otayyik (Watt and McDonald, 1988: 47). However, the Shiah historians claim that Khadijah was married only to Muhammad. They also say that she was only a few years older than Muhammad, not 40. For example, Razwy, a Shiah historian, states, “The figure 40 is only an estimate, and it is an over-estimate. Whereas it is true that Khadijah was older than Muhammad, she was not 15 years older as claimed by most of the historians, but only a few years older than him” (Razwy, 1990: 177).

The first important fact about Khadijah was that she was an upper-class woman among the Quraish. Why then did she want to marry to Muhammad? Khadijah’s wish to marry Muhammad was influenced by the discourse of sexuality within the Arabic society of that time. It was common at that time for women to freely express their sexual interests, and they controlled sexual relationships with men. In this context, the marital relationship was also one in which women played a dominant role. Poems written by Arabic women around that time express a somewhat vulgar and “open” interest in sexuality (see al-Udhari, 1999).

In addition, it is said that ancient Arabic society was more matrilineal at the time when Khadijah lived. A woman might have sexual relationships with a number of males, and she was responsible to care for

and feed the babies resulting from her sexual relationships. In this tradition, women might take the “lead” in proposing and asking a male to marry her.

Watt claims that the basis of familial structure shifted from matrilineal to patrilineal after the Battle of Uhud, March 23, 625. This battle claimed many Muslim lives in the small community of followers of the Prophet and created many orphans and widows. In this context, God revealed the verse of polygamy in the Qur’an, Chapter al-Nisa’ (4): 34. However, the majority of Muslim men interpreted the ayah to support their interests in polygamy and patriarchal values. The shift in family structure from matrilineal to patrilineal strengthened patriarchal views within Islamic society (Watt, 1956).

Although it was common among women at that period to freely express their sexual interest, Khadijah was revolutionary –and therefore political-- because she chose Muhammad who had no powerful position in the society. Armstrong (2006: 16) states that at that time Muhammad was “a relatively obscure figure, and nobody thought it worthwhile to make note of his activities”. Social, economic and political positions were key factors in establishing a man’s status. In choosing Muhammad as her husband, Khadijah showed a great deal of freedom of choice and demonstrated her ability to be independent of the influence of the dominant view in her society. Instead of referring to social, political and economic status as the basis for proposing to Muhammad, Khadijah valued his personal characteristics. Muhammad’s truthfulness, reliability, and nobility of character impressed Khadijah (al-Tabari, Vol. VI, 1988: 48). As Razwy describes it, “Muhammad’s efficient work performance and excellent business ability when he worked with Khadijah’s trading company were actually one the main reasons Khadijah was attracted to him” (Razwy, 1990). He was known as the trusted one, an acknowledgement of his trustworthy personality. Muhammad’s altruistic personality traits were different from typical Arabic behavior. Khadijah’s choice was revolutionary since it was unpopular for an upper class, rich Arab woman in that era to value inner personality traits as reasons to develop a marital relationship. In addition, although the familial structure was matrilineal, patriarchal views dominated broader social, political and economic relationships. For instance, a father might even kill his daughter in order to avoid a disgrace to the family as we can see from the story of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattab before he converted to Islam.

Khadijah’s second revolutionary act was that she was the first person to convert to Islam after the Prophet Muhammad. Again she went against the mainstream beliefs of Arabic society. In fact, it was extremely difficult to be the first believer. Khadijah had to face threats from the members of society. The new belief not only contradicted traditional beliefs, it challenged the political and economic order. Under Islamic teachings,

political, social and economic profits were beneficial only if they were dedicated for justice, equality and humanity among people. This directly challenged the positions of powerful members of the society and inspired their anger against anyone who worked to expand Islamic belief.

Khadijah had a great and powerful influence on Muhammad's life as the prophet. When Muhammad received the first revelation, he was very frightened and was sick for several days. Khadijah tenderly cared for Muhammad and supported him. She consoled him when he worried about what would happen to him if the Quraish knew about the event of the revelation. Indeed, she convinced Muhammad to be confident, and she declared herself a follower of Muhammad's belief. Khadijah gave Muhammad and his missionary mission strong financial support. She did not care that her contributions might provoke the anger of the Quraish. Under these conditions, Muhammad rejected polygamy although it was permitted in his society. In her role as the Prophet Muhammad's wife Khadijah maintained an equal position face-to-face relationship with her husband.

The Prophet's respect for Aisha is shown in an incident recorded in the Qur'an. When the Prophet and his companions returned from the battle against Mustaliq, 'Aishah who accompanied him was separated from the group. After some time she was found by Shafwan ibn Mu'aththal, one of the Prophet's companions, who took her to the place where the Prophet was resting. This incident provoked rumors. According to Asad (nd: 535), "this historical event is primarily meant to bring an ethical proposition valid for all times and all social circumstances."

Spellberg (1991: 47) mentions, 'Aishah's marriage to the Prophet was politically important for the Prophet and her father, Abu Bakr. The marriage confirmed the tie between two strong men in a family relationship. Aisha realized the political importance of her marriage and used it when confronted by the Prophet's companions. Her role in leading opposition to 'Ali ibn Abi Thalib, one of the Prophet's closest companions, in the Battle of the Camel shows that he believed she had a strong political position as a result of her marriage to the Prophet. The Battle of the Camel, as an internal dispute among Muslims, was one of the bloodiest events in Islamic history and inspired other strong conflicts. Although male companions of the Prophet, such as Ali ibn Abi Thalib, were also involved, 'Aishah was blamed. Thereafter Muslim male authorities restricted women's participation in politics.

**b. "Homosexuality:" The Politics of Islamic Sexual Identity and Islamic Masculinities**

Homosexuality, LGBT, and queerness have been becoming the issue contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups target the most in their attacks

and movements. This elaboration is an attempt to provide analysis of how these anti-homosexuality, LGBT, and queer actions have a historically political root in Islamic context.

To have extensive exploration of homosexuality discourse in Islamic society, it is important to begin with a discussion of how some hegemonic cultures and traditions before Islam profoundly influenced the formation of Islamic civilization, including its laws. Greek Hellenism and ancient Arabic tradition are two important groups supporting a type of Islamic law on sexuality-related topics. It is also important to observe how Islam dealt with the influences of these traditions. Furthermore, correlating these cultures to the mission of Islam will encourage our understandings of the problem of why Islam is popularly known as one of the major religions that strongly reject homosexuality.

According to the Quran, one of the main missions of Islam is to complete and comprehend the traditions before Islam. However, in the process of presenting the comprehensive mission in the real life of Islamic society, Islam recognizes the indigenous traditions by emphasizing the merciful for the universe as the only goal of Islam. In this regard, we have to pay more attention to the socio-cultural context of the society in which Islam first tried to apply its missions and laws. How can we reflect the merciful of the universe as the goal of Islam if we do not understand the historical context of every Islamic teaching? To some extent, this attention can lead us to understand the dialectical process between Islamic teachings and the local indigenous traditions; and further, this can be an epistemological foundation to define the condition that Islam really applies its goal as merciful of the universe. In my view, the merciful of Islam for the universe can be identified when Islamic teachings do not contradict universal humanitarian values such as anti-violence and discrimination, and recognition of human rights.

Some studies indicate that same-sex relationships have deep roots in the history of human beings. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Quran proves the evidence that homosexuality, known as *liwath*, an Arabic word that refers to Lot, has been a part of human life for a long time. It can be said that in the ancient society, homosexuality was considered common behavior. In this regard, we can propound the question, why do we now introduce homosexuality as a social deviant or even a crime while these ancient societies experienced it? Why is it believed among religious societies including Islam, that homosexuality is such a terrible sin that the ultimate punishments such as stoning, killing, and throwing from the highest building are the only acceptable punishment for gays and lesbians?

As mentioned, the characteristics of Islamic teachings and its interpretations are possibly colored by the traditions of previous societies. In the context of homosexuality, one of the most influential traditions is Greek

Hellenism. Among the ancient Greek society, homosexuality was a usual sexual behavior and some of the world's greatest philosophers were commonly known to experience such sexual relationships. Meanwhile, Islam strongly discouraged or even bans its believers from mimicking or imitating some traditions of previous societies. Furthermore, this suggestion was significant for early Islamic believers to clearly distinguish themselves from the societies around them, from the Islamic non-believers. Based on this reason, I argue that the Islamic restriction against homosexuality also has a correlation to this teaching.

In addition, the stigma against homosexuality refers to the academic tradition of interpretation within Islamic society, including the subject of homosexuality in the Quran. Besides, according to Wafer (1997), the stigma of homosexuality is related to the political interests of the early Islamic society formation. In this regard, it is important to discover the formation of stereotyped interpretations of Islamic doctrines in the Koran on homosexuality and to observe the political interests of the early Islamic society.

One of the most influential traditions in the Islamic knowledge tradition is the patriarchal view of ancient Arabic society. This society encouraged people to show the power of masculinity. It was a common view within the ancient Arabic society that only a man could be a leader. Having a daughter embarrasses the parents in that society, so that a father would even kill his daughter in order to avoid the family's disgrace. In this society, it was also a popular idea that having a number of wives or concubines was a measure of male power. When a father died, his son would inherit the father's wives or concubines. Therefore, it can be concluded that ancient Arabic society eradicated feminine values in order to keep their masculine images.

The Prophet Muhammad introduced Islamic teachings in the patriarchal Arabic society. Thus, it is possible that the patriarchal views of Arabic society have interfered with the tradition of Islamic interpretation. We can find some evidence proving this assumption in some women-related topics of interpretations. For instance, some Islamic scholars prefer to encourage patriarchal interest in interpreting the verse 4 of the chapter IV in the Quran as an approval for male Muslims to have polygamous marriages despite the fact that polygamy tends to cause violence and inequality against wives or children.

The patriarchal influence on Islamic teaching and interpretation of it also exists about the subject of homosexuality or the general subject of sexuality. Under the patriarchal tradition, the ancient Arabic society resisted

homosexual behavior because homosexuality was considered a feminine value, while at the same time, ancient Arabic society often faced tribal conflicts and wars. Therefore, these stereotyped effeminate Arabic males were contrary to tribal interests in the conflicts which needed masculine values such as bravery, courage, strength, roughness, and dominance, among others. Homosexuality could reduce these masculine values and lead to losing in the tribal conflicts and wars.

The patriarchal Arabic view toward homosexuality influenced the model of Islamic teachings and its interpretation that condemns against homosexuality. In the early formation Islamic society, it was common among the first group of Islamic believers to face socio-political and religious conflicts with societies which did not believe in Islam. In this regard, jihad as a spirit of religious defense was a well-known Islamic dogma to win these conflicts. As with other dogmas of war, jihad at that time was overwhelmed by “the masculine values”, and according to Wafer, under the patriarchal influences of Arabic society, the first group of Muslims restricted homosexuality as an irrelevant value of jihad (Wafer, 1997: 92). Under this belief, it even makes sense that there were rare public discussions of sexuality within the first group of Muslims. In addition, the patriarchal influences toward Islamic teachings on homosexuality also show that the verses of the Quran on homosexuality-related subjects describe more homosexual male experiences than homosexual female ones. According to Barton’s compilation, of about 41 homosexuality-related verses in the Quran, there is no verse describing female homosexuality. Murray (1997: 98) mentions that “the absence of lesbian love in the Quran as evidence of absence in “the primitive Islam” (and, presumably, Arabia at the time of Muhammad).” The patriarchal interest influencing the Islamic teachings did not count females as significant members of the society.

In conclusion, the political notions of Islamic view on homosexuality in the early historical development cannot be separated from two key political objectives. The first was related to the necessity of building the authentic Islamic sexual identities pure from the contagious influences of the construction of sexuality and sexual orientation of the societies before Islam. This sense of authenticity was viewed as an important way to develop an image of Muslim communities as communities better than the societies before them. The second was related to the need of building an image of “masculine and patriarchal society” that was important in the context of war.

**c. Islamic Knowledge and Law Production: Male Authority in Islamic Scholarship and Legal System**

Male scholars dominated Islamic knowledge and law production and marginalized women from this process. As a result the motivation among Muslim women to gain a high level of accomplishments in Islamic studies was very weak. Because there was no equal opportunity for women to participate in the discourse of Islamic studies as, for example, interpreters of the Qur'an or transmitters of hadiths, Muslim women were not really interested in going to mosques, school, intellectual circles or other centers of Islamic studies. Therefore, it was not easy to find an eligible and capable Muslim woman in the field of Islamic studies.

This condition worsened when the dominant male Muslim scholars generated the idea of restricting Muslim women from being imams of prayer among male Muslims or preachers at a Friday prayer. Both imams and preachers at that time were not only positioned as religious personages but also as broader social figures who could make some financial and political profits. As a result of their positions, they could have close relationships with political powers. This relation would provide a gate for the scholars to have a part of political powers. Here, not to be imams or preachers also meant that Muslim women were excluded from the economic, social and political powers. The close relationship between the scholars and the political leaders led to the development of political and legal policies by the political powers. The conservative political policies of the kingdom of Saudi Arabia are obvious proof of this intersection of interests between the scholars and the political force as the kingdom spreads the ideas of the conservative Wahabism. Stowasser describes, some conservative views of gender biases in Islamic interpretations become stronger as a result of those biases' transformation into a wider spectrum of social life when the Muslim society maintained this view in one place with social convention of morality and the political power supported this reality.

In the shifting orientation of women's issues discussion from more purely religious teachings to morality the ideas to reconstruct some gender biases of interpretation were blamed as being against convention of morality. Some scholars worried that the reconstruction would lead Muslims, especially women, to express more so-called "non-Islamic customs". The politics of social modesty and morality stereotypes Muslim women as responsibility holders in maintaining morality of society. This condition evokes the idea of traditionalism, the intellectual foundation of Islam fundamentalism.

The way the scholars perpetuated their products of religious interpretations and maintained the domination gave a significant impact to the marginalization, subordination, and discrimination against women in the Islamic scholarship and legislation. On the other hand, this situation reflects the importance of gender and sexuality in the process of the development of

domination of male scholars in constructing and maintaining their claims of religious and political authority and power through knowledge and law production. Therefore, to some extent, knowledge and law production in the history of Islam appeared to be the politics of gender and sexuality for these male scholars.

It is important to see how these processes of constructing religious and political authority through Islamic knowledge and law production (and consumption) were followed by the politics of women's sexuality and body as a political strategy of male scholars' maintaining the authority for the sake of "Islamic social order." As described above, one reason to restrict and marginalize women from the process of Islamic knowledge production was to control their appearance in the public sphere. Within conservative and traditionalist Islamic perspective, it was not Islamic or against "Islamic social order" when women Muslim communities were engaged in public activities such as seeking Islamic knowledge. As in Ibn al-Hajj's work discussed above, women's appearance in public sphere endangers Islamic social and moral order in the way that it will attract male Muslims' sexual interest. While this social and academic situation directly blocked Muslim women not only academic activities, but also in wider public participation, including in a leadership position. In this context, therefore, women's marginalization in academic and legal life becomes a political issue.

Finally, it worth observing the notion of maintaining "authentic" Islamic social and moral order is important to understand the politics of sexuality and gender of the contemporary Islamic fundamentalist groups that often provide critical responses against women's appearance in public sphere, as seen in the case of criminalization of women found in public street at night. It directly challenges the Western concept of women's rights and freedom in which women are encouraged to have full participation and engagement in any public activities.

## VI. Conclusion and Reflection

I was invited to lead a session on "Sexuality and Islam" in a training program facilitated by Sexuality Institute Coalition on Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR), in Kuala Lumpur, July 16-23 2011. This program was attended by a number of women's and LGBT rights activists in several Muslim countries. As I focused the discussion on the history as a political realm in which "real actors" -meaning "peoples" not God-- played a significant role in the construction of (patriarchal) gender and sexuality norms within an Islamic context, I refused to get too engaged in the discussion based on religious texts. I view that it will be insufficient to answer the problem of control of women's gender and sexuality rights and freedom in an Islamic context only by contextualizing the conversation and debate within the context of different approaches toward religious texts. By locating the debate beyond



the textual approach, we can address the real “politics” behind any actions and movements to deploy sexuality and gender within an Islamic context. In fact, contemporary political situations display a super dynamic political relationship among various political “players,” a situation that creates many unexpected changes. An emphasis on the political aspects of a religious group’s engagement in gender and sexuality issues in the recent time will be a key way to observe these dynamic political relationships behind their “politics” of sexuality and gender.

Nevertheless, the dominant response to different religious perspectives on sexuality and gender is one that highlights different intellectual approaches to religious texts and traditions. In this perspective, the (only) answer that can challenge conservative and fundamentalist approach to gender and sexuality issues is by providing a new academic approach that is based on feminist scholarship. They choose the project of reinterpretation of religious text as the main strategy transformation. A dominant methodology here is observing the possibility of “positive religious texts” that support women’s rights. Is it possible to discover the so-called positive texts that support feminist ideas in the early history of Islam while feminism is only a hundred-year idea?

The emphasis on political dimension in seeing an Islamic groups’ engagement in sexuality and gender issues also means that we are aware more about the “people”, the “actors” behind any process of knowledge and law production – including religious interpretation-- who make the process political, and, using a Foucauldian idea, make knowledge and law also politically powerful.

The diverse responses toward the deployment of sexuality and gender for political purpose within the context of the global political change create a great challenge to feminist scholarship; their politics cannot be separated from their responses against the Western politics of gender and sexuality that lead them to think about their own “politics of sexuality and gender” based on Islamic traditions. In addition, as I describe above, the way Islamic fundamentalist groups deploy sexuality and gender I politics seem to reflect intellectual awareness among these religious group about gender and sexuality knowledge previously produced by feminist scholarship. In the growing notion of the pluralization of “feminisms,” how does feminist scholarship provide a feminist analysis to the recent phenomena of the politics of sexuality and gender among Islamic fundamentalist groups? An analysis emphasizing the political aspects of their engagements in gender and sexuality discourse, once again, is expected to help us understand the broader aspects of this phenomenon.

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