Pious Girls: Young Muslim Women in Indonesia

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Women have significantly contributed in various fields such as social, economic, and political sectors for the advancement of the Asian region by participating in both public and domestic spheres.

Pious Girls explores the movement of Muslim women's groups and the emergence of feminine and pious political subjectivity in Indonesia, building on the author's previous research.

This book discusses groups of young Muslim women in Indonesia who demonstrate a new style womenhood. They are portrayed as devout individuals who are faithful to traditional Islamic teachings, yet also entrepreneurial, capable of adapting to neoliberalism, living in modern middle-class urban environments, visionary, and confident. The book interprets how these groups of young Muslim women are able to influence Indonesian society, politics, and economy. They not only emphasize pious behavior but also develop themselves in a dynamic social and economic context. The book also reviews various aspects of this new approach to Islam and how they reconstruct their identities as productive Muslim women in the modern era.

Beta draws extensively on published research and employs ethnographic methods combined with public discourse analysis to understand the dynamics of these groups. She directly observes their activities, conducts interviews, and analyzes social media as well as cultural products targeted at young Muslim women to develop new perspectives on the topics of Islam and women's identities and the role of Muslim women in Indonesian society.

Overall, the book is divided into four chapters. The first chapter explores the evolving concept of the ideal young Muslim woman. This chapter introduces a new paradigm that reconciles piety with modernity, illustrating how young Muslim women navigate their religious commitments alongside contemporary socioeconomic realities. Beta emphasizes the emergence of a new archetype young women who are devout Muslims while simultaneously engaging with the demands of neoliberal capitalism.

Beta's analysis highlights the complexity of this dual identity. On the one hand, these young women uphold Islamic virtues and practices, often participating in religious gatherings and adhering to modest dress codes. On the other hand, they are also active in the economic sphere, particularly in industries like modest fashion, which allows them to express both their religious identity and entrepreneurial spirit. This combination challenges traditional gender roles, as these women are not only homemakers but also active contributors to the economy.

The chapter delves into how this idealized figure is shaped and reinforced by various societal actors, including religious leaders and media. Beta discusses the role of popular religious teachers and online influencers who advocate for a balanced life where women can pursue professional careers while maintaining their religious duties. This narrative supports the idea that Islam does not oppose women's

economic participation, as long as it aligns with religious ethics and receives approval from male guardians, typically husbands or fathers.

Beta also critically examines the tension between individual aspirations and communal expectations. While these young women are encouraged to pursue careers and self-improvement, they must also conform to the expectations of being good wives and mothers, creating a delicate balancing act. The societal pressure to maintain a harmonious household while being economically productive can be both empowering and burdensome, as it places additional expectations on women.

Overall, the first chapter sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis of how young Muslim women in Indonesia are redefining their roles and identities. It discusses the interplay between religion, gender, and modernity, challenging simplistic narratives about Muslim women and offering a fresh perspective on their lived experiences in a rapidly changing society.

Chapter 2 explores how young Muslim women in Indonesia navigate the public sphere and the visual domain, particularly through social media and public engagements. Beta examines the complex interplay between visibility and visuality, highlighting the role of digital platforms and public appearances in shaping perceptions of piety and modernity among these women.

The chapter delves into the ways young Muslim women present themselves online and offline, balancing their religious identity with contemporary cultural expressions (Cooke 2001). The use of visual media, such as Instagram, allows these women to assert their religious identity while also engaging with broader societal norms and expectations. Beta argues that this engagement is not merely a passive consumption of visual culture but an active negotiation of identity, where young Muslim women consciously craft their images to reflect both piety and modernity.

Beta also discusses the challenges and contradictions faced by these women as they become more visible in the public sphere. The tension between traditional expectations of modesty and the desire for self-expression and entrepreneurship is a recurring theme. This visibility can empower young women, offering them a platform to influence others and promote Islamic values, but it also exposes them to scrutiny and judgment, both from within their communities and the broader society.

Furthermore, the chapter touches on the notion of "modest fashion," where clothing becomes a medium for expressing both religious commitment and contemporary style. Beta explores how young Muslim women use fashion to navigate their religious and cultural identities, creating a unique space that blends tradition with modernity.

Overall, Chapter 2 provides a nuanced analysis of how young Muslim women in Indonesia occupy and negotiate their visibility and visuality in a rapidly changing society. It highlights their agency in shaping their identities and the complex dynamics involved in being publicly visible as pious, modern women. This exploration contributes to broader discussions on the intersections of religion, gender, and media in contemporary Indonesia.

Chapter 3 focuses on the concept of the "Muslimwoman" and the self-transformation processes undertaken by young Muslim women in Indonesia. The chapter critically examines how these women navigate and redefine their identities within the framework of religious and societal expectations (Elson and Pearson 1981).

The chapter begins by revisiting the concept of the "Muslimwoman," a term coined by Miriam Cooke to describe the homogenized image of Muslim women in global discourses (Cooke 2001). Beta argues that this homogenization often ignores the diverse experiences and self-perceptions of Muslim women. She emphasizes that the young Muslim women in Indonesia actively engage with this label, not as a constraint but as a conscious choice to cultivate and manage their pious identities.

Beta's analysis is grounded in the examination of two primary sources: a book published by Peduli Jilbab and short YouTube films uploaded by Ukhti Sally. These sources illustrate the narratives of self-transformation promoted by young Muslim women's groups. The chapter delves into the ways these narratives highlight the importance of self-improvement and authenticity in the journey toward appropriating "Muslimwoman." This process of self-transformation, termed "memantaskan diri" (making oneself worthy), is portrayed as both a personal and communal endeavor aimed at achieving piety through acts of worship and embodied practices.

The chapter also discusses the increasing popularity of "based on a true story" books and web series that document spiritual journeys. These narratives are presented as authentic and relatable accounts that resonate with the readers' own experiences. The books and films serve as mediums for negotiating and redefining what it means to be a pious Muslim woman in contemporary Indonesia. By sharing personal stories of faith and self-transformation, these texts reinforce the neoliberal ethical regime that prioritizes individual responsibility and authenticity in the pursuit of piety.

Beta extends her analysis by comparing the self-transformation practices of young Indonesian Muslim women with those of Egyptian mosque women studied by Saba Mahmood. While both groups emphasize the integration of worship into various aspects of life, young Indonesian women are also depicted as ambitious, career-oriented, and fashion-conscious. This broader conception of piety includes not only religious knowledge and embodied practices but also personal ambitions and social engagement.

The chapter provides a nuanced exploration of the "Muslimwoman" concept and the self-transformation processes among young Muslim women in Indonesia. By analyzing contemporary narratives and practices, Beta again highlights the dynamic and multifaceted nature of piety and identity formation in a neoliberal context. The chapter underscores the agency of these women in shaping their pious identities and contributing to the ongoing discourse on Muslim womanhood.

Chapter 4 focuses on the concept of the "productive, pious feminine subject" within the context of neoliberal Indonesia. The chapter begins by examining the intersection of global Islamic revival, creative economy policies, female empowerment discourses, and social media influence, which collectively shape the identity and aspirations of young Indonesian Muslim women (Hoesterey 2016).

The author highlights how young Muslim women navigate the expectations of piety and productivity, balancing religious adherence with entrepreneurial ambitions. This dynamic is particularly visible in the modest fashion industry, where young women like Syifa and Rere engage in business while maintaining their commitment to Islamic ethics. The chapter discusses how these women are influenced by models and ideal figures of young womanhood, which are shaped by a global assemblage of Islamic teachings, state policies, and the trend of ethical entrepreneurship (Bucar 2018).

Beta argues that the productive, pious feminine subject contributes to society not through traditional political engagement but through socioeconomic activities that align with both neoliberal and religious ideals. This subjectivity is supported by religious teachers who promote entrepreneurship as a form of ibadah (religious observance), thus framing business activities within the scope of Islamic ethics. However, the emphasis on religious orthodoxy often obscures class differences and defers discussions about improving the welfare of garment workers involved in the modest fashion industry.

In Indonesia, preferential access to this new model of Muslim women is often granted to certain classes. This model includes women who combine religious identity with modernity, reflecting a blend of tradition and progress. Women from the middle and upper classes tend to have easier access to higher education, economic resources, and social networks that reinforce this model. This results in class segregation, where women from lower classes do not have the same opportunities to access the resources and opportunities that would allow them to adopt a similar way of life (Brenner 1998).

The chapter also explores the elusive connections between various elements, such as creative economy policies, Islamic revival, and female empowerment discourses, which condition the visibility and expectations of young Muslim women. These connections are subtle yet effective in mobilizing a specific kind of reconfigured young Muslim womanhood in Indonesia in service of the state (Jouili 2015).

The chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of how young Muslim women in Indonesia are positioned within the neoliberal economy while adhering to religious ethics. It highlights the interplay between global and local influences that shape their entrepreneurial endeavors and societal contributions. This chapter underscores the importance of understanding the ways in which religious and economic discourses intersect to form the productive, pious feminine subject (Colebrook 1998).

The neoliberal market in Indonesia leverages the idea of Islam to create new markets and integrate Muslim women into the market economy. With the rising religious awareness among the population,

products and services labeled as Islamic, such as Muslim fashion, halal cosmetics, and sharia-compliant financial services, are increasingly in demand. The market uses the image of the modern Muslim woman who upholds Islamic values as a marketing strategy to attract this market segment (Steger and dan Roy 2010).

Pious Girls provides a nuanced examination of the ethical and religious self-transformation of young Muslim women in Indonesia. However, the book's focus on specific groups may limit its representation of the diverse experiences of young Muslim women in Indonesia. Additionally, the academic jargon used throughout might challenge a general audience, potentially limiting its accessibility. Moreover, the analysis occasionally reflects the author's biases and interpretations, which could impact the objectivity of the findings. Despite these weaknesses, the book has several strengths. It also provides significant cultural insight, illuminating how young Muslim women navigate and negotiate their identities within the constraints of both religious and market logics. It offers an in-depth analysis, providing a comprehensive exploration of the intersection between neoliberalism and religious piety through Foucault's framework on moral subjectivation. Methodologically, Beta's feminist approach effectively gives voice to young women, situating their experiences within broader sociopolitical dynamics.

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