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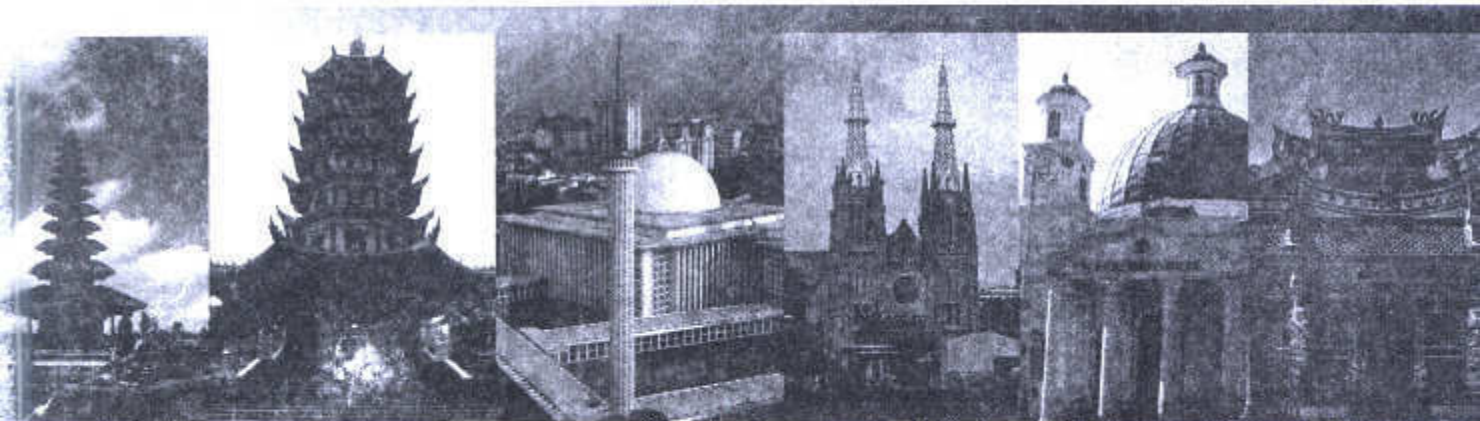


Center for Research and Development of Religious Literature and Heritage  
Office for Research and Development and Training  
Ministry of Religious Affairs of The Republic of Indonesia

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## EDITORIAL NOTES

The growth of religiously radical books has already occurred in parallel to the growth of universal ideologies, philosophical thoughts, and universal ideas of religion in the world-wide, spread globally by information and technological progress. This first article, “The Growth of “Islamic” Radical Books in Indonesia”, written by Choirul Fuad Yusuf, sociologically, attempts to describe how the development and spread of Islamic literary works, particularly on the conflictually-nuanced books in Indonesia. The article of which data is referred to the research-findings on *Survey of Religious Books in Indonesia*, highlighted some notes. *First*, the growth and development of Islamic books, since last decade, tends to be strongly dominated by the practical-Islam books. This phenomenon, is culturally predominantly caused by any pragmatic view of the Muslims at large. *Second*, if it is compared to its former development, the liberal books of Islam seems to face any decline of quantity and interest due to its messages perceived as too freely secular. *Third*, both fundamental books containing the ideas of teaching-purification, and radical “Islamic” books proposing the *syariah* Islam implementation totally and establishing Islamic state in Indonesia, tend to very be stagnant and not too popular amongst Indonesian Muslims because of their political aspiration for defending Indonesia as their country.

The second article is about “Lyrics in the Dolalak Dance in Purworejo Central Java” is written by Djarot, Timbul and Sudarsono. They highlighted that Islamic education teachings which is transmitted performatively in the form of folk-songs is relatively very effective. The article, which is very descriptive and informative in nature, shows that the performance art is methodologically significant and functional in the approaching people’s soul and spirituality to be closer to the God believed. So, for the future, the writers confidently recommend to Government to maintain and conserve this traditional method of Islamic teachings or *dakwah Islamiyah*.

The third article, Etin Anwar which talks on the use of social, religious and cultural heritage for community building and mosque participation by Indonesian Muslim communities in New York City and its impact on women's leadership in al-Hikmah mosque and their production of moral agency and pious self in the mosque setting. She argues that Indonesian Muslim women in Al-Hikmah mosque have more leadership capacity due to the cultural heritage of Indonesian Islam and the complementary status of women in their communities.

Further, Sulistiyowati's article on "Cultural Strategies of Abdi Dalem in the Global Era in Achieving Welfare" talks about the life of Abdi Dalem in facing the globalization era, particularly focusing on the why-ness of the Abdi Dalem's have a strong dedication to the King. The Abdi Dalem's (royal officials) of Jogjakarta Palace, historically, devoted of the Kings on the reach of blessing (*ngalap berkah*). They believed in the non-material as the highest values. To be an Abdi Dalem who devotes to the King will be functionally effective to gain both inner and outer welfare. Through her research carried out in 2009, she concludes that to be Abdi Dalem, actually, is not only motivated for the need of seeking for blessings (of the King or Sultan), but it is also inherited by their ancestors. Although, the monthly salary (*paring dalem*) received by Abdi Dalem, ranging from IDR 7,000.00 up to IDR 15,000.00 but they feel happier and more fortunate in getting welfare. This social fact, of course, becomes a very unique phenomenon in the modern era or *jaman saiki*.

The fifth article is "Traditional Ritual, Water Conservation and Islamic Thought, written by Muhammad Fathi Royyani. This article discusses the traditional ritual of water conservation and its relation to the Islamic thoughts on utilizing the natural resource. This article, substantially, explicates of how the relation of the concept of *Kawin Cai* and Islamic thought, known as the Seven Grade (*Martabat Tujuh*). This article important to read though it seems to be only as a reportive work.

The sixth article of "Islamic and Customary Law in the Aceh Darussalam Constitution" written by Gunawan Adnan tries to show readers that there is a tied and hard relationship between Islamic law

and customary law in the Aceh Darussalam constitution. This relationship phenomenon is clearly seen through the examination study of the manuscripts of the so-called the three law of Aceh, especially pertaining to *siyasaḥ*. The article jumps to a brief conclusion that the most Islamic law, especially the political domain (*siyasaḥ*) has been permeated into Monarchic Aceh Darussalam structure. The institution of *Ahlul Halli wal Aqdi* (parliament), *syura* system, King and functionary conditions are systemically needed for carrying out the state. Further, based on *qanun*, the form of Aceh Darussalam kingdom is not purely a monarchy, endowed by generations, but has been constructed by modern Islamic Republic State. Moreover, the relationship between Islamic law and customary law (*adat*) in Aceh Darussalam kingdom has already been found in the form of both total and selective absorptions.

The last article, written in Arabic “أثر التشيع في تصحيح الحديث”, by Abdul malik Ghazali, studied on the book of *Al-Mustadrak ‘ala Ṣaḥīḥain* written by Abu Abdillah al-Hakim al-Nisaburi (w. 405). The author argues that Al-Hakim easily approved on *hadis* either *hadis saḥih* or *hadis hasan*. This action, at least, indicated that Al-Hakim was already influenced by *syiah* domination in the reign of Muslim states at that time.

# **Women, Leadership, and Mosque's Cultures: Indonesian Heritage in New York City**

**By Etin Anwar**

## **Abstract**

This paper examines the use of social, religious and cultural heritage for community building and mosque participation by Indonesian Muslim communities in New York City and its impact on women's leadership in al-Hikmah mosque and their production of moral agency and pious self in the mosque setting. I argue that Indonesian Muslim women in Al-Hikmah mosque has more leadership capacity due to the cultural heritage of Indonesian Islam and the complementary status of women in their communities. In this paper, I will, first, discuss how the cultural heritage of a mosque along with its patriarchal, masculine leadership influences women's treatment. I will, secondly, examine how female authority is produced within the enmeshed patriarchal leadership, the heritage of Indonesian values, and masculine mosque cultures. In particular, I will discuss how women's religious and social activities generate empirical characters that shape the performance of female moral agency and the cultivation of the pious self. I will, finally, analyze a pattern of female authority in the mosque and the way in which women construct their authority as leaders in the mosque. Throughout the paper, I draw parallels between female authority in Al-Hikmah mosque and the social and cultural practices in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** American Islam, Women's leadership in mosques, Muslim diaspora, Islamic Indonesian heritage, and Gender studies

## Introduction

Overall, mosques in America are seen to institutionalize the oppression of women. Men and women are socially, culturally, and legally expected to behave differently. Socially, when women enter the mosque, they are expected to enter from doors specifically allocated for “the sisters,” to pray behind men separated by partitions, walls, barriers or even separate floors, and to socialize only with female congregants. Theologically, women are perceived to be prone to sin in the mosques, for example, when they do not dress appropriately. Their sexualized, veiled bodies could entice the male congregants, and so, be guilty of imagined sexual appeal. Legally, women could not lead the Friday prayer congregation because the Prophet Muhammad did not appoint a woman to lead a prayer. Given all these accounts, Islamic feminists conclude that the mosques are the most segregated of public space and are not friendly to Muslim women. (Nomani, 2006: 196-213; 2005, 139-152).

Although men lead nearly all mosques, their treatment of women varies by ethnicity, nationality, school of thought (*al-mazhab*), and locality. Located in New York City,<sup>1</sup> the Indonesian community’s Al-Hikmah mosque, for instance, offers women more opportunities for leadership initiatives and authority due to the progressive view of Islam among leaders and congregants that engenders a more egalitarian relationship between men and women. Prior to the founding of the Indonesian mosque in America, women were actively engaged in *pengajian* (religious meetings) and did fundraising for the mosque. They have continued to play various roles in their authoritative capacity to nurture community building and the

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the President of the mosque, Mr. Ipung and his wife, Aryani, for letting us stay in their house during New Year 2008, the Chairman of the Boards, Imam Syamsi Ali, and the board members, Mr. Achmad Padang, and many other Mosque’s staff members, Mr. Purba, Titi, Winy, Vita, Saridjo and others whom I cannot mention one by one.



development of the mosque. I chose Al-Hikmah mosque as my research location because it is the oldest mosque founded by Indonesians for Indonesian Americans.<sup>2</sup> Al-Hikmah is also a host to about 2,000 Indonesian Muslims from New York City and its vicinities, many of whom are Al-Hikmah's congregants. (Putut Widjanarko 2007:33). I selected the founding fathers of the mosque, the incumbent officials, and the active volunteers to be interviewed for this project. I approached the result of the interview and questionnaires by using a discursive analysis to find a correlative pattern of how women's cultivation of the pious self produces religious authority and civic service to the community.(Wetherell, 2001). I will draw upon Mahmood's formulation of the pious self as a result of women's empirical performativity of ritual and its mitigating effect of their ethical and political behavior. (Mahmood, 2005). My work, however, differs from Widjanarko's work that examines the complex process of how Indonesian Muslims in New York City negotiate their cultural identities. (Putut Widjanarko 2007:193). In this project, I demonstrate how Indonesian Muslims living in New York City draw the Islamic cultural heritage as a source for community building and for women's leadership in the mosque setting. This work contributes not only to the current scholarship on the subject that often overlooks Indonesian Muslim diasporas in the United States, (Afridi, 2001; Moghissi, 2006) but also to the making of the Indonesian heritage as living experiences overseas.

I am particularly interested to examine a pattern of social process of how women's leadership in al-Hikmah mosque is produced and how female social and religious activities contribute to the making of moral agency and pious self. I will,

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<sup>2</sup> New York City as a city beyond the melting pot is also a fascinating research site because it houses 579,000 Muslims from diverse ethnicities and has more than 100 mosques. See (Ilyas Ba-Yunus and Kassim Kone, 2004: 315). See also (Putut Widjanarko 2007:193).

first, discuss the mosque cultures and how women are treated therein. I will, secondly, examine how female authority is produced within the intricacy of patriarchal leadership and masculine mosque culture in American settings. In particular, I will demonstrate how women's religious and social activities produce empirical characters that shape the performance of female moral agency and the cultivation of the pious self. I will, finally, examine a pattern of female authority in the mosque and the way in which women construct their authority as leaders, teachers, and treasurers. Throughout the paper, I draw parallels between female authority in New York's Al-Hikmah mosque and the social and cultural practices of gender roles in Indonesia.

### **The Mosque Cultures and Treatment of Women**

This section examines how distinct treatment of women within the mosque's setting correlates to the cultural and religious values of the congregants. Muslims come to the United States along with their cultural, social, and religious values concerning women and gender interactions. Hierarchically-minded-Muslim men perceive themselves as endowed with a natural superiority over women as echoed in *an-Nisā'* (Al-Qur'an, 4: 34). (Maududi, 1992: 149).<sup>3</sup> This scriptural prescription legitimizes the biological and psychological difference between men and women along with constructing gendered roles, and thus, it provides religious justification and unlimited power to maintain what appropriates within the social system. The protective measures created by Islam for women —

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<sup>3</sup> See also the translation of *an-Nisā'*, (Al-Qur'an, 4: 34) as follows: "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 those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all)." (Ali, 2005:190).

as evidence of how Islam grants women's social, economic and social rights, elevate their status, and endows them with such moral and legal safeguards that protect their rights and status (Maududi, 1992:150) -- carry authoritative power for institutionalizing men as rulers and for women as ruled. As Muslim men in many parts of the world perceive such rhetoric as the only truth, the disciplining of women's bodies through the enactment of law, segregation, forbidding mixed spaces in the mosque, and excessive practices of veiling are seen as being imperative in order to safeguard women. These well-intentioned protective measures are often extended to social setting of women in the Muslim public sphere. With this in mind, it is important to examine the parallels and paradoxes of the correlation between the mosque setting and the leadership of women in Al-Hikmah mosque as it relates to mosques in the United States and the cultural connections of Al-Hikmah to Indonesia.

Some mosques in America are ethnically and racially diverse, while some are comprised of a single predominant ethnicity. African Americans or South Asians are the dominant groups which occupy sixty-four percent of American mosques. (Bagby, 2001:19). According to Bagby, "[a]t the average mosque, one-third (33%) of members are South Asian, three-tenths (30%) are African American, and a quarter (25%) are Arab." South Asians, African Americans and Arabs comprise almost 90% of all mosques. (Bagby, 2001:19). Although diverse ethnicities enrich the plurality of America as the melting pot of peoples, cultures, languages, religions, and civilizations coming from every corner of the world, it sometimes becomes the divisive category that fragments Muslims, just as the distinct world religions play a major role in dividing New York City. (Glazer, 1970:ix). Although mosques differ by ethnicities, they serve as the hub for diverse ethnicities to meet their fellow Muslims of the same ethnic origin to enjoy their company.

Native languages connect congregants because they provide cultural bond to which only natives could relate. At the same time, ethnic linguistic preferences may disrupt conversations with other Muslims due to language barriers.<sup>4</sup>

Although Islam is a transnational identity, often-times ethnic, cultural, and linguistic bonds propel immigrant Muslims to establish mosques. The Indonesian mosque in New York City is among the seven percent of mosques based on ethnic origin. (Bagby, 2001:3). Nationally, there were about 1,209 mosques in the year 2,000 (Bagby, 2001:3) and now there are more than hundred mosques in New York City. (Widjanarko, 2007:193).<sup>5</sup> Like many other mosques in America that were young (Bagby, 2001:3) and that were originally built for other purposes, such as “abandoned churches, Masonic lodges, fire stations, funeral homes, theaters, warehouses, and shops,” Al-Hikmah mosque was initially an abandoned warehouse.(Khalidi, 1998:317). The local community put a lot of effort into collecting donations. They bought the building at \$ 385,000 on August 17, 1995, which coincided with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Indonesian Independence. (Widjanarko, 2008:8). The mosque was called Al-Hikmah in reference to a passage of the Qur’an 16:125 which states: “Call thou (mankind) unto thy Sustainer’s path with wisdom (*hikmah*) and goodly exhortation.”<sup>6</sup> The choice of the date is patriotic, but it was also strategic. When the New Order’s President Suharto came to New York City for a meeting at the United Nations headquarters, representatives from the Indonesian Community presented their proposal for the

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<sup>4</sup> This observation is limited to various mosques I have attended especially among the female.

<sup>5</sup> Widjanarko, “Homeland, Identity and Media” 193. In 2001, the number of the mosques were about 70. See (Dodds and Edward Grazda, 2001: 24).

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Mr. Achmad D. Padang, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008. See also (Widjanarko, 2007: 193).

development of the mosque. On behalf of the Indonesian government, communities, and Yayasan Amal Bhakti Muslim Pancasila (the *Pancasila* Muslim Service Foundation: YAMP), Suharto donated \$150,000 to the Muslim community in New York. (Widjanarko, 2007:192-193).

The government's involvement in supporting the community's need for a mosque was common and was part of the New Order policy in Indonesia. During his thirty years of reign, Suharto built more than 900 mosques throughout Indonesia.<sup>7</sup> These mosques' development was made possible by the contributions of the Yayasan Amal Bhakti Muslim Pancasila (the *Pancasila* Muslim Service Foundation; YAMP) founded by Suharto and his cronies, Amir Mahmud and Bustanul Arifin, on February 17, 1982. Later on, the foundation served as the government's vehicle to channel the ideological tone of Islam, so that the performance of Islam in Indonesia was geared toward Pancasila Islam, a type of Islam that went along with the government's political view.

Pancasila refers to the five principles of Indonesian philosophy that undergirds Indonesian politics: (1) unity of God, (2) humanitarianism, (3) Indonesian unity, (4) system of representation, and (5) justice for all.

Starting in 1971, the Suharto government implemented the politics of 'floating mass' where any grassroots political engagement was banned and Pancasila as the foundation for all social and political organization. (Nyman, 2006:64). Along with the sterilization of Islam from political ideology, the government also homogenized Islam as being only cultural.

To this end, the foundation of the Yayasan Amal Bhakti Muslim Pancasila played a role in pacifying the Muslim masses

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<sup>7</sup> "Ulang Tahun ke-27 Yayasan Amalbhakti Muslim Pancasila", <http://www.yamp.or.id> (accessed August 24, 2009).

whose political participation had thereby been circumvented. Mr. Achmad D. Padang called the donation of the *Pancasila* Muslim Service Foundation a gift from the Indonesian society to Muslims in New York.<sup>8</sup> The community in New York City, especially the government officials and representatives, contributed even more funds to the mosque. Not only did they dare to dream of having a mosque, they indeed worked hard to realize their dream.

As many mosques are conversions of existing buildings, the spatial division in these structures is not ideal. Spaces are designated based on functionality such as having kitchen, prayer hall, and bathroom. Bigger mosques have a prayer hall, kitchen, library, office, imam's room, and separate bathrooms for men and women. In some mosques, women's spaces are non-existent. Leaders of the mosque often prioritize space for men, especially if the space is limited, because the Friday prayer is obligatory only for men. In the absence of the space for women in the mosque, women opt to pray at home for it is safer and it is more sanctioned in religion as expressed by a congregant from Gawsiah mosque. (Dodds, 2001:37). This belief finds its support from the hadith that support women to pray preferably in the house. (Al-Jawzi, 1996:64). As the compartmentalization of space for a mosque congregation is important, any ethnic and linguistic groups interested in building a mosque in New York City face three architectural issues: "(1) the separation of the sexes during prayer; (2) restrictions on images of animate beings in the mosque; and (3) the establishment of the *qiblat* (the orientation of prayer in the direction of the Ka'ba in Mecca)." (Dodds, 2001:33).

Mosques having no space for women are worrisome and not acceptable, especially for Muslim women who believe in the

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Mr. Achmad D. Padang, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

spiritual equality of men and women before God's eyes. The chairman of the Indonesian community in New York City, Imam Muhammad Shamsi Ali, at one time received an invitation from a Bengali community to lecture on "the Islamic education for the children." Upon his arrival, he noticed that no women were present at the gathering. When he asked about women's presence, the answer he received was alarming. He was told that they did not have room for women. The Imam said: "How do you expect me to deliver the message about the importance of children's education if your women are not listening. Because most of you are working outside the home, the people who are basically handling the education are the females, our wives. If they are not here, it does not benefit you effectively."<sup>9</sup> He left without giving the talk.

The separation of the space for men and women in the mosque is indeed the most contentious issue. Asra Nomani, a journalist, recalled her own experience in her mosque at Morgantown, VA where women were sent away to "a dingy room in the old mosque." (Nomani, 2006:198). Even if women were granted the space, Nomani still felt the disconnect because the main activities were in the main floors downstairs and the distance, the inadequate sound system and the chatter of women prevented her from fully understanding what was conveyed. Ms. Haryanto expressed a similar concern. Her Pakistani mosque that was newly built was not friendly to women.<sup>10</sup> She recalled the gap between the reality of the mosque and the information she received about it:

[They told us]: we accommodate families. We have space for the sisters and the mosque will be friendly to the children. In reality, they put us in the third floor. Indeed, the mosque has an elevator, but what if the elevator was broken down. Especially, this mosque

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Imam Muhammad Shamsi Ali on January 1, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Winy Haryanto, December 31, 2008.

was built from scratch. It was an apartment at first and then the mosque committee demolished it. I believe that they are still a little more patriarchal. For instance, they say: "Sisters, if you are too noisy, we will close the program." How do you talk to women like that?

Unpleasant treatment of women in the mosque setting depends also on the cultural background of the mosque. Even though it is not always stated as a norm, each mosque has certain expectations of women. Ms. Haryanto compares her experience in Arab, Pakistani, and Indonesian mosques. She recalls that:

In Arkansas, [the mosque] is not really an Arab ethnic mosque. It is more balanced between Asians and Arabs. But, the atmosphere was more Arab because you feel afraid to go to certain area of the mosque. They would reprimand any women who do that. On the other hand, I do not like when people say: 'Oh that mosque is Arab and you cannot do anything.' I was very active member of an Arab mosque. If you want to do it, you do it. You do not worry about politics and culture. You know, I do not go to the mosque because of this and that. My mosque here is a Pakistani dominated congregation. The Indonesian mosque is more free and independent. I do not like to box it in, but the Indonesian mosque is friendlier.

It is noteworthy that in Dodds and Grazka's observation of a prayer held in New York's Indonesian Consulate, men and women prayed in a hall that is equally divided and they stood side by side. (Dodds, 2001:33).

The spatial problems faced by women will not go away easily because oftentimes the restrictions come not only from the exigencies of the space, (Dodds, 2001:37) but also from cultural values. In the Muslim world, mosques are mainly male dominated spaces. They consist of a prayer hall, bathroom, *mihrab* (a semicircular niche indicating the direction of Mecca), a *mimbar* (a pulpit, where a learned man [*'alim*] stands and delivers a sermon [*khutbah*]), and a minaret.(Doreen, 1974:25).



Bigger mosques come along with a female mosque, like the Niujie mosque in Beijing or educational facilities.<sup>11</sup> In Mecca and Medina, even though the congregants are mingled, the segregation of the sexes exists in the designated space, especially during the prayer time.<sup>12</sup> Even if women are free to pray anywhere they wish, they tend to join other female congregants. Some Saudi mosques that are designed for *hajj* (pilgrimage) and *umrah* (lesser *hajj*) rituals do have female sections.

In Indonesia, most mosques are designed for men and women as indicated with separate bathrooms for men and women. However, there is no permanent barrier or partition to demarcate male and female space. Some mosques have a barrier called *hijab* (a divider made of cotton).<sup>13</sup> In general, the divider is not permanent. In case of mixed religious meetings (*pengajian*), some dividers stay, while others are removed. However, at a wedding ceremony, men and women sit together in the prayer hall with no barrier or partition. Even in Aceh where the Islamic Sharia was partially imposed in 2003, women and men still mingle in the mosque.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the mosque is the most popular site for a wedding ceremony and other religious activities. During my visit to the mosque in Aceh, I saw

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<sup>11</sup> I visited China from May 15-24, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> I visited Saudi Arabia from June 29 to July 8, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> The use of *hijab* as a spatial barrier is drawn upon the interpretation of al-Ahzab, 33:53 that states “O ye who believe! Enter not the Prophet’s houses,- until leave is given you,- for a meal, (and then) not (so early as) to wait for its preparation: but when ye are invited, enter; and when ye have taken your meal, disperse, without seeking familiar talk. Such (behavior) annoys the Prophet: he is shy to dismiss you, but Allah is not shy (to tell you) the truth. And when ye ask (his ladies) for anything ye want, ask them from before a screen: that makes for greater purity for your hearts and for theirs. Nor is it right for you that ye should annoy Allah’s Messenger, or that ye should marry his widows after him at any time. Truly such a thing is in Allah’s sight an enormity.” (Ali, 2005). See also my discussion on *hijab* in my work, (*Gender and Self in Islam*, 2006:105) for more discussion on *hijab*.

<sup>14</sup> I was in Aceh’s well-known mosque called Baiturrahman on June 14, 2009.

numerous events: two weddings, a *manasik* (a training for prospective hajj participants), two religious instructions for a mixed student's body, and a young adult religious meeting.<sup>15</sup> These events were going on at the same time inside the mosque. In many parts of Indonesia, especially at *Pesantren*,<sup>16</sup> a space is dedicated for women's religious activities, called a *Musalla*.<sup>17</sup>

Imam Shamsi Ali, the Chairman of al-Hikmah mosque, argues that the different understandings of segregation are not only cultural, but also religious. In comparing the differences between South Asians, Middle Easterners and Indonesians, he says that:

The South Asians are very much conservative in nature, particularly in terms of men's and women's segregation. They are very much a segregated society. Women should go to different rooms not only when they do the ritual, but also they have to do that for social gatherings. For instance, when I deliver lectures for men and women, they have to have barriers. The Islamic Cultural Center, that is mostly Middle Easterners, is more open. When they pray they have separate rooms, but when we have lecture, we come to the same room and they do not have to have barriers. Indonesians are more inclusive.<sup>18</sup>

This different treatment goes back to the various interpretation of *hijab* whether it refers to the partition of a room, dressing properly, or exercising discipline when interacting with the opposite sex in public life. Imam Shamsi Ali emphasizes the

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<sup>15</sup> Hajj is the fifth pillar of Islam and obligatory once throughout life time.

<sup>16</sup> Pesantren is a formal and informal religious education that teaches both Islamic and secular subjects. The informal instruction usually teaches *kitab kuning* (traditional, instructional yellow books in Arabic script) that are read in the Pesantren educational system.

<sup>17</sup> Mushalla refers to a place for religious activities from prayer to religious meetings.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Imam Shamsi Ali, January 1, 2009.

meaning of the term 'hijab' referring to the value of how to behave when both sexes come together in public spaces.

A previous Imam of Al-Hikmah mosque, however, disagrees with the mixing of men and women in the mosque.<sup>19</sup> He believes in a “regimented ideology and disapproves of Ali’s actions.”<sup>20</sup> The preference at that time was to separate men and women with a sliding door when they pray.<sup>21</sup> Ms. Haryanto is also critical of gender mixed spaces. While she feels fine with the way Indonesian mosque is now, with men and women moving freely during social gatherings, she thinks that it sometimes has some negative effects. She likes segregation of the space because it works better for women. She further explains that:

You work within the cultural framework. You do not want to become an ultra-feminist. That is not your goal. You don’t want to pray beside men. You want to have boundaries, but also you want to move. You do not want as much restriction as they put which is actually not in Islam.<sup>22</sup>

Other congregants argue that Islam is a moderate religion and we should not be too restrictive about rules in the mosque.<sup>23</sup>

Dressing properly is certainly one of the most pressing issues in the mosque. Some mosques have unwritten rules about the veil. However, entering the mosque without proper dress receives unpleasant looks or treatment. Nomani recounted Daisy Khan’s response to a reprimand by a woman who tried to pull her sleeve down to her wrists, while she was praying. She responded: “How are you going to answer on your judgment day

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<sup>19</sup> <http://masjidalhikmahny.org> (accessed on August 25, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> <http://masjidalhikmahny.org> (accessed on August 25, 2009)

<sup>21</sup> <http://masjidalhikmahny.org> (accessed on August 25, 2009)

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Winy Haryato, December 31, 2008.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Imam Shamsi Ali, January 1, 2009.

when I testify to God that you prevented me from doing my prayer.”(Nomani, 2006:202). In Al-Hikmah mosque, the veil is not imposed. Imam Shamsi Ali says that:

The veil is mentioned in the Qur'an, but it is a personal choice. Sisters will learn. If they are convinced, let them practice it. If they do not, let them learn more. However, we cannot prevent them from entering the mosque without *hijab* (veil covering). Which one is better entering the mosque with no *hijab* or not coming to the mosque at all? If they come to the mosque, they can listen to the lecture, they can study and socialize with other people.<sup>24</sup>

Being friendly to unveiled women within the mosques is imperative because kindness helps women to see that all Muslims are equal before God. Ms. Haryanto recalled her experience in Arkansas that she used to wear tight clothes and makeup when she went to the mosque. She felt welcome and never discouraged. She said, “it was a great mosque. They were very glad that people came, so that there was no hindrance. That is how a mosque should be.” She eventually donned the *hijab* (veil). The overall treatment of women in the mosques varies depending on the leadership and the cultural values of the congregants.

### **Mosque Leadership and its Cultural Roots**

Even though the Indonesian mosque is more moderate in comparison to Pakistani and Arab-oriented mosques, it still reflects a masculine-oriented leadership. Since its inception, more men initiated and were in charge in decision making in matters relating to *pengajian* (religious study) and eventually the management of the mosque. Prior to having the mosque, Muslims conducted *pengajian* from house to house or sometimes at the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia and at the

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Imam Shamsi Ali, January 1, 2009.

Indonesian Permanent Mission to the United Nations. The involvements of the government officials in New York with the community have not faded. Because Indonesian government representatives have played an important role in the community building of Indonesian Muslims in New York City, Al-Hikmah's advisory board always includes the highest ranking officials whose roles are to represent the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, the Indonesian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, and the Indonesian Bank.<sup>25</sup>

The appointment of the representatives from the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, the Indonesian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, and the Bank of Indonesia as members of the advisory board in Al-Hikmah mosque reflects a model of leadership in Indonesia. The basis for leadership varies depending on the personal background, kinship relation, social strata, seniority, sequence of birth, networking, and other relevant factors into which a person is able to draw on. Formal leadership, however, emerges because one is appointed into a high ranking position/post that incurs the authority to govern. When a person is appointed to an important post, it is an indication of power and success. For this reason, the practice of appointing high ranking officials to the advisory board is cultural, yet political. Culturally, high ranking officials receive high regard for their role as the protector of the community in the same way as the elders (*sesepuh*) do within their respective communities. Politically, having high ranking officials on the advisory board enhances the organizations' affairs and access to finance, connections, and even certain important posts within the cabinet and other affiliated offices.

In New York City, one of the most respected elders is Mr. Achmad Padang. He came to the United States in 1956 to pursue his studies at Columbia University. Back then, there were few

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<sup>25</sup> <http://masjidalhikmahny.org> (accessed on August 25, 2009).

Indonesians, but it did not deter him from actively participating in religious meetings. These meetings were held in private homes, especially at the official residences of the State representatives working at the Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia, the Indonesian Permanent Mission to the United Nations, and the Bank of Indonesia.<sup>26</sup> Mr. Padang's role in the establishment of the Indonesian Muslim Community, Inc. (IMCI) on December 22, 1989 was significant. At that time, he served as the Honorary Chairman, whereas Prang Sakirman served as the President of IMCI and Ibrahim Zarkasyi as the Director of Fundraising. (Widjanarko, 2007:192). Padang has played an important role in the inception of the mosque, its building process, and its nurturance. He currently serves on the Board of Advisors and is active with mosque activities. Mr. Padang's leadership continues to nurture the community to the point that any mosque leaders always consult him for matters relating to the development and policies of the mosque. Such respect for the elderly (*sesepuh*) is common among Indonesians because he has more authority by virtue of knowledge of Islam, seniority, and experience.

Next to the advisory board is the board of directors. This board of directors is voted on by the whole Indonesian Muslim community around New York City, New Jersey and Connecticut through a democratic process.<sup>27</sup> The election elects seven members of the board. Once elected, board members decide among themselves on the Chair of the Board. The 2008 members of the Board of Directors are Bambang Sunarno, Syaiful Hamid, Amir Sumaila, Bambang Antarikso, Hery Sarifuddin, Dany Rukmana, Denny Purba, and Novi Setiadi,<sup>28</sup> whereas the Chairman is Imam Muhammad Shamsi Ali. Born in South

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mr. Achmad D. Padang, December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr. Jaja, December 25, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> <http://masjidalhikmahny.org> (accessed on August 25, 2009).

Sulawesi, Imam Syamsi received his education from Muhammadiyah<sup>29</sup> school system called Darul Arqam and then pursued his undergraduate education and finally master's degree from the International Islamic University in Pakistan.<sup>30</sup> Imam Shamsi Ali came to the United States at the invitation of Nugroho Wisnumurti in the year of 2006 to work as a diplomat at the Permanent Mission of Indonesia to the United Nations and served as an imam to the Indonesian Muslim community.<sup>31</sup> He had previously worked at the Muslim Foundation in Jeddah to teach Muslims about Islam and Arabic language for non-Arab speaking Muslims. Since his arrival in New York City, Imam Syamsi Ali has become not only a leader of the Indonesian Muslim community, but also a voice of moderate Islam for the nation. His involvement in interfaith dialogues is impressive. He also currently serves as an Imam for the Bangladeshi community in New York City and the Chairman of the Al-Hikmah mosque. Imam Shamsi is a person in authority due to his traditional knowledge of Islam, his leadership, and his networking.

When the Board members are elected, they decide among themselves on the President of the mosque. In 2008, the committees chose a dedicated member of the mosque, Mr. Syaiful Hamid as the president of the mosque. The president is responsible for everyday decision making in the mosque.<sup>32</sup> Mr. Hamid came to the United States of America to study almost twenty five years ago and eventually worked in New York City. For decades, he volunteered for the mosque in various capacities.

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<sup>29</sup> Muhammadiyah organization was founded in 1912 by a male activist, Ahmad Dahlan. The aim of this movement was to call its followers to return to the Qur'an and Hadith and to purify Islam from superstitious practices that were common in Indonesia. For more discussion on Muhammadiyah movement. See, (Peacock, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Imam Syamsi Ali, January 1, 2009.

<sup>31</sup> <http://masjidalhikmahny.org> (accessed on August 25, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Syaiful Hamid, January 2, 2009.

He has been credited for the physical development and the beautification of the mosque. In his capacity as the chair for the maintenance section, he transformed the warehouse into a working, livable mosque.<sup>33</sup> With his leadership at hand, Hamid has introduced new initiatives that are inclusive of men and women

Another component of the mosque is the imam. The imam is usually responsible for religious education and ritual performance and works full time. Imam Syamsuddin Belo came to the United States in 2008 through the effort of Trie Edi Mulyani, New York's Consulate General of the Republic of Indonesia with the support of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Indonesia.<sup>34</sup> Educated in Egypt where he received a Master's degree, he brought to the Indonesian community the traditional religious knowledge of the *Qur'an*, *Hadith* (the prophetic tradition), *Tafsir* (interpretation of the Qur'an), and *Fiqh* (study of law pertaining to ritual obligations). He was the speaker for religious discussions/lectures either weekly or monthly or talks that were held in accordance with various events. The community also sought his advice on religious matters. Some even come for family counseling. The imam reported to the chairman of the board and the president.

Although male leadership of the mosque is dominant, it is inclusive of women and attentive to women's needs. Since its inception, women of the mosque have served as board members, including as treasurer and secretary and those in charge of social services, women's affairs, educational services, food and beverages, public affairs, youth affairs, teachers at Saturday school, and business development.<sup>35</sup> The high acceptance of women's involvement in the mosque correlates with gender

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Syaiful Hamid, January 2, 2009.

<sup>34</sup> This information was obtained from Syaiful hamid on August 30, 2009.

<sup>35</sup> <http://masjidalhikmahny.org> (accessed on September 1, 2009).



constructs in Indonesia where men and women are considered complimentary. Support for women's participation is also enhanced by the progressive Islam promoted by the mosque's leader such as the Chairman of the mosque, Imam Shamsi Ali. He argues that "the role of women in the mosque is everything except leading ritual. They can be the president, they can play all other roles men can play except leading the ritual prayer." As the mosque culture paves the way for the flourishing of female leadership, in what follows I will discuss how women construct their authority and the mechanisms that support their cause.

### **Paradoxes of Male Leadership in the Mosques and the Making of Female Authority**

The masculine cultures of the mosque correlate with the way leadership is produced and the manner in which female authority evolves. A common trend of mosque leadership is a male dominated mosque with little effort given to fully incorporate women's authoritative participation. The exclusion of women in mosques stems from the hierarchical view of gender that promotes women's best place to be at home. Al-Nawawi cites what the Prophet Muhammad said on the occasion of his farewell speech, that "women are men's prisoners." He explains that the Prophet Muhammad equates wives to the prisoners because they are held in custody in their husband's house.<sup>36</sup> As wives are under their husbands' guardianship, they need their husbands' permission to leave the house. Any violation of this norm is religiously reprimanded and culturally disapproved. Even though the traditional paradigm emphasizes the virtue of women as domestic beings, Muslim women's fulfillment within

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<sup>36</sup> Muḥammad b. 'Umar Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ 'Uqūd al-Lujayn fī Bayān bi Ḥuqūq al-Zawjain* (Semarang: Karya Saputra, n.d.). *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions II*, edited by William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1986), 4.

American contexts includes a spiritual calling to cherish and love God at the individual and communal level. Their involvement in religious and social activities makes them happy, shapes personal and social piety, and cultivates moral agency. I discuss in this section ways in which Muslim American women incur authority within the mosque setting.

Religious authority has been a masculine domain despite the extensive role of Prophet's wives in the production of knowledge. As male scholars have contributed to a plethora of Islamic intellectual traditions ranging from religious and scientific knowledge, women's authoritative scholarship has largely been unheard. Regrettably, women historically have been relegated to the domestic domain through a circular narrative of women as sexual and domestic beings. The nature of authority was eventually defined as a male prerogative where absolute recognition by those who are asked to obey with neither coercion nor persuasion becomes a norm. (Arendt, 1970:45). While this type of authority has vanished in the Muslim world, Muslims still exercise what Abou El-Fadl calls a persuasive authority, which "influences people to believe, act or refrain from something in a certain fashion by persuading them that this is about what ought to be." (Abou El Fadl, 2003:22). This type of authority has largely been embedded in the juristic paradigm and injunctions that are dominant in the discursive narratives of Islamic orthodoxy. (Abou El Fadl, 2003:22). In its development, the centrality of the jurists played an important role in the maintenance of Prophetic authority centered on male power that generates the pattern of Islamic institutions as men's clubs. Every single, well-known authoritative jurist in Islamic history has been a man.

Authority in Islam has been conferred to those religious scholars with religious knowledge. Following Freedman's distinction between "being in authority" and "being an

authority,” Abou El-Fadl explains that being in authority involves surrendering to someone occupying the official position without questioning, whereas “being an authority” involves deferring to someone with perceived special knowledge. (Abou El Fadl, 2003:22). Muslims are encouraged to defer to juristic specialists because of the authority they carry due to their presumed competence. Muslims’ deference to the specialists is often circular because male scholars have more access and opportunity to be endowed with authoritativeness, whereas women occupy the position of deferring to male scholars in authority.

While the authoritativeness in Islam, at least among the jurists, is rooted in “a perceived mastery over a body of knowledge, and a perceived adherence to a systematic methodology, based the female authority in Al-Hikmah mosque is upon the perceived knowledge, the cultivation of virtue, the performance of piety, and the cultural networking. The trajectory of these aspects creates a cohesive production of the emerging authority among women of the mosque. Women’s involvement in religious and cultural activities exhibits a social process of the deterritorialization of Islam in the American contexts. Reproducing ritualized Islam as it has been practiced in Indonesia invokes the feeling of home while away from home. Deterritorialization in this case refers to the phenomenon of a transnational Islam that is less “territorial” and less “civilizational” due to migratory flows and the growing number of Muslims living in the West.(Roy, 2004:18). Muslim women recall the memory of how to be a good Muslim within Indonesian context and re-appropriate it within American settings. In this sense, when Muslim women are faced with new territorial borders, they create a mental boundary and invent an imaginary Islam that is friendly to women and pacifies their worries of not “being home.”

Muslims, however, might have experienced the deterritorialization process without necessarily leaving ‘home’ as is the case with the female mosques described in Mahmood’s *The Politics of Piety*. (Mahmood, 2005). Driven by the historical and contemporary contentious relationship to the West and Western anti-Islam rhetoric, the emergence of Islamist movements as an antithesis to secular and liberal politics and the marginalization of religion by secular forces, women’s mosques cultivate empirical characters of bodily practices that have an impact on individual freedom and social authority. (Mahmood, 2005:1-12, 123-126). These women exert their agency by joining Islamist movements that encourage the cultivation of piety in all acts, providing lessons for one another, focusing on teaching Islamic knowledge, and cultivating the ideal virtuous self. (Mahmood, 2005:2, 122-123).<sup>37</sup>

The acquisition of knowledge for the practicing Muslim women of the mosque living in the United States comes naturally as they adjust their life to American culture. They resort to Islam because Islam provides a guideline on how to orient their life in a culture that is vastly different from that in their homeland. Even though they know little about Islam before their arrival in the United States, some of them come from practicing Muslim families. Ms. Haryanto, for instance, recalled that her upbringing well shaped her understanding of Islam:

I was born a Muslim. My parents are very pious, but our upbringing had to do with my father’s personality. He is a soft hearted person. My parents are not enforcers of the rules. They think that you have to find religion for yourself. Religion should come from our heart. My first education at home was more about Allah and how amazing Allah is. Of course we learned how to pray. However, I could not remember that my family forced us to “pray.” We prayed together at home. They indeed never enforced things. Then when I went to a college that had a very strong

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 and 122-3.

Islamic movement, I was shocked because you have to wear *hijab*, you have to do this and that, and all actions are about rules.<sup>38</sup>

After Ms. Haryanto finished college, she came to the United States to earn a Master's degree. She began to socialize more with Muslims, even though she still went out for fun with her friends. As her interest in Islam was growing, she joined the Muslim Students Association and attended the local mosque regularly. She also learned Islam from the internet and various books. She feels more comfortable in practicing Islam here than in Indonesia because in America, Islam has no attachment to any cultures or peoples. She adds that "people have more freedom to practice religion because it is more individualist society where you have a lot of freedom to practice your religion. In Indonesia, we often feel worried to express Islam because others may not practice Islam the way we do. And then we have to explain ourselves for what we do."<sup>39</sup> Nowadays, Ms. Haryanto volunteers to teach Islam.

Mrs. Titi also learned Islam intensively after she came to the United States in 1977. Growing up in Indonesia, she learned Islam from her mother and from local *pengajian* (religious meeting).<sup>40</sup> After she came to the United States, she learned Islam by attending religious meetings that were conducted from house to house. She recalled well that "when we had meetings, we moved to different offices, like consulates and the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Indonesia."<sup>41</sup> She also learned Islam from the cassettes of the well-known preacher, Zainuddin MZ. She continued her study from *pengajian* (religious meetings) and a circle (*khalaqah*) in and outside the mosque. She

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Winy Haryanto, December 31, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Winy Haryanto, December 31, 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Titi, December 28, 2008.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

has served in the management of the mosque for more than a decade. She is also sought after for advice and well-respected among the females of the mosque. She played a major role in changing the hierarchy and the authority in Al-Hikmah mosque.

Currently serving as the secretary of the mosque, Vita had more exposure to Islam prior to coming to the United States.<sup>42</sup> She learned Islam at the *madrasah* education that was equivalent to elementary school.<sup>43</sup> After finishing her *madrasah* education, she learned mostly from her parents. Her family taught her to discuss Islam openly. When she was in high school, she actively participated in religious rituals such as *Isra Mi'raj* (the celebration of Muhammad's ascension to heaven), but she did not really do anything special about Islamic education. However, her interest in Islam increased during her high school years as she actively engaged in various activities, such as the division of spirituality, *Mushala*, morning speech. The most defining moment, nevertheless, was the training on the Intensive Learning of Islam at the beginning of her freshman year in high school. The activity introduced her to the veil and she has worn the veil since then.

The female mosque brings the experience of being Muslim within Indonesian cultures to the United States and adjusts Islam in accordance with the local cultural norms. The created mental boundaries of Islam appease and reaffirm their identity as Muslims. Ms. Haryanto asserts that:

Every culture has some positive and negative aspects. Some aspects of American cultures are not in conflict with Islam, but you have freedom. That is the way Islam should be; you should

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Vita, January 2, 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Madrasah is a formal and informal Islamic education that runs through elementary, secondary and high school. It is common that in villages, young boys and girls go to the secular public school in the morning and attend Madrasah education in the afterschool hours.