Commerce, piety and politics: Indonesian young Muslim women’s groups as religious influencers

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Abstract
The article discusses the indiscernibility of social-media-based young Muslim women’s groups’ (YMWGs) transformative roles in socio-political analysis, standing in contrast to the groups’ visibility in Indonesian young women’s everyday lives. How does the (in)visibility of the YMWGs reconfigure the (political) subjectivity of Muslim womanhood? How should we understand the influence of this form of ‘women’s movement’ in the re-invention of Muslim identity? This article proposes the notion of ‘social media religious influencer’ to understand the groups’ conflation of religious, political and commercial elements in their online and offline representations and their encouragement to their followers to do self-transformation. The article demonstrates how, although such creative conflation challenges prevailing ideas about young Muslim women, it requires the young women to remain and take part in the prevailing gender regime by maintaining female conformity.

Keywords
Indonesia, influencers, Muslim women, online social movements, political subjectivity, piety, religious influencers, young women

The social and political landscape of Indonesia has undergone significant transformation after the downfall of President Suharto’s 32-year-long authoritarian regime, the New Order, in 1998. For the past 20 years, the Muslim majority country (87% of the population...
are Muslims) has become visibly more pious as the number of Islamist organizations increases, numerous movies, soap operas (sinetron), musicians, print and online media lean towards religious interests and more women are donning the veil (Barendregt, 2011; Hasan, 2009; Jones, 2010b; Paramaditha, 2010; Rakhmani, 2016; Smith-Hefner, 2007; Subijanto, 2011; Van Bruinessen, 2013). More Islamic preachers appear on both old and new media and their followers actively take part in this dakwah (prosetylization) activities and participate in Qur’an study groups or pengajian (Barendregt, 2009; Hew, 2018; Slama, 2017).

In the midst of such changes, in 2016, a series of events led to the criminalization of Basuki Purnama or Ahok – then, the governor of the capital city Jakarta. He was video-recorded imploring voters to not be fooled by religious teachers who used the Qur’an chapter Al-Maidah verse 51. The verse is often interpreted as suggesting that Muslims should not have a non-Muslim leader, thus it might suppress votes for Ahok, a Christian. The video was quickly distributed and reproduced on different social media platforms, garnering strong reactions from different Muslim groups. On 4 November and 12 December 2016, later known as Aksi 411 and 212, FPI (Islamic Defender Front) and GNPF-MUI (National Movement to Guard the Indonesian Ulema Council Fatwa) took the headlines of the national news claiming that they were the ones leading thousands of Muslims gathering at the heart of Jakarta, praying and protesting against Ahok. The same male-led groups were also considered the ‘face’ of anti-Ahok sentiment, leading to Ahok’s loss in the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017 and his 2 year imprisonment.

What was not captured by the mainstream media, however, was how, during Aksi 411 and 212, popular young Muslim women’s groups (YMWGs) were calling their hundreds of thousands of followers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (see Figure 1) to join the events. The young women’s effort, I contend, helped topple down Ahok from his office. During Aksi 411, Peduli Jilbab, one of the popular YMWGs, with more than 500,000 followers combined on Instagram and Twitter, used #aksibelaquran (action to defend the Qur’an) and participated in the event. The group called out Muslims who did not support the movement as communists (see Figure 2), reviving the New Order myth of bahaya laten komunisme (the latent danger of communism) – a myth that surrounded the anti-communist purge in Indonesia back in 1965–1966. During the gubernatorial election process in early 2017, the founders of Hijabers Community and Ukhti Sally – two other popular YMWGs – promoted #muslimvotemuslim to subdue the popularity of Ahok (Figures 3 and 4).

Young Muslim women have taken active part in different social movements based on Islamic virtues: from fighting against the veiling ban in the 1980s (Alatas and Desliyanti, 2001) to joining their male counterparts in ‘Campus Islam’ study groups in early 1990s, which were key to the end of New Order and to the ‘revival’ of Islam in Indonesia (Brenner, 1996; Hasan, 2009; Hefner, 2000). Although young women have participated in important political moments, then and now, their roles in significant socio-political shift are often unnoticed (Budianta, 2006). The number of scholarly analyses of Aksi 411 and 212 and the role that social media played in them are steadily increasing (see Lim, 2017; Mulyanto and Pontoh, 2017), but the participation of young women remains undervalued. This article, therefore, focuses on the indiscernibility of
YMWGs’ transformative roles in socio-political analyses standing in contrast to their visibility in Indonesian young women’s everyday lives.

The field of studies on Indonesian youth is growing (Naafs, 2018; Naafs and White, 2012; Nilan et al., 2011; Robinson, 2015). In relation to their political participation, Indonesian youth have been categorized as activists participating in students’ and social movements (Lee, 2011, 2016) or, at times, as troublemakers (Budiman et al., 2012). Studies of Indonesian women’s roles in politics focus on their increasing number in formal political stages, in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the women’s wings of Muslim organizations and political parties (Blackburn, 2004; Rinaldo, 2013; Robinson, 2009; Wieringa, 1992). Previous studies on young Muslim women’s influence in the social life look at their identity construction, influence among their peers, consumption patterns and their visibility in both print and social media (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018; Brenner, 1996; Jones, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c; Nisa, 2018; Smith-Hefner, 2007).

This article’s contribution is in its proposal for an approach that sees young Muslim women as political actors whose lives are entwined with and conditioned by Indonesia’s historical, political and economic trajectory and whose influence in shifting the outlook of large number of members of Indonesian society should not be undermined. It examines the young Muslim women’s political participation not during street protests or in NGOs, rather in sites where political potential is always in the process of becoming. Their participation is sometimes visible as ‘mobilization’ in the conventional sense, but more often in forms of daily motivations and encouragement for self-transformation,
engendering ‘ordinary’ expressions of a sense of belonging and mediated by the presence of the Internet and online spaces. It asserts that we look into the mundane, everyday sites and analyse the significant role the young women play in not only commercial interests, but also religious and political ones.

In this article, I enquire the role that YMWGs play in the changing socio-political landscape of Indonesia. The article asks the following questions: How does the visibility of the social-media-based Muslim women’s groups reconfigure the (political) subjectivity of Muslim womanhood? How should we understand their influence in the re-invention of Muslim identity? I propose the notion of ‘social media religious influencer’, following Crystal Abidin’s (2015, 2016a, 2016b) works on ‘influencers’, to understand the young Muslim women’s mixing of religious, political and commercial elements in their representations – both online and offline – and their encouragement to their followers to do self-transformation and to reach an ethical goal: to be good Muslim women. This concept frames the YMWGs and their founders as influencers whose curation and representation of the self are in dialogue with the socio-political, historical and cultural context, revealing the reconfigured gender regime in Indonesia.

Below, I continue by discussing briefly my methods for the study. I then define more clearly what I mean by social media religious influencers. I proceed by illustrating how the YMWGs merge commercial, religious and political interests and how they maintain the prevailing gender regime in Indonesia.

Methods

I draw from a larger research project on YMWGs in Indonesia (Beta, 2018) which focuses on six groups: Hijabers Community (HC), Tasikmalaya Hijabers (TH), Ukhti...
Sally (US), Dunia Jilbab (DJ), Peduli Jilbab (PJ) and Jogjakarta Muslimahpreneur Community (JMP). This project used a novel approach called ‘ethnography for the Internet’ (Hine, 2015) in which the Internet is seen as embedded, embodied and everyday. The Internet is embedded because it is always context-bound, it is integrated to our embodied experience and it is now a part of our everyday, mundane existence. The ‘field’ in this approach is flexible and includes both online and offline spaces. It sees the Internet as multi-spatial and multi-temporal, connecting different geographic spaces and allowing different forms of mobility (Hine, 2015: 13–15). This means that I did not limit my data gathering process to one type of space. Rather, I ‘immersed’ myself in the variety of spaces the YMWGs used, as I explain below.

From June 2015 to June 2016, I followed the posts the groups made on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. Social media platforms are very popular in Indonesia. There are more than 140 million Internet users in Indonesia (Yuniarni, 2018). It is the biggest Instagram market in Asia Pacific (Ganesha, 2017) with more than 60 million users (NapoleonCat, 2018). There are 130 million Facebook users in Indonesia (Septania, 2018) and 22 million users on Twitter (Mononimbar, 2017). During the period, the YMWGs uploaded more than 20,000 posts combined.

Offline, I did participant observations in the gatherings the groups organized and interviews with the groups’ chairwomen, the committee members, the followers and the lurkers of the groups. I also did archival studies of news articles, documents and books related to the topic of young Muslim women in Indonesia. The combination of online and

Figure 3. Dian Pelangi, one of the founders of Hijabers Community, promoting #MuslimVoteMuslim on her Instagram account. Source: https://www.instagram.com/p/BQhO8-MgWja/ (screengrabbed 20 July 2018).
offline data allowed me to work out how the YMWGs produce, reproduce and disseminate their interpretations of Islamic teachings and engage with their followers.

The research materials were interpreted using Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). I treated the research materials I gathered as a set of discourse or ‘rules, divisions and systems of a particular body of knowledge’ (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine, 2008: 99). I followed Kendall and Wickham’s (1999) steps in doing the analysis in combination with Worthman and Troiano’s (2016) application of the FDA by identifying the rules that determine the production of statements, the borders of what is sayable and visible and the material and discursive practices. In this article, I focus on how the YMWGs frame the importance of entrepreneurship, the necessity of self-transformation and how they redefine the political spaces in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

**Social media religious influencers**

Digital technology and new media have shifted, extended and altered religious practice (Campbell, 2012). New media, specifically digital media, challenge the conventional configuration of religious and state authorities, facilitating the emergence of transnational Muslim publics and making central the issue of identity politics (Eickelman and Anderson, 2003; El-Nawawy and Khamis, 2009). Media blur the boundaries between Muslims’ political and non-political expressions (Bunt, 2003) and enable a new ‘knowledge and proselytizing economy’ that fuses old and new resources with multiple frames of references (Bunt, 2009). For young Muslim women, mobile and social media create a sense of new public spaces (Pennington, 2018a, 2018b) and help them navigate their
presence in urban settings (Waltorp, 2013). In different parts of the world, social media enable young women to negotiate piety with fashion and reconstruct their identity (Kavakci and Kraeplin, 2017). In Southeast Asia, social media platforms allow young women to enact identity performance (Baulch and Pramiyanti, 2018) and play around with the limits of religious interpretations in increasingly conservative societies (Beta, 2014; Williams and Kamaludeen, 2017).

Adding to those studies, I propose the concept ‘social media religious influencer’ (or religious influencer as a shorthand) to understand the ways in which young Muslim women in the YMWGs creatively fuse commercial, religious and political participation and potentials. I define a religious influencer as a person or a group who is able to combine their interests in religious growth, financial gain and socio-political change as attractive and attainable by their (mostly young and female) followers, online and offline. Such combination, I suggest, works effectively as they focus on encouraging, without force, their followers to do self-transformation – or today, in Indonesia, more popularly known as hijrah2 – in order to become ideal and ethical Muslim women (Mahmood, 2005). A religious influencer usually deploys the notion of dakwah (proselytization) as an umbrella term that includes their commercial, religious and political interests. The followers (and lurkers) are given a sense of ‘choice’ (Lewis, 2015) in order to attain the idealized self. In other words, a young Muslim woman who follows a religious influencer can opt to learn to make herself worthy of God’s love. However, when she has decided a way to cultivate her pious subjectivity, she understands that she is obliged to follow the religious injunctions closely, aiming for the ‘goal’ set by the influencer.

The notion of religious influencer here builds upon Crystal Abidin’s works on influencers in Singapore (Abidin, 2015, 2016a, 2016b). In her work, Abidin defines influencer as

> one form of microcelebrity … who accumulate a following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal, everyday lives, upon which paid advertorials – advertisement written in the form of editorial opinions – for products and services are premised. (Abidin, 2016b: 86).

Influencers make use of selfies for financial gains as well as for self-actualization (Abidin, 2016a: 2). Adding to her work, I propose that we consider how the representations of piety and ideal womanhood are used by the religious influencers to garner following and also to mobilize their followers not just for commercial reasons, but also encouraging their followers to ‘better’ themselves.

The case of the YMWGs is significant because this is the first time in Indonesian history that a large number of young women are voluntarily participating in both online and offline activities to teach each other about Islam and creatively represent virtuous lifestyle outside the well-established social and educational Islamic institutions in Indonesia. The six YMWGs have attracted more than a million followers online and hundreds of loyal followers attend their regular meetings. They are popular especially among urban, middle-class, young women, and they use a range of online platforms, from WhatsApp, Blackberry Messenger, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, to the visual-based Instagram.
Similar to the Singaporean case that Abidin analyses (2016a, 2016b), most of the religious influencers in Indonesia are young women aged between 18 and 30 years. They deploy techniques of visual labour (Abidin, 2016b) that engage their followers. The most popular influencers in Indonesia started off as fashion bloggers, with significant rise on popularity of those identifying as Muslim fashion bloggers and Muslim fashion designers. Although influencers not wearing hijab also have significant number of followers in Indonesia, those donning the hijab formed ‘komunitas’ (interest groups) in Indonesia. HC, for instance, was founded by famous Muslim fashion bloggers and designers (Dian Pelangi, Jenahara, Ria Miranda and Ghaida Tsuraya) in 2010 and has since gained popularity in the mainstream media as a komunitas for young Muslim women interested in fashion and learning better about Islam (Beta, 2014).

In the next three sections, I discuss how the groups commercialize dakwah (proselytization) activities, encourage self-transformation and redefine the notion of being ‘political’. I show how such creative mixing may challenge prevailing ideas about Muslim women’s presence in commercial, religious and political activities; however, it requires the young women to remain and take part in the prevailing gender regime, one that maintains female inferiority. This also explains how, despite their popularity and influence, their social and political significance remains imperceptible.

**Commercializing dakwah**

In this section, I focus on how the YMWGs encourage productivity for young Muslim women. One of the more apparent features of the YMWGs is their involvement in entrepreneurial practices known as dakwah (proselytization) business. The religious influencers frame such commercial activities as beneficial for their followers as they ‘introduce…the steps needed to become virtuous female Muslims’ (Nisa, 2018: 9). The YMWGs repeatedly promote the idea, online and offline, that becoming entrepreneurial is part of the process of becoming a good (ethical) Muslim woman (Hoesterey, 2016; Sakai and Fauzia, 2016).

One instance is when I attended a pengajian organized by HC. In the ballroom of a boutique hotel in Bandung, a city 2 hours away from Jakarta, about 200 followers of HC’s Bandung branch participated in a sharing session with Diajeng Lestari, the founder and CEO of one of the fastest growing Islamic fashion e-commerce companies in the world, hijup.com. On a mini stage, Diajeng shared her thoughts about the topic of the day’s gathering ‘Clean our Body, Mind, and Soul’. The emcees asked Diajeng: ‘How do you manage to be a good mother while being a CEO?’ Having a 1½-year-old daughter at that time, Diajeng answered that she could manage her time well because hijup.com is an online company, allowing her to spend more time with her family and be flexible:

"Alhamdulillah (Praise be to Allah), my business can be more flexible because now I have people managing the office’s daily activities. I don’t really have to go to the office that often. And with the technology today, I can do meetings via Skype, or when I cannot be available for a conference call, I can just use emails. I think that, with me having my own business, my time becomes more flexible. It is very different when I used to work 9 to 5. That would make it very hard to have time with my child. Insya Allah (God willing), my company, hijup.com, follows..."
the concept of time flexibility. So, when one of my employees has a child or gets pregnant, she can work remotely from home. The company is flexible, and we hope that as women, we can be the best for our children.

Her success in doing business, as Diajeng illustrated, has allowed her to be a good mother and to help her employees raise their children well. Diajeng’s talk during the HC gathering seemed to revolve around not only her success in building her business but also how she managed her domestic life, and the questions from the audience did not go far from the management of domestic life. For instance, one member of the audience asked: ‘I would like to know your advice for us to optimize our potential as women and Muslimah (Muslim women) without neglecting our duty and obligation as wives and mothers’. Diajeng answered that the key to optimize her potentials was her husband’s permission:

For me, [what is important is] my husband’s *ridha* (permission, willingness) … When a husband and a wife can work together, the wife can maximize her potential. Both of us would sit down, and I would tell him what I want exactly. For those of you who have not discovered your passion, maybe it is a good idea to know what your passion is first. For me, what I did first was finding out what I like … So, find your passion first with the help of your husband, but also ask for his *ridha*. Because when we are supported by our husband, *alhamdulillah* (praise be to Allah), everything works well, and our activities can be optimal.

The two quotes above reveal a number of principles on entrepreneurship promoted by the religious influencers. First is that women need to always prioritize their families. There seems to be no debate about whether or not women can be CEOs, but women need to compensate their authority in the office by constantly remembering that they are first and foremost wives and mothers. Second is that Diajeng and other famous Muslim business women in Indonesia’s contemporary Muslim fashion industry consider themselves subordinate to their husbands, not because they think that they have lower capacities, but because that is what is taught in Islamic ethics. Furthermore, the quotes also reveal how Indonesian young Muslim women’s future is imagined. Although the groups’ followers and audience are mostly young unmarried Muslim women, they are already imagined as future wives who will be obedient to their husbands, but also full of (entrepreneurial) potentials that need to be developed and, at the same time, managed.

How the women see themselves fit Saskia Wieringa’s (2015) apt observation on ‘gender harmony’ and the growing trend of *keluarga sakinah* (pious family). The Indonesian modern Muslim families, in this sense, are not swept away by the worldly successes (although such achievements are important). The pious Muslim women know and maintain that they need to ask for their (future) husbands’ permission for every activity and prioritize child-rearing practices. Without the husband’s *ridha*, any attempt to optimize the self and their potentials is not deemed worthy. Having positions of authority outside the domestic sphere remains secondary to women’s ‘natural’ role as mothers and wives. Male-authority, in other words, is secured despite the women’s increasing economic capacity.
Becoming better Muslim women

This section focuses on the YMWGs’ posts on Instagram and how, as religious influencers, they consistently encourage their followers to do *hijrah* or self-transformation. The groups differ in frequency and preference in representing young Muslim women. Nevertheless, because Instagram emphasizes image creation (Laestadius, 2016), the YMWGs had to be creative with their visuals and engaging with their captions. All six groups generated content with colourful and ‘girly’ images and captions consisting of religious commentaries. The commentaries focused on self-transformation and were framed through the lens of *ilmu* (knowledge) on love and relationship issues, veiling and proper modest clothing, friendship with fellow (good) Muslim women, work and career and other Islamic teachings framed as part of piety. They also uploaded posts on Indonesian or global news related to Islam and Muslims, campaign for humanitarian efforts, events they organized or supported and ‘paid promote’ posts. The posts on knowledge, news updates, or advertorials were framed with the commentaries and became guides for the followers to be good Muslim women.

One could argue that the Instagram posts could be read like reading print girls’ or women’s magazines. There is a similar reworking of what it means to be a woman and how to be one. The posts could be seen as the articles in women’s magazines, providing patterns, models and narratives of womanhood. There are, of course, notable differences. The groups’ accounts imagine a young woman who is worthy of God’s love, instead of men’s attention. Even when one wants to compare it to Muslim women’s lifestyle magazines (Jones, 2010b; Lewis, 2010; Zubair, 2010), the frequency of the posts and the variety of topics make the YMWGs’ accounts distinctive. Their followers on Instagram, for instance, can comment, like and share the post instantly, and the account administrator can as easily reply or delete the comment. Through their posts, as I will explain below, the groups persuade their followers that they are friends or even sisters, dealing with similar issues daily. Furthermore, if magazines are obviously entwined with the capitalism of the media industry, the social media accounts of the religious influencers, I contend, obscure this.

There are two ways that the groups visualized the ideal young Muslim woman. First was by constantly uploading posts that followed a certain pattern and/or used an illustrated character to visualize the image of a good Muslim woman. DJ, PJ and US did this. DJ uploaded 8106 posts between 1 June 2015 and 1 June 2016. A day on DJ’s Instagram account, for instance, would have at least one motivational post on learning to be good and virtuous. DJ would use verses from the Qur’an or hadis (recorded words and actions of Muhammad according to his companions) to inspire the followers to do good deeds and be committed to *hijrah*. They would have posts on self-management and productivity in achieving goals and on contemporary issues related to Muslims in Indonesia. There would also be at least one post on the importance of donning the veil. Posts on love and relationship were also regular. DJ discouraged dating (*pacaran*) and emphasized the importance of getting married. The importance of building strong bonds with family members and friendships with fellow Muslim women also appeared from time to time.

The pattern of US’s and PJ’s posts was almost similar to that of DJ. However, they had more consistent appearance of a character that dominated their posts. Out of 1538 posts
uploaded by US in the same period, one manga-like character named Sally appeared consistently (see Figure 5). Sally represents the group’s name: ‘Ukhti’ is the Arabic word for ‘my sister’, and Sally is a play on the word ‘shalihat’, meaning good, pious or compassionate. Ukhti Sally (US), then, means ‘a sister who is pious’. There are two ways we can understand the use of this character. One is that she was the face of US so that its followers could feel like they were seeing and reading what the sister had to say. Two is that the character was the image of the pious sister(hood) that US imagined. Sally would always wear a long dress with a khimar (a long veil), and in most posts, she smiled or looked contemplative. She looked expressive sometimes, especially when the topic of the post was on love. Sally became the imaginary good Muslim woman that the followers could mirror or feel close to. Within the same period, PJ uploaded 1782 posts. One character appeared regularly (Figure 6), wearing a purple khimar and a long dress. In contrast to US whose characters appeared in different acts and could express emotions, PJ’s icon was rather static. Her eyes, just like a manga character, ‘smiled’. She always appeared calm and content. The character accompanied posts on love and relationship, Islamic teachings, veiling, PJ’s products (books, videos on YouTube videos, clothing items) and events.

The second way the groups visualized the ideal Muslim woman was by deploying, by implication, a network of famous individual religious influencers whose images on Instagram could help assemble the imaginary of the ideal young Muslim woman. The posts of the individual religious influencers could be seen as connected with the values that the groups promoted. For example, on their Instagram accounts, Dian Pelangi, Ria Miranda and Ghaida Tsuraya, who founded HC, always appeared modest, showed strong
commitment to Islamic teachings, got married young, ran successful fashion businesses, travelled widely and – with exception of Dian – had had children when they were just in their early 20s. The topics that HC focused on corresponded with the founders’ lifestyles. HC organized pengajian on getting married, becoming a good wife and mother, proper veiling or how to run a business according to Islamic teachings. The individual influencers and the groups would also support each other: They would post the poster of the event organized by the groups, or the groups would post the events the influencers were involved in or the products that the businesses owned by the women just released. This network increased the popularity and intensified the influence of the groups and the women. Further, they also created a sense of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011), a ‘togetherness’ between the founders, the groups and the followers.

I would like to further argue that the groups’ success was due to their demonstration of softness and femininity. Such tropes are significant because, one, they allowed the groups to appear attractive, ‘light’ and seemingly disinterested in significantly transforming the way their followers – and Indonesian young Muslim women generally – perceived themselves as pious subjects. Second, such prevailing belief in the public (and sometimes in scholarship) often framed the YMWGs as collectives for ‘fashion’ enthusiasts – reiterated as shallow or trivial, making it seem like the groups had no socio-political significance.

In short, the groups’ authority in influencing their followers’ moral and ethical outlook while doing self-transformation (hijrah) is undervalued. However, as Elizabeth Bucar (2016: 84) has argued, young and old Muslim women, being aesthetic authorities for their peers, engender particular norms and moral epistemologies essential to the creation of pious subjectivity, while others continue to devalue their aesthetic influence to subject formation (Bucar, 2017). Adding to Bucar’s argument, I would like to highlight...
that the medium and the spaces the groups choose – such as social media platforms or pengajian – and the way they present themselves in public further the group’s appearance of ‘insignificance’, while at the same time allowing them to effectively shift the imaginaries of ethical Muslim women in Indonesia. To further explain my contention, the following section demonstrates how the YMWGs remade an important space in Jakarta into one that helped promote their more conservative interpretations of Islamic teachings.

**Becoming political: remaking the democratic space**

About 8 months before the *Aksi* 411 in November 2016, PJ organized an event called Gerakan Menutup Aurat (Cover the Aurat Movement or GMA) on 14 February 2016. On that day, 15 cities in Indonesia had a wave of young Muslim women rallying on the downtown avenues. In Jakarta, about 23 communities joined PJ for GMA. The focus of the event was to promote the importance of covering the *aurat* (body parts that may cause temptation). For female Muslims, covering the *aurat* refers to the duty to veil and wear modest clothing. As I was following PJ during the GMA rally, I saw how the attention of the crowds of pedestrians was taken away by the presence of hundreds of young women donning purple veils (the dress code for the event). That year, GMA was organized on a Car Free Day, when local governments in many Indonesian cities block car traffic from the downtown area every Sunday, allowing pedestrians to walk and exercise on the avenues. Setting up the event on the Valentine’s Day that year also made their ‘disruption’ more visible.

GMA demonstrates the ways in which the socio-political significance of the YMWGs can be made indiscernible through the way the groups represent their own actions. One is through the deliberate ‘misalignment’ between the images PJ uploaded online and what happened during the rally. In one campaign post before the event (see Figure 7), PJ advocated their followers to say no to Valentine’s Day because it only promoted consumerism and nafsu (lust/desire) instead of love. ‘Say no to Valentine Day because I am Muslim’ was written in pink and purple. The accompanying image was a character holding a pink heart sign in front of her face, showing only her ‘smiling’ eyes. However, during the rally, the same sentence was written on a banner in a different visual arrangement (see Figure 8). ‘I am Muslim. No Valentine’s Day’ was written in white on top of a red banner with an image of an index finger pointing upwards, a signal of one God. Next to it was ‘Selamatkan generasi muda dari virus Valentine’s day’ (Save the young generation from Valentine’s Day virus) in white and red background. These banners were loud and angry. The ‘misalignment’ worked well. PJ successfully invited large numbers of young women using the sweet images and soft colours online, and when they were actually on the ground, the mood of the campaign changed.

Two, this ‘misalignment’ made PJ’s main concern of young women covering the body being voiced out louder by their male counterparts, and this made the fact that the event was organized by a group of young Muslim women seem insignificant. Two instances during the rally were demonstrative. As they were preparing the march, a group of young men started to gather in front of the young women. As they started walking, the young men kept repeating ‘cover, cover, cover the *aurat*, cover the *aurat* now!’ to the tune of
local children’s song *Menanam Jagung*. In the tune of another children’s song, *Potong Bebek Angsa*, the young women sang: ‘Hey friends let’s cover the *aurat*; guard your *aurat*; don’t let it be seen. Cover your *aurat*. Let’s veil’. The young men’s song was shorter, and their voices were louder than the young women’s, making their repetition of the song sounded like an order for the female audience on the road. Meanwhile, the young women, perhaps shy in singing, at times left the lyrics unsung as they rallied. They also seemed unsure sometimes whether or not they could raise their voice. Later on, there were a couple of young men running around organizing the line of the march. With a megaphone, these young men kept reminding the young women who attended the event in long dresses and long veil to walk faster. This is interesting because PJ created the event to promote *jilbab syar’i*, a veiling practice that prescribes a style of modest dressing that does not show the shape of the body. The veil donned must be long, covering most of the torso, and worn with a *gamis* (a long, loose dress). The ensemble practically makes it harder for women to walk fast. The order to walk faster was a minute detail that revealed the ineluctable gap of knowledge created by male authority in a young women’s group event.

In other words, although the design of the online campaign was created to be relatable to young women (and thus managed to have hundreds of them participating), on the ground, the conventional male-led movement and arrangement needed to be adhered to. Although PJ dedicated the event only for young Muslim women, they allowed it to be under masculine religious authority. Further, PJ organized the event in a space in Jakarta that is politically and historically significant. They marched from the National Monument to the Hotel Indonesia roundabout. That avenue they walked on was the location where different pro-democracy forces protested against the New Order regime before its end in 1998. Despite the space’s loaded background, PJ, instead, was calling for a more orthodox
interpretation of veiling and, in effect, of living. I see the two points as substantiation of what Melani Budianta (2006) already contended about a decade ago: the promotion of ‘women’s constricted citizenship’ by ‘the right-wing entities of civil society and their use of free press’ (p. 918). Young women’s political participation in the case of PJ’s GMA was limited to moral performances manifested in their bodies. The young men’s louder rendition of the songs and their commands to the female participants during the rally should be seen as markers of masculine socio-religious authority.

**Discussion: Young Women’s ‘Movement’ and Docility**

The notion of religious influencer and the examples I have provided on how the YMWGs merged their monetary, religious and political interests frame how we should think about young women as (indiscernible) political actors and their ‘movement’. Although my examples above do not seem to have direct links to electoral votes, they condition the young Muslim women’s political potentials and reconfigure their (political) subjectivity. Further, by positioning them as political actors, we are able to see the groups’ influence over the way young women in Indonesia imagine themselves, how they should be and how they will be in the future. The groups’ emphasis on productivity, their idealization of the pious family or keluarga sakinah (Wieringa, 2015) and the way they (re)make the issue of women’s bodies in public should be seen as a shift in the current imaginary of

*Figure 8.* The start of Peduli Jilbab’s Gerakan Menutup Aurat near the National Monument in downtown Jakarta on 14 February 2016. Banners with different visual vocabulary from other communities involved in the rally were also put up.
Source: Photo taken by the author.
Indonesian youth, and particularly young women, as citizen-subjects (Cruikshank, 1999; Eagan, 2006).

Although their positioning of young Muslim women as productive subjects can be seen as subverting gendered expectations on Indonesian womanhood (Sakai and Fauzia, 2016), I suggest that we look at them as a part of an emerging ‘movement of women’ (McRobbie, 2009) instead of a form of women’s movement. This perspective allows us to recognize their political potentials as well as to ‘glimpse the movement’s possibilities – without forgetting its limits’ (Tsing, 2005: 215). This movement of women, instead of promoting progressive feminist goals, actually enforces certain modes of subjection. Angela McRobbie (2009) reminds us that the notion of ‘progress’ used in the involvement of the young women in the workforce and economic activities pushes them to move into spaces that require specific features of female citizenship. She calls it the ‘movement of women’ to refer to

the need for women, particularly those who are under the age of 50, and thus still of potential value to the labour market, to come, or move forward, as active participants in these labour markets, and also in consumer culture [...] Both of these activities, working and spending, become defining features of new modes of female citizenship. (p. 124)

In other words, in Indonesia, the features of female citizenship for young Muslim women can be captured by the figure of ‘social media religious influencer’, who actively and creatively sets out how young Muslim women should look, behave and aspire in personal, social and political spaces. The religious influencer’s presence and influence are mediated by the prevalence of social media platforms and shaped by the historical, political and economic dynamics specific to Indonesia.

Conclusion

Indonesian young Muslim women’s expressions of self-transformation to become pious subjects have undergone a significant shift from the 1990s or early 2000s (Brenner, 1996; Smith-Hefner, 2007) as the idealized young women today are docile and pious (Wieringa, 2015) but also creative and entrepreneurial. Docility becomes a part of religious transformation and conditions the young women’s empowerment in the field of entrepreneurship and socio-political issues. As seen in the case of GMA above and the more recent Aksi 411 and 212 in Jakarta, when young women took part in expressing their social and political concerns, which required them to be visible on the streets, they had to give the ‘stage’ to their male counterpart. The increasing presence of the religious influencers, circulating through social media and garnering significant following both online and offline, reveals the shifting imaginary of the ideal young Muslim women and – unfortunately – dominating and lasting patriarchal gender regime in Indonesia’s economic, religious and political realms.

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Notes
1. The term ‘pengajian’ has been translated by different scholars as Qur’an study group. In practice, pengajian may include a diverse set of activities, such as Qur’an recitation, listening to the sermon of a religious teacher (ustadz or ustadzah), sharing session and discussion. The young Muslim women’s groups (YMWGs) studied here, for instance, the Hijabers Community, sometimes organize modest outfit contests during pengajian by giving sponsored prizes to attendees.

2. Hijrah originally refers to the migration of Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622 to escape prosecution. The event is foundational to Muslim identity as it represents the ‘physical movement away from unbelief’ (Masud, 1990: 29). In the Qur’an, the word refers to the act of distancing oneself from evil. In Indonesia today, hijrah denotes the process of becoming better Muslims.

3. In Indonesia, ‘paid promote’ is a new term popular in social media platforms to categorize posts that endorse and promote products or brands. Instead of paying the social media company to promote their products, the owner of the business has to pay a certain amount of money directly to the social media account owner or administrator. The owner will then proceed to create posts that would usually contain endorsing captions on the products. This is a form of tacit labour that influencers are involved in (Abidin, 2016a).


References


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