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## Politicizing Piety: Women's Rights and Roles in the *Tarbiyah* Movement in Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

The *Tarbiyah* (education) movement in Indonesia today is the best known and has the largest number of members amongst groups in the *Dakwah* (proselytising) movements that mostly work in Indonesian campuses. Using the notion of Islamic feminism, this study aims to explore the numerous and varieties of women's activities in this movement, especially in relation to the ways women see their rights and roles within their notion of piety. Female and male activists of the *Tarbiyah* movement in six state universities in East Java are used as data. Participant observations and in-depth interviews are used as techniques of data collection. Data collection was done from April 2015 to September 2016. One important finding indicates that the *Tarbiyah* members conceive that male and female are segregated in nature (biological construction), yet in fact they subscribe to concepts of women's rights and equality while maintaining sexual segregation.

### Keywords

Islam, *Tarbiyah* movement, women, rights, roles, equality

### Introduction

The Islamic feminist movement in Indonesia, which started in the 1990s (Istiadah 1995), was not the only Islamic movement in the New Order period. The 1980s marked the revival of an Islamic movement that had existed earlier. One of them is the *Dakwah* (proselytising) movement that began in secular university campuses, such as at ITB (Institut Teknologi Bandung [Bandung Institute of Technology]). The *Dakwah* movement itself is not a homogeneous movement as there are other sections, such as *Hizbut-Tahrir*, *Darul Arqam*, and *Tarbiyah* (education) centred in university campuses.

It is, however, the *Tarbiyah* movement that is most widely known and has the most members, especially students who are actively involved in the campus mosque activities or SKI (Sie Kerohanian Islam [Islamic Spirituality Section]). *Tarbiyah*, or better known as “Islamic Campus,” consists particularly of students and graduates who started their education or “persuasion” at the Salman Mosque, ITB (Van Bruinessen 2002, 117) in the 1980s. The movement later inspired similar activities in various places, both in Islamic-affiliated campuses such as in State Islamic Institutes and particularly in “secular” campuses (Van Bruinessen 2003). This phenomenon, in the words of Machmudi who wrote his dissertation on *Jamaah Tarbiyah*, indicates the emergence a new type of devout Muslims who are different from their parents in terms of religious ideology and traditions.

Inspired by a religious movement in the Middle East, the Egyptian Muslim Brothers, *Jamaah Tarbiyah* has played a role as the agent of religious reform and at the same time has embarked on political activities to present itself as a united force of *ummah* regardless of individual religious orientations within its ranks. In carrying out its reform, *Jamaah Tarbiyah* has shown an accommodative strategy in order to avoid religious disputes and resistance among Indonesian Muslims in general (Machmudi 2006, 4).

Some groups in this movement call for Indonesia to be more Islamic—in the Middle Eastern way—with religious clothing and segregation and limitation on women’s role. Many see the *Tarbiyah* movement as mirroring the *Ikhwanul Muslimin* (Muslim Brotherhood) of Egypt set up by Hassan Al-Banna in 1928. They are also afraid that this movement might steer Islam toward radical revisionism and revival, which is potentially dangerous for the moderate form of Islam in Indonesia. However, in contrast to other Islamic revivalist organizations, the *Tarbiyah* movement is reformist and relies heavily on modern interpretations of Islam concerned with democracy, civil society, human rights, and equality of women, although these values are understood differently from common Western notions.

Unlike most social movements in the world, or in Indonesia in particular, the *Tarbiyah* movement does not only revolve around a social movement, but the movement also includes religion or piety. It is essential to see that, in addition to the social mobility that occurs through this movement, the area of religion or piety becomes a very important marker of the politicization. This involves external relations, not only between individuals and religion in the private sphere, but also individuals, religion, and social dimensions in the public sphere. The *Jilbabisasi*<sup>1</sup> movement in secular

<sup>1</sup> Jilbab in Indonesia means to veil. Jilbabisasi was a veiling movement in the 1980s and 1990s where some girls from public schools chose to don veiling as a sign of religious expression. In Indonesia, there are different ways to wear

campuses, for example, is seen as a form of freedom and expression of religion both in the private sphere (one's private right in showing piety to the religion that she embraces) and the public sphere as women wear the veil when they are in a public area. Women wear the veil by choice; it is not compulsory (Brenner 1996; Guindi 1999; Cooke 2000; Carpenter 2001). This example shows that the politics of piety are active in Muslim society.

In this movement, many women become activists, although in every meeting women and men are separated by different entrances. Women sit in ranks parallel to men, although they are separated. In the parliamentary election in 2004, PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* [Prosperous Justice Party]), whose main members were also members of the *Tarbiyah*, the highest number of women were elected as parliamentary members, in comparison with other parties (both Islamic and non-Islamic ones). The numbers were even more than the 30 per cent required quota (*Pikiran Rakyat* 2004).

Although many are afraid that female activists in the *Tarbiyah* movement are accepting more rigid interpretations of gender roles, in my opinion, such a fear is exaggerated. I would argue that women's roles in this movement share some similarities with other Muslim women in contemporary Islam. Islam is still highly respected as providing guidance for religious and social life:

Muslim women see no contradiction between democratic values and religious principles [...] According to the survey conducted by Gallup, Muslim women with some education and awareness of their rights are not hostile to Islam, they do not see in Islam an obstacle to their progress. Thus, supporting women's progress, rather turning to account *Shari'a* values than eliminating them, is a recurring theme on the agenda of contemporary Muslim societies. (Chirleşan and Cîrneanu 2011, 292–293)

The emergence of the *Tarbiyah* movement increasingly shows the complexity of the issues about women and their roles in Islam in Indonesia. Unfortunately, there are very few reviews as yet or research and writing on women's roles in the *Tarbiyah* movement. Material is more commonly found about the relationship of women's roles and Islamic guide manuals. These are books that provide models or tips on how to be a virtuous Muslim woman or *Sakina* woman, without providing any deeper insights into the complexities of women's roles in Islam (Abubakar 2002, 135; Meuleman 1993, 177). Most of the writings on the movement simply discuss

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the veil. *Kerudung* is a form of veiling usually worn by older women, *jilbab* refers to the veil popular in 1980s to 1990s, and *hijab* a more fashionable veil referring to more glamorous and haute couture styles as an up-to-date veiling.

the movement in general, and virtually none of them discuss in detail the views of women and their roles in the *Tarbiyah* movement.

This study aims to observe women members of the *Tarbiyah* movements and the discourse of piety that they believe in, especially concerning the politics of religion in their daily lives and during their college years. “Politics of religion” as a term in this study indicates an examination of the discourse of Islam in the *Tarbiyah* movement and how it influences the concept of gender, and also the role of gender in constructing women’s lives. Since politics embodies relations and relations generate legitimizing power, it is clear how the concept of gendered behavior is crucial for members of *Tarbiyah* as it legitimizes the reason or their piety. In the *Tarbiyah* movement, the most frequent question asked in relation to women’s piety is the actual meaning of a virtuous woman? Being such a pious woman or a pious girl would normally be the ultimate purpose for members of the *Tarbiyah* movement. In the study that follows, comparison with Western and other forms of Islamic feminism will be discussed.

In this study, the construction of gender and the emerging gender relations for women in the *Tarbiyah* movement, particularly in Indonesia, will be the major focus. Questions that arise as to the meaning of the *Tarbiyah* movement as part of the Islamic youth movements, will be investigated. A short historiography of the *Tarbiyah* movement in Indonesia, women’s roles, women’s issues, as well as insights into gender equality in the discourse of this movement, will be addressed through analyzing in-depth interviews with ninety activists both women and men in Surabaya, Malang, and Jember, in East Java. The interviews and observations were conducted from April 2015 to September 2016. Each interview lasted approximately 60–90 minutes; they were recorded and later transcribed. Transcripts and recordings are the primary data source, while the secondary data sources were books, online resources, etc. These will all be examined through the lens of Islamic feminism.

### **Islamic Feminism**

In general, Islamic feminism deals with the private realm, but practical Islam, i.e., Islam and its teachings, which are implemented in daily life, cannot be separated from political and socio-cultural situations of the society (Gusti 2000). Therefore, the definition of Islamic feminism is not monolithic:

such feminism is unique in conjuring up delicate and challenging issues for political and religious authorities as well as for scholars in a world of a billion Muslims. Within that new overarching background which deals with Islamic laws and traditions, the category of “Islamic feminism” may stand its ground by the sheer diversity it includes: contributors to the de-

bate have been considered “new feminist traditionalists,” “pragmatists,” “secular feminists,” “neo-Islamists,” and so forth. For all these thinkers, however, there is a common concern with the empowerment of their gender within a rethought Islam. (Yamani 1996, 1)

Yamani’s quote shows that feminism in Islam has multiple meanings. Islamic feminisms, similar to other feminisms, are never meant to be simple or one-sided. Feminism is always contextually grounded as women are always historically located. Today, in certain Muslim countries where strong Islamic values influence the context of feminism, it is not surprising that Islamic feminism is also associated with feminist theology, as described by Riffat Hassan of Pakistan:

the importance of developing what the West calls “feminist theology” in the context of the Islamic tradition is paramount today in order to liberate not only Muslim women, but also Muslim men, from unjust social structures and systems of thought that make a peer relationship between men and women impossible. It is extremely important for Muslim women activists to realize that in the contemporary Muslim world, laws instituted in the name of Islam cannot be overturned by means of political action alone, but through the use of better religious arguments [...] [B]y means of feminist theology it is possible to equip and empower women to combat gender-inequality and injustice to which they have been subjected for a very long time. (1996, 52–53)

With the strong religious element in its women’s movements, Islamic feminism also marks the emergence of a politics of piety because through religious piety, justice, freedom, and equality can be achieved. Most important is to give women space for them to make their own choices on the basis of self-awareness, as stated by Didin Syafrudin of Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN/Islamic State University), Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta:

the drive in interpreting Al Qur’an is not to interpret women in male interpretations in biological, psychological or sociological meaning, but to make possibilities for women to act in their own free and conscious choices just like men. That women have traditional role or completely new role is not the problem. What matters is that women are free to choose and have their own decision. (1994, 10)

Analogous to women in other Muslim countries, Indonesian *muslimah* (Muslim women) have long demanded a claim to participate in public life. Although Indonesian Muslim women traditionally enjoyed more freedom compared to their sisters in the Arab world, this does not automatically mean that they are granted equal access and authority in public realms. Still, changes are definitely taking place.

Defenders of women’s rights from the Indonesian older generation of *ulama* (religious clerics), such as Ali Yafie, Quraish Shihab, Abdurrah-

man Wahid, Zakiyah Daradjat, Aisyah Hamid Baidlowi, and Maftuchah Yusuf, and certainly other Muslim feminists of the younger generations, such as Masdar F. Mas'udi, Zainatun Subhan, Siti Nurhayati Dzuhayatin, and Nursyahbani Katjasungkana agree that women's rights are to include women's place in the public sphere. They also agree that the exclusion of Indonesian women from the public arena was a product of socially and culturally constructed interpretations of the *Qur'an* and *Hadith*. Women are today encouraged to become political actors by becoming town mayors and members of city councils, as well as leaders in the economic field. Indonesian feminists also believe that gender is a matter of social construction. From this perspective, they state that supposed women's domesticity must not hamper women's involvement in public participation. It is for women themselves to decide which sphere they want to inhabit. Whatever their choice, it is an indication of women's liberation in social, political, and economic life. Dzuhayatin writes:

being married or single, willing to have or not to have children, choosing a career or being housewives are all issues that should be resolved on the basis of women's own choices. No one has the right to interfere in these decisions. Not even the husband or the state has the right to assert control over a woman's body or mind. (2001, 205)

The ideas and practices that Dzuhayatin and other feminists of her generation offer is vital as it exemplifies a paradigm shift in the notion of women and their public positions. The growth of global discourses on women and development has had a strong influence on women's movements in Indonesia. This has resulted in the fact that the younger generation no longer sees domesticity as an obligation for women. For them, the notion of motherhood becomes less important in shaping women's status, and a woman's decision to get married or to stay single is not determined by women's *kodrat* (destiny).

Mahnaz Afkhami identifies twelve issues in a platform for action that need attention in order to improve the situation of women's human rights: poverty, education, health, violence against women, effects of armed conflict, economic structures and politics, inequality of men and women in decision-making, gender equality, women's human rights, media, environment, and the girl child (1997, 109). In her well-crafted "Platform for Action," she argues that one major way to help women realize that their rights are being denied is through education. Afkhami is correct. Education is an essential means through which women can gather experience and knowledge so as to implement gender equality. Education is a powerful means for social transformation. The state policy of implementing *wajib belajar* (an obligation for all Indonesian children—male and female—to

enter elementary education at least from year one to year twelve) is critical in the drive for education as a way to social transformation, especially for women. However, for a number of reasons, including poverty, geographical isolation and the persistence of child labour, a sizeable number of Indonesian youth are still denied their right to education. Thus, this research is very important to investigate whether the patterns or models of the roles of women in the *Tarbiyah* movement in Indonesia are the same or different from comparable movements elsewhere.

### **The *Tarbiyah* Movement in Indonesia**

The *Tarbiyah* movement, as described by one respondent, is a movement of education and, as in other movements, primarily aims to provide education, particularly Islamic education, to its followers (members of *Tarbiyah*). The movement that initially began in a campus community at a mosque in ITB in the early 1990s eventually spread to various campuses throughout Indonesia.

The *Tarbiyah*<sup>2</sup> movement is an educating movement. According to K.H. Rahmat Abdullah in the publication of National Seminar, “*Tarbiyah* in the New Era,” at the Mosque of Indonesia University, Depok Campus, the meaning of *tarbiyah* (education) does not negate the process of *tarbiyah* that has been present in Indonesia for a long time. Without the process of *tarbiyah*, *walisongo* (the 9 Javanese saints) could never have disseminated Islam in Java. In sum, *tarbiyah* with capital ‘T’ or with lower ‘t’ obviously refers to a process of education. *Tarbiyah* is also commonly associated with a study group teaching three levels of Islamic education. First is the education of *dzikir* (worshipping) or educating the spiritual aspects. Second is the education of *fikriyah*, the scientific aspect. Third is *dakwah*, the *harakiyah* aspect, namely the implementation of the first and the second levels. Members of *tarbiyah* are taught in these levels consecutively, and when they finish their education, they will have the necessary education to go back to the community where they live. Here they can create changes

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<sup>2</sup> *Tarbiyah* came to Indonesia more than two decades ago. However, Ustadz Rahmat Abdullah, known as the Syaikhut of *Tarbiyah* in Indonesia, claimed that the process of *tarbiyah* has been going on for centuries in Indonesia and not only in the past two decades. The spread of Islam in Indonesia has worked for centuries, and the process of *tarbiyah* has taken a long time already. If the term *tarbiyah* is used to describe a movement that recently entered Indonesia for about two decades, then Ustadz Rahmat Abdullah requires to replace the lowercase “t” in the word *tarbiyah* with the uppercase “T.” It is intended to show that *Tarbiyah* is not *tarbiyah*. *Tarbiyah* refers to certain rules, system, and ideology coming to Indonesia within the past twenty years, not to the meaning of *tarbiyah* commonly used by most Muslims



(Rahmat Abdullah 2007). Basically, *Tarbiyah* educates its member how to be “a good Muslim” (Anismar 2014).

Many have said that the *Tarbiyah* group in Indonesia is inspired by the ideas and ideology of the *Ikhwanul Muslimin* (IM), founded by Hasan Al Banna in 1928, with the special aim of training cadres. The *Tarbiyah* group conducts its cadres’ training through cell forums called *liqo’*. (In the 1980s and early 1990s, such a forum was called *usrah*). A forum is usually held on a weekly basis and led by a *murabbi* (teacher) and attended by about ten *mutarabbi* (education participants). Such a coaching model is the characteristic of the *Tarbiyah* group, both in Indonesia and other parts of the world (Beda Salafi Beda *Tarbiyah* 2008).

By using the slogan “establishing brotherhood, expanding the horizons,” the movement, through its vision and mission, claims that it is a civil movement very closely related to the formation of civil society. When examined more deeply, this movement is not different from other humanist movements because, in terms of language discourse, the choice of words used are words that are very common to all such movements in the world—both those with religious affiliation and the secular ones, whose aim is equality. Words such as “peaceful,” “friendly,” “merciful,” “great,” “harmonious faith,” “science and technology,” “alignment with the marginalized,” “fight against crime,” demonstrate that this movement also contains universal values. Like other Islamic movements, words in Arabic are very prominent in this movement. Almost all the main terms are in Arabic, indicating the proximity of this movement to the Arab world (i.e., *Ikhwanul Muslimin* from Egypt). Yet they do have differences from other humanist movements, e.g., the feminist movement or the civil rights movement.

The *Tarbiyah* movement embraces religious (Islamic) values and is oriented toward the past. The present-day context appears to be no longer important for the movement’s aim, vision, and mission. Nevertheless, it recognizes that the development of science and technology is something that should be embraced and not be regarded with hostility. The golden age of the Islamic Caliphate (eighth to fourteenth century CE) became a model for the creation of a civil society wherever this movement exists. Although its strong focus is on the golden age of Islam, this movement does not include the conflicts and the dynamics that occurred in the golden age. Again, the context of universal values that *tarbiyah* supports refers to those of the golden age of Islam and not to the present. Perhaps, in this movement, the dynamics of a society, with its contestations, negotiations, and hegemony, are no longer important, especially when related to the context of an event and the confines of time and space. It is as if the con-

text of time and place is lost (in the sense of Indonesian-ness or the time and place in Indonesia/context of locality). This is in line with the opinion of Damanik Ali Said, stating that in Indonesia, although it can be classified as part of the Islamic modernism movement, it is rather difficult to find the roots of the relation between the group that started as “Gerakan Dakwah Kampus” (GDK [Campus Proselytizing Movement]) with any Islamic religious movements that may have existed in Indonesia. The existence of this movement is closely related to the influence of the International Islamic movement that thrived in Egypt, *Ikhwanul Muslimin* (the Muslim Brotherhood). The influence of this movement in the last two decades of the twentieth century was observed in many countries of the world. During this period, the movement, led by urban-based, young educated people, was able to contribute to the process of opinion formation in public religio-cultural areas. Widespread acceptance of religious symbols, such as the wearing of Muslim clothing (veil), was one of the successes of this movement. After being engaged for more than a decade in this field, creating a momentum of reform, this movement aimed to engage at the state level by establishing Partai Keadilan (Justice Party). Since then, the party has become a phenomenon in Indonesian politics (Damanik 2002).

As explained above, the followers of this movement are mostly members of campus communities (college students). They are usually addressed as *akhwat*, which means “sister,” and *akhwan*, which means “brother,” without any differentiation in age, social background, etc. Individual identity (gender, class, race and others) is merged into the single form of address: sister or brother. This marks a democratization in greeting the followers of this movement, even though they are separated by their different roles and tasks.

Often women sit behind men in meetings, but this only applies when the room size is not large enough for women to sit parallel to men, although they are separated by a room-divider. The key tenet of this movement is that men’s space is public space, and women’s space is domestic space. Men sitting in front and woman behind indicates that this movement is still connected to a patriarchal ideology with which Islam is always associated. However, this separation is not without challenge. There are occasions when men and women sit in the same room and are separated by a divider. They are separated, but sit parallel with each other.

Given that the framework of this movement is highly patriarchal, the following questions inquire about the existence of women’s rights in this movement: Do they have rights at all? If they do, what kind of rights? Are these rights in conflict, or are they in support of these devout Muslim women who are taught democracy and equal rights in their secular schools

or universities? These questions will be discussed in the following analysis, based on interviews with the followers of this movement, which is part of the Islamic Youth Movement. Most of its members are of school age or are college students.

### **Women in the Public Sphere**

According to the *Tarbiyah* movement members, a woman's main place is in the domestic sphere, although there are a lot of female members involved in public activities. Such a contradiction does not seem to be a problem, because, according to *halaqah* or studies that they carry out on a regular basis, women are an appendage of men. Women may lead, but men are preferred as leaders. Leading women are those who reach the top, but they are never in the highest rank. It is still men who hold the highest leadership positions, especially when the leadership is related to religion:

the man, a leader, whatever his position is, he remains a leader. While a woman is the companion of a man. No matter how high the woman's position is, the boss is still the man. (Interview with LLF, March 26, 2015)

It's recommended in Islam that men are leaders. But in a democratic society, men may not be leaders. (Interview with RTO, April, 2015)

Men must be leaders in religious matters, while women can be leaders in worldly duties. Men and women sit in a different room or in the same room, divided by a *hijab* or barrier. Men sometimes sit in front of women. Sometimes they sit equally, though separated. Male space is public space, and the space of women is domestic space: this is a key tenet of this movement. This separation between maleness and femaleness resonates strongly with the notion of difference feminism of the 1980s to 1990s, suggested by Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1993). This notion of feminism follows a form of biological essentialism that states men and women are different biologically. Thus, they are regarded as incomparable, and so they should be treated equally. However, this type of feminism gradually fell out of favour with later feminists.

The quotations above from women activists signal a contradictory view of how *Tarbiyah* women see themselves. It seems that they make a distinction between their life as *Tarbiyah* members within the *Tarbiyah* movement and their life outside it. It perhaps correlates with their position as devout Muslim women within the movement, yet different outside the movement when they are students at secular universities. This discrepancy is reinforced in their statements, affirming their public lifestyle, while at the same time they follow the teachings of *Tarbiyah*.

The sense of being both "in" and "out" must be continuously negotiated by these members. One activist even said that being in the movement sim-

ply did not stop her from practicing her rights to join a karate club. When doing her *karate* exercises, she chose to wear a loose skirt and not pants (Interview with FWP, May 2016). This negotiation of being in and out of the movement is crucial for the female members. It demonstrates that they have the right to choose and thus to be able to express themselves. When they are outside the movement, they behave in accordance with common decency and in accordance with rights. One activist said, “When I am with other members, I would behave accordingly (following the rules in the movement), but when I am outside the movement, I would mingle with men, working together, presenting our paper together, just like any other girl.” Here there appears to be no separation from the boys (Interview with INS, June 18, 2016). I would argue that the right of the girls to choose, is a basic right. These university girls understand that, when women are allowed to choose, they are exercising a fundamental human right. The girls’ right to choose might be well uniquely Indonesia’s Islam in favouring of girls being educated.

In relation to female leadership, the *Tarbiyah* movement does refer to women activists. The book *Keakhwatan 1* (femaleness) is written mostly by male writers: Cahyadi Takariawan, Abdullah Sunono, Wahid Ahmadi, and Ida Nur Laila. They state that women are active citizens, not only in the private sphere, but also in the public sphere. The difference is that women’s involvement in the public roles is limited to leading other women and not men. In this case, seemingly women have no right to be leaders. Women can lead men only when no man is capable. Nevertheless, based on the interviews, some activists admitted that they often became leaders of both men and women in activities outside the movement. Again, within the movement, women can be leaders of a small group, such as the head of the Student Executive Board or the commander of a ceremony, but only when no man is capable. Outside the movement, women can freely lead. One activist admitted that, when she was in the movement, she was never a leader, but outside *Tarbiyah* participation, she was a leader of extracurricular activities at her school (Interview with FWEP, May 15, 2016). Activists have also expressed their role model Aisyah, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad, who is also respected as one most reliable transmitters of *Hadith* (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad). Aisyah was also a leader and a commander in the Battle of Camel (AD 656) when she waged war against Ali Ibn Abi Talib’s troops. With her role in this battle, combined with her intelligence as transmitter of thousands of *Hadith*, Aisyah is a model of gender equality and leadership within the *ummah* (community of believers). Aisyah was indeed a “feminist” when the word “feminism” was not yet known. It is no surprise to know that some of the

*Tarbiyah* female activists and members idolize her. These girls want to follow the examples that Aisyah has provided.

### **Gender Relations in Public Sphere**

Spatial separation is important for *Tarbiyah* activists. One activist said that hijab is often understood to be a separation, whether the actual division exists or not, but separation does not automatically mean subordination (AM, April 2015). In the *Tarbiyah* movement, spatial separation between men and women is never an opposition between superiority and subordination. Although women should sit separated from men, women may express their opinion in a forum with men. It is indeed clear for the *Tarbiyah* activists that men are companions of women. Gender relations between them are not enacted in the form of superiority/subordination, where men are believed to be superior to women. The following excerpts from an interview best describe the gender relations in the public realm between women and men in this movement:

as I said earlier, the man is the leader, he who leads us, while the woman is the companion of a man, but she also cannot be ruled out, meaning she is not in the lower position, but actually in a term of position. We are parallel as we accompany each other mutually. (Interview with LLF, March 26, 2015)

The interviewee indicates that women and men are biologically different, but that biological difference does not automatically create inequality. In fact, many activists believe that men and women are companions of each other, and they regard this as equality. An activist described that in an activity, if a male was the leader, the secretary then had to be the female because male and female complement each other (Interview with NNS, May 15, 2016). A man and a woman already are each created with their specific distinctions in their own spheres. An activist declared: “Because men were physically strong, they took care of physical activities, such as moving and arranging chairs for meetings. In contrast women, because of their delicate nature, took care of logistic needs” (Interview with NNS, May 15, 2016).

In the movement, although women seem to have a lower status than men, this should not be understood that women disappear from public sphere. One activist admitted the importance of gender equality: “Knowing gender relations is very important. Because it talks about difference in terms of roles and responsibilities. Surely men must have commitment and trust. There are many female leaders now. [...] Gender equality is needed. Now it’s different era” (Interview with ZIN, June 18, 2016).

### Women as Community Members

Women's membership in this movement also indicates other interesting developments. The *Tarbiyah* movement makes women work in accordance to their reproductive function. Married women are taught to have as many children as possible (Interview with SMP, October 2011). This is a strategy of the members of this movement to increase the population numbers. The need to increase the number of members in this movement is one of the answers to the question why the brothers and sisters in this movement tend to get married as soon as possible after graduating from university, and also why they tend to have many children. Increasing the population becomes a very important strategy in the development of this movement. Although this policy does not seem to be in line with the family planning program, which is the government's agenda, it seems that the government does not do anything to interfere in this matter.

As a community member, it seems that women in this movement have, again, a contradictory role. On the one hand, their membership is seen only from reproductive needs, but, on the other hand, they are considered as cadres, who are as disciplined as male members. As members of the community, the roles of women are quite significant in this movement. Women are cadres. As cadres, in addition to being responsible for improving the quality of the members being trained, they are also responsible for the quantity or growth in membership. In this case, women are equal to men in their function as community members. Regeneration is the duty of each member of this movement. Together with this emphasis on having children, a strong sense of discipline is also introduced. *Halaqoh* (circle) and *liqo'* (meeting) are very effective forums in the spread of this movement. This is because it is through these forums that both the doctrine of faith and the personality formation of the members are instilled (Al-Bilali 2000). In this formation, female and male cadres have the same responsibility as members of the wider community and members of the *Tarbiyah* movement.

Being highly disciplined is a requirement for both male and female activists. Such disciplined activism is no longer the sole possession of men but of women as well. Women also have the right to this strict self-discipline. Despite the fact that most activists believe ideal female characters are pious, soft-spoken, and well mannered, they must be disciplined too. The resultant activism is a characteristic that is mainly associated with being masculine, but, in this movement, strict discipline is also an integral part of being feminine.

As a religious movement, the *Tarbiyah* movement definitely centres its main direction within the religious realm. These activists believe that if

women become leaders, their strong commitment to being good Muslims will direct them to the ultimate goal: to be pious women. Being pious means a woman should be virtuous, and being educated is an important quality of being virtuous. As educated women, they will contribute their work to the society, especially when they become mothers. This is because mothers are respected as the primary educators of the society. One female activist asserts that, in today's digital era, women in *Tarbiyah* will have more demanding roles, one of which is for the advancement of civilization. Women must thus contribute, not only at the state and national level, but also the world at large (Interview with NNS, May 15, 2016). These activists are typical of the millennial generation; because of speedy and instant connectivity to the world, the millennials are well aware of their position in the global scene.

### Conclusions and Suggestions

A number of findings can be concluded from this study. One is that a form of segregation remains in force in the teachings of this movement, although its members are quite familiar and supportive of the values of civil society. What is more important, however, is that female activists are highly aware of their negotiations as they transfer in and out of the movement, with the rights and roles this entails. Female activists are allowed to choose their commitments both inside or outside the movement. Being inside and outside comes with different responsibilities and roles. Freedom to choose for these members signals their fundamental rights of beings. Their awareness of such rights for women is a result derives not so much from the movement itself, but the fact that at schools, especially at university levels, women are taught strong feminist awareness and encouraged to take part in public roles. Since Indonesian independent movement (1908–1945) women had always been actively participating in the movement. Furthermore, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia guarantees gender equality by saying that all citizens are equal accorded by law and by the government (Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia 1945, Article 27). This constitution basically protects and support women's rights and women's participation in all sectors of life.

The segregation of women and men indicates only a separation of space but not of piety. Women are active in both the domestic and public sphere. When it comes to piety, these activist women believe that equality rules. When faith matters, equality is also in play, meaning that piety is the same for both women and men, regardless of gender difference.

In addition to women's piety, female members of *Tarbiyah* do traits of Islamic feminism that allow them to appear in public spaces. Women

can indeed be leaders in Indonesia, though not religious leaders. Women are equal to men when they are cadres or activists. Strong discipline is required for both men and women. Such discipline is mostly associated with men, but it is also embraced by the women of the *Tarbiyah* movement, especially in connection with piety.

One final remark on women's piety, rights, and roles in the *Tarbiyah* movement is that it needs to be understood that these versions of piety, rights, and roles are not, by any means, monolithic or inflexible. There may be alternatives and many more variations of ways these activists understand and negotiate their position as Muslim women, especially when different contexts, locations, and spaces apply. What is written here is a small effort to voice women's position in Indonesia's Islam. It remains dominated by men, though there are many strong feminists who are both aware of their rights and demand them.

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### Interviews

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- Interviews with members or activists of *Tarbiyah* movement at Universitas Airlangga, Institute Teknologi Surabaya, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Universitas Brawijaya, Universitas Negeri Malang and Universitas Jember. April 2015 to September 2016.
- Interview with LLF, activist of Tarbiyah Movement at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA/State University of Surabaya), March 26, 2015.
- Interview with FWEP, activist of Tarbiyah Movement at Universitas Negeri Malang (UNM/State University of Malang), May 15, 2016.
- Interview with INS, activist of Tarbiyah Movement at Universitas Negeri Jember (UNEJ/State University of Jember), June 18, 2016.
- Interview with NNS, activist of Tarbiyah Movement at Universitas Negeri Malang (UNM/State University of Malang), May 15, 2016.
- Interview with ZIN, activist of Tarbiyah Movement at Universitas Negeri Jember (UNEJ/State University of Jember), June 18, 2016.