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MODERN DISCOURSE OF WOMAN'S IDEAL ROLE IN INDONESIA *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān of Ibu and Female Agency*

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Abstract: The discourse of *Ibu* in *tafsir* does not follow its discourse in the Qur'an which is just and equal, yet considers carefully on its existing practices in the history of humankind prior to the prophecy of Muhammad, and in the time of the Qur'anic revelation. Muslim scholars including Muslim women scholars from time to time especially in modern era re-produce, modify, and produce different narrations which often fall into the reduction of the Qur'an's just and equal description of female agency. Using modern Indonesian context, this study discusses Muslim scholars' narration of *Ibu* agency. The study deploys a descriptive-analytic method using Anthony Giddens's perspective of agency, and the data is gathered through library review. Interviews are also used to substantiate the discussion. The study finds that they are beginning to make significant contribution to the discourse of woman in general and *Ibu* in particular

Keywords: Female Agency, Tafsir al-Qur'an, Gender, *Ibu*.

Introduction

Female agency discusses the roles of women in their social life. In it, a woman is related to another individual, group, institution, structure, and social norm or value and system. In our day female agency receives historical, epistemological as well as social movement moment towards a situation of having more gender equity. Historically, due to the shift of social force from traditional to democratic one, female agency pushes as well as is pushed by some to engage roles more than the traditional forces prescribed. Epistemologically, it becomes one of strong bases for constructing scientific knowledge,

where previous assumptions that were sexist, androcentric, and prejudicial towards women are criticized.¹ Their roles are then reconstructed to be equal from other genders. Meanwhile, social movement shoves gender equity to be implemented in various social lives from the struggle for political rights to social, economic and cultural ones. In the context of the application of democratic system which is now a global norm, gender equity paves the way in various aspects of lives criticizing the traditional roles which have been constructed by different social forces including the forces of religious norms. One of the problems of religions and religious adherents in this context concerns female agency. In Islam, information provided by present religious teachings and the perceptions of religious scholars which are dug from interpretations to sacred texts, understanding and *ijtihad* began to be criticized due to its tendency of discriminating and weakening female agency. The sources of criticism are taken either from social practices, religious texts or cultural ones.

This library research is a descriptive study,² discussing female agency in the Qur'an and its interpretation seen from the role of gender with special reference to *Ibu* as ideal role in Indonesian context. The main data of the study is documents either books of *tafsir* (Quranic exegesis), related books, journals proceedings or other related documents. The collected data is explained based on the embedded data³ using Anthony Giddens's agency perspective⁴ and Christian Lloyd's social history structurism.⁵ Technically, in describing the collected data, I discuss the narration of the development of the construction of the meanings of *Ibu* in history as well as in modern Indonesian context. Female agency in the Qur'an is deployed to describe the dynamic of its significance and relevance as an ideal mother.

Study on the history of the interpretation dealing with *ibu ideal* (ideal mother), is still largely neglected. Previous studies discuss mostly on woman in Islam in general, either those whose works concentrated

¹ Sandra Harding, *Diskursus Sains dan Feminisme* (Yogyakarta: PSW UIN Yogyakarta and ISEP McGill, CIDA, 2006), p. 6 and p. 213.

² Robert K. Yin, *Studi Kasus: Deain & Metode* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 2005), p. 1.

³ Robert K. Yin. 2005. *Studi Kasus*: p. 133-60.

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Teori Struktural: Dasar-dasar Pembentukan Struktur Sosial Masyarakat* (Jakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010).

⁵ Cristopher Lloyd, *The Structures of History* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993).

in classical period such as the works of Gertrude S. Stern (1939), Ma'mun Gharib (1977), and Nabia Abbot (1985), or whose studies traced the root of modern thought on woman in Islam in the classical period such as the study of Leila Ahmad (1992), or whose researches discuss female figure in the history of Islam such as the study of Jane I. Smith (1982, 1989), Muhammad al-Sayyid Tanthawi (1985), and Syed A.A. Rauzi (1990), or whose works which discussed the status of woman in Islam, such as the work of Aftab Hussein (1987). Among the works which are relevant is Barbara Freyer Stowasser's studies (1984, 1987a, 1987b, 1994 [the last work was translated into Indonesian in 2001]). Stowasser (2011 [1984]) uses Islamic sources (al-Qur'an, *Sunnah* and *tafsir*) to discuss Muslim woman in general and a number of female figures in particular. She for example identifies the interpretation of *umm al-mu'minin* (Mother of Muslim believers) as an ordinary as well as ideal mother. The present study uses her work as term of reference in which I examine further how *Ibu* as female agency is interpreted in the context of modern Indonesia. To do so, I discuss theoretical aspect of female agency in the Qur'an before discussing the interpretation of mother as female agency in modern Indonesian context.

Theoretical Framework of *Ibu* as Female Agent

Two theoretical frameworks are vital in this discussion: female agency, and *Ibu* agency. Female agency is constructed based of Anthony Giddens's structuration theory. Based on his perspective and the definition of *Ibu*, the framework of *Ibu* is constructed. Anthony Giddens puts structuration as a response to the existing social theories which are considered to be reductionist, trapped either in subjectivism or objectivism. He considers the important aspects of subjectivity and objectivity and what lies in between.⁶ It bases its unit of analysis on subjectivity, act, motivation, meaning, and institution, as well as practices where all these aspects are taken into consideration. In other words, social practice is one of the main sites of analysis in Giddens's view. He defines social practice as a number of living practices which are continuously taking place in space and time for a long time. It is facility and result of the continuous process of reproduction, modification, and production of its agents. In other words, discussing agency in Giddens's perspective is identifying situations in which social

⁶ Giddens, *Teori Strukturalis*, pp. 1-3.

practices become possible to happen.⁷ It means that how female agents in this case *Ibus*/mothers play role in making a social practice reproduced, modified, or produced.

Social Practice

Social practice is the routine activity or set of routine activity. It is basically neutral but appreciated for it is good and condemned for it is bad or destructive; it is continuously reproduced, sometimes modified becoming better, and or produced becoming a new social practice. Functionally and substantially social practice is maintained as long as it is needed or exercised. Agents as the doers of it are out of structure but part of social system or they are in dual structures. In it, Giddens places agent within the flexibility and constraints over the situations of the context. Sometimes an agent has abundant choices and some other times contrary, very limited choices. He describes this situation as a medallion or coin which has two sides: head and tail side. However in its limited situation, an agent still has room and opportunity to exercise power and this creates dynamic. In other words in any situation a social practice reflects dynamics as the agent is a capable doer. Seeing that changing a social practice is dependent on internal and external factors, an agent is also dependent on internal and external influences to reproduce, modify, or change a social practice into a new one. It consists of system, norm, value, structure, institution, category, etc. In short, a social practice may be defined as a set of routine activities in which social system and structure are interrelated and treated by the researcher.

The Qur'an uses the term *hidayah* to illustrate divinely-guided practice. When it is public, it is related to things that are good or useful for one own or for many. In Islam Muslim scholars term it as *maṣālib*, '*amal abl al-Madinah*, *Istihṣān*, '*urf* or *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, and to some extent *Sunnah* or Tradition. In Western tradition we know the term public interest, practical knowledge or *phronesis*.⁸ All these terms seem represent similar message, that is practical knowledge. Social practice is also about practical knowledge which is exercised routinely. The main message of Islam and in particular of the Qur'an is acquisition of

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸ Kusmana, "Hermeneutika Humanistik Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd: Al-Qur'an sebagai Wacana," *Kanḥ Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (December 2012), p. 269.

hidayah which will guide human being to be pious, beneficial for other and the universe, and happy in the life now and in the hereafter. And its *hidayah* is universal for all human being and universe. So Islam has a mission of influencing people and maintaining the universe. In its vision for human civilization Islam came with the spirit of reproduction, modification and production of social practices which are good, just, democratic, pure, and beneficial for as many as possible.

Defining *Ibu* as Female Agency

In Indonesian language the term *Ibu* as long as the discussion is concerned may refer to the following meanings: woman who delivers a baby, epithet for a woman who has a husband, and an attribution for any woman who has or has not married to respect her.⁹ In Arabic language the term *Ibu* in this case may be represented with the term *umm* or *walida*. *Umm* in this meaning basically refers to anything seen as the cause of everything to happen, educate, correct, and to begin with. *Walida* refers to a woman who delivers a baby. In other words, the term *umm* is more general as it also includes non-biological woman than *walida* which only denotes as mother who delivers a baby.¹⁰ In the Qur'an, the term *umm* is used not only for the term which is related to woman, but also for other entities such as name of place, a place to return to, and resident.¹¹ In its usages, the Qur'an mentions the term *umm* 35 times, in 20 chapters, and in 31 verses,¹² in 24 times in singular form, and 11 times in plural one. Meanwhile, the Qur'an only mentions the term *walida* in 4 times, in 3 chapters, 3 verses of them are in singular form, and the rest is in plural one, dealing natural function of mother.¹³ Of the 35 usages, 7 verses are not related to this discussion.¹⁴ The rests of the usages are related to the discussion of *Ibu*

⁹ Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan – Balai Pustaka, 1997).

¹⁰ Fathiyaturrahmah, "Pandangan al-Qur'an terhadap Peran Wanita sebagai Ibu dalam Mendidik Anak," in *Jurnal Studi Gender Indonesia*, Vol. 03, No. 02 (November 2012), p. 12.

¹¹ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender: Perspektif al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Paramadina and Dian Rakyat 1999), pp. 167-72; Fathiyaturrahmah, "Pandangan al-Qur'an", pp. 112-3.

¹² Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender*, p. 167.

¹³ Fathiyaturrahmah, "Pandangan al-Qur'an", pp. 113.

¹⁴ They are QS. 43: 4, QS. 3: 7, QS. 13: 39, QS. 28: 59, QS. 42: 7, QS. 6: 92, QS. 101: 9. Fathiyaturrahmah, "Pandangan al-Qur'an", p. 113.

in singular and plural form.¹⁵ In singular form, the use of *umm* is exploited to discuss the nature aspect of it, whereas in plural form it extends also to other functions including symbolic form, QS 33: 6 and QS. 4: 23. Of the QS 33: 6 it uses *ummahātuhum* (Their mothers), the pronoun *hum* refers to *al-mu'minin* mentioned earlier in the verse, *ummahāt al-mu'minin*. The Qur'an also uses other terms to refer to the term *ummahāt al-mu'minin*, such as *minkunna* (among you the wives of the Prophet) [QS. 33: 31], *nisā' al-Nabiyyi* (Wives of the Prophet) [QS. 33: 32], and *ajwāzika* (your wives) [QS. 33: 59].¹⁶

Having discussed above, the generic meaning of *Ibu*, the term *Ibu* is discussed here as female agency and it may be defined as norm which consists of systems and standards for the agent and others to refer to. When they are related to the Qur'an, the Qur'an documents them carefully and considerately. The Qur'an reproduces, modifies and produces social practices of motherhood in line with the nature of woman, as well as with the existing dominant discourse and practice. In terms of reproduction the Qur'an is inclusive and flexible towards the existing social practices. Wherever it resides since its initial place in the land of Arab Islam adopted more the existing social practices rather than modified the existing social practices or produced new one. Themes like clothing, food, livelihood, interactions, and social institutions are relatively reproduced. Islam focused on modification and production only when they were necessary. Islam improved humanity, civilization and theology and eschatology. The way the first generation of Muslims improved civilization alongside the capability and capacity of them themselves. The same pattern happens also in different contexts including in the context of Indonesia. So, social practices within Muslim society are just like in other (religious) societies. There are excellences and deficits. The Qur'an documents social practices of motherhood in the case of innate nature and of symbolic form or function. With regard to the woman's nature,

¹⁵ Mother of Musa QS. 20: 38, 40, QS. 28: 7, 10, 13; Maryam QS. 23: 50, QS. 5: 17, 50, 116; mother of Maryam QS. 19: 28, mothers of believers or wives of the Prophet QS. 33: 6, breastfeeding mother such as in QS. 4: 23, mothers who get pregnant, deliver babies, and breastfeed such as in QS. 53: 32, QS. 80: 35, QS. 20: 94, QS. 31: 14, QS. 39: 6, QS. 46: 15, QS. 16: 78, QS. 7: 150, QS. 33: 6, QS. 4: 23, QS. 24: 61, QS. 58: 2. Fathiyaturrahmah, "Pandangan al-Qur'an", p. 113.

¹⁶ Muhammad Ahsin Sakho, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahannya* (Jakarta: Kementrian Agama, 2004), p. 41

motherhood is described as closed as possible to the nature of motherhood itself. For example, the Qur'an describes the steps and process of the woman's period which is in accordant with the result of scientific findings. Even the Qur'an revised the social aspect of the practice of the woman's period which was discriminative and disrespectful. In this case, the Qur'an not only maintained the existing social practice of it but also modified it to honour woman and humanity.

In social sphere, the Qur'an takes a more careful attitude to share with the existing social practices. Though the Qur'an has a vision of equality and justice, it deeply appreciates the existing social practices by adopting and at the same time modifying them. For example, the role of a wife in a family is made central yet subordinate. The existing common practice places woman nearly as servant of the house, even woman did not nearly have rights before Muhammad's prophecy. This practice is not totally wrong, there are many activities and things at best are done by woman/wife due to her biological and instinctive nature. The Qur'an reproduces these good aspects of motherhood, by respecting the position of husband who is responsible for financing the family needs and asking wife to play her in return to her position as the load of the family. This social system is effective if only each spouse plays the role properly.

In terms of symbolic form or function, the Qur'an provides various role models in which in each model has dynamic. For example, the Qur'an constructs symbolic *Ibu* or mother ideally and elevate its level to its edge. This construction is seen clearly in the case of the wives of Prophet Muhammad. God through the Qur'an backs up them with suggestions and obligations which keep them away from disgraceful deed and bad attitude. Even God made some intervention to make sure His protection such as the case of 'Aisha when she was left by the group. The importance of mother for the state is analogous with the importance of her in a family but with larger responsibility and obligation. The famous proverb among Muslims that mother is the pillar of the nation reflects the important role of mother in either the family or the state. One key point can be made here is that the practice of symbolic mother is not only on the responsibility of the female agent herself, but also on the responsibility of others including the nearest people surrounding her and the state or organisation where she is affiliated. Only by these efforts, motherhood agency can perform excellently.

Discourse of *Ibu* in Modern Indonesian Context

Discussing female agency in Indonesian context actually reveals emancipation and restriction of woman's roles and public engagement. Even before the Western influence which came to the archipelago in sixteenth century, positioned mostly in patriarchal values did not make Indonesian women completely restricted in domestic roles. It is seen for example from the fact that they had engaged in various public spheres including in military.¹⁷ Subordination of women began to take place after the Nusantara archipelago received external influences particularly that of Western and Middle East influence. Western influence may refer to the values of petit-bourgeois¹⁸ and Middle East influence refers to religious values such as Islam which was assimilated with local culture especially Javanese values.¹⁹ Subordination of women was resulted from reproduction of social system or values which were constructed from cultural ideology as well as state's one. Cultural ideology was centred on female body and its relation to something and somebody else. Between these two aspects are interrelated, and they construct values and influence social institutions including of the state's institutions. *Ibu* is then defined not only as a woman who gets married and or has a baby, but also she who has no baby, yet has important position, or she who has professional skill, prosperity, spiritual and healing power, and she who is foreigner, and mature.²⁰ Women are seen as "dependent wives who exist for their husbands, their families, and the state."²¹ Ideal roles of women are as "procreators of the nation, as mothers, as educators of children, as house keepers, members of Indonesian society."²²

One resource of cultural values is reproduced through educational institutions. Education for girls was one modernization movement to

¹⁷ Barbara Watson Andaya, *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006), pp. 226-32; Ann Kumar, *Prajurit Perempuan Jawa: Kesaksian Ihtwal Istana dan Politik Jawa Akhir Abad Ke-18* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2008), pp. xi-xiii.

¹⁸ Julia I. Suryakusuma, *State Ibuism: The Social Construction of Womanhood in New Order Indonesia* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2011), p. 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Julia I. Suryakusuma "The State and Sexuality in New Order Indonesia," in Lauri J. Sears (ed.), *Fantazing the Feminine in Indonesia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 98.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

improve woman's condition. In terms of Islam, modernization of Islamic education was initially done in the context of modernization of Muslim society or Islamic reform in 18th century in South-Asia, and in 19th century in other areas including in Indonesia.²³ Girls received a special attention in education though in only certain subjects, known as schools for girls. Education for girls was ubiquitous all over the world including in the West. Education for girl in the West itself is traceable back to 16th century.²⁴ In Indonesia, woman began to participate in a modern schooling system in the late of 19th century as one of the consequence of the Dutch East Indies' policy and developed in the early 20th century.

Education movement brought about at least three social practices: woman movement, education for girls itself, and woman's organization.²⁵ Figures like Cut Nyak Dien (1850-1908), and Cut Meutia (1870-1910) of Aceh, Rahma el-Yunusiah (1900-1969) and Rasuna Said (1910-1965) of West Sumatera, Dewi Sartika (1884-1947) of West Java, Nyai Ahmad Dahlan (1872-1946) and Nyi Hajar Dewantara known as Sutartinah (1890-1972) of Yogyakarta, and Kartini (1879-1904) of Central Java, etc., are examples of the central female figures in these movements.

The discourse of *Ibu* in early modern Indonesia - between late nineteenth century and early twentieth century up to Independence Day 1945- was developed not only within the area of family which was nurtured by modernization where nuclear family and house wife were nurtured to support it, but also within social engagement.²⁶ The first extension of woman's role was marked in 1928 where the concept of "Mothers of the Nation" was initially introduced in the first women's congress. The concept was characterized femininity and motherhood

²³ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 462.

²⁴ Barbara J. Whitehead (ed.), *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe; A History, 1500-1800* (NY: Garland Press, 1999), p. xv.

²⁵ Hayati Nizar, "Profiles of Women Leaders and the History of Women's Organizations in Modern Indonesia (1890 to 1945)," in M. Atho Mudhar (eds), *Women in Indonesian Society: Access, Empowerment and Opportunity* (Yogyakarta: Sunan Kalijaga Press, 2002), pp. 64-91; Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, "Role Expectation and the Aspirations of Indonesian Women in Socio-political and Religious Contexts," in Idem, pp. 154-194.

²⁶ Suryakusuma, *State Ibuism*, p. 3.

as the spirit for their social and nationalism movement.²⁷ What does the term *Ibu* mean within this frame? If we consult the participants of the congress, we find that it means “the ideal of a modest lifestyle” deploying motherhood such as caring by donating small amount of their income for the national struggle, and paying attention to widows and children.

After independence up to the end of the period which was commonly known as the Old Order (1945-1965), despite the personal encouragement of Soekarno, the president for emancipation of Indonesian women,²⁸ the concept of *Ibu* was conceptualized further by giving more restriction for woman’s social engagement, because women are “domestic creatures by nature and therefore only suited to non-political positions.”²⁹ Though certain groups coming from communist affiliation extended woman’s role into political arena, other groups of Indonesian people which were the majority did otherwise redefining female agency to be more closely to their nature due to the restoration of the land as normal situation. In normal situation political arena is not the home for women, their home is at home. The previous situation before independent is an emergency situation. It was therefore, women were allowed to engage politically.³⁰

This situation is like the situation of the two girls who did the work which is usually and commonly done by boys i.e. shepherding, mentioned in the Qur’an. They were allowed because of urgent situation that their father was elderly and defective. When the girls’ role was substituted by man, the Prophet Musa, the order was restored. (QS. 28: 23-6) The situation in the Nusantara at that time was in the struggle for independence from colonial master. As women began to be educated and aware of their potential to contribute, and male partners also though were in opposition to any opinion to push women to public need more agents to win the movement, women with the characteristic of motherhood took part in it. Soon the independence was gained women were suggested to go back to the area they

²⁷ Dzuhayatin, “Role Expectation”, p. 165.

²⁸ Soekarno, *Sarinah; Kewajiban Wanita dalam Perjuangan Republik Indonesia* (Jakarta: Jajasan Pembangunan Jakarta, 1947).

²⁹ Dzuhayatin, “Role Expectation”, p. 166.

³⁰ Rosemari Ridd, “Power of the Peerless,” in Rosemary Ridd and Hellen Calaw (eds), *Women and Political Conflict* (New York: New York University Press, 1987), p. 4, as quoted by Dzuhayatin. Dzuhayatin “Role Expectation”, pp. 166-7.

fit, i.e. home. However, a few women organizations, including those with Islamic background such as Aisyiyah and Muslimat continued to performed roles beyond containment of household.

Realizing the role of *Ibu* as important as their male partners including in public sphere, in the New Order period (1966-1998) the concept of *Ibu* was redefined again and brought into the state as part of state's apparatus. Madelon Djajadiningrat and Julia I Suryakusuma term this conceptualization as *Ibuism*. Djajadiningrat defines it as an ideology which "sanctions any action taken by a mother who looks after her family, a group, a class, a company or the state without demanding any power or prestige in return."³¹ Julia I. Suryakusuma extends it to include social and political aspect, and perceives it as "appendages of their husbands and casts female dependency as ideal." Women are seen as "dependent wives who exist for their husbands, their families, and the state."³² She relates the term to the discussion of the Indonesia state's political system used in the New Order era in which integralistic constitutional premises were applied. She then understands that the New Order's interpretation of the term state *Ibuism* is in the same line with its state basic political ideology, i.e. in its biological meanings, regardless the fact that the term includes women with no children could be also called as mothers.³³ For example, the national strategic plan of GBHN (General Guidance of the State) 1978 defined woman's role as follows: "1. A loyal backstop to and supporter of her husband; 2. Producer and educator of the future generation; 3. Caretaker of the household; 4. Complementary economic provider for the family; 5. A member of Indonesian society."³⁴ Similar perception is also found in society. Up to 1980s, women were still constructed based on their innate nature or *kodrat*, and subordinate construction was reproduced. Rochiati Wiraatmadja in 1980s identified 8 factors that obstructed girls from participating in an education programme:

³¹ Madelon Djajadiningrat-Nieuwenhuis, "Ibuism and Priyayitization: Path to Power?," in Elsbeth Locher-Scholten and Anke Nieho (eds), *Indonesian Women in Focus: Past and Present Notions* (Dordrech: Foris, 1987), p. 44; as quoted by Suryakusuma, "The State and Sexuality", pp. 101-02.

³² Suryakusuma, "The State and Sexuality", p. 98.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁴ Norma Sullivan, "Gender and Politics in Indonesia," in Maila Stivan (ed.), *Why Gender Matters in Southeast Asian Politics* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 1991), p. 64, as quoted by Dzuhayatin. Dzuhayatin, "Role Expectation", p. 169.

“1. education for girls was not necessary or its benefits were not seen yet; 2 it is considered not good for female students to study in one class with male ones, people still did not accept a co-education; 3. From a very early age girls have been helpful in doing household chores; 4. It was seen contradictory to the local custom (*adat*); 5. A girl used to get married at a very young age; 6. An educated girl was believed to have difficulty in finding her future husband and did not want to do house work anymore; 7. Though a girl might study, after that she most probably would not be absorbed in a work force easily, so her education is considered wasteful; 8. An educated wife would be arrogant towards her uneducated husband; and other similar reasons.”³⁵

In *Reformasi* era (1998-present) *Ibu* once again becomes one of themes in which it is contested by different agents and institutions. The state continued in revising it by levelling it into equal partner that shares obligations and tasks both in private and public spheres. 30% quota for woman’s representation was ratified and law enforcement to protect mother and child is institutionalized, and gender policy extended into regional level accompanying the policy of decentralization.³⁶ At the same revived forces to maintain woman’s traditional roles emerges supported by both religious groups and local ethnics. They have the same interest in responding the decentralization policy, i.e. making some efforts to have roles and opportunities to signify *Reformasi* era such as effort to interpolate religious law into positive one, or their refusal over the ratification of the regulation of Pornography.³⁷ So, *Ibu* is perceived by these groups more in their innate nature rather in cultural construction. In short, *Reformasi* era opens new game of contestation to give meanings over the concept of *Ibu*.

³⁵ Rochiati Wiraatmadja, *Dewi Sartika* (Jakarta: Depdikbud, Direktorat Sejarah dan Nilai Tradisional, Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Sejarah Nasional, 1983), p. 47.

³⁶ In reality, though, the 30% quota for women in parliament is not easy to achieve. Read Wahidah Zain Br Siregar “Political Parties, Electoral System and Women’s Representation in the 2004-2009 Indonesian Parliaments,” in CDI—a paper on policy on political governance 2006. For general account, please read UNDP, “Partisipasi Perempuan dalam Politik dan Pemerintah: Makalah Kebijakan”, 2010.

³⁷ Julia I Suryakusuma, *Agama, Seks, & Kekuasaan: Kumpulan Tulisan 1979-2012* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2012), pp. 413-23.

Interpreting Agency of *Ibu*

Barbara F. Stowasser asserts that the Qur'an provides models for an Islamic way of life.³⁸ Muslims including Indonesian Muslim scholars have been interpreting it to formulate ordinary mother and ideal one based on Islam and in particular based on the Qur'an. The Qur'an in Giddensian perspective can be seen as the key resource which inspires social system as well as social structure of Muslims people. Because interpretation of the Qur'an deals mostly with woman's role and status which are closely related to female innate nature and femininity or motherhood, interpreters construct woman's social role and status within biological and femininity necessity. Information of the Qur'an regarding these areas of woman's engagement is exploited within the frame of her as individual, member of a family, and member of other bigger groups such as mass organization or a country. Social system and structure of mother in the Qur'an are analyzed within two important discursive resources: state and Muslim scholar. So, two main themes are discussed here to shed light the discourse of *Ibu* in modern Indonesia: state's and Muslim scholars' interpretation.

State's Interpretation

In general, the state of Republic of Indonesia has been accepting modernity with certain adaptation with local values since its independence in 1945 from its nature of organization to its program development. As an influential discursive resource, the state plays its roles in every segment of life as well as religious life. The state produces certain discourses including religious interpretation, provided for people. State's interpretation here is exclusively restricted to the publication of Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding the interpretation of the Qur'an. There is an interesting development to note though, its absence from participating in producing and reproducing discourses of *Ibu* Ministry of Religious Affairs for long time began to make a relation of interpretation of the Qur'an with what the state has been reproducing, modifying, and producing discourse of *Ibu*. There are at least two different works where woman agency is mentioned or discussed: *al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya* (1972, 2004, and 2007), and *Tafsir al-Qur'an Tematik: Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan* (2012). In *al-Qur'an al-*

³⁸ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Reinterpretasi Gender: Wanita dalam al-Qur'an, Hadits dan Tafsir* (Jakarta: Pustaka Hidayah, 2001), p. 56.

Karim dan Terjemahnya (1971, 2002), the term *ummahātubum* is only translated literally as *ibu-ibu mereka* (their mothers).³⁹

Al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya interprets the term *ummahātubum* (ibu-ibu mereka/their mothers) mentioned (QS.al-Aḥzāb 33: 6) as “menempati kedudukan ibu,” (occupying the status of mother) in matters of honouring, and respecting them, and they were prohibited to remarry after the death of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁰ Besides using *ummahātubum* to refer to the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an also uses the following terms: *minkunna* (among you the wives of the Prophet) [QS. 33: 31]⁴¹ explaining their position as the wives of the Prophet which is different from the rest of Muslim women, necessity of their obedience to Allah and the Prophet, *nisā al-Nabiyyi* (Wives of the Prophet) [QS. 33: 32] showing that their status is different from other Muslim women,⁴² and *ajwāzika* (your wives) [QS. 33: 59] illustrating the ethics of wearing *jilbāb* (head covering).⁴³ The verses emphasize symbolic role and status of the wives of the prophet Muhammad as role model for women muslims, calling them as *Ibu Kebormatan segenap kaum mukminin* (honoured mothers for all community of believers).⁴⁴

To support the honourable and high even exclusive role and status of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad, Allah lies down certain rights and obligations. The wives were expected to obey, accept the real situation of the husband, stay at home and maintain the property and respectability of the family, perform moderately, wear *jilbāb*, and not remarry after the death of the Prophet. If they committed to all these necessities, they deserved to receive double rewards and honourable and exclusive role and status.⁴⁵

The publication of *Tafsir al-Qur'an Tematik: Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan* (2012) is an example par excellence. The writing of this book was initially started in 2008. The present edition is the revised version. It is one of five other similar books. These writings were expected to

³⁹ Kementerian Agama RI, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2012), p. 592.

⁴⁰ Sakho, *Al-Qur'an*, Vol. II. Section 21, p. 617.

⁴¹ Sakho, *Al-Qur'an*, Section 22, p. 3.

⁴² Sakho, *Al-Qur'an*, Section 22, p. 3.

⁴³ Sakho, *Al-Qur'an*, Section 22, p. 41.

⁴⁴ Sakho, *Al-Qur'an*, Section 22, p. 4.

⁴⁵ Sakho, *Al-Qur'an*, Section 21, p. 615-9; Section 22, p. 3-6; Section 22, p. 41-3.

give new response towards changing situations. They are outlined in similar way with the outline of the state's Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional/RPJM (National Strategic Medium Development Plan): economic development, status and role of woman, ethics in family, society and politics, conservation, and health issue.⁴⁶ With regard to *Ibu* the book discusses her role and status, but only in empirical function particularly in the family, the sign of the Qur'an which informs symbolic status of *Ibu* is absent from discussion. Its discussion on role of *Ibu* is extensive, mostly seen from the side of function: to be housewife and to provide *zurriyyah tayyibah* (good and competitive offsprings).⁴⁷ These two functions are treated as embedded parts of woman's role which cannot be neglected or abandoned. *Ibu* is discussed with as many rooms and opportunities as men have but within these two constrains. Though sharing in carrying out these two tasks is encouraged, the book still considers that these two tasks are the main works of *Ibu*. Accordingly it prefers male leadership rather than female one.⁴⁸

Muslim Scholars' Interpretation

Like in other agencies, Muslims' reaction towards the social force of modernity is dynamic, triggered by the assumption that it often challenges the existing social practices. On one side, modernity expects *Ibu* to be an equal agent in both private and public sphere, and considers some traditional values to have out-dated and in antiquity. On the other side, other social forces criticize the negative impact of modernity in either morality or culture or even in ideology in which they are assumed to have threatened traditional wisdoms. It also considers some or even sometimes in a blindfolded way of all what comes from the West to be perceived as destructive such as individualism, materialism, and liberalism.

A number of works and translation of works regarding Muslim woman and Muslim mothers had been circulated since 1980s in Indonesia. The works were written as Muslim responses towards the challenges of modernity. As far as I am aware of, there is another characteristic which marks the response of Muslim scholars towards

⁴⁶ Muchlis Muhammad Hanafi, *Tafsir al-Qur'an Tematik: Kedudukan dan Peran Perempuan* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2012), pp. xiv-xvii.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 72-3.

modernity in spite of the four characteristics proposed by Stowasser – critical use of the Medieval sources, the use of historical as well as prophetic Muhammad sources, reformation the previous description of Muslim woman’s agency, and falsification of the Western criticism⁴⁹-, that is Muslim woman’s movement. As Explained above, since early 20th century, Indonesian women including Muslim women participated in social and revolutionary movement. In Muslim world similar movements were also emergent preceded the Indonesian Muslim woman’s movement dated back to late 19th century. Fedwa El-Guindi shows that *jilbab* has been worn not only as symbol of piety, and modesty, but also as resistance. (El-Guindi. 1999 [in English], 2003 1st ed., 2005 3rd ed. [in Indonesian edition])

There are at least two interesting themes portraying the response to modernity: maintaining traditional wisdom (*al-Mar’ah al-Şāliḥah*, *Ummahāt al-Mukminin*, and *Umm al-Nabi*), and considering new voices (rationalizing traditional wisdom, and new interpretation which includes discourse on movement).

Maintaining Traditional Wisdom

Maintaining traditional wisdom may be defined as Muslim’s response towards modernity which tends to use traditional role and status of woman as standard for *Ibu* agency. Muslim scholars commonly discuss it at least in three key phrases: *al-Mar’ah al-Şāliḥah*, *Ummahāt al-Mukminin*, and *Umm al-Nabi*.

Ibu as al-Mar’ah al-Şāliḥah

One of common discourse about woman and specifically mother agency in Islam in relation to modernity is framing Islam as way of life as opposed to other social forces. Islam as way of life means that the religion provides specific guidelines for Muslims to live. This way of life is assumed to be superior over others. For example, Abu Bakar al-Asy’ari’s book *Tugas Wanita Dalam Islam* [Task of Woman in Islam] (1981)⁵⁰ places Islam as a measurement resource treating it as ideal system over others. He explains that through the Prophet Muhammad Islam has established strong foundations to honour human beings, treating man and woman the same as both have rights to pursue

⁴⁹ Stowasser, *Reinterpretasi Gender*, pp. 311-2.

⁵⁰ The book received positive response from readers for it was reprinted eight times up to 1991. Abu Bakar al-Asy’ari, *Tugas Wanita dalam Islam* (Jakarta: Media Dakwah, 1981).

education or career.⁵¹ Accordingly a woman in his view should be seen from this starting point. He assumes that woman was created within the justice of God. He identifies God's justice for woman in her femininity due to her "lemah lembut" (tenderness), and for her status as social creature.⁵² He characterizes the ideal woman as *al-Mar'ah al-Ṣāliḥah* (pious woman).⁵³ Mother agency in his view is included in the term woman. The term *Ibu* is quoted once only to illustrate the important status of mother in the parent-child relation, i.e. about the hadith stating that paradise is under the palm of the feet of mothers.⁵⁴ The Ḥadīth is used to explain how the Prophet Muhammad honoured women. He defines *al-Mar'ah al-Ṣāliḥah* as ideal woman who pays attention to her nature and femininity. Woman social engagement is allowed as far as woman herself does not neglect the task in the family.⁵⁵ In general, Abu Bakar al-Asy'ari views *al-Mar'ah al-Ṣāliḥah* as holding double burden tasks and puts households as inevitable tasks.

Islam as way of life is further elaborated by Muhammad Ali al-Hasyimi who wrote a book in 1994 in Arabic. It has been translated to other languages: Turkish, English, Indonesian, French, etc. It was translated into English in 1997, and its English version was translated into Indonesian in 2000, and reprinted in 2013. He defines *al-Mar'ah al-Ṣāliḥah* as Muslim woman "who obeys the guidance of the religion, understands the wisdom of God, follows His orders, and knows her own limits."⁵⁶ In his view an ideal Muslim woman is an honourable and active agent who plays role contributively to civilization, yet aware of her limits. He makes a self-criticism towards modern Muslim women who are inconsistent in many things in their life, paying too much attention to certain norms of Islam and neglecting other parts of it.⁵⁷ For example, we often find inconsistencies between implementing religious ceremonies and properness of clean and healthy life or vice versa. He proposes the concept of ideal Muslim women as represent-

⁵¹ al-Asy'ari, *Tugas Wanita*, pp. 6-7.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁵³ He refers to a Ḥadīth quoted here without mentioning transmitters, to QS. 4: 34, and Umar bin Khattab's view consecutively. Ibid., p. 13, p. 33, and p. 37.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 4-61.

⁵⁶ Muhammad Ali al-Hasyimi, *Muslimah Ideal: Pribadi Islami dalam al-Qur'an dan Sunnah* (Yogyakarta: Mitra Pustaka, 2000), pp. xi-ii.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. xii.

tation of holistic Islam in which he discusses them in ten themes: Muslim woman with God, with herself, with parent, with husband, with children, children of her husband's relatives, with relatives, with neighbours, with friends and brothers in religion, and with society.⁵⁸

To support his normative elaboration of ideal Muslim women, Al-Hasyimi deploys references from the formative history of Islam in addition to the massive use of the Qur'an and *Sunnah* narratives. It seems that by using this strategy of writing he has successfully constructed a counter narration of what he believes as ideal Muslim women. His sturdy point is in his way of using references, and in presenting a narration which is assumed to be authentic, as if he sends a strong message to readers that his narration is the nearest to Islamic vision as the religion that respects women to highest degree. This point can be seen clearly in the following long quotation which tends to prioritize man over woman. The quotation is not prophetic narration, but an advice of a pious Muslim woman, Umamah binti Harits, to her daughter Ummu Iyas before she got married:

"My daughter, if my advice is not proper due to nobility, you do not need it, because you have good behaviour. However it is useful as reminder for those who easily forget and as helpful for those who are wise. My daughter if woman is capable of doing anything without the help of husband due to the poverty of her father and the fact that she always needs her father, you will be the most capable agent without husband. However, woman was created for man because man was created for woman. My daughter you will leave the place where you were growing up, where you were able to walk for the first time, to another place you do not know yet, to relation with someone you do not know him well yet. By marrying you, your husband becomes your master, be like a servant to him and he will like one to you. Take from me ten characteristics which will be yours and reminder for you:

First and second, be happy as his friend, listen to and obey him because joyfulness brings peace for his soul, yet listening and obedience pleases Allah. Third and fourth, make sure that you smell good and perform beautiful; he should not see any untidy thing from you and he should not inhale unpleasant thing from your body. Kohl is the best ingredient and water is better than any rare perfume. Fifth and sixth, prepare the meal on time, and be quiet when he sleeps, because hungriness and being disturbed from sleeping will make him angry.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Seventh and eighth, take care his servants, their children, and poverty, because maintaining their poverty shows that you appreciate him, and take care of their children and servants shows good management. Ninth and tenth, do no ever tell his secret to others and do not ever resist his order, because if you tell his secret to others, you will never feel safe from his possibility to cheat. And if you do not obey, his heart is loaded with hatred over you.

Be careful my daughter, in showing your happiness in front of him when he is angry and do not show your depressed face when he is happy, because the first you are not considerate, and the second you make him unhappy. Show to him respect and appreciation as many as you can do in order he enjoys your hospitality and friendship. Be aware that you will not reach what you wish until you let his happiness over yours, and his wish over yours with any way you like or not. And may Allah choose the best for you and protect you.”⁵⁹

This quotation represents the existing norm in the second century of Hijry or the eight century CE. al-Hasyimy treats it as relevant norm with the norm of Islam today regardless the fact that it subordinates woman. He tries to show balances of rights and obligations between man and woman with the emphasis of initial woman’s obedience over man, and not the other way around. With this treatment, *Ibu* as *al-Mar’ah al-Sāliḥah* in his view is a docile agent who prioritizes the agency of her counterpart.

This kind of work culminates in the work of Islamic jurisprudence where Muslim scholars in modern context write *fiqh al-nisā’* (Islamic jurisprudence on women). One example of this kind is a book entitled *Fiqh al-Sunnah li al-Nisā’ Wa Mā Yajibu An Tu’rafā Kullu Muslimah Min Abkām* written by Abū Mālik Kamāl ibn Sayyid Salīm. He was motivated to write the book by the fact that according to him many Muslim women do not know Islamic law regarding their matters. The information about Islamic teachings regarding women is scattered in different sources of *Sunnah* and *fiqh* book. He felt compelled to compile them concisely in one treatise. The book is outlined as the book of *fiqh* beginning the discussion of purification ritual and ends with discussion of inheritance.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 237-41.

⁶⁰ Abū Mālik Kamāl ibn Sayyid Salīm, *Fiqh al-Sunnah li al-Nisā’ Wa Mā Yajibu An Tu’rafā Kullu Muslimah Min Abkām* (n.p.: Maktabah al-Taufiqiyah, 1422 H).

The works on Muslim women issues discussed above are common understanding of Muslims including in Indonesia. Similar works were also circulated and written by both Indonesian scholars and non-Indonesian ones: Djamil Suherman (1963 1st ed., 1984 2nd ed.), Sulaiman Nadawi (1987), Lembaga Darut-Tauhid (1990), al-Tahir al-Hadad (1992), Ibnu Musthafa (1993), Hamka (1996), Forum Studi Wanita IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah (1989), Muhammad Khalaf (1993), Ali Muthohhar (2000), A. Choiran Marzuki (1998), Bassam Muhammad Hamami (1993), Huzaemah T. Yanggo (2001), Sausan Fahd al-Hawwal (2004), etc. These works have one thing in common, that is maintaining traditional wisdom but with the spirit of treating the formative history textually.

Ibu And Ummahāt al-Mukminīn

Who are *Ummahāt al-Mukminīn*? They are wives of the Prophet Muhammad. Stowasser identifies 14 wives of the Prophet, three of them died before Muhammad passed away.⁶¹ Unlike the documentation of the Qur'an pertaining the agency of *Ibu* which is comprehensive, modern muslim writers tend to discuss the discourse of *Ibu* merely in terms of function or task and obligation. Symbolic function of *Ibu* seems neglected so far. Stowasser discusses it when she examines the information about *Ibu* in Sunnah . There are at least four kinds of work regarding *Ibu*: *Ummahāt al-Mukminīn* (mothers or believers), Consorts of the Messenger, and characters of the wife of Muhammad. Regarding the first kind, writers discuss wives of the prophet. For example, *al-Qur'an dan Tafsirnya*, mentions 9 wives to identify *Ummahāt al-Mu'minin*, Sumayyah Abdul Halim discusses 13 of them.⁶² Another popular work is written by Aisyah Abdurahman Bint Syāthi. In her work *Tarājim Sayyidāt Bait al-Nubunwah* [Biographies of the Honourable women of the House of Prophecy] (1985), she frames the life of the wives of the Prophet Muhammad and the description about them as mentioned in the Qur'an and Ḥadīths as reference to

⁶¹ Stowasser, *Reinterpretasi Gender*, pp. 220-23.

⁶² They are Khadijah binti Khuwailid, Saudah binti Zam'ah, Aisyah binti Abu Bakar al-Siddiq, Hafshah binti Umar al-Faruq, Ummu Salamah binti abu Umayyah, Juwairiyyah binti al-Harits, Zainab binti Jahsy, Shafiyah binti Huyay, Ummu Habibah Ramlah binti Abu Sufyan, Mariyah al-Qibtiyyah, Raihanah binti Zaid, Maemunah binti al-Harits, and zaenab binti Khuzaimah. Sumayyah Abdul Halim, *Ummahāt al-Mukminin: Meneladani Kitabahan Hati Istri-istri Rasulullah Saw* (Yogyakarta: Mitra Pustaka, 2003), pp. vii-xii.

describe *al-Mar'ah al-Ṣāliḥah*. *al-Mar'ah al-Ṣāliḥah* in her view may be described as woman who is committed in worship, compassionate, ever searching for husband's consent, child bearing and rearing, self-control, self-esteemed, and proud, defending in the name of Islam, knowledgeable in Islamic teachings and law, wise in advising in religious matters, and keeper of the house of the family.⁶³

The second kind is written for example by Aba Firdaus al-Halwani (1996, 2003). Al-Halwani's basic assumption is that Islam honours woman. He identifies that the esteem of woman in Islam lays on two folds. The normative information where the Qur'an dedicates a significant portion in dealing with woman, and historical information where ideal women are found in the formative history of Islam is either from the *Sunnah* or *Sirah al-Nabawiyah* (biography of the Prophet). For example, he discusses women who were closed to and took care of the Prophet such as Umi Hanik, Lubabah, Arwa, Umu Aiman, Halimah, and Saima, in addition to the wives of the prophet.⁶⁴

Another kind, different writers write different profiles of the wives of the Prophet such as Muhammad Azizia (1999) who wrote the wisdom of Khadijah, and Sulaiman an-Nadwi (2000) who wrote the beloved wife of the Prophet, Aishah. In these works, the authors idealizes accordingly Khadijah and Aisyah as ideal mothers who were dedicated, loyal, pious, philanthropist, and wise for the case of Khadijah, and knowledgeable for the case of Aisyah.⁶⁵

Similar with the works relating to Muslim woman in general, the works related to mother has also a further detail description of the role and status of mother in Islam, written for example by Wafa Binti Abdul Aziz al-Suwailim. The original title is *Aḥkām al-Ummi fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī* and translated into Indonesian as *Fikih Ummahat: Himpunan Hukum Islam Khusus Ibu* (2013). In it, she collects all information regarding motherhood matters starting from definition and status of mother to themes of Islamic law following the structure of Hanafi

⁶³ As Quoted by Stowasser from Aisyah Abdurrohman Binti Syāthi, *Tarajim Sayyidat Bait al-Nubuwwah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1984), pp. 311-2, 352, 317-8, 352, 271, 323, 365, 322-3, 364, 368, 387, 297, 331, 311 and 332. Stowasser, *Reinterpretasi Gender*, p. 329.

⁶⁴ Aba Firdaus al-Halwani. *Wanita-wanita Pendamping Rasulullah* (Yogyakarta: Mitra Pustaka, 1996), pp. 5-41.

⁶⁵ Mahmudah Azizia, *Kearifan Siti Khadijah* (Gresik: Putra Pelajar, 1999), pp. 17-34; Sulaiman an-Nadwi, *Memoar Aisyah r.a.: Istri Kinasih Baginda Rasul Saw* (Surabaya: Risalah Gusti, 2000), pp. v-vi and pp. 143-6.

school of law's writing.⁶⁶ Similar to ibn Sayyid Salim's work, her work also focuses on the norm of ideal Muslim woman/mother. Her work aims at refuting the discourse of the enemy of Islam which tries to eliminate the norms and tradition of Muslim woman by promoting woman's emancipation.⁶⁷ She concludes that Islam honours *Ibu's* agency by prioritizing and protecting her.⁶⁸

Ibu And Umm al-Nabī

Another source to formulate ideal mother is mother of prophet. Among writers who write this area is Aisyah Abdurahman Bint Syāthi who wrote a book entitled *Ummu al-Nabi Ṣalla Allāh 'Alaihi wa Sallām* (1965).⁶⁹ The book was translated to Indonesian *Ibunda Para Nabi* (1992 4th ed.). She does so because in it, she also discusses other mothers of prophets: mother of Ismail (Siti Hajar), of Musa (QS. Al-Qashash: 7, mentions Ummu Mūsā), and of Isa (Maryam). Her main concern is discussing story of honourable woman⁷⁰ by letting the sources tell its story.⁷¹ Stowasser argues that Bint Syāthi's way of framing her narration of ideal mother is not the same with the method she uses in interpreting the Qur'an in which she applies a methodology developed by Amin Khuli (d. 1967), known as literary approach. In its place, Bint Syāthi bases her work on the Tradition and Medieval sources with a romantic way of reading. Accordingly she comes up with a conservative narration of ideal mother or Muslim woman in Islam.⁷² However, she refutes others particularly that of Western scholars or those who use Western tradition of scholarship by saying that that the best way of understanding the history of the figure like Siti Aminah, the mother of Prophet Muhammad, is by entrusting the people of Arabs themselves understand their history. So, an observer can understand it rightly and emphatically. In this case, she believes that the Qur'an, Sunnah, *Sīrah Muḥammad*, history of Arabs in general

⁶⁶ Wafa Binti Abdul Aziz As-Suwailim, *Fiqh Ummahat: Himpunan Hukum Islam Kbusus Ibu* (Jakarta Timur: Ummul Qura, 2013), pp. iii-xi, and p. xviii.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 487-92.

⁶⁹ Stowasser, *Reinterpretasi Gender*, p. 307.

⁷⁰ Aisyah Abdurrahman Bint Syāthi, *Ibunda Para Nabi* (Solo: Pustaka Mantiq, 1992), p. 18.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷² Stowasser, *Reinterpretasi Gender*, pp. 309-10.

written by its people are important sources to construct history of the figure like Siti Aminah.⁷³ Bint Syāthi herself bases on these sources in identifying characteristics found in the society where Siti Aminah came from. For example she finds that Siti Aminah ancestor is from the honourable Quraish lineage, quoting a Hadīth, “I was born from Kinanah Tribe, descent of Quraish, the honourable and respected clan among Arabs.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, she finds that Siti Aminah Binti Wahab is daughter of the respected tribe of Banī Zuhra who was beautiful and lived in seclusion before married to Abdullah bin Abdul Muthalib. She quotes Ibn Ishaq who illustrates Siti Aminah as “the most beautiful girl among the Quraish tribe, and the most respected ancestor and status.”⁷⁵

Bint Syāthi confers Siti Aminah’s role and status as *Ibu* both naturally and symbolically. Naturally, she discusses Aminah’s pregnancy normally just like the experience of other mothers. In addition she emphasizes the way Aminah carried out the task that is with full sincerity. In this point she illustrates Aminah as young dedicated mother who grew up as young and healthy girl, married to young and healthy boy, Abdullah bin Abdul Muthalib, got pregnant and delivered a baby normally. She did child rearing and bearing with the help of her dedicated servants and other two mothers who also breastfed her baby, Muhammad, though shortly in only six years.⁷⁶

Symbolically, Bint Syāthi exploits the fact that Siti Aminah is the mother of the Messenger Muhammad by tracing back to the descents of both Aminah and Abdullah, history of their life before and after marriage, and her son treatment especially to her after passing away, and generally to mothers in Muhammad’s surrounding, and his influence since then and up to present.⁷⁷ With all these qualities Bint Syāthi argues that Siti Aminah’s life particularly that of her role and status as the mother of the Prophet Muhammad deserves outmost recognition and respect.

The Qur’an also discusses the mothers of other agents. One of them is Maryam, the mother of the Prophet Isa. Studies on this matter is called as Mariology, and a number of works done by Muslims and

⁷³ Syāthi, *Ibunda Para Nabī*, p. 124.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 166-78.

non-Muslims have been circulated such as Abdul el-Jalil (1950), V. Courtois (1954), Geoffrey Parrinder (1965), Roger Arnaldez (1980), Jane McAuliffe (1991), Patrick Pahlavi, and Aliah Schleifer (1998, 2004 in Indonesian version). In these works Maryam is discussed within different framework, emphatic towards Islam and Muslims or otherwise.⁷⁸ Of emphatic works is Aliah Schleifer's works. She writes two important works on this matter, her thesis, *Motherhood in Islam* and her dissertation *The Blessed Virgin of Islam*.⁷⁹ Schleifer shortens the distance of this difference among the previous works by bridging them through appreciation of both traditions Islamic and Western tradition.⁸⁰ In her view, Islam discusses Maryam more in symbolic function rather than natural one. QS. 3: 43 and QS. 66: 12 are treated as the basis of her discussion about Maryam. Maryam is narrated as virgin who delivers a baby, the Prophet Isa. This fact is against the nature and common assumption of people at that time which narrates delivering a baby was possible if only there was a conception through sexual intercourse. It happened to Maryam not based on this natural process, but on the command of Allah. Maryam is ordered to obey, and she did it very well.⁸¹

Schleifer treats little information about Maryam's playing her natural task such as being pregnant, delivering a baby, and child rearing and bearing as natural necessity in which she also experiences them just like other women do. The difference is back to the context that the way she gets pregnant which does not follow the common practice is the central argument of all discussion, including of her role as *Ibu*. Schleifer treats this fact as the context of her discussion to illustrate symbolic role of the motherhood of Maryam. If Siti Aminah plays role as mother halted only when Muhammah was six years old, Maryam raises Isa up to his adolescence even witnesses his crucifixion. This symbolizes the totality of mother's dedication for the betterment of her son. The Prophet Isa says as recorded in the Qur'an "And dedicate to my mother, and she does not train me an arrogant and dangerous."

⁷⁸ T.J. Winter, "Pengantar," in *Maryam Sang Perawan Suci* (Jakarta: Pustaka Hidayah, 2004), p. 14.

⁷⁹ Gray Henry, "Mengenang Aliah Schleifer," in *Maryam Sang Perawan Suci* (Jakarta: Pustaka Hidayah, 2004), p. 12.

⁸⁰ Winter, "Pengantar", p. 14.

⁸¹ Aliah Schleifer, *Maryam Sang Perawan Suci* (Jakarta: Pustaka Hidayah, 2004), p. 91.

(QS. 19: 32)⁸² Schleifer describes her as the mother who plays a role model which symbolizes virginity and holiness, submission, obedience, and faith. For example, the Qur'an illustrates her as exemplary for the believers in the QS. 3:17 and QS. 33:35 where the value of patience, consistency, philanthropy, asking forgiveness, obedience, trustfulness, fasting, and protecting respect characterize the personality of Maryam.⁸³ With these values her role elevates to the symbol of spiritual achievement in which by some considered equal to her son in prophecy and near to the level of Muhammad in spirituality. This symbolic function signifies the attitude of Islam towards Christianity in particular and as example par excellence towards others which is tolerant and respectful.⁸⁴

Ibu and New Voices

As discussed earlier, modernization as social force does certainly influence female agency of *Ibu*. In this case, there at least two kinds of response towards modern social forces like democracy, human rights, and gender equity: rationalizing traditional wisdom, and new interpretation.

Rationalizing Traditional Wisdom

One of the trends of the agency of *Ibu* in modern Indonesian context is rationalization of traditional values. Muslim scholars including that of from Indonesia interprets the agency of *Ibu* by on one side maintaining traditional wisdom, and on the other side, considering new arguments, and undertakings. The trend receives significant number of proponents, and constitutes majority of the new voice group. The attitude refers to the motto of reformists in Islam *al-muhāfadah bi al-qadīm al-sāliḥ wa al-akhdū bi al-jadiid al-aṣlah* (maintaining traditional wisdom and taking the best one of new norms). The way they consider new voice by treating woman's *Kodrat* as terms of reference to reproduce and produce social system and structure. They are interested in formulating religious values to respond social phenomena and problems. In the case of mother they discuss values on the importance or signification of, for example, breastfeeding for a baby. The way they explore it is through tracing social practices in the

⁸² Ibid., p. 75.

⁸³ Ibid., pp.158-9.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp.157-67.

history before Islam, in the time of revelation or formative history of Islam when babies were not only breastfed by their biological mothers, and history in modern time as well when a number of giving milk varies. Their thoughts are commonly influenced by Muhammad Abduh's works. It was Abduh who treated the Qur'an as *hidayah* (divine guidance) and not as science or history as assumed by some. They identify it as Islamic values or norms to be followed by Muslims or even human kinds in general.

One of the leading Indonesian scholars in the field of Qur'anic studies is Quraish Shihab. He may be included to this group because in his works he tends to rationalizes traditional wisdom and takes advantage of modern information to support his understanding. In the case of mother agency, he supports female public engagement by rationalizing the interpretation of the Qur'an and Ḥadīth, and taking into account the opinion of modern Muslim Indonesians which are Shāfi'ī followers, and moderate. He makes stone unturned to make sense that *Ibu's* agency in Islam is dynamic and not passive. He deploys different sources to do so from the rationalization of woman's *Kodrat* and its implication, philosophy, psychology to Quranic studies. For example, when he discusses the possibility of woman's leadership and preference of man's leadership, he quotes Muhammad Thahir ibn Asyur (a Tunisian Scholar), Anton Nemiliov (a Russian scholar), Murtadha Muthahari (Shiite scholar), Abu al-Zahra al-Najafi (translator of Muthahari's *Nizām Ḥuqūq al-Mar'ah*), Reek, Cleo Dalon, Mauriche Bardeche, Thabari, Ghazali, Fakhruddīn al-Rāzi, ibn 'Arabi, and Atha, to support his stand.⁸⁵ Similar works have been also circulated among Indonesian readers such as Yunahar Ilyas (1997), Zaetunah Subhan (2002, 2004a, 2004b, etc.), Nasaruddin Umar (1999 1st ed., 2010 2nd ed.), Hamka Hasan (2009), etc.

New Interpretation

Another group is scholars who try to give new interpretation towards woman's agency including that of mother one. They discuss *Ibu* in larger social practices. They discuss *Ibu* in terms of social system as well as social structure. These areas of social practice are the area of analysis of social scientists. Religious scholars in particular interpreters discuss *Ibu* from the side of both structure and system. Their

⁸⁵ Quraish Shihab, *Tafsir al-Mishbāb: Pesan, Kesan dan Keserasian al-Qur'an*, Vol. 2 (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2000), pp. 402-12.

disciplines are social sciences or interdisciplinary discipline. Interestingly these interpreters or more exactly Muslim scholars who have interest in Qur'anic interpretation write their works not merely in Qur'anic studies tradition. They prefer deploying interdisciplinary approach to help them elaborate their constructions. For example, Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin writes woman's issues from gender and sociological perspective. Her undergraduate study is Islamic law, master focus is sociology, and her concern for post graduate is Islamic and gender studies. She discusses *Ibu* agency within the framework of social science using categories like role expectation, power relation and gender perspective.

In her view, a matter of *Ibu* is not only a matter of function but also a matter of existence which should be on equal footing between genders. She relates her discussion of *Ibu* both with functional task, and with symbol one to examine role and existence of *Ibu* in Indonesian context. By doing this she puts religious aspect in the construction of social system and structure of *Ibu* as an ideological force which is influential. So, female agency of *Ibu* in her views "has become the central woman's role in the New Order" vintage, bringing housewifization and motherhood characteristics as the main ingredients in construction of woman's role and status in Indonesia. Anchoring values of state's *ibuisim* into religious teachings is a kind of legitimacy. Accordingly the state can expect women to play roles as expected by the state, i.e. supporting agents of the state's program development.⁸⁶ What happened is that to great extent the New Order has successfully brought woman's participation of the state's program development within its framework.

Another new voice is characterized by the performance of the female agent herself, usually called in Giddensian perspective performing-agent. In this regard, there are actually many Muslim scholars -men and women- who feel invited to write. Their writing can be classified basically into two kinds: textual writing and contextual writing. Both textual and contextual interpretation share in considerably the same themes: the role and the status of *Ibu* in family, social organizations, professional work place, and in the country. It is hardly enough to find interpreters who interpret social construction aspect of *Ibu*. The Qur'an's information about symbolic role of *Ibu* such what mentions in the QS. 33: 6 as explained above does not

⁸⁶ Dzuhayatin, "Role Expectation", p. 169.

inspire them yet. It is may be because their attention mostly on values or moral aspect of the Qur'an. Musda Mulia may be treated as an example of this kind of agent. Her undergraduate degree was from IAIN Alauddin, Makasar majoring Arabic literature. Her magister was from IAIN Jakarta majoring in Islamic studies, and PhD was from the same institution when she took magister, majoring in Islamic Politics studies (1997). She is activist and prolific writer. She has been active in advocating plural and egalitarian Islam and writing some works on these issues. One of her anthologies entitled quite provocatively *Muslimah Reformis: Perempuan Pembaharu Keagamaan* (2005) [Reformist Muslim Woman: Female Reformer of Religion] signifies this kind of interaction of performing-agent. Referring to her, characteristics of *Ibu* reflects a different picture of female agency. In her writings she criticizes others who discuss the theme *Ibu* in its biological and femininity necessity. Basing her writing on the vision of Islam as *rahmatan li al-'ālamīn* and *maqāṣid al-Syarā'ah* or universal values of Islamic teachings she reinterprets certain number of the Qur'an regarding gender issues. In her hand, the Qur'an should be interpreted in inclusive as well as egalitarian spirit. By this stand, she sends her voice loudly and her actions bravely.

Another example may refer to KH. Hussein Muhammad. He writes a number of works on Islam and gender issues such as *Fiqh Perempuan* (2001), *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan* (2004), and *Ijtihad Kyai Husein* (2011). He spent most of his time for informal religious education in pesantren. He pursued his education at Lirboyo Pesantren, Kediri, East Java and continued his undergraduate level at PTIQ (perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Al-Qur'an or Institute for Quranic Studies). His Master degree was obtained from University of al-Azhar, Cairo, Egypt. Since then he teaches at Dar al-Tauhid pesantren, Arjawaringin, Cirebon.⁸⁷

Husein Muhammad does not use *tafsir* to approach the Qur'an due to its nature which tends to base its operation mainly on text. Instead, he uses *ta'mil* to extend the search for meanings to the objective of the Qur'an. It seems that he is influenced by modernists who treat the Qur'an as *hudan li al-Nās* (the book of guidance for human beings) and *rahmah li al-'Ālamīn* (blessings for the Universe), initially promoted by Muhammad Abduh. Husein Muhammad also bases his understanding

⁸⁷ Husein Muhammad, *Ijtihad Kyai Husein: Upaya Membangun Keadilan Gender* (Jakarta: Rahima, 2011), p. 439.

of the Qur'an on these two principles.⁸⁸ In so doing, he asserts the importance of causality and the objective of text. For him, causality searches for rational reasoning and objective for moral purpose.⁸⁹ He calls this approach as a sociological and contextual point of view.⁹⁰ He understands the Qur'an as having informative and prescriptive values; the former consists of God's information about reality, and the later of God's command and prohibition.⁹¹ God's information is basically existing social practices documented by God. Underlined the Qur'anic teachings in his view is universal message and cases which responded the reality of the time before revelation, the time of revelation and the projection time. He characterizes the Qur'an as having universal purposes of *kemaslahatan* (public utility), *kerahmatan* (mercifulness), *keadilan* (justice) and *kebijaksanaan* (wisdom).⁹²

Based on reflection above, Husein Muhammad understands *Ibu* agency within woman's agency and in this contextual perspective, treating supposedly discriminative verses towards woman as conditional and tactical as the contexts of human beings from a place to another is different. He believes that the Qur'an actually consistently maintains its universal messages, while it wisely takes the existing social practices into consideration. *Ibu* agency in the Qur'an in his view is as dynamic as *Bapak* (father) one. Like *Bapak*, *Ibu* has also space and opportunity to engage. In matters where priority is given to men like in the case of marriage, inheritance, and public engagement, the Qur'an accommodated the context of the revelation in which it supported patriarchal society.⁹³ The situation today that includes in modern Indonesia is far different from the past because women have been receiving better education, and working in public places as men do. These recent social practices are powerful and determinative. It is therefore criticizing traditional female role, and status, questioning the placement of women as second class with their double burden. Husein Muhammad believes that female agency has not theological problem in adopting new voices due to the wisdom of Islamic universal message.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. xvi.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. xlvii.

⁹⁰ Husein Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan: Refleksi Kiai atas Wacana Agama dan Gender* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2007), p. 198.

⁹¹ Muhammad, *Ijtihad Kyai Husein*, p. xvii.

⁹² Muhammad, *Fiqh Perempuan*, pp. 186-7.

⁹³ Muhammad, *Ijtihad Kyai Husein*, p. 38.

In his view, task and obligation of men and women or of husband and wife are shared between them, one obligation or task, one another is open for both agent as each of them has been improved to the level and each of them can share many things in their family life as well as public one. For example, he does not mind if a woman becomes head of the family, head of a country or many others as long as she is capable of, and committed to the family or public concern.⁹⁴

Moreover, Husein Muhammad discusses female agency in another level, discourse of woman's movement. In this case he proposes what he terms as *Ukhuwwah Nisa'iyah* (Sisterhood Solidarity). He defines it as sisterhood or solidarity of the same woman's fate and fight to rediscover humanity rights which had been uprooted by social system created by people.⁹⁵ For him, one way of rediscovering women's rights is respecting *Ibu*. *Ibu* in his writings is often termed as *perempuan* (woman) as reflected in his deduction of QS. 31: 14 in which the Qur'an terms *ummu*/mother to illustrate the reproductive function and situation of a woman who gets pregnant. For instance, he uses term of *kesehatan reproduksi perempuan* (woman's reproductive health) to describe *Ibu*'s reproductive health.⁹⁶ He does this may be because the term *perempuan* (woman) is broader than the term *Ibu*. So, whenever he discusses woman as long as it relates to the matters of *Ibu* usually deal with, it can be inferred that he discusses *Ibu* agency. In general, he does not identify which period of history in Muslim society that uprooted woman's fate and fight. Instead, he makes a contrast between the history in the time of Prophet Muhammad when women enjoyed certain degree of rights, justice, freedom, and respect, and the rest of it up to present time when women had been suffering significant degree from discrimination and injustice.⁹⁷ In this sense, he pays a lot of attention to woman's movement both in discourse level or action one. He writes for example a number of themes, such as female head of family, woman's reproductive health, the importance of monogamy, female *ulama*, woman's rights, female worker, advocating for woman, woman trafficking, woman's freedom, etc. Meanwhile, he himself has been also active in woman's movements such as leading member of

⁹⁴ See for instance his discussion about head of family, female *ulama*, female worker etc. Muhammad, *Ijtihad Kyai Husein*, pp. 49-68, pp. 155-180, and pp. 233-248.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 181-95.

Rahima, an NGO which deals with Islamic discourse on gender issues and member of Indonesian Woman's Rights Commission. For his part in this discourse and movement he received appreciation from the Government of America as the recipient of "Heroes Acting to End Modern Day Slavery."⁹⁸

Conclusion

Having discussed above it can be concluded that the discourse of *Ibu* in modern Indonesian context in Giddenian's and Lloyd's perspective reveals a contrast description between the Qur'an's documentation and Indonesian Muslim interpretation. The Qur'an actually views *Ibu* in inclusive and egalitarian picture, yet with considerate appreciation of the existing social practices of mother agency. In contrast, their interpretation of the subject matter often falls in the Qur'anic information which is seemingly discriminative and subordinate towards *Ibu* as the legitimacy. This is one stand but dominant in spite of another one which is still insignificant, but its potency is growing as new social forces such as human rights, democracy, gender movements support the stand. Accordingly, these new voices are beginning to make significant contribution to the discourse of woman in general and *Ibu* in particular. []

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⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 440.

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