

THE SPREAD OF MUSLIM FEMINIST IDEAS IN INDONESIA

Before and After the Digital Era

Nina Nurmila

State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung

email: nina.nurmila@uinsgd.ac.id

Abstract

Internet has changed the way how knowledge is spread. This paper describes the spread of Muslim feminist ideas in Indonesia. It answers the questions of what constitute feminist ideas, how Muslim feminist ideas spread before and after the Digital Era and what challenges and opportunities provided by the internet that hinder and help the spread of these ideas. Muslim feminism has spread in Indonesia since the early 1990s through the translation of the works of non-Indonesian Muslim feminists such as Fatima Mernissi, Riffat Hassan, Asghar Ali Engineer and Amina Wadud. Since 2010, the increasing use of internet among Indonesians has made the spread of Muslim feminist ideas faster. However, it is challenging that conservative groups also mobilized the internet to oppose Muslim feminist ideas. Another challenge is that not all Indonesian Muslims have easy access to the internet and therefore Indonesian Muslim feminists still have to adopt various offline media such as seminars or radio to spread their ideas.

[Internet telah mengubah cara penyebaran pengetahuan. Artikel ini akan menjelaskan penyebaran ide-ide feminis Muslim di Indonesia. Artikel ini akan menjawab pertanyaan tentang apa yang dimaksud dengan ide-ide feminis Muslim, bagaimana ide-ide feminis Muslim tersebar sebelum dan sesudah Era Digital dan tantangan serta kesempatan apa yang diberikan oleh internet yang menghalangi dan membantu penyebaran ide-ide ini. Feminis Muslim telah tersebar di Indonesia sejak awal tahun 1990-an melalui penerjemahan

karya-karya Muslim feminis yang bukan dari Indonesia seperti Fatima Mernissi, Riffat Hassan, Asghar Ali Engineer dan Amina Wadud. Sejak tahun 2010, meningkatnya penggunaan internet dikalangan orang Indonesia telah membuat penyebaran ide-ide Muslim feminis lebih cepat. Akan tetapi, terdapat tantangan yaitu bahwa kelompok konservatif pun menggunakan internet untuk menentang ide-ide feminis Muslim. Tantangan lainnya adalah bahwa tidak semua Muslim Indonesia memiliki akses yang mudah terhadap internet, oleh karena itu para feminis Muslim Indonesia masih juga harus menggunakan berbagai media di luar jaringan seperti seminar atau radio untuk menyebarkan ide-ide mereka.]

Keywords: Muslim feminism, Indonesia, digital era, conservatism

A. Introduction

There have been many definitions of feminism. Cambridge Dictionary defines feminism as “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state”.¹ According to Badran, “feminism is broadly construed to include an understanding that women have suffered forms of subordination or oppression because of their sex, and advocacy of ways to overcome them to achieve better lives for women, and for men, within the family and society.”² Similarly, Karam defines feminism “as an individual or collective awareness that women have been and continue to be oppressed in diverse ways and for diverse reasons, and attempts towards liberation from this oppression involving a more equitable society with improved relations between women and men”.³ Based on these definitions of

¹ “Feminism”, *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/feminism>, accessed 28 Dec 2020.

² Margot Badran, “Competing Agenda: Feminists, Islam and the State in Nineteenth -and Twentieth- Century Egypt”, in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. by Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1991), p. 202.

³ Azza M. Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State: Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 5.

feminism, in my earlier work,⁴ I define feminism as “an awareness of the existing oppression or subordination of women because of their sex and as working to eliminate such oppression or subordination and to achieve equal gender relations between men and women”.

Feminism is not homogenous. In the West, there are many types of feminism such as liberal, radical, socialist, Marxist, socialist, existentialist, postmodern, multicultural and global feminism as well as ecofeminism.⁵ Following Karam’s categorization of feminism in Egypt,⁶ I categorize Indonesian feminism into three groups: secular, Islamist and Muslim feminism. Indonesian secular feminists, coming from any religious affiliation either they are Muslims, Christians or other adherents of religion, use national or international law to achieve gender justice. Indonesian Islamist feminists believe that men and women are complementary, in which men are the family leaders and women are housewives. They resist being labeled as feminists and in fact, tend to be anti-feminist though they are active in public life. This group is more appropriately called Islamist women, or the conservatives, not Islamist feminists. Indonesian Muslim feminists believe that the Qur’an is a strong basis for gender equality, but it has been interpreted according to patriarchal lenses. Therefore, to achieve gender justice, the Qur’an should be re-interpreted from an equal gender perspective.⁷ This paper describes the spread of Muslim feminist ideas in Indonesia. In what follows, this paper will explain what constitutes Muslim feminist ideas, how did these ideas spread before and after the Digital Era, and what are the challenges and opportunities provided by the internet to spread Muslim feminists ideas in the Digital Era. Digital Era is the era under a massive influence of the internet and digital technologies (such as cellular phone and

⁴ Nina Nurmila, *Women, Islam and Everyday Life: Renegotiating Polygamy in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 4.

⁵ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1989).

⁶ Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State*.

⁷ Nina Nurmila, “The Influence of Global Muslim Feminism on Indonesian Muslim Feminist Discourse”, *Al-Jāmi’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 49, no. 1 (2011), pp. 33–64.

computer); or the current era in which digitalization is predominant.⁸ Digitalization is the conversion of text, pictures, or sound into a digital form that can be processed by a computer.

B. Muslim Feminist Ideas

Originally, the term “feminism” is derived from the French word *feminisme*.⁹ Not all people, especially in the East, can accept this term. The term “feminism” is often seen negatively and misunderstood. In post-colonial Muslim societies including Egypt, the term “feminism” is stereotyped with enmity between men and women and a call for immorality in the form of sexual promiscuity for women.¹⁰ Similarly, in Indonesia, Ratna Megawangi,¹¹ for example, assumes that feminism oppresses the role of housewife. This assumption was rejected by Myra Diarsi¹² that feminism is not against the role of housewife. Further elaboration on resistance and acceptance of feminism was made by Etin Anwar¹³ who argues that initially most Muslim women resisted feminism, but since the beginning of the 1990s there has been a convergence between the idea of feminism and progressive Islamic values in which both of them argue for justice.

Opposition to feminism, in my opinion, resulted from the lack of understanding about feminism as well as misogynistic attitude toward women. Misogynistic attitude is hatred toward women, consciously or unconsciously. Consciously, someone, either men or women may dislike the success of women, because they are women. Unconsciously, a teacher may discriminate against women, for example, by giving female students

⁸ “What is Digital Era”, *IGI Global*, <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/ethical-values-and-responsibilities-of-directors-in-the-digital-era/7612>, accessed 28 Dec 2020.

⁹ Neeraj Rana, “Feminism in Literature”, *International Journal of Advanced Educational Research*, vol. 3, no. 1 (2018), pp. 428–9.

¹⁰ Karam, *Women, Islamisms and the State*, pp. 5–6.

¹¹ Ratna Megawangi, “Feminisme: Menindas Peran Ibu Rumah Tangga”, *Ulumul Qur’an*, vol. 5, nos. 5–6 (1994), pp. 30–41.

¹² Myra Diarsi, “Feminisme Tidak Anti terhadap Peran Ibu Rumah Tangga: Wawancara bersama Myra Diarsi”, *Ulumul Qur’an*, vol. 5, nos. 5–6 (1994), p. 33.

¹³ Etin Anwar, *A Genealogy of Islamic Feminism: Pattern and Change in Indonesia* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

lower grades for the same achievement with male students. In addition, patriarchal culture places adult male (the patriarch) in the central position and put women and children in a subordinate position.¹⁴ Most people have been acculturated to live in this patriarchal system and therefore they tend to see this system as normal. When they see something different from this culture, such as equality between men and women, they regard it as foreign and not normal. Therefore, they consider the feminist movement a threat to patriarchal culture and system.

Different from the majority of Muslims who tend to take for granted injustice toward women, as expressed for example in many influential books of *tafsir* such as *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, *Tafsir Jalalayn*, and books of *fiqh* such as *Syarh 'Uqud al-Lujjayn*, as well as Indonesian Marriage Law and Compilation of Islamic Law,¹⁵ Muslim feminists believe that God is just and therefore it is impossible that the messages of God written in the Qur'an support injustice.¹⁶ The fact that some Qur'anic verses are used to support injustice toward women, some Muslim feminists call for a reinterpretation of these verses. The following are some of the examples of Muslim feminist reinterpretation of the Qur'an on polygamy, women's

¹⁴ Nina Nurmila, "Pengaruh Budaya Patriarki Terhadap Pemahaman Agama Dan Pembentukan Budaya", *Karsa*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2015), pp. 1–16.

¹⁵ See for example *Ibn Kathir's* and *Jalalayn's* interpretations of the Qur'anic verse 4: 34 which tend to subordinate women by stating that men are superior to and better than women in terms of knowledge, reason, guardianship, etc. which can be accessed at Ibn Kathir, "An Nisa': 34", *Altafsir.com*, <https://www.altafsir.com/tafasir.asp?tmadhno=0&ttafsirno=7&tsorano=4&tayahno=34&tdisplay=yes&page=3&size=1&languageid=1>, accessed 16 Dec 2020; Jalalayn, "An Nisa'; 34", *Altafsir.com*, <https://www.altafsir.com/Tafasir.asp?tMadhNo=1&tTafsirNo=8&tSoraNo=4&tAyahNo=34&tDisplay=yes&UserProfile=0&LanguageId=1>, accessed 16 Dec 2020; Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Nawawi, *Terjemah Uqudulujain: Etika Berumah Tangga* (Jakarta: Pustaka Amani, 2000). See also Indonesian Marriage Law No. 1/1974, for example Article 4 which discriminates against women by treating women and men differently, allowing men to be polygamous, and Article 31 which gives leadership in the family only to male regardless of their ability/inability to financially support the family. Similar contents of the articles are written in the Compilation of Islamic Law, see *UU Perkawinan*, 1/1974, <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Home/Details/47406/uu-no-1-tahun-1974>, accessed 29 Dec 2020. *Kompilasi Hukum Islam*, 1/1991, <https://putusan3.mahkamahagung.go.id/peraturan/detail/11e9da0c8167c5c0b9c2313930343435.html>, accessed 29 Dec 2020.

¹⁶ Nurmila, "The Influence of Global Muslim Feminism on Indonesian Muslim Feminist Discourse".

leadership, inheritance, and guardianship.

1. *Muslim Feminist Reinterpretation of the Qur'an on Polygamy*

Muslim interpretations of polygamy can be categorized into three groups based on the method and sources they use to justify their opinion.¹⁷ The first group interprets that Islam allows polygamy based on the literal reading of some parts of the Qur'an 4: 3, not from the beginning and not until the last part of the verse: "... marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. ...".¹⁸

The second group allows polygamy if a husband can fulfill certain criteria and can be just among his wives; if not, the husband should have only one wife. This interpretation is also based on the literal reading of some parts of the Qur'an 4: 3, but they quote longer part of the verse than the first group: "... marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one ...".¹⁹

The third group prohibits polygamy based on the contextual reading of the whole verses of the Qur'an 4: 2, 3 and 129. To explain the standpoint of the third group requires an explanation longer than to explain the standpoint of the first and the second group. This will begin by explaining the context of the revelation of the Qur'anic verse 4: 3. The Qur'anic verse 4: 3 was revealed after the war of Uhud, when many Muslim soldiers died, leaving their wife and children have no guardian. The Prophet Muhammad then assigned some of his companions to take care of the orphans, their mothers, and their properties. However, some of the guardians did not do their job well by exchanging their property with better property of the orphans or eating some of the orphans' properties. The orphans did not know what was going on, but God certainly knew this and warned the Prophet's companions that what they did was a great sin. This warning is written in the Qur'anic verse 4: 2;

And give to the orphans their properties and do not substitute the

¹⁷ Nurmila, *Women, Islam and Everyday Life*, pp. 61–3.

¹⁸ Saheeh International (tran.), "Surah An-Nisa - 3", *Qur'an.com*, <https://Qur'an.com/an-nisa?locale=en&font=v1&reading=false&translations=20%2C131>, accessed 17 Aug 2019.

¹⁹ *ibid*

defective [of your own] for the good [of theirs]. And do not consume their properties into your own. Indeed, that is ever a great sin.²⁰

In addition, there was a prophet saying (hadith) narrated by Aisyah that some of these guardians wanted to marry the orphans because they were interested in the beauty and the property of the orphans but they were unwilling to give the orphan a proper *mahr* (bridal gift). Therefore, the Qur'an 4:3 was revealed "suggesting" to marry other women, not the orphans, if they could not be just to the orphans by giving them improper *mahr*:

And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].²¹

Justice as a requirement for polygamy is stated to be impossible to achieve in the following Qur'anic verse 4:129:

And you will never be able to be equal [in feeling] between wives, even if you should strive [to do so]. So do not incline completely [toward one] and leave another hanging. And if you amend [your affairs] and fear Allah-then indeed, Allah is ever Forgiving and Merciful.²²

Based on the above three verses and the fact that polygamy has caused injustice toward women and children, Abduh argues for the prohibition of polygamy.²³ Unfortunately, his standpoint against polygamy is unpopular, even hidden, among Muslims including Indonesian Muslims. As a Muslim feminist who researched men, women, and children in polygamous marriages, I agree with Abduh's argument that polygamy should be prohibited because I found that polygamous marriage causes negative effects on the wellbeing of women and children.

²⁰ Saheeh International (tran.), "Surah An-Nisa - 2", *Qur'an.com*, <https://Qur'an.com/an-nisa?locale=en&font=v1&reading=false&translations=20%2C131>, accessed 17 Aug 2019.

²¹ Saheeh International (tran.), "Surah An-Nisa-3".

²² Saheeh International (tran.), "Surah An-Nisa-129", *Qur'an.com*, <https://Qur'an.com/4:129?font=v1&translations=20%2C131>, accessed 17 Aug 2019.

²³ Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Qurān al-Hakīm: Al-Shabīr bi-Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Darul Ma'rifah, 1973), p. 350.

While this interpretation of the third group has been increasingly accepted among progressive Muslim feminists such as Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, Alimatul Qibtiyah from Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah, and Nur Rofiah and Badriyah Fayumi from Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama, male Muslim feminists such as Husein Muhammad and Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, and many other Muslim feminists who were involved in Indonesian Women's Ulama Congress (Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia/KUPI) in 2017, the majority of Indonesian Muslims who have no exposure yet to Muslim feminist idea mainly belong to the second group who believe that polygamy is permitted in Islam on condition that the husband should be just among his wives. Thus, those who belong to the third group is still minority.

2. *Muslim Feminist Reinterpretation of the Qur'an on Women's Leadership*

Most Muslims believe that only men can be family leaders based on their literal understanding of the following the Qur'an 4: 34;

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance-[first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.²⁴

The word *rijāl* in the above verse is generally interpreted as male. This interpretation is different from the interpretation of Nasaruddin Umar,²⁵ one of the male Muslim feminists who differentiate between *dhakar* (male) and *rijāl* (the masculine). According to him, one who is born as male (*dhakar*) does not necessarily can become *rijāl* (the masculine). To be masculine (*rijāl*), someone needs to fulfill the two requirements stated in the Qur'an 4: 34. First, the persons should be superior to their spouse (either in educational or income level). Second, they should spend some of their income for family maintenance. Thus, being *rijāl* is

²⁴ Saheeh International (tran.), "Surah An-Nisa - 34", *Qur'an.com*, <https://Qur'an.com/4:34?font=v1&translations=20%2C131>, accessed 17 Aug 2019.

²⁵ Nasaruddin Umar, *Argumen Kesetaraan Jender Perspektif Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1999).

not about whether someone is male or female, but about the fulfilment of the criteria. Therefore, both males and females who fulfil the criteria can be *rijāl* and the male who does not fulfill the criteria, he remains as male (*dhakar*), not *rijāl*.

Similar with the interpretation of Nasaruddin Umar, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd²⁶ interprets the Qur'an 4: 34 as descriptive verse, not prescriptive verse. This means that the verse is understood as a description of gender relations at the time of revelation: that at that time, men were breadwinner of the family because they were physically stronger women (earning money at that time required physical strength) and gave family maintenance. Consequently, in the current era, gender relations can be the same as that described in the above Qur'anic verse or be different. The important thing is that this gender relation is just: both husband and wife contribute to the family either as the family breadwinner or as the housewife. When the husband is the sole family breadwinner, it is fair for the wife to be a housewife who takes care of the housework, raises children and serves her husband. However, when both husband and wife work to earn a living, both are also expected to share house works and taking care of their children. When the wife becomes the sole breadwinner of the family, the husband should flexibly do all house works, rear children and serve his wife, just like what his wife does when the husband becomes a family breadwinner.

Likewise, Asghar Ali Engineer²⁷ considers the Qur'an 4: 34 as a socio-theological verse, not theological verse. Husein Muhammad²⁸ also regards this verse as informative verse, not normative verse. Their interpretations imply that there is room to change the roles of husband and wife, with the possibility of women becoming a family leader when she fulfills the two criteria stated in the Qur'an 4: 34.

Nevertheless, there have been obstacles for women to have a leadership position in public life. This includes a most commonly quoted

²⁶ Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "The Nexus of Theory and Practice", in *The New Voices of Islam: Rethinking Politics and Modernity: a Reader*, ed. by Mehran Kamrava (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2006).

²⁷ Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (London: C. Hurst & Co, 1992).

²⁸ Husein Muhammad, *Ijtihad Kyai Husein: Upaya Membangun Keadilan Gender*, Jakarta: Rahima, 2011.

hadith:

It was narrated by Abu Bakra that: “Allah has given me luck with the sentence I heard from the Prophet -peace be upon him- one day after the Camel War after I almost joined the camel troops and fight with them. When the Prophet was informed that the King of Persia gave the power to his daughter, the Prophet said: Never prosper a group who has given their affairs to women” [my translation].

Different from the Qur’an that Muslims take for granted in terms of its quality as the first source of Islamic teachings, we need to be more critical in accepting the message of hadith. The Qur’an was compiled not long after the Prophet died, in the era the Caliph Abu Bakra (11-13 AH/632-634 AD), while hadith was compiled after almost a century after the Prophet died, in the era of the Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz (717-720 AD). Some narrators or reporters (*rawi*) were found lied about what had been said by the Prophet or claimed the saying was from the Prophet when it was actually not from the Prophet.

Fatima Mernissi,²⁹ one of the Muslim feminist scholars, conducted rigorous research on this hadith and found that the only narrator of this *hadith*, Abu Bakra, mentioned this hadith 25 years after the Prophet died. No one mentioned this hadith except him, who narrated it after the Camel War. Before the war, Abu Bakra supported Aisha, the Prophet’s widow, who was defeated by Ali bin Abi Thalib, the Prophet’s son-in-law, in this war. According to Mernissi, this hadith was narrated by Abu Bakra to justify his maneuver of leaving Aisha for supporting Ali bin Abi Thalib.

The above hadith was written in *ṣahih Bukhari*, which is considered the *ṣahih* (valid) collection of the Prophet’s tradition. However, in her research on *Fathul Bari*, the explanation of *ṣahih Bukhari*, Mernissi³⁰ found that in the era of Caliph Umar bin Khattab, Abu Bakra was flogged 80 times because he accused someone of committing adultery (*zina*) without being able to provide four witnesses. According to Mernissi, someone who has this record cannot narrate hadith categorized as *ṣahih*. This means, even though this hadith is in *ṣahih Bukhari* collection, it does not guarantee that it is a valid hadith due to the flaw of its narrator. Even if

²⁹ Fatima Mernissi, *Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 1991).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

this hadith was valid, this was only directed to the Princes of Persia who at that time was young and inexperienced, not to all women in general, because the important aspect of leadership is the ability to be a leader, not biologically male. Some men can be a leader and so do some women. What is unacceptable is appointing someone who has no expertise and required skills in charge of public affairs.

There has been changing attitudes toward women's leadership among Muslims. For example, previously, the position of rector and also many other important positions in campus mainly occupied by men. However, in the last 20 years and especially after the Digital Era, there has been increasing number of women who gain doctoral degree and become full professor. Because of their qualifications, in the last five years, there has been increasing number of women who can become a rector. There are seven out of 58 (12%) Islamic Higher Educational Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri/PTKIN*) whose rectors are female. This is slow but promising phenomenon that women's leadership can be acceptable among Indonesian Muslims. To speed up the achievement of Planet 50-50, which was initiated by UN women in 2016, in which it is expected that there will be a balanced number of leadership between men and women by 2030, Nurmila suggested to change gender neutral policy of PMA 68/2015 on the rector selection process into affirmative policy.³¹ This is because our culture still adopts patriarchal system which tends to put men in superior position and subordinate women and therefore giving the same policy for men and women within this patriarchal system may result in discrimination against women. This is pointed out in Nurmila's study that not all female candidates of prospective rectors could go through the next level of the selection because they could not fulfill the

³¹ PMA 68/2015 (Peraturan Menteri Agama Nomor 68 Tahun 2015 tentang Pengangkatan dan Pemberhentian Rektor dan Ketua pada Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan yang diselenggarakan oleh Pemerintah) is a gender neutral policy in which the requirements to be a rector does not explicitly exclude women. However, since most positions in campus still mainly be given to men, there were five female candidates of prospective rectors in four State Islamic Higher Educational Institutions who could not go through the next process of rector selection because they could not fulfill one of the requirements, the managerial experience. Therefore, to solve this problem, it is suggested to change the policy into affirmative policy in which female candidate can be exempted from having this managerial experience.

requirements of having at least two year experiences of being at least Head of Department. This is not happening to any male candidates of prospective rectors because most positions in campus have been mainly given to men.³²

3. *Muslim Feminist Reinterpretation of the Qur'an on Inheritance*

Indonesian Muslims, like most Muslims in other parts of the world, generally believe that the portion of inheritance for women is half the portion of male inheritance based on the Qur'an 4:11;

Allah instructs you concerning your children: for the male, what is equal to the share of two females. But if there are [only] daughters, two or more, for them is two-thirds of one's estate. And if there is only one, for her it is half. And for one's parents, to each one of them is a sixth of his estate if he left children. But if he had no children and the parents [alone] inherit from him, then for his mother is one third. And if he had brothers [or sisters], for his mother is a sixth, after any bequest he [may have] made or debt. Your parents or your children - you know not which of them are nearest to you in benefit. [These shares are] an obligation [imposed] by Allah. Indeed, Allah is ever Knowing and Wise.³³

This belief is partially true for men and women in the position of children or if they are in the position of husband and wife as stated in the Qur'an 4:12;

And for you is half of what your wives leave if they have no child. But if they have a child, for you is one-fourth of what they leave, after any bequest they [may have] made or debt. And for the wives is one fourth if you leave no child. But if you leave a child, then for them is an eighth of what you leave, after any bequest you [may have] made or debt. And if a man or woman leaves neither ascendants nor descendants but has a brother or a sister, then for each one of them is a sixth. But if they are more than two, they share a third, after any bequest which was made or debt, as long as there is no detriment [caused]. [This is] an ordinance

³² Nina Nurmila, "Proposing Feminist Intepretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Support Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education", *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam*, vol. 19, no. 2 (2020), pp. 125–40.

³³ Saheeh International (tran.), "Surah An-Nisa - 11", *Qur'an.com*, <https://Qur'an.com/4:11?font=v1&translations=20%2C131>, accessed 17 Aug 2019.

from Allah and Allah is Knowing and Forbearing.³⁴

However, if women and men are in the position of parents (father and mother), their portion of inheritance is the same, one-sixth, if they have children. If they do not have children, the mother receives one-third and the father receives the remaining of the inheritance (*'aṣabah*). This portion of the remaining can be more or less than the portion the mother receives depending on with whom they inherit.

This division of inheritance is related with gender relationships in the context of revelation.³⁵ At the time of revelation, men were idealized to become family breadwinner, which was hard and big responsibility. Earning a living at that time needed physical strength. Islam as a religion of justice gave more rights to the person who has a heavier burden and many responsibilities. This verse is also related with the kinship system, in which Arab people have a patrilineal kinship system. In this patrilineal kinship system, lineage is traced through the father's line, as is in the inheritance of property, titles, group membership and so on.³⁶ Different from the Arab kinship system, Indonesia has three different kinship systems: patrilineal in Bali and northern Sumatra (Batak society), matrilineal in Minangkabau, where descendants follow the female line,³⁷ and bilateral kinship among the majority of Indonesian people. Within the bilateral kinship system, there is no preference for sons over daughters – both are highly valued;³⁸ and sons and daughters have equal rights of

³⁴ Saheeh International (tran.), “Surah An-Nisa - 12”, *Qur'an.com*, <https://Qur'an.com/4:12?font=v1&translations=20%2C131>, accessed 17 Aug 2019.

³⁵ Nina Nurmila, “The Indonesian Muslim Feminist Reinterpretation of Inheritance”, in *Islam in Indonesia: Contrasting Images and Interpretations*, ed. by Jajat Burhanudin and Kees van Dijk (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), pp. 109–22.

³⁶ Hildred Geertz and Clifford Geertz, *Kinship in Bali* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 161.

³⁷ Joke van Reenen, *Central Pillars of the House: Sisters, Wives, and Mothers in a Rural Community in Minangkabau, West Sumatra* (Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1996), p. 23.

³⁸ Charles Hirschman and Jennifer Edwards, “Social Change, Southeast Asia”, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, vol. 9, ed. by George Ritzer (Oxford: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2007).

inheritance from either maternal or paternal lines.³⁹

In reading the Qur'an 4: 11-12 on inheritance, it is relevant to refer to Masdar Mas'udi's division of the Qur'anic verses into fundamental (*muhkamat*) and instrumental (*mutashabihat*) verses.⁴⁰ In his view, fundamental verses are the verses that contain the fundamental principles of Islam, which are applicable in all places and time. Muslims do not need to do *ijtihad* on these principles such as that God is one, God is just, that it is important to help the needy and to stand for justice. In contrast, instrumental verses are the verses that contain explanations on how to do the fundamental principles of Islam such as the Qur'anic verses on the division of inheritance. These verses on the division of inheritance are regarded to be instrumental to the fundamental principles of Islam about standing for justice. Mas'udi's definition of *muhkamat* and *mutashabihat* verses is different from that of mainstream ulama. Mainstream ulama define *muhkamat* verses as the Qur'anic verses which are clear and easy to be understood such as the Qur'an 4: 11-12 on the division of inheritance, while *mutashabihat* verses as the verses which are difficult to be understood such as the Qur'anic verse 6: 59 on the essence of the unseen, which is believed that only God knows its meaning.⁴¹

Using Mas'udi's contextual approach, the Qur'anic verses on inheritance are instrumental verses aimed at realizing the fundamental teaching of Islam of standing for justice. How to achieve justice in Arabian countries with a patrilineal kinship system differ from that in Indonesia with its bilateral kinship system. The main point in this division is to stand for justice. To impose what is applicable in the Arab patrilineal kinship system into the place where it has a bilateral kinship system without any adjustment to the system may lead to injustice in the inheritance division, as argued by Hazairin. Similarly, it can be unjust to apply the same division of inheritance in the context where males are no longer the only breadwinner in the family or cannot even financially

³⁹ Suzanne April Brenner, *The Domestication of Desire: Women, Wealth, and Modernity in Java* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 138.

⁴⁰ Masdar Farid Masudi, *Islam dan Hak-Hak Reproduksi Perempuan: Dialog Fikih Pemberdayaan* (Bandung: Mizan, 1997).

⁴¹ Muhammad Anwar Firdausi, "Membincang Ayat-Ayat Muhkam dan Mutasyabih", *Ulul Albab: Jurnal Studi Islam*, vol. 16, no. 1 (2015), pp. 80–8.

provide for the family, as argued by Munawwir Sjadzali.⁴² The right for a bigger share of inheritance should not be attached to sex, but to the responsibility that the person take. Thus, more portion of inheritance should be given to either male or female who is a family breadwinner.

Another contextual approach to the verses of inheritance is offered by Shahrur, a progressive *ulama* from Syria, whose thought of *budud* (Islamic punishment) is similar to Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd's views.⁴³ In reading the Qur'anic verse 4: 11 on inheritance, Abu Zayd interprets that there is a maximum limit for men in receiving the inheritance, namely twice the portion of female inheritance, and there is a minimum limit for women in receiving the inheritance, namely half the portion of male inheritance. The maximum limit for men means that there is no minimum limit for men and the minimum limit for women means that there is no maximum limit for women. The reason for setting a maximum limit for men is that before the coming of Islam, there was no limit for male inheritance: all inheritance was for male, while female had no right for inheritance and was even regarded as property that could be inherited. To stand for justice for women gradually, the Qur'an set a minimum limit for women. The reason for setting a minimum limit for women is that Islam is a religion of justice which aims to improve the position of women.

Based on this limit (*budud*) approach, it is acceptable to divide the inheritance between men and women equally, and even to give more portion for women than for men because women only have minimum limit. What is not acceptable is to give men more than twice a portion of female inheritance because this will break the maximum limit set by the Qur'an 4: 11. However, the practice of breaking the limit is still happening in the countries which have strong patriarchal culture such as Saudi Arabia and India, where sisters sometimes are still persuaded to give up their portion of inheritance for the sake of family unity; assuming that sisters will have a husband to give them maintenance. Consequently, a sister is dependent on her brother until she gets married if she is married; if not, she is dependent on her brother the whole of her life.

⁴² Rosidi Jamil, "Hukum Waris dan Wasiat: Sebuah Perbandingan antara Pemikiran Hazairin dan Munawwir Sjadzali", *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2017), pp. 99–114.

⁴³ Zayd, "The Nexus of Theory and Practice".

The above re-interpretation of the Qur'an on inheritance is often being misunderstood by literalists who accuse the contextualists and Muslim feminists that they are changing the Qur'anic verses. For literalists, it is the reality which need to be brought into what is written in the Qur'an, not to change the rule stated in the Qur'an. This is different from the view of contextualists and Muslim feminists who argue that the Qur'an support justice and therefore how to divide inheritance is instrumental/practical which can be adjusted with the changing roles of men and women in different context and time. Thus, the above interpretation can only be accepted among contextualist group, the minority academic group, within progressive institutions such as UIN Yogyakarta and UIN Jakarta as well as progressive Muslim feminists themselves.

C. The Spread of Muslim Feminist Ideas in Indonesia Before and After the Digital Era

This part will explain briefly the history of internet until the coming of the Digital Era in Indonesia, before elaborating the difference between the spread of Muslim feminist ideas before and after the Digital Era. As written earlier, Digital Era is the era under a massive influence of the internet and digital technologies.⁴⁴ This is not happening instantly but its development has begun in America since October 1969, when University of California of Los Angeles, successfully sent the data from one computer to another, leading to the creation of Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) funded by the US Department of Defense. Further development was that electronic mail (email) was created in 1971,⁴⁵ which allows user to send letter electronically which is faster than posted mail. The use of internet was initially limited within the military network, but then it was expanded into external military network after 1972, when ARPA project was announced publicly. The increasing number of institutions such as universities which joined the network made ARPANET was divided into two: ARPANET for non-military

⁴⁴ "What is Digital Era".

⁴⁵ CNN Indonesia, "Mengenal Sejarah Internet", *CNN Indonesia* (13 Mar 2019), <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/teknologi/20190312125646-185-376484/mengenal-sejarah-internet>, accessed 31 Dec 2020.

network and MILNET for military network.⁴⁶ The network was further expanded worldwide with the invention of World Wide Web (WWW) in 1989.⁴⁷ This has changed the way how knowledge is spread from one place to another.

The use of internet has becoming more popular widely since the invention of social media and other means of communication by using internet such as Google in 1998 (with its increasing products from time to time such as YouTube, Gmail, search engine and Google Meet), Facebook and Skype in 2003, Twitter in 2006, WhatsApp in 2009, Instagram (IG) in 2010 and Zoom in 2011.

The use of internet in Indonesia has begun since 1983, by Joseph Luhukay, an academician at Computer Science Department, Universitas Indonesia (UI), who completed his PhD at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. After that, internet was used in a very limited basis among big universities such as UI, ITB, IPB and UNHAS with very expensive cost. Commercialization of the use of internet began in 1994 by IndoNet and RadNet.⁴⁸ Beginning 1995, internet was accessed more publicly by the opening of many *Warung Internet* (Warnet),⁴⁹ a place which provide computers with internet access for public charged hourly, throughout Indonesia, especially in big cities in Java such as Jakarta, Bandung and Surabaya. The usage of *Warnet* began to be decreasing when many houses could pay monthly internet package from Telkom Indonesia since 2004, and later from many other service providers. In addition, most information can be accessed through smart phone since 2013. This massive usage of internet has changed the way people access knowledge, which can now be accessed by just touching the screen of smart phone or computers. For the purpose of this writing, I can say that Digital Era

⁴⁶ Eril, "Sejarah Singkat Internet dan Perkembangannya Sampai Saat Ini", *Qwords* (16 Dec 2019), <https://qwords.com/blog/sejarah-singkat-internet/>, accessed 31 Dec 2020.

⁴⁷ CNN Indonesia, "Mengenal Sejarah Internet".

⁴⁸ Faz, "Awal Mula Internet Masuk Indonesia", *merdeka.com* (16 Oct 2019), <https://www.merdeka.com/teknologi/awal-mula-internet-masuk-indonesia.html>, accessed 31 Dec 2020.

⁴⁹ Fatimah Kartini Bohang, "Warnet, Riwayatmu Dulu dan Sekarang", *KOMPAS.com* (22 Apr 2015), <https://tekno.kompas.com/read/xml/2015/04/22/13140077/Warnet.Riwayatmu.Dulu.dan.Sekarang>, accessed 31 Dec 2020.

in Indonesia begins approximately from 2010, when internet has been widely available and many Indonesians can easily access the internet at affordable price.

Before the Digital Era in Indonesia, Muslim feminist ideas spread through the translation of articles and books written by Muslim feminists such as Riffat Hassan, Fatima Mernissi, Amina Wadud, and Asghar Ali Engineer into the Indonesian language. *Ulumul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmu dan Kebudayaan* was one of the pioneer media that introduced Muslim feminist ideas to the Indonesian public since its birth in 1990. In its first edition, the journal introduced a study by Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad, which argues that the justification of anti-emancipation is not based on the Qur'an. This was followed by the fourth edition that published Riffat Hassan's article entitled "Teologi Perempuan dalam Islam"⁵⁰ (Islamic Theology of Women), which was translated by Wardah Hafidz from Hassan's article "Equal before Allah? Women-Men Equality in Islamic Tradition" published by *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*.⁵¹

Furthermore, in the following years, *Ulumul Qur'an* published an article "Perempuan dalam Syari'ah: Perspektif Feminis dalam Penafsiran Islam" (Women in Sharia: A Feminist Perspective of the Interpretation of Islam).⁵² This article was a work by Asghar Ali Engineer which was translated by Kelompok Studi Perempuan (Women's Studies Group) "Tjoet Nyak Din" Ciputat and was edited by Wardah Hafidz, who seemed to be the leading contributor to the spread of Muslim feminist ideas in the early 1990s, who at that time just returned from her MA studies in America.

Moreover, *Ulumul Qur'an* published more articles on the debate about feminism by Indonesian Muslim feminists in two editions in 1994. These articles were "Feminisme Sebagai Counter-Culture" (Feminism as a Counter-Culture),⁵³ "Argumen Supremasi atas Perempuan: Penafsiran

⁵⁰ Riffat Hasan, "Teologi Perempuan Dalam Islam: Sejajar di Hadapan Allah?", *Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 1, no. 4 (1990), pp. 50–1.

⁵¹ Riffat Hassan, "Equal before Allah? Women/Men Equality in Islamic Tradition", *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, vol. 7, no. 2 (1987).

⁵² Asghar Ali Engineer, "Perempuan dalam Syari'ah: Perspektif Feminis dalam Penafsiran Islam", *Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 5, no. 3 (1994).

⁵³ Wardah Hafidz, "Feminisme Sebagai Counter-Culture", *Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 5, nos. 5–6 (1994).

Klasik QS al-Nisa': 34" (Argument for Women Supremacy: A Classic Interpretation of the QS al-Nisa': 34),⁵⁴ "Dari Psikologi Androsentris ke Psikologi Feminis: Membongkar Mitos-mitos tentang Perempuan" (From Androcentric Psychology to Feminist Psychology: Deconstructing the Myths of Women), and "Feminisme: Menindas Peran Ibu Rumah Tangga" (Feminism: Oppressing Women's Role as Housewives).⁵⁵

In these editions, *Ulumul Qur'an* also published interviews with women movement activists and book reviews. These were "Feminisme Tidak Anti Terhadap Peran Ibu Rumah Tangga" (Feminism is not Against the Women' Role as Housewives), an interview with Myra Diarsi, "Perempuan dalam Perbincangan" (Discussing Women), a dialogue with Nurul Agustina, and a book review entitled "Tradisionalisme Islam dan Feminisme".⁵⁶ The efforts of spreading Muslim feminist ideas through journal publication was followed by the Indonesian translation of the books written by Muslim feminists such as Amina Wadud, Ashgar Ali Engineer, Fatima Mernissi, Asma Barlas, Farid Esack, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.⁵⁷ These books are read and discussed by many progressive

⁵⁴ Didin Syafruddin, "Argumen Supremasi atas Perempuan: Penafsiran Klasik QS al-Nisa': 34", *Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 5, nos. 5–6 (1994).

⁵⁵ Megawangi, "Feminisme: Menindas Peran Ibu Rumah Tangga".

⁵⁶ Diarsi, "Feminisme Tidak Anti terhadap Peran Ibu Rumah Tangga: Wawancara bersama Myra Diarsi"; "Perempuan dalam Perbincangan: Wawancara dengan Nurul Agustina", *Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 5, nos. 5–6 (1994); "Resensi Buku: Tradisionalisme Islam dan Feminisme", *Ulumul Qur'an*, vol. 5, nos. 5–6 (1994).

⁵⁷ Amina Wadud Muhsin, *Wanita Di Dalam Al-Qur'an*, trans. by Yaziar Radianti (Bandung: Pustaka, 1994); Ashgar Ali Engineer, *Hak-Hak Perempuan dalam Islam*, trans. by Farid Wajidi and Cici Farkha Assegaf (Yogyakarta: Lembaga Studi dan Pengembangan Perempuan dan Anak, 2000); Riffat Hassan and Fatima Mernissi, *Setara di Hadapan Allah* (Yogyakarta: LSSPA); Fatima Mernissi, *Teras Terlarang: Kisah Masa Kecil Seorang Feminis Muslim*, trans. by Ahmad Baiquni (Bandung: Mizan, 1994); Fatima Mernissi, *Pemberontakan Wanita: Peran Intelektual Kaum Wanita dan Sejarah Islam*, trans. by Rahmani Astuti (Bandung: Mizan, 1999); Asma Barlas, *Cara Qur'an Membebaskan Perempuan*, trans. by R. Cecep Lukman Yasin (Jakarta: Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2007); Farid Esack, *Membebaskan Yang Tertindas: Al Qur'an, Liberalisme, Pluralisme*, trans. by Watung A. Budiman (Bandung: Mizan, 2000); Farid Esack, *On Being A Muslim: Menjadi Muslim di Dunia modern*, trans. by Dadi Darmadi and Jajang Jahroni (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2004); Farid Esack, *Menghidupkan Al-Qur'an Dalam wacana dan Prilaku*, trans. by Norma Arbi'a Juli Setiwan (Depok: Insani Press, 2006); Nashr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Kritik Wacana Agama*, trans. Khoiron Nahdhiyin, (Yogyakarta: LKIS, 2003).

Indonesian Muslim activists such as those in P3M, Rahima, Alimat, Rumah Kitab and academicians at Indonesian Islamic Higher Educations. All of these Muslim feminists have also been invited to give lectures in Indonesia many times. In fact, Amina Wadud has spent her retirement here in Indonesia since 2018, when she was often being invited to give lectures in many conferences and seminars, especially those organized by Islamic Higher Educations under the Ministry of Religious Affairs and beginning 2021, she is a Visiting Professor at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta until the end of 2022, which may be renewable.

After the Digital Era, many more students and lecturers read Muslim feminist ideas either through direct reading of non-Indonesian Muslim feminist works in English or its translation offline or online as well as through reading Indonesian Muslim feminist books such as those written by Musdah Mulia, Lies Marcoes, Husein Muhammad, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, Nur Rofiah and Alimatul Qibtiyah. Moreover, many journal articles have been written on Muslim feminist thought or by Indonesian Muslim feminists accessible online free of charge.⁵⁸ This is easier and faster access to the reading materials on Muslim feminist ideas than accessing them in print. Free training on gender and Islam is also advertised online by Nur Rofiah and Alimatul Qibtiyah as well as by Rumah Kitab led by Lies Marcoes. The gender training (Ngaji Keadilan Gender dalam Islam/KGI) by Nur Rofiah began on 11 May 2019 conducted offline throughout Indonesia, even though its advertisement was online. After the pandemic of Covid-19, beginning March until September 2020, the training was conducted online, attracting many

⁵⁸ See for example Nurmila, “The Influence of Global Muslim Feminism on Indonesian Muslim Feminist Discourse”; Nurmila, “Pengaruh Budaya Patriarki Terhadap Pemahaman Agama dan Pembentukan Budaya”; Irma Riyani, “Muslim Feminist Hermeneutical Method to the Qur’an (Analytical Study to the Method of Amina Wadud)”, *Ulumuna*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2017), pp. 298–314; N.F.N. Mardety, “Amina Wadud’s Criticism against Misogynistic Interpretation of Qur’an: a Study of Hermeneutic Feminism”, *Jurnal Perempuan*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2015), pp. 51–6; Eko Setiawan, “Studi Pemikiran Fatima Mernissi Tentang Kesetaraan Gender”, *Yinyang: Jurnal Studi Islam Gender dan Anak*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2019), pp. 221–44; Nuril Fajri, “Asma Barlas dan Gender Perspektif dalam Pembacaan Ulang QS. An-Nisa/4”, *Aqlam: Journal of Islam and Plurality*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2019); M. Agus Nuryatno, “Examining Asghar Ali Engineer’s Qur’anic Interpretation of Women in Islam”, *Al-Jāmi’ah: Journal of Islamic Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2007), pp. 389–414.

participants not only from Indonesia, but also Egypt, Malaysia, Australia, Argentina and France by using various online media such as WhatsApp Group, Skype, Facebook, Google Meet, Zoom, YouTube, Instagram, Podcast, and StreamYard. Without all of these internet applications, the spread of Muslim feminist ideas during pandemic might be stagnant.

The main difference in terms of method of delivery between before and after the Digital Era is that reading materials on these Muslim feminists ideas can be easily accessible online, while before the Digital Era, reading materials on these Muslim feminist ideas were only available in print. This print version is not necessarily easy to be accessed due to the barrier of distance and time, especially for academicians who reside outside Java because most publications were mainly available in Jakarta and Yogyakarta (Java). Another difference is that free online training on Gender and Islam during the Digital Era can reach wider audience throughout Indonesia and even Indonesian communities who live abroad as long as they have internet connection.

D. Muslim Feminist Ideas in the Digital Era: Challenges and Opportunities

Since 2010, the increasing use and better access to the internet among Indonesians have made the spread of Muslim feminist ideas faster and easier. By using search engines like Google, internet users can access Muslim feminists' works and ideas in convenient ways.

As written in my earlier work, most Indonesian Muslim feminists graduated from *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and Islamic higher education institutions such as Institut Agama Islam Negeri/IAIN (State Institute of Islamic Studies) and Universitas Islam Negeri/UIN (State Islamic University).⁵⁹ However, this does not prevent them from using and mastering internet-based information and communication technologies. In their attempt to spread feminist ideas, these Muslim feminists use internet-based platforms such as websites, emails, and social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. For example, each Center of the Gender and Children Studies (Pusat Studi Gender dan Anak/PSGA) at Islamic Higher Education throughout Indonesia has its own

⁵⁹ Nurmila, "The Influence of Global Muslim Feminism on Indonesian Muslim Feminist Discourse".

journal, which is available online. The contents of this journal mainly promote Muslim feminist ideas. In addition, as written earlier, free training on Gender and Islam offered, for example, by Muslim feminists such as Nur Rofiah and Alimatul Qibtiyah were using various online media such as WhatsApp Group, Skype, Facebook, Google Meet, Zoom, YouTube, Instagram, Podcast, and StreamYard to promote their feminist ideas.

Nevertheless, compared to other streams of Indonesian feminists, Indonesian Muslim feminists seemed to be lagged in the way of harnessing the internet to spread their ideas. The Islamist feminists -most of them graduated from secular higher education institutions and studied technology-related subjects- employ the internet better to spread their “version of feminism” and criticize the Muslim feminist ideas and activism. Eva Fahrún Nisa⁶⁰ compares the use of internet technology and social media by these two groups to describe how Islamist feminists (female Muslim conservatives) attract followers more than progressive Muslim feminists. In her observation, Nisa found that most Muslim feminists such as those who attended Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) use Facebook to describe their personal activities, while the conservative Islamist group opts to use Instagram to spread their conservative agenda. Recently there has also been opposition to feminist ideas on Instagram using the tagline of “Uninstall Feminism” or “Indonesia tanpa feminis”.⁶¹ In addition, the Islamist feminists also develop websites such as <https://thisisgender.com> and The Center for Gender Studies, not to educate public about gender, but to give misleading information about gender and feminism as well as to criticize feminism as imported Western ideology which is regarded to be contradictory with Islam. This group, without having enough knowledge about feminism, has used the freedom of movement and equal access to education that was initiated by feminists, to reject the idea of feminism itself.

⁶⁰ Eva F. Nisa, “Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia: Online Conflicting Narratives behind the Women Ulama Congress”, *Asian Studies Review*, vol. 43, no. 3 (2019), pp. 434–54.

⁶¹ Widia Primastika, “#UninstallFeminism: Benarkah Indonesia Tak Butuh Feminisme?”, *tirto.id* (4 Aug 2019), <https://tirto.id/uninstallfeminism-benarkah-indonesia-tak-butuh-feminisme-dlfe>, accessed 27 May 2019.

The “battle” in spreading feminist and Islamist ideas continued.⁶² Both the conservative and the progressive groups continued to spread their ideas offline and online. The conservative Muslim group, for example, advocated *hijrah* (emigration) for Muslim women saying that their best place is home and their best role is to be housewives and educators of the family. The group also promoted GEMAR (Gerakan Menutup Aurat; Covering *Aurat* Movement) urging Muslim women to wear “sharia veil”, which is longer and looser than the commonly-worn Muslim women head covers.⁶³ This promotion to domesticate women was also conducted offline such as in mosques to attract more followers. The progressive Muslim feminists also spread their ideas through online media such as the website *mubaadalah.com* and *mubadalah.id*, which promotes equal gender relations in the family. However, as argued by Nisa, the conservative group attracted more followers online than the progressive Muslim feminists.⁶⁴ Most of their followers seem to be senior high school students and university students majoring in science and technology, not students in Islamic studies or Islamic Higher Educations.

Furthermore, Indonesian Muslim feminists are facing other challenges in this Digital Era. Most Indonesian people now have easier and cheaper access to the internet than before 2010. However, this does not mean that these Indonesian Muslim feminists can easily access all necessary academic resources like online international journal articles on Muslim feminism. Most good quality international journals have to be subscribed to by university libraries with a high price or to be bought online individually with a very expensive price of about IDR 500.000 per article. Besides, there has been a digital divide in Indonesia in that the outer Java regions such as districts in Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Sumatera still have less access to the internet compared to those in Java. To respond to these challenges, Muslim feminists should still use various offline method to spread their ideas. Those who work as university lecturers, for example, can opt to spread Muslim feminist ideas in their

⁶² See Nina Nurmila, “The Current Battles between Progressive and Conservative Muslim Women in Indonesia”, *Agenda: Jurnal Analisis Gender dan Agama*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2020), pp. 1–9.

⁶³ Nisa, “Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia”, pp. 11–2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

courses among their students.

E. Concluding Remarks

Muslim feminist ideas began to spread in Indonesia in the early 1990s as seen in the translation of the works of non-Indonesian Muslim feminists into the Indonesian language. These include the works of Fatima Mernissi, Riffat Hassan, Amina Wadud, and Asghar Ali Engineer. These Muslim feminist ideas have given alternative interpretations of the Qur'an from equal gender perspective such on the issue of women leadership, polygamy and inheritance which are more friendly to women. Since 2010, the increasing use and better access to the internet in Indonesia have made the spread of Muslim feminist ideas faster and easier than before the Digital Era. This has provided Indonesian Muslim feminists with the advantages of internet-based new media such as websites, Facebook, Skype, Twitter, WhatsApp, Zoom, Google Meet, Podcast and YouTube to promote their ideas to a wider audience in Indonesia.

However, the coming of the internet to Indonesia has also brought challenges to Indonesian feminists. The internet, in fact, is not only used by the supporters of feminism, but also by those who oppose the feminist ideas. This is clearly seen in the use of the internet-based new media such as Instagram by Indonesian Muslim conservative groups to oppose Muslim feminist ideas promoting that feminism is an imported ideology which is not suitable for Muslims. Another challenge facing Indonesian Muslim feminists is a digital divide in which not all Indonesian Muslims have easy and equal access to the internet. Access to quality resources like articles on feminism published by good quality academic journals is only available for certain groups at a high price. In response, even in the digital era, Indonesian Muslim feminists still have to adopt various existing offline and old media such as seminars, discussions, offline lectures or radio to spread their feminist ideas. This is even more challenging in the context of pandemic of Covid-19 when offline mobility since March 2020 has been restricted to prevent the spread of the corona virus. Therefore, when offline lectures, seminars and discussions are being conducted to spread Muslim feminist ideas, health protocols of wearing mask, physical distancing and washing hand more often, of course, should be strictly adopted.

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