From: Pamela.Nilan@newcastle.edu.au [mailto:Pamela.Nilan@newcastle.edu.au]
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To: Asia Pacific Regional Human Development Network
Subject: [ap-hdnet] GENDER DISCUSSION: Gender Identities

Asia-Pacific Human Development Report

Facilitator's note: Pamela Nilan (Associate Professor of Sociology, Research Training Convenor, Vice-President: Asia Pacific Sociology Association, School of Humanities and Social Science, Faculty of Education and Arts, University of Newcastle), Alexander Broom (Senior Lecturer in Sociology, School of Humanities and Social Science, Faculty of Education and Arts, University of Newcastle), Argyo Demartoto (Lecturer in Sociology, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia) and Mike Donaldson (Senior Lecturer in Sociology, Faculty of Arts, University of Wollongong) share their research on Indonesian masculinities. This responds to why social values largely shape human choice, and how power operates and shapes social inclusion. They point to migrants' strategies/values of belonging, strong shared emotional experience, as being instrumental in identity. But behaviour is linked to experiences of previous networks too. Values mirror a mix of new and older pressures. They suggest that oppressive social relations could be transformed by clearer understanding of the interplay between local and other social networks.

[About this discussion: The AP-HDNet (http://www2.undprc.lk/ext/HDRU/index.php) welcomes you to the e-discussion on gender - addressing unequal power, unequal voice. We encourage you to share your experience, country examples, lessons learned, and good (and not so good) practices. Your responses and comparative experiences will be important for the preparation of the Asia Pacific Human Development Report. Thank you very much for your interest and cooperation.]

Dear Network Members,

This contribution addresses masculine identities of Indonesian Muslim men in Indonesia and in Australia. We have been researching the construction of Asian Muslim masculinities before and after moving to Australia. Since 2001 a series of terrorist attacks worldwide under the ostensible banner of Islamic jihad - especially the Bali bombings and 9/11 - has intensified mainstream Australian suspicions of Muslim migrants, men in particular. Despite our proximity as nations, there seems to be little understanding of Indonesian cultural identities.

For example, throughout their 6 years of imprisonment the 3 Bali bombers (all from Java) presented a confident smiling face and a devout, yet light-hearted persona - at odds with both the seriousness of their crimes and their looming executions. Western observers found this incomprehensible, even psychotic. However, even though the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims condemned their crimes outright, the 'smiling assassin' persona would not have struck them as incomprehensible, but credible in terms of the discourse of hegemonic masculinity enshrined in Javanese culture. Accordingly, though in circumstances of proven guilt and imminent death by firing squad, the convicted bombers as Javanese men were exhibiting masterful self-control - conquering fear by depicting the

opposite and - bolstered by their unyielding religious conviction - appealing to the "ummah" (worldwide congregation of the Muslim faithful) in solidarity.

Like most other migrants arriving in Australia, Muslim Indonesian male migrants gravitate to the suburbs and workplaces dominated by Indonesians and/or Muslim migrants. The mosque provides a place of cultural refuge and resources for social and economic networking. In the sense that such networks build confidence, prosperity and social capital for Muslim Indonesian male migrants and their families, they are very positive. However, in the sense that such networks foster extremism, strengthen insularity from mainstream multicultural Australia, and encourage conservative adherence to strict patriarchal orthopraxy, they may act against the interests of the nation as a whole. We need to develop understandings of Indonesian masculinity that can inform community interventions leading to greater social and cultural inclusion through building, in a well-informed way, on the positive aspects of existing Muslim Indonesian male migrant social networks.

Australians' fear of Muslims congeals around two core 'male' issues: men's attitudes to women and terrorism (Poynting & Mason 2007). Both make fundamental assumptions about the attitudes and behaviour of Muslim men. There is a contrast between the type of masculinity Australians regard as 'normative' or hegemonic, and the actual or imagined masculinity practised by Muslim migrant men, as the Cronulla race riots demonstrated.

Our research so far has uncovered the following themes of difference:

Self-regulation: Muslim Indonesian men were surprised that almost all the Australian men they encountered - regardless of age and class - lacked self-control and demonstrated kasar (unrefined, lower class) behaviour, joking around, exhibitionism, talking loudly, sexual boasting, grunting and yelling while watching sport, getting drunk, arguing and fighting. Interviewees claimed that Australian men were curiously unregulated, even animal-like in their behaviour. Their reaction highlighted the significance of self-regulation as an important characteristic of Muslim Indonesian masculinity (see Sen 2002; Clark 2004; Nilan 2006; Boellstorff 2005). Self-regulation is a virtue enshrined in Koranic teaching (Ahmed 2006: 22). Javanese ideals of masculinity also enshrine the notion of power gained through inner self-control.

Sexuality: The men made a strong link between self-regulation and sexuality. They said they were shocked at the unregulated, shameless sexuality of Australian men. They were offended by: Australian men's sexual boasting; public displays of affection between couples; availability of pornography and sex aids; and lack of media censorship. The identification of unregulated sexuality as dangerous and the confinement of sex to marriage are significant moral tenets of Islam. They inform the social/political pressure for anti-pornography laws recently passed in Indonesia. The new laws reflect the extraordinary resurgence in public Muslim piety and devotion across South-East Asia (Smith-Hefner 2005), arising partly in reaction to western cultural hegemony. The construction of masculinity here is one of male sexual passions that must be controlled and should not be tempted, so that public morals and family life are protected (Gerami 2005; Ahmed 2006). In Australia the mosque was considered by some of our interviewees as a refuge from anxiety about sexual images and ideas - among many other stresses and conflicts. All interviewees were pre-occupied with how they might be seen and judged by other Indonesians, demonstrating a strong collective orientation and a desire to avoid shame.

Family Life: Interviewees thought Australian men behaved irresponsibly towards their parents, wives and children. They did not often visit or socialise with their own and their wives' families, and were not in the habit of teaching their children correct moral values. There was little respect for family life and the role of the father. Islamisation in Indonesia is attempting to strengthen the centrality of the family, even while women are moving more and more into paid work (Bennett 2005). Muslim teaching stresses that in marriage the man is equally responsible for the moral education of children (Roded 2006; Nilan, Donaldson and Howson 2008). Interviewees were committed to their moral regulatory role as family leader.

Solidarity: Interviewees criticised Australian men for being 'selfish' and individualistic, for lacking solidarity and common cause with peers. Solidarity here is understood as based on shared feelings, purposes and interests. They implied that their solidarity with each other as men enabled them to maintain the tenets of their faith and their sense of cultural identity.

From our subsequent research on masculine identities with men in Central Java in 2008, some new themes have emerged:

- Western men were thought to have a more industrious work ethic, even though Islam teaches men that working is an act of devotion;
- Western men were thought to treat women equally, while Indonesian men dominate women, even though in Islam men and women are equal in the eyes of God;
- The mosque was considered a place for men, not women.

It is clear that local masculinities, and in this case Indonesian masculinities, can no longer be understood simply from within national boundaries. In the Muslim male migrant context in Australian cities, targeted interventions to bring about greater social inclusion and harmony need to address the social construction of masculine identity in devout, insular migrant communities. Such interventions need to build on the positive aspects of male social networking around mosques.

With best regards,

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