


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Muslim Women Against Feminism: The Family Love Alliance (*Aliansi Cinta Keluarga*) and Its Impact on Women's and Sexual Rights in Contemporary Indonesia

Afifur Rochman Sya'rani 

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga, Indonesia  
Email: [afifurrochmans@gmail.com](mailto:afifurrochmans@gmail.com)

## Abstract

This article discusses how Islamic conservatism has affected public discourse and policymaking on gender and sexuality and its impact on the struggle for gender equality and sexual rights in contemporary Indonesia. It particularly seeks to examine and analyse how Muslim women in the Family Love Alliance produced a counter-discourse against feminism in their struggle to oppose the ratification of the sexual violence eradication bill. While research on Islam and gender in Indonesia has primarily focused on Islamic feminism, little research has addressed the counter-discourse against Islamic feminism produced by Muslim women and how this might influence ideas of and advocacy for women's rights and gender equality. Some scholars on Indonesian Islam have also argued that rising Islamism has turned the country more religiously conservative. However, scholarly understanding of the relationship between Islamic conservatism and gender remains limited. Drawing on my fieldwork in 2018 and 2019 and informed by social movement theory, this study captures how AILA women activists represent a conservative Islamic backlash against gender equality movements in contemporary Indonesia's public sphere.

**Keywords:** women; gender; Islamic conservatism; anti-feminism

## Introduction

On December 2017, Indonesian women activists from *Aliansi Cinta Keluarga* (the Family Love Alliance (AILA)) demanded a judicial review from the Indonesian Constitutional Court on Articles 284, 285, and 292 of the Penal Code (KUHP) on immoral crime. They mobilised, demanding lawmakers to expand the scope of immoral crime to include adultery (*zina*) and homosexuality as criminal offences. Although the Constitutional Court ultimately rejected AILA's demand, analysts see AILA as a challenge to the pursuit of gender equality and sexual rights in contemporary Indonesia (Afrianty 2020; Kartika 2019; Margret and Pandjaitan 2020).

AILA is an association of several Islamic organisations established in 2013 whose members are primarily women based in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. It identifies itself as an Islamic organisation that aims to protect women, children, and families. The organisation focuses on moral issues they deem subversive to the traditional concepts of family, women, and sexuality. As an anti-feminist movement, they have opposed feminist ideology and advocacy by influencing public discourse and lobbying state policymakers.

Women in the AILA movement were indeed on the front line of strong opposition to the ratification of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill (RUU PKS, *Rancangan Undang-Undang Penghapusan Kekerasan Seksual*) proposed by Indonesia's National Commission of Anti-Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) in 2016. They argued that the bill is a feminist attempt to enforce sexual freedom, potentially paving the way to legalising what they call "sexual deviations," such as adultery, prostitution, and homosexuality. More importantly, they view the bill more as subverting Islamic morality than saving women from sexual violence. In resisting the bill, they built an alliance with political parties, attended a public

hearing at the Indonesian parliament, and propagated their counter-discourse against it both offline and online.

Literature on Islam, gender, women, and democracy in Indonesia has demonstrated that democratisation and Islamisation have fostered Muslim women's active participation in the public sphere (Afrianty 2020; Brenner 2011; Rinaldo 2008, 2013; Robinson 2009). Scholars see the presence of Islam in the public sphere as part of "the Islamic revival" (Mahmood 2005; Rinaldo 2010, 2013). In this context, Islam plays a crucial role that facilitates women's agency in the struggle for both women's rights and gender equality and the making of piety and the Islamisation of public life (Afrianty 2015; Rinaldo 2008, 2013; Robinson 2006, 2009; Van Doorn-Harder 2006; Wieinga 2009).

In the context of Indonesia's political reforms (*Reformasi*), scholars have studied how gender and sexuality have become a battleground where issues of morality and the boundaries between the private and the public are fiercely debated and contested (Afrianty 2020; Brenner 2011; Platt *et al.* 2018; Wichelen 2010). In the last two decades, this can be seen in the public debates over female leadership, polygamy, the enforcement of sharia-inspired local bylaws (*perda shari'a*) on women, and the anti-pornography bill (Brenner 2006, 2011; Rinaldo 2012, 2013; Robinson 2009; Van Doorn-Harder 2008; White and Anshor 2008; Wichelen 2010). These debates have involved Muslim women activists with two competing ideologies: "the liberals" and "the conservatives" (Brenner 2011). The former emphasises the need for a reformist-contextual approach to reading Islamic texts in light of gender equality (Anwar 2018; Nurmila 2011). The latter, by contrast, vigorously attempts to control public morality based on conservative Islamic values, arguing that feminist ideas and agendas represent Western imposition (Brenner 2011; Rinaldo 2013).

Nevertheless, while most research on Islam and gender in Indonesia has been conducted to study Islamic feminism or women's rights activism (Affiah 2017; Afrianty 2015; Anwar 2018; Nurmila 2011; Van Doorn-Harder 2006, 2008; Wieinga 2009), little research has addressed women's activism in conservative Islamic groups (see Rinaldo 2013). Scholars of Indonesian Islam contend that the rise of Islamic conservatism has made Indonesian Islam more conservative, a recent phenomenon that Martin Van Bruinessen (2013) calls a "conservative turn." Scholars of gender and women in the context of Indonesia's democracy also argue that Islamic conservatism is a principal challenge to the idea and agenda of women's rights (Afrianty 2020; Rinaldo 2019; Wieinga 2009). However, scholarly understanding of the relationship between Islamic conservatism and gender and women's rights activism remains limited.

This study contributes to the literature on women, gender, and religious conservatism in Indonesia by elucidating how a religious anti-feminist women's movement has influenced public discourse and policy-making on gender and sexuality and its impact on the struggle for gender equality and sexual rights. As a case study, this study seeks to examine and analyse how Muslim women activists in the AILA movement produce a counter-discourse against feminism to oppose the ratification of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill.<sup>1</sup> It addresses the following questions: how do AILA members frame their contention against feminism in their struggle to oppose the ratification of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill? What is the implication of this anti-feminist movement to democracy and gender equality more generally?

The emergence of AILA reflects the recent conservative backlash from the anti-feminist group in Indonesia. Indeed, such an anti-feminist movement is not unique to Indonesia. Scholars have shown how morality, the preservation of the nuclear family, and traditional religious interpretations of women and sexuality have been the main feature of women-based anti-feminist movements worldwide (Anderson 2014; Bendroth 1999; Blais and Dupuis-Déri 2012; Gallagher 2004; Marshall 1985; Steuter 1992; Wilcox 1987, 1989). This study, therefore, draws on these studies to extend the literature to the particular case of Indonesia. It is based on my fieldwork from November 2018 to May 2019 and examination of AILA's current policies and publications. Informed by social movement theory, particularly the

<sup>1</sup>I follow the definition of women's movement by Amrita Basu (2010: 4), in which it is "defined by their constituencies, namely, women, but can address a variety of goals, whereas feminism has specified goals, of challenging gender inequality, but its constituencies can be male or female."

idea of the framing structure<sup>2</sup>, this paper attempts to demonstrate how AILA uses the idea of Islamic morality and the preservation of traditional family to produce a counter-discourse against feminism. I argue that this counter-discourse against feminism should be viewed in the context of the ideological battle on gender and sexuality that has taken place in contemporary democratic Indonesia. To AILA, this discourse serves as a tactical weapon in their fight to enforce traditional gender roles, heterosexual nuclear families, and conservative Islamic sexual morality at the state level.

### Indonesia after the *Reformasi*: Islam, Gender, and Sexuality Contested

Indonesia's democratic transition, which began in 1998 with the fall of Soeharto's authoritarian dictatorship, has drastically changed all aspects of life, including gender and sexuality. Against this background, this section discusses how Islam, gender, and sexuality have been a subject of contestation by both feminist and anti-feminist groups.

#### *Islam, Feminism, and the Advocacy for Gender Equality*

In Indonesia, democratisation has facilitated the growth of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that support gender equality and sexual rights (Platt *et al.* 2018; Rinaldo 2019; Robinson 2009). Women's rights movements in Indonesia's post-authoritarian society have grown significantly with the formation of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan). The commission, created in 1998 in response to a mass rape episode, has evolved into the national umbrella organisation for women's rights groups like Rahima, the Fahmina Institute, the Coalition of Indonesian Women (Koalisi Perempuan Indonesia), and Kapal Perempuan, to name a few. In addition, several sexual rights NGOs, like Arus Pelangi, GAYa Nusantara, and the Ardhanary Institute, fight for LGBT rights and sexual diversity.

Activists for women's rights undoubtedly use democracy to advance their fight for gender equality. They have been successful in passing several gender-sensitive laws. The passing of Law No. 23/2004 abolishing domestic violence, the "thirty percent quota of female legislatives in political parties" (2008 and 2012), "a number of new laws mandating children protection" (2002), "the criminalisation of trafficking in persons" (2007), and "the ratification of the UN convention of the rights of migrant workers and their families" (2012) are among the most notable outcomes (see Rinaldo 2019: 142). In December 2018, the Indonesian Constitutional Court allowed judicial review of the 1974 Marriage Law's Article 7(1) provision that set the minimum age of marriage to 16 for girls and 19 for boys. It is claimed that the law jeopardises women's reproductive abilities and may restrict their access to education (Afrianty 2019).

Indonesian feminism has also been informed by transnational feminist discourse and movements (Anwar 2018; Blackburn 2004; Mutaqin 2018; Nurmila 2011; Rinaldo 2011; Robinson 2006, 2020; Van Doorn-Harder 2008). For instance, since the 1980s, many Indonesian women's rights NGOs have started incorporating the discourse on feminism, gender equality, and women's rights from the United Nations Women's Charter, the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, and CEDAW, into their activism. They have carried out numerous projects on women's empowerment and advocated for women's rights with financial support from international donors and in connection with global feminist organisations (Rinaldo 2019; Robinson 2009).

One platform through which women's rights advocacies evolve is religious organisations (Rinaldo 2019). For example, the two major Islamic groups in Indonesia founded their own women's organisations: Muslimat and Fatayat, which belong to the Nahdlatul Ulama' (Van Doorn-Harder 2006), and Aisyiyah and Nasyiatul Aisyiyah, which belong to the Muhammadiyah (Syamsiyatun 2007). However, the line between secular and Islamic women's rights activists in Indonesia remains fuzzy, despite their different perspectives and objectives, because the two can collaborate on advocacies and exchange ideas (Rinaldo 2019).

The discussion of feminism and gender equality in Islamic studies began developing primarily in the 1990s. Gender studies were incorporated into Islamic thinking, and patriarchal interpretations of Islamic

<sup>2</sup>This topic's discussion goes beyond the scope of this paper. I utilise this idea to organise all of my research's findings and arguments. For a discussion of framing structure in social movements, see Wiktorowicz (2002).

literature were critically re-examined (Robinson 2006). Scholarly writings on Islam, women, and gender by Islamic feminists from the Middle East and the West have been translated into and published in Bahasa Indonesia. Similarly, Indonesian Muslim reformists have written scholarly books on the issue, proposing a contextual approach to Islam to develop an egalitarian Islamic vision of justice and gender equality. Shortly after Indonesia's reform transition in 1998, Islamic-based women's rights NGOs like Rahima, the Fahmina Institute, and Alimat were founded. These NGOs have focused on advocacy and gender rights mainstreaming from an Islamic perspective (Van Doorn-Harder 2008; Wieinga 2009).

Since then, ample research has concentrated on the contribution of Islamic activism to the fight for women's rights and gender equality in Indonesia. Pieterella Van Doorn-Harder (2008), for example, analyses the initiatives and academic works of Muslim feminists who use Islamic activism to advance women's rights and gender equality. She describes how Muslim feminists in Indonesia specifically reinterpret the Qur'an, the Prophetic tradition (hadith), and Islamic law in light of gender equality. Saskia E. Wieinga (2009) focuses on explaining the role of Indonesian Muslim women activists in coping with the challenge of Islamic fundamentalism. Dina Afrianty (2015, 2018) examines how Acehese Muslim women use the Islamic feminism worldview to challenge the implementation of sharia law.

In sum, Indonesian Muslim women's rights activists use Islam as a point of reference in the fight for gender justice. This approach is crucial in Indonesia since Islam significantly impacts socio-political spheres. These activists have addressed various issues relating to women and gender, such as women's leadership, reproduction, polygamy, human trafficking, and domestic abuse (Van Doorn-Harder 2008; Wieinga 2009), exhibiting what scholars call "Islamic feminism" (Anwar 2018; Badran 2009).

More recently, the First Congress of Indonesian Female Muslim Clergy (KUPI, *Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*) was held in April 2017 in Cirebon, West Java, and featured discussions on women, gender, and sexuality. It resulted in three Islamic legal declarations (*fatwas*) on child marriage, sexual violence, and environmental degradation (Nisa 2019; Rohmaniyah et al. 2022).

Since its establishment, KUPI has become the non-formal umbrella organisation for Islamic-based women's rights movements. It was formed through the collaboration of a network of Muslim intellectuals, activists, and women's rights organisations, especially Rahima, Fahmina Institute, and Alimat, in the context of Indonesia's post-*Reformasi*. Their capacities to interpret Islamic texts (*turath*), combined with a strong background in gender justice activism, have profoundly strengthened the status and roles of female Muslim clerics as subjects with equal religious authority as males. More importantly, KUPI has introduced a methodology for formulating *fatwas* on gender issues, grounded on not only Islamic principles of gender equality but also women's biological and social experiences (Kodir 2022).

The second congress of KUPI was recently held on 24-26 November 2022 in Jepara, Central Java, where Raden Adjeng Kartini, the Indonesian heroine and first feminist, was born. KUPI's second congress has issued five *fatwas* on (1) the protection of women from violent extremism, (2) the dangers of forced marriage, (3) rape-related pregnancy, (4) female genital circumcision or mutilation, and (5) ecological issues that impact women's reproductive health (KUPI 2022).

### ***Islamic Conservatism and Gender Debates***

Following the *Reformasi*, Islamic conservatism has been growing due to democracy, freedom of speech, and state decentralisation. The influence of global Islam or transnational Islamism, particularly from the Middle East, has also significantly permeated Indonesian society and politics (Bruinessen 2013; Hasan 2013). Islamic conservatism has been a vital force of Islamisation in the country. Its influence can be seen in public displays of piety, enforced Islamic law, and even religious intolerance (Aspinall 2008; Brenner 2011; Buehler 2016; Hasan 2009; Fealy 2008). Therefore, the presence of Islamic conservatism is significant for understanding the role of Islam in Indonesia. According to Martin van Bruinessen (2013: 13), a characteristic feature of conservative Muslims is their objection to "the idea of gender equality and challenges to established authority, as well as to modern hermeneutical approaches to scripture."

Scholars on Islam and democracy in Indonesia have demonstrated how Islamists have used democracy to push anti-democratic agendas (Bruinessen 2013; Sebastian et al. 2021; Hefner 2019). For example, in 2005, the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI, *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*) issued a *fatwa* against secularism, pluralism, and liberalism. It also frequently issues *fatwas* against religious minorities they deem heretical,

like the Ahmadiyah, which radical Islamists subsequently use to justify persecuting them (Bagir 2018; Burhani 2021; Hasyim 2020; Lindsey and Pausacker 2016). The Islamic Defender Front (FPI, *Front Pembela Islam*), another Islamist organisation, uses violence to combat what it views as immoral and un-Islamic behaviours, attacking religious and sexual minorities and raiding prostitution and gambling venues (Facal 2020; Wilson 2014). Unlike the FPI, influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*) aims to establish “a sharia-based society.” Using democratic means, the party attempts to control public morality by promoting the prohibition of alcohol, gambling, prostitution, pornography, consensual sex, and homosexual practices (Hamayotsu 2011).

Scholars on women and gender in Indonesia have long argued that after the *Reformasi*, women’s rights activists should not only negotiate with the state but also address the rise of Islamic conservatism as a counter-movement to the idea and agenda of women’s rights and gender equality (Afrianty 2020; Hefner 2017; Rinaldo 2019; Wieinga 2009). It is against this background that Islam, gender, and morality have been contested, as the conservative Islamic groups have attempted to promote gendered-biased public policies that sustain traditional women’s roles (Afrianty 2020).

Examining the debate on polygamy in the post-*Reformasi*, Suzanne Brenner (2006) challenges a common assumption that transitioning from an authoritarian regime to democracy will positively impact women. According to Brenner, although women were permitted to oppose the polygamy law in public, it remains. Muslim men’s rights to polygamy have been openly proclaimed using the new freedom of democracy. Most notably, Haji Puspo Wardoyo, the “self-styled head of the Indonesian People’s Association for Polygamy (*Masyarakat Poligami Indonesia*),” hosted “the polygamy awards” in July 2003. Giving polygamists rewards, he even asserted that polygamy is ethically and legally acceptable according to Islamic jurisprudence (*shari’a*). In addition, conservative Muslim groups claimed that Indonesia’s 1974 Marriage Law grants men the right to divorce and polygamy. Conversely, many Indonesian Muslim feminists argued that polygamy contradicts the Islamic principles of gender equality and justice. By proposing a contextual interpretation of the Qur’an, they insisted that Islam essentially endorses monogamous marriage (Nurmila 2009).

Due to vehement opposition from conservative Muslim groups, advocating for women’s rights and gender justice at the state level is not always successful. For example, in 2004, the attempt to introduce a “Counter Legal Draft (CLD)” in a reformation of the Indonesian Compilation of Islamic Law (*Kompilasi Hukum Islam*) failed. As with the 1974 marriage law, the Compilation is usually used to address legal matters on marriage, divorce, and inheritance. However, many Muslim feminists objected to the Compilation because it contained gender-biased interpretations of Islamic law. The CLD was then proposed, which mainly demanded the outlawing of polygamy, the recognition of interreligious marriage, equal inheritance for both men and women, and the abolishment of male guardianship for women (Hefner 2017; Mutaqin 2018; Nurmila 2009).

Besides, because of “regional autonomy” (*otonomi daerah*), women have become asymmetrically targeted in regional regulations based on sharia (*perda sharia*). For instance, in several regions of Java, Sumatra, and Aceh especially, the *perda sharia* has required women to cover their bodies through veiling and be accompanied by their *mahram* (a consanguinity relationship in Islam) when out at night (Robinson 2009). The main concern of the *perda sharia* is to control “sexual morality” in the public sphere. In this respect, the female body is seen as the symbol of public morality and, hence, must be domesticated. Women’s rights activists have strongly criticised the *perda sharia*. In their view, controlling and disciplining women’s bodies reflects masculine domination over women. Anthropologist Kathryn Robinson (2009: 173) contends that veiling “has been championed by conservative male elites as a way of imposing discipline on female bodies and excluding women from public space.” Sexual rights NGOs like Arus Pelangi also lamented that the *perda sharia* has a discriminative impact on sexual minorities, as LGBT people had been attacked under a sharia-based regional law on anti-prostitution (Wieinga 2009).

In 2008, proposed by conservative Muslim groups, most notably the PKS, the Anti-Pornography and Porno-action Bill (*undang-undang anti-pornografi dan porno-aksi*) was passed. It explicitly outlaws pornographic content in movies, magazines, songs, drawings, and photos, as well as any sexual behaviours considered immoral. In support of the bill, conservative Muslim groups contended that pornography and



obscenity not only conflict with Islamic morals but also imperil the family and undermine national morality. In opposition, women's rights activists argued that the bill restricts women's freedom in treating female bodies as a source of immorality. They also asserted that the bill contains an Islamic-biased view of morality since non-Islamic or other cultural expressions of gender and sexuality could be deemed immoral (Rinaldo 2012; Wichelen 2010).

The above discussion reveals how Indonesia's democracy has fostered contentious debates on gender and women issues in the public sphere and the growth of conservative religious backlash against feminist advocacy. The question of religious interpretations and the politics of morality have always been the salient feature of these debates. In the following section, I briefly discuss the organisational context of the AILA movement and its gender ideologies to explain its nature as an anti-feminist movement.

### Women in the AILA Movement: Organisational Character, Activism, and Gender Ideology

AILA is an alliance of socially conservative Islamic organisations with a shared concern for enforcing Islamic morality in Indonesia. Officially launched in February 2014, the alliance focuses on addressing what they call "sexual immorality" that encroaches on the traditional concepts of women, family, and sexuality, such as "pornography, prostitution, fornication (*zina*), free sex (*seks bebas*), and homosexuality." Based on the organisation's official document, AILA mainly aims to "create civilised Indonesian families." Accordingly, it has three primary programs: First, "critical studies on concepts and products of legislation on family, women, and children." Second, "to educate society by disseminating AILA's studies and policies." Third, "advocating against products of legislation on family, women, and children, which are in contradiction to the nation's identity" (Interview with Widyasari and Susanti 2019).<sup>3</sup>

Based on AILA's goal, they clearly seek to influence public discourse and policymaking to enforce conservative Islamic morality regarding gender and sexuality. One of AILA's main features is producing anti-feminism discourse and opposing feminist advocacies because, as I explain later, according to AILA women activists, feminism constitutes a threat to Islamic morality. In January 2018, AILA published a book titled "*Delusi Kesetaraan Gender*" (the Delusion of Gender Equality), which was particularly dedicated to criticising feminism. AILA has also propagated anti-feminist ideas through social media. They concede that feminist ideas have permeated the state's policies, particularly through the ratification of some international covenants that support women's rights and gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW). Therefore, AILA women activists believe that resisting feminism discursively is insufficient. More crucially, they consider political engagement essential to influence and critique the state's policies on gender and sexuality (Interview with Kania 2018d).<sup>4</sup> They contend that Indonesia's laws, regulations, and policies should cohere with "cultural and local wisdom, eastern custom (or the so-called Asian values), and most particularly Islam as the majority religion" (Interview with Soebagio 2019).<sup>5</sup>

AILA's members are women based in Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, who generally come from middle-class and well-educated backgrounds. Some are social activists, while others are female Muslim preachers. AILA was formed by members of Islamic or dakwah organisations, such as the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (INSISTS) and Centre for Gender Studies (CGS)<sup>6</sup>, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS, *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*), Mushida (*Muslima Hidayatullah*), Salimah, Wanita Islam (WI), Gerakan Peduli Remaja (GPR), Persatuan Islam Istri (Persistri), Indonesia Tanpa JIL (ITJ), Gerakan Indonesia Beradab (GBI) (Interview with Kania 2018d).

AILA's first public appearance was in 2017 when they demanded a judicial review from the Indonesian Constitutional Court of Articles 284, 285, and 292 of the Penal Code (KUHP) regarding

<sup>3</sup>Interview with AILA women activist Diana Widyasari and Suci Susanti in Jakarta, 14 January 2019.

<sup>4</sup>Interview with Dinar Dewi Kania, AILA's Division of Research and Law, in Jakarta, 9 November 2018.

<sup>5</sup>Interview with Rita Soebagio, AILA's chairman in Jakarta, 21 January 2019.

<sup>6</sup>Two key persons of AILA, Rita Soebagio and Dinar Dewi Kania are INSISTS' researchers. Established by "graduates of Malaysia's Institute for Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC)," INSISTS is an Islamic think-tank based in Jakarta. Developing the discourse of "Islamization of science" and "Islamic worldview," it focuses on countering ideas of liberalism, pluralism, and secularism (including feminism) introduced by Indonesian liberal Muslims (see Ardianto 2018; Bruinessen 2013; Kersten 2015). CGS is one of INSISTS' wing organizations concerned with countering feminism. In this context, it is fair to argue that these two Islamic think tanks significantly impacted and expanded AILA's counter-discourse against feminism.

immoral crime. They organised, pleading with the government to include homosexuality and adultery (*zina*) or consensual sex as crimes under the definition of immoral offences. Despite the constitutional court ultimately declining to approve AILA's requests, they sparked a public debate about whether the state should control sexual morality in the public sphere. Women's rights and feminist groups, especially the Komnas Perempuan, strongly opposed AILA's demands. For them, consensual sex and homosexuality are clearly private matters in which the government must not interfere (Interview with Widyasari and Susanti 2019).

Regarding gender ideology, AILA women activists acknowledge the equality of men and women before God and their equal rights and responsibilities in Islamic obligations and teachings. One AILA women activist explained that Islam outlines a set of religious duties that both men and women must uphold, such as God's command to have true faith, perform the prayer, make a journey to Mecca, practice righteousness, and seek science. Nonetheless, AILA women activists uphold traditional gender relations and roles that support women's domesticity. However, in their view, this does not mean that women are barred from being active in the public sphere (Interview with Soebagio 2019).

In the eyes of AILA women activists, women's status and roles are not socially constructed but have been determined by divine revelation as explained in the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition. Their understanding of women's status and roles are articulated through the idea of *fitrah* or *kodrat*, meaning women's social roles are based on their biological nature. Based on this belief, the roles of women as mothers and housewives and men as breadwinners are considered inherently natural (Kania 2018a). The concept of motherhood is also articulated in terms of its function as "the very first school for their children (*al-umm madrasat al-ula*)."<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, women are primarily supposed to nurture and educate their children and build the moral fabric of future generations. In their view, since this gender difference has been determined by Islamic provision, it is fixed, absolute, and unchangeable regardless of socio-cultural context. Yet, they also insisted that this role division should be considered complementary, not hierarchical (Hilipito 2019)<sup>7</sup>.

Unlike Muslim feminists, according to AILA women activists, the Qur'anic concept of *qiwama* acknowledges men's authority and leadership in the family, requiring wives to submit to their husbands. One AILA women activist explained that this concept is crucial to maintaining a harmonious family "according to the will of God and His messenger." She believed that men's familial leadership follows the nature of human beings since it has been universally practiced throughout human history. According to her, a man's inability to exercise his leadership (*qiwama*) endangers his family's survival. Men's *qiwama* is fundamental to their masculinity within the framework of a family, and each man should be able to fulfil these ideals when he gets married (Hidayati 2019).<sup>8</sup>

### In the Name of Islamic Morality and Family: Resisting the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill

The newly passed Sexual Violence Eradication Bill (*Rancangan Undang-Undang Penghapusan Seksual*) (RUU PKS) sparked mass demonstrations by feminist and women's rights groups as proponents and conservative Islamic groups as opponents. While the former urged the bill's passing, arguing that Indonesia's current legal system is insufficient to systematically prevent and eliminate various forms of sexual violence, the latter argued that the bill threatens Islamic morality, family, and the nation.

Accordingly, the bill took ten years to pass. It was first initiated in 2012 by Indonesia's National Commission of Anti-Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) as the umbrella organisation of Indonesian feminist or women's rights movements. It was subsequently brought to the House of Representatives (DPR RI) in 2016 by two political parties, the National Awakening Party (PKB) and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), to be included in the national legislation program.

<sup>7</sup>Meyrinda Rahmawaty Hilipito, Member of AILA's Division of Law and Research, "Kewajiban dan Hak Asasi Manusia (Duties and Human Rights)," a material delivered in an online class on "Islamic Worldviews on Women Issues" held by The Center for Gender Studies (CGS) via WhatsApp group, 15 April 2019.

<sup>8</sup>Nurul Hidayati, the AILA's General Secretary, "Konsep Qawwamah (Concept of Men's Authority)," a material delivered at an online class on "Islamic Worldview on Women Issues" held by The Center for Gender Studies CGS) via WhatsApp group, 24 April 2019.

After several heated debates in the parliament, the bill was finally passed in April 2022 (Cakra Wikra Indonesia 2022; Interview with Tardi 2022)<sup>9</sup>.

Explicit in the bill's formulation is the perspective of feminist legal theory and the concept of sexual consent. With an emphasis on a victim's experience, the bill aims to comprehensively eradicate various forms of sexual violence, including sexual harassment, marital rape, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and forced abortion (Interview with Tardi 2022). It also introduces the definition of sexual violence and provides a legal basis for preventing and handling sexual violence, including legal protection for the victim. The bill's definition of sexual violence is as follows:

Sexual violence is defined as any act of degrading, humiliating, assaulting, and/or other acts against the body, a person's sexual desire, and/or reproductive function, by force, against a person's will, which causes a person to be unable to give consent in a free state, due to unequal power relations and/or gender relations, which results in or can result in physical, psychological, sexual suffering or misery, economic, social, cultural, and/or political losses (Komnas Perempuan 2017).

More significantly, a women's rights activist from Komnas Perempuan claims that the anti-sexual violence bill contains six essential provisions, each of which is equally imperative and serves as a legal foundation for the eradication of sexual violence in Indonesia:

There are six key points of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill, each of which cannot be removed, namely (1) prevention of sexual violence, (2) criminal forms of sexual violence, (3) victims' rights, (4) special procedural law for sexual violence, (5) penalties and criminal provisions, (6) coordination and supervision (Interview with Tardi 2022).

As a contemporary Indonesian counter-movement against feminism, AILA women activists mobilised specifically in response to this bill. They legitimised their activities mainly by presenting them as preserving Islamic morality and the traditional concept of family. In resisting the bill, they produced counter-discourse in public, generated street mobilisation, and propagandised on social media through hashtags like #uninstallfeminism and #Indonesiatanpafeminis (Indonesia without feminism). Together with their political ally, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), to thwart the bill's passing, they also attended several public hearings in the parliament to argue against it (Cintakeluarga.org 2018).

Anti-feminism discourse is central in AILA's rhetoric against the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill. Such discourse primarily frames feminism as a threat to Islamic morality and the family. Their counter-discourse against feminism should be accordingly contextualised to examine how it was deployed to oppose the bill's ratification.

### *Feminism against Islamic Morality*

AILA women activists argued that feminism is incompatible with Islamic morality to oppose the ratification of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill. They argued that the definition and types of sexual violence are conceptualised from the perspective of feminism rather than Islamic morality. More importantly, they contended that the bill defines sexual violence in terms of "gender-based violence," which implies that what makes sexual violence violent is the existence of coercion or unintended behaviours within the context of unequal power or gender relations. Accordingly, the scope of sexual violence regulated in the bill is sexual conduct that implies an element of coercion, such as "rape, forced abortion, forced prostitution, and forced contraception." To AILA women activists, the source of norms for this bill should be Islamic morality and "Eastern culture," which prohibit what they call "deviant sexuality" (e.g., consensual sex outside marriage) regardless of whether it is consensual. Based on this, they then framed the bill as aiming for "sexual liberalisation" rather than addressing sexual violence (Kania 2018c).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Siti Aminah Tardi (Indonesia's National Commission of Anti-Violence against Women), online, 05 October 2022.

<sup>10</sup>See also AILA's archival document to oppose the ratification of the sexual violence eradication bill (RUU PKS) at the Indonesian parliamentary, 28 January 2018 (Dpr.go.id 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.dpr.go.id/dokakd/dokumen/RJ3-20180807-123806-9410.pdf>



One AILA women activist explained that feminism justifies the practice of same-sex relationships and consensual sex outside marriage through feminism's concept of "gender equality, sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression" (Interview with Soebagio 2019). Feminism, which AILA women activists see as the source of sexual immorality, can be compared to the organic framework of a tree. That is, "feminist is the root, gender theory is the branch, and LGBT is the fruit":

Many groups of society or policymakers remain uncritical in dealing with a variety of concepts and thoughts which unconsciously contribute to the fertility of immoral acts, such as the concept of gender, sexual orientation, and its conceptual derivations. This is because they lack reference that there is (a strong connection) between the deviant sexual acts and the concept of gender or gender equality that come from feminism (Soebagio 2018: viii).

Feminism is also framed as a threat to the Islamic conception of a woman's nature. One AILA women activist explained that the feminist idea of gender as a socially constructed category of what constitutes femineity and masculinity conflicts with traditional women's roles:

It can be concluded that the meaning of "gender" as socially constructed (category) contains value, ideology, ambition, and interest of certain groups. The concept of gender as socially constructed (category) does not mean to see women as opposed to men, who are more suitable to bear, nurture, and care for children" (Shafira 2019).<sup>11</sup>

As I explained while discussing AILA women activists' gender ideology, their perspective of women's status and roles in Islam is articulated through *kodrat/fitrah wanita*, where women's biological nature defines their social roles. Considering this, it is conceivable that AILA women activists strongly oppose the feminist notion that sex is a biological category and that gender is a socially constructed category that dictates gender roles and relationships. Furthermore, they extend the concept of *kodrat/fitrah wanita* by arguing that Islam justifies their oppositions:

From the Islamic perspective, the difference between men's and women's roles are primarily determined by revelation (*wahy*). Men's responsibility as a leader of family and breadwinners is not determined by Arabic culture but rather by revelation as the messenger of God had practised. Likewise, the obligation to seek science for both men and women are not determined by culture, but rather by God's revelation (Kania 2018c: x).

Scholars of gender and sexuality in Indonesia have demonstrated that conservative Muslims commonly use *kodrat/fitrah wanita* to defend traditional women's roles (Rinaldo 2013; Robinson 2009). This idea also mirrors the state's gender ideology of Soeharto's New Order. As Kathryn Robinson (2009: 10) explains, by inventing the notion of *azas kekeluargaan* (the family principle), the Soeharto regime imposed "the ideology of sex categories based on biology" to legitimate and control the state's proper gender roles: men as household heads, the symbol of publicity, and women as mothers and wives, the symbol of domesticity. More importantly, based on this gender ideology, the regime restricted women's active participation in the public sphere, sustained through the concept of *kodrat wanita*, which refers to a "woman's social role that is preordained by her biological (especially reproductive capacities)."

Based on this line of reasoning, AILA women activists then framed the bill as containing the ideology of radical feminism because it implicitly contains the idea of sexual freedom or sexual consent, which is usually voiced through the idea of bodily autonomy ("my body is mine!"). They then framed feminism not as a paradigm for women's liberation or empowerment but, conversely, as a basis for Muslim women to transgress Islamic morality by fully controlling their bodies, having the choice to have consensual sex outside of marriage, wearing whatever clothes they want, and to having the right to choose their gender identity and non-binary sexual orientations (Kania 2018a; Interview with Soebagio 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Azalia Shafira, "Definisi Gender (the Definition of Gender)," a material delivered at an online class on "Islamic Worldview on Women Issues" held by The Center for Gender Studies (CGS) via WhatsApp group, March 14 2019.

Indeed, proponents of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill, including Muslim women's rights organisations like Rahima, argued that the bill is fully Islamic because sexual violence violates Islamic norms. In particular, according to the Congress of Indonesian Female Muslim Clergy (KUPI), the principle of non-violence is one of the central tenets of Islam. They claimed that "The bill is an effective way to protect human beings from sexual violence that dehumanises them, and is also a strategic means to implement the objective of sharia (*maqashid al-shari'a*)" (KUPI 2020: iv). In this regard, KUPI, in collaboration with Alimat, and the Indonesian National Commission of Anti-Violence against Women, published a book dedicated to countering anti-feminist voices against the bill from a progressive Islamic perspective (KUPI 2020). In addition, the Indonesian National Commission of Anti-Violence against Women insisted that the idea of coercion governing the definition of sexual violence implies that this bill is *lex specialist*, meaning that consensually sexual practices are beyond the bill's regulation (Komnas Perempuan 2018).

However, in defence of their position during the parliamentary debate on the bill, AILA women activists proposed a conceptual alternative for the bill: "*kejahatan seksual*" (sexual crime) instead of "*kekerasan seksual*" (sexual violence). They argued that the former term is more consistent with Islamic morality as it also includes consensual sex outside marriage and same-sex relationships as immoral offences (Kania 2018c).<sup>12</sup> By bringing this alternative concept to the fore, they attempted to insert their agenda of regulating public sexual morality based on conservative Islamic values.

### **Feminism against the Family**

AILA women activists also frame their contention against feminism as aiming to preserve the traditional family. In this respect, feminism is framed as a Western-liberal force to alienate women from their families:

Feminist movements have eventually alienated women from the warmth of the family. Women are too busy pursuing careers and competing with men to prove their existence. Then many of them experience alienation, depression, and other psychological problems. This is because they are against their instinct and nature (*kodrat*) as a woman (Kania 2018b: 13).

Feminism is framed as the cause of family disharmony because it obstructs the established Islamic concept of the biological nature of women and their roles in a family. To AILA women activists, this is because feminism positions the family as the very institution in which patriarchy operates. In this regard, one AILA woman activist exemplified that feminism demands legalising contraception and abortion because women's roles as mothers should not be based on their biology but rather on their free choice (Interview with Soebagio 2019).

AILA women activists then deployed this notion to oppose the sexual violence eradication bill. They framed that the bill is against family values since it defines sexual violence not based on the perspective of Islamic morality. Furthermore, they argued that the bill would imperil the function of the family as the guardian of Islamic morality since the idea of sexual coercion governs the bill's scope of sexual violence. For example, one AILA women activist exemplified that the earlier draft of the bill includes "sexual control" as a form of sexual violence, "which includes any rule deemed as discriminative against women based on morality and religion," such as to coerce them to "internalise certain religious symbols." As she understood, the bill will preclude parents from, for instance, making their daughters wear the veil because this is against their consent (Interview with Soebagio 2019).

As mentioned earlier, AILA women activists highly value the traditional family. A professor of family resilience at Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), Euis Sunarti, one of AILA's advisory boards, claimed that the Indonesian ideal conception of family is "religious, hierarchical, and harmonious." This conception is deemed inherent and embedded in Indonesian culture, contrary to Western feminism's ideas of freedom and gender equality. She believed that the family's hierarchical structure is not discriminatory but should

<sup>12</sup>See also AILA's archival document to oppose the ratification of the sexual violence eradication bill (RUU PKS) at the Indonesian parliamentary, 28 January 2018 (Dpr.go.id 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.dpr.go.id/dokakd/dokumen/RJ3-20180807-123806-9410.pdf>

be based on balance and justice. It presupposes that men are the familial leaders, and each family member has a respective functional role (Hidayatullah.com 2020). In Islamic terms, this conception of family is frequently justified through the idea of *qiwama* derived from the Qur'an, *al-Nisa'* (4): 34, which is traditionally interpreted as guaranteeing men's leadership and authority over women in marital relationships.

In this context, she argued that the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill undermines this "structural-functional conception of the family" because, in her viewpoint, the bill uses "a feminist social-conflict paradigm" to define gender-based sexual violence. Furthermore, she insisted that this feminist paradigm is anti-family because it considers family as the foundational structure of patriarchy (Sunarti 2021). In this vein, she said the bill could create familial conflicts:

The feminist paradigm used as the basis for this bill will cause conflict and even increase the potential for sexual violence at the most core level, namely the family or household. This is because it eliminates the functional, structural paradigm inherent in the values and culture of relations between men and women in Indonesian families and society. This paradigm has already been institutionalised in the Indonesian Law on Marriage and the Law on Family Development (Sunarti 2021: 78–79).<sup>13</sup>

As an alternative, AILA women activists contended that to solve what they call "sexual crime," the state must govern sexual morality publicly and strengthen the roles of the family. AILA women activists mainly use this notion to outlaw consensual sex outside of marriage and same-sex relationships in Indonesia. In their view, family is foundational to the order of the nation and state (see Sunarti 2021).

In response to AILA women activists, Muslim feminists contended that the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill would instead strengthen family resilience (Interview with Kodir 2022).<sup>14</sup> In their views, it is misleading to claim that the bill is against the family because the concept of non-violence and gender equality underpinning the bill is intended to establish equal relations within the family. In the same vein, the Congress of Indonesian Female Muslim Clergy (KUPI) has introduced three Islamic principles on which gender relations should be based: *ma'ruf* (doing good to one another), *mubadalah* (reciprocity), and *keadilan hakiki* (true justice) (Kodir 2022). Conversely, the practice of marital rape and other forms of sexual violence are believed to jeopardise the function of the family. In particular, according to KUPI, sexual violence is against the Islamic principles of marriage:

Sexual relations in a marriage that are free from sexual violence are an imperative prerequisite for the attainment of *sakinah* (peaceful) and *maslahah* (good) family. *Mawaddah wa rahmah* (mutual love and care) as the central pillar of the *sakinah* family will not be achieved when marriage is marred by sexual violence (KUPI 2020: iv–v).

The family, seen as shielding the moral fabric of society, is also linked to the discourse on state and religious relations (Platt *et al.*, 2018). AILA women activists used the state's discourse on the ideals of the nuclear family within Indonesia's 1974 Marriage Law to outlaw LGBT sexualities and consensual sexual practices outside marriage (Sunarti 2021: 60).<sup>15</sup> In this respect, heterosexual marriage and the nuclear family are seen as the only legitimate and ideal conceptions of marriage and family, which is in line with the values of the state's development. Contrarily, they argued, same-sex relationships put the stability of the family at risk because they cannot result in the procreation of children and violate Indonesian cultural and religious norms.

<sup>13</sup>See also AILA's archival document to oppose the ratification of the sexual violence eradication bill (RUU PKS) at the Indonesian parliamentary, 28 January 2018 (Dpr.go.id 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.dpr.go.id/dokakd/dokumen/RJ3-20180807-123806-9410.pdf>

<sup>14</sup>Interview with Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, Cirebon, West Java, 14 October 2022.

<sup>15</sup>See AILA's archival document. "Putusan MK Nomor 46/PUU-XIV/2016" (the constitutional court's decree on AILA's demand to outlaw adultery and homosexuality) (Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia 2016). Retrieved from [https://mkri.id/public/content/persidangan/putusan/46\\_PUU-XIV\\_2016.pdf](https://mkri.id/public/content/persidangan/putusan/46_PUU-XIV_2016.pdf)

This narrative demonstrates how the concept of heteronormativity used to oppose and criminalise non-normative sexual rights is ingrained in the state's discourse on the nuclear family (Wieringa 2015). As anthropologist Tom Boellstorff (2004: 470) argues, "It is through heterosexuality that gendered self and nation articulate." This discourse began when the New Order regime imposed the state's "family principles (*azas kekeluargaan*)" as the gender ideologies of the ideal citizen (see also Robinson 2009; Wieringa 2015). As a result, within the state discourse, heterosexuality is seen as the only valid sexual preference for familial citizenship. According to Boellstorff (2004: 470), this reveals how LGBT sexualities are excluded from "the national belonging," or "to be national must be a heterosexual choice" – a common narrative deployed by conservative Muslims, including AILA women activists, in Indonesia's contemporary context.

AILA's emphasis on morality and family should also be set against a broader context. As Platt *et al.* (2018) explain, in many Southeast Asian countries, the politics of morality is profoundly grounded in and articulated through the discourse of religion and family because the family is deemed the guardian of religiously public morality. The idea of the so-called "Asian values" are then invented within "familial and collectivist social structures," considered morally distinct from Western values (Platt *et al.* 2018: 1–3). The same discourse also applies to the context of Indonesia, mainly developed by the state's power and conservative Muslim groups (Bennett and Davies 2016; Boellstorff 2004; Brenner 2011; Wichelen 2010; Wieringa 2015).

Similar narratives can also be found in other pro-family or anti-feminist movements worldwide, with primarily female members (Bendroth 1999; Marshall 1985; Steuter 1992). For example, in the context of the American protestant fundamentalist pro-family movement, Margaret Lamberts Bendroth (1999: 36) explains how, historically, "The family becomes the moral terrain of religious conservatives." In this context, familial rhetoric was deployed to oppose "abortion, homosexuality, and the Equal Rights Amendments (ERA)." According to Bendroth, the narrative of "family decline" is commonly used to reject the challenge of modernity. In the context of conservative Islamic movements, the notion of preserving the traditional family reflects their concerns about threats to traditional gender roles, typically associated with Western secularism. Like Bendroth, Erin Steuter (1992) explains how American anti-feminist movements deployed the narrative of "the preservation of traditional industrial family" to oppose women's suffrage and the ERA. According to Steuter (1992: 291), what drives the emergence of pro-family or anti-feminist movements is that "Rapid social change was seen by many women as a threat to families and the traditional function of women."

In the case of AILA women activists, the interplay between the idea of women's *kodrat* or *fitrah* and harmonious familial structures is used to defend women's traditional roles within a nuclear family against feminist challenges. In Indonesia's post-authoritarian context, this is not unique to AILA women activists. As Saskia E. Wieringa (2015) explains, the idea of "*keluarga sakinah* (happy, peaceful family)" is constructed by conservative Muslim groups to perpetuate women's traditional roles. That is, to build a harmonious family, women are supposed to be pious (*shalihah*) and obedient (*taat*) to their husbands. Accordingly, feminist ideas and agendas of gender equality are seen as a threat to familial harmony.

### Ideological Battle: The Image of the Enemy

As many scholars of gender and sexuality in Indonesia have explained, while Indonesia's democratic reform has created space for increasing involvement in politics, this does not always align with the agenda to reform gender-based public policies (see Afrianty 2020). Gender and sexuality issues in Indonesia's *Reformasi* always entail contestation over the role of Islamic morality in the public sphere. As Suzanne Brenner (2011: 478) argues, "Gender and sexuality have become key arenas in which battles over competing views of democratisation as well as Islamic morality are waged."

Against this background, I argue that the activism of AILA women activists should be understood in terms of the ideological fight against feminism in contemporary Indonesia. Their main agenda is to enforce sexual morality at the state level based on conservative Islamic values, and feminist ideas and politics are seen as a threat to their political struggle. One AILA woman activist explained:

The makers of women's programs which result from CEDAW, are our enemy. Why do they impose it on the Muslim world while America has never ratified it? Moreover, Ulama have been reminded about this due to its danger. People who undertake this departs from an ideology. Including LGBT, it is part of an ideology (Majalah Hidayatullah 2016).

In light of this ideological battle, to AILA women, it is crucial to delegitimise feminist ideas and advocacies. The fundamental strategy is to essentialise feminism as a Western ideology threatening Islam. The construction of the ideological image of feminism is evident in the following AILA woman's narrative:

Many people are not aware that struggling for gender equality does not mean struggling for women's justice because justice does not necessarily mean equality. The definition of gender also does not refer to a particular biological sex. Therefore, consciously or not, those struggling for the idea of gender equality are struggling for feminist ideology, an ideology that proposes unlimited freedom, particularly transgressing religious guidelines... The struggle for gender equality will eventually become a time bomb for Indonesian society and the nation. Women and men no longer know about their ideal nature (*kodrat*) and the role they must conduct as God's servants and vicegerents on Earth (Kania 2018c: xiii–xiv).

For AILA women activists, it is crucial to distinguish their ideology and identity from those of Indonesian feminists. This is evident in how they distinguish between "Islamic" and "feminist" worldviews. In contrast to scholars of gender and Islam in Indonesia who have demonstrated how Islam and feminism are compatible (Anwar 2018; Rinaldo 2013; Van Doorn-Harder 2006; Wieinga 2009), my study of AILA women activists shows how they make the two incompatible. One AILA women activist explained:

If we do not use those concepts (in the Islamic worldview), we certainly use another worldview. Now, some attempts encourage us to use the concept of feminist worldview. Feminism is a worldview or framework that also offers the concept of God, happiness, life, and morality. There is a feminist version of the concept of morality such as the ethics of care and justice. This will be different from the concept of justice in Islam. The Islamic concept of happiness and womanhood is different from those of feminism. Therefore, if we use a feminist worldview, it does not necessarily mean that we use a woman's worldview. Certainly, dealing with every woman's problem, a Muslim woman who uses an Islamic worldview is different from a non-Muslim woman who uses a secular worldview (Kania 2019).<sup>16</sup>

AILA women activists' idea of an "Islamic worldview" is largely influenced by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a Malaysian Muslim intellectual whose thoughts are developed by INSISTS, an Indonesian conservative Muslim think-tank, to argue against reformist-liberal Muslims. Nevertheless, I contend that their conception of an Islamic worldview differs from that of Islamic feminism, which also acknowledges the imperative of an Islamic worldview as both a frame of reference and an alternative to secular-liberal feminism. Indeed, Islamic feminists are characterised by their intellectual capacity to engage with classical Arabic Islamic texts, proposing a contextual hermeneutical approach to re-reading them in light of gender justice (Anwar 2018; Badran 2009; Safi 2003; Nisa 2019).

In contrast, AILA women activists lack the adequate ability to engage directly with classical Islamic texts. Their conception of Islamic worldview arguably echoes textualist interpretations of women and gender in Islam, as seen in how they understand the traditional status and roles of women as mutable prescriptions in Islam. In this regard, they oppose Islamic feminism because, in their views, it is just a feminist imposition to deconstruct the established Islamic texts pertaining to women's issues

<sup>16</sup>Dinar Dewi Kania, "Perempuan dan Islamic Worldview (Women and Islamic Worldview), a material delivered at an online class on "Islamic Worldview on Women Issues" held by The Center for Gender Studies (CGS) via WhatsApp group, 11 March 2019.



(Interview with Kania 2018d). In their opinion, turning back to Islam against feminism means subscribing to what Islam has already prescribed for women in a conservative sense.

Set against this ideological battle, to AILA women activists, the fact that feminism is a contentious concept is irrelevant. What matters for them is constructing an ideological image of feminism as their enemy. For example, one AILA woman activist recognised various forms of feminism, including liberal, radical, socialist-Marxist, and post-colonial feminism. She also understood that the waves of feminist movements have their respective characteristics, thoughts, and demands. However, disregarding these complexities, feminism is reduced as a threat to the Islamic conception of womanhood, morality, and traditional family (Kania 2018a). In this regard, AILA women activists seek to maintain that they are the guardians of Islamic “true womanhood,” the family, and religious morality – a common claim made by pro-family and anti-feminist movements (see Bendroth 1999; Marshall 1985; Steuter 1992).

## Conclusion

This study attempted to elucidate how Islamic conservatism has significantly challenged the ideas and agendas of women’s rights and gender equality in contemporary Indonesia. AILA women activists’ attempts to enforce conservative values of Islamic sexualities on the state level demonstrate how conservative Islamic groups are increasingly involved in morality projects, using democratic means to achieve their goals by influencing public policies and discourse on gender and sexuality. In this context, AILA women activists see feminist ideas and activism produced by secular and Islamic feminism as threatening the politics of morality they struggle for.

AILA women activists’ discourse of anti-feminism is heavily articulated through the notion of Islamic morality and the traditional concept of family. In their views, feminism is the root of what they considered “sexual immorality,” and this is precisely the argument they deployed to oppose ratifying the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill proposed by Indonesian feminist groups. The bill, they argued, is a feminist attempt to liberalise women and their sexuality and recognise the political status of LGBT people. This counter-discourse serves as a tactical weapon in their fight to uphold sexual morality based on conservative Islamic principles, defend the heterosexual nuclear family, and oppose feminist challenges to the traditional Islamic view of women.

Finally, in the context of Indonesia’s democracy, the presence of women’s rights movements and the counter-movements with their respective competing ideologies demonstrates an “agonistic plurality” of worldviews on gender and sexuality, to borrow the language of political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2013). Although the successful passing of the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill may be the most significant achievement of Indonesian feminist advocacies in the post-*Reformasi* era, it does not indicate that the voices of conservative Islamic groups are silenced. Since contentions about gender always necessitate debate over the place of morality in the public sphere, conservative Islamic groups will always have a *raison d’être* mobilising them, especially in a heated political climate.

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## Unpublished interviews and sources

- Interview with two AILA women activist, Diana Widyasari and Suci Susanti, January 2019, Jakarta.
- Interview with AILA's Division of Research and Law, Dinar Dewi Kania, November 2018, Jakarta.
- Interview with AILA's chairman, Rita Soebagio, January 2019, Jakarta.
- Interview with Siti Aminah Tardi (Indonesia's National Commission of Anti-Violence against Women), 05 October 2022, online.
- Interview with Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir (KUPI, Fahmina Institute), 14 October 2022, Cirebon, West Java.
- Dinar Dewi Kania,** "Perempuan dan Islamic Worldview (Women and Islamic Worldview), a material delivered at an online class on "Islamic Worldview on Women Issues" held by The Center for Gender Studies (CGS) via WhatsApp group, March 11, 2019.
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- Meyrinda Rahmawaty Hilipito, Member of AILA's Division of Law and Research,** "Kewajiban dan Hak Asasi Manusia (Duties and Human Rights)," a material delivered at online class on "Islamic Worldview on Women Issues" held by The Center for Gender Studies (CGS) via WhatsApp group, April 15, 2019.
- Nurul Hidayati, the AILA's General Secretary,** "Konsep Qawwamah (Concept of Men's Authority)," a material delivered at an online class on "Islamic Worldview on Women Issues" held by The Center for Gender Studies (CGS) via WhatsApp group, April 24, 2019.

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