

GENDER AND ISLAM: ON THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY OF MUSLIM MALE AUTHORS IN INDONESIA AND FRANCE

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Abstrak

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi hubungan antara karya sastra dan perubahan social terkait dengan politik seksualitas. Secara umum, karya-karya sastra di dunia yang ditulis oleh pengarang laki-laki, secara historis memiliki muatan yang banyak memosisikan perempuan sebagai objek terutama terkait dengan tubuh dan seksualitasnya. Setelah peristiwa 11 September 2001 yang secara koincidental hampir bersamaan dengan munculnya era Reformasi di Indonesia, baik di Indonesia maupun Prancis semakin banyak karya-karya bertemakan Islam yang ditulis. Dengan menganalisis karya-karya bertemakan Islam yang ditulis oleh pengarang laki-laki, yakni Syngué Sabour Pierrede Patience, karya Atiq Rahimi and Ayat-Ayat Cinta karya Habiburrahman El Shirazy, artikel ini menggunakan lensa teori dengan menetengahkan konsep mengenai politik seksualitas. Sebagai metode, digunakan analisis wacana kritis sebagai usaha untuk memahami beroperasinya kekuasaan bahasa di dalam karya-karya tersebut. Fokus dari penelitian ini adalah pada aspek fundamental yang dipandang oleh penulis novel untuk menjustifikan kontrol terhadap seksualitas perempuan. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa tubuh dan seksualitas perempuan dikendalikan baik secara fisik maupun simbolis, tidak hanya oleh laki-laki tetapi juga oleh keluarga dan masyarakat. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengontrol moralitas publik dan untuk melanggengkan rejim kekuasaan laki-laki yang dilembagakan secara agama, budaya dan politik.

Kata Kunci: gender, Islam, politik, seksualitas, pengarang laki-laki.

Abstract

The article aims to explore the relation between the work of literature and the social changes on the politics of sexuality. In general, literary works written by male authors, historically have a lot of content that positions women as objects, especially related to their body and sexuality. After the incident of September, 11, 2001, which coincidentally almost in the same time with the emergence of the Refromasi era in Indonesia, both in Indonesia and France, more Islamic-themed work were written. By analyzing Islamic-themed works written by male authors, namely, Syngué Sabour Pierre de Patience by Atiq Rahimi and Ayat-Ayat Cinta, by Habiburrahman ElShirazy, this article uses a theoretical lens by highlighting the concept of the politics of sexuality. Critical discourse analysis method is used as an attempt to understand the operation of the power of language in these works. This article focused on the fundamental aspects considered by the authors to justify the control over women's body and sexuality. This research finds that women's body and sexuality are controlled both physically and symbolically, not only by men but also by their families and society. The objective is to control the public morality and to perpetuate the religiously, culturally, and politically institutionalized male dominant regime.

Keyword: *gender, Islam, politics, sexuality, male authors*

Introduction

This article seeks to understand the link between literature and social change within the context of body politics and the politics of sexuality. It understands body politics as the social and political practices through which society, power structures, and dominant cultures control individual and social bodies¹. According to Harcourt, body politics also involves the discourse on women's bodies and sexuality, not only at the personal, family, or community levels, but also at the national and global levels.

The concept of body politics has been widely debated in gender studies, with particular focus given to three aspects: the politics of sexuality, the control of bodies and sexualities by particular political and knowledge regimes²; the body, as used for reproduction in the name of progress and development³; and the body in a capitalist context, i.e., as a commodity and as a product⁴. In this article, focus is given to the politics of sexuality, the controlling and administering of female bodies⁵. As a concept, the politics of sexuality traces its roots to Kate Millet's *Theory of Sexual Politics*, in which she explores the link between power and sexuality⁶. Women's bodies are controlled and administered owing to their perceived fundamentality; by exerting control over women's bodies and female sexuality, men underscore their power in broader society. For example, by controlling the practice of reproduction, men are able to assert control

over the nation⁷. Embedded within the politics of sexuality is a progressive dynamic through which perceptions of society's situation can be understood.

The specific means through which bodies and sexuality are controlled are highly contextual. Islamic societies, for example, have their own tendencies in controlling and administering women's bodies and sexualities⁸. Many writers have explored these dynamics, with a particular focus on the symbols that position women and female sexuality within Islamic society (i.e., veils, polygamy, menstruation, male–female interactions, etc.). Through its discussion of Islamic perspectives of the politics of sexuality, as presented through literature, the current article will contribute to this corpus.

Reviewing the literature, discussion of the politics of sexuality in Islamic societies and communities around the world is apparent. For example, Amir-Moazami, Jacobsen, and Malik have explored gender and gender subjectivities in Europe's Islamic communities, focusing particularly on the subjectivities that emerge when communities must exist under the control of particular regimes⁹. Meanwhile, a volume collected by P. Ilkcaracan and R Athar titled *Sexual Politics in Muslim Societies* investigates such sensitive issues as morality, conservative democracy, pornography, and homosexuality¹⁰. Women sexuality from historical context in Islam societies have been discussed by Irma Riyani in her article entitled Research on (Women's) Sexuality in Islam¹¹. Drawing on non-Muslim French informants, Udasmoro has explored the linguistic othering of Muslims in contemporary

¹ Wendy Harcourt, *Body Politics in Body Politics in Development: Critical Debates in Gender and Development* (London: Zed Book, 2009).

² Michel Foucault, *Histoire de La Sexualite I: La Volonte de Savoir* (Paris: Edition Gallimard, 1976); Kate Millet, *Theory of Sexual Politics* (Great Britain: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1969); Véronique Mottier, *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³ Julia Suryakusuma, *State Ibuism: The Social Construction of Womanhood in New Order Indonesia* (Jakarta: Institute of Social Studies, 1988); Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001).

⁴ Clare Craighead, '(Monstrous) Beauty (Myth): The Commodification of Women's Body and the Potential for Tattooed Subversions', *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equiity* 25, no. 4 (2011): 42–49.

⁵ Mottier, *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction*.

⁶ Millet, *Theory of Sexual Politics*.

⁷ Nira Yuval-Davis, 'Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging', FREIA's tekstserie, No. 75 (Denmark: Institut for Kultur og Globale Studier, Aalborg Universitet., 2011), <https://doi.org/10.5278/freia.58024502>.

⁸ Irma Riyani, 'Research on (Women's) Sexuality in Islam', *Islamika Indonesiana* 1, no. 2 (2014): 1–18.

⁹ Schirin Amir-Moazami, Christine Jacobsen M, and Maleiha Malik, 'Islam and Gender in Europe: Subjectivities, Politics and Piety', *Feminist Review* 98, no. 1 (2011): 1–8.

¹⁰ Pinar Ilkcaracan and Rima Athar, *Sexual Politics in Muslim Societies": Studies from Palestine, Turkey, Malaysia and Indonesia* (Jakarta: CSBR, 2018).

¹¹ Riyani, 'Research on (Women's) Sexuality in Islam'.

French literature¹², especially related to Muslims' women sexuality. Using Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission* and the anthropological research on the French people living in a Muslim country like in Indonesia as her case study, she has also explored how Muslims stereotyped by French authors are perceived by the informants¹³. Although the above-mentioned writings have borrowed from gender studies, they have yet to truly incorporate the politics of sexuality into their discussions; they refer predominantly to the power of political and state elites, ignoring the fact that power is also exerted by the ordinary individuals that surround women. This article thus focuses on the politics of sexuality in the literary works of the Afghanistan-born French author Atiq Rahimi and the Indonesian author Habiburrahman El Shirazy. These writers have been selected for their prominence in early literary discussion of Islamic perspectives of women's bodies.

Every society shapes women's bodies in its own way, and body politics is inexorably linked with society's dominant political, social, and religious regimes. As such, the regimes that control women's bodies and female sexuality are more than political; they are also organizational, institutional, and even personal, exerting power through their everyday discourses. Owing to their distinct histories, French and Indonesian society have taken opposite views of religion.

The French people have been significantly traumatized by religion and religious practices. For example, the French Revolution of 1789 was intended to overthrow the country's regime, a political system and government that had been deeply penetrated by the Church. Opposition to religion has continued for centuries, with secular scholars commonly framing religion as a subversive regime that must be rejected. Existentialist thinkers have even questioned the very existence of God, as seen in Jean-Paul Sartre's statement "Il n'y a pas de Dieu" (There is no God) and Albert Camus' "Dieu est mort" (God

is dead) (Udasmoro & Shahab, 2017).

Meanwhile, the Indonesian nation has been deeply steeped in religious teachings and institutions in both its current state and in its development. Particularly prominent has been Islam, the religion embraced by the majority of the country's population, which has become a driving force of Indonesian culture and been used to legitimize social and political power¹⁴. Islamic organizations were at the vanguard of the nationalist movement throughout the colonial era, and even during the national revolution, using social and political strategies to assert Indonesians' right to sovereignty and Islam's political legitimacy. Later, after decades of authoritarian rule during which Muslim organizations relied predominantly on surrender strategies, this legitimacy again rose to the forefront. As political reform, which began following the resignation of President Suharto and collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998, significantly advanced democracy, Muslim organizations were able to use freedom of speech and freedom of expression to express their religious identities and their discourses of piety. One of the freedoms can be seen from the mushrooming of Islamic literature that combine Arabic and Indonesian culture at the end of the 1990s¹⁵.

These historical experiences have informed how the French and Indonesians perceive religion. According to a survey by Tamir et al, some 84% of French people do not consider God or religion important facets of their lives; indeed, atheism and other forms of irreligion are of little concern to the French social, political, and legal systems. Conversely, a survey by the Pew Research Center found that more than 96% of Indonesians believe in God and consider themselves religious¹⁶; this cannot be separated from the legal requirement

¹² Wening Udasmoro, 'The Language Construction of Muslims as the Others in French Contemporary Discourses', *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 77–99.

¹³ Wening Udasmoro, 'Experiencing Literature: Discourses of Islam through Michel Houellebecq's *Soumission*', *Kritika Kultura* 32 (2020).

¹⁴ Achmad Fawaid, Zamroni Zamroni, and Hasan Baharun, 'Contesting Sacred Architecture: Politics of Nation-State in the Battles of Mosques in Java', *Qijis* 7, no. 1 (2019): 129–71.

¹⁵ Cucum Cantini, 'Mengungkap Kebungkaman Dalam Produktivitas Fiksi Pop Islami Penerbit Mizan', *Jurnal Poetika* V, no. 1 (2017): 1–13.

¹⁶ Christine Tamir, Aiden Connaughton, and Ariana Monique Saazar, 'The Global God Divide', *Pew Research Center*, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/07/20/the-global-god-divide/>.

for all Indonesians to embrace one of six official religions¹⁷.

Despite their significant differences, these two countries are linked by an ongoing discourse regarding religion, Islam, and its role in contemporary society. Such discourse has gained increased prominence in previous decades. Following a terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York, United States, on September 11, 2001¹⁸, questions of Islam and its role in contemporary society have significantly influenced the political dynamics of countries around the world. In France, this discourse has been shaped by the influx of refugees fleeing economic and political turmoil in Muslim-majority North Africa, as well as by rightist political parties that oppose such immigration. This also changes the pattern of local (municipal) politics in attempting to govern the relation between the State and the practice of religiosity. The municipals, for instance, start to set up the consultative bodies to regulate religious diversities¹⁹. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, this discourse has been complicated by ongoing democratization processes that have promoted the establishment of increasingly numerous and diverse Islamic organizations. The democratization processes open new opportunities for small and minor groups to appear in the political arena²⁰.

In these countries, numerous literary works have explored the interactions between Islam, social dynamics, and national/global politics. As their theme, many works have examined Islamic perspectives of women and their sexuality, as well as their political and social roles²¹. Such

literature has frequently framed women's bodies as communal, as belonging to society and thus under social control. The male authors of these works frequently narrate women through their own perspectives, integrating them into their fiction, their religious messages, and their individual and social experiences; such authors often position themselves as wielding power, as part of the ruling community. Nonetheless, as men and as Muslims in particular social and cultural contexts, these authors hold quite diverse perspectives.

In France, numerous male authors have examined Islam through their works, often by exploring female bodies and sexuality. Many of these authors come from Muslim-majority countries, former French colonies and other lands (*Outre Mer*'across the sea'). One such author is Atiq Rahimi, an Afghanistan-born writer who rose to prominence with his best-selling novel *Syngué Sabour Pierre de Patience*²². Atiq Rahimi was born in Kabul in 1962. He fled Afghanistan to Pakistan during the Soviet invasion. He got the political asylum from France in 1985. In 1990s, his book *Eart and Ashes* was a best seller in Europe and in the US. In 2008, he won the prix Goncourt, one of the most prestigious literary prize for his novel, *Syngué Sabour Pierre de Patience* (Zabihzadeh et al., 2015). In this novel, Atiq Rahimi depicts an Afghan Muslim woman who experiences violence from her husband. Rahimi describes her through stereotypes, presenting her as weak beings who can only assert herself when her husbands is comatose²³.

In Indonesia, similarly, works with Islamic themes have been produced by male authors from diverse backgrounds; the majority, however, were educated at the Muslim boarding schools (*pesantren*) where their novels are often set. One writer commonly identified as a pioneer of Islamic literature in Indonesia is Habiburrahman El Shirazy, a graduate of Al-Azhar University, Egypt, who owns and operates his own *pesantren*.

ment: Critical Debates in Gender and Development; Millet, *Theory of Sexual Politics*.

¹⁷ Joe Cochrane, 'Embrace of Atheism Put and Indonesian in Prison' in *New York Times*, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/04/world/asia/indonesian-who-embraced-atheism-landed-in-prison.html>.

¹⁸ John R. Bowen, *Can Islam Be French? Pluralism and Pragmatism in a Secularist State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Julia-Martinez Arlño, 'Governing Islam in French Cities: Defining "Acceptable" Public Religiosity through Municipal Consultative Bodies', *Religion, State and Society* 47, no. 4–5 (2019): 423–39.

²⁰ Moch Nur Ichwan, 'The Local Politics of Orthodoxy: The Majelis Ulama Indonesia in the Post-New Order Banten', *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 6, no. 1 (2012): 166–94.

²¹ Harcourt, *Body Politics in Body Politics in Develop-*

²² Atiq Rahimi, *Syngué Sabour Pierre de Patience* (Paris: Des Editions P.O.L, 2008).

²³ Yuli Mahmudah Sentana, 'The Lure of Image: Kebongongan Pada Narasi Perempuan Dalam Syngué Sabour Pierre De Patience Karya Atiq Rahimi', *Jurnal Poetika* IV, no. 2 (2016): 116–28.

Many of his works have been domestic best-sellers and even adapted to film, including *Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of Love)* published in 2004, *Di Atas Sajadah Cinta* published in 2006 and *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih 1 and 2* published in 2007. Through the best known of these, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta (Verses of Love)*²⁴, the author differentiates Egyptian and Indonesian Muslim, their piety, and their sexuality. This research uses the *Verses of Love* as the data.

Both *The Patience Stone* and *Verses of Love* narratively explore the positioning of women within Islamic societies, and in doing so discuss the normative processes through which their bodies are controlled. To better understand their narrative framing, as well as broader discourses regarding the politics of sexuality in Islam, this article attempts to answer two questions. First, what fundamental issues are perceived as justifying the control of women's bodies and female sexuality in those novels? Second, how do male authors narrate women's reactions to the political and social power structures that control their bodies?

This study employs critical discourse analysis in its exploration of two literary works. According to critical discourse analysis, literary studies must not only explore the linguistic production of narrative content, but also the production of ideas and paradigms²⁵. Critical discourse analysis holds that, to understand literary works as social products, it is necessary to consider extrinsic aspects such as the power structures and discourses that shaped their authors' paradigms²⁶.

According to Wijzen, critical discourse analysis takes as its data (the wordings, alternative wordings, rewordings) evident in a text²⁷. As such, this study focuses on the wordings in *The Patience Stone* and *The Verses of Love* relevant to

the politics of sexuality. This is supplemented by discussion of the linguistic elements contained within these wordings, including paradoxes, metaphors, hyperboles, etc²⁸. Through these novels' use of language, the authors' depictions of the power processes that shape female sexuality can be understood.

Data analysis consists of several stages. After being collected, data from *The Patience Stone* and *The Verses of Love* are analyzed through categorization. Based on these categories, specific wordings (metaphors, paradoxes, etc.) are identified and investigated, with reference to existing theories on the politics of sexuality, to tease out tendencies in their usage. Finally, these textual units are explored within the specific social and political contexts in which they were produced.

Sexuality and Control in *The Patience Stone*

Although all religions have their own codified rules and guidelines regarding women's bodies and female sexuality, Islam's stand out for their specificity. This is not surprising, given that women's bodies as inexorably linked with the Islamic concepts of *akidah* (creed) and *akhlaq* (character)²⁹. However, despite the specificity of these rules and guidelines, they are nonetheless interpreted and implemented within specific cultural and social contexts. For instance, although the Qur'an clearly stipulates that women must cover their *aurat* (private parts), definitions of this term vary significantly³⁰.

Within Islam, men have generally played a greater role in controlling women's bodies. Nonetheless, it cannot be said that men are dominant in all Islamic societies; this too is cultural. There is always negotiation, and men's diverse experiences result in diverse views of women's bodies, female sexuality, and the means through which they are controlled. It is thus not surprising that *The Patience Stone* and *Verses of*

²⁴ Habiburrahman El-Shirazy, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (Jakarta: Republika-Basmala, 2004).

²⁵ Dominique Maingueneau, *Discours et Analyse du Discours* (Paris: Armand Collin, 2014).

²⁶ Roma Ulinuha, Wening Udasmoro, and Yahya Wijaya, 'Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method in Social and Literary Framework', *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 2, no. 2 (2013): 262-74.

²⁷ Frans Wijzen, 'Discourse Analysis in Religious Studies (Editorial)', *Religion* 43, no. 1 (2013): 1-3.

²⁸ Dominique Maingueneau, *Au Dela Des Oeuvres: Les Voies de l'analyse Du Discours Litteraire* (Paris: Harmattan, 2010).

²⁹ Farish A Noor, 'When Religion Becomes a Commodity', *Straits Times*, 31 May 2016.

³⁰ John R. Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State and Public Space* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Love exhibit different priorities in their narrative control of women.

In *The Patience Stone*, women's bodies and female sexuality are positioned as symbolizing social piety in Afghani culture. Even though women are entrusted with maintaining this piety, they are socially and culturally positioned as beneath men. They are expected to remain pious, to keep their bodies unblemished, even as they receive no protection and even as men attempt to violate their bodies.

This can be seen, for instance, in the question of virginity, a concept that has been challenged by Muslim feminists such as Fatema Mernissi. Drawing on the culture of North Africa, particularly her home country of Morocco, Mernissi argues that virginity is not for women, but for men. It is men's preoccupation, men's pride and prestige³¹. As such, women fear the loss of their virginity, and will furtively undergo surgery as a means of proving their virginity and avoiding social ostracism. It can be argued that on the one side, women obey the social structure built by men's culture. However, on the other side, it can be also interpreted that this is a women strategy facing to this established social structure difficult to avoid.

Meanwhile, drawing on Egyptian experiences, Nawal el Saadawi argues that questions of women's virginity frequently result in violence against them³². This cultural emphasis on virginity can be traced back to the Qur'anic story of Maryam (known as the Virgin Mary in Christianity). Her purity has been continually reproduced through religious narratives, and been expanded to frame woman's virginity on their wedding nights as indicative of their piety.

Such emphasis on virginity is also reflected in *The Patience Stone*. As seen in the following quotation, women are expected to acquiesce to societal norms regarding virginity; at the same time, they employ particular strategies to avoid being perceived as unmarried non-virgins, which would result in conjugal exclusion and social ostracism. As narrated in the novel:

*Although I was a virgin, I was really scared. I kept wondering what would happen if by chance I didn't bleed that night. ... Her hands sweep through the air as if batting away a fly. "It would have been a catastrophe. I'd heard so many stories about that. I could imagine the whole thing". Her voice becomes mocking. "Passing off impure blood as virginal blood, bit of a brainwave, don't you think?"*³³

One commonly recognized symbol of virginity is bleeding. However, the blood shed during sexual intercourse is perceived differently than the blood shed during menstruation. Although women's bodies produce both, they are positioned differently within the hierarchy constructed and controlled by men. Virginal blood is perceived as clean, as symbolizing a woman's piety, while menstrual blood is perceived as dirty even though it is an integral part of human reproduction. The concept of menstrual blood has longtime been discussed by one of the most prominent the Islamic scholars Arent Jan Wensinck (1882-1939). He argued that the purity law on menstrual blood was influenced by the Jewish purity law³⁴. This law has been followed by the Muslim societies believed as part of Islamic teaching. The discussion about menstrual blood as part of women sexuality is clearly reflected in the below quote showing its importance in Afghani culture:

*"And remember the night—it was when we were first living together—that you came home late. Dead drunk. You'd been smoking. I had fallen asleep. You pulled down my knickers without saying a word. I woke up. But I pretended to be deeply asleep. You... penetrated me... you had a great time... but when you stood up to go and wash yourself, you saw blood on your dick. You were furious. You came back and beat me, in the middle of the night, just because I hadn't warned you that I was bleeding. I had defiled you!" She laughs, scornful. "I had made you unclean."*³⁵

In the above quote, a woman is narrating her

³¹ Fatema Mernissi, 'Virginity and Patriarchy', *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 2 (1982): 183–91.

³² Nawal El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World* (London: Zed Books, 1980).

³³ Rahimi, *Syngué Sabour Pierre de Patience*, 17.

³⁴ Hagal Mazuz, 'Islamic and Jewish Law on the Colors of Menstrual Blood', *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 164, no. 1 (2014): 97–106.

³⁵ Rahimi, *Syngué Sabour Pierre de Patience*, 17.

husband's use of her body and her sexuality for sexual satisfaction. In her narration, the woman uses passive language (which is uncommon in French, where the active voice is most common). The very passivity of these sentences emphasizes the woman's objectification. At its conclusion, the woman states that her husband—perceiving himself as defiled—was enraged after discovering that she was menstruating. Such depictions of menstrual blood as dirty are common in French works on Islam by various male authors.

Perceptions of women's blood in Arab culture are paradoxical. On the one hand, menstrual blood is despised; on the other hand, virginal blood is respected as a symbol of piety and purity³⁶. According to El Saadawi, the rejection of menstrual blood as unclean is commonly justified through reference to a Qur'anic story about a Jewish man's undignified treatment of his menstruating wife. Although this tale was intended to criticize such inhumane behavior, it has subsequently been interpreted to legitimize the stigma against menstrual blood.

In *The Patience Stone*, Atiq Rahimi narrates a similar issue through one of his characters. However, there is a crucial distinction between 'dirty' menstrual blood and 'pure' virginal blood; the former is shed by a temporary wife, while the latter is shed by a virgin. There is a hierarchy here, with virginal women being honored for their perceived purity and piety. Importantly, however, this purity is not for the women themselves; it is for men, who are in no way obligated to maintain a similar level of purity. So great is the pressure that women employ various strategies to ensure that they bleed on their wedding nights. Women in North Africa, as mentioned above, use surgery; as narrated by Atiq Rahimi, experiences in Afghanistan differ significantly. Nonetheless, the novel also shows that women's virginity is insufficient to ensure that they are treated well.

In the first quotation, a woman narrates her sexual experience in an active voice, but nonetheless positions herself as a frightened object. In the second quote, a woman narrates her sexual experience in the passive voice, thereby positioning herself as an object. Nonetheless, in both quotations female characters are given

narrative space, exhibiting opposition through their mockery and scorn. These women reject the hierarchization of menstrual and virginal blood, and thus are capable of negotiating their bodies and experience (albeit silently).

Also discussed in this novel is the issue of reproduction. However, unlike virginal and menstrual blood, which are narrated as being controlled by men, reproduction is shown as involving all members of the family. Women experience significant pressure from their husbands' families, as shown below:

And each time, your mother would come over to me, asking impatiently whether I didn't feel nauseous at all. She thought I was pregnant! When I told other people—my sisters—about the state I got into when you were away, they said I was in love, that was all. But all that didn't last long. After five or six months, everything had changed. Your mother had decided I was barren, and kept hassling me all the time. And you did, too.³⁷

Men's families wield power over matters of reproduction and offspring. In this matter, mothers-in-law are dominant, even though men are the ones with a significant interest in having offspring and continuing their lineage. Afghan society, which is used in the novel as a proxy for Islamic society, is built upon the foundation of a patrilineal system that maintains male power. In such a situation, mothers-in-law serve as the mediators of the patriarchal regime; it is in this capacity that they oppress other women, with their power being legitimized by their age.

In *The Patience Stone*, Atiq Rahimi employs rewording to underscore the importance of reproduction. This can be seen, for instance, in the narration of the main character's aunt and her similar experiences with perceived infertility.

They married her (my aunt) off to this terrible rich man. A total bastard. Stuffed with dirty cash. After two years of marriage, my aunt hadn't been able to bear a child for him. I say for him, because that's how you men see it.³⁸

³⁶ El Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World*.

³⁷ Rahimi, *Syngué Sabour Pierre de Patience*, 30.

³⁸ Rahimi, 37.

The above quote, spoken by a woman, offers a clear critique of the male regime. There is also a clear social hierarchy, wherein a poor woman is expected to unquestioningly obey a wealthy man. Women are expected to act perfectly, and in the local cultural paradigm reproduction and childbirth are identified as integral to perfect womanhood. In this case, women are expected to maintain their body and sexuality, especially to reproduce the generation for the sake of the society built by men's culture³⁹.

Sexuality and Piety in *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*

In many cultures, sexuality is commonly used to justify and legitimize morality. Sexual behavior, particularly the sexual behavior of women, is often perceived as the easiest means of measuring the morality of society⁴⁰. Importantly, however, this morality is not singular, but hierarchical.

Such questions of morality are explored by male authors in their works. Habiburrahman El Shirazy's *Verses of Love*, for instance, follows an Indonesian student in Egypt who attracts the romantic attentions of both Egyptian and Indonesian women. Although this novel deals predominantly with love, it also details the means through which men choose their wives, which are closely linked with women's bodies and female sexuality. Unlike *The Patience Stone*, which is narrated by a woman, *Verses of Love* is narrated by a man; nonetheless, both novels deal with the experiences and objectification of women in Islamic societies.

Prominent in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's discussion of women's bodies and female sexuality is clothing. Throughout *Verses of Love*, women's clothing is depicted as symbolically reflecting their morality. In depicting one of the main character's love interests, an Egyptian Christian named Maria, it is written.

Her clothing was loose, modest, neat. Always long, down to her ankles. She just didn't wear the veil. But still, that was much more respectful than the Egyptian girls her age, who wore tight clothes and pants,

³⁹ Yuval-Davis, 'Power, Intersectionality and the Politics of Belonging'.

⁴⁰ Mottier, *Sexuality: A Very Short Introduction*.

*often exposing a bit of their stomachs. Even though they called themselves Muslims*⁴¹.

Loose, concealing clothing is described as characterizing honorable and respectful women. In this context, religion is not given particular prominence; indeed, the narrator criticizes Egyptian Muslims who wear tight clothing. The narrator thus subjectivizes the male main character, positioning him as an actor who must actively avoid the temptations of women's bodies and female sexuality. Frequently, the male gaze is understood as framing women as objects of visual and sexual pleasure⁴², being a means through which (heterosexual) men mobilize their power and create hegemony. Although the male narrator in *Verses of Love* seemingly rejects the male gaze, he paradoxically employs it in different situations to construct women. This can be seen, for instance, in the novel's depiction of another female character, Aisha.

*"Aisha, open your veil! Your fiancé has the right to see your face," urged Sarah, her aunt. Slowly, Aisha revealed her face. Her clean white face was bowed before me. Subhanallah*⁴³.

Paradoxically, women's bodies are depicted as belonging not only to their husbands, but also to their husbands-to-be. There is a hierarchy of gazes, wherein women's bodies are closed to outsiders but open to their husbands. This gaze, importantly, does not limit itself to women's bodies; it also extends to women's pious behavior. The piety of women is related to men. This is seen in the narrator's description of Nurul, the daughter of a famous Indonesian cleric.

*Is there no greater blessing than a devout girl, one who refreshes a young man's soul? I still can't believe what I experienced that day*⁴⁴.

Throughout the novel, women—of all sorts and types—are subjected to the male gaze and

⁴¹ El-Shirazy, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, 25.

⁴² Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Language, Discourse, Society (New York: Palgrave, 1989); R Ritland, 'Visual Pleasure from Motherhood: Alyssa Milano Changing the Male Gaze', *Media, Culture and Society* 40, no. 8 (2018): 1281–91.

⁴³ El-Shirazy, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, 114.

⁴⁴ El-Shirazy, 114.

reduced to objects of visual and sexual pleasure. Men, conversely, are the subjects who shape their fates. This hierarchy is particularly evident in the novel's description of another woman, an Egyptian named Noura. Her body and sexuality do not only belong to her family, but are transformed into public commodities when she is prostitute by her stepfather and her brothers.

In Noura's beauty, her father saw a business opportunity. Noura could be sold. Noura, however, was unable to do as her father wished. Since then, she had suffered.

One foreign tourist had ordered an Egyptian virgin, and offered 10,000 pounds for Noura. A price quite agreeable to her father and brothers. [Noura] refused, and her father whipped her, over and over. Unable to withstand this attack, Noura acquiesced⁴⁵.

Women are framed as the property of their families, being subjected to violence at the hands of their fathers and brothers. Men are shown as perpetuating violence against women, as exerting control over their "property". Meanwhile, as in *The Patience Stone*, mothers are depicted as incapable of preventing violence against their daughters, as concealing this violence, perpetuating it through their inaction, and even reproducing the culture of domestic violence.

Again and again, Noura was beaten by her own kin, becoming the target of her father and her siblings' rage. We didn't know why her mother didn't defend her. We were shocked by what we saw⁴⁶.

By positioning women as the objects of violence, *Verses of Love* represents the masculine Egyptian culture that is often framed as reflecting the religious practices of its Muslim majority. However, this novel rejects such practices as un-Islamic. Instead, it views such practices and stereotypes as being found in societies and communities around the world. For example, the perception of women as unclean is not only found in Muslim societies, but also in Western traditions. Rather than rejecting violence against women, it is justified by framing it as deeply ensconced in cultures around the world, and thus

unremarkable.

I recalled that the Roman priests, back before Islam had arrived, had agreed that women were unclean creatures, the puppets of devils. They even questioned whether women were human⁴⁷.

It is thus evident that, through *Verses of Love*, the author legitimizes misogyny by depicting them as unclean, as the "puppets of devils", etc. Violence is framed as being universal, and thus it goes unchallenged in the novel.

Of the literary works discussed here, *The Patience Stone* is more critical in its depictions of the practices of Muslims. The author, a migrant Muslim who has long lived in France, has been influenced by other French authors such as Michel Houellebecq (whose book *Soumission* deals with similar questions). French society, though secular, is strongly influenced by Christian traditions, wherein menstrual blood does not have similar connotations.

Meanwhile, referring to Roman society, Habiburrahman El Shirazy describes violence against women as part of Western tradition. He thus justifies its practice, not as part of Islamic culture per se but rather as being common in human societies worldwide—including in the West, where it has frequently been challenged.

Conclusion

In both *The Patience Stone* and *Verses of Love*, male authors similarly examine the politics of sexuality and its application in Islamic societies. They present women's bodies and female sexuality as being controlled, both physically and symbolically, by men, by their families, and by society. Such control is utilized as a means of controlling public morality while simultaneously perpetuating the religiously, culturally, and politically institutionalized male regime.

However, these novels differ in their priorities. In *The Patience Stone*, control of women's bodies and female sexuality is intended to silence women, who can only speak when their husbands are indisposed (i.e., in a coma). Through its depiction of women's reproductive

⁴⁵ El-Shirazy, 135.

⁴⁶ El-Shirazy, 73.

⁴⁷ El-Shirazy, 152.

functions, these novel critiques the misogyny of contemporary society and men's control of women as a means of buttressing their social position and the patrilineal social structure. At the same time, it critiques the positioning of women as the objects of men's sexual pleasure. The symbol of womanhood, such as the virginity or the menstrual blood become the concern of the author. The aim is to control women purity for the sake of perpetuating the dominance of men in controlling the society.

Unlike the dichotomy of *The Patience Stone, Verses of Love* narrates men and women as existing within a hierarchy that is strongly informed by piety. It depicts women as being desired by men not only because of their physical beauty, but also their spiritual purity. However, these desire position women in to a place that they have to fulfill the expectation of the society in term of sexuality and also morality.

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STANDAR PENULISAN ARTIKEL

NO	BAGIAN	STANDAR PENULISAN
1.	Judul	1) Ditulis dengan huruf kapital. 2) Dicitak tebal (bold).
2.	Penulis	1) Nama penulis dicitak tebal (bold), tidak dengan huruf besar. 2) Setiap artikel harus dilengkapi dengan biodata penulis, ditulis di bawah nama penulis, dicitak miring (<i>italic</i>) semua.
3.	Heading	Penulisan Sub Judul dengan abjad, sub-sub judul dengan angka. Contoh: A. Pendahuluan B. Sejarah Pondok Pesantren... 1. <i>Lokasi Geografis</i> 2. <i>(dst)</i> .
4.	Abstrak	1) Bagian Abstrak tidak masuk dalam sistematika A, B, C, dst. 2) Tulisan Abstrak (Indonesia) atau Abstract (Inggris) atau ملخص (Arab) dicitak tebal (bold), tidak dengan huruf besar. 3) Panjang abstrak (satu bahasa) tidak boleh lebih dari 1 halaman jurnal.
5.	Body Teks	1) Teks diketik 1,5 spasi, 6.000 – 10.000 kata, dengan ukuran kertas A4. 2) Kutipan langsung yang lebih dari 3 baris diketik 1 spasi. 3) Istilah asing (selain bahasa artikel) dicitak miring (<i>italic</i>). 4) Penulisan transliterasi sesuai dengan pedoman transliterasi jurnal Musāwa.

NO	BAGIAN	STANDAR PENULISAN
6.	Footnote	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Penulisan: Pengarang, <i>Judul</i> (Kota: Penerbit, tahun), hlm. Contoh: Ira M. Lapidus, <i>Sejarah Sosial Ummat Islam</i>, terj. Ghufron A. Mas'udi (Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada, 1988), 750. 2) Semua judul buku, dan nama media massa dicetak miring (<i>italic</i>). 3) Judul artikel ditulis dengan tanda kutip (“judul artikel”) dan tidak miring. 4) Tidak menggunakan <i>Op. Cit</i> dan <i>Loc. Cit</i>. 5) Menggunakan <i>Ibid.</i> atau نفسه المرجع (Arab). Dicitak miring (<i>italic</i>). 6) Pengulangan referensi (<i>footnote</i>) ditulis dengan cara: Satu kata dari nama penulis, 1-3 kata judul, nomor halaman. Contoh: Lapidus, <i>Sejarah sosial</i>, 170. 7) Setelah nomor halaman diberi tanda titik. 8) Diketik 1 spasi.
7.	Bibliografi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Setiap artikel harus ada bibliografi dan diletakkan secara terpisah dari halaman body-teks. 2) Kata DAFTAR PUSTAKA (Indonesia), REFERENCES (Inggris), atau مصدر (Arab) ditulis dengan huruf besar dan cetak tebal (bold). 3) Contoh penulisan: Lapidus, Ira M., <i>Sejarah Sosial Ummat Islam</i>, terj. Ghufron A.M., Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada, 1988. 4) Diurutkan sesuai dengan urutan alfabet.

PEDOMAN TRANSLITERASI

Transliterasi Arab-Latin yang digunakan dalam tulisan berbahasa Inggris pada Jurnal *Musāwa* ini adalah literasi model L.C. (*Library of Congress*). Untuk tulisan berbahasa Indonesia, memakai model L.C. dengan beberapa modifikasi.

A. Transliterasi Model L.C.

ح = ḥ	ج = j	ث = th	ت = t	ب = b	ا = -
س = s	ز = z	ر = r	ذ = dh	د = d	خ = kh
ع = ‘	ظ = ḏ	ط = ṭ	ض = ḏ	ص = ṣ	ش = sh
م = m	ل = l	ك = k	ق = q	ف = f	غ = gh
	ي = y	ء = ‘	ه = h	و = w	ن = n

Pendek a = i = u =
 Panjang ā = ī = إي ū = أو
 Diftong ay = إي aw = أو

Panjang dengan *tashdid* : iyy = إي ; uww = أو

Ta’marbūtah ditransliterasikan dengan “h” seperti *ahliyyah* = أهلية atau tanpa “h”, seperti *kulliya* = كلية ; dengan “t” dalam sebuah frasa (*contract phrase*), misalnya *surat al-Ma’idah* sebagaimana bacaannya dan dicetak miring. Contoh, *dhālika-lkitābu la rayba fih* bukan *dhālika al-kitāb la rayb fih*, *yā ayyu-hannās* bukan *yā ayyuha al-nās*, dan seterusnya.

B. Modifikasi (Untuk tulisan Berbahasa Indonesia)

1. Nama orang ditulis biasa dan diindonesiakan tanpa transliterasi. Contoh: As-Syafi’i bukan al-Syāfi’i, dicetak biasa, bukan *italic*.
2. Nama kota sama dengan no. 1. Contoh, Madinah bukan Madīnah; Miṣra menjadi Mesir, Qāhirah menjadi Kairo, Baghdād menjadi Baghdad, dan lain-lain.
3. Istilah asing yang belum masuk ke dalam Bahasa Indonesia, ditulis seperti aslinya dan dicetak miring (*italic*), bukan garis bawah (*underline*). Contoh: ...*al-qawā’id al-fiqhiyyah*; *Isyrāqiyyah*; *‘urwah al-wusqā*, dan lain sebagainya. Sedangkan istilah asing yang sudah populer dan masuk ke dalam Bahasa Indonesia, ditulis biasa, tanpa transliterasi. Contoh: Al-Qur’an bukan Al-Qur’ān; Al-Hadis bukan al-Hadīth; Iluminatif bukan illuminatif, perenial bukan perennial, dll.
4. Judul buku ditulis seperti aslinya dan dicetak miring. Huruf pertama pada awal kata dari judul buku tersebut menggunakan huruf kapital, kecuali *al-* yang ada di tengah. Contoh: *Ihyā ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*.

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