

THE PATH OF KEBAYA WOMEN : THE ROLE OF THE SYARIKAT ISLAM WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDONESIA'S DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICS, 1966-1975

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Abstract

This study explores the role of *Wanita Syarikat Islam*, known during the period as *Gerwapsi* (Gerakan Wanita Syarikat Islam), in Indonesia's political landscape between 1966 and 1975. Despite the extensive attention given to Syarikat Islam as a broader movement, the specific contributions of Gerwapsi have been largely neglected in academic historiography. This research aims to address that gap by highlighting the organization's political activism during the crucial transition from the Sukarno to the Suharto regime. Employing a qualitative-descriptive method within a historical framework, the study utilizes primary sources including archival records, photographs, period newspapers, interviews with historical actors, and autobiographies. Data validity is reinforced through triangulation and cross-referencing of multiple source types. Findings indicate that Gerwapsi significantly influenced political discourse and decision-making during the New Order's early years. The organization participated in efforts to attribute responsibility for the G30S/PKI incident to Sukarno, contributed to the formulation of the Islamic Marriage Law, and advocated for the repeal of Presidential Regulation No. 2 of 1959. Gerwapsi also led initiatives against gambling, prostitution, and human trafficking. These roles demonstrate that Gerwapsi was more than an auxiliary women's group; it was a central political actor. This study offers a vital addition to research on women's political movements in modern Indonesian history.

Keywords: Roles, Women's Movement, Syarikat Islam, Politics, Indonesia.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji peran Wanita Syarikat Islam, yang pada masa itu dikenal sebagai Gerwapsi (Gerakan Wanita Syarikat Islam), dalam dinamika politik Indonesia antara tahun 1966 hingga 1975. Meskipun Syarikat Islam secara umum banyak mendapat perhatian dalam historiografi, kontribusi khusus Gerwapsi justru kurang diangkat. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengisi kekosongan tersebut dengan menyoroti kiprah politik Gerwapsi dalam masa transisi dari rezim Sukarno ke rezim Soeharto. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif-deskriptif dalam kerangka metodologi sejarah, studi ini memanfaatkan sumber-sumber primer seperti dokumen arsip, foto, surat kabar sezaman (1966–1975), wawancara dengan saksi sejarah, dan autobiografi tokoh kunci. Validitas data diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber dan pemeriksaan silang antara bahan primer dan sekunder. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Gerwapsi berperan penting dalam pembentukan wacana politik nasional, termasuk keterlibatannya dalam penetapan tanggung jawab Sukarno atas peristiwa G30S/PKI, kontribusinya dalam penyusunan Undang-Undang Perkawinan Islam, serta advokasinya untuk mencabut Peraturan Presiden No. 2 Tahun 1959. Gerwapsi juga aktif

mengusulkan kebijakan pemberantasan judi, perdagangan manusia, dan prostitusi. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa Gervapsi bukan sekadar sayap organisasi, tetapi aktor politik penting pada masa pasca-1965.

Kata Kunci: Peran, Gerakan Wanita Syarikat Islam, Politik, Indonesia

Introduction

"A girl whose mind has been enlightened, whose outlook has been broadened, will no longer be able to live in the world of her ancestors."

"Gadis yang pikirannya sudah dicerdaskan, pemandangannya sudah di perluas, tidak akan sanggup lagi hidup di dalam dunia nenek moyang"

(R.A. Kartini)

The quote from R.A. Kartini is highly relevant in illustrating the progressive shift in women's perspectives, as they become increasingly aware of their rights and freedoms. Women today emerge as intelligent, broad-minded, independent, and creative individuals capable of standing on their own while still embracing their roles as women. This statement serves as a source of motivation for women who have ventured beyond their immediate surroundings, gaining broader insights and thus avoiding confinement within traditional norms.

The national movement evolved into a tool for political struggle, particularly as the potential for implementing Islamic politics in the early 20th century was significantly hindered. At that time, the movement faced opposition from the Dutch-Christian colonial authorities, as well as from emerging communist and nationalist groups that appeared confident and assertive. In response, Islamic political movements began to emerge as a counterforce. These movements permeated all levels of society, involving both the young and the old. Moreover, political activism was not limited to men—women also became actively involved. In

fact, within many core movements, parallel women's movements also emerged, reflecting the notion that women were no less capable in advancing the cause of Indonesia.

For example, alongside the development of the Budi Utomo movement, a women's branch known as Wanita Utomo also formed. Similarly, Muhammadiyah, founded by Ahmad Dahlan, was complemented by its women's wing, Aisyiyah. Likewise, Syarikat Islam, established by Tjokroaminoto, saw the formation of Wanita Syarikat Islam as its female counterpart. These developments underscore the crucial role that women played in the broader landscape of Islamic political movements in Indonesia.

Since 1959 to 2018, Indonesia has had 180 national heroes, meaning that three national heroes were appointed in one year. As many as 49 heroes were appointed by Sukarno, this could be the largest number in the world. In some regions of the world, the concept of a national hero is very different from that in Indonesia. In the United States, more people are considered national heroes who were involved in the revolutionary war of independence. Meanwhile, in France, nationally recognized figures are marked by the presence of a tomb in the Pantheon. The number is also less than 100¹. This number is also not inferior to women in their role in their devotion. This is reflected in the large number of women who become heroes².

Before the 19th century, women faced significant restrictions on their freedom. They were still bound by customs passed down through generations. At that time, Indonesian society tended to place women in a more constrained social sphere than men, with very limited mobility.

¹ Adam. A.W, *Pabrikasi Pahlawan Nasional. In Revolusi Tak Kunjung Selesai Potret Indonesia Masa Kini*, Edited by Remy Madinier, 261–766 (Jakarta: KPG & IRASEC, 2010).

² Suwito Eko Pramono, Tsabit Azinar Ahmad, and Putri Agus Wijayati, 'National Heroes in Indonesian History Text Book', *Paramita: Historical Studies Journal*, 29.2 (2019), 119–29.

One form of this restriction was the practice of "pingitan," where women were required to stay at home, prohibited from working outside, and denied active participation in society and education³. However, with the growing awareness of feminism, pioneered in Europe, Indonesian women gradually became more conscious of their rights. This awareness eventually led to the emergence of the first feminist movement in Indonesia, initiated by R.A. Kartini.

Kartini's contribution to the early feminist movement in Indonesia, though brief, remains significant in the context of women's rights and freedoms. Born on April 21, 1879, and passing away in 1904, Kartini wrote letters that ignited the spirit of young Indonesians and garnered sympathy, eventually sparking Indonesia's feminist movement. Due to the keen interest of Abendanon, the head of the colonial education department since 1900, Kartini's writings were published under the title *Door Duisternis Tot Licht* (*Out of Darkness Comes Light*). These writings provided crucial insights for young women at the time⁴. Alongside Kartini, several other influential female figures, such as Dewi Sartika and Rohana Kudus, also played significant roles in Indonesia's feminist movement⁵.

Over time, Indonesian women became increasingly aware of the importance of education. Women must recognize their responsibility in educating future generations. In line with the struggle for emancipation, several organizations were established, such as *Putri Mardika* in 1912, founded in Jakarta. Its purpose was to provide financial assistance to women for schooling, offer

guidance and necessary information, and foster enthusiasm and self-confidence among women to participate in society⁶. Additionally, religious and nationalist-based organizations emerged. Two significant religious-based organizations were Muhammadiyah, founded by H. Ahmad Dahlan, and Syarikat Islam, which originated from Syarikat Dagang Islam, established by Samanhudi⁷.

The women's movement was further strengthened with the first Indonesian Women's Congress on December 22, 1928. This congress marked a crucial milestone in the "Unity of the Indonesian Women's Movement" and was held shortly after the Youth Congress on October 28, 1928, which propelled the nation toward unity and independence⁸.

It is important to recognize that the women's movement could not have been realized without the involvement of men. As Kuntowijoyo (2001) noted, women's roles in historical movements were never entirely independent. Although the world is composed of both men and women, the term "movement and role" is often interpreted connotatively, suggesting that women are mere contributors while the world remains dominated by men. However, history acknowledges that women are independent individuals, as evidenced by numerous books written about female figures⁹.

One such example is the involvement of women in major Indonesian organizations. Muhammadiyah, founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, established its women's wing, Aisyiyah, while Syarikat Islam created its women's

³ Wisnu Subroto, Melisa Prawitasari, and Muhammad Rezky Noor Handy, 'The Existence of Women Diamond Miners in Pempung, South Kalimantan, XX-XXI Century', *Paramita*, 33.1 (2023), 31–40 <<https://doi.org/10.15294/paramita.v33i1.39213>>.

⁴ Surisno Sulastin, *Kartini: Surat-Surat Kepada Ny. R.M. Abendanon-Mandir* (Jakarta: Djambatan, 1989).

⁵ Susan Blackburn, *Kongres Perempuan Pertama: Tinjauan Ulang* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia dan KITLV-Jakarta, 2007).

⁶ Cora Vreede-De Stuers, *Sejarah Perempuan Indonesia; Gerakan Dan Pencapaian*. Translated By Ehira Rosa,

Paramita Ayuningtyas, And Dewi Istiani. (Komunitas Bambu, 2008).

⁷ Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900-1942* (Pennsylvania: Saint Joseph's University, 1973).

⁸ Julia Suryakusuma, *Ibuisme Negara: Konstruksi Sosial Keperempuanan Orde Baru* (Jakarta: Komunitas Bambu, 2011).

⁹ Ani Purwanti and others, 'Empowering Women: A Reflection on Protecting Against Dating Violence In the Indonesian Context', *Qubahan Academic Journal*, 4.1 (2024), 38–52 <<https://doi.org/10.58429/qaj.v4n1a245>>.

organization, Wanita Syarikat Islam, to amplify women's voices in Indonesia¹⁰.

Speaking of Syarikat Islam, one cannot overlook H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto, a key figure in its development. His contributions were evident when Syarikat Islam operated under Dutch colonial rule, making it one of the first recognized nationalist movements in Indonesia¹¹. Originally founded in Surakarta in 1911 by Haji Samanhudi, a batik trader from Laweyan, Surakarta, Syarikat Islam was initially a response to concerns over economic competition from Chinese merchants under Dutch administration. This prompted Samanhudi to strengthen and protect indigenous traders by establishing Syarikat Dagang Islam based on Islamic principles. At Samanhudi's request, Umar Said Tjokroaminoto helped draft the organization's statutes, and in 1912, the organization changed its name to Syarikat Islam, with one of its objectives being the advancement of national trade¹².

Syarikat Islam played a pioneering role in Indonesia's nationalist movement, opposing colonialism. This has led to debates regarding whether Budi Utomo or Syarikat Islam should be considered the true initiator of the Indonesian nationalist movement¹³.

By 1923, Syarikat Islam's rapid development led to the decision to establish it as a political party, resulting in its transformation into Partai Syarikat Islam (PSI). However, internal conflicts led to a split between the White Syarikat Islam (*SI Putih*), which founded PSI, and the Red Syarikat Islam (*SI Merah*), which later formed the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI)¹⁴. Over time, PSI was renamed Partai Syarikat Islam Indonesia (PSII), reflecting the emergence of various movements aspiring for Indonesia's independence. PSII was a

relatively large and respected party, actively participating in parliamentary democracy. During the parliamentary democracy period, PSII competed in elections against PKI and later faced challenges from Sukarno's left-leaning guided democracy, which eventually collapsed and was replaced by Suharto's New Order¹⁵.

The nationalist movement evolved into a political struggle, as Indonesian youths became increasingly aware of their political potential. By the 1920s, the political aspirations of Islamic movements were constrained, facing colonial rule, communists, and nationalists¹⁶. Consequently, political Islam movements emerged across various demographics, including both men and women. Women played an active role in advancing Indonesia, as seen in the establishment of the Wanita Syarikat Islam movement, which developed alongside Syarikat Islam. This movement stemmed from women's awareness of gender equality in mid-20th century Indonesia, inspiring them to organize¹⁷.

Wanita Syarikat Islam was established to shape individuals as devout servants of Allah, guided by the Qur'an and Sunnah, while also contributing to national development and women's empowerment. The movement initially formed as a local women's division of Syarikat Islam in Makassar and later expanded across Sulawesi and Java, adopting various names over time, including Siti Fatimah (1918), Syarikat Puteri Islam (1927), and PSII Puteri (1973). From 1947 to 1966, it was known as *Gerakan Wanita PSII (Gerwapsi)*, which played a key role in Indonesia's 1955 elections, securing seats in parliament. In 1973, it officially transitioned into Wanita Syarikat Islam, shifting from a political party to a humanitarian and social organization¹⁸.

¹⁰ Takashi Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion: Popular Radicalism in Java, 1912-1926*, *Pacific Affairs* (Newyork: Cornel University, 1992), LXV <<https://doi.org/10.2307/2760206>>.

¹¹ Shiraishi, LXV.

¹² Noer.

¹³ M.C. Ricklefs, *Sejarah Indonesia Modern 1200-2008* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2008).

¹⁴ Noer.

¹⁵ M.C. Ricklefs.

¹⁶ Nicholas Herriman, *The Entangled State: Sorcery, State Control, and Violence in Indonesia* (Yale University Southeast Asia Studies New Haven, CT, 2012).

¹⁷ Shiraishi, LXV.

¹⁸ Shiraishi, LXV.

Based on the above discussion, this research examines the role of Wanita Syarikat Islam in Indonesian politics, particularly from 1966 to 1975. The year 1966 marks Gerwapsi's political influence during Indonesia's leadership transition from Sukarno to Suharto, while 1975 signifies its transformation into a non-political humanitarian movement¹⁹. Hence, this study will focus on "The Role of Wanita Syarikat Islam in Indonesian Politics from 1966 to 1975.

The Role of GERWAPSI in Indonesian Politics

The G30S/PKI has been dismantled, and the establishment of the New Order must not be delayed any further; it must be carried out immediately. We have laid its foundation through the Fourth General Assembly of the MPRS²⁰. President Suharto also emphasized that upholding the New Order is not only a struggle for the present but also a responsibility for the future of our nation. This is not just the struggle of one group but of all groups. Therefore, many factions attempted to contribute to building the New Order. Despite President Suharto's acknowledgment of the stringent requirements demanded by the New Order, these requirements had to be met²¹.

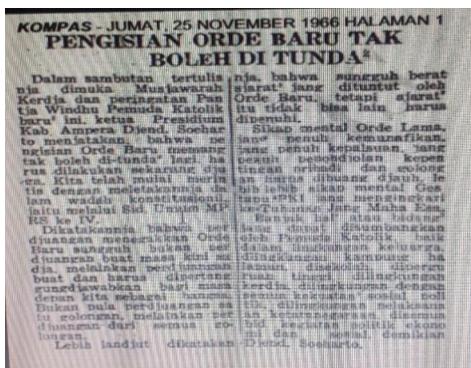


Figure 1. Newspaper clipping on the urgency of establishing the New Order

Source: Kompas, Friday, November 25, 1966

¹⁹ Dina Afrianty, 'Agents for Change: Local Women's Organizations and Domestic Violence in Indonesia', *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, 174.1 (2018), 24–46 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-17401024>>.

²⁰ Suryakusuma, *Ibuisme Negara: Konstruksi Sosial Keperempuanan Orde Baru*.

In the formation of the New Order, the Women's Movement of the Islamic Union Party (GERWAPSI) played a significant role in building Indonesia. True to its objective, GERWAPSI became a platform for women to voice their rights in Indonesian politics. This is evident from the historical records of a GERWAPSI secretary-general as follows:

1. The Dishonorable Removal of President Sukarno

The Old Order mentality, characterized by hypocrisy, falsehoods, and prioritizing personal and group interests, had to be eradicated. The G30S/PKI movement, which had betrayed belief in God Almighty, became the basis for the dissolution of the PKI, as per MPRS Decree No. 25 of 1966. This led to a reduction in the number of DPRGR members. Major General Suharto subsequently increased PSII's seats from twelve to twenty, allocating two of these seats to women, though this represented only 10% of the total²².

In February 1967, discussions arose within the legislative body regarding a resolution calling for a special session of the MPRS to demand President Sukarno's accountability for the G30S/PKI incident. The MPRS Special Session resulted in MPRS Decree No. XXXIII/MPRS/1967, which stipulated:

Following a period of political turbulence and national instability, President Sukarno was officially declared unable to fulfill his constitutional responsibilities. This decision was a culmination of various political pressures and widespread dissatisfaction with his leadership, particularly in light of his inability to navigate the country through the challenges of economic decline, social unrest, and growing opposition. The government and political institutions deemed

²¹ Latif Kusairi, 'Ontran-Ontran Demokrasi: Kekerasan Dengan Isu Dukun Santet Di Banyuwangi 1998-1999', *Universitas Gadjah Mada*, 2015.

²² Julia Suryakusuma, 'Ibuisme Negara', in *Ibuisme Negara*, 2011.

that his administration no longer had the capacity to effectively govern Indonesia, leading to the formal declaration that he was unfit to carry out his duties as the head of state. This decision marked a significant turning point in Indonesia's political history, as it signaled the beginning of a transition away from Sukarno's leadership toward a new political structure²³.

In addition to being declared incapable of executing his constitutional responsibilities, President Sukarno was also deemed unable to implement the policies set forth by the Provisional People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat Sementara, or MPRS). These policies were crucial to the nation's stability and progress, as they were designed to address the socio-political and economic crises that had emerged under his rule. However, his failure to enforce these directives further eroded confidence in his ability to govern, prompting the legislative and military authorities to intervene. His lack of action in implementing key MPRS policies was viewed as a significant shortcoming, reinforcing the argument that a new leader was necessary to steer the country in a different direction²⁴.

As a consequence of his deteriorating political position, President Sukarno was officially prohibited from engaging in any political activities until the next general election. This restriction was imposed to prevent him from exerting influence over political affairs and to ensure a smooth transition of power. Furthermore, his mandate as the nation's leader was formally revoked, effectively stripping him of all governmental authority. In accordance with MPRS Decree No. IX/MPRS/1966, all executive powers were transferred to the designated executor of the decree, who was entrusted with leading the government during the transitional period. This decision underscored the determination of political and military leaders to restructure the

government and establish new leadership to guide Indonesia forward.

The individual appointed as the executor of the MPRS decree would assume the role of Acting President until the MPRS elected a new leader to take over the presidency. This transitional arrangement was essential in maintaining governance and ensuring the continuation of state functions during a period of political uncertainty. By establishing a temporary leadership structure, the government sought to stabilize the nation and prepare for a more permanent resolution through the election of a new president. This step was also meant to reassure the Indonesian people and the international community that the transfer of power was being conducted in an orderly and lawful manner.

Additionally, legal proceedings involving Sukarno were to be conducted according to the law to uphold justice. Any investigations or charges against him would be handled in accordance with Indonesia's legal framework, ensuring that due process was followed. The responsibility for overseeing these legal proceedings was entrusted to the Acting President, who was expected to ensure fairness and transparency in addressing any allegations or legal matters concerning Sukarno. This aspect of the transition highlighted the government's commitment to legal and institutional integrity, reinforcing the idea that political changes were being implemented within the bounds of the law.

Overall, these measures reflected the decisive shift in Indonesia's political landscape, marking the end of Sukarno's rule and the beginning of a new era. The transition was carefully structured to maintain order, uphold legal principles, and pave the way for a stable government. By declaring Sukarno unfit to govern, revoking his authority, restricting his political activities, and establishing a legal framework for his potential prosecution, the political leadership took significant steps to

²³ Alítri, 'Protecting Women from Domestic Violence: Islam, Family Law, and the State in Indonesia', *Studia Islamika*, 27.2 (2020), 273–304.

²⁴ Azli Fairuz Laki and others, 'Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Islam : Satu Analisis', *Prosiding Seminar Antarabangsa Al-Quran Dalam Masyarakat Kontemporeri 2018*, 2018.

redefine Indonesia's governance and set the stage for the nation's future leadership.



Figure 2. The March 7, 1967 event MPRS revokes President Sukarno's mandate

Source:

<https://titiknol.co.id/peristiwa/peristiwa-7-maret-1967-mprs-mencopot-mandat-presiden-soekarno/>

2. Drafting the Islamic Marriage Law

During the New Order, the government proposed a bill on Islamic marriage in 1967/1968. The PSII faction entrusted Zubaidah Muchtar as spokesperson in plenary sessions and commissions. The rationale for supporting the Islamic Marriage Bill was that, since colonial times, Muslims lacked a positive legal framework for marriage, whereas non-Muslims had established laws. For instance, Christians followed the HOCI, while Indonesians of European descent adhered to the BW. Meanwhile, native Indonesians who were Muslim followed customary/Islamic law.

The Islamic Marriage Bill was crucial for Muslims, as marriages needed to be based on Islamic jurisprudence (munakahat). If a marriage was not valid under Sharia law, it would be equivalent to adultery, leading to dire religious consequences. However, non-Muslims did not support the proposal, resulting in an impasse at the third discussion stage. As a result, the bill was indefinitely shelved due to the lack of unanimous agreement among factions.

3. The Initiative Proposal to Repeal Presidential Regulation No. 2 of 1959



Figure 3. Dr. H. Bustaman, S.H., and Minister of Education & Culture, Masyhuri, S.H., discussing the repeal of Presidential Regulation No. 2 of 1959

This initiative was documented in a book by Zubaidah Muchtar detailing her career in law enforcement and politics. As a member of the legislature, vice-chair of the PSII faction, and vice-chair of Commission E (Welfare), she played an active role in many initiatives. One of her most notable contributions was proposing the repeal of Presidential Regulation No. 2 of 1959, which prohibited civil servants in category F (high-ranking officials) from joining political parties²⁵.

This proposal, supported by multiple factions and Golkar, was eventually approved and enacted into law. The justification for this repeal was that democratic life should allow every citizen, including civil servants, to participate in politics as long as it aligned with Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution.

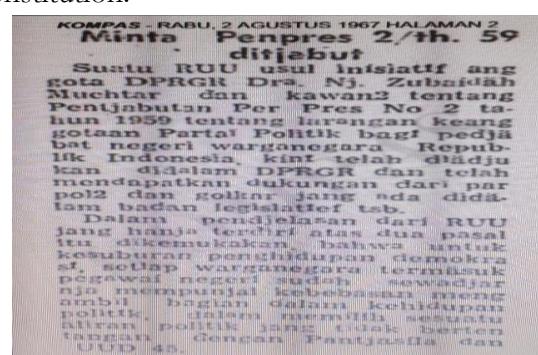


Figure 4. News report on the demand to repeal Presidential Regulation No. 2 of 1959

Source: Kompas, Wednesday, August 2, 1967

²⁵ Muchtar Zubaidah, 'Wawancara Dengan Zubaidah Muchtar', p. 0.

4. The Initiative Proposal to Prohibit Gambling



Figure 5. Zubaidah Muchtar with Minister of Social Affairs, Rusiah Sarjono, S.H., discussing the proposal to ban gambling in 1968

Source: Zubaidah Muchtar, *Sailing Without Boundaries*, (Jakarta: Murai Kencana, 2008), p. 98

In 1968, Jakarta was plagued by widespread gambling, particularly the "Hwa Hwee" lottery, which extended to rural areas. The PSII faction, represented by Zubaidah Muchtar, led the initiative to ban gambling in all forms. However, the proposal faced resistance, as certain factions sought to permit gambling in major cities like Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Semarang. Despite PSII's call for a vote to clearly identify supporters and opponents of gambling, opposition factions refused.

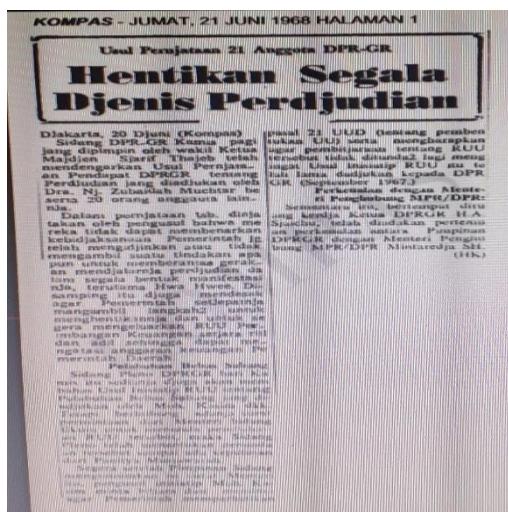


Figure 5. News report on Zubaidah Muchtar and fellow DPR-GR members urging a gambling ban

Source: Kompas, June 21, 1968

A subsequent *Kompas* article, "*Gambling is Forbidden by All Religions*" (March 14, 1969),

reported Minister Mintaredja's statement confirming the government's stance on gambling. Although the government recognized gambling's negative impact, financial constraints led to the continued regulation of gambling in restricted areas for foreign nationals, while Indonesians were prohibited from participating²⁶.

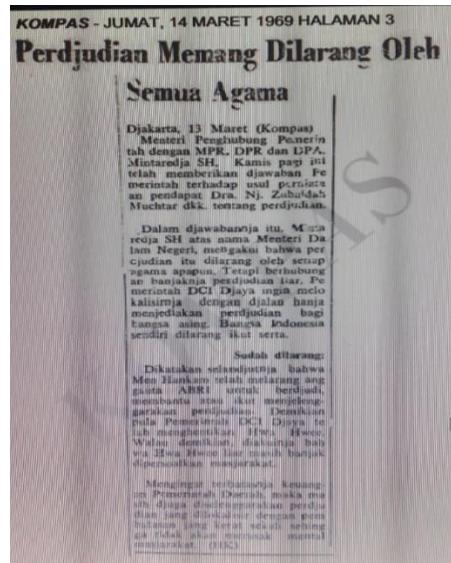


Figure 6. News report on gambling being forbidden by all religions

Source: Kompas, March 14, 1969

Ultimately, under President Suharto's leadership, Law No. 7 of 1974 on Gambling Control was enacted. The previous KUHP article (Article 542) only imposed a one-month sentence or a fine of IDR 4,500. However, the new law increased the maximum penalty to four years in prison or a fine of up to IDR 10 million.

5. Eradication of Human Trafficking & Prostitution

The Deputy Chairperson of Section E (Social Welfare) of DPR-GR, Nj. Dra. Zubaidah Muchtar, explained to the press on Monday that in order to address the worsening moral and ethical decline, the DPR-GR, together with the government, needs to discuss the Bill on the Eradication of Human Trafficking and Prostitution without

²⁶ Purwanti and others.

waiting for the preparation of the Basic Social Welfare Bill²⁷.

She emphasized that the urgency of this matter is critical for the immediate enactment of this law. The existence of a bill on the eradication of human trafficking and prostitution would not only provide a strong legal foundation for the government's authority and obligations but also generate two forms of actions: repressive and preventive measures, as stated by Nj. Zubaidah Muchtar.

The prostitution rate has increased at all levels and in every region, leading to complex issues. Even more distressing, according to the Deputy Chairperson of Section E of DPR-GR, this increase is also occurring among children. Reports indicate that underage children have contracted venereal diseases, and some have been living as husband and wife without marriage and without their parents' knowledge²⁸. Addressing the issue of prostitution²⁹ localization, the Deputy Chairperson of Section E of DPR-GR stated that such localization psychologically and pedagogically implies to the younger generation that prostitution is acceptable, especially if conducted in designated areas³⁰. However, prostitution is prohibited by all religions, at all times, by anyone, and anywhere.

Gerwapsi Transforms into Wanita Syarikat Islam with a Non-Political Orientation

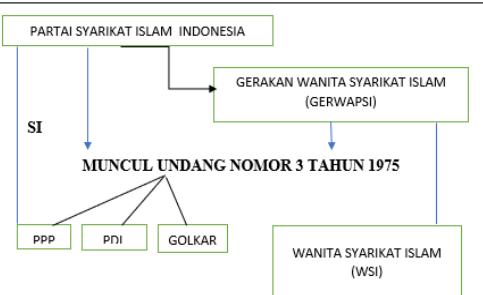


Diagram: The Transformation of GERWAPSI into WSI

Source: Interview with Neneng Subibatu Rohmah, December 5, 2020.

Over time, the New Order government re-verified political parties, reducing their number to ten. By 1975, a major political party emerged from functional and professional organizations Golongan Karya (Golkar). The concept of party simplification (Fusion Concept) was reaffirmed in 1973 through Law Number 3 of 1975 on Political Parties and Groups. This law reduced the number of political parties from ten to three: PPP, PDI, and Golkar³¹.

Under this law, PSII merged its political activities into PPP, and PSII transformed into SI. The existence of Gerwapsi from 1966 to 1975 had a significant impact on Indonesian politics, particularly in advocating for women's rights. However, with the enactment of the party law in 1975 and the New Order's political party fusion policy, Gerwapsi, which was previously a women's political organization, transitioned into a mass organization called Wanita Syarikat Islam. Since then, it has no longer been involved in political affairs.

²⁷ Revina Septiani, 'Strategi Dakwah Badan Musyawarah Organisasi Islam Wanita Indonesia (Bmoiwi) Dalam Pembinaan Akhlak Muslimah Di Masjid Istiqlal', 2014, 114.

²⁸ Elli N. Hayati and others, 'Behind the Silence of Harmony: Risk Factors for Physical and Sexual Violence among Women in Rural Indonesia', *BMC Women's Health*, 11 (2011) <<https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6874-11-52>>.

²⁹ Afrianty.

³⁰ Budhi Haryanto and others, 'Can Prostitution in Indonesia Be Eliminated?', 86.Icobame 2018 (2019), 1–6 <<https://doi.org/10.2991/icobame-18.2019.1>>.

³¹ Arri Handayani, Suwarno Widodo, and Desi Maulia, 'Mapping the Susceptible Areas from Violence against Women and Children', *Gender Equality: International Journal of Child and Gender Studies*, 8.2 (2022), 173 <<https://doi.org/10.22373/equality.v8i2.13646>>.

Conclusion

Over time, Indonesian women have increasingly recognized the crucial role of education in their empowerment and the advancement of society. As the primary caregivers and educators of future generations, women bear the responsibility of shaping an enlightened and progressive nation. In line with this awareness, various organizations emerged to support women's education and social participation. One of the earliest examples was Putri Mardika, established in Jakarta in 1912, which aimed to provide financial assistance to women for their education, offer necessary guidance, and instill confidence in women to engage actively in societal affairs. Besides secular movements, religious and nationalist-based organizations also played a significant role in promoting women's involvement in public life. Muhammadiyah, founded by H. Ahmad Dahlan, and Syarikat Islam were among the most influential religious organizations in this regard.

Muhammadiyah created a special platform for women through Aisyiyah, while Syarikat Islam established Wanita Syarikat Islam under the pioneering efforts of H.O.S. Cokroaminoto. Discussing the Islamic Women's Movement within Syarikat Islam cannot be separated from Cokroaminoto's influence, as he was a key figure in the struggle for Indonesian independence. His leadership and progressive ideas posed a significant challenge to the Dutch colonial government, earning him the title "King of Java Without a Crown." Furthermore, figures such as Yati Arudji Kartawinata and Zubaidah Muchtar contributed significantly to the development of the women's movement within Syarikat Islam, particularly in the formation and leadership of Gerwapsi.

The development of Wanita Syarikat Islam was intrinsically linked to the evolution of Syarikat Islam itself. Initially established as Syarikat Dagang Islam in 1911 by Samanhudi to advance

indigenous trade, the organization expanded beyond economic concerns to address social and political matters, leading to its renaming as Syarikat Islam in 1912. With legal recognition and restructuring under H.O.S. Cokroaminoto, the organization evolved into Partai Syarikat Islam Indonesia (PSII) in 1946. These changes also influenced the women's division within Syarikat Islam, which underwent multiple transformations, from Syarikat Siti Fatimah in 1918 to Syarikat Putri Islam in 1927, Pergerakan Istri PSII in 1933, Gerakan Wanita PSII (GERWAPSI) in 1947, and finally Wanita Syarikat Islam (WSI) in 1973³².

The emergence of women's organizations across Indonesia reflected a growing consciousness about women's rights and national unity. PSII's women's division, WSI, was part of a larger network of women's movements, including Wanita Oetama, Aisyiyah of Muhammadiyah, Jong Islamieten Bond Dames Afdeling (JIBDA) of Jong Islamieten Bond, and Meisjeskring of Jong Java. These organizations played a crucial role in fostering nationalism and social cohesion, culminating in the First Indonesian Women's Congress in Yogyakarta in 1928. This congress, attended by around 600 participants from 30 different organizations, was a milestone in uniting Indonesian women's movements under a common goal of social progress and gender equality. Wanita Syarikat Islam, at the time known as Wanita Partai Syarikat Islam Indonesia, was an active participant, demonstrating its alignment with the broader aspirations of the Indonesian women's movement.

The contribution of Wanita Syarikat Islam extended beyond social and humanitarian efforts, reflecting the broader political transformation of Syarikat Islam. As PSII became a political entity, its women's wing, Gerakan Wanita Partai Syarikat Islam (GERWAPSI), played a direct role in national politics. Within the PSII structure, GERWAPSI operated under the leadership of the general chairman, shaping its programs in

³² Latif Kusairi, 'Witchcraft and Sumpah Pocong: Transformation and Resolution of Cases with the Issue of

Shamans in Banyuwangi', *SHAHIH: Journal of Islamicate Multidisciplinary*, 7.1 (2022), 55–66.

alignment with PSII's political agenda. The organization played an instrumental role in shaping the political landscape of Indonesia by actively influencing several key issues that had a profound impact on society. Its involvement extended beyond social and humanitarian causes, as it took firm political stances to advocate for justice, morality, and legal reforms that aligned with its principles. One of the most significant political actions undertaken by the organization was its advocacy for the dishonorable removal of President Soekarno. This stance was based on the belief that his leadership no longer served the best interests of the nation. By taking this bold political position, the organization demonstrated its deep concern for the country's governance and future direction, positioning itself as a critical player in Indonesia's political evolution.

In addition to its involvement in national leadership matters, the organization also contributed to legal reforms, particularly in the realm of family and marriage law. It played a pivotal role in the drafting of the Islamic Marriage Law, which aimed to create a legal framework that upheld Islamic principles while ensuring the protection of women's rights in marriage. This initiative was crucial in addressing issues such as polygamy, divorce, and marital responsibilities, ensuring that legal provisions reflected both religious values and contemporary social realities. The organization's active participation in this legislative process highlighted its commitment to strengthening legal protections for families and promoting social harmony.

Beyond political and legal advocacy, the organization took a firm stance against social vices that threatened the moral and economic stability of society. One of its major efforts in this regard was proposing a resolution to ban gambling. Gambling was seen as a detrimental activity that led to financial ruin, social instability, and moral decay. By pushing for a prohibition on gambling, the organization sought to protect individuals and families from the negative consequences associated with this practice. Its advocacy was

rooted in the belief that a society free from such harmful influences would be better equipped to foster economic growth, stability, and ethical values.

Moreover, the organization demonstrated its commitment to social justice by leading efforts to combat human trafficking and prostitution. These issues were pressing concerns in Indonesian society, as they involved the exploitation of vulnerable individuals, particularly women and children. The organization actively campaigned against these practices, raising awareness, advocating for stricter laws, and providing support for victims. By addressing these deeply rooted social problems, the organization reinforced its role as a champion of human rights and gender equality, striving to create a safer and more just society for all.

Through these various initiatives, the organization not only played a crucial role in shaping political discourse but also worked tirelessly to promote a more ethical, just, and morally upright society. Its influence extended across political, legal, and social spheres, demonstrating a holistic approach to national development. By advocating for leadership changes, legal reforms, and social protections, the organization left a lasting impact on Indonesia's historical and political landscape, reinforcing the importance of active civic engagement in shaping a nation's future.

However, the political landscape in Indonesia underwent a major shift with the introduction of Law No. 3 of 1975, which reduced the number of political parties from ten to three: PPP, PDI, and Golkar. As a result, PSII merged its political activities into PPP, marking the transition of PSII back into Syarikat Islam as a non-political organization. This restructuring had a profound impact on GERWAPSI, which subsequently transformed from a politically active women's organization into a purely social and humanitarian entity under the name Wanita Syarikat Islam.

Today, Wanita Syarikat Islam continues to exist as a social organization dedicated to

empowering women through education, economic development, and humanitarian initiatives. Though it no longer engages in political activities, its legacy remains deeply embedded in the history of Indonesian women's movements. The struggles and achievements of Wanita Syarikat Islam, along with other pioneering women's organizations, have laid a strong foundation for gender equality and women's empowerment in Indonesia. Their historical contributions continue to inspire future generations of Indonesian women to actively participate in shaping the nation's future, ensuring that the spirit of emancipation and social progress endures.

This paper thus contributes significantly to the historiography of Indonesian women's political movements by presenting WSI/GERWAPSI not simply as ancillary or symbolic entities but as autonomous organizations with real political influence and social vision. By emphasizing their legislative advocacy and leadership roles, this study challenges prevailing narratives that often marginalize women's roles in Islamic political history and enriches the discourse on gender, religion, and politics in Southeast Asia.

For future scholarship, this research offers a foundational framework to explore further the intersections of women's movements with legal reform, political transitions, and social justice campaigns. It also encourages more rigorous methodological approaches in historical gender studies to uncover the complexities of women's agency in nationalist and postcolonial contexts. Moreover, the findings invite comparative analyses with other regional women's organizations, expanding the understanding of how gender and religion interact in political mobilization.

In conclusion, this study not only fills a critical research gap but also affirms the importance of Wanita Syarikat Islam's legacy in Indonesia's political and social development. It provides a rich historical account that can inspire continued efforts to document and analyze the vital contributions of women to Indonesia's nation-

building process and the ongoing struggle for gender equality and political empowerment.

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