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Research Notes

The Seminar on *Da'wah* in Kuala Lumpur in 1977 and
the Emergence of *Hijab* Awareness in Indonesia

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Osman Bakar, *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth:
The Islamic Heritage* [Revised New Edition] (Kuala Lumpur:
Islamic Book Trust, 2022). 114 pp. ISBN 978-967-2795-00-1.

Reviewer: *Senad Mrahorović*

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Research Notes

The Seminar on *Da‘wah* in Kuala Lumpur in 1977 and the Emergence of *Hijab* Awareness in Indonesia

Alwi Alatas*

Agus Setiawan**

Achmad Sunjayadi***

Yunadi Ramlan****

Abstract: In the late 1970s, a new awareness of wearing *hijab* emerged in Indonesia, especially among Muslim students in public schools. Even though it was banned by the New Order government throughout the 1980s, *hijab* was finally permitted to be worn in public schools and its use continued to spread in Indonesia since then. One of the activists who was involved in the emergence of *hijab* awareness suggested that it arose after The Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on *Da‘wah* that was held in Kuala Lumpur in February 1977. This seminar was attended by representatives of Muslim youth organisations from several Asian countries. Using thematic analysis approach via library research and interviews, this study explores the extent to which the seminar relates to

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the rise of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia in that period. Although the seminar was not the only factor driving the emergence of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia, this research found that there was a close and dynamic relationship between the two.

Keywords: Seminar on *Da'wah*, Kuala Lumpur, *hijab* awareness, 1970s, Islamic revival

Abstrak: Pada penghujung 1970-an, satu kesedaran baru dalam memakai *hijab* muncul di Indonesia, terutamanya dalam kalangan pelajar Islam di sekolah awam. Walaupun ia diharamkan oleh kerajaan Orde Baru sepanjang 1980-an, *hijab* akhirnya dibenarkan dipakai di sekolah awam dan penggunaannya terus berkembang di Indonesia sejak itu. Salah seorang aktivis yang terlibat dalam kemunculan kesedaran berhijab mencadangkan bahawa ia timbul selepas *the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah* diadakan di Kuala Lumpur pada Februari 1977. Seminar ini telah dihadiri oleh wakil pertubuhan belia Islam dari beberapa negara Asia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis kandungan menerusi penyelidikan perpustakaan beserta kaedah temubual, kajian ini meneroka sejauh mana kaitan seminar tersebut dengan kebangkitan kesedaran berhijab di Indonesia dalam tempoh tersebut. Walaupun seminar itu bukan satu-satunya faktor yang mendorong kemunculan kesedaran berhijab di Indonesia, kajian ini mendapati terdapat hubungan rapat dan dinamik antara kedua-duanya.

Kata kunci: Seminar *Da'wah*, Kuala Lumpur, kesedaran *hijab*, 1970-an, kebangkitan Islam

Introduction

Islamic clothing for women, commonly referred to as *hijab*, was not widely worn by urban Muslim women in Indonesia in the 1970s. The *hijab* referred to here is clothing that covers a woman's entire body except for the face and hands from wrist to fingers, as required by Islam – the issue of the *niqab* or face cover for Muslim women will not be discussed in this article. Religious Muslim women in Indonesia at that time only wore typical headscarves, known as *kerudung*, which still showed some of their hair. Interestingly, *hijab* awareness began to appear in Bandung and several other cities in Indonesia in the late 1970s and has continued to grow since then. *Hijab* in public schools was initially rejected by the Indonesian government, and students who

wore it ran into difficulties throughout the 1980s. However, it was approved in the following decades and was increasingly prevalent in society. Today, *hijab* is not only a part of Indonesian culture but has also developed into a very profitable fashion industry.

There are several factors that contributed to the emergence of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia in the late 1970s. One of the factors was a seminar on *da'wah* held in Kuala Lumpur in early 1977 (henceforth the seminar or the Kuala Lumpur Seminar). The seminar, which was organised by *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia*/Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) and World Assembly of Muslim Youth (WAMY), was titled The Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on *Da'wah* and lasted for five days. A source person for this research, who contributed to the initial spread of *hijab* awareness in Bandung, attended the seminar and underlined the importance of the seminar pertaining to the emergence and early development of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia. Therefore, this study investigates how the Kuala Lumpur Seminar had contributed to the emergence of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia. What was the content of the seminar, and who were the people involved? This study uses thematic analysis approach via library research and interviews to comprehend the relationship between the 1977 Seminar in Kuala Lumpur and *hijab* awareness in Indonesia.

The Emergence and Development of *Hijab* Awareness in Indonesia Since the End of the 1970s

In this section, the emergence and development of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia are treated as a background for this study before discussing the role of the seminar. In the late 1970s, a new awareness of *hijab* emerged in Indonesia, especially among students in public schools. Several Islamic youth and student organisations advocated the ideal form of *hijab* for Muslim women. This reflected a fresh consciousness of *hijab*, which was then disseminated through *da'wah* efforts. The content of this new *da'wah* was, of course, not only related to the issue of *hijab*. However, this research will only focus on the development of *hijab* in Indonesia in that era. The New Order government initially suspected the new *da'wah* and *hijab* awareness as a form of political movement. This created antagonism throughout the 1980s between those who supported the *hijab* and those who opposed it. Public schools controlled by the New Order government became a battleground of these two different

perspectives, as more and more female students decided to wear *hijab* in public high schools.

During this period, *Pelajar Islam Indonesia*/Indonesian Islamic Students (PII) actively promoted *hijab* to female students who participated in their Islamic trainings. Struck by the new awareness, some female students decided to wear *hijab*. The appearance of *hijab* at schools, which differs from the approved uniforms, prompted mixed reactions. Some schools allowed *hijab* or tolerated it, but some saw it as a violation. Initial friction arose at some schools in Bandung (Hidayat, personal communication, 2019; “Siswi Berjilbab Tersingkir,” 1985). After that, the trend of *hijab* in public schools increased, and the conflict also increased between the *hijabi* students and the school administrations.

The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, responded to this situation by issuing Surat Keputusan/Decree No. 052 (SK 052) that introduced a national school uniform (Surat Keputusan Dirjen PDM No. 052, 1982). This regulation became the basis for many public schools to prohibit *hijab*. This regulation, however, did not stop the *hijab* trend. Throughout the 1980s, many *hijabi* students were pressured, kicked out of class, and forced to move to other schools. A report, for example, stated that in mid-1983, around 100 *hijabi* students were expelled from public senior high schools (Tamam & Arifin, 1984). The following year, around 350 students in Bandung were threatened with expulsion from public schools for wearing *hijab* (Anas, 1984). The *Majelis Ulama Indonesia*/Indonesian Council of Muslim Scholars (MUI) and several other Islamic organisations tried to persuade the government to relax its stance on *hijab*, but these efforts did not immediately give the expected result. The *hijab* trend in public schools was perceived by the government as a clandestine Islamic political movement. In the mid-1980s, for example, the Ministry of Education issued a brochure which stated that the *hijab* movement (*aksi jilbab*) “yang dilancarkan oknum-oknum tertentu, bukan suatu gerakan agama, melainkan merupakan gerakan politik” [launched by certain individuals, is not a religious movement, but a political movement] (*Wartasiswa*, n.d.).

In the late 1980s, a few *hijabi* students brought their cases to court. This had attracted widespread public attention and support (Alatas, 2021). As tensions related to *hijab* escalated, the New Order government

changed its policies and became more friendly to Islam (Gaffar, 1993; Thaba, 1996). In 1991, the Ministry of Education issued a new decree that accommodated the use of *hijab* in public schools (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1991), thus largely putting an end to the *hijab* ban controversy. Since then, the awareness and use of *hijab* has continued to spread in Indonesia.

The Link between the Kuala Lumpur Seminar and the Emergence of *Hijab* Awareness in Indonesia

The emergence of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia in the late 1970s was influenced by a number of factors, such as Muslim dauntless responses to the government's unfavourable policies and religious optimism driven by the idea of centennial Islamic revivalism. These factors and detailed account of *hijab* ban in the 1980s have been discussed in the authors' previous research (Alatas & Desliyanti, 2001), which later reprinted under different title (Alatas, 2021). However, the role of the Kuala Lumpur Seminar is a new finding that has not been discussed before, hence the focus of this article. One of the Indonesian attendees of the Seminar, Bambang Pranggono (personal communication, November 11, 2022) from *Pemuda Istiqamah Bandung*, asserts that *hijab* awareness in Indonesia emerged after this seminar. The key figures and the content of the seminar are analysed below to understand their influence on the emergence of *hijab* movement in Indonesia.

The Seminar on *Da'wah* in Kuala Lumpur was held on 24-28 February 1977 and organised by ABIM and WAMY in cooperation with the Malaysian Foundation of Islamic *Da'wah* and *Pusat Islam Malaysia/* Islamic Centre of Malaysia. The Malaysian government supported this activity through *Pusat Islam Malaysia*. The seminar was attended by representatives of Muslim youth from dozens of Asian countries and a few non-Asian countries. Among the international figures who attended this seminar was Dr. Taufiq Shawie from the World Federation of International Arab Islamic Schools, Dr. Ahmad Totonji, Assistant Secretary General of WAMY, Dr. Abdullah Nasif, Vice-Chancellor of King Abdul Aziz University, and Prof. Osman Raliby from the *Dewan Da'wah Islamiyah Indonesia/*Indonesian Islamic *Da'wah* Council (DDII). Among the speakers at the seminar were Anwar Ibrahim, as President of ABIM, and Dr. Mohd Kamal Hassan, an academic in Malaysia. The seminar featured presentation of working papers,

speeches, panel discussions, and reading of reports on the development of Islam in several countries. Some Indonesians were registered as organising committee members, representing *Pemuda Muhammadiyah/Muhammadiyah Youth*, *Pelajar Islam Indonesia/Indonesian Islamic Students (PII)*, *al-Jam'iyatul Wasliyah*, *Gerakan Pemuda Islam/Muslim Youth Movement (GPI)*, and DDII (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah, 1977).

The Kuala Lumpur Seminar, in which the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwanul Muslimin) seemed to have an important influence, primarily represented reformist organisations and modern Islamic movements. The main figures mentioned and referred to in the seminar were Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, Abul A'la al-Maududi, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Qutb, and Mohammad Natsir. Dr. Taufiq Shawie, one of the main speakers in the seminar, was an early member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt who lived and worked in Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s and 1970s. ("Tawfiq al-Shāwī," n.d.). Shawie put the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, *Jamaat-i-Islami* of Pakistan, and *Majlis Syura Muslimin Indonesia/Council of Indonesian Muslim Associations (Masyumi)* of Indonesia in the same ideological-intellectual movement category in his speech. According to him, all of those movements are popular, view Islam as an all-embracing way of life, and support *sharī'ah* and *jihād* (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah, 1977). Dr. Ahmad Totonji, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, was involved in the early development of several Islamic organisations: Muslim Student Associations (MSA) in 1963, the International Islamic Federation of Student Organisation (IIFSO) in 1969, World Assembly Muslim Youth (WAMY) in 1972, and International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in 1981 (Baran, 2008). WAMY played an important role in the seminar and, along with MSA and IIFSO, was mentioned for its assistance and contributions to several countries.

Several important themes were repeatedly mentioned in the seminar: Islamic revivalism or renaissance, Islam as a complete way of life, the challenges of Western secular ideologies and Soviet communism, and the importance of education, *da'wah* and non-violence popular Islamic movement. In the opening of the seminar, Zakaria Hashim, the chairman of the organising committee, clearly expressed that the seminar is "a manifestation of ... renaissance of the Muslim ummah, especially among the youth" (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on

Da'wah, 1977, p. 26). Anwar Ibrahim described his era as “a very critical and challenging period of history,” pointing at the danger of secularism, cultural imperialism, and the battle of the minds (*al-ghazw al-fikr*). However, he was optimistic about the “sudden emergence of a new *ghairah* [spirit] towards Islam, a renaissance of the Muslim ummah – the rising tide of Islam” (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah, 1977, p. 30).

The aim of the seminar, as highlighted by the chairman, is “to continue the efforts towards the attainment of greater awareness ... of ideals in realising Islam as a complete way of life” (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah, 1977, p. 27). During the report on Islam in Malaysia, ABIM stated that it promotes Islam as a religion (*al-dīn*) that covers the whole aspects of life (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah, 1977). Osman Raliby from DDII repeatedly referred to Islam as “total submission and complete obedience to God” (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah, 1977, p. 183). DDII itself is known as an Islamic organisation that promotes a thorough (*kaffah*) implementation of Islam in Indonesia (Rosidi, 2021).

It is important to note that there is no mention of *hijab* or Muslim dress in the entire seminar report and there is only a brief section on women at the end of the report (Report on the Asian Muslim Youth Seminar on Da'wah, 1977). However, *hijab* is actually one of the important articulations of Islam as a complete way of life, and it was worn by Malaysian and many other delegates during the seminar. As mentioned by Pranggono (personal communication, November 11, 2022), the Indonesian delegates from Bandung were surprised to see many female attendees wearing *hijab* in the Kuala Lumpur Seminar. They got a leaflet with information about the development of *hijab* in Malaysia in the last five years. The spread of *da'wah* and *hijab* in Indonesian public schools might also be encouraged by the seminar's recommendation to strengthen the leadership of Muslim scientists and by the exemplary role of some international figures in the seminar, who are themselves important Muslim scholars with a high degree of education and strong international network.

Some Indonesian institutions that sent their representatives to the seminar, such as PII and DDII, would be actively involved in the emergence and advocacy of *hijab* in Indonesia. The young activists of

Masjid Istiqamah Bandung agreed to propagate *hijab* awareness soon after returning from the seminar. The female members of *Pemuda Istiqamah* started to wear *hijabs*. In 1979, an article on *hijab* written by Sumarni Suhendi (1979) was published in the *Bulletin Kulliyatul Mujahidin Istiqamah*. The article provided information about clothing design that ideally covers the body of Muslim women. *Badan Komunikasi Pemuda Masjid Indonesia* (BKPMI) – later changed into *Badan Komunikasi Pemuda Remaja Masjid Indonesia* (BKPRMI) – was founded on 3 September 1977 in Masjid Istiqamah Bandung (Mulyono, 2018). Toto Tasmara became the first chairman of this organisation and Bambang Pranggono its secretary; both attended the Kuala Lumpur Seminar. The organisation was concerned with the tendency in the direction of Indonesian national development to create a secular society. Another background of its establishment is “*isu kebangkitan Islam Abad XV Hijriyah yang ditandai dengan kesemarakannya kegiatan keagamaan*” [the issue of Islamic revivalism of the 15th century Hijri that was marked by the vibrancy of religious activities] (“Sejarah berdirinya BPKRMI di Indonesia,” 2018). The first committee of this organisation was inaugurated by KH. E. Z. Muttaqien on behalf of *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI). E. Z. Muttaqien would play an important role as the head of MUI of West Java in supporting students with *hijab* in Bandung (Majelis Ulama Propinsi Daerah Tingkat I Jawa Barat, 1980; “Larangan buat si kudung,” 1982).

According to a West Java PII activist, Dadan Dania (personal communication, 2022), PII held a congress in Surabaya in 1980, during which the participants from West Java took the lead in wearing *hijab*. In the same year, PII Bandung and West Java organised a seminar on *hijab*, attended by many high school students, boosting the enthusiasm to wear *hijab* among students in the region. Dania does not mention any relation with the seminar in Kuala Lumpur. However, this study believes that there was a connection between the two, though maybe indirectly, since PII had a representative in the Seminar’s committee. Besides, Dania’s activities centred in Bandung and he had a connection with Masjid Salman, *Institut Teknologi Bandung* (ITB), in which ‘Imaduddin Abdul Rahim had an important influence. PII Jakarta also received influence from West Java. Zainal Muttaqien (2000), a leader of PII Jakarta, informed that the members of PII Jakarta started to wear *hijab* and actively promoted it after attending a training in Puncak, Bogor, in June 1980. The instructors were mostly from West Java.

One of the most important figures in Bandung, West Java, is Muhammad ‘Imaduddin ‘Abdulrahim. Pak ‘Imad, as he is fondly known, had an important role in spreading Islamic *da‘wah* in Indonesia and Malaysia, and he was also one of the speakers in the Kuala Lumpur Seminar. He was born in 1939 in North Sumatera to a religious family with high social status. He started his intellectual career by studying religion and participating in local Islamic organisations. He studied electrical engineering at ITB, Bandung, in the 1950s and graduated in 1962. In Bandung, he was active in *Himpunan Mahasiswa Islam/* Islamic Student Association (HMI) and involved in the establishment of Masjid Salman ITB (Harahap, 2011). In 1963, he continued his study at Iowa State University in the USA. He finished his master’s in 1965 and directly continued his doctoral studies in Chicago. However, he had to return to teaching at ITB that year (Hidayat & Zarman, 2010).

In HMI, ‘Imaduddin trained students through *Lembaga Dakwah Mahasiswa Islam* (LDMI), and he continued this program in Masjid Salman ITB under a new name, *Latihan Kader Dakwah* (LKD), then changed into *Latihan Mujahid Dakwah* (LMD) and after that *Studi Islam Intensif* (SII). LMD trainings had triggered a new Islamic consciousness, which was expressed, among others, through the wearing of *hijab* by female student activists (Latif, 2005). In these training activities, ‘Imaduddin got his inspiration from the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and the *Jama‘at-i-Islami* of Pakistan (Alhumami, 2020). Most probably, he was exposed to the ideas and networks of those Islamic movements when he studied in the USA, which may also explain his involvement in IIFSO. He represented IIFSO at the regional conference on *da‘wah* in Muslim minority countries, organised by WAMY and held in Hong Kong in December 1977, while Anwar Ibrahim represented WAMY on the same occasion (“World Assembly Muslim Youth regional conference on *da‘wah* in Muslim minority countries,” 1977). ‘Imaduddin was imprisoned in 1978 by the New Order government for his critical attitude towards the government. Furthermore, he later played a major role in the founding of *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia/*Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), which epitomised the shift of the New Order’s Islamic policy from suppression to inclusion (Hefner, 1993).

All of the above shows the dynamic interaction of intellectual figures and ideas that streamed into the Seminar on *Da‘wah* in 1977 in

Kuala Lumpur and its relation to the emergence of the *hijab* movement in Indonesia afterwards. This study, of course, does not claim that the seminar was the only or the main cause of the emergence of the *hijab* movement in Indonesia. However, it shows that this seminar had an important contribution to the emergence of new awareness about *hijab* in Indonesia since the end of the 1970s.

Conclusion

In the late 1970s, influenced by several factors at home and abroad, a new awareness and spirit of *da'wah* emerged in several cities in Indonesia, which, among other things, gave rise to a *hijab* movement among students and the young Muslim generation. Despite the initial ban on *hijab* in public schools by the Indonesian government, the enthusiasm to wear *hijab* did not subside. In 1991, the New Order government changed its policy and allowed the wearing of *hijab* at public schools. In the following decades, *hijab* was increasingly worn by Muslim women in Indonesia.

This study discusses one of the factors that triggered the new awareness of *hijab* in Indonesia, which is the Seminar on *Da'wah* among Muslim youth in Asian countries held in 1977 in Kuala Lumpur. The seminar invited representatives from various Asian countries including Indonesia. The main themes discussed as well as the presence of certain figures and institutions in the seminar showed important link with the emergence of *hijab* in Indonesia in the following years. Coming home from the seminar, some of the Indonesian participants from Bandung started spreading awareness about *hijab*. *Hijab* awareness spread to many cities and Muslim girls and women wearing *hijab* were increasing in public schools and other places since then. Although the seminar in Kuala Lumpur was not the only factor behind the emergence of *hijab* awareness in Indonesia in the late 1970s, this study finds a link between the seminar and the emergence of *hijab* in Indonesia in that period.

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