

BRANDS OF PIETY? Islamic Commodification of Polygamous Community in Indonesia

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Abstract: The interrelation between the Islamic faith and consumerism has evoked abundant of religious expressions among Indonesian Muslims as well as identity contests and public piety. Despite the fact that consumerism is irrelevant to many developed countries and has shifted into post-consumerism culture, Indonesian Muslims are keen on practicing consumerism in every aspect of life, including religious practices. This article discusses religious commodification aspects within the practice of polygamy among Indonesian urban Muslims, especially the trend of polygamous marriage promoted on online media. It is through virtual ethnography methods on two distinctive polygamous groups, namely Forum Poligami Indonesia (Indonesian Polygamy Forum) and Rabbanian Family, that the data were gathered. We propose that polygamy has become commodified like any other economic objects due to freedom of expression brought about by democratic atmosphere and development of online media. Moreover, the rise of popular Islam that has conservative tendency, as expressed by middle-class Muslims in Indonesia, has become a strong indication of such a practice.

Keywords: Islamic commodification, consumerism, polygamy.

Introduction

Polygamy, when it is seen as a practice of commodification among Muslim society in Indonesia, is considered peculiar. One of the problems is that the teaching on polygamy can be found in the most

authoritative source of Islamic teachings, that is the Qur'an,¹ which cannot be separated from the diversity of interpretations. The conservative tendency brought by trans-national Islam which views Islam as an ideology vis-a-vis Western ideology also contribute to polygamy's spotlight. Likewise, the fact that a number of religious and public figures practicing polygamous marriage publicly could be considered a legitimate precedent for everyone to follow. However, religious commodification within Islam is not a new topic. One of the types of evidence is that society has been in the condition of what the experts define as the consumerism era. An era marked by the high consumption culture. This culture has replaced the function of consumption from meeting basic human needs to markers of identity and symbols. The use value and exchange value of goods or services have changed to sign and symbol values. As proposed by Baudrillard that in the Postmodern era, use-value and exchange-value are obscured by *sign-value* that puts consumption as *non-utilitarian* activity.² This phenomenon occurs because of the hegemony of capitalism and global economic politics that have become a world ideology.

In its development, the object of consumption has also penetrated the realm that is considered sacred, such as religious practice. In the Islamic context, one of the indications of commodification practice can be observed in the increase in the production of various Islamically packaged merchandise, such as beauty products, clothing, medicines, transportation, or tourism services. This growth in the production of goods and services is accompanied by higher market demand as a result of Muslims' growing prosperity. According to Azra, just like in the economic world, the balance between supply and demand also applies to the context of Islamic commodification practices. He gives an example with the phenomenon of *hajj* travel service with the ONH Plus (*Ongkos Naik Haji Plus/VIP hajj* pilgrimage fee) format.³ ONH Plus is aimed at meeting market demand, those are the congregants who have more assets but have high mobility and limited time. Through this facility, they could perform *hajj* (Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca and Madina) without waiting in long queues by paying more

¹ The Qur'an (Chapter al-Nisā': 3).

² Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* (SAGE Publications, 2017), 76.

³ Azyumardi Azra, "Komodifikasi Islam," *Republika* (Jakarta, September 11, 2008).

than regular or ‘economy’ fee, as the regular *hajj* pilgrimage. In this sense, *hajj* has become a traded commodity.

In terms of polygamy in Indonesia, certain practices that lead to consumerism occurred in the last decade, especially in the era of freedom of expression brought about by democratic sphere. A number of communities based on Polygamy have been established and conducted numerous promotions, such as the one conducted by *Aisha weddings*,⁴ a class on polygamy with Hafidin, education on polygamy through the ‘robbanianfamily’ YouTube channel, and similar events.⁵ The commercialization of the practice of polygamy is not specific to exploitation of woman. However, economic activity can be found in various promotional events such as seminars, workshop or offline *ta’aruf* (personal-approach meeting oriented to self-introduction).⁶ In various distributed leaflets, various programs were held in the form of da’wa events. We see that the phenomenon is a strong indication of the practice of service production to attract consumer responses. In other words, consumption activities in the polygamous community do exist. On the other hand, M. Endy Saputro argues that consumption activity in the religious realm among middle-class Muslim society is no longer the same as the phenomenon of a mere consumerism. Instead, he named the phenomena as the so-called Muslim post-consumerism. In his opinion, Muslim post-consumerism is a part of urban piety, not a failure of understanding modernity. This Muslim behaviour is an identity that responds to economic globalization.⁷ Thus, is the phenomenon of polygamous communities in Indonesia classified as urban piety or Islamic commodification? Therefore, we conduct this research to fulfill and test with various data evidences gathered using online research. Through virtual ethnography, we observed their

⁴ Aisha Weddings, “Hukum Poligami Di Indonesia,” 2021, accessed February 20, 2021, www.facebook.com/aishaweddings.com/posts/10154065808067067; Aisha Weddings, “Hukum Poligami Dalam Islam,” last modified 2021, accessed February 20, 2021, www.aishaweddings.com/keyakinan/poligami.

⁵ *Poligami Setelah Istri Wafat?*, 2022, accessed May 6, 2022; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaSasn5JVoU>; Robbanian Family, “Robbanian Family,” accessed May 6, 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/robbanianfamily>.

⁶ *Ta’aruf* is an Islamic tradition of getting to know each other between men and women for the purpose of establishing a marriage relationship by presenting a witness or a third person.

⁷ M. Endy Saputro, “Everyday Qur’an Di Era Post-Konsumerisme Muslim,” *Mutawâtir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadis* 5, no. 2 (2015), 181.

activities which were uploaded on social media, for instance, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and their websites. In accordance with ethnographical research, we confirmed that those social media accounts are valid and that these accounts are the official social media account of the community that became our subjects of study. Besides, we also become a part of the community as members of their online community.

The Landscape of Islamic Commodification in Indonesia

Numerous practices of Islamic commodification in Indonesia are the result of a number of events; such as the exposure of religious expression after the fall of the new order era, the rise of the urban Muslim middle class society as well as the shift of Indonesian Islam image, as Carla Jones finds it.⁸ Besides, Greg Fealy proposes that the new model of religious expression is another element that became the sign of Islamic commodification practice in Indonesia.⁹ A such religious expression can be found anywhere else. The phenomenon is Muslim community's response towards globalization and global economic politic. In this regard, Noorhaidi Hasan refers to this religious expression as public piety¹⁰ since Islamic image is deliberately promoted due to the cultural influence of the Muslim middle class, who are accustomed to popular culture, which tends to be *artificial* and, in some ways, loses its substantive meaning.

However, Hasan argues that commodification followed by a high demand for Islamic product is not commercialization. Instead, it is an effort to offer and set up Islam to be accepted by a wider market. In turn, it can make a significant contribution to Islamic da'wa.¹¹ In this regard, commodification does not have a negative connotation. This phenomenon can be found in da'wa activities carried out by the *Habaiib*

⁸ Carla Jones, "Materializing Piety: Gendered Anxieties about Faithful Consumption in Contemporary Urban Indonesia," *American Ethnologist* 37, no. 4 (2010): 617–637.

⁹ Greg Fealy, "Consuming Islam: Commodified Religion and Aspirational Pietism in Contemporary Indonesia," *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, /core/books/expressing-islam/consuming-islam-commodified-religion-and-aspirational-pietism-in-contemporary-indonesia/C816FFBF005DBB5805EA850148B9CD2A accessed November 6, 2019.

¹⁰ Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Making of Public Islam: Piety, Agency, and Commodification on the Landscape of the Indonesian Public Sphere," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 3 (2009): 229.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

in Kwitang, Jakarta, who are the descendants of Hadhrami living in Indonesia, especially Islamic scholars from the Sayyid community, or descendants of Prophet Muhammad. These *habaib* carried out their *da'wab* in luxurious places such as star hotels and resorts. They commonly referred this movement as *Bazar Du'a*. Such a movement is aimed at attracting the middle-class Muslims. According to Mona Abaza, the consumptive element in this *da'wa* activity is clearly displayed. In addition, she called the *da'wa* activities of the *habaib* community in Kwitang as a marketing religion.¹²

It is evident that there is a close relationship between middle class Muslims and the practice of commodifying Islam, especially when it is viewed from the aspect of lifestyle. The middle-class Muslim society is generally characterized by consumptive culture.¹³ According to Saputro, the consumerism practice of the middle-class Muslims can be both material and spiritual. In terms of material, consumerism practice is usually manifested in various goods and services labelled Islamically, such as *shar'i* clothing, Prophet-prescribed herbs and medicines, halal cosmetics and the like. Meanwhile, in terms of spirituality, it can be observed in the phenomenon of celebrity preachers, Islamic content on social media, the *Habaib's dhiker* assembly, and Arie Ginanjar's Emotional Spiritual Quotient (ESQ).¹⁴

The phenomenon of consumerism in the Muslim middle class has also produced various community identities. The chosen lifestyle becomes the determinant of a certain identity. For instance, the rise of the *hijab* trend is not solely aim to cover *aurat* or to implement Islamic law but to maintain the prestige of the community. Saputro calls it as the politics of shame.¹⁵ Furthermore, the trend of wearing *hijab* in the style of the *hijaber* community in Malang is also a form of existence in society.¹⁶ Another example lifestyle phenomenon of consuming halal

¹² Mona Abaza, "Markets of Faith: Jakartan Da'wa and Islamic Gentrification," *Archipel* 67, no. 1 (2004): 173–202.

¹³ Mohammad Hasan Ansori, "Consumerism and the Emergence of a New Middle Class in Globalizing Indonesia," *Explorations a Graduate Student Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 9 (2009): 87–97; Saputro, "Everyday Qur'an Di Era Post-Konsumerisme Muslim."

¹⁴ Saputro, "Everyday Qur'an Di Era Post-Konsumerisme Muslim."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Yollanda Desiana Chandra, "Konsumerisme dalam Komunitas Hijab Kontemporer" (Universitas Brawijaya, 2017).

products in several studies in many Muslims' countries shows certain markers of a person's pious identity as found by Johan Fischer,¹⁷ Sarah A. Tobin¹⁸ and Shirazi.¹⁹

Consumerism bias does not only hit the middle-class Muslim in Indonesia. Iranian Muslim which can be classified as "extreme" Muslims in expressing religion, cannot deny this consumptive phenomenon; though, there are negotiations and compromises between Islamic values and hegemonic global capitalism during the process.²⁰ A similar case happens to Pakistani citizens living in the UK. Islamic values play a certain role in their consumption practices. This phenomenon indicates that consumerism has affected the Muslim world. Dialectics between consumerism and religion can also be seen in various other religious teachings, such as Catholicism and Judaism.

Zuzana Búriková examines the consumerist practices of Roman Catholic villagers in Northern Slovakia. He argues that the contradiction between anti-consumerist opinions and consumerist practices is not rare, including in the Roman Catholic villagers. Focusing on popular religion as it was lived in the everyday lives of the villagers, Búriková found that Roman Catholic villagers negotiated their consumption practice with Christian values.²¹ In the context of Judaism, the Haredi, an ultra-Orthodox community in Israel, become an important target for food and other retail companies. These community is one of the poorest sectors but they are large families, often more than eight children. Retailers' efforts to reach the Haredi communities included special chain stores with strict levels of Kashrut (Jewish dietary laws), low-cost products, large packages for big families

¹⁷ Johan Fischer, *Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping Among the Malays in Modern Malaysia* (NIAS Press, 2008).

¹⁸ Sarah A. Tobin, *Everyday Piety: Negotiating Islam and the Economy in Amman, Jordan* (Boston University, 2011).

¹⁹ Faegheh Shirazi, *Brand Islam: The Marketing and Commodification of Piety* (University of Texas Press, 2016).

²⁰ Hossein Godazgar, "Islam in the Globalised World: Consumerism and Environmental Ethics in Iran," in *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability: Paradise Lost?*, Lyn Thomas (ed.), *Consumption and Public Life* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 115–136.

²¹ Zuzana Búriková, "Consumerism in Slovak Catholic Homes," in *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability: Paradise Lost?*, 137–151.

and dress codes of store staff that promise a comfortable, modest atmosphere for the religious consumers.²²

The strong influence of global ideology has eventually led to the commodification of Islamic practices. At least two models of commodification emerged in the midst of the Indonesian Muslim community. First, Islamic labels in various consumption objects in the forms of food, clothing, transportation services, tourist attractions,²³ films,²⁴ music and even toys.²⁵ Second, commodification in the form of commercialization of various religious ritual practices such as online *ta'aruf* for marriage,²⁶ Islamic *da'wah*,²⁷ Islamic content on social media channels and wearing *hijab* (Muslim scarf).²⁸

The practice of commodification both in the forms of Islamic labelling on economic objects and commercialization in various Islamic rituals have led to various findings. Abdur Rozaki argues that it is an image of piety of the Muslim community as well as a struggle for identity. Furthermore, Rozaki states that the phenomenon of global capitalism and Islamic values do not always present a confrontation. On the contrary, they negotiate and adapt to one another in many ways.²⁹ In the meantime, Eric Sasono questions the phenomenon of Islamic films in Indonesia whether it is a form of religious commodification or Islamization process.³⁰ Meanwhile, Yanwar

²² Omri Shamir and Guy Ben-Porat, "From the Parliament to the Market: Political Consumerism and the Fight for Sabbath," in *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability: Paradise Lost?*, 175–193.

²³ Herlina Yustati et al., "Religious Commodification to Increase Public Welfare through Tourism Halal in Indonesia," *Proceeding IAIN Batusangkar* 1, no. 1 (2018): 209–216.

²⁴ Eric Sasono, "Islamic-Themed Films in Contemporary Indonesia: Commodified Religion or Islamization?," *Asian Cinema* 21 (2010).

²⁵ Faegheh Shirazi, "Islam and Barbie: The Commodification of Hijabi Dolls," *Islamic Perspective* 3 (2010): 10–27.

²⁶ Fathor Rahman and Ghazian Luthfi Zulhaqqi, "Fenomena Ta'aruf Online dan Praktik Komodifikasi Perkawinan di Dunia Digital," *Kafa'ab: Journal of Gender Studies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 63–80.

²⁷ Yusron Saudi, "Media Dan Komodifikasi Dakwah," *Al-I'lam: Jurnal Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam* 2, no. 1 (2018): 37–44.

²⁸ Chandra, "Konsumerisme Dalam Komunitas Hijab Kontemporer."

²⁹ Abdur Rozaki, "Komodifikasi Islam (Kesalehan dan Pergulatan Identitas di Ruang Publik)," *Jurnal Dakwah* 14, no. 2 (2013): 199–212.

³⁰ Sasono, "Islamic-Themed Films in Contemporary Indonesia."

Pribadi sees that the phenomenon of consumption practices of Bantenese people as reciprocal relationship (coexistence) between the commodification of Islam and the market economy.³¹

In short, global politics on economy, consumerism culture and commodification in every aspect of life including religion have become social phenomena intertwined as a cause and effect law. Religion, inevitably, becomes an object of consumption in various packaging. It might be a form of an effort to exist as well as to maintain spirituality in the midst of infiltration of material culture.³² To maintain religious sustainability the understanding on certain religion should not be kept in heart, however, it must be promoted attractively for the community to follow. Einstein's findings in her book entitled *Brands of Faith* are quite relevant to review the phenomenon in this consumerism era.³³

Polygamous Communities in Indonesia

Polygamy has been practiced in Indonesia long before the coming of Islam to the archipelago. The patriarchal culture, which places women on the second level, is a legacy that is not easy to eliminate. In the post-modern era, the culture still exists and is a part of everyday life. The women's body is always the object of men's desire. At certain level, with the legitimacy of religious arguments, men have the rights that sometimes 'exceed' their character. Referring to Justito Adiprasetyo on the practice of polygamy in Java, religious legitimacy over the practice of polygamy places sexuality aspects more prominent than other aspects, such as finance and children.³⁴ For example, in the colonial era, Cora Vreede de Stuers stated in *Sejarah Perempuan Indonesia* as Janti quotes it, shows a fantastic number of polygamous marriages. In 1939 the total number of polygamous marriages in Sumatra reached 69.790, and Sulawesi amounted to 22. 378, whereas Java was at the top

³¹ Yanwar Pribadi, "The Commodification of Islam in the Market Economy: Urban Muslim Studies in Banten," *Ajkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 1 (2019): 82–112.

³² Lyn Thomas, "Sustaining Spiritualities in Consumer Cultures," in *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability: Paradise Lost?*, 72–89; Sharmina Mawani and Anjoom Mukadam, "Living in a Material World: Religious Commodification and Resistance," in *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability: Paradise Lost?*, 55–71.

³³ Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: Marketing Religion in a Commercial Age*, Religion, media and culture series (London ; New York: Routledge, 2008).

³⁴ Justito Adiprasetyo, *Sejarah poligami: analisis wacana foucauldian atas poligami di Jawa* (Penerbit Ombak, 2015).

rank with more than 70.000 marriages.³⁵ The figures are an approximation that the numbers can be less or more. Regardless of whether the figures mentioned by Stures are correct or not, the phenomenon of polygamous marriage has taken root in the lives of Indonesians. The motive of doing polygamy is various, from merely sexual, recreational, and even social-political in nature.³⁶ In many historical records, a number of rulers, aristocrats or noblemen are listed of having more than one wife. At a certain level, these wives have different treatment from wives who have royal blood. Such phenomenon has moved Raden Ajeng Kartini (d. 1904), who was a Javanese royal lady and victim of polygamous marriage to criticize the practice of polygamy among Javanese royal circle.³⁷ Through her letters to her Dutch friends, she is considered the most prominent pre-independence Indonesian feminist.³⁸

These data illustrate the sustainability of polygamy practices in Indonesia in the context of individual practices. That is, the practice is spread sporadically as a result of social and cultural production. As for polygamy in the context of a social practice or an action embodied and organized by an institution that only emerged in the last decade. A number of polygamy association in Indonesia that actively promote polygamy are Forum Keluarga Poligami Samara (FKPS) and Yayasan Keluarga Samara Indonesia (YKSI). Besides, there are associations of polygamy in online media namely Forum Poligami Indonesia (FPI) and Rabbanian Family. Though the four communities do not necessarily accommodate the entire polygamous community in Indonesia, at least the four are active and hold various kinds of publications, promotions and campaigns. This research, specifically, observes at the last two associations mentioned above. According to Ahmadi et al., FPI's existence shows an indirect relationship with large organizations in

³⁵ Nur Janti, "Angka Poligami Dari Masa Ke Masa," *Historia - Majalah Sejarah Populer Pertama Di Indonesia*, <https://historia.id/kultur/articles/angka-poligami-dari-masa-ke-masa-vgXwV>, accessed November 4, 2019.

³⁶ Azhari Akmal Tarigan, Nurhayati, and Watni Marpaung, "Taming Islam's Polygyny Law: Revealing Male Sexual Desire in Indonesia's Polygyny Practices", *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 15, 1 (2021)

³⁷ Sri Mastuti, et. al, "Kartini and The Feminism Thinking in Javanese Nobles Women (Women Priyayi)", *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 226.

³⁸ Kartini, *Habis Gelap Terbitlah Terang* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 1963).

Malaysia, namely Global Ikhwan.³⁹ This organization is better known as the Sufi community that opposes the Malaysian government which later became the subject of discussion among the society with calls for polygamous marriage. The association was banned several times by the Malaysian government and it was considered as a threat to the state based on the decision of Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (JAKIM) in 1994.⁴⁰

In Indonesia, before the establishment of FPI, there had been Klub Istri Taat Suami (KITS) which had similar activities. In his findings, Ahmadi argues that the existence of KITS as one of the wings of Global Ikhwan organization, which is a transformation in a new form when it is established in Indonesia. The club was declared by Gina Puspita who had reaped pros and cons from various groups. She is one of the wives of polygamy practitioner, Abdurrahman Riesdam Efendi.⁴¹ In Malaysia, this organization was named Obedient Wives Club (OWC), a branch of the Global Ikhwan organization. The organization was founded by an educated woman from a prominent figure of Global Ikhwan in 2011. According to Han, the main purpose of establishing this organization is to reduce the number of domestic violence and minimize the number of divorces.⁴² In our opinion, the network between FPI and Global Ikhwan in Indonesia is not fully established. In this regard, there is a kind of genealogy of organization but in its development, especially in Indonesia, it has undergone various changes and modification. For instance, the name of the FPI community has undergone a certain change. At first, its name was Dauroh Poligami Indonesia. The name originated from a seminar on polygamy held by the group. Currently, this association also publishes

³⁹ Global Ikhwan, since the very beginning, is not the only established name. Global Ikhwan existing up today has several names. In its first establishment, the name of this organization was Darul Arqam, which turned into Syarikat Rufaqa' Corporation (SRC) or Rufaqa.

⁴⁰ Rizqa Ahmadi, Wildani Hefni, and Mutrofin Mutrofin, "Indonesian Global Ikhwan's Reception and Exspression toward Sunnah Polygamy in Online Media," *Ulu' Albab Jurnal Studi Islam* 20, 1 (2019): 76–78.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴² Lee Wooi Han, "The Islamic Resurgence and Muslim Women's Subjectivity; A Case Study of the 'Obedient Wives Club' in Contemporary Malaysia," in *Southeast Asia Annual Conference Conference Papers* (Presented at the Southeast Asia Annual Conference Conference papers, Taiwan: Department of Public Affairs and Center for International and Public Affairs, Fo Guang University, 2013), 2.

its program through the www.kelaspoligami.com website.⁴³ On the other hand, we found that the emergence of FPI is more prevalent in online media. As if it has no solid network with similar organization like Forum Poligami Samara (FKPS). However, these associations complement one another. For example, when FPI holds a seminar, they invite the speaker from another association and vice versa.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, the establishment of Rabbanian Family community has not been relatively long. Based on our search on their official social media account and website, the community has only been active in the last two year. Their YouTube channel and Instagram accounts were created on 27th April 2020, whereas their Facebook account was created on 18th January 2021. Rabbanian Family is identical to Hafidin as the mentor. He practices polygamous marriage with four wives and has 25 children. In this community, Hafidin has the image of a motivator. Hafidin has been the trend setter in the practice of polygamy. One of the programs offered by this community are workshop or *dauroh*. It is a kind of training held in certain period of time which provides various knowledge of polygamy for the participants. Though it is just established recently, the association has gained attention of social media users.⁴⁵

Polygamy and Islamic Commodification di Indonesia

For members of FPI, marrying more than one woman is the prophet's recommendation that should be done by Muslim men. The interpretation on this recommendation of polygamy is derived from the Qur'an, Chapter al-Nisā' verse 3 and the biography of the Prophet. Since the Prophet practiced it, then it becomes *sunnah*, a prophet tradition that should be emulated. In their opinion, the existence of the

⁴³ Vicky Abu Syamil, "Kelas Poligami," *Forum Poligami Indonesia*, <https://www.kelaspoligami.com/> accessed May 6, 2022.

⁴⁴ Ahmadi, Hefni, and Mutrofin, "Indonesian Global Ikhwan's Reception and Exspression toward Sunnah Polygamy in Online Media"; Arzia Tivany Wargadiredja, "Berikut Catatanku Setelah Ikut Kopdar Pegiat Poligami Garis Keras," *Vice*, <https://www.vice.com/id/article/yw4gyv/berikut-catatanku-setelah-ikut-kopdar-pegiat-poligami-garis-keras> accessed May 6, 2022.

⁴⁵ Robbanian Family, "Robbanian Family," *Rabbanian Family*, <https://www.facebook.com/robbanianfamily>; Robbanian Family, accessed May 6, 2022; "Robbanian Family," <https://www.instagram.com/robbanianfamily/> accessed May 4, 2022.

sunnah of polygamy is as important as other kinds of *sunnah*.⁴⁶ In fact, one of the polygamy activists in the association stated that leaving the practice of polygamy means leaving the Prophet's *sunnah*. The activists of this association are ready to face the risks and resistance of the majority people of Indonesia including their Muslim fellows who disagree with the practice. FPI interprets resistance from an individual or group that oppose polygamy as an obstacle to Islamic da'wa should be dealt with. What has been done by FPI, according to Taufiq, one of the founders of this group, is a form of education on the importance of polygamy. While many Muslims believe the impossibility of treating the wives equally and therefore should be avoided, Taufiq suggests polygamy is the tradition of the Prophet and therefore should be emulated. Therefore, it is important to revive the *sunnah* that has been abandoned by Muslims. In his opinion, the practice of polygamy is the implementation of the *sunnah matrūkah*, a kind of *sunnah* that had been abandoned.⁴⁷ On different occasions, Taufiq, argues that the practice of polygamy is an attempt to fight against western hegemony regarding the rise of free-sex culture and the trend to restrict children. These two subjects, in Taufiq's opinion, are the point of attack carried out by the enemies of Islam. Therefore, reviving polygamous marriage is one of the efforts to defy the attacks.⁴⁸ In our opinion, it is a response towards a modern culture that was considered to contradict Islamic norms.

To promote polygamy, the association of polygamy in Indonesia implemented three things such as educating, facilitating, and mentoring. The education provided by FPI through regular seminars and workshops. In the forum, not only does the participants receive information from the presenter, but all the audience also share their experience on polygamy. The arena becomes the venue to meet and share the idea on the practice of polygamy. The same practice is conducted by Rabbanian Family. Through a two-day workshop, the participants will be provided with various tips for success in building a polygamous life. Furthermore, FPI gets engaged in facilitating the

⁴⁶ *Sunnah* means recommended acts worship in the Muslim community based on the Prophet Muhammad tradition. In the Islamic law perspective, the performer of *sunnah* will get merit reward from God in the hereafter.

⁴⁷ "Poligami: Kebencian Wanita Terhadap Syar'iat Ta'adud Wajib" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNXV-QwmW2A> accessed November 6, 2019,.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

meeting of men and women who are ready to undergo polygamous marriage. The forum also acts as match making both online and offline *ta'aruf* assisted by a facilitator. They deny that *ta'aruf* is a form of marriage transaction. During *ta'aruf*, Islamic norms are obeyed. The prospective couple will not be left without being accompanied by the facilitator or the third party. Different from FPI, Rabbanian Family does not facilitate participants with self-introductions with the future wives as such. Instead, Rabbanian Family merely provides education and consulting assistance. In terms of mentoring, FPI promises every single member a means of consultation starting from pre-wedding, during marriage and post-marriage. The assistance provided is intended to maintain the durability of marriage relationship of the members of the association. These three things are usually promoted through various online media to attract society. This association is aware that in the social media era, the effort to promote certain understanding or movement should not only be socialized verbally but also in a more effective realm, that is, online media. Through flayers or *meme*, the advertisement of FPI activities become more effective.

There are many factors behind this open polygamy promotion movement. Back to the freedom of expression brought by the 1998 reform, freedom of religious expression is open wide and find its momentum.⁴⁹ The new order regime which severely restricted freedom of expression, including religious beliefs. Furthermore, many people hid their religious identity due to pressure from the government. The situation then reversed when reformation took place in 1998. Various forms of understanding and religious teachings are growing rapidly. Not only local beliefs developed, but the transnational Islam understanding also came to the fore. In addition, the increase of the middle-class Muslims community is regarded as an important factor in creating distinctive Islamic expressions. The middle-class Muslim is different from the traditional Muslims that accommodate tradition and local culture. Middle class Muslim community are characterized as consumptive society with consumption choices that are usually labelled Islamic. This association emphasizes more on artificial Islamic expression by following popular culture

⁴⁹ Fealy, "Consuming Islam."

Saputro argues that middle-class Muslim community in Indonesia has their own way in accepting the text of the Qur^ʿān,⁵⁰ as well as Ḥadīth. Ahmadi sees that the Prophet’s Ḥadīth has inspired many middle-class Muslims in Indonesia to be more confident to behave consumptively based on the norms contained in the Prophet’s Ḥadīth. The emergence of hijab trend, various halal tours, products labelled as sharia are new models of consumptive culture.⁵¹ This also applies to the practice of polygamous marriage. Normative basis derived from both the Qur^ʿān and Ḥadīth become so important for them in leading their way of life in the midst of global consumerism. Despite the fact that what they have done has indirectly ignored numerous visions and the spirit of Islamic values within the norms. This Muslim community seems to understand religious norms textually and superficially.

The trend of polygamy promotion increasing in the middle-class Muslim community is one of the popular phenomena in Indonesia. Referring to Fealy, this phenomenon is an inseparable part of the widespread expression of Islam with various daily behaviours. The middle-class Muslim community is more interested in expressing Islam through lifestyle rather than deepening its understanding of Islam itself. Unsurprisingly, this phenomenon is monopolized by business people to gain maximum profit. Fealy refers it as the new form of religious expression. The image of Islam has undergone a shift.⁵² In case of FPI phenomenon, the commodification of religion that occurs is not as massive as the practice in other domains, such as the consumption of food, clothing, cosmetics, and other sharia services. However, the fact that commercialization on religious understanding and practices especially on polygamy through various promotions have become the evidences that the practice is the other side of commodification in the realm of implementing Islamic law. As it is observed by Fealy, one of the impacts of Islamic commodification is the freedom to choose religious understanding as well as identity strengthening.⁵³ This is what happened in some communities of

⁵⁰ Saputro, “Everyday Qur’an Di Era Post-Konsumerisme Muslim.”

⁵¹ Rizqa Ahmadi, “Kontestasi Atas Otoritas Teks Suci Islam Di Era Disrupsi: Bagaimana Kelas Menengah Muslim Indonesia Memperlakukan Hadis Melalui Media Baru,” *Jurnal Studi Agama dan Masyarakat* 15, 1 (2019): 30.

⁵² Fealy, “Consuming Islam.”

⁵³ Ibid.

polygamy in Indonesia. The behaviour of polygamous practitioners leads to a tendency to present themselves as virtuous (pious) human figures by implementing sharia which have been left by most Muslims. They present themselves as a community that enforces Islamic law in a new identity. Rather than upholding Islamic law, their activities tend to show more material benefits.

On a practical level, there is strong evidence that polygamy has become a commodity; that is, the promotion of polygamy through seminars or workshops provided in a certain rate as a condition of participation. As part of seminars, FPI offers counselling services for husbands who have practiced polygamous marriage and also those who plan to practice it. The same services are also provided by Rabbanian Family.

Figure 1. Two similar leaflets of Polygamy promotion published by Hafidin's team (image credit: www.rabbanianfamily.com, 2021)

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These services are quite expensive. Each participant is charged with 4 million rupiah approximately (about US\$ 275) for a package of activities. These services are promoted through their social media platforms to attract consumers, which is quite effective. This community plays their role in promoting polygamy at a time when some people considered it as taboo, whereas others considered it a tantalizing promotion. Besides, this forum provides health services for men who suffer from impotence or have weakness in sexual intercourse. They named this therapy as Van Nilli Strong couples' therapy. The initial information we gathered from their official website informs that Van Nilli Strong therapy is emphasized more on exercise.

This therapy is called ‘Senam Kekuatan Jima’ (SKJ, or an exercise to strengthen sexual relations). The service is provided without the use of drugs, massage or traditional ritual practices such as occultism, implants and superstition. This therapy is intended to improve the duration of sexual intercourse not to cure impotence.⁵⁴

Figure 2. A leaflet of an exercise to strengthen sexual relations called “Vannilli Strong” published by forumpoligamiindonesia.com (image credit: www.vannilistrong.com, 2019)



Viewing this phenomenon, Rahayu proposes four hypotheses. *First*, the segmentation targeted by this association is the urban community who is considered as experiencing a certain crisis in their monogamous marriage. Such a situation becomes an opportunity to promote polygamous marriage as the solution to the problem. *Second*, the promotion on polygamy can be a part of electoral political interest. Indirectly, the targeted polygamy practitioners, Rahayu referred it as consumers, will be organized and mobilized to support particular political party. *Third*, as promoted by FPI, polygamy is an effort to set it as business commodification to generate revenue. *Fourth*, the effort conducted by FPI is aimed at building polygamous economy in capitalist society which is set up in a religious spirit.⁵⁵ Among the four aforementioned hypotheses, we argue that the strongest evidence

⁵⁴ Vicky Abu Syamil, “Therapy Pasutri Van Nilli Strong,” *Forum Poligami Indonesia*, <http://www.forumpoligamiindonesia.com/2018/05/therapy-pasutri-van-nilli-strong.html> accessed November 5, 2019.

⁵⁵ Ruth Indiah Rahayu, “Mengapa Perkawinan Poligini Gencar Disosialisasikan?,” *IndoPROGRESS*, <https://indoprogress.com/2018/08/mengapa-perkawinan-poligini-gencar-disosialisasikan/> accessed November 4, 2019.

within the phenomenon of polygamous community such as FPI and Rabbanian Family is the third evidence. The socialization carried out by the two associations in the form of seminars and trainings became commodities to run the community as well as to maintain the survival of the community. In fact, in promoting polygamous marriage, there is a shift from the religious purpose of reviving the *sunnah* into a commodity through offering services that can bring material benefits. What happened to the two communities can be found in other polygamous associations such as Yayasan Keluarga Samara Indonesia (YKSI). Riski, the founder of YKSI, does not deny that there is an economic motive behind organizing various activities within this foundation. Besides seminars and face to face meetings, these polygamy practitioners develop an application namely *maupoligami.com*. The goal of this application is to promote the vision of the association as well as to inform the society on the practice of polygamy. In the interview, Riski insisted on the great potential of the application. Indonesia, with Muslims as the majority population, is the targeted consumer segmentation. His optimism is motivated by Islamic populism in Indonesia which has been increasing in the last decade. He believes that this application can hook approximately 20 to 30 thousand users in Indonesia.⁵⁶

It has become the strong evidence that the typology of commodification as seen on these two communities is in the form of commercialization of religion. Polygamous marriage is assumed as imitating the Prophet's behaviours. Therefore, a number of things that could ease the process to do polygamy such as sharing knowledge in the forms of Islamic da'wa are considered as common things and even recommended for Muslims. They seize this niche opportunity to gather revenue by holding seminars, trainings, and services that promote polygamy for mainly Indonesian new Muslims urban community who try their best to live Islam in the footsteps of the prophet.

Conclusion

Public piety and identity contestation is inseparable issue from the phenomenon of the rise the Islamic lifestyle displayed by

⁵⁶ Arzia Tivany Wargadiredja, "Berikut Catatanku Setelah Ikut Kopdar Pegiat Poligami Garis Keras," *Vice*, https://www.vice.com/id_id/article/yw4gyv/berikut-catatanku-setelah-ikut-kopdar-pegiat-poligami-garis-keras accessed November 6, 2019.

contemporary Indonesian urban Muslims. The consumerism bias in the practice of Islamic rituals is easy to find. Some people think that the growing Islamization causes this phenomenon. Others might consider that such a phenomenon is closely related to the rise of populist Islam which is identical with artificial expression of Islam. This expression is the result of the combination of popular culture with the passion for embracing Islam among Muslim urban society. On the other hand, religious attitudes practiced by the urban community are far from spirituality that is different from the traditionalist Muslim.

The practice of polygamy promoted by FPI and Rabbanian Family in online media has become the conforming thesis on the practice of commodification in the realism of Islamic rituals. Though the practice does not lead to women sexual exploitation, it has involved economical practice such as promoting some products, taking the opportunity, and defining the market. Such a phenomenon does not emerge in an empty space. It has become a result of the freedom of expression, the increasing number of middle class of Muslims in big cities, as well as the emergence of popular Islam. []

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