5 Politics and marriage among Islamic activists in Indonesia

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Background

The increasing religious activism in Indonesia in recent times affects how the society perceives and defines marriage. Today, there are two mainstream religious movements in Indonesia: secularist and fundamentalist. The secularist movement separates religious values from daily life, while the fundamentalist movement tries to integrate religious values as much as possible in all aspects of life. One fundamentalist movement is the *Tarbiyah* movement.

The *Tarbiyah* movement emerged in secular colleges in 1999. It then transformed into *Partai Keadilan* or PK (the Justice Party), and now it is referred to as *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* or PKS (the Welfare Justice Party); a party that garnered many votes in the 2009 Indonesia legislative election. The transformation of *Partai Keadilan* (PK) into *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS) was due to its low vote gains in the 1999 election, as a result of which the party did not meet the criteria of a minimum representation of 2 per cent in the House of Representative for joining the next legislative election (in five years). The representation of PK in the House of Representative was only 1.8 per cent and it decided to transform its name and symbol into PKS without changing the organization structure, vision and mission, and statutes and bylaws.

The *Tarbiyah* movement tries to combine all aspects of life, such as marriage, with Islamic values. This movement was inspired by the *Ikhwanul Muslimin* movement of Egypt (Damanik 2002) which envisions seven goals (Hawwa 2000):

1   Self improvement to become people with physical strength, solid morality, advanced knowledge, good earning power, strong faith (*aqidah*), ability to conduct religious rituals correctly, self motivated with good time management skills, credible and trustworthy, and helpful to others.
2   Equipping Muslim families with the ability to build an Islamic atmosphere, maintain Islamic etiquette, find good life partners who understand their rights and obligations, and educate children and all family members with Islamic values.
3   Guiding society, proselytising, prohibiting bad conduct and encouraging good conduct, fostering good deeds, educating society regarding Islamic thoughts and promoting Islamic values in daily life.

4   Liberating the homeland politically, economically and morally from foreign dominance.
5   Improving governance.
6   Restoring the glory of the Muslim world.
7   Becoming a world educator.

The second goal is fundamental to the principle of family building of *Tarbiyah* activists. The establishment of Muslim families between like-minded couples is central to the homogamous and endogamous character of families of *Tarbiyah* activists. This is illustrated in the following interview quote:

> I did not dare to make a decision to accept or refuse, because I worry that the different perceptions and thoughts may lead to communication obstacles in my family in future.
>
> (Takariawan 2002)

From the PKS perspective, marriage, as a society's foundation, should be enforced based on Islamic values. *Dakwah* is the calling that is intensively promoted by the PKS activists to their cadre via *halaqoh* and *usrah*. The values of marriage that the PKS activists bring into their propaganda are based on establishment of the Muslim family as a programme of the deputy of cadre formation; the *tarbiyah aliyah* or family education. This programme is based on the national coordination meeting of DPP PKS on 28 August 2006 during which it was decided that the organizational purpose of family management of the PKS is to build the *dakwah* family.

Even before they had joined the movement, PKS activists commonly perceived dating negatively even if it did not involve premarital sexual intercourse. This was due to their religious, family and personal values and was one reason for the appeal of the methods of matchmaking employed by the PKS. The matchmaking process was also appealing to *Tarbiyah* activists due to the intensity of meetings, the sharing of values and group purpose, enforcement of group identity, and the strengthening of trust among members when one member is entrusted with the match making of another: 'I entrust this marriage process to my murobbi (mentor) in my regular religious class which I have been attending since college' (Takariawan 2002).

This paper seeks to study the psycho-social dynamics involved in matchmaking among members of *Tarbiyah*. It will explore the considerations made in choosing a partner, and how members accommodate individual and group interests in choice of partner, and how the couples adjust to each other after marriage.

Methodology

This research uses qualitative method and the phenomenology approach. The sample consisted of four couples matchmade by their religious mentor (*murobbi/murobbiyah*), and two persons in charge of the community's marriage institution. The couples were selected based on the following criteria: both had been ardent

members of *Tarbiyah* for at least 7 years; and both had been chosen as main cadre for the *Tarbiyah* group. Data was collected based on observations, interviews, and documentation. Content and structure of data was verified through feedback from the interviewees.

Findings

Before the *Tarbiyah* party's establishment and declaration, its members comprised males and females who were leaders and activists in reputable universities and other tertiary institutions in Indonesia. Routine activities conducted by members were study of Islamic values based on the Koran and *hadeeth* (the way of the Prophet Muhammad). This group functioned without a name and structure, but the *tarbiyah* (education) sessions were referred to as *Tarbiyah* congregation.

A massive change took place later, marked by the emergence of the model young Muslim family espousing Islamic symbols like wives and even pre-pubescent daughters wearing *jilbab* (female head scarf) which extend to their chests, sons wearing long pants, and fathers wearing the *koko* (Islamic tunic). The dress code was a deliberate effort to compete with mainstream culture, based on the belief that enforcing *dakwah* (proselytising and spreading Islamic values) within the family is the foundation for social changes in society.

For *Tarbiyah* members, the next step is to establish a Muslim family that possesses the ability to enliven the Islamic atmosphere by observing Islamic etiquette, and this is facilitated when the married couple is like-minded (of one *fikraah*). During *halaqoh* (group education and mentoring activity), which usually comprises five to 12 attendees with one permanent *murobbi* (mentor), the serious discussion about marriage is begun. There are some basic criteria that have to be fulfilled based on the perception of a harmonious marriage. One of these is the notion that the woman or the bride to be, or the man, should be a *tarbiyah*.

Among *Tarbiyah* activists, there are a number of ways of finding a partner:

1   The man declares his readiness to marry and he is matchmade by party members with the party as the marriage institution. This was practised by the founding members of the party during its formation.
2   The man conducts *khitbah* or proposes directly to the woman during the initial stages of group formation when the group norms are forming. This was practised by the first generation of *Tarbiyah* activists.
3   The man requests assistance from a friend or his *murobbi* (mentor) from the same *halaqoh* to conduct *khitbah* or to propose to the woman, when the group's norms have been established (informal organization). This was done by the second and subsequent generations of *Tarbiyah* activists.

These methods are regarded as being based on the *syar'ie* (law) described in the Koran, the *hadeeth*, and Prophet Muhammad's *shirah* (history) as they comprehend it. The marriages are endogamous, but within this framework the actual choice of

Table 5.1 Dynamics of spousal choice at different stages of organizational development

Organizational development	Group norm establishment	Group norm already established	Formal organization norm (party)
Spousal choice dynamic	Idiosyncratic choice or personal choice without mediator	Idiosyncratic choice mediated by the *murobbi* (mentor)	Idiosyncratic choice mediated by the marriage institution

partners could be idiosyncratic or personal, albeit with a mediator. Marriages of the first generation of *tarbiyah* activists were based on personal choice, but the practice changed later when the married *murobbi* (mentor) was given the role of mediator for the *mutarobi* or people in *murobbi's* guidance.

During the party era, the practice of matchmaking changed once again. The mediation role for the *mutarobi* was institutionalized and the institution was termed BKKBS and *Lajnah Munakahat*. Extensive group dynamics occurred among activists during the matchmaking process (see Table 5.1).

Psychosocial dynamics in finding a partner

Besides the group dynamics that influence the dynamics of partner choice among PKS activists, there are psychological dynamics at the individual level that can be illustrated as follows.

Activists who relied on matchmakers commonly identified more with their social identity than with their self concept. With the exception of the party founders who chose their own life partners, activists referred to themselves as inferior, not accustomed to the opposite gender, and humble in appearance. In contrast, they regarded their status in the group as high. This can be seen among those positioned as main cadre and holding rank in the party.

> I can't imagine having a girlfriend . . . and I feel inferior . . . I don't have self confidence . . . so it is difficult to have relationship with girls . . . (MDF, male, 43 years old)

> What can I say? . . . I'm a person with low self confidence . . . I don't want to be noticed . . . (AH, male, 33 years old)

> Me . . . I feel ordinary . . . I have no potential even though my murobbi told me that I am doing well in my group . . . (UM, female, 43 years old)

> I don't feel beautiful, men aren't likely to be attracted to me. (YN, female, 30 years old)

Their motivation for marriage was basically based on a desire to follow in the path of the Prophet (*sunnah*), and to protect themselves from sinful deeds (like adultery). There was also external motivation, from friends in the group or the *murobbi* who often encouraged marriage in routine meetings:

When somebody asked me when I would get married, I (laughing) . . . if the prophet (Muhammad) married at 25 . . . it means I should also do the same. (UM, female, 43 years old)

Why marry? Yeah, one of the reasons is self protection. (AH, male, 33 years old)

During the period of the party's establishment, the main considerations when choosing a life partner were religious devotion and a strong will to engage in *dakwah*:

I just said, find me the most qowi (strong in Islamic knowledge) person. (MDF, male, 43 years old)

I need to be guided by someone whose understanding of tarbiyah is at least at the same level as mine, or higher. My self confidence is decreasing, as it was before the 'jamaah'. I need someone who understands . . . my murrobi knows best . . . and he should be able to be leader, to make things right, and so on. And I want a person who stays at the mosque. . . . (YN, female, 30 years old)

The situation was different for the generation who married after the formation of the party, whose emphasis was on criteria such as character, family background, sex appeal, and ability to become a life companion:

Physical appearance? Yes. . . . I think it is natural for men to like women based on physical looks, but for me, this is not the only criterion. (AH, male, 33 years old)

. . . this photograph interested me, and I was impressed when I read the personal data . . . (YN, female, 30 years old)

Marriage for the PKS activists is seen as a group religious activity which optimizes *dakwah*. This dynamic at the individual level interacts with the dynamics among PKS activists—especially those between the *murobbi* and the people under his guidance (*mutarobi*). The relationship between *murobbi* and *mutarobi* is very close and intense, and tends to be paternalistic such that every idea introduced by the *murobbi* is easily accepted.

At the group level, the organizational transformation from non-formal to formal had a big impact. The process was as follows. First, there was a tendency for group norms to move from informal at the beginning to formal (see Table 5.2). Secondly, in adapting from individual to group emphasis there was a need for a gradual redefinition of group norms, especially those related to marriage. The adaptation process relates to the following.

Choice

Before the organizational norm was established, especially the norm about marriage, the first generation of the movement's activists was allowed to choose *mutarobi* women as wives under the condition that they marry within *tarbiyah*.

Table 5.2 Interaction of group dynamic and individual dynamic in Islamic movement activist choice of spouse

Organizational phase (organizational dynamic)	Forming phase	Arranging phase	Political party phase
Actor (activists)/ Dynamics at individual level	First generation activists	Second generation activists	Party activists
Self concept	High	Low	Low
Marriage motivation	Sunnah (the path of prophet); self protection	Sunnah (the path of prophet); self protection, age consideration	Sunnah (the path of prophet); self protection, age consideration;
Candidate criteria	Fits personal attraction and personal need; good Islamic values comprehension; good Islamic *dakwah*	good Islamic values comprehension; good Islamic *dakwah*	fits personal attraction and personal need; good Islamic values comprehension; good Islamic *dakwah*
Point of view on marriage	Marriage is to fulfil personal need	Marriage is for sake of religion and *dakwah*	Marriage is to fulfil personal need and support *dakwah*
Personal and family values	Tend to perceive dating less negatively, though do not condone premarital sexual intercourse	Tends to perceive dating negatively	Tends to perceive dating negatively
Adaptation	Fast	Slow	Fast
Matchmaking models	Endogamous idiosyncratic (in group, personal choice)	Endogamous prototype (in group, driven by situational factor and model/ prototype)	Endogamous idiosyncratic (in group, personal choice)

This can be characterized as endogamous marriage with idiosyncratic or personal choice.

During the time of the second generation of *tarbiyah* activists, there was a need to manage the Muslim *dakwah* in the interest of consolidation of group identity. So group interest was prioritized over individual needs. This became the justification for the members to marry other members at that time. As the party grew larger and the need for group consolidation was not a high priority anymore, this was replaced with the need to accomodate individuals as members of the group.

A hundred percent I entrust it to the 'lajnah' (commitee) . . . I want to marry . . . I have my criteria . . . then, please find me someone who fits my character and criteria. Though the final decision shall be mine, it is the 'lajnah' input, so I fully trust 'lajnah' . . . so, please give me alternatives. (AH, male, 33 years old)

. . . actually, refusing is allowed. It means that the congregation (jamaah) is facilitating. The final decision is ours . . . I am not worried because it is ok to refuse. (YN, female, 30 years old)

Trust

There have been changes in defining belief or trust in the marriage process among the *tarbiyah* congregation or PKS activists. Trust is firstly based on social identity during the early stages of marriage, and then based on personal identity. The change is not ideological but it is more pragmatic and adaptive:

. . . I trust the existing tarbiyah . . . and I think this should be ongoing . . . and murobbi also sees that. We get material mostly from *murobbi* and he is also a role model. The strongest influence comes from uztad (religious teacher) ma'ruf . . . (UM, female, 43 years old)

Prototype attraction

For the first generation activists, personal attraction was possible between males and females because there was more interaction between them. For the second generation, a form of prototype, indirect attraction was more common, in which the individual was not attracted personally to a potential partner but was rather attracted to the mental image of a 'prototype' partner which was deliberately introduced through routine meetings. The social or prototype attraction occurred for the second generation at the time of the organizational development, because the interaction between male and female activists was limited, and male activists were not allowed to guide female activists. Couples had little detailed information about each other and the organization was undergoing a phase of urgent need to build solidarity and group identity.

For this second generation, the standard matchmaking procedure was conducted by the *murobbi* (mentor) or the institutional mediator and it required detailed personal data. There were possibilities of interpersonal attraction, but couples did not have direct interaction, in contrast to first generation activists.

Well, there they are . . . we see that husbands of the murrobi are so good . . . they are full of care, good responsibility . . . we also look forward to an ideal husband like that . . . (UM, female, 43 years old)

The standard marriage procedures of the Muslim *dakwah* activists are as follows (see Figure 5.1):
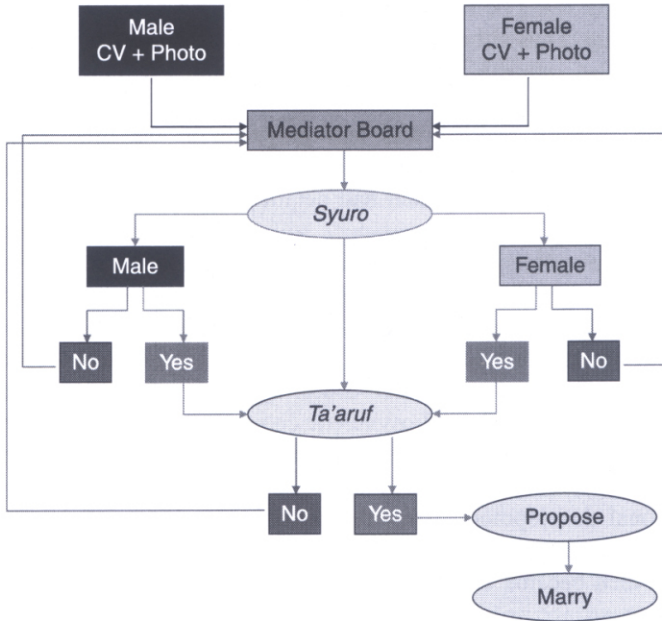
Figure 5.1 Marriage procedure.

1 The couples who are ready for marriage have to prepare a personal data and profile and submit it to the mentor.

2 The marriage institution processes the data and conducts *syuro'* or a meeting to seek agreement to find out the *sekufu* (parallel) couple among other marriage candidates. The results of the meeting would be sent to the male activist through his mentor.

3 The female activist's personal data is given to the male activist, and if the male agrees, his personal data will be exchanged with the female. If the male refuses, the process will be repeated after the selection of another female activist's personal data.

4 The male activist's personal data is given to the female activist and if the female agrees, they both will be brought together to conduct *ta'aruf* (getting to know each other) or a forum for introduction, accompanied by their mentors. If the female activist declines, the process will be restarted.

5 If both the male and female agree, there will be a *ta'aruf* accompanied by the mentor, and if both of them agree to the marriage, both families will be invited to a meeting.

6 The meeting of the families is followed by *khitbah* or the engagement ceremony.

7 The marriage ceremony takes place.

The decision making of the *tarbiyah* activists who wanted to marry at the time the marriage norms were being established was reinforced by situational factors within the group. Thus although individuals made the ultimate decision, decision making was also influenced by the group and tended to be heuristic (without clear criteria).

Heuristic decision making was less prevalent at the time of the party's establishment, because the procedure for marriage required detailed and specific personal data. Thus the individual had detailed information about the potential spouse, such as physical appearance, self identity, life objectives, family background, viewpoints, job, even the income per month and so on. This detailed information, along with photograph, as a standard procedure gave certainty and opportunity to determine the best candidate for oneself.

The marriage dynamics among the *tarbiyah activists* were influenced by the matchmaking process at particular times. The first generation activists who practised endogamy based on idiosyncratic choice or personal choice were able to do so and to adapt to their partners easily because interaction between male and female activists was made possible during guidance activities. At the time of early organizational development, when the second generation activists emphasized matchmaking, or prototype attraction, marriage adaptation took longer. Marriage adaptation then became faster for couples who were matchmade and mediated through the marriage institution.

The pattern of problem solving which occurs when the couple gets married is as follows: individual–group–institute–individual. The problems that emerge have to be dealt with by the couples themselves. If the conflicts are not resolved at the individual level, then the couple share their problems during the regular religious meeting (*halaqoh*). This forum will suggest solutions to resolve the problems. When the problems remain unresolved, the couple may turn to the marriage institution. In contrast to the the the semi formal *halaqoh* forum, the marriage institution is a formal institution named BKKBS (The Welfare Family Counselling Bureau) or a higher institution referred to as *Lajnah Munahakat* (see Figure 5.2).

As social identity is the basis of group formation, the matchmaking process uses persuasive as well as authoritative approaches. This can be seen from intensive interaction and communication, and also the referent power, so that it creates trust to build legitimation between the *murobbi* (mentors) and the *mutarobi* (the followers). The normative values are what drive the persuasion process. The persuasive influence was more apparent before BKKBS (The Welfare Family Counselling Bureau) and *Lajnah Munahakat* were established. After these two institutions were established, the influence process became more authoritative and institutionalized.

Turner (2005) suggests that the authoritative approach accords legitimation and respect to an institution and enables control of members with an assumption that it has authority to handle problems. In the case of the PKS, over time it was agreed that the BKKBS needed to transform itself into a more formal institution.

Complaints about ineffective communication between the matchmaking institution and the *murobi* (mentor), and between the *murobi* and the couples to be matchmade have become a common problem. The matchmaking procedure is
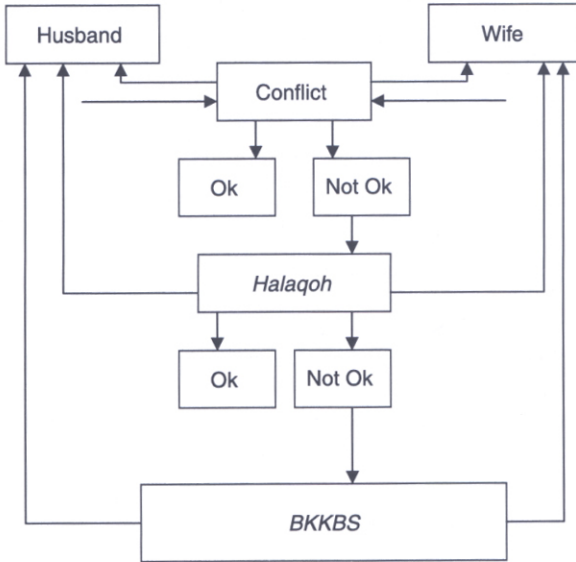
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Figure 5.2 The role of organization in marriage conflict resolution.

allegedly done in a closed manner and not done in sufficient detail. These are critical issues in the matchmaking process. First, the group's attention to building Muslim social identity through the smallest social unit, the family, is potentially disturbed if this process is not managed properly. Respect and honour to the *murobbi* or even to *jamaah* (group) will potentially be lost if the couple encounters many problems in adapting to one another.

Second, it seems that marriage adaptation was easier for the first generation activists and for those who married when the matchmaking model was endogamous and based on idiosyncratic or personal choice, but this was still limited to marriage between *tarbiyah* activists. This model needs to be developed for the process of organizational revamping in the future, to decrease the potential problems of marriage adaptation.

Third, the reduced attention to accommodation of personal needs because of the purpose of group identity building can be resolved by optimizing the mediation role of the institution, paying more attention to the personal background, personality, communication style, family financial management style, the way of expressing affection, the way of selecting friends, life values, and life philosophy.

Conclusion

The organizational transformation of the *jamaah tarbiyah* from a non formal organization into a political party influenced the way the matchmaking process was conducted by the activists.

At the beginning, before the group's norms were established, the choice of partner was left to the individual, so it developed into an idiosyncratic endogamous model. At the early stage of development of organizational norms, the choice and process of agreement were influenced by the group's need to protect group identity, solidarity, and the group relationship. The matchmaking process developed into an endogamous prototype model. At the time of political party establishment, the process was based on individual need, reverting to the endogamous prototype model which was mediated by the marriage institution as the group's authority mechanism. More attention was paid to accommodating the individual desires and wishes of the marriage candidates.

The second generation activists who married at the time of organizational norm development, especially the marriage norm, tended to make heuristic decisions and prioritized the group needs. This could be attributed to the lack of detailed information about marriage candidates, and the strong emphasis on social identity and group solidarity at that time. At the time of the political party establishment, decision making was more systematic than during the time of the second generation activists.

The marriage adaptation among first generation activists and those who married at the time of political party establishment was faster or without significant obstacles compared to that of second generation activists. This is because the matchmaking process during the time of the first generation activists, unlike during the time of the second generation activists, emphasized individual needs.

The PKS is trying to improve its management of matchmaking, in consideration of internal complaints demanding institutional improvements. However, in its efforts to improve family welfare, but as a public organization, PKS is still giving more emphasis to its internal management and development than to wider societal development.

Notes

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