

PERFORMATIVITY OF BODY AND MUSLIMAH SEXUALITY

In Aquila Asia Magazine

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Introduction

As the first international magazine for muslimah¹ in the world, *Aquila Asia* may be a magazine pioneer that present today and represent urban people. *Aquila Asia* sold in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Brunei get great attention from West society because it appeared very interesting, representing class, modern with Islam background. Reuters, for example, stated in its web site:

“SINGAPORE (Reuters Life!) - There’s a beautiful model on the cover, a teaser about an article on sex and a swimsuit spread, but what makes Asia’s newest women’s magazine stand out is its audience: stylish, modern Muslims”.

Aquila Asia magazine call itself as guidance magazine for cosmopolitan Islam society, that identification of cosmopolitan and urban society is presented in the magazine. The matters include, among others, relation of Islam with other religions, modern lifestyle but relate to locality of Islamic society in South East Asia, high mobility of women, and interpretation of cosmopolitan society in viewing and practicing Islam is part of *Aquila Asia* identifying the magazine for cosmopolitan and urban society. Cosmopolitan claim is also viewed as marketing strategy of the magazine.

¹ A call for muslim women that author use in this research

Islam lifestyle discussed in *Aquila Asia* has also difference from construction presented in other muslimah magazine. Using English, *Aquila Asia* magazine is look like “crispier” in interpreting religion as life principle and view. Language used also represents higher social class in urban society. Use of English is also part of the magazine’s strategy targeting high class in the four countries. For example, Special Features title *Sex and the (Muslim) City* discuss what Islam view on women marrying at not virgin condition and what the magazine offers in discussing and renewing vagina.

What body and female sexuality was constructed is matter discussed openly. The reality is far different for other muslimah magazines in Indonesia such as *Paras*, *Alia*, or *Noor*. Modern urban society emphasizes various rational and open views. However, is it true? Or muslimah representation the magazine offer offered again idea on traditional muslim women ideality. Based on the issue, this research formulate following problem: what is body performativity and muslimah sexuality in *Aquila Asia* magazine?

This paper emphasized on how muslimah body and sexuality is represented in *Aquila Asia* magazine. Therefore, column in first volume of March-April was *Special Feature: Sex and The (Muslim) City*. The column was selected to see what the magazine position is when discussing women sex and body issues. Text problem including text and picture will be viewed to get description on matter as research object. This research will use critical discourse of Norman Fairclough (1995: 56) that state “A discourse is the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view”.

According to Fairclough there is three dimensions in critical discourse analysis: text, discourse practice, and socio cultural practice. Text dimension contain how language is used in sentence to state idea by media producing text. Second, discourse practice is when production aspect and text consumption is done simultaneously. As Fairclough (1995:59) write, “The discourses practice dimension of communicative event involves various aspects of the processes of text production and text consumption”. Socio cultural practice view how text is made based on context of society and culture where the text is made and consumed.

Commodity is all matters that can be exchangeable. Appadurai (1986) explain that commodity exchange is often used to protect social hierarchy system

in society. Due to exchange made a thing to be commodity because it has not only as functional value but also exchange value over other symbols in society. Commodity is part of consumption of identity and social status forming (Fearherstone, 2007). As part of habitus, consumption is prerequisite of individual or group existence with “I shop so I exist”. Comodification may also involve body that becomes commodity. Body is human physical structure organism that has five senses that systematically move cooperating that is physical, organic or material (Synott 1993: 1).

In Islam issue, for example, women body is media in offering muslim dress, hijab or other praying tools. Through body presented using dress in the name of religion, body is part of religion commodity. Appeared body is presented and present because body is physical site relating to social structure living in society. As Beverly Skeggs state in Holiday and hassard (2005: 3).

“Bodies are physical sites where the relations of class, gender, race, sexuality and age come together and are embodied and practiced’, adding that’ class is always coded through bodily dispotitions: ‘the body is ubiquitous signifier of class’.”

Classification can be determined through body using expensive brand dress or hijab. Body is considered having class when appear cared, clean and presenting social identity. Body is site where construction on body is really a social construction that is not given (Turner, 2008:11). Therefore, body in media is part of comodification and significant commodity to understand and analyze further.

In *Special Feature of Sex and The (Muslim) City Aquila Asia* No. 01 Maret-April 2010, there was argument indicating view of *Aquila Asia* magazine on muslimah body and sexuality they have. Although in early paragraph *Aquila Asia* explains in Islam shariah², sexual course between man and woman (that cause penetration of penis into vagina) is *haram*³ (unlawful), next text show emphasis of the magazine viewing female virginity as part of society construction that desiring women being able to keeps esteem than man.

² Shariah is Islamic law, precisely formulation of historic Islam law. Four sources of shariah are Quran, prophet sunnah, ijma, and qiyas. Progressive view on shariah meaning is provided by Abdullahi Admed An-Na'im (1990), for An-Na'im shariah is not whole Islam, but interpretation of nashs understood in certain historical context.

³ Law in Islam that state something sin when done



Picture 1

With sharia, premarital sex is haram-non permissible, not allowed or unlawful and it is an equally severe sin, whether a male or a female performs it. Despite this, it is usually the females left to bear the brunt of the social stigma attached to premarital sex while the males are largely overlooked.

The above text indicate clearly the magazine's disagreement in viewing women position that in social construction is demanded to keep their virginity, but in other side, men are allowed to do whatever they want without any demand by broad society. In an ideological discourse on sexuality, expose of media, particularly Islam media, often place muslim women as part determining happiness of a marriage. View of women having to serve, understand husband desire or as household queen often place women as determinant of marriage existence.

Sexuality in perspective of majority Islam also place women as part of men (husband) when exist in a family- an interpretation of letter Al-Nisa verse 4 in Al-Quran (Inayah, 2008: 220) or it means women as wife is follower or men (husband). Marriage in virgin condition is demand for women but not for men. As view of Melinda Binte Junaidi, an informant quoted by *Aquila Asia* as follow:

“This unfair reality is not lost on Muslim women, such as 28-year-old Singaporean Melinda Binte Junaidi. Says the managemant assistant officer at a local university, 'I feel that is a huge double standars. It's okay for men to go around spreading their wild oats, but it's a requirement

for the woman to be a virgin? How hypocritical! I would understand completely if there was societal pressure on both men and women to remain virgins until marriage, but that is not the case in a lot of Muslim circles”

Through above text production *Aquila Asia* has broken unbalanced discourses on women sexuality. *Aquila Asia* provides space for muslimah view disagreeing over double standard against women in society. Presentation of Melinda as office employee (administration in a university in Singapore) can be said representation of middle class either in economic or education, indicated how the magazine represent its segmentation in responding social discourses on female body.

In Fairclough approach (1995: 58), it is called as discourse practice where magazine institution incorporates text production aspect and text consumption in an article. Basic idea of text production of *Aquila Asia* is disagreement against social discourse on virginity demand over women. This magazine has produced discourse over unbalance relation between women and men and in same time representation of middle class women is presented as representation of modern urban muslimah through life style or thought to support idea or discourses that is spread by the magazine text.

Discussion of female sexuality is also given with unusual title *Let's talk About Sex, Baby Virginity-according to some muslims*, which present in cover of *Aquila Asia* magazine. Issue of sex in the article is also positioned as part of private and public issue that place individual privation when making selection over their vital organ. Vital organ of woman that previously is owned by certain religion and culture is shifted by *Aquila Asia* to be private ownership of women as personal choice. Vagina as female genital is presented as the most essential female authoritative part. Therefore, there is no institution or regulation that control against it.

So, in *Aquila Asia* magazine, text produced on female virginity is more positioned as myth of good women. Myth is construction under certain cultural interest, so virginity is considered one of myth weakening women position in social reality. In context of vagina discourses in Indonesia, Gadis Arivia (Jurnal Perempuan, 2000: 75-77) has written discourse of Indonesia society in naming vagina just appear ten years ago. She said word “*anunya*” become aid for

Indonesia society when they want to name vagina. Shame, taboo, and placing vagina as dirty vital organ make saying vagina avoided. However, critical though can be used not only saying vagina, women have been freed from patriarchal value. The simplification that saying 'anunya' shifted to word vagina means previously existing taboo and pressure against women sexuality gradually change is also less appropriate.

The author should not infer immediately when see a Islam magazine such as *Aquila Asia* have stated vagina even position vagina as female vital organ that is talked, discussed as choice of women in treating it as positive discourses over position of muslimah in media. It appears when author observed article following discussion of women vagina in next page. In next page of *Aquila Asia*, there is special column offering ways to care and renew vagina. In the text discourses on virginity appear freely giving choices for muslimah to shape against their virginity with various vagina care in traditional and modern method. Vaginoplasty, Madura wood, vagina spa and Brazilian Wax are offer of *Aquila Asia* to position vagina as part not separated from women sexuality. It can indicate how the magazine positions vagina as important element of muslimah when selecting various choices to celebrate their freedom in treating their vital organ.

However, in other side, in the text there occur body normality the *Aquila Asia* offer as part of gender performativity to shape today women identity. Normal body is indicated, among other, with sterile, fragrant, "tight" vagina is identification of gender identity as way to perform their gender, according to value in society. The below text indicates the matter:



Picture 2

What can you do to keep your vagina happy?

Whether it is for yourself or your partner, here is a selection of treats for it

The above opening sentence indicates how to treat vagina to be better and happy. Happy means not only contentment but also *keset*, fragrant, or “tight”. The next sentence emphasize that happy vagina is not for themselves but for partner. Making partner happy can be done with sexual activity, and vagina is part of body that can be renewed for the happiness and partner. Partner in the context of the magazine refer to heterosexual relation. It means that female sexuality discourses is in frame of woman likes man, not woman likes woman (homosexual).

Tip of vagina surgery is one of method offered. Medical treatment is one of solutions making better and more perfect body. With surgery in hospital, women are invited to make better their genital. Even after bear children, women vagina is considered not close and it can disturb sexual enjoyment of the partner. Traditional method is also done by women when they feel medical treatment is very expensive and risk. Madura wood or Vagina Spa can be choice of women to appear more natural again.

Sexuality satisfaction of the partner is goal of the treatment. The reality indicates how women are discourses to be able to renew themselves to serve their partner. Women should improve their body if they want to consider as normal. Foucault though about docile bodies in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) explain how docility is result of discipline action. Discipline is different from force or violence, but discipline is way to control body working and position.

The Foucault though is developed further by Judith Butler in his book *Gender trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* (1990). She views that sex not present as biological thins, but construction done repeatedly through norm, which then in sex matter there is regulatory practice that involve body discipline. The result is text on women body that early seem contradict with taboo in discussing vagina, still have taboo values as previously present. Then women appear having autonomy in selecting doing sex intercourse before or after marriage, including choice of women in treating their vagina.

Conclusion

However, in other text, offer of renewing vagina in the magazine precisely state normalization of women body, in order to be virgin, new or young according to regulatory practice in sex matter. Based on the above analysis indicate how *Aquila Asia* magazine construct women body and sexuality that is still owned by social construction. It means that there is paradox. In one side, *Aquila Asia* gives support for muslimah to freely treat their body, but in other side, *Aquila Asia* gives various information to renew vagina. The conclusion author draws is that *Aquila Asia* indicate semi full struggle. In one side, they want to help position of muslimah but in other side they strengthen social construction on muslimah body that should be virgin, sterile and holy.

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Aquila Asia No. 01 Maret-April 2010

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