

Against the Tarbiyah's Symbolism of Hijab: Feminism, Islamic Conservatism and Reconstruction of Hijab Symbolism in Indonesia

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Abstract

Although Indonesia is the largest Muslim country in the world, the way of how Muslims dress had never been a major focus of Islamic practice until the 1980s. The promotion of a particular Islamic dress code, especially *hijab* (veil), started in the early 1980s on Indonesian campuses. Since the *Reformasi* in 1998, the wearing of *hijab* has grown significantly along with the spread of the Tarbiyah movement, a transnational Islamist movement affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood from Egypt. The rise of Islamic conservatism has targeted women to be controlled through their dress and caused Indonesian women to lose their freedom to decide whether they want to wear *hijab* or not. To fully understand this controlling mechanism, this article explores how the Tarbiyah movement has constructed and utilized the symbolization of *hijab*, and the weakness of the movement in enforcing its conservative values to its Muslim women members. Such exploration may direct us to a counter-strategy against the values. Based on in-depth interviews with four former Tarbiyah activists who have been active in feminism, this article examines the way the Tarbiyah controls its female activists through the *hijab* symbolization and how feminism has helped these activists to detach themselves from the movement. Thus, this article will make an important point on how feminism contributes to the battle against Islamic conservatism in Indonesia.

Key Words

The Tarbiyah movement, feminism, veil, *hijab*, Islamist groups

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Introduction

“I really want to die. There’s no point I live my life,” a friend of mine texted me after being severely bullied by her friends due to her decision to remove her *hijab*.¹ “No wonder that you’re poor! It’s all because you are getting away from God by removing your *hijab*,” one of the texts she got says. She had been removing her *hijab* for 4 days and verbally abused since the first day she went out in public without her *hijab*. Other than her, there was also Rina Nose, a celebrity who had been intensely attacked on social media for no longer veiling. In her first Instagram picture without her *hijab*, she had received hundreds of thousands of comments in a few days. People not only kept asking why she made the decision but also aggressively expressing their sadness, disappointment, even rage. She had been severely accused of toying with Islam and changing her religion. Although she took down the picture and turned off the comment section of her social media, the insult continued through other media platforms.

The unveiling has been a difficult decision for Indonesian Muslim women in Indonesia nowadays. In an interview, Rina Nose asserted that she had been wearing a *hijab* for only about one year and prepared herself for six months before she finally took off her *hijab*. This decision made her receive a lot of social pressure on social media. However, committing to wearing the *hijab* is not easy for Indonesian Muslim women. Another friend of mine texted me and said that she wanted to wear a wide-loose *hijab*, the so-called *syar’i hijab*, but she was not sure about it. She said: “... since I work in sport, I’m afraid that I will not be able to maintain my *hijab* and it will give a sort of impression that I’m just playing with my religion.” Those examples show that Indonesian Muslim women are no longer free to wear what they want to wear or not to wear what they do not want to wear.

Indonesia is not an Islamic state although it is the largest Muslim country in the world. Indonesian Muslims are regarded as the representatives of moderate Islam in the world (Hakim 2016). However, LIPI (*Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia* [the Indonesian Institute of Science]), reported that radicalism and fundamentalism in Indonesia have been spread and strengthened among Indonesian Muslims since the era of *Reformasi* in 1998 (Lestari 2016). It has caused an increasing number of intolerance acts such as attacks on non-Muslims’ worship places. It also leads to the ruling of certain kinds of dress codes for women (Wieringa 2015). *Hijab* was not a major focus of the Islamic practice before 1980 (Salim 2015). The promotion of *hijab*-wearing or veiling in Indonesia was initiated by state university students who had an affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwanul Muslimin*), an Islamist group from Egypt. Since after, through

the *Tarbiyah* movement in campuses in Indonesia, the promotion of *hijab* wearing continues and the symbolism of *hijab* has been changing over time, from a symbol of Islamic identity, resistance to Western domination, freedom of expression, to a symbol of piety. Later on, the changes then affected people's attitudes toward *hijab* and Indonesian Moslem women.

As someone who had committed to wearing a *hijab* for 12 years until 2016, I personally had been experiencing the dynamic changes of *hijab* symbolism and its impact on me as a woman. When I decided to wear *hijab*, people were quite resistant to my decision since *hijab* was stigmatized as a symbol of women's involvement in a certain Islamic extremist group. I had also experienced a short period when women could freely wear and take off their *hijab* anytime they want. Later on, along with the promotion of *hijab* as the symbol of Moslem women's identity and piety, I also experienced the growing pressure for women to wear a *hijab*. Indonesian Moslem women kept losing their freedom to veil or unveil due to the institutionalization of *hijab*-wearing in certain areas or institutions in Indonesia and the possibility to get bullied when a woman decided to unveil.

Despite the symbolism, there are various reasons why a woman decides to wear a *hijab* such as religious reasons, local or institutional regulation, psychological/conformity, political, fashion (Juneman 2010), and advocacy strategy (Suryakusuma 2007). As for the reason to unveil, a study by Juneman (2010), shows that two out of four informants of his study decided to not wear *hijab* anymore after their encounter with non-Islamic activism. Moreover, one of them testified that her involvement in women's activism has changed the way she perceived her *hijab* and decided to take it off. Nevertheless, less is known the correlation between the decision to veil or unveil and women's activism, especially in the *Tarbiyah* movement as the one that initially promoted the *hijab*-wearing and in feminism as the movement which is known in Indonesia as a Western product so that is against the veiling.

Therefore, this article aims to give an understanding of the intersecting issues of veiling, feminism, and Islamist activism in the context of Jakarta as the capital city of Indonesia, the major target of *hijab*-wearing promotion by the *Tarbiyah* Movement. The research for this article was conducted through the exploration of women's activists' subjectivity, focusing on women who had been involved in the *Tarbiyah* movement and moved to feminism. Therefore, this article mainly aims to explore how women's activism in the previously *Tarbiyah* movement and currently feminism

affects the way women's activists construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the *hijab* symbolism and whether it also affects the decision to veil or unveil? This article attempts to answer the following three main questions: How was the symbolism of *hijab* constructed by the *Tarbiyah* movement and functioned as the means to discipline its female members' bodies?; how did the ex-female member of the *Tarbiyah* movement question and realize the negative ideology embodied in the symbolism of *hijab* constructed by the *Tarbiyah* movement? (3); and how did the involvement in feminism affect the ex-female members of the *Tarbiyah* movement to reconstruct the symbolism of *hijab* and (un)veil themselves?

Qualitative research was conducted to answer the above-mentioned research questions by using a literature review and in-depth interviews as data collection techniques. The literature review focused on the issues of *hijab*, the *Tarbiyah* movement, and feminism in the context of Indonesia. Using a snowball sampling technique, the in-depth interviews were conducted with four subjects of research who did their activism in Jakarta. They are former activists of the *Tarbiyah* movement who have moved to the feminist movement. Some still wear *hijab* and others do not (Tabel 1).

Table 1
The Subjects of Study

Subject	Age	Marital Status	Education	Occupation	Veil/Unveil
AF	32	Married	Bachelor Degree in Social and Political science	Researcher and writer on gender issues and Islam	Veil
DS	24	Single	Bachelor Degree in Law	Gender analyst for a legal aid institution	Veil (Considering to unveil)
RN	31	Married	Master Degree in Gender Studies	Founder of a feminist community of the sexual harassment issue	Veil
CU	26	Single	Bachelor Degree in Social Science	An employee of an NGO for gender and sexual diversity issues	Unveil

There were three sets of questions for the interview. The first set asks the subjects' involvement in the *Tarbiyah* movement, from the first exposure until they finally left the movement. The second set explores how they initially veiled themselves and made changes to their *hijab*. It also questions their motivation and feeling regarding the initial decision to veil and the changes they have made. Lastly, the third set of questions asks about their activism in the feminist movement, starting from their first exposure until the recent one. The interview was conducted in person from October until September 2017. There was also a further inquiry process conducted by email until December 2017 to make sure that my understanding of the experience they have told was correct and to have their confirmation that the information I would put on the report was safe enough for their confidentiality.

The Issues of *Hijab*, *Tarbiyah*, and Feminism in Indonesia

Historically, according to Salim (2015), dress had never been a major focus of Islamic practice in Indonesia before 1980. *Kerudung* or *selendang* which partially covered women's hair was considered sufficient to fulfil the Islamic advice to cover female bodies. It was the 1979 Iranian revolution that led to an increase in the promotion and the wearing of Middle Eastern-style veils and other forms of Islamic dress in Indonesia. Hijab in Indonesia was initially promoted by state university male students affiliated with a transnational Islamist group Ikhwanul Muslimin (IM [Muslim Brotherhood]) whose *dakwah* aimed to counter Western cultural and political hegemony. The term "Islamist" refers to a fundamental or radical Islamic group that has a literal understanding of the Quran and Hadith (Albana 2017). The Indonesian *Tarbiyah* movement also emphasizes the concept of Ikhwanul Muslimin's *dakwah* (Rinaldo 2013). Therefore, veiling becomes not only a marker of Islamic identity but also a form of opposition to perceived Western cultural domination in Indonesia. In response to the promotion, the New Order government intermittently took actions against the practice. Effendy (2003) explained that in 1982, the government formulated the policy to prohibit students from wearing *hijab* in public and non-Islamic schools. In 1991, the policy was taken down. According to Machmudi (2008), the *Tarbiyah* movement through its Campus Activist of *Dakwah* (ADK) started to spread its ideology in secular and best campuses in Indonesia such as the University of Indonesia (UI), Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), and Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB). Besides, in Indonesia, Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* [PKS]) has been well-known as part of IM (Burdah 2017). According to Rinaldo (2013), most PKS women

began their involvement in the group through their initial involvement in Moslem study group, Moslem student activism or *Tarbiyah* networks, and some also joined with their husbands. PKS women's views on marriage, family, and gender are more conservative than other Islamic groups since they are part of the textualist milieu. Pious practices such as ruling the Moslem clothing for women help to instil in party members a sense of the essential difference between man and women, one that is respected through bodily separation. A study conducted by Turmudi (2016 in Ramadhini 2017) shows that the spread of *hijab* wearing on the campus was more effective if the students organized it because it could strengthen religiosity in terms of the implementation of *hijab* as a daily outfit. However, according to Suryakusuma (2013), Muslims in Indonesia are becoming increasingly concerned with formalism such as clothing and rules, rather than spirituality and faith after the *Reformasi* 1998.

As quoted in Fujita (2015), Dewi Candraningrum, the lecturer at Muhammadiyah University Surakarta and the author of the book *Negotiating Women's Veiling*, stated that after Suharto was toppled in late 1998, the headscarf became a symbol of freedom for women. But, conservative activists pushed to make veiling mandatory afterwards. A feminist anthropologist Saskia E. Wieringa (2015) also mentioned that the growing influence of conservative Islamic teachings has led not only to the increasing numbers of intolerance towards other Islamic groups and sexual minority, but also the ruling of a certain kind of dress code for women. Due to the significant escalation of the process of Islamization after Suharto, the changes in the interpretation of the Quran occurred. Therefore, at the national level, dress and modesty have been a major focus for change following the lead of the Saudi Arabian government's translation. The new Indonesian version of the Quran interpretation released by the Ministry of Religion in 2007 mandated more covering of women's bodies than the older version one, which was released in 1970 and was more flexible (Salim 2015).

In *No Longer a Choice*, Eve Warburton (2007) also explained that since the fall of the New Order regime, there has been a serious shift in Indonesian society concerning the *hijab*. In the past, most Indonesians considered Islamic dress as a matter of private interpretation. In contrast, since *Reformasi*, local governments and Islamic institutions have begun to force women to cover and, at the national level, the proposed anti-pornography laws place restrictions on women's dress and emphasize control of the female body as a tool for social reform. The supporters of these new regulations argue that this is a necessary step for addressing

what they see as ‘moral crises’ of Indonesian society, claiming that the veiling of women will create a moral and stable community. Islamic universities have begun enforcing Muslim dress for female students on campus. The proponents of tighter regulations argue that veiling displays a strong religious public image and improves the moral quality of the student community. Meanwhile, in non-religious universities, even where there are no legally enforceable rules, there is growing pressure for women to dress modestly and wear *hijab*. Warburton also explained that the control of the female body and the promotion of personal morals have become part of a mainstream political approach for addressing Indonesia’s complex social and economic problems. The veil is a powerful symbol of Muslim identity and moral control so that enforcing *hijab* became an easy way for institutions to show their adherence to Islamic principles and commitment to moral reform. In early 2000, the *hijab* started to be well-marketized in the fashion industry. Thereafter, the fashion industry of Moslem wear keeps growing significantly as more “young” and attracting urban women to wear *hijab* as their fashion style. The representative of the Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs, Euis Saidah, mentioned that there are 20 million people in Indonesia wearing *hijab* in 2012 and the development of Moslem-wear fashion rose 7% per year (Noorastuti and Abbdinnah 2012). Therefore, Indonesia has set a target to become a centre for global Muslim fashion by 2020. The government is quite optimistic with the target since Indonesia has become the third country with the highest Moslem wear consumption after Turkey and Iran based on a report by Thomson Reuters and Dinar Standard in the Global Islamic Economy Report in 2012. Besides, within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Indonesia is one of the biggest Moslem wear producers and exporters.

Despite the above historical journey of *hijab* promotion in Indonesia, there are various reasons why Indonesian Muslim women veil themselves. Siti Musdah Mulia (in Juneman 2010) explains that some women wear *hijab* for theological reasons as they believe that wearing a *hijab* is an Islamic obligation. Others wear *hijab* because of local and institutional regulations. Another reason is psychological one in that some attempt to conform with their surrounding in which many women wear *hijab*. There is also a political reason as some fulfil the demand of certain Islamic groups which utilize Islamic symbols as their political strategy. Lastly, fashion has been the most significant reason for the wearing of *hijab* in Indonesia, especially after the 2000s.

In addition, the massive spread and formality of *hijab* wearing seem to influence women’s activism. For instance, Neng Dara Affiah, an Indonesian

Muslim Feminist, wears a *hijab* because she comes from a strong *pesantren* (traditional Islamic learning institution) tradition. She said that wearing a *hijab* makes it easy for her to be accepted in Muslim communities when she carries out grassroots gender training, gives seminars, or attends Qur'anic recitals and other religious meetings (Suryakusuma 2013). Due to the dynamic changes in the representation of *hijab* in Indonesia, Lies Marcoes (in Wahid Institute 2007), an Indonesian Muslim Feminist, stated that *hijab* cannot be interpreted monolithically. "Hijab can be a business field or class identity. It can also become the mean of women's subordination and struggle", she said. In the discussion on The Freedom to Veil held on May 23rd, 2017, two Indonesian Muslim feminists spoke about *hijab* in the context of Indonesia. Nong Darol Mahmada, based on her study on Fatima Mernissi's interpretation of the Quran and Hadith regarding veil, firmly stated that wearing *hijab* is not an obligation in Islam and Indonesia is socially and culturally different from Arab or Middle Eastern countries. According to her, Indonesian women have more freedom than Middle Eastern women to some extent. Lailatul Fitriyah explained that *hijab* can be considered as an obligation in one context and not so in another one, and it represents the symbol of oppression in one context and the symbol of women's empowerment in another one in Indonesia. This is in line with Fadwa El-Guindi (1999), a Muslim Feminist who conducted the feminist study on veiling, who said that veiling must be viewed in its historical, socio-cultural, and situational/spatial context to ascertain its meaning and significance.

Juneman (2010) researched the decision of four women who decided to take off their *hijab* from a psychological and sociological perspective. Through interviews, he found that their decision to veil and unveil is significantly caused by their existential beliefs, a continuous process of Muslim women to formulate and reformulate their way to view a *hijab*. The belief would be affected by the subject's chronological age as well as their life crisis, challenges, and any form of disturbance cognitively, affectively, or socially. The result of his research shows that the experience of veiling and unveiling is particularly related to the aspect of the symbolic function of *hijab* itself. However, that aspect could not be separated from other aspects such as logic, social perspective internalization, moral consideration, the limits of social awareness, authority locus, and the coherence of the subject. Thus, the way of valuing oneself as a Muslim woman who wears or no longer wear a *hijab* has a close relationship with her way to value her own religious and not religious life. Besides, too much emphasis on the concept of sin versus reward and hell versus heaven

as something they should always be aware of has become the significant factor that affects the aspect of moral consideration. It is also related to the subject's interactions with her family, friends, and her other circumstances. Interestingly, two of his respondents decided to unveil after their encounter directly and non-directly with non-Islamic activism, namely feminist activism. Unfortunately, this aspect was not further explored in the study. Thus, in this article, I will explore more about women's activism concerning the (un)veiling by focusing on the subjectivity of women's activists who had been involved in the Islamist movement but then moved to feminism. More specifically, I will examine the symbolism construction and reconstruction of *hijab* by the subjects.

The Tarbiyah Movement's Construction and Utilization of the Symbolism of *Hijab*

The Construction of Hijab Symbolism

Most of the subjects of this study wore *hijab* for the first time in their senior high school. It is only OM who started to wear it at the end of her junior high school, right after she finished the school national examination. However, all of them had worn *hijab* before they were involved in the *Tarbiyah* movement which was started by their involvement in *liqo*. Later, their involvement in *Tarbiyah* affected the way they perceive what the *hijab* is and the way they wore their *hijab*.

The interviews show that each of the subjects had their initial reason and motivation to wear *hijab* for the first time, which is different from one to another. Unlike the others, DS did not want to wear *hijab*, but she then wore it because her high school had obliged her to wear one. AF, who had been exposed to the social and political issues in the Islamic world since very young, was motivated to wear *hijab* to show her Islamic identity as the manifestation of her solidarity with Muslims who had been killed and tortured in the Bosnian war. Besides, like RN, the experience of sexual harassment in public places had also contributed to the decision to veil. AF said:

I feel like it was a form of religious and solidarity statement. The religious statement itself is not in the sense that I can be more pious, but become more secure, and protected. From the identity aspect, this is also part of my Islamic spirit that just found its manifestation. And at the pragmatic aspect, it might protect me from sexual harassment.

RN also stated the same reason to wear *hijab* as she said:

Now, I have been in a point that women who wear *hijab* have the same potency as women who do not wear *hijab* in terms of becoming the victim of sexual harassment. However, in Indonesia and according to my experience, by wearing *hijab*, I could have more bargaining positions to fight back. It is like I am bringing my fence everywhere, so if someone keeps violating me I could fight.

Thus, both AF and RN thought that the *hijab* made them more secure from sexual violence that they had experienced before. While OM, although she was unsure about why she decided to wear *hijab*, she was motivated to wear one since she was in her second grade of junior high school. It was when she was involved in after-school mentoring in her school's *mushola* in which she attended discussions on *hijab*.

Despite the different motivations of why they decided and started to wear *hijab*, all the subjects admitted that gradually they covered their bodies further by wearing a longer and wider *hijab*, long skirt, and socks, and covering their arms. Besides, the change in how they covered their body happened when they were involved in the *Tarbiyah*. The feeling that they were supposed to conform to the group in terms of veiling was one of the reasons why they covered more parts of their bodies (Juneman 2010). As RN explained, the way women in *Tarbiyah* interacted made her uncomfortable if she did not conform to their veiling "template", by which members had to wear a long *hijab* that covers her bottom, a long skirt, arm covering, and socks. DS started to wear *hijab* due to the school rule as her school is affiliated with PKS (an Islamist party) or *Tarbiyah*. She also admitted that she started to wear a wide and loose *hijab* as she wanted to conform to her surrounding. OM said: I am thinking that maybe at that time I wore a loose and long *hijab* because my friends in that group wore that kind of *hijab* and people valued others based on their *hijab*". This is confirmed by AF who stressed that: "Besides, they also fixed me..., fixed the way I wore my *hijab*, the way I do *jamaah* prayers".

Another reason they covered more parts of their body is related to the symbolism of *hijab* in the *Tarbiyah* movement they followed. They realized that in the group, *hijab* was a symbol of Muslim women's piety. As OM said before, in the group members valued others based on their *hijab*; the looser and longer *hijab* one wore, the more pious she was regarded. AF said:

So, the bigger *hijab* you wear, the better you are. We measure our piety from the size of *hijab*. If one wears a short *hijab*, she will be considered as *fujur*. It is a term in the *Tarbiyah* movement, which means breaking rope or breaking *liqo*. The movement members may think that she is losing her faith in Islam.

This is confirmed by RN who said that “So, physical code is so much important for them although it was not visibly written. It has become the indicator of the level of Islamic piety”.

This is also in line with DS explanation that in her high school, she learned from her surroundings that *hijab* was a representation of piety, and a wide *hijab* meant that the wearer was a pious woman. So, there was pressure from her surroundings that made her wear a loose and long *hijab*.

Thus, based on the explanation above, the early reason and motivation of subjects to wear *hijab* are theological, but they then developed into non-theological ones due to the subjects’ experiences. The experience of sexual violence led the subjects to wear *hijab* to feeling more secure. Following school’s rules is another reason why they decided to wear *hijab*. Then, their involvement in the *Tarbiyah* movement made them cover more parts of their bodies. This is due to the indirect pressure to conform to the “template” showed by their fellows in the *Tarbiyah* movement as well as the constructed symbolism of *hijab* as the sign of Muslim women’s piety. Then, how the *Tarbiyah* movement utilized this symbolism?

The Utilization of Hijab Symbolism

At the end of her first grade in high school, RN decided to wear *hijab* for the first time. Since after, she started to come to mentoring sessions (*liqo*) more often in the *Tarbiyah* movement. She was excited to see her mentor. “At that time, I just started to wear *hijab* and I became excited to find more information about Islam. I read Islamic books, I came to mentoring sessions more often, and tried to find more places to have discussions on Islam,” she explained. She admitted that it was just after she wore *hijab* for the first time she was interested to have a deeper understanding of Islam. She felt that because she wore *hijab*, she had to understand Islam more than before. She found the mentoring sessions in the *Tarbiyah* movement a way to understand Islam. As seen from RN’s experience, *hijab* wearing affected women’s attitude towards religion. In her case, it improved her interest in learning more about Islam and led her to attend actively the mentoring sessions.

In the other cases, the wearing of *hijab* interested the senior members of *Tarbiyah* movement to approach the subjects and get them involved in *Tarbiyah* activism. As DS explained:

During religious activities in the campus orientation program, they will assess students to be recruited by their appearance first. It will be easy for women to be targeted. They will personally approach those who wear loose and long *hijab* and long skirt.

Furthermore, once the subjects of my study were involved more actively in the *Tarbiyah* movement, they looked similar to other members of the movement in appearance. For instance, like the senior members of the movement, they covered more parts of their bodies. The similarity in appearance then affected their relationship with those outside of the group. As OM said, after she wore her *hijab* for the first time, her friends identified her as a member of ROHIS (Islamic activism at high schools) because of the similarity of her appearance with the *Tarbiyah* members. Her friends who were not from ROHIS felt awkward to her. In the other words, wearing *hijab* in line with the *Tarbiyah*'s way of wearing *hijab* created exclusivity. This also affected the level of their militancy, the most important criteria in the further recruitment of *Tarbiyah* members.

According to Kholis Fuad (in Rahmat 2008), a PKS male activist, the selection system in the *Tarbiyah* movement prioritize militancy so that the activists' commitment to the vision and mission of the group would not easily fade away. This is proved by the experience of OM. OM was more militant than her friends in her senior high school. She obliged herself to not come late to the *liqo* and be never absent. But, she became more judgmental toward those of different groups as well those of the same movement. OM said:

Oh, so sad... I was horrible. At that time, I felt like I was the most righteous one. I became so much judgmental to the other different groups also to my own. I could not accept even if someone needed to accompany her mother. I would say that the *liqo* is more important. I believe so much in a verse of the Quran, surah At-Taubah verse 41, that said, "Go forth whether light or heavy and strive with your wealth and your lives in the cause of Allah. That is better for you if you knew". My group often repeated that verse to motivate us to involve in *liqo* and any other activities. I absorbed it too well. I did not care about my body condition. Even if I got dizzy, I would come to the *liqo*.

This is similar to AF who admitted that she would confront women who removed their *hijab*. Her militancy made her act “just like a *sharia* police officer.”

Thus, it is why physical code become so much important for the *Tarbiyah* movement. It is an indicator of members’ militancy. According to Kokom (in Rahmat 2008), an activist of the *Tarbiyah* movement, the moderation of the outfit ruling affected the women activists’ level of militancy. It decreased their commitment to Islamic *dakwah*, their willingness to struggle and sacrifice, and the intensity of their participation in the *Tarbiyah* activities. She also mentioned that moderation caused them fragile, easily affected by other groups, and withdraw from the *Tarbiyah* movement.

Questioning the *Tarbiyah*’s *Hijab* Symbolism

The life crisis experienced by the subjects of this study was momentum for them to question the *Tarbiyah* movement. It triggered them to realize patriarchal and heteronormative values embedded in the movement. The following is the detail of the life crisis experienced by the subjects of this study.

Falling Victim to an Abusive Relationship

Falling victim to an abusive relationship was a moment in which AF realized to leave the *Tarbiyah* activism. It was not the direct cause of why she detached herself from the movement. Instead, she left the movement after she realized what had made her fall into the unfortunate situation and the lack of support given by the movement. AF admitted that she was the victim of the early marriage doctrine socialized by the *Tarbiyah* movement. One day, she read a book entitled *Indahnya Pernikahan Dini* (The Beauty of Early Marriage). Then she hoped to meet a nice guy who would bring her out of the house. Thus, when she met this guy, she thought that by marrying him, she could leave the house soon. Even though he had that commitment, the guy still approached her aggressively and it seemed that he used the commitment to touch and harass her sexually. She was also pressured by her fellows in the *Tarbiyah* movement. AF said:

They said:”You know, you’ve become part of our core team, you must know the rules, but why you are still being close to him? Did you get married already?” I was frustrated and because of that pressure, I decided to get married.

Since the marriage and because of the abusive relationship, AF became less active in the *Tarbiyah* and was no longer involved in the movement. She could not develop herself because of being busy with her personal struggle. AF tried to tell her seniors in the movement about her plan to divorce. But, they told her to rethink her decision and discouraged her. AF was disappointed. She said:

I kept silent for so long. I wanted to leave the relationship but I was too scared. I was terrorized. I needed someone to tell me that I am not alone. I already had two kids at that time. He said: "Who will be interested in you if we get a divorce?! You will just be a widow with two kids". I couldn't stand it anymore. The *Tarbiyah* didn't support me. It didn't give any spirit of resistance against personal oppression. We supported Palestine even did the demonstration for Palestine. But, when we faced a personal problem, we had to fight alone.

Amidst abusive marriage and was no longer involved in the *Tarbiyah*, AF was introduced to feminism when she took two classes on politics and women. In the classes, she started to be empowered. Moreover, the lecturer was empowering and supportive. When she told the lecturer about her family condition, her lecturer supported her plan to divorce. She found her spirit of resistance again and was triggered to question herself: "We (women) are interested in politics of violence and resistance, but why do we allow ourselves to be oppressed? We (women) have a high political will when we see the injustice here and there, but when it happened in our domestic sphere, why can we just be silent?"

Falling Victim to Sexual Violence

All the subjects of this study experienced sexual violence. The occurrence of sexual violence itself was not enough to empower and trigger them to question the values that were cultivated by the *Tarbiyah*. To empower them and change their attitude towards *Tarbiyah* and *hijab*, it needed to be mediated with another event that could raise the subjects' consciousness of becoming the victim and that they were not the cause of the sexual violence.

In the case of DS, sexual violence that happened to her after she was involved in the *Tarbiyyah* movement did not immediately trigger her to question the negative values that had been cultivated by the movement. Instead, she tended to blame herself. She said:

It was in 2012. I experienced sexual violence from my male friend who is a member of the *Tarbiyah* as well. No one knows this. I just told my high school friend who doesn't know how to react to that. She just asked me to learn from my mistake. So, I blamed myself. Why did I allow myself to be with him by myself, just two of us? We were not supposed to have an intimate relationship, but I was a rebel. I was not his girlfriend, but we were close. One day he kissed me forcefully. But then he repeated kissing me three or four times. I kept coming back to him because I thought that he was a responsible one. I didn't know that it was sexual violence.

It took two years for DS to find out that it was sexual violence and she became a victim. In 2014, she attended a seminar on sexual violence at the University of Indonesia. The speaker shocked her and she felt empowered. DS said: At that time, I remembered what had happened to me in 2012. Oh my God! It (sexual violence happened to her) was not my fault! I felt empowered!"

This consciousness of being the victim empowered DS. She realized that there was something wrong with the value she had internalized from the *Tarbiyah* movement. She said:

I felt like, this was supposed to be able to be prevented. Not the sexual violence itself, but how I was supposed to deal with that. To whom should I report it and for sure not blame myself. And I think one of the problems that caused this was how I was educated and the circumstances where I live. How Islam teaches about women is not empowering at all. Not empowering at all. This make the cases like this (sexual violence) will never be exposed because people will just keep silent and women will just blame themselves. This enraged me, but I did not know to whom because my culture and religion talk like this (blaming the victim). I did nothing bad to anybody. How come this horrible thing happened to me? They said if we are good, we will receive the good. In fact, it is not like that.

Being Lesbian

In 2011, OM started to question her sexuality. This led her to learn about female sexuality and explore more about her own. It was not easy for her because she was still involved in *liqo*. She stopped her activities in *tarbiyyah* including the *daurah* due to an accident and her leave of absence. So, at that time, her interaction with the movement had been lessened.

In her exploration of her sexuality, she tried to find the Quranic verses, hadith, and ulama's jurisprudence on homosexuality. She found that there is nothing that talks about same-sex attraction, but same-sex sexual activities or behaviour. At that time, she did not think that she would do the sexual activities either. However, she was also exposed to a narration that said that homosexuals deserve to be killed. This kind of narration made her upset as she felt that her feeling about a woman was given by God. Then she could not understand why she was supposed to be punished for something that she never asked for.

In her *liqo* and her circle of friends, she tried to bring up the issues of LGBT to be discussed. But, these were not positively responded to. In her *liqo*, she shared that she wanted to be a counsellor. But, her *murrobiah* (a feminine form of *murrobi* or mentor) warned her not to become a counsellor for LGBT. In her circle of best friends, she asked what they would do if they had a family member who is LGBT. Her friends told her that they were unsure, but probably they could not accept him or her. Thus, OM realized that her sexuality was something that she could not talk to them although she had tried to give some hints.

Being Feminist

RN had been interested in women's issues before she was involved in *Tarbiyah*. It was when her identity as a feminist was bothered by *the Tarbiyah* movement that she no more tolerated different values between her and the group.

During the 2014 presidential election, the *liqo* became a medium for spreading hatred against Chinese communities, communists, and feminists. While RN identified herself as a feminist, she decided to leave the *Tarbiyah* in 2015 because she could not stand it anymore. She told her friends that she could not involve anymore in the movement and would find her spiritual journey. She said:

I decided not to involve [in the *Tarbiyah* movement] anymore even until now. Before, I thought that if I was no more there, I wouldn't be able to reach them out anymore. I tried to survive there, in the system, because I wanted to disseminate my thought about gender and give them a different perspective. But then I realized, whom I was trying to save? I thought that I needed to save myself, so I left and decided to continue the struggle through another way.

The life crisis that had happened to the subjects of this study triggered them to question the negative values, such as misogynist, patriarchal and

heteronormativity, embedded in the Tarbiyah movement (Shaiks and Maguire 2007). It refers to the violence they experienced, such as falling victim to an abusive relationship and sexual violence, as well as an indirect attack on their sexual and feminist identity. Moreover, the lack of support from the *Tarbiyah* members led the subjects to find another source of support. This led to their detachment from their Tarbiyah group and the movement. The exposure to feminism when they had to deal with their life crisis empowered and triggered them to question the values that had been internalized by the *Tarbiyah* and later led to the change in their attitude toward the movement. As a result, this change affected their attitude toward their *hijab*. The wearing of *hijab* is caused by the commitment to a group which is manifested through the *hijab* symbolism according to the group's construction of it which is socially legitimized (Ramadhini 2017).

The Involvement in Feminism and the Reconstruction of Personal Hijab Symbolism

The violent reality facing the subjects of this study triggered them to question the negative patriarchal and heteronormative values which had disempowered them. The lack of support they got from their fellow members and the exposure to feminism helped them to detach from the movement. Besides, it helped them to reconstruct the symbolization of *hijab* which then led them to take their *hijab* off or not. Thus, in this part, each of the subjects' reconstruction of the *hijab* symbolization will be explained. Then, it will show how they internalized the meaning of being (un)veiled.

Re-Veiling as the Means to Negotiate and Be Socially Accepted

Sexual and domestic violence experience made AF realized that the Tarbiyah movement would not support her and other women who experienced crises. She wore *hijab* when she was 17 years old and since then it became a statement of her Islamic identity, struggling, and personal convictions. But, in 2016, AF decided to remove her *hijab*. She said: "I've always tried to be a good Muslim woman, but I kept falling into traumatic experiences and was disappointed with my convictions".

AF admitted that when she removed her *hijab* for the first time, she felt free. For her, it felt like she released the burden and horrible experiences in the past. But at the same time, AF also questioned if it was really her. She had unveiled for 8 months when I met her. For her, it was also a battle. Her mom was furious about her decision to unveil. After eight months

she had unveiled and had struggled on it, she managed to negotiate with her circumstances by changing her perspective regarding *hijab*. Wearing *hijab* was no longer a burden afterwards. She did not consider *hijab* as the symbol of a certain Islamic identity which bothered her life. Rather, it became her way to negotiate to be accepted by her family, her people in Aceh, and the Islamic community. AF realized that freedom could not be attached and symbolized by a piece of cloth. She found that by doing all this she got a kind of freedom, but she lost other things when she veiled and unveiled.

Unveiling as the Way to Gain the Freedom of Expression

The consciousness of being a victim of sexual violence led DS to realize that her Islamic circumstances, namely the *Tarbiyah* movement, did not enable her to be empowered. Not only did she detach from the movement, but also managed to find her space in her workplace. Besides, it led her to the point in which she was no longer comfortable with the *hijab* that she wore. *Hijab* lost its significance for DS. She said:

Because I've learned feminism, I felt like it is not anybody business how long my *hijab* is. So, now I feel that the *hijab* is only an accessory like a hat or jacket. Moreover, feminism also has taught me that there is a lot of different interpretation regarding *hijab*, even there's also an interpretation that says it is okay to not wear it. [...] I wanted to express myself through what I wear, and it cannot be done if I wear *hijab*. By expressing ourselves it means that we have power over our own body, right? I envy my feminist friends. They can wear any kind of clothes, any colour of lipstick. They seem to have their freedom.

In March 2017, DS tried to unveil for a few days when she came to Coldplay's concert. When she removed her *hijab* for the first time, she thought that she would feel guilty or uncomfortable. In fact, she was fine with it. Moreover, she was finally able to wear an outfit she wanted to wear. When she informed me on December 12th, 2017, DS had removed her *hijab* in her office for two or three months. She felt happy and tried to wear anything that she had not been able to wear when she was still veiling.

Veiling to Own Her Body

Regardless of the heated debates on *hijab*, RN felt that wearing *hijab* made her own her own body. This is related to her relationship with her mother who always controls her body. RN said:

Even when I was 30 years old, my mom still protested the way I dressed and asked me to wear her chosen dress. She always complained about my things, my hair, anything. But now I don't care anymore. When I wear *hijab*, my family support me, including my mom. Previously, when I wore a long and wide *hijab* until my bottom, she didn't like it. For her, I was too conservative. But now when I am more stylish, she wants me to wear my *hijab* like before. She becomes more religious according to her definition.

RN no longer wore *hijab* until her bottom and opted to wear pants rather than a long skirt. But, her *hijab* was wide enough to cover her chest. She explained that it was related to her multiple experiences of sexual violence. She perceived her breast as the source of sexual harassment. She was and is still uncomfortable with her breast. She does not want to look at them and when she has sexual activities she did not want to talk about her breast. She felt that her breast was the source of what had happened to her all this long. So, she kept wearing *hijab* that covers her breast.

Unveiling as the Symbol of Rebellion

Removing her *hijab* became OM's way to distinguish herself from the members of the *Tarbiyah* movement. She said:

I don't want to look like that group anymore, I don't want to be identified as part of them. So, I kept removing the things that made me look similar to them. I removed my arms covering, I remove my under-veil. I folded my sleeves. I am not comfortable even just with wearing a thin *hijab*. And after I told you this, I am thinking that maybe at that time I wore a wide *hijab* because my friends in that group wore that kind of *hijab* and they valued others according to their *hijab*. Now, I don't want to be part of that group. It is very uncomfortable.

Moreover, removing *hijab* was an expression of OM's rebellion against the ideas on sexual violence and *hijab* promoted by the Islamist groups. She thought that she disagreed with the idea that *hijab* protects women from sexual violence. She could not accept the idea that she needs to do something, in this case wearing *hijab*, to prevent men from doing sexual harassment to her. This made her rethink and question why she wore *hijab* if she didn't believe in it anymore.

Despite her willingness to fully unveil, OM wore *hijab* on certain occasions and circumstances where her friends from the *Tarbiyah*

movement lived and did their activities. This was her way to respect her friends who still held the conservative values of *hijab*. Moreover, she needed to keep veiling to support her work to infiltrate into the Islamist groups' discussion on LGBT. She wore *hijab* more flexibly. She did not wear *hijab* whenever she wanted and she wouldn't mind wearing it in a condition that she needed to wear it like when she needed to negotiate with conservative Islamic groups on certain issues. She believed that *hijab* was only a piece of cloth or accessory, but she also regarded it as having power that she could exercise in certain occasions and contexts.

Conclusion

This article has shown that women's activism in their former Tarbiyah movement and current feminism affected the way they constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed the *hijab* symbolism and influenced their decision to wear or not to wear *hijab*. Despite different motivations on why the subjects of this study decided and started to wear *hijab*, the involvement in the Tarbiyah movement affected the way they covered themselves. They gradually covered more parts of their bodies just like their fellow members in the movement in conformity with the *hijab* symbolism constructed by the Tarbiyah movement. *Hijab* was regarded as a symbol of Muslim women's piety as the members of the movement valued others by the kind of their *hijab*. The wider *hijab* a woman wore, the more pious she was regarded. *Hijab* and dress code were indicators to measure the militancy of Tarbiyah female activists.

The life crisis experienced by the subjects of this study such as falling victim to gender-based violence and the realization that they were feminists and lesbians was the momentum for them to question the teachings and values enforced by the Tarbiyah movement. This led them to realize patriarchal and heteronormative values promoted by the movement, which in turn disempowered them. The disappointing attitude of fellow members also brought the subjects of this study to detach themselves from the Tarbiyah movement. The exposure to feminism, when they had to deal with their life crisis, empowered them and changed their attitude toward the Tarbiyah movement. Moreover, this change in attitude towards the movement affected their attitude toward *hijab*. Their disappointment with the Tarbiyah movement did not necessarily bring them to remove their *hijab*. The subjects of this study changed their way of veiling their bodies and reconstructing new values of (un)veiling. Thus, veiling and its symbolism constructed by *Tarbiyah* had no longer the power to determine

the subjects' behaviour. Their reconstruction of *hijab* symbolism enabled them to regain control of their bodies and determine whether they would go veiled or unveiled according to certain contexts and situations.

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Endnotes

1 *Hijab* is a term that has cultural and linguistic roots that are integral to Islamic (and Arab) culture as a whole (El-Guindi 1999) and has the meaning "to cover or separate things". In relation to clothing in Islamic teaching, *hijab* could be defined as Muslim women's modest wear or the Islamic tradition of veiling. In this article, the terms *hijab* and veil is used interchangeably.

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