

Paper Presented at

**AMSS 34th Annual Conference
Cosponsored by
Temple University, Philadelphia, PA
September 30 – October 2, 2005**

Abstract Only – Work in Progress

**“Contemporary Islamic Education and Civil Society:
Reflections on the Indonesian Pesantren, Religious Pluralism,
and the Empowerment of Women”**

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Can contemporary Islamic institutions of learning make a contribution to civil society? In light of the emerging stigmatization of Islamic education as an institution that encourages radicalism and violence, such a question may seem counter-intuitive. The secularization of education is often described as a necessary precondition for the successful and non-violent accommodation of the structural conditions of modernity: namely, pluralism and the democratization of public life. Examining the theories of secularization, this paper questions the privileging of secular models of education over their religious counterparts. The argument will be developed further using ethnographic data about Indonesia's *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) and their contributions to the country's emerging democratic civil society. Of particular concern are questions of how *Pesantren* deal with religious pluralism, i.e., the engagement of religious diversity, as well as their role in the empowerment of women, particularly in terms of social and economic justice. This paper examines a potentially civility-enhancing role of religious institutions in contemporary societies, by analyzing the educational programs at *Pesantren Al Muayyad Windan* in the city of Solo as an instructive case study. Far from denying the existence of dominating religious formations which diminish the space in which a robust civil society can grow, this paper argues for a careful case-by-case approach which incorporates both the circumstances under which Islamic educational institutions contribute to education for civility and a fresh perspective on the contentious question of religion's appropriate role in education and public life.