

## Conference Paper

# Women in the Eye of Pesantren

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## Abstract

Pesantren is a religion-based boarding school chain that is widespread in Indonesia. Pesantren are often negatively stigmatized by a small number of people owing to the perception of the schools radicalizing religious values and demanding the obedience of women. In contrast, this study aims to analyze the way in which Pesantren education plays a major role facilitating the contribution of women in three domains, namely domestic, public, and social. Analysis of women's self-conception and the role of women in these three domains was conducted using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design and interview techniques, together with observations on female students in one Pesantren in Central Java and East Java and two religious groups in the West Java region. The results revealed that Pesantren education for women had an impact on the social recognition of women.

**Keywords:** Islamic Boarding Schools, Pesantren, Social recognition, Three domains of women, and Women.

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of radicalism and various acts of terror in the name of religion bring its own suspicion towards Islamic boarding schools (in Indonesia known as Pesantren). Pesantren is in the dualism of people's beliefs, between good and bad in instilling religious values in it (Abidin, 2017; Pohl, 2012). As an institution that has rules based on Islamic religious values, Pesantren are open to anyone who wants to learn and deepen Islamic teachings, but the openness is limited, which means that there are things that cannot be touched by the wider community as in the pattern applied education and limited interaction between the two as an effort to maintain the Pesantren's social security itself.

Sturdy instilling of religious values in Pesantren is not infrequently seen as different by ordinary people. They look more at the seeds of radicalism that will grow as a result of the strong religious values that are implanted. This becomes unfair when the Islamic Boarding School itself has tried its best to instill and build religious values in such a way as to include integrating religious values and the current social conditions of the

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community as an effort to introduce the value of the flexibility of Islam in interpreting social conditions in society.

Rigid assessments pinned by the community so that it triggers excessive suspicion of Pesantren's, one of which is caused by a sense of being an outside group by the community itself (out group feeling). Not being part of a Pesantren makes outsiders feel different from people within. This is as if supported by Pesantren's rules that governing relations with outsiders, as an effort to maintain the understanding of religion wrongly interpreted by the outside community without understanding and in-depth analysis so as to cause misappropriation which will further make religious values more rigid and misused by groups which is not responsible as a justification for the actions taken.

Pesantren's run the education system based on religious studies, both in the classical and modern interpretation of the Al-Quran (Muafiah, 2013). Learning about the classic books (Islamic based) in the Pesantren is not the least that gives a striking difference between women and men, as the books in the areas of Tafsir, Hadith and Fiqh which discuss more about women in the field of worship and morals, Kalam Science or Philosophy discusses the spiritual position of women, and the basic conclusion of the many books is the superiority of men over women, so there is a load of gender inequality in the classic books (Towaf, 2008). Women's involvement is discussed still around the domestic realm, namely, the economy, education and households in the domestic environment (Muhannif, 2002).

In addition to the classic books, there are also popular classical commentaries by At Tabrani and Ar Rozi which are more misogynistic and marginalize the position of women, while the discussion on allowing women to determine their rights as individual and social beings while still paying attention to the obligations and goodness in their struggle is discussed in modern commentaries by Muhammad Abduh and Rasyid Ridha (Ismail, 2003; Towaf, 2008). The study of the *yellow book (in Islamic education, yellow book referring to traditional books containing Islamic religious lessons (diraasah al-islamiyyah) taught at Pesantren's)* in looking at where women position women is in four things, namely merging in men, half the price of men, equal to men, and higher than men (Zein & Setiawan, 2019). Therefore, it is always necessary to have a deep understanding in analyzing various religious sciences that discuss women and men. Their position and role can lead to gender bias if only interpreted textually without flexibility and deepening in the current conditions in society (Malihah, Komariah, Nurbayani, & Wulandari, 2016).

In an effort to fuse various differences between women and men in the education process, the Pesantren provides a unique education for women and men. Not all education systems applied are the same for both, there are several educational

programs that are specialized based on the assessment of their rights and obligations and needs. This needs assessment covers various aspects of the lives of women and men, namely personal needs as an independent individual, maximizing the role and function of both in the family and social community, and responsibilities as servants to Allah SWT (Malihah & Nurbayani, 2015; Nuroniyah, 2019). All of this is presented in a continuous, sustainable and integrated education system between Pesantren as an inculcation of religious values with the school education system as generally available in the Pesantren environment.

In-depth studies of women and men as typical individuals are answered with a learning system that is also unique to both. In-depth understanding of women and men is expected to be able to make both of them understand each other that there are some values that are different textually in religious studies for both but, contextual analysis in social life and obligations to God are the same (Muafiah, 2013). In simple terms the basis of education is to give a deep understanding of yourself which will then make it easier to understand others.

Specificity in the education system for women and men aims to form good character and morals as the guidance of Islam (Mannan, 2017). The uniqueness of the education system is not limited to differentiating education because there is subordination between the two but rather to maximizing roles and functions based on the concepts of gender relations and proportionality, that there are roles that need to be shared so that they are equal for women and men. There is an attempt to deepen through the study of flexible religious values to provide more provisions for women and men in a reformative manner as the demands of the times are growing without leaving the basis of religious values themselves.

The education system is supported by the consistency of reward and punishment which strengthens the character and compliance of both religion and God. Pesantren interactions run not without clear causes and rules, but are designed to form concepts or self identities so that they develop as expectations and goals of the education system are applied. One way is to understand who he is and what society recognizes about him (Sharif, 2009), as Cooley's description of the looking glass self (Cooley, 1956).

The role of the functions of women and men in Islamic boarding school education is interpreted into various educational activities that should be obtained by both of them as provisions in the social community. Women are provided with special education in order to understand women's rights and obligations in various aspects of life, and men are provided with leadership education as a preaching provision in the future (Asror, 2014). The urgency of education for both of them cannot be separated or compared

because one of the bases in the application of Pesantren education is the portion value for women and men with a clear basis, namely the Al- Quran and Hadith (Warliah, 2017).

The background of the implementation of the Pesantren education system with various considerations and religious basis used is the basis in research on women in the image of the Pesantren. How women are prepared to be able to become what they should be as guided by Islam and the development of the needs of the times. The results are expected to be able to answer the current educational needs of women without leaving religious values, and the micro role of women as the beginning of the sublime role of women.

## 2. Method

The qualitative approach is used in research on women in the image of Pesantren, and answers two main research questions, namely education for women in Pesantren's and the role of micro as the beginning of the sublime role of women (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 163; Moleong, 2012: 7). The inductive logic approach is also used in research to build a theory based on the observations or observations made by the Researcher and Team many times (Malihah, Wilodati, Komariah, & Wulandari, 2017; Wulandari, Hufad, Nurbayani, 2016; Wulandari, 2015).

Phenomenological designs are used in research to get the meaning that is contained in the application of education for women in Islamic boarding schools, and the importance of the micro role of women as the beginning of the sublime role of women. Both are expected to be explored comprehensively through in-depth identification of research subject experiences in certain phenomena (Hadiwiyono, 1985: 139; Creswell, 2012: 20; Creswell, 2012) at Pesantren Al-Huda (West Java), Pesantren Rhaudatus Salaam (Central Java), and Pesantren Tebu Ireng (East Java).

The study was conducted objectively through observing the experience of the behavior patterns of members of Pesantren as social actors in research (Nindito, 2005). The development of the meaning of subjectivity towards an observed phenomenon is carried out by the researcher so that the meaning can be conveyed properly. This subjectivity encourages researchers to explore the values behind the application of the education system in Pesantren, especially for women so that the relationship to the observed phenomenon can also be well illustrated (Mama, 2002).

Open interviews were conducted with representatives of informants from each Pesantren, as social interaction between researchers and informants, and research answers were saturated. Reflective interviews are also used by researchers, with

questions flowing in conversations with informants. Researchers are only armed with the main questions, but do not ask one by one in a structured manner. Observations in research carried out as an effort to balance the role of researchers as well as participants in research (Brayboy, B.M., & Deyhle, 2000). Therefore, at the time of observation, researchers need field notes as direct records of events that occur (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982: 74). The documentation study was obtained through a secondary study supporting research data and documentation of various activities in the observation activities obtained during the study (Wulandari, 2015). Literature studies are used to strengthen the studies presented in research analyzes (Bell, 1992: 53).

Analysis of research data with phenomenological design is carried out through six steps namely processing field data as obtained during observation at the Pesantren, reading and remembering the data obtained during observations, describing the data through descriptions of events or activities at the Islamic boarding school that occur, classifying the data according meaning related to the purpose of research, textural and structural interpretation of data, as well as visualization and presentation of data through narratives in tables and units of meaning (Creswell, 2013: 148).

Data validation in phenomenological research is done by sending information on the results of the data processed to experts in the fields of Education, Religion, and Gender to be given constructive input to researchers (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993) (Kurwarno, 2009). The research process using phenomenological design requires the researcher to put aside his personal experience in order to understand the experiences of the informants under study. This as an effort to validate qualified research data, also aims to avoid the dualism of views, namely from informants as insiders and researchers as outsiders (Naples, 1996).

### 3. Result and Discussions

#### 3.1. Women's Education in Pesantren

The Pesantren's present special education for women in developing their character. Education is designed based on the study of women's rights and obligations as an independent individual, as members of society who need each other, and as part of an important element in society, namely the family (Zakiyah, 2002). All of that is still oriented towards the teachings of Islam, namely the Koran and the Hadith. The focus of women's education studies in Pesantren's is in fact not as traditional as imagined, in

fact education is presented up to date with various agreed-upon limits and regulated in the prevailing Pesantren education system.

Restrictions on internet access, watching television, and a ban on using mobile phones do not make the education system stop at the stage of only lecturing and armed with textbooks as teaching material. Pesantren provides print media (newspapers) as a means of adding information for students that can be obtained every day. This restriction which then spurs students to explore broad information through print media has been provided by the Pesantren. This restriction is in fact a separate whip for students to always read the news through print media in order to stay aware of the latest news developments.

The learning system for students both regular and religious learning at every level of schooling in the Pesantren always associates with the latest news in the community. This can be seen from two sides, namely, firstly as an appreciation to students who have been actively digging into information through print media, and secondly as a stimulus to actively read itself. Yes, integration of regulations, tools, and learning systems is needed to create a unified educational system that is qualified, not only for students but also for educators (Hernawati & Nurbayani, 2018; Islamiah & Nurbayani, 2018). This then makes the Pesantren education system managed to create a superior generation even with restricted access (Mahmudah, 2015).

Another limitation is in financial matters. Students in a Pesantren environment referred to as Santri are not allowed to hold more allowance than stipulated by the Pesantren. The use of allowance is carried out under the guidance of teacher whose duty is to oversee the expenditure of students. Even students are required to make a budget plan to withdraw the allowance which can only be done once a week. The application of this rule is not without reason, students are expected to be able to take responsibility for their rights in getting pocket money. Not only can it apply at will in its use and as an inculcation of the concept of financial management which certainly cannot be separated from everyday life.

For women, more than just implementing the rules that have been set. Women consider that this is one of the exercises in managing household finances in the future. Women who can manage finances will make their families free from deficiencies. Not only that, women see this as one of the opening doors of heaven, namely by carrying out their role as women in the family. Small things if done maximally become one of the opening of big things, as women can maximize their role, even in the domestic sphere (Nurbayani, Komariah, Nurohim, & Nurhizky, 2019; Srimulyani, 2007; Wilodati, Komariah, & Wulandari, 2019).

Strengthening character through maximizing the role and function of women is done through special activities for women ( known as Keputrian ) carried out in small groups and with the guidance of female teachers or commonly referred to as Ustadzah. This activity discusses the rights and obligations of women as independent individuals, as part of community members, and as candidates for forming a superior generation for their families. the study is based on religious guidance for women themselves. At a glance this activity is one way for women to be as satisfied with their roles as women in general are proud of their domestic roles, but the study goes beyond that.

Women are first given an explanation of "Who is the real woman?", This will be the basis or foundation for studying women. Women's understanding of themselves as guided by the Religion, with various potentials that must be developed by women makes these activities run flexible and open up the world of women. Not always with the domestic sphere, but also the public sphere that women can easily get by maximizing their role as women in the domestic sphere itself.

In general, the assessment of women in the study aims to instill confidence in women as human beings with various features they have. Specifically, women are given the foundation of belief that there is a separate path for women to develop themselves without becoming like men. Women and men have their respective portions and strengths to make themselves available without being like the others. Women and men have their own way of actualizing themselves, be it in the realm of domestic, public, and social. The three domains are not just one discussion between the two, namely women or men, but talk about cooperation between them in the pattern of gender relations.

### **3.2. The Role of Women in Micro Level as the Beginning of the Noble Role of a Women**

Not a few women who feel marginalized for their position in the domestic realm. The realm that makes women unable to do much, cannot move freely, and has no meaningful contribution. This area is also widely discussed as a prison for women, because it cannot accommodate and actualize women as men do. The domestic sphere is becoming more and more common for women who think to get "as men get", but not with women who think about "the portion of women and men" as implanted in the education system for women in Pesantren.

The domestic role of women is seen as a micro role which does not have much influence on life. On the other hand, in fact this micro role is capable of being the

cornerstone of the macro role that is widely pinned to men (S. Nurbayani, I. Anggun, 2019). In describing one nuclear family, women in their domestic sphere act as the opening of the male public sphere, and vice versa. There is an "agreed" division between women and men to occupy the two domains, meaning that the placement of control over the two domains is not absolutely women's or men's, but is the result of agreement, acceptance, and even omission of one another. This omission then becomes the oldest injustice in society, not about the domestic sphere for women and the public for men.

Domestic and public is an inseparable system. There must be someone in control of the two domains, and if only speaking within the scope of the nuclear family, division into something that is absolutely necessary, even in the elements of activity in both domains. Except if there is a share of other people who are part of the extended family and the involvement of outsiders to carry out domestic roles such as using family assistants.

The women in the Pesantren are of the view that they do not have to be like men to be considered, women can achieve the desired actualization while still being women, one of which can be obtained even by only being in the domestic sphere. There is no problem with the domestic sphere, the problem is when it cannot carry out its role and function as a creature that has the mind to develop as it should. No limitation is felt at all on the domestic sphere, especially the public in the era of globalization as it is now, it is only about traditional social recognition of the strength of the public sphere and weaknesses of the domestic sphere (Malihah et al., 2017; Sutarni, N., Wulandari, P., Asyahidda, 2017). Strengths and weaknesses that are seen as truth over living systems "as they should be" (Hakam, Nurbayani, Asyahidda, & Fitria, 2017; Wulandari, Hufad, Nurbayani, 2016).

The domestic sphere is seen as one of respect for women. Through this realm, generations are created. The generation that is expected to be able to destroy the perception that power is only owned by the public sphere, but also develops the strength of the domestic sphere with an open mind, broad knowledge, and qualified skills. In fact, the strength of the public sphere starts from the solid foundation of the domestic sphere, namely the family, and women spearhead the power of the public sphere. This is what has been formed for a long time about the position of women in the domestic sphere, what is different is the awareness to acknowledge it, because what happens in society in general is the recognition that is held more high than the process behind the recognition, and this is where the "work" of women is.

The view of concepts that are always on something that seems to make women's work unreal. Domestic activities are seen as something that has no material value, but on the other hand many non-material and immaterial results are created from domestic work.

Even calling domestic activity a job becomes something that is not easily accepted. Women with their domestic roles will always be in an unworthy position if they are still in the perception of traditional masculinity.

Women in Pesantren with the provision of qualified general and religious education are of the view that, there is no problem and there is no need to worry excessively but not based on the domestic sphere. No need to worry about the assessment of "invisible" women, because the invisible work turns out to be able to produce work that is recognized and coveted for some people who still consider the magic of the public sphere. Even women in Pesantren are of the view that knowledge and the high education of women for the family. Women in big positions and careers still must not forget let alone leave family. For Pesantren women, the strength of the family as proof of women's real work and the results of all the struggles of women's education. The domestic sphere and family resilience are acknowledgment and appreciation for women, therefore no matter how much women become whatever women, the value of women is actually how the family is doing.

## 4. Conclusion

The domestic and public sphere is a system that runs the joints of life. It is inappropriate to judge higher and lower among one another. It is appropriate to look deeper into the results generated from these two realms, both visible and invisible results. The existence of women in the domestic sphere should have received support and appreciation to reach the public sphere and vice versa, the presence of men in the public sphere is not an excuse and is not an obstacle to getting to know and have a stake in the domestic sphere. Gender relations are impossible without a contribution in both the realm of women and men, because there are truly domestic or public, both of whom are dealing with certain situations and conditions in life.

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