

GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN PESANTREN IN JOHOR (MALAYSIA) AND CENTRAL JAVA (INDONESIA)

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates gender construction in Islamic boarding schools or 'pesantren' Semarang, Indonesia (Al-Islah and Al-Ashor) and Johor, Malaysia (Mahad and Marsah). It was found that despite their different countries and customs, the schools in Indonesia and Malaysia show some similarities, especially in terms of the teaching of Islamic jurisprudence and their perceptions of the rights of men and women as explained in the Qur'an. However, they differ, especially in terms of the implementation of these in their daily lives. In Johor, Malaysia, men are responsible for activities outside of the households whereas women are in charge of the domestic chores. In Semarang, Indonesia, however, women, despite their household responsibilities, can also work outside. In addition, in terms of polygamy, most people in Johor support it as long as it does not break any religious laws.

Key Words: gender construction, nature concept, Islamic boarding school

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengelaborasi hasil penelitian di pesantren yang ada di Johor, yakni Maahad dan Pesantren Al-Islah (pondok pesantren putri) dan Al-Ashor (pondok Pesantren modern campuran). Konstruksi gender di kedua pesantren yang berbeda negara dan kebiasaan ini ternyata hampir sama, artinya untuk hal-hal yang terkait dengan ajaran-ajaran Fikih Islam dan hak-hak perempuan dan laki-laki menurut Al-Qur'an persepsi mereka sama. Namun, dalam implementasi kehidupan sehari-hari ditemui beberapa perbedaan antara lain persepsi mengenai tugas pembagian peran sosial antara laki-laki dan perempuan di Johor peran sosial di luar rumah tetap menjadi tanggungjawab suami dan tidak menekankan atau menganjurkan para perempuan untuk bekerja di luar rumah. Demikian pula untuk pekerjaan rumah tangga, menjadi tugas istri dan tidak menyarankan suami untuk berbagai tugas rumah tangga tersebut. Hal ini agak berbeda dengan kondisi di Indonesia. Pada umumnya sudah terbuka dan memandang hal yang biasa ketika perempuan selain sebagai ibu rumah tangga juga bekerja di luar rumah di berbagai bidang pekerjaan. Temuan menarik adalah ketika dibahas masalah poligami, Johor mendukung poligami asalkan sesuai dengan syariah agama.

Kata Kunci: konstruksi gender, konsep kodrat, pondok pesantren

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BACKGROUND

Talking about women, one cannot ignore the socio-cultural context where they live in and what kind of society they have been brought up in (unfortunately, these are often neglected). Women cannot also be separated from their heterogeneity as they, indeed, vary in terms of education, culture, knowledge, life experiences, social life, and also environment, which form them. Similarly, discussions around *Muslim* women should also regard these characteristics plus one more category that is religion. The education system they have is also very specific since some of them get their education from *Pesantren* (Traditional Islamic Boarding School) which is different from the general education system.

Women's social status in Islamic perspective can be approached either textually or contextually where textually means analyzing and explaining women's status by considering normative perspectives as written in *Al-Qur'an* and the opinions asserted by *ulamas* (*ahli fiqh*) who interpreted the normative teachings told by *Allah SWT* in *Al-Qur'an*, and contextually means analyzing the background of the revelation of *Ayats* (verses) of *Al-Qur'an*, while also analyzing the socio-political and socio-cultural context before finally interpreting the verses. In Islam, these two approaches are usually conducted by *Ulamas* (clerics) so that the interpretations of *Al-Qur'an* depend on what the *ulamas* believe is right.

Contextual approach to *Al-Qur'an* normative explanations as suggested by some Muslim clerics is one of several attempts to analyze and elicit answers to the needs of the society which is facing social, economic, cultural and technological challenges. It indicates demands to creatively develop Islamic teachings while still upholding *Al-Qur'an* in order to answer the challenges and problems faced by the society.

Actually, the verses in the *Qur'an* were revealed in certain socio-historical contexts; therefore the interpretations should be based on those contexts. When ages and conditions change, the interpretations and explanations

should change too. Some of the verses in the *Qur'an* which mention women have to be interpreted in conformity with their socio-historical background. If nowadays there are lots of changes that have pushed women to change, the analytical framework used to interpret *Al-Qur'an* should also be modified, instead of using the same framework for every context. This is very important considering that there seems to be marginalization of women existence in the interpretation of *Al-Qur'an*.

Islam has proven itself to have been able to set women free. However, in the next stage of its development, there is an impression of stagnancy or even backward movement. One of the reasons is that one often gives meaning to the verses without considering their historical context and imposes it on others as a set of rules and moral guidance to be implemented universally. It is important to bear in mind that when *Al-Qur'an* gives answers to solve specific concrete problems and decrees some rules, it explicitly or implicitly gives reasons behind those answers. By considering the reasons mentioned and the context carefully, one can obtain its foundations or principles which must be taken as clues to implementations.

It can thus be concluded that there are very significant interactions between the revelation of a verse and the conditions and changes happening in the society. The question is whether or not there is progress achieved related to the status and roles of women according to the laws derived by some *ulamas* from *Al-Qur'an*. Stressing on the implementation of certain verses basing only on the text, without paying attention to the context and the changes that have happened, means ignoring social ideals and moral values implied. So, *Al-Qur'an* should be interpreted in a dialogical way between text and context.

It is very interesting to study the people who act as transformation agents from a religious community such as traditional Islamic Boarding Schools. So, not only should one know how the *santris* (students of a *Pesantren*) live and

make such a transformation, but one should also study how a system explains the transformation made by its own agents. Lately, discourses with gender equality sense – as a center of religious education – turn to be very important. In societies there are mixed processes between social life and fixed religious life. Therefore, certain things which can normally and are actually allowed to change in social life have sometimes turned to be fixed and frozen.

An education system, in relation to the fixity, has unique characteristics, and is often used by some people as a legitimate means of subordinating women. In order to get clearer and deeper understanding of such an education system, this study analyzed *pondok's* education system in Java-Indonesia and Malaysia. Java and Malaysia were chosen based on several reasons such as the way that Islam in both regions has a lot of similarities in terms of its agents (students and clerics) as well as the *Islamization process*. Specifically, there are some similar aspects between Java and Malaysia which can be categorized into three: historical, ecological and socio-cultural. First, historically, the inhabitants in both regions have similar cultures as they are geographically close neighbors. Besides, Islam in both regions is spread locally by using such media as Mosque, and *madrasah (Islamic schools)*. The local clerics from both regions generally studied Islamic disciplines in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia (Mecca) and Egypt (Al Fatani, 1994; Steen Brink, 1992). Second, ecologically the inhabitants of both regions come from the same sub-race, i.e. Malay sub-race. Both regions are located in Malaya coasts, so Islam proceeded through the same paths or routes, that is sea route and trades by Arabian, Persian, and Indian *Muslim* traders. Third, from socio-cultural perspectives, as concluded in Niels Mulder's study, there are a lot of similarities between the societies in both regions in terms of attitudes, perspectives, ideals, and social behavior such as hierarchical view of social structure, mystical ideas, and mysticism, and also social codes and ethics (Mulder, 1983).

Based on the previous background showing the controversies and various impacts of interpretations of the *Al-Qur'an* with specific reference to gender equality and women status in society, new ways should be found to reconsider women's social, economic, and political formations in the education system. Some differences in interpreting women's social status in *Al-Qur'an* need to be reviewed regarding the rapid social, cultural, and political development of the environment where women have been raised. Women's collective experiences have been through various changes as part of larger social transformations. The macro contexts have settled several conditions which enable or—on the contrary—slacken any kind of individual experience transformations as has been experienced by women collectively.

Furthermore, it is indeed crucial to study the daily lives in the society, and to investigate how the practices appreciate gender equality discourse without misogynic intention.

In terms of changes, there are three consecutive processes in social formation that need to be addressed: construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction. Construction is a process where the objective realms (women objective realms) have been taken for granted and become public agreement, although there is still social dynamics inside. Deconstruction happens when the legitimacy of the fixed women objective realms is being questioned and then brings new practices to women's life. This process sets up the next process, i.e. reconstruction which means re-conceptualization and redefinition.

This study focuses on how the previous three processes above proceed in daily life, in workplaces, education institutions, in social life, and also in family life. More specifically, it attempts to address the following:

1. the contextual knowledge of the *Santris* about the gender phenomena based on Islamic doctrines?
2. the gender orientation of the *Santris* in Pondok Pesantren Al-Islah, Al-Asror, and In Mahad Johor?

3. the gender orientation of the Teachers at Johor Islamic School and that of the people in Johor?
4. women Rights to work outside the house, get education and be the leader in the society in Johor, Malaysia and Java Indonesia

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Gender and Fate Concept

In various fields in our daily lives, stereotypes of men and women are formed, so that sometimes people just take it for granted as fate. This social construct has forced men and women to realize what is already justified as fate. That is why it is not surprising that when asked about the ideal type of woman, the answer is mostly "a good mother and a good wife". When a further question is asked "what kind of good mother or wife?" the answer will be "the one who is obedient to their husband and takes care of her children" (see Abdullah, 1997). In some people's mind a good wife or mother should always be beside her husband and children, to be around when needed, and always support the success of the husband. Such a blue print has been developed and maintained by the existing social institutions and codes, so that it influences not only the way men see women but also the way women look at themselves and their roles in various social processes in the society.

However, some people still find it shocking when those discussions mention men and women because what pervades is that there is an attempt to deconstruct the already fixed social constructs and codes. Gender concepts should be distinguished from sexual concepts. Sex is defined in relation to the categorization of people into two different groups based on the biological features attached to each group. (Fakih, 1996). For example, humans of the male sex (men) are those having penis, Adam's apple, and produce sperms, whereas those of the female sex (women) are those having womb,

breasts, vagina, and ovary ducts. Those organs are biologically attached to men and women permanently and can not be exchanged because they have been biological rules or called fate. However, gender concepts include men's or women's features which are socially or culturally constructed. As this construct has been going on and preserved in various social rules, these separating features seem to be obligatorily taken by men and women respectively. For instance, men are regarded as strong, rational, muscular, bold, etc, whereas women must be described as soft, beautiful, emotional, caring, etc. Actually, those features are interchangeable, meaning that men can be emotional, motherly, caring, and there are times that women are muscular, rational, and strong without having to exchange sex type. The changes of those constructed features might happen from time to time, in different places and different society, So all those things are called gender concepts. Thus, features which are interchangeable are not fates but gender constructs.

The difference in gender should not be a problem as long as it does not result in *gender inequalities*. But, in fact, this difference has formed many kinds of unfairness towards men and especially towards women: How gender differences has caused gender unfairness is clearly seen in many phenomena such as marginalization, women economic poverty process, subordination, stereotyping, negative labeling, violence, more work burdens, or the socialization of gender roles.

This gender construction seems to be deconstructed in relation to the demand of this era as women characters today are different from those in the past. That is why, to find out what kind of characters women are, one needs to listen to women's voices, which have been, so far, hidden. The more women work outside proves that there is a question to familialism ideology and that women have deconstructed their life history.

Gender Role Socialization

The history of *gender differences* between men and women has gone through a very long process. Thus, the gender differences are triggered off by many factors. Among others they are created, socialized, strengthened, and even constructed socially and culturally through religious and state doctrines. Through a long process gender socialization is regarded as God's decision which cannot be changed so that gender differences are regarded as the fate to be accepted unquestionably by both men and women.

Conversely, through a dialectic talk, this social construct is socialized evolutionally, which in turn slowly gives biological influences to each sex. For example, because the social construct says that men should be strong and aggressive, men are trained, socialized and motivated to hold those characteristics. They must be physically strong and well-built as they have to be "macho". On the other hand, women must be weak, soft, and passive so they are trained and motivated to be "what is required" by the society. This socialization process has started since they were babies. Baby girls' clothes are often soft-and-bright colored such as pink and orange, and they are cuddled caringly like a china that should be protected until they are grown up in such a way as if the world outside were so harmful for these creatures called "women". Baby boys, on the other hand, should be given heavier strokes to make them steady and bold. They are socialized with something "knightly" and introduced to the world exclusively owned by "men". This socialization has influenced not only the vision and emotion of both men and women but also further biological development.

All the daily treatment and the toys provided are aimed at giving gender stereotyped role. For instance, the toys and games which are supposed to be appropriate for girls are household, teaching, and nursing role plays as well as dolls or mother's handbags and shoes. Conversely, games such as footballs, war-play,

and toys such as toy cars and airplanes are regarded as "hard games and toys" appropriate for boys. When grown up, those children continue these gender stereotyped roles: girls help their mothers at home or in the kitchen, take care of the home and younger siblings; and do other domestic tasks. This goes on so that when those girls have grown up, they still have to take the domestic responsibilities regardless of their position as career women, while men are regarded as household leaders with responsibilities as breadwinners without any burden of domestic work. Although lately many women take over breadwinning responsibilities, very few are recognized.

This long-termed and settled socialization has made it difficult to distinguish whether what is attached to men and women so far are fate or social construct. But based on the fact that those qualities and tasks are interchangeable, it is clear they are not fate but merely social constructs.¹

Today there are many inappropriate affirmations happening in the society in which social constructs are taken as fates. On the other hand, what is regarded as "women's fates" are in fact social and cultural constructs. For example, educating children and home making and other domestic works are often labeled as women's responsibilities whereas in fact they are socio-culturally attributed to women by a certain society. Thus, it is possible that they are actually performable by men as they lack universalities. To conclude, what is sometimes said as God's fate, in this context, can merely be social constructs (Fakih, 1996).

Gender role socialization sometimes makes women feel guilty of not doing domestic tasks. While not being recognized as men's duties, these domestic tasks are traditionally considered taboo to be done by men. These tasks make working women more burdened, and so for those economically privileged, these tasks are delegated to helpers or housemaids. This means there is a transfer of marginalization from women to women (wives to helpers). All

manifestations of gender inequality are so interrelated that one influences another. And thus, eventually they are completely accepted and very few take them as mistakes.

The Concept of Women according to *Fiqh* (Islamic Laws)

The mushrooming of Western Feminism studies has finally influenced educated muslim scholars, especially those concerning the facts that many women occupy the practice-level of the Islamic world. Although the studies around women in Islam through feminism perspective are popular in Indonesia in the last ten years, the debate around the issue is still profound. Not only did the studies get scientific criticism but they also received severe and insinuating attacks. Some muslim feminists are often labeled as Western minded (distorting from Islam).

The possible reason for the objection of feminism in reading the situation faced by Islamic women is the demand to reread (re-interpret) the sacred text, that is *Al Qur'an*, whose validity is unquestionable. The problem is that the tradition gives high authority to certain interpreters. Unfortunately, some classic interpretations often legitimize domination over women. The question is why Islam seems to place men higher than women (An-Nisa 34). *Al Qur'an* as the reference for the basic principles in the society basically acknowledges that women have as high a position as men do. The things which distinguish their position is the commitment and submission to God (Al Hujurat 13).

Quraish Shihab in *Wanita Islam Indonesia Dalam Kajian Tekstual dan Kontekstual* (1993), referring to some contemporary *ulamas*, says that Islam is not that many people have accused or assumed in some practices in the society. Actually, Islam gives position and respected places for women. If so, then there is distortion which blurs this special position of women, i.e. the interpretation by some clerics, and so, religion (Islam) is often used to support some practices against women.

Gender orientation of the *santris* whether it always refers to the teachings in the religion (Islam) textually can be examined from the references, that is, the holy Qur'an, hadist, and *fiqh* books. *Fiqh* is generally learned in such *Pesantren* as Women *Pesantren* Al Islah and Al Asror in Semarang. As a guideline there are four topics to be addressed, that is, the concept of women based on *fiqh*, the socio-political rights of women, women's rights outside their homes, and women's rights and responsibilities for learning. In the *Fiqh* scriptures there are many discussions found about women's problems, both in *ibadah* (rituals to God) and *muamalah* (rituals to human beings)

The world of *Pesantren* is often related to the so-called "yellow scriptures" (ancient scriptures revealing the interpretations of the Qur'an). Moreover, *Fiqh* studies in *Pesantren* often refer to these scriptures. In social life as seen in the *fiqh* statements referred to by all Mahzab (mainstreams), for example, a woman is weighted one half of a man.

Concerning this, Masdar F Masu'di, critically finds 5 principles. However, the ones often highlighted are issues around giving testimony, distribution of heritance, and the men's right to do polygamy. Meanwhile women are permitted to marry only one husband. (An Nisa 24).

In the relationship of husband and wife, for example, women position is only as the object and husband as the subject. These can be seen in the following *fiqh* statements:

- In terms of status, a man is the one who marries, whereas a woman is the one to be married. According to the traditions, women who are married can be observed just like objects in the process of bargaining.
- Men have the rights as the subject in the divorce whereas women can only put up motion of distrust.
- The obligation to fulfill the husband's requirements, prohibition to reject husbands' desire for having sex.

- Prohibition for a wife to go out from home without her husband's permission.

All these statements are interesting to be studied further from the operational (contextual) side. The Qur'an itself as the basic principles for moral justice supports the teachings to uphold justice in economy, politics, culture and gender. The problem is why in practice the *fiqh* laws sound discriminative and place women lower than men.

This research, which focuses on gender equality and justice in *Pesantren*, is expected to provide answers to these problems. Female *santris*, women with various educational backgrounds – elementary school to university – are expected to be able to understand and analyze what is fair and what is unfair and how the mechanism of the unfairness happening to be religious principles works. The analytical instrument should thus be more than the controversial instrument.

The problem now is that in the Qur'an there are *Qothiy* reasons, which include absolute verses and do not have more than one interpretation. Though there are only a few of such verses, they perform very basic principles. The others are *Dhanny* reasons, which include the Qur'an verses with more than one interpretation. To analyze the latter one should use analytical instruments from other disciplines such as gender analysis instruments (Fakih, 1996, p. 136). The objective is the possibility to do *fiqh* (law) reconstruction which can then be used as a reference of Islamic practices, that is interpretation and laws which are not only produced by women but also use gender analysis and perspective.

Women's Sosio-political Rights.

Jamal Ad-din Muhammad Mahmud as quoted by Quraish Shihab in *Wanita Islam Indonesia dalam Kajian Tekstual dan Kontekstual* (1993: 14) says:

"Tidak ditemukan satu ketentuan agama pun yang dapat dipahami sebagai melarang

keterlibatan perempuan dalam bidang politik, atau ketentuan agama yang membatasi bidang tersebut hanya pada kaum lelaki".

"There is not even one religious doctrine which can be understood as prohibiting women's involvement in politics or any religious doctrine limiting this area only for men"

The verses which are often used by interpreters to limit women's social and political rights, according to some contemporary interpreters, are meant for household affairs, not for limiting women socio-political rights.

In Surah At-Taubah, 71, Al Qur'an stresses:

"Dan orang-orang yang beriman, lelaki dan perempuan, sebagian mereka adalah auliya bagi sebagian yang lain. Mereka menyuruh untuk mengerjakan yang makruf, mencegah yang munkar, mendirikan salat, menunaikan zakat, dan mereka taat kepada Allah dan Rasul-Nya. Mereka itu akan diberi rahmat oleh Allah, sesungguhnya Allah Maha Perkasa lagi Maha Bijaksana".

"The believers, men and women, are protectors one of another, they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice regular charity, and obey God and His messenger. On them will God pour His mercy: for God is Exalted in power, Wise" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf Al-Quran, 2010: 323)

Generally, the verse above can be understood as the compulsory for men and women to work together in all fields of life which can be described as "Having people to do good deeds and avoid bad deeds" (Shihab, 1993).

There is another verse of the Qur'an which is used to prove that God gives women and men similar political rights, that is Surah Asy-Syura, 38: "Their affairs are (always) solved through musyawarah (discussion)". In this problem, the meaning of syura (musyawarah) or discussion, in the Qur'an, becomes one principle to manage various fields in life including political life in which every citizen, including women, in the community is demanded to conduct syura' (discussion or meeting) In this case, it can be seen in Islamic

history that Aisyah RA, the wife of Muhammad SAW, led a troop to make war against Ali bin Abi Thalib who at that time acted as the caliph (head of the state).

Women's right to work outside the house

To find out women's right outside home, the reference often used is Surat Al-Ahzaab ayat 33. Among others:

"Waqarna fi buyuutikum wa laa tabarrajna tabarruj al-jaahulyahtil uulaa..."

"Dan tetaplak kamu di rumahmu dan janganlah kamu berhias seperti berhias orang-orang jahiliyah dahulu...."

"And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of ignorance; ... (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, Lajnah Pentashih Mushaf Al-Quran, 2010: 733)

This verse is taken as reasons to forbid women from going out of home, both for learning or for working. But how does actually Islam see working women?

Muhamad Qutb in his book *Ma'rakah At-Taqlid* as quoted by Quraish Shihab (1993) says:

"Itu bukan berarti bahwa wanita tidak boleh bekerja, Islam tidak melarangnya, hanya saja Islam tidak senang (mendorong) hal tersebut. Islam membenarkannya sebagai darurat dan tidak menjadikannya sebagai dasar".

"(It does not mean that women are not allowed to work but this (verse) indicates that Islam does not support (insist on) this practice. This verse is meant for critical moments and not for basic principle"

Sayyid Qutb's signals, in his interpretation of the verse used to prohibit women from "going out" of home, is that women's basic job description is household affairs, outside home is not her permanent position or not her basic responsibilities.

Related to working women, Quraish Shihab, quoting Saqir Atiyyah, says, "Women have the rights to work as long as she needs it or as long as the job needs it and as long as religious norms and codes are still upheld."

This last interpretation seems to be appropriate to be used as the reason to allow

women work outside home. This is supported by M. Qutb as quoted by Quraish Shihab in, that:

"Perempuan pada zaman Nabi pun bekerja, ketika kondisi menuntut mereka untuk bekerja, tetapi masalahnya bukan adanya hak atau tidak, karena Islam tidak cenderung membenarkan wanita keluar rumah kecuali untuk pekerjaan-pekerjaan yang sangat perlu yang dibutuhkan oleh masyarakat, atau atas dasar kebutuhan wanita tertentu. Kebutuhan wanita untuk bekerja karena tidak ada yang membiayai hidupnya, atau karena yang menanggung hidupnya tidak mampu mencukupi kebutuhannya merupakan kebutuhan yang menetapkan hak bekerja untuk wanita".

"Women in The Prophet's era worked, when the condition demanded them to work, but the problem is not if there is the right or not, because Islam does not tend to let women go out to of home except for some necessities which are needed by the society or because of the necessities of the women themselves. Women's necessities are based on the fact that nobody supports their life or because the ones supposed to support their life are not able to fulfill their needs. Thus these needs determine women's right to work"

It cannot be imagined how much loss a Muslim woman, the sate (Indonesia), and even Islam itself will experience, if women are forced to stay at home. Meanwhile, those women are potential to give productive roles, not only for their own prosperity, but also for the people in the world.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The Profile of Research Location and Subjects in Al Islah and Al-Asror Pesantren (Central Java)

This *Pesantren* (Al Islah) is located in Mangkang village, Mangkang sub-district, Semarang, central Java. This *pesantren* is very unique, in that (1) it is attended and dwelt by both male and female *santris*; (2) The age of the *santris* varies from elementary school students to college-students; (3) it is located close to the Sate Institute of Islamic religion, so many *santris* are university students.

The *santris* of Al-Ishlah *Pesantren* Semarang come from different provinces and districts and every year the number is increasing. In 2003, the number of *santris* staying in this *pesantren* boarding (in *santris*) reached 415 *santris* consisting of 182 male *santris* and 233 female *santris*. Whereas the *santris* who did not take a boarding (out *santris*) reached 210 *santris* consisting of 80 male *santris* and 150 female *santris*. Those who did not take the boarding were mostly from areas around the *pesantren* or students who stayed in their student boarding houses close to the *pesantren*. So there were altogether 625 *santris*.

Out of the 625 *santris*, around 45 female *santris* took *tahasus tahafudz Quran* program, but no male *santris* did it. In the academic year of 1996/1997 there were 68 *santris* completing reading the Qur'an (khatam Al Qur'an).

The alumni of Pondok *Pesantren* Al-Ishlah have spread out in the society. More than 75% of them work in private sectors, and the rest are in government sectors. Many of them have taken part as development motivators especially in the mental and spiritual fields.

The subjects of the research were 15 female *santris* and 15 male *santris* chosen to represent each region. The main characteristics chosen was first the age of the subjects : minimally 15 years old, in the hope that at that age they were mature enough to express their opinions related to gender issues. There were 3 participants, however, under 15, but they were as enthusiastic as the others in taking part in this research. The occupations of their parents vary, ranging from teacher, farmer, and traders. These *santris* have attended the *pesantren* at the average of 2 – 3 years. The names of the *santris* taking part in the research was hidden based on to their requirement, but the male *santris* actually did not have any problem with clear identity, so their real names could be used.

Al-Asror *Pesantren* is located on a land of 1445 m² at Jl Kauman no 1 Patemon Gunungpati Semarang. This *pesantren* is very close to The Sate University of Semarang that is about 2 km on the way from Gunungpati to Ungaran. Al Asror *Pesantren* was formerly religious

meeting place for the people living around the mosque in the area. In 1990, when the campus of the university was moved to this area, the *Pesantren* dormitory was established for male *santris* and the management was those of the students of the university living in the boarding houses around the mosque. One year after that the female *pesantren* was opened.

The missions of the *pesantren* are, first, to produce Muslims who are knowledgeable, good mannered, and supporting religious doctrines for a healthy and dynamic life. Second, to increase the scientific motivation to create a healthy and dynamic society. Third, to hold an Islamic oriented education as the capital for living in the world and in the hereafter so as to create togetherness in the society based on truth, justice, care, tolerance, and respect.

By 2003, the number of *santris* at Al Asror *Pesantren* was 80 male *santris* and 64 female *santris*, all of them are in-*santris* or they stay in the boarding. So altogether there were 155 in-*santris*

Out of those *santris*, 15 female *santris* and 15 male *santris* were taken with consideration that the age is at least 15 years old, the period of staying in the boarding is at least 2 years. The reason is that at 15 years of age, *santris* are ready to express opinion about their daily activities, related to gender issues in Islam according to Al Qur'an and al Hadist.

The Profile of MAAHAD and MARSAH Religion Schools Johor, Malaysia

The policy of the Malaysian Government to turn the Islamic Center into The state Religious School in 2000 brought some changes to the Islamic Center. For example, in Malaysia there is no Islamic centers or *Pesantren* anymore as they have been changed into what is called The State or Royal Religious School. In Malaysia in fact *Pesantren* or Islamic center could only be found in Kedah, Kelantan, Johor. Now all of them have changed into Sekolah Agama Kerajaan Kedah (Kedah Sate Religious School, Sekolah Agama Kerajaan Kelantan (Kelantan State Religious School, and

Sekolah Agama Kerajaan Johor (Johor State Religious School).

The Research was focused in Johor, as geographically it is closer to Indonesia (Kepulauan Riau) so that the characteristics would not be much different from that in Indonesia. In Johor there is one Religious School that is *MAAHAD*, which is a Secondary Religious School. In Johor there are two categories of Religious schools supervised by The ministry of Education, the principal of *MAAHAD* is Ustadz Anoar Sarimin.

Besides *MAAHAD*, there is also *MARSAH*, Institutut Pengajian Tinggi Islam (Institute for Islamic Studies). *Marsah* was founded in November 1997. The executive Head was Datuk M. Tahrir bin Datuk Kiai Haji Shamsuddin. The number of students at *MARSAH* was 185 people coming from several countries such as Malaysia (Johor), Singapura, Indonesia, Cambodia, and China. The lecturers consisted of 14 people coming from Egypt, Libya, and Indonesia. The period of study at *MARSAH* was 3 years and after that students could take further studies at Al-Azhar University at Kairo, Egypt.

There were four people as the subject of the research that have been interviewed intensively. They were (1) Ustadz Mohd. Nasir Bin Amir as *Ketua penolong Pengarah Bahagian pendidikan Islam Jabatan Agama Negeri Johor* (in Indonesia similar to The Head of Provincial Department of Religious Affairs); (2) H. Abubakar Bin Selamat Bekerja as the teacher at The School of Religion and the Staff of Islamic Arts of the Religion Office (3) Hj. Dra. Lailan mafrida, M.A. *Penolong Pengarah Pengembangan Seni Budaya* (4) H. Muharam Bin Parlie as the *Penghulu Mukim Sedenak, Johor Bahru*.

The Contextual knowledge of the *Santris* about the Gender Phenomena Based on Islamic Doctrines

Generally, the understanding level of the research subjects, in this case the *santri*, toward

the Islamic contextual doctrines were fine. They have applied the Al-Quran as the basic foundation in running their life. When they face some troubles or find any difficulties in their life, they will take those problems back into the Islamic doctrines immediately in order to solve them. So they can get the answers for their problems. Once when the researchers asked them about the opportunity to get education, all respondents agreed that there are no differences between men and women to have a good education. Men and women have the same opportunity. To get much education is one's own choice. One might travel around the world just to gain knowledge. According to the Islamic doctrines, both men and women have the same right to get a good education.

But, when they were asked about education and the financial problem, they gave different answers. The researchers led them to a situation to be discussed. For the example, when a family of two children, son and daughter, only have a chance to send one child to school to whom should the chance be given, the son or the daughter? Surprisingly, 95 % of the respondents gave an answer that their son should be given this chance to get education. The reason is one day the son will be the head of the family and they must make a living for their family, therefore, son must be given the first opportunity to get good education. The idea was shared by Kistam, Syifaudin, and Surti. They stated the same opinion together:

"If there is insufficient finance within the family, then son must be sent to school first. Because later they will have the responsibility to be the leader of the family and they must support their family as well. Besides, if the parents send their sons to school first, then after they graduated they can help their sisters."

Erni and Siti, had their own reasons:

"If one day they have to make a decision, they will choose to send their sons to school. Because sons have much time to study at school for studying at school usually takes time and effort. It is different from daughters. They will get married sooner than boys."

In the work field, all the respondents did not have any objection about women working outside the house, as long as they always keep their feet on the ground and realize who they are and what their fate is. Concerning fate, there was still a misunderstanding left among the research subjects.

Many *santris* kept assuming that women must stay at home all day long, to take a good care of their children and their family, to be a good wife for their husbands, and they must never ever insult their husbands. When the researchers told the respondents to give their opinion about women working outside the house, almost all of the respondents had the same answer. They agreed that women may work outside their house but with one condition. Women must remember who they are and what their basic responsibility is. Even though they are very busy with their job, they cannot forget to take care of their children and their family. The respondents also suggested some possible job that will be more suitable for women. According to them, women should be a teacher or any kind of jobs that do not require a lot of physical effort and jobs with no high risk. Because women are weaker than men in physical terms.

In accordance with Sahudi, Sugito, Nur Fuad Fikri, Jamiatun, Siti Faridatun, and Nurul Alvi gave their comments:

"Well,...We think that the most perfect job for women is become a teacher. Why? Because it is more safety and women do not need to do a lot of hard works. "

Then Aryanto, Jamiatun, and also Nur Fuad Fikri added that:

"Although women are allowed to work outside their house, they have to keep in their minds that they still have responsibility as housewives. They have to take care of family, their children, and be a good wife and mother as well. "

When the researchers asked about the same question; about the right job for women to the other respondents, they had the similar answer too.

Maslinah, M.Khambali, and Eko Pujiono had the same idea about the topic as follows:

"It is all right for women to work outside, but they must not forget about their responsibility to give attention to their family, and they must not come home late, because it is not appropriate for women. And the most important thing is never ever ignore their family, and pay more attention to their children because children usually need more attention and caring from their mothers. The last thing that should be put into consideration is women must always show respect to their husbands though they can earn their own money. It does not mean that wives have right to underestimate their husbands. "

The researchers also asked what the respondents know so far about the concept of gender based on *Fiqh*. They said that women must be *sholikhah* (have good behaviour) and must be aware of anything. Women must obey all the traditional doctrines and must not break any of the rules.

From the illustration above, it can be concluded that almost all *santris* had already understood about the contextual rules of religion so far. They live their life as the order of Islamic doctrines. But there was still a burden left. For the issues related to the gender matters, especially about the relationship between men and women. Their opinion seems to be influenced by the social and cultural assumptions. Although they always obeyed the contextual rules of their religion in their daily life, the social and cultural factors still played an important role that gave big influence in their life. They still did not get it and often got confused or misunderstood the concepts of gender and fate.

Gender Orientation of *Santris* in Pondok Pesantren Al-Islah, Al-Asror, and In Mahad Johor

During the interview session, the respondents always gave answers or solutions in solving the problems related to the general issues based on their knowledge about the Islamic doctrines. For example, when they were asked about the issue dealing with job fields

for men and women, most of them agreed that men and women have different part in job field areas. Meanwhile, there were only 3 people (Narti, Maslinah, and Arti) who said that it is not necessary to make a distinction between men and women's jobs. As long as women can do what men can do, it is not a big problem for them to work in any job fields.

As to Maslinah (17), a courageous female *santri* in the *pesantren* who had a modern thought and very open-mind, she supported the struggle of women in emancipation, she said that:

"Nowadays, we are entering the era of globalization and emancipation, where there is no more discrimination left. So if women are restricted to work only in certain area, they might not be able to develop their selves. Women will not make any progress at all. In fact, as we can see now there are many clever women with their modern minds lately."

On the contrary, though Arti basically had the same opinion as Maslinah, she had her own way to express her idea. Arti stated her opinion more softly. The way she spoke was very calm but the point was clear. Apparently, Arti was the one and only *santri* who had finished reading the Al-Quran (*Khatam Al-Quran*) among all female and male *santris*. Having the opportunity to answer, Arti said:

"It does not matter where the women should work. We can find many clever women not only at present, but there were many clever women and modern women since Mohammed time. They worked as the Al-Quran literacy experts, the monetary experts, even there was a record about women who worked as a strategic planner in war zone. Therefore, in my opinion, each person (whether men or women) has the same opportunity to work in any fields, as long as they want it and can do it."

Narti (19) had the same ideas as her friend, Arti. Narti is a student at IAIN Semarang on the first year. She was very brave with a clear voice and high tone when she spoke. Narti had a lot of courage to speak up her mind and her ideas. As a matter of fact, she could answer all the

questions scientifically, for example, when she gave her opinion about women right in politics.

She gave her opinion below:

"...Concerning with the politics issue.... Actually, I do not completely aware of this topic and I do not have a lot interest toward this topic as well. For me politics is cruel and it is a very touchy subject for all. So I am rather afraid of talking much about it, because I am afraid of making mistake that might offend someone. I just wonder what does it mean by women right in politics? Are those represented by several women who sit in the Representative Board.... If it is so.....It is all right as long as women are able to do their job and as far as it is not restricted by religion."

Now the question is concerning the suitable subjects learnt by men and women in the education field of study. Most of the respondents agreed that "hard" subjects are more appropriate for men. Meanwhile, the "soft" subjects are perfect for women.

Lita (12) was a very shy girl in the *pesantren*. She only smiled and bowed her head most of the time. Maybe it is because she was still young, but, in fact, she was a smart girl. Her parent works as a religious teacher. No wonder why all her answers showed much influence of the religious context, especially, when she stated her opinion about the appropriate jobs for men and women.

Here is her opinion:

"I think the appropriate education for boys is something to do with technical, machinery, mining, and etc. While for girls, I think it is better to give education about households, cooking, art, or anything related to women, etc."

Based on the illustration above and all the answers from the respondents during the interview, the researchers found out that the research subjects got all the clues in handling their problems concerning with the gender issues from the Al-Quran. According to these phenomena, the researchers then drew an interesting conclusion although it was still temporarily. All the *santri* had already gained

enough knowledge about the gender concept so far (especially for those who had reached 17). And all the respondents did not give a *conservative* statement during the session as people thought before about them in general.

Gender Orientation of the Teachers at Johor Islamic School and of Johor People

Generally the Gender equalization concept among the teachers of the Religion School of Johor refers to modern Islamic laws, the same thing happen to the people of Johor in general. There are many opinions about gender equality. In particular, they seemed to have not understood the concept of gender equalization and regarded that gender differences had always happened as a fate, so that there was no need to strive for it. In general people seemed to have not really understood what gender equalization concept was, but when it was related to the equal rights and responsibilities of men and women, all subjects of research answered that it had already been outlined in the Qur'an.

In daily lives, gender horizon had seemed to be the center of attention of the people in general. This is because the people in Johor thought that job description in the household had been common things. Especially in Johor, there was an interesting phenomenon about this job description. Referring to the Islamic view in Arab that women work inside the house, many men go to the market for shopping. This is very opposite of what happen in Indonesia where going to the market for shopping is women's job. This opinion was agreed by Kak Lailan (Dra. Lailan Machfrida, M. A).

Kak Lailan is an Indonesian working in Johor for 10 years, in his Malay Indonesian she said:

"Waktu pertama datang tu kakak tekejut-kejut juga Hen, banyak laki-laki di Joho ni pada bantu istri pergi ke pasar, mereka menganggap halitu biasa dan menjadi tugas laki-laki, di tempat kita mana ada yang seperti itu he he he" (When I am came in Malay, I am surprised, a lot of man in Johor could help his

wife go to traditional market, in Indonesia not like that)

The view of the teachers at the religion school about the gender perspective is that it seems gender perspective is not important for them as the did not know about it. But when explained about gender concept the teachers said that they completely supported any idea of movement and appeal to appreciate women with refernce to Islamic teachings. This is in line with what ustadz Moch Nasir Bin Amir :

"Mengenai kesetaraan laki-laki perempuan macem itu ya agama menjadi dasar yang kuat, misalnya dari segi pergaulan perbedaan laki-laki dan perempuan tentu ade, perempuan ade masalah dalam pergaulan dari segi agame, umpama dari segi menutup aurat saja, perempuan harus menutup aurat sampai semua tubuh kecuali muka dan tapak tangan, laki-laki hanya sebatas lutut, maknanya, ada perbedaannya antara laki-laki dan perempuan" (Equity man and women, religi can make fundamental which strong. To telationship between men and women are different, for example, women must cover full body except face and finger, so men not)

When further asked about the difference between men and women in social and other life field in the society, he answered :

"Ya diajarkan tentang tanggungjawab lelaki bagaimana? Tanggungjawab seorang ibu bagaimana? Wanita bagaimana? Nah....ada anak perempuan bagaimana anak perempuan bagaimana anak laki. Kalau misalnya dalam rumah tangga dalam masyarakat perempuan tak memimpin laki-laki"

From those opinion, it is clear how the teachers see and supervisors of the religion school see gender perspective and how they always relate social life with Islamic religion. According to one subject of the research, who was also an official in Islamic religious affairs said that Malaysia also had Ministry of Women Development, family and Society. However, the policies and rules are only understood by people of certain circle. It has not yet reaching villages and so far only educated people can do it. One of the policies done by the government is that

there was Forum of Single Mothers (Widows Organization) by giving women skills so that they could go struggling for a more decent life.

From some observation and interview during the research, the understanding of people on gender perspective between Indonesia and Malaysia are almost the same, meaning that for the educated. In the cities, the gender concept can be understood and gender equalization does not become a problem, but for the uneducated, or those living in the suburb or villages, this gender perspective understanding have not yet been distributed evenly and not all people know about it.

The differences which are significant are seen when in Indonesia there are many movement organization or NGO which are concern about women empowerment can be found and are very sound from the regional level up to the center or national level. This is because there is president instruction no 9, 2000 (Inpres No 9 tahun 2000) about gender mainstreaming from the center to regional level even for every project in the villages women who participate should be at least 20 %.

Based on the condition in the field, it can be seen that the religion school in Malaysia has already taught their students the rights between men and women based on the standart teaching of Islam. There is also lesson about *fiqh* or laws for women but more to the responsibilities and prohibitions which are given to women. It means that the laws taught was the laws that have not had gender perspective. The religion school still stresses the religious activities and materials and very little talks about how to see the social problems from the religious points of view.

The Santris' Understanding of Al-Quran Doctrines in Giving Influence on Their way of Thinking

The researchers also asked about what kind of education pattern they would give to their children later if they got married. All the respondents agreed to use the same education pattern as what they got in *pesantren*. Rani (17) said that she was going to apply an Islamic education pattern for their children later. In her

opinion, religion was a very basic foundation for their children to run their life.

Next, the researchers asked further more about the way how the respondents would nurture their sons and their daughters. In general, all the respondents said that they would not make any distinction in nurturing their children. But maybe for girls, they would pay much more attention and treat them more strictly because girls were more fragile than boys. They would give their daughters a strong basic foundation in religion, so they could behave wisely. It was agreed by Indri (17):

"If I have children, basically I will not discriminate between my sons and my daughters in nurturing them. But I will keep an eye on my daughters more strictly than on my sons. Because based on the religion, it is said that women must be able to behave themselves appropriately."

Amazingly, when the researchers tried to reveal about the marriage concept in accordance with the Islamic Doctrines, they gave a lot of attention. Based on the Islamic doctrines, men are allowed to have more than one wives (4 wives maximum) as long as they could treat all their wives equally. Most of the respondents could accept this polygamy concept in marriage, but they doubted that husbands could treat all their wives wisely. They continued that there was no one who could treat something or someone as wisely as The Prophet Mohammad s.a.w.

This can be seen in the opinion given by Siti (15):

"According to the Islamic doctrines, having more than one wife is allowed. But the most important thing to be considered is the justice among the wives. Can husbands treat all their wives wisely? "

Then in order to find out what is deep down inside their minds toward this topic, the researchers asked them whether:

"So in that case, it is okay for you to be the second, the third, or even the fourth wives, isn't it?"

But surprisingly, all the respondents answered: NO WAY!! There was only one girl

who said nothing. And then the researchers tried to find out her opinion.

She said calmly:

"It is okay for me to be the second wife, or the third wife, but with one condition. As long as the husband can treat us wisely so I think it is not a big deal. In fact, to have more than one wife is permitted by Islamic doctrines," said Jumini (17).

From all the illustrations above, a conclusion can be drawn that in understanding the doctrines in Al-Quran, concerning with thought and attitude, they believed that they should learn the doctrines strictly and that the doctrines would remain the same to be learnt exactly as the text. And in fact, when it is related to attitude and making a decision about their desire or what they want, they found out that doctrines are not as strict as what some people thought. It means that they believed that Al Quran favored the changes of the situation and the condition and some rules offer options rather than obligations.

Women's Rights to work outside the house, get education and be the leader in the society in Johor, Malaysia

The discussion on this field is very interesting because there are various answers about it. Some subjects say that the education for sons and daughters should be the same / equal, and so is the rights to be the society bleader. But there is an opinion from one of the subjects when ask can a woman be a leader? Ustadz Mohd Nasir Bin Amir answered as follows:

"kalau norma sekarang sudah bias tapi harus didukung dengn hadist pada umumnya. Contohnya kalau perempuan sebagai pemimpin yaqng ada dalam sub pandangan agama, dia perlu ke hadapan dalam masjid. Tapi walaupun tak jadi imam, tapi kalau dia seorang pemimpin contohnya sebagai gubernur kalau di Indonesia kalau ada pembesar presiden dating duduk di hadapan bersama-sama presiden, maknanye perempuan ada duduk di bagian belakang. Tiba-tiba kalau pemerintahnya gubernurnya Cuma wanita atau

perempuan, apa bias duduk di hadapan gitu dengan presiden, dia tidak bias, tapi mungkin wakilnya die yang bias gantikan die , jadi die harus tahu berlaku demikian. (Well, the rule now says, women can be leaders, but should be supported by hadists because leaders (like in Indonesia) will be faced with religious problems, for example when governor is a woman and the president comes to visit and there is a meeting in the mosque . Here there is a rule that women are at the back rows after men, in this case the woman governor cannot sit together with the president , and she had to send a male representative to sit with the president).

In the opinion above, it is clear that the social issues in the society are always related and justified with religious teaching. Women can be leaders it there is hadist supporting it , also the relaion with the social tasks as a leader. Women are faced with religious rules that men are imam (leaders) and women are *makmum* (those who are led) Meaning that the one sitting at the front to be leades should be men, so when there is a female leader, she could not be siting at the front row with other male leaders.

Generally, all respondents agree that there is no problem with the rights of men and women to study abroad . This can be understood since the gender equalization perspective are accepted among the educated people in Malaysia. This can be seen in the family of H Muharam Bin Parlie, as the the Penghulu Mukim Sedenak, Johor Bahru. In this family, the daughters take further studies abroad, in England and Germany, whereas the sons chose to study in Malaysia. According to H Muharam, this is not because who/ which child is taking the program, but what is the choice of the children.

In terms of household chores, there are various answers, but generally all subjects believe that household chores are women's responsibilities, and husbands help only if they have time.

Abu Bakar Bin Selamat who works as a teacher at the religion school and staff of Islamic arts in the religion office says :

"Maknanya suami baru bisa beri bantuan pada istri ketika dia sudah pulang dari office, biasanya para suami sudah pada lelah dan tidak mau beri sokongan untuk tugas-tugas istri di rumah, macem saye karena kerja saye hanya sikit sekali beri sokongan nak buat kerja istri di rumah. Jadi maknanya suami diberi urusan untuk office sedangkan istri diberi urusan untuk kerja rumah tangga" (Well, husbands can help their wife with the household chores only when they are home from the office. Usually, however, husbands are already tired and unwilling to glend a hand to the wife. Me, for instance. I do help my wife but only a litte because I have to work. So men are given tasks to work at the office whereas women are given tasks to handle problems in the household).

When asked about his opinion on today's trend of women outside the house due to the progress of the era and the high education of wives, Ustadz abubakar answered :

"boleh saja perempuan bekerja di luar rumah, tapi maknanya dia tidak boleh lupakan urusan anak-anak, karena dia sebagai istri bukan bertugas mencari nafkah, yang saye lihat setelah istri bekerja, menjadi tidak baik, menjadi sering berantem dengan anaknya karena dia sudah capek kerja di office, sedangkan anak ni pingin dekat-dekat dengan ibunya. Nah bagi saya asalkan bias bagi mase dan bekerja untuk urusan yang baik saya pikir boleh..." (women can work out side the house, but should not forget taking care of the children as working for a living is not their main duty, but as I see it, working women often have problems with their children as they were tired of working while their children want to be with them. So for me, if they really want to work for betterment, never mind)

From the opinion above, it is clear that the gender equalization concepts is mixed up with fate. Women are generally permitted to work outside the house but not as the main breadwinner, and are not supposed to neglect the household affairs and children education, as these chores are regarded as women's responsibility.

CONCLUSION

From the research on gender construction at *pesantren* it can be concluded that : almost all *santris* had already understood the contextual rules of religion so far. They live their lives according to the order of Islamic doctrines. But there was still a burden left. For the issues related to the gender matters, especially about the relationship between men and women. Their opinion seems to be influenced by the social and cultural assumptions. Although they always obeyed the contextual rules of their religion in their daily life, the social and cultural factors still played an important role that gave a big influence in their lives. They still did not get it and often got confused or they misunderstood the concepts of gender and fate.

The gender understanding and orientation of *santris* and teachers of *pesantren* in Indonesia are still mixed up with fate, so that social problems in the society are always justified by textual rules in religion. In Malaysia the condition is more or less the same, in the educated people circle the concept of gender exists, but in the uneducated circle especially in villages there is very little or even no gender equalization concept.

As for the right for women to work outside the house, there is not much different between Malaysia and Indonesia. Women are welcome to work outside the house as long as they do not neglect her role as a mother or a wife. This shows that women have both public and domestic burden.

The rights for women to be leaders are given in Malaysia though teachers of religion who became the subjects of the research tend to suggest the opposite (women becoming leaders in the society). Should there be one, there must be *hadits* supporting it. This shows that solutions to some social problems in Malaysia are determined by textual religious justification. On the other hand, in Indonesia, manipulations of Al Qur'an verses sometimes happen in relation to restricting women from participating in social affairs.

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