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## THE 2017 KUPI CONGRESS AND INDONESIAN FEMALE 'ULAMĀ'

Umma Farida

IAIN Kudus - Indonesia | ummafariana@stainkudus.ac.id

Abdurrohman Kasdi

IAIN Kudus - Indonesia | abdurrohmankasdi@stainkudus.ac.id

**Abstract:** This article aims at revealing the role and struggle of Indonesian Female 'Ulamā' after KUPI (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, Indonesian Female 'Ulamā' Congress) on April 25-27, 2017 in promoting the social transformation movement. The role of female 'ulamā' has been marginalized and forgotten. Although women and gender studies continue to find their momentum, attention has hardly been given to women's religious figures. The paper tries to show the existence and role of female 'ulamā' in Indonesia after the KUPI as such. These female 'ulamā' have been actively struggling to fight against injustice against women. In addition, they also have become pioneers in promoting the social transformation in Indonesia by responding to issues on humanity and nationality as well as developing the moderate understanding of Islam and building mutuality in male and female relations.

**Keywords:** Female 'Ulamā', KUPI, Social Transformation.

### Introduction

Islam has encouraged women's participation and emphasized that woman are equal to men as part of the society. In this sense, women, therefore should be given opportunity to develop their abilities so that they can participate effectively in the development of the society. Islam also emphasizes that women are allowed to achieve the highest level of intellectual and spiritual progress. There is no priority for men over women in respect of educational rights. The verses of the Qur'an or

Hadith related to education are addressed to both men and women equally.

In addition to participating in the acquisition of knowledge, women give great attention to the religious studies. M.M. Azami in his book, *Dirāsāt fī al-Ḥadīth an-Nabawī wa Tarīkh Tadwīnīhi*,<sup>1</sup> states that there is an interesting phenomenon which is worth to be observed that is the existence of a number of educated and intellectual women who are not inferior to men. Among these women are the mothers of believers (*ummābat al-mu'minīn*) Aisyah, Hafshah, Ummu Salamah, Ummu Kulsum bint Uqbah, Hujaimah al-Wasabiyyah, Fatimah bint Qais, Asy-Syifa' bint Abdillah al-Qurasyiyyah, Aisyah bint Sa'ad, and Karimah bint al-Miqdad.

Imam Syafi'i (d. 204 H), one of the revered muslim scholars of Hadith in his book *al-Risālah*,<sup>2</sup> defended the full transmission of a woman, even though he did not receive the testimony of one woman for mundane affairs. In terms of religion and knowledge, women are not inferior to men. In the days of Companions, more than 1200 Female Companions (*Sahābiyyāt*) narrated Hadith and were accepted as teachers or sources of transmission of Hadith. Similarly, Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 241 H), one of the prominent imams of religious sects (*madhbāb*) wrote a special volume of Hadith narrated by *Sahābiyyāt* in his Musnad. Ibn Hanbal recorded the existence of 125 *Sahābiyyāt* from about 700 narrators of Hadith in the first narration (*al-rawī al-a'la*). That number is equal to 18% of the total *Sahābiyyāt* in the Prophethood. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani also recorded a number of biographical *Sahābiyyāt* in his book, *al-Isābah fī Ma'rifaḥ al-Sahābah*.<sup>3</sup> According to Ruth Roded, the number of *Sahābiyyāt* in al-Asqalani's book is 1.551 from 12.304 biographies of Companions of Hadith narrators.<sup>4</sup>

The fact above explained that women throughout Islamic history have taken significant roles in the continuity of Muslim community and one of these roles is keeping the transmission chain about the life

<sup>1</sup> M. M. Azami, *Dirāsāt fī al-Ḥadīth an-Nabawī wa Tarīkh Tadwīnīhi* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islami, 1992), p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> Imam Syafi'i, *ar-Risālah* (Cairo: Dar al-Ḥadīṣ, 1995), p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> Ali Munhanif, *Perempuan dalam Literatur Islam Klasik* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2002), p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Roded, *Kembang Penadaban: Citra Wanita di Mata Para Penulis Biografi Muslim* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), p. 18.

of the Prophet. It also evident that these women have the scholar potentials and intellectual quality that are equivalent to men. One important note is that their presence in the public areas with men is never questioned. They build the Islamic civilization together with male 'ulama'. However, in the following period, female 'ulama' seem to be drowning in the male-dominated history stage. Their existence became marginalized and forgotten. Although women and gender studies continue to find momentum, attention has almost never been given to religious female profiles because the researchers are usually still holding the assumption that women are insignificant as religious scholars.<sup>5</sup>

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Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim majority population in the world, certainly does not lack number of the female 'ulama' who are experts in the religious fields. The problem is that there are not many records or documents that review their profiles. So, the roles of female 'ulama' who do exist to defend and fight for the interests of women are not widely known. This is the unfortunate fact that happen in Indonesia even though the social transformation carried out by the New Order Government through the development program resulted in the emergence of the various face of Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia.

According to Helmi Ali Yafie, the movement of female 'ulama' that fought for the rights of women only emerged in the last half of the New Order government, led by a group of modernist and traditionalist Islamic intellectual scholars, the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) movement oriented to the strengthening of civil politics rights as well as social economic rights, and the rise of PSW (*Pusat Studi Wanita*, Center of Women Studies) and PSG (*Pusat Studi Gender*, Center of Gender Studies) in several Islamic Universities in the late 1980s. In the next development, three NGOs (Alimat,<sup>6</sup> Rahima,<sup>7</sup> and Fahmina<sup>8</sup>)

<sup>5</sup> Azyumardi Azra, "Biografi Sosial-Intelektual Ulama Perempuan: Pemberdayaan Historiografi", in Jajat Burhanuddin (ed.), *Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2002), p. xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Alimat, the movement of Indonesian family justice. Thought and movement of Alimat makes women as the subject and perspective in creating the fair and gender-balanced family. (<http://alimatindonesia.blogspot.co.id/2010/03/tentang-alimat.html>).

<sup>7</sup> Rahima, *Pusat Pendidikan dan Informasi Islam dan Hak-hak Perempuan* or Center of Education Islamic Information and Women Right is a social institution focusing on developing the women in islamic perspective. (<https://www.rahima.or.id/index.php>)

initiated KUPI (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, Indonesian Female Ulama Congress) at *Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu*, Babakan, Ciwaringin, Cirebon, 25-27 April 2017, which became the milestone of the revival of female '*ulama*' in Indonesia.<sup>9</sup>

The Post-Congressional discussion was intended to track the actions and movements of female '*ulama*' in Indonesia. They play many roles in the society by responding to domestication and injustice against women. Data collection was done by documentation method by finding literature and documents related to the topic discussed, interview, and observation. Then, reduced data were presented descriptively and critically.

### **Female '*Ulama*' and Social Transformation**

*'Ulama*' or scholars are the prophetic functional switchers. Every '*ulama*' is required to carry out the mission of the prophets to the whole society although it is in difficult circumstances.<sup>10</sup> The mandate of easing the values of Islamic teachings on each side of life demands the active roles of '*ulama*'. According to QS. Ali Imran: 190-191, '*Ulama*' become the servants of God. They must be a warrior of truth, enforcer and at the same time leading the *umma* in promoting virtue and preventing crime.

Female '*ulama*' is a typical nomenclature because this nomenclature arises when the dominant view just acknowledges male '*ulama*'. It appears as a form of resistance to the movement and religious discourse that marginalize women, and indicates that in fact, many women have all the requirements to be called '*ulama*', who are not inferior to male '*ulama*'. The female '*ulama*' who have the religious knowledge, with the mastery of classical Islamic sources standards and carrying the mission of Prophethood, such as upholding the justice and

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<sup>8</sup> Fahmina, movement which creates the human civilization which is prestigious and fair based on the critical awareness of pesantren or boarding school tradition. Legally established on 10 November 2000 by Marzuki Wahid, Affandi Mochtar, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir and Husein Muhammad. (<http://blogcp.sttjakarta.ac.id/?listing=fahmina-institute>)

<sup>9</sup> Helmi Ali Yafie, *Jejak Perjuangan Keulamaan Perempuan Indonesia* (Cirebon: KUPI, 2017), pp. xxv-xxviii.

<sup>10</sup> Badruddin Hsubky, *Dilema Ulama dalam Perubaban Zaman* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1995), p. 65.

humanity, and maintaining the balance of the environment also deserve to be called the heirs of the Prophets.<sup>11</sup>

Nomenclature of female 'ulamā' has been increasingly prominent since the holding of KUPI at Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu Cirebon, April 25-27, 2017. In this Congress, the meaning of female 'ulamā' was confirmed ideologically, not biologically. It means that female 'ulamā' are more emphasis on the character of 'ulamā' who have a female perspective although that persons have female or male sex. In another word, anyone who has the qualification of 'ulamā', which has a woman perspective and sees the issue with a female view could be called female 'ulamā'. The consequence is that women who have the qualification of 'ulamā', but using the male view, cannot be classified as female 'ulamā'. Nomenclature of female 'ulamā' comes at the time when women subjected to unfair treatment, abuse, and violence, which is due to a patriarchal culture reinforced by male-biased religious views.

The transformation conceptually means an attempt to transfer a form to a better form. As a process, the transformation is a rapid phase or turning point for a meaning of change.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, Umar Kayam as quoted by Masyhur Amin (ed.) defined the socio-religious transformation is a process of changing the structure and the religious social system. Every element of society that has the capability to make the changes can perform the socio-religious transformation, including female 'ulamā'.

The social structure of a predominantly Muslim Indonesian society with the male dominance of power and the strong patriarchal religious interpretation becomes an opportunity for female 'ulamā' to transform the gendered religious understanding. Here, the presence of female 'ulamā' is useful in ending bias and dominance in the religious interpretation because discussion on women's issues, according to Mansour Fakih,<sup>13</sup> needs a collective process that combines study, investigation, social analysis, education, and action. This effort is intended to realize the balance and change by positioning women at the center of change, and create the possibility for women to control

<sup>11</sup> Yafie, *Jejak Perjuangan Keulamaan*, p. xxix.

<sup>12</sup> Ryadi Gunawan in Masyhur Amin (ed.), *Agama, Demokrasi dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: LKPSM, 1993), p. 228.

<sup>13</sup> Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1995), pp. 134-136.

and use their own knowledge, and foster the critical awareness, which in turn accelerates a broad and comprehensive social-religious transformation.

Through the observation and discussion of women's issues, female '*ulama'*' can identify some religious interpretations that are strategic to be the subject of study. It is because the interpretation or religious understanding has a strategic position in perpetuating the insincerity, or vice versa in an effort to uphold the justice.

### **KUPI as the Affirmative Action for the Existence of the Female '*Ulama'*'**

*Ulama'*, both male and female, have the same role in carrying out the prophetic mission of promoting the virtue and loving the universe to realize a peaceful, just, and equitable life. But in reality, female '*ulama'*' often face various challenges, such as negligence, ridicule, and even violence in carrying out this prophetic mission. Badriyah Fayumi in Yafie<sup>14</sup> explained that there are two dimensions of similarities and differences in the comparison between female '*ulama'*' and male '*ulama'*'. The dimension of the similarities lies in the requirement of prerequisites that must be owned by both female and male '*ulama'*', ranging from the adequate religious knowledge, piety, moral, to the social devotion and struggle. While the difference dimension is that male '*ulama'*' do not face the prejudice, discrimination, and gender inequality, while female '*ulama'*' experience it all because of the strong patriarchal culture. Therefore, it is necessary to make the various efforts to strengthen the knowledge, skill, and network among female '*ulama'*', affirmation, and appreciation of their works, as well as the strengthening of cultural ex<sup>11</sup>n<sup>11</sup>ce. These hopes and ideals led to initiate KUPI, was held on 25-27 April 2017, at Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu al-Islamy, Babakan, Ciwaringin, Cirebon. This congress aimed to strengthen the existence and the role of female '*ulama'*' in the history of Islam and the nation of Indonesia in order to teach the Islamic values, nationality and humanity.<sup>15</sup>

The Congress was not standing alone as there were various series of previous activities had been implemented. These activities are: Workshop on female '*ulama'*' methodology, *Semaan* and *Khataman* al-

<sup>14</sup> Badriyah Fayumi in Yafie, *Jejak Perjuangan Keulamaan*, pp. 300-301.

<sup>15</sup> <https://infokupi.com/mukadimah/>, accessed on 23/3/2018.

Qur'an involving 200 *Hafizah* from the Association of the memorizers of the Qur'an (*Huffāz al-Qur'an*) Cirebon, social and cultural activities, performances art and culture, writing contests about female 'ulamā', conducting the intensive *Silaturrabim* with the Islamic boarding school (*Pesantren*) and Islamic organizations leaders, both at national and local levels, and holding the pre-congressional workshops from November 2016 to February 2017 in three regions in Indonesia. For the eastern part of Indonesia, the pre-Congress workshop was held in Makassar, on 28 February-2 March 2017, inviting participants from Sulawesi, Papua, Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara. For the western region, it was held in Padang, on 28-30 November 2016, by inviting the participants from the island of Sumatra, from Aceh to Lampung. While for the central region was held in Yogyakarta, on 19-21 November 2017, by inviting the participants from East Java, Central Java, and West Java.

The activities undertaken during the Congress as described above have shown that the actions and movements of Indonesian female 'ulamā' do not focus in the field of education only, but also in the social and political organizations. Nevertheless, female 'ulamā' still faced the problem of the recognition towards their existence, which stems from the social and psychological constraints of Indonesian people who hold the paradigm that the capacity and the role of 'ulamā' more precisely filled by male 'ulamā'. Besides the internal problems of female 'ulamā' themselves who do not want to present themselves in public areas and hence people often ignore the roles they have done.

KUPI was designed to facilitate a dynamic dialogue between the religious understanding and the reality of women's lives. The diverse backgrounds among the participants of the Congress allow for the exchange of knowledge and experience in such a way as to enhance the capacity to understand and articulate the Islamic, national, and humanitarian values in the current context. This Congress also discussed nine crucial issues in Indonesia, including women's scholar education; the response of *Pesantren* to female 'ulamā'; issues of sexual violence; child marriage; migrant workers; village development; religious radicalism; conflict and destruction of nature. Each thematic discussion was managed by the organizations that have the expertise and work in their fields, such as *Migrant Care*<sup>16</sup>, PEKKA<sup>17</sup>, *Rumah*

<sup>16</sup> *Migrant Care, Perbimpunan Indonesia untuk Buruh Migran Berdaulat or The Indonesian Association of Sovereign Migrant Workers*, established in 2004, and focuses on



*Kitab*<sup>18</sup>, AMAN Indonesia<sup>19</sup>, *Komnas Perempuan*<sup>20</sup>, *Forum Pengada Layanan*<sup>21</sup>, STID Al-Biruni<sup>22</sup>, and Fahmina.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Role of Indonesian Female ‘*Ulama*’ after KUPI in Promoting the Social Transformation**

According to Badriyah Fayumi as a Steering Committee of KUPI, female ‘*ulama*’ have the specification in the *da’wa* process and that are as follows; full of harmony, unify, not provocative and *rahmah li al-‘alamīn-*

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strengthening the protection and services provided by government agencies to migrant workers. <http://www.migrantcare.net/profil/>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

<sup>17</sup> PEKKA or *Yayasan Pemberdayaan Perempuan Kepala Keluarga* started its work in Aceh in 2000 to assist the widows who were as victims of the conflict in Aceh. Now PEKKA has become a membership-based mass organization that works in empowering female heads of household to ensure their lives. PEKKA is active in 20 provinces, 65 regencies, 220 districts and 850 villages. <http://www.mampu.or.id/id/-partner/pekka-pemberdayaan-perempuan-kepala-keluarga>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

<sup>18</sup> *Rumah Kitab, Yayasan Rumah Kita Bersama* is a research institute for policy advocacy to fight for the rights of marginalized people due to discriminative religious social views. *Rumah Kitab* works through research, critical religious text studies, empowerment of *pesantren*, educational institutions and marginal community. <https://rumahkitab.com/>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

<sup>19</sup> AMAN Indonesia, The Asian Muslim Action Network. AMAN Indonesia is a network of Muslims and non-Muslims both individuals and institutions in Asia. AMAN Indonesia works to promote justice and peace, including community empowerment, inter-religious dialogue, and advocacy on human and women's rights. <http://amanindonesia.org/>; <https://indorelawan.org/organization/58d4e188f75df86-969553804>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

<sup>20</sup> *Komnas Perempuan*, the National Commission on Violence toward Women, is an independent state institution for the upholding of women's human rights in Indonesia. It focuses on developing and upholding human rights mechanisms for the promotion of violence against women at local, national, regional and international levels <https://www.komnasperempuan.go.id/about-profile-komnas-perempuan>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

<sup>21</sup> *Forum Pengada Layanan bagi Perempuan Korban Kekerasan* or The Service Provider Forum for Women of Violence Victims, established in 2014 on the basis of the need for a comprehensive handling of gender-based violence to women. <http://fp1-region.blogspot.co.id/p/tentang-kami.html>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

<sup>22</sup> STID Al-Biruni, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Dakwah al-Biruni, located in Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon. It focuses on organizing Islamic Community Development Program and Islamic Broadcasting Commission. <http://albirunistid.blogspot.co.-id/p/1.htm>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

<sup>23</sup> <https://infokupi.com/dialog-tematik-dan-musyawah-keagamaan>. Accessed on 23/3/2018.

oriented. They held four principles in their preaching, they are: Islam, nationality, humanity, and universality. These principles are in accordance with the essence of Islam, which is a mercy for the universe.<sup>24</sup>

After the implementation of KUPI, three intensive meetings have been held. These meetings involved the KUPI network, and limited meetings. The first meeting was the Launching of Process Document and Result of KUPI followed by Strategic Planning on 29-31 August 2017 at Millenium Hotel Jakarta. These meetings resulted in stakeholder analysis, opportunity and challenge analysis, identity formulation of KUPI movement, vision, mission, and strategic program. The second meeting was KUPI Road Map Workshop on 16-18 December 2017, KUPI movement has succeeded in formulating the activity proposals, the main target of KUPI, the nature of KUPI movement, and the achievement of Indonesian Female Ulama movement during 2018-2022. The third meeting was KUPI's Consolidation of Networks on 27 February to 1 March 2018 at Millennium Hotel resulting in the formulation of network works, the existence of deliberations and technical secretariats.

By looking at the process and results of KUPI in Cirebon, KUPI is defined as the Islamic movement of *rahmah li al-'ālamīn* with spiritual, intellectual, cultural and structural dimension to affirm the existence and the role of female 'ulama', Islamic values, nationality, humanity, and environmental sustainability with emphasis on the perspective of gender justice. Or in other words, KUPI becomes a joint movement for anyone who recognizes female 'ulama', accepts and believes in the concept of ultimate justice for women, uses the perspective of interdependence in gender relations, embraces the religious methodology used during the Congress, and practices the results decided by Congress. However, KUPI is not an organization, institution or anything that is structural and fixed within a certain period.

Badriyah Fayumi explained that a person or institution could be called as a part of the female 'ulama' movement if they fulfill 4 (four) characters. First, practicing Islam that affirms the identity of

<sup>24</sup> Badriyah Fayumi, "Peta Gerakan Ulama Perempuan Pasca KUPI", paper presented in *Halaqah PUG dan Pemberdayaan Perempuan pada Pendidikan Keagamaan Islam*, PSGA-LP2M UIN Walisongo Semarang in collaboration with Direktorat PD. Pontren Kemenag RI, 27-29/3/2018.

nationality, human values, environmental sustainability, and world peace. Second, recognizing the existence and the role of female 'ulama' as part of the call of faith and the inevitability of the history of human civilization, as well as the call of nationhood. Third, using the concept of essential justice for women and the perspective of *Mubādala* in understanding the texts of Islamic references and social reality. Fourth, referring to the Qur'an, Hadith, opinion of 'ulama', Constitutions and real-life experiences of women in formulating religious attitudes and views on issues of social life, especially those concerning male and female relations.<sup>25</sup>

In line with Fayumi, Nur Rofi'ah (Chairman I of the KUPI Organizing Committee), emphasized that KUPI is a movement of female 'ulama' role, so that after the implementation of KUPI, female 'ulama' continue to act in their respective communities by caring especially on the women, the children, the weak (*dlu'afā*), and the weakened (*mustadl'afīn*), humanizing and equating them with other peoples. The following are the roles of female 'ulama' in carrying out the social transformation:

### ***Responding to Issues of Humanity and Nationality***

The existence and the role of female 'ulama' in Indonesia are increasingly visible after the implementation of KUPI at Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu al-Islamy Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon, on 25-27.4.2017. In this Congress, female 'ulama' agreed on the issuance of three *fatwas* to respond to the issues raised in the society. These three fatwas are fatwa's on sexual violence, child marriage, and natural destruction. In the Press Conference (29.8.2017), Badriyah Fayumi revealed,<sup>26</sup>

"KUPI (Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia, Indonesian Female 'Ulama' Congress) states that sexual violence both with and without legal marriage is *haram*, so all of the elements in society have to make prevention efforts. When it happens, they have to take handling. Similarly, the prevention of child marriage is mandatory because child marriage causes more damage than benefits and goodness. KUPI also stressed that parents, families,

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted from <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/kongres-ulama-perempuan-indonesia-hasilkan-3-fatwa-/4005416.html>. Accessed on 3/4/2018.

communities, and government are the leading actors who are required to prevent the child marriage. If a child marriage has taken place, then the obligation of all parties to ensure the protection of children's rights, especially the right to education, health, parental care, and protection from all forms of violence, exploitation, and discrimination. Meanwhile, the destruction of nature on behalf of any kind, including in the name of development, the law is absolutely *haram*, and the state is obliged to attend to prevention." REF

Not only *fatwās* on those three issues, KUPI also issued several recommendations, among them are: the importance of religious education for female 'ulama', the response of *Pesantrens* to female 'ulama', the cessation of sexual violence, the protection of children from the early marriage, and the protection of migrant workers.<sup>27</sup>

If we look closely, the three *fatwas* do show the sensitivity of the female 'ulama' to the real problems that occur within the society that might be neglected by male 'ulama' in general. The issue of sexual violence, for example, is seen by many as one consequence of many views that women are the second class human and are subordinate that can be mastered, exploited, and enslaved by men. Disclosure of sexual violence cases is also complicated because it is related to the traditions or religious views of people who think that it is still taboo to talk about sex in public realm. Moreover, the disclosure by victims often doubles the suffering of women and their families.

In relation to this, one example of female 'ulama' who shows advocacy for women's rights is Teungku Hanisah (born 3.7.1968). She is more known as *Ummi Hanisah*. She is a female 'ulama' from Aceh who actively preach and teach in the the *Majlis Ta'lim* and religious talk shows both on-air and off-air responding to humanitarian problems and actively assists women victims of violence. She opposed the *Sirri* marriage which was rife in Aceh and protested the plans of the West Aceh Regent to prohibit women from using trousers through the Regent's Regulations. According to her, traditional Acehnese women's clothing used long pants. They also worked in the fields and fought like men. Therefore, this prohibition is not needed.

Hanisah's critical attitude is not without risk. She was even expelled from her own *Dayab* (*Pesantren*, Islamic Boarding School)

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/kongres-ulama-perempuan-indonesia-hasilkan-3-fatwa-/4005416.html>. Accessed on 3/4/2018.

because the people thought she was doing unusual activities. She became a *Dayab* leader from thousands of *Dayab* in Aceh who was willing to make her *Dayab* a shelter for women and children who are victims of sexual and domestic violence such as rape and trafficking. She left the *Dayab* which she built by herself in 2000 and moved to another village. She built again her *Dayab* called *Dayab Dīniyah Dārussalām*. The education model in her *Dayab* does not only teach the Islamic studies, but also life skills such as farming, making *batik* of Aceh, and making soap for the daily needs. She shows her deep concern on why religious beliefs and traditions tend to be rigid, and how incidents of violence against women often end with the judgment and the blaming against the victims. So, she tried to make her *Dayab* a safe home for women and children.

In addition to responding to the humanitarian problems, female '*ulama*' also pay attention to the environmental conservation. Female '*ulama*' are well aware that the inhabited earth does not belong to recent generations only, but also to the future generations. Female '*ulama*' took action and asked the Government to change the paradigm of viewing the nature that considered as the development resources to be the source of life so that nature does not become the object of exploitation but part of the human life system.

One example of this is Arikhah (born 29.11.1969), the leader of *Pesantren* Darul Falah Besongo Semarang. She is one of the female '*ulama*' who pays attention to the urgency of nature conservation. She has concern on the environmental damages that could threaten the balance of ecosystems and human survival. She invited her students (*Santri*) to preserve the environment, which is a part of Islamic teachings. In fact, when there were farewell or when *Santri* are graduated and plan to go back to their village, she often to give them plants to be treated in their village. So, she basically taught her students to spread ideas and actions on environmental sustainability in addition to the provision of religious knowledge and skills acquired while studying in her *Pesantren*.

The same action was also carried out by Nissa Wargadipura (born 23.2.1972), the leader of *Pesantren* ath-Thaariq Garut. She succeeded in making her *Pesantren* a House of Ecology. This idea stems from her concern about natural disasters that often occur in Indonesia, including the flash floods that hit Garut in 2016. Another factor is the failures of the farmers in her village to harvest several times. This then

encouraged her to assist the farmers through *Serikat Petani Pasundan* (Pasundan Farmers Union). She also has concerns on the nutrition of children who are not well looked after while they are the next generation who will build the country of Indonesia. According to her opinion, maintaining and conserving the biodiversity is the God's mandate, and the ecological recovery will realize food sovereignty so that people can create various food fulfillments without having to depend on food produced by multi-national companies. With a land capital of 8.500 m<sup>2</sup>, she manages it with her family and students through a spiritual approach that is to place it as a field for worship. She believes that the land and nature provide the benefits for humans. She teaches people to put themselves as a part of the ecosystem and part of the food chain, and not to put themselves as decision-makers on nature/ land.

Here, not only has made her *Pesantren* as a House of Ecology, Nisa also has a House of Diversity. The House of Diversity is aimed at engaging in inter-religious dialogues in order to promote harmony and tolerance and prevent conflicts between the followers of different religions. The fact that Indonesians embrace various religions such as Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism does make it vulnerable from inter-religious conflict.

### ***Developing the Moderate Understanding of Islam***

The urgency for promoting the moderate Islam is based on Al-Baqarah: 143. The moderate society (*Ummatan Wasathan*) in the above verse, according to Taher, has three characteristics. First, the existence of the right for freedom that is always be balanced with the obligation. So, *Ummatan Wasathan* is those who are aware of their rights and obligations in a balanced way. The second characteristic is the balance of worldly life and *Ukrawi* and this means as well balance between material and spiritual. The third characteristic is the balance that manifests in the importance of reason and morality.<sup>28</sup> In line with Taher, Nurjannah argued that the moderation is demonstrated by upholding the necessity of being fair and right in the midst of the collective life and avoiding any extreme approaches.<sup>29</sup>

Among the female 'ulama' who are eager to promote the moderate

<sup>28</sup> Taher, *Berislam Secara Moderat* (Jakarta: Grafindo Khazanah Ilmu, 2007), pp. 143-146.

<sup>29</sup> Nurjannah, *Radikal VS Moderat: Atas Nama Dakwah, Amar Makruf Nabi Mungkar dan Jihad* (Yogyakarta: Aswaja Pressindo, 2013), p. 41.

understanding of Islam is Nur Rofiah (born 6.9.1971), a lecturer in Institute of Qur'anic Studies Jakarta. The moderate Islam, in her view, requires the balance, not marital, parental, social, and environmental relation imbalances, including the balance of gender relations.<sup>30</sup> The moderate Islam views the women as a whole person and not as a servant.<sup>31</sup> This view position woman equally to man and in this regards is that she is a human who can worship and gain merit,<sup>32</sup> and can go to heaven.<sup>33</sup> This view is based on the Qur'an which asserts that the glory of a human before God is not determined by his/her sex, but by his/her piety. Both man and woman also share the mandate as a *Khalīfa* on earth.<sup>34</sup> In fact, equality between the two is also associated with the faith<sup>35</sup> and devotion as described in the hadith of the Prophet, "Be virtuous to God in treating the wives because it is fact that you are proposing them with the mandate of Allah and justifying their genitals with the sentence of Allah."<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, Badriyah Fayumi (born 5.8.1971), the leader of *Pesantren* Mahasina Darul Qur'an wal Hadits Bekasi, actively builds the Moderate Islam views through many recitations, electronic media, and social media. According to her, Muslims are the majority population in Indonesia and therefore they have to strengthen this nation with moderate Islam. Moderatism is one of the means to save Indonesia from the threat of terrorism and radicalism. Moderate Islam is also important to assure the protection of the minorities, the weak (*du'afā*) and the weakened (*mustad'afīn*). Included here are the biased views on women that put them as second class citizens.

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<sup>30</sup> Nur Rofiah, "Ulama Perempuan dan Kontribusi Islam Moderat Indonesia untuk Peradaban Dunia", paper presented in *Halaqah PUG dan Pemberdayaan Perempuan pada Pendidikan Keagamaan Islam*, PSGA-LP2M UIN Walisongo Semarang in collaboration with Direktorat PD. Pontren Kemenag RI, 27-29/3/2018.

<sup>31</sup> *al-Hujurat*: 13; *az-Zariyat*: 56.

<sup>32</sup> *an-Nahk* 97.

<sup>33</sup> *an-Nisa*: 124.

<sup>34</sup> *al-Abzab*: 72.

<sup>35</sup> *at-Taubah*: 71.

<sup>36</sup> Muslim an-Naisaburi, *Sabīb Muslim* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 2000), hadith no. 2137.

### ***Building the Reciprocal Relation between Men and Women***

Husein Muhammad stated that the world desperately needs the emergence and existence of female 'ulama'. The presence of women to become equal with men in all access to life in domestic and public spheres, together with them in harmony and not fighting against them. Women are needed to be with men to build this nation for the realization of the shared ideals: justice, progress, and prosperity. They are needed to give new meanings to a just and humane life. The relationships between men and women is a reciprocal relation (*Mubādala*), as being taught in the Qur'an.<sup>37</sup>

KUPI socializes the *Mubādala* method in understanding the religious texts. *Mubādala* is a way of reading text that raises its reciprocal meaning and applies to both sexes by the absorbing the text messages. REF Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir explained that the perspective of the interconnectedness of male and female relationship is rooted in the basic tenets of Islam as *Tawhīd* necessitates a direct relationship between servant-man or woman with the God. If the vertical relationship is equivalent, then the horizontal relationship should also be equal. The Qur'anic texts also strengthen this perspective of reciprocity.<sup>38</sup>

The function as a caliph of God (*khalīfa*) on earth that is equally carried by women and men required cooperation between them. In addition, it also required interconnection in building five pillars. The First is the household. Here, men and women are trying to be righteous (*shālih*) partners from each other. Each of them pleases, serves, guards oneself, brings benefits, and refuses to harm between one and another. Second is the children's education. Here, the righteous husband and wife, can realize a future generation that is strong and beneficial for the religion, the society, and the nation. The task of childcare and education is actually on both father and mother, not only one of them, either the men alone or women themselves. The third is the formation of society. The family is the root of community formation. The logic is that if a righteous family can create a righteous generation, then it is necessary for us to have a good cooperation

<sup>37</sup> Husein Muhammad, "Perempuan Ulama di Atas Panggung Sejarah", paper presented in *Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI)*, PP Kebon Jambu al-Islamy Babakan Ciwaringin Cirebon, 25-27/4/2017, p. 12.

<sup>38</sup> *al-Mā'idah*: 2; *at-Taubah*: 71. <http://mubaadalah.com/2016/06/mafhum-mubadalah-interpretasi-resiprokal/>. Accessed on 4/4/2018.



between men and women in the efforts in forming a good society (*khaira umma*). This means that the 'just male-dominated cooperation with negating the role of women' is unacceptable. The fourth is a good country (*balda thayyiba*). This dream country is built by a good society.. According to Faqih, one of the way to measure a quality is by assessing the extent of access and benefits given to both men and women. So, the cooperation between the two sexes is necessary in order to ensure that the state is not falling in to being subjected to domination, hegemony, and violence. Instead, both men and women, with good cooperation, can bring all goodness to the society and keep away all harms from it. Fifth is spreading a tolerant and great Islam that brings peace and love for the universe (*Rahmah li al-'Alamin*). Again, as previous missions, this great message can only be brought by the good cooperation between men and women in the society.<sup>39</sup>

In line with Husein and Faqih, Masriyah Amva (born 13.10.1961), the leader of *Pesantren* Kebon Jambu al-Islamy Cirebon, has affirmed herself for the past decade as a preacher of gender justice and harmony in diversity of the Indonesian people within Islamic perspective. In this regards, she emphasized the importance of women's independence. When she took over the leadership of the *Pesantren* after the death of her husband, Muhammad, she had to face many challenges in maintaining the sustainability of this *Pesantren*. At the end of the day, she did not only managed to succeed in leading the *Pesantren* which includes educating more than a thousand male and female students, supervising male and female staff and teachers, she also has managed to be able to actively acted in the public sphere as a productive writer and working in the community empowerment especially in the economic improvement of the lower class. Her managerial ability excels in the management of the *Pesantren*. The specialty of this *Pesantren* is its acceptance towards the ideas of gender justice and pluralism from Islamic perspective. Here she believes that gender equality movement does not aim to suppress men. Rather, it aims to put the women equally and be partners with men and work with the men. Therefore, all elements of the nation including '*ulama*' need to support the strengthening of women's position as well as the gender equality movement. In addition, as a pluralist, she believes that every creature must love other creatures regardless of the background. She

<sup>39</sup> <https://mubaadalahnews.com/2017/08/5-kerjasama-laki-laki-dan-perempuan-dalam-islam/>. Accessed on 4/4/2018.

wrote in her book, "The diversity is a characteristic of God's creation. The variety of skin colors, languages, forms, desires, opinions, plants, and animals, are indicative of the perfection and the beauty of God. So, how can a human being reject this diversity of creation and want to get rid of different people? Prohibit the dissent? Forbid the differences in choice? Hate all of these differences? In fact, such people are people who do not understand how the God created the life." It is worth emphasizing that she has used her intellectual capacity to promote her ideas on gender equality and justice. As a matter of fact, she has written more than 16 books which contain the spiritual contemplation from her daily life experiences which also share her ideas and views on gender.

Mastriyah is not alone; many other female '*ulama*' have also tried to realize a balanced relationship between men and women especially in a marriage. The reason behind this particularity is the fact that, even though marriage ideally is aimed at being a place for the nursery of love, affection and intimate reciprocal relationship between husband and wife, there are still many cases where the relationship is corrupted by various conflicts, disputes, violence, and the domination of husbands towards wives. Marriage is also frequently seen as fetter for women's freedom. As a response to this, Sinta Nuriyah Wahid (born 8.3.1948) acted her concern and together with FK3 (*Forum Kajian Kitab Kuning*, the Study Forum of Classical Islamic Books) and Puan Amal Hayati conducting a review of one of the very well-known and commonly taught kitab in *Pesantren* in Indonesia, that is '*Uqud al-Lajjayn*'. The kitab is widely criticized as heavily filled with gender biased content that prescribes the imbalance of rights and obligations between husband and wife. Shinta argued that even though the book might be relevant at the time of its author, Syaikh Nawawi al-Bantani, the changing time requires reformed ways of thinking and hence it also needs to be adjusted to recent development in order to avoid being outdated.

In addition to this attempt, there is also another effort made in order to strengthen and promote ideas on balanced and just reciprocal relation between men and women. Here, several parties including the KUPI network, the Gender Study Center, and the Sub-Research and Community Service Center of Walisongo State Islamic University of Semarang in cooperation with Directorate of *Diniyah* and *Pesantren* Education, Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia

conducted a Workshop on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Islamic Religious Education on March 26-28, 2018.

### ***Developing the Peace***

Although their role in Peace building is often overlooked, female '*ulama'*' still believe that Peace-building efforts are responsibility of all parties and them included. History showed that they indeed have actively participated in resolving various social conflicts for peacemaking; volunteering in humanitarian activities; assisting in the distribution of foods, medicines and other essential needs. Even outside the conditions of conflict and war, women as peace actors dare to do something that can break the chain of hatred and revenge.<sup>40</sup>

Female '*ulama'*' are aware that the Indonesian system of democracy, along with the existence of many parties, has the potentials to increase the heat of the political temperature in the country. Therefore, The KUPI network asks all parties to work together to ease the heat and encourage for conducive and harmonious climate. It is important as part of maintaining the integrity of the nation and state. For this purpose, the conduct an event and this is called as the moral call. The moral call for peace-building was conducted at Istiqlal Mosque on 1.3.2018 with the presence of the female '*ulama'*' from West Java, Central Java, Yogyakarta, East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, West Sumatra, and South Sulawesi.

The moral call event basically voices their encouragement to all parties, particularly the political parties, the healthy and good politics practices. This manner is needed in order to safeguard the peace within a country that is heavily diverse. They call for all the politicians and political parties to avoid bad practices in the political contestation such as identity politicization, hoax, and hate speech that can endanger the nation's social cohesion. The initiation of issuance of this moral call, according to Fayumi, is based on the concern of female '*ulama'*' across Indonesia that view the potential negative excesses of that political contestation.

In relation to this, Sinta Nuriyah also took some additional efforts. She engage several female '*ulama'*' who show strong struggle to maintain the religious harmony in Indonesia in the efforts and among them is an

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<sup>40</sup> Husein Muhammad, "Islam dan Perdamaian", in *Swara Rahima*, No. 35, Y. XI (July 2011), pp. 26-27.

activity called “*Sabur Together*”. As one ritual for preparing Muslims to fast, this *sabur* together involves adherents of other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This activity is not only aimed at providing food for the weak and those who are in need but also aimed at opening dialogue between the adherents of diverse faiths. This extraordinary action made The New York Times crown her as one of “11 Powerful Women in the World” released on 15.12. 2017. Similarly, her daughter, Zannuba Arifah Chafsoh (born 29.10.1974) or commonly known as Yenny Wahid, is also popularly known for being persistent in building a network of women in Indonesia to promote great ideas such as tolerance and peace, strengthening the social cohesion through economic empowerment, and strengthening the women's leadership through a program called Women Participation for Inclusive Society (WISE).

The peace-building must always be pursued because Islam itself is a religion of peace and nonviolence. People should avoid the opposition and inter-religious conflict. Peace-building is not only aimed at removing, but also eliminating potentials that can trigger future conflicts.

Female *'ulama'* who take part in the four fields above are not limited to those who are mentioned. There are still many other female *'ulama'* who carry out the role in their respective ways and professions. They educate and advocate for the policies related to humanitarian and national issues.

Female *'ulama'* as the *da'wa* actors as well as social transformation agents have the Islamic integrity which is united in the totality of life, both in relation vertically with God, internally with oneself, and horizontally with fellow human beings and God's creatures. They have the high social awareness, social sensitivity, empathy, sympathy, willing to sacrifice, and charity for the benefit of the weak (*du'afa'*) and the weakened (*mustad'afin*) as well as other social interests. They also have the capability to reinterpret the concept of universal (*qath'i*) and particular or technical (*zanni/juz'i*) in Islamic teachings and reconstruct the understanding of religious texts that are gender equitable.

The universal teaching, according to Masdar F. Mas'udi, is a teaching of ethical principles, such as human freedom and individual accountability, the teaching of human equality regardless of sex, color, and ethnicity; justice; deliberation; human equality in the law; criticism and social control; do not harming oneself and others; keep promises

and uphold the agreement; help in the kindness; the strong should protect the weak; the equality of husband and wife in the family and mutual treatment with courtesy between the two. All of these teachings are principal and fundamental because their truth is in accordance with time and space that is universal. The particular teaching is the teaching of the implementation of the *qath'ī* and universal principles. Meanwhile, the particular teaching (*Zannī*) does not contain truth or goodness in itself because it is related to space, time, and different circumstances.

By re-enacting the universal and the particular religious texts, society will not be locked into the front of technical, instrumental and conditional matters. It includes reinterpreting the religious themes that are gender biased reconstructed to be gender equitable. Like the themes of women's leadership, inheritance rights of women, the value of women's testimony, women's reproductive rights, the right to determine spouses for women, polygamy, abortion, and others.

The action and the movement of female '*ulama'*' in promoting the social transformation have shown their significant role in educating the society. The presence of female '*ulama'*' does not mean to suppress the religious role of men, but to cooperate with one another. Female '*ulama'*' can perfect and work on aspects that have not been filled by male '*ulama'*', especially female '*ulama'*' have three powers that male '*ulama'*' are not or rarely possessed: First, religious knowledge is sensitive to injustice; Second, tenderness; Third, the leadership that protects and loves the people they lead.

### Conclusion

15

Indonesian Female '*Ulama'*' Congress (KUPI) at Pondok Pesantren Kebon Jambu, Babakan, Ciwaringin, Cirebon, 25-27 April 2017 is a momentum of the revival of female '*ulama'*' in Indonesia. The implementation of KUPI based on the consideration that the presence and contribution of female '*ulama'*' is a necessity in the history of Islamic civilization and Indonesian nationalism. Female '*ulama'*', as well as male '*ulama'*', are also carrying out the same mission in spreading the kindness and the love for the universe and manifesting a peaceful, just, and equitable life.

Since the implementation of KUPI, female '*ulama'*' continue to conduct the social transformation in Indonesia. They act in their respective communities by caring especially on the women, the

children, the weak (*du'afā*), and the weakened (*mustad'afīn*), humanizing and equating them with other peoples. In their actions, they hold the four principles of *da'wa*, namely: Islam, nationality, humanity, and universality. These four principles are relevant to the nature of Islam which is a blessing to the universe.

Female '*ulama'* have been actively responding to the issues related to humanity and nationality especially about sexual violence, child marriage, and environmental conservation. They are also persistent in building peace and developing a moderate understanding of Islam that requires the balance in all aspects, including a balance in gender relation by reinterpreting the theological texts of Islam with a gender perspective, which is called the method of *Mubādala*. []

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