

November 2009

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Kull, Ann (2009). At the Forefront of a Post-Patriarchal Islamic Education: Female Teachers in Indonesia. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1), 25-39.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol11/iss1/3>

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## At the Forefront of a Post-Patriarchal Islamic Education Female Teachers in Indonesia

By Ann Kull<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

This article argues that the ongoing introduction of a gender perspective in Indonesian Islamic education is challenging the partially unconscious patriarchal gender regime of these institutions and a means of resisting traditional notions of religious authority. The activities of female teachers, scholars and researchers are instrumental in these endeavors. This study draws on empirical material collected through fieldwork in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Makassar, Banjarmasin, and Bandung, and includes brochures, books, course literature, research, interviews, and discussions. Data is primarily collected from state institutes for higher Islamic education and especially at their respective Centers for Women Studies. This material constitutes examples of how female, and male, religious scholars and teachers challenge the prevailing gender bias in Islamic education on all levels by introducing a gender perspective in curriculum, teaching, and textbooks, but also in their roles as exemplars and religious authorities. I argue that these measures are important in creating gender awareness among Muslim students. However, to successfully challenge the structures of Islamic education, several conditions have to be met: producing less gender-biased Islamic interpretations, an academic climate that is open to inclusion of these interpretations in Islamic education on various levels, increasing the number of female teachers, and sufficient economic funding. Some of these prerequisites are already being met in the case of Indonesia.

*Keywords:* Indonesia, fieldwork, gender perspective in Islamic education

### Introduction

Islamic boarding schools or *pesantrens*<sup>2</sup> have historically dominated Islamic education in Indonesia. *Pesantrens* have a traditionalist orientation and follow the teachings of the founding *kiai*, or religious scholar. The current leading *kiai* plays a great role in education as well as life at the schools. As a reaction to these traditional institutions reform-minded Islamic scholars established *madrasa*<sup>3</sup> schools in the early twentieth century; general subjects were included in the curriculum and pedagogical methods were reformed. This development had an impact on *pesantrens* but a majority is still very patriarchal and colored by local traditions (Azra, Afrianty & Hefner, 2007).

Higher Islamic education in Indonesia has, since the early 1970s, been continuously reformed regarding curriculum and approach to the study of Islam. This

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<sup>2</sup> *Pesantrens* are generally associated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Indonesia's largest Islamic organization.

<sup>3</sup> *Madrasas* are Islamic schools with a modernist orientation mainly associated with Indonesia's second largest Islamic organization, Muhammadiyah.

process was initiated by Harun Nasution as rector at the State Islamic Institute in Jakarta and Mukti Ali as Minister of Religious Affairs (Kull, 2005). However, in the area of gender studies and institutional gender equality, development is generally lagging behind, although Indonesia is far ahead of many other Muslim countries. In order to successfully challenge the still dominant patriarchal structure of Islamic education in Indonesia there are several prerequisites that need to be met. The first is to produce Islamic interpretations with a gender neutral or even openly female perspective. The second is the conviction to include these interpretations in the curriculum and textbooks, and/or political instruments aimed at facilitating such an inclusion. The third is a large cadre of well-educated female teachers. An additional and general condition is sufficient economic funding.

Methodologically this paper is built on a combination of fieldwork and text analysis. Fieldwork was carried out in Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Makassar, Banjarmasin and Bandung – places chosen because of their geographical diversity and local variations in Islamic practice and tradition – primarily at their State Islamic Institutes (IAIN/UIN<sup>4</sup>), and especially at their respective Centers for Women Studies (PSW<sup>5</sup>). The textual material includes brochures, books, course literature, researches, interviews and discussions.

The concepts “gender order” and “gender regime” – elaborated by R.W. Connell in his *Gender* (2002) and further developed by Kathryn Robinson in her book *Gender, Islam and Democracy in Indonesia* (2009) – inform the analysis of this article. As Connell explains, a gender order is the dominant pattern of gender arrangements and norms in a given society. However, within a gender order there are many gender relations or gender regimes and Connell says that “gender regimes are a usual feature of organizational life”, for example, in educational institutions. He further contends that “the gender regime of an institution can change – though change is often resisted.” Finally, according to Connell, “It is possible for social practice to move gender orders in different directions” (2002, p. 53). However, in the opinion of Robinson, there is not one but many localized gender orders within the diverse Indonesian archipelago, not least due to the well established influence of world religions, and particularly Islam. Still, there are also many gender regimes (2009). One conclusion that can be drawn from Robinson’s reasoning is that in Indonesia there is, at least, one Islamic gender order and within this order there are several gender regimes, one of them, I argue, is the gender regime of Islamic education.

The theme of diverse Islamic practices and Muslim environments in Indonesia is discussed by Susan Blackburn and others in a recent publication. The authors stress the importance of regarding Muslim women as agents of change, not, as they are often described especially in Western scholarship, as passive victims of male oppression. A majority of the authors in this book are female Indonesian scholars of Islam and the social sciences discussing “how women negotiate their gender, agency and identities as Muslims in diverse spaces” (Blackburn, Smith & Syamsiyatun, 2008, p. 3). One aim of the present article is to provide an additional contribution in this field in highlighting the agency of Muslim female teachers and scholars who challenge the male-dominated

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<sup>5</sup> *Pusat Studi Wanita*

authority in religious scholarship and leadership, though some male scholars also take part in this endeavor.

In an article in the *Jakarta Post* Yulia Immajati states that, “Indonesia reached gender parity in both primary and secondary [general] schools in 2002.” She further observes that gender parity prevails at the level of primary education but that girls’ enrollment is decreasing at the secondary and higher levels. She argues that this is due to “the existing gender biased norms and values that people are quite resistant to challenge” (Immajati, 2009), or, in other words, the norms and values of Indonesia’s prevailing gender order(s). Another study on gender parity in *madrassa* schools during the same year shows a different picture. Here girls’ enrollment is increasing from a percentage of 50-50 in the lowest level to 55% in the higher levels (Azra, Afrianty & Hefner, 2007). My general impression during fieldwork observation in institutions for higher Islamic education is that gender parity prevails, although some faculties are dominated by male students and other by female. Immajati suggests several measures in order to challenge the prevailing biased norms and values in general education, such as a review and reform of educational policies and practices that oppress women, as well as of sexist and gender-biased curricula and textbooks (Immajati, 2009). Although gender parity is improving in Islamic education, there are similarities in the current situation of general and Islamic education.

However, prevailing gender regimes are structures or relations of power and not easily changed if they are based on patriarchal traditions, and especially when based on religious knowledge. Connell discusses the importance of power relations as a dimension of gender. These relations of power operate in various ways; most obvious is “institutional power” operating through bureaucracies and organizations, but equally pervasive, though more diffuse, is “discursive power”<sup>6</sup> or the way we “talk, write and conceptualize” (2002, p. 59). Both these power relations are present in the framework of Islamic education and in the struggle for religious scholarly authority.

### **Reform of Islamic Thinking and Higher Education**

For many years the authoritarian Suharto regime (in power from 1966-1998) restricted political activities in the name of Islam but at the same time supported cultural expressions of religion and individual practices. The regime also encouraged Islamic education on all levels and it has expanded dramatically, something that benefited Muslim women and men of all ages (Robinson, 2009). In this climate the ideas of progressive and liberal Muslim thinkers who take a firm stand against Islamic party politics have flourished. Their original aim was to reform Islamic thought in Indonesia, which, according to them, had stagnated due to heavy focus on politically oriented ideologies and the establishment of an Islamic state (Kull, 2005). Instead, they argued that an important contribution of the great scholars of Islam was that they managed to keep religious thinking fresh and relevant to their time, thereby contributing to the development of the societies where they lived and worked (Federspiel, 2006). Thinkers like these are often called neomodernists and stress the necessity of placing the Qur’an and *hadith*, the narrated tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, in their historical context. Therefore, the importance of context, and not only the *asbab al-nuzul* or occasions of revelation, but the entire cultural context, historical as well as modern, is instrumental in

<sup>6</sup> Connell is here inspired by Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977).

their *ijtihad*, or interpretation of Islam (Barton, 1995). Abdullah Saeed states that this model of *ijtihad* can be called context based, or contextual *ijtihad*, and adds that it is guided by a concept in classical Islamic tradition *maslaha*, which means “public interest” or “common good.” In carrying out this *ijtihad* the interpreter “mainly conducts a ‘context analysis’ both for the modern situation and the classical period” (Saeed, 1997, p. 284). This is a movement involving several steps, moving from the modern Indonesian context to the historical context of the Qur’an and back again, and according to neomodernist thought it can provide answers to problems that need to be solved in the current Indonesian society.

Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid are regarded by many Indonesian scholars as the most important neomodernists, and both have been active in the reform of Islamic education for many years. Madjid was a long-time teacher and professor at IAIN/UIN in Jakarta where he inspired new generations of students to take part in a continuous reform of Islamic thinking (Kull, 2005). Wahid was leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) from 1984-1999 and he worked ceaselessly for a reform of its vast network of *pesantren*. Wahid made another important contribution when in 2000, during his short term as the president of Indonesia, he introduced a general gender mainstreaming policy. According to Lies Marcoes-Natsir, senior program officer at Asia Foundation in Jakarta, this is an important reason that the gender perspective is today included in all sectors of Indonesian society. Marcoes-Natsir herself has been a feminist activist since many years back, and she obtained her basic religious education at a *pesantren*. Initially she was a leftist feminist but realized the importance of working for women’s rights within religious institutions and frameworks.<sup>7</sup> This is an insight that she increasingly shares with other women activists.

The method of contextual *ijtihad* was elaborated by Indonesian liberal scholars in the 1970s to 1990s and many students of Islam adopted this approach. Additionally, in 1996 Marcoes-Natsir and other pioneers invited Riffat Hassan, Ali Ashgar Engineer and Amina Wadud, all well known progressive international scholars in the study of women and Islam, to inspire Indonesian scholars of Islam. Due to this experience and their educational background Indonesian scholars, women as well as men, are now at the forefront of producing less gender-biased interpretations of Islam.<sup>8</sup> Siti Musdah Mulia, Siti Ruhaini Dzyhayatin, Lily Zakiyah Munir, Hussein Muhammad, Nazaruddin Umar and Syafiq Hasyim, are some leading figures. These people are also active in the reform of Islamic law and Islamic education on different levels and in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). A majority of religious scholars are formally affiliated with Muhammadiyah or NU and have their educational roots in their respective school systems. The female branches of both organizations – Aiisyah in Muhammadiyah, and Muslimah and Fatayat in NU – are encouraging women to become teachers and preachers (van Doorn-Harder, 2006). The leadership and boards of Muhammadiyah and NU are supportive of women’s involvement in central leadership positions, and concrete steps for action – the writing of guidelines and issuing of a *fatwa* or formal legal view – were taken in 2004 and 1997 respectively. However, resistance at the grassroots level has hindered their implementation (White & Anshor, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Field notes, Jakarta, April 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Indonesian scholars mainly write in Indonesian, which is an obstacle to a wider diffusion of these thought-provoking ideas.

There are fourteen IAIN/UINs in Indonesia, and an additional number of smaller so-called STAIN.<sup>9</sup> Reform-minded scholars have worked for a continuous reform of curriculum and methodology of these institutions and a development towards progressive and liberal approaches in the study of Islam (Jabali & Jamhari, 2002; Kull, 2005). Through this educational reform, including an increased development of postgraduate research, several IAIN have been recently upgraded from institutes to universities, thus, the sometimes double labeling IAIN/UIN. Since the 1970s IAINs in Indonesia have cooperated with McGill University in Canada, a cooperation that has become increasingly formalized over the years (Jabali & Jamhari, 2002). This cooperation is of great importance for the developments discussed in this article as well, not least because IAIN, McGill and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) co-publish important results of research in the field of Indonesian gender studies, making it available to a wider Indonesian audience and providing an instrument for teachers working on continued reform of Islamic education from a gender perspective.

According to Jabali and Jamhari, the students of IAIN/UINs may not only become the future teachers of their own institutions, they also become a part of the next generation of teachers and leaders in *pesantrens* and *madrasas*, facilitating a wider reform of Islamic education on all levels (2002). In addition, the same authors observe that higher Islamic education contributes to an increase in the quality of both “religious comprehension” and “religious thinking” among Indonesian Muslims, making them more capable of contributing to the development of Indonesian society (2002).

### Centers for Women Studies

All IAIN/UINs have a Centre for Women Studies or PSW. The first PSW was established in Jakarta 1988, followed by Bandung 1989 and Yogyakarta and Banjarmasin 1995 (no data available for Makassar). Some of them have more facilities and greater potential, like Jakarta and Yogyakarta; others are small, with limited resources, like Banjarmasin. Their profiles and focus of activities also are slightly different; some of them promote the gender perspective in Islamic education to a greater degree than others. The general gender mainstreaming policy introduced in 2000 strengthened the role and position of all PSWs, something that has made them more active and self-confident (Jubaedah, 2004). Most senior staff are middle aged experienced scholars while the majority are young and less experienced but very enthusiastic, so quite naturally the generational variable is important in mainstreaming. The staff includes both women and men, but women constitute a large majority, and, to use the words of Robert Hefner, “IAIN-trained women are in the vanguard of efforts to rethink Islam and gender” (2008, p. 149).

The motto of PSW in Jakarta is “Powerful Women, Glorious Country” and they have produced a brochure presenting themselves and their activities. Their vision and mission is quoted here at length as it is in line with the ideas and goals expressed by staff at all PSW visited during my fieldwork.

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<sup>9</sup> *Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri*

*Vision*

Realizing a democratic, tolerant, and equal social life through scientific and Islamic values developed with a gender perspective.

*Mission*

Developing gender equity in Islamic science paradigm.

Intensifying the socialisation of gender equity.

Improving the quality of women's lives in various strategic sectors according to Islamic values.

Increasing an autonomous organization through institutional reinforcement and linkage expansion.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, they all stress the importance of using the gender approach in research carried out in all fields of Islamic studies, and they are committed to using the results in reforming curriculum and textbooks, as well as working for their diffusion to a wider audience. This mission is facilitated with the cooperation with McGill and CIDA, mentioned above, and in some cases the Indonesian Department of Religious Affairs helps with publication.

A workshop called "Development of Curriculum for Gender Studies" was held in 2002 with participants from a number of IAIN/UINs and STAINs, which resulted in the book *Introduction to Gender Studies* (2003).<sup>11</sup> This book discusses and analyzes various aspects of sex, gender, gender mainstreaming and feminism. According to Azyumardi Azra, at that time rector at UIN in Jakarta, "it can be used as study material in the introduction to gender studies in tertiary education and especially at IAIN/UIN and STAIN all over Indonesia" (quoted in Tim Penulis PSW UIN Jakarta, 2003, p. viii). It can be regarded a starting point for engagement in gender issues on a larger scale within the field of Islamic education in Indonesia. Two years later, PSW Jakarta published *Developing an Academic Culture with a Gender Perspective* (2005),<sup>12</sup> a book that further elaborates aspects of gender in Islamic education, such as woman-friendly study environments and gender-sensitive approaches and methodologies. The most important step however was the publication, also in 2005, of five textbooks on the Qur'an, *hadith*, Islamic history, *fiqh* or jurisprudence, and Sufism, all with a consistent gender perspective. These books are used in the initial courses for *all* students at the UIN in Jakarta<sup>13</sup> and are crucial to loosening the grip of the patriarchal gender regime of Islamic education. However, this development also shows the steps taken from a general introduction of gender studies in the first book towards a complete inclusion of a gender perspective in the later publications.

PSW Jakarta, however, indicates a serious problem in its Strategic Planning for 2006-2010, stating that it has "insufficient budget to support the performance of its activities" (PSW UIN Jakarta, 2005, p. 21). This unfortunate fact was obvious during my visit in April 2008 when the first edition of the pioneering five books was already out of print and no money for a second printing was available. The lack of money, and not, in this case, a lack of innovative research and initiatives, is a general weakness in the

<sup>10</sup> Brochure collected at PSW in Jakarta, April 2008.

<sup>11</sup> *Pengantar Kajian Gender*

<sup>12</sup> *Membangun Kultur Akademik Berperspektif Gender*

<sup>13</sup> Field notes, Jakarta, April 2008.

Indonesian educational system. In addition, the Strategic Plan remarks that more staff with an expertise in gender-oriented Islamic scholarship is needed. Yet, they are doing well with staff from many different Islamic disciplines and a wide network of cooperation with other PSWs, governmental institutions, NGOs, and teachers in Islamic education outside IAIN/UIN (PSW UIN Jakarta, 2005).

PSW Yogyakarta pointed out the urgency of methodological reform and reconstruction (Dzuhayatin, Munawar-Rahman & Umar, 2002). That same year UIN in Yogyakarta initiated a self-critical institutional analysis, carried out during the second half of 2002 and first half of 2003, focusing on gender issues and female representation and participation. They examined areas such as vision, mission, and aim in different faculties, recruitment policies, and cooperation between PSW and the faculties, as well as the teachers' ability to implement the gender perspective in class. The investigators present several positive findings and especially emphasize the open-minded attitude that has prevailed at IAIN/UIN in Yogyakarta since its founding. However, they stress the negative impact of the patriarchal culture in the surrounding Javanese society. Of importance, however, is the very strong support from the rector at that time Amin Abdullah and his predecessor Atho Mudzhar in all PSW activities that promote gender equality. In addition, PSW is regarded as having a positive image at the campus and harmonious relations with other IAIN/UIN institutions and faculties, as well as having a reputation for being professional outside campus.

Nevertheless, there are also negative findings. For instance, there is no explicit policy to promote female participation on the general board or in obtaining other positions. The investigators remark that this is an affirmation of a patriarchal mindset of the male leadership and, although it may be unintentional, the result is that there are no female board members at UIN and a great discrepancy prevails between women and men in all other academic positions. They also stress the fact that women are still clearly at a disadvantage when applying for academic appointments. Furthermore, they observe that only teachers associated with PSW (12%) implement the gender perspective in their teaching, something that leads to an insufficient dissemination of the approach among students. The investigators present several recommendations for improving the situation, for example, the formulation of clear policies regulating the share of men and women in all activities, but also in leadership, management, and academic positions (such a system is already established in the field of representation in political parties and parliament). They stress the necessity of including both an explicit and an implicit gender perspective in the curriculum as well as training for all teachers in implementing this perspective. In addition, they encourage a daily gender-equal interaction between all staff groups (Susilaningsih & Najib, 2004).

The investigation led to immediate action and already during the fall semester 2003 UIN in Yogyakarta introduced a new model for disseminating gender perspective in its courses. This model is elaborated in *The Necessity of Giving Priority to Gender in the Curriculum of IAIN*,<sup>14</sup> where PSW presents 28 courses; covering areas such as Qur'an, *hadith*, *sharia* or Islamic law, history, Arabic, psychology of religion, and philosophy. All courses are described in detail, including teachers, titles and presentations of all lectures, suggested readings, and learning outcomes. The readings include books by progressive Indonesian scholars and well-known international scholars. It would seem

<sup>14</sup> *Pengarusutamaan Gender Dalam Kurikulum IAIN*

from this information that the courses in Islamic studies not only stress the gender perspective but also generally apply a historically critical approach to the study of Islam and stressing the importance of context – something that is common in gender-neutral or woman-positive interpretations of Islam in Indonesia. In the foreword, the editor admits that there are difficulties to be overcome, both procedural and financial, but at the same time stress the ambition to have a gender perspective in *all* subjects taught at UIN, as well as consistency in aim, lecture, methodology and textbooks (Aryani, 2004). I do not have more recent material from UIN in Yogyakarta but we can assume that further progress has been made in the field of curriculum and teaching as gender discourse has the function of making visible the discursive power of the patriarchal classical interpretation. However, we also know that structures of institutional power, such as the bureaucracy and the administration, are very resistant to change and we can expect a slower development here.

During my visit to PSW at UIN in Makassar, the staff described their effort to introduce the gender perspective among teachers, not only at their own UIN, but also at *pesantren* around the country. They proudly said that no less than 250 such courses have been held at *pesantren* in central Sulawesi, Lombok, southern Kalimantan and west Sumatra since 2001, and it is still an activity with high priority. Professor Bargo Ishak is the founder of this PSW, a woman in her sixties who has been teaching at IAIN/UIN Makassar since 1968. She describes how she introduced a gender perspective in her teaching – educational management – step by step for the last 10 years. Most of her students are future teachers in Islamic studies and a great majority of students, both men and women, according to her greet this development positively.<sup>15</sup>

At PSW in Bandung I met a young woman, a teacher in the field of human rights law, who told me that human rights courses, including women's and children's rights, are required at the *sharia* faculty. Human rights are taught both from an Islamic and positive law perspective, and her impression was that male students were both interested in and supportive of women's human rights. She also pointed out that teaching in Islamic law already has a consistent gender perspective and PSW has regular "gender perspective training" for teachers at UIN in general.<sup>16</sup> Most students, female as well as male, are here described as supportive of both women's rights and the inclusion of a gender perspective in teaching. As the students constitute the youngest generation at these institutions, they can generally be expected to be more accepting of this development than the teachers of previous generations.

PSW at IAIN in Banjarmasin has recently developed into a Centre for Gender Studies (PSG).<sup>17</sup> Still, the theoretical awareness of the PSG staff is not yet in line with the progress made in their practical work. They regretted the still very low gender awareness among IAINs teachers in general, older as well as younger, and noted that, so far, it is up to the individual teacher whether to include the gender perspective or not. But PSG is working for a long-term inclusion of the gender perspective in teaching. PSG has carried out a number of interesting research studies, unfortunately not yet included in the curricula at IAIN.<sup>18</sup> During fieldwork in Banjarmasin, many people stressed the still very

<sup>15</sup> Field notes, Makassar, April 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Field notes, Bandung, April 2008.

<sup>17</sup> *Pusat Studi Gender*

<sup>18</sup> Field notes, Banjarmasin, April 2008.

strong patriarchal character of Banjarese Islam and society; for example, polygamy is widespread. One observation is that this patriarchal character is also influential at IAIN.

All PSWs have wide networks of cooperating NGOs, *pesantrens*, *madrasas* and women's study groups in mosques. Women's study groups, often situated in a mosque but sometimes in a private home, are led by *muballighas* or female preachers and are common throughout the country. This is an example of an area where Muslim women empower other Muslim women by means of Islamic education. Especially PSWs in Jakarta and Bandung have been active in introducing a gender perspective among these *muballighas*. Many female teachers and researchers are personally active outside of campus life, using their knowledge and authority for the creation and running of NGOs that work for empowerment and education of Muslim women (Jabali & Jamhari, 2002), for example, the nationally influential Rahima Women's Association in Jakarta and Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center and Kesejahteraan Fatayat (Fatayat Welfare Foundation) in Yogyakarta.

### ***Pesantren***

Steps are being taken to further reform Islamic education on other levels. For example, the publication in 2006 of a gender manual – *Dawrah Fiqh Concerning Women: Manual for a Course on Islam and Gender* – produced by Fahmina institute, an independent NGO originally close to NU's *pesantren*, with Lies Marcoes-Natsir as one of the authors. This book provides instructions and interpretations of Islam from a gender perspective following the educational model applied at *pesantren* where most Indonesian Muslims receive their main religious education. Although Abdurrahman Wahid carried out a reform of *pesantren* education, there is still much to be done and not least in the field of gender. The power structure in most *pesantren* is very patriarchal, and instruction on women in Islam is mainly based on *kitab kuning*<sup>19</sup> and especially *Uquud al-Lujjain*, a work from the nineteenth century by a *kiai* from Java, a religious scholar and leader of a *pesantren*. According to Syafiq Hasyim, himself a *pesantren* graduate and the author of *Understanding Women in Islam: An Indonesian Perspective* (2006), this work is still very influential, although commentaries critical of it have appeared since 2003 and have sometimes been used in education as well. There are also reactions against these commentaries from conservative *kiais* in NU, something that indicates a heated debate.<sup>20</sup> This debate originated in the *pesantrens* but spread to the entire NU and especially its female branches (van Doorn-Harder, 2006). However, in this debate we find both *kiais* and *nyais*,<sup>21</sup> their female counterparts, favoring a critical gender perspective in *pesantren* teaching and presenting new understandings of old texts. In addition, they raise issues of importance for promoting women's rights in Islam, including women's reproductive rights, marriage, polygamy, and patriarchal structures in *pesantren* (Zainab, 2002).

Nelly van Doorn-Harder discusses how women teachers and students challenge traditions within the *pesantren* and step by step work towards a more public space and role in the life of these institutions. She describes a glamorous graduation ceremony,

<sup>19</sup> Classical Arab language works by Indonesian religious scholars, which are studied in *pesantren* around the country.

<sup>20</sup> Field notes, Jakarta, April 2008. See also White & Anshor (2008).

<sup>21</sup> In this context a *nyai* is a wife or daughter of a *kiai*; at the same time she is often well-educated in Islamic knowledge.

totally dominated by female teachers and students, held outdoor in a public space, which fully recognized the effort of the graduates. This was a great achievement in an environment heavily burdened by tradition and patriarchal hierarchies. At the same time the responsible woman teacher is aware that “she walks a delicate line” in this changing but still conservative milieu (2006, pp. 165-67). Eka Srimulyani tells the stories of some extra ordinary women – *nyais* from three different generations – who have an exceptional knowledge of Islam, high self-esteem, and strong support from their parents, husbands and other relatives. Srimulyani contends that the combination of these women’s qualifications and capabilities and their favorable position as middle-class women with supportive and highly influential and respected families made it possible for them to receive a position far beyond the usual for women – a process she calls “negotiation.” Lily Zakiyah Munir, mentioned above, is the daughter of Abidah one of these pioneering *nyais* (Srimulyani, 2008). Munir is also the director of an NGO, Centre for Pesantren and Democracy Studies, where she works for a continued reform of *pesantren* education and inclusion of the gender and human rights perspective. She is a telling example of the importance of role models and encouraging environments, and her family background provides legitimacy, but it does not mean, however, that her work is appreciated by all within the *pesantren* communities. In conclusion, the gender regime in *pesantren* education is challenged and in some cases modified, but still not overturned.

The methodology and approach to Islamic studies of the gender manual can provide a valuable guideline for further reform of *pesantren* education. The manual challenges both the content and structure of it favoring an active and critical approach instead of the more common passive approach. The manual is used in education of women activists all over the country although not (yet?) in *pesantren*. However, Saparinah Sadli, who chaired the first Women Studies graduate program at the University of Indonesia and is a long-time activist herself, says that many activists have realized that “the struggle for women’s rights is strongly influenced by existing religious concepts, and it is therefore very difficult to separate women’s issues from religious discourse” (quoted in Muhammad, Kodir, Marcoes-Natsir & Wahid, 2007, p. xiii). Many women activists receive their Islamic education from a *pesantren* or have no formal Islamic education at all. However, the approach, methodology and interpretations of the gender manual provide a tool for how to argue for gender equality within the framework of Islam.

To sum up, IAIN/UIN and *pesantrens* are not yet at the same point in the development of a less patriarchal and more gender neutral Islamic education for two reasons: the pace of reform, discussed above, and the structure of leadership. IAIN/UINs have an elected rector and board of scholars and, while *pesantrens* also have a board, the role and personal charisma of the founding *kiai* and his successors, often sons, is still very important. The institutions of IAIN/UIN are young and have been continuously reformed regarding approach and curriculum. They can thereby be regarded as more prone to change. *Pesantrens* are old institutions, only recently subjected to thorough reform and more dependent on their respective *kiai*’s personal opinion and attitude. There are progressive and innovative ones but the majority still objects to changes, not least in the field of women or gender issues. In conclusion, the challenge to the prevailing patriarchal gender regime in Islamic education at *pesantrens* has not been as successful as those at IAIN/UINs, although there are notable exceptions.

### Female Students, Teachers and Researchers – Increasing Numbers and Authority

The number of women students enrolling in higher Islamic education has continuously increased for several decades, and currently women often constitute 50% of the students in these institutions. We also have an increasing number of women among the postgraduate students and researchers, which indicates a rising number of female teachers on all levels. Among senior researchers we find, for example, Nurnaningsih, Siti Ruhaini Dzyhayatin, Susilaningsih, Siti Syamsiyatun and Tati Hartimah. They are all active at different PSWs as researchers and in producing textbooks, arranging workshops and educating students and teacher colleagues. Among their junior counterparts we find Alimatul Qibtiyah, Dede Kania and Winy Trianita, to mention but a very few, all writing theses in the field of Islam and gender studies.

Female teachers and researchers are important in two ways; first, for the content and approach of their teaching and research, and second, as role models and religious authorities. Although not all female teachers have a progressive and liberal approach to Islam and the gender perspective in Islamic education, they still challenge male structures of authority. This latter case can be exemplified with Ibu Arbainah who is a highly respected senior teacher in Islamic law in a *madrassa* in Banjarmasin. She is also a *muballigha* who has been preaching to women during the last 25 years. Ibu Arbainah is not pursuing a consistent gender perspective but she is a strong woman who strives to educate and empower girls and women from within the framework of Islamic teaching based on her own interpretations of works by local religious authorities. She is herself a student of a famous local *alim* (plural, *ulama*), religious scholar and develops his ideas, bearing in mind the current social context of everyday life in Banjarmasin. Ibu Arbainah points out the importance of placing oneself within an existing tradition in order to legitimate one's own ideas, not only for women but also for men.<sup>22</sup>

Most women mentioned here base their authority on scholarly credentials and religious knowledge. To quote van Doorn-Harder, "Through their religious knowledge, they are uniquely prepared to protect authority against authoritarianism and against any development that attempts to undermine women's potential and empowerment" (2006, p. 21). However, many also have support from their families – parents and husbands – and radiate strength and a firm belief in themselves and their abilities. They seldom complain about negative attitudes expressed towards them by superiors, colleagues or students, but of course there are opponents of female teachers and scholars, and there are also regional differences within Indonesia. Actually, religious scholarly authority is a matter of discussion in the Indonesian context, for women and men alike. To put it more directly, the question is who has the right to call himself or herself an *alim*. According to Hooker, "the '*ulamâ*' are a self-appointed and self-perpetuating class by virtue of their education .... Until recently this meant being a graduate of a *pesantren* owned and run by a *kyai*.... More recently it has become possible to attain '*ulamâ*' status through other avenues, for example, by graduating from a State Islamic Institute..., although '*ulamâ*' from the *pesantren* tradition often dispute this" (2008, pp. 132-33). Because the *ulama*, as a group are self-appointed, the dispute constitutes a part of what Connell calls a relation of "discursive power." Female *ulama* are sometimes contested, most often by conservative *pesantren* graduates, *kiais* and Middle-Eastern educated scholars, not only because they are women but also because of a conceptual power struggle. *Ulama* is a gender-neutral

<sup>22</sup> Field notes, Banjarmasin, April 2008.

term while *kiai* is a term strictly confined to men, and *nyai* is its female counterpart. However, the title *nyai* says nothing about a person's knowledge of Islam, although many *nyais* have a solid Islamic education, public or private. We can assume that there will be a trend toward more women claiming the title of *ulama*.

Two recent surveys<sup>23</sup> conducted at public and private Islamic schools in Java, including those run by Muhammadiyah and NU, present a discouraging picture concerning the open-mindedness of teacher's attitude to pluralistic values. The results show that a great majority of the teachers oppose pluralism and demonstrate an "intolerant" attitude, as well as express support for "conservative" and even "radical" interpretations of Islam (Khalik, 2008; Nurrohman, 2008). The surveys do not explicitly mention the teacher's attitude towards gender neutral or woman-supportive interpretations of Islam but an assumption could be that they are not generally positive. During the last four to five years there has been a noticeable development towards conservative Muslim values in several strata of Indonesian society, including Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars (MUI) and, accordingly, also among teachers in lower Islamic education, though gender issues are seldom addressed explicitly. Still, I would argue that attitudes generally are much more open-minded and tolerant, including on the gender issue, in higher Islamic education and among the leadership and elite level of Muhammadiyah and NU. Therefore, either these organizations have failed to promote tolerant values among their respective grassroots members or these surveys are a sign of a (temporary?) backlash due to the current strength of conservative Muslim values in Indonesian society.

## Conclusion

During the many years of Suharto rule, political activities in the name of Islam was restricted or forbidden, something that indirectly promoted liberal and progressive activities and interpretations of Islam that were less politically oriented. This societal climate, in combination with a continuous reform of higher Islamic education, including both the methodology and approach to the study of Islam, has shaped the Indonesian scholars who are now at the international vanguard of producing less gender-biased or women positive interpretations of Islam. It has also prepared scholars and teachers for a readiness to include these and other new ideas and approaches in the curriculum, although a larger number of scholars with an expertise in gender-oriented Islamic scholarship are needed. However, conservative teachers and scholars – often *kiais* at *pesantren* and scholars educated in the Middle East – resist the inclusion of a gender perspective, as well as progressive and liberal approaches in general.

The material discussed in this article can roughly be divided into three categories. First, research and books that provide general recommendations for how to include the gender perspective in Islamic education on different levels. Second, material based on gender neutral or women-positive interpretations of Islam – like textbooks on *sharia*, *hadith*, Islamic history and so on – with the gender perspective interwoven throughout the book. Lastly, manuals that guide teachers and students lecture by lecture, subject by subject, providing not only the gender perspective in Islamic learning but also methodological and pedagogical guidelines. This material clearly indicates that there are

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<sup>23</sup> These surveys were carried out by Center for Islamic and Society Studies (PPIM) at UIN in Jakarta and Malindo Institute.

innovative research and initiatives but the study has found that economic funding is sometimes insufficient. In this material, as well as in discussions with teachers and scholars during fieldwork, it is obvious that regional differences are still significant.

Regional differences are also discussed by Robinson and are a variable of analytical interest in this study. There are, for example, considerable differences between Jakarta and Banjarmasin, not only in Muslim daily life but also in the field of Islamic education. Of course, Jakarta is the capital, but it is also a mega city with an ethnically and religiously pluralistic population, while Banjarmasin is a much smaller city with a relatively homogenous population and its society and religion are colored by the influence of the surrounding strongly patriarchal culture. The consequence of this latter circumstance is also mentioned by PSW in Yogyakarta. Another analytical variable is the generational factor. Many people involved in these gender issues – staff at PSW, teachers and researchers – are young and enthusiastic but sometimes also inexperienced. However, there are older pioneers who not only have knowledge, experience and authority but also provide important role models for the younger generations.

In sum, IAIN/UINs, *pesantrens* and Islamic education on the lower levels are not yet at the same point of development towards a more gender neutral Islamic education. IAIN/UINs are far ahead and the students educated there, where approximately 50% are women, will become the future teachers in higher Islamic education, *pesantrens* and *madrasas*. These new cadres of teachers will not only provide a growing number of female teachers and role models, but also be reasonably well prepared to facilitate a further diffusion of a gender perspective and a woman-friendly interpretation of Islam – leading the way towards a post-patriarchal Islamic education.

There are, however, institutional and discursive obstacles. First, it is the matter of organizational structures. Although people in leading positions, like Amin Abdullah in Yogyakarta and Azyumardi Azra in Jakarta, have strongly supported and facilitated the diffusion of a gender perspective in Islamic education, the main power structures at IAIN/UIN – rector, deputy rector and board – are still dominated by men. To facilitate a more gender equal situation a system of quotas would be necessary, at least initially. The situation at the *pesantrens* is even more gender unequal, due to the traditional power of the individual *kiai* and his male heirs, something that also makes it more complicated to challenge.

Second, the religious knowledge and authority of female *ulama* are sometimes contested, both on the grounds that they are women and because of the ongoing debate about who has the right to call him/herself an *alim*. It is both a matter of the definition of an Islamic term and a trial of strength between competing approaches in the study of Islam, patriarchal versus gender equal or women positive. Due to a rising number of highly educated and vocal women we can expect an increased acceptance of women's religious knowledge, as well as of their right to religious authority and leadership.

To conclude, the gender regime in Islamic education is only one of many existing gender regimes in Indonesian society. However, this particular regime reaches large parts of the population and provides a basis for the current gender inequality among Muslim Indonesians. The developments discussed in this paper form a conscious project of making Islamic education less patriarchal, in content as well as form, and Indonesia already meets several of the stated prerequisites. The gender mainstreaming policy provides an additional political instrument and therefore it is possible to challenge,

modify and even replace the prevailing gender regime. The economic conditions are not ideal, something that is not a specifically Indonesian problem. Still, this development is one of many ongoing developments working for social change in the rapidly modernizing and globalizing Indonesian society. In a longer perspective, this development may even challenge the dominating Islamic gender order, forcing it to move in a different and less gender-biased direction.

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