

Deconstructing gender norms in pesantren: A critical ethnographic study of the pesantren curriculum in Indonesia

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Article Information	Abstract:
Submitted: 2025-05-24 Revised: 2025-07-10 Published: 2025-12-03	Pesantren in Indonesia maintain traditional gender structures through formal and non-formal curricula, reproducing male dominance, limiting female participation, and reinforcing patriarchal hierarchies amid rapid social change. This study aims to analyze the dynamics of gender power reproduction and contestation in three pesantren in East Java through a critical ethnographic approach, tracing layered patriarchy and symbolic agency within pedagogical practices and the pesantren curriculum. This study employed a critical ethnographic approach with a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 informants and analyses of curriculum documents. Data analysis applied Carspecken's critical ethnographic framework, supported by source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and ideological critique. The findings revealed four main issues: (1) pesantren curricula reproduce gender inequality through patriarchal roles and vertical power relations; (2) resistance emerges through progressive female teachers, critical students, and informal learning groups; (3) gender-responsive curricula are hindered by monolithic religious content, patriarchal structures, and limited teacher competence; and (4) minimal representation of female Islamic scholars limits students' recognition of women as religious role models. The study demonstrates that pesantren reproduce patriarchy through curricula, institutional structures, and symbolic representations, while resistance from female teachers and students remains largely symbolic due to the absence of sustainable structural reform. This study contributes to expanding the concept of patriarchal habitus and proposes a pesantren patriarchy contestation model through curriculum reform, critical pedagogy, inclusive policies, and strengthening women's participation toward sustainable structural transformation.
Keywords: Gender Norms; Pesantren Curriculum; Critical Ethnography; Patriarchy.	



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INTRODUCTION

Pesantren, as traditional Islamic educational institutions, play a strategic role in shaping character, religious values, and social norms in Indonesia. Amid rapid social changes, the curriculum practices in pesantren have received increasing attention, particularly regarding how pesantren reproduce or negotiate gender norms. Salim (2020) notes that many pesantren still maintain traditional gender structures, while Sanah et al. (2021) question the position of gender roles within their curricula. By integrating formal and nonformal education, pesantren possess strong authority in transmitting values to millions of students. Wahyono (2023) reports that there are 39,043 pesantren across Indonesia, with the highest concentrations in West Java (12,121) and East Java (6,744), indicating the extensive influence of pesantren in shaping social norms (Suryadi et al., 2025; Nadhifah et al., 2025).

Previous studies have extensively examined gender issues in pesantren. However, the curriculum remains shaped by patriarchal perspectives that position women as subordinate (Ali & Naylor, 2013; Pierik, 2022; Liu, 2023). Conceptually, this reflects structural inequality reproduced through the education system. Empirical evidence is seen in gender-insensitive teaching materials and the limited presence of women in leadership (Kurniawati & Muafiah, 2023), as well as patriarchal bias embedded in texts, pedagogical practices, and institutional structures (Dema, 2008). These conditions reinforce stereotypes that hinder women's empowerment. Although gender mainstreaming initiatives have been introduced (Fauzi & Zebua, 2020; Fitriyah et al., 2023), normative-descriptive approaches remain insufficient to uncover internal dynamics (Malihah et al., 2023; Wardiana et al., 2024). Discursive micro mechanisms of patriarchal reproduction, hierarchical "neutral" practices, and negotiation resistance processes remain underexplored (Nikjoo et al., 2025). Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by employing a critical ethnographic approach to reconstruct the dynamics of gender reproduction and contestation in pesantren.

This article aims to analyze the deconstruction of gender norms within pesantren curricula by examining the reproduction of gender inequality, forms of resistance, structural barriers, and the limited representation of female Islamic scholars. In line with these aims, the study addresses four research questions: (1) how pesantren curricula reproduce gender inequality by positioning women as domestic caretakers and educational objects within vertical power relations; (2) how resistance emerges through progressive female teachers' reinterpretation of religious texts, students' critiques of kitab kuning, and informal learning communities; (3) how the primary barriers to gender-responsive curricula include monolithic religious content, patriarchal institutional structures, and limited teacher competence; and (4) how the minimal representation of female Islamic scholars in the curriculum limits students' recognition of female religious role models. Accordingly, this study theoretically confirms the persistence of patriarchal habitus and micro-resistance, while practically recommending curriculum reform, teacher training, and the mainstreaming of female Islamic scholars within pesantren education.

This study is grounded in the argument that pesantren function as arenas of layered patriarchal reproduction through kitab kuning, pedagogical practices, institutional structures, and symbolic representations. The curriculum positions women within domestic roles and limits their access to intellectual authority. Within these rigid structures, subtle forms of resistance emerge through progressive female teachers' reinterpretation of religious texts, students' critiques of kitab kuning, and informal learning communities. However, such resistance remains largely symbolic in the absence of structural reform. The primary barriers include monolithic curricula, patriarchal hierarchies, and limited gender competence among educators. Therefore, transforming pesantren requires curriculum reform, critical pedagogy,

and the active inclusion of women within institutional structures. This study proposes a new conceptual framework of layered reproduction contestation, enriching Bourdieu's discourse on patriarchal habitus. This novelty provides an original contribution to the literature on Islamic education and gender studies within religious institutions.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study employed a critical ethnographic approach (McGrath & Hand, 2021) using an instrumental case study design at Pesantren Nurul Huda Situbondo. Textual narrative analysis was informed by Nasheeda Aishath et al. (2019) and Naeem et al. (2023). Although field observation was limited, curriculum documents were treated as cultural artifacts representing power relations (Boote & Beile, 2005; Bowen, 2009). The selection of a single case was based on its internal diversity, enabling comparative analysis across sub-units. As a modern pesantren integrating religious and general education, this setting allowed critical document analysis alongside interpretations of everyday practices and actors' experiences, thereby revealing implicit structures and overlooked ideological positions.

Data Sources

Research data were collected through interviews and analyses of pesantren documents to examine gender norms within the learning domain. Referring to Guo et al. (2024), semi-structured qualitative interviews were employed to capture the experiences and meanings constructed by educational actors within the socio-cultural context of pesantren. Primary data consisted of curriculum documents, including kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), which were analyzed to identify the construction of gender narratives within formal policies. Secondary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with ten informants. These interviews complemented the document analysis by incorporating the lived experiences of the actors, thereby strengthening the understanding of gender dynamics within pesantren educational practices.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the critical ethnographic approach proposed by Carspecken (1996), which positions pesantren as social arenas where values, ideologies, and power relations are produced and reproduced (Morison & Macleod, 2013; Ghimire, 2021). The analysis focused on everyday practices, interactions among actors, and curriculum documents as well as kitab kuning as cultural artifacts to trace the construction and negotiation of gender norms, while uncovering structures of patriarchal domination and forms of resistance. Discursive practice analysis examined the production, distribution, and interpretation of texts within teacher student relations (Ong et al., 2024), whereas social practice analysis situated discourse within broader socio-religious power relations. Thematic analysis was employed to identify discursive patterns that both sustain and challenge traditional gender norms (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Slemon, 2025; Dewangga et al., 2025).

Triangulation and Validity

The quality of this research was ensured through source triangulation, theoretical triangulation, and ideological critique (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009). Source triangulation was carried out by comparing curriculum documents, kitab kuning, and interview data, while theoretical triangulation utilized Islamic feminist theory, critical pedagogy, and critical ethnography. Ideological critique was applied to reveal textual biases and ensure a reflective analysis of gender discourse embedded within power relations, emphasizing the connection

between institutional documents and everyday social practices within the pesantren environment.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Reproduction of gender inequality through pesantren curriculum

The fundamental problem in pesantren curricula is their systematic reproduction of gender inequality. Instead of functioning as an emancipatory space, the curriculum perpetuates unequal power relations between men and women. Through the use of authoritative texts and biased instructional designs, pesantren institutions, both directly and indirectly, legitimize male domination, restrict female representation, and confine women's roles to the limited domestic sphere. This condition can be understood as a form of institutionalized symbolic violence that is historically reproduced within religious educational practices.

This aligns with an interview with Ustadzah SA, who expressed her concern: "Women in pesantren are taught to be obedient and to manage the household, because that is their primary duty." (Interview, 2025) On the other hand, a female student, ANH, voiced her hope for change: "We want to be involved in decision-making at the pesantren, not just follow the existing rules." (Interview, 2025) Both statements reveal a gap between the norms being taught and the desire for more equal participation.

Table 1

Representation of Gender Norms in Pesantren Curriculum

Curriculum Component	Findings on Gender Representation	Critical Analysis
<i>Kitab Kuning</i> (fiqh content)	Women are constructed as household caretakers	Religious knowledge is produced monologically, legitimizing gender-based divisions of labor as absolute truths
Islamic Education Modules	Women's obedience to husbands is taught as a religious obligation	Women's subjectivity is reduced to vertical power relations (wife–husband), thereby limiting women's access to public spaces
Formal Curriculum (general subjects)	Men are positioned as leaders and educators, while women are treated as educational objects	The curriculum structure reproduces gender hierarchy through male-biased intellectual authority and leadership

Source: Processed by the researcher, 2025.

Table 1 demonstrates that pesantren curricula systematically reproduce gender inequality. Within *kitab kuning*, women are constructed solely as household caretakers, reflecting a cultural distortion in which religious knowledge is produced monologically and gender-based divisions of labor are treated as absolute truths. Islamic Education modules teach wives' obedience to husbands as a religious obligation, reducing women's subjectivity to vertical power relations while simultaneously limiting their access to public spaces. Meanwhile, the formal curriculum positions men as leaders and educators, whereas women are treated merely as educational objects, reflecting masculine hegemony within the institution through male-biased intellectual authority and leadership.

Based on the findings, the pesantren curriculum reveals three mechanisms through which gender inequality is reproduced. First, within *kitab kuning*, cultural distortion occurs as religious knowledge is produced monologically, causing gender-based divisions of labor to be treated as absolute truths and constructing women solely as household caretakers. Second, Islamic Education modules normalize domination by teaching wives' obedience to

husbands as a religious obligation, thereby reducing women’s subjectivity to vertical power relations and limiting their access to public spaces. Third, the formal curriculum reinforces masculine hegemony within the institution by positioning men as leaders and educators, while women are treated merely as educational objects. This three layers cultural distortion, normalization of domination, and institutional hegemony mutually reinforce one another, transforming the curriculum into a systematic instrument for reproducing gender inequality.

Internal resistance and negotiation among students and progressive educators

Pesantren frequently reproduce gender inequality through normative religious legitimacy. However, beneath these rigid hierarchies, subtle forms of resistance emerge: female teachers reinterpret patriarchal texts, students critically engage with *kitab kuning*, and informal study groups create alternative discursive spaces beyond institutional authority. These practices represent latent forms of resistance that gradually challenge and shift the dominance of masculine discourse from within the pesantren itself.

Changes in pesantren educational practices have begun to emerge through reflective narratives that indicate resistance to patriarchal domination within the Islamic curriculum. This was expressed by SA: “I believe it is important to incorporate gender-equitable interpretations so that female students do not feel that Islam belongs only to men” (Interview, 2025). Similarly, NF stated: “The classical texts we study sometimes make me feel that I have no place in the public sphere. However, when the female teacher explained them contextually, I realized that Islam does not exclude women” (Interview, 2025). These findings suggest that resistance to patriarchy within pesantren curricula, through gender-equitable interpretations, has gradually reshaped the understanding that Islam does not marginalize women from participation in public life.

Table 2
Forms of Resistance and Gender Negotiation in Pesantren

Figure	Actors	Forms of Resistance	Critical Analysis
	Progressive female teachers	Integrating feminist interpretations into tafsir and fiqh instruction	Progressive female teachers reinterpret authoritative texts to deconstruct cultural distortions that subordinate women, acting as critical agents within the hierarchical structure of pesantren.
	Female students	Critically engaging with kitab kuning during classroom discussions	Female students’ resistance is manifested through the negotiation of textual meanings, where their discomfort reflects an emerging proto-critical consciousness.
	Study groups	Establishing informal discussion communities on women and Islam	Study groups create alternative public spaces free from institutional authority, functioning both as resistance and as the reconstruction of counter-knowledge.

Source: Processed by the researcher, 2025.

Table 2 identifies three forms of resistance to patriarchy within pesantren. First, progressive female teachers integrate feminist interpretations into the teaching of tafsir and fiqh, thereby opening spaces for the reinterpretation of authoritative texts. Second, female students actively critique *kitab kuning* during classroom discussions, expressing discomfort toward gender-biased texts. Third, informal study groups have emerged to discuss women and Islam as alternative spaces beyond the control of pesantren authority. These three

forms of resistance are subtle yet significant, reflecting collective efforts to challenge cultural distortions, develop critical consciousness, and construct counter-knowledge from within the hierarchical structure of pesantren.

Based on the research data, resistance emerging within pesantren demonstrates collective agency in confronting patriarchal hegemony. Progressive female teachers act as critical agents engaged in dialogic data reconstruction, deconstructing cultural distortions by introducing alternative interpretations without abandoning scholarly authority. Meanwhile, female students develop a proto-critical consciousness through their recognition of discomfort toward texts, which serves as an initial foundation for more advanced critical awareness. Informal study groups create an alternative public sphere, a relatively autonomous space from traditional power control, enabling the collective production of counter-knowledge. These three layers of resistance mutually reinforce one another: reinterpretation of texts by female teachers facilitates student critique, while informal discussion spaces sustain the continuity of the movement. This internal transformation indicates that structural change can emerge latently before becoming visible at the surface level.

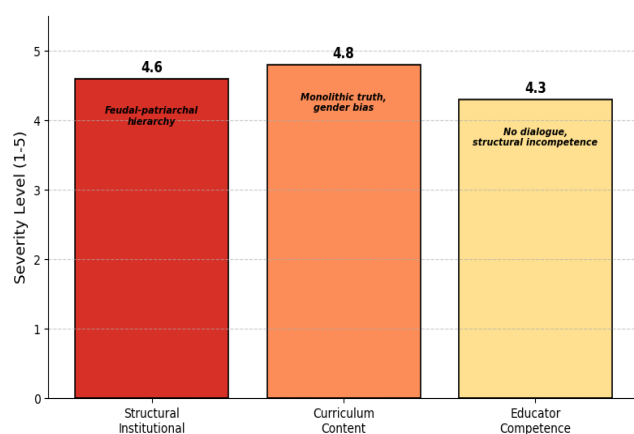
Systemic barriers to a gender-responsive curriculum in pesantren

Pesantren, as an ideal moral institution, in fact systematically reproduces gender inequality. This condition is not caused by individuals, but by institutional structures, curricula, and educators' competencies that perpetuate gender bias. The absence of dialogic spaces, stagnation of teaching materials, and limited gender training further reinforce the reproduction of inequality. As a result, gender disparities are continuously reproduced and legitimized in the name of tradition and religion, reflecting a structural institutional failure that is rarely critically examined in depth.

This is reflected in an interview with MZ: "The teaching materials are still too rigid regarding women's roles, whereas students are now beginning to question why women are only placed in the kitchen or at home" (Interview, 2025). Similarly, LH stated: "I often feel that women are not considered important in the textbooks we study. We also want to learn about great women in Islamic history, not only stories about men" (Interview, 2025). Thus, pesantren teaching materials are perceived as rigid and gender-biased, leading students to increasingly question the restriction of women's roles and to demand greater representation of prominent female figures in Islamic history.

Figure 1

Barriers to the Implementation of a Gender-Responsive Curriculum in Pesantren



Source: Processed by the researcher, 2025

Figure 1 shows three main barriers to the implementation of a gender-responsive curriculum. First, institutional structural barriers (score 4.6) involve a vertical hierarchy that institutionalizes feudal-patriarchal values through rules and oral traditions, making resistance to gender equality not merely an individual choice but a systemic product. Second, curricular content barriers (score 4.8), the highest, arise from the positioning of religious knowledge as a monolithic and stagnant truth, neglecting the historical roles of women and failing to be updated in accordance with the needs of contemporary students. Third, teacher competency barriers (score 4.3) result from limited gender training and lack of dialogic spaces, producing structural incapacity that perpetuates bias.

Based on the research findings, these three barriers are systemic and mutually reinforcing. Institutional structural barriers serve as the foundation that makes policy change difficult to implement, as oral traditions and the *kyai–ustadz–santri* hierarchy are not easily challenged. At the curriculum level, the hegemony of monolithic knowledge prevents teaching materials from being revised, resulting in the continuous reproduction of gender bias. Meanwhile, teacher competency barriers indicate that although some educators show good intentions, the absence of concrete training and dialogic spaces hinders pedagogical transformation. Most critically, these structural incapacities function as a safeguard of the status quo: without simultaneous intervention across structure, content, and educator capacity, a gender-responsive curriculum cannot be realized. The researcher confirms that these data were obtained through source triangulation at Pesantren Nurul Huda.

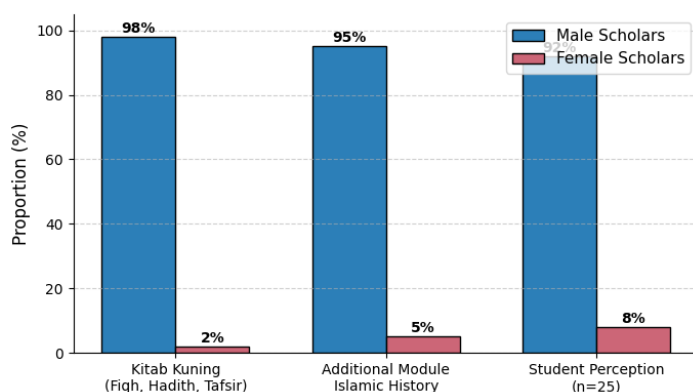
Limited representation of female Islamic scholars in the pesantren curriculum

The representation of female Islamic scholars in the pesantren curriculum remains very limited, both in *kitab kuning* and Islamic history modules. Learning narratives are dominated by male scholars, resulting in religious authority and leadership being constructed as a masculine domain. Consequently, women's contributions to Islamic history are marginalized and not positioned as central figures. This condition limits students' understanding and reflects the systematic reproduction of gender bias within the pesantren curriculum at an institutional level.

This is reflected in the statement of SR: "I have never found a single female scholar in the fiqh textbooks we study. It seems as if women have no place in the history of Islamic scholarship" (Interview, 2025). Furthermore, AR stated: "The history books we study only discuss figures such as Umar, Abu Hanifah, Shafi'i, and others. There are no stories about knowledgeable women, even though we also want to learn about them" (Interview, 2025). Meanwhile, MZ explained: "I often insert stories of female figures in class so that students understand that women also play an important role. Even though they are not included in the official module, I believe it is important for them" (Interview, 2025).

Figure 2

Representation of Islamic Scholars in the Pesantren Curriculum



Source: Processed by the researcher, 2025.

Figure 2 shows an imbalance in the representation of Islamic scholars in the pesantren curriculum. In *Kitab Kuning* materials (fiqh, hadith, and tafsir), male scholars account for 98%, while female scholars represent only 2%. Female figures are mentioned passively rather than being presented as central figures. In the Additional Islamic History module, the proportion is 95% male scholars and 5% female scholars, with limited references to general names such as Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah or Sayyidah Khadijah. Furthermore, student perceptions (n=25) indicate that 92% of respondents only recognize male scholars as role models, while only 8% can mention female scholars. In other words, students rarely recognize female scholars as role models in religious learning.

Based on the research findings, this imbalance in the representation of Islamic scholars constitutes a form of structured symbolic violence. The pesantren curriculum does not merely neglect female figures but actively erases traces of women's intellectual leadership in Islamic history. The proportion of 98% male scholars in *kitab kuning* indicates that scholarly authority is constructed in a monolithic and masculine manner. Figures such as Siti Aisyah, Ummu Salamah, and Fatimah al-Fihri, who should serve as role models, are instead reduced to marginal references. As a result, students' perceptions (only 8% recognizing female scholars) directly reflect curricular distortion. This creates a vicious cycle: the absence of female role models reinforces the belief that women are unfit for religious leadership. Thus, representation is not merely a matter of numbers, but the production of a false consciousness of gender hierarchy legitimized as religious doctrine.

Discussion

The findings of this critical ethnographic study at Pesantren Nurul Huda indicate that, first, the pesantren curriculum reproduces gender inequality by constructing women as domestic caretakers and educational objects within vertical power relations. Second, despite this dominance, forms of resistance emerge through progressive female teachers who reinterpret religious texts, students who critically engage with *kitab kuning*, and informal learning groups. Third, the main barrier to implementing a gender-responsive curriculum is the dominance of monolithic religious content, followed by institutional structural constraints and gender-biased educator competencies. Fourth, the representation of female Islamic scholars remains very limited, resulting in most students rarely or never recognizing female figures as role models in religious education. Overall, the curriculum reproduces gender inequality, resistance emerges, but is constrained by structural, curricular, and representational limitations.

These findings are relevant to gender equality in Indonesian pesantren. Subaidi et al. (2023) show that spiritually egalitarian pesantren still maintain patriarchal structures, consistent with the first finding that curricula reproduce gender inequality by positioning women as domestic caretakers and educational objects. Fotaki & Pullen (2023) and Prasmiwardana et al. (2025) confirm androcentric curricula. The second finding identifies resistance through progressive female teachers, student critiques of *kitab kuning*, and informal learning groups, aligning with Muslim feminist perspectives (Stack, 2020; Gupta et al., 2023). Although structural legitimacy is needed for transformation (Kuteesa et al., 2024; Walsh et al., 2025), the third finding highlights key barriers: monolithic religious content, institutional constraints, and biased educator competencies. The fourth finding shows that minimal representation of female scholars sustains symbolic domination (Hora, 2014), limiting students' recognition of female role models despite growing demands for inclusivity (Arquisola & Rentschler, 2023).

Theoretically, these findings confirm Bourdieu's (1984) concept of patriarchal habitus. The first finding shows that the curriculum reproduces gender inequality by positioning women as domestic caretakers and educational objects. Male authority is further reinforced (Kark & Buengeler, 2024) by the fourth finding, which highlights the minimal representation of female Islamic scholars, limiting students' recognition of female role models. Critical discourse analysis (Zhang & Zhang, 2021) confirms that kitab kuning constructs ideological realities. However, the second finding reveals micro-resistance (Haugaard, 2022), including progressive female teachers' reinterpretation of texts, students' critiques, and informal learning groups, aligning with Kabeer's (2016) reflective agency. The third finding identifies key barriers: monolithic religious content, institutional structures, and limited educator competence. Because resistance is not supported by structural reform, its impact remains symbolic. Thus, pesantren function as arenas of contestation (Nisa'u & Karsidi, 2025) but have not yet transformed the institutional habitus fundamentally.

This study shows that social transformation in pesantren cannot rely solely on individual resistance. The first finding indicates that the curriculum reproduces gender inequality by positioning women as domestic caretakers and educational objects. Micro-resistance (Vu & Pham, 2022), including progressive female teachers' reinterpretation of texts, students' critiques of kitab kuning, and informal learning groups (second finding), represents important but fragile efforts without systemic support (Shallaita et al., 2021). The third finding identifies key barriers: monolithic religious content, institutional structures, and limited educator competence. The dominance of patriarchal epistemology (Rahman, 2017; Srimulyani, 2007) is reinforced by the fourth finding, which shows minimal representation of female Islamic scholars, limiting students' recognition of female role models. Therefore, sustainable transformation requires a gender-responsive curriculum through integrating female scholars' works (Fitriyah & Rahman, 2024), critical pedagogy training (Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2024), and dialogic spaces for evaluating classical texts (Ansori et al., 2025; Zamzami & Putri, 2024).

This study strengthens critical literature on spatial segregation as patriarchy. First finding, curriculum reproduces gender inequality by positioning women as domestic caretakers. Safitri et al. (2025) and Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) argue spatial separation subordinates' women, consistent with fourth finding: minimal representation of female scholars limits student role models. From Bourdieusian perspective (Bourdieu, 1984; Edgerton & Roberts, 2014), institutional habitus restricts social and cultural capital. Lindell (2022) interprets segregation as symbolic violence, reinforced by third finding: barriers to gender-responsive curriculum include monolithic content, institutional structures, and educator competence. The study's novelty lies in negotiative agency (second finding): resistance through progressive female teachers' text reinterpretation, students' critiques of kitab kuning, and informal learning groups, demonstrating pesantren as contestation arena. This study proposes a "model of pesantren patriarchal contestation" in Indonesian pesantren (Nurfai, 2022; Vohra et al., 2015).

Based on empirical evidence, this study proposes several policy recommendations for pesantren. First, curriculum reform through the integration of gender-sensitive interpretations and works by female Islamic scholars, accompanied by critical evaluation of *kitab kuning* that reflect patriarchal bias. Second, the provision of continuous training for both male and female teachers on dialogical pedagogy, gender equality, and the facilitation of inclusive discussion spaces. Third, the revision of institutional regulations to ensure equal access for female students to advanced tafsir studies, formal forums, and leadership positions. Fourth, the use of digital technologies, such as virtual discussion platforms, to

overcome physical limitations caused by spatial segregation, as well as the provision of recorded learning materials to support equal symbolic access. Fifth, the establishment of participatory committees involving female students, progressive female teachers, and pesantren administrators to formulate policies on learning space governance and curriculum development. These recommendations aim to shift agency from symbolic forms toward sustainable structural transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the pesantren curriculum systematically reproduces gender inequality through three mechanisms: the construction of women as domestic caretakers and educational objects, the minimal representation of female Islamic scholars, and the dominance of monolithic religious content that is resistant to reinterpretation. The most significant barrier lies in the curriculum itself, which positions religious knowledge as absolute truth, followed by feudal-patriarchal hierarchical structures and biased educator competencies. Amid this dominance, forms of micro-resistance emerge through progressive female teachers who reinterpret texts, students who critically engage with *kitab kuning*, and informal learning groups. However, because such resistance is not accompanied by structural reform, its impact remains largely symbolic. Thus, while pesantren function as arenas of contestation, the patriarchal habitus has not yet been fundamentally transformed.

This study contributes to expanding the concept of patriarchal habitus by demonstrating how religious dominance is legitimized through texts, pedagogical practices, leadership structures, and spatial segregation. It also proposes a “model of pesantren patriarchal contestation,” illustrating the ongoing tension between the reproduction of inequality and micro-level resistance from within the system. Practically, the findings call for curriculum reform through the integration of works by female Islamic scholars, critical and dialogical pedagogical training for educators, and the revision of institutional regulations to ensure equal access for female students to formal forums and leadership positions. In addition, the use of digital technologies and the establishment of participatory committees involving female students, progressive female teachers, and pesantren administrators are strategic steps to shift symbolic agency toward sustainable structural transformation.

This study is limited to a single pesantren (*Pesantren Nurul Huda*) using a critical ethnographic approach; therefore, the generalizability of its findings needs to be tested across different pesantren typologies, such as modern pesantren, traditional (salaf) pesantren, or female-led pesantren. In addition, the study focuses primarily on curriculum and learning processes and does not yet explore longitudinally how micro-resistance evolves or diminishes over time. Future research could examine the effectiveness of gender-sensitive curriculum reform interventions through participatory action research. Comparative studies between pesantren that have and have not implemented reforms are also needed to identify key factors for successful transformation. Finally, studies on the perceptions and subjective experiences of female students as agents of change should be further developed using narrative or phenomenological approaches.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Ach Barocky Zaimina: Conceptualization; Formal Analysis; Methodology, Investigation, Project Administration; Writing-original draft. **Asnawan:** Conceptualization; Formal Analysis; Resources and Investigation. **Anuwat Sohwang:** Formal Analysis; Visualization and Writing-review & editing.

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