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Negotiating Gender Justice in Indonesian Pesantren: Muslim Women's Reception of the Qur'anic Interpretations of Husein Muhammad and Zaitunah Subhan

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Abstract

Research on gender justice in Qur'anic interpretation has largely focused on textual analysis and normative debates, with less attention to how progressive interpretations are received and negotiated by Muslim women in pesantren. This study examines how Muslim women in seven pesantren in Probolinggo Regency, East Java, Indonesia, receive and contextualize gender justice ideas developed by K.H. Husein Muhammad and Zaitunah Subhan. Using a qualitative case study design, it draws on interviews, observations, and documentary sources, with participants comprising *nyai*, *ning*, female religious teachers, and senior female students. The data are analyzed through Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework and Hans-Robert Jauss's reception theory, complemented by the Living Qur'an approach. The findings indicate that participants articulate gender justice through the concepts of reciprocal equality (*musāwah mu'ādalah*) and human dignity (*karāmah insāniyyah*). Their responses involve negotiating contemporary gender discourses with the scholarly traditions of pesantren, particularly the *kitab kuning*, and with established practices of religious instruction and institutional life. These negotiations are reflected in how women's roles in religious interpretation, education, and institutional leadership are understood and articulated. Building on these findings, the study proposes a Contextual Reception Model of Gender Justice to explain how women in traditional pesantren engage with gender justice ideas through context-sensitive negotiations with Islamic scholarly traditions. The study contributes to gender and Qur'anic studies by conceptualizing reception as a social and religious process through which interpretive ideas are negotiated and translated into pesantren life.

Keywords: Gender Justice, Reception Theory, Living Qur'an, Pesantren, Muslim Women's Agency.

Abstrak

Penelitian tentang keadilan gender dalam penafsiran Al-Qur'an selama ini lebih banyak berfokus pada analisis tekstual dan perdebatan normatif, sementara perhatian terhadap bagaimana penafsiran progresif diterima dan dinegosiasikan oleh perempuan Muslim di lingkungan pesantren masih relatif terbatas. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana perempuan Muslim di tujuh pesantren di Kabupaten Probolinggo, Jawa Timur, Indonesia, menerima dan mengontekstualisasikan gagasan keadilan gender yang dikembangkan oleh K.H. Husein Muhammad dan Zaitunah Subhan. Dengan menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini memanfaatkan data yang diperoleh melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Partisipan penelitian terdiri atas nyai, ning, ustazah, serta santri perempuan senior. Data dianalisis menggunakan kerangka encoding/decoding Stuart Hall dan teori resepsi Hans-Robert Jauss, yang dilengkapi dengan pendekatan Living Qur'an. Hasil

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penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para partisipan mengartikulasikan keadilan gender melalui konsep kesetaraan timbal balik (musāwah mu'ādalah) dan martabat kemanusiaan (karāmah insāniyyah). Respons mereka melibatkan proses negosiasi antara wacana gender kontemporer dan tradisi keilmuan pesantren, khususnya kitab kuning, serta praktik pengajaran agama dan kehidupan kelembagaan yang telah mapan. Proses negosiasi tersebut tercermin dalam cara mereka memahami dan mengartikulasikan peran perempuan dalam penafsiran agama, pendidikan, dan kepemimpinan kelembagaan. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, penelitian ini mengusulkan Model Resepsi Kontekstual Keadilan Gender (Contextual Reception Model of Gender Justice) untuk menjelaskan bagaimana perempuan di pesantren tradisional merespons dan mengembangkan gagasan keadilan gender melalui proses negosiasi dengan tradisi keilmuan Islam yang mempertimbangkan konteks sosial dan keagamaan mereka. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi terhadap kajian gender dan studi Al-Qur'an dengan mengonseptualisasikan resepsi sebagai proses sosial dan keagamaan yang memungkinkan gagasan penafsiran dinegosiasikan dan diwujudkan dalam kehidupan pesantren.

Kata Kunci: *Keadilan Gender, Resepsi Al-Qur'an, Agensi Perempuan, Pesantren, Penafsiran Al-Qur'an.*

A. Introduction

The discourse on gender justice in Qur'anic interpretation has become one of the most dynamic and contested areas within contemporary Islamic scholarship.[1] Across Muslim societies, debates surrounding women's rights, gender equality, religious authority, and the interpretation of sacred texts have intensified in response to broader social transformations, including democratization, educational expansion, digital religious engagement, and the growing visibility of Muslim women in public life. These developments have encouraged renewed examinations of classical exegetical traditions and stimulated the emergence of interpretive approaches that seek to reconcile Islamic teachings with principles of justice, equality, and human dignity.[2] Within this context, gender-sensitive Qur'anic interpretation has gained increasing scholarly attention as an effort to revisit inherited understandings of religious texts and to explore alternative readings that are more responsive to contemporary realities.[3] This issue is particularly significant in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, where debates on gender justice intersect with local religious traditions, educational institutions, and socio-cultural norms that continue to shape Muslim women's lived experiences.[4]

The growing prominence of gender discourse in Islamic studies has generated substantial academic discussions concerning the relationship between scripture,

[1] Muhammad Fauzi Noor, 'A Feminist Interpretation of Qur'anic Texts by Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan', *INTIHA: Islamic Education Journal*, 1.3 (2024), pp. 144–56.

[2] Husnul Khotimah, 'Paradigma Tafsir Egalitarianisme Zaitunah Subhan Dalam Tafsir Kebencian', *Journal of Islamic Thought and Philosophy*, 2.2 (2023), pp. 185–207.

[3] Aksin Wijaya, Ibnu Muchlis, and Dawam Multazam Rohmatulloh, 'Rethinking Gender Justice in the Quran: A Critical Exploration of Muslim Feminist Perspectives', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis*, 26.1 (2025), pp. 77–98; Johannes Buthelezi and Johannes Buthelezi, 'A Phenomenological Exploration of Tertiary Sport Activities for Students with Non-Normative Gender Expressions in Three South African Institutions A Phenomenological Exploration of Tertiary Sport Activities for Students with Non-Normative Gender Expressions in Three South African Institutions', 6627 (2026), doi:10.1080/18146627.2026.2646512.

[4] Sahan Bulathwela and others, 'Artificial Intelligence Alone Will Not Democratise Education: On Educational Inequality, Techno-Solutionism and Inclusive Tools', *Sustainability*, 16.2 (2024), p. 781.

interpretation, and social transformation[5].Rather than viewing the Qur'an as inherently patriarchal or egalitarian, contemporary scholars increasingly emphasize that gender relations within Muslim societies are mediated through interpretive processes that are historically, culturally, and politically situated.[6] Consequently, the question is no longer limited to what the Qur'an says about women, but extends to how its meanings are produced, negotiated, and implemented by diverse Muslim communities.[7] This shift has encouraged scholars to investigate not only exegetical texts but also the reception and appropriation of religious interpretations among ordinary believers. Such an approach is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where pesantren continue to function as influential centers of religious learning, social reproduction, and authority formation.[8] As institutions that transmit Islamic knowledge while simultaneously responding to societal change, pesantren provide a critical arena in which debates on gender justice are interpreted, contested, and reconfigured.

Among the most influential contributors to contemporary Indonesian discussions on gender justice are Husein Muhammad and Zaitunah Subhan.[9] Both scholars have advanced interpretive frameworks that challenge patriarchal readings of the Qur'an and advocate a more inclusive understanding of gender relations grounded in Islamic ethical principles.[10] Their works emphasize justice, reciprocity, and human dignity as fundamental values underlying Qur'anic teachings, thereby offering alternative perspectives to conventional interpretations that have often legitimized gender hierarchy.[11] The significance of their contributions lies not merely in their reinterpretation of specific verses but also in their broader effort to reconstruct the relationship between Islamic textual authority and contemporary concerns regarding women's rights.[12] Their ideas have been widely discussed within academic circles, Islamic organizations, and educational institutions, making them important references in the ongoing development of Islamic feminist thought in Indonesia.[13]

Recent studies have contributed significantly to understanding the intellectual foundations of gender-sensitive Qur'anic interpretation.[14] Existing scholarship has examined the hermeneutical approaches employed by Muslim feminist scholars, the epistemological assumptions underlying gender-just interpretations, and the implications of these

[5] Ana Rahmawati and others, 'Interpretation and Cultural Implementation of the Qur'ānic Jilbāb Verses: A Living Qur'ān Study in Pesantren', *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 16.1 (2026), pp. 70–85; Umniyatul Labibah, Imam Taufiq, and Moh Yasir Alimi, 'Living Qur'an of Pesantren Women: A Manifestation of QS. An-Nisa 34 in A Woman Leadership Role of Nyai Munjidah Wahab', *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis*, 23.1 (2022), pp. 89–110.

[6] umniyatul Labibah, "Living Qur'an Perempuan Pesantren," n.d.

[7] Arif Rahman and others, 'Living Qur'an Approach to Improve Critical Thinking Skills in Islamic Religious Education Learning', *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education*, 8.4 (2024), pp. 1383–98.

[8] Moh Toriquddin and others, 'Living Qur'an, Niqab, and Islamic Law: A Study at Mambaush Sholihin Islamic Boarding School, Gresik, East Java', *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 8.2 (2024), pp. 934–53.

[9] Iffah Khoiriyatul Muyassaroh, Maragustam Siregar, and Marhumah Marhumah, 'Living Tafsir in Ponorogo Pesantren: Epistemic Typologies of Female Ulama on Gendered Scriptural Readings', *PALASTREN: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 18.2 (2025), pp. 209–40.

[10] Zaenatul Hakamah, Dhiyaatul Millah, and Azra Jinggan Avicena, 'Revisiting Contemporary Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia: A Critical Case Study of The Living Qur'an Method at IAIN Kediri', *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman*, 37.1 (2026), pp. 255–72.

[11] Hakamah, Millah, and Avicena, 'Revisiting Contemporary Qur'anic Studies in Indonesia: A Critical Case Study of The Living Qur'an Method at IAIN Kediri'.

[12] Judith Harford, Richard Bruton, and Brian Fleming, 'Perspectives on Education Policy-Making in Ireland, 1990–2025', *Irish Educational Studies* 2026, 2026, pp. 1–19.

[13] Shinta Nurani, Luthfi Maulana, and Eni Purwati, 'Living Qur'an as New Market Trends of Islamic Education in Indonesia', *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies*, 6.1 (2022), pp. 1–18.

[14] Khotimah, 'Paradigma Tafsir Egalitarianisme Zaitunah Subhan Dalam Tafsir Kebencian'.

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interpretations for Islamic legal and social discourse.[15] Other studies have explored the role of pesantren in promoting gender awareness, the transformation of women's religious leadership, and the negotiation of gender norms within Islamic educational settings.[16] These studies have enriched scholarly understanding of the interaction between Islam and gender in contemporary Indonesia.[17] Nevertheless, much of the existing literature remains concentrated on textual analysis, intellectual biography, normative theological debates, or institutional policy discussions.[18] Consequently, relatively limited attention has been devoted to examining how Muslim women themselves receive, interpret, negotiate, and internalize gender-just Qur'anic interpretations within their everyday religious experiences.[19]

This limitation reveals an important gap within contemporary Qur'anic studies.[20] While scholars have extensively analyzed the ideas of Husein Muhammad and Zaitunah Subhan, there remains insufficient empirical understanding of how these ideas are understood and appropriated by women who occupy different positions within pesantren communities.[21] Existing studies often assume a linear relationship between progressive interpretations and social transformation, overlooking the complex processes through which religious meanings are accepted, modified, resisted, or contextualized by local actors. Such an omission is particularly significant because pesantren are characterized by layered authority structures involving charismatic leadership, textual traditions, educational practices, and communal norms.[22] Muslim women within these institutions, including nyai, ning, ustadzah, senior female students, and university-level santriwati, are not merely passive recipients of religious knowledge but active participants in the production and negotiation of religious meaning.[23] Understanding their perspectives is therefore essential for explaining how gender justice discourses circulate and acquire relevance within lived religious contexts.[24]

Addressing this gap requires an analytical framework capable of capturing the dynamic interaction between text, interpretation, and social experience. This study employs Reception Theory and the Living Qur'an approach as complementary perspectives for examining the reception of gender-just Qur'anic interpretations among Muslim women in

[15] Labibah, Taufiq, and Alimi, 'Living Qur'an of Pesantren Women: A Manifestation of QS. An-Nisa 34 in A Woman Leadership Role of Nyai Munjidah Wahab'.

[16] Fatmawati Fatmawati and others, 'Transformation of Women's Leadership in Pesantren from Fiqh Siyāsah Perspective: Social Dynamics in the Patriarchal Culture of South Sulawesi', *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 8.3 (2024), pp. 1800–17.

[17] Fatmawati Fatmawati, 'Gender, Authority, and Islamic Education: Bu Nyai's Role in Shaping Feminist Thought in Indonesian Pesantren', *Syaikhuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pranata Islam*, 15.02 (2024), pp. 357–80; Mohammad Dendy Musthofa, 'Gender Leadership and the Dynamics of Women's Leadership in Islamic Educational Institutions', *Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 11.1 (2026).

[18] Peu Saha and Abhijeet Biswas, 'Pathways to the Soul: Examining the Role of Mindfulness, Inner Peace, Emotional Resilience, and Social Support in Spiritual Tourism', *Tourism Recreation Research* 2026, 2026, pp. 1–22.

[19] Hsin-Yun Chuang and Fong-Jia Wang, 'Body-Mind Harmony in Taekwondo: Mindfulness as a Moderator in Enhancing Physical Literacy, Self-Efficacy, and Learning Outcomes', *Quest* 2026, 2026, pp. 1–16.

[20] Najiburrohman Najiburrohman and Fitriyatul Hasanah, 'Student Reception On The Implementation Of One Day One Page: Study Living Qur'an At Pondok Pesantren', *MUSHAF: Jurnal Tafsir Berwawasan Keindonesiaan*, 2.2 (2022), pp. 43–59.

[21] 'Resepsi Al-Qur'an Di Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri 1 Mantingan, Ngawi, Jawa Timur', *Thaqafiyyat : Jurnal Bahasa, Peradaban Dan Informasi Islam*, 21.3, pp. 50–70, doi:10.14421/thaq.2022.22104.

[22] Seong-Su Kim, Seongbeom Kim, and Hee-Woong Kim, 'Hate Speech Detection on Online News Platforms: A Deep-Learning Approach Based on Agenda-Setting Theory', *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 42.3 (2025), pp. 673–705.

[23] Ming-Chia Hsieh, Hui-Chun Pan, and Shih-Wei Chou, 'Exploring E-Learners' It Mindfulness and Its Impact on Post-Adoption Behavior: A Dedication-Constraint Relationship of Commitment in Live Streaming Learning Environments', *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, 41.17 (2025), pp. 11055–76.

[24] Cameran Ashraf, 'Exploring the Impacts of Artificial Intelligence on Freedom of Religion or Belief Online', *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 26.5 (2022), pp. 757–91.

pesantren. Reception Theory enables the investigation of how audiences actively construct meanings from religious texts and interpretations, highlighting the role of social location, experience, and agency in shaping understanding. Meanwhile, the Living Qur'an perspective extends the analysis beyond textual interpretation by focusing on how Qur'anic meanings are embodied, practiced, and negotiated within everyday life. The integration of these two approaches constitutes the primary novelty of this study. Rather than limiting the analysis to the intellectual content of gender-sensitive exegesis, this research explores how such interpretations are received and contextualized within the socio-religious culture of pesantren, thereby bridging the gap between textual discourse and lived religious practice.

This study was conducted at seven pesantren in Probolinggo Regency, East Java, Indonesia: PP. Al-Mashduqiah Kraksaan, PP. Nurul Qur'an Kraksaan, PP. Zainul Hasan Genggong, PP. Nurul Jadid Paiton, PP. Badridduja Kraksaan, PP. Riadhussholihin, and PP. Ainul Hasan. These institutions were selected because they represent influential centers of Islamic learning with diverse educational traditions and varying degrees of engagement with contemporary gender discourse. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research explores how Muslim women occupying different positions of religious authority and social agency understand, receive, and negotiate interpretations of gender justice. The participants comprised a minimum of five women drawn from three categories of religious and social actors: nyai and ning as holders of structural and charismatic authority; ustadzah and teachers of classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) as epistemic authorities; and senior female students (santriwati) or female university students as cultural agents within pesantren communities. Participants were selected purposively based on their roles, experiences, and relevance to the research objectives. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives and practices. Data analysis involved data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretive analysis, with triangulation used to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The analysis was informed by Reception Theory, particularly Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework and Hans-Robert Jauss's reception theory, in conjunction with the Living Qur'an approach. This methodological framework enabled an in-depth examination of how interpretations of gender justice are received, negotiated, and translated into religious and social practices within pesantren settings. Against this background, the present study aims to analyze how Muslim women in pesantren understand, negotiate, and contextualize gender justice interpretations proposed by Husein Muhammad and Zaitunah Subhan. By focusing on women's reception rather than solely on the content of feminist exegesis, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between Qur'anic interpretation, religious authority, and gender transformation in contemporary Muslim societies.[25] Theoretically, it expands the application of Reception Theory and Living Qur'an studies within the field of Qur'anic interpretation. Empirically, it provides field-based evidence regarding the ways gender justice discourses are received within Indonesian pesantren communities. Practically, the findings offer insights for the development of more inclusive religious education and gender-responsive Islamic scholarship.[26] Through this contribution, the study seeks to enrich contemporary debates on gender justice by demonstrating that the significance of Qur'anic interpretation lies not only in its textual formulation but also in the diverse ways it is understood, negotiated, and lived by Muslim women within their socio-religious environments.

[25] Rania Hanafi and others, 'Islamic Religious Education and State School Policies in France and Senegal', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 48.1 (2026), pp. 92–104.

[26] Sonia Val and Alejandro Quintas, 'Key Performance Indicators for Optimizing Academic Performance and Course Design in Online Educational Platforms', *Cogent Education*, 12.1 (2025), p. 2529420, doi:10.1080/2331186X.2025.2529420.

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B. Results and Discussion

The empirical data collected from seven distinct pesantren in Probolinggo, namely PP. Al-Mashduqiah Kraksaan, PP. Nurul Qur'an Kraksaan, PP. Zainul Hasan Genggong, PP. Nurul Jadid Paiton, PP. Badridduja Kraksaan, PP. Riadhussholihin, and PP. Ainul Hasan, underwent an iterative thematic analysis to decode how gender justice is conceptualized, negotiated, and practiced. Utilizing a qualitative case study design integrated with Reception Theory and Living Qur'an frameworks, this section evaluates the voices of three critical groups of actors: the structural-charismatic authorities *(Nyai and Ning),* the epistemic authorities *(Ustadzah and kitab teachers),* and the cultural agents (senior female santri and university students). The structural organization of this section blends raw empirical data with deep theoretical hermeneutics, moving from cognitive theological understandings to structural negotiations, everyday lived realities, and finally, a synthesized contextual model of Islamic feminist reception within traditionalist and modern educational enclaves.

Understanding Gender Justice Through Qur'anic Interpretation

The conceptualization of gender justice within the pesantren ecosystem is neither a rigid adoption of secular feminist frameworks nor a passive reproduction of classical patriarchal exegesis. Rather, it represents an active, textually grounded cognitive process wherein female actors redefine fairness, equity, and human dignity (karamah insaniyyah) through specialized hermeneutical entry points. The participants across all seven institutions decode gender justice not as absolute mathematical equality (musawah mutlaqah), but as reciprocal equity (musawah mu'adalah) rooted in the ethical-universal principles of the Qur'an. This understanding directly influences how they read normative family structures, legal rights, and spiritual capacities within their local religious culture. To map out these diverse hermeneutical stances, Table 1 delineates the specific indicators, conceptual codes, and raw empirical expressions characterizing the female pesantren authorities' cognitive reception of gender justice.

Table 1: Muslim Women's Understanding of Gender Justice

Informant	Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Code
NY-1 *(Nyai, PP. Nurul Jadid)*	"Justice in the Qur'an cannot be measured by Western secular metrics of identical role distribution. It is fundamentally anchored in *karamah insaniyyah* (human dignity). When Surah al-Hujurat (49:13) declares that the most noble is the most pious, it eliminates ontological hierarchy between genders. Therefore, justice means providing equal spiritual and intellectual access while respecting functional specificities."	Ontological and Spiritual Egalitarianism	*ONT-EGAL*
US-3 *(Ustadzah, PP. Zainul Hasan Genggong)*	"We must separate the universal rulings (*al-ahkam al-kulliyyah*) from the specific-contextual rulings (*al-ahkam al-juz'iyyah*). Verse 34 of Surah an-Nisa regarding *qiwamah* (leadership/protection) is conditional upon economic maintenance (*infaq*). If a woman works or shares the household burden, the traditional autocratic interpretation of *qiwamah* must be re-negotiated to mean consultative	Hermenutical Contextualization of Text	*HERM-CONT*

	partnership (*tashawur*)."		
SN-2 *(Senior Santri, PP. Al-Mashduqiah)*	"Gender justice means that our choices to study, lead student organizations, and express opinions are not restricted by interpretations written centuries ago. The Qur'an promotes *lita'arafu* (mutual recognition), which implies that men and women must work as equal socio-religious partners in the *pesantren* space."	Socio-Religious Agency and Reciprocity	*REC-AGEN*
US-4 (Senior Ustadz, PP. Zainul Hasan Genggong)	"Gender justice in Islam should be understood through the principles of 'adl (justice), shura (consultation), and mutual responsibility. The Qur'an recognizes the dignity of both men and women while assigning moral accountability to each individual. Within the pesantren context, women's participation in education and socio-religious activities should be guided by sound Islamic understanding, respect for scholarly traditions, and the recognition of their intellectual and spiritual capacities."	Islamic Ethical Justice and Reciprocal Responsibility	*ISL-JUST*
US-5 (Senior Ustadz, PP. Nurul Jadid)	"Gender justice in the Qur'an should be understood through the integration of textual guidance, Islamic ethical principles, and the realities of contemporary society. Men and women share the same spiritual responsibility before God and have the right to pursue knowledge and contribute to the community. In the pesantren tradition, the interpretation of gender-related verses should be grounded in sound Islamic scholarship while remaining responsive to social developments, ensuring that religious teachings promote justice, mutual respect, and collective responsibility."	Ethical Reciprocity and Contextual Islamic Interpretation	*ETH-REC*

The empirical findings presented in table 1 reveal a sophisticated tier of theological awareness. The interpretation provided by NY-1 highlights a clear resistance against external secular constructs, choosing instead to ground the discourse of liberation within internal Islamic terminology, specifically karamah insaniyyah. This demonstrates that for the charismatic leadership, gender justice is structurally acceptable only when it is legitimized by sacred texts. Conversely, US-3's excerpt exposes an analytical engagement with classical jurisprudence (fiqh). By employing the classical methodological framework of al-kulliyyah (universal) versus al-juz'iyyah (particular), this epistemic cohort effectively subverts patriarchal readings of Surah an-Nisa: 34 from within the traditional framework, transforming

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an absolute male privilege into a contingent, shared responsibility.[27] The younger cohort, represented by SN-2, translates these hermeneutical shifts into immediate spatial demands, viewing the text as a living mandate for organizational and intellectual participation. Analyzed through Stuart Hall's and Hans-Robert Jauss's formulations of Reception Theory, these empirical positions showcase a state of "negotiated reading." The pesantren women do not adopt an "oppositional stance" that rejects the Qur'anic text or classical heritage (turath); instead, they alter the "horizon of expectation" (erwartungshorizont) of their religious community. They utilize their deeply ingrained classical grammar to expand the meaning of the text, inserting contemporary lived experiences into old interpretive templates. The theological reception here is active and creative: the text is received not as a dead historical artifact, but as a dynamic moral guide whose ultimate trajectory is the eradication of structural injustice.[28] This reception strategy allows them to preserve their religious identity while advancing gender equity.

This pattern of internal textual negotiation refines the foundational assertions of previous literature on Islamic feminism in Indonesia.[29] While foundational studies often characterize traditionalist pesantren spaces as inherently resistant to feminist hermeneutics due to the dominance of patriarchal kitab kuning (classical yellow books), our empirical data indicates a profound shift. The findings expand upon the work of early researchers who identified a top-down dissemination of feminist ideas from elite progressive intellectuals. In contrast, the data from Probolinggo uncovers an organic, bottom-up hermeneutical appropriation. The novelty here lies in the discovery that ustadzah and senior santri do not merely copy the theories of urban Muslim feminists; instead, they vernacularize these concepts using classical usul al-fiqh (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) tools, rendering gender justice internally coherent within highly conservative traditionalist enclaves.

Negotiating Feminist Interpretations within Pesantren Traditions

The introduction of explicit contemporary feminist interpretations, specifically those championed by Indonesian progressive scholars K.H. Husein Muhammad and Prof. Dr. Zaitunah Subhan, generates complex socio-epistemic dynamics across the surveyed pesantrens. These spaces become sites of intense negotiation where traditionalist textual loyalty collides with, adapts to, or modifies reformist ideas. Rather than a flat rejection, the reception of Muhammad's text-critical approach to fiqh and Subhan's socio-exegetical critiques reveals a continuum of structural and intellectual adaptation, balancing traditional institutional stability with modern egalitarian demands. Table 2 maps how these progressive interpretative frameworks are received, showing the variations in negotiation across different institutional authorities.

Table 2. Forms of Negotiation of Feminist Interpretation

Informant	Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Code
NG-2 *(Ning, PP. Zainul Hasan Genggong)*	"Kiai Husein Muhammad's view that women can become absolute religious authorities and muftis is textually justifiable through historical precedents like Aisha. However, in our *pesantren* tradition, we must implement this slowly to avoid social friction. We accept his	Strategic Pragmatism and Gradualism	*STRAT-GRAD*

[27] Bulathwela and others, 'Artificial Intelligence Alone Will Not Democratise Education: On Educational Inequality, Techno-Solutionism and Inclusive Tools'.
[28] Bulathwela and others, 'Artificial Intelligence Alone Will Not Democratise Education: On Educational Inequality, Techno-Solutionism and Inclusive Tools'.
[29] Bulathwela and others, 'Artificial Intelligence Alone Will Not Democratise Education: On Educational Inequality, Techno-Solutionism and Inclusive Tools'.

	egalitarian premise but modify the application to fit the local social readiness of our congregation (*jama'ah*)."		
US-1 *(Ustadzah, PP. Badridduja)*	"Zaitunah Subhan's deconstruction of polygyny verses using a historical-sociological lens is highly liberating. Yet, when teaching it to students, we do not completely discard the classical commentaries (*Tafsir al-Jalalayn*). We place them side-by-side. We teach the classical text for historical preservation, and use Subhan's work to provide the contemporary ethical solution."	Epistemic Dualism and Parallel Textuality	*EPIS-DUAL*
SN-5 *(University Student, PP. Nurul Jadid)*	"We fully embrace Subhan's ideas on economic and political rights for women. However, some progressive ideas that seem to completely ignore the biological realities of motherhood (*ummuhat*) are adapted. We negotiate her framework so that it supports professional career paths without delegitimizng the sacredness of the family unit."	Modification of Progressive Paradigms	*MOD-PROG*

The data within table 2 displays an intricate matrix of strategic adaptation. The structural elite, exemplified by NG-2, exhibits a form of negotiation Governed by concerns of institutional survival and social responsibility. They accept the validity of Husein Muhammad's feminist critiques but subject their practical implementation to the law of gradualism (tadarruj). This confirms that structural authorities act as cultural gatekeepers, filtering radical interpretations to maintain community trust. On the other hand, US-1's pedagogical approach reveals an institutional strategy of "parallel textuality." By teaching classical and modern feminist interpretations simultaneously, the epistemic authorities avoid overt institutional conflict while subtly shifting the minds of the santri.

This dualism acts as a safety valve, preserving the appearance of traditional orthodoxy while fostering modern critical analysis. From a theoretical perspective, this multi-layered negotiation illustrates the concept of "interpretive communities" within reception theory, while introducing a distinct phenomenon that can be termed epistemic hybridity. The pesantren actors are not passive recipients of feminist texts; they are active negotiators who possess dual literacy, they are equally fluent in medieval Mu'tazilite or Ash'arite theological nuances and modern gender analysis tools.[30] They apply a filter of maslahah (public interest) to contemporary feminist writings. If a progressive idea threatens the structural integrity of the pesantren or the family unit, it is modified or blended with traditional values.[31] Therefore, the reception of feminism here is highly selective, transforming alien progressive concepts into localized, tradition-sanctioned norms.

The pedagogical coexistence of classical turath and contemporary feminist texts was observed during a senior-level Qur'anic exegesis class. This practice illustrates the integration of traditional Islamic scholarship with contemporary gender perspectives in the

[30] Muhammad Irsyad Baitusslam, Muhammad Dina Afiyah, and Malikul Habsi, 'THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION PSYCHOLOGY IN GUIDANCE SERVICES ON PILGRIMS'TRUST TOWARD UMRAH TRAVEL AGENCIES', *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Reseach*, 1.5 (2025), pp. 70–78.

[31] Muhammad Irsyad Baitussalam, Moh Affan, and Malikul Habsi, 'The Effect of Standardization of Investment and Dividend Decisions on Company Financial Performance', *FRAME: Foundations of Research and Management in Education*, 3.01 (2026).

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pesantren learning environment. The simultaneous engagement with these two bodies of knowledge reflects a form of epistemic dualism, in which classical religious texts remain an important source of authority while contemporary feminist perspectives provide an additional framework for critically examining gender-related issues in Qur'anic interpretation. Rather than replacing the traditional scholarly tradition, this pedagogical approach creates opportunities for dialogue, negotiation, and contextualization between established Islamic scholarship and contemporary discourses on gender justice.

This intricate negotiation offers an empirical corrective to contemporary literature Regarding Islamic reformism in education institutions. Many scholars have argued that progressive gender reform in Islamic education institutions either leads to secularization or causes a conservative backlash that suppresses reformist texts. The empirical realities across these seven pesantrens challenge this dichotomy. The novelty of these findings lies in the documentation of epistemic dualism as a successful method of structural preservation and intellectual evolution. By refusing to replace classical texts with modern ones, and choosing instead to read them in a continuous dialogue, these institutions demonstrate how traditionalism can internalize feminist critique without losing its foundational identity or causing ideological fragmentation. Further examination of the interview data reveals that the negotiation of feminist interpretations operates through several interconnected dimensions, including theological legitimacy, institutional authority, pedagogical mediation, social acceptability, and family-cultural considerations. The acceptance of feminist interpretations is therefore not determined solely by whether an idea is considered intellectually convincing. Rather, pesantren actors evaluate whether such interpretations can be incorporated into the existing epistemological, institutional, and cultural structure of the pesantren. This process demonstrates that reception is fundamentally relational and contextual.

At the theological level, feminist interpretations become more acceptable when they can be connected to established Islamic sources and intellectual traditions. The arguments of Husein Muhammad and Zaitunah Subhan are not necessarily perceived as foreign interventions when their central propositions can be associated with Qur'anic principles, Prophetic traditions, maqāṣid al-sharī'ah, or historical precedents within Islamic civilization. The reference to Aisha, for instance, provides an important epistemic bridge for legitimizing women's authority in religious scholarship. Through this mechanism, the issue of women's religious authority is reconstructed not as an entirely new feminist demand but as the recovery and reinterpretation of possibilities already embedded within Islamic history.

This finding indicates that religious legitimacy functions as a primary gateway for feminist reception within pesantren. Progressive ideas that can be translated into an Islamic normative vocabulary are more likely to receive acceptance than ideas presented exclusively through external feminist terminology. Consequently, the language of justice ('adl), benefit (maslahah), dignity (karamah), responsibility (amanah), and human equality becomes an important conceptual bridge between contemporary feminist discourse and pesantren traditions. The negotiation also takes place at the institutional level. Pesantren authorities do not merely determine whether a particular interpretation is true or false; they also consider its potential consequences for institutional stability and community relations. The statement of NG-2 illustrates that institutional leaders may accept the normative validity of gender equality while delaying or modifying its practical implementation. The principle of tadarruj consequently functions as a mechanism of controlled transformation. Reform is introduced gradually so that the community can adapt without experiencing an abrupt rupture with established religious and social expectations.

Such a pattern suggests that what appears externally as conservative resistance may sometimes represent a strategy of institutional mediation rather than outright rejection. The pesantren authorities act as cultural and epistemic gatekeepers who determine the speed,

form, and boundaries of reform. They preserve institutional continuity while simultaneously opening limited spaces for intellectual transformation. Thus, the relationship between tradition and reform is better understood as a process of negotiation than as a simple confrontation. Another important pattern concerns the pedagogical dimension. The practice of placing classical turath alongside contemporary feminist scholarship demonstrates that pesantren educators frequently employ a comparative rather than substitutional model of teaching. Classical texts continue to be taught because they represent the intellectual genealogy and religious identity of the institution, while contemporary feminist scholarship is introduced to provide alternative perspectives for understanding contemporary social realities. This pedagogical strategy creates what may be termed interpretive layering, in which different historical and intellectual perspectives coexist within the same learning environment. Interpretive layering enables students to understand that religious interpretation is historically situated and can be revisited in response to changing social conditions. Students are not necessarily encouraged to abandon classical interpretations; instead, they are encouraged to recognize the existence of multiple interpretive possibilities. This practice potentially develops a form of critical religious literacy in which students learn to distinguish between the permanence of religious principles and the contextuality of particular interpretations.

The findings further indicate that feminist reception is strongly influenced by the cultural significance of the family. The statement of SN-5 demonstrates that women's economic and political rights can be accepted, although certain progressive propositions are modified when they are perceived as insufficiently attentive to motherhood and family responsibilities. This indicates the emergence of what can be termed contextual egalitarianism, whereby gender equality is accepted but interpreted through an Islamic conception of family, responsibility, and social harmony.[32] Contextual egalitarianism is particularly significant because it demonstrates that the adoption of feminist principles does not necessarily produce a uniform model of gender relations. Within pesantren, equality may be conceptualized in relational terms rather than exclusively through individual autonomy.[33] Women's access to education, professional careers, economic participation, and public leadership can be promoted while the social and ethical significance of family life remains strongly maintained. Feminist ideas are therefore localized through existing moral frameworks rather than reproduced in precisely the same form as their original formulation. The principle of maslahah also appears to function as an important evaluative mechanism in this process. Informants tend to assess progressive interpretations not only according to their textual validity but also according to their perceived benefits and consequences for students, families, and the wider pesantren community. Interpretations that are considered capable of promoting justice and reducing discrimination are more readily accommodated, whereas those perceived as potentially producing social disruption are more likely to be modified.[34]

In this respect, *maslahah* operates as a translation mechanism between feminist ethics

[32] Athina Konstantinidou, Efi A Nisiforou, and Charalambos Vrasidas, 'Enhancing Personalized Learning with Artificial Intelligence and Analytics: University Staff's Insights', *Interactive Learning Environments* 2026, 2026, pp. 1–21; Suhayib and M F Ansyari, 'Design of Islamic Religious Education: Purposes, Alignment of Curriculum Components and Contexts', *British Journal of Religious Education*, 45.4 (2023), pp. 382–93.

[33] Dogan Gursoy, Gözdegül Başer, and Christina G Chi, 'Corporate Digital Responsibility: Navigating Ethical, Societal, and Environmental Challenges in the Digital Age and Exploring Future Research Directions', *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 34.3 (2025), pp. 305–24; Mohammad Kosim and others, 'The Dynamics of Islamic Education Policies in Indonesia', *Cogent Education*, 10.1 (2023), p. 2172930.

[34] Erma Rahmawati, Fikri Abdul Aziz, and Gina Raudhatul Jannah, 'The Phenomenon of the Hijab Wrapping Tightly in the Qur'an Sunnah Review and Its Comparison with the Veil and Burqa', *Bulletin of Islamic Research*, 2.1 (2024), pp. 93–112, doi:10.69526/bir.v2i1.24.

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and pesantren tradition. Contemporary concepts such as equality, women's rights, leadership, autonomy, and participation are translated into an Islamic ethical framework emphasizing justice, dignity, responsibility, and communal welfare. The process does not eliminate the critical dimension of feminist interpretation; instead, it transforms its expression into a form into a form recognizable as legitimate within the pesantren's own epistemological universe. Taken together, the findings indicate that the reception of feminist interpretation exists along a continuum rather than within a binary opposition between acceptance and rejection. The continuum ranges from selective acceptance, contextual adaptation, epistemic coexistence, to normative modification. In selective acceptance, feminist propositions are incorporated with relatively little alteration. In contextual adaptation, the central principle is accepted but its application is adjusted according to local circumstances. In epistemic coexistence, classical and contemporary interpretations are maintained simultaneously. In normative modification, progressive ideas are reformulated to correspond with established religious, familial, and communal values.[35]

The model demonstrates that feminist interpretation within pesantren is not simply transmitted from progressive scholars to religious communities. It undergoes a multilayered process of selection, translation, reinterpretation, and localization. The final form of feminist discourse encountered by students and members of the pesantren community may consequently differ from the original formulation proposed by Husein Muhammad or Zaitunah Subhan. Nevertheless, the underlying ethical principles of justice, dignity, equality, and women's agency may remain present within the localized interpretation. This process provides further evidence for the concept of epistemic hybridity identified in this study. Epistemic hybridity refers to the simultaneous operation of traditional and reformist interpretive frameworks within the same institutional setting.[36] Classical turath remains a source of authority and institutional identity, while contemporary feminist scholarship provides new analytical tools for addressing gender relations. Neither framework completely eliminates the other. Instead, they interact through comparison, reinterpretation, selective acceptance, and contextual adjustment. The significance of epistemic hybridity lies in its challenge to the assumption that modernization necessarily requires the displacement of tradition. The pesantren cases demonstrate that intellectual transformation can occur through internal dialogue with inherited knowledge. Traditional texts may remain authoritative while their meanings are reconsidered in light of contemporary ethical concerns. Feminist interpretation consequently becomes not a replacement for tradition but a stimulus for its internal reinterpretation.[37]

Furthermore, this finding suggests that institutional change may begin at the epistemic and pedagogical levels before becoming visible as formal structural transformation. Changes in the language used to discuss women, the questions posed in religious classes, the comparative reading of classical and contemporary texts, and the growing legitimacy of women's intellectual participation may gradually reshape the gender culture of the institution. The transformation is therefore cumulative and may not immediately appear through formal institutional policies. The findings also reveal an important distinction between acceptance of feminist principles and implementation of feminist practices. A pesantren may intellectually acknowledge the legitimacy of women's equality while maintaining gradual or selective implementation in institutional life. This distinction is analytically important because it prevents the classification of pesantren institutions into simplistic categories such as

[35] Nufiar Abd. Wahid , Khadher bin Ahmad , Jafar Assagaf , Husna Amin, 'Hermeneutical Analysis Of Hadith Concerning The Necessity Of Having The Husband's Permission In The Implementation Of Sunnah Fasting For The Wife', *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7.4 (2023).

[36] Noor, 'A Feminist Interpretation of Qur'anic Texts by Amina Wadud and Zaitunah Subhan'.

[37] Khotimah, 'Paradigma Tafsir Egalitarianisme Zaitunah Subhan Dalam Tafsir Kebencian'.

conservative or progressive.[38] Instead, the evidence demonstrates that an institution may simultaneously maintain traditional structures and promote reformist intellectual orientations. Therefore, the negotiation of feminist interpretations within pesantren should be understood as a dynamic process of continuity, adaptation, and transformation. Tradition provides the institutional and epistemological foundation through which new ideas are evaluated, while feminist scholarship provides critical resources for identifying inequalities and proposing alternative interpretations. The interaction between these two dimensions produces a localized form of Islamic gender discourse that is neither a complete rejection of tradition nor an uncritical adoption of contemporary feminism. In this sense, the contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that pesantren can function as sites of negotiated feminist knowledge production. Rather than merely receiving interpretations produced by external scholars, pesantren actors participate actively in reconstructing their meanings. Kiai, nyai, ustadz, ustadzah, and santri become participants in a dynamic interpretive process in which religious tradition and contemporary gender discourse continuously inform one another. This finding expands the understanding of feminist reception in Islamic educational institutions by showing that reform can emerge through negotiation, translation, and internal epistemic transformation rather than through direct opposition to tradition.

Living Qur'an and Lived Experiences of Gender Justice

The transformation of textual interpretation into lived reality finds its clearest articulation in the everyday socio-religious spaces of the pesantren. Beyond the classroom, the negotiated meanings of the Qur'an manifest as a "Living Qur'an" a phenomenon where sacred texts are embodied in institutional structures, administrative operations, leadership access, and daily decision-making processes.[39] In the seven observed pesantrens, the lived experience of gender justice is reflected in the shifting boundaries of female authority, where women are no longer confined to managing domestic spheres (dapur and kasur) but are increasingly leading strategic institutional sectors. Table 3 compiles empirical evidence demonstrating how the principles of Qur'anic gender justice are operationalized and lived within the daily routines of these communities.

Table 3: Manifestations of Living Qur'an in Gender Justice Practices

Informant	Interview Excerpt	Lived Arena	Code
NY-4 *(Nyai, PP. Al-Mashduqiah)*	"Our administration is no longer male-dominated. Inspired by the Qur'anic mandate of mutual consultation (*shura*, 42:38), women head major financial and educational divisions here. We sit in the same boardroom as the Kiais, debating budgets and curriculum design. The text is alive in our egalitarian institutional policy."	Institutional Leadership and Governance	*GOV-LIV*
US-7 *(Ustadzah, PP. Riadhussholihin)*	"In the past, only male scholars led public *Tafsir* halaqahs (circles). Now, we have established female-led exegesis sessions for the public. When we read verses about social justice, we explicitly relate them to	Public Religious Authority and Advocacy	*AUTH-ADVO*

[38] Sukino Sukino and Fauzan Fauzan, 'Islamic Education's Responses to Social Changes and Community Behaviors', *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society*, 2020, pp. 29–47, doi:10.15408/tjems.v7i1.16717.

[39] I M Hidayat and M Alfaozi, 'Kajian Living Qur'an Tradisi Membaca Surah Al-Kahfi Santri Di Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Rawalo Banyumas', *JIQSI - Jurnal Ilmu Al Qur'an Dan Studi Islam*, 1.1 (2023), pp. 1–14.

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	local domestic abuse prevention and women's health. The Qur'an becomes a practical tool for female protection."[40]		
SN-1 *(Senior Santri, PP. Nurul Qur'an)*	"We are trained to run debates, lead community prayers within the female compound, and manage large budgets for santri events. The old belief that women should not lead is debunked every single day through our visible competence. We live the verses of Surah at-Tawbah (9:71) which state that believing men and women are allies of one another."[41]	Student Agency and Spatial Autonomy	*SPAT-AUTO*

The institutional realities documented in Table 3 indicate that the Living Qur'an framework operates as a powerful mechanism for socio-structural reconfiguration. As NY-4 details, the application of Surah ash-Shura (42:38) shifts from an abstract political concept to an administrative requirement that mandates female representation in financial and strategic governance. This practical restructuring breaks down long-standing patriarchal monopolies over institutional resources. Furthermore, US-7's testimony shows that female religious authority has expanded beyond private rooms into public, community-facing advocacy roles. The reclamation of the halaqah space allows ustadzahs to contextualize the text, turning abstract theology into a practical defense mechanism against local domestic issues.[42]

Theologically, these lived practices signify that the Qur'an functions within the pesantren not merely as a text to be memorized (textus), but as an ongoing social practice (actus). The reception of gender-just interpretations move from intellectual acceptance into social embodiment. By deploying verses like Surah at-Tawbah: 71 to validate their leadership, the female actors build a protective canopy that shields their progressive practices from conservative pushback. This social embodiment shows that the Living Qur'an can serve as an internal emancipatory tool, allowing women to subvert patriarchal cultural limitations while maintaining high religious legitimacy within their communities. This empirical finding deepens the existing analytical framework of Living Qur'an studies. Previous academic works on the Living Qur'an in Indonesia have focused primarily on the ritualistic, mystical, or performative aspects of the text, such as mujahadah (spiritual strivings), tahfidz (memorization) cultures, or the use of verses for healing and protection. This study provides a fresh perspective by documenting the politicized and gender-responsive Living Qur'an. The novelty lies in showing how sacred texts are deliberately used to reorganize power dynamics, secure institutional budgets, and expand female space within traditionalist enclaves. The Qur'an is transformed from a ritualistic text into an active blueprint for building equitable institutional structures.

Toward a Contextual Model of Gender Justice Reception in Pesantren

The empirical data and theoretical insights gathered across the seven pesantrens in Probolinggo culminate in the formulation of a new conceptual model: the Contextual Model of Gender Justice Reception. This model demonstrates that the path from encountering a sacred text to producing a gender-just religious practice is neither linear nor passive. Instead, it is a highly dynamic process marked by cognitive filtering, structural negotiations, and strategic adjustments. Female actors in these spaces continually balance traditional religious

[40] Interview with US-7 (Ustadzah, PP. Riadhussholihin), September 17, 2025.
[41] Interview with SN-1 *(Senior Santri, PP. Nurul Qur'an)*, September 15, 2025
[42] Interview with NY-4 *(Nyai, PP. Al-Mashduqiah)*, September 14, 2025

commitments with modern egalitarian needs, facilitating an internal evolution of Islamic thought and practice. Figure 1 outlines the cyclical and multi-staged path of this contextual model, showing how progressive interpretations move through the unique institutional matrix of the pesantren.[43]

The model starts with the interaction between Phase 1 (the foundational, normative texts of Islam and classical turath) and Phase 2 (the introduction of modern feminist hermeneutics). When texts by scholars like Husein Muhammad or Zaitunah Subhan enter the pesantren, they do not immediately alter social behaviors. Instead, they pass into Phase 3: Cognitive Reception.[44] Here, *ustadzahs and nyais* use classical interpretive tools like usul al-fiqh, maqasid al-shariah (objectives of Islamic law), and maslahah to evaluate these progressive ideas. This evaluation ensures that any reformist concept is translated into traditional Islamic terminology, making it comprehensible and acceptable to the community. Next, the model moves into Phase 4: Strategic Negotiation, which serves as the tactical heart of the process. In this phase, institutional authorities utilize methods like parallel textuality (teaching classical patriarchal texts and contemporary feminist texts side-by-side) or gradual implementation to introduce new perspectives without triggering social unrest or community backlash.[45] Once these ideas are safely integrated, they transition into Phase 5: Lived Contextualization. In this stage, the negotiated concepts find expression through the Living Qur'an, reshaping administrative structures, expanding female leadership, and establishing public advocacy initiatives. The process concludes at Phase 6: Transformed Practice, which feeds back into how foundational texts are read by future generations, ensuring sustainable, organically grown change.

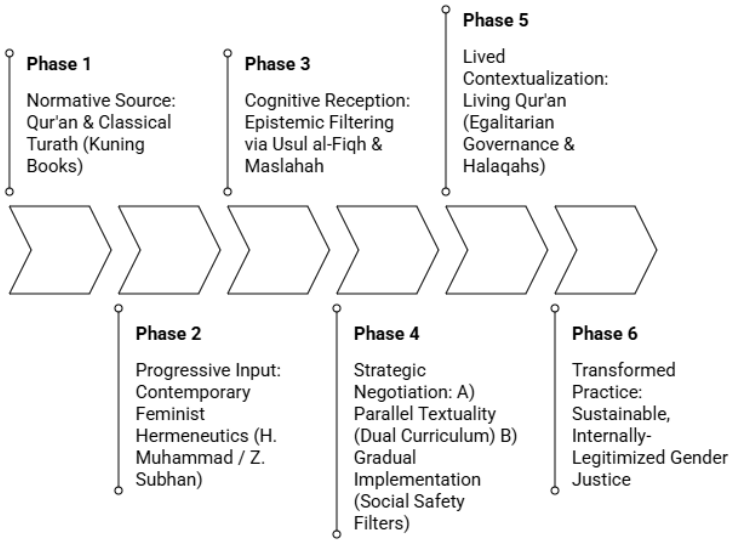


Figure 3: Contextual Model of Gender Justice Reception in Pesantren

The scholarly value of this model lies in its ability to explain how traditional communities evolve from within. It challenges older, secular feminist paradigms which often

[43] Khoiruddin Nasution, Ocktoberrinsyah Ocktoberrinsyah, and Syah Muhammad Mousa Alzaki, 'Complete Family Construction for Working Wives in Indonesia and Australia', *Samarah: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Dan Hukum Islam*, 9.1 (2025), pp. 1–22, doi:10.22373/SJHK.V9I1.25840.

[44] Najiburrohman and Hasanah, 'Student Reception On The Implementation Of One Day One Page: Study Living Qur'an At Pondok Pesantren'.

[45] Fariha Bibi and Ni Wayan Sartini, '"Gender and Social Power Dynamics in Compliment Responses: A Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Study of University Students in Indonesia and Pakistan"', *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 10.1 (2023), doi:10.1080/23311983.2023.2262076.

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assert that true gender equality can only be achieved through the abandonment of breaking away from traditional religious texts and structures. The Contextual Model demonstrates that pesantren women achieve sustainable emancipation not through abandonment, but through a deep, masterful re-engagement with their sacred texts. This model provides an analytical framework for future researchers tracking religious evolution, proving that tradition is not a static barrier to progress, but a malleable resource for social justice.

The findings of this study offer significant contributions to contemporary Islamic scholarship by expanding and refining several foundational theoretical frameworks: Refining Reception Theory: This study extends Hans-Robert Jauss's Reception Theory by demonstrating that the "horizon of expectation" within traditional communities is not merely passive. It can be intentionally altered from within by using traditional interpretive tools to legitimize progressive ideas. This reveals a highly proactive form of reading, which we term epistemic hybridity. Enriching Living Qur'an Studies: This research shifts the focus of Living Qur'an scholarship away from purely ritualistic, mystical, or performative uses of the text. It documents a politicized, gender-responsive Living Qur'an, showing how sacred texts can serve as active blueprints for institutional restructuring and power reallocation. Advancing Contemporary Hermeneutics: The study provides empirical proof of how abstract feminist hermeneutics are vernacularized within conservative spaces. It highlights parallel textuality as a viable strategy for pedagogical evolution, showing that modern and traditional texts can coexist to foster critical dialogue.

Curriculum Optimization in Pesantrens: Institutional leaders can adopt the parallel textuality model within their educational frameworks. By teaching classical jurisprudence alongside modern contextual commentaries, pesantrens can nurture critical thinking skills without alienating conservative community stakeholders. Gender-Responsive Governance: The administrative strategies utilized by progressive pesantrens like PP. Nurul Jadid and PP. Al-Mashduqiah can serve as structural blueprints for other Islamic institutions. Integrating women into top-tier financial, administrative, and strategic decision-making bodies can be framed not as an ideological departure, but as an fulfillment of the Qur'anic principle of shura. Public Advocacy and Leadership Models: Establishing female-led public halaqahs enables ustadzahs to address critical, localized women's issues—such as domestic abuse prevention and reproductive health—with high religious legitimacy. This model can inform community outreach programs across wider networks of Islamic boarding schools.

De-centering Middle Eastern Narratives: Global discourses on Islamic reform often center on Middle Eastern state-led initiatives or urban, Western-educated Muslim elites. This study highlights Indonesia's pesantren subculture as an alternative global model of organic, decentralized, and bottom-up gender reform that succeeds inside deeply traditionalist rural communities. A Model for Global Islamic Education: As Islamic educational institutions worldwide grapple with the challenges of modernization and inclusivity, the pesantren's ability to blend medieval scholastic traditions with progressive gender justice frameworks offers a valuable pathway for educational reform elsewhere. Redefining Transnational Muslim Female Agency: This research challenges the Eurocentric paradigm that often measures female liberation by the rejection of traditional religious symbols and structures. The agency of Indonesian pesantren women demonstrates to the international community that empowerment can be profoundly realized through the masterry of sacred texts and the internal reform of religious spaces.

While this study offers an original, textually grounded analysis of gender justice reception across seven major pesantrens in Probolinggo, several limitations must be acknowledged to guide future scholarly inquiries. First, the contextual scope of this research is bound to a specific cultural and geographical zone within East Java, Indonesia. The observed institutions operate primarily within a distinct traditionalist Islamic environment

influenced by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) cultural frameworks. Consequently, the mechanisms of negotiation, epistemic hybridity, and structural adaptation documented here may differ significantly from Islamic boarding schools in other regions of Indonesia, or those affiliated with different socio-religious organizations (such as Muhammadiyah or Persis), which operate under alternative interpretive frameworks.[46] Second, from a methodological standpoint, this qualitative case study prioritizes depth over breadth. While the purposive sample successfully captured the rich, nuanced insights of key female actors (Nyai, Ustadzah, and senior Santri), it does not quantify the wider statistical distribution of these egalitarian viewpoints among the broader, non-elite student populations. Additionally, while the study documents the successful expansion of female institutional space, it did not fully measure the covert resistance or subtle structural pushback from some conservative male authorities within these institutions.[47] Finally, there are theoretical limitations regarding the immediate scalability of the proposed Contextual Model of Gender Justice Reception. The model relies heavily on the presence of highly educated, bilingual female actors who possess dual literacy in both classical turath and contemporary gender analysis. In smaller, less resourceful rural pesantrens where access to higher education or progressive reformist literature is constrained, the transition from cognitive reception to lived egalitarian practice may encounter significantly higher friction. Future research should apply this model across a wider variety of institutional sizes, geographic locations, and ideological backgrounds to further test and refine its analytical utility.[48]

Beyond these contributions, the findings suggest that the transformation of gender relations within pesantren should be understood as a process of internal epistemic negotiation rather than external ideological replacement. The women involved in this process do not simply receive feminist interpretations as finished intellectual products. They actively reconstruct, contextualize, and translate these interpretations through the religious knowledge systems that already constitute their intellectual identity. This finding place agency at the center of the process of religious reform and demonstrates that women can become both subjects and producers of interpretive transformation. An important implication of this finding is the need to distinguish between textual conformity and interpretive conservatism. A strong attachment to classical Islamic texts does not necessarily indicate opposition to gender justice. In the observed pesantren contexts, classical texts can become precisely the resources through which women challenge discriminatory interpretations. By acquiring advanced competence in fiqh, tafsir, hadith, and other branches of Islamic scholarship, women gain the epistemic authority necessary to participate in debates that have historically been dominated by male religious scholars. Their agency consequently emerges not through rejection of religious authority but through the acquisition and strategic use of that authority.

This phenomenon can be conceptualized as textual agency. Textual agency refers to the capacity of religious actors to employ authoritative sacred and scholarly texts as resources for contesting, revising, and reconstructing established gender relations. Unlike approaches that conceptualize agency primarily as resistance against religious structures, textual agency emphasizes the possibility of transforming structures through mastery of their own legitimating knowledge. In the *pesantren* context, this form of agency is particularly

[46] An Indonesian Journal and others, 'Jurnal Islamic Education Studies : Jurnal Islamic Education Studies ':, 6.2 (2023); 2 Harun Al Rasyid3 M. Rivan Febriansyah Harahap,*1 M. Habib AlHabsyi, 'ANALISIS FENOMENA I'JAZ AL – BAYANI DALAM NAZM (SUSUNAN) AL- QUR'AN', 2.2 (2024), pp. 117–24.

[47] Universitas Islam and Negeri Alauddin, 'Tokoh Ulama Hadis Kontemporer Di Dunia Dan Di Indonesia', 3.July (2025), pp. 1–8, doi:10.56874/Almutabar.V1i2.444.Rian; Faridatus Sa'adah3 Dzulfiqar Fauzan Nafis1, Syamsu Madyan2, 'STUDI KOMPARATIF PEMIKIRAN ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER DAN BUYA HAMKA TENTANG POLIGAMI', 7 (2025), pp. 1–18.

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significant because religious legitimacy remains a central source of social authority. The study further indicates that women's empowerment within *pesantren* should not be assessed solely through numerical representation in leadership positions. Although the inclusion of women in administrative, educational, and strategic structures represents an important institutional development, a deeper transformation occurs when women acquire the authority to define problems, formulate religious arguments, participate in decision-making, and influence institutional priorities. Thus, epistemic authority precedes and strengthens structural authority. Women's participation becomes more sustainable when institutional positions are supported by recognized intellectual competence and religious legitimacy.

Another contribution concerns the relationship between gender justice and institutional sustainability. The findings demonstrate that reformist gender discourse does not necessarily undermine institutional cohesion. When reforms are introduced through culturally legitimate mechanisms such as *shura*, *maslahah, maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, and gradualism they can be incorporated into existing organizational structures. This suggests that gender-responsive institutional reform may be more sustainable when framed through concepts already accepted by the community rather than through an entirely external ideological vocabulary. The findings therefore provide a basis for developing a broader analytical proposition: the sustainability of gender reform is positively influenced by the degree to which reformist interpretations are epistemically compatible with the institution's existing religious worldview. Compatibility does not imply complete agreement with traditional interpretations. Rather, it refers to the ability of new interpretations to establish legitimate connections with inherited concepts, texts, values, and institutional practices. This proposition may be tested quantitatively or comparatively in future studies across different Islamic educational institutions.[49]

Based on the empirical findings, the Contextual Model of Gender Justice Reception can be understood as consisting of five interconnected stages: encounter, validation, negotiation, adaptation, and institutionalization. First, encounter occurs when pesantren actors are exposed to contemporary gender-sensitive scholarship through books, lectures, higher education, social media, academic networks, or direct interaction with progressive scholars. Second, validation occurs when these new ideas are examined against established Islamic sources and intellectual traditions. Third, negotiation takes place when actors identify areas of compatibility, tension, or potential conflict between progressive interpretations and inherited traditions. Fourth, adaptation occurs when accepted ideas are reformulated according to local cultural, familial, and institutional conditions. Finally, institutionalization occurs when the negotiated interpretation becomes embedded in curriculum, leadership structures, educational practices, public religious activities, or everyday institutional norms.

This sequence is not necessarily linear. In practice, pesantren actors may move repeatedly between these stages. A new institutional practice may generate questions that lead educators back to textual validation, while a new interpretation may require further negotiation before it can be institutionalized. The model should therefore be understood as a dynamic and recursive process rather than a rigid developmental sequence. The model also demonstrates that reception does not automatically equal implementation. An individual may intellectually accept a feminist interpretation while remaining cautious about its institutional application. Conversely, an institution may adopt gender-responsive practices before all members fully accept the underlying theoretical arguments. This distinction is essential for understanding why cognitive, pedagogical, and structural transformations may occur at different speeds.

[49] An Najmi Fikri Ramadhan, 'Hermeneutics of Gender: A Comparative Study of Hermeneutical Models Amina Wadud and Farid Esack', *Bulletin of Islamic Research*, 2.2 (2024), pp. 199–216, doi:10.69526/bir.v2i2.10.

From the perspective of Islamic educational management, these findings indicate that gender-responsive reform requires more than curriculum revision. It requires an institutional ecosystem that enables women to participate in knowledge production, leadership, decision-making, and community engagement. Consequently, pesantren leaders seeking to develop more inclusive institutions may consider several interconnected strategies. First, institutions can develop gender-responsive curriculum enrichment by placing classical turath texts in dialogue with contemporary scholarship on gender, justice, family, and women's rights. Second, institutions can strengthen female scholarly capacity by providing opportunities for women to pursue advanced education in tafsir, fiqh, Islamic education, and related fields. Third, pesantren can establish participatory decision-making mechanisms that provide meaningful opportunities for women to contribute to institutional planning and governance. Fourth, institutions can develop female-centered religious forums, including halaqah, counseling spaces, and educational programs addressing issues that disproportionately affect women.

These strategies are important because institutional transformation is unlikely to be sustainable when it depends exclusively on individual progressive leaders. Sustainable reform requires the creation of organizational mechanisms that allow gender-responsive interpretations to survive leadership transitions. In other words, the ultimate challenge is to transform individual agency into institutional capacity. The findings also open several avenues for comparative research. Future studies could compare pesantren affiliated with different Islamic organizations, including NU, Muhammadiyah, Persis, and independent pesantren traditions. Such comparison would make it possible to determine whether epistemic hybridity is a broader characteristic of Indonesian Islamic education or a phenomenon particularly associated with specific traditionalist environments. Comparative research could also examine differences between rural and urban pesantrens. Urban institutions may have greater access to universities, digital resources, international scholarship, and transnational feminist discourse, while rural institutions may rely more heavily on local religious authorities and inherited textual traditions. These differences may influence the speed and form of feminist reception. Another important direction concerns generational change. The increasing exposure of younger santri to digital media, higher education, and global Islamic discourse may create new forms of negotiation that differ from those of previous generations. Future research could therefore examine whether epistemic hybridity becomes stronger among younger generations or whether increased exposure to global discourse produces new forms of epistemic tension.

Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable. The present study captures the negotiation process at a particular historical moment, whereas gender transformation within pesantren is likely to unfold over an extended period. Following the same institutions across several years could reveal whether progressive interpretations eventually become normalized, remain marginal, or generate new forms of institutional resistance. Finally, future studies should incorporate the perspectives of male religious authorities and students who disagree with progressive interpretations. Including these voices would provide a more comprehensive account of resistance, contestation, and power dynamics within the negotiation process. Such research would allow scholars to examine not only how gender justice is accepted but also how its boundaries are constructed, challenged, and renegotiated.

Taken together, the findings support a broader theoretical proposition: religious tradition should not be conceptualized merely as an obstacle to gender justice but as an active epistemic arena in which the meaning of gender justice is continuously constructed and reconstructed. In the pesantren context, feminist transformation becomes sustainable when progressive ideas are able to enter into meaningful dialogue with established religious knowledge, institutional authority, and local cultural values.

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The contribution of this study therefore extends beyond documenting the reception of Husein Muhammad and Zaitunah Subhan.[50] It demonstrates a broader mechanism of social change in religious institutions: tradition can become a medium of transformation when actors possess sufficient epistemic agency to reinterpret its authoritative resources. The women in these pesantrens illustrate that empowerment does not always require leaving religious tradition behind. In some contexts, empowerment may emerge precisely through deeper engagement with the texts, institutions, and intellectual traditions that constitute religious identity. This perspective offers an alternative to both the modernization thesis that equates progress with secularization and the conservative thesis that equates textual continuity with resistance to change. The pesantren experience suggests a third possibility: transformative traditionalism, in which institutional continuity and gender reform are not mutually exclusive but can develop through sustained epistemic negotiation. Accordingly, the Contextual Model of Gender Justice Reception should be understood not as a universal prescription but as an analytical framework for explaining how gender-sensitive interpretations travel, are negotiated, and become institutionalized within religious educational environments. Its central proposition is that sustainable reform emerges when new interpretations acquire legitimacy through the internal epistemic resources of the community while simultaneously responding to contemporary demands for justice and equality. This makes the model particularly relevant for understanding religious reform in contexts where tradition remains a powerful source of identity, authority, and social cohesion.

C. Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive synthesis of how gender justice is hermeneutically negotiated and socially embodied within the unique traditionalist and modern subcultures of seven selected pesantrens in Probolinggo. The empirical analysis demonstrates that female actors in these enclaves do not adopt an oppositional stance toward classical Islamic heritage *(turath)*, nor do they passively mimic Western secular feminist frameworks. Instead, they operate from a distinct academic position of epistemic hybridity, utilizing foundational jurisprudential tools *(usul al-fiqh)* and ethical-universal Qur'anic principles to vernacularize contemporary progressive hermeneutics. This dual literacy is structurally and pedagogically managed through a system of parallel textuality, where classical commentaries and modern gender-responsive texts coexist within the curriculum. By reading these texts in continuous dialogue, these institutions successfully expand the community's horizon of expectation from within, minimizing socio-religious friction while systematically deconstructing absolute patriarchal biases. Furthermore, through the operationalization of a gender-responsive Living Qur'an, these negotiated interpretations move beyond intellectual exercise into concrete social practices, as evidenced by the strategic inclusion of women in top-tier institutional governance and the expansion of female-led public halaqahs. The main scholarly contribution and novelty of this study lie in the formulation of the Contextual Model of Gender Justice Reception in Pesantren. This model challenges conventional, Eurocentric feminist paradigms by proving that sustainable, resilient, and internally legitimized gender equity can be organically engineered through deep, masterful re-engagement with sacred texts within highly conservative spaces, offering an alternative decentralized blueprint for global Islamic gender reform. Practically, these findings serve as an actionable framework for curriculum optimization, gender-responsive budgeting, and the institutionalization of female religious leadership in Islamic boarding schools worldwide. However, this study recognizes certain contextual and methodological boundaries that open critical pathways for future scholarly inquiries. Because this research

was geographically and culturally limited to traditionalist, Nahdlatul Ulama-leaning pesantrens in East Java, the localized strategies of negotiation and structural adaptation documented here may vary in different socio-religious environments. Furthermore, while this qualitative case study successfully captured the rich, nuanced perspectives of key female authorities, it did not measure the broader statistical distribution of these egalitarian viewpoints among non-elite student populations or the covert institutional pushback from conservative male counterparts. Therefore, future research should pursue a logical contextual expansion by applying this reception model to smaller, rural, or non-affiliated Islamic boarding schools across diverse regions. Future investigations would also benefit from mixed-method approaches or the exploration of institutional power dynamics as a central variable, thereby testing the scalability of this model and continuing to map the complex, ongoing evolution of gender justice within global Islamic education.

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Interviews

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Interview with US-1 *(Ustadzah, PP. Badridduja)*
Interview with SN-5 *(University Student, PP. Nurul Jadid)*