

WOMEN AND MUSLIM EDUCATION IN WEST SUMATRA, INDONESIA

Eka Srimulyani
Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, Aceh, Indonesia
Email: e.srimulyani77@gmail.com

Firdaus
Universitas Islam Negeri Bonjol, Padang, Indonesia
Email: firdaus@uinib.ac.id

Sarwan
Universitas Islam Negeri Imam Bonjol, Padang, Indonesia
Email: sarwanma@uinib.ac.id

Silfia Hanani
Universitas Islam Syech Jamil Djambek, Bukittinggi, Indonesia
Email: silfiahnanani@uinbukittinggi.ac.id

Syarifatul Hayati
Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Tarbiyah Diniyah Putri, Padang Panjang, Indonesia
Email: atulsyarifnew@gmail.com

Abstract

Minangkabau was known for its dominant Islamic education history especially in modern times since the beginning of the twentieth century as a number of so-called madrasah or Islamic educational reforms have been credited to several prominent figures in the region. This region also has a significant history and tradition of matriarchal and matrilineal kinship that relate to women's position, and their contributions in the public affairs, including in the field of education. Several prominent women from the region have been named as founders of several schools for women, or journalists that campaign for women's education. This study examines the socio-historical aspects of women and education and the women's educational movement initiatives from the cases of few female figures such as Rahmah el-Yunusiyah and others. From a historical perspective and qualitative library research data, this study shows the presence of local female figures in the field of education alongside their male counterparts amidst the kaum muda and kaum tua socio-religious contestation. The socio-local traditions influenced women's presence and contribution to the public sphere, and those women not only established schools for women but also advocated women's rights, including their rights for education through journalism and politics.

Keywords: *women's movement; muslim education; west Sumatra; minangkabau*

Abstrak

Sejak awal abad kedua puluh, Minangkabau dikenal karena sejarah pendidikan Islam yang dominan, terutama melalui sejumlah madrasah atau reformasi pendidikan Islam yang dikreditkan kepada beberapa tokoh-tokoh terkemuka di wilayah tersebut. Wilayah ini juga memiliki sejarah dan tradisi matriarki serta kekerabatan matrilineal

* Corresponding author, email: e.srimulyani77@gmail.com

yang signifikan yang berkaitan dengan posisi wanita, dan kontribusi mereka di ruang publik, termasuk di bidang pendidikan. Sejumlah wanita terkemuka dari wilayah ini telah dinamakan sebagai pendiri beberapa sekolah untuk wanita, atau jurnalis yang berkampanye untuk pendidikan wanita. Studi ini meneliti aspek sosio-historis wanita dan pendidikan, serta inisiatif gerakan pendidikan wanita dari kasus beberapa tokoh wanita seperti Rahmah el-Yunusiyah dan lainnya. Dari perspektif historis dan data penelitian perpustakaan kualitatif, studi ini menunjukkan kehadiran tokoh-tokoh wanita lokal di bidang pendidikan bersama rekan-rekan pria mereka di tengah kontestasi sosio-religius kaum muda dan kaum tua. Tradisi sosio-lokal mempengaruhi kehadiran dan kontribusi wanita di ruang publik, dan wanita-wanita tersebut tidak hanya mendirikan sekolah untuk wanita, tetapi juga melakukan advokasi untuk hak-hak perempuan, termasuk hak pendidikan melalui jurnalisme dan politik."

Kata Kunci: gerakan perempuan; pendidikan islam; sumatera barat; minangkabau

مستخلص

منذ بداية القرن العشرين، اشتهرت منطقة مينانجكاباو بتاريخها البارز في التعليم الإسلامي، وذلك بفضل عدد من ما يُسمى بالمدارس الإصلاحية الإسلامية التي يُنسب الفضل فيها إلى عدة شخصيات بارزة في المنطقة. تتميز هذه المنطقة أيضًا بتاريخها وتقاليدها الهامة في النظام المتراركي والنسب المادري الذي يتعلق بموقع المرأة ومساهماتها في الفضاء العام، بما في ذلك في مجال التعليم. تم تسمية عدد من النساء البارزات من المنطقة كمؤسسات لعدة مدارس للنساء، أو كصحفيات تدافع عن تعليم النساء. تدرس هذه الدراسة الجوانب الاجتماعية والتاريخية للمرأة والتعليم، ومبادرات حركة التعليم النسائي من خلال حالات عدة شخصيات نسائية مثل رحمة اليونسية وغيرها. من منظور تاريخي وبيانات بحث مكتبي نوعي بيانات، تُظهر هذه الدراسة وجود شخصيات نسائية محلية في مجال التعليم جنبًا إلى جنب مع نظرائهن الرجال وسط منافسة اجتماعية ودينية بين الكوم مودا والكوم توا. أثرت التقاليد الاجتماعية المحلية على حضور المرأة ومساهماتها في الحيز العام، ولم تقتصر جهود هؤلاء النساء على إنشاء مدارس للنساء فحسب، بل دافعن أيضًا عن حقوقهن من خلال الصحافة والسياسة.

كلمات رئيسية: حركة النساء; التعليم المسلم; سومطرة الغربية; مينانجكاباو.

A. Introduction

West Sumatra sometimes also referred to as Minangkabau (ethnic group) is one of the regions in the Indo-Malay archipelago that has a strong history of Islamic education, especially in modern times¹ or since the beginning of the twentieth century. Much earlier, the records of Islamic education across the archipelago placed Aceh as the centre, well-known for the celebrated Muslim scholars, and Islamic educational institutions as well as the knowledge production of its *ulama*. In his book on the history of Islamic Education in Indonesia, Yunus described in detail the establishment and the history of Islamic education in West Sumatra, which he classified into two main periods; firstly the traditional period and

¹ Mahmud Yunus, *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia* (Jakarta: Hidakarya Agung, 1993).

secondly the modern period. In Yunus' work and any other books on the history of Islamic education, the role of women was not captured proportionally. The only and the most referred female figure in relation to their agency in the Islamic education development was Rahmah al-Yunusiyyah. Rahmah was very well known for her strong leadership and contribution to the development of Islamic education in West Sumatra, particularly through the Diniyah Putri school. Compared to the Islamic school founded by her brother Zainuddin Labay el-Yunusiyy, the Diniyah Putri school gained more popularity and recognition until currently.

Indeed, West Sumatra has a specific context of Islamic education which is also marked by the existence of two groups of "*kaum muda*" and "*kaum tua*".² These two groups had dialectical thoughts that not only influenced the social-religious life of the Muslim in the region but also affected on the development of Islamic education at the same time, including on the issue of women and education. However, although there has been a numerous exposure to the dynamic of Islamic education development with the celebrated figures, yet the research on women's roles or agency in this field is limited. Although, in reality, there were a number of well-known female figures in the region, who were pioneers in the educational field, such as Rohana Kudus,³ Rahmah el-Yunusiyyah⁴ and others. Nevertheless, many of those published works on women and Islamic education in the region take a historical approach as the basis for their analysis.⁵ Little tried to dig up from socio-cultural perspectives why this region has such a significant number of women leaders, and how it could relate to the traditions of matrifocality and matriarchal values exists/existed among Minangkabau ethnic group, in which the figure of *bundo kanduang* has a specific respected socio-cultural position within their family and society. Thus, this article examines women and education, from socio-historical perspectives, and not only utilizes the historical lenses but also other social theoretical frameworks, which we believe also shape women's presence in the field of education as among pioneers and significant actors especially during the early beginning of the twentieth century.

² Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra 1928-1933* (New York: Cornell University, 1971).

³ Silfia Hanani, 'Women's Newspapers As Minangkabau Feminist Movement Against Marginalization in Indonesia', *Global Journal al Thaqafah* 8, no. 2 (31 December 2018): 75–83, <https://doi.org/10.7187/GJAT122018-7>.

⁴ Aminuddin Rasyad, 'Rahmah El Yunusiyyah: Kartini Dari Perguruan Islam', in *Manusia Dalam Kemelut Sejarah*, ed. Taufik Abdullah, Aswab Mahasin, and Daniel Dhakidae (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1978).

⁵ Yunus, *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia*; Silfia Hanani, 'RUHANA KUDDUS PELOPOR GERAKAN ENTERPRENEUR PEREMPUAN DI MINANGKABAU', *Marwah: Jurnal Perempuan, Agama Dan Jender* 19, no. 1 (20 June 2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.24014/marwah.v19i1.9619>; Mighfaza M. Helmi and Yeni Huriani, 'Pemikiran Rahmah El Yunusiyyah Dalam Membangun Pendidikan Islam Bagi Perempuan Di Indonesia', *Jurnal Iman Dan Spiritualitas* 3, no. 4 (2023); Mulyani Mulyani, 'Taṭawwur Al-Tarbīyah al-Islāmīyah (Surau) Fī Minangkabau', *Studia Islamika* 4, no. 1 (30 March 2014), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v4i1.790>.

Minangkabau society has been well known as the biggest matriarchal tribe in the world.⁶ Whereas at the same time, this society is also well-known among the stronghold community in Indonesia. Religion including Islam has been understood to prefer paternal principles. In a number of works, Minangkabau has also been referred to as one of the stronghold Muslim communities in Indonesia. One of the most popular *adagium* from Minangkabau Muslim society is “*adat basandi syara', syara' basandi kitabullah*” [*adat* (custom) based on *syara'* (religion) and *syara'* (religion) based on based *kitabullah* (Allah holy text book)]. This indeed shows how religion, and religious values have been inseparable in the tradition or the life of Minangkabau people. Admittedly, there has also been few historical records from the region, in which the religious thought contestation led to serious conflicts between those two groups of so-called Muslim traditionalists and Muslim modernists.⁷

The emergence of the female agency in the history of Islamic education in West Sumatra might have some connections to the practice of matriarchal tradition and matrilineal kinship among the Minangkabau society. The women and the kinship from the women's side have been considered as important, and this contributed to the recognition of spaces for women to be involved in the public roles.⁸ However, it is quite clear as well, that the notion and the practices of patriarchy or patriarchal values also existed in Minangkabau like any other society in Indonesia. The influence of *adat* (custom) and Islam was behind all of the social construction and its ‘reconstruction’. As a stronghold Muslim community with Islamic values and practices, the matrilineal as a concept and practice is/were still dominant, and it juxtaposes through the role of *adat*.

This is a qualitative research, most of the data came from the library research, and also followed with several visits to the women's [Islamic] schools such as Diniyah Putri, the Sekolah Kerajinan Amai Setia, which was founded by Rohana Kudus. The research combines both historical and sociological perspectives in looking at the agency of West Sumatran women in the educational field.

⁶ Azizi Bahauddin, ‘The Matriarch, the Matrilineal System, and the Minangkabau Rumah Gadang’, in *Eco-Urbanism and the South East Asian City* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023), 199–222, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-1637-3_11.

⁷ Taufik Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra 1928-1933* (New York: Cornell University, 1971).

⁸ Joke van Reenen, ‘The Salty Mouth of a Senior Woman: Gender and The House in Minangkabau’, in *Women and Household in Indonesia: Cultural Notions and Social Practices*, ed. Juliette Koning et al. (London and New York: Curzon Press, 2000); Evelyn Blackwood, *Webs of Power: Women, Kin, and Community in a Sumatran Village* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Inc., 2000).

B. Discussion

1. *The History of Islamic education in Minangkabau: traditional and modern period*

In general, the history of Islamic education in West Sumatra is classified into two main periods, namely the traditional period (before 1900) and the reform period (after 1900).

a. *Traditional period*

During the traditional period (before 1900), the educational tradition in Minangkabau has some specific features as the typical model of traditional education. There was no planned 'academic' year or a specific curriculum or syllabus for teaching and learning, and most of the subjects taught were religious or Islamic sciences. This traditional period in West Sumatra began around 1680, from the history of a well-known ulama from Ulakan, Pariaman, namely Syaikh Burhanuddin (1056-1104/1646-1695) who travelled and studied in Aceh,⁹ a region famous for being the centre of Islamic learning during the seventeenth century as a student of Abdul Rauf al-Singkili (1024-1104/1615-1693).¹⁰ Burhanuddin Ulakan was later known as a remarkable ulama in the earlier history of Islam as well as the earliest phase of Islamic education in West Sumatra. He established a *surau*, and this *surau* was also a center of *tarekat shattariyyah*.¹¹ Seemingly, this *surau* served both as the center of *tarekat shattariyyah* and a place for learning as well.¹² Most of the historians refer to this *surau* as the first *surau* in the history of Islamic education in West Sumatra.¹³ As an old building, the *surau* had or stored several artefacts as well, more importantly the classical manuscripts from the earlier period, which were back then were the references for Islamic learning in the history.

Placing the existence of *surau* within Minangkabau matriarchal and matrilineal traditions context, in which most of the rooms in the house were occupied by girls. Boys had no room in the traditional Minangkabau house as the boys stayed overnight in the *surau* both

⁹ Hamka, the famous Muslim scholar from Minangkabau noted the influence of Aceh on Muslim practices in Pariaman. This region was known for the purity of its Islamic observance in contrast to other parts of Minangkabau *nagari* (region) in which the *adat* predominated as the significant element and was more highly visible in social life. For further information, see Hamka, *Ayahku, Riwayat Hidup Dr. Abdul Karim Amrullah Dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama di Sumatera Barat* (Jakarta: Yayasan Umimda, 1979), 13.

¹⁰ Hamka, *Adat Minangkabau Menghadapi Evolusi* (Jakarta: Firma Tekad, 1983), 21; The learning institution established by Burhanuddin in Ulakan was similar to that founded in Aceh by Abdul Rauf al-Singkili. See Eri Rosatria, "Alāqat Harakat Nashr al-Islām Wa al-Tarbīyah al-Islāmiyyah Fī Ṣūltanah Aceh", *Studia Islamika* 3, no. 1 (30 March 2014), <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v3i1.815>; Abdul Ra'uf himself was a celebrated ulama, who wrote many classical Arabic textbooks. He was the first Malay ulama to write *fiqh mu'amalah* in his work, *Mir'at al-Tullab*, and to translate the Qur'an into the Malay language. He was appointed as mufti of the Acehese kingdom. See Oman Fathurrahman, *Tarekat Syatariyyah Di Minangkabau: Teks Dan Konteks* (Jakarta: Prenata Media, 2008).

¹¹ Aryumardi Azra, *Jaringan Ulama Timur Tengah Dan Kepulauan Nusantara Abad XVII & XVIII Akar Pembaharuan Islam Indonesia* (Jakarta: Prenada Media, 2005), 209.

¹² Taufik Abdullah, 'Adat and Islam: An Examination of Conflict in Minangkabau', *Indonesia* 2 (October 1966): 1, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350753>.

¹³ Mulyani, 'Taṭawwur Al-Tarbīyah al-Islāmiyyah (Surau) Fī Minangkabau'; Mardanas Safwan and Sutrisno Kutoyo, *Sejarah Pendidikan Daerah Sumatera Barat* (Padang: Proyek Inventarisasi dan Dokumentasi Kebudayaan Daerah, 1981), 55.

for educational and social purposes as well.¹⁴ During their stay in the *surau*, the boys learned basic Islamic teachings such as learning about *shalat* (prayer), Qur'an recitation and others. The boys stayed overnight in *surau* usually from 6 years old until they got married.¹⁵

Although the history of Ulakan *surau* backdated to the seventeenth century, nevertheless, there was quite little data available¹⁶ on how it was operated from the educational perspective or from teaching and learning process. Seemingly, there was also no information on whether women also learned in the *surau* (during the day time). Most of the data available about *surau* from the traditional periods were during the last part of the nineteenth century. In the meantime, it is called "*pengajian Qur'an*" (Qur'anic learning) for the elementary or basic learning of Islamic science.¹⁷ The *pengajian Quran* consisted of four subjects: *pengajian. al-Qur'an* (Qur'anic learning), *ibadat* (rituals), *keimanan* (theology) and *akhlaq* (characters/ethics)

The next level is called as "*pengajian kitab*" (studying Arabic textbooks), in which a senior syaikh/teacher taught students on several branches of Islamic sciences such as *sarf* (Arabic syntax), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis). Having finished learning Arabic, a student passed on to the subsequent subject: *fiqh* of the Shafi'ite school. The source for the subject was *Kitab al-Minhaj* written by Abu Zakariya Yahya bin Saraf al-Nawawi or Imam Nawawi (d.676/1278), *tafsir* (Qur'anic commentary) using the *Tafsir al-Jalalayn*¹⁸ as the textbook. These subjects: *sarf*, *fiqh* and *tafsir*, those subjects learned one by one respectively by the students.

b. "Reform" Period

It is generally agreed among the scholars that the reform period started at the beginning of the twentieth century when some Minangkabau *hajjis* returned from Mecca with ideas of some reforms in religious thoughts and practices.¹⁹ Azra mentioned that upon their return to Indonesia, those students of Ahmad Khatib became the reformers in their hometowns. This reform movement touched not only social and cultural aspects of Muslims,

¹⁴ Imam Bawani, *Tradisionalisme Dalam Pendidikan Islam: Studi Tentang Daya Tahan Pesantren Tradisional* (Surabaya: Al-Ikhlas, 1993), 56.

¹⁵ Hamka, *Adat Minangkabau Menghadapi Evolusi*, 36.

¹⁶ According to Azra although the qualification and the characteristics of Syaikh Burhanuddin *surau* may not be claimed as characteristic of an Islamic educational institution, at least, it has already developed the foundations of a peculiarly Islamic educational institution. See Azyumardi Azra, 'Surau di Tengah Krisis', in *Pergulatan Dunia Pesantren: Membangun Dari Bawah*, ed. Dawam Rahardjo (Jakarta: P3M, 1983).

¹⁷ Yunus, *Sejarah Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia*, 29.

¹⁸ It was written by two Jalals; Jalal al-Din al-Mahalli (d.864/1459) and Jala al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505). For further information about the *Kitab*, see Howard M Federspiel, *Popular Indonesian Literature of the Qur'an* (New York: Cornell Modern Indonesian Project, 1994), 11.

¹⁹ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Dan Tarekat, Gading*, 2015, 24–25.

but also influenced the pedagogy of Islamic education.²⁰ The students from Sumatra, Java, or the Malay Peninsula were known as *Jawah* students,²¹ and the most influential *halaqah* for these *Jawah* students was the *halaqah* of Ahmad Khatib, who was originally from Minangkabau. Some of his students were well known as reformists, like Ahmad Dahlan, the founding father of the modernist organisation Muhammadiyah, Muhammad Tayyib Umar, Karim Amrullah, and Abdullah Ahmad. They all struggled to spread a spirit of reform.²² Syaikh Ahmad Khatib himself was appointed as an *imam* of the Shafi'ite School in the *Masjid al-Harm* therefore, he abided strictly by the teaching of this school. He disagreed with Abduh's ideas of reform, but he allowed his students to read the works of Abduh. According to Noer, the hidden reason why Khatib allowed his students was to induce them to reject Abduh's ideas.²³ Seemingly, his plan was not successful, instead of rejecting these out of hand, his students became interested in Abduh's work instead. The works of Abduh and his followers became popular among his students.

From 1908 to 1930, *surau* has more emphasis on memorization (*hafalan*).²⁴ Analyses of Arabic texts (*i'rab*) were among the main focuses of the class, the priority in the class was to memorize *Matan Taqrib (nahwu)*.²⁵ It was in 1916, that a significant initiative was undertaken by the establishment of a *madrasah* imitating the structure of HIS (*Hollands Inlandse School*). It was a combination between a secular school and an Islamic system.²⁶ The religious sciences and Qur'an were included in its curriculum. The reform still did not reach the infrastructure; the students still had to sit on the floor, with no tables and chairs. In the initial period, there were three classes for the elementary level and as time passed these three classes were divided into several other classes, thus finally became seven classes.²⁷

The last period of the reform began in the 1930s. In this period, the alumnae of Cairo dominated the field of reform. If in the previous period, the reformers were familiar with the ideas of reform from Egypt only from publications, in this last period, some Minangkabau students had the opportunity to study in Egypt itself. As a result, when they returned to Indonesia, due to their influence, the development of Islamic education accelerated. The influence of Egypt on Islamic education in West Sumatra through the journal *al-Manar* was

²⁰ Azra, 'Surau Di Tengah Krisis', 2.

²¹ Fred R. von der Mehden, *Two Worlds of Islam: Interaction Between South East Asia and the Middle East* (United States of America: University of Florida Press, 1993), 13.

²² Delian Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam Di Indonesia 1900-1942* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1996), 39.

²³ Delian Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam Di Indonesia 1900-1942*.

²⁴ Hamka, *Kenang-Kenangan Hidup, Vol. I* (Jakarta: Gapura, 1951), 11.

²⁵ Hamka, 42.

²⁶ Karel A. Steenbrik, *Pesantren, Madrasah, Sekolah: Pendidikan Islam Dalam Kurun Moderen* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1974), 41.

²⁷ Delian Noer, *Gerakan Modern Islam Di Indonesia 1900-1942*, 52-53.

replaced by real interaction by some Minangkabau students with the academic world in Egypt.²⁸ Most of them returned to Indonesia during the 1930s. As Boland says from about the thirties, the influence of Cairo upon Indonesian intelligentsia became very strong.²⁹ Moreover Dhofier pointed out that after 1950 the Meccan tradition was no longer the model followed in establishing an Islamic school.³⁰

2. Women and Education in West Sumatra: Socio-Historical Perspectives

The socio-history of women's education within a context of *surau* is still lack of data and publication as well, at least for instance compared to *pesantren*'s education. Meanwhile, at the same time, we witness tremendous significant records of the history of Islamic education in West Sumatra, especially from the work of Mahmud Yunus.³¹ The history of Islamic education in West Sumatra as has been elaborated earlier shows a dynamics of two different contrasting schools of the so-called traditionalist (*kaum tua*) and modernist (*kaum muda*) groups.³² Within those settings, the question is where were the Minangkabau women? Within a matriarchal tradition, matrilineal kinship, and other socio-cultural factors they might also have a specific significant position, participation, or contribution to the development of Islamic education in Minangkabau. Van Reenen,³³ a Dutch scholar believed that even the central position of *rumah gadang* (big maternal house) that applied strong matrilineal bonds and kinship and female leadership through the figure of *bundo kanduang* had an effect on the women's socio-cultural movement in the given area. Consequently, it also affected the social agency of women especially in socio-cultural life.³⁴ On the other hand, the intersection of sociocultural practices and religious (Islamic) practices was also quite strong, but the question then is whether this intersection also affects the position and agency of women in the field of Islamic education development or not, both in the past and currently.

The theory to examine the role of women in the history of Islamic education like in Minangkabau can also be started from the lenses of the classical theory of public and private

²⁸ In 1919, there were eighty Southeast Asian students in Cairo; three-fourth-quarters of them were Indonesians. The total number of students increased after 1922 with the improvement of the economy in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. See William R. Roff, 'Indonesian and Malay Students in Cairo in the 1920's', *Indonesia* 9 (April 1970): 73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3350623>.

²⁹ B.J. Boland, *The Struggle of Islam in Modern Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV, 1971), 231.

³⁰ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradition and Change in Indonesian Islamic Education* (Jakarta: Office of Religious Research and Development, 1995), 74.

³¹ Eka Srimulyani, 'The Idea of Mahmud Yunus to Reform Arabic Teaching', *Jurnal Ilmiah Didaktika*. XII, no. 1 (2011): 1-17.

³² Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra 1928-1933*; B.J.O Schrieke, *Pergolakan Agama Di Sumatera Barat: Sebuah Subangan Bibliografi* (Jakarta: Bharata, 1973).

³³ van Reenen, 'The Salty Mouth of a Senior Woman: Gender and The House in Minangkabau'.

³⁴ Blackwood, *Webs of Power: Women, Kin, and Community in a Sumatran Village*.

dichotomy. Nevertheless, this conceptual paradigm is unable to answer several important questions on women's role and agency. It needs to be accompanied by other analyses of how matriarchal, and other socio-cultural features of the Minangkabau society affect the position of women in public life, including education. Moreover, the agency theory is also needed to explain or examine what typical agency that women in Minangkabau had in the educational field, is it a "docile agency",³⁵ or a "creative agency".³⁶ According to Soerjono Soekanto³⁷ role as a concept is dynamic and it has something to do with rights and responsibilities as well. In this regard, the concept of roles in this research is also closely connected to the gender analysis and the social construction.

a. Women's agency in Minangkabau Muslim society

Women or *parampuan* or *padusi* in local terms are portrayed as those who have to own a good character and get along well in the society, and submit to the ethics or principles known as *kato nan ampek* or popularly known as *jalan nan ampek*.³⁸ Within Minangkabau culture a woman is expected to be helpful and handful, which in local term defines as "*capek kaki ringan tangan*". All of these local values put a strong emphasis on women's behavior and action. The matriarchal and matrilineal values embraced by Minangkabau society have placed women in a relatively 'higher' position, one of these social positions is "*bundo kanduang*". To reach the position of a *bundo kanduang*, a woman has to get through or accomplish several phases. The childhood phase is called "*dayang*", at this stage she is under the close supervision of her parents. When she grows up as a teenager, the term is "*puti*", and during this phase, she starts to help *mandeh* with domestic chores to prepare her to be able to handle future private and public roles as someone who will receive the legacy of *adat* (custom) and tradition. The next phase is when she is getting married, and by then she is called as *bundo* which also means mother, and at this stage, according to Minangkabau tradition, she has been considered as someone responsible for undertaking the *adat* (cultural) roles. Nevertheless, not all Minangkabau women or *bundo* (mother) will reach the socio-cultural position as "*bundo kanduang*".

³⁵ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005).

³⁶ Eka Srimulyani, 'Gender in Contemporary Acehese Dayah: Moving beyond Docile Agency?', in *Gender and Power In Indonesian Islam: Leaders, Feminists, Sufis and Pesantren Selves*, 2013, 66–80, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203797518>.

³⁷ Soerjono Soekanto, *Sosiologi Suatu Pengantar* (Jakarta: PT Raja Grafindo Persada., 2002).

³⁸ Makhdom Ahmad Alpetoti and Zainun Kamaluddin Fakhri, 'ETIKA KATO NAN AMPEK DALAM BUDAYA MINANGKABAU', *Paradigma: Jurnal Kalam Dan Filsafat* 4, no. 02 (11 January 2023), <https://doi.org/10.15408/paradigma.v4i02.30406>.

Bundo kanduang is an elderly woman who is respected well among her clan or her extended family, and she is someone who has a high position socially and culturally, and takes good care for others as well.³⁹ Through *harta pusako tinggi* (family inheritance), a *bundo kanduang* is responsible to ensure the welfare of her clan or extended family. There have been some changes lately in how the male siblings take over the ownership and the management of the family inheritance⁴⁰ but still, a *bundo kanduang* has particular important roles in her extended family, she is responsible for the education of her family, especially her nephews.⁴¹ This process has been believed to result in producing several celebrated figures in the history of Minangkabau such as Syekh Ahmad Khatib, Buya Hamka, Muhammad Hatta, Muhmmad Yamin, Tan Malaka, Muhammad Natsir, Syekh Sulaiman Arrasuli, dan Agus Salim, Syaikhah Rahmah el-Yunusiyah the founded of Diniyyah Putri, Rang Kayo Rasoena Said, Syamsiyah Abbas, a female ulama, Siti Manggopoh a well-known warrior, and Rohana Kudus, a celebrated journalist.

b. Women and schooling in Minangkabau: context and challenge

In Minangkabau, the discourse on women and education has been discussed more intensively around the twentieth century, although the historical record of women's participation in the educational field might occurred earlier, especially among the blue blood or aristocracy families whose members gained a privilege for their educational access and attainment. This limited access did not affect a bigger society in general. A bigger change in terms of education in the socio-historical context of Minangkabau society related to the emergence of reformist group of *kaum muda* such as through the publication *Al-Moenir*, published on 1st April 1911 di Padang. *Al-Moenir* is considered as the first media that places the issue of women and education as one of the dialectical issues in their publication.

Due to the two groups religious contestation of *kaum muda* and *kaum tua* has been tough, and to some extent it also created serious conflict among their followers in the community.⁴² The confrontation touched upon the fundamental issues in religion such as heresy, infidelity, and it also affected closely to the aspect of religious education. The intention of *kaum tua* to preserve the old learning model that focused heavily on Islamic

³⁹ Ermi Sola, "BUNDO KANDUANG" MINANGKABAU Vs. KEPEMIMPINAN', *JURNAL SIPAKALEBBI* 4, no. 1 (26 August 2020): 346–59, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jsipakallebbi.v4i1.15523>.

⁴⁰ Siska Sasmita, 'Peran Perempuan Suku Minangkabau Yang Menjadi Kepala Keluarga (PEKKA) Bagi Penciptaan Ketahanan Pangan Rumah Tangga Di Kecamatan Padang Timur', *Humanus* 10, no. 1 (30 July 2012): 82, <https://doi.org/10.24036/jh.v10i1.489>.

⁴¹ Fasli Jalal, 'Bundo Kanduang Adalah Cermin Perempuan Minangkabau Sebagai Seorang Ibu Sejati', *bakaba.net*, 7 December 2022.

⁴² Schrieke, *Pergolakan Agama Di Sumatera Barat: Sebuah Subangan Bibliografi*.

sciences has been contested by the educational reform ideas of *kaum muda*, in which for them learning for Muslim is not only about Islamic jurisprudence or Islamic sciences but also Western science that could advance their civilization.⁴³

There have been several crucial educational issues touched upon by the modernist group of *kaum muda*, and the topic of women and education or schooling was among those provoked in their thoughts which they also published or disseminated to public.⁴⁴ Although looking at their al-Moenir publication, it was only (0,45%) portion from all issues discussed the topic.⁴⁵ Still, this group was among the pioneer who brought the topic to be a public awareness through their *dakwah* (Islamic preaching) and publication. Haji Abdul Karim Amrullah (1879-1945), popularly known as Haji Rasul was behind the idea to make Padang Panjang as the center for Islamic education, in which Rahmah el-Yunusiyyah then founded the Diniyah Putri in Padang Panjang apart from several others male figures such as Zainuddin Labay (1890-1924), Daud Rasidi (1880-1948), Abdul Hamid Hakim (1893-1959), AR. Sutan Mansur (1895-1985), Hamka (1908-1981).⁴⁶

Some sources mentioned that Rahmah learned religious sciences from Haji Rasul,⁴⁷ and this claim was supported by other data from Sanusi Latif who said that Rahma was indeed Haji Rasul's student.⁴⁸ Rahmah and her female friends Rasuna Said, Nasiah dan Upik Japang came to visit Haji Rasul residence to learn.⁴⁹ If she was the student of Haji Rasul, it implied that she learned from a modernist figure, and her on women's access to education and public position.

c. Minangkabau women in the educational field

Rahmah El Yunusiyyah is a Minangkabau woman who was very known for her contribution to advancing women's education.⁵⁰ She confronted the inequality faced by women in the field of education as she believed supported women's rights including in the educational field.⁵¹ She was born on 29 December 1900 in Surungan Padang Panjang.⁵²

⁴³ Haji Abdullah Ahmad, 'Kiriman Dari Tuan H,M,T.U Pemimpin Kita Di Tanjung Sungayang', *Al-Munir* 2, no. 9 (1912): 167-69.

⁴⁴ Zulmuqim, 'Pembaharuan Islam Di Indonesia Awal Abad XX: Studi Terhadap Pemikiran Dr.H.Abdul Karim Amrullah' (Ph.D Thesis, IAIN Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, 2001); Abdullah, *Schools and Politics: The Kaum Muda Movement in West Sumatra 1928-1933*.

⁴⁵ Sarwan, 'Isu Kemajuan Dalam Majalah Al-Imam (1906-1908) Dan Al-Munir (1911-1915)' (Ph.D Thesis, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2012), 141.

⁴⁶ Hamka, *Ayahku, Riwayat Hidup Dr. Abdul Karim Amrullah Dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama Di Sumatera Barat*.

⁴⁷ Hamka.

⁴⁸ Sanusi Latif, 'Gerakan Kaum Tua Di Minangkabau' (Ph.D Thesis, IAIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 1988).

⁴⁹ Hamka, *Ayahku, Riwayat Hidup Dr. Abdul Karim Amrullah Dan Perjuangan Kaum Agama Di Sumatera Barat*.

⁵⁰ Zusneli Zubir, *Dari Pingitan Hingga Karier: Perjalanan Tokoh Perempuan Minangkabau Menentang Tradisi* (Jogjakarta: Eja Publisher, 2011), 66.

⁵¹ Mighfaza M. Helmi and Huriani, 'Pemikiran Rahmah El Yunusiyyah Dalam Membangun Pendidikan Islam Bagi Perempuan Di Indonesia'.

Since her childhood, she has shown her strong determination to achieve her goals with strong effort and personality.⁵³ This later has made her as a respected figure among Minangkabau society.

Her dreams to provide other women with a better education have been firm, with her strong determination and efforts a well-known school for girls was then founded, namely “*Madrasah Diniyyah Lil Banat*” or “Diniyyah School Poetri” later known as Perguruan Diniyyah Putri. She believed for some reason, women shall be educated separately from their male counterparts since several courses and subjects need to be taught in a special class for women only.⁵⁴ To advance women’s education, she utilized several mediums, not only through education or schooling system but also through her *dakwah* (Islamic preaching) and her social work. Her *dakwah* (Islamic preaching) activities expanded from her hometown to Aceh, Sumatera Utara, and even to overseas (Malaysia). She was an eloquent orator, although, in the meantime, few people believed that women should not be speaking publicly in front of mixed audiences, or in the presence of male audience.

Apart from Diniyyah Putri, she also founded a “menyesal school” to upgrade women’s literacy for those married women, who never attained any formal education and gained literacy. The school was established in 1925 and lasted until 1932. She also expanded her Diniyah Putri into several other areas in Kwitang, Jatinegara, and Tanah Abang, in 1935, but during the Japanese occupation, these schools discontinued.⁵⁵ On the 1st February 1937 Rahmah founded a higher school, namely “*Kulliyatul Mu’allimat el Islamiyyah*” to produce Islamic teachers. The school has graduated a number of alumnae who were/are spread over across Indonesia and overseas as well such as in Malaysia, Middle East, and the Netherlands⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Rahmah also has a strong intention for establishing a faculty (Islamic higher education), which called Faculty of Islamic Education and Dakwah, in which she already initiated since 1964, and was launched by the governor of West Sumatra Prof. Drs. Harun Zein on 22 November 1967. This faculty then became Fakultas Dirasat Islamiyyah (Faculty of Islamic Studies) on 3 December 1969, in which its certificate was recognized and stratified as similar to the bachelor of arts in other Islamic universities such as IAIN al-Jami’ah Imam

⁵² Aminuddin Rasyad, Leon Salim, and Isnaniah Saleh, ‘Pemikiran Rahmah El Yunusiyah Dalam Membangun Pendidikan Islam Bagi Perempuan Di Indonesia’, ed. Riki Eka Putra (Jakarta: PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2023), 5.

⁵³ Rasyad, Salim, and Saleh, ‘Pemikiran Rahmah El Yunusiyah Dalam Membangun Pendidikan Islam Bagi Perempuan Di Indonesia’.

⁵⁴ Rasyad, ‘Rahmah El Yunusiyah: Kartini Dari Perguruan Islam’, 6.

⁵⁵ Nafilah Abdullah, ‘Rahmah El Yunusiyah Kartini Padang Panjang (1900-1969)’, *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama* 10, no. 2 (20 July 2017): 51, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jsa.2016.1002-03>.

⁵⁶ Rasyad, Salim, and Saleh, ‘Pemikiran Rahmah El Yunusiyah Dalam Membangun Pendidikan Islam Bagi Perempuan Di Indonesia’.

Bonjol, which is now known as UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

d. Women and social change in the educational field

The reformists group as mentioned earlier tried to make a change or influence on the socio-religious discourse, including on the issues of women's rights and equality. Hadler⁵⁷ mentioned Hamka's statement that if women are not educated, and not engaged in the social movement, then women will be still disadvantaged, even if they live in a matrilineal kinship system. In the last part of the nineteenth century, the educational movement initiated by Minangkabau female figures resulted in a more independent women's life to achieve social equality in different fields.⁵⁸ There were three main models of women's educational movements, which became a movement for social changes, from the establishment of women's specific school, journalism to politics.⁵⁹

In this regards, there are three female figures in the modern history of Minangkabau, namely Rahmah El Yunisyyah, Rasuna Said, and Rohana Kudus, who were also supported by their male counterparts such as Zainuddin Labay, Hamka dan Abdullatif Syakur undertook important part in those social movements. Rahmah established a school for women (*Diniyah Putri*), which has been an icon for female Islamic education in the region. The school has been developed for one century currently (November 1923 – 2023) with far greater development and achievement. Meanwhile, the publication of the reformist figures also started to defend women's rights such as polygamy, women's economic independence, rights for education.

Before this, Rohana Kudus through her school that supports women's economic independence, in which she founded Sekolah Perempuan Kerajinan Amai Setia in 1911. In this school women were taught vocational skills that could generate income for them, to support their family. In this school, women were also introduced to financial literacy and financial management, in which women's *koperasi* (cooperatives) was founded which was totally owned by women's groups themselves.⁶⁰ Rohana Kudus believed that women's education should be based on better literacy skills, in which she published several articles on women's equality and women's welfare. This publication also boosted the popularity of her

⁵⁷ Jeffrey Hadler, *Sengketa Tiada Putus: Matriarkat, Reformisme Islam, Dan Kolonialisme Di Minangkabau* (Jakarta: Freedom Institute, 2010).

⁵⁸ Zikriadi, Bahaking Rama, and Muhammad Rusdi Rasyid, 'Perkembangan Pendidikan Islam Masa Awal Di Sumatera Barat, Lembaga Dan Tokohnya', *PIJAR: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran* 1, no. 2 (24 January 2023): 142–50, <https://doi.org/10.58540/pijar.v1i2.155>.

⁵⁹ Silfia Hanani, 'Women's Newspapers As Minangkabau Feminist Movement Against Marginalization in Indonesia'.

⁶⁰ Hanani, 'RUHANA KUDDUS PELOPOR GERAKAN ENTERPRENEUR PEREMPUAN DI MINANGKABAU'.

Amai Setia school, in which then several Dutch official's wives became among their loyal customers since then. The literacy and campaign for women's issues was promoted through her own published Newspaper in 1912, namely "Soenting Melajoe". Through the newspaper, she presented her opposition to women's discrimination, her support for women's education. The same path of advancing women's right through journalism was followed by Rasuna Said, who was initially a teacher, she advocated women to be knowledgeable on politics, and to be engaged in politics. This became a separation turning point between her and Rahmah el-Yunusiyyah. Rasuna Said also published a women's newspaper namely Majalah Mingguan Menara Poetri in 1937.⁶¹ Another male local figure, namely Abdulatif Syakur also published women's newspaper Djauharah Oentoek Kaeom Perempuan in 1924.⁶² In which all of the management and editorial board were women. This signified women's literacy and the quality of their education, which was an effective campaign for women's rights, including in the field of education.

C. Conclusion

Minangkabau was/is one of the regions in the archipelago that has a strong history of Islamic education. Its history classified into two main periods; traditional and modern period. The modern period started at the beginning of the twentieth century and it was also the moment when a number of educational reforms occurred, and women's participation in the field emerged substantively. On the other hand, this was also the time when the contestation of *kaum muda* and *kaum tua* appeared and influenced many aspects of the community socio-religious lives, including in the field of education. This is also the socio-historical context, when the campaign for women and education was brought about to the public, especially through a number of publications from *kaum muda* group or from those leading Minangkabau females figure themselves such Rasuna Said, Rohana Kudus, etc. Admittedly, the topic of women and education related to the traditions of how socially and culturally women are positioned. As a matriarchal society with a strong matrilineal kinship, the process of "*bundo kanduang* making" has been also a process for women to be prepared to take wider public roles and agency.

⁶¹ Ahmad Adam, *Suara Minangkabau: Sejarah Dan Bibliografi Akhbar Dan Majalah Di Sumatera Barat* (Malaysia: The University of Malaya Press, 2012).

⁶² Yosi Nofa and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, 'BETWEEN TRADITIONALIST AND MODERNIST: THE ISLAMIC REFORMATION OF HAJI ABDUL LATIF SYAKUR IN MINANGKABAU IN THE 20TH CENTURY', *Akademika : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 28, no. 1 (3 July 2023): 85, <https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v28i1.5777>.

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This article also revealed the way how women in Minangkabau, especially from the journey of several prominent female figures undertook their roles side by side with their male counterparts to initiate changes and ‘innovation’ in the field of education. Interestingly, not all of them were founder of the school, but still they campaigned for women’s rights and education, through their publication. In general, at least there are three models of women’s educational movement, that they were engaged in; establishing the school, Islamic preaching (dakwah), publication (journalism), and politics. All of those initiatives have laid a legacy until now, such as the establishment of Diniyah Putri School in Padang Panjang, the Sekolah Kerajinan Amai Setia in Koto Gadang. The publication of several newspapers such as Soenting Melaju by Rohana Kudus has also been a medium to advance women’s literacy, on the other side, figures like Rasuna Said chose politics as her strategy to make a change for women’s life and rights. All of these have indeed laid a foundation and affect the current development of Islamic education in the region.

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