

MAINTAINING INTEGRITY AND EXPANDING AUTHORITY: The Role of Ulama Women in Madura

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ABSTRACT

Madura is an island whose community is known for its religiosity. Hence, religious authorities are very prominent among the Madurese. At the same time, the strong patriarchal culture in Madura makes its community view that religious authority is limited to Kyai. However, modernity urged the Ulama women (Bu Nyai) to be more active and adaptive with the technological change. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the important transformation done by Ulama women in strategizing da'wa to significantly influence the ummah during this modern era. This paper will first elaborate on the social background, the authority of religious figures, and the roles of women in Madura to broadly observe the role of Ulama women in maintaining their integrity and expanding their authority. The methodology applied in this research is qualitative, with a study case approach in Sampang, Madura. Data are collected from interviews as primary sources and related literatures as secondary sources. The framework used in the research is the concept of new Muslim womanhood in assessing the transformation to increase the reliability and validity of the research. The study found that Ulama women has transformed their role from traditional to modern by actively participating in business without ignoring their responsibility as religious authority.

Keywords: Religious authority, Ulama women, integrity, da'wa, entrepreneurship.

A. INTRODUCTION

Madura is identically recognized as one of the religious islands in Indonesia due to the strong religious tradition as a result of the Islamization process in its historical records.¹ The religious tradition implemented by the communities made religious figures have an essential authority in Madura, as stated in its classical slogan, *bhuppa' bhabbu ghuru rato*, which means parents, (religious) teachers, and government.² This hierarchical system shows that religious teachers are more respected than the government. It could be ensured that any part of Madura has its authoritative religious people whom people refer to. The charismatic role of religious authority is mainly portrayed with men due to the patriarchal culture adopted in Madura in which men are seen as superior to women, which gives women limited space to explore their lives.³

As time went by, trends of modernity came to urged women transforming their role into more actively adapt with the digital development. In response, there have been various recent research discussing about the Ulama women in Madura. For example, the research conducted by Sadiyah and Anshori discussed about the role of Ulama women in dealing with ecology.⁴ Another research was conducted by

¹ Yanwar Pribadi, "Religious Networks in Madura: Pesantren, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Kiai as the Core of Santri Culture," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 51, no. 1 (2013): 2, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2013.511.1-32>.

² Ulya Fikriyati, Ah Fawaid, and Subkhani Kusuma Dewi, "Vernacular Tafsir in Madura," *Australian Journal of Islamic Studies* 6, no. 4 (2021): 47–67, <https://doi.org/10.55831/ajis.v6i4.403>.

³ Rolita Adelia Prasetya, "Meretas Budaya Patriarki Madura: Eksplorasi Pasar Tradisional Sebagai Ruang Publik Perempuan Desa (Studi Fenomenologi Di Pasar Tradisional Desa Labang, Bangkalan)," *Al-Hikmah Media Dakwah, Komunikasi, Sosial Dan Kebudayaan* 13, no. 1 (2022): 11–20, <https://doi.org/10.32505/hikmah.v13i1.3750>.

⁴ Zaimatus Sadiyah and Ahmad Afnan Anshori, "Power and Agency: The Role of Bu Nyai (Female Ulama) in Dealing with Disposable Sanitary Napkins Problem in Pesantren (Case Study Of Pondok Pesantren Annuqayah Sumenep Madura)," *Tashwirul*

Jannah about the role of Ulama women in perceiving gender equality.⁵ Also, the role of Ulama women in enlightening the morality of the umma.⁶ However, there is no any research conducted to address the ulama women in responding the modernity during this contemporary era through the entrepreneurship. Research conducted by Sakai and Anoraga in 2019 found that middle-class women started to build a small-scale business using the social media.⁷ Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap of the study to find out the role of Ulama women in Madura in maintaining their integrity and maintaining their authority.

The study case of this research is in Sampang Madura that relatively backwards compared to other cities in Madura. For instance, previous research conducted by in 2019 reported that Pamekasan is a rapid-growth region, Sumenep is a retard region, and Sampang and Bangkalan are backward regions.⁸ Although the Ministry of Religious Affairs recorded that Sampang has the largest number of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in Madura, with about 352 institutions spread along fourteen subdistricts, it is relatively stagnant in backwardness compared to other

Afkar 40, no. 1 (June 30, 2021), <http://www.tashwirulafkar.net/index.php/afkar/article/view/51>.

⁵ Hasanatul Jannah, *Ulama Perempuan Madura* (IRCISOD, 2020).

⁶ Mohammad Takdir, "Kiprah Ulama Perempuan Nyai Hj. Makkiyah Asâ€™ad Dalam Membentengi Moralitas Umat Di Pamekasan Madura," *'Anil Islam: Jurnal Kebudayaan Dan Ilmu Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (June 30, 2015): 72–97.

⁷ Minako Sakai and Bhirawa Anoraga, "Education, Digital Enterprise and Islam in the Indonesian Modern Embedded Economy," in *Muslim Women in the Economy*, ed. Shamim Samani and Dora Marinove (Routledge, 2020).

⁸ Indah Purnama Sari, Bado Riyono, and Agus Supandi, "Indeks Pembangunan Manusia Di Madura: Analisis Tipologi Klassen," *JABE (Journal of Applied Business and Economic)* 6, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.30998/jabe.v6i2.4578>.

districts.⁹ Another research by Fajrin resulted that Sampang is the lowest economic growth.¹⁰

The theoretical framework used in this paper is new Muslim womanhood theory proposed by Sakai, stating that Muslim women in this modern era have their approach to delivering da'wa through entrepreneurship and mediating their piety supported by the current development of social media.¹¹ Entrepreneurship lately become a trend as an informal job along with the accessibility of social media. According to Sakai and Anoraga, the informal job in Indonesia is considered part of the household activities for women to gain more money as it goes along with daily activities without any recognition as a formal job. They added that three main factors encourage women to participate in the informal economy: First, the equality of gender in education is not fully transmitted to equal jobs. Second, the patriarchal culture, especially among Muslim conservatives, led women to home-based income-generating. Third, the development of digital technology eases women to participate in the informal economy easily.¹²

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This research will observe the role of Ulama women in Madura in maintaining their integrity and expanding their authority using qualitative

⁹Kementrian Agama, "Pangkalan Data Pondok Pesantren," ditpdpontren.kemenag.go.id, 2014, <https://ditpdpontren.kemenag.go.id/pdpp/statistik>.

¹⁰Verawati Fajrin and Heri Sudarsono, "ANALISIS PERTUMBUHAN EKONOMI DI PULAU MADURA," *Jurnal Ekonomi-Qu* 9, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.35448/jequ.v9i1.5434>.

¹¹Minako Sakai, "Embracing Islam, Work and Family: Women's Economic Empowerment in Islamising Indonesia," *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 43 (2019), <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue43/sakai2.html>.

¹² Sakai and Anoraga, "Education, Digital Enterprise and Islam in the Indonesian Modern Embedded Economy."

research with a study case approach in Sampang, one of the cities in Madura. According to Creswell and David Creswell, qualitative methodology is used to investigate the individuals or groups assigned to social issues, resulting in a flexible structure of the final report based on the interpretation of the data.¹³ In this context, the data is obtained by the interview with the Women ulama called “Bu Nyai” or “Ning” who are fostering *pesantren* and exploring entrepreneurship simultaneously as part of their strategies for delivering da‘wah in society. The informants are chosen using theoretical and purposive sampling to obtain the research objective.¹⁴

The informants are the Women Ulama in Sampang who handle *pesantren* and business at the same time. First, Bu Nyai Mahdiyyah Afrok from *pesantren* Darul Hijrah is a national fashion designer and owner of a fashion store. Second, Bu Nyai Mila from *pesantren* Darus Su‘ada’ is a make-up artist. Third, Bu Nyai Ibtihal from *pesantren* al-Haramain Duwa’ Pote is a food entrepreneur. Fourth, Bu Nyai Nadya from *pesantren* al-Khodijah is a food entrepreneur. Last, Bu Nyai Atiyyah from *pesantren* al-Manar is an Arabian food entrepreneur. The data from the interview are collected using a semi-structured interview in which the questions are openly explored and expressed based on the framework used in the research.¹⁵ At the same time, according to Creswell and David Creswell, triangulation data is necessary to obtain more comprehensive findings

¹³ John W Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design* (SAGE Publications, 2017).

¹⁴ Norman K Denzin and Yvonna S Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Sage, 2018).

¹⁵ Saepudin Mashuri et al., “Semi-Structured Interview: A Methodological Reflection on the Development of a Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies Ruslin,” *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education* 12, no. 1 (2022): 22–29, <https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-1201052229>.

through interviews, observations, and data analysis.¹⁶ Thus, to increase the reliability and validity of the data, this research applies triangulation data by interviewing *pesantren*'s students (*santri*) and citizens to examine their roles within society.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Socio-cultural Context of Madura and Its Religious Authority

It is obvious that Madurese communities strongly uphold religiosity based on their activities that embody Islamic values. Regarding religious background, most Madurese communities are influenced by the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) organization. It is evidenced by the *pesantren* system, which adopts the traditional system. In addition, Madurese communities also strongly uphold their culture as part of local wisdom. Local wisdom of Madura is a set of norms, customs, and values implemented by the local communities for personal or community guidelines in socializing within society.¹⁷ For instance, the wise advice from the Madurese ancestors for generations to generations, *tello' parkara sè kodhu èhorma-tè iyâ arèya omor, ondhâng-ondhâng bân aghâma*, which means three important things that should be respected, those are life, constitution, and religion. As a result, the socio-cultural context in Madura will never be separated from religiosity itself. Many classical poems are referred to the meaning contained in the Quran and sunna, which reflects that Islamic values have a remarkable impact on the society in Madura. The religiosity of Madura does not involve only the cultural aspect but also educational, political, and

¹⁶ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*.

¹⁷ Zainuddin Syarif and Abd Hannan, "Kearifan Lokal Pesantren Sebagai Bangunan Ideal Moderasi Islam Masyarakat Madura," *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 2 (2020): 220–40, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2020.14.2.220-240>.

economic aspects. The research done by Hannan and Syarif stated that the Islamic tradition adhered to by Madurese communities is highly influenced by NU while adopting conservatism in terms of a paradigm or a way of thinking.¹⁸

In terms of the educational aspect, most people in the communities considered *pesantren* as the elite educational institution for Madurese communities due to its system and religious teachings. Thus, they mostly preferred to be educated in *pesantren* rather than formal school, which later shaped the *santri* culture. According to Pribadi, *santri* culture is derived from the collaboration of three main elements: *pesantren*, NU, and the Kyai. There are types of Kyai, those are: First, Kyai *pesantren*, who foster *pesantren*. Second, Kyai tarekat, who lead the Sufi order (tarekat). Third, Kyai *langgar*, who handles a small mosque in a village. Last, Kyai dukun, who medicate people or medicine man.¹⁹ Due to the significant role of the *pesantren*, the center of authority among the Madurese community is Kyai who foster *pesantren*.²⁰ This authority is strongly built in the society, which means the inherited ones from Kyai *pesantren*'s family are also considered religious authorities. For example, the wives of Kyai are called "Nyai", and their sons are called "Lora", and their daughters are called "Ning". Alatas defined religious authority as a recognition of being connected to the prophet Muhammad, allowing them to disseminate the prophet's teachings

¹⁸ Syarif and Hannan.

¹⁹ Yanwar Pribadi, *ISLAM, STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDONESIA : Local Politics in Madura*. (Routledge, 2020).

²⁰ Hasanatul Jannah, "PONDOK PESANTREN SEBAGAI PUSAT OTORITAS ULAMA MADURA," *Jurnal Al-Hikmah* 17, no. 1 (2019): 91–108, <https://doi.org/10.35719/alhikmah.v17i1.9>.

to the people without any oppression. This relationship is not given. It is an achievement and a product after a long process.²¹

For this reason, religious authorities need to maintain their relationship with society as figures who are trusted to be heirs of the prophet. Kyai are not only expected to solve religious issues but also social and political matters. In this case, some Kyai decided to take part in political aspects and collaborate with political parties and the government.²² For example, the current regent of Bangkalan is Lora Abdul Latif Imron, the descendant of Syaikhona Kholil. Unlike other people, Kyai easily gain followers as they are charismatic and win the sympathy of the public. Madurese communities respect them because they believe that Kyai are trustworthy and could do more than commoners do. Also, they expect to receive blessings (*barakah*) or dignity (*karamah*) under the guidance of the Kyai.²³ Besides, some Kyai prefer collaborating with the government rather than involving in political matters to expand their authority. For example, the support of Kyai *pesantren* in socializing the covid -19 vaccination.

Conversely, the government maintains its relationship with the Kyai to gain more followers and sympathy from the communities. For example, some activities have been conducted in Sampang to strengthen the Kyai-government relationship, such as cycling together. Regarding this matter, H. Junaidi, as a regent of Sampang, asserted that such activity is important to preserve a good synergy between ulama and umara.²⁴ On the other hand,

²¹ Ismail Fajrie Alatas, *What Is Religious Authority?: Cultivating Islamic Communities in Indonesia* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

²² Wiwid Adiyanto and Rarashanti Wulandhari, "Kekuasaan Kiai Dalam Politik : Modal Fuad Amin Sebagai Bupati Terpilih Di Kabupaten Bangkalan," *CHANNEL: Jurnal Komunikasi* 8, no. 1 (2020): 59, <https://doi.org/10.12928/channel.v8i1.15147>.

²³ Pribadi, *ISLAM, STATE AND SOCIETY IN INDONESIA: Local Politics in Madura*.

²⁴ Pemerintah Kabupaten Sampang, "Gowes Bareng, Bupati Sampang Ajak Ulama - Umara Perkuat Sinergi," Kabupaten Sampangkab, 2022,

the religious authorities are the heirs of the prophet who are trusted to disseminate the prophet's teachings. By this definition, Ulama women (Bu Nyai) are also considered as part of the religious authorities in regard to their broad knowledge of Islamic teachings and their position as wives of the religious authorities, but with a limited scope due to the patriarchal culture adopted within the traditional communities in Madura. Nevertheless, the modern era, with the rise of media that is accessible to anyone else, gives broadened opportunities for women to deliver their aspirations and innovation. It is crucial to recognize the contribution of the women in Madura and their roles in responding to the modern era to grasp the role of Ulama women and their actions in the modern era, which will be discussed in this paper.

2. The Roles of Women in Madura

The role of women in Madura is portrayed by the traditional and cultural image that runs within the communities. The strong patriarchal culture tends to be assumed due to the religiosity of the Madurese communities. In fact, the patriarchal culture is arguable in the Islamic tradition since it emphasizes humanity with the equal rights of women and men. Despite the protracted discussion on the patriarchal issue in Islamic tradition, there must be another reason for how patriarchy is constructed in human culture. In the case of the Madurese tradition, patriarchal culture is possibly shaped by the folktales upheld by the communities as part of the local wisdom. Some famous folktales in Madura are *Aer Mata Ebu*, *Aryo Menak*, and *His Wife*, and *The Origin of Madura*, describing the woman as

<https://sampangkab.go.id/berita/gowes-bareng-bupati-sampang-ajak-ulama-umara-perkuat-sinergi/>.

a person who sacrifices herself for the happiness of her husband and sons.²⁵ Thus, it is undeniable that the roles of women in Madura tend to be limited compared to men. As a consequence, the discussion on the common roles of women in Madura in the household, economic, educational, and social spheres is essential to grasp the involvement of women within Madurese communities.

As in a common traditional culture, women in Madura should uphold three principles, cooking for the family, serving husbands with a good dress, and giving birth with taking care of the children in the house while men make money for them out of the house.²⁶ Otherwise, women are involved in working with husbands in the ricefield as a general livelihood in Madura. As time went by, the involvement of women in the economic sphere decreased, such as bankers, traders, and teachers, but they were still burdened with the essential task of being wives and mothers. In addition, Madurese women also work overseas as Indonesian women workers (TKW), to gain money to improve their family's economic issues.²⁷ The career of women in Madura is determined by their educational journey or experience because the more educated the higher the salary. Based on East Java Statistics Indonesia, educational participation in elementary schools and junior high school is relatively equal between males and females.²⁸

²⁵ Imron Wakhid Harits, "The Social Position And Typology Of Madurese Women In Madura Folktales," *ATAVISME* 14, no. 2 (2011): 194–203, <https://doi.org/10.24257/atavisme.v14i2.68.194-203>.

²⁶ Zainur Rozikin and Rio Kurniawan, "Representation of Madura Women in the Household," 2018.

²⁷ Agus Sugiono, Aminatus Zakhra, and Evi Malia, "Interpretasi Dampak Keuangan Keluarga Tenaga Kerja Wanita (Studi Fenomenologi TKW Pamekasan Yang Berimigrasi Ke Saudi Arabia Dan Malaysia)," *AKUNTABEL* 14, no. 2 (2018): 107, <https://doi.org/10.29264/jakt.v14i2.1903>.

²⁸ Badan Pusat Statistik Jawa Timur, "BPS Provinsi Jawa Timur," jatim.bps.go.id, 2020, <https://jatim.bps.go.id/indicator/40/171/1/apm-sma-16-18-th-.html>.

However, in senior high school, the number of men is higher than women, especially in Bangkalan and Sumenep. The essential reason Madurese women obtain formal and non-formal education is a preparation for being a mother. Hence, many women in Madura do not continue to the higher educational institution, which may bring them into difficulties in terms of careers. In response, some institutions, such as higher educational institutions, Trunojoyo University, conducted training for managing e-commerce and the marketplace to develop women's economic and entrepreneurship skills.²⁹

Moreover, there has been a paradigm transformation in the contemporary era in overviewing women and their roles. For instance, some Madurese women successfully gained doctoral degrees to dismiss the women stereotype.³⁰ In addition, in terms of political context, the involvement of women has been considered. Madurese women have taken part in politics to be village heads (*klebun*) and they play an important role in gaining public trust by building the infrastructure.³¹ Undeniably, some men used the open opportunity of women in maintaining their strategy such as commanding a wife after the end of the husband's period in rolling a village.

²⁹ Ariesta Kartika Sari et al., "Pelatihan Pemanfaatan E-Commerce Bagi Peningkatan Mutu Sosial Tenaga Kerja Dan Wanita Di Kelurahan Rongtengah Sampang Madura," *AKSILOGIYA: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 1, no. 2 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.30651/aks.v1i2.931>.

³⁰ Mamiq Alki, "Lailatul Qomariah Anak Tukang Becak Asal Madura Selesaikan Doktoral Di ITS Dan Beasiswa Penelitian Di Jepang - Warta Lombok," wartalombok.pikiran-rakyat.com, 2021, <https://wartalombok.pikiran-rakyat.com/pendidikan/pr-1071430886/lailatul-qomariah-anak-tukang-becak-asal-madura-selesaikan-doktoral-di-its-dan-beasiswa-penelitian-di-jepang>.

³¹ Mohammad Imam Sufiyanto, Alviatul Munawaroh, and Siti Maghfiroh Qurrotul Aini, "Women's Role in Social Community and Regional Leadership in Madura," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 12, no. 2 (2022).

Within the various conditions of Madurese communities in perceiving women, it is obvious that generally, the contemporary era with technological development has changed the way Madurese communities think about the role of women. The spirit of feminism has appeared and impacted Madurese women.³² Madurese attempted to explore their skills through the internet and media. The involvement of women in social, educational, political, and economic spheres increased in the modern era. So that will gradually decrease the gender gap that exists in Madurese society and gradually remove the blind patriarchal culture in Madura. As a result, the roles of female religious authorities in Madura differ significantly due to their unique approach to da'wah strategies, which contrasts with the traditional methodology of da'wa. They started utilizing media such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. This paper will also provide information on Madurese women's religious authorities' methodology of da'wa and their transformation in response to modernity with its industrial revolution.

3. Ulama Women in the Traditional Culture

Madurese community is relatively described as a traditional community. In the Oxford dictionary, the term traditional literally means a part of a particular group's beliefs, customs, or way of life that has not changed for a long time. It is assumed that the Madurese community has an image of a traditional community due to the strong implementation of local wisdom, which consists of a set of norms, customs, or advice that is inherently taught from generation to generation.³³ In the case of Ulama

³² Aminah Dewi Rahmawati, Emy Susanti, and Bagong Suyanto, "The Female Klebun of Madura within the Power Constellation of the Patriarchy: A Post-Colonial Feminism Perspective," *Simulacra* 4, no. 1 (2021): 87–99, <https://doi.org/10.21107/sml.v4i1.10391>.

³³ Oxford University Press, "Traditional," in *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries API*, 2013.

women, religious authorities have the privilege to manage *pesantren*, *santri*, or even society. In addition, it is important to overview their life activities socially, educationally, and economically to understand the roles of Madurese Ulama women in the traditional culture, it.

The traditional social life of Bu Nyai in Sampang Madura is generally similar to the other part of Madura, Bangkalan, Pamekasan, and Sumenep, due to their position as wives of Kyai, the holder of the highest religious authority. The authority of Kyai is very high and respected in which Bu Nyai must also fully respect their husband. For instance, in terms of walking, Bu Nyai should stand a bit behind their husband as a sign of respect. Hence, they initially had been in the important role of being a wife, mother, educator, and *pesantren* manager. According to Jannah, *pesantren* that still adopt the old traditional culture with a strong implementation of a patriarchal system where the position of men is dominant often results in injustice.³⁴ First, is marginalization, where Bu Nyai strongly depends on Kyai, especially in terms of economic aspects. Second, is subordination or underestimation, when Bu Nyai are structurally and culturally powerless. Third, is a stereotype, when Bu Nyai are considered as weak with limited access to socialization. Fourth is a burden, where Bu Nyai have to be responsible for their duties as a mother, wife, and household controller. Fifth is violence, where Bu Nyai have no rights of choice which may cause domestic violence against women and oppression in terms of marriage, and polygamy.

The matchmaking within the internal families of religious authorities is claimed to maintain their privilege and authority as public figures. The children of Kyai and Bu Nyai are educated to be their parents' successors;

³⁴ Jannah, *Ulama Perempuan Madura*.

thus, Kyai and Bu Nyai put their children in traditional *pesantren*. In a very conservative and traditional culture, a daughter of Kyai and Bu Nyai are not allowed to go through any educational institution with a high probability of meeting with men. Hence, her father plays an important role in educating them by focusing on Islamic teachings such as studying the Quran, 'Aqīdah, and Fiqh. However, this tradition is not monolithic, some others prefer to put their daughters in any educational system but most ended in Junior High School and Senior High School as they have to marry someone. It is obvious that the main purpose of raising a daughter is to be a good wife for Kyai and a righteous mother for their children. Hence, Nyai in this case is economically dependent on her husband.

Moreover, the modern era has changed some Nyai's worldview in facing reality as they want their children a way better than them. The transformation from the traditional way of life to the modern way of life is challenging for them but they need to adapt to the modern era for obtaining a better life and creating a better generation in the future. However, according to the data, Sampang has the highest number of *pesantren* compared to other regions in Madura, while the number of women being the leader of *pesantren* in Sampang is the lowest one among others, which means that men, Kyai, still dominate the guardians of *pesantren* in Sampang. Thus, the following chapter will highlight the role of Ulama women in Sampang beyond their role in rolling *pesantren*, particularly in entrepreneurship aspects since there have been some innovations taken by the Ulama women in maintaining their integrity and expanding their authority.

4. The Role of Ulama Women in the Modern Era

The contribution of Nyai to the ummah is obvious but their efforts are often not appreciated enough in the history of Islam in Indonesia. The case occurred due to the culture that is justified by the religious text.³⁵ Sugiarti asserted that the marginalization of women in Madura is initially supported within a small community, which is a family, and based on this, Madurese males act to be saviors and protectors for the women.³⁶ However, in response to the modern era, there is a paradigm shift in viewing women and opportunities. Bu Nyai with more open and modern nowadays is gradually recognized by the public. Despite their educational background that mostly ended in High School, Bu Nyai attempted to show that they are now starting to be adaptive to the digital era. As Bu Nyai *pesantren*, they have three essential duties in their home. First, Bu Nyai is the main educator for her children, and she is the one who pays attention more to the growth of their children. Second, Bu Nyai as the Kyai's wife needs to serve what her husband needs. Third, Bu Nyai as a leader of *pesantren* should be a good model and excellent teacher for her students. Hence, the role of Kyai as their husband is essential to produce good cooperation in managing the household and *pesantren*.

For that reason, the role of Kyai in addressing contemporary issues and responding to modernity is important for Nyai. As mentioned earlier, Nyai were only educated at home with their parents or at least through high school before they married, and after marriage, husbands play the role of their fathers in educating them and shaping their minds. Kyai will educate

³⁵ Helmiannoor Helmiannoor and Musyarapah Musyarapah, "Eksistensi Dan Dedikasi Ulama Perempuan Terhadap Pendidikan Islam Di Nusantara," *SYAMIL: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education)* 7, no. 2 (2019): 87–99, <https://doi.org/10.21093/sy.v7i2.1782>.

³⁶ Eni Sugiarti, "MARGINALISASI WANITA MADURA," *Jurnal Sejarah Lontar* 6, no. 1 (2017): 40, <https://doi.org/10.21009/lontar.061.05>.

their wives to be able to practice the knowledge gained from their father and husband through the fostered *pesantren*. Nyai and santri builds a relationship between Bu Nyai and the community because the student-teacher relationship will not end over time; this is how traditionalist Islam understands the ethical values toward teachers. Regarding this matter, Ibn Miskawayh asserted that the highest love is spiritual love which the teacher is at the second highest level after Allah and before parents due to its strong spiritual attachment.³⁷

As in Madura, communities' attachment to the religious teachers is very strong because they mostly spent their childhood in *pesantren*, which may shape their worldview. Thus, it is obvious that Bu Nyai *pesantren* should make efforts to educate their ideological and biological children. Fascinatingly, the current era encouraged the creativity of women to pursue career life through the availability of accessible technology. As a result, Nyai used this opportunity to contribute to the entrepreneurial trend by creating a business and this chapter will discuss the way of Bu Nyai in maintaining integrity and expanding authority as religious authority.

a) Maintaining Integrity as Religious Authorities

There are two different phenomena that occurred within religious authorities' families. Bu Nyai, who were born within religious authority's family but do not foster *pesantren*, and Bu Nyai *pesantren* respond to this trend differently. The inherited Nyai seems to be more open and adaptive to social situations. Most Nyai who do not foster *pesantren* join the business trend due to their vacant time and accessible media but it may not happen with those who handle *pesanten* (Bu Nyai

³⁷ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb Al-Akhlāq Wa Taṭhīr al-A'rāq*, 1st ed. (Media al-Husayniyya al-Miṣriyya, 1911).

Nadya – a food entrepreneur, personal communication, January 16, 2023). At the same time, Nyai who foster pesantren chose to join a trend only as a part-time job whenever they have a vacant time as they have a schedule of teaching every day from morning to night such as reading Quran, taḥfīz, and ṣalawāt recitation. Hence, Nyai pesantren have higher responsibility and prestige that should be maintained as role models for their students and community. Bu Nyai Atiyyah (a food entrepreneur) said: "I should put my family and my students first. Thus, I normally do my business during the students' holiday because I have more time to focus on my work during that time" (personal communication, January 16, 2023). Another interviewee, Bu Nyai Ibtihal (food entrepreneur) mentioned that the business she primarily did is nothing but a hobby. Now she prefers to focus on developing a business for branding her pesantren by empowering the students to be more creative and productive (personal communication, January 17, 2023).

In contrast, another opinion came from Bu Nyai, who decided to become a fashion designer and a make-up artist, they spent more time in their career compared to pesantren. They asserted that what they do is with their husband's permission and support. Being a fashion designer was a great challenge for Nyai who was only educated until junior high school and it would not happen without the support from her husband (Bu Nyai Afrok – a fashion designer, personal communication, January 16, 2023). The same goes for Bu Nyai, a make-up artist who said that family matters do not bother her activities as a career woman. The pesantren is handled and controlled by her

husband and the child is guided by her students (Bu Nyai Mila – a make-up artist, personal communication, January 17ib, 2023).

All in all, there are two different traditions within the family of religious authorities. First is the one who thinks that women must first be responsible for being wives, mothers, and teachers. Second, the one who thinks that women deserve to freely choose what they loved and wanted the most as long as it is permissible in Islam. In the first case, Nyai must maintain their integrity as religious authorities and keep balancing their careers and responsibilities as mothers, wives, and teachers. Otherwise, they have to make sure that everything they do must be under their husband's permission, and here is the role negotiation and cooperation take a place within the family of religious authorities.

b) Expanding Authority

The authority that is inherently given to Bu Nyai is part of the mandate that must be strongly upheld. Even though she doesn't handle Islamic boarding schools, the title "Bu Nyai" is a limitation for always acting within the shari'ah corridor. Jannah (2020) argues that the Madurese believe the title of religious authority is given by God, so that their families are treated in a special way among the people. Also, Hidayati (2022) mentioned that there are five privileges of Bu Nyai that be the reason for their authority. First, the kinship of Bu Nyai, as they only married Kyai who have broad knowledge and position in the community. Second, intellectuality is signed by the expertise of Islamic knowledge. Third, the socio-cultural construction is shaped by the Madurese community to always respect Bu Nyai and their generations. Fourth, power influence is where Kyai and Bu Nyai have their place of

authority from the village to the larger city. Fifth, wealth, and relationships are built in the economic involvement although it is relatively small. This chapter aims to show that the economic involvement of Bu Nyai is gradually increased through entrepreneurial activities and how they expand their authority through their involvement in those activities.

The idea of Bu Nyai to participate in entrepreneurial activities is to strategize their *da'wa* which is facilitated by the accessibility of social media. Bu Nyai can promote their business without spending a lot of time and distracting their primary tasks at home as Nadya (a food entrepreneur) said: "I used to promote my food through WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and sometimes TikTok and it also increase my ability in editing and using social media" (personal communication, January 16, 2023). The *da'wa* is done by introducing the Islamic element to their product, for example, they sell Arabian food for the celebration of *mawlid*, *tasyakkuran*, and *haul*. This also occurred with both, a fashion designer and a make-up artist, they branded their work with Islamic fashion and style. Afrok (a fashion designer) said that her main purpose in taking part in fashion design is to cover the *awrah* yet still be fashionable (Bu Nyai Afrok – a fashion designer, personal communication, January 16, 2023). Bu Nyai already has a market for their business, particularly family, students (*santri*), and the alumni of their *pesantren*. The relationship among Bu Nyai in Madura is strongly built by supporting each other, showing the spirit of woman empowerment. The Madurese communities clearly adopt the strong relationship between student-teacher. They also engaged with the community in their business area to expand their authority, and as a

result, they existence help the common people in their circle to solve the problem related to religion.

Fascinatingly, there are different opinions in responding to the trend of Bu Nyai's participation in entrepreneurial activities that were found through the interview of santri and Madurese citizens in viewing this activity to increase the reliability of the research. The interview was classified into two objects, urban community, and rural community. The urban community tends to respond to this trend positively. Evi (pseudonym, a citizen) said: "the involvement of Bu Nyai in entrepreneurial activities is an innovation and inspiration. For me, it does not matter as long as it is within the shari'ah's corridor", also, Rahmat (pseudonym, a citizen) said: "Bu Nyai are currently more egalitarian, creative and productive and it shaped our minds that Bu Nyai are not like what people think to always be in second position after the Kyai, they even can be what they want to be and they are independent" (personal communication, January 20, 2023). The comments show people's reaction to the work of both Nyai, they appreciated and praised it. However, the rural community has a different thought. Mahmud (pseudonym, a citizen) said Bu Nyai is better to be at the home to prioritize home duties and rarely show their existence publicly because Ulama women should maintain their prestige and self-worth (*murū'a*)" (personal communication, January 20, 2023). This different way of thinking is may happen to some factors: 1) gender gap in education and job opportunities. 2) Islamic conservative tradition that still exists within society. 3) patriarchal culture that considers authority to be only owned by men. All in all, Madura is still progressing to be more adaptive to the modern era, and

Bu Nyai's role in utilizing the accessible facilities in this era has inspired the umma on the spirit of da'wa and woman empowerment.

D. CONCLUSION

The research found that the interest of Bu Nyai in transforming their role into an informal economy is due to its flexibility without ignoring their responsibility as religious authority. In regard to this matter, the negotiation of Bu Nyai with the Kyai plays an important role as they need to manage time between the household, *pesantren*, and business. Although they were born within the traditional culture, Bu Nyai have to do their best to inspire their children and the umma to be a better generation. Bu Nyai also used this opportunity to spread da'wa and expand their authority as religious figures within the community. It perfectly fits the theory of new Muslim womanhood where Muslim women currently appear to the public and yet show their piety to promote economy and woman empowerment. This innovation and motivation have inspired the umma to revive the spirit of da'wa and to promote gender equality which is still within the *sharī'a*'s corridor.

Among the positive responses within the society, the rural community still views negatively due to the gender gap in education and job opportunities, the conservative Islamic tradition that still exists within society, and the patriarchal culture that considers authority only owned by men. In highlight, future research is needed to complete this research with its limitations, such as the short research time and a limited number of informants, by observing the involvement of Bu Nyai in other aspects of

entrepreneurship to understand the response of religious authorities to contemporary issues comprehensively.

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