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by Imam Mujahid

MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER: THE MARGINALIZATION OF FEMALE MUSLIM SCHOLARS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to reveal the media's insensitivity to female Muslim scholars (*ustadzah*) in Indonesia by showing the media's tendency to support the dominance of patriarchal culture and use male-centered perspectives when understanding social and religious issues. This article applies critical discourse analysis to explore the media representation of *ustadzah* in Indonesia, with a focus on representations of certain actors and subjects. The processes of inclusion and exclusion are analyzed in detail. *Ustadzah* are rarely involved in Indonesian social discourses. Although Indonesians tend to learn about Islamic scholars and scholars through the media, *ustadzah* have a limited media presence. As such, religious discourse in Indonesia—the world's largest Muslim-majority country—is dominated by those male scholars whose sermons are frequently televised. The typology of female Muslim scholars produced by this study (controversial scholars, incompetent scholars, and commercial scholars) provides an analytical tool for understanding the media's construction of gender. It shows that, even as times change, patriarchal culture and power structures continue to dominate Indonesian social life and media. Although the media has long been described as a pillar of democracy, its practices are ironically quite different: it is very authoritarian and pro-status quo. The media is used as a tool to legitimize the power and dominance of patriarchal culture. Even though women are widely involved in the public sector, they are still considered the second sex.

Keywords: gender representation, female Muslim preachers, media insensitivity, marginalization, Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

While in the Middle East a number of female scholars have taken a role in traditional Islamic scholarship (from hadith studies through fiqh), female scholars are rare in Indonesia. This paucity is concerning. Many Indonesian women study at Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and other religious schools, and—as in the country's public schools—they frequently receive the best marks. Their paucity in Islamic discourse, thus, indicates that their classroom performance does not significantly affect their social lives, as the skills that they develop at school cannot be translated into broader social legitimacy.

Generally, scholars only become popularly known to Indonesians through the media, being exposed to the public through media channels that broadcast and report on their events, sermons, and lives. Only a handful of women Muslim scholars have received such attention (Table 1). Of these, Tuti Alawiyah and Lutfiah Sungkar are no longer active, having died in the 2010s. A third, Mamah Dedeh (born Dedeh Rosidah in Ciamis, West Java, in 1951) is currently the most popular woman Muslim scholar on Indonesian television. Her sermons are screened by Indosiar, a privately-owned broadcaster, almost every day.

Table 1: Media Programs with Islamic Themes in Indonesia

Broadcaster	Program	Genre	Scholars/Speakers
Metro TV	*Syiar Kemediaan*	Sermons	Mostly men, except for **Nani Handayani** (a "controversial" female scholar)
	Ulama Nusantara	Documentary	Predominantly male scholars
	Syiar Sirah Nabawi	Talk Show	All men
Indosiar	*Mama & Aa Beraksi*	Sermons	**Dedeh Rosidah**
Trans TV	*Islam Itu Indah*	Sermons	Maulana (a male scholar) and **Oki Setiana Dewi** (a "controversial" female scholar)
TVOne	*Damai Indonesiaku*	Sermons	Predominantly male scholars
RCTI	*Assalamualaikum Ustadz*	Sermons	Alhabsy (a male scholar)

Source: Authors' observations

This is ironic. Although Indonesia is the largest Muslim majority country in the world, female scholars have a much smaller media presence than the male preachers who dominate national television. This can be seen not only as proof of patriarchal culture's dominance of the Indonesian media, but also as reflecting a general lack of gender sensitivity. Religious authority, this condition seems to say, belongs only to men.

Ultimately, the dominance of male scholars has left the Indonesian media insensitive to women and their needs. Women's problems are examined through the lens of patriarchy, resulting in a male bias. Women's perspectives are neglected, and women are

increasingly marginalized in the discourses that shape their lives. Discussions of polygamy, for example, vary significantly among men and women. Male scholars are, at best, neutral, while women tend to be more critical. This can be attributed to their different perspectives: the men tend to be patriarchal, while the women are more feminine.

The media, despite being expected to "cover both sides", has tended to misrepresent women and subordinate female scholars. Rather than provide a neutral medium, the media has actually perpetuated the status quo, i.e. the dominance of the patriarchy. Rather than challenge Indonesia's deep-rooted patriarchal culture, thereby becoming transformative and emancipatory, the media has reproduced a social discourse that subordinates and marginalizes women. This article, thus, explores how female Muslim scholars (or *ustadzah*) are represented in the Indonesian media.

DISCOURSE AND MEDIA REPRESENTATION

Conceptually, the term 'representation' refers to how particular persons, groups, or ideas are shown or displayed. In a media context, representation refers to persons, groups, and ideas are shown through the mass media. Generally, the media is expected to act as a neutral institution that conveys information to the public as it is. However, the media actually has an interest in producing specific meanings that further its agenda. It does not merely convey information or entertainment; rather, it is consciously used for propaganda and ideological purposes, reaffirming the status quo and thereby supporting the ruling class (Abdullah et al., 2019).

Therefore, according to Hall (2003), it is important to explore how the media represents reality, as it is through representation that meaning is determined. Audiences should recognize that what is conveyed by the media is not reality as it is, but rather a "reality" that has been edited and framed to better suit the ideology, objectives, and interests of the media.

Through representation, the media produces political meaning and consensus (or dissensus) while advancing particular values, ideologies, interests, and interests. Problematically, media interests do not always reflect the public interest. Rather, media representation furthers the interests of the dominant class, the elites of society. Althusser (1984) critically labeled the media an "ideological state apparatus", something that serves only as the "mouthpiece" of the ruling class and advances its interests and ideologies. As a result, the interests of the common people—the *mustad'afin*, the *wong cilik*, the subordinate class—are ignored.

As there exists a direct link between media owners and media content that confirms the legitimacy and power of the elite, media representation must be understood not as natural representation, but rather as a mediated representation shaped by the interests and ideologies of the dominant class. This produces what Althusser (1984) calls 'false consciousness' and what Chomsky (2003) describes as the "engineering of consent". In such a situation, the public is likened "ignorant herds" that must be led and influenced.

According to Schiappa (2008), it is impossible to realize a mediated representation of reality that encourages social transformation and avoids bias, stereotypes, prejudices, and other negative content. Schiappa agrees with Hall (2003) that, although the media promotes the interests of the elite, its representation— no matter how sophisticated—is ultimately polysemic; in other words, the meaning understood by audiences does not necessarily correspond to the meaning intended by the media.

Etymologically, the word "discourse" comes from the Latin *discurrere* ("flowing back and forth"), which was expanded to mean "engaging in something" or "giving information about something" (Vas 1992: 7). As such, in Latin it not only referred to active debate and speaking, but also traffic (Vogt 1987b: 16, in Stefan et al., 2000: 228). Today, discourse may be understood more simply as the open and public discussion of an object or idea that gives rise to a widespread understanding (Lull, 1998: 225). Kleden (1997) refers to discourse as "speech/writing in which a speaker/writer conveys something about something to listeners/readers" (Kleden, 1997: 34).

Discourse scholars such as Fairclough (1989) have shown that language is involved in the construction of power and ideology. Furthermore, media discourse is inherently part of and influenced by social structures and interactions (Fairclough, 1995; Scott, 1988; Udasmoro, 2009). Scott (1988), for instance, sees discourse as involving specific statements, terms, categories and beliefs that are constructed historically, socially and institutionally.

Viewing discourse as a social practice, by necessity, implies a dialectic relationship between discursive events and the situations, institutions, and social structures surrounding them. As such, although the media is often presented as a neutral space for public discourse (and its messages are thus frequently accepted uncritically), this is far from the truth. As argued by Gramsci (1971), the media is involved in domination through consent (hegemony) because it is seen as an effective means of spreading the values, beliefs, perspectives, and ideologies of the dominant group in order to achieve a public consensus.

In Indonesia, female Muslim scholars (also known as *ustadzah*) do not necessarily have to write books as they do in the Middle East. They may not have their own *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) or madrasas, or even be more accurately identified as preachers (*daiyah*) or missionaries (*mubalighah*). Nonetheless, certain socio-religious factors enable them to be accepted and recognized as scholars despite a lack of profound religious insight.

According to Azra (2002), quoting Berkey (1992), there are several reasons for the rarity of women scholars of Islam in Indonesia. First, women are generally limited to the domestic sphere (household), and have limited access to and involvement in the public sphere (community). Second, influential members of Indonesian society have shown little interest in, and even doubt regarding, women's capacity as scholars and even their general religious knowledge. Nonetheless, there are opportunities for women, so long as they are capable of struggling through a social environment that does not favor them and willing to dedicate themselves to their scholarship.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is a qualitative one, applying a Leeuwian approach to critical discourse analysis to understand how certain actors or subjects are represented. It focuses on how female scholars of Islam (*ustadzah*) are shown (included) or not (excluded) in the Indonesian mass media. This is intended to determine how *ustadzah* are represented in the media.

Table 2: Forms of Exclusion and Inclusion in Media News

Technique	Focus
Exclusion	a. Are there any disappearances of actors in the news? (Passivation). b. Are there media efforts to put forward certain actors and eliminate other actors? (Nomination) c. How are the strategies taken to hide or eliminate these social actors? Is the subject or actor removed by using clauses?
Inclusion	a. How do actors appear in news texts differently? (differentiation) b. Is an event or social actor displayed by giving concrete instructions? (objectivation) c. Is the actor shown as is or is the media categorizing the actor? (nomination/categorization) d. Are actors portrayed with certain bad identities or stereotypes? (nomination/identification) e. Does the event or actor appear clearly or not (anonymously)? (determination/indetermination)

The formal object of this study is the media's representation of *ustadzah*, i.e. how the Indonesian media represents female scholars of Islam and constructs discourse regarding them. As its material objects, meanwhile, this study examines news articles and media events related to female scholars.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three tendencies have been identified in the Indonesian media's representation of female scholars of Islam: the representation of *ustadzah* as controversial, the representation of *ustadzah* as incompetent, and the representation of *ustadzah* as (too) commercial.

Controversial Scholars

The label "controversial" always accompanies women when they decide to work in the public sector, where their presences is not only considered against nature, but a threat to men. Therefore, even though women have the freedom to work outside the home, in reality it is still "half-hearted". Apparently, the traces of Indonesia's patriarchal past remain an ever-present cultural residue. Similar to traditionalism, in the modern world women still experience significant discrimination, often in forms and manners that are far more sophisticated than before.

For example, although the media does not prohibit women from working, a number of indicators show that it has not been free of gender discrimination. This can be seen in the access, control, and benefits of the media. Although numerous women work in the media—and quite a few become popular through their involvement—men continue to control the media and maintain easy access; they are also the primary beneficiaries. This clearly affects media representation and biases.

This can be seen in the media representation of *ustadzah*. Unlike male religious scholars, these women are vulnerable to controversy and labels such as incompetent and materialistic. For example, news stories (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3) often describe Mamah Dedeh as speaking without thinking, rather than focusing on her positive attributes (intelligence, patience, etc.). Why does the media not portray female scholars positively?

Figure 1	Figure 2	Figure 3

The tendency to speak without thinking or to otherwise be too frank is seen in Indonesian culture as a sign of immaturity. A mature person will be able to control him or herself, to avoid speaking out of turn or create controversy. As such, describing a religious scholar as prone to speaking without thinking means representing said scholar as imperfect, immature, or even incompetent. Nonetheless, the media has created such an image in its representation of Mamah Dedeh.

Such a negative representation is further underscored by the media's choice of news events to cover. In the case of Mamah Dedeh, this can be seen in the media's focus on her use of the word *autis* (autistic) and the phrase *Islam Nusantara*, both of which reinforce her image as a controversial scholar. For example, an article on the online news portal *Liputan 6* stated "... the speaker known as Mamah Dedeh was criticized for using the word *autistic* to describe people who are too engrossed in playing with their mobile devices." This sentence clearly incorporates what Leeuwen identified as inclusion and exclusion, explicitly identifying Mamah Dedeh (inclusion) while removing her critics (exclusion). The goal is clear to focus readers' attention on Mamah Dedeh and her perceived mistakes.

Meanwhile, in reference to the *Islam Nusantara* controversy, a *Tribun* article wrote, "This statement offended Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) ... because the concept of Islam Nusantara originated with NU ... ". This sentence uses exclusion twice, through the phrases "this statement" and "Nahdlatul Ulama". In the first instance, the article does not explicitly identify which of the numerous statements it includes; indeed, as the Indonesian phrase *pernyataan ini* can be understood as singular or plural, it implies that all of Mamah Dedeh's statements were offensive.

The second instance of exclusion is found in the phrase "Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)". In this sentence, the subject is

described abstractly, despite a more concrete subject (i.e. NU chairman Prof. Dr. Said Agil Munawar) being available. However, the subject is not specified, and as a result Mamah Dedeh is represented as having insulted the entirety of the Nahdlatul Ulama—Indonesia's largest Islamic organization. The phrase "because the concept of Islam Nusantara originated with NU" further places Mamah Dedeh in opposition to the organization as a whole.

Incompetent Scholars
The media is an extension of the dominant group (i.e. men), and thus tends to reflect their interests. Women in the media, as such, cannot be free from discrimination. In fact, they may experience more severe discrimination in the media than in their religious and cultural traditions. Where traditional authority discriminates against women by domesticating them, the media instead opens public spaces for women while simultaneously exploiting and commodifying them. In other words, although the media does not explicitly identify women as the second sex—it does not, as in the traditional orthodoxy, describe women are *kanca wingking* ("bedtime buddies", i.e. subordinates of men)—it nonetheless denies their authority. This may be done by exploiting them, or by representing them as incompetent, uneducated, and unintelligent.

This can be seen, for example, in the case of Oki Setiana Dewi and the extensive media coverage of an online petition against her. After this petition was made, Merdeka.com published a story titled "The Chaos Surrounding the Petition against Oki Setiana Dewi" while *Tribun* published one titled "Oki Setiana Dewi Confesses that it is Inappropriate to Call Her an Ustadzah". These articles shaped public understanding of the scholar through their exclusion and inclusion.

Figure 4	Figure 5	Figure 6

This can be seen in the sentence: "In the petition, it was explained that some netizens doubted the credibility of this artist with two children". This sentence incorporates two levels of exclusion through its use of the words "petition" and "some netizens". In referring to the petition through a subordinate clause, readers' attention is drawn not to the petition itself, but rather to its (unspecified) doubts. Similarly, the vague term "some netizens" is used deliberately as a means of exclusion; through the use of this term, the media can avoid identifying the netizens, their positions, their authority, etc.

Meanwhile, the inclusion of Oki is made clear through the phrase "this artist with two children", which its meaning through the politics of representation. Moreover, the article simply presents the petition's claims about Oki's competence—"Oki Setiana Dewi is still not fluent in her recitation of the hadiths and the Quranic verses. Even her *makhraj* and *tajwid* are random"—without providing any further information or critical assessment. Through this description, as well as the conclusion "Oki Setiana Dewi doesn't have the knowledge to be called a preacher, let alone a scholar", it is clear that the media has taken a similar attitude to that of the petitioner: Oki is incompetent.

Commercial Scholars
Another negative label applied to *ustadzah* is "materialistic" (in Indonesian, *matre*). Such a derogatory term has long been used in reference to women, with phrases such as *cewek matre*

(material girl) being more common than their corollaries for men. Women branded as materialistic are perceived as seeking only the accumulation of personal wealth, with the inference being that their riches will be used for hedonistic purposes. Being labeled *matre*, therefore, is highly derogatory.

The label *matre* has also been applied to female Islamic scholars, perhaps most explicitly in an article titled "A Netizen's Experiences Inviting Ustadzah Oki: Arrogant and Expensive". Through this title, the media has utilized a process of inclusion and exclusion; Oki is included, identified clearly as "Ustadzah Oki", while the "netizen" remains abstract. Who? A person? Community? Organization? This title, thus, draws readers' attention not to the subject of the news—the source—but rather to the female scholar. In the body of this article, it clarifies "[Oki] was accused of living as glamorously as a celebrity, and as often demanding exorbitant speaking fees". The purpose is clear: to represent the *ustadzah* as a commercial scholar.

Likewise, the article "How Much to Invite Ustadzah Oki? Mamah Dedeh Demands This Much" (published by *Tribun* in May 2016) includes the sentence "In addition to being charged with not acting as proper for a religious scholar, Oki was also accused of demanding high fees for persons who invited her [to lecture]. ..." In this sentence, Oki is specified explicitly. The "persons who invited her", meanwhile, are left unidentified. Who? This question is left unanswered; rather, the article focuses the reader's attention solely on Oki as a "materialistic" scholar who charges exorbitant fees.

Figure 7	Figure 8

Mamah Dedeh is represented as similarly expensive. This can be seen, for example, in the sentence, "Jajang, who at the time (2013) was a doctoral student at the University of Boston, called Mamah Dedeh, with each lecture costing Rp. 40 million"; these reported fees were higher than those of male scholars who were popular at the time, such as Ustadz Jeffri and Ustadz Maulana. The claim that "Mamah Dedeh even reported that some irresponsible people had used her lectures as business opportunities" further reinforces the impression that she is "calculating" and "materialistic".

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that, in the media's representation of female Islamic scholars, three categories are broadly used. Women scholars, or ustadzah, may be presented as controversial, as incompetent, or as commercial clerics (i.e. *ustadzah matre*). This shows that, even as times have changed, patriarchal culture and power structures still dominate the Indonesian media.

As such, although the media has long been described as a pillar of democracy, its practices are quite different. It has been used as a means of legitimizing the power and dominance of patriarchal culture, thereby preserving the status quo. Even though women are widely involved in the public sector, they are still considered the second sex. This holds true for female religious scholars as well; there is a latent to involve them in the media. As such, they are widely misrepresented and victimized in the Indonesian mediascape.

LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Given the complexity of gender issues in Indonesian society and culture, this academic document has faced considerable limitations. These shortcomings may provide a basis for further research. Particularly important is analysis of the socio-political contexts of media representation, which would necessitate reaching beyond the text as a linguistic phenomenon.

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CONFLICT OF INTERET

The authors declare they have no conflicts of interest.

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