

## IN SEARCH FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN RURAL MADRASAS OF MALANG RAYA

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**Abstract:** While gender awareness in the country increasingly arises and is widely debated, few studies have examined the level of gender sensitivity of awareness in Islamic schools. Using case study, this article examines the construction of gender equity in nine rural madrasas in South Malang, Indonesia, by building the framework of social ecosystem of education in madrasas in order to construct the gender equity in rural madrasas. The findings show that in general, the educators in the madrasas already have a gender awareness because they have been familiar with feminism and gender equity in education; however, traditional and conservative gender perspective are still at large. It finds that there are still various gender differences, stereotypes, and an uncomfortable school climate which all challenge the formation of gender equality. Therefore, the social ecosystem of education in rural madrasas deserves enforcement for the embodiment of gender equality.

**Keywords:** Gender equity, madrasas, gender norms.

### Introduction

The phenomenon of gender inequality in Islamic education institutions in Indonesian context has been debated over a decade, and became concerns of the Islamic education institutions such as *pesantrens* and madrasas. Ann Kull has conducted a research on gender awareness in Islamic education institutions and found that many of them reformed Islamic thought and education with a modern pedagogical method. Therefore, the Islamic education institutions in Indonesia are more open and aware of gender related issues. However,

while some continue to increase their gender awareness; others still maintain the conservative perspective of gender issues.<sup>1</sup>

Since the last two centuries, there has been a stronger intervention of the state on the issues of modernity such as pluralism and gender in society.<sup>2</sup> Islamic education was not only a place for learning and teaching but it also a place to respond the development of modernity, such as pluralism and gender freedom to adapt to Islamic education. This gender issues have been socialized and discussed in many studies and publications. Most of the findings showed that the Islamic society's gender sensitivity is low.<sup>3</sup> This condition is due to the legitimacy of religious dogma which tends to favor men.<sup>4</sup> Even attitudes, behaviors, and policies can confirm gender inequality in *pesantren* as an Islamic education institution that implement a segregation system.<sup>5</sup> The issue of gender inequality in madrasas also received broad attention from previous studies particularly those associated with the socio-economic problems of rural communities.<sup>6</sup>

The main problem discussed in this study is how gender equity in rural madrasas in Indonesia is constructed and how gender norms are embedded in co-education. Using a case study approach, this study examined nine Madrasas in rural areas in South Malang, East Java. Data are collected by interviewing the madrasas' principals, male and female teachers, and students.

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Kull, "Gender Awareness in Islamic Education: The Pioneering Case of Indonesia in a Comparison with Pakistan," *Studia Islamika* 19, 3 (2012), 299-404.

<sup>2</sup> Robert W Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Schooling Islam: The Culture of Politics and Modern Muslim Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 2. See also Ronald Lukens-Bull, "Madrasa by any other Name: Pondok, Pesantren, and Islamic Schools in Indonesia and Larger Southeast Asian Region," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 4, 1 (2010): 1-21.

<sup>3</sup> Marhumah, "Konstruksi Gender, Hegemoni Kekuasaan, dan Lembaga Pendidikan," *Karsa* 19, 2 (2011), 167.

<sup>4</sup> Nur Rohmah and Labib Ulinnuha, "Relasi Gender dan Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 3, 2 (2014), 345-346; Nur Kholis, "Gendered Career Productivity And Success In Academia In Indonesia's Islamic Higher Education Institutions," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 6, 2 (2012): 341-366.

<sup>5</sup> Eka Sri Mulyani, "Muslim Women and Education in Indonesia: The *Pondok pesantren* experience," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 27, 1 (2007), 88-99.

<sup>6</sup> M. Niaz Asadullah, Sajeda Amin, and Nazmul Chaudhury, "Support for Gender Stereotypes: Does Madrasah Education Matter?," *Journal of Development Studies* 55, 1 (2018), 39-56.

This study focuses on examining gender equity in rural madrasas with some considerations. First, madrasah is an Islamic education that is influenced by the dogma of Islamic teachings. In madrasas, gender relations between students and teachers are regulated based on the Islamic gender norms. For example, in Islam boys and girls are prohibited from sitting next to each other, being in proximity in a remote or hidden place due to fear of deed that may cause defamation and moral degradation. However, boy and girl students always meet in learning and various activities in madrasas. Second, most madrasas in rural Indonesia are private with limited facilities and infrastructures. According to the data from Bappenas (*Badan Perencanaan Nasional*, National Planning Board) and the Ministry of Religion between 2004-2015 the physical conditions of madrasa buildings are in a poor condition. The physical condition of the building is an indicator of the quality of madrasas in rural areas. Third, in rural areas, madrasas systematically attract children from poor families and parents with low education despite their economic challenge. On the other hand, madrasas in rural areas are considered as the best alternative for parents, especially those who have references to religious education.<sup>7</sup> Fourth, the Indonesian government has recently pushed for the importance of non-agricultural income in rural livelihoods. This policy has an impact on the increase of the number of migrants from rural areas to work abroad. The low proximity between parents and their children due to work distance results in the lack of parents' attention to students in madrasas.<sup>8</sup>

These reasons are the framework to build social ecosystem of education in madrasas which then become the construction of gender equity in rural madrasas. There is a strong need to find solutions to handle many obstacles caused not only by religious legitimacy, socio-cultural construction, family economic status, but also learning processes, policies, and Islamic schools' climates. Extracurricular activities, for example, should be given based on gender norms and expectations. Although unintentionally, girls rarely register for soccer

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<sup>7</sup> M. Niaz Asadullah and Maliki, "Madrasah for Girls and Private School for Boys? The Determinants of School Type Choice in Rural and Urban Indonesia," *International Journal of Educational Development* 62 (2018), 104.

<sup>8</sup> Kazushi Takahashi, "Determinants of Indonesian Rural Secondary School Enrolment: Gender, Neighbourhood and School Characteristics," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 47, 3 (2011), 400.

extracurricular activities, while boys avoid cooking or sewing. In education, teachers impose gender norms into the classroom which can negatively affect students, not only in school but also in their lives. When acting outside gender norms, students are highly risk to become victims of gender-based violence. Further, it can affect the students' comfortability in learning and deny the education they are supposed to receive.

### **Gender Normativity and the Social Ecosystem of Education**

The social ecosystem of education is a very important element for socializing and shaping the cultural beliefs about male and female "proper" behavior. Traditional gender norms place women in domestic roles and focus on the family. Women are believed verbally gifted, socially skilled, less appropriate in physical occupation. Meanwhile, men are considered smart in math and science and are more focused on financial gain and status.<sup>9</sup>

The roles of men and women are continuously being built in various institutions, such as educational institutions through continuous social interaction. Systematic allocation of people in gender positions socially results in gender status which is a binary system of social organizations that creates inequality.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, gender is embedded in identity, announced in social situations and 'manifested'.<sup>11</sup> From the perspective of constructivism, reality is not formed scientifically; neither is it something given. Reality is the result of individual construction of objects.

The construction of reality depends on the way individuals perceive based on their own respective frameworks. Therefore, Berger and Luckmann illustrate society as a human product. Each individual constructs reality because each person has a different frame of reference and field of experience, so they freely interpret various things and build the reality they want based on their respective frameworks. The resulting construction of reality has a certain basis which causes them to believe the truth of construction. Various reality constructions

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<sup>9</sup> Maaiké van der Vleuten et al., "Gender Norms and STEM: The Importance of Friends for Stopping Leakage from the STEM Pipeline," *Educational Research and Evaluation* (2019), 4.

<sup>10</sup> Amanda Jayne Miller and Sharon Sassler, "The Construction of Gender Among Working-Class Cohabiting Couples," *Qualitative Sociology* (2012), 427-446.

<sup>11</sup> Klaus Nielsen, "Gender, Learning and Social Practice Gendered Discourses in the Bakery," *Vocations and Learning* (2008), 173-190.

made by individuals produce social constructions of certain realities.<sup>12</sup> The roles and responsibilities of women and men in the context of Berger's ideas must be seen as constructions of reality, so that the potential for the same event to occur is constructed differently.

Gender equity in education is a fair opportunity, access and benefit to resources for male and female students so that they can make the right career and life choices.<sup>13</sup> A school condition that is equal, harmonious, balanced, and without discrimination can provide a common fulfillment of basic rights in increasing the capacity and quality of self both male and female students. Gender-equitable schools can create the expected fair competition because essentially male and female students have the potential to both learn and excel both independently and collaboratively. Realizing gender equity in madrasas does not only involve female but also male students known as "gender relations".

In accordance with the theory of gender systems, there are several key components of the gender system in which these components maintain or change the gender system. According to Chafetz, there are at least cultural, environmental, technological, economic, demographic and political components that institutionalize gender practices and reproduce gender differences and gender inequalities.<sup>14</sup> The gender system approach is integrated with the situation perspective (the situated perspective) which views that students' physical and mental activities are influenced by teacher mediation in learning, and the social, physical, and cultural contexts in which learning activities take place are constructions of inculcation of gender values.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, situational factors need to be criticized to analyze the construction of gender equity in madrasas.

In this paper, gender systems and various situations in the social environment of education in madrasas are used as a theoretical framework in formulating the social ecosystem of education in

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<sup>12</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 79.

<sup>13</sup> Feyza Tantekin Erden, "A course on gender equity in education: Does it affect gender role attitudes of preservice teachers?" *Teaching and Teacher Education* 2, 3 (2008), 409.

<sup>14</sup> Janet S. Chafetz, *Varieties of Gender Theory in Sociology. Handbook of Gender Sociology* (New York: Kluwer/Plenum, 1999), 3-23.

<sup>15</sup> Sara Hennessy, "Integrating Technology into Teaching and Learning of School Science: a Situated Perspective on Pedagogical Issues in Research," *Studies in Science Education* 42, 1 (2006), 21.

madrasas. The social ecosystem of education in madrasas is an important environment that can embed gender norms that maintain gender inequity or support gender equity norms.

### **Gender Issues in Rural Malang Communities**

In this paper rural areas refer to five sub-districts in South Malang where nine Islamic educational institutions discussed are located, namely Gondanglegi, Donomulyo, Pakisaji, and Bantur.<sup>16</sup> Four madrasas are in peri-urban sub-districts of Godanglegi, and one madrasa in Donomulyo,. One madrasa in Pakisaji, an urban development area and three madrasas are in rural area of Bantur. Located at the border of Ngajum District, the madrasa in Pakisaji can be categorised as peri-urban. The peri-urban area already has access to radio, television, and media information; and is connected to the surrounding agricultural area with a smooth road. It also introduces economic activities to the labor market in the city; and becomes a driving force for migration for its population every day. Bantur is classified as rural because its people depend entirely on agriculture.<sup>17</sup> The level of rural population density in Malang is the lowest compared to the two other types of regions.<sup>18</sup> Despite these differences, however, in the context of this study, these madrasas were categorised as being in rural communities.

The cultural characteristics of rural communities in these four districts are mostly influenced by Madurese culture or what is called *pandalungan*,<sup>19</sup> namely Madurese communities who live in Pasuruan, Probolinggo, and Lumajang who are assimilated with Javanese people in Malang known as *wong pandalungan* (people of *pandalungan*).<sup>20</sup> People with *pandalungan* culture are very strong in maintaining three self-

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<sup>16</sup> The area of Malang Regency is around 3,534.86 km<sup>2</sup> which is categorised into three areas, namely urban, peri-urban and rural. See Zulfikar Muhammad Yamin Latuconsina, "Analisis Faktor-faktor yang Mempengaruhi Indeks Pembangunan Manusia Kabupaten Malang Berbasis Pendekatan Perwilayahan dan Regresi Panel," *Journal of Regional and Rural Development Planning* 1, 2 (2017), 202-216.

<sup>17</sup> Ramadhiani Arimbi, "Enam Indikator "Peri-urban" yang Harus Anda Ketahui," <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2015/09/15/100000821/Enam.Indikator.Peri-urban.yang.Harus.Anda.Ketahui?page=all>

<sup>18</sup> Latuconsina, "Analisis Faktor-faktor.

<sup>19</sup> Rencana Program Investasi Jangka Menengah Kabupaten Malang 2011-2015, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Musthofa Kamal, "Wayang Topeng Malangan: Sebuah Kajian Historis Sosiologis," *Resital* 9, 1 (2008).

images, namely politeness, honor and Islam.<sup>21</sup> Also, in *pandalungan* culture, woman's self-image raised the issue of gender in rural areas in South Malang. For *pandalungan* community who embraced a strong Islam, family honor is determined by the actions of daughters or wives. Their dignity and honor must be protected.<sup>22</sup> Rural communities conditionally still limit women's rights with the thought that they will not go wrong because this will mean disaster for the community. In Gondanglegi, women must always follow their husbands, meaning that a husband is still seen to determine the social fate of wife in family life. Honor and self-esteem in family and social life in particular are, in their understanding, parts of the religious teachings of Islam, which have to be well performed.<sup>23</sup>

Rural society view that Islam does not recognize discrimination based on differences in sex, color, class, race, territorial, ethnicity, and religion. The difference in role is not as a form of degradation in the assessment of women but it should be that a man and a woman carry out the role of their lives as in Islamic teachings. Islam recognizes gender relations that respect each other and share roles. Like the position of women in general in Indonesia, in gender relations in the family, women get the role to manage family finance and are asked to be able to manage the finance carefully. Therefore, a wasteful wife certainly does not get a proper place in the family because the wife can determine whether the family is a perfect family by being able to perform the pilgrimage or not. For the Muslim community, especially the Madurese, their faith has not been completed if they have not yet performed a pilgrimage to Mecca.

Another gender issue in rural Malang Regency is the feminization of the workforce, namely the greater number of female migrants compared to men. Malang is one of the regions in East Java that has the highest contributor of migrant workers in Indonesia.<sup>24</sup> They come from South Malang, such as Bantur, Turen, Donomulyo, Tirtoyudo, Dampit, Kalipare, Pagelaran, and Sumbermanjing. Most of them work

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<sup>21</sup> Harun Ahmad, Ali Haidar, and Yahmin, "Representasi Harga Diri Orang Madura di Jawa: Studi tentang Wanita Madura di Gondanglegi Kulon Kecamatan Gondanglegi kabupaten Malang," *Jurnal Filsafat, Sain, Teknologi, dan Sosial Budaya* 24, 2 (2018), 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>24</sup> Wilda Fizriyani, "Malang Penyumbang Tenaga Kerja Migran Tertinggi di Indonesia," *Republika*, December 3, 2018.

in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea, and Japan.<sup>25</sup> There has been a change in the way people look at the migrant workers. In the past, it was not suitable for women, especially those who were married to become migrant workers. Currently, however, they view the work as an obligation and the only option to meet their daily needs. It is an honor for them, therefore, to leave for overseas to become migrant workers in countries such as Hong Kong and Taiwan, allowing them to resume jobs as caregivers for the elderly, infants and toddlers, or as employers in the manufacturing sector.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, there has been a shift in perspective for the *pandalungan* Muslim community, where in the past women were restricted in their rights to protect their image and self-esteem and must follow their husbands. Now, they have freedom as migrant workers, who are away from their families.

### **Gender Issues in Rural Madrasas in Malang**

Data of this study are collected from nine madrasas, namely Madrasa Tsanawiyah Jauharot Al Muzakki Gondanglegi, Madrasa Aliyah Khairuddin Gondanglegi, MA Ibn Hajar Gondanglegi, MAN 1 Gondanglegi, MA Wali Songo Bantur, MTs Mambaul Ulum Bantur, MTS Nurul Huda Bantur, MTs Nahdlatul Ulama Futuhiyyah Donomulyo, and MTs Raudotul Uql Pakisaji. The gender issues in rural madrasas are discussed in the context of Islamic education and grouped as follows.

All madrasas' principals interviewed state that male and female students have the same rights and roles in education. They suggest that all students, both male and female, who get enrolled in education have the same rights without any discrimination. Furthermore, they maintain, as the principal of MTs Jauharot Al-Muzakki recalls, that male and female teachers as well as staffs have the same role in decision making.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mohammad Rizal, "Migrasi Tenaga Kerja Indonesia ke Luar Negeri Menggunakan Cost Benefit Analysis: Studi di Kabupaten Malang," *Researchgate* (2014), retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327239295>.

<sup>26</sup> Anggaunita Kiranantika, "Indonesia Migrant Worker: Modern Representation of Women as Javanese Villagers in East Java, Indonesia," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* (ASSEHR) 313 (2018).

<sup>27</sup> Interview with the principal of MTs Jauharot Al-Muzakki, May 21, 2018.



## Gender Differences

Social categories in the form of different characters between boys and girls in the school environment are constructed based on gender differences. However gender differences learned in Islamic schools are related to student participation in learning and gaining achievement in madrasas. Formally madrasa's principals and teachers have awareness that students should be treated equally, regardless of the gender difference. However, the social construction of madrasas have influenced differences in participation between male and female students in learning. Female students tend to be more active in indoor learning activities while the male are more in outdoor learning activities, especially in physical activities.

According to the principal of MTs Jauharot Muzakki, this difference results from the fact that male and female students have different abilities.<sup>28</sup> He argues that in general female students have higher achievement in learning than male counterparts. According to the Principal of MTs Futuhiyyah, the factor of interest in learning causes girls to be less active in activities outside the classroom such as sport activities. In sport, girls commonly just get together and chat each other. In the similar vein to the opinion of principal of MTs Futuhiyyah,<sup>29</sup> the principal of MAN Gondanglegi states that boys are more interested in physical activities that are carried out outside the classroom. There are basically girls who are interested in learning activities outside the classroom, but boys still dominate them. Meanwhile, girls dominate in-class activities. According to the principal of MTs Nurul Huda, boys are less active in learning in their classrooms and tend to act playfully.<sup>30</sup>

Motivation is another factor for girls to actively learned and to have higher academic achievement than boys. According to the principal of MTs Raudhotul Uqul, teachers must motivate and guide boys more in learning than girls. Lack of motivation causes them to be passive in learning. According to a female teacher at MA Khaeruddin, boys rarely read and lack of focus when studying. They tend to be lazy in the classroom but were motivated in outdoor activities. According

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with the principal of MTs Futuhiyyah, May 24, 2018.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with the principal of MTs Nurul Huda, June 26, 2018.

to male teachers from MAN Gondanglegi and MA Manbaul Ulum,<sup>31</sup> boys are dominantly more active outside the classroom because they are more interested to physical activities. At MA Ibn Hajar, according to some teachers, boys tend to be less serious, ignoring the lesson. The lack of parents' attention at home" causes boys to be lazy in learning.. This is because most parents work abroad.

Thus, there are several factors that cause differences between girls and boys in participating in and outside the classroom, including different abilities, interests and motivation in learning and the teacher's strategies. The lack of parent's attention and the influence of gadget and social media may also be other contributing factors to such a difference.

### **Bullying and Violence**

The most common aspects of school climate and part of the school experience explored in this study are those related to bullying and violence which refer to repeated acts of aggression that cause physical or psychological problems. Forms of bullying can be physical, verbal, social, or electronic. Both boys and girls are involved in all forms of bullying even though boys are more likely to be involved in physical intimidation.

Among the nine Islamic schools, there are still cases of violence between them. Violence is found in three schools. In two schools, a series of intimidations are repeatedly experienced by girls because of the treatment of boys. The forms of intimidation found at the locus are mutually reproachful, calling a boy by his father's name and calling a girl by her body shape. There are also cases in which boys at MTs Raudat al-Uqul did not go to school because they were verbally intimidated.<sup>32</sup>

The interaction between teachers and students in the madrasas studied is accustomed to providing physical sanctions or punishment. The different cases in eight madrasas are so illustrative. The punishment could be in the form of cleaning the yard, running around the yard, doing push-ups, sit-ups, scotch jams, and memorizing *Asmaul Husna* while standing. All those punishments are intended to create the

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with the principal of MAN Gondanglegi and MTs Mambaul Ulum, May 26, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with a female teacher of MTs Raudat al-Uqul, June 26, 2018.

mentality of self-discipline and respect to fellow students in order to view them humanely.

### **Gender Relations**

Schools are social systems with a learning environment that play an important role in the development of students' personality and characters. The environment and social climate in schools become a strength in forming social relationships that determine positive social interactions between students, characterized more by warmth and responsiveness as well as discourage anger or violence. The purpose of social relations here is to strengthen social skills through social interaction between students, the physical environment, students' leadership who lead in groups, and conducive school climate.

The Madrasas under study have applied a collaborative learning which basically refers to the provision of boys and girls together in the same classroom. According to a male teacher from MTs Jauharot al-Muzakki, boys and girls interact with each other. This social interaction encourages them to read, discuss, and work in groups. In activities outside the classroom, they interact well without differentiating boys and girls. They follow extracurricular activities together with collaborative experiences. Through social interaction they realise that they could perform school projects and do big events together in school.<sup>33</sup>

Social interaction encourages them to lead the group. Based on interviews with male and female teachers in nine Islamic schools, girls often became leaders in groups. They stand out as peer leaders. This peer leadership could improve their ability to manage groups, empathize with students, and develop their communication and leadership skills. Through peer leadership, students have experiences in integrative and applied learning; knowledge of school resources; interaction with teachers, staffs, and peers; critical thinking, problem solving, and higher order thinking skills; ability to work under a certain kind of pressures; interpersonal skills; and awareness and respect for diversity.

Social relations in schools depend on the positive school climate that consists of shared values and are considered as a long-lasting quality of the school environment. School climate is often associated with school safety, both physically and psychologically, because a safe

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with a male teacher of MTs Jauharot Al-Muzakki, May 21, 2018.

school environment is very important for learning. The data indicate that boys tend to feel uncomfortable when they are in class (2 boys), library (1 boy), laboratory (1 boy), canteen (2 boys), toilet (4 boys), and in a dormitory (2 boys). The reason for such discomfort is the crowd and noise of the class, canteen, library, and unclean toilets. Boys are uncomfortable in the dormitory because there are many boys leaving the dormitory without permission, showing act of being not discipline.

On the other hand, female students tend to feel less safe in class (2 girls), madrasa yard (1 girl), laboratory (1 girl), library (1 girl), canteen (1 girl), toilet (6 girls), and on the road (1 girl). The crowded class, chaotic parking lot of the schoolyard, dirty laboratory and library due to the on-going renovation, the dirty and doodled wall of the toilet and the traffic of the vehicles on the highway next to their school have caused discomfort for the girls. Also, they find the situation in the canteen uncomfortable because many people chat to each other there.

### **In Search for Gender Equality in Rural Madrasas**

Gender equality has become the big concern of madrasas. All teachers and principals, as the data suggest, formally claim that male and female teachers have the same rights in accessing, participating, controlling and getting benefits from resources in schools so that they have the opportunity to develop their capacity in building and having a fair career trajectory. Similarly, male and female students have equal opportunities, access and benefits to resources so that they could make the right career and life choices. Social relations that are fairly established have implications of the fair distribution of roles between men and women, and produce social consequences, such as the division of labor between men and women, the socialization process, and the payroll system without discrimination.

The difference in roles that society are aware of allows gender to become a social awareness. The phenomenon is in line with Berger's argument that the world of everyday life is not taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives.<sup>34</sup> Gender relations in madrasas illustrate gender norms that are institutionalized in the social area where teachers and students direct their behavior toward the ideals of maturity and womanhood with important consequences for life opportunities. Their action that is repeated frequently becomes an

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<sup>34</sup> Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 33.

established pattern for the process of habituation.<sup>35</sup> Whenever there is reciprocity typification of habitual actions by different types of actors will institutionalize different types of actions. All actions in gender relation which are repeated once or more tend to be habituated to some degree, and slowly forms a gender system.<sup>36</sup>

Gender norms that originate from Islam govern the patterns of communication and interaction between men and women in madrasas, such as sitting position, not being in close proximity between boys and girls except in allowable activities, and maintaining the image and self-esteem in behaving between different sexes. Relationships contribute to the dynamics to encourage cooperation, the development of leadership, and communication skills. Students interact to each other in developing critical thinking skills, problem solving, empathy, respect for diversity, and various social skills. However, the dynamics of gender relations sometimes experience acts of harassment and violence. On the field, a male student is reported to have mocked his friend which ended in a fight. Some madrasas also impose physical punishment on students who break the rules. Habituated gender norms, in short, are embedded as routines, and form the meaningful character for the individual.<sup>37</sup>

The discourses on gender in Indonesia is nonetheless growing rapidly and have reached Islamic educational institutions in rural areas. Efforts such as feminism seem unstoppable in Islamic schools.<sup>38</sup> Girls are assumed to have the same role as boys. They are no longer restricted to developing, participating, achieving, and choosing a career fairly and appropriately. However, gender awareness is still colored by traditional gender norms, such as the fact that women are not interested in learning outside the classroom that requires physical exertion. Learning motivation of boys tends to be low in academic learning because of the influence of digital technology. These traditional gender norms also give rise to the dynamics of gender differences.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>36</sup> Chafetz, *Varieties of Gender Theory in Sociology*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> Berger, *The Social Construction of Reality*, 71.

<sup>38</sup> See for instance, Saipul Hamdi, "Interpreting and Enacting Islamic Feminism in *Pesantren Al-Muayyad Windan*," Bianca J. Smith and Mark Woodward (eds), *Gender and Power in Indonesian Islam: Leaders, Feminists, Sufis and Pesantren Selves* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 119-134.

The tendency of gender differences in madrasas is not a serious problem as long as it is not coupled with acts of discrimination.<sup>39</sup> But if the differences in students' participation occur continuously and without the teacher's efforts to balance, gender norms will continuously have an impact on the formation of gender identity, gender typicality, and even gender stereotypes. Gender typicality involves how attributes are distinguished by sex and are measured by empirical observations or assessments, such as abilities, interests, and motivation to learn. Gender stereotypes consist of people's beliefs about gender differences. Gender identity includes one's self-representation in relation to gender categories. The combination of gender identity and gender stereotype is better known as gender differentiation.<sup>40</sup>

Gender stereotypes may arise in madrasas through teachers' beliefs that boy students are stronger and freer. For rural communities in southern Malang who are influenced by *pandalungan* culture, women are required to maintain their dignity and honor with certain family rules, including the stipulation that they must be obedient to parents; they must not go out until late at night to maintain safety, self-esteem, and self-respect and family. On the contrary, boys could go out until late night. Society tend to tolerate boys if they behave badly. Gender stereotypes would instill gender norms in schools that are unfavorable to one side. Boys are tolerated if they make mistakes or do bad things. As a result, boys' learning motivation tend to be lower than girls.

This stereotype is a form of traditional gender norms favoring boys than girls.<sup>41</sup> For rural communities who adhere strongly to traditional gender norms, this stereotype is advantageous to maintain the security, image and self-esteem of girls from promiscuity and the threat of social crime. In the digital age, gender differences cannot be separated from the problems of digital gender that are socialized from an early age. Different expectations and interests of parents encourage boys to be more vocal, risky and adventurous than girls. Girls tend to be more obedient and caring. The expected attributes of boys seem to

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<sup>39</sup> Azyumardi Azra, "Reforms in Islamic Education: A Global Perspective Seen from the Indonesian Case," Charlene Tan (ed.), *Reforms in Islamic Education: International Perspective* (London & New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 59-76.

<sup>40</sup> D. Perry and R. Pauletti, "Gender and Adolescent Development," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 21, 1 (2011), 66.

<sup>41</sup> Srimulyani, *Women from Traditional Islamic Educational Institutions*, 39-40.

be more in tune with the parents' technology perspectives. Also, people tend to reinforce stereotypical ideas around gender and digital technology, so that computer games were often targeted at boys.

As a result, parents do not protect boys from any kind of addiction to online games. Social construction encourages boys to receive more support and autonomy from their parents who do not limit their opportunities to explore and develop curiosity with digital technology. Meanwhile, girls who are often protected become less exposed to social environment, and as a result they are lack of supports in exploring the use of digital technology.<sup>42</sup>

Learning methods can make the difference between expansive and restrictive learning experience. Expansive learning is a process in which learners actively learn because teachers can motivate them to obtain real meaning structures, based on their problems and the development of their new potentials for actions and activities. Restrictive learning is a process, in which individuals are forced to learn something reasons that are embedded in the classroom, so that they do not develop personal motives for learning.<sup>43</sup> Teachers who are unable to develop expansive learning make students in some madrasas less active. In fact, some of students lack academic ability so that their participation in learning and their achievement tend to be low.

Madrasa is a critical context that determines the development of students' behavior, emotions, social, and academic achievement. The madrasas climate reflects social construction and is related to the safety and comfort of school students. The madrasa's atmosphere with gender awareness contributes to creating an environment where students feel safe. The madrasa's atmosphere that is not safe because of the usual intimidation and violence can have implications for students' sense of security and comfort. Intimidation can lead to fights in madrasas. Factors affecting the madrasa climate are policies that do not yet support a positive madrasa environment, such as a policy of physical sanctions on students who violate madrasa rules. Thus, the social context and comfort in madrasas are the important predictors of gender justice.

The socio-economic background of rural communities is a part of gender system that can explain gender inequality in madrasas. Madrasas

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<sup>42</sup> Billy Wong and Peter E. J. Kemp, "Technical Boys and Creative Girls: The Career Aspirations of Digitally Skilled Youths," *Cambridge Journal of Education* (2017).

<sup>43</sup> Nielsen, "Gender, Learning and Social Practice, 184.

in rural areas are more numerous than in urban areas, and the majority of madrasas are private, much in demand by poor families and parents' interest for girls. The choice of girls to go to madrasas in both rural and urban areas does not only come out of economic motives (such as the fact that the school fee in madrasa is cheaper than in others) but also of religious motives. However, big number of girls who get enrolled in madrasas, outnumbering boys, could lead to the reproduction of conservative gender norms in society, and possibly undermine efforts to empower women.<sup>44</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Discourses about gender are no longer new for rural madrasas. Educational practitioners in madrasas have been familiar with feminism and gender equality so that they already have gender awareness. Unfortunately, both traditional and conservative gender norms are persisting in rural madrasas so that gender differences stereotypes, and harassment are still around. If this occurs continuously, it will hamper the realization of gender equality in rural madrasas.

Gender equality in madrasas is determined by such various elements as patriarchal system, religious ideology, or social construction in society, student abilities, student expectations, learning methods and processes, learning motivation, madrasa's climates, gender relations, economic status, and family background. The so-called social ecosystem of education in rural madrasas has contributed to the development of gender equality in rural nadrasas. []

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<sup>44</sup> Asadullah, "Madrasah for Girls and Private School for Boys?."



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