

Reconstructing Gender Justice in Islamic Education: Comparative Insights from Fatima Mernissi and Husein Muhammad

Lisdawati Buton¹, Muhammad Indra Adi Gunawan², Achmad Khusnan³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Islam Al Azhar Gresik, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the thoughts of Fatima Mernissi and Husein Muhammad regarding gender equality in Islamic education. The research employs a library research method with a descriptive approach, utilizing content analysis and comparative analysis to explore the perspectives of both scholars. Primary data sources include Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* and Husein Muhammad's *Islam Agama Ramah Perempuan*, supported by relevant secondary literature. The findings indicate that both scholars share the view that Islam upholds equality, justice, and human dignity between men and women. Mernissi emphasizes education as a transformative instrument to empower women, eliminate illiteracy, and challenge patriarchal structures that limit women's roles. Meanwhile, Husein Muhammad highlights educational justice through equal access, participation, learning opportunities, and character development for both genders. Their differences are influenced by distinct socio-cultural contexts, with Mernissi focusing on Moroccan women's liberation and Husein Muhammad emphasizing Islamic educational practices in Indonesia. This study contributes to the development of gender-sensitive Islamic education discourse.

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Corresponding Author:

, Lisdawati Buton

Universitas Islam Al Azhar Gresik, Indonesia; Lisdawatibuton1@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Gender is no longer an unfamiliar issue to discuss; rather, it is a classical issue that has been studied for a long time. Nevertheless, gender studies remain interesting because gender-related issues continue to develop and experience dynamic changes along with the transformation of time and social conditions (Alimta Adyajeng, 2021). It is still deeply embedded in our collective memory that there was a statement claiming that women were the second-class beings, implying a distinction between men and women where women were considered not to have the same rights as men. This perspective resulted in attitudes that degraded women, limiting their opportunities to participate in politics and

express their rights. As expressed in a classical saying, women were often restricted to only three roles: the kitchen, the well, and the bed (Alfian Rokhmansyah, 2016).

In this context, education becomes one of the alternatives to prevent gender-biased behavior among various social groups and to create a generation with gender awareness. Therefore, education plays an essential role in realizing gender equality within society. Education is not only a means of transferring social norms, abilities, and knowledge but also a medium for studying and conveying new ideas and perspectives (Azyumardi Azra, 2004). In addition to general education, religious education can also serve as a foundation for establishing social relationships between human beings, both men and women. Religion is a system that regulates faith (belief) and worship toward the Almighty God, as well as a set of principles governing interactions among humans and their relationship with the surrounding environment (Achmadi, 1992).

Islam is a peaceful, comprehensive, and integrated religion whose teachings regulate all aspects of human life, both worldly and spiritual matters. Therefore, education cannot be separated from Islamic teachings. Before the arrival of Islam, women occupied an unequal social position compared to men. For centuries, women continuously experienced male domination, and their conditions were often miserable and concerning. Women were treated as objects for the satisfaction of kings or rulers, and they were even regarded as commodities that could be traded (Intan Nuraini Putri et al., 2022). Islam is a religion that upholds justice, and this justice encompasses all levels and groups of human beings, whether men or women, young or old. Everything has been regulated according to its appropriate position. Islam has honored women and placed them in an equal position with men in various aspects, including employment, education, and other social fields. However, in reality, these principles have not always been fully realized in social life.

Normatively, Islam has explained a concept that does not consider social background as a basis for discrimination. The Qur'an describes human diversity and emphasizes that the most honorable person is the one with the highest level of piety, as stated in QS. Al-Hujurat (49): 13:

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted."

The development of intellectual thought regarding equality between women and men has continued to become a subject of discussion in various fields, such as politics, education, and social life. The Qur'an serves as a life guide for Muslims, emphasizing justice and providing opportunities for both men and women to contribute and develop themselves without neglecting their respective rights and responsibilities (Muhammad Akip, 2020). According to Mansour Fakihi in his article "The Position of Women in Gender Analysis Perspective," various forms of gender injustice can be identified. One of them is violence against women caused by gender differences. Such violence ranges from subtle forms, such as sexual harassment and dependency, to physical violence, including rape (Mansour Fakihi, 1999). This situation contributed to the emergence of feminist movements that challenged gender issues in interpreting the Qur'an. These movements have enriched Islamic studies by introducing different perspectives and methodologies, particularly because many social realities demonstrate unequal treatment toward women (Widyaputri Primidiani, 2023).

Through a feminist perspective, various forms of normative knowledge that contain gender bias but have been used as orientations in religious life, particularly regarding gender relations, are critically examined, reconstructed, and returned to the spirit of Islam, which places the liberation of women within the broader framework of human dignity and liberation (Andik Wahyun Mukoyyidin, 2023). Islamic feminism emerged as a response to inequalities and injustices experienced by women within Muslim societies. Its emergence gave rise to Muslim feminist scholars who, based on their Islamic beliefs, attempted to challenge interpretations that they considered unfavorable toward women. One of the prominent Muslim feminist figures is Fatima Mernissi from Morocco.

After completing her studies and writing her works, Mernissi concluded that if women's rights became problematic for some modern Muslims, the reason was not the Qur'an, the Prophet, or Islamic tradition itself, but rather because women's rights conflicted with the interests of male-dominated elites (Fatima Mernissi, 1987). Mernissi argued that religion must be understood progressively in order to comprehend social realities and their underlying forces. She stated that religion had often been used as a justification for violence, and eliminating primitive and irrational interpretations was necessary to overcome political oppression and violence. According to her, the mixture between the profane and the sacred, between God and political leaders, and between the Qur'an and human fantasies of faith must be critically deconstructed (Nailun Najah, 2023).

Besides Morocco, Indonesia also has Islamic scholars who advocate for women's rights, one of whom is Husein Muhammad. As a scholar managing Dar al-Tauhid Islamic boarding school in Arjawinangun, Cirebon, he became one of the prominent activists for women's rights. Husein's awareness of women's oppression emerged when he focused on discussions about women from a religious perspective. Through these studies, he recognized that women faced significant social and religious challenges (Husein Muhammad, 2021). Husein Muhammad is one of the scholars who contributed to reform by promoting gender equality and justice within the paradigm of Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and Islamic law. According to him, Indonesian society is strongly influenced by religious attitudes, traditions, culture, and social patterns, all of which are shaped by religious norms, particularly interpretations of religious texts (Muhammad Akip, 2020).

Gender equality is not merely about placing women and men in the same social position, but also about ensuring equal rights, particularly in the field of education. Education for women is one of the most fundamental rights that must be fulfilled. This does not mean competing with men's positions, but rather empowering women for themselves, their families, and society. Educated women will give birth to educated children, and these children will become the generation capable of advancing Indonesia in various aspects of life.

METHODS

This study employs a library research method with a descriptive approach. Library research is conducted by examining and analyzing various written sources relevant to the research topic. The descriptive approach is used to provide a systematic description and interpretation of the ideas, concepts, and perspectives related to gender equality in Islamic thought, particularly those developed by Fatima Mernissi and Husein Muhammad. The analytical methods applied in this study are content analysis and comparative analysis. Content analysis is used to examine the meanings, arguments, and concepts contained in the works of the selected scholars, while comparative analysis is employed to identify similarities, differences, and distinctive characteristics between Fatima Mernissi's and Husein Muhammad's perspectives regarding women's rights and gender equality in Islam.

The data sources in this research consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include Fatima Mernissi's book entitled *Women and Islam* and Husein Muhammad's work entitled *Islam, the Religion of Women-Friendly Values*, which serve as the main references for analyzing their thoughts. Meanwhile, secondary sources are obtained from various written materials, including books, journal articles, and academic publications relevant to the research theme. These secondary sources support the analysis and provide broader perspectives related to the ideas of Fatima Mernissi and Husein Muhammad in accordance with the objectives of this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Fatima Mernissi's Thought on Gender Equality

Gender Equality

The Qur'an not only emphasizes that men and women are fundamentally equal before Allah, but also that they are members and "protectors" of one another. Fatima Mernissi argues that Islam strongly affirms the equality between men and women (Fatima Mernissi, 1999). This principle is reflected in Qur'an Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13:

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from a male and a female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Aware."

In her studies, Mernissi discusses the position of women who have historically been regarded as inferior and considered second-class beings. According to her, the categorization of gender differences is often based only on reproductive functions, where women possess the unique ability to give birth and create new generations. However, this reproductive contribution has frequently been ignored in the social relationship between men and women. As a result, women's roles have been underestimated, while men have been positioned as dominant actors in social, political, and cultural spaces.

Furthermore, in Qur'an Surah Al-Ahzab verse 35, Allah explicitly describes the equal position of men and women:

"Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their chastity and the women who guard their chastity, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who remember Allah often for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."

Based on this verse, Fatima Mernissi views that the relationship between men and women in Islam is based on equality and mutual respect. Islamic education affirms that both men and women have equal rights and positions before Allah. The fundamental distinction between them is not based on gender, social status, or physical differences, but rather on the level of faith and piety.

Gender Equality in Islamic Education

Women's Roles and Opportunities in Education

Fatima Mernissi acknowledges that differences between men and women will continue to exist naturally, but these differences should remain within reasonable boundaries and must not eliminate the fundamental freedom, human rights, and individual as well as social responsibilities possessed by women. According to Mernissi, education for women is a powerful instrument that enables them to determine their own future and participate actively in social and political life. Women play a significant role as the foundation of everyday life, and their intellectual development can contribute to transforming society and directing nations toward a better future. Therefore, education becomes essential for women, particularly because one of the major problems in Arab societies in the past was the high rate of female illiteracy and limited access to knowledge (Fatima Mernissi, 1987).

Through education, women are not positioned as competitors against men, but rather as individuals who have the capacity to contribute to family, society, and national development. Education provides women with awareness, independence, and the ability to participate in various aspects of life.

Implementation in Educational Institutions

Since independence, Morocco has attempted to expand educational access, although initially these efforts mainly benefited men. The country attempted to provide schools for half of the male population at that time, resulting in approximately 55.4% of Moroccan men remaining illiterate. Muslim countries

that gained independence also attempted to transform negative perceptions regarding education by implementing mass education programs in rural areas, although these programs were initially designed primarily for men (Fatima Mernissi, 1987). However, gender inequality in education remained significant. Thirty years after independence, approximately 90% of rural Moroccan women were still illiterate, and nearly all of them were excluded from political participation. In 1982, women represented only 37.4% of primary school students, 33.1% of secondary school students, and 26.3% of university students (Fatima Mernissi, 1987). These conditions demonstrate that educational equality for women in Morocco had not yet been fully achieved, although efforts were continuously made to overcome illiteracy and the social domination of men. Mernissi also emphasizes that education is a strategic pathway to improve women's dignity and social status. She argues that women's education can challenge traditional concepts of sexual identity and gender roles. Education also influences patterns of early marriage because increasing educational opportunities for women can reduce the prevalence of early marriage among women (Nur Afif, 2020).

Educational Methods

Mernissi proposed several educational strategies for women to create a social image in which women possess equal intellectual and social capabilities compared to men. These strategies were developed according to the social conditions of Moroccan society at that time. The first strategy is the dissemination of education through the media industry. Mernissi emphasizes the importance of developing strategies that enable educated women working in the media sector to play a greater role, particularly by producing women-oriented programs, films, and videos using local languages. According to her, the development of media industries provides opportunities for women to become active agents in promoting women's advancement in important sectors of the future (Fatima Mernissi, 1999).

The second strategy is the dissemination of education through feminist research. Mernissi highlights the importance of feminist research as a means of raising awareness and empowering women. She refers to Zainab Fawaz Al-Amili, an Egyptian female writer in the 1890s, who published a collection of biographies of women entitled *Generalizations of Secluded Housewives* (Al-Durr Al-Manthur fi Thabaqat Rabbat Al-Khudur). In the introduction, Fawaz explained that her work was intended to contribute to improving the quality and dignity of women. This initiative strengthened Mernissi's belief that feminist research could become an important method for encouraging women to overcome illiteracy and social limitations in Morocco (Fatima Mernissi, 1997).

The third strategy is the dissemination of education through Nisa'ist publishing initiatives. According to Mernissi, Nisa'ist research has produced significant works regarding women's issues. These achievements were made possible through the efforts of researchers who worked under difficult conditions and had limited access to media platforms. Therefore, Mernissi argues that the existence of Nisa'ist publications can facilitate women's access to knowledge, encourage learning motivation, and strengthen women's intellectual development. The involvement of many female scholars in Western countries within Nisa'ist publishing movements also demonstrates that women have the right to pursue education and participate in knowledge production (Fatima Mernissi, 1999).

Husein Muhammad's Thought on Gender Equality

Gender Equality

According to Husein Muhammad, the position of women and men is equal, and there is no distinction between them based on gender, language, ethnicity, nationality, or social background. Both men and women have the same dignity, and the only factor that distinguishes them before Allah is their level of faith and piety. This principle is reflected in Qur'an Surah An-Nahl verse 97:

"Whoever does righteous deeds, whether male or female, while being a believer, We will surely grant them a good life and We will surely reward them with a reward according to the best of what they have done."

Husein Muhammad's interest in gender equality discourse began when he participated in religious discussions (halaqah) and became involved as a member of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan). Through this involvement, he witnessed various cases of violence against women that occurred not only in public spaces but also within domestic environments. Husein chose to critically examine the relationship between religion and women because he believed that religion itself could never justify violence and oppression against anyone, especially women. According to him, violence against women occurs due to social structures that place men in a position of power and dominance over women (Husein Muhammad, 2021).

Husein Muhammad further explains that gender equality can be achieved when there is no discrimination between women and men, allowing both to have equal access, opportunities, participation, and control in development processes, as well as receiving equal and fair benefits from development. Having access means possessing opportunities to utilize resources and having the authority to participate in decision-making regarding the use and outcomes of those resources (Husein Muhammad, 2021).

Based on these ideas, it can be concluded that human beings are created with diversity but possess equal dignity before Allah. Gender equality refers to the principle that women and men have equal rights in various aspects of life, including education, economy, social relations, and culture. Gender equality ensures that no individual's access to rights is restricted based on biological differences. Awareness of gender equality continues to be developed as an important social discourse and serves as a measure of how justice is implemented within human relationships, both between men and women.

Gender Equality in Islamic Education

Equal Opportunities in Education

Gender inequality in education is closely related to discrimination. Historically, men have been given greater opportunities to pursue education, while women's access has often been limited. Many societies still perceive men as the primary economic providers, resulting in greater educational priorities being given to men. Such perspectives have contributed to the assumption that women possess lower intellectual capacity and are therefore unsuitable for occupying public leadership positions. Women who attempt to enter public spaces are sometimes considered to violate traditional gender roles and religious expectations. These views have become significant factors contributing to educational inequality between men and women (Husein Muhammad, 2021).

According to Husein Muhammad, gender issues in education must be addressed because failure to resolve them will continue to marginalize women. Gender equality in education is essential to ensure that women have the same opportunities as men to contribute to intellectual and social development. In his book *Women, Islam, and the State*, Husein Muhammad emphasizes:

"Knowledge is considered fardhu 'ain, meaning an obligation that must be fulfilled by every Muslim individual. Learning not only religious knowledge but also other fields, such as mathematics, national language, history, social sciences, and humanities, is considered fardhu kifayah, meaning a collective obligation. As stated in the hadith of Prophet Muhammad: Seeking knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim man and Muslim woman." (Husein Muhammad, 2021).

Based on Husein Muhammad's perspective, women and men possess equal rights and opportunities to obtain education. There is no Islamic principle that restricts women's participation in

educational environments, whether formal or informal. Furthermore, governments also have a responsibility to support educational justice without discrimination based on gender.

Implementation in Educational Institutions

Husein Muhammad does not fully agree with the practice of separating classrooms based on gender because he considers it potentially restrictive. However, he also does not reject this practice entirely because it is not necessarily a form of gender injustice and may be adapted to the cultural and traditional contexts of certain educational institutions. Husein views the integration of male and female students in the same classroom as a normal practice as long as both students are able to maintain proper manners (*akhlaq*) and respect one another. According to him, the most fundamental aspects of education are equal learning opportunities and equal learning materials provided to both men and women without any form of discrimination.

As a gender equality activist and one of the leaders of Dar'at Tauhid Islamic Boarding School in Arjawinangun, Cirebon, Husein Muhammad applies these principles in the educational practices of the *pesantren*. The institution implements a learning system where male and female students can study in the same classroom, although certain classes may still use partitions (*hijab/satir*) when considered necessary according to educational conditions. Furthermore, subjects related to women's jurisprudence (*fiqh al-nisa'*), including menstruation (*haid*), postpartum bleeding (*nifas*), childbirth (*wiladah*), and related issues, are also taught to male students. This practice represents an effort to promote fairness and equality in education while encouraging men to understand and respect women's experiences, and vice versa. In the learning process, Husein emphasizes the importance of character formation (*akhlaq*) among students. When students are able to maintain good manners and ethical behavior, the learning process can take place effectively. Conversely, a lack of moral awareness may lead to discrimination, humiliation, and disrespect between male and female students.

Educational Methods

Dar'at Tauhid Islamic Boarding School continues to apply traditional Islamic educational methods commonly practiced in Indonesian *pesantren*, including the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), *halaqah*, lectures, and other traditional learning approaches (Hilma A'laudina, 2021).

Classical Islamic Book Study (Kajian Kitab Kuning)

Within the *pesantren* environment, one of the main forms of formal learning is the study of *kitab kuning*. These books generally contain works written by classical Islamic scholars, particularly those influenced by the Shafi'i school of thought. The main purpose of studying these texts is to educate students to become future Islamic scholars. The term *kitab kuning* is often referred to as *kitab gundul* because the texts are generally written without vowel markings (*syakl*), and due to their long historical tradition, they are sometimes also called classical or traditional Islamic books.

Two main methods are commonly used in *pesantren* to study *kitab kuning*: the *sorogan* and *bandongan* methods. Both methods have distinctive characteristics in reading and interpreting classical texts through a strict grammatical approach based on *nahwu* and *sharaf*. The classical books taught at Dar'at Tauhid Islamic Boarding School cover various fields of Islamic knowledge, including Arabic grammar (*Nahwu Sharaf*), Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), principles of Islamic law (*Ushul Fiqh*), Hadith, Qur'anic interpretation (*Tafsir*), Theology (*Tauhid*), Sufism (*Tasawuf*), ethics, history (*Tarikh*), and rhetoric (*Balaghah*).

Halaqah

Halaqah is a learning model commonly conducted by students sitting in a circle around the Islamic scholar (*kyai*). Students discuss various issues under the guidance and supervision of the *kyai*. This

method is frequently applied in academic discussions, *bahtsul masail*, and collective deliberations (*musyawarah kubra*). The *bandongan* and *sorogan* methods are also included within this learning tradition. In the *bandongan* method, the teacher reads, translates, explains, and interprets the learning material while students listen and observe. Meanwhile, in the *sorogan* method, students individually read and translate texts directly in front of the *kyai* (Husein Muhammad, 2019).

Lecture Method (Ceramah)

The lecture method was initially practiced by K.H. A. Syathori in delivering religious teachings and educational materials to students and the wider community. This tradition continues to be maintained by his successors. The activity is conducted weekly, particularly after Friday prayers, where students and the community listen to religious advice (*tausiyah* or *mau'idzah hasanah*) delivered by the *kyai*. In delivering lessons, *Kyai Syathori* commonly uses storytelling methods followed by explanations of the discussed topics.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that gender equality in Islamic education is a fundamental concept that emphasizes equal dignity, rights, and opportunities between men and women in accessing, participating in, and benefiting from education. The thoughts of Fatima Mernissi and Husein Muhammad demonstrate that Islamic teachings fundamentally support justice and equality, while gender inequality emerges from social, cultural, and interpretative constructions rather than from the essence of Islamic values itself. Fatima Mernissi's perspective highlights education as a transformative instrument for empowering women and reconstructing traditional gender relations. According to Mernissi, women and men possess equal responsibilities as learners and educators, and both have the same opportunity to acquire knowledge. Although biological differences between men and women exist, these differences should not become a justification for limiting women's rights and freedom. For Mernissi, women's education plays a strategic role in improving women's dignity, strengthening their social awareness, expanding their opportunities for mobility, and challenging traditional gender roles that have historically restricted women's participation in society.

Meanwhile, Husein Muhammad emphasizes that gender equality in Islamic education is rooted in the principles of justice, humanity, and respect for human dignity. He argues that men and women are equal before Allah, and the only distinction lies in their faith and piety. In the educational context, equality means that women and men must receive equal access, learning opportunities, educational materials, facilities, participation, and benefits from educational processes. Husein Muhammad's ideas are not only conceptual but also implemented through educational practices in Islamic boarding schools, particularly through inclusive learning environments and the cultivation of ethical values (*akhlaq*) among students. The comparative analysis between Fatima Mernissi and Husein Muhammad reveals both similarities and differences. Both scholars share the same fundamental view that gender discrimination against women is incompatible with Islamic principles of justice and that education is a key instrument for achieving gender equality. However, their approaches are shaped by different social and historical contexts. Mernissi's ideas emerged from the experience of women's marginalization in Moroccan society, particularly related to female illiteracy and limited educational access. Therefore, her educational strategy focuses on expanding literacy, media participation, and feminist knowledge production. In contrast, Husein Muhammad's perspective developed from his engagement with Indonesian religious communities and his experiences addressing violence and discrimination against women, resulting in a stronger emphasis on educational practices within Islamic institutions and *pesantren* traditions.

The findings of this study indicate that achieving gender equality in Islamic education requires three essential dimensions: gender-sensitive perspectives among educators, learning resources that represent gender justice, and educational processes that provide equal participation for all students regardless of gender. Therefore, the thoughts of Fatima Mernissi and Husein Muhammad provide important theoretical and practical contributions to developing a more inclusive Islamic education system that upholds justice, equality, and human dignity.

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