

The Journey for Being Pro-feminist Male Ulama: A Study among Four Indonesian Ulama

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Abstract

Male ulama have significantly influenced the feminist movement in Indonesia by providing religious interpretations that are attuned to women's experiences and actively addressing injustices faced by women. This research delves into the transformative journeys of four male ulama as they adopted pro-feminist stances and engaged with the feminist movement. Utilizing a phenomenological approach and in-depth interviews for data collection, the study focuses on how these ulama promote gender justice and embrace feminist principles. The findings reveal that the journey to pro-feminism for these ulama involves multiple phases: recognizing sensitizing events, cultivating feminist consciousness, reinforcing feminist values, and taking tangible actions against women's injustices. In their advocacy for gender justice, these ulama have crafted a methodology for interpreting religious texts that centers women's experiences as crucial to understanding faith. This interpretative approach not only supports a gender-just mindset but also seeks to integrate gender justice principles into daily practices. Ultimately, the study illustrates the essential roles male ulama play in fostering a pro-feminist environment and encouraging societal change regarding gender issues in Indonesia.

Ulama laki-laki telah memberikan pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap gerakan feminis di Indonesia dengan memberikan tafsir agama yang sesuai dengan pengalaman perempuan dan secara aktif menangani ketidakadilan yang dihadapi perempuan. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi perjalanan transformatif empat ulama laki-laki dalam mengadopsi sikap pro-feminis dan terlibat dalam gerakan feminis. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis dan wawancara mendalam untuk pengumpulan data, penelitian ini fokus pada bagaimana ulama-ulama ini mempromosikan keadilan gender dan mengadopsi prinsip-prinsip feminis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa perjalanan menuju feminisme bagi para ulama ini melibatkan beberapa fase: mengenali peristiwa yang memicu kesadaran, mengembangkan kesadaran feminis, memperkuat nilai-nilai feminis, dan mengambil tindakan konkret melawan ketidakadilan yang dialami perempuan. Dalam advokasi mereka untuk keadilan gender, para ulama ini mengembangkan metodologi untuk menafsirkan teks-teks agama yang menempatkan pengalaman perempuan sebagai hal yang krusial dalam memahami keyakinan. Pendekatan interpretatif ini tidak hanya mendukung pola pikir yang adil gender tetapi juga berusaha mengintegrasikan prinsip-prinsip keadilan gender ke dalam praktik sehari-hari. Pada akhirnya, penelitian ini menggambarkan peran esensial yang dimainkan oleh ulama laki-laki dalam menciptakan lingkungan yang pro-feminis dan mendorong perubahan sosial terkait isu gender di Indonesia.

Keywords: feminist movement; gender injustices; gender sensitive interpretation; women's experiences

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Introduction

Male ulama play an important role in supporting the feminist movement in Indonesia (Cazarin 2021; Ismah 2016; Nikmatullah 2024; Rizki et al. 2024), specifically offering religious perspectives that consider the voices and experiences of women (Fahrub, Alhaa, and Achadi 2023). The religious perspective is considered to be more empathetic to women and is critical to the mainstream religious perspectives that merely consider men's experiences as the standard in interpreting Islamic texts (Fuad, Afrianty, and Basya 2025; Ismah 2016). These pro-feminist male ulama not only offer religious perspectives that concern about women, but also criticize and transform the social structure that gives privilege and power to male ulama (Jamil and Usuluddin 2024). The Wahid Institute referred to them as part of the fourth wave of the Islamic feminist movement in Indonesia (Wahid et al. 2008). They provide a way out of the deadlock that feminists and secular gender justice activists have faced when they are challenged with religious gender biased doctrine (Keddie 2018).

Studies on pro-feminist men in Indonesia and global context have been conducted in the past, such as those on the New Men's Movement (*Gerakan Laki-laki Baru*) in Indonesia (Fahadi 2022; Febrianto 2014; Hasyim 2014; Larasati and Astuti 2019; Maihasni, Reftantia, and Jendrius 2024; Ramadhan 2018), and on how men engage in the movement to end violence against women and achieve gender equality (Bell and Flood 2020; Bojin 2013; Casey and Smith 2010; Flood 2019; Gíslason and Einarsdóttir 2025; Jewkes, Flood, and Lang 2015). Studies on pro-feminist male ulama have also been carried out, such as those by Rahman (2017) and Susanti (2015), who investigated Husein Muhammad as one of the well-respected male pro-feminist

ulama in Indonesia. Rahman (2017) studied the approach used by Husein Muhammad in interpreting the texts of the Qur'an and Hadith and his contribution to the development of Islamic gender discourse and gender mainstreaming in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Susanti (2015) studied Husein Muhammad's views on the oppression experienced by women in Muslim society and the role of religion and ulama in enabling such an oppression. In addition, Susanti also investigated Husein Muhammad's views on the position of women in Islam. Similar research was conducted by Hakim (2020), who studied the mubadala interpretation method offered by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir. The study found that the mubadala interpretation method, which seeks to free women from male-imposed restrictions and position them equally with men in Qur'anic narratives, reflects the approach used by postmodernist feminists. Another study related to Muslim men and feminism was conducted by Ahmad et al. (2021), which examined the role of male students in supporting the feminist movement and religious moderation.

According to existing studies, prior discourses on pro-feminist men's movements in achieving gender justice often regard men from the perspective of social movements and men in general. The views were not specific to the context of the Muslim society. Studies related to pro-feminist male ulama have highlighted the approach and methods of interpreting religious texts about women; however, the male ulama's experiences in obtaining feminist consciousness have not been investigated. Therefore, this study fills the gap by examining the process by which male ulama become pro-feminist and how they promote feminist values and principles in Indonesia.

To analyze the phenomenon of pro-feminist male ulama, this study uses Men's Pathways to

Anti-Violence Involvement theory developed by Casey and Smith (2010). The theory was grounded on their research on 27 men involved in the anti-violence against women movement. They found that men's involvement in the movement consists of four stages. First step is the occurrence of sensitizing event, in which men experience events that sensitize them about violence against women. Second step is obtaining opportunity to be involved in the anti-violence movement. Third step is a shifting in perspectives/views on the issue. Fourth step is the men's involvement in the anti-violence movement. These four stages are used in this study to investigate the experiences of four pro-feminist male ulama in Indonesia.

As a qualitative study, this research acknowledges the diversity of reality, recognizing that individuals experience phenomena differently. Thus, there exist the realities of the informants, the researcher, and the readers of the research report (Creswell 1998). To address the diverse views, the researcher built a close relationship with informants to get a better understanding regarding the reality of the informants or how the informants understand the phenomenon being studied. This study also believes that research is not value-free; consequently, this research cannot be separated from the researcher's biases.

This study aims to reveal the understanding and perception of pro-feminist male ulama on their experiences of being involved in efforts to create gender justice in Indonesia. For that reason, this study employs a qualitative approach that prioritizes the description of informants' experiences in a narrative and in-depth manner (Sudaryono 2018). Qualitative research that seeks to uncover participants' understanding of a phenomenon is known as phenomenological. As a qualitative study

employing this approach, in-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method, enabling the researcher to explore participants' perceptions and lived experiences more closely and deeply (Kaufer and Chemero 2021; Sudaryono 2018). In addition to interviews, studies of documents related to the pro-feminist male movement were also collected to provide a deeper understanding of the broader context of the pro-feminist male ulama phenomenon in Indonesia.

This study refers to the data analysis processes developed by Creswell (1998), which consist of horizontalization. Horizontalization could be understood as effort by researchers to look for statements in interviews about how informants encountering the phenomenon being studied. The list of statements are then grouped into meaning units and categorized into different themes. Next, based on the themes, researchers describe the textural (textual?) description of the informants' experiences along with examples of verbatim quotations. The researchers then constructed the entire meaning unit and essence of the informants' experiences.

The participants of this study were four pro-feminist male ulama who were actively involved in advocacies to create gender justice in Indonesia. The four informants were purposively selected with several criteria: a) actively producing Islamic discourses that support gender equality and justice, b) participating in campaigns to promote gender justice and end violence against women, c) being part of an organization or institution that actively advocates for gender equality and justice. The profiles of the four informants of this study can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Informan of the Research

No.	Initial	Education	Activities
1	IN	IN earned his doctorate degree from UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri/Islamic State University) Sunan Ampel Surabaya. IN also obtained religious education at <i>pondok pesantren</i> (Islamic boarding school) Zainul Ulum II in Gondang Legi Malang for three years and at Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Islamic Boarding School.	IN is a former Commissioners of the National Commission on Violence against Women. He is also a lecturer at the Ibrahimy Islamic Institute Situbondo and Ma'had Aly Situbondo, teaching courses in Fiqh and Usul Fiqh.
2	FAK	FAK Graduated from two universities in Syiria Abu Nur University (1989-1995) concentrating in Da'wah Studies and at Damascus University (1990-1996) in Islamic Law Studies. He obtained his Master's degree from the International Islamic University (IIU) Malaysia in 1997 to 1999 and erved his doctoral degree from Gajah Mada University, Yogyakarta in 2015.	FAK is lecturer at UIN Syeh Nurjati Cirebon and Institut Studi Islam Fahmina Cirebon. He is also Vice Director of Ma'had Aly Kebon Jambu Cirebon.
3	MW	MW received extensive Islamic boarding school education from the Assuniah Mulyasari Islamic Elementary School (1977-1983), then continued at a Madrasah Tsanawiyah/Islamic Junior High School level and MHS levels at the Babakan Ciwaringin Islamic Boarding School in Cirebon from 1983-1986. MW erved undergraduate degree from UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and obtained his masters from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta	MW is a lecturer at UIN Syeh Nurjati Cirebon and also an Rector of the Fahmina Islamic Studies Institute in Cirebon, West Java
4	NA	NA graduated from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta and obtained his master degree from the same university	NA is the Supervisory Board of the Modern Muhammadiyah Boarding School (MBS) Ki Bagus Hadikusumo Jampang in Bogor ,West Java. He is also involved in various activities, such as advocacies and mentoring for women victims of violence in Islamic boarding school.

The Process of Four Male Ulama to be Pro-Feminist

Casey and Smith (2010) observed that men's involvement in activism to oppose violence against women through a process that they called Men's Pathways to Anti-Violence Involvement, in which this study found similar process. The four male ulama in this study went through a long process to become pro-feminist. This long journey is divided into four important phases,

and within each phase, there are sub-phases. The feminist journey of male ulama consists of four important phases: sensitizing, formation of feminist consciousness, strength-ening feminist consciousness, and taking actions to end gender injustices. This male ulama's long journey happened in the context of Indonesian culture, which remains patriarchal (Robinson 2020). Conservative Islamic perspectives justify the traditional gender order, even though at the same time, more progressive perspectives are

also developing (Rokhmad and Susilo 2017), causing traditional gender roles and more progressive gender roles to contest each other (Smith and Woodward 2013). Although they go through the same process as secular male activists, pro-feminist male ulama face different challenges. They encounter resistance when they attempt to reinterpret religious doctrines in a gender-responsive methodology. The pro-feminist male ulama are considered controversial and face rejection from conservative groups (Feillard and van Doorn-Harder 2025; Kloos and Ismah 2023).

Sensitization Phase

As illustrated above, the journey of the four male ulama begins with sensitizing. This phase is the beginning, with male ulama experiencing events related to the issues that are of concern to feminism, such as gender, sexuality, and injustice, even when they are not particularly aware of it. Among the experiences that became the start of the feminist consciousness growth include increasing proximity or closeness to female figures, dealing with issues of injustice faced by women, encountering minority groups, and receiving socialization of flexible gender roles in the family.

Closeness to a female figure who play an important role in the male ulama's life is a critical experience related to the issue of gender roles. As experienced by one informant, who felt that his older sister contributed to his academic career. He believed that the peak of his career would not have been reached, had his older sister not provided economic support for his degree. As the only person in the family who completed a doctoral degree, this informant realized that women played an important role in his life journey. At the same time, the informant witnessed the reality that women have been

treated unfairly. He also pondered to the fact that women (specifically his older sister) received a smaller inheritance than men, despite the older sister's hard work in supporting him.

"I realized, in my family, it happened that out of five siblings, I am the only one who went to college, from undergraduate, postgraduate to doctoral degree, and the one who paid for my undergraduate degree was my older sister. She worked. She only went to boarding school. When the issue of inheritance was mentioned, I immediately connected it with my life experience. Since my undergraduate degree, my postgraduate degree, and even my doctorate, it happened because I had climbed the ladder of an undergraduate degree, and my older sister was the one who paid for it. My older sister helped with housework, and the only one who went to college was me. But when the inheritance was divided with a 2:1 ratio, I felt angry; my older sister got one, and I got two instead. I felt angry, (I) felt bad, the one who struggled to pay for my college (only got that much), and I, who could access the economy more easily, got two, and she (only) got one; it was unfair," (IN, personal interview, August 8, 2021).

Closeness to female figures also became essential part of FAK's life journey. According to him, in some issues, he tended to take his mother's side rather than his father's. This just happened without being driven by a certain view such as feminism. FAK's attitude of siding with women also shown when he found out that his female friend in elementary school was forced to get married. Since then, FAK hold disagreement regarding child marriage issues.

"I am closer, kind of more on the side of my mother compared to my father. When there are differences between them, I try to understand my mother, but I don't consider that as feminism. I don't know why that happened. Why that, for instance, when a friend of mine was forced to get married when she was in elementary school, I

protested “internally” (had an internal conflict), but I didn’t do anything because I didn’t know how to go against it,” (FAK, personal interview, August 11, 2021).

Similar pattern was found in a study conducted by Hasyim (2014), who studied male involvement in the elimination of violence against women in Indonesia. Witnessing violence or abuse committed by male figures (such as fathers) on females with close proximity (such as mothers) or to other human beings, became an underlying stimulant to the growth of male awareness in participation of anti-violence movements against women. Casey and Smith (2010) addressed the experience and witness of violence as a sensitization event for men when it comes to the issue of injustice experienced by women.

Besides closeness to female figures, the encounters of informants with minority groups led them to be aware with issues of gender and sexuality. Encountering transgenders or having siblings who perform contradicting common gender norms fosters acceptance and support for the minority groups.

“I was made very aware of LGBT when I interviewed a citizen at that time in Wonosobo. I remember at that time I was already in Lakpesdam (Lembaga Kajian dan Pengembangan Sumber Daya Manusia/ Institute for Human Resources Studies and Development), which means I was still doing my Master’s or Doctorate. I was in charge of a citizen forum program. I was in Wonosobo, and then I met a trans woman, and I had a discussion, a dialogue, and it was quite intense. And her questions amused me, I asked about ‘How did you become a transwoman and so on?’ she talked a lot about it, ‘Sir, if I could’ she said ‘I don’t want to be a transwoman but this is who I am (and) I’m living it (just fine)’ she said ‘I feel like this is a gift from God, because I myself don’t want to be like this and I don’t want my life to be like this, insulted, not respected, even I was

treated in various ways, considered as one who is *haram*/forbidden, I never asked for this’ while crying. ‘This is God’s will, Sir, I’m sure this is God’s will because I didn’t want to be like this but God made me like this, how can I reject God’s gift’ it reached a point where she said ‘If I may, Sir, I feel like there is a third gender’ she said, ‘God created not just men and women in the sense of genital organs,’ she said, ‘but also, well, like we are (transwomen), we are considered men in terms of genital ownership, we have penises but in terms of souls (inside) we are women,” (MW, personal interview, August 16, 2021).

When it comes to the socialization of gender values and roles, the informants possess experiences of practicing gender roles, in contrast to the norms enforced in their society. Although gender norms typically differentiate the roles of men and women in an evident means, informants in this study experienced flexible and non-rigid role-sharing practices. They witnessed the flexible role-sharing practices through their parents, which caused informants to consider role-sharing that was not aligned with community norms. Additionally, although both fathers and mothers have important role models for informants to comprehend gender roles, fathers especially, holds a critical role during their childhood.

“... since I have six siblings, with four boys and then two girls after that. So, ever since I lived at home, my mother taught me well, since I was little, (my mother taught me to) washing dishes, sweeping (the floors), and I was taught how to cook, (it was) nothing new. At that time, cooking was done without a stove, so we still used firewood, and we took turns. I sometimes cooked and washed one day, then my younger siblings would do it on other days, (they would) sweep the floors on a day, and wash the dishes on the designated day. We are used to doing domestic work, including doing laundry, because my mother was the only woman (in the house), meaning the rest of us were men, including my father.

My father is also used to doing laundry, washing is something common that he usually does, he's used to taking care of domestic matters, even though my father is a Kyai, in this case a Kyai in our village, and also taught, (he also went) to the fields and (does) a lot more," (MW, personal interview, August 16, 2021).

MW's experience reinforces prior studies that found flexible parental role-sharing practices, which are not as rigid as the gender norms enforced in society, have a significant influence on children's views of gender values. Boys who see their fathers involved in care work, such as nurturing, domestic, and reproductive work, are more open to the values of gender equality and justice (Alemann, Garg, and Vlahovicova 2020; Cano and Hofmeister 2023; Deutsch, Servis, and Payne 2001; Doyle et al. 2014).

Feminist Consciousness Formation

The second phase of the feminist journey of male ulama is the formation of feminist consciousness. The phase occurred when male ulama began to structure their previous life experiences, whether it was the closeness to women, witnessing the injustices experienced by women, encounters with minority groups, or the socialization of flexible and non-rigid gender roles practices that they had obtained from their parents. Casey and Smith (2010) identified this phase as the shifting of meaning phase. This phase occurs when men undergo a shift in their worldview regarding gender relations.

In this phase, the study's informants began to question the issues of injustice experienced by women and other groups they encountered in their lives. The process of questioning the injustice experienced by women and other minority groups in this study is considered as the formation of feminist consciousness. This study found that the feminist consciousness of a

male ulama was formed through a lengthy process and varied from one to another. Among these processes are living in Islamic boarding schools with a rich tradition of critical thinking, encountering progressive thinkers, engaging with human rights issues, democracy, and pluralism, and, lastly, interacting with female activists. The first is living in the knowledge tradition of Islamic boarding schools that encourage critical thinking and familiarization with different religious perspectives. For example, IN, who grew up in a traditional Islamic boarding school in East Java, highlighted the importance of critiquing the perspectives presented by ulama. In a tradition like this, he and other students were encouraged not to simply accept the views of the ulama they looked up to.

"But initially, I studied at Ma'had Ali in Situbondo in the boarding school, well, this school) was especially known to have eccentric ustads. Eccentric as in, they like to bring up opinions that are different from the general ones. That is because, in terms of the Islamic legal knowledge base, at Ma'had Ali, differences (in views) are indeed presented. Besides that, we were taught to be critical of one's teaching or one's opinion. By studying Usul al-Fiqh, we were taught not to just accept what the ulama said (blindly)," (IN, personal interview, August 8, 2021).

The second is the encounter with progressive thinkers. A traditional Islamic boarding school, which accustomed students to diverse religious perspectives and encouraged them to critically evaluate the perspectives or opinions of the ulama they studied, allowed IN to meet progressive Indonesian Muslim thinkers, such as Harun Nasution and Ibrahim Hosen. The meeting led him to the idea that claims of truth were not justified. FAK also experienced encounters with progressive ulama while studying in Damascus. His academic journey in

Syria brought him together with prominent ulama such as Muhammad Habas, who had memorized the Qur'an with a very open mind. He also studied with Ramadhan al-Buthi and several other progressive ulama. Having contact with scholars who have open minds led FAK to the idea of Islahiyah or Islamic reform, with one of its important ideas, which is the contextualization of Fiqh. In line with the journey of the two previous informants, NA's encounter with the perspective of Mansour Fakih while studying at UIN (Universitas Islam Negeri/State Islamic University) Jakarta also led him to discussions related to gender issues.

"Well, when I had not come into contact-haven't known new perspectives like those offered by Mr. Masdar (Masdar Farid Mas'udi) yet, there was someone who influenced the way I think too. When I met national figures like Mr. Harun Nasution and then Mr. Ibrahim Hosen, the father of Nadirsyah Hosen, they were, in fact, very progressive in terms of their thoughts. That also gave me additional inspiration that-before that I have a traditional mindset because in Islamic boarding schools, we were generally not allowed to be different, but when I met these people, they gave me a new perspective on how to view differences between ulama, we should not keep claiming (of what's right), that had started to be taught by people like Mr. Harun like Mr. Ibrahim Hosen at that time. So, then the freedom to continue digging into traditions that were not disclosed has been growing strong until now," (NA, personal interview, September 5, 2021).

The third is the endeavor to address issues of human rights, democracy, and pluralism. Critical awareness, built from the Islamic boarding school knowledge tradition and encounters with progressive thinkers, allows participants in this study not only to gain awareness of issues related to justice, human rights, democracy, and pluralism but also to encourage them to be directly involved in promoting these issues. The

endeavours to address these issues reveal that the male ulama in this study exhibit the characteristics of a moderate religious thinker. Acceptance of human rights, democracy, and pluralism is a crucial stage in embracing the concept of gender justice or the feminist issue. As expressed by IN, awareness of the issue of gender justice ensures acceptance of the ideas of human rights, democracy, and pluralism.

"As for gender issues, in Islamic boarding schools, it is at one level of complexity above the issue of democracy and pluralism. The issue of gender is not easy to accept; its complexity surpasses that of democracy, pluralism, and the others, which are easier to accept. But the issue of gender is indeed more complicated to accept among traditional ulama. Though accepting the issue of gender means ensuring the acceptance of these issues before, which were general issues. As an icon of moderate Islam, that is, this actually (reflects) the acceptance of human rights, (and) democracy. If these issues are not accepted, it seems like the issue of gender would also be difficult to accept. My friends and I are already tuned in to the issue of democracy, pluralism, human rights, we are already tuned in. Gender is a small part of the human rights issue that is actually a little more complicated (than human rights). Therefore, the search was a bit intense there, as for the texts, and it turns out that there are actually many more texts related to women's issues; they are easier to find but rarely discussed. That's what's really interesting, actually. So, I struggled a lot with that issue because they (perspectives on women) were probably shaped according to the environment, too. Thus, I, who had little knowledge about moderate Islam, was forced into the issue, and I then went through the process of finding/continuously searching. I read and then discussed gender issues in Islam- it was quite a long process, starting from learning how to read the Fiqh, the Hadith, and the Quran. Until I came to the belief that Islam is just and gender-friendly," (IN, personal interview, August 8, 2021).

The fourth is the encounter with female activists (feminists). Meeting female activists is the final important process formation of feminist consciousness. The meetings happened in two forms: idea interaction and direct interaction. Idea interaction occurs when informants read the works of Muslim feminists, such as Rifat Hasan, Fatima Mernissi, Nawal el-Sadawi, and other feminists. Direct interaction occurs when informants meet female activists, for example, in workshop forums, discussions, and training sessions. Muslim female activists such as Lies Marcoes, Farha Ciciek, Badriyah Fayumi, and Sinta Nuriyah play an important role in the process of building feminist consciousness among male ulamas in this study.

"After that, we learned about gender characteristics. I first learned about gender characteristics from Lies Marcoes. In the past, after I got a little bit of knowledge about moderate Islamic discourse and democracy issues, I was often invited to Cirebon; in fact, my first 'field' was in Cirebon, where I was mostly with Fahmina, and in between that, we often learned about gender with Lies Marcoes. As a result, the gender perspective (I have) was first introduced by Lies Marcoes. Although for the moderate Islamic discourse, I was introduced to it by a male kyai because there were no female ones yet," (IN, personal interview, August 8, 2021).

Taking Actions to End Gender Inequality

The male ulama in this study are not only aware that injustice happens to women, but they also take action to end the injustices. Hook (2014) viewed that feminism is a movement to end sexism, oppression, and exploitation based on gender. The actions of the male ulama in this study exhibit distinct characteristics compared to those of pro-feminist men in general. The actions of these male ulama reflect the context of their struggle, in which religious norms were

often used to justify injustices against women such as leadership or authority of men over women (Aziz, Abdullah, and Prasajo 2020) and even domestic violence (Saputri et al. 2024). The typical action of pro-feminist male ulama is to reinterpret religious texts using a gender justice perspective.

"In fact, when I was at the National Commission on Violence Against Women, for more than five years in the first period, I became more convinced of the importance of changing the culture and then reinterpreting teachings that are indeed gender biased, which, of course, have an impact on injustice. Because I was at the National Commission on Violence Against Women, I have often been faced with facts that are very challenging, very surprising, very touching, basically a lot of different things. All of that is because it is rooted in many things (happens because of many aspects). I believe that the root of gender injustice is not a single root but a branched root; there are many branches of it. One of the big aspects is the interpretation of religion," (IN, personal interview, August 8, 2021).

The development of the interpretation method is a vital piece of work because it provides a framework and procedure for interpretation, making the perspective of gender justice the primary value. This interpretation method was developed by emphasizing the importance of listening to women's voices and starting from women's experiences in reading a religious text.

"That made me realize how an interpretation needs to 'listen' to women because in that connection, when there is a hadith, a text from the Quran, a command from an ulama. Then Mrs. Shinta asked, 'Why is the meaning like this? Can it be understood like this?' (I would respond) Yes, Ma'am, I will investigate it. I then thought, she was right, why do some of the meanings/interpretations seem not to listen, not start from the experiences of

women? What we consider as *mubādalah* (the concept of reciprocity) also comes from those connections, how they (interpretations) should have departed from- and to read it (understand it), what is very important in my opinion, is the point of view of women. So, in general, in my opinion, the general reference is what Islamic logic is, or *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, or the wisdom of sharia. I have mastered it since I was in an Islamic boarding school. I have learned *qawā'id al-aḥkām fi maṣāliḥ al-anām* that the law must have benefits, but the benefits must be for women. Well, that is from this process because women are human beings and so on, but the 'hook' (relation) is already there," (FAK, personal interview, August 11, 2021).

The reinterpretations and methodological developments that incorporate women's experiences represent an important contribution of male ulama in challenging gender-biased and discriminatory religious discourses, thereby addressing the injustices faced by women. This gender sensitive alternative religious discourse provides a crucial reference for female activists, who often face resistance that uses religion as the basis for argumentation. Furthermore, male ulama in this study emphasized that the values and principles of equality and justice have been a concern of Islam since the beginning, and it is proven that this discourse already exists in the Qur'an, al-Hadith, and even Fiqh. Thus, the discourse of justice for men and women is an old discourse of Islam that has re-emerged because it is in accordance with the demands of the era. This affirmation is an important response to the assumption that gender justice is considered as values and teachings from the West or not from Islam.

"We are trying to explain that this is not a discourse from another part of the world (the West), this is a discourse that already exists in the Qur'an, in the hadith, in Fiqh. There are then people who try to deliver this discourse-resurface the issue that this is not a new

discourse, but this is an old discourse that has reappeared in accordance with today's society, (in accordance with) the demands of today's society. As a result, we have no choice but to dig from the source. For example, if people say, 'How do we overcome religious beliefs that lead to discrimination against women or that degrade women, dishonor women?' This is not a matter of 'We talk about it like this, not because we've been neglecting the issue, but (even) the prophet already talked about it in the past. We would bring up the hadith (about it). For instance, in the past, during the time of the prophet, 70 women came to the prophet's house saying, "O prophet, our husbands are beating us, they often hit us." Then the prophet said, "Hey husbands, don't beat your wives." Then they stopped and didn't beat them anymore. After some time, more women were beaten, and they came to the prophet's house again. 'Prophet, there are still some of us who are beaten.' Then the prophet said, '*Laisa ulā'ika bi ḥiyārikum*,' those who like to beat others are not good people. We bring up things like this, the hadith, the verses, the understanding of Fiqh studies. We tell them that in the treasury of Islam, there are things that have not been conveyed to society. It is our job to deliver it, to teach so that this life becomes a life of *rahmatan li l-'ālamīn* (blessings to all) because Islam came for *rahmatan li l-'ālamīn*," (NA, personal interview, September 5, 2021).

Furthermore, the efforts to reinterpret and develop interpretations grounded in women's experiences, along with the affirmation that justice has been a core concern of Islam since its inception, were institutionalized by the informants in this study. Institutionalization in the sense of making a justice-based way of thinking a system of thought and education becomes an important medium of institutionalizing gender-just thinking, along with other perspectives such as pluralism, democracy, and human rights.

"Because of that, we think that this should be made into a system, an education system, that's why we created ISIF (Istitut Studi Islam

Fahmina). ISIF was made with full awareness to kind of institutionalize, the ideology or fundamental thinking from 'Fahmina' about gender equality, pluralism, democracy, local culture, human rights, something like that," (MW, personal interview, August 16, 2021).

Not only reinterpreting religious text and institutionalizing gender-just thinking based on women's experiences, informants in this study fight for gender justice through culture. These actions are reflected in the attitudes and behavior of male ulama in everyday life, which demonstrate the values and principles of equality and justice. For MW, debates and conflicts are often expressed in terms of discourses and are not always reflected in everyday life. As a result, the values of justice and pluralism must be lived in everyday life, flowing naturally.

"Also, the issue of public and domestic work, in terms of practicing it, I think there is no issue about it, but then again, there is a doctrine that is claimed to be a part of Fiqh which is still around *al-rijālu qawwāmūna ala l-nisā'* (men are leaders for women), and according to that, the one who is obliged to support (financially) is the head of the family (men). For things like that, the doctrine still exists, and our socio-cultural construction is the same. That's what makes it seem like there is a conflict; the conflict is felt when faced with a specific problem/issue. How do you act? Though if not challenged/questioned, things actually just flow. Life flows. One can have a mindset and practice things differently (not according to the mindset they have), they consider it usual because people are actually like that. If it's not questioned, people will not react a certain way. For instance, between religions, the doctrine remains the same, but people (Muslims) can be friends with non-Muslims, with the LGBT community, there is no problem with it, and no one questions it. So, because of that, this also inspired us, the strategy is maybe just to actually let it flow, this life must flow, the changes do not need to be too driven, meaning they are not supposed to be too steered, but to

flow like the water of life," (MW, personal interview, August 16, 2021).

Conclusion

This study concludes that male ulama, as a dominant group that has power and privileges in society, can be pro-feminist. However, they need to go through a long journey that begins with sensitization, in which they experience events that bring them awareness of the injustices faced by women. From this sensitization, pro-feminist male ulama develop a way of thinking that makes gender justice the basic value. When the feminist perspective developed, the male ulama entered a phase of strengthening their feminist perspective by building and maintaining a network in various forums. The final phase of the journey to becoming pro-feminist is taking action to end gender injustices experienced by women. An important contribution of pro-feminist male ulama in promoting gender justice is their work of interpreting gender-biased and misogynistic religious texts. Pro-feminist male ulama provide important references in the form of both interpretations and methods of interpreting religious texts that are based on women's voices and experiences. The presence of male ulama in this study, with a gender-just religious view, created a way out for activists and gender justice advocates who often encounter dead ends when faced with resistance based on religious arguments.

The pro-feminist male ulama not only work on reinterpreting religious texts, but they also put them into practice, which reflects the values of equality and justice in their daily lives. In their relationships with their wives, they are willing to share responsibilities both in relation to domestic and public responsibilities.

This study does not investigate the challenges and resistances that are faced by male ulama in

their journey to become pro-feminist. Moreover, this research also does not portray the strategy of male ulama in negotiating their power and privilege in their daily lives, especially in their relationship with women.[]

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