

Defending Women Beyond Feminism: Gender Perspectives in Indonesia

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Abstract: This article examines the development of gender understanding in Indonesia. Specifically, the understanding of gender discussed in this article comes from the perspective of one of the leading Islamic organizations in Indonesia, namely Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has its own way of thinking in defending women's rights. This article aims to show that Nahdlatul Ulama's concept of defending women is different from the concept of feminism that emerged in Western civilization, namely by looking at the capabilities and capabilities of women themselves. Therefore, I use the words "Defending Women But Not Feminism" with the intention of emphasizing that the way NU defends women's rights is not based on the feminist paradigm way of thinking that has developed in modern times. The research methodology used in this research is a qualitative approach. This article uses library research procedures, especially analytical descriptive methods. This research uses book data, relevant literature, and other important sources. This research uses document analysis as a qualitative research methodology. The results of this research show that NU's thinking paradigm in defending women's rights is different from Western feminism. NU has a different view in defending women's rights, namely "beyond feminism".

Keywords: Beyond Feminism, Defending Women; Gender Equality, Nahdlatul Ulama

A. Introduction

Yahya Cholil Staquf also known as Gus Yahya, the general director of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) attended an event and made an intriguing statement at his speech. The context was that Gus Yahya was giving a greeting at one of the NU events, and the object of his statement was Fatayat and Muslimat, one of the women's organizations in the NU.¹ The statement was "*NU does not need to join in with feminism*". The statement sparked public opinion about Gus Yahya's thinking.

¹ A.L. Triono, "Gus Yahya Tegaskan Keterlibatan Perempuan Di PBNU Bukan Untuk Isu Kesetaraan," *NU Online*, 2022, <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/gus-yahya-tegaskan-keterlibatan-perempuan-di-pbnu-bukan-untuk-isu-kesetaraan-gender-ztm72>.

Gus Yahya is known as a women's rights fighters, but why make such a statement? Will Gus Yahya reject feminism and support the patriarchal system? But other understandings or interpretations may also be presented, like this: that is exactly what Gus Yahya is fighting to raise the dignity of women. In other words, this is what Nahdlatul Ulama should do, which is what Gus Yahya called on Fatayat and Muslimat in the reception. That is the character thinking of NU. What exactly did Gus Yahya mean? How do we deal with gender issues and understand feminism? Gus Yahya wanted to reject the notion of feminism, or what? The purpose of this article is to understand Gus Yahya's statement about gender as a representation of Nahdlatul Ulama, as he is the general chairman of NU. The objective of this paper is to analyse Gus Yahya's assertion regarding gender as a symbolic representation inside NU, given his prominent position as the general chairman of the organisation.

Anti-feminist groups in Southeast Asia exhibit political astuteness by frequently linking perceived violations of human rights to Asian values. The cultural and religious contexts in Southeast Asia significantly shape the experiences of individuals, particularly in relation to their sexual and reproductive health rights, with a notable bias towards favouring men. The influence of Islamic culture in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam on the efforts of Muslim or feminist women in Southeast Asia to politicise spirituality has been discussed by Maryani.² As said by Halford, the formation of gender identity is significantly shaped by religious institutions, practises, and beliefs in various domains such as personal life, congregational settings, workplaces, and the broader community. This phenomenon is particularly evident within conventional religious communities, wherein women may encounter gender disparities that are perpetuated by religious doctrines that prioritise male perspectives and patriarchal structures.³

In the Indonesian context of religious movements, NU holds a prominent position as a major mass organisation that exerts considerable impact on the

² E. Maryani, "Indonesiatanpafeminis.Id as a Challenge of Feminist Movement in Virtual Space," *Frontiers in Sociology* 6 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2021.668840>.

³ A. Halford, "Come, Follow Me', The Sacralising of the Home, and The Guardian of the Family: How Do European Women Negotiate the Domestic Space in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints?," *Religion* 12, no. 5 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050338>.

beliefs and ideologies of individuals, particularly those adhering to traditional Islamic practises. The fatwas promulgated by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) through the Central Board of Nahdlatul Ulama or Pengurus Besar Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) serve as a fundamental reference for decision-making and societal conduct. Nevertheless, the establishment of NU has perpetuated a patriarchal ethos. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the prevalence of men who hold positions of greater prominence and exert more influence compared to women. There is a lower level of visibility among women in NU.⁴

The topic of gender equality has emerged as a prominent subject of social conversation. The advancement of gender equality has commenced to unfold under the purview of religious or Islamic institutions in Indonesia. One notable aspect is to the representation of women in leadership roles within the PBNU organisation, specifically within the Nahdlatul Ulama Executive Board. The name liberation can also be ascribed to this phenomenon. The pursuit of gender equality and the attainment of equitable rights and freedoms for women has been a protracted endeavour spanning from the 14th century AD onwards, aimed at securing parity with their male counterparts. The proponents of women's liberation advocate for gender equality across various domains, including education, employment, the economy, and governance.⁵

Despite the enduring prevalence of patriarchal perspectives and their consequential impact on institutional practises within NU, it is noteworthy that individuals occupying positions of power, such as religious leaders (kiai), has the potential to effectuate transformative shifts in conventional gender norms.⁶ Based on a report from NU Online, KH Yahya Cholil Staquf has included women in the PBNU Tanfidziyah ranks during his management tenure for the period of 2022-2027.⁷

⁴ Z. Ilman and T.N. Aji, "Partisipasi Politik Muslimat NU Dalam Pemilu Tahun 1955 Dan 1971," *Avatara* 8, no. 1 (2020).

⁵ H. Hasri, "Emansipasi Wanita Di Negara Islam (Pemikiran Qasim Amin Di Mesir)," *AL-Khawarizmi* 2, no. 2 (2018): 107-14.

⁶ C. Boyer, "Religious Leaders Can Motivate Men to Cede Power and Reduce Intimate Partner Violence: Experimental Evidence from Uganda," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 119, no. 31 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2200262119>.

⁷ Triono, "Gus Yahya Tegaskan Keterlibatan Perempuan Di PBNU Bukan Untuk Isu Kesetaraan."

Gus Yahya emphasised that the decision to include women in management positions was not driven by considerations of gender equality. Rather, the selection process was guided by factors like as capability, capacity, and the organisational needs of preparing management personnel for specific institutions and bodies within PBNU. Hence, the objective of this research is to examine the transformation in NU's religious framework concerning the participation of women in collective leadership at PBNU, and its consequences in addressing contemporary challenges and embracing a new era within NU as it enters its second century.⁸

This article aims to examine the sociological and epistemological advancements in the field of gender studies that have contributed to the development of gender perspectives within the Nahdlatul Ulama community. This article will use two models of approach. The first approach is an integral reading of the understanding of feminism, both historical and so on. The second approach is the way the NU thinks, or epistemology, which the NU uses in answering every question, including gender issues. The two approaches, at least in this book, are to answer two things. One, what and how does it understand feminism? Two, how does the nahdliyin (member of NU) think about dealing with every question, including the understanding of feminism? This type of article is library research, where the method used in this article is analytical-descriptive, using book data, some related literature, and some other important sources.

B. Methods

The research methodology used in this research is qualitative approach. This type of article is library research, where the method used in this article is analytical-descriptive, using book data, some related literature, and some other important sources. This study employed document analysis as a qualitative research design. The library research design serves as a systematic and accountable approach to identifying, selecting, and gathering written data from various sources pertaining to a certain problem within a given field. This process ensures the acquisition of reliable study material through methodical and purposeful work methods. This study employs library sources as primary

⁸ Triono.

subjects of investigation. In order to gather primary sources, the author engages in a comprehensive examination and integration of many books, papers, documents, and current events pertaining to NU and women. These sources are subsequently utilised within a socio-phenomenological framework to present a cohesive interpretation.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Feminism in Western Paradigm

The period of enlightenment, which requires freedom of expression, association, and actualization as one of the primary components of human rights, is not distinct from the beginnings of the feminist movement. For such freedom, women and men are equal; hence, discrimination and subordination are not acceptable. Feminism in the 19th century was critical of the developments but concentrated on the goal of cultural change. The goal of the cultural revolution was to reinforce the values of marriage, religion, and the family⁹ Politics emerged as a critical driver of real-world transformation. Feminism in the twenty-first century concentrated on eradicating differences in sexual orientation, race, class, and ethnicity between men and women.¹⁰ The goal of all feminist movements is to bring about equality and justice for men and women in both the public and private domains so that they can support one another in the forward-thinking process of social change.

Religious and cultural patriarchy dominated the fight for gender equality and justice for men and women. A patriarchal system of social structures or practices gives men the authority to control, subjugate, and take advantage of women. Men dominate women in terms of their jobs, careers, sexuality, bodies, positions in the home, and standing in society. The social, legal, and moral rules that favour men over women are the result of patriarchy, which keeps women in subordination and marginalization.

Hodgson-Wright (2006) posits that the inception of the feminist movement can be traced back to three distinct catalysts. Initially, there has been an

⁹ J. Donovan, *Feminist Theory*, 4th ed. (New York: Continuum, 2012).

¹⁰ Donovan.

endeavour to modify the fundamental subjugation of women within the context of church doctrine. Furthermore, contrary to the numerous behavioural standards that tended to impose limitations on women throughout that period. Furthermore, the establishment of solidarity among female writers is another crucial aspect to consider. The establishment of solidarity fosters a sense of confidence and facilitates the provision of financial support within the community of female writers. The intellectual education provided to young girls in families affected by the Enlightenment subsequently disseminated ideas regarding the significance of women's education, which served as a foundation for a nascent political movement during the initial phase of feminism.¹¹

The inception of the initial wave of feminism is commonly attributed to the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's influential work, *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in 1792. This wave persisted until the attainment of women's suffrage in the early twentieth century.¹² The purpose of Wollstonecraft's educational program is to foster the intellectual growth of women, enabling them to become self-reliant individuals, particularly in terms of financial independence.¹³ Harriet and John Stuart Mill furthered the advocacy for Wollstonecraft's ideas. The individuals in question are promoting the augmentation of employment prospects for women, as well as campaigning for the enhancement of legal entitlements pertaining to women's rights within the context of marriage and divorce.

The initial wave of feminism has also been influenced by the endeavours of certain women to advocate for women's rights pertaining to post-marital circumstances, such as child custody following divorce. Caroline Norton, a notable advocate for women's rights within the context of marriage, gained recognition for her efforts in securing custody of her son after her divorce.¹⁴ The actions undertaken by these women served as catalysts for an increasing recognition of

¹¹ S.G. Ross, *The Birth of Feminism – Women as Intellect in Renaissance Italy and England* (London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

¹² V. Sanders, "First Wave Feminism," in *Cambridge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

¹³ Alan Richardson, "Mary Wollstonecraft on Education," in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Wollstonecraft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

¹⁴ Kathryn Gleadle, *Radical Writing on Women, 1800- 1850*. (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, n.d.).

the subjugation experienced by women, subsequently giving rise to the formation of organizations aimed at advocating for the rights and well-being of women. The feminist movement in Britain has had significant growth in the United States, culminating in a significant milestone at the Seneca Falls Convention (1848). This convention advocated for the eradication of all forms of gender-based discrimination.

Sanders (2006) argues that first-wave feminism has a certain degree of ambivalence. The initial wave of feminists had a cautious approach towards deviating from societal norms and refrained from participating in unorthodox lifestyles.¹⁵ There may be a correlation between the criticism received by Mary Wollstonecraft in her posthumous biography and the current situation. As said by Kirkham (1997), this particular movement only targets unmarried women belonging to the middle socioeconomic class, particularly those with elevated levels of intellectual capacity.¹⁶ In the interim, the focus of their activism is limited to concerns, with a lack of cognizance regarding the broader feminist movement. The opportunity for a job and domestic life is predominantly accessible to affluent women who possess the financial means to employ domestic help for household tasks. One notable critique is that these feminists continue to depend on male assistance in pursuit of their objectives.

The onset of the second wave of Feminism can be traced back to the 1960s, which was characterized by significant events such as the release of the influential book "The Feminine Mystique" by Betty Friedan in 1963. This was followed by the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 and the subsequent rise of conscious raising groups (CR) in the latter part of the 1960s. Pursuant to Thompson (2010), Second-wave feminism is widely regarded as the most cohesive and comprehensive kind of Feminism in terms of its conceptualization and activism.¹⁷ Feminism represents the subsequent phase of the prominent concept of women's liberation, recognized as a unified and transformative social movement. The emergence of this wave can be attributed to

¹⁵ Sanders, "First Wave Feminism."

¹⁶ M. Kirkham, *Feminism, and Fiction. The Athole Press* (London: The Athole Press, 1997).

¹⁷ Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," in *No Permanent Waves- Recasting Histories of US Feminism* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2010).

the discontentment experienced by women in response to the multiple forms of discrimination they continued to face despite the legal and political advancements accomplished during the first wave of Feminism.¹⁸

Thornham (2006) categorizes the second wave of Feminism in America into two distinct streams. One prominent right-wing inclination is a liberal stance that endeavours to advocate for women's inclusion in various aspects of societal existence, particularly in the United States.¹⁹ This perspective seeks to ensure that women possess equal rights and responsibilities as their male counterparts. The current stream is affiliated with the National Organization for Women (NOW), which was established by Betty Friedan in 1966. The second stream is commonly referred to as the left stream and is characterized by a more radical perspective. Radical Feminism emerges as a response to the perceived lack of inclusivity within liberal Feminism, particularly on racial and social disparities, as well as opposition to the Vietnam War and its associated acts of American aggression. As stated by Siegel (2007), The primary tenet of radical Feminism is around the notion of "consciousness raising," which is underpinned by the understanding that "the personal is political".²⁰ This perspective posits that patriarchal power operates inside intimate spheres, including marriage, parenting, and sexual relationships. As per the prevailing discourse, women have been compelled by patriarchal structures to adopt an apolitical stance, relinquishing agency, and exhibiting characteristics of vulnerability. The opposition towards beauty contests stems from the perception that these events perpetuate societal norms of beauty, which in turn undermine the status of women.²¹

Thornham (2006) asserts that a prominent characteristic of second-wave feminism in both Britain and America is its endeavour to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework that encompasses various feminist movements. according to Thornham, Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1956), held significant influence as a critical reference in the context

¹⁸ S. Thornham, "Feminism and Film," in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*. (London and New York: Routledge, n.d.).

¹⁹ Thornham.

²⁰ D. Siegel, *Sisterhood Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

²¹ S. Genz and B. Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Text and Theories*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2009).

of Feminism during the 1970s. Simone de Beauvoir expressed her opposition to several forms of determinism, including biological determinism within the field of physiology, the determinism of subconscious impulses in Freud's psychoanalysis, and the determinisms associated with economic subordination in Marx's theory.²² De Beauvoir (1956) posits that these theories have engendered the internalization of the notion of women as the Other and women as women, owing to the influence of patriarchal social constructs.²³

In the United States, the perspective of de Beauvoir was further elaborated upon by prominent figures such as Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, and Shulamith Firestone. As claimed by Jenainati and Groves (2007), Both Friedan and de Beauvoir assert that the liberation of women from oppression necessitates a transformation of the woman herself. Friedan believed that achieving gender equality between women and men necessitates a woman's relinquishment of the household confines and societal expectations associated with femininity, which perpetuate a subservient status for wome.²⁴

In the opinion of O'Reilly and Porter (2005), the second wave of feminism posits that conscious upbringing serves as the most effective alternative for promoting knowledge of women's oppression.²⁵ In contrast, Kate Millett and Firestone can be characterized as holding more radical perspectives. Within the realm of literature, Kate Millett engages in the advancement of literary, film, and cultural studies to challenge and counteract systemic oppression facilitated through ideological manipulation. Firestone adheres to Marxist ideology and instructs women on how to gain control over the means of reproduction.²⁶

The second wave of feminism encountered criticism from several marginalized groups, including black women, lesbians, and workers, who

²² S. Phoca and R. Wright, *Introducing Postfeminism*. (Cambridge: Icon Books, Ltd., 1999); Thornham, "Feminism and Film."

²³ S. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. (London: Lowe and Brylign, 1956).

²⁴ Cathia Jenainati and Groves Judy, *Introducing Feminism*. (Malta: Gutenberg Press, 2007).

²⁵ A. O'Brien and M. Porter, "Introduction," in *Motherhood: Power and Oppression*. (Toronto: Women's Press, 2005).

²⁶ R. Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Colorado: Westview Press, 2009).

subsequently organized themselves into the radical movement.²⁷ There is a prevalent belief that the movement for women's liberation primarily focuses on the concerns of white women and neglects to address the intersecting issues of class and race. However, Thompson (2010) contends that feminism has been affected by matters pertaining to women in Africa, Latin America, and Asia since its inception.²⁸ In the discourse around second-wave feminism, there are allegations made by lesbians that this movement placed a greater emphasis on heterosexuality while marginalizing lesbianism.²⁹ However, scholarly works by Whelehan (1995) and Tong (2009) demonstrate that radical feminization and lesbian feminism emerged concurrently during the 1960s and 1970s.³⁰

The feminist ideologies of the second wave are commonly regarded as a combination of prophetic and utopian elements. According to Bammer (1991), Although second-wave feminists saw a growing sense of unity, it is essential to acknowledge that disparities have consistently existed among women of varying social levels, races, and ethnicities.³¹ Hence, the pursuit of an all-encompassing feminism that can adequately represent the entirety of women is an idealistic concept³² as it is grounded on a multitude of diverse concerns and hence possesses a nuanced trajectory of evolution have been cited in this context.³³

The re-definition of concepts in feminism in the late 1980s was motivated by a range of criticisms directed towards universalism within second-wave feminism. Brooks posits that a minimum of three elements influence the re-articulation of feminist conceptions. Firstly, there is a growing recognition within

²⁷ S. Gubar, *Critical Condition: Feminism at the Turn of the Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Jenainati and Judy, *Introducing Feminism*.

²⁸ Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism."

²⁹ Thornham, "Feminism and Film."

³⁰ Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*.; I. Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought - Second Wave to Postfeminism*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 1995).

³¹ A. Bammer, *Partial Visions - Feminism and Utopianism in the 1970s*. (New York: Routledge, 1991).

³² R. Braidotti, "Feminist Philosophies," in *A Concise Companion to Feminist Theory* (Melbourne: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

³³ Braidotti; S. Budgeon, *Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Gender in Late Modernity*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Gubar, *Critical Condition: Feminism at the Turn of the Century*.; Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*.; Whelehan, *Modern Feminist Thought - Second Wave to Postfeminism*.

the feminist movement itself that its notions can be racist and ethnocentric since they primarily reflect the experiences and perspectives of middle-class white women while marginalizing women from ethnic groups and different socioeconomic classes. Furthermore, it is widely acknowledged that the second wave of feminism failed to address the matter of sexual disparities adequately. Meanwhile, alongside feminism, there is a growing emergence of theories such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, which are subsequently aligned with the progression of feminism.³⁴

The term "postfeminism" was first mentioned in an article dating back to 1920. The phrase was employed to delineate a stance that is supportive of women's rights but without harbouring animosity towards men, thereby commemorating the accomplishments of the initial wave of feminism in securing suffrage.³⁵ The term "postfeminism" resurfaced during the 1980s, encompassing a wide range of interpretations and connotations. In their seminal work, Gill and Scharff (2011) provide a comprehensive overview of the four distinct conceptualizations of postfeminism. Postfeminism can be understood as a theoretical framework that emerges at the junction of feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. The subsequent conceptualization of postfeminism pertains to the commemoration of the decline of feminism, characterized by the attainment of the objectives set forth during the second wave of feminism in the 1970s, rendering them obsolete during the 1980s.³⁶ The concept of postfeminism, which posits the celebration of feminism's demise, was proposed by advocates of the second-wave feminist movement. Tania Modleski, for instance, posited postfeminism as a scholarly inquiry that negated and subverted the feminist movement's efforts, effectively regressing women to a pre-feminist state.³⁷

³⁴ A. Brooks, *Postfeminism: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

³⁵ S. Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991); Genz and Brabon, *Postfeminism: Cultural Text and Theories*.

³⁶ R Gill and Schraff, *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

³⁷ Gamble Sarah, *Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

As claimed by Gill and Scharff (2011), the third conceptualization of postfeminism might be seen as a reactionary response or backlash. Susan Faludi is widely recognized as a prominent advocate for the conceptualization of postfeminism as a reactionary response. In her influential publication titled *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991), Faludi articulated the concept of postfeminism as a cultural phenomenon that opposed feminism, mainly through the media and popular culture of the era. The phenomenon of backlash received encouragement from governmental entities, based on the source cited in 2006.³⁸

Third-wave feminism can be characterized as a progression of feminism that emerged throughout the 1990s, drawing inspiration from earlier feminist movements. As said by Tong, the current wave of feminism diverges from its predecessor in terms of its definition of the feminist agenda since it emphasizes the celebration of differences. Based on the source cited in 2009, the information provided is found on page 271. In contrast to Gamble's dissent towards the concept of postfeminism, Tong went a step further by deliberately abstaining from acknowledging postfeminism and instead opting to employ the term multicultural feminist.³⁹

In contrast, Budgeon characterizes postfeminism as an evolution of feminism that exhibits more extraordinary contradictions in relation to second-wave feminism. In the opinion of Budgeon, postfeminism encompasses both acceptance and rejection of feminism. Budgeon concurred with Angela McRobie's perspective, which posits postfeminism as a commemoration of feminism's accomplishments, thereby positioning feminism as a historical phenomenon. The realization of feminist objectives paves the path for women to pursue personal aspirations by adopting lifestyle choices and consumption habits that align with the principles of postfeminism.⁴⁰ The citation provided in the text is from 2011, page 281. According to Budgeon and McRobbie, third-wave feminism can be characterized as having a worldwide reach, being driven by activism, and having an intellectual orientation. On the other hand, postfeminism tends to exhibit more

³⁸ Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*.

³⁹ Tong, *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction*.

⁴⁰ A. McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism Gender, Culture, and Social Change*. (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

individualistic tendencies, aligning with consumer culture and enjoying popularity in mainstream society.

In one sense, it is explained that feminism is an ideology advocated by the West to fight for equality between two types of human beings, namely men and women. Their aim is to free women from the grip of religion, culture, and the structure of social life. But this understanding is still not perfect. Then there is a lot of feminism in its character and background. Each stream has its own asbestos nucleus. The first is the flow of liberal feminism, a view that puts women in full and individual power. Liberal feminism wants to say that women must be strong and prepare themselves for free and equal competition with men. This liberal feminist understanding was born in the context of materialist American culture, where everything is measured based on matter. So, through this understanding, women are driven out of the house, have a free career, and are not dependent on men at all.

The second is radical feminism, a concept that emerged in the mid-1970s when the ideology of the struggle for female separatism was encouraged. Historically, this flow emerged as a reaction to gender-based social dominance in the West. At that time, there was a lot of sexual violence against women, and the pornography industry was trafficked. Because of that background, women, through this understanding, are moved to fight radically, which is why they are later called radical feminism. In post-modern feminism, this understanding assumes that gender does not mean identity or social structure. This stream adopts the notions of anti-absoluteness and anti-authority. The fourth is anarchist feminism that goes out of a political context and sees the state and men as the source of problems that urgently need to be tackled. The fifth is socialist feminism; understand this saying that there is no socialism without women's freedom. This stream abolished male ownership of women, inspired by Karl Marx's current desire to form a society without classes.

2. NU's Way of Thinking in Understanding Gender Issues

NU, also known as Nahdlatul Ulama, was established on January 31, 1926, by KH. Hasyim Asy'ari (1871-1947) and KH. Chasbullah (1883-1971) with the primary objective of safeguarding the interests and rights of adherents of orthodox Islamic beliefs. It is imperative for Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), similar to other Islamic organizations, to undergo adaptation in response to the prevailing

colonial, political, and social limitations.⁴¹ One of the most challenging issues pertains to the endeavour of surmounting a patriarchal societal structure, wherein women find themselves confined by their domestic obligations and subject to limited roles. The prevailing patriarchal society is characterized by the perception that men occupy the highest positions within the social hierarchy while women are relegated to a subordinate status. The cultural context at the time hindered Fatayat NU's aspiration to establish itself as an independent women's group.⁴²

NU encompasses two women's organizations within its structure, which are responsible for management at various levels, ranging from the central level down to the village/kelurahan level across the entire country. The organization above is Muslimat NU, a women's group that was established on March 29, 1946, in Purwokerto, Central Java. It operates under the auspices of NU. The organization known as Fatayat NU, established on April 24, 1950, consists of individuals who are above the age of forty. Fatayat NU caters to the demographic of young women affiliated with NU, encompassing those within the age range of twenty to forty years.⁴³

NU's initiative to encourage women to pursue leadership roles in the public sphere indirectly contributes to the enhancement of women's general well-being. Women must possess both the requisite skills and ethical principles in order to assume leadership roles. The absence of skills and ethics in women's leadership has the potential to establish an unfavourable precedent within the discourse around women's leadership. The objective of this initiative is to enable women to make a significant contribution to the advancement of their nation's civilization in the future by cultivating intellectual, social, emotional, and professional skills. Through these contributions, women will progressively acquire the confidence and credibility of the general public, thus facilitating their organic ascension to

⁴¹ A.R. Arifianto, "From Ideological to Political Sectarianism: Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, and the State in Indonesia," *Religion, State, and Society*, 2, 49 (2021): 126–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09637494.2021.1902247>.

⁴² A.R. Adisti, "Reviving the Spirit of Gender Equality: Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama between Idealism and Realization," *Journal of Nahdlatul Ulama Studies*, 1, 2 (2021): 17–33, <https://doi.org/10.35672/jnus.v2i1>.

⁴³ M. Mahsun, "Female Candidates, Islamic Women's Organisations, and Clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian Elections," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 40, no. 1 (2021): 73–92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1868103420988729>.

positions of leadership. As said by Asmani (2015), in order for Indonesian women to assert their presence and fulfil their potential in the context of a highly competitive globalized era, it is imperative to enhance their competence and moral integrity.⁴⁴ The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), established in 1926, is the most prominent Islamic organization in Indonesia. Within the NU, there are two women's groups that hold administrative positions at various levels, ranging from the central level to the village/kelurahan level, across the entire country of Indonesia. The group above is known as Muslimat NU, which is a women's organization that was established on March 29, 1946, in Purwokerto, Central Java. It operates under the auspices of NU. The organization known as Fatayat NU, established on April 24, 1950, consists of individuals who are above the age of forty. Fatayat NU caters to the demographic of young women within the NU community, encompassing individuals between the ages of twenty and forty.⁴⁵

Nahdlatul Ulama's commitment to addressing women's issues has been there from its inception. However, unlike Indonesian women during that period, NU has not actively involved its female members in the public domain. Nahdlatul Ulama, an organisation nearing its centenary milestone, recently achieved a significant milestone after a span of 96 years. This accomplishment entailed the inclusion of eleven women within the management structure of PBNU for the period spanning 2022 to 2027.⁴⁶ These entities are classified as belonging to the structural (implementing) category, commencing from Mustasyar, A'wan, and Tanfidziyah. By implementing this modification, PBNU's forthcoming policies will encompass a wider scope and exhibit more responsiveness towards the concerns and welfare of women.

The pursuit of gender equality among women has transcended many pesantren institutions and has now permeated the most prominent kiai venues, such as the National Conference, Konbes, and NU Congress. To foster discourse surrounding gender justice within the NU community, several stakeholders,

⁴⁴ J.M. Asmani, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Pergulatan Wacana Di Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)," *Addin* 9, no. 1 (2015): 33–50.

⁴⁵ Mahsun, "Female Candidates, Islamic Women's Organisations, and Clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian Elections."

⁴⁶ A. M. Niam, "Terobosan Kiprah Perempuan Di Perkumpulan Nahdlatul Ulama," *NU Online*, 2022, <https://www.nu.or.id/risalah-redaksi/terobosan-kiprah-perempuan-di-perkumpulan-nahdlatul-ulama-1kE1v>.

including Fatayat, IPPNU, academics, and activists, collaborate to promote the effective and extensive dissemination of justice ideas through the organization's official platforms. Ultimately, decisions that support the principle of gender equality are increasingly being made, particularly in relation to the representation of women in leadership positions.

Within the framework of the NU agreement, Bahtsul Masa'ail convened a series of three meetings in 1961, 1997, and 1999 to deliberate on the eligibility of women to assume leadership positions. The decisions made in 1961 differed from the decisions made in 1997 and 1999. The 1961 Nahdlatul Ulama council meeting deliberated on the matter of women assuming the role of village leaders, ultimately reaching a consensus regarding the corresponding legal framework. Regarding the provided rationale, the prohibition on women competing for the position of village head was justified on the grounds that such a role was functionally equivalent to that of a judge but limited to emergencies. The decision carries an underlying suggestion that women are not capable of assuming leadership positions.⁴⁷

Noteworthy advancements within Nahdlatul Ulama took place in 1997 during the NU National Conference in NTB. During this event, Machrusah Taufiq, the General Chair of IPPNU at the time, assumed a leadership role with assistance from Najihah Muhtarom. The conservative NU priests are educated through the utilization of historical, social, and nationalist analyses. In her discourse, Machrusah Taufiq delves into the historical trajectory of accomplished female leaders in Indonesia. From a sociological perspective, there is a notable presence of women leaders who have achieved success in effectively leading various organizations within their regions.

Moreover, it is anticipated that women possess the capability to contribute to nation-building alongside men. Consequently, limitations imposed by the public sector serve to diminish the potential of women, thereby impeding progress and creating inconsistencies in the pursuit of Indonesia's ambitious developmental objectives. This interpretation is widely accepted among scholars,

⁴⁷ Niam.

who also recognize the presence of nationalist, historical, and sociological factors.⁴⁸

However, it is noteworthy that conservative clerics persist in upholding their textual reasoning arguments inside a framework of thought that regards the text as unquestionable without delving into a comprehensive examination of the various dimensions of societal benefit and the underlying objectives of legal implementation. Despite the prevalence of conservative clerics and the relatively limited number of reformist clerics, a tactful and empathetic approach enables conservative clerics to be more receptive to reformist proposals that prioritize moderation.⁴⁹

In addition to examining the scholarly agreement within NU about women's leadership and its associated arguments, it is noteworthy that KH. Yahya Cholil Staquf, the chairman of PBNU for the 2022-2027 term, has actively appointed various women to occupy structural posts within PBNU. She presented ideas that diverged from the prevailing discourse on women's leadership, focusing on topics such as gender equality and related matters. In the opinion of Gus Yahya, the rationale behind the inclusion of women in the management of Tanfidziyah PBNU was primarily based on their scientific aptitude, competence, and extensive expertise in effectively executing organizational tasks.

According to Gus Yahya, it is now opportune to harvest the advantages of the educational endeavours for women, which NU has diligently established. Historically, Islamic boarding schools have been known to provide educational opportunities for female students by welcoming them into their classrooms. The participation of women in the public sphere is experiencing significant growth, accompanied by enhanced educational opportunities and a greater awareness of their rights. Women possess the capacity to acquire knowledge in any subject matter, contingent upon their inclinations and aptitudes. Therefore, it provides professional opportunities inside their respective industry. Numerous instances have been recorded wherein women have assumed positions of official authority, such as the presidency, governorship, district leadership, and mayoralty. Several female individuals have been designated as rectors inside state-affiliated Islamic

⁴⁸ Asmani, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan: Pergulatan Wacana Di Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)."

⁴⁹ Asmani.

educational institutions. NU women's housing regulations are indicative of a broader societal trend. In a previous instance, NU adopted an alternative method towards the inclusion and representation of women inside the organizational structure.⁵⁰

The transformation in the religious framework of NU, particularly with women's leadership, is rooted in the evolution of religious comprehension and empirical observations made by NU clerics. Furthermore, aligning with NU's ongoing efforts to contribute to societal progress, it becomes imperative to incorporate women in facilitating various essential changes. These changes encompass the transformation of individuals' perspectives, the transformation of prevailing attitudes, and the transformation of collective mindset.⁵¹

The women above organizations have exerted a substantial influence on the livelihoods of numerous Muslim women. Regularly, the two factions engage in religious practices, including Majlis Ta'lim. Individuals who are affiliated with regional branches frequently engage in service endeavours that are connected to NU, including the administration of educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and kindergartens. Additionally, they are involved in other development initiatives, including small-scale education programs, income-generating projects, and microcredit initiatives. These activities have the dual purpose of enhancing members' theological education and fostering the development of solidarity and social networks within the greater NU community (ummah). Muslimat and Fatayat exhibit significant influence in regions where pesantren, particularly those affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), enjoy substantial support, such as East and Central Java.⁵²

Nahdlatul Ulama's commitment to addressing women's issues has been there from its inception. However, unlike Indonesian women during that period, NU has not actively involved its female members in the public domain. Nahdlatul Ulama, an organisation nearing its centenary milestone, recently achieved a

⁵⁰ Niam, "Terobosan Kiprah Perempuan Di Perkumpulan Nahdlatul Ulama."

⁵¹ A.N.K. Faizun, "Rosiana Silalahi Pertanyakan Sikap Gus Yahya Soal Feminisme, Ini Jawabannya," *NU Online*, 2023, <https://www.nu.or.id/nasional/rosiana-silalahi-pertanyakan-sikap-gus-yahya-soal-feminisme-ini-jawabannya-108WN>.

⁵² Mahsun, "Female Candidates, Islamic Women's Organisations, and Clientelism in the 2019 Indonesian Elections."

significant milestone after a span of 96 years. This accomplishment entailed the inclusion of eleven women within the management structure of PBNU for the period spanning 2022 to 2027.⁵³ These entities are classified as belonging to the structural (implementing) category, commencing from Mustasyar, A'wan, and Tanfidziyah. By implementing this modification, PBNU's forthcoming policies will encompass a wider scope and exhibit more responsiveness towards the concerns and welfare of women.

D. Conclusion

Through the brief description above, you can understand what and how Western feminism flows with its various backgrounds. Gus Yahya, in this case, in my opinion, wants to say that *nahdliyin* (member of NU) are not the same as them. Nahdliyin do not need to imitate their way of thinking. We are different and we must have our own way of thinking. That is what Gus Yahya wanted to say. So, it is not correct to say that Gus Yahya is a misogynist and backward person. In fact, Gus Yahya really fought for women's rights by creating new things that were original to us, our traditions. Gus Yahya put so many women as members of change in the current NU management, which had never been that many before. What distinguishes Gus Yahya's style of feminism is that it fights for women's rights by paying attention to the abilities and capacities of women themselves. Not by clashing two identities which from the start were different and did not need to be equated, namely men and women. In this case, it is not gender that is at issue so it must be clashed, but the emphasis is on the capacity and abilities of each man and woman. In other words, even though men have less ability and capacity than women, women who have more abilities need to be used, and vice versa.

And that is how the nahdliyyin should think. Responding to contemporary problems by continuing to use the classical traditions (*turats*) that we have, but at the same time not closing our eyes to developing thinking, all of this is used to answer the challenges of the times. That is what the author calls as "the Epistemology of the Nahdliyyin". For the author personally, Gus Yahya's attitude is the attitude that the nahdliyyin should take. For the author, Gus Yahya's statement is an elegant, brave statement, and describes a chairman who should

⁵³ Niam, "Terobosan Kiprah Perempuan Di Perkumpulan Nahdlatul Ulama."

be an example for other nahdliyyin. In the author's view, Gus Yahya wants to invite the nahdliyyin to use their own roots in fighting for women's rights. Nahdlatul Ulama has an epistemological heritage that has been passed down from generation to generation, namely ahlu sunnah wa al-jamaah al-nahdliyyah. []

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