

GENDER CONSTRUCTION AT ISLAMIC POOR COMMUNITY: Study of Critical Ethnography in Sidosermo Dalam Surabaya

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Abstract

This study focuses on studying gender construction in the Islamic community in Surabaya. This community is in Kampung Sidosermo Dalam, one of the Islamic area in Surabaya. In everyday social and cultural conditions, women always wear the hijab and men wear koko shirts and sarongs. Women are always constructed as the second social class below men. The social construction that is built is not only agreed upon by men, but women also agree on it. The motto that women live by every day is *suwargo nunut neroko katut*. That a woman's heaven and hell is with her husband. The aim of the research is to dismantle unfair gender constructions so that hopefully there will be enlightenment leading to correct gender constructions. The research method uses qualitative with a critical ethnographic approach. The data collection technique used in-depth interviews for 15 informant with Sidosermo Dalam figures, kyai, nyai, RT, RW, as well as women who agreed that they were always in the second class. Apart from that, researchers also used participant observation techniques to explore data. The research results show that women have always experienced oppression since childhood. Every day they receive different treatment from men. The doctrine that women are always subordinate to men has been taught to the population from generation to generation. The construction of *suwargo nunut neroko katut* becomes a guide for interaction. This social construction is built and maintained using religious arguments as legitimacy. This patriarchal and oppressive condition must be immediately changed and corrected by the government, mass organizations and citizens themselves.

Keywords: *Social Construction, Gender, Islamic Community*

Introduction

Gender construction gives birth to bipolarity in the different characteristics, roles and positions of men and women. This condition gives rise to lasting social injustice. One of the reasons is because it gets theological legitimacy from gender-biased religious understanding. The conditions become even more difficult when the issue of gender is reduced to the formulation and interpretation of traditional laws produced by previous interpreters, and has experienced a kind of shift because it is influenced by the socio-cultural context, subjectivity, economic interests and political elements of the parties (Faqih, 1997).

This research discusses gender construction in a social setting where

patriarchal norms and culture are very strong based on classical Islamic religious interpretations. This community is in the middle of the metropolitan city of Surabaya, one of the largest metropolitan cities in Indonesia. Surabaya's rapid development and a strong tendency towards capital-based development (capitalism), still shows the phenomenon of a region that still strongly maintains its Islamic traditions.

This community is in the Sidosermo area and is better known by the surrounding community as "Ndresmo or Kampung Ndresmo Dalem or Kampung Sidosermo Dalam". If we mention the name of one of those terms, the local residents will definitely know. Kampung Sidosermo Dalam or Ndresmo has around

100 families and there are 2 RTs in it. Each RT is in a different sub-district because this area coincides with two sub-districts, namely Wonocolo sub-district and Wonokromo sub-district. Half of the residents are in RT4/RW1 Wonocolo subdistrict and the other half are in RT-1/RW2 Wonokromo subdistrict. RT stands for *Rukun Tetangga* (Neighborhood Association) which is the smallest social group after the family in some area or communities in Indonesia. Whereas, RW is *Rukun Warga* (Citizen Association). Hierarchically, above the Neighborhood Association is the Citizens' Association

Kampung Sidosermo Dalam in social processes based on classical religion, in dressing, women are required to wear the hijab, men wear Muslim clothing such as koko shirts and sarongs in society. Elementary and middle school children become Hafidz or Hafidzah (memorizers of the Qur'an). Another reality shows that the term for men and women there is Mas. This is an indicator that they have the blood of a Kyai or Nyai.

If we are the original descendants of the Kyai and Nyai in this area, then the term for the Kyai's child is Mas. Even though he is male or female, if the parents are Kyai or Nyai, then he or she will be called Mas. Different from the Javanese cultural customs in general, Mas is the term for a boy. But in this area, Mas indicates that he is a descendant of the Kyai or Nyai. Both male and female will be called Mas.

Talking about the roles and positions of women and men in this community, there is a very one-sided polarity where men have a primary position compared to women. This happens because of the

strong understanding and social practices based on patriarchy. Social practices based on patriarchal ideology have been implemented for generations. The Qur'an, which was constructed from generation to generation by adopting classical interpretation, is a strong legitimization of the continuation of this tradition. Ironically, not only men agree, women also agree with the concept of this tradition. So don't be surprised when in this community women really obey and follow everything said by men or their husbands. Even one of the poor women there named Nur Jannah said that if a woman goes to heaven with her husband, "*suwargo nunut, neroko katut*". This Javanese proverb means "Will follow (her husband) to heaven, or will be dragged to hell (along with her Husband). It is not only the poor who agree with these ideas, but also the rich too. They think that all of this is because of God's orders and has become a destiny that must be followed.

Most of the mothers in this area stay at home, although some help support the family's economy by becoming tailors and food sellers. Most residents there depend on giving Zakat from rich people. So this Islamic community is also characterized as a poor community in the middle of an urban area because many of its residents come from poor families.

Even though women in this place help the family economically, the position and bargaining power of women compared to men is still very low. There are no stories about women being the ones who determine important decisions in the family. Moreover, we will never see women involved in community management or being priests in activities.

Because women's domain is not in the public realm but instead in the domestic realm. This tradition has been passed down from generation to generation until now and is entering the eighth generation since the founding of the community.

To deepen the study in this research, the researcher used a critical ethnographic approach. Because it is realized that the Kampung Sidosermo Dalam has had a unique culture passed down from generation to generation based on classical interpretations of Islam. This culture becomes very appropriate if approached using ethnography with a gender perspective. Where there is a process of empowerment and support for weak and oppressed parties, in this case women. Critical ethnography is based on ethical responsibility for the process of injustice in certain aspects of people's lives (Madison, 2005). The ethical responsibility of critical ethnography is based on the moral principles of human freedom and saving the oppression of humanity both culturally, economically and politically. Researchers using critical ethnographic methods have a moral obligation to contribute to the process of enlightenment and change towards conditions of freedom and equality (including equality in knowledge). Therefore, critical ethnographic researchers provide enlightenment and ultimately can fight against domination and have a mission to do what to do with this condition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009).

So far, there has not been much research in Indonesia on the social and cultural setting of an Islamic community using an ethnographic approach with a

gender perspective. Most people who use ethnographic themes in a community only describe an Islamic community with all its attributes. For example, dissertation research conducted by Tutin Aryanti (2014) in the Kauman Islamic community in Yogyakarta, only focused on describing the hijab culture there. Not much research has raised the issue of gender and the construction of gender in the social setting of Islamic communities in the middle of a metropolis. Moreover, this community is a poor community in the middle of an urban area.

Even though there has been ethnographic research on poverty in urban communities, it has not touched much on aspects of gender issues and the construction of gender. So what is studied is only to portray the reality of poverty and how they survive in poverty in the middle of urban areas, such as in Surakarta by Yuniar (2017).

Therefore, it is very interesting if this research uses a critical ethnographic approach in uncovering gender realities that are occurred in Muslim communities as well as poor communities in the middle of big cities. This ethnographic research contributes to the process of changing gender construction which has been lopsided and has been going on for generations. Until finally it can be used as a part of the change process towards a gender-equitable community.

Methods

This research uses a critical ethnographic research type. Critical ethnographies are a type of ethnographic research in which researchers are interested in providing advocacy for the

emancipation of marginalized groups in society (Creswell, 2008). Critical researchers are typically politically minded individuals who try to seek through their research, advocacy against inequality, injustice, and domination (Carspecken & Apple, 1992).

Critical ethnographic research can be understood in a context that envisions the empowerment of individuals. Critical research is often associated with the confines of power, injustice or certain ideologies. The specificity of critical ethnography makes the procedure have various distinctive features. In summary, critical approach research is the embodiment of hope in the era of critical ratios (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009).

Researchers deliberately chose informants according to the criteria, namely residents of Ndresmo (Sidoserma Dalam) who supported gender ideology and those who rejected it. Some of them occupy strategic positions as owners of Islamic boarding schools, organizers of social religious groups, or holders of structural RT and RW (Neighborhood and Citizen Association) positions. Fifteen informants were selected who provided information related to gender construction. Four people are structural figures, all men as heads of RT and RW, four male informants who are Islamic boarding school owners and all of them have the status of Kyai, two female Islamic boarding school owners with the title Nyai. The rest are 5 women who are married and have a poor family category.

Apart from that, researchers also carried out direct observations and participant observation for three months. From the data collected, researchers

classified them according to the main themes of gender construction. Researchers also recorded data on the daily lives of women and men in Sidoserma. The existing data was then analyzed using Peter Berger's social construction theory. Data analysis in qualitative research according to Miles and Huberman (1992) uses the following steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

Results and Discussion

Life History of women in Kampung Sidoserma Dalam

The life history of Kampung Sidoserma Dalam women shows that from childhood to family they experience conditions of gender inequality in their daily lives. They have experienced many injustices. Especially the reality that it is haram for women to become priests, they are always under men and they serve men's needs. So the ideal role is always in the domestic realm. This condition is almost similar to the results of Nasution's (2016) research regarding the oppression of women in the young marriage tradition. It's just that in Sidoserma Dalam, it's not only married people who experience oppression, but also those who have been oppressed since childhood.

During childhood, gender differences will be seen. When playing in their environment, boys and girls will be separated. So that the game groups are always of the same gender. For girls, they are not allowed to leave the Ndresmo area so they only play in that place. Meanwhile, for men it is not a problem because they are seen as capable of looking after themselves. Regarding education, from

childhood to marriage, girls in Ndresmo do not have to go to high school. Because in the future they will only return to family matters to help their husband. Men are required for high school.

Not to mention when they were in elementary school or MI (Islamic Elementary School), MTS (Islamic Junior High School) and MA (Islamic Senior High School), girls in Ndresmo were not allowed to be class president, student council president or head of activities consisting of male and female members. If the organization has both male and female members, the chairman is always male, for example the OSIS (*Organisasi Siswa Intra Sekolah*) it means Intra-School Organization Students. There will never be a woman as chairman.

When it comes to marriage, there is a culture that has been passed down from generation to generation in this village regarding marriage, that women cannot freely choose their soul mate. They have to follow what their parents say. So, according to the parents' choice, a woman's mate is usually chosen with the child of a Kyai in one area or with the child of a kyai in another hut outside the Kampung.

The peak of a Sidosermo woman's life is when she starts a family. A woman will be a mother to her children and a wife to her husband. Even though sometimes there are unfair conditions, it is all a matter of fate and religious rules. For example, in this village the men don't work, so the women help the family financially, some sell cakes, some sew, and some go around selling fried food. Even though they work to earn a living,

the main decision makers in the family are still men.

So in this way, the daily lives of women in Kampung Sidosermo Dalam always experience injustice and subtle oppression is visible. It's just that they accept this condition because it is destiny and they will get heaven. The daily living conditions of women in Kampung Sidosermo Dalam provide a concrete picture of how women are powerless in various aspects. Previous research conducted by Emy Susanti (2007) explained that poor women in urban areas, even though they work, are always in the second social class position. Conditions in Sidosermo were worse because religion was included in the context of the oppression of thought.

A Gender Bias Construction (*suwargo nunut neroko katut*)

The idea of gender is actually already known to the residents of Kampung Sidosermo Dalam. Gender is the position of men and women in everyday social life. It's just that the problem is that women and men are constructed unfairly. The man is the main figure and the woman is the follower, *suwargo nunut neroko katut*, follow the husband to heaven and hell. This construction of gender which considers women second class has been passed down across generations.

When conducting research, variations in the construction of second class women's gender were found. There are those who openly say that women's heaven is below men's, there are also those who subtly state that a woman's duty is to serve (be a servant) for her

husband because that means she will get heaven. Giving the statement *suwargo nunut neroko katut* means that women are always oppressed. The sentence heaven and hell is a typical term in religion, especially Islam. So in this way religion is constructed as a tool to suppress women's social life. When we look at Moore's (1994) research, women's subordination is not only cultural, but also rooted in the division of labor based on gender. This division of labor originates from the symbolic association between women and nature and men with culture. Women, with their reproductive function, are associated with the domestic sector and men in the public environment, ultimately giving rise to hierarchical relationships, namely men are considered superior and women inferior. Women in Sidoesmo Dalam face unfair conditions. Even though they work, they still return to the main slogan of heaven and hell following their husband. The position of women is only as a companion and could even be said to be a housemaid.

Textual Religion as a Legitimation for Maintaining Traditions

The reality of women as a second class is a manifestation of the knowledge (stock of knowledge) of citizens which is continuously reproduced, and there is mutual agreement regarding this discourse. At the moment when reality is formed jointly and ultimately institutionalized, this is called objectivation. Where actions taken together become a pattern and become institutionalized. There is a clear rule even though it is not written formally that making men the first class is good and

rewarding, if you refuse it you will be sinning. Even if you don't follow, you will be ostracized, get karma, and be considered not part of the Ndresmo area.

From direct observation in the form of participant observation in the field, it can be seen that lifestyle patterns and social arrangements are very gender biased. Men's and women's activities are always separated. And if there is a recitation in which there are men and women, the speaker is always a man. They say that a woman's voice is intimate and must be protected. There will also be no stories about women giving lectures if there are men in the congregation.

Social actions are carried out repeatedly in Kampung Sidoesmo Dalam where the Islamic classic style is very strong, especially with regard to the position of men and women. Men are always considered as the main ones and this is in accordance with Allah's commands in the Qur'an and has been exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad SAW through his hadith. So if you refuse, you will be sinned and later in the afterlife you will be rewarded with torment.

The idea of *suwargo nunut neroko katut* which uses the proposition in the Qur'an QS An Nisa verse 34 as one of the main controls, is as follows: "*One of the clear verses that men take care of women is in the QS. An Nisa verse 34...then it is clear that women must follow men (husbands)...they cannot be accused of sinning...since childhood...our parents always educate us very much in Islam...recite the Qur'an and socialize according to the rules of the Qur'an....and the knowledge Well, this comes from the Ndresmo environment and ancestral*

heritage...so no matter what it must be maintained..."(Source: Interview with Rofiq on June 29, 2024)

Almost the same statement was also conveyed by one of the senior kyai figures and chairman of the istighosah council Monday night, Kyai Mas Karim as follows: *"In istighosah where the congregation is male, it is always emphasized and conveyed to the congregation to protect their wives and children from attacks from the outside world....husbands must educate their wives...and wives must have full responsibility to take care of the house...to educate their children and other household matters.....this is sakinah family and in accordance with the example of the Prophet Muhammad SAW..."*(Source: Interview with Karim on June 30, 2024)

So in this way it is clear that men as leaders have been legitimized by the power of the Al-Quran and the Hadith of the Prophet. So that the patriarchal social and cultural world obtains strong approval and legitimacy based on religion. This is one of the objectifications that exists regarding second class women in Ndresmo. There is a mutual agreement and it has become a social institution even though it is not written that the main thing for men is carrying out God's commands and being rewarded.

If you refuse, you will be excluded from social interactions and receive karma

Karma is bad retribution in the future for our current actions. In the process of getting used to it in daily life, rules are formed that are mutually agreed upon even though they are not written.

One thing that is held tightly is that you will get bad karma if you don't carry it out. And in everyday life they will be ostracized and considered a virus. As said by Mas Aisyah below : *"When I have different views from the villagers, I am ignored every day and rarely anyone reprimands me. Just invite me to chat if there's a need...I feel like I'm not respected and considered a virus when I'm in their group...even passing in front of them makes me feel that way..."*(Source: Interview with Aisyah on July 1, 2024)

This mother openly had different views from the existing Kampung Sidosermo Dalam, so she felt that she received bad treatment when interacting with them. Even after living in the village for decades, the treatment of the residents remains the same. There are no significant changes to him. Such harsh treatment is usually applied to fellow residents of Ndresmo area who have different views.

In line with Mas Aisyah's statement, the village residents provided the following explanation: *"It's very clear, bro, the rules here are very Islamic...if you don't want to implement them, don't stay here...because it hurts your people...that's why if someone refuses they will not be greeted or recognized even if they are originally from Ndresmo..."*(Source : Interview with Rofiq on June 29, 2024)

This statement is very clear that if it is a habit there, if you refuse the common rules, you will be treated as ostracized and will not be respected. So herein lies one of the biggest mistakes in viewing a social construction on the basis of institutions that are formed irrationally or

incorrectly and always corner one party, namely women. So in this way, the discourse on social institutions must be reconstructed and revised properly so that conditions that are more gender equitable can occur.

Gender Equality as a Western Product that Wants to Destroy Islam

The construction adopted by residents where women are the second class and are perceived as rewarding local wisdom, there are efforts from several parties to change this construction. It's just that these efforts always encounter resistance from the residents themselves. As stated by Mas Siti Aisyah below: *"My father was a colonel and was most recently the head of the sub-district military unit in the South Surabaya region... since I was little, I was used to being educated in discipline and went to state schools... even though I was also from the boarding class, I didn't tend to go there... now and previously I was known in among the residents as liberal agents...the right hand of the West...because they promote that women and men are the same...I was once ostracized for years and when I passed in front of the women in the village...I was looked at very cynically...as if- as if I were a virus..."*(Source: Interview with Aisyah on July 1, 2024)

This mother did not live in the Kampung Sidosermo Dalam during her childhood and youth. It's just that before her husband retired, she decided to build a house in the Ndresmo area. From the start, returning to Ndresmo brought a different culture. His religious ways were influenced by modernity and the

disciplined military world. So a critical attitude is always prioritized. He is 180 degrees in contrast to the Ndresmo culture. For example, regarding the issue of celebrating a deceased person, he said it is not mandatory. Then, women are required to use family planning to control the number of children, which is not the case in the culture at ndresmo. Moreover, the role of women must also be involved. His various ideas were rejected outright and instead he was ostracized from the Ndresmo even though he was a descendant of the Kyai in this area.

The Process of Forming Gender Construction

The process of forming the construction of women as a second social class, that women must be at home, and that women cannot be equal to men, was actually formed not briefly but long and long by going through the dialectic of moments of externalization, objectivation and internalization. Peter Berger explains that this dialectic lasts a very long time and is always simultaneous. As we all know, the objective order of daily social life (social world) in Ndresmo is based on social institutions that use religious legitimacy in their objectification. The Qur'an and Hadith are constructed to perpetuate patriarchal and religious traditions. The process of socializing gender construction is carried out massively so that residents internalize that women are below men.

In accordance with Berger's theory of social construction, which assumes that religion, as part of culture, is a human construction, meaning that there is a dialectical process when looking at the

relationship between society and religion. Religion is an objective entity because it is outside humans. Religion experiences a process of objectification, such as when religion is in texts or becomes a system of values, norms, rules and so on. These texts or norms then undergo a process of internalization within the individual, because religion has been interpreted by society to become its guidance. This simultaneous dialectic takes place continuously in Sidosermo Dalam.

Religion also experiences an externalization process because it becomes a reference for norms and values that function to guide and control people's actions. Objectified religion ultimately has strong legitimacy to regulate human life. So that in everyday life it will be clear that religion has an important role in constructing reality. Including the idea of *suwargo nunut neroko katut* adopted by Ndresmo who use the proposition in the Qur'an QS An Nisa verse 34 (men are leaders for women)

The Islamic religion, especially the verses of the Qur'an, were constructed to strengthen and perpetuate a patriarchal culture that is actually rooted in three things, namely issues of patriarchy, androcentrism and sexism. Androcentrism which shows that religious traditions are constructed, developed by men from a male perspective. Therefore, the main focus is men's experiences. Meanwhile, patriarchy shows the dominance and superiority of men in religious discourse and history. Religion and its construction ultimately becomes sexist, meaning that the dominant understanding of religion gives privilege to men and men's

experiences and places men as superior. At the same time placing women lower and considering them as inferior. This construction process must be changed so that men and women have the same position, roles and rights.

The government, through its various service elements and apparatus, has not been able to play much of a role in improving the construction of thought in Sidosermo Dalam. This is homework for policy makers because the results of the empowerment have not yet been felt. The government is trapped by the concept of local wisdom that exists in Ndresmo. The unique characteristics of Ndresmo or Sidosermo are always maintained by the government. At least they have been less successful in overcoming gender issues in the field.

Conclusion

The gender construction formed in the Kampung Sidosermo Dalam or Ndresmo community places women always in the second class position. From childhood to marriage and in the household, women always experience oppression. This biased gender construction is exacerbated by the existence of religious legitimacy. Sacred religious texts are interpreted textually so that the impact on women's position is always oppressed. They cannot get out of the darkness because of wrong interpretations. This wrong interpretation then becomes the basis for behavior and social processes. The understanding of the interpretation of the text is wrong and has been maintained for generations by creating slogans that gender equality is a western product that destroys Islam. This

kind of construction is totally wrong. Because balanced relations between men and women must be upheld. Women must be treated fairly in the context of social life. Limiting their space for movement is a wrong construction. Biased gender construction in Sidosermo Dalam, which is a local culture, clearly there is no special program from the government. It has been going on for decades, even hundreds of years, showing that the government is wrong in providing guidance. Moreover, the city community in Surabaya has actually advanced in the world of globalization. The existence of biased gender construction in Sidosermo means that the Government must be concerned about providing enlightenment. Regular coaching in collaboration between various social groups must be carried out. This is because the problem of incorrect gender construction has become a culture and has been rooted for a long time. The government needs to make improvements to the wrong ideas in Ndresmo. The strategic position of the authorities means that community development should be felt. However, based on the results of data and analysis, the community enlightenment and empowerment program is very invisible and unnoticeable. The real proof is that the Ndresmo region and its culture have been going on for eight generations.

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