

## RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION AND GENDER NEGOTIATION IN PESANTREN: REPRODUCING THE LEGACY OF KIAI AS'AD SYAMSUL ARIFIN

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**Abstrak:** Kerangka analitis yang menafsirkan relasi gender dalam pesantren semata-mata melalui struktur patriarkal terbukti tidak memadai karena mengabaikan proses komunikatif yang secara aktif membentuk dan menegosiasikan norma gender dalam kehidupan religius sehari-hari. Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana warisan komunikasi Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin membentuk konstruksi gender di Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif kritis-konstruktivis dengan desain studi kasus intrinsik, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa santri perempuan di Sukorejo memperoleh ruang institusional yang setara dengan santri laki-laki dalam pendidikan, kepemimpinan organisasi, dakwah publik, dan komunikasi religius digital bukan dengan melampaui batas moral pesantren, melainkan melalui legitimasi komunikatif yang bersumber dari nilai-nilai etis warisan Kiai As'ad: kejujuran, keikhlasan, dan tanggung jawab sosial. Relasi gender dibentuk melalui dua mode komunikasi: komunikasi berbasis syariat yang mengatur perilaku, etika ruang, dan ketertiban institusional; serta komunikasi berbasis hakikat yang mengolah internalisasi etis, fleksibilitas moral, dan kesejahteraan komunal. Penelitian ini menawarkan kerangka komunikasi gender Hakikat–Syariat sebagai model analitis baru yang menempatkan komunikasi religius sebagai mekanisme utama produksi, negosiasi, dan legitimasi norma gender dalam kehidupan pesantren.

**Kata kunci:** komunikasi religius, gender dalam pesantren, hakikat dan syariat, otoritas ulama, komunikasi moral

**Abstract:** Academic analyses of gender in pesantren have predominantly focused on patriarchal structures. Yet, such approaches remain analytically constrained. They often overlook the everyday communicative processes through which gender norms are negotiated and enacted within religious life. This study interrogates the ongoing influence of Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin's communicative legacy in shaping

gender at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo. Utilizing qualitative methods, participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis within a critical-constructivist, case-based framework, the research demonstrates that women at Sukorejo occupy institutional spaces alongside men across education, leadership, public da'wah, and digital religious communication. Their participation is embedded within pesantren moral boundaries. Legitimacy is grounded in the embodiment of core ethical values closely associated with Kiai As'ad's legacy: sincerity, honesty, and communal responsibility. Gender relations are structured by two interwoven communicative modes. Sharia-based communication regulates conduct, space, and institutional order. Hakikat-based communication fosters ethical internalization, adaptability, and communal welfare. The Hakikat-Sharia Gender Communication Framework advanced here positions religious communication as the central mechanism through which gender norms are constituted, negotiated, and institutionalized within pesantren life.

**Keywords:** Religious communication, gender in pesantren, hakikat and Sharia, ulama authority, moral communication

## A. Introduction

Contemporary Indonesian Muslim society has undergone significant sociological transformation over recent decades, particularly regarding women's public roles within religious institutions.<sup>1</sup> Women now occupy increasingly visible positions across Islamic educational institutions, socio-religious organizations, and digitally mediated public spheres.<sup>2</sup> Within the pesantren landscape specifically, this trajectory is pronounced: women's participation has expanded considerably across formal institutional education, Islamic organizational structures, and digital religious communication.<sup>3</sup> Yet this expansion does not unfold in a normative vacuum. Codes of conduct governing modesty, bodily ethics, and gender interaction continue to structure the texture of everyday pesantren life.<sup>4</sup> These two conditions broadened participation and

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety: Islam and Feminism in Indonesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Nina Nurmila, *Women, Islam and Everyday Life: Renegotiating Polygamy in Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2009), 78

<sup>2</sup> Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, *Women in Indonesian Islam: Discourses and Practices* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2015); Gavin W. Jones, Terence H. Hull, and Maznah Mohamad, eds., *Gender and Islam in Southeast Asia* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 52–68

<sup>3</sup> Evi Muafiah et al., "Gendered Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia: Female Agency, Institution, and Everyday Lives" (2024); Ahmad D. Nugroho, "Empowering Voices from Pesantren," *Al-Tanzim* 8, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v8i2.8167>

<sup>4</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1982), 55–73; Suzanne April Brenner, "Reconstructing Self and Society," *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 4 (1996): 673–697

enduring moral expectations are not mutually canceling; rather, they coexist in productive and constitutive tension that demands serious analytical attention.<sup>5</sup> Characterizing gender in pesantren as either straightforwardly patriarchal or unambiguously liberatory, therefore, fails to capture this empirical complexity.<sup>6</sup> The social reality is considerably more layered, suspended between tradition, institutional authority, and ongoing negotiated change.<sup>7</sup>

Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo in East Java is a strong example for examining this tension. The institution has produced generations of women who are active in Islamic education, leadership in Nahdlatul Ulama-affiliated organizations, public religious preaching, and digital da'wah through TikTok and YouTube.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the pesantren maintains strict moral rules. These govern space, behavior, propriety, and gender interaction in daily life.<sup>9</sup> Women at Sukorejo are not passive recipients of institutional rules.<sup>10</sup> They negotiate participation through communicative practices rooted in pesantren moral culture. These practices are shaped by the lasting ethical influence of the pesantren founder, Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin.<sup>11</sup> Moral regulation and increased participation both exist and form the central empirical problem of this study.

Scholarly engagement with gender and pesantren has accumulated across several thematic axes. Foundational work by Dhofier established that pesantren life is organizationally structured around the authority of the kiai, whose

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<sup>5</sup> Eka Srimulyani, *Women from Traditional Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 88–104; Dina Afrianty, *Women and Sharia Law in Northern Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2015), 44–61

<sup>6</sup> Andrée Feillard, *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999), 201–218; Siti Bella, H. Syaifuddin, and Jamilah, "From Subordination to Authority," *MUMTAZ* 5, no. 4 (2026).

<sup>7</sup> Robert W. Hefner, *Making Modern Muslims* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009)

<sup>8</sup> Moh. A. Manan and M. Bajuri, "Budaya Literasi di Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Indonesia* 4, no. 2 (2020): 116–123; Husnul Ridho, "Ma'had Aly Pencetak Kader Ulama Warisan KH As'ad Syamsul Arifin," *NU Online*, August 22, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Z. Q. A'yun and D. D. Prianti, "Rhetoric in the Islamic-Javanese Communication Pesantren Tradition," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 24, no. 1 (2022); Fatmawati, "Gender, Authority, and Islamic Education," *Syaikhuna* 15, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>10</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 17–39

<sup>11</sup> Mahmudi and Ahmad N. Rizal, "Reviving Values through Tradition," *Mimbar Agama Budaya* 42, no. 1 (2025): 1–14; Irfan F. Ilyas and Rina Y. Lestari, "Syair Aqaid Saeket sebagai Media Dakwah Kultural Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin," *Al-Hikmah* 22, no. 1 (2023).

legitimacy constitutes the irreducible center of institutional order.<sup>12</sup> Van Bruinessen further demonstrated that pesantren traditions reproduce Islamic authority through networks of ulama and the transmission of traditional religious culture across generations.<sup>13</sup> These foundational studies, however, treated gender primarily as a derivative feature of hierarchical social structures rather than as a phenomenon actively produced through communicative practice. Subsequent scholarship shifted attention toward women's subordination and religious interpretation: Ahmed and Wadud situated women's positioning within broader structures of patriarchal religious hermeneutics, providing important frameworks for understanding how textual traditions have historically constrained women's authority.<sup>14</sup> Indonesian scholars, including Feillard, Srimulyani, and Afrianty, then empirically documented the considerable expansion of women's roles across pesantren education, organizational life, and public religious engagement, constituting an important corrective to earlier portrayals of pesantren women as uniformly passive and institutionally powerless.<sup>15</sup> More recent scholarship has continued to document substantive gains in women's access to education, public participation, and digitally mediated religious engagement.<sup>16</sup>

A major analytical gap appears in this literature. Whether focused on patriarchy, subordination, or empowerment, most frameworks remain structural and outcome-oriented.<sup>17</sup> They look at gender arrangements and outcomes but neglect communicative processes. These processes actively form, sustain, and renegotiate gender norms.<sup>18</sup> Gender regulation in pesantren extends beyond

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<sup>12</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1982), 55–73.

<sup>13</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Pesantren and Kitab Kuning," in *Texts from the Islands*, ed. Wolfgang Marschall (Bern: Ethnologica Bernica, 1994), 121–145.

<sup>14</sup> Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 149–167; Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 62–79

<sup>15</sup> Andrée Feillard, *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999), 201–218; Eka Srimulyani, *Women from Traditional Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 88–104; Dina Afrianty, *Women and Sharia Law in Northern Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2015), 44–61

<sup>16</sup> Evi Muafiah et al., "Gendered Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia" (2024); Vivie Nurhidayati, "Peran Pesantren dalam Pemberdayaan Perempuan," *TSAQAFATUNA* 7, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.54213/tsaqafatuna.v7i1.587>.

<sup>17</sup> Ahmad D. Nugroho, "Empowering Voices from Pesantren," *Al-Tanzim* 8, no. 2 (2024); Siti Bella, H. Syaifuddin, and Jamilah, "From Subordination to Authority," *MUMTAZ* 5, no. 4 (2026).

<sup>18</sup> Z. Q. A'yun and D. D. Prianti, "Rhetoric in the Islamic-Javanese Communication Pesantren Tradition," *Analisis* 24, no. 1 (2022); Ahmad F. Abidin, H. Ramadan, and Zaenal Mukarom, "Habitus di Arena Simbolik," *Jurnal Komunikasi Universitas Garut* 12, no. 1 (2026).

rules and religious texts.<sup>19</sup> It shapes daily life through study circles, ritual, spatial arrangements, moral symbolism, kiai–santri relationships, and everyday routines.<sup>20</sup> Religious communication does more than express doctrine. It binds moral order, social legitimacy, and gender norms into one institutional system.<sup>21</sup> Existing frameworks have missed this communicative dimension. This leaves unexplained how pesantren traditions maintain both moral continuity and social adaptation.<sup>22</sup>

This study addresses that gap by making religious communication the main focus for understanding gender in pesantren. Instead of treating communication as a reflection of existing structures, this research sees religious communication as an active force shaping gender norms.<sup>23</sup> This approach gives a grounded view of how pesantren maintain moral authority while legitimizing women's growing involvement in educational, organizational, public, and digital religious spaces.<sup>24</sup> The study introduces the Hakikat–Sharia Gender Communication Framework as its core contribution. This framework unites two communication dimensions that past research has separated or ignored. It looks at the normative-regulatory role of sharia-based communication and the moral-spiritual role of hakikat-based communication, by showing how these two work together, the framework provides a new way to analyze religion, communication, and gender in pesantren.<sup>26</sup>

The study uses two key analytical approaches. Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis is the main tool. It examines religious communication

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<sup>19</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>20</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1982), 55–73; Ronald Lukens-Bull, "Teaching Morality," *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000): 26–47

<sup>21</sup> James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 11–28; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5–14.

<sup>22</sup> Evi Muafiah et al., "Gendered Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia" (2024); Fatmawati, "Gender, Authority, and Islamic Education," *Syaikhuna* 15, no. 2 (2023).

<sup>23</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 1–25; James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 11–28

<sup>24</sup> Ahmad D. Nugroho, "Empowering Voices from Pesantren," *Al-Tanzim* 8, no. 2 (2024); Eva F. Nisa, "Female Preachers and Islamic Authority in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>26</sup> Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, *Gender dalam Perspektif Islam* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2001); Siti Musdah Mulia, *Muslimah Reformis* (Bandung: Mizan, 2005).

through texts, discursive practices, and sociocultural practices.<sup>27</sup> This helps analyze how moral narratives, symbolic language, and institutional discourse shape gender norms in pesantren.<sup>28</sup> Dell Hymes' ethnography of communication adds context. It uses speaking elements, setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, and norms to show how gender is practiced in everyday religious communication.<sup>29</sup> These frameworks allow the study to ask what is communicated about gender and how that communication works.<sup>30</sup> The study focuses on sharia-based communication, which regulates conduct, space, and boundaries, and hakikat-based communication, which promotes ethical sincerity, communal duty, and spiritual legitimacy.<sup>31</sup> These two methods are complementary. They help pesantren keep order and adapt to the moral context.<sup>32</sup>

Guided by this framework, the study has one research question: how does Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin's communicative legacy shape gender through hakikat–sharia religious communication at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo? Three aims follow from this. First, examine how Kiai As'ad's moral messages are reproduced in the pesantren and how they shape ideas about gender.<sup>33</sup> Second, analyze how sharia-based and hakikat-based communication affects women's behavior, participation, and legitimacy in pesantren.<sup>34</sup> Third, study how religious communication enables women in Sukorejo to gain influence

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<sup>27</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 56–98; Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 63–88

<sup>28</sup> Ahmad F. Abidin, H. Ramadan, and Zaenal Mukarom, "Habitus di Arena Simbolik," *Jurnal Komunikasi Universitas Garut* 12, no. 1 (2026)

<sup>29</sup> Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 35–57; Z. Q. A'yun and D. D. Prianti, "Rhetoric in the Islamic-Javanese Communication Pesantren Tradition," *Analisis* 24, no. 1 (2022).

<sup>30</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 13–36; James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 18–33.

<sup>31</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1987); Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28–53; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 28–47.

<sup>33</sup> Mahmudi and Ahmad N. Rizal, "Reviving Values through Tradition," *Mimbar Agama Budaya* 42, no. 1 (2025): 1–14; Irfan F. Ilyas and Rina Y. Lestari, "Syair Aqid Saeket," *Al-Hikmah* 22, no. 1 (2023).

<sup>34</sup> Fatmawati, "Gender, Authority, and Islamic Education," *Syaikhuna* 15, no. 2 (2023); Fitri Maulidina et al., "Feminism and Gender Justice in Pesantren Life," *IJITH* 4, no. 2 (2025).

in education, leadership, public da'wah, and digital religious spaces, all while staying within the pesantren's moral culture.<sup>35</sup>

To address these objectives, the study employs a qualitative methodology situated within a critical-constructivist paradigm, with an intrinsic case study design centered on Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo.<sup>36</sup> Sukorejo was selected for its analytical salience as an institution in which rigorous moral regulation of women coexists alongside their substantively expanding participation across multiple institutional domains.<sup>37</sup> Data were generated through three complementary methods: participant observation of religious gatherings, organizational activities, spatial arrangements, and everyday pesantren interactions; in-depth semi-structured interviews with pesantren administrators, female religious leaders, ustadz, ustadzah, santri, senior alumni, and Muslimat NU and Fatayat NU activists; and document analysis covering institutional regulations, biographical accounts of Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin, sermon recordings, and digital da'wah materials.<sup>38</sup> Analysis followed Fairclough's CDA across the three dimensions of text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice, with ethnographic observations integrated throughout to contextualize communicative practices within the rhythms of everyday pesantren life.<sup>39</sup> Validity and trustworthiness were established through triangulation across methods and data sources, and member checking with selected informants.<sup>40</sup>

Several challenges emerged during fieldwork. Discussions concerning gender relations often involved sensitive moral and religious issues, resulting in

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<sup>35</sup> Evi Muafiah et al., "Gendered Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia" (2024); Siti Bella, H. Syaifuddin, and Jamilah, "From Subordination to Authority," *MUMTAZ* 5, no. 4 (2026).

<sup>36</sup> Robert E. Stake, *The Art of Case Study Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 3–24; John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 251–274.

<sup>37</sup> Moh. A. Manan and M. Bajuri, "Budaya Literasi di Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo," *JPII* 4, no. 2 (2020): 116–123.

<sup>38</sup> Glenn A. Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method," *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40; Angelica Orb, Laurel Eisenhauer, and Dianne Wynaden, "Ethics in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 33, no. 1 (2001): 93–96.

<sup>39</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 56–98; Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 51–66.

<sup>40</sup> Norman K. Denzin, *The Research Act*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978), 291–307; Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 301–331

socially desirable responses from some participants. In addition, the enduring symbolic authority of Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin occasionally blurred the distinction between normative ideals and lived practices. To address these limitations, data triangulation was conducted through interviews, observations, institutional documents, and historical records.

## **B. The Communicative Reproduction of Kiai As'ad's Moral Legacy and Its Gender Implications**

The analytical entry point for understanding gender construction within Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo lies in the textual structure of Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin's five-point wasiat. At the level of text, the first dimension of Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis will exhibit a distinctive moral vocabulary that warrants close analytical attention.<sup>41</sup> The document is structured around five injunctions addressing institutional loyalty, moral alignment, social contribution, spiritual practice, and personal virtue. What is analytically significant is not merely the content of these injunctions but the communicative logic embedded within them.

Three features of the wasiat's textual construction are particularly consequential for gender analysis. First, the moral obligations it articulates are addressed collectively to *santri* without explicit differentiation between male and female students. The phrase "*all of my santri, whoever they are, children of anyone, and in whatever condition*" operates as a deliberate communicative inclusivity, positioning moral obligation as a universal pesantren ethic rather than a gendered prescription.<sup>42</sup> Second, the wasiat foregrounds sincerity, honesty, and diligence as the primary criteria of legitimacy, not formal religious credentials, social status, or gender. This moral vocabulary functions discursively to decouple institutional legitimacy from structural hierarchies, including gender hierarchy.<sup>43</sup> Third, the three domains of obligatory contribution, Islamic education, da'wah through Nahdlatul Ulama, and community economic empowerment are framed as shared social responsibilities applicable to the entire santri community. The

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<sup>41</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (London: Longman, 1995), 56–98

<sup>42</sup> Mahmudi and Ahmad N. Rizal, "Reviving Values through Tradition," *Mimbar Agama Budaya* 42, no. 1 (2025): 1–14; Irfan F. Ilyas and Rina Y. Lestari, "Syair Aqid Saeket," *Al-Hikmah* 22, no. 1 (2023).

<sup>43</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 78–92; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 17–39

communicative effect is to position public religious engagement, including by women, as a moral duty rather than an exceptional concession.<sup>44</sup>

This textual structure aligns with Fairclough's argument that discourse functions as a social practice that produces and legitimizes institutional authority through language, symbols, and communicative structures.<sup>45</sup> The wasiat does not operate merely as historical counsel; it functions as a moral discourse that actively shapes how legitimacy, participation, and social responsibility are understood within pesantren culture. Berger and Luckmann's observation that social reality is continuously reproduced through institutionalized meaning and collective interaction is directly applicable here: the wasiat has become institutionalized not as a static document but as a living moral reference continuously activated in pesantren communicative life.<sup>46</sup>

At the level of discursive practice, Fairclough's second analytical dimension, the wasiat's moral content does not remain confined to its original textual form but is continuously reproduced through multiple communicative channels within the pesantren.<sup>47</sup> Sermons, pesantren gatherings, alumni networks, organizational forums, and digital religious media all serve as arenas through which Kiai As'ad's moral injunctions are re-articulated, recontextualized, and reaffirmed across generations of santri communities.<sup>48</sup>

This communicative reproduction operates through what Carey conceptualizes as the ritual model of communication, where communication functions not merely as the transmission of information but as a ritual process through which communities sustain collective meaning and social order.<sup>49</sup> Within Sukorejo, the repeated invocation of Kiai As'ad's moral messages across diverse communicative settings sustains pesantren ethical consciousness by connecting institutional loyalty, communal welfare, and religious participation to moral legitimacy. Each repetition reinforces the normative framework through

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<sup>44</sup> Evi Muafiah et al., "Gendered Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia" (2024); Fitri Maulidina et al., "Feminism and Gender Justice in Pesantren Life," *IJITH* 4, no. 2 (2025).

<sup>45</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 63–88; Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 71–96.

<sup>46</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 51–61

<sup>47</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 71–96.

<sup>48</sup> Husnul Ridho, "Ma'had Aly Pencetak Kader Ulama," *NU Online*, August 22, 2019; Moh. A. Manan and M. Bajuri, "Budaya Literasi di Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo," *JPII* 4, no. 2 (2020): 116–123.

<sup>49</sup> James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 11–28.

which santri, including women, understand their obligations and their place within the pesantren community.

The communicative style embedded within the wasiat is analytically significant in its own right. Kiai As'ad did not communicate exclusively through rigid juridical language but through emotionally resonant moral idioms emphasizing sincerity, honesty, diligence, communal responsibility, and spiritual steadfastness.<sup>50</sup> This affective dimension of his communicative legacy is consequential: it means that moral authority within Sukorejo is reproduced not primarily through coercive institutional enforcement but through ethical internalization, a process Hirschkind describes as the cultivation of embodied ethical sensibilities through everyday communicative practice.<sup>51</sup> Santri communities do not merely comply with Kiai As'ad's moral injunctions; they internalize them as constitutive elements of pesantren identity and religious selfhood.

The digital extension of this communicative reproduction represents a particularly significant contemporary development. Several female pesantren figures at Sukorejo actively disseminate Islamic teachings through social media platforms while continuing to reproduce communicative styles grounded in propriety, modesty, ethical speech, and religious responsibility rooted in Kiai As'ad's legacy.<sup>52</sup> As one informant observed:

*"Today, Bu Nyai is also actively spreading Islamic teachings through social media and TikTok live streams. Pesantren da'wah is no longer limited to face-to-face religious study sessions, but has entered digital spaces."* (Ifa, santri)

This observation is analytically significant at the level of discursive practice. Digital platforms do not represent a departure from the pesantren communicative tradition; rather, they function as expanded arenas through which the same moral vocabulary, ethical authority, and institutional identity are

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<sup>50</sup> Irfan F. Ilyas and Rina Y. Lestari, "Syair Aqid Saeket," *Al-Hikmah* 22, no. 1 (2023); Mahmudi and Ahmad N. Rizal, "Reviving Values through Tradition," *Mimbar Agama Budaya* 42, no. 1 (2025)

<sup>51</sup> Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 28–47

<sup>52</sup> Ahmad F. Abidin, H. Ramadan, and Zaenal Mukarom, "Habitus di Arena Simbolik," *Jurnal Komunikasi Universitas Garut* 12, no. 1 (2026); Z. Q. A'yun and D. D. Prianti, "Rhetoric in the Islamic-Javanese Communication Pesantren Tradition," *Analisis* 24, no. 1 (2022).

reproduced within broader Muslim public spheres.<sup>53</sup> The medium changes; the communicative logic of moral reproduction persists.

At the level of sociocultural practice, Fairclough's third analytical dimension, the communicative reproduction of Kiai As'ad's legacy, carries direct and consequential implications for gender relations within Sukorejo.<sup>54</sup> The findings demonstrate that women's expanding involvement in education, organizational activity, and digital da'wah is consistently legitimized through precisely the moral principles reproduced from Kiai As'ad's wasiat. Participation becomes institutionally acceptable not because existing gender norms are discarded, but because women's activities are interpreted as extensions of pesantren moral responsibility, communal benefit (*maslahah*), and religious service.<sup>55</sup>

This finding aligns with Weber's conceptualization of charismatic authority as a form of legitimacy grounded in perceived moral and spiritual credibility.<sup>56</sup> Within Sukorejo, Kiai As'ad's authority endures not through his personal presence but through the symbolic force of his reproduced moral discourse. His communicative legacy supplies the ethical language through which adaptation to contemporary realities becomes morally negotiable without undermining pesantren authority or institutional identity. As one informant articulated:

*"What is taught at Sukorejo is not only Islamic jurisprudence, but also how to uphold propriety and morality. Women are respected, and their dignity is protected. However, women must also be able to adapt to changing times as long as they do not abandon pesantren values."* (Siti, santri, and organizational activist)

This account reflects the precise communicative logic the present study identifies. The moral framework reproduced through Kiai As'ad's legacy does not position women's participation as a transgression of pesantren ethics but as its contextual extension. Adaptation and moral continuity are not framed as opposing imperatives; they are held in productive tension through

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<sup>53</sup> James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 42–58; Eva F. Nisa, "Female Preachers and Islamic Authority in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>54</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 89–112

<sup>55</sup> Fatmawati, "Gender, Authority, and Islamic Education," *Syaikhuna* 15, no. 2 (2023); Siti Bella, H. Syaifuddin, and Jamilah, "From Subordination to Authority," *MUMTAZ* 5, no. 4 (2026)

<sup>56</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 241–254.

communicative processes that continuously reinterpret what fidelity to pesantren values requires in changing social conditions.<sup>57</sup>

Critically, this dynamic resists reduction to straightforward patriarchal domination. Mahmood's critique of liberal assumptions about agency demonstrates that religious discipline often operates through ethical self-formation and moral cultivation rather than solely through coercive subordination.<sup>58</sup> Women within Sukorejo are not adequately understood as passive recipients of institutional authority. Rather, they are moral agents who negotiate religious participation through communicative legitimacy grounded in pesantren ethical traditions, claiming institutional space not by opposing pesantren morality but by demonstrating their embodiment of it.<sup>59</sup> As one female santri described, "We follow pesantren values not just because we must, but because we believe these values give us strength and allow us to serve our community with sincerity." Another senior woman's organizational leader explained, "Participating in public religious activities is how we show our commitment to what Kiai As'ad taught us. When we speak or teach, we do so as representatives of pesantren morals." These perspectives illustrate how women ground their participation in everyday reality, actively affirming and interpreting pesantren moral frameworks as part of their own religious agency. The communicative reproduction of Kiai As'ad's legacy, therefore, does not merely constrain women's participation; it simultaneously provides the moral resources through which that participation is institutionally claimed and sustained.

Nevertheless, the framework should not be interpreted as inherently inclusive. Sharia-based communication may also function as a mechanism of exclusion when moral regulations and institutional interpretations are mobilized to restrict women's participation. Consequently, religious communication can produce both inclusion and exclusion depending on how legitimacy is constructed within specific social contexts. The analytical value of the framework lies in its ability to explain these competing outcomes through communicative negotiation.

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<sup>57</sup> Mahmudi and Ahmad N. Rizal, "Reviving Values through Tradition," *Mimbar Agama Budaya* 42, no. 1 (2025); Moh. A. Manan and M. Bajuri, "Budaya Literasi," *JPII* 4, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>58</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 153–188.

<sup>59</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28–53; Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5–14.

### C. Sharia and Hakikat as Dual Communicative Modes: Negotiating Gender within Pesantren Moral Horizons

Where the preceding discussion established how Kiai As'ad's moral legacy is communicatively reproduced within Sukorejo, the analytical task of this section is distinct: to demonstrate how sharia-based and hakikat-based communication operate not as sequential or opposing forces, but as simultaneously active and mutually constitutive communicative modes through which gender relations are continuously negotiated within pesantren life. This distinction is analytically consequential. Prior scholarship has tended to treat Sharia either as a regulatory apparatus constraining women or, in more recent empowerment-oriented literature, as a framework being progressively loosened to accommodate women's expanded roles.<sup>60</sup> Both framings remain structurally oriented and fail to account for the communicative logic through which Sharia and hakikat interact in everyday pesantren life.

Sharia-based communication within Sukorejo operates primarily through behavioral regulation, spatial ethics, institutional discipline, and the preservation of communal moral boundaries. It governs the physical organization of pesantren space, the separation of male and female dormitories, the etiquette of gender interaction, dress codes, and the behavioral expectations structuring women's visibility within institutional life.<sup>61</sup> This regulatory dimension is not experienced within pesantren culture as external imposition but as a constitutive feature of religious identity, a point Asad makes when arguing that Islamic disciplinary practices are inseparable from the formation of moral subjectivity.<sup>62</sup> At the textual level of Fairclough's CDA, sharia-based communication is instantiated in institutional regulations, behavioral guidelines, and the normative religious language governing propriety, modesty, and gender interaction throughout pesantren life.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Dina Afrianty, *Women and Sharia Law in Northern Indonesia* (London: Routledge, 2015), 44–61; Eka Srimulyani, *Women from Traditional Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 88–104.

<sup>61</sup> Z. Q. A'yun and D. D. Prianti, "Rhetoric in the Islamic-Javanese Communication Pesantren Tradition," *Analisis* 24, no. 1 (2022); Fatmawati, "Gender, Authority, and Islamic Education," *Syaikhuna* 15, no. 2 (2023)

<sup>62</sup> Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 56–98; Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 63–88.

Hakikat-based communication operates through a fundamentally different logic. Rather than governing conduct through external behavioral prescription, it works through ethical internalization, cultivating sincerity, communal responsibility, moral-spiritual awareness, and affective attachment to religious authority as interior dimensions of religious selfhood.<sup>64</sup> Where sharia-based communication establishes the boundaries of acceptable conduct, hakikat-based communication shapes the moral consciousness through which those boundaries are understood as spiritually meaningful rather than merely obligatory. Nasr's analysis of Islamic spirituality is instructive here: the interior dimensions of Islamic practice, sincerity, moral intention, and spiritual cultivation constitute a distinct but inseparable dimension of Islamic normative life, not reducible to juridical categories.<sup>65</sup> Schimmel similarly demonstrates that mystical and ethical dimensions of Islamic tradition operate through communicative practices that cultivate embodied moral sensibilities across generations.<sup>66</sup>

The analytical contribution of the Hakikat-Sharia Gender Communication Framework lies precisely in its refusal to privilege either dimension. Butler's theorization of gender as performative constituted through repeated enactments rather than expressive of a prior essence provides a useful, if partial, parallel here.<sup>67</sup> Gender within pesantren is indeed produced through repetition: the repeated performance of propriety, modesty, ethical speech, and communal responsibility. However, Butler's framework, developed within a secular feminist epistemology, does not adequately account for the moral-spiritual dimension through which these repetitions are experienced as religiously meaningful rather than merely socially constructed.<sup>68</sup> Mahmood's critique of liberal agency frameworks is more analytically productive in this context: religious discipline within pesantren operates through ethical self-formation, where the cultivation of moral virtues, including gendered ones, is understood by women themselves as constitutive of religious subjectivity rather than as its

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<sup>64</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1987); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 5–14

<sup>65</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (London: Routledge, 1987).

<sup>66</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

<sup>67</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 24–34.

<sup>68</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 17–39

constraint.<sup>69</sup> The two communicative modes, Sharia and hakikat, therefore operate conjunctively: Sharia structures the communicative environment within which gender is enacted, while hakikat provides the moral-spiritual vocabulary through which that enactment acquires religious legitimacy and personal meaning.

The most analytically instructive site for observing the interaction between sharia-based and hakikat-based communication is the growing domain of digital da'wah among women at Sukorejo. This domain is significant precisely because it represents a context in which the tension between moral regulation and expanded participation is most visibly negotiated and where the communicative logic of the Hakikat–Sharia framework is most concretely demonstrable.

At the level of discursive practice, digital religious communication among Sukorejo women does not represent a departure from pesantren moral horizons. Rather, it constitutes a new communicative arena in which the same ethical values, propriety, modesty, sincerity, and communal responsibility are reproduced through digitally mediated forms.<sup>70</sup> As one informant directly observed:

*"Today, Bu Nyai is also actively spreading Islamic teachings through social media and TikTok live streams. Pesantren da'wah is no longer limited to face-to-face religious study sessions, but has entered digital spaces."* (Ifa, santri)

Analyzed through Fairclough's discursive practice dimension, this observation reveals something analytically significant: the communicative content and ethical register of pesantren da'wah remain continuous across the transition from face-to-face to digital settings.<sup>71</sup> What changes is the communicative medium and the scale of public reach; what persists is the moral vocabulary, the ethical authority of the nyai as religious communicator, and the pesantren values reproduced through her communication. Digital space, therefore, functions not as a liberatory break from pesantren moral structure but as an extended communicative arena through which pesantren religious legitimacy is reproduced within broader Muslim public spheres.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 153–188.

<sup>70</sup> Ahmad F. Abidin, H. Ramadan, and Zaenal Mukarom, "Habitus di Arena Simbolik," *Jurnal Komunikasi Universitas Garut* 12, no. 1 (2026); Eva F. Nisa, "Female Preachers and Islamic Authority in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>71</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 71–96.

<sup>72</sup> James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 42–58.

While institutional legitimacy remains important, women are not merely passive recipients of religious authority. Female participants described their involvement in education, organizational leadership, digital da'wah, and community service as expressions of religious responsibility and personal commitment. Their agency emerges through actively interpreting and embodying pesantren values within changing social contexts rather than through direct resistance to institutional authority.

This finding directly engages the sociocultural practice dimension of Fairclough's framework, the third analytical level at which discourse is situated within broader social transformation.<sup>73</sup> The expansion of women's digital da'wah at Sukorejo is embedded within wider transformations in Indonesian Muslim public life, where digitally mediated religious communication has become an increasingly significant site for the negotiation of Islamic authority, gender roles, and religious legitimacy.<sup>74</sup> Yet the pesantren response to this transformation is neither uncritical adoption nor defensive rejection. Instead, digital communication is incorporated through a communicative logic that simultaneously accommodates new social realities and reproduces pesantren moral authority, precisely the interaction between sharia-based regulation and hakikat-based moral flexibility that the present framework theorizes.

The account of Kiai As'ad's communicative approach provided by a senior pesantren alumnus illuminates the deeper logic underlying this adaptive capacity:

*"Kiai As'ad always considered people's circumstances first. Not every issue was treated in the same way. Sometimes the emphasis was on Sharia, while at other times on social welfare and public benefit. Therefore, his decisions were highly contextual."* (Miftah, senior pesantren alumnus)

This account is analytically rich and warrants sustained attention. It does not describe a figure who suspended Sharia in favor of pragmatic social calculation, nor one who applied Sharia mechanically without regard for context. Rather, it describes a communicative orientation in which sharia-based regulation and hakikat-based concern for communal welfare (*maslahah*) were deployed contextually and in relation to each other precisely as the present framework

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<sup>73</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Longman, 1995), 89–112

<sup>74</sup> Eva F. Nisa, "Female Preachers and Islamic Authority in Indonesia," *Asian Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (2018); Ahmad D. Nugroho, "Empowering Voices from Pesantren," *Al-Tanzim* 8, no. 2 (2024).

theorizes.<sup>75</sup> Kiai As'ad's contextual communicative approach, as reproduced through this and similar accounts circulating within the pesantren community, provides the moral precedent through which contemporary adaptations, including women's digital religious engagement, acquire institutional legitimacy. His communicative legacy does not merely authorize what women may do; it provides the ethical reasoning through which the community understands why such authorization is religiously coherent.<sup>76</sup>

The findings presented across this and the preceding discussion ultimately support a reconceptualization of women's positioning within Sukorejo that resists both the patriarchal domination thesis and the linear emancipation narrative prevalent in much of the existing literature.<sup>77</sup> Women at Sukorejo do not occupy their institutional positions despite pesantren moral structures; they occupy them through communicative processes that those structures themselves enable and legitimize.

This distinction is theoretically consequential. Mahmood's analysis of women in the Egyptian mosque movement demonstrated that religious discipline operates through ethical self-formation, the cultivation of virtues, dispositions, and moral sensibilities that constitute rather than constrain religious subjectivity.<sup>78</sup> Within Sukorejo, the parallel is direct. Women who participate in organizational leadership, public da'wah, and digital religious communication do not do so by negotiating exemptions from pesantren moral expectations. They do so by demonstrating their embodiment of those expectations by enacting the values of propriety, sincerity, communal responsibility, and moral seriousness that the pesantren communicative tradition continuously reproduces.<sup>79</sup> Their agency is expressed not in opposition to pesantren morality but through the moral legitimacy that pesantren communication itself provides.

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<sup>75</sup> Mahmudi and Ahmad N. Rizal, "Reviving Values through Tradition," *Mimbar Agama Budaya* 42, no. 1 (2025): 1–14.

<sup>76</sup> Irfan F. Ilyas and Rina Y. Lestari, "Syair Aqaid Saeket," *Al-Hikmah* 22, no. 1 (2023); Moh. A. Manan and M. Bajuri, "Budaya Literasi," *JPII* 4, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>77</sup> Siti Bella, H. Syaifuddin, and Jamilah, "From Subordination to Authority," *MUMTAZ* 5, no. 4 (2026); Fitri Maulidina et al., "Feminism and Gender Justice in Pesantren Life," *IJITH* 4, no. 2 (2025).

<sup>78</sup> Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 28–53.

<sup>79</sup> Evi Muafiah et al., "Gendered Pesantren in Contemporary Indonesia" (2024); Vivie Nurhidayati, "Peran Pesantren dalam Pemberdayaan Perempuan," *TSAQAFATUNA* 7, no. 1 (2024).

Hirschkind's analysis of Islamic ethical sensibilities further illuminates this dynamic. The cultivation of embodied ethical dispositions through everyday communicative practice, sermon attendance, ritual participation, organizational engagement, and now digital da'wah produces moral subjects whose religious agency is inseparable from the communicative traditions that formed it.<sup>80</sup> Women within Sukorejo are moral agents in precisely this sense: their capacity to claim institutional space is grounded in communicative legitimacy rather than in structural concession or individual resistance.

At the sociocultural level, this finding challenges the secular-modernization assumption that increased women's participation inevitably erodes traditional religious authority.<sup>81</sup> The evidence from Sukorejo suggests the contrary: pesantren traditions sustain institutional continuity precisely by reproducing moral legitimacy within communicative environments that continue to evolve. Sharia-based communication preserves symbolic stability and institutional order; hakikat-based communication enables contextual moral flexibility without surrendering pesantren identity. Through this dual communicative process, pesantren traditions sustain moral authority while simultaneously legitimizing women's participation in education, socio-religious organizations, public da'wah, and digitally mediated religious communication.<sup>82</sup> Gender within pesantren, therefore, is not a fixed institutional arrangement awaiting liberation or lamenting tradition. It is a continuously negotiated communicative achievement, produced, reproduced, and renegotiated through the ongoing interaction of Sharia, hakikat, symbolic authority, and the living moral legacy of Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin.

Although these findings are grounded in the specific context of Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo, they may offer relevant analytical insights for other pesantren and Islamic educational contexts, particularly where moral authority and tradition interact with expanding domains of female participation. The dual communicative framework of Sharia and hakikat could be used to explore how other institutions manage similar tensions between

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<sup>80</sup> Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 28–47.

<sup>81</sup> Rachel Rinaldo, *Mobilizing Piety* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Kurniawati Hastuti Dewi, *Women in Indonesian Islam* (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2015)

<sup>82</sup> Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 129–146; James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 18–33.

institutional continuity and adaptation. However, the degree of applicability will depend on factors such as local leadership traditions, the specific moral vocabulary in circulation, patterns of institutional authority, and openness to digital engagement. Future research could address these comparative dynamics more directly to clarify how the communicative processes identified here may manifest or diverge across diverse pesantren environments and broader Islamic contexts.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This study showed that gender relations at Pondok Pesantren Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo developed through ongoing religious communication. These relations could not be fully explained by patriarchal domination or simple stories of women's emancipation. The findings indicated that women in Sukorejo held roles similar to those of men in education, organizational leadership, public da'wah, and digital religious communication. They did not bypass pesantren moral boundaries. Instead, they relied on communicative legitimacy rooted in the ethical legacy of Kiai As'ad Syamsul Arifin. His five-point wasiat, which spread through sermons, alum networks, organizational forums, and digital platforms, provided the moral language that allowed women's participation to grow as part of pesantren religious responsibility. Gender negotiation in the pesantren worked through communication that balanced sharia-based institutional rules with hakikat-based ethical values. These two approaches supported each other and did not act as opposites.

These findings led to the development of the Hakikat–Sharia Gender Communication Framework. This framework offered a new way to understand religion, communication, and gender in pesantren. Unlike other approaches that focused only on patriarchy, conservatism, or individual women's agency, this framework emphasized religious communication as the main way gender norms formed. In pesantren, people produced, negotiated, legitimized, and repeated these norms in daily life. The framework showed that sharia-based rules and hakikat-based moral growth worked together. They helped keep the institution stable and supported social change. This study was an intrinsic case study and did not aim for statistical generalization. However, the communicative patterns found here may help explain gender negotiation in other pesantren and Islamic schools. Future comparative studies across different pesantren traditions are needed to determine whether this framework applies in other contexts.

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