

Constructing The Meaning Of Women In Islamic Education: A Discourse Analysis Of Kitab Kuning From A Philosophy Of Science Perspective

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Abstract

As a faith-based educational institution, the pesantren initially emerged as a center for the cultivation of religious values and the dissemination of Islam. Because its primary character is that of an Islamic educational institution, the pesantren has, over time, systematically developed a distinctive Islamic tradition. One enduring hallmark of this tradition is the continued practice of reading and teaching kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts). Sustained for generations, the study of kitab kuning has become a substantive and authoritative reference within pesantren communities. Moreover, the pesantren's emphasis on the continuity of sanad, which traces chains of transmission back to the Prophet and earlier scholars, positions kitab kuning not merely as instructional materials but also as a medium for transmitting scholarly authority grounded in recognized lineages of knowledge. However, when classical texts are treated as normative references, their discourse may operate as an epistemic regime that legitimizes particular moral orders and shapes socio-religious identities within educational practice. This article examines how Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani's 'Uqūd al-Lujayn fī Bayān Ḥuqūq al-Zawjayn constructs meanings about women and how these meanings are reproduced as pedagogical "truths" in Islamic education in pesantren. Methodologically, this study employs a library research design by integrating: (1) Michel Foucault's power/knowledge framework to explain regimes of truth and disciplinary normalization; (2) Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to map textual strategies and their articulation with discursive and social practices; and (3) Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy to formulate a dialogical reconstruction of learning. The primary data are drawn from the Indonesian translation, Syarh 'Uqūd al-Lujayn (Etika Berumah Tangga), including its internal citations (Qur'anic verses, hadith reports, and moral narratives). Secondary data consist of recent scholarly studies on gender discourse in pesantren, kitab kuning scholarship, and reputable theoretical works in hermeneutics and philosophy of education. Findings based on the primary text indicate that 'Uqūd al-Lujayn frames women predominantly within a relational and hierarchical ontology centered on husband and wife relations, elevates obedience and domestic piety as moral ideals, and strengthens its claims through the situated citation of scriptural evidences and appeals to scholarly authority. This argumentative structure generates asymmetric moral standards that may function as a hidden curriculum in pesantren learning. The article contributes to Islamic educational philosophy by offering an epistemological critique of classical-text authority and proposing a pedagogical reconstruction through critical and dialogical reading, contextual hermeneutics, and gender-just interpretive principles.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of women's empowerment has long been recognized in modern society. Empowerment can be understood as an effort to position women as individuals who possess the rights and capacities to exercise control over, and provide direction for, their own lives, so that women may attain a status and position equal to those of men as fellow members of society. Nevertheless, there are factors that cause women to be constrained in conditions of powerlessness or incapacity, one of which is ignorance. Ignorance places women in a disadvantaged position

because they are unable to understand how discriminatory practices, constructed socially, are imposed upon them. They do not know the rights they should obtain; nor do they understand what constitutes “natural” roles and what constitutes gender roles.

The process of raising consciousness and empowering women can be pursued when pathways to educational access are widely opened. Education serves as a means to broaden patterns of thought, shape mentalities, and strengthen women’s resilience in confronting life’s challenges. Through education, women’s cognitive capacities are expanded and their intellects are sharpened so that they may think rationally, realize their potential and creativity, possess motivation for advancement and achievement, pursue careers, and attain dignity comparable to that of men. However, the discourse of empowerment does not always proceed straightforwardly across all educational spaces. In tradition-based religious education, particularly within pesantren, the formation of perspectives on women is often influenced by reference texts (turath) that are repeatedly taught in classrooms. For this reason, examining how classical texts shape pedagogical truths is crucial for understanding points of tension between empowerment ideals and the practical reproduction of norms.

Historically, both formal and non-formal education have existed for a long time. Nevertheless, not everyone is able to access formal education, which is often costly. Therefore, non-formal education emerged as an alternative that offers more accessible learning opportunities. One enduring example of non-formal education is that of traditional or salafi pesantren, which study kitab kuning (classical texts) as the primary source of learning activities after the Qur’an and hadith.

Similarly, in this study the author intends to discuss, in a specific manner, the context of teaching the book *Uqud al-Lujayn* at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Al-Azhar, Citangkolo, Banjar City, West Java. This contextualization is presented as a site of discourse reproduction, namely a pedagogical space in which classical-text discourse gains normative force and is reproduced, rather than as a claim of full-scale field research.

In several pesantren that also teach classical texts, kitab kuning are not merely instructional materials. More than that, they are regarded as the heart of the entire educational process, which not only forms scholarly authority but also, often unconsciously, constructs students (santri) as subjects who learn through adab, chains of scholarly transmission (sanad), and reverence for the ulama tradition (Syua’ib & Husni, 2025). One of the kitab kuning most widely studied in pesantren is the work of Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani entitled *Uqud al-Lujayn fi Huquq al-Zawjayn*. From the perspective of the philosophy of education, the tradition of reading and teaching such classical texts is crucial to examine, because whatever is taught continuously, how it is taught, and how truth is attached to the text will, gradually, shape an individual’s ways of thinking and acting.

According to Ratnasari (2021), the kitab kuning used as references in pesantren teaching and learning generally revolve around the intellectual frameworks of Ash’ari theology, Shafi’i jurisprudence, and al-Ghazali’s Sufism (Ratnasari, 2021). Problems then arise when a classical text such as *Uqud al-Lujayn* is positioned as a normative reference that appears stable and final for addressing all issues and contexts. In gender-related matters, for instance, the book’s discussions of family life and marital ethics are very often used as primary references in shaping social norms. The classical text *Uqud al-Lujayn* by Shaykh Nawawi al-Bantani is considered by some to contain discussions that seem unsupportive of women, because it includes themes concerning the rights and obligations of husbands and wives, domestic piety, and regulations governing behavior and interactions between men and women. In the translated commentary (sharh) of *Uqud al-Lujayn*, for example, Chapter I opens directly with Qur’anic evidence from

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Surat al-Nisa (4:34) on qawwam, thereby indicating a legitimating strategy. The construction of marital-relations norms begins through citation of the verse, while the normative elaboration follows thereafter (An-Nawawi al-Bantani, 2000, p. 45).

Referring to Ratnasari's study, several Orientalists who researched kitab kuning in Indonesia, among them Martin van Bruinessen, have noted that Uqud al-Lujayn is among the books most commonly studied in pesantren. Yet, according to Indonesian Islamic critical groups, this text is considered highly unfriendly toward women. Many statements are viewed as placing women in a secondary, domestic, and marginalized position (Ratnasari, 2021). The study reinforces the point that this classical work by Shaykh Imam Nawawi al-Bantani is widely used and attracts considerable readership, especially within Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren. The initial basis of discourse acceptance in this book appears as early as the introduction, when the author states that the text was composed in response to readers' requests (An-Nawawi al-Bantani, 2000, p. 3).

Within an educational context, the content and reading practices of a text such as Uqud al-Lujayn have the potential to construct pedagogical truths about women, namely understandings regarded as true because they are taught, repeatedly rehearsed, and legitimized by classroom authority, rather than tested through reflective inquiry. Therefore, the urgency of this article lies in the need to examine the issue in depth. First, it addresses an epistemological problem by tracing how knowledge about women is produced and justified through the citation of scriptural proofs, the authority of the ulama, and rhetorical devices (moral narratives). Second, it addresses a pedagogical problem by explaining how such knowledge is transmitted within educational spaces so that it may become a hidden curriculum that unconsciously regulates how santri understand bodies, social space, and family relations. Rahma (2025) emphasizes that women's voices in the kitab kuning tradition often undergo interpretive repression and even epistemic exclusion, namely when women's experiences are not recognized as legitimate sources of knowledge (Rahma, 2025).

This article focuses its analysis on the construction of meanings of womanhood in the text Uqud al-Lujayn as a learning discourse: (a) how women are represented (ontology and moral identity), (b) how normative claims are legitimized (the epistemology of authority), and (c) how its pedagogical effects may be understood as a power-knowledge relation within educational spaces. This study will examine: (1) How does Uqud al-Lujayn construct representations of women within the relational framework of husband-wife relations and socio-religious norms? (2) What discursive strategies are employed to legitimize these claims? (3) What are the implications for the philosophy of Islamic education, particularly regarding educational aims, the status of truth, and directions for the development of pesantren curricula? Meanwhile, the objectives of this article are: (1) to present a critical and argumentative analysis of the construction of meanings of womanhood in the teaching of kitab kuning; (2) to demonstrate philosophical dimensions, namely the epistemology, ontology, and axiology of knowledge in education, by drawing on theorists such as Foucault, Fairclough, and Freire; and (3) to offer a pedagogical reconstruction that enables classical texts to continue being taught with proper adab within tradition, yet read in reflective, dialogical, and gender-just ways. The author hopes that this article will contribute to enriching studies in Islamic education and the philosophy of science, particularly in the critical reading of classical textual authority.

2. METHOD

This study employs a library-based qualitative research design. The analytical method integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough) to map linguistic strategies and discursive practices, philosophy of science and education analysis drawing on the theories of Michel Foucault and Paulo Freire to examine the status of pedagogical truth, power relations, and the axiological orientation of education, and contextual hermeneutics to bridge the world of the text with contemporary learning contexts.

The institutional context of this research is situated in a Madrasah Diniyah at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Al-Azhar, Citangkolo, Banjar City, West Java. This learning setting is employed to illustrate how texts are positioned and function within educational processes, while the primary data remain derived from textual analysis (library research) and supported by relevant scholarly literature (Nawawi al-Bantani, 2000).

The analytical procedure is conducted concisely through several stages: (1) selection of thematic textual units (husband and wife rights and obligations, domestic piety, and the regulation of interaction and the body); (2) discourse coding (modality, moral evaluation, subject and object representation, and strategies of legitimation); (3) interpretation at the levels of discursive practice (how the text is commonly taught within the pesantren tradition) and social practice (structures of gender relations); and (4) formulation of implications for the philosophy of education and proposals for pedagogical reconstruction.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The kitab kuning constitutes a cultural product of the medieval period, largely shaped by a gendered cultural sensibility that is closely aligned with male perspectives. It is therefore unsurprising that discussions within and about the kitab kuning are often permeated by male interests and implicit biases. Over a considerable period, the tradition of reading and teaching the kitab kuning has expanded and become deeply embedded within institutions such as pesantren. This article, which investigates the discursive mechanisms of reproduction through the teaching of the text 'Uqud al-Lujayn at the Madrasah Diniyah Putri of Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Al-Azhar in Banjar City, follows this trajectory. Accordingly, the terms employed in this study are not treated as abstract concepts, but rather as plausible effects that emerge when the text of 'Uqud al-Lujayn is taught and internalized through pesantren practices of reading and instruction.

At Pesantren Miftahul Huda Al-Azhar, the kitab kuning does not merely function as a neutral textual artifact. It operates as a pedagogical apparatus, namely an authoritative reference that structures modes of learning, shapes perceptions of authority, and determines criteria of truth by appealing to the scholarly tradition and scriptural proofs. In Foucauldian terms, an apparatus (*dispositif*) refers to a network of practices and discourses that produces particular kinds of subjects. Consequently, the teaching of the kitab does not only generate knowledge, but also cultivates a *habitus* of deference to authority and the internalization of norms as personal morality. As a normative reference, 'Uqud al-Lujayn is thus capable of producing a powerful truth effect, especially when delivered through a one-directional model of transmission. At this stage, Freire's critique becomes relevant. When kitab-based learning tends toward a banking model, students are positioned to receive norms as a complete package and to absorb them uncritically, even though Islamic education also requires *hikmah*, understood here as reflective wisdom, and moral responsibility.

Once it is established that kitab instruction can consolidate an authority of truth within the classroom, the subsequent analytical step is to examine what kind of subject is produced by the

text. For this reason, the following section investigates how ‘Uqūd al-Lujayn positions women as moral subjects within the structure of family relations.

A. The ontology of women and patterns of relational hierarchy

In philosophy, ontology concerns how something is understood as “being” or “real,” while in discourse studies the concept may be employed to examine how a text constructs the basic identity of a subject. Therefore, prior to discussing norms and obligations, it is necessary to consider how ‘Uqud al-Lujayn first frames women as subjects. In other words, the analysis attends to how the text constructs women’s foundational identity before elaborating ethical prescriptions. From a discourse perspective, women in ‘Uqud al-Lujayn are predominantly framed through a relational ontology, in which women are primarily understood as wives within the husband and wife relationship. Women’s moral identity is then constructed through normative categories such as obedience, the safeguarding of honor, and the fulfillment of domestic duties. This relationality is not merely a sociological description, but a normative structure that defines what counts as the “good woman” within an educational setting. Alma’arif and Muhajir (2023) argue that ‘Uqud al-Lujayn, widely studied in pesantren, contains indications of gender bias and can function as a legitimating instrument for the construction of such bias (Alma’arif & Muhajir, 2023). This finding is consistent with an ontological reading in which, when women are reduced to relational functions, the space for agency and epistemic autonomy tends to narrow.

B. Discursive strategies of legitimation

At the textual level, normative claims in ‘Uqud al-Lujayn are reinforced through the citationality of religious proofs, including Qur’anic verses and hadith, the authority of scholars and their opinions, as well as moral narratives. Within critical discourse analysis, such structures are not simply a matter of reference. They function as legitimation strategies designed to render claims as certain, reduce the space for contestation, and direct readers toward accepting conclusions as moral common sense. In the classroom context of madrasah diniyah within pesantren, the citationality of scriptural proof operates with particular force. Proof-texts do not merely serve as evidence, but also signal that the discussion belongs to a sacred domain that should not be challenged. As a result, critique is frequently misconstrued as qillatul adab, understood as a lack of proper etiquette. Here, Foucault’s framework is instructive, since truth is not determined solely by correspondence, but by regimes of truth, namely networks that determine what may be considered true and who is authorized to speak. When a pedagogical regime of truth leaves little space for dialogue, learning practices tend to reproduce hierarchy without ethical reflection.

C. Discipline of the body, space, and domestic piety

One of the most significant pedagogical effects of classical texts that address household life is a pedagogy of space, namely the ways in which a text directs subjects to organize their movement and spatial conduct. Classical works that emphasize domestic piety, with the home imagined as a locus of virtue, and caution toward public space, tend to orient women toward a form of piety closely tied to the restriction of mobility. In Foucauldian terms, this constitutes a form of discipline that exceeds external punishment, since the subject comes to monitor herself through shame, fear of slander, and the desire to be recognized as morally good. Gender studies on pesantren indicate that traditional literature often serves as the basis for gender norms that become internalized as piety. Nuroniyah (2023), for example, explains that gender discourse in pesantren is frequently grounded in traditional Islamic literature and diverse interpretations of the concept of qawwam, ranging from extreme patriarchal to more

moderate positions (Nuroniyah, 2023). This insight enables domesticity to be read not as a neutral rule, but as a norm operating within a spectrum of gender ideologies.

The regulation of body and space subsequently shapes patterns of moral evaluation. It indicates who bears the greatest responsibility for honor, who is presumed most vulnerable to moral error, and who is considered to require surveillance. From this point, the possibility emerges of an imbalanced moral standard in learning practices.

D. Asymmetrical moral standards and the hidden curriculum

Discursive structures that prioritize obedience and the regulation of body and space may generate asymmetrical moral standards in which women carry substantially heavier moral burdens, such as responsibility for family honor, the anticipation of slander, and the control of interaction, while men are more often positioned as holders of relational authority. In an educational context, such asymmetrical structures can become a hidden curriculum when students learn that social order depends upon controlling women. At this juncture, the philosophy of education raises an axiological question: for what ends is household education oriented. Ideally, if the aims of Islamic education include justice and compassion, pedagogical practices should strengthen shared responsibility and reciprocal ethics, rather than concentrating moral burdens primarily upon women.

E. Epistemic exclusion and women's voices

Rahma (2025) identifies a crucial problem within the kitab kuning tradition, namely that women's voices may be marginalized through epistemic exclusion. Rahma calls for readings that open space for women's experience so that women do not remain mere objects of discourse (Rahma, 2025). In the context of reading and teaching 'Uqud al-Lujayn, epistemic exclusion may occur when women's experiences, including domestic violence, double burdens of labor, or economic relations, are not treated as ethically relevant data for assessing the pedagogical impact of a norm. From a Foucauldian perspective, epistemic exclusion can be understood as an effect of a regime of truth that determines who is recognized as a legitimate speaking subject. When only certain authorities are acknowledged, such as teachers, ulama, or ustadz, women's experiences, though real, may be dismissed as unscientific or irrelevant within kitab discussions. This constitutes a problem in the philosophy of science, since criteria of truth and evidence are not neutral, but attached to structures of power.

F. Dialogue with recent scholarship and academic grounding

A growing body of scholarship indicates that the teaching and interpretation of classical texts addressing family relations and the rights and obligations within them has received increasing attention. First, Alma'arif and Muhajir (2023) underscore indications of gender bias in 'Uqud al-Lujayn and its role in legitimating such constructions. Second, studies of pesantren gender discourse, such as Nuroniyah (2023), demonstrate a spectrum of understandings of qawwam and gender ideology among kiai. Third, research on women's agency in contemporary pesantren shows that nyai and women educators can act as agents of curricular and pedagogical transformation. For example, Muafiah et al. (2024) discuss women's agency and gendered pesantren life in contemporary contexts (Muafiah et al., 2024). This scholarly dialogue provides an evidentiary basis to avoid framing critical reading as mere opinion. Rather, the present article is situated within recent research mapping critiques of gender bias in texts, the spectrum of pesantren gender ideologies, and the roles of women actors in education. In addition, studies of pesantren-based women's empowerment suggest that religious education can become a medium for strengthening women's capacities and

agency when curricula and learning practices provide space for reflection, participation, and the affirmation of female students' experiences (Ratnasari, 2021). These findings reinforce the argument that kitab kuning instruction should be located within a pedagogy that is both critical and rooted in adab, so that textual authority does not suppress women's reasoning and lived experience.

G. Pedagogical reconstruction: a critical yet adab-oriented reading

The reconstruction proposed in this article situates kitab kuning learning within three principles of educational philosophy. In Freirean terms, kitab-based instruction can be shifted from a banking model toward problem-posing education, in which students are encouraged to question moral rationales, social contexts, and the pedagogical consequences of norms. Such reconstruction may be implemented through musyawarah kitab, thematic bahtsul masa'il, and collaborative learning practices that incorporate the perspectives of women educators.

H. Operationalization and contribution of the study

The following operational model is designed as a practical solution compatible with pesantren culture:

- 1) Step 1, *ta'dzim* of the text (adab). The teacher clarifies the status of turath and the ethics of reading.
- 2) Step 2, discourse mapping (critical discourse analysis). Students identify claims, forms of proof or authority, and moral framing.
- 3) Step 3, hermeneutic dialogue. Students compare the world of the text with contemporary realities in a responsible manner.
- 4) Step 4, practical transformation. Students formulate an ethics of family life grounded in rahmah, reciprocity, and protection from domestic violence.

This model seeks to maintain a balance between tradition, including adab and scholarly authority, and academic-philosophical demands, including epistemological critique and axiological reflection. Ultimately, the principal contribution of this article is to demonstrate that gender issues in Islamic education should not be read merely as differences in normative content, but as an epistemology-of-education problem concerning how knowledge is produced, who is recognized as an authority, and how norms become pedagogical truths. By integrating the perspectives of Foucault, Fairclough, and Freire, this article contributes to the study of the kitab kuning through a critical approach to discursive production and pedagogical reconstruction, thereby moving beyond approaches that focus solely on textual content.

4. CONCLUSION

This article concludes that 'Uqud al-Lujayn frames women primarily within a relational and hierarchical ontology, centered on the wife-husband relationship, while emphasizing obedience, domestic piety, and the regulation of the body and social space. Its normative claims are reinforced through the citationality of scriptural proofs, the authority of ulama, and moral narratives, thereby carrying the potential to constitute a pedagogical regime of truth within pesantren learning. Such a discursive structure may produce asymmetrical moral standards that function as a hidden curriculum in education.

From the perspective of the philosophy of science and the philosophy of education, the central problem within the tradition of reading and teaching the kitab kuning, particularly 'Uqud al-Lujayn, lies not merely in the "content of the text," but in the mechanisms of legitimation and transmission that can foreclose dialogical space and intensify the epistemic exclusion of women's

experiences. Accordingly, this article proposes a pedagogical reconstruction through a critical yet adab-oriented learning model that draws on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), power and knowledge analytics, dialogical pedagogy, and ethical horizons grounded in maqasid and mubadalah. In this way, the turath tradition remains respected, while its educational practice is continually oriented toward the formation of faithful subjects who are just, reflective, and morally responsible.

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