




Reconsideration of Patriarchal Culture Through Balancing the Dual Roles of Rifa'iyah Women in Pekalongan

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Abstract

Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan managed to break free from constraints of patriarchal culture, enabling them to actively participate in the public sphere. Over time, they have initiated changes in their understanding and interpretation of religion, adapting these to contemporary developments. Their courage and consistency in these efforts have facilitated evolutionary adaptability within the social and cultural systems of the Rifa'iyah community, ultimately realizing complete freedom for women in public activities. This study employs the historical research method, encompassing heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The findings reveal, first, that Rifa'iyah women have driven societal change by challenging cultural norms through innovative interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith. They also hold that their actions align with the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i. Second, the social roles of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan include participation in the Wagean Islamic Study, establishing the UMRI organization, engaging in professional work, participating in activities outside the home, and being politically active. Moreover, Rifa'iyah women successfully balance dual roles by fulfilling their responsibilities as mothers and wives while collaborating with their husbands.

Perempuan Rifa'iyah di Pekalongan berhasil melepaskan diri dari belenggu budaya patriarki dan bebas bergerak di ruang publik. Perkembangan zaman membuat mereka mulai berusaha melakukan perubahan dalam pemahaman dan penafsiran agama yang harus disesuaikan dengan perkembangan zaman, keberanian dan konsistensi dalam bergerak yang pada akhirnya membuat

Kata Kunci: peran sosial, peran ganda, peran publik, perempuan Rifa'iyah

sistem sosial dan sistem budaya komunitas Rifa'iyah secara evolusioner dapat beradaptasi, sehingga kebebasan perempuan Rifa'iyah dalam beraktivitas di ruang publik dapat terealisasi secara total. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah metode penelitian sejarah yang meliputi heuristik, kritik, interpretasi, dan historiografi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan, pertama, perempuan Rifa'iyah berhasil menggerakkan perubahan dengan cara melawan arus budaya yang didasari oleh kebaruan penafsiran mereka terhadap Al-Qur'an dan Hadis. Mereka juga meyakini bahwa tindakan yang dilakukan sesuai dengan ajaran KH. Ahmad Rifa'i. Kedua, peran sosial perempuan Rifa'iyah di Pekalongan dimulai dari pengajian Wagean, mendirikan organisasi UMRI, aktif bekerja dan beraktivitas di luar rumah, serta aktif dalam politik. Selain itu, perempuan Rifa'iyah dapat berperan ganda dalam menjalankan kewajibannya sebagai ibu dan istri dalam rumah tangga dengan cara bermitra dengan suami.

Introduction

Rifa'iyah is a religious organization that has actively promoted Islamic revivalism from its inception. Beyond being an Islamic missionary movement, Rifa'iyah movement has been characterized as a social resistance movement (Kaprabowo, 2019). Its founder, K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i, opposed the Dutch colonial bureaucratic system through his writings and teachings in *Tarajumah* books (Djamil, 2001). These texts, which address *Ushuluddin*, *Fiqh*, and *Sufism*, explicitly encourage resistance against the colonial system, reflecting K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i's commitment to the renewal and purification of Islam in Java (Amin, 1997). Among his teachings was a prohibition against marrying individuals employed by the Dutch Colonial Government, who were regarded as infidels (Putra Utama et al., 2013).

K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i has succeeded in producing many local male ulama figures, for example Abdul Aziz from Wonosobo, Abu Hasan from Wonosobo, Muhammad Toyib from Kalibaru Batang, Abdul Hadi from Kretek Wonosobo, Abu Mansyur from Sepuran Wonosobo, Ishak from Sepuran Wonosobo, Abdul Hadi from Kretek Wonosobo, Abdul Kohar from Kendal, Abdul Fatah from Wonosobo, Muhammad Tubo from Purwosari Kendal, Maufuro (son-in-law of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i) from Kalisalak Batang, Munawir Wonobodro Batang, and Abu Ilham from Kalipucang Batang (Muhammad Khamdi, 2009).

One of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i's students who continued the preaching in the countryside was Abu Ilham. He developed the Rifa'iyah teachings in Kalipucang

Wetan Village, Batang, Central Java. Abu Ilham then founded the Rifaiyah Islamic Boarding School which is located close to the Salafiyah Mosque in Kalipucang Wetan (Muhammad Khamdi, 2009). Other disciples, such as Kiai Idris and Kiai Halim, expanded Rifa'iyah teachings to Pekalongan (Djamil, 2001), (Muhammad Khamdi, 2009).

The beginning of the formation of the Rifa'iyah organization came from the awareness of one of Rifa'iyah's followers named Cariban. He founded the Rifa'iyah Islamic Education Foundation in Pemalang on May 7, 1965. The establishment of the foundation is claimed to be the beginning of the de facto establishment of the Rifa'iyah Community Organization. After that, on December 25, 1991, Rifa'iyah leaders held a meeting at the Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School, Cirebon, one of the results of which was the official formation of the Rifa'iyah organization (Fadhila & Amaruli, 2020).

The establishment of the Rifa'iyah organization in 1965 apparently also disturbed the existence of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan to play a role in the organization, religion, and society. However, this desire was only realized on September 8, 2000 by forming the Rifa'iyah women's organization. The establishment of this organization was initiated by the Rifa'iyah teenage girls' group in Pekalongan under the name IFARI (*Ikatan Fatayat Rifa'iyah*). Then IFARI changed its name to RUMRI (*Remaja Umroh Rifa'iyah*) on January 11, 2001. After that, on March 3, 2002, it changed its name again to UMRI (*Umaroh Rifa'iyah*) which became a forum for all Rifa'iyah women and not just teenagers. Until finally on April 17, 2015, the name of this organization changed again to Ummahatur Rifa'iyah (Miftakhun Ni'mah, 2016). This organization generally oversees the management in the Pekalongan Regency, Pekalongan City, part of Batang Regency and Pemalang Regency.

The lack of women's roles in the historical records of the Rifa'iyah movement has caused anxiety about the existence of Rifa'iyah women who try to contribute to the Rifa'iyah congregation itself. Moreover, in the teachings of Rifa'iyah, women's voices are considered as *aurat* and should not be heard in general or heard by men who are not their *mahram* (Rosyid, 2020).

Although the opinion of Imam Zarkasyi and the majority of scholars contained in *Tabyinal Ishlah* book written by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i does not forbid it, but it reaches the level of *makruh* (discouraged) when in prayer and is permissible when outside of prayer. The opinion of K.H. Ahmad Rifai in *Tabyinal Ishlah* book also did not issue a sentence that forbids women's voices if they are heard by men (Amin, 2020).

However, K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i emphasized that hearing women's voices is permissible as long as it does not cause slander or arouse lust when hearing it. Of course, this can lead to many interpretations from his followers. Sometimes because of caution, the understanding that women should not speak in public becomes a doctrine that is widely spread among Rifa'iyah women, including in Pekalongan.

Despite this, the Rifa'iyah women of Pekalongan are not confined to domestic roles. They actively participate in social and organizational activities, contributing to the expansion of the Rifa'iyah movement. However, they continue to uphold their domestic responsibilities, ensuring that their involvement in external activities does not compromise their familial duties. This dual commitment defines the unique character of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan. Behind their active roles in supporting their husbands or engaging in organizational efforts, they still dedicate time to managing household affairs before pursuing external activities.

The Rifa'iyah women's organization serves as the foundation for their social movement in Pekalongan. Through this organization, they aim to demonstrate their societal roles and contribute meaningfully to the community. Their social activities also emphasize religious and cultural values, such as wearing Rifa'iyah *batik* cloth or sarongs, seeking their husbands' permission for activities outside the home, and maintaining modesty by covering their *aurat*. The inclusive and transformative nature of the Rifa'iyah women's organization, combined with its grounding in local wisdom, makes it distinctive in modern times. This organization exemplifies a strong women's association that harnesses the intelligence and resilience of Rifa'iyah women as a local resource to create a positive societal impact.

UMRI (*Unit Muslimah Rifa'iyah*) acts as a platform for Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan to sustain K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i's mission of improving the understanding and practice of Islamic teachings among his followers. Beyond religious education, UMRI also strives to develop educational institutions and enhance community welfare. By channeling their ideas and efforts through UMRI, Rifa'iyah women actively promote religious intellectualism, support educational advancement—particularly encouraging youth to pursue higher education—and improve societal well-being.

Rifa'iyah women are felt as the strength of the Rifa'iyah movement which is full of gentleness, warmth, and patience. Rifa'iyah women are a symbol of morality whose spirit lives in the family and society. As well as the extraordinary strength of femininity to support, protect and be a source of inspiration for the family and

society. It is natural that the role of women is so great, both in domestic and public roles (Christina S. Handayani and Ardhian Novianto, 2004).

The biggest challenge for Rifa'iyah women who want to play a role in public is pressure from the environment, especially pressure from senior clerics. Because they still think that women should stay at home. It is feared that if women go out of the house and dress up excessively it will invite danger for the women. So that the efforts of Rifa'iyah women to be able to play a role in public can be accepted without causing social destruction, they take a cultural approach with senior clerics such as K.H. Syadzirin Amin and the leaders of Rifa'iyah Pekalongan.

Peter L. Berger (1997) posits that society shapes humans, and humans, in turn, shape society. In the context of the Rifa'iyah movement, women play a crucial role in sustaining Rifa'iyah teachings and local wisdom, alongside their male counterparts. It is essential to recognize Rifa'iyah women as active contributors to both household and societal domains, ensuring the movement's development remains inclusive rather than predominantly masculine. Peter (2016) highlights that Javanese women traditionally hold multifaceted roles, including as entrepreneurs, guardians of tradition and religion, and cultural mediators.

Peter (2016) highlights that Javanese women traditionally hold multifaceted roles, including as entrepreneurs, guardians of tradition and religion, and cultural mediators. Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan embody these roles by actively contributing to the development of their organization and preserving their religious and cultural identity amid globalization and modernization.

This fact is finally able to erase the stigma that Rifa'iyah women are old-fashioned, traditional, undeveloped, and unable to keep up with the times. The spirit of UMRI in building Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan is one of the representations of a strong women's association. The strength and intelligence of Rifa'iyah women need to be supported, managed and developed as local potential, so that they become an example of Rifa'iyah women's organizations in other areas, and have a positive impact on the wider community.

This research is important to be conducted to find out the existence and social role of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan, which presents the discourse of transformative Islamic teachings in the life of religious society. This raises questions for researchers regarding the life and role of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan. So that it can be seen to what extent the life of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan, and is considered in the Rifa'iyah organization.

Studies on Rifa'iyah and Rifa'iyah women have been conducted by several previous researchers, such as the work of Fadhila and Amaruli, which focuses on the Rifa'iyah organization and its existence in Wonosobo where this existence is built with three activities, namely studying the *Tarajumah* book, establishing Islamic boarding schools, and establishing schools (Fadhila & Amaruli, 2020). Rosyid's work emphasizes the accommodative politics of the Rifa'iyah community towards the community environment in Kudus which is manifested in its activeness in the fields of government, social, and culture that are not rigid (Rosyid, 2022). Mustika's work emphasizes the preservation of Rifa'iyah *batik* as a cultural identity carried out by Rifa'iyah women in Batang, namely by holding free *batik* training for children and providing motivation to Rifa'iyah teenage girls to help preserve the culture inherited from their ancestors (Mustika, 2018). Rosyid's work emphasizes the role of Rifa'iyah women in maintaining Rifa'iyah teachings through the activeness of Rifa'iyah women in Pati in preaching with the *Tarajumah* book (Rosyid, 2020). The last is the work of Fadila et al., which emphasizes the important role of Rifa'iyah women in Batang in preserving Rifa'iyah *batik*, as well as the challenge of Rifa'iyah women to always preserve the Rifa'iyah *batik* culture which is full of religious values, namely *dhikr* and *shalawat* (Fadlia et al., 2020).

Previous studies have explicitly emphasized the role of Rifa'iyah women in preserving Rifa'iyah *batik*, the contribution of Rifa'iyah women in maintaining Rifa'iyah teachings through studying the *Tarajumah* Book, as well as the existence of the Rifa'iyah organization and how they adopt an inclusive attitude with the surrounding community. However, previous studies have not discussed the social role of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan in their roles in organizations, educational institutions, and the dual roles of Rifa'iyah women. Therefore, this study is aimed to analyze the problems that have been mentioned and to complement previous research studies.

To understand in depth the problems above, this paper focuses on several questions as follows: what is the role and status of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan and how is the life of Rifa'iyah women in the public sector. Based on these problems, this study aims to describe the role and status of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan and to see the portrait of the life of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan. So that it will be clear to what extent the life of Rifa'iyah women is shown in building their organizations and communities.

Research Method

This study employs a field research approach to analyze societal phenomena critically and in depth. The historical research method is applied, encompassing heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2001). *First*, heuristics, namely the process of collecting sources. The sources used in this study are primary sources and secondary sources. Primary sources are obtained through interviews and collection of document archives. The interview process was carried out continuously so that researchers could understand the meaning of the resource person's description. Interviews were conducted by researchers with the main actors of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan, such as Halimah, Chair of UMRI Central Java Region; Aminata Zuhriyah, Manager of UMRI Kedungwuni Branch; Kiswanti, Chair I of UMRI Pekalongan Region; Kiswati, Manager of UMRI Pekalongan Region, Chair of *Pengajian Wagean* Management of UMRI Pekalongan Region, and Caretaker of Raudhatul Fadhilah Paesan Tengah Females' Islamic Boarding School; Miskiyah, Chair of UMRI Pekalongan Region; Nok Istiafiyah, Secretary of UMRI Pekalongan Region; and Mufidatul Akromah, Deputy Chair of UMRI Paesan Tengah Branch. Sources of document archives include UMRI profiles, accountability reports (*LPJ*) of UMRI activities in 2022, UMRI organizational structure, and archives of deeds and by laws of the Rifa'iyah Islamic education foundation. Secondary sources were obtained from books and journals related to Rifa'iyah women.

Second, a critical process is carried out, namely internal criticism and external criticism of the data sources obtained. Internal criticism is carried out by comparing statements or information from all informants with each other in order to obtain factual data (Louis Gottschalk, 1985). External criticism is carried out based on the position of the informant in the organization, education and Islamic boarding school used as a source of research data. External criticism is carried out by researchers through matching the statements of one informant with another to minimize subjectivity (Hamid & Madjid, 2015). *Third*, interpretation is developed together with analysis supported by the concepts and theories used in a study (Abdurrahman, 2011). *Fourth*, historiography is carried out to report the results of the study which are written systematically and chronologically (Hana, 2020).

This research is social research that seeks to describe the role and position of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan using a historical approach and a sociological approach. The historical approach is used to find out unique and meaningful events that are monitored over time, so that aspects of change that occur in human life are

revealed (Abdurrahman, 2011). While the sociological approach is used to find out the phenomena experienced by society related to social interaction, social structure, social processes, and social change in society (Soerjono Soekanto, 1990).

To understand social phenomena related to gender that are complex, every depiction or description requires an approach that can describe the angle from which the reality of gender is written. This study will describe the role and position of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan using a historical approach and a sociological approach. The historical approach is used to find out unique and meaningful events that are monitored over time, so that aspects of change that occur in human life are revealed (Abdurrahman, 2011). While the sociological approach is used to find out the phenomena experienced by society related to social interaction, social structure, social processes, and social change in society (Soerjono Soekanto, 1990). To analyze the social and intellectual role of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan, this study refers to the concept of social roles and the concept of gender equality. Later, the concept can be explained based on theories as expressed by experts.

According to Mansour, gender shows the differences in the social roles of men and women in their community environment (Mansour Fakhri, 1996). Gender is a character formed by a society that lives in a social and cultural environment. It is the gender perspective that makes men and women not distinguished by sex or gender, but distinguished in the form of nature, status, and role in society. For example, women socially and culturally have activities taking care of children, households, and cooking. But in the current social and cultural environment, the role of men can be exchanged with the role of women, and vice versa.

According to Siti Musdah, the concept of gender usually refers to a set of traits, roles, responsibilities, functions, rights and behaviors that are inherent in men and women because of the formation of culture or the social environment of the society where humans grow and are raised (Siti Musdah Mulia, 2007). However, in the socio-cultural framework of Indonesian society, men are indeed seen as superior to women. So, the perception often arises in society that women's nature is as actors behind the scenes, as assistants to husbands and housewives who are instrumental in delivering the success of their children (Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, 1998).

Gender can be said to be a learning process for men and women to be educated in society according to their gender. This is what makes the gender paradigm refer to the learning process that individuals must undergo in society, to know their social

and cultural identity in their position and role in society. In other words, gender is the difference between women and men in roles, functions, rights, behaviors that are formed by local social and cultural provisions (Nugroho. Riant D, 2008).

Meanwhile, the concept of gender equality is a condition where men and women have the same rights as human beings, so that they can play a role and participate in social, economic, political, cultural, and educational fields (Fibrianto, 2018). Everyone has the same opportunity to develop themselves and play an active role in domestic and public life. With gender equality, women who are sometimes marginalized culturally due to patriarchal culture and conservative religious understanding, have the opportunity to be creative in building themselves, organizations, and society.

The Qur'an as a reference for the values and norms of Muslims, says that basically men and women are the same in the eyes of Allah (SWT) because of piety (QS. Al-Hujurat: 13). They are both servants of Allah who are only distinguished based on biology and not differences in their social context. Therefore, if the understanding of Islamic teachings is not in line with the principle of justice, that understanding should be re-examined. Then, it is necessary to reinterpret the study of women's *fiqh* in order to provide opportunities for women to be equal to men in their roles in public (Ats-Tsauri, 2020).

When women are granted the freedom to perform the same activities as men, they can actively contribute to the social fabric of their communities. According to Soerjono Soekanto, social roles are rights and obligations inherent to individuals based on their positions, reflecting their functions, adjustments, and processes within society (Soerjono Soekanto, 1990). Women, when provided the same rights as men, can participate in societal development, both through organizational activities and individual contributions, thereby shaping the social structure.

Structural changes within the Rifa'iyah movement in Pekalongan have significantly increased opportunities for Rifa'iyah women to engage in various roles. These changes have enhanced facilities accommodating women's participation in organizational, educational, Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*), and societal domains. These newfound opportunities must be utilized and implemented effectively to ensure the continuity of the movement's structural integrity.

The Role and Status of Rifa'iyah Women

Historically, the Rifa'iyah community in Pekalongan adhered to a social system that limited women's liberties. Women were perceived as weak and in need of male protection—an embodiment of sociological, not theological, male superiority. This system positioned men and women unequally in both public and domestic spheres.

The public sphere was traditionally associated with male self-actualization, while the domestic sphere was relegated to women (Hidayatullah et al., 2009). Such gender-based division of labor has disadvantaged women and is increasingly irrelevant in the context of modern scientific and technological advancements.

Women were subordinated to men, with limited freedom to participate in public life. Unmarried women were expected to obey their parents, while married women were obligated to obey their husbands. This practice was justified by the teachings of Rifa'iyah Islam. However, the underlying issue lies not in the personal differences between men and women but in the primitive social and cultural systems that constrain women's public roles. Beauvoir strongly opposes such systems, advocating for women's freedom to define their identities without external impositions (Thurfah Ilaa, 2021).

The Qur'an, in fact, explicitly grants men and women the flexibility to organize role divisions that are mutually beneficial rather than one-sided. Religious interpretations require contributions from both male and female perspectives to achieve balanced insights

In practice, societal norms often reflect a higher status for men, with obedience to husbands regarded as a religious obligation. This perspective is rooted in a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad SAW, narrated by Abu Hurairah, which states that the best wife is one who pleases her husband, obeys his orders, and safeguards his property in his absence.

Within the Rifa'iyah community of Pekalongan during the 1980s, primitive cultural practices led to significant restrictions on women's roles. Early marriages were common, with girls often married off at the onset of puberty to alleviate their families' economic burdens.

Women's education was undervalued, as society prioritized their domestic roles over academic pursuits. Few parents supported formal education for daughters, favoring Islamic boarding schools instead. These *pesantren* served as moral fortresses against external cultural influences and were viewed as the primary institutions for inculcating Rifa'iyah values.

After Rifa'iyah women graduate from Islamic boarding schools, they are usually immediately married by their parents' permission. According to Nok Istiafiyah - Secretary of UMRI Pekalongan, she is one of the many Rifa'iyah women who were married after finishing their studies at the Islamic boarding school. At that time, she finished studying at the Ribatul Islami Islamic Boarding School in Kaliwungu, Kendal in 2000. She actually had the willingness to continue her high school, but her parents did not agree. She was finally able to continue her education by taking a Package C Educational Program in 2022 after getting married. She considers education to be important for the future, especially in the present. Men and women have the same rights in pursuing education, so this convenience must be utilized properly. She also requires her children to be able to go to college before getting married. It seems that Rifa'iyah women must always carry out transformations in the field of education. So that in the next generation, great women in the field of education will be obtained who achieve bachelor's, master's, doctoral, and even professorships, a woman from Rifa'iyah. According to Halimah - Head of UMRI Central Java Region and Secretary of the *Syuro* Council of UMRI Pekalongan and Kiswanti - Head of Pengajian Wagean UMRI Pekalongan, in the past when women who were still studying at the boarding school were expected by men who wanted to marry them, the women usually asked permission from *Nyai* (Female Islamic clerics) to move them. After that, they were married by their parents' permission.

In the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i, as outlined in *Tabyinal Ishlah*, the concept of *wali mujbir* grants fathers or grandfathers the right to marry off their daughters to suitable men. Suitability is defined by conditions such as fairness, trustworthiness, social compatibility (*kufu*), and the payment of a proper dowry. When these conditions are met, *wali mujbir* can arrange the marriage of women, even those who have not yet reached puberty, to the selected men.

In *khitbah* (engagement) process, women are often excluded from family deliberations. Typically, they remain silent and accept proposals from men who desire to marry them or from men chosen by their father or grandfather. However, men and women are permitted to meet before the engagement. According to the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i, it is recommended (*sunnah*) for men and women to see each other prior to the engagement.

Based on this teaching, the Rifa'iyah community has integrated the concept of one *kufu* into their cultural practices. These principal mandates that their descendants marry within the Rifa'iyah community. According to K.H. Habibullah, the Head of

the Foundation and Caretaker of the *Insap* Islamic Boarding School, *kufu* is both a cultural and religious tenet in the Rifa'iyah community of Pekalongan. This practice aims to maintain household harmony and protect familial lineage by ensuring compatibility in aspects such as thought, social status, economy, and education. By adhering to one *kufu*, the Rifa'iyah community seeks to preserve their teachings and lineage. This practice is implemented by encouraging marriages among Rifa'iyah descendants, whether within their own region or across different areas.

This tradition has fostered strong bonds among the Rifa'iyah community. For example, members from one area often already know those from another due to long-standing familial ties and a collective memory of genealogies. As a minority group in Indonesia, the Rifa'iyah community places great emphasis on maintaining brotherhood and kinship, which serve as vital elements in strengthening their collective identity (Djamil, 2001).

Although the one *kufu* principle remains culturally significant, it is no longer a strict requirement but rather a recommendation. Contemporary Rifa'iyah women have greater autonomy in choosing their spouses, without coercion from their parents. The primary consideration for marriage today is that both partners are Muslim and adhere to the *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* tradition. For instance, some Rifa'iyah women, such as Halimah and Kiswanti, have married men who are not part of the Rifa'iyah community.

According to Halimah, in the past, Rifa'iyah women were often regarded as *konco wingking* (domestic companions). Women rarely asserted their desires, such as pursuing higher education, due to societal pressures and parental authority. While they possessed both the ambition and capability to pursue their goals, the prevailing social structure constrained their opportunities. This system shaped Rifa'iyah women into silent and obedient individuals.

The system effectively coerced individuals to act in its interest. As Parsons (Ritzer, 2012) explains, when a social system becomes deeply ingrained in people's lives, its values and norms are internalized, becoming part of their conscience. Similarly, the Rifa'iyah social system requires women to seek permission from their husband or parents before engaging in activities outside the home. If permission is denied, even for beneficial activities, the woman must comply. Additionally, women must be accompanied by a mahram or husband when traveling more than two *marhalah* (approximately 80 km). However, exceptions are made if they travel with other women, use public transportation, and there is no perceived harm.

The Rifa'iyah community's cultural system intertwines with its social and personality systems, traditionally confining women to domestic roles as housewives. Their primary responsibilities were limited to the domestic sphere, commonly summarized as "bed, kitchen, and well." These norms restricted women from pursuing careers or more public roles. As a result, Rifa'iyah women were expected to prioritize obedience to their husbands, child-rearing, and education within the home. This cultural system perpetuated a belief in women's inherent nature as unchanging and subordinate, further limiting their opportunities in public life.

In the past, Rifa'iyah women were primarily focused on domestic activities, such as managing the household, cooking, and caring for the well. This cultural system prevented them from considering careers or assuming more public roles. Rifa'iyah women had three main priorities in their lives: obeying their husbands, caring for their children, and educating them. As a result, these priorities shaped behavior and attitudes, reinforcing the notion that women's nature could not be changed. This mindset prevailed in Rifa'iyah society and was often presented as a religious teaching. The concept of women's nature was sometimes used as a justification to limit their roles within the family and society. Consequently, women were often disadvantaged. This understanding was frequently supported by religious teachings, both from the Qur'an and hadith. One such hadith, narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari, states, "Whoever entrusts their affairs to women will not achieve prosperity."

Additionally, the Rifa'iyah community imposes several value restrictions on women. For example, women are not allowed to ride motorbikes or wear pants, as these activities are considered masculine. The prohibition of women riding motorbikes is particularly prevalent in Kedungwuni district, especially in Paesan village. Some female preachers still uphold this tradition. This interpretation appears to be gender-biased, as it regards the appropriateness of riding motorbikes and wearing pants as exclusively for men. However, this restriction is also accompanied by an emphasis on the cultural practice of wearing batik cloth and batik sarongs, which are part of the Rifa'iyah women's identity.

Halimah once sought clarification about the cultural restriction on women riding motorbikes and wearing pants from a female preacher in Pekalongan. There is no explicit prohibition from K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i in his books. The restriction is based on the cultural values and norms held by the Rifa'iyah community in Pekalongan. Nevertheless, some Rifa'iyah women, particularly those involved in UMRI, are still viewed as not adhering to Rifa'iyah culture if they ride motorbikes alone to religious gatherings.

As for the prohibition on wearing pants for Rifa'iyah women, it is not only because it resembles men's clothing, but also because wearing pants may expose the body's shape, which are considered *aurat* (parts of the body that should be covered). Moreover, pants for women are often designed to fit tightly, emphasizing body shape. However, it is important to note that Rifa'iyah women are allowed to wear pants if they are worn under a skirt, cloth, or sarong. In this context, the prohibition applies to wearing pants as an outer garment without being covered by fabric, a skirt, or a sarong.

The prohibition of resembling the opposite sex has actually been mentioned in a hadith narrated by Imam Al-Bukhari, in which the Prophet Muhammad SAW cursed men who resemble women and women who resemble men. However, according to K.H. Habibullah, the prohibition on women riding motorbikes in Rifa'iyah is a specific social fatwa issued by KH. Zainal Abidin to a member of the Rifa'iyah community in Paesan village. In other areas, such as the Tirto district, this cultural prohibition does not apply.

K.H. Abidin issued his fatwa based on the family circumstances and the children of the local community member. KH. Abidin viewed that teaching the daughter of this person to ride a motorbike would bring many disadvantages. Therefore, the fatwa prohibited women from riding motorbikes for this family. However, this fatwa was followed and practiced by the Rifa'iyah community in Paesan village, particularly among the elders of Rifa'iyah, and was considered part of the culture and social system that must be adhered to.

In the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) tradition, the situation is not much different from the reality in the Rifa'iyah community in general. The Rifa'iyah women's *pesantren*, such as those in Paesan village, previously did not open up to activities beyond religious studies. Initially, the *pesantren* in Paesan village focused on religious education. Furthermore, culturally, Rifa'iyah women were not educated to work outside the home. They were shaped into housewives who were expected to obey their husbands.

Although there were opportunities and demands for Rifa'iyah women to work due to economic pressures, they typically worked without leaving the house or going far from home. As a result, many of them engaged in *batik*-making and embroidery, like Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan and Batang. Economic independence for women would improve their status and position. This aligns with the Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs), which also address gender equality in various aspects of life, such as education, health, employment, and the prevention of violence (Ginting & Zokho Sihura, 2020).

Unconsciously, the social and cultural systems that were considered good for shaping women's character could actually suppress the potential within these women themselves. Moreover, the roles and status of Rifa'iyah women were once marginalized, with no opportunities for them to engage in activities and participate in the public sphere. They also lacked the freedom to express their potential, except for *batik*-making and embroidery.

The role of Rifa'iyah women in the past was indeed heavily restricted by the culture embedded in the social system of the Rifa'iyah community. They only had roles in domestic affairs and were not allowed to engage in activities beyond that. Their status was always secondary to that of men. Even obedience to their husbands became the main foundation of their role within the family.

However, Rifa'iyah women actually had the desire to move independently and expand their roles and status in society. But opportunities to change the social system were still difficult to achieve, as no Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan yet recognized the importance of such a change.

Then, in 2000, several Rifa'iyah women, such as Nor Khasanatul Karimah, Halimah, and Miskiyah, wanted a change in the social and cultural systems within the Rifa'iyah community. They did not want Rifa'iyah women to be seen as people who were left behind, shackled, and unable to keep up with the times.

Finally, their struggle, along with that of other Rifa'iyah women who sought change, materialized with the establishment of an organization called Ummahatur Rifa'iyah (UMRI) in Pekalongan. Although *Pengajian Wagean* activities had existed earlier, they were solely focused on religious activities. However, it must be acknowledged that *Pengajian Wagean* became the main mass base that facilitated the movement for change among Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan.

The Life of Rifa'iyah Women in Public: Wagean Study Group

The Rifa'iyah women's activities outside the home began with the *Pengajian Wagean* (named after "Wage," the third day in the traditional Javanese five-day week). This study group was initiated by Kiai Ahmad Fajari bin Taryadi, Kiai Ahmad Ichwandhi bin Gayani, and Umi Kulsum binti Wardani. Both Kiai Fajari and Kiai

Ichwandhi were members of the Rifa'iyah community from the Meduri Branch, Tirto, Pekalongan.

The group was established out of Kiai Ichwandhi's aspiration for Rifa'iyah women in Meduri Village to engage in regular activities that would enhance their understanding of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i's teachings in *Tarajumah* book. In 1988, women in Meduri Village and its surroundings gathered to form a structured *pengajian* (religious study group). On August 19, 1988, in line with Muharram 6, 1409 H, the *Pengajian Wagean* was formally established, with Umi Kulsum binti Wardhani serving as its first leader.

Initially referred to as *Pengajian Muslimat* Rifa'iyah, the group's activities were documented in the archives of Notification Letter No. 05/PPMR/2000. These records included details such as the cash balance, mandatory contributions, and an increase in the number of preachers from five to eight. Over time, the study group expanded beyond the Muslimat and Fatayat Rifa'iyah Tirto branches and spread across all branches in Pekalongan City and Regency.

Pengajian Wagean, initially organized by the Muslimat and Fatayat Rifa'iyah Branch in Tirto, Pekalongan, has expanded over time to include every branch of Muslimat and Fatayat Rifa'iyah in the Pekalongan City and Regency. On Friday, September 1, 2000, from 15:00 to 17:00 WIB, a meeting was held at the residence of K.H. Ahmad Syadzirin Amin, where it was decided that *Pengajian Wagean*, previously managed by individual branches, would now be the responsibility of the Regional Leadership of Muslimat and Fatayat Rifa'iyah in Pekalongan City and Regency.

During this meeting, there was also a proposal to rename the organization from Muslimat Rifa'iyah to a new name, which eventually became Ummahatur Rifa'iyah (UMRI). However, they decided to wait for the upcoming Branch Conference and the agreed-upon plenary results before making any changes. If the conference agreed on a new name, the regional leadership would consider implementing it. Additionally, the meeting emphasized the importance of creating a new, better name accompanied by a logo.

To enhance the spirit of preaching and the development of human resources among Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan, the meeting also encouraged members and administrators to involve Rifa'iyah preachers in *Pengajian Wagean*. This initiative aimed to strengthen the internal preaching spirit and deepen religious knowledge through the traditions of the *Tarajumah* book by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i.

The leadership of Muslimat and Fatayat Rifa'iyah also established *khitabah* (preaching) training sessions for female Rifa'iyah cadres every Friday Legi. These sessions were held alternately at various mosques within the branches of Muslimat and Fatayat Rifa'iyah in Pekalongan City and Regency. The meeting also emphasized the need for each member to protect themselves from teachings that do not align with Rifa'iyah principles. Furthermore, it was mandated that each branch and sub-branch create a nameplate and stamp as organizational identifiers.

The leadership of *Pengajian Wagean* underwent a change in 1990, with 'Tanatun from the Meduri Branch in Tirto taking over until 2014. She served as chairwoman for approximately 24 years, as there were no other cadres deemed capable of leading the study group at that time. In 2014, a new leadership was appointed: Kiswati from Paesan as chairwoman and Kiswanti Husna Maabi from Dadirejo as vice-chairwoman. Kiswati was chosen for her religious knowledge and organizational experience, leading the *Pengajian Wagean* from 2014 to 2023.

The organizational structure of the *Pengajian Wagean* includes a chairwoman, vice-chairwoman, secretary, and treasurer. There is also a team of seven individuals responsible for leading the study sessions, rotating every Friday *Wage* at different branches of UMRI in Pekalongan City and Regency, as well as Pemalang. The study sessions follow a structured management system, with records from 2008 to 2022 detailing the leadership structure and the schedule of branches assigned to lead the sessions.

In the early period of the establishment of *Pengajian Wagean*, the one who filled the study was Kiai Fajari from the Sapugarut Branch. *Pengajian Wagean* at that time used the Book of *Syarikhul Iman* by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i. The book contains teachings about faith, Islam, and *ihsan*. It is also the first work written by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i.

Pengajian Wagean, which at that time was going to be focused on special studies for women, turned out to have many male congregants coming. They were from the Tirto Branch, namely around 9 branches that came to the event. The men joined because at that time the *Tarajumah* book study event was still very rare. So, there was great enthusiasm from the Rifa'iyah community to attend the study. During the *pengajian* event, the men's and women's places were separated and a satyr was used as a divider. Kiai Ichwandhi as the initiator of this *pengajian*, suggested to the women in Meduri Village to hold a *Pengajian Wagean* event attended exclusively by female congregations. After input and several discussions, finally *Pengajian Wagean* was specifically for Rifa'iyah women. After some time, it turned out that *Pengajian*

Wagean received a positive response from Rifa'iyah women from other branches. Finally, Rifa'iyah women from other branches around Tirto, also participated in *Pengajian Wagean*. Then, *Pengajian Wagean* gradually developed and had many congregations.

After the establishment of the UMRI Pekalongan Regional Management in 2002, *Pengajian Wagean* finally entered the routine program of UMRI Education and Da'wah Sector until 2023. *Pengajian Wagean* in every process includes chanting *nadham-nadham* (poetry) and studying *Tarajumah* book by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i. The obligation to study *Tarajumah* book written by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i in every female Rifa'iyah's study group, makes this study group unique from other women's organization in Indonesia. According to Halimah's statement, *Pengajian Wagean* was not only attended by members and administrators of the City and Pekalongan Regions, it was also attended by members and administrators of UMRI Pemalang Branch. The program schedule for *Pengajian Wagean* from the past to the present is still the same, starting from the opening, *tartil* and *shalawatan*, the committee's remarks, reading of the *Tarajumah* Book by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i, prayer and finally closing. According to Kiswanti, *Pengajian Wagean* has entered the 302nd position as of August 2022.

In addition to study group activities, *Pengajian Wagean* also holds a savings and loan program for study group members. The event also became the basis for fundraising for the construction of the Rifa'iyah Center building in Batang. In fact, contributions for the construction of the center building do not only occur at *Pengajian Wagean*, but in every UMRI activity from the sub-district, branch, and regional levels, there is usually fundraising.

In addition, there are mandatory contributions for each branch which are submitted to the UMRI Pekalongan Regional Management. It can be seen that UMRI Pekalongan always works together in developing its organization. According to Miskiyah, UMRI Pekalongan was able to buy land in Bojong for approximately IDR 450,000,000 for the construction of the UMRI Pekalongan building. However, the construction was postponed because until now it is still focusing on the construction funds for the Rifa'iyah Center building.

Ummahatur Rifa'iyah (UMRI) Pekalongan

The establishment of the UMRI organization stemmed from the concern of Rifa'iyah women regarding their limited involvement in the public sphere. They

observed that similar women's organizations within other groups had already provided platforms for active participation, whereas Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan from the 1990s to the early 2000s lacked such an organization. In response, key figures such as Nor Khasanatul Karimah, Miskiyah, and Halimah sought to harness the potential of Rifa'iyah women across various fields to continue the legacy of their founding elders. Motivated by this vision, they approached Rifa'iyah leaders, including K.H. Syadzirin Amin in Paesan, Kedungwuni, to gain support (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023).

Halimah and her colleagues' visit to K.H. Syadzirin was met with a positive response. He endorsed the formation of a Rifa'iyah women's organization, emphasizing that their goal should be to promote preaching and spread goodness. Recognizing the progress made by women in other organizations, K.H. Syadzirin expressed the need for Rifa'iyah women to contribute actively to community development. With this endorsement, Rifa'iyah women began strategizing to mobilize support from other women within Pekalongan Regency and City. However, these efforts were initially hindered by the lack of a structured movement during the 1990s.

Finally, Nor Karimah whose house is in Jajarwayang, Bojong District went to Halimah's house in Bojong Minggir. It so happened that their houses were in the same district. She brought a decree (*SK*) from the Rifa'iyah Regional Leadership stating that their names were in the *SK*. They entered as Regional Administrators of Rifa'iyah Pekalongan in the women's development.

After Nor Karimah learned about the contents of the decree, she then invited Halimah to join the Rifa'iyah organization and be active. Nor Karimah was still a teenager at that time and was still very enthusiastic about organizing. Meanwhile, Halimah was 30 years old at that time and had three small children (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023). So, Halimah had to think long and hard about dividing her time between the organization and her household. Moreover, Halimah had to ask her husband's permission when she was going to be active in the organization. Nor Karimah's dedication in serving to build the Rifa'iyah organization, apparently made Halimah finally enthusiastic about moving to build the Rifa'iyah organization in Pekalongan.

Nor Karimah and Halimah's entry into the women's development in the Rifa'iyah organization became the opening path for their desire to gain sympathy from the Rifa'iyah Regional Management and other Rifa'iyah women. Seeing the enthusiasm and contribution of Nor Karimah who wanted to form a Rifa'iyah

women's organization in Pekalongan. Making K.H. Abdullah Hamzah as the Regional Administrator of Rifa'iyah Pekalongan, also provided support and input to immediately form the organization. Finally, Nor Karimah consolidated with Halimah, Miskiyah, and other women from Bojong District to move to every house to gain support from other Rifa'iyah women.

Nor Karimah can be said to be the main actor who founded and drove the UMRI organization in Pekalongan (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023 and Miskiyah, November 15, 2023). If Nor Karimah had not carried out a militant movement and invited other Rifa'iyah women, it is likely that UMRI would have been difficult to establish. Seeing that at that time, Rifa'iyah women were still shackled by patriarchal culture, where women had not carried out many public activities, especially in organizing.

Nor Karimah then moved to visit women's figures from one village to another. This movement was carried out so that Rifa'iyah women would gather to discuss the establishment of the Rifa'iyah women's organization in Pekalongan. Nor Karimah was not actually alone, she was also supported and accompanied by Miskiyah, Halimah, and other women when the guerrillas visited the villages. Although their numbers were not many, their movements were carried out consistently and continuously.

The movement carried out by Nor Karimah received many reactions from the community, especially women. Some supported her good intentions and many also rejected the idea. Comments from Rifa'iyah women at that time, still thought that the Rifa'iyah women's organization was not needed and was considered not useful for them (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023). Even Rifa'iyah women were afraid that if there was an organizational forum, it would make them further away from the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i, because they were busy with activities in the organization. However, Nor Karimah remained enthusiastic about carrying out socialization and consolidation. It took approximately one year for Nor Karimah and her friends to convince Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan to unite to form an organization.

After gaining more sympathy from Rifa'iyah women, Nor Karimah and her friends held a meeting on September 8, 2000 (UMRI Profile, 2020). The event took place in the hall of the Al-Mustaqim Bojong Minggir Mosque, Bojong District. Representatives from every village in the Bojong District came to the event. The meeting agreed to establish the first Rifa'iyah women's organization in Pekalongan,

named IFARI (*Ikatan Fatayat Rifa'iyah*). The term *Fatayat* in the name of this organization is indeed taken from the name of the NU women's organization. This is because many of the female members of Rifa'iyah were previously active in NU women's organizations such as Fatayat and Muslimat. They were mostly active in organizations outside Rifa'iyah, because at that time there was no Rifa'iyah organization for women.

The establishment of the Rifa'iyah women's organization in Pekalongan was initially pioneered by Rifa'iyah women from Bojong District, especially teenagers. Although later on, this organization was also joined by many married Rifa'iyah women. IFARI's flagship program at that time was the youth study every Friday *Kliwon*. This activity was led by Ustadzah Miskaromah from Bojong District. Actually, not much data was found from IFARI's activities, because administrative activities had not been running well. Moreover, the initial thought in this organizational movement was consistency in religious movements in the form of routine study in each branch.

IFARI then held the 1st Branch Conference at the Baitul Muttaqin Mosque, Jajarwayang, Bojong District. In the conference, it was agreed that the organization which was originally called IFARI would change its name to RUMRI (*Remaja Umroh Rifa'iyah*). Because the initiators were teenagers, this organization was given the addition of teenagers. The reason for changing the name of IFARI was because the term *fatayat* was identical to the women's organization *Nahdlatul Ulama'* (NU). In order to create a name distinction, the Rifa'iyah women made a change.

The use of the term Umroh in the name RUMRI was taken from one of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i's daughters named *Nyai* Fatimah or known as *Nyai* Umroh. The use of the name was to commemorate the services of *Nyai* Umroh, who had participated in the struggle to spread the teachings of Islam by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i in Kendal, Batang, and Pekalongan.

The change of name to RUMRI also changed the direction of the activities of this organization. RUMRI began to focus its activities on the field of preaching education and organizational administration. RUMRI, which was initially only attended by women from the Bojong area, then began to spread its wings and expand its membership. RUMRI invited Rifa'iyah women throughout Pekalongan Regency/City and invited Rifa'iyah women from Ulujami, Pemalang, to a routine meeting on Friday *Kliwon*. Another activity that is routine for this organization is conducting religious tourism to the hermitage of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i in Limpung, Batang.

After socialization to Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan and routine RUMRI activities were carried out consistently, finally this organization began to grow. Nor Karimah, Halimah, and Miskiyah at that time thought about conducting socialization of the organization to areas outside Pekalongan. At that time there were 6 districts targeted to socialize the establishment of this organization, namely Pemalang, Batang, Kendal, Temanggung, Wonosobo, and Pati. These areas were chosen because they have a large Rifa'iyah community base and do not yet have a similar women's organization.

This socialization was carried out not only to show the existence of the organization de facto but also to foster the spirit of Rifa'iyah women in other areas to create similar organizations. This socialization turned out to be able to spark the seeds of enthusiasm of Rifa'iyah women to formulate the establishment of similar organizations in their respective areas. It took a long process for the RUMRI management to open their minds and make Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan and other areas aware of their backwardness in developing women's resources in Rifa'iyah.

The movement carried out by Nor Karimah and her friends to gain the existence of RUMRI finally paid off. In 2002, RUMRI received special attention from the Regional Leadership of Rifa'iyah Pekalongan. So that the role of RUMRI in building Rifa'iyah women's resources began to be raised in the 1st Rifa'iyah Regional Conference (*Musda*) which was held on March 3, 2002 at the Al-Mustaqim Mosque complex, Bojong. According to Halimah, the results of the 1st *Musda* became the starting point and de jure recognition of the birth of the first Rifa'iyah women's organization in Pekalongan (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023). The event was attended and opened by the Regent of Pekalongan H. Antono and closed by K.H. Abdullah Hamzah, who at that time served as the Regional Leader of Rifa'iyah, Pekalongan Regency.

In the 1st *Musda*, RUMRI officially requested the regional leadership of Rifa'iyah to coordinate with other Rifa'iyah leaders so that a similar Rifa'iyah women's organization in other regions would be created immediately. The 1st *Musda* also agreed to change the name of RUMRI. At that time, the name of RUMRI changed to UMRI (Umroh Rifa'iyah). At the same time, UMRI officially became an autonomous body of the Rifa'iyah organization in Pekalongan.

This name change was intended to expand the scope of the organization's members, which were initially dominated by teenagers, and then could be joined by

all ages. At that time, all Rifa'iyah women were uniting in the UMRI organization to collect the potential, talents and all the creativity of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan. UMRI then held the 1st *Musda* to compile the *AD/ART* and the organizational symbol along with its description. The idea for the UMRI symbol at that time was created by Nor Karimah (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023)

After receiving official recognition as an autonomous regional body, the Regional Leadership of UMRI Pekalongan made a recommendation to the Central Leadership of Rifa'iyah to make UMRI an autonomous Rifa'iyah body at the central level in the 6th Rifa'iyah Congress in Semarang on December 8, 2002. Based on the results of the 6th Congress, the name of the Rifa'iyah women's organization throughout Indonesia was unified to UMRI.

Based on the results of the 4th Congress, Rifa'iyah women in Indonesia then held the 1st General Conference (*Mubes*) on July 13, 2003 at the Rifa'iyah Kretek building, Wonosobo. In the 1st Congress, the use of the name UMRI as the name of the Rifa'iyah women's organization in Indonesia was well received by the participants. The Congress activities also determined improvements to the *AD/ART*, compiled programs and elected leaders for the 2003-2008 Term of Service. Due to several obstacles, the UMRI Central Leadership only held the 1st National Working Conference on June 28-29, 2005 in Pekalongan (UMRI Profile, 2020). The event was attended by the Deputy of the Ministry of Women's Empowerment of the Republic of Indonesia.

Finally, the abbreviation of Umroh Rifa'iyah was changed to Ummahatur Rifa'iyah (UMRI) on April 15, 2015. The change of the abbreviation of UMRI was carried out after a leadership meeting held at H. Muhlisin's house in Cirebon. The event was attended by several representatives of UMRI at the regional level in Indonesia. The meeting was held for 1 full day, from morning to night.

The name change was due to the fact that the abbreviation of UMRI, which initially contained the term *umroh*, was considered by the public to be the same as the name of a *hajj* and *umroh* travel agent. In order to avoid misunderstandings, the term was changed. After having a new name, a new management was formed in Pekalongan, other areas, and the formation of management at the central level.

UMRI Pekalongan began to organize the system and organizational movements starting in 2002. Since the name of the organization changed to Umroh Rifa'iyah, the development of the movement began to be seen. With members who are not limited by age, UMRI became the only Rifa'iyah women's organization in

Pekalongan. Moreover, after the 1st *Musda*, it became the beginning of the existence of this organization and became a forum for accommodating various aspirations of Rifa'iyah women at that time.

Pengajian Wagean, which at that time was still centralized in Tirta, then became part of UMRI Pekalongan's activities. Seeing that the early establishment of UMRI in Pekalongan focused on developing the field of da'wah, *Pengajian Wagean* activities became the easiest work program to implement.

Pengajian Wagean activities had indeed been running previously. However, when the *pengajian* became part of UMRI Pekalongan's work program, the coverage area was expanded to the entire Regency/City of Pekalongan. Practically, UMRI's activities at that time focused on the fields of preaching and religion at first. This was done to attract a mass base, because most of the Rifa'iyah women at that time were mothers. They wanted the Rifa'iyah women's association to focus on developing the religious field in order to improve the knowledge and Islamic faith of its members.

UMRI Pekalongan began to be established organizationally since Halimah's leadership in 2008 to 2022. Although there are still some shortcomings in the process of archiving UMRI data administration. Due to the lack of understanding of administration and archiving, UMRI data from 2008 to 2016 is difficult to find. In addition, UMRI also does not have a permanent office, this causes organizational data to be spread to several administrators and sometimes the data is lost. Only in 2022, UMRI Pekalongan held an administration training attended by all UMRI Pekalongan administrators. This training is carried out directly with practice in each bureau/field. This activity was trained directly by Nikmah - Secretary of UMRI Center (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023).

In addition to *Pengajian Wagean*, UMRI also holds a routine meeting of the UMRI Pekalongan management on Friday *Pahing*. The meeting was attended by two representatives of the management in each sub-district and branch throughout Pekalongan. The meeting was held to discuss the progress of the implementation of the work program of each sub-district, branch and region. It is also a coordination forum for the UMRI management in Pekalongan.

There are several areas of work that are the focus of UMRI development for Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan. *First*, the field of education and organization. *Second*, the field of appreciation and Islamic arts and culture. *Third*, the field of economics and entrepreneurship. *Fourth*, the field of social welfare and health. *Fifth*, the field of human resources and youth. The division of these areas is based

on a joint deliberation with the Regional Leadership of UMRI Pekalongan. In addition, UMRI through the Human Resource Department and youth division also accommodates the wishes of teenagers by officially ratifying the name Himmah Rifa'iyah Pekalongan in 2021. Then the name Himmah was officially chosen by the UMRI Central Management to be used as the name of the Rifa'iyah youth women's organization throughout Indonesia at the 10th Rifa'iyah Congress on September 23, 2023 in Batang.

During Halimah's management, UMRI Pekalongan became an open, innovative organization that synergizes with the government in developing women in Pekalongan Regency. Halimah is one of the Rifa'iyah Pekalongan women who is brilliantly active in the central, regional and local management. She is a Rifa'iyah woman who is enthusiastic about building the civilization of Rifa'iyah women in Indonesia. Her activeness in the UMRI organization and her preaching activities in the community can be an inspiration for all Rifa'iyah women in Indonesia.

After finishing her management of UMRI Pekalongan, Halimah spread her wings to UMRI at the regional and central levels. Due to her real work and enthusiasm in building the Rifa'iyah organization, she was elected as the Chairperson of UMRI Central Java Region in 2023. In addition, she was also elected as Deputy Chairperson I of UMRI Pusat. Although elected as Chairperson of UMRI Central Java and Deputy Chairperson I of UMRI Pusat, she remains active in building society through preaching and is still active in UMRI activities as secretary of the *Syuro* Council of UMRI Pekalongan.

Rifa'iyah Women in Educational Institutions

Rifa'iyah women are now better in their education. Many of them have gone to school up to the *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA) level. Some even continue their education to university level. According to data from Madrasah Aliyah Rifa'iyah Keudungwuni, there are 25 female Rifa'iyah students entering college from 2017-2023. There are at least 6 female Rifa'iyah teachers who are graduates from well-known universities in Pekalongan and Semarang who work at MA Rifa'iyah. This number does not include scholars who teach at TPQ (Quran Education Study Group), TK (Kindergarten), PAUD (Early Childhood Education), MI (Islamic Elementary School), and MTs (Islamic Junior High School) under the auspices of Rifa'iyah. It is estimated that there are still many Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan who have graduated.

According to Halimah, the Rifa'iyah community in Bojong Minggir District is estimated to have one graduate per house. This is because many Rifa'iyah people are already aware of the importance of education for the future. Parents now no longer impose their will, but are more open to discussing with their children about their future in education.

In the spirit of advancing the education of Rifa'iyah women in Pekalongan, educational institutions also bring in guest teachers who are experts in the field of religion to teach at Rifa'iyah schools. Names such as Halimah and Kiswati as graduates of Islamic boarding schools who are already experts in the fields of religion, organization, and *kerifa'iyah* were invited to become guest teachers at Rifa'iyah educational institutions. Their knowledge and experience are certainly useful for female Rifa'iyah students, to revive the spirit of the struggle to purify religion carried out by K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i.

As a result of the large number of Rifa'iyah women who have pursued higher education, the freedom of Rifa'iyah women to carry out daily activities has now begun to loosen. The abundance of highly educated human resources can be a strength for the Rifa'iyah organization in Pekalongan. Moreover, those who are already graduates want changes in the management of the general education system and Islamic boarding schools. Especially changes in the mindset of Rifa'iyah women to be more modern.

One of the major agendas of Rifa'iyah women in the field of education is the creation of a local content-based curriculum in formal and non-formal schools at the TPQ, PAUD, and TK levels under the guidance of the Rifa'iyah Pekalongan women's organization. However, this discourse will only be implemented after the 10th Rifa'iyah Congress in Batang in September 2023 (Interview with Halimah, October 21, 2023).

The Rifa'iyah Female Islamic Boarding School has also organized itself to adapt the Islamic boarding school system to the development of the times. The Rifa'iyah Islamic boarding school system now provides skills for its students so that they can live independently. The Raudhatul Fadhillah Islamic Boarding School, which is managed by Kiswati, provides its students with skills learning in the field of culinary arts. In addition, the students are also directed to take part in learning at the BLK (Job Training Center) owned by the *Insap* Foundation located in Paesan Village, Kedungwuni. One of the lessons that the students like is sewing and embroidery training.

In addition, female Islamic boarding schools have also begun to realize the importance of personal and environmental health. Starting from the many students who had skin diseases, due to an unclean environment. Finally, now routinely socialization of women's reproductive health and environmental health is held at the Islamic boarding school accompanied by the local Health Center every four months.

One of the women who helped raise awareness of the importance of health in the Islamic boarding school environment is Aminata Zuhriyah - a member of UMRI's Health Sector. According to her, the Rifa'iyah Islamic boarding school previously paid little attention to cleanliness. *Nyai's* awareness of the importance of health in the Islamic boarding school environment was also lacking. Seeing the reality, many *Nyai* at that time had diabetes. This was discovered when Aminata conducted a blood sugar test conducted at Islamic boarding schools in Pekalongan.

Aminata also routinely approached *Nyai*, the caretaker of the Islamic boarding school, to conduct health socialization for her students. Moreover, at that time many students had skin diseases and were considered normal in the Islamic boarding school environment. After conducting a persuasive and intense approach, he was finally able to carry out socialization and free health tests routinely once a month at the Islamic boarding school.

In addition, he also conducts free health tests every Friday *Pahing* for UMRI members who are conducting traveling religious studies activities. He usually conducts health tests in the form of blood pressure tests, sugar tests, cholesterol tests, and uric acid tests. Several times he has also conducted socialization and health tests at several Rifa'iyah Kindergartens. For the purchase of health test equipment, he asked for donations from the Rifa'iyah Regional Management of Pekalongan Regency by making an activity proposal.

Participation of Rifa'iyah Women in the Socio-Political Sphere

Over time, Rifa'iyah women have also experienced various advances and shown improvements in terms of quality and quantity in the field of education. However, the low participation of Rifa'iyah women in the public sphere is due to cultural, structural, and gender-biased constraints. Where every individual should have the same rights, obligations, and roles in playing a role in society according to their abilities (Sihite, 2007). The Qur'an has actually taught women's independence, one

of which is in the political field. As exemplified by Queen Balqis as explained in QS. A-Naml verse 23 Allah says “Indeed I found a woman (Queen Balqis) ruling over them, and she was given everything and had a great throne”. And in QS. At-Taubah verse 71, Allah SWT says “And those who believe, men and women, some of them (are) helpers (leaders) for others. They enjoin (do) what is good, prevent what is evil, perform prayers, pay zakat and they obey Allah and His Messenger. They will be given mercy by Allah; Verily Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise.”

Based on the verse above, Allah SWT does not prohibit women from becoming leaders. Apart from Ratu Balqis, there is a female leader in Java named Ratu Kalinyamat and female leaders in Aceh, namely Ratu Tajul Alam Shafiyatuddin Syah, Ratu Nur Alam Naqiyatuddin Syah, Ratu Inayatsyah Zakiyatuddin Syah, Ratu Kamalat Syah (Alwi, 2019). So, the word *auliya* (leader) is not only shown to men, but is also shown to women (Ibnu Khoer et al., 2021). Therefore, women can also become leaders as long as they are able to meet the criteria as a leader. At the same time, women can also enter the world of work according to their expertise.

However, the world of politics is always identified with men, therefore the participation of Rifa'iyah women in politics is not visible. Moreover, there are cultural boundaries and values of propriety that prevent Rifa'iyah women from occupying important positions in the public sphere. There is an assumption that, if Rifa'iyah women enter the political stage, it is considered inappropriate or less common. Because politics is considered a harsh world and full of ambitious competition. In this context, male domination over various roles in society and in the public sphere is inevitable.

If in this matter, there needs to be a change in the social system and cultural system in the Rifa'iyah community in Pekalongan. Considering that every individual has the same rights, obligations and roles in society. The gender stereotype that is often expressed is that women are not firm and slow in making decisions. This is the reason used to reject Rifa'iyah women when they want to occupy strategic positions in political institutions in Pekalongan. Therefore, the Rifa'iyah community needs to form an emancipatory culture to support the potential of Rifa'iyah women in order to create the ideals of justice and democracy.

Along with the passage of time, the values and social norms of the Rifa'iyah community in Pekalongan continue to change. If we trace the representation of women in politics, there is one Rifa'iyah woman who is included in the political

context in the village, namely Miskiyah. Miskiyah is one of the Rifa'iyah women who once served as the Head of Jajarwayang Village, Pekalongan.

When she entered the village political stage, she was constrained by socio-cultural values that did not provide access and opportunities for women to enter the world of politics. Although in terms of ability and intellectuality, Miskiyah has adequate abilities. At the same time, there are still doubts for the Rifa'iyah community, regarding the ability of women to carry out their functions and roles in the political arena. Because the Rifa'iyah community considers that women, their roles and functions are as housewives. The community assumes that Rifa'iyah women should not focus too much on playing a role in public and ignore their role as housewives. This is based on a hadith narrated by Abi Bakrah, the Prophet Muhammad SAW said that a nation that hands over leadership to women will never achieve prosperity. This hadith should not be used as a general law because it relates to a specific case.

The entry of women into politics has indeed brought polemics in the Rifa'iyah community. Because women are not yet allowed to hold important positions in politics. Rejection of Miskiyah occurred when she nominated herself as a candidate for village head. The rejection was carried out by several groups of Rifa'iyah *kiai* leaders. But there were several leaders who approved her candidacy.

People who do not agree with women becoming leaders are those who are still normatively carried away by the hegemony of patriarchal culture. Meanwhile, people who agree with women entering the political arena are those who have modern views. That when Rifa'iyah women have abilities and intelligence in certain fields, they are allowed to play a role in the public sphere.

Miskiyah actually did not run independently, but was encouraged by the Jajarwayang Village community to run as a candidate for village head (Interview with Miskiyah, November 15, 2023). Previously, she had been a village activist and had been a member of the LKMD (Village Community Resilience Foundation), a member of the PKK (Family Empowerment and Welfare), a member of the Baznas (National Zakat Agency) Pekalongan Regency Branch and Treasurer of the MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) Pekalongan Regency. Seeing Miskiyah's dedication from the village to district level, this is probably what made the Jajarwayang Village community have more hopes for her. So that Miskiyah was nominated by the community to become a candidate for village head.

There are two factors, namely internal factors and external factors, that made Miskiyah want to run as a candidate for Jajarwayang Village Head in 2007. The internal factor is the support of her husband and extended family. Miskiyah had asked permission from her husband and extended family for her nomination as a candidate for village head. This good desire was finally fully supported by her husband, parents, and extended family. However, there was one message that her parents gave her, namely not to be hostile to other candidates in the village head election in Jajarwayang (Interview with Miskiyah, November 15, 2023). This is what Miskiyah always held on to when going through the campaign, voting, and post-voting processes.

After getting the support of her husband and family, she was hesitant about her nomination. So, there was an external factor that made her even more confident to run in the village political arena. She had received full support from several Rifa'iyah scholars and colleagues. At that time, she met with the Head of the Pekalongan Regency MUI, Ghazali, to discuss her nomination as village head. After the meeting, several representatives of Rifa'iyah scholars came to Miskiyah's house to provide support for her candidacy as a village head candidate. Several Rifa'iyah scholars from Sapugarut, Pekalongan Regency also provided support. Several MUI administrators of Pekalongan Regency also provided moral support for her to make up her mind to become a village head candidate.

The problems apparently still occurred after Miskiyah officially registered and nominated herself as the Head of Jajarwayang Village. The political competition in the village head nomination at that time was quite heated. Considering that there were only two village head candidates, namely Miskiyah and Karsono. At that time there was a dispute between the supporters of the two candidates. The dispute was caused because one of Miskiyah's photo posters was deliberately reversed by Karsono's supporters. This angered Miskiyah's supporters. Finally, the two supporters had a fight. However, the conflict did not escalate because it was secured by the local police.

The problem culminated in the police summoning the two village head candidates. However, the incident ended peacefully and there were no demands from Miskiyah. Because she did not want any hostility between them and his supporters. Miskiyah also managed to calm the anger of his supporters not to do anything illegal during the campaign process.

During the voting period, Miskiyah finally won the competition with an absolute victory. She considered this victory a great responsibility and mandate that she had to carry out as well as possible (Interview with Miskiyah, November 15, 2023). Therefore, during her tenure as village head from 2007-2013, she did a lot of development in her village, such as building roads, building free toilets for the poor, and distributing aid evenly to the poor. She always uses village funds optimally and fairly to her community.

Miskiyah has succeeded in becoming a Rifa'iyah woman who has succeeded in breaking through cultural boundaries and gender bias in Rifa'iyah society. She is a representation of Rifa'iyah women who are progressive, brave, and religious. Nowadays, there should be more Rifa'iyah women who play a role in politics. The representation of Rifa'iyah women in politics can be a reflection that Rifa'iyah women have become progressive, open-minded women who are able to play a greater role in the public.

Conclusion

The social role played by Rifa'iyah women provides great hope in the fields of politics, economics, social, and education. Although initially Rifa'iyah women were bound by a patriarchal value system, so that the system influenced the behavior patterns of society and restricted women's freedom. The impact was the emergence of prohibitions that emerged in the joints of Rifa'iyah women's lives in Pekalongan. However, Rifa'iyah women made various efforts to oppose this cultural current. For example, forming the UMRI organization, and being actively involved in public activities in the fields of education, government organizations, and preaching.

Rifa'iyah women carry out movements against the current based on the belief in the teachings of *Ahlussunnah* Islam. They also believe that the actions they take do not conflict with the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Rifa'i. According to their understanding, men and women as creatures of Allah SWT are equal. Each has the potential and ability to actualize themselves and therefore their actions must also be accounted for to Allah SWT.

Therefore, Rifa'iyah women functionally play a dual role in their household life. Some material work is needed to support their operational activities. Rifa'iyah women who work, as an effort to overcome deficiencies in meeting the family's economic needs. While other roles that are domestic in nature, are still carried out

by partnering with their husbands. In addition, their public role is carried out as a medium for self-actualization and the desire to bring benefits to society.

The researcher hopes that there will be further researchers who will reveal more deeply the problems of Rifa'iyah women. The study of Rifa'iyah women can be analyzed more deeply using a multidisciplinary approach such as using a sociological, cultural, political, religious, and economic approach. A multidisciplinary approach can help further researchers in revealing the problematic reconsideration of patriarchal culture in society. Gender and sociological approaches are not yet satisfactory enough to see the religious and cultural symptoms that develop in Rifa'iyah society, especially the role of women. Hopefully, the findings and limitations in this study can help further researchers to investigate deeper about the study of Rifa'iyah women.

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