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## The Power of Nyai in The Development of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro Sukoharjo

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### Abstract

This article aims to explore the power of nyai in pesantren using a gender equality perspective. This Islamic boarding school was under the leadership of Nyai Lilis Patimah after the death of her husband, KH Agung Syuhada. This research study is based on empirical data using observation, interviews and documentation methods at the Kholifatulloh Singo Ludiro Islamic boarding school, Mojolaban, Sukoharjo. This Islamic boarding school was founded by KH Agung Syuhada and Nyai Lilis Patimah. At the beginning of the establishment of the *pesantren*, its presence was rejected by the community. After KH Agung Syuhada passed away in 2017, the position of caretaker for Kholifatulloh Singo Ludiro Islamic boarding school shifted to Nyai Lilis Patimah. This is because their sons and daughters are still immature so they have not been able to take leadership in the *pesantren*. Although the *pesantren* is led by a nyai, the development of this pesantren is quite rapid. This is because Nyai Lilis Patimah had a big role in the *pesantren* before her husband died. The role of nyai Lilis Patimah in developing *pesantren* illustrates the equality of roles of kiai and nyai in the Kholifatulloh Singo Ludiro Islamic boarding school so that nyai have power in the *pesantren* since her husband is still alive. After her husband died, the authority and power in the change and renewal of the *pesantren* rested with Nyai Lilis Patimah so that all orientations and policies regarding the management and development of the *pesantren* were controlled by Nyai Lilis Patimah. Meanwhile, the *ustaz* and *pesantren* administrators are the implementers of Lilis Patimah's singing policies. The power of

Nyai Lilis Patimah is influenced by the existence of symbolic capital, economic capital, and social capital that has been owned since her husband was still alive.

**Keywords:**

Power, Nyai, Pesantren.

**Abstrak**

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kuasa nyai di pesantren dengan menggunakan perspektif kesetaraan gender. Pesantren ini berada di bawah kepemimpinan Nyai Lilis Patimah setelah wafatnya sang suami, KH Agung Syuhada. Kajian penelitian ini berdasarkan data-data secara empiris dengan menggunakan metode observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi di pesantren Kholifatulloh Singo Ludiro Mojolaban Sukoharjo. Pesantren ini didirikan oleh KH Agung Syuhada dan nyai Lilis Patimah. Pada awal berdirinya pesantren sempat ditolak kehadirannya oleh masyarakat. Setelah KH Agung Syuhada meninggal dunia pada tahun 2017, posisi pengasuh PP Kholifatulloh Singo Ludiro beralih kepada nyai Lilis Patimah. Hal ini dikarenakan putra putrinya masih belum dewasa sehingga belum mampu mengambil kepemimpinan di pesantren. Walaupun pesantren dipimpin oleh seorang nyai, namun perkembangan pesantren ini cukup pesat. Hal ini dikarenakan nyai Lilis Patimah memiliki peran besar terhadap pesantren sebelum suaminya meninggal dunia. Kiprah nyai Lilis Patimah dalam mengembangkan pesantren menggambarkan adanya kesetaraan peran kiai dan nyai di pesantren Kholifatulloh Singo Ludiro sehingga nyai memiliki kuasa di pesantren semenjak suaminya masih hidup. Setelah suaminya meninggal dunia, wewenang dan kuasa dalam perubahan dan pembaharuan pesantren ada pada nyai Lilis Patimah sehingga semua orientasi dan kebijakan tentang pengelolaan dan pengembangan pesantren dikendalikan nyai Lilis Patimah. Sedangkan para ustaz dan pengurus pesantren sebagai pelaksana kebijakan nyai Lilis Patimah. Kuasa nyai Lilis Patimah dipengaruhi oleh adanya modal simbolik, modal ekonomi, modal sosial yang dimiliki semenjak suaminya masih hidup.

**Kata kunci:**

Kuasa, Nyai, Pesantren.

**Introduction**

*Pesantren*, or *pondok pesantren*, are the center in which a particular community of *santri* live their social, religious and academic life on the basis of the values of faith and piety. *Pesantren* are dynamic playgrounds (Bourdieu, 2009) where all inhabitants are involved in social interaction and practices. In this term, *pesantren* can be analyzed by considering their three main components: places, humans, and activities.

According to Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *kyai* are the primary agents in *pesantren* life, because they play decisive roles in leading and dictating policies on the change and development of the *pesantren* (Dhofier, 2010). Their status as the leaders of absolute power and authority within their *pesantren*. This status also grants them ultimate authority over general people outside the *pesantren* thanks to their in-depth knowledge of religious teachings and their great problem-solving and conflict management skills, which help them offer public services. Meanwhile, *nyai* (*kyai*'s wives) are often in a subordinative role under the complete domination of *kyai*.

In addition to *nyai*, other agents performing subservient roles in *pesantren* life include *kyai*'s sons (*gus*) and daughters (*ning*), male teachers (*ustadz*), female teachers (*ustadzah*) and *pesantren* managers (*lurah pondok*, usually senior *santri* appointed to carry out managerial responsibilities under the supervision of *kyai*). Important decisions on any significant aspects in *pesantren*, like the provision of ulema cadres, are usually under male domination, which is in this case under the domination of *kyai*. The concept of *ijbar* rights (the authority of Muslim fathers to make their daughters marry certain men) illustrates another example of the fact that both *kyai*'s daughters (*ning*) and wife (*nyai*) have no rights to choose their spouses. Except in academic fields, *pesantren* families delegate many responsibilities to male heir (Marhumah, 2010). *Nyai* and *ning* are usually delegated to managing domestic affairs like leading five-time prayers in congregation with female *santri* and waking them up for activities in the *pesantren*. Although some female figures like *nyai* are actively involved in female Muslim's gatherings or become *mubaligah* (female Muslim preachers), in common, they hardly occur in public affairs. In traditional Islamic books, women have such marginal importance that they cannot serve as judges or leaders.

However, as a matter of fact, a number of *pesantren* have begun to embrace the concept of gender equality. In the Pesantren Seblak in Jombang, for instance, some *nyai* play the same valuable role as do *kyai*, either in domestic arenas or in wider social ones (Noorhayati, 2017;

(Sa'diyah & Anshori, 2021); Melamahu, 2019; Muhtador, 2020). In women's community with strong religious traditions, *nyai* can serve as religious leaders, teachers, and pivotal figures with dynamic nature to occupy catalytic roles in the community. In *pesantren*, *nyai* are educated powerful elites as they are teachers, role models and figures to whom *santri* can go for constructive advice. Besides, *nyai* can partake in sharing religious concepts and teachings in *pesantren*. In this regard, *nyai* also make a significant contribution to social, political, economic, and cultural changes and transformation.

In reality, there are some cases in which a *pesantren* loses its leader (*kyai*) and his successor has not had intellectual maturity nor shown great leadership to assume domestic responsibilities for the *pesantren* management, not to mention social and public responsibilities. In such cases, it is *nyai* who takes on the role the leader. When a *kyai* dies, he should be succeeded by those with the same capacity; otherwise, if the successor lacks great capacity, the *pesantren* will have difficulty maintaining its existence, and in most cases, it even fails to do so. Therefore, the role of *nyai* in such cases is inevitable.

The research about the leadership of *nyai* in *pesantren* is interesting to be discussed partly because of the rise of female ulema through the national gathering of *nyai* throughout Indonesia held from July 13 to July 15, 2019 which was organized by Rabithah Ma'ahid Islamiyah (RMI) of East Java for the purpose of strengthening the role and existence of *nyai* in response to the social religious development and marking the milestone of the rise of female ulema (Izzati, 2018). Another event should be taken into consideration is the consolidation program held by members of the Association of the Leaders of Pesantren for Girls and National Mubalighot (JP3M) under the leadership of Nyai Hj. Mafukhah Afif AH, the leader of Pesantren Sirajurrokhim of Temanggung, Central Java. JP3M is an organization formed among people of *pesantren* to create a network of Indonesian *pesantren* in order to help each other improve the management of *pesantren*. JP3M also serves as a facility for creating

competent and independent female leaders of *pesantren* and *mubaligah* who have comprehensive religious views and can contribute to spreading Islamic teachings, especially those of *Ablussunah wal jama'ah* (Helmiannoor & Musyarapah, 2019; Izzati, 2018a).

Coinciding with the development of JP3M is the occurrence of a cultural, structural movement in West Java initiated by the Indonesian Female Ulema Congress (KUPI) stressing the importance of gender mainstreaming through education by providing women with learning, training and workshop in order that women have critical thinking skills, awareness of their rights, and increased understanding of gender itself (Izzati, 2018). The latest development shows that the 2002-2026 Executive Council of Nahdlatul Ulama (PBNU) has included some of its female members in its organizational (PBNU, n.d.)

The phenomena of the emergence of female ulema in public affairs have made a historic breakthrough which helps rebuild the awareness of female ulema and summon up their energy which has drained away for a long time. Those events will also help assert the existence of female ulema and reveal their essence in the course of history dominated by patriarchal culture. The breakthrough may affect women's roles and positions: they will not only perform domestic duties but also undertake public responsibilities.

As is known thus far, *nyai* is seen as an agent in *pesantren* with more marginal role than *kyai*. The work of Dhofier (2010) provides a vivid illustration of this condition. Sa'diyah & Anshori (2021) mentioned that in *pesantren* men and women receive a disproportionate share of work. The leadership of women draws less attention than that of men because women are deemed to lack leadership skills and managerial competence to run *pesantren*.

On the contrary, some literature indicates the opposite trends: some *nyai* are said to have power and authority in the context of *pesantren* and even in the wider context of social life (Ningrum & Mursidi, 2018c; Srimulyani, 2012; Marhumah, 2010; Muhtador, 2020; Prasetiawan & Lis,

2019); Noorhayati, 2017; Melamahu, 2019). According to Ikromin (1919) the phenomena of the active role of *nyai* in *pesantren* have changed the mainstream culture having been preserved by general public which affirms that the leadership in *pesantren* should be performed by a man leader (*kyai*). However, in fact, women, in this case *nyai*, can also be agents of changes since they can introduce a few changes to other agents in *pesantren* (Srimulyani, 2012), including *santri* (students of *pesantren*), *ustadz/ustadzah* (male and female teachers) and *pesantren* managers among others because a *nyai* has symbolic or cultural, economic, and social capitals.

There are some figures of *nyai* who are leading *pesantren* in Indonesia, one of whom is Nyai Masriah, the leader of PP Kebon Jambu Al-Islami whose existence once drained away after the death of its leader, Kyai Muhammad. In fact, although lead by a woman leader, the *pesantren* is able to be still in existence, and it even has housed many male and female students (*santri*). This indicates that the leadership of woman ulema has received positive public recognition, despite the fact that the *pesantren* is located in a traditional Muslim region whose most population embrace patriarchal culture and limit women's activities only in carrying out domestic duties (Razak & Mundzir, 2019).

In order to open up our intellectual horizon about the leadership of woman ulema in *pesantren*, the researcher will discuss the power of Nyai Lilis Patimah of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, located in Mojolaban, Sukoharjo. She is a unique figure in that she has symbolic or cultural, economic, and social capitals. This research is on a figure of *nyai* who assumes supreme power and authority in a *pesantren*. This case is worth researching given that almost all the *pesantren* in Sukoharjo are lead by man leaders and only a few of woman ulema occur and actively contribute to social and cultural transformation. In the regency of Sukoharjo, Central Java, there are 27 *pesantren*; 26 of which are lead by man leaders, and the other one is lead by a woman leader (*nyai*) (Kementrian Agama, 2020).

In exploring the power of *nyai* in the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, the researcher adopted the theory of gender equality. The term

gender refers to social and cultural differentiation between femininity and masculinity in relation to roles, behaviors and attitudes deemed to be displayed by both men and women. This research puts a question about the way she exercise her power in leading and developing the *pesantren* and about capitals she possesses in exercising her power in the *pesantren*.

The data-collecting techniques used in this research included observation (Hadi, 1995), interviews, and documentation (Moleong, 2010). This research was conducted from May to August 2019. The subject of this research (Arikunto, 1989) was the leader of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ldiro, Mojolaban, in Sukoharjo regency. This research involved three informants: Nyai Lilis Patimah (the leader of the Pesantren Kholifatullah singo Ludiro), Agus Salim (her son in law and one of the ustadz in the *pesantren*), and Diana Ulfa (an alumna of the *pesantren*).

### **The Profile of Nyai Lilis Patimah**

Nyai Lilis Patimah was born in Bandung on 12 November 1973 into a religious family. Her father was H. Dana Ismaya, who was not a *kyai* but actively attended religious forums and gatherings. Her paternal grandfather was Ujang Patma, one of the prominent figures of Syarekat Islam (SI) and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in her village, while her maternal grandfather – her mother was Ismaemuna – was Syarif Hidayatullah who was also active in attending religious forums and cherished the tradition of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Her grandfather built a mosque and endowed parts of his land for the founding of a *pesantren*, which is now under the leadership of her uncle. It was under the supervision and upbringing of one of her uncles, although he is affiliated with a modern Muslim organization called Muhammadiyah, that Nyai Lilis patimah matured into a figure actively involved in religious activities and become a moderate Muslim (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

Nyai Lilis Patimah received formal education in Public Elementary School (SDN) III of Ciaro (1986) and Public Junior High School (SMPN)

III of Cicalengka (1989). When she in junior high school, Nyai Lilis patimah also attended Islamic school (*madrassa diniyah*) in the *pesantren* of her family, the *pesantren* and mosque built on land endowd by her grandfather. Subsequently, Nyai Lilis Patimah went to a *pesantren* in Lembang (1992) to extend her education. In the *pesantren*, Nyai Lilis Patimah learned arabic, religious knowledge and ethics and followed spiritual practices. It was in the *pesantren* that Nyai Lilis Patimah heightened her spirual awareness. Her educational and family backgrounds help her to have symbolic or cultural capital to found a *pesantren* (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

Nyai Lilis Patimah and KH. Agung Syuhada' got married in 1994, and then they lived in a rented house in Surakarta. They agreed to found an Islamic educational institution. In 1997, KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah moved into the thouse which since then has developed into a *pesantren* (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

As a newly-married couple, KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah had to fulfill their basic needs, including the need for food, shelter, and clothing. In a phase of her life, Nyai Lilis Patimah once won the trust of her husband in the financial managment. KH Agung Syuhada was known to be an active member of the United Development Party (PPP), particularly a member of PPP election campaign team, from which he earned a monthly salary of 60.000 rupiahs. Nyai Lilis Patimah used to save 10.000 rupiahs from the total salary and put the money in the bank. After years of saving money, she asked her husband to take her to the bank to withdraw her savings when fire raged in Surakarta. KH Agung Syuhada' questioned how she could have as much as money. Nyai Lilis Patimah replied that the money was from her husband's monthly salary. The money was then spent registering for the hajj pilgrimage and purchasing some plots of land, on which will be founded a *pesantren*.

After her return home from the pilgrimage in 2002, Nyai Lilis Patimah was offered a 7 million rupiah stall in Gading Market in Surakarta



by her fellow member of the hajj pilgrim group. She gladly accepted the offer by considering that the larger the *pesantren*, the more orphaned and poor children will come to study there.

Nyai Lilis Patimah also shared her unforgettable experience with the researcher. She recalled a moment in which KH Agung Syuhada' took her to the market for doing her business, but he did not wait for her until she finished transacting the business. She said that he probably felt ashamed that her wife carried out a business in the market. However, Nyai Lilis Patimah still worked in the market, for her stall always got orders from important, famous figures, whether the orders were in bulk or not.

Through time, Nyai Lilis Patimah developed her two stalls into bigger ones and bought four other stalls. In addition, she joined a group of *arisan*, a social gathering in Indonesian culture in which a group member will by turns get a particular amount of money they pay each other. From the *arisan*, Nyai Lilis Patimah once received as much as 200 million rupiahs. KH Agung Syuhada' happened to get surprised at this. Nyai Lilis Patimah spent the money buying a spring in Kemuning, in which she produced her own brand of mineral water, Gus Was. While she was pursuing her doctoral degree in Yogyakarta, Nyai Lilis Patimah also ran property and land purchase business, from which he gained a profit of 2 billion rupiahs. Nevertheless, KH Agung Syuhada' wanted to go back to the village instead of living in luxury.

In Nyai Lilis Patimah's eye, her husband was popularly known as a prominent figure in developing *pesantren*. But Nyai Lilis Patimah thought of the future of her children. She tried to build sound economy for her children, who will succeed the leadership of the *pesantren* in the future. One of her efforts to do so was to ask for the permission of KH Agung Syuhada' to meet Rohayyah, who often invited KH Agung Syuhada' to deliver religious lectures in her home. From the meeting with Rohayyah, Nyai Lilis Patimah began to know how Rohayyah got economic and entrepreneurial success despite her low educational background. The meeting also inspired Nyai Lilis Patimah to learn how to develop the economy of the *pesantren*.

One of her efforts to develop the finance of the *pesantren* was to create a travel agency for hajj and umroh pilgrimage by establishing a business relationship with other hajj and umroh travel agencies like Nusantra travel agency, Ar-Risalah travel agency, and Salsabila travel agency. She actually got only a few registers, usually 17 registers in each batch. But she was often trusted to be a tour guide for the registers of those travel agencies. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on this collaborative partnership with the hajj and umroh travel agencies was actually drawn up and signed by KH Agung Syuhada', but it was Nyai Lilis Patimah who put it into practice.

Amidst her busy schedule in leading and developing the *pesantren* together with her husband, Nyai Lilis Patimah seriously pursued university education. She studied at STAIMUS Surakarta and graduated in 2003; she enrolled in a Master's program at UII Yogyakarta and graduated in 2010; she pursues a doctoral degree in UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and graduated in 2015 (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

In addition to her status as the leader of a *pesantren*, Nyai Lilis Patimah once served as the principal of SMA Islam Kholifatullah (2013-2016) and was a lecturer in the Mambaul Ulum Islamic Institute of (IIM) Surakarta (2015-2016) and in University of Nahdlatul Ulama (UNU) Surakarta (2016-on). After her husband's death, Nyai Lilis Patimah served as the Vice Rector for Academic and Student Affairs of the University of Nahdlatul Ulama (UNU) Surakarta and the chief leader of JP3M (the Association of the Leaders of Pesantren for Girls and National Mubalighot) of Sukoharjo regency (2019-on). Nyai Lilis Patimah also delivers some religious lectures in some cities surrounding Surakarta. Her leadership skill was polished through her her organizational experiences in her youth. Nyai Lilis Patimah was once the secretary of SEPMI (the Union of Indonesian Muslim Youth) in 1992, an activist of PMII (the Indonesian Muslim Students Movement), and a member of Regional Branch Office of the Crescent Star Party, or PBB (2000-2003) (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

## The History of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro

A *pesantren* is commonly founded as a response to the general public's need for religious conformity. Such religious awareness may increase due to such external factors as a religious figure's reminding them that their way of life contradicts religious teachings or due to such internal factors as their own hope for the attendance of religious leaders. Such was the case behind the founding of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro. In 1997, KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah began to live in what is now the the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro. The then-social community surrounding the *pesantren* lacked religious education and had no mosque for religious education of their children and for religious forums and gatherings. For this reason, in 1998 KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah nerved themselves to establish a TPQ (the Qur'an learning center). As a matter of fact, some people supported the establishment, but some others did not. Since then, she had a real fight on her hands which at the same time creates chances and challenges she had to deal with calmly by asking for the divine blessing. Nyai Lilis Patimah themselves taught those children patiently.

In 1999, more and more students (*santri*) attended to learn to recite the Qur'an in a 160 square meter house of Nyai Lilis Patimah. Some of the students came from other cities like those from Wonogiri, Malang, and Karanganyar. Both Nyai Lilis Patimah and KH Agung Syuhada' began thinking of the development of the *pesantren*. Nyai Lilis Patimah then reminded KH Agung Syuhada' of the statement of KH Agung Syuhada', who grew up in *pesantren*, that if a *santri* does not establish a *pesantren*, his knowledge will be of no use. (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

The Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro was officially founded in 2000 and consequently KH Agung Syuhada' had to provide facilities and infrastructure of the *pesantren*. Fortunately, the sterling reputation of KH Agung Syuhada' helped draw attention of some public fugures in Surakarta to get involved in developing the *pesantren*. Public participation

increased well. A member of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) of Surakarta donated his two months' salary to the *pesantren*. In his welcoming address in the ceremony of laying the first stone, the Regent of Sukoharjo said that never before had he inaugurated a *pesantren* built without funding proposals. This means that the *pesantren* was founded purely on the basis of the great public trust for KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah. When knowing that KH Agung Syuhada would make the hajj pilgrimage, the regent paid him the hajj pilgrimage cost (ONH) (L. Patimah, interview, 2019). Public participation and government support encouraged KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah to continue developing the *pesantren*. The rise of financial supports from general public owed much to the charismatic personality of KH Agung Syuhada and his important role in social life.

### **Gender Equality between Nyai Lilis Patimah and KH Agung Syuhada'**

According to Fakih, the concept of gender refers to a socially and culturally constructed identity given to men and women. As long as humans support equality, the gender differences will cause no problem. However, some social issues like marginalization (the process of making women economically impoverished), subordination (considering women to be of no importance in political decision-making process), the gender stereotype creation, violence, excessive workload (longer working hours and more responsibilities), and the socialization of gender norms and roles, in fact, exhibit a clear pattern of inequality (Fakih, 1996).

In the *pesantren* world, *kyai* form the most essential element of a *pesantren*. A *kyai* is the founding father of the *pesantren* or his male descendants. *Kyai* are considered especially by village community to be charismatic religious leaders. Therefore, a *kyai* is a highly respected figure whose words are heeded. Aboebakar Aceh said that a figure will not be regarded as a *kyai* except that he possess some qualities including having

Islamic knowledge, piousness, direct lineage from *kyai*, and a number of *santri* (students) and providing community services. Hiroko Horikoshi stated that *kyai* are not only cultural brokers but also conceptual motors, inspirators and mediators of social changes (Horikoshi, 1987a).

*Kyai* play a major role in the growth and development of a *pesantren*. They are pivotal figures with full power and authority to make decisions and issue policies for the existence and development of a *pesantren*. Being organizational and spiritual leaders, *kyai* are responsible for the development of their *pesantren* (Steenbrink, 1996). *Pesantren* have become centers of Islamic education and da'wa. As the oldest educational institutions in Indonesia, *pesantren* have occupied a prominent role in the history of education in Indonesia.

The existence of a *pesantren* cannot be separated from the charisma of its leaders. In the same way, the number of students staying and learning in a *pesantren* may rise or fall depending on its *kyai's* wealth of knowledge. In this regard, research on a *pesantren* and its dynamic nature mostly focuses on the figure of its *kyai* as the central figure in it (Ningrum & Mursidi, 2018c; Horikoshi, 1987a), and the *Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro* is no exception.

*Kyai* are the only figure of absolute authority in the hierarcical structure in the *pesantren* world. They have to filter alien cultures introduced to their *pesantren* in order that Islamic values are completely embodied in *santri's* morality (Horikoshi, 1987a; Wahid, 2000; Horikoshi, 1987b; Dhofier, 1996). This requires *kyai* to have powerful personality. Strong personality and deep sincerity of *kyai* are highly necessary for the *santri* character building process. In essence, *santri* have surrendered themselves to *kyai* to be educated to be good Muslims. The ascetic life in *pesantren* in combination with the willingness to obey existing rules there to receive God's blessing will be instilled in *santri's* personality. It is in this context that the statement that *pesantren* education can produce good people is true.

As a matter of fact, in managing a *pesantren* and helping solve problems confronting *santri*, especially female *santri*, the role of *nyai* (*kyai's* wife) or *kyai's* sisters is equally important for *santri's* existence in a *pesantren*. But *nyai's* role is barely highlighted. *Nyai* play as important roles as *kyai* do in everyday life in *pesantren*, although their roles are usually acknowledged and recognized only in the internal structure of *pesantren* life (Ningrum & Mursidi, 2018c).

Being a *kyai* and *da'i*, a person who invites people to understand and accept Islamic teachings, KH Agung Syuhada' delivered Islamic lectures in different groups of people, like formal lecture to employees of banks and government offices or public lectures in society. *Nyai* Lilis Patimah said that KH Agung Syuhada' could be invited to deliver lectures five times a day. The time KH Agung Syuhada' spent performing public services was more than that he spent enjoying himself at home in a ratio of 70% to 30%: 70% of his time was dedicated to the fulfillment of public needs, while 30% was spent with his family and students in the *pesantren*. At the beginning, *Nyai* Lilis Patimah was resistant to such condition until she realized that she should serve as his partner and support all of his activities and struggles. *Nyai* Lilis Patimah has since begun to take steps to support the development of the *pesantren* and serve as the figure in charge of domestic affairs in it because *Kyai* Agung was often outside the *pesantren* serving general public (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

*Nyai* Lilis Patimah admitted having been confronted with many problems when managing the *pesantren*, but fortunately she managed to find the solutions to those problems through time. Most of the *santri* in the *Pesantren* Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro get meals and education for free, which incurs additional expenses amidst the *pesantren's* financial instability due to its lack of reliable source of revenue. On the one hand, *Nyai* Lilis Patimah had to find a way to manage the *pesantren's* finance for the fulfillment of *santri's* need for meals and education; on the other hand, she had to allocate the finance to cover the cost of the maintenance and development of educational facilities and infrastructure of the *pesantren*.

At the beginning, some donors helped the *pesantren* meet the *santri*'s need for meals, but subsequently the *pesantren* tried to strengthen its economy by itself to assert its economic independence. This prompted Nyai Lilis Patimah to explore potentials of the *pesantren*, one of which was by producing mineral water Gus Was since 2016, and buying 4 stalls in Gading Market in Surakarta among others (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

Besides solving the problem related to *santri*'s need for meals or food, the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro also tried to the arrested development of the number of students attending the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro. Nyai Lilis Patimah stated thereof that

After years of the struggle for the existence and development of the *pesantren*, namely from 1998 to 2008, Nyai Lilis Patimah saw no increase in the number of students registering as the *santri* of the *pesantren*. At the time, the *pesantren* housed only about 40 *santri*, and they had to go to schools outside the *pesantren* for formal education. Some visitors to the *pesantren* often asked for the establishment of formal educational institutions in the *pesantren*. Such questions and requests from guests and student parents encouraged Nyai Lilis Patimah to initiate the discussion with KH Agung Syuhada' about the establishment of formal educational institutions (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

In 2010, Nyai Lilis Patimah established junior high school (SMP). KH Agung Syuhada' fully understood the importance of establishing the institution, but he did not know how to complete the procedure for the establishment, licensing process, and accreditation. In this case, KH Agung Syuhada' served as the figure who give formal consent, while Nyai Lilis Patimah was the one who facilitated the institution. In establishing formal educational institutions in the *pesantren*, Nyai Lilis Patimah received solid support from her fellow doctoral students of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta: Sadiran helped her establish junior high school (SMP); Abdurrohman helped her to establish senior high school (SMA). The establishment of the two formal educational institutions won the complete support of KH Agung Syuhada'.

Possessing good communication skill, KH Agung Syuhada' helped widely promote the schools. When invited to deliver religious lectures, KH Agung Syuhada often brought student admission brochures, both brochures of the *pesantren* and those of the schools, to be distributed to general public. As a matter of fact, the establishment of formal educational institutions successfully drew attention of many students to register at the *pesantren* and school. When KH Agung Syuhada' passed away, the students of the *pesantren* numbered 195. In 2019, the number of the *santri* of the *pesantren* was 220.

An alumnus of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, Diana Ulfa said that the rapid development of the *pesantren* owes much to the effective teamwork of KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah. They made an equal job division in developing the *pesantren*. KH Agung Syuhada' was responsible for external affairs like performing community services and forging working relationships with business people, government officials, and activists of political parties among others. Meanwhile, Nyai Lilis Patimah was responsible for domestic affairs of the *pesantren* though she also helped building up social relationships.

Unfortunately, there came a time when diabetes ruined the health of KH Agung Syuhada'. In such condition, Nyai Lilis Patimah served as the schedule maker of KH Agung Syuhada'. Due to the poor health condition of KH Agung Syuhada', she ensured that her husband attended the invitation to deliver religious lectures no more than twice a day. She did so to create an ideal balance between her husband's discharging social responsibilities and maintaining his own health. In case KH Agung Syuhada' got more than two invitations on the same day, she would reschedule the appointment on another day. Since then Nyai Lilis Patimah has begun to deliver religious lectures at the request of religious assemblies. This indicates that Nyai Lilis Patimah also has played the role as the co-leader of the *pesantren* since it was founded.

In order to give himself, his family and his students to great encouragement to taking part in da'wa activities, Kyai Agung Syuhada' gave



his last command, which he wrote when he was before the tomb of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH and before the Kaaba. The command, as it was written on one of the walls in the *pesantren*, states

For my children, grandchildren, descendants and santri wherever you are, it is obligatory for you to establish the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahyu 'an al-munkar* (enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong). You do not fear to lose or lack what you have now. You have to know that when *Abi* (I) founded this *pesantren*, I was an object of scorn, envy, and slander. You have to carry on this struggle bravely. For my descendants, know that in your body flows the blood of lions. Hold firmly to the Quran and the Sunnah. Go study with wise *kyai* with in-depth knowledge and be a member of organizations with the values of *Abul-sunnah*. Remember, the unbelievers are not the only ones who are hostile to you.

KH Agung Syuhada' was a widely known religious preacher (*mubaligh*) in Surakarta. He began his activity of preaching Islam in his youth, even when he was a child, which made him known as a young *mubaligh*. He delivered Islamic teachings in villages, offices, mosques, *pesantren*, and religious assemblies. After years of being a *mubaligh*, he formed a wide network.

KH Agung Syuhada' had established a close relationship with the family of the President Ir. H. Joko Widodo. He was a figure who taught the family to recite the Qur'an. Such a close relationship was also developed between KH Agung Syuhada' and Hj. Sujatmi Notomiharjo (the President's mother), Ida and Titik (the President's sisters). They often visit the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro. Meanwhile, the President's mother knew Nyai Lilis Patimah from religious gatherings, and she often attend the forums in which Nyai Lilis Patimah delivers Islamic teachings. Besides, both the President and his mother often attend the religious lectures by KH Agung Syuhada', who was frequently invited to explain

Islamic teachings for the big family of the President (Qusyairi, 2018). Hj. Sujiatmi Notomiharjo frequently attended Islamic forums of KH Agung Syuhada', like the Islamic forum on Sunday morning and the joint Islamic gatherings of Muslim women – a community in Surakarta which gathers Muslim women with strong religious conviction (Qusyairi, 2018).

Nyai Lilis Patimah also frequently delivers religious lectures in some places in Surakarta, one of which is a routine Islamic forum in the house of Titik Relawati (the younger sister of the President Joko Widodo). In this forum, Nyai Lilis Patimah reads and explains a classical book entitled *Taqrib* as well as its commentary, or *syar*, entitled *Fath al-Qarib*. Such forum is considered to be more interesting and more substantial than the lecture system.

It is widely known that *Fath al-Qarib* is one of the most frequently read classical books in traditional *pesantren* in the culture of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). It contains detailed explanations about Islamic laws (*fiqh*). Nyai Lilis Patimah used the same learning model as traditional NU *pesantren*. This forum is usually attended by 20-30 persons, including the family of Joko Widodo. After inaugurated as the President, Joko Widodo always spends time attending the forum every time he is in Surakarta. Those members of the forum obtain considerable benefits: they can understand Islamic teachings such as five types of decisions (*ahkam*) like *halal* (permissible), *haram* (forbidden/sinful), *sunnah* (recommended), *mubah* (neutral/ permissible), *makruh* (disapproved) and *wajib* (required/ mandatory). All the members obtain from the forum will be put into practice in their everyday life. It can be said, therefore, that the religious practices of the family of the President Joko Widodo is the same as those of the people of NU.

Another religious lecture delivered by Nyai Lilis Patimah is the joint Islamic gathering of Muslim women throughout Surakarta city. The gathering is held on the first and third Wednesdays of every month. It is located on Sambeng Street, Surakarta. The gathering is usually attended by 200-250 persons of the total 500 members. Unlike other Islamic

gatherings which are held by a particular Muslim organization and attended only by its members, this joint gathering invited female Muslim preachers (*mubalighat*) from various Muslim organizations, including NU, Muhammadiyah, Al-Irsyad, Tablighi Jamaat, and even Wahabi. Likewise, Muslim women attending this gathering are affiliated with various religious groups and movements. As is popularly known, Surakarta is famous for its uniqueness and its religious diversity. Almost all Muslim organizations, like NU, Muhammadiyah, MTA, wahabi, Al-Irsyad and Kejawen, can be found in the city. Amidst the diversity, the President's mother often attends Islamic forums whose culture and tradition resemble those she has cherished since her childhood.

### **The Power of Nyai Lilis Patimah to Lead a Pesantren**

Pesantren are places where *santri* (students) learn Islamic knowledge from a master (*kyai*) believed to have in-depth religious knowledge. For *santri*, *kyai* are the figures of leadership and the guardians who educate them to be good Muslims. They possess the highest authority, and at this rate, they play the most decisive role in the development of *pesantren*. Actually, learning activities in *pesantren* are under the supervision of *kyai* and *nyai* (*kyai's* wife); therefore, the role of *nyai* can be downplayed because they are also instrumental in developing *pesantren*. The Pesantren Kholifatullah singo Ludiro, Mojolaban, Sukoharjo regency, is also in such condition.

When a *kyai* dies, his wife (*nyai*) is the one who will take on the responsibility for maintaining the existence of the *pesantren*, especially when her children are not yet ready to share their knowledge with their *santri*. In this case, *nyai* assumes a critical role in pursuing and realizing *kyai's* dreams of developing the pesantren.

On Saturday, August 26, 2017, at 04.30 WIB (Western Indonesia time), Kyai Agung Syuhada' passed away at the complex of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, Mojolaban, Sukoharjo. He left a wife named

Nyai Lilis Patimah, three children, namely Aka Aqilah Nasywa (Bunga), Alifah Fathimatuzzahro (Mawar) and Fawwaz Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro (Gus Was), and a son of law named Muhammad Agus Salim. His death was heartbreaking for Nyai Lilis Patimah. She was left to care for their teenage children and 250 male and female *santri*. The burden Nyai Lilis Patimah had to shoulder might have been heavier than what can be imagined given that KH Agung Syuhada' freed all his *santri* from any tuition, and they can fulfil all their needs, from their need for education to their daily needs like meals, for free. The financial burden of the *pesantren* was carried by KH Agung Syuhada', Nyai Lilis Patimah and some generous donors. The majority of *santri* in the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro are orphaned and poor children. According to Agus Salim, the son of law of KH Agung Syuhada', the *pesantren* spends as much as 80 million rupiahs a month for its operational expenses, including the fulfillment of *santri*'s needs. Nyai Lilis Patimah must have taken this into consideration in her efforts to maintain the existence of the *pesantren*.

The attendance of Jokowi's mother and support from his sisters, Hj. Titik Relawati and Hj. Ida, and other mourners gave her encouragement and enhanced her motivation not to let herself sink into grief. Jokowi's mother's condolence statement is as follows.

“Nyai Lilis, we are deeply sorry for the loss of your beloved husband and our great master, the deceased KH Agung Syuhada'. Mr. Jokowi also sent you his sincere condolence. He said that he was sorry not to come in person due to his busy schedule in Jakarta. Nyai Agung should not fear, but instead you should be calm. You are not alone. We will always be with you”, said Hj. Sujatmi Notomiharjo at the time (Qusyairi, 2018).

It was Jokowi's mother's condolence message that helped raise Nyai Lilis Patimah's spirit, warmed her heart, and sent a new wave of optimism to her. In the era of KH Agung Syuhada's leadership, the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, Mojolaba, Sukoharjo, was managed by KH

Agung Syuhada's together with Nyai Lilis Patimah. This means that the married couple complemented each other in developing the *pesantren*. Meanwhile, when KH Agung Syuhada' died, Gus Was (his son) was only a junior-high-school student, and his son of law Agus Salim seemed not to be ready to lead and manage the *pesantren*. It was reasonable, therefore, that at the time Nyai Lilis Patimah was stricken with overwhelming grief and great confusion.

Nyai Lilis Patimah was fully aware of public opinion that KH Agung Syuhada' possessed the supreme authority in the *pesantren* and in his family: Nyai Lilis Patimah had big shoes to fill. However, she tried to come to terms with her grief. She said that after the sad loss she along with her children and her son of law would carry on the struggle of KH Agung Syuhada' to maintain the existence of the *pesantren* and speed up its development. After the death of Kh Agung Syuhada', Nyai Lilis Patimah was the only candidate to fill the leadership vacuum. She no longer served as a partner in support of the leader of the *pesantren*; she herself is the leader of the *pesantren* now on. She is the principal agent in the *pesantren*, while other agents, including her children and her son of law, play supporting roles (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

Nyai Lilis Patimah began to use the network which had been created by KH Agung Syuhada'. It is fortunate that she was involved in the establishment of the network, although she played only a supporting role; the network of KH Agung Syuhada' is also hers. The charisma of KH Agung Syuhada' and supports from various elements of society, including the support from the government and the big family of the President Joko Widodo, are vital to the existence and development of the *pesantren* (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

The building in the *pesantren* built and completed with the government support was inaugurated by Jokowi's mother. Moreover, one of the buildings in the *pesantren* was named after Hj. Sujatmi Notomiharjo by way of Nyai Lilis Patimah's appreciation of the huge contribution of Jokowi's mother to the development of the *pesantren* after

the death of KH Agung Syuhada'. It was also Hj. Sujiatmi Notomiharjo who often bolstered the morale of Nyai Lilis Patimah and motivated her to resume learning activities in the *pesantren*. Support and encouragement from general public helped summon the willpower of Nyai Lilis Patimah to continue and preserve the legacy of KH Agung Syuhada', i.e. the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

As for the management of the *pesantren* and formal educational institutions, Nyai Lilis Patimah enforced a rule that all teachers, who teach either at formal schools or in the *pesantren*, must stay in the *pesantren*. This has positively affected the provision of learning activities in the *pesantren*. The learning activities are normally conducted despite the absence of Nyai Lilis Patimah who arranges her schedule to perform her role in the *pesantren* and carry out her social responsibilities outside it. Besides, Nyai Lilis Patimah initiated the establishment of an organization or association gathering alumni of the *pesantren* as well as their parents. The organization was established to strengthen the emotional bond between the *pesantren* and its alumni. Nyai Lilis Patimah found it important to involve those alumni and their parents in developing the *pesantren*. Their suggestion and advice are highly necessary for the development of the *pesantren*, especially after the death of the *kyai*. In addition, outside the *pesantren*, Nyai Lilis Patimah carried on her business to cover the *pesantren*'s expenses.

Another activity of Nyai Lilis Patimah outside the *pesantren* is to teach at the University of Nahdlatul Ulama (UNU) of Surakarta, in which she once served as a Vice Rector for Academic and Student Affairs. It is a great honour and amazing achievement for a woman to successfully manage a *pesantren*. Instead of being over, her career outside the *pesantren* took off rightly after she lost her husband. It is actually normal for women to achieve great success in the public arena or in the business world; rarely do they achieve success while leading a *pesantren*. Her strategic position in UNU has enabled her to know more about the development of human resources and grasp available opportunities. When the government launched a scholarship program called Bidikmisi, Nyai Lilis Patimah

prepared and motivated her *santri* to enrol in the scholarship program. it was not easy for her to encourage those *santri* to extend their education at universities given the fact that most of the *santri* in the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro were born into low-income parents (*dbuafa*) (interview with L. Patimah, 2019).

In common with other *pesantren*, the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro puts a heavy emphasis on accelerating *santri*'s moral and spiritual. Nyai Lilis Patimah actively educate her *santri*, leads five-time prayers congregation, and provides spiritual guidance for them. Diana Ulfa, an alumnus of the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, shared her impression about Nyai Lilis Patimah. She said:

Although I stayed and studied in the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro for less than two years, I got a vivid impression that Nyai Lilis Patimah always performs five-time prayers in congregation unless she is very busy or is dealing with urgent business she cannot abandon. Nyai Lilis used to invite 7-10 *santri* to stay at musalla (a place for prayer apart from mosques) or at her house to accompany her to performing five-time prayers in congregation, night prayers (*tabajud*), Qur'an recitation, and fasting. Never did I see her perform compulsory five-time prayers alone – sometimes she performed voluntary (*sunnah*) prayers alone. Those 7-10 *santri* invited to stay at her house were assigned to wake her up if she did not attend musalla for night prayers due to exhaustion. *Umi* (as Nyai Lilis Patimah she is usually called by her *santri*). She is steadfast in night prayers. If not busy, she spends more time in the Arifa Al-Istiqomah Mosque. I have heard that KH Agung Syuhada' once said to Nyai Lilis Patimah that he dreamed of peacefully dying while in *sujud* in the Arifa Al-Istiqomah Mosque (D. Ulfa, interview, 2019).

Except when busy, Nyai Lilis Patimah attends and leads a student activity called *muhadborob* every Saturday night. In the end of the activity, Nyai Lilis Patimah will give her commentary about the *muhadborob*. In the activity, she once advised *santri* to display confidence, properly behave according to the existing situation, develop their communication skills,

and bring books on which to write important information they gain from the *mubadhorob*. In everyday life in the *pesantren*, Nyai Lilis Patimah sets a good example to her *santri* of good behavior, and she will admonish those *santri* considered to behave inappropriately. Moreover, Nyai Lilis Patimah often asks *santri* to be steadfast in performing five-time prayers in congregation and *dhiker* (to remember God and chant His names). In order to build and develop their spiritual awareness, she obliges *santri* to engage in all activities in the *pesantren*, like reciting the Qur'an, performing five-time prayers in congregation, learning Arabics, Nahw (Arabic grammar), and Sarf (Arabi morphology), among others. Additionally, she trains *santri* to live ascetic life by making a habit of voluntary fasting, like fasting on Sunday and Thursday and Daud fasting, and night prayers. *Santri* in the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro have to wake up at 01.00 am for night prayers, and they are allowed to get back to sleep (D. Ulfa, interview, 2019).

Diana Ulfa, having stayed as a *santri* in the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, Moolaban, Sukoharjo, for two years, still keeps in contact with the *pesantren*. She often visits the *pesantren* just for meeting and shaking the hand of Nyai Lilis Patimah. She admitted that she belonged to the category of unruly *santri*, but she is very grateful to have studied under KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah, because it was in the *pesantren* that she could learn ethics, good behavior, and the priciple of thinking before acting. Everytime Diana Ulfa shakes her hand, Nyai Lilis Patimah always says, "Here is my *santri* who has been a university student". A *santri* will be truly touched by such statement of Nyai Lilis Patimah (D. Ulfa, interview, 2019).

## Conclusion

The power of Nyai Lilis Patimah to manage and develop the Pesantren Kholifatullah Singo Ludiro, Mojolaban, Sukoharjo regency, owes much to the capitals she possesses before or after the death of her



husband, KH Agung Syuhada'. The capitals under discussion include symbol or cultural, economic, and social capitals. The cultural capital of Nyai Lilis Patimah is the fact that she does not have a direct lineage from a *kyai*, but her grandfather, father, mother, and uncle always encouraged her to be actively involved in religious forums and gatherings in her village.

The economic capital of Nyai Lilis has been acquired since she was trusted by KH Agung Syuhada', who was then an active member of the the United Development Party (PPP), to manage the finance of her family. Her great managerial skill allowed her to put some of her husband's salary in the bank, and her savings enabled her to register both her and her husband to take hajj pilgrimage and buy some pieces of land. She also managed to run a stall in the Gading Market. When she got 200 million rupiahs from an *arisan*, she began to produce her own brand mineral water Gus Was. Additionally, to attain the financial independence of her *pesantren*, she established a travel agency for hajj and umroh pilgrimage in collaboration with other hajj travel agencies like Ar Risalah and Salsabila travel agencies. What is more, she also ran property and land purchasing business, from which she got a profit of 2 billion rupiahs.

From the perspective of social capital, it can be said that the rapid development of the *pesantren* results from the good teamwork and partnership of KH Agung Syuhada' and Nyai Lilis Patimah. They made an equal job division in developing the *pesantren*. KH Agung Syuhada' was responsible for external affairs like performing community services and forging working relationships with business people, government officials, and activists of political parties among others. Meanwhile, Nyai Lilis Patimah was responsible for domestic affairs of the *pesantren* though she also helped building up social relationships. This all is indicative of gender equality between leaders, who are in this case *kyai* and *nyai*, in their effort to develop their *pesantren*.

The fact that Nyai Lilis Patimah has played a major role in developing *pesantren* indicates that women have high potential to actively participate in the public arena without neglecting their domestic responsibilities. Her

roles as a supporting partner of *kyai* in managing the *pesantren* and her contribution to the fulfillment of social needs illustrate that a *pesantren* may embrace the concept of gender equality. The symbolic or cultural, economic and social capitals that Nyai Lilis Patimah has are the factors behind her success in developing the *pesantren* after the death of her husband. There are underlying motivations behind Nyai Lilis Patimah's taking on those expanded roles: *first*, to develop the *pesantren*; *second*, to assert the financial independence of the *pesantren*; and *third*, to make sure that her succeeding generations will not have difficulty managing and developing the *pesantren* in the future.

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