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Women's Contribution to Religious Propagation in the Middle East

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Abstract. This article is based by the domination of the role of men over women in Middle Eastern society, whereas when viewed from the religious perspective of the majority of Middle Eastern society, namely Islam, women is highly respected and have a special position in society. This is due to the pre-Islamic culture and perceptions that undermine women in their social status, so that women are only objects of entertainment, household and sexuality without being permitted to massive public activities. This situation lasted for some time, until finally a modern religious and social-based movement that fought for women's rights emerged. According to the theory of liberal feminism, women should get the same rights as men, while maintaining the natural differences that exist between the two. A woman cannot be confined at home and taking care of her family, but she has the right to socialize and appear in public. Although discrimination against women continues, in fact there are women who have recorded their role of preaching to society. If all this time the preachers were generally male, then history records that there were female preachers who were influential in the religious life of Middle Eastern society. The research method I use is descriptive-analysis based on literature review. Based on the study that I convey in this article, the contribution of women in religious preaching in the Middle East is a reality that should be appreciated amidst globalization and modernization, even though the culture of patriarchy and women's subordination has not completely disappeared and has become a hereditary culture of Middle Eastern society.

Keywords: Women Contribution; Religion; Propragation; Middle East.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender is human nature created by God as a gift and wisdom contained therein. In general, Islam recognizes two human genders, namely men and women who have different characteristics. Gender differences are not a taboo subject in Islam, because Allah has explained that differences in human status are not to be hostile to each other and feel superior, but to know each other. In the Qur'an itself it has been explained that: "Indeed we (Allah) have created you in the form of male and female and made you nations and tribes so that you (one) know each other. Indeed, the most noble in the sight of Allah is the pious (among you). Indeed, Allah is all-knowing, all-observant" (Qur'an 49:13). Even though this verse is known by many people, in practice women are discriminated against in social life. In the Middle East region, girls are buried alive if they are born to a mother and get a low position if they pass their lifetime. Men play an important role in all aspects of life, while women are entertainment, household and sexual tools for him. This situation lasted a long time in pre-Islamic times, until finally the Islamic religion came to glorify women. However, due to the patriarchal culture of Arab society which is still strong, this

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concept of glorification of women in terms of equal rights is not fully implemented. Along with the times, women began to get their rights and were free from the negative stigma attached to them so far. Changes in women's views cannot be separated from the influence of modern movements that demand changes in sensitive issues, such as women's rights in life. This is reinforced by modern religious-based movements, which attract religious adherents to realize the truth of the movement and support it. Islam is one of the religions characterized by many movements in the modern era, including ideological renewal movements and the order of life in Islamic society. Figures that influence the role of women are Muhammad Abduh and Rifa'ah Badawi Al-Tahtawi with their educational reforms, and Fetima Mernissi with her Islamic feminism.

Contact between men and women is strictly regulated, with the goal of controlling or suppressing women's negative behavior (Sacarellos et al., 2016). In general, in the Middle East, women are subject to strict rules. This makes it difficult for them to express their opinions or voice their opinions in society. Therefore, the contribution of women in the Middle East is difficult to predict. However, women from middle-class families may have access to public speaking due to their higher education. Although the position of women has been degraded for some time, historical ink has recorded the names of women who have become role models in the life of Middle Eastern society. This situation is due to their expertise and usefulness to others, so that women are slowly able to present their identity in public. Among them there are those who are known for their devout worship and guarding personal purity, experts in mastering religious texts, ascetic attitudes and Sufi behavior, accomplished lecturers to professors at a well-known university in the world. This makes the role of women in the Middle East region very strategic and calculated throughout the ages.

Women's rights are severely restricted due to Sharia law. Saudi Arabia ranked 141st out of 144 countries in 2016 in terms of gender equality, according to the 2016 Global Gender Gap Report. In fact, Saudi Arabia has faced significant international criticism for its strict enforcement of laws on women, including gender-specific restrictions, guardianship, and sexual violence, which undermine women's rights. Alhejji et al. (2018) found that formal institutional order and informal power are linked to efforts to achieve equality for women. Formal institutions such as laws and local policies have supported gender equality, while informal power, derived from cultural norms and traditions, has been much more effective in hindering these efforts. Saudi Arabia is a country with a conservative or Bedouin culture. The older generation in Saudi Arabia continues to strive to maintain this culture. This choice has delayed the changes the Saudi

government wants to implement. These changes, however, would open up significant opportunities for women's contributions in the country.

Magfiroh & Zamawi (2020) concluded that the women's resistance in the documentary For Sama demonstrates the power of feminism among Middle Eastern women and rejects negative socio-cultural stigmas. This can manifest in all aspects of life amidst the Syrian conflict. This opinion suggests that Middle Eastern culture hinders women's progress. The dominance of Middle Eastern men, which fosters negative stigmas, makes Middle Eastern women afraid to advance. Let alone fighting for their nation, opportunities to fight for themselves are difficult. Women need courage to break free from this negative stigma. Syria is a country in a state of conflict, and women who are consumed by this negative stigma find it difficult to emerge from the situation and protect their children. Yet, children can be a strength for women to fight for a better life.

Meanwhile Gunadi, et. al (2023) mentioned that the Islamic feminism offered is more focused on achieving equality in education, social life, and economics. This understanding clearly demonstrates the differences between the two "feminist" teachings. ISIS feminism is merely a cover for building human resource strength by exploiting women's roles on the battlefield. Furthermore, ISIS's leadership is still dominated by men, and there are still numerous cases of harassment and rape of women within ISIS. ISIS understands the desire of many Middle Eastern women for equality. However, ISIS harbors malicious intentions to exploit women's enthusiasm for contributing to overcome the disempowering situation in Middle Eastern culture by using women as agents in ISIS's actions in the Middle East due to their lack of troops. As a result, Middle Eastern women are in danger. Therefore, it is time for Middle Eastern countries to accommodate women who have the intention to contribute.

The problems in this research are how is the history of the development of women's contributions in the Middle East and how is the religious propaganda brought by women in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the benefits that can be provided in this research are to describe the development of women's contributions in the Middle East and to provide information on religious propaganda brought by women in the Middle East. The novelty of this research is the contribution of women who are in developed and rich countries such as the Middle East region because it is famous for its oil resources, experiencing challenges in spreading religious propaganda in the region.

METHODS

The method used in writing this article is descriptive-analysis. This research is qualitative in nature because it does not contain elements of numbers and statistics. Data collection came from a literature study that came from books, journals, and websites on Middle Eastern and women's studies. The theory used is the theory of liberal feminism which states that there is no difference between men and women, so there must be equal rights between the two without being as thorough as differences in reproductive organs (Marzuki, 2007). If viewed from this theory, the role of women in religious preaching in the Middle East has periodically obtained its rights, which were initially constrained by religious dogma and societal perceptions that women should be at home and not appear in public. Along with the times, female preachers have become public figures in Middle Eastern society by paying attention to the boundaries.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In classical (pre-Islamic) times, women were in a low position in Middle Eastern society. The birth of a daughter is considered a taboo and brings disaster to her family. Without considering humanity, many newborn girls were immediately buried without justifiable reasons. This was influenced by the stereotypes of society at that time which stated that women were bad luck and could not be as useful in life as men. Men can be relied on physically and mentally, while women have weaknesses so that they are only used as entertainment for men. This condition is also influenced by patriarchal culture which is ingrained in Middle Eastern society. Women only play a role in the household giving birth to children and caring for them, cooking, washing clothes, other housework and sexuality. As for work outside the home, such as social, economic and political organizations, men do it.

In the Arab family tradition, the father figure holds full authority and responsibility so that it is like the top of a pyramid that overshadows the bottom (wife and children). The wife will join her husband's kin group (patrilocal kinship pattern), and the child will attach himself to his father (patrilineal). The wife's relationship to her husband is a bond of love (aqila), close friend (qarina), and mahram (hirma). Women do not have the right to express love directly to men, but must accept the proposals of men who come to her or suggestions from her father. (Barakat, 2015)

In the post-classical era to the Middle Ages, there was a change in views on women. Women are not considered lowly and useless, they are even elevated in dignity by the Islamic religion. Gender discrimination is not justified because it is God's creation that must be respected, because each gender has a character and benefits that have been created according to its nature. The Islamic Arabic proverb says: "Al-Umm Madrasatul Ula" (Mother is the first education for children), which makes the role of mother or wife important and respected in society. When

Islamic teachings forbid entertainment programs that neglect the remembrance of Allah, women are no longer the singers who usually entertain men at these events. Many women are used in da'wah activities, wars until they are asked for a religious fatwa.

Even though there have been significant developments towards women, there is still an attitude of subordination towards women. In the Islamic, Jewish and Christian religions which are dominant in the Middle East, women are required to wear headscarves and robes that cover their entire bodies (QS. 33:59) which are considered symbols of separation. Women are still marginalized by being a backup or supporting role in public roles. The main role of women remains in the household sector, while roles in social organizations, government, economy and politics are in a marginal position. A dogmatic religious ideology explains that: "wa qarna fi buyutikunna wa laa tabarrajna tabarrujal jaahiliyyatil uula..." (QS. 33:33), it is better for women to stay at home and to avoid slander by men with lots of preening and inappropriate clothing profanity, cajoling (kaid) that arouse lust and sexual crimes. However, some parties did not agree with this situation and wanted a change. (Barakat, 2015)

In medieval to modern times, the demand for change against women is getting stronger. In Europe, a feminist movement emerged that demanded equal rights for women and men in social life, when the patriarchal style flourished from the classical to the Middle Ages. Feminism is not a universal movement with a homogeneous concept that represents all women, but includes multiple concepts with various approaches. This movement underwent three phases: early feminism opposed the subordination of women due to patriarchal views of men which eventually inspired various thoughts related to women, second feminism opposed discrimination against women which gave birth to liberal schools (demands for women's involvement in all aspects) and radical socialism (opposition to patriarchal domination). men in women's personal lives), and the third feminism which demands equal rights for women of any race and rejects ethnocentricity. (Suwastini, 2013)

This feminist movement influenced Middle Eastern women, so that female figures emerged who voiced equality of rights and emancipation of women in public life. Today's women are not only seen as objects of entertainment, household and sexuality, but their role is developing in social organizations, economic actors, culture, and government officials. In the religious field, female religious leaders have emerged who have given a new color to Islamic da'wah which has so far been dominated by men. When Muslims experienced a setback in the 19th century due to internal factors (divisions between mazhabs, disputes among Muslims, ethnic and mazhab fanaticism) and imperialist colonialism of the West, Islamic movements began to emerge fighting

for the revival of Islam from ideology, social and culture. . Among these movements, there is something that brings the value of awakening for women who have been considered backward because society is close minded.

Muhammad Abduh, one of the Egyptian figures of the reformist Islamic movement who brought the values of moderation to Islamic teachings. He has a mission to develop the Islamic world through social, political, educational and press. As a person who studies theology and philosophy, Abduh has rational thoughts in religion, because religion cannot be understood from the dogma of holy book texts alone, but reason has a role to digest and understand its contents. Among the effects of his thinking, he argued that women should have equal rights with men. She rebutted the opinion of the western nation which stated that Islam oppressed women, even though in reality Islam gave equal rights and obligations in worship, study and activities for men and women. Abduh made education for women, so that they get the right to education, knowledge that men get and eliminate ignorance from them. This is done so that household relations are harmonious, because the domination of knowledge possessed by men sometimes results in disrespect for women, even though women have a high position in Islam. (Khoiro, 2019)

Rifa'ah Badawi Al-Tahtawi has the same thoughts as Muhammad Abduh in reforming Muslim education. In his time, many women were uneducated so that they looked stupid and had no authority in social life. Al-Tahtawi has the concept of loving the motherland (hubbul wathan) to raise a civilized society. He did not differentiate between the roles of men and women in building the nation, so that a universal education strategy that was developed from elementary, middle to high levels could be enjoyed by all groups. Women receive special attention from Al-Tahtawi, so that they are educated so they can improve their relationship with their partner, and are involved in work under certain conditions. Teaching reading and writing is the main thing that they must get to achieve higher knowledge. (Khoiro, 2019)

Fetima Mernissi is a female Islamic feminist figure from Morocco. In addition to the modernist Islamic movement that influenced the development of the role of Arab women, the feminist movement influenced some Arab women to fight against the male patriarchy in society. He had experienced the discriminatory attitude of the surrounding community which distinguished men and women socially and culturally. He was hurt by an explanation from his teacher at high school who brought him a hadith about dogs, donkeys and women can cancel their prayers if they walk in front of people who are praying (mushalli). There is also a hadith which states that if a leadership is handed over to women, then wait for the moment of its downfall. This made him worried, but he told his grandmother's story about the Prophet Muhammad. who maintains the

honor of women from several hadith literature related to his relationship with his wives. Finally, he conducted a critical study with historical analysis related to religious arguments relating to women and the results needed to be corrected a lot regarding the chain and history of hadith, the biography of the narrator and the desired meaning of multiple interpretations and could not be monopolized. She became an Islamic feminist movement that aims to restore women's rights fairly in all aspects of life. The starting point of Fatimah Mernissi's feminist thinking is based on understanding (reinterpretation) of religious texts in the form of the Qur'an and Al Hadith (Widyastini, 2008). Even though Middle Eastern women have experienced discrimination in life throughout the ages, in reality there are some of them whose roles have been recorded and are remembered in history. Their position may still be under male domination, but their influence in religious preaching has made them famous and remembered for all time. Feminist figures also make it as a role model to further their goals.

Maryam bint Imran is a devout woman who comes from an intellectual and religious Israelite family. Because of her obedience to God, she was tested by giving birth to a child without being married. News of her pregnancy spread throughout the country and rumors arose about her adultery (allegation). He immediately withdrew to the palm tree farthest from his village, and gave birth to the Prophet Isa As. which will carry a prophetic treatise. God protected him and his son from various accusations and threats because of his obedient actions. Maryam is an example of a woman who contributes to preaching the purification of the soul (tazkiyah an-nafs) by increasing worship (Ibn Kathir, 2013).

Aisyah bint Abi Bakr was the wife of the Prophet Muhammad. who is an expert on hadith and is a source of reference for religious fatwas. He comes from a family that is devout in worship, kind to others and close to the Prophet Muhammad. Bellau was married to the Prophet when she was still young, and it was at this time that she heard a lot of spiritual cleansing from her husband. As the closest person, Aisyah knew very well the behavior, daily life, manners, ups and downs of the Prophet Muhammad in her household, so that she was one of the narrators of the hadith of the prophet who could be accounted for. Aisyah became a female figure who contributed to the transmission of holy texts (hiwayah/hadith).

Nafisah bint Hasan bin Zaid (Sayyidah Nafisah) is a hadith expert who is still a descendant of Ali bin Abi Talib. He is a person who cannot read and write (ummi), but has extraordinary intelligence in understanding religious knowledge, one of which is the science of hadith. He is also known as a person who is diligent in worship and ascetic towards the pleasures of the world. His simple attitude and mature knowledge invite people to learn from him, one of them is

Muhammad bin Idris Asy-Syafii (Imam of the Shafii School) and Ahmad bin Hanbal (Imam of the Hanbali School). Nafisa is a role model for women who contribute to the transmission of sacred texts (hiwayah/hadith), while at the same time showing that it is possible for women to be teachers for men and not a disgrace.

Rabi'ah Al-Adawiyah is a female Sufi expert and literature recorded in the history of the Abbasid dynasty. She had experienced a period when women were used as slaves and singers for men, which she finally freed from this situation when God gave her inspiration and privileges that others could see. The next life he spent alone in a place to worship and compose poems praising God who had given him grace. His asceticism and consistency in goodness makes people people around him take knowledge and example from him. Rabi'ah became a female Sufi figure who could be followed just like the male Sufis.

Abla Al-Kahlawi is a well-known lecturer in modern Egypt, as well as dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. He became a regular speaker on several television stations in Egypt with his Islamic preaching. He also held humanitarian activities in Egypt to help people who were orphaned or sick. Her role in Egypt rivals that of men, so she can show that women can be involved in useful public activities. Abla became a female preacher who motivated other women to fight for their public rights..

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanations presented in the discussion chapter which includes images of women in Middle Eastern society throughout the ages, changes in the views of women in the modernization era and female figures who take part in religious da'wah in the Middle East, it can be concluded that: Women have experienced discrimination in the past, when Islam came to the Middle East region to elevate women's dignity from adversity to prosperity and comfort. Women are no longer seen as mere objects of satisfaction, but have started to play a role in a limited public agenda; The development of the modern movement gave birth to new perceptions regarding the role of women in life, they are entitled to social, cultural, educational rights in social life. Religious reviews and new ideas about women make us realize that we should place them proportionally and even though the discrimination experienced by women has occurred for a long time, they still play a role in religious propagation in the Middle East slowly and significantly. This is proof that women are able to synergize in the world of da'wah with men, so that there is no gender monopoly on an object of activity.

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