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## EARLY FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS AND IDEA AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN IN 1920s INDONESIA

Farid Muttaqin<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

*Colonial encounters were pivotal in the development of feminist consciousness and the women's liberation movement among women and men in colonized countries like Indonesia. However, the influences of the colonial encounter on the foundation of feminist consciousness were not developed by passive recipients of colonial ideas. The initial idea of Islamic education for Muslim girls showed the crucial influence and contribution of Islam and Muslim women to early feminist ideas in Indonesia. Islamic education for Muslim girls was intended to answer the specific problem of women's lack of empowerment within family and social life. The idea of education for women's empowerment transformed into part of the nationalist movement against colonialism when in the end it led to the foundation of Muslim women's organizations that brought Islam as a critical tool. Foundation of Muslim women's organizations was a critical internal effort against patriarchal values and structures in the Islamic context. I argue that these feminist agendas, such as Islamic education for girls and Muslim women's organizations, were integral to the Islamic reform movement.*

### مستخلص

وكانت لقاءات الاستعمارية محورية في تطوير الوعي النسائي وحركة تحرير المرأة بين النساء والرجال في البلدان المستعمرة مثل إندونيسيا. ومع ذلك كانت تأثيرات اللقاء الاستعماري على أساس من الوعي النسوي لا تطويره من قبل متلقين سلبيين للأفكار الاستعمارية. وأظهرت الفكرة الأولية التربية الإسلامية لمليقات المسلمين تأثير

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حاسم ومساهمة الإسلام ومسلم للنساء على الأفكار النسوية المبكرة في اندونيسيا. وكان القطل للنسوية الإسلامية للبنات المسلمات للرد على مشكلة معينة من افتقار المرأة إلى التمكين داخل الأسرة والحياة الاجتماعية. فكرة التعليم من أجل تمكين المرأة تحولت إلى جزء من الحركة الوطنية ضد الاستعمار عندما قاد في النهاية إلى تأسيس منظمات النساء المسلمات التي جلبت الإسلام كأداة حاسمة. وكانت مؤسسة من منظمات النساء المسلمات جهد داخلي حاسم ضد القيم والبنى الأبوية في السياق الإسلامي. أزعج أهنه الأجنات النسوية قتل التربية الإسلامية للفتيات ومنظمات النساء المسلمات وتكفلن جزءاً لا يتجزأ من حركة الإصلاح الإسلامية

**Keywords:** *Feminist, Consciousness, Women, Muslim, Indonesia*

## A. Introduction

An encounter with colonial rulers is often viewed as the main, even the only, factor in the development of feminist consciousness among women (and men) in some colonized countries. For example, Qasim Amin's (1863- 1908) inspiring reflection on women's rights in Egypt, documented in his books, *Al-Mar'ah Al-Jadidah* (The New Women) and *Tahrir Al-Mar'ah* (Women's Liberation), exhibits the significant influences of British perspectives of women's liberation as a result of his interaction with the foreigners. His ideas of women's liberation do not emerge solely from his views on the situation of Egyptian women. His intensive intellectual mingling with his British colleague, Lord Cromer, and his experiences while studying in France, awakened his concern about women's seclusion. He was inspired with idea of women's education to follow Western civilization's view of women's liberation (Ahmed, 1992: 155). A similar case is found in Indonesia. The idea of women's emancipation through educating girls, voiced by Kartini (1879-1904) in the late 1800s, was often viewed as resulting from her intensive interaction with her Dutch colleague, Rosita Abendanon-Mandri (Soebadio, 1979).

Colonial encounters were pivotal in the development of feminist consciousness and the women's liberation movement among women and men in colonized countries. However, in my view, the influences of the colonial encounter on the foundation of feminist consciousness were not developed by passive recipients of colonial ideas. The social and personal interaction between the "colonial" and the "colonized" in which women in

colonized countries like Indonesia gained inspiration and motivation to develop feminist consciousness and build a feminist movement was not based on the hierarchical power relationship in which the colonial was always the powerful “savior” of colonized women, saving them from discrimination and marginalization. Indonesia provides us with an example of how feminist consciousness and ideas were built from a dynamic process which included active self-reflection among Indonesian women about various social and political situations that appeared to be a problem of gender discrimination and marginalization. The colonial encounter was not a unique source of inspiration in the development of feminist consciousness in Indonesian history.

The initial idea of Islamic education for Muslim girls showed the crucial influence and contribution of Islam and Muslim women to early feminist ideas in Indonesia. Even though, as Locher-Scholten (2002: 21) mentions, Kartini’s idea of a school for girls was vital in leading the later generation of Indonesian feminists, the idea of Islamic schools for Muslim girls cannot be separated from its pioneers’ social, academic, and personal interaction with male Muslim leaders and clerics (*ulama*) and their self-reflection about specific conditions of Indonesian Muslim women.

In many countries, including Egypt, Japan (Sievers, 1983), and Indonesia, education for women appeared to be one of the most powerful agenda items of “women’s liberation” and the feminist movement in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Before Kartini thought of founding a school for girls, only a limited number of elite Indonesian women, mainly those coming from royal families and government officials, participated in Dutch schools (Soebadio, 1979). While some Dutch schools offered very limited access to the *pribumi* or “native” Indonesian boys from the non-elite families to learn limited writing and reading skills, the *pribumi* girls had no access at all (Nata, 2001). The projection and imagination toward Western civilization reflected through equal access to and participation in education for women dominated construction of the idea of schools for girls and women. This situation developed a notion that education for women was a global feminist agenda with the West as the only source of women’s liberation and feminist movement.

Islamic schools for Muslim girls and women in an Indonesian historical context showed that the idea of education for girls was contextual

and local, which means some specifically local conditions motivated these early activists. In other words, the idea of school for girls during the colonial period did not always reflect a wish to “imitate” the colonial progress of “civilization.” In the case of Indonesia, Islamic education for Muslim girls was intended to answer the specific problem of women’s lack of empowerment within family and social life. The idea of education for women’s empowerment transformed into part of the nationalist movement against colonialism when in the end it led to the foundation of Muslim women’s organizations that brought Islam as a critical tool.

Participation of Muslim women’s organizations in the nationalist movement was not meant only to fight against Dutch colonialism. It played a crucial role in challenging the male-dominated nationalist movement that had decentralized women’s voices and agendas in the struggle for independence. Women’s organizations in the nationalist movement represented an attempt to have a voice and to incorporate feminist agendas into the nationalist movement. Furthermore, foundation of Muslim women’s organizations was a critical internal effort against patriarchal values and structures in the Islamic context. As a consequence, it can be an argument to prove that Islam and the Muslim societies during the colonial period were not a singular entity; rather, they were dynamic, heterogeneous and progressive, including in the context of gender and sexual relations. Here I argue that these feminist agendas, such as Islamic education for girls and Muslim women’s organizations, were integral to the Islamic reform movement.

In discussing the points I carry out in this paper, I specifically examine the life experiences of Rahmah Al-Yunusiyah (1901-1969) and Walidah Ahmad Dahlan (1872-1946), two female Muslim pioneers who significantly contributed to voicing the idea of Islamic schools for girls and Muslim women’s organizations in Indonesian history. Al-Yunusiyah exhibited a “public personhood”, divorcing her husband in order to focus on realizing and expanding her idea of Islamic schools for girls. Walidah Ahmad Dahlan focused on “domestic subjectivity” in which she developed her ideas of schools for girls and Muslim women’s organizations through her marital relation with Ahmad Dahlan, the leader of the Islamic reform movement. These differences challenge the conventional notions of the division between public and domestic in which the first is often viewed as more political than the second.

Despite their crucial contributions to “women’s emancipation” and “women’s empowerment,” Muslim women are often ignored in the discussion of the history feminist movements in Indonesia. In the historical context of colonialism, the Dutch, with their policies of “empowering local people” which included education, prioritized Indonesians from elite families like Kartini and discriminated against Muslim communities. Kartini’s ideas of girls’ schools received significant attention and were spotlighted by the Dutch rulers, which led to her popularity even in the memory of later generations of Indonesians. In 1911, a Dutch government officer, JH Abendanon, documented Kartini’s letters to her Dutch colleague, Rosita Abendanon-Mandri, in the book *Door Duisternis tot Licht* (After Darkness, Light Is Born) which was first translated into English, *Letters of a Javanese Princess*, in 1920. Meanwhile, the Dutch rulers viewed Islamic education as a potential challenge against their power. Under such political conditions, the Dutch colonial government marginalized important efforts of Muslim women like Walidah and Al-Yunusiyah. The biographies examining their life experiences do not examine their work within the context of feminist movements or women’s liberation movement. As a result, the ideas of “Islamic feminism” were not really popular even in the ears of the Indonesian Muslim group. Elaboration of the life experiences of Walidah and Al-Yunusiyah in the context of the early development of feminist consciousness will contribute to centralizing their ideas and the contributions of Muslim women to feminist movements in Indonesia.

### **B. Kartini, Dutch Colonialism and School for Girls**

Kartini was born into an elite family on April 21, 1879, in Jepara, Central Java. Her mother Ngasirah was the daughter of a religious scholar. Her father was Raden Mas Adipati Sosroningrat, Regent of Japara. His father, the Regent of Demak, Pangèran Ario Tjondronegoro, was an enlightened man who had given European educations to all of his sons and who is described by his granddaughter Kartini as—“the first regent of middle Java to unlatch his door to that guest from over the sea—Western civilization.” (Coté, 1992). As some of children from the elite family, Kartini had the opportunity to attend a Dutch school. With the privileged ability of speaking Dutch, she had access to reading books, magazines and newspapers and an opportunity to

communicate and interact with Dutch communities. Under this social situation, Kartini gained an opportunity to know Western ideas of emancipation and liberation, including women's emancipation (*Biography of Raden Adjeng Kartini*, 2014).

Kartini called for the erection of schools for girls. The opportunity of attending the Dutch school and having an intensive interaction with the Dutch significantly shaped her idea of schools for girls. However, she was greatly concerned about the social and political injustices in Java centered in the rulers' abuse of power. In her 1903 letter, "Give the Javanese Education" Kartini mentions, "The State and the nobility have benefited from this but what have the people themselves gained? What benefit have the people had from their highly revered nobles who the Government uses to rule them? To date, nothing, or very little; more likely they have been disadvantaged on those occasions when the nobility has abused its power" (Kartini, 1992). Kartini also criticized the tradition called *adat* of submission and fatalism within Javanese society that was fostered by an Islamic teaching of destiny (*takdir*). After she rejected belief in the virtue of an *adat* that forced a girl to marry, Kartini viewed education as the answer (Coté, 1992). In her mind, education was not only meant to build intellectual capacity but also to provide moral education (Kartini, 1992).

Because of the emphasis on moral education, Kartini pointed out the importance of schools for girls. She thought that "woman has a great task to perform in the moral development of society...; she can contribute much, if not most, to ensure the improvement of the moral standards of society.... How can Javanese mothers now educate their children if they themselves are uneducated? The education and development of the Javanese people can never adequately advance if women are excluded, if they are not given a role to play in this" (Kartini, 1992).

Kartini's critical reflection against the social-political situation of living under "feudalistic" Javanese society, specifically with the local *adat* of fatalism and the religious faith of destiny, showed that the colonial encounter was not the only inspiration shaping her idea of women's emancipation through education for girls. Her letters and the idea of schools for girls displayed Kartini's strong self-reflection of social, cultural, political, and religious problems within the society. With the idea of schools for girls, Kartini founded the academic and intellectual basis for feminist movements in Indonesia that

gave lessons to the later generations of Indonesian feminists to pay attention to education for girls and women. As Dahlan (1979: 48-49) points out, Kartini's ideas of education for girls and her critical reflection against local and religious custom played a crucial role in developing feminist consciousness among the later Muslim women in the country.

### **C. Islamic Reform and the Nationalist Movement**

Ahmad Dahlan, born in 1868 in Yogyakarta, Java, was a pioneer of the Islamic reform movement in Indonesian history. He experienced an academic life in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, where he met some Egyptians well-known in the Islamic reform movement, such as Muhammad Abduh, Al-Afghani, and Rasyid Ridha. In 1912, Dahlan founded the Muhammadiyah, one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, to voice his idea of Islamic renewal. He criticized the dogmatic and uncritical way of understanding Islam; he also criticized Muslims' "staticism" and lack of spirit toward "the advancement of life." He meant the foundation of Muhammadiyah to provide education for Muslims to introduce a new tradition of understanding Islamic teachings. One of Dahlan's ideas of Islamic renewal was the transformation of Islamic education from an "informal" mosque-based education to more formal Islamic schools (*Biography of Ahmad Dahlan*, 2012).

In addition to Yogyakarta in Java, Minangkabau in West Sumatra was another important geographical area of the rise of the Islamic renewal movement, especially through the Muhammadiyah. Abdul Karim Amrullah, born in 1879, was an important figure of the Islamic reform movement in this area. Like Dahlan, Amrullah experienced academic life in Mecca. He founded the Minangkabau branch of Muhammadiyah and spread the idea of Islamic education in the area (Rasyad, Salim, and Saleh, 1991: 37). Once again, for the pioneers of Islamic reform movements, Islamic education was the answer to the problem of "staticism" with Indonesian Muslims at that time.

The Dutch colonial administration implemented a special policy for Islamic education. The colonial power did not give Muslims an opportunity to participate in the Dutch schools. Instead, it controlled Islamic schools through obliging them to report the syllabus of courses (Nata, 2001). For Muslims, colonialism was an issue both of nationalism and of religion. Dahlan's idea of formalizing Islamic schools was not only an important idea of the Islamic



reform movement, it was also a critical agenda of nationalist movements since it challenged the colonial policy of education.

In the history of Indonesia, the “Islamic” nationalist movement as found in Dahlan’s Islamic education was not really popular and was even ignored in the studies of the Indonesian nationalist movement. This situation resulted from a long historical process when the Dutch colonial administrator developed a ‘structure of not seeing’ (Florida, 1995) “overlooking Islamic influences... while exaggerating and essentializing the influences of non-Islamic ideals” (Hefner, 1997: 11). The nationalist movements led by “non-religious” leaders some of whom gained social and political benefits from the Dutch colonial policy of providing schools for *pribumi* (“native”) Indonesians. On October 28, 1928, the prominent figures of this “non-Islamic” nationalist movements, such as Soegondo Djojopoespito, Djoko Marsaid, Muhammad Yamin, R. Katja Sungkana, and Johannes Leimena conducted a nationalist congress called “The Youth Pledge” (Museum Sumpah Pemuda, 2013). As in the Islamic reform movement, male figures dominated. As a result, neither the Islamic reform movement nor the nationalist movement incorporated feminist agendas of women’s emancipation in their agendas.

#### **D. Walidah Ahmad Dahlan: Education for Girls and the Muslim Women’s Organization**

Walidah was born in Yogyakarta in 1872. Her father, Kyai Pengulu Haji Muhammad Fadhil, was a distinguished *‘ulama* (Muslim cleric) in Kauman, Yogyakarta. She married Ahmad Dahlan, after which she was more popular as Nyai Ahmad Dahlan (Suratmin, 1990: 10). Her background of a religious family and the educational environment in Kauman were an important foundation on which to develop her academics and activism, which became more developed after her marriage to Ahmad Dahlan.

The Kauman society was a Javanese religious society (*santri*) (Alfian, 1989: 144). They actively participated in traditional Islamic education (*pengajian*) based in *pesantren* (home-based education) and mosques. Some wealthy families sent their children to large *pesantren* in other cities, such as Tebuireng and Gontor in East Java. As in the case of Dahlan, some families sent their sons to study Islam in Mecca and Egypt. In this academic circumstance, Kauman produced many *‘ulama* (Suratmin, 1990: 14). Walidah was born and raised within this situation.

Her parents did not send her away to *pesantren* because she was a female. Kauman society restricted their daughters to activities outside their homes (Wahyudi, 2002: 43). With this limitation, Walidah still had the opportunity to develop her social-academic accomplishment.

Walidah's father, her first teacher, taught her basic Islamic knowledge such as reading the Qur'an and textbooks on Islam written in the local Javanese language with the Arabic alphabet (Wahyudi, 2002: 43). He also gave her a chance to teach younger female students in her parents' house (Suratmin, 1990: 19). On the one hand, this experience helped Walidah develop the capacity for public communication and, on the other, played an important role in opening her mind about the needs of providing public education for girls. She realized that there was a huge problem of illiteracy among Muslim girls in her hometown. Occasionally her father asked her to lead a larger *pengajian*, which contributed further to strengthening her leadership skills (Suratmin, 1990: 21).

Walidah married Dahlan when she was still very young, in an arranged marriage that was common within Kauman society at that time. The arranged marriage had a significant impact on Walidah, calling her attention to the conditions of Muslim women and she began working her ideas of emancipation of Muslim women after her marriage (Wahyudi, 2002: 57). She often accompanied Dahlan when he gave public lectures and *pengajian* in many Muslim communities (Puar, 1989: 60).

The experience of being the wife of the leader of the Islamic movement contributed to Walidah's awareness of the primary problem of Indonesian Muslims – illiteracy and lack of access to educational services. She understood that the Muhammadiyah her husband founded did not really pay attention to the specific problem of illiteracy among Muslim women. Walidah taught women who worked in the local garment factory a skill of reading the Quran and writing using Arabic alphabets.

When the Muhammadiyah was first founded, Walidah was Dahlan's only help in operating the organization (Suratmin, 1990: 30). Even though Dahlan and the Muhammadiyah did not really pay attention to women's empowerment agendas, he inspired Walidah to create and work on "feminist" agendas when he said that Muslim women had an equal "right" to take advantages from the Muhammadiyah (Suratmin, 1990: 30). Following her

husband's idea of founding the Muhammadiyah, in 1919, Walidah established a Muslim women's organization called the Aisyiyah as a vehicle for her ideas of empowering Muslim women in Indonesia (Pimpinan Pusat 'Aisyiyah. 1992). Walidah envisioned that Aisyiyah, as the Muhammadiyah women's organization, would play an important role in integrating the agendas of empowering and "liberating" Muslim women into the Muhammadiyah's agenda of the Islamic reform movement (Wahyudi, 2002: 60).

Dahlan, actively involved in the nationalist movement, had many colleagues from such nationalist movements as Sudirman, Soetomo, Soekarno, and Mas Mansyur. Walidah took advantage of this situation to broaden her social-intellectual milieu with these nationalist movement leaders. As a result, she gained knowledge about nationalist movements and stronger organizational and leadership skills (Wahyudi, 2002: 45). After Dahlan's death in 1923 (Suratmin, 1990: 36), Walidah maintained her social-intellectual power to struggle for Indonesian women's rights and the independence of Indonesia.

With other women's organizations, Aisyiyah initiated the first Indonesian women's congress December 22-25, 1928, two months after the "Youth Pledge" that was dominated by male figures of the nationalist movement. While the women's congress as a nationalist movement directly challenged colonialism, the congress also criticized the male-dominated nationalist movement that neglected specific women's problems and ignored feminist agendas. With the women's nationalist movement, Aisyiyah and other women's organizations involved in the women's congress voiced a number of agendas that took into consideration women's specific problems. Results of the women's congress included demands for (1) the colonial administration build more schools for girls and financial support (*studie fonds*) for girls from the lower class with excellent academic potential; (2) marriage registration that would give wives legal protection; (3) financial support for widows and orphans of *pribumi* government officials; (4) building an organization that focused on combating illiteracy among girls, reducing under-age marriages, and providing short courses on health issues for girls, and (5) founding a union of Indonesian women's organizations to consolidate women's nationalist movements (Blackburn, 2008).

Walidah's ideas and efforts of empowering women I describe above show the significant contribution of Muslim women in both feminist and the

nationalist movements in Indonesia. Walidah developed her ideas of women's liberation through her marital life with Ahmad Dahlan; this situation demonstrates that marital and domestic life can play a crucial role in the development of progressive ideas of women's liberation among Muslim women in 1920s Indonesia.

Such terms as "women's emancipation," "women's liberation," and "women's empowerment" more popularly appeared in the discussion of feminist and women's movement in Indonesian history. In specific, the popular use of the term "women's emancipation" indicated the particular influence of Dutch "feminist idea" during the colonial period that mainly used the word "emancipatie." I prefer using the term "feminist movement" to present a stronger political and social value in understanding the ideas and agendas of Indonesian Muslim women I discuss here.

#### **E. Rahmah Al-Yunusiyah: the Formalization of Islamic Education for Muslim Girls**

In 1923, about twenty years after the death of Kartini, Al-Yunusiyah, began to strengthen the Diniyah School Putri (Islamic School for Girls). This school was first established by her older brother, Zainuddin Labay al-Yunusy in 1916 as part of his Islamic reform project through the formalization of Islamic education (Hamka, 13). Nine months since the establishment of the school, Zainuddin passed away and Rahmah continued this idea and brought this into the important position as academic institution that supported Muslim women's empowerment. The first groups of her students included 71 women who were mainly young mothers. These students founded *Persatuan Murid-murid Diniyah School* (the Union of the Diniyah School Student) (Nata, 2001: 226).

Al-Yunusiyah was born in 1904 during the golden period of the rise of Islamic reform movement in Minangkabau, West Sumatera. In the age of 16, Al-Yunusiyah married Bahauddin Latif, the son of a prominent Muslim cleric, Abdul Latif. Bahauddin had to move to other town when he was involved in a conflict against his father due to the different religious understanding. Al-Yunusiyah remained in Minangkabau as she wanted to continue her education in an Islamic school there. After six years in the marital relationship, in 1922, Al-Yunusiyah divorced Bahauddin. She did not want that Bahauddin's involvement in political movement will ruin her dream and

distract her focus of building an Islamic school for girls. She was even reluctant when some of her colleagues had the idea of remarriage. She wanted to focus on her Islamic school for Muslim girls (Rasyad, Salim, and Saleh, 1991: 39-41).

She broke the domination of Muslim male scholars. She was among the 20 greatest Muslim scholars of West Sumatra that is dominated by male 'ulama (Munawaroh, 2002: 31). Since her childhood, Al-Yunusiyah was engaged in many academic activities of seeking Islamic knowledge from prominent male ulama including her old brother, Zainuddin, and Abdul Karim Amrullah (Rasyad, Salim, and Saleh, 38).

The Islamic school for Muslim girls she founded challenged the public views about the traditional gender role of women strongly alive within the Minbangkabau society at that time. Rahmah had to face public cynicisms. Often times, Al-Yunusiyah and her students heard their neighbors mocking, "Can women be a teacher? Impossible! Don't spend your time to go to schools or to read books because you would end up going back to kitchen..." (Rasyad, Salim, and Saleh, 43). Al-Yunusiyah's mission in building Islamic school for girls was "to educate girls who have Islamic spirit and capable women teachers who have responsibility of social wealth and nationalism based on the devotion to the God" (Munawaroh, 13). The Islamic school she founded and managed did not teach "knowledge and skills" of being "good wives-wise mothers" based on Islamic morality. Rather, the school taught Islamic knowledge that had orientation to build intellectual capacity of Muslim women including Arabic, Islamic history, Islamic theology, and Islamic jurisprudence as well as public speaking skill (Rasyad, Salim, and Saleh, 39).

Her vision of Islamic education for girls was different with the idea of education for Muslim girls voiced by the earlier pioneer of education for girls in Padang Panjang, Roehana Koeddoes. While Koeddoes focused more on building technical and vocational skills like sewing and cooking, Al-Yunusiyah emphasized more on building intellectual capacities of Muslim women (Munawaroh, 15). By providing a wider access for Muslim girls to engage in Islamic academic and intellectual activities, Al-Yunusiyah opened the door for them to enjoy the power of knowledge.

Al-Yunusiyah became the first Indonesian woman to visit Al-Azhar University of Cairo, a center of excellent in Islamic studies; she was invited by the President of the University. Even though, this was only a short visit, the

experience of visiting the university provided her with significant intellectual and social power among Muslim scholars in her hometown. Al-Yunusiyah's Islamic schools for girls inspired Sheikh Abdurrahman Tadj, the President of Al-Azhar University to transform this idea to the university. Al-Azhar University also awarded Al-Yunusiyah *shaikhah* (female master in Islamic knowledge), the highest honorary scholar title. Al-Yunusiyah was the first woman to receive the award (Ghazali, 1991: 238). This award was not only a recognition of her contribution to Islamic education for Muslim girls; more than that this was an acknowledgment of her great accomplishment as a reformist Muslim scholar and her authoritative position in Islamic knowledge; the *shaikh* honorary title was usually only for male scholars (Ghazali, 239).

In the context of living under colonialism, Al-Yunusiyah's intellectual network with Muslim scholars from Al-Azhar University played an important role in shaping feminist movement in Indonesian history. Unlike Kartini who gained significant influences from her Dutch colleagues, the connection with Muslim scholars in Egypt contributed to the acknowledgement of Al-Yunusiyah's contribution and authority in the field of Islamic reform movement in her hometown; Minangkabau society were among the most religious Muslims in Indonesia. As a result, her project of Islamic education for Muslim girls gained popularity and public support. It is very important to specifically study whether Al-Yunusiyah had the opportunity to build intellectual connection with or encountered with feminist ideas of a number of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Egyptian feminists, such as Qasim Amin, Malak Hifni Nassef (1886-1918), Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947), Doria Shafik (1908-1975), and Mai Ziyada (1886-1941).

Al-Yunusiyah made an important step to design a collaboration between the Islamic school she founded and Al-Azhar University. This collaboration provided scholarships for the alumni of her school to study in Al-Azhar University. The first delegation to study in the university included 8 alumni in 1958 (Munawaroh, 29). One of them earned a prestigious accomplishment and was asked by the university to teach in the Department of Letters. The government of Kuwait also awarded scholarships for the alumni of Al-Yunusiyah's school to study in some universities there (Munawaroh, 29).

The collaboration of Al-Yunusiyah's Islamic school for girls and some universities in the Middle East, especially Egypt demonstrated her contribution to Islamic reform movement in the region with the inclusion of "women's rights to participate in education" in the Islamic educational institutions. Unlike the transformation of the idea of Islamic reform from the Egyptian scholars to the Indonesian reformists that was mainly through mainstream issues of theology as found in the case of Ahmad Dahlan and Abdul Karim Amrullah (Hamka, 1961: 39-40), Al-Yunusiyah's experiences revealed that women's rights issues played an important role in the transformation of Islamic renewal ideas from Indonesia to Middle East, Egypt in particular.

The Islamic schools for girls she founded also gave a major impact in shifting the academic tradition of Islamic schools from the traditional model of *pesantren* to a more formal educational system. In the traditional academic system of *pesantren*, the learning system was centralized in one figure of male *kyai*, the leader of *pesantren*. The earlier learning process of the *pesantren* system was not based on a "systematic" syllabus and was conducted mainly in a mosque (Dhofier, 1999). Al-Yunusiyah attempted to decentralize the power of (male) religious leader in an Islamic academic institution and called for the sharing of authority and responsibility with other teachers and instructors involved. Al-Yunusiyah's Islamic education for girls was a strategic way to train Muslim women with Islamic knowledge and to increase the number of Muslim women teachers and scholars. The idea of the formalization of Islamic schools for Muslim girls also challenged the patriarchal academic tradition in *pesantren* that positioned male teachers in the center of academic activity and gave only boys to participate. With the Islamic school for girls, Muslim girls had a greater opportunity to engage in seeking Islamic knowledge. Al-Yunusiyah's idea of Islamic education for girls inspired many *pesantren* in Java, the basis of *pesantren* educational system, to build special learning programs for girls and even build *pesantren* for girls (*pesantren puteri*) (Munawaroh, 33).

Unlike Kartini who had a close social and personal relation with and gained significant influences from her Dutch colleagues, Al-Yunusiyah was consistently independent from the Dutch colonial ruler. In the early

1900s, the Dutch administration applied a policy to intervene with Islamic education by restricting courses viewed to contribute to the development of critical tradition among Muslim students and led them toward the rebellion (Hamka, 8). Al-Yunusiyah received an offer of financial subsidy from the Dutch colonial government to improve her Islamic school. She rejected the offer in order to maintain the independence of her school from the intervention of the Dutch colonial interests. In 1905, the Dutch administration issued a regulation that obliged *guru agama* (teacher of Islamic knowledge) to request approval from and to report their learning process to local ruler (Machnun Husein, 1983: 5-6). Al-Yunusiyah initiated establishing *Komite Penolakan Ordonansi Sekolah Liar* (the Committee to Reject the Regulation of Unregistered Schools) to oppose the Dutch policy that controlled unregistered schools (Munawaroh, 23).

Al-Yunusiyah also expressed a critical challenge against the intervention of male Muslim scholars. When the Muhammadiyah was first introduced in Minangkabau, some of the male initiators approached Al-Yunusiyah to affiliate her Islamic school with the Muhammadiyah's education program. She rejected this idea because she wanted to maintain her school free from the influences of any organizations that, in the context of nationalist movement, often involved in political movement. When Mahmud Yunus, a prominent male Muslim scholar issued the idea to reform the Islamic educational system in Indonesia through the establishment of *Panitia Ishlah al-Madaris al-Islamiyah* (The Committee of Islamic Schools Unification) and the fusion of Islamic schools into one learning system in order to improve the quality of the educational system (Munawaroh, 2002: 21-22). Al-Yunusiyah opposed the idea coming from Yunus, a very important male Muslim figure and a distinguished 'ulama. She had her own thinking that it was easier to manage Islamic schools if the management of the learning system was held by each school.

Al-Yunusiyah wanted to increase the number of Muslim women teachers in Islamic schools (*guru agama*) to teach Muslim women and girls as her agenda of women's emancipation from the isolation and marginalization in any social fields. Al-Yunusiyah viewed that this mission can only be achieved if Islamic schools consistently focused on teaching



and learning activities and were not intervened by non-academic related interests, including politics (Munawaroh, 13).

Al-Yunusiyah's idea of increasing the quantity of female *guru agama* betrayed the policy of the Dutch colonial government that emphasized the education for girls to develop women's attitudes of being good mothers. The Dutch policy of gender segregation in education was formulated based on the perspective that women were supposed to be good mothers and they had obligation to care their families and their children. Since many of their children went to Dutch schools, their mothers had to learn Dutch in order to be able to communicate with their children. In the letter, the Dutch ruler mentioned that education for women for academic-intellectual goals, such as to produce female teachers, was unnecessary (S. L. van der Wal, 1960: 23-25).

Al-Yunusiyah did not restrict Muslim women to participate in political movements. She understood that education was a medium to empower women's capacity so they can enter into social lives with knowledge in their hands and compete against men. She did not suggest Muslim girls to be involved deeper in political activities that would destroy their orientation and motivation to accomplish maturity in academic matters. She developed theoretical foundation of female students' political ways which was "to love their country based on the strong belief in Islam (*iman*)" and not through the participation in political movement. The female students had to prepare well their intellectual development, so they would be able to compete with men when they were involved in politics (Munawaroh, 21). In 1933, she led a political gathering of mothers in Padang Panjang, West Sumatera to protest against the Dutch occupation. She was a member and the committee of *Sarikat Kaum Ibu Sumatra* (the Union of Sumatran Mothers) who fought against the Dutch colonial ruler (Munawaroh, 24).

Al-Yunusiyah's idea of Islamic school for Muslim girls significantly contributed to women's liberation movement in Indonesia. Her idea was also crucial to challenge Islamic reform agenda that centralized male Muslim scholars; the agenda of education for Muslim girls became an

integral agenda of the Islamic reform movement. Al-Yunusiyah used her project of Islamic education as one of her nationalist agendas against Dutch colonialism. Despite the fact that she was involved in an underage marriage which was a common practice in 1900s Indonesia, Al-Yunusiyah's decision not to follow her husband's migration and to finally separate with him in order to focus on education and academic life demonstrates her out-of-the-box way of thinking. Within Indonesian society, even until contemporary period, divorce is considered taboo and a widow receive many stereotypical and stigmatic views as bad woman/wife. Muslim widows often get stronger negative opinions from the community as impious Muslim. Al-Yunusiyah challenged popularly traditional view within Muslim communities in Indonesian history about women's obligation as a good housewife and a loyal wife.

## **F. Conclusion**

Muslim women have contributed significantly to the development of the feminist movement in Indonesian history. Despite Kartini's idea of school for girls that developed from her intense interaction with her Dutch colleague becoming the main inspiration, these Muslim women's idea of Islamic education for Muslim girls prove that feminist awareness in the colonial historical context was not just the result of colonial encounters. The feminist consciousness was also developed through self-reflection of the conditions of Muslim women and a personal, social, and academic interaction within Muslim communities in local, national and trans-national contexts. The contribution of Muslim women also appeared in the active involvement of Muslim women's organizations in the nationalist movement that challenged both the colonialism and the male-dominated nationalist movement. Finally, the contribution of Muslim women to the development of feminist consciousness and awareness in the Indonesian historical context showed that the Islamic feminist agenda cannot be separated from the Islamic reform movement. This also reflected the progressive dimension of Islam and the Muslim communities in Indonesia during the colonial period.

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