

Restorying the Experiences of Muslim Women Academics in Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education: A Narrative Inquiry

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Siti Muflichah*

Universitas Islam Negeri Banjarmasin, Indonesia

Abstract

In the last three decades, women have been the majority of undergraduate students in Indonesian higher education. However, the story is different when it comes to women as academics in Islamic higher education institutions. Compared to their male colleagues, female academics have unequal academic and lower leadership positions. There is a low percentage of female academics who have achieved the academic positions of associate professors or professors. They also have low productivity in research and publications. This article deals with the inequality facing Muslim women academics in Indonesian state Islamic higher education (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri* [PTKIN]). It asks the question: Do these problems happen due to no opportunities given to Muslim women academics to develop their academic career? In doing so, this article uses narrative inquiry as an approach to revealing the story of Indonesian Muslim academics and the voice of Muslim feminists, which is not internationally acknowledged and recognized. It focuses its analysis on the voice and career experiences of a Muslim woman (*Muslimah*) academic in an Indonesian state Islamic university using the feminist methodology. It aims to portray how and why female academics face unequal academic achievement. Understanding their voice of higher academic promotion is important to solve the problem of the ‘leaking pipeline’ about gender-based representation in university. The article argues that Indonesian *Muslimah* academics had low representation at academic advancement as they experienced more barriers than their male colleagues.

* Siti Muflichah, Department of Arabic and English Education, Universitas Islam Negeri Banjarmasin, Indonesia. Email: sitimuflichah@uin-antasari.ac.id

Key Words

Indonesian Muslim women academics, Islamic higher education, fingerprint, narrative inquiry

Introduction

The development of Indonesian academics' career runs through *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*, three main tasks for Indonesian higher education institutions, which include teaching, research, and community services (Gaus and Hall 2016). Besides, there is a kind of activity that adds to the career development, which is not compulsory, known as *kegiatan penunjang*. Academics who have done these activities will be evaluated and may get a promotion either in academic level enhancement or leadership position.

In the context of State Islamic Indonesian Higher Education (SIIHE), female academics achieve a lower development level both in academic career and leadership position (Kholis 2012). Compared to their male colleagues, these academic women achieve less publication, have less thesis supervision, and receive fewer research grants, but have heavier teaching tasks. Similarly, they are rarely appointed as committee members and organizers of university-related activities. Women have not been appointed as rectors in SIIHE (MORA 2008; Kholis 2012). Their academic positions range from lecturers to associate professor. Only 3% were female professors in 133 Islamic higher education institutions (MoRA 2003). Moreover, at state Islamic universities, a few academic women have reached vice-rector positions (around 6% from 2006 to 2010). Similarly, Murniati (2012) found that no females were appointed as rectors and male academics occupied the positions of vice-rectors, deans, and vice deans with 75%, 88,9%, and 78,3% respectively. So, in general, a high percentage of academic women hold the lower leadership positions (MoEC 2008).²

A significant change happened in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia in the 2000s, which caused women to experience the condition as illustrated above. It is seen clearly in the area of management behavior, which has influenced the position of academics. The adoption of the "new managerialism" doctrine, which puts the private sectors' norms and practices to organizations in governmental sectors like state Islamic universities, made this trend stronger. Deem (1998) asserts that universities

2 Fortunately, in 2019-2020, recent data show a new development in which female academics were appointed as rectors in some state Islamic universities such Amani Lubis in UIN Jakarta, Nyayu Khadijah in UIN Palembang, and Inayatillah in STAIN/IAIN Tengku Dirundeng Meulaboh Aceh. Furthermore, the percentage of academic women in the middle leadership positions has increased twice in the last decade.

that focus on research are experiencing a dramatic change, especially when it comes to the relationship between gender and managerialism. Teelkem and Deem (2013) state that the new managerialism is gender-biased even though it seems to give women more chances based on the meritocratic system (Harris, Ravenswood and Myers 2013). “New managerialism” is a masculine arena that benefits male managers and it is unequal management with certain practices and values. Female academics’ positions and experiences are directly influenced by such change. This change has happened to state Islamic higher education in Indonesia resulting in the transformation of its particular aspects such as a transition from the form of institute or college to that of a university (Lukens-Bull 2013).

In this context, this study investigates how female academics at state Islamic universities experience career advancement within neoliberal managerial conditions. It explores how my understanding of the career development of Indonesian female academics is informed by the theories of management and gender. In doing so, I use narrative inquiry (Reissman 1993) to understand a female academic’s lived experiences of career development in Indonesia and recognize the story of her life as a knowledge source. This study employs feminist research methodology and aggregated stories of women academics’ experiences. These stories are integrated with management theories and feminist ethics about the experience of Indonesian academic women. The very specific condition of academic women who live and work under recent managerial conditions is revealed by Gaus and Hall (2016). In the Indonesian context, new managerial doctrines are connected with the implementation of performance evaluation, work-based targets, emphasis on practices (Ball 2015), and supervision of attendance through fingerprint scanning machine use. More classes are taught by academic women. More administrative works related to certain courses are tackled by female academics including planning, reporting, and engaging in strict evaluation, a process that is mostly done online. The academic women also experience supervising more theses making them have restricted time to read and write research proposals. The women who rarely participate in the process of national research grant submission are included in other problematic practices. It is also reported that female academics feel alienated to participate in international publications and they are required to focus on students’ pastoral care. These women also have low-level academic and leadership positions (Bagilhole 2002).

Postcolonial Feminism

As this article discusses the experiences of female academics at state Islamic higher education in Indonesia, I think using theories that deal with women's experiences in postcolonial regions is the best choice. The theoretical framework of this study is provided by the postcolonial feminist theory. So, this part explores the work of Mohanty (2003) and the development of postcolonial feminism as a theoretical framework used in this study to understand and theorize the variety of women's experiences at state Islamic higher education in Indonesia.

According to Mohanty (2003), one of the impacts of colonialism is a forced lopsidedness between the West and the rest of the world. Utilizing inclusive presumptions, the West is reprimanded for characterizing the individuals of the non-Western world as "the other". Likewise, women's liberation can be characterized as a scholarly and dissident development that intends to improve the situation of women. Postcolonial feminism provides us with language to explore how female academics are enabled to 'speak'. This is significant because female scholars have been misused by history and seen as 'the other'. As contended by postcolonial woman's rights defenders, postcolonial women's liberation centers around 'the others' and rejects ladies' universalism. Subsequently, postcolonial woman's rights advocate the affirmation of all gendered voices of Islamic female scholars. It focuses on works for freedom in terms of the social, cultural, economic, and religious identity of women located ontologically, epistemologically, and geopolitically outside the global North (Mohanty 2003). Using postcolonial feminism, this study focuses on a female academic to reveal her voice of how she navigates her low presentation in a leadership position and academic career. This contributes to studies of Muslim women (*Muslimah*) academics and the female academics' experiences under colonialism and patriarchy in Indonesia. Their experiences are rarely heard in literature.

Feminist Research Methodology

I apply the feminist research methodology in this study. The feminist research methodology applies principles to the struggle of feminists for equal justice and inextricably links with feminist theories (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2007) and, therefore, presents a proper methodological framework to this study. Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007) claim that the feminist research methodology originated in the second wave of feminist movement context and aimed to implement explicit feminist perspectives in conducting research. It also has the goal to enhance women's welfare

and promote change. Feminist research methodology questions structure and ideologies that are oppressive to women. Feminist research records the life and experiences of women by erasing stereotypes and biases based on gender, which create a subjugated knowledge of women (Litchman 2013).

Besides, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) maintain that feminists do not apply the same approaches in their research. They share dissimilar perspectives, as same as they ask different questions, which draw from several methods and methodologies. They are aware of colonialist ideologies of practices, which are sexist, racist, and homophobic. Therefore, feminist research adopts several research methods. Harding (1987) argues that although they share the same basic methods with other researchers, feminist researchers are guided by a methodology that comes from special epistemology which looks for knowledge from women's experiences. In feminist research, therefore, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) and Litchman (2013) argue that there is no fixed set of rules in method, methodology, and epistemology.

According to Charmaz (2006), and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), this feminist research methodology is a 'complete' approach that includes all stages of the research process. It starts from theory to practice. It is from creating research questions to writing research results. Feminist researchers focus on an inextricable link among epistemology, methodology, and method about how to collect and analyze data. All feminist researchers are consistent in expanding new epistemologies, methodologies, and methods of knowing, revealing hidden aspects of women's life and claiming back subjugated knowledge.

Accepting the theories of feminist theorists Stanley and Wise (2002:2), this article removes positivist features. It looks 'unusual' such as avoiding to inform merely how to do research 'correctly'. This feminist activist sociology research needs experimentally grounded examinations of how information is created. My exploration reflects styles of human science that centers around 'experience', with women's regular day to day existence. Additionally, I comprehend that 'women's mistreatments' are differing and convoluted. Consequently, ladies persecutions need complex apparatuses of dissecting and getting them.

Narrative Inquiry

As this study aims to understand, interpret and seek the meaning of female academic life experiences, I use narrative inquiry to collect required data. Narrative inquiry is a methodology inside the subjective convention that

holds that the story is one of the basic units of human experience (Clandinin 2007). As a part of a qualitative research design, the story is used to explain human life. The word “narrative”, according to Polkinghorne (1995: 5), means “events and happenings are configured into a temporal unity utilizing a plot”.

Narrative inquiry enables us to understand fully female academics’ lived experiences at universities, especially their experiences of being subjugated and marginalized when they apply for promotion of academic career. Narrative inquiry allows both participants and authors to sort out their current circumstances and anticipate what is to come (Connelly and Clandinin 1990).

The narrative inquiry also allows me to give voice to women who are marginalized in the traditional research models and recognize women’s life stories as knowledge (Hesse-Biber 2012). As a feminist method, it is used to portray women’s presentation into universities to have their roles as women to shape subjects and make meaning. Women may not even be heard of their own lived experiences. Feminist data collection provides a space and context for women to tell and hear their own and other’s stories (Ropers-Huilman and Winters 2011). Lipton and Mackinlay (2015) claim that stories of women faculty permit women to comprehend the status of women in the scholarly world. The stories also keep up a concentration upon women’s liberation in conversations of sex fairness in higher education.

In telling Muslim academic feminists’ story, I concur with Olyaei (2013) that through sharing a story, it is conceivable to pass on the message of Muslim women scholar-activists that qualities like human poise, sexual orientation balance, and women’s privileges are not the restrictive assets of Western mainstream progress and, indeed, these are the common worldwide qualities that we have to take a stab at. By glancing through this story, Muslim women activists will be encouraged to contend that because of the dynamic and moral establishment of Islamic talk, they can emphatically uphold these common liberties.

In her research, Oikkonen (2013) tries to connect between narrative and feminism. She states that feminist narrative is a multi-area theory that consists of psychoanalytical, poststructuralist as well as culturally-oriented approaches to gender and narrative. She proposes the types of narrative analysis that connect the counteraction of some studies such as gender, science, cultural, and poststructuralist literary studies. Moreover, Oikkonen (2013) claims, the narrative is like a machine of text that ensures the story keeps moving. This machine changes representation into certain place

and time organized patterns establishing the sense of movement which is recognized with the narrative. As a medium of knowledge creation, narratives generate interaction between gender and sexuality. Roof (1996) assumes that gender and sexuality have organized narratives and both derive from the textual dynamic of narration.

I met a woman academic who works at a state Islamic university and interviewed her. We agreed to collaborate in this feminist project and share our experiences on how to deal with hard times in academia, namely dealing with the new managerialism system. Her name is Mutia. I picked up Mutia for she had the potential to generate the data that I looked for. She holds a Ph.D. degree from an overseas university. She is currently the head of a department at graduate school. She experienced a lag in her academic promotion.

From the data I collected, I created a story. The data was re-storied by applying an approach offered by Riessman and Quinney (2005:2). In analyzing data, I applied an interpretation of texts based on stories told by Mutia and blended them with my story as the author. Below are the steps starting from collecting data until analyzing them.

Table 1
The Stages of Narrative Research

| | | |
|---------|-----------------------|--|
| Stage 1 | Share stories | Stories shared during the interview |
| Stage 2 | Construct stories | Researchers construct stories from the interview |
| | -Transcribing story | |
| | -Generate theme | |
| Stage 3 | Re-storying | |
| | -Time | Researchers build sequences or events |
| | -Space | |
| | -People | |
| Stage 4 | Share our re-storying | Narrative stories created by researchers |

Adapted from Ollerenshaw, J. A., and Creswell, J. W. 2002. "Narrative Research: A Comparison of Two Restorying Data Analysis Approaches." *Qualitative Inquiry* 8(3): 329-347.

Our Sad Experiences within Neoliberal University

This restorying is about challenging experiences on how to solve problems related to many tasks at the department, students' services, lack of opportunity to write a research proposal, and most importantly, fingerprint-based attendance. I met a female lecturer, Mutia, who told stories to me about the application of new managerialism at her university. She told me how her personal life was heavily influenced by new managerialism. Once Mutia and I sat together, she adjusted the way she sat, leaned her shoulder, and started telling me her story. She said that she had to provide stuff for her kids to go to school the night before.

"In my university, fingerprint-based attendance regulation is implemented. Then, my morning schedule must change. All my routine schedules change. For instance, I make everything for my kids to go to school is ready the night before. I always scream to my kids: "Hey, where are your socks? Where are your tie and hat? Have you done your homework?"."

I asked her whether she woke up earlier. I heard Nina, my other female colleague, who had to wake up two hours earlier to comply with the fingerprint regulation. "Now I wake up so early", she said.

The room was filled with her voice. I started to be aware that only us in the room. Without further due, Mutia continued her story like waves were about to crash. "The time to go to university is changing, from 9 AM to 7.30 AM. This changes the time to do laundry. It cannot be done in the early morning anymore. It has to be done in the night."

She continued the sequences. But, a noise outside the room diminished the rhyme of her story. It seemed they were graduate students who just finished their class. I put my shoulder forward and I focused more on the next words from Mutia's mouth, "When the time to go to campus was 9 AM, I had a chance to dry the clothes. Now, I cannot. Yeah, it is changing. The regulation of fingerprint-based attendance that is to be done at 7.30 AM influences my time to take my kids to school. I need to make everything ready before going to take them to school. After delivering my kids, I stop by my university to do a fingerprint. I have to get out of home at 6.30 AM. I think you know how the city traffic condition in morning rush hours is. It is hard to leave our house at 6.30 AM. It is hard for me."

When she was telling this part, I could see her dropping her shoulders.

The sad feeling roamed in the room. I decided to ask her another topic, the services she did to her students. I described a definition of pastoral care to her and she was happy to share her stories.

“It is a must for me to do pastoral care to students. It is my obligation”, Mutis said.

Mutia’s story that free pastoral care to her students was something must do reminded me clearly that my male office mate warned that I have to clearly say “no” to provide pastoral care to my students. According to him, our promotion is not counted on how much we do pastoral care to students, but rather on credit points taken from teaching, research, and community service activities, which are known as *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*.

I understand that supervising students is a kind of community service. It is not a must for academics to mentor students. However, according to the male colleague, other activities are more “worth” than mentoring students such as teaching and being a speaker in a community seminar or a religious meeting. When we are promoted, community service points are only counted 10 percent, while research has a value of around 40 percent (DGHE 2013).

“Why have to?”

“I should help and focus on students’ life. I worry about them, if we do not help, just in case later in the next 20 years, they are still jobless.”

She gasped for breath. I heard how heavy her breath was.

Mutia claimed: “I am worried, if we do not help them, then who is responsible for them? I think helping them is exactly our task. It contributes to their success in the future.”

“So, I guess you provide more time on mentoring students?” I replied.

There was a long pause between my question and her answer.

“Yes, it is true”. The way Mutia replied was very calm.

I witnessed with my own eyes that female academics tended to not say clearly “saying no” when they were asked to give service to their students. Griffin, Bennett, and Harris (2013) confirm that female academics have difficulty in expressing their feeling to say “no” or do less service (and teaching). I have a female colleague who is still hard to say “no” to students’ requests even though she has a high academic position. She experiences well in her career progress, but she has low power in front of her students. As Mutia admitted the ways she got involved with students in personal and professional ways, she said confidently that she provided more time to the students and engaged personally with them than her male colleagues.

Acker (1997) warns that task-loads at universities create gender inequality in some types of academic tasks. Female academics conducted

unpaid service to students, more administration and teaching. In the area of research, men do more than women. This is illustrated by Mutia as she described: “I have difficulties to apply for a competitive research grant because to prepare an application for the grant, I must read and read. I have limited time. I have less time to prepare a research proposal. Very little time. Really.”

Then, Mutia made a connection between her dream for the next year’s hope and her last year’s failure. “But, I have to apply for the grant. I plan it for next year. Last year, I was in rush in preparing required documents for my department accreditation. I did not enough time to write a research proposal because I did not have time to read”.

She looked at the big window behind me. Her eyes showed a dreamy look. She sighed and tried to remember all her memories when she had limited time to read so she was not able to submit a research proposal. “When I was a lecturer without any additional tasks, I mean, without responsibility as the head of a department, I surely had the time... Now, I am a department chair, I have no time. Meetings make me busy and students’ thesis proposals become my priority”.

In Indonesian public Islamic universities, academic work is not segregated by gender. Female and male academics have the same workloads of teaching, research, and administrative tasks. However, academics work in a variety of environments; some work in natural science areas and laboratories, others work in humanities areas (Becher and Trowler 2001) and this circumstance influences the way women academics work.

A study by Acker (1997) about women’s lack of time in writing proposals reveals that over workloads at university led to gender inequality in specific jobs of academia. Explaining this, Deem (2003) claims that new managerialism is gender-biased for, by monitoring employees, it is related with certain forms of macho-masculinity over female academics. At this point, new managerialism also tends to control the education sector. Furthermore, Deem and Hillyard (2002) assert that women bear the culture of ‘long hours’ because men do less teaching and administration. This means that the female academics are required to work more and spend more time at the campus for the interest of their universities.

Since Mutia experienced long hour culture, I asked her about her academic position as I believed these two were related.

“Bu Mutia, what is your academic position now?”

No words came out of her mouth. She gave me a sharp sight. Her eyebrows which followed the curve of her dark eyes looked like an arch.

Then, she answered shortly: “I have not applied for promotion for many years. I am still a senior lecturer now.”

My direct response was “I thought you were associate professor, looking at the time of your service. What is your obstacle?”

She frowned and then replied.

“I do not publish in internationally accredited journals”.

I am aware that nowadays, to apply for the position of associate professor, academics had to have a good publication in international academic journals.

“Does this mean that the reason why you do not apply for the associate professor position is that you are not ready to apply for research grants and you do not have international publication?”

“Yes for me. My difficulty is the process of editing. To edit my articles needs the right moment. Two days is enough for writing, but editing is hard for me since to do that I need to be absent from campus. For me, the problem is that I do not have enough time. I need more time,” Mutia said.

I listened intently, Mutia frowned. I did not expect that she would tell me her promotion problem. However, I could understand her because I experienced the same. My understanding was real, it just happened to me when I was a manager. I did not have time to myself, on top of that, time to prepare my publication (Muflichah, Andriani and Mackinlay 2018).

After telling her academic promotion problem, Mutia shared her long story on how to manage thesis supervision. She did it by email to save her time and did not want to spend much time with the students at the campus. Her students sent her their thesis drafts by email. When she finished giving feedback, she and her students had a meeting. To do household chores, Mutia employed a student to do laundry. She picked up her teenage daughter from school because it was the only chance to talk with her. Her daughter had a relationship with her male classmate and this made her worried.

As our meeting ended, I asked her about the inspiration for being a professor. She wanted to be, but, she was not sure to reach it. “I am keen to achieve a professor position, but my kids should...” She halted her sentence. Her uncertainty was overwhelmed and my understanding of the unspoken word was there is no such value in being a professor if her children are neglected.

I whispered: “Oh. Oh yes”. My throat was dry and I had a strange feeling as I had no idea how to properly respond to her story.

I understood that my interpretation of Mutia's story was a sense-making activity. My interpretation has a performative dimension: It is an active process of constructing, shaping, and transforming intersubjective reality as pointed by Riessman (1993), and it is not just about representing the world. My understanding of Mutia's story was influenced by my reading of feminist theories. As a Feminist, I needed to focus on the amenability of our own stories. I also had to focus on narrative constructs and grammatical forms of discursive uses of gender and feminism.

Before I talked with Mutia, I did not pay attention to the management shift at the state Islamic university in Indonesia. But, after I listened to her sad story, I realized that how theories of management influence the career of female academics like Mutia. Deem (2003) and Susanti (2011) helped me retell the sad story of how academic life has deteriorated in many aspects since the last decade. I agree with Smith and Webster (1997:5) that "the university has turned out to be 'survivalist', dominated by a sense of the duty to endure rather than enjoy". Similarly, Whitehead (2011) claims that the shift of educational culture in university to managerial culture will lessen equal opportunity discourse and create gendered culture. Those cultures prefer men to apply aggressive management. Moreover, Whitehead (2011) says that the implementation of cultures will be a hazard for women who want to succeed in university or who want to encourage themselves to be managers.

Conclusion

This article is a work of female academics who embrace the feminist perspective so that it shows an intellectual collaboration that regards highly women's experience and knowledge. This kind of work is still rare and has not been fully addressed by the Indonesian government. This article's resources were derived from our personal and intellectual experience as female academics. This work is weaving ideas to employ sisterhood. In this article, I have expressed that how to exchange our experience is very important and mutual trust among us has been developed through showing care for each other and through sharing our stories which grows our mutual relationship. From the feminist epistemology, I express our focus on lived experiences in this study. I have witnessed that under the doctrines of new managerialism universities as workplaces like the state Islamic university where Mutia works change into places that provide female academics more difficulties than their male colleagues. I can conclude from our stories that one Indonesian female academic in a state

Islamic university experienced lag to be promoted. She was left behind in terms of publication, research grants, and promotion to be a professor. I hope that these stories of Indonesian Muslim women (*Muslimah*) academic provide deeper and wider insights into global female academics' stories. Women's ideas, experiences, and perspectives are valuable and need to be acknowledged as well. Their stories are relevant to female academics' work. So, stories are central to the theory of research methodology which embraces feminist values.

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