

## Representation of the Strengths of Santri Women in Pesantren Novels: A Feminism Anthropological Perspective

By

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### Abstract

In the novel "Hati Suhita" and "Dua Barista", the authors were successful in portraying the image of santri women (the wives) who have diverse strengths in handling issues in their families. The strength ingrained in pesantren culture. In order to distinguish itself from women in other areas of the world, the pesantren culture is exceptional in how it manages gender relations in the position and role of santri women (the wives). The purpose of this study is to interpret the sources of strength of santri women (the wives) represented in two pesantren literary novels. This research uses a qualitative method with a hermeneutic phenomenology approach. The characters' life experiences depicted in "Hati Suhita" and "Dua Barista" are interpreted to see the strength of santri women in dealing with household problems. The results indicate that the strength is manifested through: (1) the imitation of the commendable attitude of ummi (mother), (2) the hope for the blessing of parents, (3) God worshiping, (4) the performance as the caretaker of pesantren, and (5) the application of Javanese cultural values 'mikul dhuwur mendhem jero' and 'tapa'. It is concluded that the strength of santri women in dealing with the problems they face is not only in physical form but also in mental and spiritual forms, as a characteristic of the pesantren community.

**Keywords:** feminist anthropology; literature; novel; strength; santri women.

### 1.0 Introduction

This research is about the uniqueness of pesantren culture in the context of gender relations. Gender is a socio-cultural construction that differs from one place to another or from one period to another. It means that the roles of men and women are constructed by certain societies at certain times (Mishra, 2021). This research is essential to do because the categories of women are historically and culturally different. According to McGee and Warms (1996), the differences are not only between women and men but also between women themselves. It also applies to santri women (the women studying in pesantren), who have their own characteristics because they live in a unique pesantren culture.

This study will examine how santri women depicted in two pesantren novels, Hati Suhita (2019) and Dua Barista (2020), solve their household problems. Pesantren is an Islamic-

based educational institution that generally adopts the local culture (wisdom) where the pesantren stands. According to Rangkuti (2019), many pesantren adopt patriarchal systems and practices, whether intentionally or not. Therefore, revealing the strength of santri women in solving their problems in the pesantren environment would be interesting.

There are many studies on pesantren women depicted in literary works, including those by Zahra (2019), Fitriyah (2017), and Afiah and Muslim (2021). Zahra (2019) states that gender injustice often occurs in pesantren community. However, not all gender inequalities resulted in different roles and positions between women and men. Fitriyah (2017) studies women who are passionate about achieving their goals and the forms of gender injustice that occur in the pesantren environment. Meanwhile, Afiah and Muslim (2021) reveal the values of feminism that have developed in the pesantren environment.

In contrast to these studies, this current study examines the ways used by two characters in Hati Suhita and Dua Barista to solve their household problems. It is interesting to study because the female characters have to solve their household problems when, at the same time, they play their role as the wife of a kyai's son (Gus), being the daughter-in-law of a kyai, and the caretaker of a pesantren, simultaneously.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Pesantren and Pesantren literature**

Many pesantrens, Islamic educational institutions, exist in Indonesia. The elements that support the system of pesantren are pondok (dormitories), mosques, Kyai/Bu Nyai (pesantren leader), santris (students), and teachings of Islam (Dhofier, 1995). These elements characterize the existence of a pesantren in Indonesia. Pesantrens are community-based institutions established by individuals, foundations, or Islamic community organizations. The aim is to cultivate noble character and uphold the teachings of Islam reflected in humility, tolerance, balance, and moderation.

Pesantren is an inseparable part of Indonesian literature. As a scientific institution, it has a distinctive and unique character that other educational institutions do not have. This uniqueness is due to the literary tradition of the Arab community which is preserved in the pesantren. From there, pesantren literature emerged, as part of Islamic literature. According to Abdurrahman Wahid in Sunyoto (2012), there are two definitions of pesantren literature: (1) literary works that explore customs in pesantren; and (2) literary works with strong religious color.

### **2.2 Santri women**

Santri women are women who study in pesantren (Islamic boarding schools). In the context of this research, santri women are women who uphold the values of santri and implement them in daily life. Many researchers have been interested in studying santri women. Jauhari and Towaf (2019), for example, examine bu Nyai's (the wife of the pesantren leader) leadership in a pesantren. The results showed that Nyai's leadership was limited to female pesantren, she was only responsible for teaching female santris but was never assigned to teach male santris. If a kyai (the leader) of the pesantren dies, his successor is the Kyai's son or son-in-law. The area of the leadership of a Nyai is only in female boarding schools (pondok) or in the kitchen area.

In the context of pesantren culture, gender relations are socio-cultural constructions formed by a pesantren community. Pesantren community uses the Qur'an and Hadith and the books of the scholars as life guidance in everyday life (Salim, 2020). There are three categories

of santri women: (1) modernist santri women who agree with gender equality because, in their opinion, the social roles between men and women are the same, (2) traditionalist-modernist santri women who agrees with gender equality because, in their opinion, the social roles between men and women are equal, and (3) traditionalist santri women who judge that men's jobs are masculine while women's jobs as ideally feminine. They do not agree with gender equality because the roles of men and women, in their opinion, are already regulated in religion and cannot be equated. In Muslim societies, the construction of contemporary gender systems in different cultures is various, depending on the degree of encounter among local factors, such as religion, norms, laws, and customs (Anwar, 2017).

### **2.3 Anthropology of feminism**

The early development of the influence of feminism into anthropology was by deconstructing the three-layered structure of male bias (Moore, 1998). Moore (1998) explains that the first bias consists of biases originating from anthropologists who bring into their research various assumptions and expectations about the relationship between women and men and the significance of these relationships for understanding the wider society. The second bias is the bias that exists in the community group being studied. The third bias is formed because of the inherent bias in Western culture.

The three biases above, as Moore further explains, can be overcome if they focus more attention on women, by direct learning and describing what women actually do as opposed to what men say about what women do, and recording and analyze the statements, perceptions and attitudes of the women themselves. The location of the main problem is not at the empirical research stage, but at the theoretical and analytical level. Therefore, feminist anthropologists are faced with the task of working on and redefining theories and paradigms in anthropology. Thus, feminist anthropology begins by criticizing the male bias in this discipline, and the indifference and misunderstanding of women and their activities.

## **3.0 Method**

This current research is qualitative in nature with a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (Mannan, 1990), aimed at studying life experiences (phenomenology) and interpreting life texts (hermeneutics). This study reveals the strength of santri women in dealing with family-related problems in pesantren culture. The data sources are the novels of "Dua Barista" by Najhaty Sharma (2020) and "Hati Suhita" by Khilma Anis (2019). The two novels were chosen because they represent the strength of santri women (i.e., Alina Suhita and Mazarina) in facing and solving their problems.

The two novels have a pesantren setting. The two female figures are descendants of great kyais and their marriages were arranged. The two women act as wives and as caretakers of pesantren. The two santri women lived with their in-laws and both experienced household problems and had to leave their homes. But at the end of the story, the problems they experienced ended in happiness. Based on some similarities in the two novels, it can be identified that they are able to survive because of the strengths they possess.

The research data is any information in the two novels reflecting the strengths of the santri women in dealing with their problems. There are ten data quotes containing this information, which are in the forms of the characters' thoughts and actions. The data in Hati Suhita are 6 quotes and in Dua Barista the data are 4 quotes. The data were collected through the following steps: 1) Reading continuously and repeatedly the data sources, 2) critically reading both data sources to understand the meaning contained in the two works, and 3) selecting and marking the parts of the story that relate to the research data.

The collected data were then analyzed by 1) repeatedly reading the two works as a whole to get the full meaning, 2) paying attention to keywords and making them the object of study so that important ideas can be found, 3) focusing on important statements based on the experience studied. In the context of this research, matters relating to the strength of santri women are rooted in Islamic values and Javanese culture that can be identified through the characters' thoughts and actions.

## 4.0 Results and Discussion

In "Hati Suhita" (HS), it is told that Alina Suhita, a daughter of a Kyai, is betrothed to Gus Birru, a son of another Kyai. This matchmaking is intended to maintain the continuity of the pesantren. In their marriage, Gus Birru poured out his frustration by not having sex with his wife but pretending to be an intimate husband and wife when they were outside. However, there is Suhita's strength as a wife in dealing with the bad treatment from her husband. The same thing was experienced by Mazarina who was betrothed to Gus Ahvash in "Dua Barista" (DB). The two figures are family members of Kyai lineage. In the course of a marriage, the husband must accept the fact that his wife (Mazarina) is infertile. To continue the leadership of the pesantren, Gus Ahvash had to think about the feelings of his parents. In short, Gus Ahvash practiced polygamy with the permission of his parents and Mazarina as his wife. Meysaroh as the second wife, formerly the khadam (housemaid) of the family, has now changed Mazarina's position to become the primary wife of Gus Ahvash. Inner battles always color the life of Gus Ahvash's family from day to day. Mazarina and Meysaroh are two female figures who have strengths in dealing with household problems. The following table summarizes the ways related to Islamic values and Javanese culture used by the two characters in the novels.

**Table 1.** Representation of santri women's strength in two pesantren novels

	<b>Novel Hati Suhita</b>	<b>Novel Dua Barista</b>
<b>Representation of the strength</b>	Ummi (Mother) as role model	Ummi (Mother) as role model
	Pleasure of parents	Pleasure of parents
	Worshipping to God	Worshipping to God
	Mandate as the caretaker of Pesantren	Mandate as the caretaker of Pesantren
	Applying Javanese culture(mikul duwur mendem jero dan bertapa)	Applying Javanese culture (padhang pethenge omah iku tergantung wong wadhon)

### *The figure of Ummi (Mother) as a role model and the pleasure seeking of parents.*

Mother in pesantren environment is called Bu Nyai. She has a strategic role and position in many ways, especially as a companion to the Kyai. In addition to taking care of the household and family, Bu Nyai is also in charge of taking care of the students at pesantren. This role is illustrated in the two novels (HS) and (DB). The mother figure becomes a strength that makes Alina Suhita and Mazarina survive. In (HS), it is stated as follows.

Aku tertawa. Dialah ummiku mertuaku. Anugerah terbesar dalam hidupku. Yang mencintaiku sedalam ibuku sendiri. Ummikkulah satu-satunya alasanku bertahan di rumah ini.

I'm laughing. She is my mother-in-law. The biggest gift of my life, who loves me as deeply as my own mother. my Ummi is the only reason to stay in this house.(Anis, 2019:5)

To survive is Suhita's reason for dealing with Gus Birru's attitude of not treating her as a real wife. Matchmaking is a burden for both Suhita and Gus Birru. Only by Ummi can Suhita be assured when she is very sad. Ummi is a source of extraordinary strength. When Quranic verses were read by Ummi and Suhita listened to them, she felt something reassuring her. There is a power that gives Suhita the energy in dealing with her problems.

Umik adalah perempuan pesantren generasi lama yang menjunjung tinggi nilai-nilai moral, mementingkan sikap tawadlu' untuk merepresentasikan keilmuan.

Umik is an old generation of pesantren women who upholds moral values and prioritizes a humble attitude to represent her knowledge. (Sharma, 2020: 106)

Similarly, Mazarina's mother-in-law patiently guides and advises her. She is a woman who is very disciplined in reciting Quran and praying in the congregation. She tells Mazarina that women, whatever their professions are, have to be diligent in doing household chores. The daily life lessons that her ummi instills become the strength to accept her shortcomings as a wife, especially when she is unable to give birth to children so that she 'allows' her husband to remarry with another woman.

The power in question is the existence of ummi. Ummi's role and position are the same as Suhita's and Mazarina's, as a wife of a Kyai and caretaker of pesantren. She can overcome all family problems and she has a patient and sincere personality and is able to manage the pesantren well.

Mother is the first teacher and she teaches the difference between right and wrong paths at every step of life. She is a person who inspires her children to do the right thing in life (Meghwal, 2018). In his research, Moses (2019) describes a mother as a motherland, life-giver, supporter, nurturer, comforter, and healer, all of which are positive powers for their children. A mother's strength lies in her innate capacity for love and sacrifice. The mother figure becomes a reference because the basic characteristics of a mother contain tremendous power. Power in the form of compassion, patience, nurturing, comforting, and healing physical and psychological wounds.

#### **4.2 *Ridha (The Pleasure) of Parents***

The two female characters, Suhita and Mazarina, both seek the pleasure (ridha) of their parents. It is believed that God's (Allah's) pleasure lies in both parents' pleasure. Conversely, God's wrath lies in parent's wrath. Devotion to parents is an embodiment to get the parents' pleasure which is believed to be the key to happiness.

This principle is typical in the lives of santri, as exemplified by Suhita and Mazarina who are described as women who well understand religion and are obedient to their parents. This principle illustrates the noble degree of parents in Islam. The pleasure of parents is the key for their children. This principle is the basis for every santri's life and becomes the strength that brings happiness.

The adab or good attitude of a child towards his parents is to carry out their orders and advice. In carrying out these orders, a child should do it with respect, love, and affection, because all of their orders must be for the good of their children too. It is impossible for parents to order a child to do something that can lead him to things that can harm him (Tanjung et al., 2020). But with regard to children's rights, parents must also consider all decisions well, especially in determining a mate for their sons and daughters. In Islamic teachings, a son or daughter has the right to refuse or accept an arranged marriage from their parents. An arranged



marriage must get the daughter's consent and she should not be forced. Even in Islamic teachings, there are regulations regarding the procedures for polygamy and the rights of every wife. Karimullah (2021) explains that the existing polygamy regulations in family law in Indonesia try to narrow the opportunities for polygamy to occur. This can be seen from the various requirements specified for polygamy, such as permission from the wife and the court, as well as several other complicated requirements. Polygamy law in Indonesia has the status of emergency law which can only be done if it is urgent and needed (extraordinary circumstances). If someone wants to practice polygamy, then he must complete all the requirements that have been determined in Indonesian law.

Even though in Khilma Anis' novel the matchmaking problem ended happily, it took time to accept each other. Many problems had to be overcome first. Meanwhile, in Najaty Sharma's novel, the parent's command to Mazarina's husband to practice polygamy is a difficult choice. Thus, it can be concluded that polygamy can be practiced, but it is usually accompanied by various complicated problems that must be resolved in order for a marriage to have a happy ending. That is why Indonesian law stipulates complicated conditions so that a person can practice polygamy in an effort to protect the rights of wives.

#### **4.3 Obedience to God**

Another form of strength is worshiping Allah, the God Almighty. It is done by praying and reciting Quran. These activities were practiced by Suhita when she experienced complicated life problems.

Aku lekas sembahyang dan mengaji lalu mengumpulkan kekuatan untuk `berlaga` di meja makan saat sarapan nanti, di mana abah dan ummik akan melihat kami sebagai pengantin baru yang mesra dan sumringah. Ini adalah bagian yang paling sulit dan aku tidak tahu sampai kapan bisa menutupinya.

I quickly prayed and recited the Quran and then gathered my strength to `compete` at the dining table at breakfast, where my father and mother would see us as an intimate and happy newlywed. This is the most difficult part and I don't know how long I can cover it. (Anis: 2019:30)

Prayer is an obligation for a Muslim, as a form of communication between a servant and his God and is also a medium for complaining to God. Reciting the Koran is an activity of reading the verses of the Koran and trying to understand them. When praying and reciting the Koran, strength arises because it feels like God is near and is with His servants.

Malam itu, kutumpahkan segala tangisku di atas sajadah. Kulapangkan dadaku seluas-luasnya. Menyadarkan diri atas nikmat Tuhan yang begitu besar. Tidaklah benar jika rahimku diangkat dan aku merasa tak ada artinya. Itu pikiran orang yang tak bertuhan. ..

That night, I spilled all my tears on the prayer rug. I spread my chest as wide as possible. Be aware of the great grace of God. It's not true that my uterus was removed and I felt nothing. That's the mind of a godless person. .. (Sharma, 2020:12)

Deeply sad, Mazarina pours out everything she felt to God. However, she is still grateful for everything that God has given. The strength obtained is always being grateful because, in principle, Mazarina is still healthy, loved by her husband and needed by the students. The principle of gratitude in Islam is that a servant should always be grateful in any circumstances, and believes that God will give immeasurable pleasure. The problems experienced by Suhita and Mazarina made the two characters make a defense by increasing prayers and reading the

Koran.

Khairon (2021) explains that one manifestation of faith is obedience to worship. All forms of obedience are symbols of faith. Obedience that is manifested by praying and reciting the Qur'an is a form of surrender to the test in order to get closer to God. Bussing et al., (2020) explain that spiritual drought makes prayers not answered by God. This is what makes the two female characters (Alina Suhita and Mazarina) very sure that whatever happens is God's will. Therefore they do not stop praying by reciting the Qur'an and praying well. In addition, the pesantren environment also shapes their personality and behavior which is filled with good Islamic values.

#### ***4.4 Role as the Caretaker for Islamic Boarding School Students.***

The role as the pesantren caretaker in the two novels is illustrated clearly. The titles of Gus and Ning are honorary titles for the son or daughter of a Kyai and Bu Nyai. It is hoped that they will one day replace the role and position of their parents as pesantren caretakers. Therefore, matchmaking tradition still exists in pesantren with the concept of linasabiha (seeing lineage or descent) for the purpose of continuing the pesantren dynasty. It is reasonable to do because being a son and a daughter or son-in-law of a kyai is not easy. They are required to understand well the Islamic teachings as a provision to teach their students.

Suhita and Mazarina are the daughters of great kyais. Both of them are betrothed to kyai's sons. The household problems that arise during their marriage raise inner strength that makes them survive despite experiencing deep sadness. Being the caretaker of pesantren is the strength to survive. This is a call of the heart that cannot be refused despite the many domestic problems faced.

Sejak kecil, abah dan ibuku sudah mendoktrinku bahwa Segalaku, cita-citaku, tujuan hidupku adalah kupersembahkan untuk pesantren Al Anwar, pesantren mertuaku ini.

Bahkan, saat aku sudah semester tujuh, Kiai Hannan memintaku pindah pesantren dan meninggalkan kuliahku agar aku bisa lebih lanyah hapalan dipesantren baruku. Aku menurutinya karena itu kemauan mereka. Demi pesantren mereka. (Anis, 2019: 3)

Since childhood, my father and mother have taught me that I dedicate everything, my goals, and my life to pesantren Al Anwar, my father-in-law's pesantren

In fact, when I was in the seventh semester, Kiai Hannan asked me to change schools and leave my studies so that I could memorize the Koran more fluently in my new pesantren. I obeyed because it was their will. For their pesantren. (Anis, 2019:3)

Suhita realizes that it is better to think about her santris than think about her life's problems because many santris need her. Alia Suhita cannot imagine the fate of the pesantren if she leaves it, while Gus Birru prefers to be active outside the pesantren. She thought that she could benefit others, not only for the students but also for her parents-in-law.

kesibukanku adalah mengasuh dan mengajar santri, dan sesekali menyalurkan hobby mendesain

my busy life is nurturing and teaching students, and occasionally channel my hobby of designing (Sharma, 2020:230)

As a daughter-in-law, Ning Maza (Mazarina) devoted herself totally to nurturing and teaching students. Even though she has other talents, she prefers to develop her father-in-

law's pesantren because, from a young age, she had studied in her own parents' pesantren. Mazarina memorized easily Alfiyah verses and studied fiqh books completely. The situation makes her easier to adapt to her father-in-law's pesantren.

Being a daughter of a Kyai, she is obliged to become the successor to the leadership of the pesantren. Matchmaking between gus and ning is common; therefore, she must be prepared for it because she will be the leader of pesantren. This is for the purpose of the sustainability of pesantren. In these two novels, the mandate to be the successor to leadership becomes a strength for the two santri women in overcoming their household problems.

Kyai leadership is seen as a unique leadership phenomenon in terms of tasks and functions. It is because their role is not only as Islamic education leaders, designing curricula, and carrying out teaching and learning processes related to religious studies, but also as mentors and educators in society (Arifin, 1993, p. 45). Therefore, kyai are required to have wisdom and broad insight and must be able to become role models for others (Sunyoto, 1989, p. 82).

Kyai's charisma is one of the forces that create influence on society. Charisma arises because of two things: being a descendant from a respected kyai and possessing good mastery of Islam accompanied by morals and a pious personality (Zaenuddin, 2020). In the world of Islamic boarding schools, Kyais are male and are the leaders of Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, women have the highest position as caregivers, as played by two characters in the novels.

In Jordania and other Arab countries, negative stereotypes and prejudices against women as well as non-inclusive policies and behaviors create legitimacy for discrimination against women (e.g., Koburtay et al., 2018). Jordan is known for its unique, clan-centered, and authoritarian tribal norms and traditions. Religion plays a major role in Jordanian society and some scholars assert that interpretations of Islam are influenced by patriarchal misinterpretations and masculine practices (Afiouni et al., 2014). In Indonesia, in the context of pesantren culture, there has been a shared awareness that women do not need to be discriminated against, because if the terms and conditions for becoming a leader have been met, they are declared fit to lead, including Islamic boarding schools. It's just that a woman in these two pesantren literary novels is not only responsible for the sustainability of the cottage but is also responsible for domestic affairs in her household.

#### **4.5 . Upholding Javanese cultural values**

These two novels are colored with Javanese cultural values that become the life philosophy of the characters. Based on the author's background, Khilma Anis (HS), from a young age, loved wayang (Javanese puppets), so that it is not surprising that her novels are much colored with Javanese culture. Similarly, Najhaty Sharma (DB) has a Javanese cultural background because she comes from a Javanese family. One of the Javanese values is the concept of mikul dhuwur mendem jero is a principle that must be adhered to in a Javanese household.

Aku tak mungkin bilang bahwa hidupku seperti diguyang ono blumbang, dikoki alang-alang, disiakan dan diabaikan. Aku tak mungkin mengatakan itu. Aku harus mikul duwur mendem jero.

I can't say that my life is like being splashed in a pond, covered in reeds, wasted and neglected. I can't possibly say that. I must mikul duwur mendem jero (carry high, hold it deep)(Anis, 2019:19).



There are many problems to overcome in the early period of marriage between Alina Suhita and Gus Birru. However, she believes that she can overcome the problems. Her belief comes from the Javanese proverb 'mikul dhuwur mendem jero' which means upholding the parents' degree and covering up the shortcomings of her family's disgrace.

Even though she lives in a pesantren, she still adheres to Javanese cultural values, and even implements them in her daily activities. The feeling of being torn apart because of Gus Birru's treatment sometimes made her patience lose. However, as a wife who understands Islam and understands Javanese cultural values, she persists despite being hurt. Suhita chose to remain steadfast and kept her heartache to herself because she wanted to maintain the dignity of her extended family.

Inilah yang tak boleh kulupa; tapa-tapak-telapak. Kakek mengajarkan itu karena disanalah kekuatan seorang wanita berada. Tapa akan menghasilkan keteguhan diri. Tapa akan mewujudkan dalam tapak. Tapak adalah telapak. Kekuatan wanita ada di telapaknya, atau kasih sayangnya. Sesungguhnya di bawah telapak wanita eksistensi dan esensi surga berada.

This is what I should not forget 'tapa-tapak-telapak'. Grandpa taught it because that's where a woman's strength lies. Tapa will produce self-determination. Tapa will manifest in 'tapak'. 'Tapak' is the sole. The power of a woman is in her sole or her affection. Truly under the woman's sole the existence and essence of heaven resides.(Anis, 2019:16)

The word "Tapa" controls her self-determination to always stay in her husband's house, whatever the condition is. The goal is to achieve love and benefit for others. It is a noble thing that Suhita must strive for even though with difficulty, because everything is connected to the Creator, the God who Controls the human heart.

“Perempuan itu, apapun profesinya, ia tetap harus luwes mengerjakan tugas-tugas rumah. Sebab, padhang pethenge omah iku tergantung wong wadhon. Sepintar apaun dia, kalau tidak cakap dengan tugas kewanitaan dan tidak tanggap dengan keadaan sekitar, nanti dia akan tampak hilang kepintarannya!”

“Women, regardless of their profession, still have to be flexible in doing household chores. Because, the darkness and the light of a house depend on women. No matter how smart she is, if she's not proficient with feminine duties and isn't responsive to her surroundings, then she'll seem to lose her intelligence!” (Sharma, 2020:117)

In principle, women must be able to do many things, both in carrying out their profession and domestic tasks. The balance of the two tasks is a measure of a woman's ability, because the darkness and light of a house depends on women.

Dark (petheng) and light (padhang) are symbols that can have both positive and negative connotations. Javanese values embodied in Javanese ethics are believed to have a deep meaning for life. Javanese people with good manners and speech will be referenced by others. Suhita and Mazarina hold Javanese ethics and choose to persist with the moral strength of wisdom because, according to Javanese consciousness, acting according to moral norms is not a matter of will but of understanding (Nugroho, 2021). Therefore, Javanese values are believed to have meaning in life that will lead them to happiness in the future.

Ethical norms are obtained from the words spoken by parents through the events that occur around them. Javanese people are famous for their politeness and gentleness. In communicating, for example, the ethics is to respect older people. All principles and rules

embedded in Javanese society aim to achieve a harmonious life and avoid conflicts between people. (Lita, A.N., et.al, 2021).

The implementation of Javanese values that are manifested in daily behavior becomes the strength of the two female characters in the two novels, because Javanese ethics has many values of wisdom and philosophy that are still relevant today. (Ratnawati, V. 2019)

## 5.0 Discussion

Gender relation in a society has its own uniqueness or peculiarity. The uniqueness is due to the culture that surrounds it. In a pesantren context, gender differences are reflected in various relationships, especially in the relation between husband and wife. When santri women (the wives) experience gender injustice, they will act in accordance with Islamic values as the principles they believe in. This is a strength to "resist" even though it is not easy because it seems as if they surrender to the existing situation. What they are actually doing is building spiritual strength to be able to rise up in adversity.

Psychologically, the id of a wife is wanting to love and be loved by her husband. For the problems she faces, her ego rebels and has to put up a fight for the bad treatment she gets. But the pesantren culture has been embedded in her subconscious so that her superego fights in a different way. As a result, her resistance is not in the form of violence but in the form of peace, namely by looking at the mother figure. This figure becomes a strength to survive in any condition and as a source of peace of mind and heart. The important and main parents' role is to direct their families to the correct learning and behaving in accordance with the rules of their religion. The role of parents as motivators is needed by children, especially when children face problems/difficulties (Syaifullah, 2021).

In "Hati Suhita" and "Dua Barista" the wives (santri women) build strength in a unique way. Spiritual strength is what makes them survive in facing the household problems. When Alina Suhita and Mazarina were faced with matchmaking, a common practice in the pesantren tradition, they accepted it wholeheartedly to seek for the pleasure of their parents. They believe that the pleasure of Allah lies in the pleasure of their parents and the wrath of Allah lies in the wrath of their parents. This is different from the concept of Western feminism stating that women should be given the opportunity to make decisions because their position and role is equal to that of men (Moore, 1998; Idrus, 2006). This obedience to parents is the source of strength for the wives in these novels in dealing with and overcoming their problems.

This situation is different from that reported by Jaiyeola and Isaac (2020) that in Africa in general, and in Nigeria in particular, culture has produced hegemonic masculinity in which men are considered superior to women. Women are shown as exhibitors of emotional features of sadness, sensitivity and concern. This perception explains the dominant role of males in Africa. Culturally, until recently, roles and positions in African society were distinguished by gender stereotyped characteristics. In this case, women are expected to operate behind the scenes where they are isolated from active decision-making roles.

Ade (2021) shows that although Cameroonian law guarantees and protects the rights of women and girls, women's subordination still exists in the social, political, economic and legal fields of society as a patriarchal practice. This subordination of women by men is due to the interpretation given by men about their religion and tradition, which gives them the full right

to exercise their domination. The two articles, talking about the culture in Nigeria which provides positions and roles in society based on gender stereotypes and in Cameroon where religious interpretations and traditions, show gender inequality that exists in African community (Idrus, 2006).

The results of this study indicate that cultural values are used as a guide for people's lives, including the concept of Javanese culture which is reflected in the proverb *mikul dhuwur mendhem jero*, which means to elevate or highlight the advantages and virtues of the family and cover up the shortcomings or ugliness of the family. This proverb has a very deep meaning, namely upholding the degree and dignity of parents. When Alina Suhita has to be silent to survive her household problems, it does not mean that she is weak, but rather in an effort to implement the Javanese cultural values, which is to always cover the shortcomings of her household so that her extended family will always be at peace.

Distinctiveness in the form of teachings that are rich in pesantren values as well as Javanese cultural values is believed to be a principle of life and must be implemented in all lines of life as the basis for the activities of santri women in household and family life.

## 6.0 Conclusion

The strengths of santri women (the wives) described in the two novels arise because of the arranged marriage undesired by one of the parties and polygamy that occurs due to a wife who cannot give birth to children as the successor to pesantren. The forms of strength are: (1) reflecting to the figure of a mother (in-law) who has noble character, (2) gaining the pleasure of parents to obtain the pleasure of God, (3) performing prayers and reciting Quran to make them to always be close to God, (4) carrying out the mandate as a pesantren caretaker to distract from their problems, and (7) adhering to Javanese cultural values which serve as a way of life.

The power to carry out a fight is not always synonymous with protest or frontal activity. Pesantren culture is able to provide solutions through the values taught in Islam that are far from violence.

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