

Article

Revisiting Literacy Jihad Programs of 'Aisyiyah in Countering the Challenges of Salafism

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Abstract: The rise of the Salafi movements in Indonesia during the last two decades has created an increasingly pessimistic view of the status of women in Islam. This paper aims to lessen this negative view by showing the tremendous contribution of 'Aisyiyah, the oldest modern Muslim women's organization in Indonesia, to transforming Indonesian society through literacy jihad for women and families. Using in-depth interviews with board members of 'Aisyiyah, combined with library research to collect primary data on the past activities of 'Aisyiyah, this qualitative research portrays how 'Aisyiyah has preserved and maintained its consistency in conducting literacy jihad since the 1920s. Through the establishment of 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, usually shortened to TK ABA, and the publication of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine, the literacy jihad of 'Aisyiyah constantly empowers many Muslim women and families, especially those who live in urban areas across the country. Currently, the number of TK ABA has reached nearly 22,000 units, and the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* has also entered a digital platform to continue raising the voice of women's rights in Indonesia. Furthermore, we posit that the literary jihad programs of 'Aisyiyah provide a new perspective on the relationship between modernist Muslim organizations and the Salafi movements, which have been seen as similar because they both subscribe to the same purification ideology.

Keywords: women movements; 'Aisyiyah; Muhammadiyah; modernism; revivalism; literacy; Indonesian Islam



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1. Introduction

The picture of women in Islam, especially related to their status and societal roles, is often seen negatively (Hurvitz and Alshech 2020; Mahbuba and van Wichelen 2021). The rise of radical Islamic groups in the last few decades seems to have accentuated this negative view (Dzuhayatin 2020; De Leede 2018). Mass media coverage on the issue of female slave trading during the ISIS rule in Syria or the ban on women from attending school by the Taliban in Afghanistan undeniably contributed to this pessimistic view, primarily related to women's rights issues. Furthermore, the emergence of transnational Islamic movements in many parts of the Islamic world (Sebastian et al. 2021; İskenderoğlu 2022) within the last two decades has also strengthened this negative impression. Although these transnational Muslim movements, especially those that follow a revivalist ideology, do not use physical violence, their *dakwah* (preaching) potentially puts women in a dilemma (Galonnier 2017).

Echoing this global situation, Indonesian women's organizations also have to face various issues related to the increasing number of transnational Islamic movements (Qodir 2014). In addition to the growing number of intolerance cases, due to differences in religious ideology, the presence of these movements also creates challenges specifically for women activist movements. The rise of the Salafi movement, which subscribes to the ideology of puritanism, for example, has initiated several activities campaigning for women to return to the domestic sphere and condemning women who work outside the home as unfaithful (Izharuddin 2016; Ubaidillah et al. 2018). Another controversial campaign of Salafism is the

invitation to marry at a young age to avoid immorality and free sex, which become very attractive for young Muslims, especially those who live in urban areas (Kresna 2019). These campaigns have become a serious challenge for Muslim women's organizations, including 'Aisyiyah, the oldest Muslim women's organization in Indonesia.

The consistency of 'Aisyiyah in preserving a voice of moderate Islam in Indonesia through literacy jihad is interesting to study, especially their efforts to empower women and families (Mu'arif 2020). The dynamics of 'Aisyiyah's development in responding to various emerging challenges, including these Salafism campaigns, can be a source of inspiration for many other Muslim women's organizations. The success story of the literacy jihad of 'Aisyiah can be seen through their two effective programs: the establishment of 'Aisyiah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten and the publication of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine. Starting with the establishment of 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten in Yogyakarta in 1924, 'Aisyiyah has managed to establish nearly 22,000 kindergartens throughout Indonesia, even in several districts where Muslims are in the minority (Sirait 2021). Meanwhile, the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine has continued to develop since its first publication in 1926. *Suara 'Aisyiyah*'s transformation to a digital platform can be an effective tool to deliver the voice of moderate Islam related to women and family issues for Muslim youth as a counter to the Salafism campaigns (Amna 2017; Fitrianita 2018). Therefore, we argue that the literacy jihad program of 'Aisyiyah further confirms that Salafism does not develop as a monolithic entity, but will always adapt to the demands of the locality in which Salafism develops. In addition, an increasingly pessimistic view related to the social role of Muslim women should not be concerned because, if we look at the success story of 'Aisyiyah in implementing the literacy jihad program, there will be more opportunity for Muslim women to contribute to creating a better community.

2. Methodology

Before discussing the literacy jihad programs of the 'Aisyiyah, it is necessary to provide some notes on the methodology to understand the position of this paper. This paper is based on research on the women-empowering model of the 'Aisyiyah, conducted in Yogyakarta from November 2020 to February 2021. Data were collected through direct observations of the 'Aisyiyah programs, such as schooling activities, the process of handling issues for the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine, and *pengajian ibu-ibu* (Islamic learning forum for adult women) at the village levels. Besides, this research also employed interviews with board members of the 'Aisyiyah, some village officers, and participants of the 'Aisyiyah's programs. The result of this research has been published in an accredited national journal of *Aplikasia* (Sofia 2021).

From this previous research, we found an interesting phenomenon, which was the massive use of the Internet in spreading *dakwah* (preaching), including by Salafi activists. In responding to the use of the Internet as an important medium for *dakwah*, we developed this research by employing an Internet research method by collecting information related to the *dakwah* of Salafism, especially on issues of women and family, from some popular websites belonging to both official and personal websites of Salafi activists. The collected data were categorized into two aspects: conceptual (values, norms, and doctrines) and practices (rituals and habits) to understand the main focus of each website. We used the basic theory of the Great and Little tradition with its vigorous debates on studying Islam and Muslims in Indonesia, as reflected in the works of Nakamura (2020). The contextualizing of the "Great and Little tradition" within Indonesian Islam shows a unique interaction, which differs from the practice of Islam in other places, as further explained below. The main purpose of this additional research is to provide more information on developing an alternative model for empowering women and families.

3. Understanding Modernism and Salafism in the Indonesian Context

Categorizing Islamic movements is problematic because it involves various perspectives according to the researcher's needs. Clifford Geertz's trichotomy regarding Javanese

Islam, which divides Islam into “*abangan, santri, and priyayi*” (Geertz 1976), for example, is based on obedience to the obligations in Islam. This trichotomy has a weakness when faced with the fact that so many differences arise when devout Muslims (*santri*) are only accommodated into one category. Traditional Muslims, commonly represented by *Nahdlatul Ulama*, and modern Muslims, represented mostly by *Muhammadiyah*, have some differences in practicing their daily rituals, often leading to the establishment of two mosques at a small village level. Woodward (2011) offers five categorizations of Islam in Indonesia: indigenized Muslims, traditional Muslims of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, modern Muslims of *Muhammadiyah*, Islamism, and neo-modernism, to accommodate the recent development of transnational Islamic movements. However, we should note that each category also has different variations of the sub-categories. Within the modern Muslims of *Muhammadiyah*, for example, some members only focus on social services, such as health and education, in their broader framework of *dakwah* work. Still, some members are more concerned with the puritanical *dakwah* model to purify Islamic teachings from local influences. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the differences between modern Muslims of *Muhammadiyah* and the emergence of Salafi movements because both can be categorized into modern Muslim movements in many aspects.

The Salafi movement in Indonesia began to develop in the early 1980s with the establishment of several educational institutions, especially those that received full financial support from the Saudi Arabian government, such as *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab* or the Institute for Islamic and Arabic Sciences (Sebastian et al. 2021). Most of the main figures of the Salafi movement in Indonesia today are alums of *Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Islam dan Arab*. The Saudi Arabian government has been at the forefront of developing the Salafi movement in Indonesia with the Wahhabi movement, which since the 1920s, especially after the fall of Mecca and Medina to the Wahhabis (Nakamura 2011), threatens the religious practice of traditional Muslims. Although there are significant differences between the Salafi movement and the Wahhabi movement, particularly in the reproduction of knowledge and *dakwah* strategies, Indonesian Muslims, especially those that are traditional Muslims, consider the Salafism movement simply as a continuation of the Wahhabi movement.

This statement is certainly an oversimplification if we further examine the development of the Salafi movement in Indonesia. In fact, there are five variants of Salafism in Indonesia (Simorangkir 2015), namely: (1) political Salafism, represented by the Prosperous Justice Party, the Indonesian version of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt; (2) *jihadi* Salafism, represented by *Jamaah Ansar al-Daulah* and *Jamaah Ansar al-Tawhid* and characterized by efforts to defeat those considered as the enemies of Islam using all means, including the use of violence; (3) *dakwah* Salafism, which is represented by various *dakwah* movements, such as *Bin Baz pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), the Qur’an Tafsir Council, and the *Tablighi Jamaat*, and having the main characteristic of promoting purification of Islam from local traditions; (4) traditional Salafism, represented by *pesantren* Temboro and several other *pesantren*, which were formerly affiliated with traditional Muslims of *Nahdlatul Ulama*; and (5) progressive Salafism, represented by several national figures, such as Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of *Muhammadiyah*, who were inspired by the modernist movements of al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, and characterized by a puritanical model of religious practice, but more open to modern ideas for the advancement of Muslims.

Since Salafism is not monolithic, it is necessary to understand the position of modern Muslims of *Muhammadiyah* within Salafism, especially related to *dakwah* Salafism. In this case, modern Muslims of *Muhammadiyah* are often associated with *dakwah* Salafism (Pohl 2012; Jabrohim 2021). Both have a strong puritan nuance in the practice of *dakwah* (preaching) as reflected in their similar jargons, namely “returning to the Qur’an and al-Hadith”. Both have a similar target in their *dakwah*, which wants to purify Islamic teachings from local practices (Said and Sobariyah 2021). Interestingly, traditional Muslims of *Nahdlatul Ulama* emerged as a response to the purification ideology of *Muhammadiyah* and Wahabism (Said and Sobariyah 2021). The relationship between modern Muslims

of *Muhammadiyah* and traditional Muslims of *Nahdlatul Ulama* has always been marked by tensions related to local religious practices. It can be seen from various studies on *Muhammadiyah* conducted by foreign researchers, who generally emphasize the face of puritanism in modern Muslims of *Muhammadiyah*. Michael Feener, for example, considered a modernist Muslim of *Muhammadiyah*, has promoted the “Salafi vision” and added the notion of rationality, while at the same time urging the need for *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) (Feener 2007). Mitsuo Nakamura also has a similar idea on understanding modern Muslims of *Muhammadiyah* in Indonesia. He called *Muhammadiyah* “orthodox Islam in the form of a reformist movement” (Nakamura 2011, p. 3). Another prominent figure in the study of Indonesia, Howard M. Federspiel, has also considered *Muhammadiyah* as “an orthodox Islamic movement” (Federspiel 1970, p. 57).

However, it was not until the emergence of *Muktamar* (National Congress) of *Muhammadiyah* in 2010 that the document “Centennial Statement of *Muhammadiyah*” (*Zhawâhir al-Afkâr al-Muhammadiyah li al-Qarni al-Tsâni*) was officially issued. This document proposed a new interpretation in portraying the philosophical foundation of practicing *dakwah* and *tajdid* (renewal), which has to be oriented solely towards achieving the progress of humanity (Muhammadiyah 2010). At the National Congress in 2015, three important documents were issued. The first document, entitled “The Pancasila State as a [National] Consensus and a Place to Testify” (*Negara Pancasila sebagai Dar al-Ahdi wa al-Syahadah*), stated the acceptance of *Muhammadiyah* upon Pancasila, with additional spiritual and political values. The second document discussed the Community-based Enlightening *dakwah* model, in which *Muhammadiyah* should include all community members practicing their *dakwah*, including minority and marginalized people. The third document consists of *Muhammadiyah* and Strategic Issues on the Islamic Society, Nationalism, and Humanity (*Muhammadiyah dan Isu-isu Strategis Keumatan, Kebangsaan, dan Kemanusiaan Universal*), which addressed the issue of *takfiri* (accusing another Muslim as being an infidel) (Latief and Nashir 2020). The narratives from the *Muhammadiyah*’s National Congress above show how *Muhammadiyah* has transformed its ideological from “purist and conservative” to more “progressive and inclusive.”

These continuation attempts through the National Congress of *Muhammadiyah* show that *Muhammadiyah* is not identical to *dakwah* Salafism or Wahabism. Many attempts have also been made to support this transformation. Hilman Latif, for instance, raised the issue of Islamic philanthropic activities within *Muhammadiyah* to emphasize the progressive and inclusive *dakwah* of *Muhammadiyah* (Latief 2016). In line with this attempt, Zakiyuddin Badhawwy (Baidhawwy 2015) uses the issue of coping with disaster management and mitigation to lessen the radical and fundamental tendencies in Muslims. This article seeks to provide a similar narrative in showing the opposite direction of modern Indonesian Muslims of *Muhammadiyah* with the *dakwah* Salafism by revisiting the success story of the literacy jihad program of ‘Aisyiyah, the oldest modern Muslim women organization.

4. The Success Story of ‘Aisyiyah in Promoting Literacy Jihad

As the oldest Muslim women’s organization, ‘Aisyiah has made a significant contribution to knowledge creation and making information accessible for women to empower them and facilitate them to play an active role in improving the surrounding communities. To understand the Indonesian context of the ‘Aisyiyah as a representation of a modern Muslim women’s organization, it is important to briefly discuss the history of the ‘Aisyiyah and its relations to *Muhammadiyah*, the biggest modern Islamic movement in the country. Therefore, this section is divided into three parts: discussing briefly the historical development of ‘Aisyiyah, the success story of ‘Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, and the consistency of *Suara ‘Aisyiyah* in disseminating information about women empowerment.

4.1. Historical Development of ‘Aisyiyah

The early Twentieth Century of Indonesian history was marked by the emergence of some nationalist movements, such as Budi Utomo (1908), Indische Partij (1912), and Taman

Siswa (1922), as well as some religious-based movements, such as Serikat Dagang Islam (1909), Serikat Islam (1911), and Muhammadiyah (1912). The emergence of these nationalist and religious movements was inspired by external factors such as the introduction of new concepts of liberalism and human rights, the implementation of ethical politics in the Dutch Indies, the victory of Japan over Russia, and the emergence of Islamic modernism and Pan-Islamism. Furthermore, the women's organizations that were founded became part of those movements (Darban 2010).

'Aisyiyah, for example, was originally the women's division of Muhammadiyah. Before being officially declared a Muslim women's organization on 19 May 1917, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, the founder of Muhammadiyah (Van Doorn-Harder 2006; Pohl 2012; Zara 2021), and his wife, Hj. Siti Walidah, actively taught organizational skills to the women's division of the Muhammadiyah movement (Darban 2010). In addition to creating intensive learning for them, K.H. Ahmad Dahlan and his wife formed an Islamic study circle called "Sapa Tresno," which provided the study of various Islamic knowledge. This women's division became the forerunners of the 'Aisyiyah, the oldest Muslim women's organization (Ro'fah 2016).

As a part of Muhammadiyah, 'Aisyiyah focuses on providing services for women and families, primarily related to the issues of health, education, economy, and literacy (Darban 2010). Although 'Aisyiyah's concern in these four areas is in line with the overall teachings of Muhammadiyah as its parent organization, this does not necessarily mean that 'Aisyiyah has no role in determining its own work plan. The important role of 'Aisyiyah in the early periods of its establishment was noticed during the First Women's Congress in 1928, where two representatives of 'Aisyiyah were highly praised at the Congress (Karomatika 2018). This Women's Congress is crucial because it is a manifestation of national awareness and unity for women in particular, where two months before this Congress was held, the youth oath was taken on 28 October 1928 (Karomatika 2018; Mu'arif 2020). In this Congress, nationalists and religious-based women's organizations raised similar issues on the position of women in marriage, polygyny, and education for women.

'Aisyiyah's consistency in fighting for women's rights gained momentum when, in 1966, it was officially declared an independent organization (Qibtiyah 2009), and even the head of 'Aisyiyah in each branch automatically became the Muhammadiyah administrator. This condition certainly gave 'Aisyiyah more authority to continue to develop, even when many nationalist-based women's organizations had to disband because they were involved in practical politics, where the political party they were fighting for lost in the national political contestation (Darban 2010). The development of 'Aisyiyah does not seem to affect the change in the ruling regime significantly. 'Aisyiyah has 34 regional branches at the provincial level, 370 at the district/city level, 2332 at the sub-district level, and 6924 at the kelurahan or village level. With an estimated membership of 20 million, 'Aisyiyah has become the oldest and largest Muslim women's organization in Indonesia.

4.2. 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergartens: Literacy Jihad through Education

'Aisyiyah's contribution to eliminating illiteracy in society through education started two years after 'Aisyiyah was founded, with the establishment of Frebol Kindergarten in 1919, the first kindergarten in Indonesia. The establishment of Frebol Kindergarten was preceded by Nyai Siti Walidah's concern about many children in Kauman who played without direction and guidance. She then gathered them and invited the Muslim girls to be educated and trained by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan so they could provide guidance to the children. This group of Muslim girls, known as Siswa Praja Wanita (SPW), initiated the founding of Frebol Kindergarten (Taman Kanak-Kanak Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 1983). Frebol refers to Friedrich Wilhelm August Frobel (1782–1852), a German philosopher known as the founding father of early childhood education. It seems that 'Aisyiyah has a similar approach to Frobel about modern education for young children (Ro'fah 2016). Using the name Frobel as the school's identity, adapting the Frobel concept of contemporary education, and integrating it with monotheistic education, it became the hallmark of

learning at the Froebel Kindergarten ([Taman Kanak-Kanak Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 1983](#)). In 1924, Froebel Kindergarten changed its name to 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, abbreviated as TK ABA.

Establishing an educational institution is motivated by the difficulty for many people in accessing education. At that time, it was still difficult, especially for women, to access education. Moreover, many women marry at a young age and, in the process, lose many of their rights. Given this condition, 'Aisyiyah works towards equal rights. 'Aisyiyah encourages girls to be able to enjoy education like boys. Moreover, choosing a focus on early childhood education is a progressive idea. It shows the identity of 'Aisyiyah as a modern Muslim women's organization that pays serious attention to the development of the concepts of contemporary education, which at that time was arguably still rare.

Statistically, 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten has an impressive development. It became a kindergarten spread across the country, with nearly 22,000 units. This number continues to grow with various types of education. Early Childhood Education Institutions in 'Aisyiyah consist of the 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, as well as other early childhood education units such as *Taman Pendidikan Anak* (Children's Education Park), *Kelompok Bermain* (Play Group), *Satuan Paud Sejenis* (Early Education) Kindergarten Unit, and *Taman Pendidikan al-Qur'an* (Alternative Education of Qur'an). These achievements show how 'Aisyiyah became a pioneer and leader in early childhood education in Indonesia, serving nearly 20 percent of children across the country ([Sirait 2021](#)).

Through the Elementary and Secondary Education Council, which oversees the 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, 'Aisyiyah developed the vision of 'Aisyiyah's education, which creates a noble character for the people and the nation. To advance education and educate the people, it is hoped that the younger generation of Muslims will become pious, have a noble character and capability, and be helpful to the community. Therefore, 'Aisyiyah provides education based on Islam by optimizing all aspects of its development.

4.3. *Suara 'Aisyiyah: Literacy Jihad through a Magazine*

Another form of literacy jihad carried out by 'Aisyiyah is through the publication of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*. *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is a monthly magazine belonging to the Central Executive of 'Aisyiyah, published from 1926 until now. *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is the oldest women's magazine in Indonesia whose development can be followed from the Dutch colonial era and the Japanese era to the independence era. Apart from being an organizational tool that publishes 'Aisyiyah's programs, this monthly magazine is also a strategic tool in providing knowledge expansion and awareness to 'Aisyiyah residents, especially regarding the role of women in the domestic and public worlds.

In the early decades of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*'s publication, the branches of 'Aisyiyah leaders were also involved in supplying writings. The distribution of papers was decided within the 'Aisyiyah Section of the *Muhammadiyah* Congress.

In the early days of the emergence of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, there were also dozens of women's newspapers or magazines. They were inconsistent in publishing each edition, and some had to be disbanded due to financial issues and other political reasons. However, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* remained consistent in its efforts to voice women's interests through advancing women's literacy. The involvement of the top leaders of 'Aisyiyah as editorial board members of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* reflects their commitment to the cause. They hold many positions, and they are as follows: first, the position of the General Chairperson of the Central Executive of 'Aisyiyah, who is also the General Leader of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*; second, the appointment of the magazine managers, whose duties are compiled and published by the Central Executive of 'Aisyiyah; third, the involvement of one of the Heads of the Central Executive of 'Aisyiyah as the technical coordinator and daily monitor and evaluator; fourth, the existence of periodical implementation and financial reports to the Central Executive of 'Aisyiyah; fifth, direct instructions from the Central Executive of 'Aisyiyah to all regional branch members to subscribe to *Suara 'Aisyiyah*; sixth, promotion and discussion of the

contents of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* on the main page and official social media determined by the Central Executive of 'Aisyiyah; and seventh, discussing the development of this magazine at every 'Aisyiyah Congress. This direct involvement shows how the leaders of 'Aisyiyah have paid serious attention to ensure important information is covered in *Suara 'Aisyiyah* in every edition. They are fully supporting the agenda of literacy jihad so that people can read and understand knowledge and science correctly, especially on the issues of women and families.

'Aisyiyah's seriousness in managing the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine since 1926 has received appreciation from various parties. In 2021, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* received a record from the Indonesian Record Museum. Previously, in 2020, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* received an award from the Yogyakarta Language Center as a print media that used the best grammatical language. These two awards prove that the community and the state recognize the existence of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*. In addition, this magazine also obtains a legal permit from the government and receives an assessment from the Press Council, and its journalists take a journalist certification exam from the Press Council.

Literacy jihad is a central focus of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*. For almost a hundred years, it has sought to address many problems facing women. If we observe and classify the publications of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* from when it was first published in 1926 until 2021, there are seven types of literacy jihad being fought for:

1. Latin Script Literacy

In 1926, many Indonesians, especially women, had not received an education. At that time, many Indonesian people were illiterate in Latin script; some even did not understand the script at all. Some people used local letters and languages daily, while others were familiar with Arabic letters or *Pegon*. For this reason, *Suara 'Aisyiyah*'s initial struggle was the eradication of illiteracy, which focused on the ability to read and write Latin script. The emergence of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* is based on the spirit of women immediately acquiring knowledge and knowledge correctly through reading. At the beginning of its publication, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* used Javanese, but then used Latin script. The 1927 edition (Radjab) also used Javanese with Latin letters and past spellings. On the back of the 1927 edition, starting on page 62, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* used Malay or Indonesian. Until 1930, only two articles have been written in Javanese, and in 1932, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* used purely Malay or Indonesian languages.

2. Literacy on Degree of Women

Problems that have been discussed constantly since the first publication of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* are the writings that inspire women throughout Indonesia to realize that their status is no different from that of men. For example, there is an article about the degree of women in the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* edition of 1927 entitled "*Derajadjadijating Tijang Estri Wonten ing Agami Islam*" (Degree of Women in Islam), the anonymous author who calls himself Goeroe S.P.Bg. Tadjmiloe Achlak. Likewise, in the 1930s, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* continued to speak about the status of women, for example, on pages 311–313 Number 12 (December) of 1932 with the title "*Dapatkah Islam Mendjoendjoeng Deradajat Kaoem Poetri?*" (Can Islam Uphold the Degree of Women?), by St. Chafsoh Moenawir Baturijah, Kendal. In this edition, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* also reported on the growth of *Muhammadiyah* and 'Aisyiyah outside Java, various conferences, and news from abroad.

3. Literacy on Loving Science and Homeland

During the independence period, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* discussed the importance of women studying and contributing to the homeland. These two problems are repeated to show that the issues of women's literacy and status are important, as well as the reader's understanding. The language style is distinctive and full of high literary nuances to touch the readers' hearts, so that they want to continue studying. In addition, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* also presented the writing "*Kaoem Poetri dalam Peperangan*" (Women in War). It was stated that, in other countries, many women have participated in wars, but in our country, women

have not been involved. The writing inspires the idea that women must also be involved in the struggle for independence.

4. Literacy on Islamic and Indonesian Identities

After the independence of the Republic of Indonesia, the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* editions of the 1950s published many articles about advancing women's Islamic and Indonesian identities. Various articles show how the public sphere can be entered by women with knowledge and literacy abilities. An example of provocative statements in *Suara 'Aisyiyah* states:

People say women are in the kitchen, but now it's not. Women also run outside as laborers in the office, factories, etc. People say that women should only become educators, become teachers, but it also turns out that this is not only where women place themselves. They run and compete in the political field as representatives of the people, have been ministers, and so on. People say that women are in the back line where they belong in warfare. But no women participate on the battlefield as entertainers and nurses; some even carry guns to kill the enemy.

In its subsequent editions (1953–1955), the issue of the role of women in the public sphere was continuously written about, for example in the articles “Women in State Development”, “Women and the Free Movement”, “Should Women Dress Up and Wear Kebayas?”, “The Personality of the Islamic Woman”, and “The Obligations of a Muslim Woman”. These writings place the identity of Muslim women who have Eastern customs and also have broad knowledge across different topics and issues. Not only through writing articles, but ideas about the identity of Indonesian Muslim women are also conveyed in literary rubrics in the form of poetry and short stories. In 1956, this Islamic and Indonesian identity was strengthened by an article entitled “Beauty Contest: Things That Destroy Morals and Society”.

5. Literacy on Critical Thinking

In the 1960s, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* appeared very scientific. The articles were discussed in great depth and detail with a scientific perspective. At that time, the Chief Editor was Siti Baroroh. The articles published were the handiwork of scientists from this country, for example Siti Baroroh, Amien Rais, Abdul Hadi W.M., Rachmat Djoko Pradopo, Ismadi, Dawiesah, Bared, and Tadjimah. Later, these figures were known as scientists, professors, or professors of *Muhammadiyah* pride. The writings in the 1960s discussed the themes of population, literature, health, politics, leadership, and religion. This era also discussed many international issues through the adaptations of foreign media. One rubric explicitly indicated the progress of critical thinking at that time, namely the Science Room rubric. The rubric includes the thoughts of Prof. Dr. Lowenstein in an article entitled “There is No Conflict between Religion and Science”. Lowenstein is a historian and philosopher from Germany who came to Yogyakarta at that time. This scientific characteristic continued when Siti Chamamah managed *Suara 'Aisyiyah* until the 1970s.

6. Literacy on Being Responsive to Social Problems

When 'Aisyiyah had finished discussing the issues of literacy, the status of women, Indonesian identity, and being able to think critically, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* entered the discussion about a very long journey of the nation, from the 1980s to the 2000s. The stability achieved by this nation made *Suara 'Aisyiyah* present writings about the efforts made to create “*baladatun thayyibatun wa rabbun ghafur*” (a prosperous country with God's forgiveness). In support of the nation, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* created social networks through its branches in country. The voice of 'Aisyiyah helped communicate various concepts from the Central Leadership of 'Aisyiyah to the grassroots. What happened to the community at the grassroots was raised by *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, so the leaders at the central level could respond properly. All the rubrics written in these three decades showed the intelligence of 'Aisyiyah in reading the social problems and responding to them appropriately. For example, consultation rubrics began to be held in this decade. The names of the 'Aisyiyah programs, such as the *Sakinah* Family and *Qaryah Thayyibah* (good community), also became

the names of the rubrics that could encourage the acceleration of the idea of developing an Islamic society based on *Muhammadiyah* and 'Aisyiyah doctrines. Representatives from the assembly in 'Aisyiyah are also included in the management of *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, so this magazine shows its contribution to the nation in a strong way.

7. Literacy on Smart Digital

Entering the decade of the 2000s, when technological developments occurred rapidly, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* adjusted to a digital platform. At the beginning of this century, people became familiar with the Internet. The themes of *Suara 'Aisyiyah* in this decade were always inseparable from worldwide technological developments, for example articles about getting to know websites and using the Internet. Towards the decade of the 2010s, *Suara 'Aisyiyah* continued to discuss globalization and the number of problems that arose in virtual life. *Suara 'Aisyiyah* became a medium to remind its readers to have digital intelligence and be ready to enter the post-truth era. In this era, it is no longer clear which texts are authoritative and which are not. *Suara 'Aisyiyah* consistently urges the readers to avoid hoaxes, take advantage of virtual networks as a medium of *dakwah* (preaching), and improve living standards.

This thematic series clearly illustrates the consistency of the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine in guarding the discourse on gender equality and ensuring the fulfillment of the rights of women and children in Indonesia so that they can gain access to the widest possible information for a better life.

5. 'Aisyiyah and the Challenges of Salafism

'Aisyiyah's struggle in building public literacy is evident. At least, this can be seen from the numbers of 'Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergartens, which reached almost 22 thousand units and *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, which is recognized as the oldest and most consistently published magazine in Indonesia. These two accomplishments of 'Aisyiyah can be used as effective tools to create a more positive impression of women in Islam. It is critical to note that the proliferation of transnational Islamic groups, especially those that follow a revivalist ideology, has become a serious challenge for Muslim women's organizations (Kailani 2018; Sebastian et al. 2021). The transformation of the Salafi group's *dakwah* in the digital world poses a new threat to the sustainability of fulfilling women's rights that has been championed by 'Aisyiyah. Various campaigns initiated by the Salafi groups have directly challenged the active role of women in society. Some taglines raised through those campaigns, such as: "invitation to marry at young age" (Kresna 2019), "Indonesia without dating" (Sunesti et al. 2018; Sulaiman 2020), "Home is the best place for women" (Khotijah and Madkur 2018), or "ready to be a second wife" (Fitrianita 2018; Sunesti et al. 2018), have potential to obstruct the fulfillment of women's rights.

Indeed, the potential threats to fulfilling women's rights, such as banning girls from schools, like in Afghanistan, are unlikely to occur in Indonesia. However, directing public opinion through various campaigns, such as condemning women for working outside the home or campaigning for the ideal position of a woman to stay at home, eventually will bring up restrictions on women's rights. They use various media in campaigning their doctrines, such as flyers, posters, and banners, to create various taglines, which they upload on their social media accounts, such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The attractive packaging of *dakwah* messages with a short but provocative language style illustrates how their *dakwah* targets young Muslims, especially in urban areas.

Winning sympathy from young Muslims is relatively easier than persuading the older generation. In addition to the relatively unstable psychological condition, the younger generation is usually not faced with the demands of life's necessities yet. Therefore, they are more easily persuaded by provocative and ideological messages. The change in the *dakwah* pattern is not only limited to the use of digital platforms, but can also be seen in the choice of places: mosques, prayer rooms, city squares, or football fields, often used to hold religious activities, which are seen to be unattractive to young people. Instead, they prefer to use cafes, hotel ballrooms, boutiques, malls, or other hangout places to study

and practice Islamic knowledge. Besides, the packaging of *dakwah* that pays attention to the needs of young people becomes a challenge for mainstream Islamic organizations that usually are represented by *Muhammadiyah*, *Nahdlatul Ulama* and 'Aisyiyah.

If we use the issue of women's status in Islam, the position of 'Aisyiyah, as a representation of modernist Islam, is opposite to that of Salafi campaigns. Modernism and Salafism have different ideological directions on this issue, although many observers claim that one characteristic of modernism is purification. Both modernist Islam and Salafi activists in Indonesia use the same ideology of *dakwah*, with the similar jargon of "returning to the Qur'an and hadiths" (Said and Sobariyah 2021). The idea of providing equal access to education for girls, as the spirit of the establishment of 'Aisyiyah, shows that modern Muslims and Salafism in Indonesia are not always in agreement. This can be used as an effective tool for campaigning for a unique characteristic of modern Islam in Indonesia.

Another serious challenge posed by the *Tarbiyah* and Salafi movements is the establishment of a relatively new model of the schooling system, called "*Sekolah Islam Terpadu*" (Integrated Islamic School), usually abbreviated as IT and placed after the name of the school level, such as Taman Kanak-kanak Islam Terpadu (Kindergarten level) or Sekolah Dasar Islam Terpadu (Elementary School level). The Integrated Islamic School model can attract people's attention because it offers a full-day school, which is seen as helping families whose parents have to work. The public or state school model operates only from 7 am to 1 pm, while working hours for parents end at 4 pm. Therefore, one parent must pick their children up and bring them home during their working hours. With the full-day school model, parents no longer need to ask permission from their employers to pick up their children from school during working hours. Instead, they can pick them up after work. In addition to this practical reason, most parents feel comfortable with the label "Islam" without further confirming whether the schools are affiliated with moderate or radical Islamic groups.

Parents' ignorance in considering the school's Islamic affiliation has created some interesting cases (Muliya and Rivauzi 2021). Some of those parents are surprised by the changes in their children's behavior, such as forbidding parents from watching television, showing hatred towards infidels or non-Muslims, and refusing to perform certain rituals (Lestari 2016). The change in behavior in these children is evident in how radical teachings have also entered classrooms. A popular children's song, entitled "*Tepuk Anak Sholeh*" (A Pious Child Clap), for example, has gone viral on social media because it teaches children to hate non-Muslims (Ridlo 2017). These transformations of *dakwah* Salafism have become a concern and challenge for moderate Islamic groups in Indonesia.

In this context, 'Aisyiyah could play a significant role in countering Salafist *dakwah*, especially related to the status of women in Islam. As the biggest modern Muslim women's organization, 'Aisyiyah has the advantage of countering negative views on women in Islam posed by the Salafi groups compared to non-religious-based women's movements. Moreover, as a representative of Muslim women's organizations, 'Aisyiyah is also supported by academically recognized figures who have the integrity to discuss and interpret Islamic doctrines, especially regarding the fulfillment of women's and family rights (Aryanti 2013). The consistency of these figures, who are trusted by the public in countering the Salafism claims through *Suara 'Aisyiyah*, can at least guide readers amid the proliferation of hoax information wrapped in religious messages.

Literacy jihad, as shown by *Suara 'Aisyiyah* through a series of themes, shows how 'Aisyiyah always presents a moderate Islamic view that provides spaces for fulfilling women's rights. In addition, the transformation of the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine to a digital platform can certainly be an alternative in countering various forms of Salafist *dakwah*, that also actively uses social media to gain attention from young Muslims (Lestari 2016). Although 'Aisyiyah has developed the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* into a digital platform, much work is still needed to counter the high intensity of Salafist *dakwah*, especially related to the issue of creating more eye-catching and attractive messages for broader potential readers.

Perhaps it is a good time for *Suara 'Aisyiyah* to share more contents with those outside its membership.

Another challenge of proselytizing Salafism is the existence of an integrated Islamic school that has the potential to teach radicalism and foster an intolerant attitude (Yusup 2018; Siregar 2021). The emergence of integrated “Islamic schools”, which provide flexibility to increase study hours for Islamic subjects, is not different from the “*madrassa*” system under the supervision of the Ministry of Religion. Perhaps this is merely a *dakwah* strategy used by the Salafism groups to form a school model with a larger portion of Islamic lesson hours, but still under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, rather than being supervised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The Ministry of Education has relatively few experts in the Islamic field, so supervision of Islamic subjects is not as strict as at the Ministry of Religion. Therefore, the label “Islamic school” is seen as making it easier to spread their religious ideology compared to using the label “*madrassa*,” which has a relatively more comprehensive set of regulations and stricter supervision regarding Islamic subject materials taught to students.

The opportunity for the inclusion of radicalism and intolerance in classrooms should be prevented by giving more serious attention, particularly concerning the supervision and cooperation between the two ministries, namely the Ministry of Religion and the Ministry of Education (Taufiqurrahman and Mubarak 2022). The Ministry of Education has to be more selective in granting permits for the establishment of Islamic schools by scrutinizing the curriculum of Islamic subjects to avoid an ideology of intolerance and *takfiri*, which means judging people outside one’s group as infidels. In this context, the existence of ‘Aisyiah with nearly 22,000 units of ‘Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten and other educational institutions at various levels, ranging from elementary to university, can be a good example of how to direct supervision through the involvement of board members of local branches of ‘Aisyiyah (Taman Kanak-Kanak Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal 1983) and also *Majelis Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah* (Assembly of Primary and Secondary Education) of *Muhammadiyah*.

The management of ‘Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, as part of ‘Aisyiyah’s business program, shows a great contribution and concern for early childhood education development, which in recent years has become an important target for Salafism groups. However, the high intensity of Salafist *dakwah* using the Internet and establishing an educational institution (Sunarwoto 2021) needs to be responded to systematically by all moderate Islamic groups. ‘Aisyiyah, as a modern Muslim women’s organization, seems to prioritize the issues of women and families, while other issues, such as radicalism or intolerant activities, should be countered by other moderate Muslim groups.

The success story of ‘Aisyiyah in lifting the status of women and families through the literacy jihad programs shows two important points. First is the negative picture of the status of women in Muslim communities that has resurfaced through the works undertaken by radical groups and Salafism. Second, by exploring ‘Aisyiyah, as a representative of modern Muslim women’s organizations, clearer understanding can be gained about the nexus between modernism and Salafism.

6. Conclusions

As the oldest Muslim women’s organization in Indonesia, ‘Aisyiyah has made a tremendous contribution to showing the world that Muslim women can contribute to creating a better life in society, especially for women and families. Furthermore, the consistency of ‘Aisyiyah in its literacy jihad programs, especially through the establishment of ‘Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergartens and other education institutions, as well as through the publication of the *Suara 'Aisyiyah* magazine, can be seen to be an excellent example of countering the *dakwah* of Salafism, which potentially forces women into the confinement of domestic tasks. Besides, the existence of nearly 22,000 units of kindergartens can also be used as a tool to protect children from radical and intolerant ideologies, which

have started entering the classrooms, especially through some integrated Islamic schools that are affiliated with Salafi groups.

As a modern Muslim women's organization, 'Aisyiyah provides a new way of balancing information on studying the relationship between modernism and Salafism or moderation and extremism. However, a more comprehensive study on this issue is still needed to ensure that modern Islam should be more accommodating to minority and marginalized communities.

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