

Nyai in Islamic Boarding School has Important Role in Matchmaking

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The culture of a pesantren (Islamic boarding school) has made the *Kyai* (cleric) the reference for religious teaching and other social matters. But in terms of matchmaking, *Nyai* (wife of cleric) has the role not to be negated.

Previously, women were seen as the silent group that accepts the matchmaking process designed by parents or family. Opinion and voice of the women were considered unimportant that make them 'passive agent'.

"But our research showed otherwise. Women are active agent," said Nihayatul Wafiroh MA, defending her dissertation titled *Women's Agency in Arranged Marriages within the Context of Pesantren* in UGM Graduate School on Monday (7/11).

Nihayatul said of five informers, the *Nyai* has a very significant role in a matchmaking. "One of the informers said the decision to go with or stop a matchmaking process lies not in the hands of the father or cleric but the mother or *Nyai*," she said.

The MP said other informers revealed that all process from matchmaking to wedding were handled by the mother. "Some *Nyais* even asked their daughters to speak honestly to their father if she really

would accept her match,” she said.

But this issue never showed up because pesantren family still has the concept of 'perfect marriage', meaning that all external matters are handled by the man. “So, the role of women is invisible, what is understood is that the Kyai has the important role,” said Nihayatul.

The findings negate that women have no role to play. Women are actually the active agent. They play their agency role in various ways. “The Nyai even advocates the daughter to make her choice and speak out her mind,” she said.

The habitus that has become a kind of doctrine that matchmaking is a representation of loyalty to the Kyai is not accepted absolutely by the women. “The women as active agent make criticisms to that consensus and prove that they do not always follow the habitus without playing their agency role,” Nihayatul concluded.

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