# Gender Reconstruction in Indonesian Muslim Families in Hadith Memes

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## Gender Reconstruction in Indonesian Muslim Families in Hadith Memes

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#### Abstract

Hadith memes are individual expressions of daily socio-religious reality through social media, including negotiating gender in an open and free virtual space. This paper aims to explore gender construction in Muslim families through hadith memes on Facebook pages. Using qualitative methods and a feminist approach, the study shows that the gender reconstruction contained in hadith memes is part of the individuals' and communities' freedom of expression in understanding religion through the selection and interpretation of hadith texts according to their knowledge, and dissemination through social media. Gender reconstruction in Muslim families shows debatable opinions between conservative and progressive Muslim groups; Muslim feminists criticize the hegemony of men as a religious authority supporting the patriarchal ideology in social media. This trend is fostered simultaneously with the strengthening of individual religious authority in the digital space to reconstruct and negotiated gender based on the interpretation of the Islamic texts in religious memes.

Keywords: Hadith memes, Facebook, gender reconstruction, Indonesian Muslim family, religious memes.

#### 1. Introduction

Meme as a social phenomenon digitally developing does not only show amusing messages, but also religious messages that can be interpreted freely and openly.

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Facebook, an online platform, offers open opportunities for content creators to create numerous memes through its "post-media" feature. Memes often describe the textual dimension of religious messages, hence they potentially shallow the understanding of religious narratives, especially in terms of women (Qudsy, Abdullah, Pabbajah, 2021). Women are depicted as subordinated to men (Moreno-Almeida & Gerbaudo, 2021) through symbolic violence (Hidayat & Immerry, 2020) and cyberbullying (Benavides-Vanegas, 2020). Gender-based violence and harassment against women are spread through sexist jokes or humor (Drakett et al., 2018). In the case of US politics, women are embedded with certain stereotypes, such as being physically weak, anti-feminine, dictator, and so forth (Nee & De Maio, 2019). Therefore, social media has reinforced male dominance in various aspects of life, resulting in injustice towards women.

The gender-construction-related study on memes discusses three views: Firstly, meme spreads gender ideology (Gbadegesin, 2019; Lomotey, 2020) through jokes or humor containing online sexism (Drakett et al., 2018). Secondly, memes construct discrimination against women in various areas including politics (Dickerson & Hodler, 2021). Lastly, a meme is used by feminists to fight against gender-related injustice and as a medium for social protest(Brantner et al., 2020; Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016). However, there are still a limited number of studies on religious memes concerning gender construction in Muslim families.

This study aims to examine the gender construction in the hadith-inspired memes spreading on Facebook. In particular, this study maps how gender construction in Muslim families is influenced by religious authority and individual expression through hadith memes. The research questions are as follows: a) how is the discourse of husband and wife in the hadith memes spread on Facebook? b) how is the gender construction of Indonesian Muslim families in the hadith memes (religious memes)? c) what are the factors leading to gender construction? These three questions are significant to reflect gender negotiation in the construction of hadith memes.

This study is based on two arguments: gender construction in religious memes does not only describe women's subordination but also women's negotiation space to carry out conventional gender reconstruction, and religious memes not only lead to the de-authorization of religious figures but also become an arena for individual freedom to express their interpretations of religion which is subjective and open. This open access to information shows that gender-related understandings about women in memes not only reflect the construction that has been formed in the reality of gender relations - that tend to be subordinate to women -, but also the resistance to patriarchal culture.

#### 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Muslim meme hadith on facebook as a reflection of muslim daily habits

Memes are imitation contents in the form of ideas, stories, or behaviors spread on various social media platforms such as Facebook (Doncel, 2016; Etee, 2020; Moody-Ramirez & Church, 2019). According to Dawkins (1982), memes are cultural reflections in the form of humor, jokes, and satire on certain daily cases, events, or conditions (Dawkins, 1982) presented in a combination of images and text to convey messages effectively (Bellar et al., 2013). Hadith meme is part of religious memes also known as religious-oriented internet memes (Bellar et al., 2013). and faith memes (Benson, 2015) regarding religious themes or traditions (Aguilar et al., 2017) in the form of images or sentences distributed over the internet (Cheong et al., 2012; Shifman, 2012). Hadith is the words and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad which is the second source of Islamic teachings after the Koran. Based on the previous explanation, a hadith meme can be defined as a meme containing a quote from a hadith, a translation, or a message of a hadith. According to Bellar et al. (2013), religious memes act as an everyday lived religion (Bellar et al., 2013), where people quote words from religion or based on their daily religious experiences in their families, communities, or society (Ali, 2020). It means that religious memes are related to religious practices, technology, and institutions as a medium to link with daily life (Burroughs & Feller, 2015).

Studies of religious-oriented internet memes are divided into three categories: Faith memes which not only function as a medium to communicate and deliver religious messages to the public (Burroughs & Feller, 2015; Bellar et al., 2017; Jubba et. al, 2023), criticize and debate religion, but also promote stereotypes of certain religions (Campbell, Joiner, et al., 2018), and for specific political interests (Campbell, Arredondo, et al., 2018). Imron confirms that hadith memes are used as a contestation tool between groups of Muslims and to confirm and strengthen group religious identities (Imron, 2019). Faith memes are included in popular culture by adopting popular media characters, such as Captain Jack Sparrow, Bad Luck Brian, SpongeBob, and so forth, as part of the humor (Bellar et al., 2013) and Faith memes are used not only by religious institutions but also by religious media and followers (Brubaker et al., 2017). These three faith memes are not only digital media to facilitate public opinion but also to powerfully disseminate existing opinions. Memes as propaganda tools and constructing collective identities are also used as a cultural critique of the domination of certain races (DeCook, 2018). It indicates that memes are a medium for disseminating various influential ideas on individual and social behavior.

#### 2.2. Gender construction discourses

Gender is a social construction concerning the roles, positions, and responsibilities of men and women associated with masculinity and femininity (Eivergård et al., 2021). Gender is also a social category affecting an individual's social status, access to resources, and individual freedom (Mwatsiya, 2019). It means that gender construction is closely related to race, social, and economic status.

Previous related studies of gender construction focused on women's subordination and gender negotiation and reconstruction. On social media, women are subjected to experience subordination (M. Z. Muttaqin & Ambarwati, 2020) and getting stereotyped (Jones & Aubrey, 2019) through humor and sexist sentences (Wathsala & De Zoysa, 2019). In addition, despite they are working for the family, women are still experiencing gender inequality at home (Fetterolf & Rudman, 2014); some examples of the previously mentioned cases are acts of violence against women occurring in African communities (Mwatsiya, 2019) and Colombia households (Zuluaga et al., 2020) caused by the local culture (Shahnaz et al., 2020). Furthermore, gender negotiation occurs in the form of resistance to male domination (Langnes & Fasting, 2017); some examples of such issues are what happened in South Africa and Ghana where women reconstructed their relationships toward a more equal relationship in marriage, and (Lesch & Parker, 2019) at the same time empowered women (Boateng, 2019; Gebregeorgis, 2016).

#### 2.3. Religious authorities in digital religions

Digital religion is an effort to integrate religious life utilizing technology with various aspects of digital culture (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020). Digital religion is related to digital technology, lived religion, and religious practices in contemporary culture (McClure, 2017). This study bridges offline and online religious practices by integrating religious life with the use of technology in the digital culture (Campbell & Evolvi, 2020; Goulding et al., 2020). Internet technology not only mediates traditional religious authorities to expand their influence but also makes it easier for any religious adherents to continue to study/learn religion. In the Indonesian context, online Islamic communities, such as One Day One Juz (ODOJ), are becoming new religious institutions whose members depend on technology (Muslim, 2017).

There are three categories related to previous studies on religious authority on digital religion. Firstly, religious authorities use the internet to expand the scope of their authority (from only offline to also online (Fakhruroji, 2019) by using the Prayer App (Karis, 2020) Cloete, 2016)) hence not limited to certain locations (Neumaier, 2016). Secondly, religious authorities can use the internet to revitalize religion (Zhang, 2017), increase religious inclusiveness (McClure, 2017), and convey media-friendly religion (Solahudin & Fakhruroji, 2020). Lastly, digital religion increases the role of individuals and groups as new religious authorities (Hasanah & Anam, n.d.), shifting the role of traditional religious leaders thus religious interpretation becomes more open, egalitarian, and diverse.

#### 3. Methods

This qualitative study relies on data from Facebook pages (with the keyword 'meme hadis' in the search menu) with various sources such as fan pages, groups, and personal accounts. Facebook was chosen because Facebook is a popular social media used for social interaction in spreading its users' ideas, thoughts, activities, and feelings (Etee, 2020); Facebook is used by various groups including religious leaders to spread religious teachings to preach and a platform for their followers to learn religion; and Facebook is a space for community negotiations on socio-cultural conditions in daily life.

Memes concerning gender construction in Muslim families obtained from Facebook pages were identified based on the themes of Muslim family hadith, such as husband, wife, and their obligations, and so forth, and other related themes. Memes are selected by using sampling -not only quotes from hadith texts in Arabic and or their translations but also quotes from hadith messages.

The data were analyzed using content analysis and social gender theory; the unit of analysis is the text of the hadith or its translation about rights in the Muslim family. The first step of the analysis is identifying all the hadith texts, then selecting them based on the theme: the hadith of the Muslim families, spouses, attitudes, violence, providing for the wife, the wife being disobedient to her husband, and other related themes. The data obtained were classified based on the contents of the hadith texts related to husband, wife, and spouses which were then analyzed based on gender construction.

#### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. Husband and wife's discourses in hadith memes

Hadith memes on Facebook regarding Muslim families can be divided into six parts, namely the spouses' obligations, good treatment toward spouses, permissible acts for spouses, prohibited acts against spouses, retribution for bad treatment of spouses, and counter-narrative.

Table 1 shows that the wife's obligations are emphasized more than the husband's hence the wife receives more in return than the husband. This is strengthened by religious lectures delivered by ulama-ulama (Muslim religious leader figures) through recitations in mosques and majlis taklim (taklim assembly/religious meeting) when discussing the obligations of the wife and their consequences. Meanwhile, good treatment of spouses is emphasized to the spouse by several prohibitions. The husband's ability to practice polygamy is juxtaposed with the wife's ability to complain to her husband as the Prophet's companions protested when they complained about their husbands.

Theme	Husbands (Meme Titles)	Wives (Meme Titles)
Obligations	Providing for the family (1) Hadith of dowry (2)	The benchmarks of a pious woman are obedience, attractiveness, and being obedient to their husband (3) Six reasons a wife should obey their husband (4) Obeying husbands is more significant than parents (5) The great rights of a husband over their wife (meme 6) A wife's fortune to their husband (7) The Prophet's will to women (Fatimah) (8) Husband's blessing is heaven for their wife (9) The significance of the husband's blessing (10)
Good treatment toward partner	Honoring the wife is one of the righteous husband characteristics (11)     My husband, you are all I want (12)     Treating your wife well is the glory of Allah's law (13)     Nine ideal attitudes of a husband toward their wife (14)     Advice for Muslim families (15)     Suavity in the house is a sign of kindness (16)	17 tickets to heaven for women (17)     Endangered Sunnah: grooming to welcome husband (18)
Permissible acts	Hadith about polygamy (19)	Hey Salafi, do complain about the Prophet's Sunnah (20)
Prohibited acts	Five mistakes committed by a husband that hurt their wife (21)	Do not confiscate your husband's ATM/ Salary (22) Do not you're your husband (23) Wife's right to not be hit in the face (24)

#### Continue

Retributions	19 husband' sins to their wife	The wife disobeys Their husband (27)	
	(25)	A disobedient wife until they re-obeys their	
	<ul> <li>Disobedience of husband to wife (26)</li> </ul>	husband (28)	
		<ul> <li>The rebellious women (29)</li> </ul>	
		<ul> <li>Your husband is your heaven or your hell (30)</li> </ul>	
		<ul> <li>Why do so many women go to hell? (31)</li> </ul>	
		<ul> <li>Four criteria for women living in hell (32)</li> </ul>	
		<ul> <li>What women should know about their</li> </ul>	
		husbands (33)	
Counter-		Weak hadiths are frequently shared by women	
narrative		(34)	

#### 4.2. Interpretation and restatement of hadith in memes

Hadiths in memes are interpreted and restated to make it easier for the readers to understand them, as follows:

Table 2. Restatement of Hadith Concerning Husband and Wife.

1 abie 2. Residiement by 1 ladith Concerning 1 lasband and wife.				
Hadith Texts	Hadith Restatement			
It was narrated that Abu Hurairah said: "It was said to the	The benchmark of a pious wife			
Messenger of Allah: 'Which woman is best?' He said: 'The one	is obedient, attractive, and			
who makes him happy when he looks at her, obeys him when	obedient to her husband			
he commands her, and she does not go against his wishes with				
regard to herself nor her wealth." (HR. an-Nasai)				
Source https://www.pinterest.com/nasihatsahabat/ruma	h-tangga-keluarga-islami-sesuai-			
sunnah-nabi-%D8%B5%D9%84/				
If a woman prays her five prayers, fasts her month of The husband's blessing is the				
Ramadan, guards her chastity, and obeys her husband, she will wife's heaven.				
enter Paradise from any gate she wishes." (HR. Ahmad)				
Source https://www.facebook.com/meme.ikhwan.akhwat/posts/1418618315162683				
"It is not allowable for a woman to fast when her husband is O wives remember [Hadith].				
present without his permission" (HR. Bukhari)				
Source <a href="https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=515371549813843&amp;set=gm.41250569">https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=515371549813843&amp;set=gm.41250569</a>				
74227945				
A wife who sleeps at night while her husband has not	The wife apologizes every			
forgiven her, then the merit of her prayer all day does not go	night.			
even an inch above her head"(HR. Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah)				
Source <a href="https://www.facebook.com/meme.ikhwan.akhw">https://www.facebook.com/meme.ikhwan.akhw</a>	at/posts/1433125673711947			
Whenever a woman harms her husband in this world, his Wives are prohibited from				
wife from the Houris of Paradise says: 'Do not harm him! harming their husbands				
May Allah destroy you! He is but a passing guest with you, including confiscation of their				
and he will soon leave you to join us." (HR. Tirmidzi)  ATMs or salaries.				

Source	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=116737363999264&set=gm.5317256				
	<u>11506172</u>				
Continue					
	net (**) said: "I was shown the Hell-fire and that	why do so many women go to			
	tity of its dwellers were women who were	hell?			
	" It was asked, "Do they disbelieve in Allah?" (or				
	ungrateful to Allah?) He replied, "They are				
	ungrateful to their husbands and are ungrateful for the favors				
	ood (charitable deeds) done to them. If you have				
	n good (benevolent) to one of them and then she				
	hing in you (not of her liking), she will say, 'I have				
	eived any good from you." (HR Buhari dan				
Muslim)					
Source	www 1 fyannuray.info				
	net (**) said, "If a man spends on his family (with	Providing for the family			
the intention of having a reward from Allah) sincerely for					
	e then it is a (kind of) alms-giving in reward for				
_	Bukhari dan Muslim)				
Source	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=11525	5917480742&set=gm.5296568			
	<u>81713045</u>				
	marriage is the one that is most easy. (HR. Abu	No title			
Daud)					
Source	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=11053	2810301506&set=gm.24159/9			
	938468999				
	enger of Allah, peace, and blessings be upon him,	Treating your wife well is a			
	Allah regarding women. Verily, you have taken	glorification of Allah's law.			
them as a trust from Allah, and intercourse has been made					
lawful by the word of Allah. Your rights over them are that					
they do not let anyone in the house you dislike. If they do so,					
you may strike them without violence. Their rights over you are that you provide for them and clothe them in a					
reasonable manner."					
Source	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=89387	46676360848reat=om 2416261			
	115097548				
	of Allah (*) said, "The most perfect man in his	Honoring the wife is one of			
	g the believers is the one whose behaviour is most	the pious husband			
	and the best of you are those who are the best to	characteristics.			
their wives." (HR. Ahmad)					
Source	https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=51466	6639949247&set=gm.2950039			
	<u>385263055</u>				

#### 4.3. Gender reconstruction in hadith memes

Gender construction in Muslim families based on hadith memes posted on Facebook can be mapped based on three levels: discrimination against women

in the form of subordination and domestic violence, gender equality and justice in treating spouses, and women's agency.

#### 4.3.1. Wife subordinations and women agency

Various hadith memes describe the subordination of the wife to her husband based on the belief that the husband's position is higher than the wife's; The wife's piety is reflected by her obedience to her husband (figure 1), and that will determine whether the wife goes to heaven or hell (figure 2).

Figure from 1 to 5. Hadith memes on wife subordinations and women agency



Figure 1 Figure 2 Figure 3

HEY TALAFI, DEMO ITU SUNNAH NABI as bin Abdullah bin Abi Daubab RA ber



Figure 4 Figure 5

Hadith memes also depict the reconstruction of gender equality in form of an equal and fair marital relationship. The meme describes a pious husband who treats his wife well (figure 3) and helps his wife with housework (figure 4). The women's agency can be seen in the quote from the Prophet's hadith about the protests of women who complain that their husbands are perpetrators of domestic violence. The hadith is given an interesting caption with the title "O Salafi, do complain about the Prophet's Sunnah" (figure 5).

Gender reconstruction in hadith memes is influenced by several factors. The first is the struggle for space between conservative and progressive religious groups in online media. These two groups use two different methods in understanding religious texts where conservative groups use textual methods with an impact on the misogynistic religious understanding that supports patriarchal traditions, while progressive groups better understand al-Quran and hadith texts openly, and dynamically by considering the historical context of the text and the socio-cultural context of today's texts to support gender equality and justice. PPIM's findings reveal that conservative narratives dominate social media in Indonesia, whereas moderate groups tend to be silent (PPIM, 2020) even though Muslim feminist groups also use the internet as a medium for disseminating ideas which also adopt offline media due to limited access to online media (Nurmila, 2021).

The second factor is that there is no single religious authority in the digital religion era. Religious authority has so far been held by traditional religious leaders who play a significant role in providing religious knowledge to their followers through offline meetings at mosques, recitations, *majlelis taklim*, madrasas, and so forth. In the digital religion era, the traditional religious authority is shifted by a new religious authority (Arrobi, 2021), namely people with deep religious knowledge and people who are just learning religion. Ironically, the last group, including the *bijrab* group (the group with a new perspective on religion) also dominates online media and gains many followers on social media (PPIM, 2020).

The last factor is the millennial generation using the internet freely, openly, and bravely to express their religious choices and views through social media. Data shows that millennials access social media an average of 2.5 hours per day compared to music and video streaming services and online media (Lidwina, 2021). Social media is also used to share and learn about religion from various sources; Qudsy's research shows that the mediatization of religion has an impact on the desacralization and superficiality of religion (Qudsy, Abdullah, Pabbajah, 2021).

#### 5. Discussion

Studies on the construction of gender in the household in hadith memes show that there is a negotiation against the hegemony of patriarchal ideology in Muslim families. The hegemony of patriarchal ideology is marked by the subordination of the wife to her husband; the husband is believed to be the

path to heaven for the wife. Gender negotiations are characterized by the demands to do well to their spouses, especially a husband to their wives, and the retribution for their respective actions. In addition, the phrase "the husband's sin and disobedience" for his actions against his wife is a form of gender reconstruction by Muslim feminists. The contest is marked by criticism of gender-equality hadiths by conservative groups who dominate social media. The strong dynamics of patriarchal domination in social media are responded to by Muslim feminists by reconstructing misogynistic religious texts to be less gender-biased.

Gender negotiations in hadith memes reflect the existence of a new religious authority strengthened institutionally and individually on social media which also shows the de-authorization of traditional clerics; new religious authorities can be online religion-based institutions and media, and individuals. They have the authority to determine digital religious discourse, including gender issues among online religious communities (Echols, 2013). The contestation of gender discourse in a family reflects the dynamic and reflective practice of gender in daily life along with the increase in religious literacy (Islam) and changes in traditional gender roles. Although the dominance of patriarchy is still strong, religious expression, within the scope of institutions and individuals, in the re-reading of misogynistic religious texts provides new awareness for a more egalitarian relationship. Social media not only creates a new religious authority that makes religion more subjective, open, dynamic, and contestant, but also increases the inclusivity of religious literacy. Religious literacy is required so those religious adherents are not victimized by hoax news in the name of religion; it means changes in media culture from traditional such as religious authorities from religious leaders to individual authorities (Day, 2020). The development of technology, especially the internet, is a new concept of reality which is a challenge for religion. Internet use affects the way people think about religion and religious practices and traditions.

Religious memes not only replace the old formal and normative da'wah (religious proselytizing) pattern but are also a form of delivering religious messages through an informative, light, simple, and easily accepted popular culture to social media users. Humorous language embedded in critical jokes leads religious messages to be more grounded and easy to understand. Internet memes show the expression of individuals and communities in daily life presented with humor and comedy that affect the readers. A religious Meme is a lived religion or personal interpretation of religious beliefs and practices in which women negotiate subordinating traditional gender roles towards equality (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021). Muslim feminists are against the hegemony of patriarchal ideology in an equal way. In Indonesia, there are several religious media, such as mubadala.id which resists/against the patriarchal tradition.

The media carry out the commodification of religion in the construction of piety in certain circles (Kusumalestari, 2020). Although the patriarchal culture is very strong in the Muslim community, there are efforts, especially those carried out by Muslim feminists, to carry out resistance. Similar resistance is initiated by the male-majority Christian blogger feminists against the hegemony of online gender ideology; they convey their authority over such a view (Echols, 2013).

The study of gender construction in social media shows the existence of gender negotiations: the hegemony of masculinity and feminist resistance to gender injustice. In the context of hadith memes, negotiations are carried out within a textual authority in the form of gender-equality hadith texts proposed by online communities or individuals. To look in more detail, religious texts related to gender issues are both genders biased and fair (gender equality). Muttaqin (2020) points out that online ulama (Islamic scholars) tend to subordinate women because of the commodification of religion. The strengthening of patriarchal culture is inseparable from the current context of Indonesian social media dominated by conservatives and transnational religious influences. However, as stated by Syuqqah (2002), the spirit of Islamic teachings is gender justice (Syuqqah, 2002). Men and women have similar rights in the public and domestic domain. If there is a misogynistic text, it needs to be reinterpreted according to the proceeding context. The past context when the text was present or the Arab socio-cultural context when Islam was present in the 7th century and the present context where Muslims are in the modern world (Saeed, 2005).

#### 6. Conclusion

Social media is a negotiation space or platform for individuals, communities, and online religious institutions in translating, interpreting, and expressing their religious experiences and knowledge based on their inclinations. This article not only shows the dominance of misogynistic traditions in memes but also counters or against patriarchal hegemony through egalitarian and gender-equal traditions. Memes not only show the hegemony of men who master technology and at the same time marginalize women, but also show the agency of Muslim feminists in fighting for gender equality and justice. Gender in Hadith memes is a space that is both reconstructed and negotiated; hadith in memes can be debated and reinterpreted.

Analysis of gender construction through hadith memes on social media has provided a new perspective in understanding gender construction in Muslim families; it is to be more subjective, dynamic, open, and critical. This

allows for a new direction in research on gender construction in Muslim families. However, this research is limited to certain social media analysts. Thus, it is necessary to carry out further research by paying attention to a broader theme, media, and sources enriched with observations and interviews with research sources.

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