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Dismantling Epistemic Injustice: The Journey of Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI) from the Feminist Standpoint Perspective

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Acknowledgment

Glossary

Alimat: a woman scholar of religious sciences

Ayah: a verse or sign in the Qur'an, referring to a unit of revelation that conveys divine meaning

Bid'ah: an innovation in religious practice that is not based on established precedents from the Quran and Hadith, often considered as adding to or subtracting from the religion

Fahmina: an acronym for "Fahm" and "Na," meaning "our understanding" or "our perspective," as well as the name of a social institution in Cirebon focusing on religious and social discourse

Fatwa: a non-binding legal opinion or interpretation on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified jurist (mufti)

Fiqh: the science of Islamic jurisprudence, which is the theoretical and practical study of the detailed sources of Islamic law

Hadith: the collection of traditions containing the sayings, deeds, approvals, or characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad, serving as a major source of guidance for Muslims

Ijtihad: the process of making a legal decision by an independent jurist using an interpretation of the sources of Islamic law, a crucial part of legal reasoning in Islam

Kiai: an honorary title for a respected male scholar or religious leader, especially in the context of Javanese Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*)

Muhammadiyah (Persyarikatan Muhammadiyah): a major Indonesian Islamic organization promoting modernist Islamic teachings, education, and social services

MUI: an abbreviation for *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* or Indonesian Ulama Council, a formal Islamic authority who issues fatwas

NU (Nahdlatul Ulama): a major Indonesian Islamic organization promoting traditional Sunni Islam, education, and social welfare

Nyai: the female equivalent of Kiai, usually the wife of a Kiai or a respected female leader in a pesantren

P3M: an abbreviation for *"Pusat Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat"* (Center for Research and Community Service)

Pesantren: traditional Islamic boarding school in Indonesia where students (santri) live and study religious subjects

Quran: the holy book of Islam, containing the words of Allah as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Jibril

Rahima: an acronym for *"Pusat Pendidikan dan Informasi Islam dan Hak-Hak Perempuan"* (Center for Islamic Education and Information and Women's Rights), a non-governmental organization focusing on issues of Islam, gender, and women's rights

Santri: a student in an Islamic boarding school (pesantren), as well as an acronym for the philosophical concepts of a student's life

Sharia: the body of Islamic law derived from the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, governing all aspects of a Muslim's life

Tafsir: the science of interpreting the Quran, providing explanations for its meanings and messages

Tawhid: the fundamental principle of Islam, affirming the absolute oneness and uniqueness of Allah as the one and only Creator and Sustainer of the universe

Abstract

This study examines the form of epistemic injustice in Islamic knowledge production, which is reflected in the journey of the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI), through a feminist standpoint perspective. Women ulama often experience epistemic injustice because the system of Islamic knowledge production in Indonesia tends to delegitimate the capability of women ulama to produce knowledge, which indicates the practice of gender-based marginalization. By studying the standpoint of women ulama in KUPI, this research investigates how epistemic injustice manifests through KUPI's journey and how KUPI challenges that through the agency of women ulama. The qualitative analysis in this research explores KUPI's framing of gender-related issues and women ulama's experience, as well as their interrelation with the knowledge production in KUPI, as an antithesis to the dominant system of Islamic knowledge production. This research also explores KUPI's work on the female genital mutilation (FGM) issue and the anti-sexual violence bill as the manifestation of their efforts to dismantle epistemic injustice in the Islamic system. The findings contribute to critical discussions on epistemic injustice within Islamic and feminist standpoint discourses, underscoring the importance of women ulama's voices and gender-awareness in the Islamic knowledge production process in Indonesia.

Keywords: Epistemic Injustice, KUPI, Knowledge Production, Feminist Standpoint

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Knowledge production is one of the most essential aspects of Islam, since this religion is established through fostering knowledge that was passed from God to the Prophet. This is mentioned in the first revelation for Prophet Mohammad, namely the first verse of Surah Al-Alaq, with the command: "Read in the name of your Lord who created." This verse is interpreted as a sign that Islamic civilization was built through the command to produce knowledge (Al-Suyuti, 2019). On the other hand, the Quran, as the basis of Islamic knowledge production, also builds on the value against marginalization. For example, many verses of the Quran encourage Muslims to free enslaved people, which was a very common practice in Arab society at that time (Al-Suyuti, 2019). However, the history of knowledge production in Islam, which stems from the perspective of anti-marginalization, does not always align with that spirit. The practice of marginalization is still involved and nurtured in the process of knowledge production until now (Barlas, 2001).

Asma Barlas, in her paper, states that theologically, any Islamic knowledge that diminishes the humanity of particular groups to maintain supremacy does not reflect the divine. This is because Islam is founded on the principle of divine unity *(tawhid)*, so no existence should be higher than another (Barlas, 2001). However, the process of Islamic knowledge production, which begins from the reading of the Quran, is still influenced by patriarchal values. This condition brings the implication of failing to see the context and the creation of an injustice paradigm (Barlas, 2001). For that reason, Amina Wadud argues that the basis of Islamic feminism should be on the process of untangling the contradiction between hermeneutical justice when interpreting the Quran and justice in the real social context (Wadud, 1995).

To develop the discourse on Islamic feminism, we need to begin with re-reading the scripture with a critical and non-dominant lens, as mentioned by Mernissi in her works (Ennaji, 2020). Islamic feminism relies on *ijtihad* or the interpretation process to understand the holy text, which, according to some Islamic scholars, is no longer open nowadays; the process of ijtihad is seen as something already fixed and non-negotiable anymore. Meanwhile, for Mernissi and many feminist scholars, *ijtihad* should be kept open, because this is the only way we can contest the patriarchal norm and male domination in terms of reading the Islamic holy text. The process of *ijtihad* also builds the capability of scholars to produce contextual and situated knowledge, as an antithesis of universalism in practicing Islam (Ennaji, 2020). Mernissi also criticizes the way white feminism used to see Islam as the only explanatory factor of women's subordination, without having a nuanced understanding of the dynamics within Islamic discourse itself. She argues that with a critical approach to understanding Islam, we can see it as the way women resist and dismantle patriarchy (Ennaji, 2020).

KUPI, which stands for *Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* or Indonesian Women Ulama Congress, was founded as a movement to address gender-related issues that are rarely discussed within Islamic discourse in Indonesia. To achieve this goal, KUPI comes up with a new approach to address those marginalized issues by delivering the concept known as epistemic partnership (Kodir, 2025). This concept is claimed as something that is born from women's experience in order to achieve ultimate justice, not just a label of justice from the dominant perspectives. By doing so, KUPI is trying to introduce the Islamic spirit of egalitarianism to the process of addressing social issues (Kodir, 2025). In this paper, I will explore how they point out the epistemic injustice in the issues that they are working on as well as exploring the strategies to deal with such issues.

Practically, the involvement of women ulama in Indonesia within Islamic discourse reflects persisting gender discrimination within Islamic institutions. It also manifests in the absence of affirmative action in many religious forums, thereby resulting in a gender-biased Islamic discourse (Oktaviani, 2021). This condition can be seen from the way people recognize fatwas or ideas from men ulama more easily compared to women ulama. This makes sense since the field of Islamic scholarship in Indonesia has been male-dominated. For example, we can have a look at the largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, which only appointed its first woman to a top position in 2022, after 100 years of its existence (Cahya, 2022). Consequently, women ulama have significantly lower popularity and recognition compared to their male counterparts. This reason also legitimizes KUPI's existence in order to give full visibility to women ulama with the legitimacy of the interpretation (Ennaji, 2020).

Recent academic research on the Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (KUPI) mainly investigates a few key areas: first, reclaimed women's ulama authority and its surrounding dynamics, such as how they formulated this movement in the deep patriarchal context of Islamic religious authority in Indonesia (Faizah, et al., 2024) (Romaniyah, et al., 2022) (Ismah, 2024), second, capturing the constructivist approach, which focused on how KUPI interprets *ayah* with the original hermeneutical method called *mubadalah* (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021), and third, movement dynamics, which focused on battle narratives that occurred behind this movement (Nisa, 2019).

While much research focuses on KUPI's theological framework and socio-political dynamics, few have explored how KUPI works on the subtle layers of epistemic injustice in order to address the systemic bias of Islamic knowledge production. Some studies have mentioned that KUPI brings an alternative epistemology to their work (Romaniyah, et al., 2022) but have not explained how that works or even address the corresponding epistemic injustice. More importantly, the studies fail to specify which particular types of epistemic injustice KUPI actively tackles. This missing detail is important since understanding these subtle forms of unfairness and the precise ways KUPI fights them is key to acknowledging their

direct and indirect impacts on society. It also helps us recognize the strategies KUPI uses to dismantle these ingrained biases

In order to examine how KUPI addresses epistemic injustice, I will dive deeper into two cases that have been studied by KUPI. First is female genital mutilation (FGM), which was officially deemed haram during the second Congress of KUPI (KUPI, 2022) and second, KUPI's loud and clear advocacy for anti-sexual violence policies among the wave of opposition to these policies (KUPI, 2020). A study conducted in Somalia about FGM, showed that public campaigns by men ulama to not marry FGM survivors successfully reduced the rate of FGM (Gulesci, et al., 2025). In the Analysis chapter, we will have a look at whether KUPI has employed such a strategy.

There has been considerable debate about those two issues, especially regarding concerns about how Islam views them in general. Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI), which is considered the most authoritative organization in terms of issuing fatwas, has a very strong position on both cases. Regarding FGM, they stated that it is encouraged as part of practicing the Islamic tradition (MUI, 2008). They issued the fatwa with no basis of medical opinion, but sought to legitimize healthcare for continuing the practice. "Female circumcision is viewed as a *makrumah*, an honorable act, and its implementation is considered a recommended religious practice," as stated in MUI fatwa number 9A of 2008. Regarding the anti-sexual violence bill, MUI did not openly reject that, but they did highlight the term marital rape, which they argued could be used to criminalize married couples (Permana, 2022). Other Islamic organizations have even voiced strong opposition to this bill, as term consent is perceived as a legitimation to legalize premarital sex (A., 2022). With this kind of setting, of KUPI's position and the process of knowledge production behind that, will be interesting.

Research Question

1. How does the journey of KUPI reveal and challenge epistemic injustice within Indonesia's Islamic knowledge production system?

Sub-questions:

a. How do the experiences of women ulama in KUPI illustrate epistemic injustice in their interactions with religious authorities?

b. How does the social position of women ulama in KUPI shape their standpoint on epistemic injustice in the context of the Islamic knowledge production process?

c. How did the Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (KUPI) historically emerge, and what factors contributed to its formation?

d. What social factors contribute to building these various forms of epistemic injustice, especially in the cases of the FGM fatwa and anti-sexual violence bill advocacy?

e. What strategies and mechanisms does KUPI employ to produce and validate knowledge from the standpoint of women ulama, especially in the cases of the FGM fatwa and anti-sexual violence bill advocacy?

The paper begins in Chapter 1 with an introduction to the research focus. Chapter 2 contextualizes the emergence of the Congress of Indonesian Women Ulama (KUPI) by exploring the broader landscape of religious authority, feminist movements, and ongoing struggles for women's rights in Indonesia. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical and analytical framework of the study, drawing on the concepts of epistemic injustice, feminist standpoint theory, and Foucauldian notions of power, knowledge, and resistance, as they relate to KUPI's movement. Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach, including the qualitative research design, data collection, and analytical methods such as interviews and document analysis. It also discusses ethical considerations and the researcher's positionality. Chapter 5 details the empirical findings, highlighting the manifestations of epistemic injustice encountered by women ulama, their position within the knowledge production process, and the strategies developed by KUPI to resist dominant narratives, especially through their engagement with the FGM fatwa and advocacy for the Anti-Sexual Violence Bill. Chapter 6 offers a critical discussion of the findings, reflecting on the theoretical implications, contributions to Islamic feminist discourse, and potential for social transformation, while also noting limitations and areas for further research. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes the study by summarising the key insights.

Chapter 2 Context: Situating Women Ulama in KUPI

2.1 The Landscape of Women Ulama in Islamic Discourse

In Islamic religious and historical documents, the name of Aisya is frequently mentioned as a woman figure who made significant contribution in the beginning of Islam. Aisya is mostly attributed as the wife of the Prophet, and is later described as a talented hadith narrator, which means she also produce and deliver Islamic knowledge. However, the story of Aisyah is also a portrayal of women's involvement in Islamic knowledge production. In the beginning, she got rejected and was concealed many times (Mernissi, 1991). Meanwhile, other researchers argued that the role of Aisya was very crucial in terms of delivering hadith, since she served as a bridge between the private and public lives of the Prophet (Harpci, 2015).

Aisyah used to be called "the mother of the faithful" for many reasons, one of which was that she could use her privilege of a Prophet's wife to ask him directly any matter (Harpci, 2015). This aspect used to be romanticized a lot as the best chapter of her contribution to Islam, even though there were many other contributions she made and many dynamics around them, which are rarely mentioned in the Islamic discourse. For example, she initiated a women's school in her house to respond to the lack of access for women to education at that time. She is also left a significant legacy for Muslim women by correcting the hadith delivered by Abu Hurairah, a well-known hadith narrator, and rejecting the Quran interpretation by a well-known tafsir scholar, such as Ibn Umar (Harpci, 2015).

Aisyah is an early form of women's resistance in Islam, who has been silenced and discredited many times. According to Mernissi, Aisya's contribution to politics in the early days of Islam was easily labeled as an anomaly or bid'ah, and because of that, Islamic scholars, who were predominantly men, created a systemic annihilation to delegitimize women's voice in the Islamic knowledge production process (Mernissi, 1991). For example, when Aisha took command in a battle in 656 CE, the battle was called the Battle of the Camel, because Aisha directed her troops on the back of a camel during the battle. According to Djebbar's account, as written in Cooke's book, many later texts wrote about this history, mentioning that Aisya led the losing side. It was even used to legitimize the tradition that says, "those who entrust women will never gain prosperity (Cooke, 2001)."

However, Aisyah and many other women in the early Islamic period also became figures of resistance and resilience. Aisyah continued to question misogynist hadith narrators and states disagreement with the Quranic tafsir, which fails to address injustice (Mernissi, 1991). Several other women figures, such as Khaulah and Umm Salma, focalize women's voices toward the Prophet, who responded directly to God through revelation. For example, in one surah of the Quran (Surah An-Nisa), there is a written law about inheritance for women which is very progressive compared to pre-Islamic Arab law, which gave women inheritance to other men. However, male scholar at that time found a loophole to maintain their privilege and prevent women from getting their rights. In the same surah, there is one verse that says, "Do not give your wealth to the foolish (Safih)." This term is mostly interpreted as one who cannot diversify bad and bad things. The man scholar tried to include women in this category (Mernissi, 1991).

The spirit of resistance that emerged from the first generation of women in Islam was inherited and continued through the emergence of Islamic feminism. This contemporary discourse operates within the same domain, actively struggling alongside the initial resistance of early Muslim women. Both movements are fundamentally engaged in a contesting reinterpretation of religious texts. This shared battleground is crucial because the roots of discrimination, particularly against women, are found in the initial political interpretations of these religious texts. (Moghadam, 2002). Moghadam argues that Islamic theological discourse will always involve competing interpretations of religious texts, which are often tied to power

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and social hierarchy. In that position, Islamic feminism offers a space for dialogue and political change on the battleground of religious text interpretation (Moghadam, 2002).

Several Islamic feminist scholars have continued the legacy of resistance against patriarchal interpretations of Islam within their own cultural and historical contexts. One example is Assia Djebar, whose literary works reimagine women's roles in Islamic history. Her reinterpretation of historical narratives, such as describing the Prophet Muhammad's decision to allow his daughter to inherit property, represents a radical feminist moment (Cooke, 2001). Djebar challenges male-centered readings of Islamic tradition. Another prominent Islamic feminist name, Nawal El-Saadawi, challenges the theological concept of the God-Satan dichotomy, particularly as it relates to economic imperialism. She argues that when religious texts, such as the Quran, and their interpretations are made exclusive and inaccessible by those in power, such as her teacher, they can be easily manipulated (Cooke, 2001).

This manipulation then allows religious leaders to use the threat of hellfire as a powerful tool. For instance, imagine a community where a poor farmer, struggling under an oppressive economic system, protests the unfair land distribution or high taxes imposed by the wealthy. The religious authority, having made the Quran's interpretation exclusive to themselves, might then declare that criticizing the established order is 'satanic behaviour' and warn of dire consequences in the afterlife. In this way, the religious framework is co-opted to maintain the economic control of the elite and suppress any form of dissent or challenge from the economically marginalized (Cooke, 2001).

What remains a challenge in the struggle for Islamic feminism is the necessity to challenge two dominations at once. Arabic and Islamic culture, which prohibits women from being critical, and Western domination, which disregards knowledge that comes from Muslim women (Moghadam, 2002). Islamic feminism needs to tackle the manipulation of the sacred texts that has become a structural characteristic of Muslim societies, while preserving its indigenous culture from being eroded by colonial feminism, which sees Arabic and Islamic culture as something backward and deserving to be dominated (Moghadam, 2002).

In order to achieve justice, Islamic feminism resists the exclusion from knowledge production through re-reading the *sharia* and opening the door to *ijtihad*. This kind of resistance is needed to challenge the narratives used to be seen as rigid and no longer open to change (Mernissi, 1991). A significant ongoing challenge for Islamic feminism is to amplify the voices of women ulama within an environment where the interpretation of sacred texts remains largely male-dominated, and to demonstrate how their effort of reinterpretation can bring about a profound societal impact (Moghadam, 2002).

2.2 Feminist Movements and Women's Rights Advocacy in Indonesia

We can trace women's activism in Indonesia back to the colonial era, when some of these stories were documented. For example, several women who got involved in the armed struggle against the Dutch colonial regime, such as Cut Nyak Dien and Christina Martha, were later inaugurated as National Heroes (Arivia & Subono, 2017). In addition, during the colonial era, several forms of women's resistance have remained an important legacy to this day, one of which is the first women's congress, held from December 22 to 25, 1928. This congress raised three gender related issues at the time: marriage issues, polygamy, and access to education for women. In 1938, there was a huge demand for women to make a resolution allowing women to vote and to be elected (Arivia & Subono, 2017).

Several names of women activists also emerged during the colonial era, such as Dewi Sartika and Nyai Ahmad Dahlan, who built schools for women, and Rohana, who built a progressive and critical newspaper to raise awareness of women-related issues at that time. Another big name in Indonesian feminist history is RA Kartini, who imposed many ideas about education access and work opportunities for women through her correspondence with her Dutch friends. Kartini is now acknowledged as a national hero for women's empowerment (Arivia & Subono, 2017).

During the colonial period, two of the biggest Islamic organizations were established: Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, which formerly focused on promoting religious values. However, later on, they also promoted the integration of women's rights through their affiliated bodies, such as Aisyiyah, which is affiliated with Muhammadiyah, and Muslimat and Fatayat, which are affiliated with NU (Parvanova, 2012). As Muhammadiyah developed, it sought to reform Islamic faith by stressing the idea of equality and justice, thereby establishing Aisyiyah. Meanwhile, Muslimat and Fatayat in NU focused on specialized training and education for women as a form of challenging the perception about women's social status at that time, which was considered as domestic beings (Parvanova, 2012).

However, after the independence of Indonesia from the colonial regime, the women's movement faced several setbacks. For instance, when the third women's congress was held, women demanded that December 22 be commemorated as Women's Day. Unfortunately, the government changed it into Mother's Day, which adopted the Western tradition of Mother's Day, to celebrate the domestic and unpaid labor of mothers. The situation got worse when the Soeharto regime enforced the institutionalized domestication of women through state motherhood ideology. During Soeharto's authoritarian rule, mass killings were also targeted at women's organizations, including Gerwani, as they were seen as a threat because of their capability to mobilize women workers' community. This is also part of Soeharto's anti-communism movement (Arivia & Subono, 2017).

In the middle of that struggle under Soeharto's regime, some leftist organizations were working to raise human rights issues, especially to defend the rights of labor

and migrants as a form of resistance to the direction of Soeharto's neoliberal economic policies. At the same time, many Muslim scholars started to explore the idea of human rights, as this became a major concern at that time. This condition led to the emergence of P3M, which stands for *Perhimpunan Pengembangan Pesantren dan Masyarakat* (Association for the Development of *Pesantren* and Society). This organization worked on re-examining Islamic texts through a lens of advocacy for human rights. This organization would later influence other Muslim women's organizations to start doing similar things (Rinaldo, 2019). P3M has nurtured thinkers who are sensitive to social conditions, including Kyai Muhammad, who became one of the main initiators of KUPI.

After the authoritarian regime ended and Indonesia entered what we used to call *Reformasi* or the reformation era, many organizations and movements emerged publicly, including the women's movement. One of the major achievements of the women's movement in the Reformasi era was the establishment of the National Commission on Violence Against Women (*Komnas Perempuan*) in response to the widespread gender-based violence that occurred during 1998, amid the transition from the New Order (Soeharto's regime) to the Reformasi period. After that, many NGOs focused on empowering women economically, and some of them also focused on advocating human rights issues, such as labor rights for women. Some organizations worked specifically on knowledge production, such as Jurnal Perempuan and Kapal Perempuan, which produced academic studies, popular articles, and so on. However, this did not mean that women's movements became easier, because with the right to freedom of expression finally becoming accessible during the Reformasi era, conservative voices also arose. These conservatives were mostly against the idea of advocating women's rights; as a result, the women's movement faces difficulties in advocating pro-women policies, such as anti-sexual violence and gender equality laws (Arivia & Subono, 2017).

During the reformation era, the women's movement got polarized due to the rise of conservatism, especially when it had many representatives in parliament. The conservatives were trying to marginalize the secular women's movement by labelling and rejecting their ideas. At the same time, the conservatives were also trying to control Muslim women's organizations under the pretext of not deviating from religious values (Rinaldo, 2019). This situation arose because during the reformation era, conservatism got much support, which made them capable of mobilizing people using religious discourse as a weapon. Their capability to mobilize people also led to their closer ties with the authorities, while at the same time, women's rights advocacy had less power at the grassroots level due to the disconnection between the national and local movements (Rinaldo, 2019).

Under challenging conditions for the women's movement, Muslim women's organizations played a crucial role, as issues concerning women and Islam attracted a wide audience. Both the state and conservatives have an interest in controlling women through religion, making this topic continually relevant to them. For activists and women's rights defenders, it is crucial because religion is often perceived as an

obstacle to advocacy. In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, the voice of Islam plays a key role at this intersection (Poerwandari, et al., 2018). To fulfil this necessity, some Islamic scholars such as Lies Marcoes and Farha Ciciek built their own platform to discuss gender discourse within Islam, Rahima. Rahima, together with Fahmina Alimat, which was founded by Kiaai Muhammad, later became the organization that initiated KUPI (Parvanova, 2012).

Nowadays, even though more progressive women's movements have emerged, some of which even have representatives in parliament, advocating for women's rights remains challenging due to some hierarchical and interest conditions. For example, even though we already have progressive Muslim women leaders in parliament, to gain legitimacy within the Islamic community itself, they are still facing many patriarchal boundaries that limit their voice (Parvanova, 2012). Furthermore, even though we already have some representatives or femocrats who can make strategic decisions, most of them are inconsistent and figure-dependent, because there is no common value of the feminist movement they represent (Arivia & Subono, 2017). Therefore, women's groups must be open, compromise, and find a middle ground to build strategies for the movement and go beyond confrontational advocacy (Poerwandari, et al., 2018).

2.3 Knowledge Production in Indonesian Islamic Discourse and The Emergence of KUPI: History and Objectives

There is a tension between the traditional way of Islamic knowledge and the contemporary way, which is led by Islamic puritanist scholars. The traditional way relies on the interpretation of religious texts by ulama, which is distributed unidirectionally to santri. On the other hand, the contemporary way uses a more interactive approach and less hierarchical (Saat & Burhani, 2020). However, what remains the same between those two is that women's voices are not considered a valid basis of knowledge production, nor are they even considered authoritative to distribute the knowledge. In the traditional term, women are seen as supportive partners for the male ulama. Meanwhile, puritanists view women as domestic creatures who should not take part in any matters outside their domestic obligations (Nurlailawati, 2020).

The exclusion of women from Islamic knowledge production can be seen as a deliberate act of power-knowledge. This dynamic actively shapes what is considered truth and who has the authority to convey it, effectively subjugating women's voices and rendering their experiences invalid as a source of religious knowledge (Soetomo, 2024). That explains the strategic position of alternative institutions such as KUPI, which challenges the patriarchal power structure by creating a new counter-

discourse. KUPI might become a good alternative perspective in the middle of a knowledge-power dynamic that marginalizes women's voices (Avivah, 2021)

KUPI stands for *Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, or can be translated as Indonesian Women Ulama (Islamic Religious Leader) Congress. This is a five-yearly meeting that gathers women ulama to actively contribute to the fatwa-making process. A fatwa is a legal opinion in response to Islamic law, and is considered a process of interpreting Islamic law. The first KUPI congress was held at Kebon Jambu boarding school on April 25 to 27, 2017. This first Congress aimed to reacknowledge the works of women ulama and discuss the challenges and opportunities for their works in the Islamic knowledge production (KUPI, 2023). This congress fundamentally reshaped the male-dominated authority in the formulation of Islamic knowledge, marking a significant progress in this power shift (Ismah, 2024).

This event can be categorized as a new initiative. As of this year, this congress is less than a decade old. However, deep down, the bloom of this congress is deeply rooted in many historical stories. Decades before KUPI held its first-ever women's ulama congress in the world (Wahid, 2017), women's ulama in West Sumatra, Indonesia, had already marked their resistance in the 19th century toward Islamic puritanism, which brought about anti-culture and anti-gender movements through publications. They published their magazine called Al-Munir, which compiled criticisms by young people toward puritanism and accommodated women's voices, which were marginalized at that time (KUPI, 2023). At the beginning of the 20th century, women ulama in Java also initiated a movement seeking broader access to education for women from diverse backgrounds, not limited to those from aristocratic families, as was the case during the Dutch colonial era. In 1914, the first formal women's school under the Islamic education system was opened in Yogyakarta by Siti Walidah. Later, this school was renamed Aisyiyah, which is a women's movement under one of the biggest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, Muhammadiyah, which was founded by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, the husband of Siti Walidah (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021). This movement was later followed by Nyai Nur Khadijah, who opened a women's Islamic boarding school in Jombang in 1919, as well as Rahmah El-Yunusiah, a women ulama who opened a women's Islamic school in West Sumatra in 1930 (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021).

Although at that time women had gained access to Islamic education, the development of women scholars was still hindered because women were not yet allowed to study the system of legal reasoning in Islam, which affected most of our way of practicing Islam every day. This was until 1952, when K.H. Wahid Hasyim, as a Minister of Religious Affairs, opened access to allow women to study at the Faculty of Sharia (Islamic Law), which enabled them to qualify as ulama (KUPI, 2023). While this was a significant advancement for Muslim women at the time, education still faced barriers, making it an elite pursuit. Gaining access required complicated negotiations and different types of capital. For example, women needed family connections to prominent ulama (religious leaders) or strong engagement

with major Muslim groups such as Muhammadiyah and NU to get their insights. Without such access, other women had to settle for an Islamic education system that often held misogynistic perspectives, thus maintaining men's top hierarchical status (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021).

Because of that societal gap, progressive scholars from those two biggest Islamic organizations started to build their movement, which later became the foundation for the birth of KUPI. They are P3M, FK3, Rahima, Fahmina, and Alimat. Each of them makes various contributions to KUPI. For example, P3M, which stands for *Pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and Community Development, collaborates with FK3, which stands for Forum of Classical Islamic Text Study, to build an epistemological basis to reinterpret Islamic classical texts (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021). They check their references and foster critical analysis of the interpretation of classical Islamic texts. Rahima has a special program to train women ulama and build community-based authority. Fahmina focuses its Islamic analysis on human rights and democratic issues. While Alimat is concerned with equality issues, particularly in the family, it also has specific requirements for referring to a scholar as a woman ulama, which not only secures the qualifications to become an ulama but also requires them to have gender perspectives to be involved in their work. The diverse contributions encompass ideas, key figures, and methodologies employed by KUPI in its congress (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021).

To understand the importance of KUPI's work and legacy, we should first understand that generally, there are two typologies in the Islamic epistemological foundation. The first one is argumentative knowledge, which refers to knowledge gained through reason, logic, and discussion. This knowledge uses evidence, analysis, and debate to reach an understanding. This first typology gives rise to two specific approaches in the Islamic knowledge production system, which are philosophical and constructivist (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021).

The second one is hereditary knowledge, which passes down knowledge through tradition, revelation, and established religious texts. This knowledge is accepted based on its origins or the authority of those who transmitted it, such as the Prophet Muhammad and the subsequent scholars. In this typology, knowledge is received and preserved, rather than discovered. This typology brings about two other approaches to the Islamic knowledge production system, which are theological and mystical approaches that are now becoming increasingly common in Islam (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021).

The absence of constructivism and philosophical approaches cultivates biases that are aligned with the power relations in the knowledge production process. This condition makes gender discourse rarely discussed there because they need to maintain misogynistic narratives to control people (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021). For example, when mainstream Islamic discourse addresses the interpretation of verses about polygamy, it often overlooks the crucial historical context. They tend to overlook the fact that when these verses were revealed, Islam actually limited the number of wives and stopped the objectification of women. Instead, their focus often remains

purely on the text, asserting that Islam permits men to have up to four wives and emphasizing the perceived benefits for men (Rofiah, 2020).

Those conditions explain why the rise of KUPI with its different perspectives and approaches is unique yet important in this societal setting of Muslims in Indonesia. KUPI contributes to challenging the domination in knowledge production. They are also presenting new ways of cultivating knowledge by centering women's experiences and expertise in the discussion, which used to be marginalized. The involvement and collaboration from cross-sectoral expertise also broadens the definition of ulama, which used to be limited to those who lead *pesantren* or preach in mosques. Therefore, KUPI also becomes a melting pot for women's activism in many sectors, since KUPI manages to bridge the production of knowledge that involves both right-wing and left-wing activists on crucial issues (KUPI, 2023). Other research also mentions that KUPI emerges as an antithesis to the common assumption that *ijtihad* (independent reasoning in Islamic jurisprudence) has ceased to stifle legal thinking on women's conditions across different times and spaces (Romaniyah, et al., 2022).

The significant work of KUPI is built upon five maqashid syariah (universal Islamic principles), which encompass the purposes of Islamic law-making. In short, they examine whether the current paradigms and laws in Islam are aligned with those principles (Ma'ruf, et al., 2021). To do that, they developed a critical hermeneutical method called *mubadalah* (reciprocity) to foster a reformed gender-inclusive *tafseer* (exegetical work) based on social justice perspectives in the social and religious domains (Romaniyah, et al., 2022). This is a huge step taken by women's ulama to challenge the dominant authority that plays a considerable role in the production and distribution of Islamic knowledge.

The way KUPI structured its congress and the composition of the people behind it can be considered an epistemological revolution. This is because KUPI directly challenged the long-standing neglect of independent women's religious scholar institutions and their contributions. Previously, these women's institutions were often considered mere subgroups of larger, male-dominated organizations such as Fatayat (under NU) and Aisyiyah (under Muhammadiyah). KUPI's movement effectively breaks the tradition of overlooking and silencing women's intellectual and religious legacy by allowing them to actively participate in the knowledge production process (Romaniyah, et al., 2022). The KUPI's way of disseminating knowledge from its congress through social media channels and the Kupipedia website is also a progressive contribution of this movement. Previously, it was difficult for the public to access the outcomes of such ulama discussions. We would only hear our teachers' interpretations, which could carry biases and fail to provide the full context of how the knowledge was formulated (Faizah, et al., 2024).

Although this movement has made many contributions within the community and beyond, there are still some conditions that remain challenging for KUPI. For example, in the context of Indonesian society, there are many discourses of anti-feminist movements that try to frame any particular activity related to gender

discourse as inconsistent with the religious norms in Indonesia (KUPI, 2023). In many cases, gender-based violence is still normalized with the argument that women deserve it because they violate Islamic rules, which are commonly interpreted by men as maintaining a patriarchal order. This particular context triggers women ulama to debunk the interpretations that systematically bring disadvantages to women (KUPI, 2023). Institutional constraints also remain challenging for this movement, because formerly women's contributions in Islamic organizations were to support the larger umbrella organizations, such as Aisyiah to support Muhammadiyah and Muslimat to support NU. Often, that role reinforces the narrative of domestication (Faizah, et al., 2024). KUPI, in this sense, can be seen as a threat to the dominant narratives and status quo.

Chapter 3 Theoretical and Analytical Framework

3.1 Epistemic Injustice: (Beyond) Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice

Epistemic injustice is a form of power inequality that mistreats knowers for their capacity to know (Fricker, 2007). This form of power depends on a socially imaginative concept of identities that came from systemic prejudice. Fricker divides epistemic injustice into two forms. The first one is testimonial injustice, which is the condition when knowers suffer from prejudice that makes them less credible, which she calls a credibility deficit, or vice versa, puts certain profiles over their capacity because of prejudice dysfunction, which leads to what Fricker calls a credibility excess. The analysis of testimonial injustice begins with an examination of social power, which enables individuals to influence and control the actions of others (Fricker, 2007). For instance, if a stereotype works against a speaker, it can result in epistemic dysfunction of the exchange. In that case, the subject can no longer talk about their knowledge due to their credibility deflation (Nielsen & Utsler, 2022). It then creates a vicious cycle, because identity prejudice is generated and maintained through a failure to recognize others as legitimate and credible sources of knowledge (Nielsen & Utsler, 2022).

The second form of epistemic injustice is hermeneutical injustice, which occurs when we experience a gap in collective hermeneutical resources, rendering us unable to precisely acknowledge and explain our experiences (Fricker, 2007). For example, when we lack sufficient terms to describe the different shades of color. In the context of social issues, Fricker provided a precise example of sexual harassment. Before the term existed, we did not acknowledge such experience because it was marginalized. This form of injustice stems from a more fundamental root, which is the ontological struggle due to power relations. This condition will lead to

hermeneutical marginalization; because of the lack of a source to explain, the experience gets marginalized. Hermeneutical injustice typically manifests in the speaker's struggle to articulate their experience as the basis of knowledge (Fricker, 2007).

For these two different forms of epistemic injustice, Fricker suggests various ways of countering them. For the first one, she argues that the best way to dismantle testimonial injustice is by training testimonial sensibility in the community, which encourages testimonial exchange between the individual and the collective. For the second one, Fricker suggests that we cultivate as many hermeneutical resources as we can get in order to foster sensitivity toward indescribable experiences, empower marginalized or silenced communities, and also challenge the dominant narratives that nurture our perspectives (Fricker, 2007).

Apart from Fricker's two types of epistemic injustice, Gayatri Spivak also conceptualizes epistemic violence, defined as the dislocation and unacknowledgement of people when attempting to testify from oppressed positions. For example, the codification of law to maintain power and hegemonic order (Spivak, 1998). Spivak argues that epistemic violence is a part of a general violence, which occurs in the process of knowledge production. Epistemic violence builds on assumptions and constructions of consciousness from the work of imperialist subject construction. It can be part of the civilization project of colonialism, which made subaltern women remain muted (Spivak, 1998).

Epistemic violence, according to Spivak, is the consequence of an imperialist knowledge system that uses knowledge as a weapon to oppress others. It can only be carried out by erasing local knowledge. In this case, the subaltern functions only as the counter possibility to the dominant knowledge, not the main subject that is capable of creating knowledge. Their knowledge is called subjugated knowledge, as a set of knowledge that is disqualified because it is considered below the required level of scientific knowledge. The implication is that in the colonial knowledge production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak for itself (Spivak, 1998).

Another scholar who is also concerned with epistemological problems is Linda Martín Alcoff. She observed the practice of epistemology of ignorance that causes the knowers to discredit or dismiss their knowledge (Alcoff, 2024). Epistemology of ignorance does not require complete erasure; it can also be present through false information and an intentional stance on what one knows. It can also manifest in the form of cultural amnesia as a strategy to legitimize the invalidation of local knowledge and delegitimize the status of the knowers (Alcoff, 2024). To counter this condition, we can formulate epistemic norms that encourage self-trust and the cultivation of more careful perceptions (Alcoff, 2024).

Otto Maduro also added the idea of countering the epistemology of ignorance by reconnecting with our critical purchase, which means producing knowledge with a strong purpose to promote justice and using the positionality of the knower to examine the surroundings. He called it epistemological humility, or knowledge

production from below (Maduro, 2011). Epistemological humility criticizes the authoritarian form of transmitting knowledge, which reinforces self-perception as an incapable speaker due to the superiority of other knowers. Otto argues that even individual knowledge is never really individual; it always has a root, and in the process, tries to reformulate new knowledge (Maduro, 2011).

Other scholars have also mentioned that the examination of epistemic injustice can be done through the persistent reproduction of stigma, which is fueled by misconceptions (Hukmi & Taufiqurrahman, 2024). In the religious setting, epistemic injustice often occurs in the form of labeling, which has implications of oversimplifying identities and applying anticipatory prejudice, which harms certain groups (Hukmi & Taufiqurrahman, 2024).

These discussions above reflect a lot of Maldonado-Torres's assertion that those who occupy the zone of being are expected to speak about others. This is also manifested in the colonial knowledge production, which is fundamentally linked to the absence of the others (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). Torres also criticizes the colonial mindset of being in the Cartesian formulation, "I think, therefore I am," which implies the negation of the other's processes and ways of knowing and being. Consequently, universally valid knowledge is viewed as that produced by those who occupy the zone of "being", while the knowledge and experiences of the "others" are ignored, trivialized, or erased (Maldonado-Torres, 2007).

3.2 Feminist Standpoint Theory: Key Concepts and Debates

Feminist standpoint theory is a perspective in feminist epistemology that argues that all knowledge is socially situated, and therefore, we need a stronger standard of objectivity apart from the one that detaches from the social context (Harding, 1992). This theory originated from marginalized lives and the perception of everyday life as problematic, prompting us to reevaluate the established and dominant status quo. Harding explains in her paper that the emergence of this theory has historically come from marginalized people who have started gaining a public voice, allowing them to offer perspectives that are short of marginal, thereby contributing to objectivity, and in doing so, their experiences can be heard (Harding, 1992).

These perspectives that stress on subaltern experiences then become important when we discuss the phenomenon of feminist activism. This is because if we only understand the world from the dominant perspective, important relationships within society might be obscured and limit our understanding of the real connections that are entangled in those phenomena. For example, our understanding of colonialism, which is shaped by the dominant perspective, might firmly separate the victims and

label them as weak and the colonizers as winners, which correlates with powerful characteristics (Harding, 1992).

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Another important point of feminist standpoint theory is the way this theory centers the relationship between knowledge and politics, since power lies behind political stance, and it influences knowledge production. For instance, when we say that women's experiences are the basis of feminist knowledge, the political process in that knowledge cultivation can influence how those experiences are seen and translated, as well as whether the knower is acknowledged as a central subject or not (Harding, 1992).

In line with that, Smith also built the theory upon a feminist standpoint. She argues that women's experiences are the basis of feminist knowledge. There is a disjunction between how women experience the world and the dominant theory of the world in society. This is a sign that women's experiences are excluded or even seen as non-existent in terms of knowledge production. Therefore, Smith argues that standpoint epistemology should begin by centering the relationship between knowledge and politics behind that, so we can see whose dominant voice and interest play a role in the knowledge production process (Smith, 1926). This is also a critic of the objectivity of knowledge, which tries to separate what is known from the knower's interest and biases, which, according to Smith, is not possible, especially in the process of producing sociological knowledge, because our knowledge is shaped by what we experience and reflect on (Smith, 1926).

Muslim scholars also have a strong position in theorizing the Islamic feminist standpoint. Fatima Sedat, in her paper, mentioned that Islamic feminism should not be viewed through the Western feminist paradigm. This is because Islam can derive its own feminism from Islamic tradition, the lived experiences of Muslim women, as well as from androcentric history. Muslim women's position and their relationship to power are important in two different ways: first, to see clearly how exactly the dominant narratives blur their experiences, and second, to trace how standpoint knowledge is capable of expanding further than an affirmative action in the dominant paradigm (Sedat, 2013).

Amina Wadud also brings another perspective of the Islamic feminist standpoint. According to her, the Islamic feminist standpoint concerns the process of untangling the inconsistency between hermeneutical justice in terms of Quranic interpretation and justice in the societal context (Wadud, 1995). She argues that the

fundamental principle of social justice in Islam is reciprocity, which should be embodied in the process of interpreting the holy text. This becomes reasonable since the Quran left a mandate to be stewards on earth, and to fulfil this responsibility, we need to expand the limitations we had in the past, including acknowledging women's experiences that hinder the process of producing Islamic knowledge (Wadud, 1995).

Another standpoint in Islamic feminism came from Asma Barlas, who argues that the patriarchal readings of the Quran failed to understand the context of Quran verses and perform the hermeneutical aspects of reading the Quran, which led to the creation of an injustice paradigm in terms of reading and interpreting the Quran (Barlas, 2001). She argues that different methods can lead to different meaning-making processes and analytical results of the same text. Therefore, she suggests reforming Quran reading, starting by reforming the method (Barlas, 2001).

Barlas, in her paper, argues that theologically, any method of reading the Quran that diminishes the humanity of women cannot be considered reflective of the divine, because the principle of *tawhid* (Islamic monotheism) fundamentally opposes such an interpretation. She contends that only through engaging in creative ijtihad (independent legal reasoning) can Islam be reformed and move away from patriarchal interpretations, particularly regarding the status of women (Barlas, 2001).

In Indonesia, the feminist standpoint came from women's domestication and the politicization of religion. This tension brings deeper discussions, which recentre women's agency in religious rituals and public discourse. Etin Anwar wrote in her book that the discourse of feminist standpoint in Indonesia started by challenging the marginalization of women and seeking equality. At the same time, this has also become a counterstrategy to counter the rejection of feminist discourse in Indonesia (Anwar, 2021). Anwar also mentioned that being a Muslim feminist, especially in Indonesia, means resisting epistemic gendered hierarchies that abandon women's potential as moral agents (Anwar, 2021).

3.3 Power, Knowledge, and Resistance in KUPI's Context

The above demonstrates a strong correlation between knowledge and power. This correlation is why the concept of situated knowledge is crucial, emphasizing the importance of the origins of knowledge, especially when it is used to challenge the existing system and give a voice to marginalized groups. This idea fits with the concept of epistemic injustice, which encourages us to look closely at how knowledge is created and shared. It invites us to consider whether these processes are fair or unfair to certain people. In other words, how we create and share knowledge can either promote justice or cause harm.

Nor Ismah, in her research, found that in KUPI's context, the examination of power is exercised through gaining legitimacy from below. Ismah argued that KUPI scholars started their movement by building a strong relationship with their mass base in order to establish their legitimacy and authority as scholars (Ismah, 2024). In this research, we will see how this legitimacy brings impact to KUPI ulama in terms of producing knowledge, and together with other strategies employed by KUPI, builds their own discipline in Islamic knowledge production, as a challenge to dominant Islamic narratives.

In this research, we are going to dive deeper into how resistance toward domination is changing the landscape of knowledge production by examining KUPI's movement through the lens of epistemic injustice. Manifestations of epistemic injustice could be seen in how people misjudge their capability to produce knowledge and how the knowers struggle to make themselves intelligible, especially when their experiences are not acknowledged because of the lack of sources to explain them (Fricker, 2007). This framework will guide the investigation into how women ulama encounter barriers (Hukmi & Taufiqurrahman, 2024) in their knowledge production. We are also going to see the manifestation of situated knowledge, which also has a theological basis, in the process of KUPI's fatwa-making about female genital mutilation (FGM) and their advocacy for the ratification of the anti-sexual violence bill.

In essence, I am going to use the theories above to explain how Islamic knowledge is created, shared, and employed as an act of resistance. The concepts of epistemic injustice, epistemic violence, epistemology of ignorance, and epistemological humility provide a critical lens to understand how knowledge hierarchies and structures operate within the Islamic knowledge production system in Indonesia. I am also using the theory of situated knowledge and the Islamic feminist standpoint to highlight the positional and experiential nature of knowledge production. Together, these perspectives form a framework to analyze how power relations shape who is recognized as a legitimate knower and how marginalized experiences are transformed into authoritative Islamic knowledge. This synthesis allows me to trace how KUPI's practices embody acts of epistemic resistance that

challenge   dominant   hierarchies   of   religious   authority.

Figure 1 Analytical framework diagram

Chapter 4 Methodological Considerations

4.1 Methods and Methodology of the Research

In this research, I used a qualitative approach throughout the whole process because it allows me to examine human experiences in detail. In addition, qualitative research as a methodology has distinctive features that I needed in this research to identify issues from participant perspectives (Hennink, 2020)or specifically in my case, the perspectives of women ulama, who are not dominant in the system.

In this research, it is important to achieve *verstehen*, which is the goal of qualitative research: an empathetic and interpretive understanding of human behavior and social action. This goal can be achieved through an interpretive paradigm in the qualitative methodology, which can help to address underlying assumptions through emic perspectives of human experiences and actions (Hennink, 2020).

As the method of data collection, I conducted online interviews, primarily using the constructivist concept of interviewing, which allows the interviewer and interviewee to co-construct narratives and interpret them through engagement with the research topic (Roulston, 2013). I conducted interviews with eleven informants in total, including one legislator, one government official (the Chairperson of Komnas Perempuan), one researcher from KUPI who is also actively involved in its activities, one member of an organization outside KUPI that collaborates with it, and the rest from within KUPI itself. My criteria for selecting prominent and key figures focused on their direct involvement and significant contributions to KUPI's

founding and ongoing activities. Of the eleven informants, nine were women and two were men. They fell into three main categories:

Number	Category	Number of Informants	Gender Composition	Description
1.	Founders of KUPI	4	Two women, two men	Individuals (two women and two men) who played crucial roles in conceptualizing and establishing the congress.
2.	Women ulama and activists	5	Five women	Individuals from diverse fields and regions who actively contribute to KUPI's initiatives and theological discourse.
3.	Policy makers and collaborators	2	Two women	One woman legislator and one woman member of parliament who draw on KUPI's work to inform policymaking and institutional advocacy.

Table 1Categories of Research Informants

I also conducted a desk study on secondary data, using the method of qualitative content analysis by decoding them into categories that represent the way KUPI dismantles epistemic injustice through their past and ongoing work (Schreier, 2012). The following are some of the secondary data that I analyzed:

1. KUPI media such as Kupipedia.id and Kupi.or.id,

2. KUPI's archives of Congress results, and

3. Documentation from the congress.

For the data analysis phase, I used Atlas.ti software. This software helped me organize and code the transcripts and documents. In this stage, I identified the main ideas and recurring patterns that directly answered my research questions. In Atlas.ti, I used 89 codes, drawn both from references and from spontaneous themes that emerged in the transcripts. I also examined the co-occurrence between these codes to help deepen the analysis. After that, I moved on to take a deeper look at these findings.

4.2 My Positionality

I am aware that my positionality would significantly influence the research process. Studying the Women Ulama Congress, I acknowledge the biases I bring as a Muslim woman who grew up in a similar environment to the women I wanted to study. My educational background followed a path that is often associated with becoming an ulama, such as studying at a *pesantren* and memorizing the Quran. In this setting, they might consider me as an insider. However, becoming an ulama was never something I imagined for myself. My highest aspiration was to be close to ulama families or be recognized as a good student, because in my understanding back then, the ulama were men who were usually born into ulama families and followed a clear educational path. Much of what I learned in the *pesantren* was shaped by the works of male scholars, whose struggles and achievements were celebrated. Because I share a similar background, I might easily relate to their stories and over-identify, assuming I fully understand their struggles without giving enough room for differences.

At the same time, my familiarity with the context can help me build trust and access spaces that outsiders might find difficult. Nevertheless, I must be careful not to let this familiarity turn into arrogance or overconfidence. The emic perspectives as part of an insider here might help me ask deeper questions to the informants but also prevent me from asking provocative questions that might be needed. Another important aspect to reflect on is my current position as a student at a Western academic institution. Conducting research from this platform could unintentionally make me prioritize Western academic standards over local ways of knowing.

To address these risks, I continuously reflected on my positionality throughout the research process, especially while conducting in-depth interviews. I approached the narratives of women ulama with humility, allowing their voices to lead rather than fitting them into my assumptions. I also sought to consciously recognize and value diverse knowledge systems, beyond those validated by Western academic standards. Remaining attentive to critical feminist and decolonial perspectives helped me stay aware of the power dynamics inherent in knowledge production. I regularly sought feedback from peers and mentors, particularly those familiar with both feminism and Islam in local contexts, to ensure that my analysis remained grounded and self-reflective.

Chapter 5 Findings: Manifestations of Epistemic Injustice Revealed by KUPI

This chapter presents the findings of the research based on eleven in-depth interviews as the main source of data. In addition, KUPI's interpretive work on classical Islamic texts is used as supporting material to illuminate how these discourses were manifested in KUPI or were shaped by KUPI's epistemological framework. The findings are organized into four interrelated sections to reflect on KUPI's challenges, strategies, and practices in challenging epistemic domination. To protect participants' confidentiality, all interviewees are referred to using anonymized codes that correspond to their categories, as explained in the methodology chapter. "F" stands for founders, F1 and F2 are women, while F3 and F4 are men. "WA" stands for women ulama and activists from various backgrounds. The code "P" refers to policymakers and collaborators, including P1, the leader of Komnas Perempuan, and P2, a former legislator, who collaborate with KUPI in certain ways. The numbering (e.g., F1, F2, WA3, P1) differentiates individual participants within each category, as explained below.

Code	Description
F1	A woman, the founder of KUPI, who introduced the concept of *Keadilan Hakiki* (substantive justice)
F2	A woman, the founder of KUPI
F3	A man, the founder of KUPI, who introduced the concept of *Mubadalah*
F4	A man, the founder of KUPI, who introduced the concept of *Ma'ruf*
WA1	A woman, an academic researcher on religious and gender issues, and a member of the formulation team in the first KUPI Congress
WA2	A woman, a lecturer, and part of the KUPI working group on gender-based violence
WA3	A woman, a chief of mubadalah.id (KUPI's digital media platform)
WA4	A woman Islamic scholar with a broad grassroots base, currently serving as the chairperson of Rahima
WA5	A woman from the Gusdurian community, KUPI's collaborator on the digital campaign
P1	A woman, the chairperson of the National Commission on Violence Against Women *(Komnas Perempuan)*

P2	A woman, a former legislator who was vocal in advocating for the Anti-Sexual Violence Bill

Table 2Categories and Roles of KUPI Research Participants

5.1 General Challenges of KUPI's Movement

Women ulama experienced several challenges even before KUPI, as their experiences as women in religious and social settings were closely related to how Islamic knowledge was produced and reproduced. As interviewee F4 noted in the interview, "We study at the *pesantren* by examining the thoughts of male scholars, which are delivered by male scholars, even when discussing matters like menstrual jurisprudence (which women experience), it is still presented by men (F4, 2025)." This is aligned with the explanation of interviewee F1 regarding that condition. "The logical consequence of this male-dominated condition is that the distinctly human experiences of women are not taken into account (F1, 2025)."

After recognizing that male domination shapes the experiences of women in Islam, during the interview, I also found several challenges in articulating women's realities in terms of Islamic knowledge production. The first one is the lack of recognition of women's knowledge, which is because most of the Islamic institutions and organizations are male-dominated. "In religious organizations, women are often placed at the lowest levels, which results in minimal involvement in decision-making (F2, 2025)." For instance, when an authoritative institution such as MUI addresses gender-related issues, the evaluation of the outcomes will mostly focus on the lack of women's representation and consideration in the fatwas. This is because women's experiences and knowledge are dismissed from the process of fatwa-making.

 KUPI ulama found that another challenge in articulating women's realities is the prejudice that not only happens in the form of anticipatory prejudice, but also happens systematically. For example, a huge debate among men ulama took place at the 30th NU Congress in 1999, where they debated whether women were eligible to serve as president or not. This also showed that knowledge production is closely correlated with political interests. Formerly, there had been no debate about that topic, because it was not considered important by the male ulama who held positions and made decisions in those religious organizations.

Some Islamic organizations already have what they call affiliated organizations dedicated to women, for example, NU with their Muslimat and Muhammadiyah with Aisyah. This condition used to be seen as an effort to build equality in the organization, but the implementation carries the risk of marginalizing women in decision-making processes. This is what KUPI learned from previous movements and tries to incorporate women and their experiences as the basis of decision-making. One of the interviewees recounted her experience of being invisibilized in the organization just because she is a woman. "I was once in a decision-making

position within an organization, but the formal leader had to be a man because I, as a woman, was considered unfit to be the face of an authority figure in a religion-based organization. From that experience, I began to feel a deep sense of conflict. Why was my intellectual capacity acknowledged yet simultaneously concealed, as if my contributions were valuable only when kept invisible? (F2, 2025)."

Furthermore, many women also experience other challenges. For example, Nor Isma, a female researcher who sought opinions from some principals of the *pesantren* about KUPI's movement, faced immediate rejection from the male principals as soon as they heard about KUPI. "What's the point of those women creating another forum? There are already platforms within the affiliated organizations. They don't need to start all these strange new movements," said an interviewee, quoting one of her interviewees (WA1, 2025).

In the process of knowledge production and organizing movement in KUPI, there are also numerous challenges that arise from the internal and external factors. Within KUPI, the women ulama are still facing self-doubt about calling themselves ulama. According to interviewee F1, this is a result of the long and systemic marginalization of women's experiences and knowledge. "In KUPI, many women do not feel confident calling themselves ulama because they feel unworthy or insufficiently knowledgeable, even though they are already professors and have taught in *pesantren* for years. This, however, is the result of a system that has marginalized women's experiences for centuries (F1, 2025)."

Externally, KUPI is also facing the challenge of rejection from many Islamic institutions because its ideas are considered contradictory to the general interpretations of Islam. The position of KUPI then becomes complicated, because it is not seen as something that belongs to any particular civil movement, as stated by an interviewee in the interview. "There is a tension between society's reception of women's movement terminology, such as feminism, and the secular movements' views on religion. Society tends to be antagonistic toward the term feminism and the causes championed in its name, while secular movements often accuse religion of being an instrument that perpetuates patriarchy (F3, 2025).

Another challenge is that, as an institution that seeks to amplify women's voices in the process of Islamic knowledge production, KUPI still lacks legitimacy and recognition from society. "Sometimes female Islamic scholars are actually more knowledgeable, but society still refuses to trust them because of that same issue of authority. This is exactly what KUPI has been trying to build, even though it remains a long-term challenge (WA3, 2025)."

5.2 Resistance Methods and Strategies of KUPI

From the interviews, I discovered at least four methods that KUPI employed in terms of knowledge production. The first one is re-reading the sacred texts. Many informants mentioned that the battleground of Islamic knowledge production lies in the method of reading the sacred texts. The principles of KUPI teach the recitation of the holy texts as a source of principles and carry the spirit further to specific issues, as stated by F1 (2025): "We're not talking about abortion (as the main subject of the discussion); abortion is just a technical matter. The substance is about preserving life. Whether one chooses abortion or not, the soul must be protected (as commanded in the Quranic text)." Another informant also mentioned reading the context before implementing the text, for example, when we talk about the verses on polygamy below:

وَٱبْتَلُواْ ٱلْيَتَٰمَىٰ حَتَّىٰٓ إِذَا بَلَغُواْ ٱلنِّكَاحَ فَإِنْ ءَانَسْتُم مِّنْهُمْ رُشْدًا فَٱدْفَعُوٓاْ إِلَيْهِمْ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ ۖ وَلَا تَأْكُلُوهَآ إِسْرَافًا وَبِدَارًا أَن يَكْبَرُواْ ۚ وَمَن كَانَ غَنِيًّا فَلْيَسْتَعْفِفْ ۖ وَمَن كَانَ فَقِيرًا فَلْيَأْكُلْ بِٱلْمَعْرُوفِ ۚ فَإِذَا دَفَعْتُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ أَمْوَٰلَهُمْ فَأَشْهِدُواْ عَلَيْهِمْ ۚ وَكَفَىٰ بِٱللَّهِ حَسِيبًا ٦

Translation: Test "the competence of" the orphans until they reach a marriageable age. Then, if you feel they are capable of sound judgment, return their wealth to them. And do not consume it wastefully and hastily before they grow up "to demand it". If the guardian is well-off, they should not take compensation, but if the guardian is poor, let them take a reasonable provision. When you give orphans back their property, call in witnesses. And sufficient is Allah as a "vigilant" Reckoner (Khattab, 2015).

According to interviewee F3, this verse is not talking about or even promoting polygamy, but about protecting the vulnerable. "When I read various texts of the Quran and hadith, it's very clear that we must pay attention to the vulnerable (F3, 2025)." This method of reading the text in KUPI was also acknowledged by other informants as the method of reading the context before the text. "The main sources of data they rely on differ, for example, between those used by KUPI and those used by MUI. MUI's foundation lies in the text, how the text is understood, and how it is interpreted. KUPI, on the other hand, starts from the context; from that context, they then move toward the text," said WA2 (2025).

KUPI incorporates the principle of divinity known as *tawhid* into its reading of texts. The principle of *tawhid* holds that God is the only absolute being. This principle brings implications of equality among humans, as stated by WA2 (2025) in the interview. She said, "Islam does not differentiate between men and women; the only distinction lies in their piety." After applying a clear perspective on reading the holy texts, KUPI then formulated three main methods that they employed.

There are three main methods for producing knowledge in KUPI: *keadilan hakiki, mubadalah, and ma'ruf. Keadilan hakiki* can be translated directly as "substantive justice." It goes beyond the mere application of laws (formal justice) and focuses on the actual practices and outcomes. This method was introduced by Nur Rofi'ah at the beginning of KUPI's formation. "(This method) begins with the realization that the world has been run by men for centuries, which resulted in marginalizing women's experiences (F1, 2025)." She stated that the ultimate goal of this method is to demonstrate a way of practicing Islam that considers men and women equally.

This method is implemented through centering experience-based knowledge, as well as giving recognition and acknowledgement to the marginalized voices. This practice was revealed in many interviews, one of which was stated by interviewee WA3. "KUPI gives affirmation to women, not only concerning their biological experiences, but also regarding their capacity and knowledge. Consequently, this is reflected in how KUPI organizes its congress, for example, by providing as much support as possible for female religious scholars through the provision of daycare facilities, easy access to sanitation, and so on (WA3, 2025)." The method of *Keadilan Hakiki* is also a form of reflection on the *tawhid* principle, thereby bringing back the interpretation and implementation of Islamic values toward the *tawhid* principle, as the divine, where everything must begin. This method helps reconstruct the consciousness of the knower by actively questioning who is positioned as the standard in relation to law and humanity.

The second method of knowledge production in KUPI is *Mubadalah*, which is an Arabic term that means "reciprocity" or "mutual exchange." It is one of the key concepts in Islamic feminist discourse in Indonesia, which was introduced by interviewee F3. "*Mubadalah* sees reality from the perspective of relationships, whether the relationships bring justice, based on humility, and welfare for both sides, or not (F3, 2025)." The goal of this method is to read and reinterpret Islamic texts, especially those concerning gender roles and relationships, from a perspective of mutual respect and partnership between men and women, rather than hierarchy. He also stated that relationships are a great social capital that we have, and reformation efforts can start from there. "Let's build relationships without a spirit of domination among one another; let's make sure that even the marginalized voices are heard in the room (F3, 2025)."

Other informants gave some important examples of how *Mubadalah* was applied in the process of reading texts. "(There is a narration that says) if a husband invites his wife to bed and she refuses, causing his disappointment, then she will be cursed by the angels until morning. We must understand this text not to mean that the woman is immediately sinful or deserves punishment, but rather that the "curse" here may signify that she is distanced from, or deprived of, physical pleasure. This interpretation aligns with the view that the marital relationship, including its physical dimension, is meant as a mutual effort for both partners to bring pleasure and satisfaction to one another," said F4 (2025). Interviewee F1 also mentioned that the

implications of this method are considering the situation of the marginalized voices and making sure that no one is left behind in the process of knowledge production because of the dominant system. "It proposes an interpretive framework that restores balance in power relations by affirming mutual responsibility and equality within religious understanding (F1, 2025). In the internal teams of KUPI, *Mubadalah* is also applied by tackling the self-doubt of women ulama about their capability as ulama. For instance, when KUPI's ideas were rejected due to the assumption that they are against the Islamic values, KUPI addressed that concern without doubting their methods and principles.

The last method in the trilogy of knowledge production in KUPI is *Ma'ruf,* which is an Arabic word that can be translated as "what is good and recognized." This term refers to actions and behaviors that are considered good, appropriate, and beneficial by a community or general societal consensus, as long as they do not contradict Islamic principles. This method was introduced by interviewee F4. *Ma'ruf* brings the spirit of flexibility that allows for adaptation to local values, knowledge, and social norms, emphasizing kindness, respect, and communal well-being. "Context can shape how a text is understood. Therefore, engaging with traditional sources and acknowledging local forms of knowledge becomes essential (F4, 2025). According to interviewee WA1 about her research on KUPI, she found that *Ma'ruf* is one of KUPI's ways to accommodate not only local values but also human rights values that are rarely discussed in the Islamic knowledge production process. "For example, by incorporating international law, CEDAW, and other frameworks into the production of knowledge (WA1, 2025)." One of the notable practices of the *Ma'ruf* method is how KUPI redefined the term women ulama, which is the key term they used in KUPI. "There is a distinction between women ulama (*ulama perempuan)* and women who become ulama *(perempuan ulama).* The term women ulama refers to scholars who employ a gender perspective in their analyses and studies. In this sense, the category does not exclude the scholar's biological sex or gender identity in order to be included in that category (F1, 2025)."

In general, the fatwa creation process in KUPI begins with issue tabulation, followed by a congress, and then post-congress issue advocacy. They implement those trilogies in every stage. "We start from *halaqah komunitas* to *halaqah regional* and then to *halaqah kubro.* In practice, there are representatives from the eastern, central, and western regions, covering the entire Indonesian delegation. After gathering their voices, we hold a *halaqah tematik* to discuss the issues that we already have based on the themes. Finally, the process culminates in a congress, where we discuss the chosen issues in collaboration with many experts (WA4, 2025)." In this process and after the congress, KUPI is also willing to build as many collaborations as needed and even involve people in power, while maintaining their method and principles.

5.3 KUPI's Dynamics in Producing FGM Fatwa and Advocating for the Anti-sexual Violence Bill

In principle, KUPI uses the aforementioned methods and concepts in all of its work. In this sub-chapter, I will explain how the process of knowledge production works in KUPI, especially in these two cases: female genital mutilation (FGM) and the anti-sexual violence bill advocacy. These two particular cases were chosen because they challenged the status quo at that time.

In the case of FGM, the authority used the fatwa from MUI, which states, "Female circumcision is viewed as a *makrumah*, an honorable act, and its implementation is considered a recommended religious practice (MUI, 2008)." Based on this fatwa, even the Ministry of Health cannot prohibit the practice of FGM carried out for religious reasons, and therefore, the practice continues to be performed for such reasons.

Then, in 2022, KUPI issued a fatwa that explicitly prohibits FGM. In its report, KUPI concluded that: "The act of performing female genital mutilation and/or cutting (FGM/C) that causes harm without medical justification is prohibited *(haram)* (KUPI, 2022)." In the report, they outlined various considerations before issuing this fatwa. They explained from the beginning how this issue became a concern and how the dynamics surrounding this issue evolved in various parts of the world.

According to the interview, the process of bringing FGM to the table began with raising the consciousness and awareness of the differences between genital circumcision for the penis and the vagina. "We held multiple discussions to raise awareness that male and female genital anatomy are different, and therefore, the implications of circumcision also differ. For females, it can even be life-threatening, which contradicts religious principles that forbid endangering human life (F1, 2025)." Subsequently, KUPI held many *halaqah* (hearing cycle) in many local communities to hear the experiences of the victims and their relatives about FGM. "We do not want KUPI to narrate the survivors' experiences; we only serve as a platform and a safe space for survivors to speak and express their views(WA3, 2025)."

The *halaqah* in local communities takes place at least one year before the conference. After that, they bring the discussion to the regional and national levels based on the themes that have been narrowed down during the process. Throughout this process, KUPI also prepares itself to conduct the Islamic study by examining the literature and debates. From the interview, I learned from Muhammad that the debate about FGM usually starts from the following hadith:

خَمْسٌ مِنَ الْفِطْرَةِ :الِاخْتِتَانُ، وَالِاسْتِحْدَادُ، وَنَتْفُ الْإِبْطِ، وَتَقْلِيمُ الْأَظْفَارِ ، وَقَصُّ الشَّارِبِ

"Five practices are part of the fitrah (natural disposition): circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, plucking the armpit hair, trimming the nails, and shortening the moustache. (A. Siddiqi, 2007)"

One of the KUPI founders then explained the debate in terms of understanding this hadith:

"The hadith (below) about the five practices that are part of the *fitrah* actually refers to men. The hadith lists five acts of *fitrah*, including circumcision, but it is not intended for women. For women, the term used is not *khitan* (circumcision) but *khafḍ*, which means 'to lessen' or 'to reduce.' In the hadith, it says, *ikhfadhi wa la tunhiki,* meaning 'reduce slightly, but do not cause harm.' Therefore, it is not a command to cut, but rather a limitation of excessive or harmful practices. In my view, this shows that the Prophet was introducing a gradual transformation from pre-Islamic Arab traditions, which previously practiced severe forms of FGM. The Prophet did not immediately prohibit it but guided the community toward change step by step, until the harmful practice was eventually abandoned. (F4, 2025)."

He then explained that the debate on this issue stems from the paradigm of how we read the text, which is later on translated to a fatwa. "This is where I differ from the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI). The MUI still uses the hadith about five practices that are part of the *fitrah* to justify FGM, whereas that hadith actually applies to men. I believe the MUI has not been critical enough about the historical and cultural context of Arab society at the time (F4, 2025)."

Interviewee P1, the head commissioner of *Komisi Nasional Anti Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan* (The National Commission on Violence Against Women), pointed out that the fatwa from KUPI has become a new paradigm from religious leaders about that issue. "KUPI's fatwa mediated the tangled controversy surrounding FGM, which was initially banned, then challenged by MUI, and later saw MUI prohibiting the ban. Then KUPI conducted a comprehensive study and reinterpretation of religious texts related to female circumcision. The results of this study were later taken into consideration in legislative decision-making processes (P1, 2025)."

The process of advocating for the anti-violence bill by KUPI followed similar processes to those used for producing a fatwa on the FGM issue. These involved tabulating issues in local communities, conducting a table discussion with an expert, and rechecking Islamic discourse around this issue. However, the interesting point is in how KUPI actively engaged with the process of legal advocacy of this bill. I interviewed one of the former legislators who supported this bill in parliament. She explained that the position of KUPI, which strongly supports this bill, was invaluable. "At that time, the presence of KUPI was strategic in providing a counter-narrative to the groups mobilized in the name of religion and morality to oppose this bill. Because KUPI not only brings women's voices, but also women ulama's voices (P2, 2025)."

This work then strengthened KUPI's legitimacy to build cooperation with the government, as KUPI's fatwas later could be leveraged to shift the direction of public policy (WA2, 2025). This also aligns with the statement of interviewee F3,

who noted that since a number of moderate mass organizations tended to remain silent on this issue, KUPI came to play a central role (F3, 2025). "NU and Muhammadiyah stayed silent; they neither supported nor endorsed it. They are not willing to use their huge legitimacy to support it. Why? Because the bill was perceived as a 'feminist' bill (F3, 2025)."

Having succeeded in the advocacy process, KUPI continues to spread the knowledge to its community. This strategy involves many political moves, for example, using their privilege and positionality. For example, interviewee F4 from KUPI often uses the privilege of his male identity as well as his close kinship with several authoritative ulama in Indonesia to gain access to Islamic boarding schools and to disseminate the ideas and fatwas of KUPI. "I went to various *pesantren* to share KUPI's fatwa, introducing myself as someone from the Lirboyo family, even though I was often rejected by them for being seen as liberal (F4, 2025)." However, even though Kiai Muhammad still faces rejection, he also gains symbolic legitimacy from his association with the respected Lirboyo family name. The kinship label functions as a form of social capital that opens doors to spaces otherwise resistant to KUPI's progressive discourse. "For instance, someone from Lirboyo in Kediri wrote a book on women's thought and gave it to me. I could see some progress in it, but the underlying assumption is still that women belong at home and are positioned as inferior to men (F4, 2025)."

KUPI also actively builds online campaign strategies to spread the knowledge. One of the strategies is to build collaboration with the Gusdurian Network, which has extensive resources and a wide network of young people. "Gusdurian serves as a driver on social media, reaching people who could not be reached through direct congress meetings (WA5, 2025)." KUPI also builds its own website and repository, which stores the documents and ideas from the congress in Mubadalah.id and Kupipedia (WA3, 2025). "This is an initiative from KUPI to go beyond fatwas, but also how to make them a tool to build recognition of subjugated and experience-based knowledge originating from the survivors and marginalized communities (WA3, 2025)."

5.4 KUPI's Future Potential and Blind Spots

Based on the conversations I had during the interviews, I found that KUPI has some potential to be explored in the future, especially as a niche movement identity. However, KUPI, due to its positionality, also has some limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed for the purpose of improvement. One potential that can be used by KUPI is its position, which lies in between the culture of *pesantren* and left-wing feminism. "We're kind of bridging the world of *pesantren* with the world of feminism, the *pesantren* community, which often doesn't really understand gender

or feminism, and we can communicate those ideas in religious language. But to secular feminists, who may have limited knowledge of religion and are only familiar with biased interpretations, we explain that those are not the only interpretations. That's the role right in between those two worlds (F1, 2025)."

However, this position does not necessarily mean that KUPI is always accepted by both parties. The prejudice from both sides is still very much present. "Then we end up being accused by the *pesantren* side of being part of the feminists, and by the feminists of being part of the *pesantren* (F1, 2025)." In addition, the prejudice from KUPI itself to both parties is also present. "The approach of my activist friends tends to be more deconstructive, accusing religion, blaming interpretations, and even criticizing certain hadiths as misogynistic. It's true that many interpretations are filled with hatred, and yes, some hadiths are indeed misogynistic. But the question is, if we enter a religious space and start saying that religion hates women, that interpretations are sexist, that hadiths are misogynistic, will religious people actually want to listen? (F3, 2025)."

Another potential that can be utilized by KUPI is its international connections. Since this was the first women's ulama congress, many international visitors came and observed the process of knowledge production in KUPI. "I recently met a Muslim woman from Norway who has also been struggling there, because many Islamic institutions completely ignore women's perspectives and refuse to listen to her, even though she's a doctor in Islamic Studies, fluent in Arabic, and has studied in Jordan and Morocco. Yet they still wouldn't listen. So she hopes that through KUPI, something can be done about it. She told me that, for her, KUPI feels like an oasis (F3, 2025)." A similar concern was also expressed by interviewee P2, who argued that KUPI could use the international connections to build stronger legitimacy for their fatwas, especially through international forums. "At the very least, in the global context, if KUPI can expand its influence by continuing to build and maintain connections, since its participants have already included international figures, and keep bringing those networks into more prestigious and formal forums, then its fatwas could eventually gain real weight. So they could become authoritative fatwas (P2, 2025)."

From the interview, I also got a sense of hope from within and outside KUPI to leverage the movement beyond Islam. Some informants suggested starting KUPI's movement by building and strengthening awareness about the condition of the existing knowledge production system in Islam and the position of KUPI. "It starts with self-reflection, because I believe that real change begins to take effect when we experience it ourselves. What needs to be done is a process of discovering what is closer to divine, improving, and engaging in dialogue. The most important step is building awareness within ourselves. Once that happens, I'm sure the impact will extend beyond the individual to the family, the community, and eventually to a much wider society (WA4, 2025). A similar idea was expressed by interviewee WA3, "This awareness is important because without the awareness of what kind of sources are

considered trustworthy, KUPI's work, which mainly focuses on women's experience, will not always be considered as legitimate knowledge (WA3, 2025)."

Another interviewee from Gusdurian shared other reflections and hopes that other women religious leaders would also have the space and movement as the Muslims in KUPI. "Religious leaders from non-Islamic faiths, Christians, Catholics, Hindus, Buddhists, often express hopes of building something similar, even though their communities are more fragmented. Unlike Islam, which represents about 80% of Indonesia's population and thus has a stronger base, these minority groups face greater challenges. For many of them, even the simple right to worship safely remains a challenge (WA5, 2025)."

These suggestions for KUPI also opened up the blind spots that KUPI might have. During the interviews, I not only listened and extracted their knowledge, but I also sensed and became aware of what was absent from the discussion. One that is missing from the discussions was class struggle when we talk about women ulama; even though many of them are familiar with the grassroots context, many of them also come from certain privileged backgrounds. One of the examples came from KUPI's founder, "I have been raised in an open environment where dialogue is possible, change can take place, and both boys and girls can have equal space to grow (F2, 2025)." Another informant also gave an example of her privilege to get access to education. "After finishing high school, most people either continued their studies in *pesantren* or got married. But my father chose to send his daughters to college, which led to conflict with our extended family, who saw it as breaking family tradition (WA2, 2025)." These might explain the absence of class struggle in most discussions I had with KUPI's ulama.

Another potential blind spot that KUPI needs to be aware of is that there is a potential to create another hierarchy in KUPI. This is because if we talk about the main method that is used by KUPI to produce knowledge, it only comes from three people: Nur Rofi'ah, Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, and Husein Muhammad, two of whom are also men. Even though they collaborate effectively to amplify the voices of women ulama, the potential bias still needs to be watched closely. Other than that, we did not talk about the funding of the KUPI congresses and the knowledge production process as a whole. The points I mentioned above can also be seen as limitations of this research, both in terms of the approach I used and the selection of information I chose to focus on.

Chapter 6 Discussion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

In this sub-chapter, I will summarize the key findings from the interviews and documents about knowledge production in KUPI. This sub-chapter highlights how KUPI, as a movement, constructs and disseminates Islamic knowledge in Indonesia and how it reveals the challenges behind it. KUPI, as a movement, has emerged from a long historical context about how women ulama in Indonesia make various contributions to producing and reproducing Islamic knowledge in Indonesia. However, the realization of women's barriers to access Islamic knowledge is actually what inspired the emergence of KUPI.

From the interviews, I understand that women often learn Islam through the interpretations of male scholars, even on gender-based issues. This male-dominated system then brings implications for erasing women's perspectives from theological discourse topics, such as menstruation, that concern women's lived experiences. This domination then extends to the traditions and systems of Islamic organization. In large and dominant institutions such as the MUI or religious organizations, including NU and Muhammadiyah, women are structurally positioned at the bottom, with limited authority in shaping Islamic knowledge.

The resistance to this kind of domination had been going on for a long time before KUPI's existence, through alternative newspapers that focused on women's concerns, religious congresses that accommodated and discussed women's capability to lead the nation, and affirmative policies that addressed women's needs. However, this did not necessarily foster a sense of dignity for muslim women. Many women, even those highly educated, internalized this marginalization and hesitated to call themselves ulama, which also happens to women ulama in KUPI. This self-doubt is a result of centuries of epistemic subordination. Not only does KUPI face internal challenges such as self-doubt, but also resistance from conservative religious authorities who perceive its ideas, particularly feminist interpretations of Islam, as incompatible with Islamic values.

KUPI's strategy of resistance starts from rethinking the foundations of Islamic knowledge production. It begins with a hermeneutics of contexts, a method that prioritizes social realities before textual interpretation. This approach challenges the textual approach of dominant institutions such as MUI by emphasizing that sacred texts must be read in light of contemporary human conditions. The guiding principle of *tawhid* anchors this interpretive framework, affirming equality among all humans as a reflection of the divine.

From this foundation, KUPI articulated three key epistemological methods: *keadilan hakiki* (substantive justice), *mubadalah* (reciprocity), and *ma'ruf* (social goodness).

Keadilan hakiki, developed by Nur Rofi'ah, seeks justice not merely in the formal application of law but in the actual lived outcomes of religious practices. It requires centering marginalized experiences and acknowledging women's embodied knowledge as a legitimate source of theology. This method is visible in KUPI's

organizational practices, such as ensuring access to childcare and sanitation during congress, which materializes justice through lived equality.

Mubadalah, introduced by Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, emphasizes reciprocal relationships between men and women as the ethical foundation of Islamic interpretation. Rather than hierarchies of authority, it envisions gender relations as partnerships rooted in mutual care and responsibility. *Mubadalah* reinterprets problematic ways of reading hadiths, such as those about marital obedience, through the lens of reciprocity, understanding sexual ethics as shared responsibility rather than male entitlement.

Ma'ruf, elaborated by Husein Muhammad, refers to actions that are socially recognized as good and beneficial within Islamic ethical boundaries. This method allows religious interpretation to integrate local wisdom and universal human rights values, such as those in CEDAW and international law. It reflects KUPI's openness to contextual and pluralist ethics, accommodating both Indonesian cultural norms and global justice frameworks. The redefinition of "women ulama" is also a direct result of this method.

These three methods guide KUPI's process of producing fatwas and organizing advocacy. Fatwa-making in KUPI typically begins with community-level *halaqah* that gather testimonies from local experiences, followed by regional and national deliberations culminating in the congress. Throughout, KUPI also maintains collaboration with diverse stakeholders, including secular actors and state institutions, while staying grounded in its interpretive principles.

KUPI's epistemological innovation is particularly visible in its fatwa on female genital mutilation (FGM) and its advocacy for the anti-sexual violence bill. The FGM issue shows how the dominant authorities legitimize harmful practices under religious values, for example, seeing FGM as an honorable practice. In contrast, KUPI's 2022 fatwa categorizes FGM as a forbidden *(haram)* act because it causes harm, asserting that it contradicts Islamic injunctions to preserve life. This conclusion followed extensive halaqah processes, where survivors' voices were prioritized, and textual debates were revisited. One of them is through rethinking the interpretation of *fitrah* (natural disposition), which used to legitimize FGM practice. This process then shows the impact of how patriarchal readings used to ignore contextual intent to do gradual cultural reform, not the perpetuation of violence.

The anti-sexual violence bill followed a similar model of epistemic engagement. KUPI mobilized religious legitimacy to counter conservative resistance, reframing the bill as an extension of Islamic ethics rather than a secular feminist agenda. KUPI's involvement was noticed as crucial in bridging the gap between religious and feminist discourse, providing a moral framework for legal advocacy. The involvement of KUPI in this issue also created public legitimacy of KUPI's fatwas, which strengthened its cooperation with the government and positioned it as a moderating force within Indonesia's religious politics.

KUPI also invests in disseminating its knowledge through both traditional and digital infrastructures. Figures such as Muhammad use their social networks and religious credentials to access conservative *pesantren* circles, while online platforms such as Mubadalah.id and Kupipedia serve as repositories for feminist Islamic thought. Collaborations with youth networks, including Gusdurian, expand KUPI's digital reach, translating academic and theological debates into accessible public education.

In the conversations about the future of KUPI, many informants mentioned that KUPI's hybrid identity, which stands between the *pesantren* tradition and leftist feminism, shapes both its potential and its tensions. This position allows KUPI to act as a translator between religious and feminist discourses, for example, explaining gender justice in theological terms to *pesantren* communities while showing secular feminists that Islam contains emancipatory potential. Nevertheless, this same position exposes KUPI to rejection from both sides; KUPI can be accused by conservatives of being "too feminist" and by secular activists of being "too religious." Internationally, KUPI's model has inspired Muslim women scholars from other contexts who face similar exclusion. Its congress has drawn attention from global audiences as an example of Islamic feminist praxis institutionalized within religious frameworks.

Even though KUPI has achieved a lot of milestones, several blind spots remain. The most apparent is the absence of class analysis. Many women ulama interviewed come from privileged or educated backgrounds, raising concerns that KUPI's epistemology may insufficiently address material inequalities within Muslim women's lived realities. Another internal challenge is the concentration of intellectual authority in a few central figures, two of whom are men. While collaboration among them is strong, the asymmetry risks reproducing a new hierarchy within the movement itself. Finally, the economic dimension of KUPI's operations, such as funding sources for congresses and projects, requires further investigation.

6.2 Theoretical Implications: Epistemic Injustice and Feminist Standpoint Theory

According to Frickers, there are two types of epistemic injustice. The first one is testimonial injustice, which is the condition when the knower suffers from prejudice that makes them seen as less credible, which she calls a credibility deficit, or vice versa, puts a certain profile over their capacity because of prejudice dysfunction, which makes them gain what Fricker calls a credibility excess (Fricker, 2007). This is reflected in the dynamics of women ulama, from how they are exposed to an education system that marginalizes women's voices, to how they continuously experience how Islamic institutions exert domination to reduce the legitimacy of

their capabilities. The position of women ulama in the landscape of Islamic knowledge production might change slowly compared to the conditions decades ago. However, the long-dominant system still has an impact on how women still cannot talk about their knowledge due to their credibility deflation (Nielsen & Utsler, 2022). It then creates a vicious cycle, because identity prejudice is generated and maintained through a failure to recognize others as legitimate and credible sources of knowledge (Nielsen & Utsler, 2022).

The conditions that shape the social reality of women ulama are also aligned with feminist standpoint theory, which states that all knowledge is socially situated (Harding, 1992). Therefore, in the case of women ulama, their identity as women and Muslims contributes to shaping the way they know and the knowledge they acquire. As Muslim women, their standpoint not only comes from their first-hand experience, but also from androcentric history (Sedat, 2013). This is also related to the *mubadalah* method in KUPI, which argues that everything is relational and applies in the way we understand how Muslim women know.

The second form of epistemic injustice, according to Fricker, stems from a more fundamental root, which are ontological struggles due to the power relations. This condition will lead to hermeneutical marginalization; because of the lack of sources to explain, the experience gets marginalized. Hermeneutical injustice typically manifests in the speaker's struggle to articulate their experiences as the basis of knowledge (Fricker, 2007). Some of the interviewees mentioned how women's experiences used to be narrated by men, even in very gendered experiences such as menstruation. This reality then shapes a stronger imbalance in the way women know. Furthermore, this also affects how women ulama perceive their knowledge as illegitimate, even when it is grounded in their own empirical experience. "Even the books on menstruation are written and taught by men, so when women's experiences do not align with what is written in those texts, they are considered abnormal (WA3, 2025)."

According to Amina Wadud, the Islamic feminist standpoint relies on the process of untangling the inconsistency between hermeneutical justice in terms of Quranic interpretation and justice in the societal context (Wadud, 1995). That is why KUPI also focuses on rereading the sacred texts as one of their resistance forms. KUPI's way to bring back the principle of *tawhid* and emphasize its implications, which is to treat people equally, is the act of demanding justice in terms of reading and interpreting the Quran.

Women ulama's experiences in the organizations also align with Linda Alcoff's theory of epistemology of ignorance. Many informants shared similar stories about how in large and dominant institutions such as the MUI or religious organizations, including NU and Muhammadiyah, women are structurally positioned at the bottom, with limited authority in shaping Islamic knowledge. As Alcoff noted, the epistemology of ignorance does not require complete erasure; it can also manifest in the form of marginalization as a strategy to legitimize the invalidation of local knowledge and delegitimize the status of the knower (Alcoff, 2024). This strategy is

also employed in the FGM case, where the experiences of the victims can easily be invalidated through false information and an intentional stance of what one knows, in this case, using holy texts as a basis for invalidation.

KUPI's advocacy to support the anti-sexual violence bill reflects what Spivak called epistemic violence. According to Spivak, epistemic violence is defined as the dislocation and unacknowledgement of people when attempting to testify from oppressed positions. Based on the interview results, some of the challenges faced by KUPI in advocating for the anti-sexual violence bill include the lack of attention to victims' voices, as well as repeated rejections of the bill that were grounded in a moralistic paradigm, which sees the law as a source of morality intended to regulate the lives of victims and those vulnerable to becoming victims, instead of providing them with protection. This act of commodifying law to control people can be part of the civilization project of colonialism, which made the subaltern women remain muted (Spivak, 1998).

However, even though KUPI is trying to focus on the marginalized voices, there is still a chance to reproduce the violence if they are just using the marginalized voices as a counter possibility to the dominant knowledge, not the main subject that is capable of creating knowledge. This risk exists not only in the case of the anti-sexual violence bill, but also in the context of knowledge production in general. If the subjugated knowledge of women in general or women ulama of KUPI in particular is still seen as "another option," the subaltern lacks a history and cannot speak for themself (Spivak, 1998).

KUPI has developed several measures to counter the current dominant knowledge production system, from building a system of hearing the voiceless, creating their own methods, and paving the way for advocacy after fatwas. This can be seen as the way to encourage self-trust and the cultivation of more careful perceptions (Alcoff, 2024). The way KUPI tries to hear from the local communities can be read as an effort to bring testimonial exchange between the individual and the collective, even though at the end of the congress, this voice remains centered on the elite of KUPI. According to Etin Anwar, what KUPI did can be seen as an effort to recentre women's agency in religious rituals and public discourse. Bringing religious discourse along with gender-based issues, such as how KUPI deal with FGM and the anti-sexual violence bill, can become a counterstrategy to counter the rejection of feminist discourse in Indonesia (Anwar, 2021).

In the case of KUPI's FGM fatwa, they applied the concept of epistemological humility, which criticizes the authoritarian form of transmitting knowledge, which reinforces the perception of oneself as an incapable speaker due to the superiority of other knowers (Maduro, 2011). As explained in the findings, the existing fatwa about FGM does not accommodate the perspectives of the victims; it comes from male ulama's interpretation of texts, a concept KUPI tries to challenge. Asma Barlas once mentioned that the Islamic feminist standpoint begins with reading the context of the Quran (Barlas, 2001). KUPI then did that by re-examining the paradigm of FGM that previously claimed to be "based on text" practice.

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These discussions reflect a lot of Maldonado-Torres's statement that those who occupy the zone of being are expected to speak about others. This explains what KUPI is trying to do within the Islamic knowledge production in Indonesia, which is reclaiming their existence through several ways in order to accommodate the knowledge and experiences of the "others" who are ignored, trivialized, or erased (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). However, the situation that KUPI face with the local communities and the victims today also requires accountability, so that they do not create another form of domination over the people. As mentioned by Smith, standpoint epistemology should begin by centering the relationship between knowledge and politics behind that, so we can see whose dominant voices and interests play a role in the knowledge production process (Smith, 1926).

6.3 Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

There are some limitations to this research which are open to further exploration. First, this research only focused on the dynamics inside KUPI, such as the learning process of women ulama, the methods they used to shape discourse, and their challenges. However, the broader political context surrounding KUPI that possibly influences KUPI's work has not been studied despite its importance, especially to understand their situated knowledge comprehensively. This research also did not give much exploration on KUPI's ideology as a movement, which will be interesting to follow further, especially on the impact of KUPI's stance and approaches. KUPI's position, which tries to be moderate for *pesantren*, left feminist, and government, is also worth exploring in future research.

This research relies largely on interviews and textual analysis of KUPI's internal discussions. The actual dynamics of fatwa-making and implementation in the field could be observed ethnographically to understand how those ideas translate into local religious practices and social behaviors. This would give a more grounded sense of how epistemic transformation happens in everyday settings. With this approach, the impact of KUPI's work could also be studied more systematically.

The aspects of funding and resource networks also deserve further attention. Investigating where KUPI's financial and institutional support comes from could provide insights into its level of independence and the sustainability of its movement.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

In concluding this study, the journey of KUPI has revealed the problem of epistemic injustice in Islamic knowledge production in Indonesia through the experiences of women ulama, even during their education. KUPI attempts to resolve this kind of systemic problem through the establishment of a platform that amplifies

the voices of women ulama. To challenge those conditions, KUPI uses several strategies, starting from re-reading the holy text to emphasizing the context. KUPI also builds its own methods to approach issues, which results in fostering an understanding grounded in epistemological humility.

Women ulama's experiences have shaped their standpoint, which brings impacts on their sensitivity to seeing gender-based issues such as FGM and sexual violence in general. Their experiences as Muslim women, growing up in the local traditions, seeing gender issues, as well as their path of learning and unlearning process, can be seen in KUPI's approach to issues that are centered on women's lived experiences. KUPI has been successfully transforming the challenges that came from domination into resistance through collective courage.

However, KUPI still has several limitations that need to be acknowledged and addressed for improvement. The moderate position of KUPI has a risk of carrying its own assumptions about religious and activist approaches. In KUPI's dynamics, there is still a lack of discussion on class struggle and the concentration of authority in a few leading figures. These issues highlight the importance of continuous self-reflection and epistemological humility in KUPI's efforts to build a more inclusive form of knowledge production.

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Appendices

A. Interview guide

Assalamu'alaikum. Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. My name is Zahra, and I'm conducting research for my thesis at ISS Erasmus University Rotterdam, under the Title: Dismantling Epistemic Injustice: The Journey of Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (KUPI) from the Feminist Standpoint Perspective. The purpose of this interview is to understand the experiences and contributions of women ulama in Islamic scholarship and leadership, particularly regarding how certain challenges are perceived and addressed by KUPI. Your insights are invaluable for this study.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. All your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous; your name will not be linked to any quotes or data in my research. You have the right to skip any question you don't wish to answer or to end the interview at any time.

With your permission, I would like to record this interview for transcription purposes only. The recording will be securely stored and will not be shared with anyone outside the research process. Do I have your consent to record our conversation?

Do you have any questions before we begin? May I proceed with the interview?

Section 1: Understanding Their Journey and Context

1. Could you please share a bit about your journey and how you became involved in Islamic scholarship and leadership (ulama)?

2. Thinking about your childhood or the community where you grew up, what was life generally like for women and girls? What roles and expectations were common for them?

Follow-up: How do you think your grandmother's or mother's experiences as women compare to your own? Do you feel things have changed, and if so, in what ways?

Follow-up: What are your hopes or aspirations for the lives of young women and girls, perhaps your own daughters or those in your community, in the future? Do you envision their lives being different from yours or your mother's?

3. In your daily life, in your village or town, what is your perspective on how men and women are generally treated? Do you believe there's fairness in how they participate in society, make decisions, or bear responsibilities? Can you give an example of something you've observed?

Follow-up: What aspects of women's lives in your community do you believe are fulfilling or satisfying? And what aspects do you think might be challenging or dissatisfying for them?

4. When did you first become aware of any situations where women, including yourself, might face specific difficulties or challenges in being fully recognized or authoritative, especially in religious matters? Was there a particular moment, or was it a gradual realization over time?

Follow-up: How did these observations or personal experiences influence your thinking about the position of women in religious discourse and leadership?

5. From these reflections, what motivated you to join KUPI? Was it a desire to address specific issues you observed, a personal ambition, or something else entirely?

Section 2: Exploring Experiences of Epistemic Injustice

6. Based on your experiences or what you've witnessed in religious discussions, meetings, or public forums, have there been situations where your voice, insights, or interpretations as a woman ulama were dismissed, ignored, or not taken seriously, simply because you are a woman? Could you please share a specific example from your personal involvement?

Follow-up: How did these specific instances of dismissal or disregard affect you personally and professionally? Did they ever lead you to question your own knowledge or authority?

Follow-up: In those moments, how did you respond? Did you challenge the dismissal, or did you find other ways to make your voice heard?

7. In your opinion, what are the subtle signs or clues that women's voices or experiences are being overlooked in religious discussions and decision-making processes? For instance, is the simple non-involvement of women in certain important processes an indication?

Follow-up: Can you give me an example of a situation where you recognized these signs, and how that recognition shaped your understanding of the broader issue of epistemic injustice?

8. Let's talk about the process of fatwa-making. In your view, why is this process often less likely to include or prioritize the experiences of marginalized groups, especially women?

Follow-up: What are the consequences when the fatwa process doesn't involve diverse experts relevant to the issue, or individuals who have direct experience of the problem being addressed?

Follow-up: From your perspective as a woman ulama, what unique insights or considerations do women bring to the fatwa-making process that might otherwise be missed?

9. Beyond fatwa-making, what have been the biggest challenges you've personally faced in getting the experiences and knowledge of women ulama fully recognized and valued within broader Islamic scholarship and in your interactions with other religious authorities?

10. (Thinking about your background, e.g., social class, regional origin, or any specific advantages you may have), how have your personal surroundings or social context supported or constrained your own understanding and (re)learning about religious authorities and their way of relating to marginalized experiences?

Follow up: How have these aspects of your identity influenced how you perceive and navigate epistemic injustice within the Islamic knowledge production system?

Section 3: KUPI's Response & Strategies (Advocating for Change)

11. Given the challenges we've discussed, how has your involvement in KUPI, and its focus on women's experiences, helped you to understand and address these issues?

Follow-up: How has being part of KUPI, and engaging with other women ulama influenced your own understanding and resilience in the face of epistemic injustice?

12. Let's discuss specific issues. Take the case of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Could you describe your personal involvement, or KUPI's process, that led to the conclusion that FGM is considered haram (forbidden)? Was women's direct experience and understanding integral to this process?

Follow-up: In your opinion, does a lack of direct familiarity with women's bodies and experiences among some ulama affect their decisions regarding Islamic law on issues like FGM?

Follow-up: Can you elaborate on how the lived experiences of women, particularly those directly impacted by FGM, were gathered and integrated into KUPI's decision-making process? If you were directly involved, what was your role?

Follow-up: Do you have experience with FGM being an issue in your own village or community? If so, how did that personal awareness influence your perspective on KUPI's stance?

13. Some argue that male ulama, given their traditional authority, might be more effective in publicly declaring FGM as forbidden. What is KUPI's view on this? From your perspective, do you believe it's essential for women to speak out on this, or would the voices of male ulama be more impactful in challenging existing practices?

14. In the case of sexual violence (and advocating for an anti-sexual violence bill), there are numerous reports and extensive evidence. Why do you think this issue, particularly within religious settings, still struggles to be prioritized or acted upon, even with so much information available?

Follow-up: From your perspective as a woman ulama, what specific challenges arise when trying to advocate for victims of sexual violence within religious frameworks that may not adequately address their experiences? Have you encountered or witnessed cases of sexual violence in your own community, and how has that influenced your involvement?

15. What were KUPI's main considerations and motivations for actively advocating for the anti-sexual violence bill? And why do you think some other religious institutions are not supporting, or even opposing, such bills?

16. What specific methods and approaches does KUPI use to create, validate, and share knowledge that comes from the unique perspective of women ulama?

Follow-up: How do these methods help challenge traditional interpretations of religious texts or societal norms? For example, has the Mubadalah approach been significantly helpful, or are there other alternative methods KUPI uses?

Follow-up: Can you provide a concrete example of how KUPI's methods have successfully challenged an existing interpretation or norm, and what impact that had on your own understanding or work?

17. Thinking about KUPI's efforts regarding issues like FGM and the anti-sexual violence bill, what has been KUPI's role and overall strategy in attempting to shift the public's or other ulama's views and narratives on these matters?

Follow-up: How do you assess the effectiveness of these strategies in dismantling epistemic injustice, specifically in changing how women's knowledge is received and valued in broader society or within religious institutions?

Follow-up: Do you personally take these discussions or learnings from KUPI back to your own community or village? If so, how do people there respond, and what are the challenges or successes you've encountered?

Section 4: Broader Context

18. Based on your experiences and KUPI's journey so far, what do you see as the most significant societal and structural factors that continue to contribute to the exclusion of women's voices and experiences in religious discussions in Indonesia?

19. Thinking about the bigger picture of religious reform, how do KUPI's approaches and aims compare? Are they similar to, or different from, what other groups are doing, including progressive male religious leaders, both in Indonesia and other countries?

20 Is there anything else you would like to share about KUPI's work, the challenges of gaining recognition for women's voices in religion, or your own experiences that we haven't covered today?

Closing

Thank you so much for your time and for sharing your invaluable insights. Your perspectives are incredibly helpful for my research. As a reminder, your responses will remain confidential. If you think of anything else you'd like to add or clarify, please feel free to contact me.

B. Transcript and coding sample

C. KUPI's Gallery from Halaqah to Congress

Source: Kupipedia.id