

# The dialectic of fiqh understanding and the female Imam-Khatib tradition in Balingka, West Sumatra, Indonesia

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# **The dialectic of *fiqh* understanding and the female *Imam-Khatib* tradition in Balingka, West Sumatra, Indonesia**

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## Abstract

This study aimed to determine the relationship between the fiqh understanding and women's religious role in the tradition of female priests and preachers (*imam-khatib*) in Balingka, West Sumatra, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was used with data obtained through interviews with informants, including female priests (*imam*), religious scholars, village guardians, community leaders, and women figures in Balingka. Furthermore, documentation and observation were also used to collect data. The results showed a relationship between the dynamics of fiqh understanding and women's religious role. A moderate fiqh understanding makes the practice of female *imam-khatib* persist, supporting its recognition, and acceptance. Conversely, radical fiqh thoughts make the tradition of female *imam-khatib* criticized and challenged. The shift in fiqh understanding brings this tradition to an end after lasting for almost a century in Balingka. The study of Islam socialized by the Salafis through television and internet media shifted the understanding of fiqh from a moderate to a radical style, bringing this tradition to an end. Consequently, women are marginalized from their religious roles and are subordinate to men's roles.

Penelitian ini bertujuan mengungkap hubungan pemahaman fikih dan peran keagamaan perempuan pada kasus muncul dan berakhirnya tradisi imam-khatib perempuan di Balingka, Sumatera Barat, Indonesia. Desain penelitian ini adalah field research dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Data penelitian didapatkan melalui wawancara dengan informan terpilih yang terdiri dari para pelaku imam-khatib perempuan, para ulama, wali nagari, tokoh masyarakat, dan tokoh perempuan di Balingka. Di samping itu, digunakan juga data hasil studi dokumentasi dan observasi. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa terdapat hubungan antara dinamika pemahaman fikih dan peran keagamaan perempuan di Balingka. Ketika pemahaman fikih bercorak moderat, praktik imam-khatib perempuan mendapatkan pengakuan, diterima dan bertahan. Sebaliknya ketika pemikiran fikih beralih ke corak radikal, tradisi imam-khatib perempuan mendapatkan kritikan dan tantangan. Pergeseran pemahaman fikih menjadi salah satu penyebab berakhirnya tradisi imam-khatib perempuan yang telah berlangsung selama hampir satu abad di Balingka. Kajian Islam yang disosialisasikan kaum salafi melalui media televisi dan internet menjadi pemicu pergeseran pemahaman fikih dari corak moderat ke corak radikal yang berujung berakhirnya tradisi imam-

khatib perempuan di Balingka. Perempuan Balingka terpinggirkan dari peran keagamaannya dan kembali tersubordinasi di bawah peran laki-laki.

**Keywords:** *Female Imam-Khatib; Dialectic; Moderate fiqh; Radical fiqh; Balingka*

### **Introduction**

The dialectical relationship between religious understanding and gender has influenced women's roles, including religious circles. Shifting religious understanding towards being female-friendly improves their status and role. Conversely, unfriendly religious understanding reduces women's status and role. According to Catherine Wessinger, gender roles result from a complex process in which religious worldviews and conceptions interact. Some resources within established religious traditions support women's equality, while others promote their subordination. Socio-economic factors supporting certain roles concerning religious norms and ideals have created a division of labor that reinforces gender inequality. However, religion supports the transition to gender equality in changing socioeconomic situations.<sup>1</sup>

Kati Niemelä showed that the shift in religious understanding in Finland and other Nordic countries increased women's status and role in the Church. The first female pastor was ordained at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in 1988. This strengthened the impetus for the Church to change its practices, policies, and theological orientation.<sup>2</sup> The same phenomenon occurs in America, as revealed by Barbara Hargrove, Jean Miller, and Sheila Greeve Davaney. Religions in America widely respond to changes in women's social roles. Consequently, new

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<sup>1</sup>Catherine Wessinger, *Theory of Women in Religions*, New York: New York University Press, 2020.

<sup>2</sup>Kati Niemelä, "Female Clergy as Agents of Religious Change?", *Religions*, Volume 2, Number 3 (2011), 358-371.

professional roles in churches and synagogues have been opened, including the ordination of women ministers. Several theological issues have also been raised, including restoring their part in religious history, changing the image of God and the church, and gender equality and justice issues. The general pattern of changing women's roles has altered the social and ideological structure of American religions'.<sup>3</sup> In other cases, the dialectic of understanding religion and gender roles causes the marginalization and subordination of women's roles. Hannelie J. Wood showed how religious understanding within the Church plays a role in forming and maintaining gender inequality in Africa.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Monsoor Moaddel found that religious understanding limited women's role in Iran.<sup>5</sup>

Changes in women's religious role also occurred in Balingka, West Sumatra-Indonesia. Initially, they enjoyed a unique and prestigious religious role as priests and preachers (*imam-khatib*) at the Eid prayers held especially for women. According to Busyro, this practice is considered an application of gender equality as promoted by progressive Islamic groups.<sup>6</sup> However, the tradition that had lasted almost a century later came to an end. In recent years, *imam-khatib* for Eid prayers have no longer been played by women and have been replaced by men. Balingka women are marginalized from their religious roles and have been subordinated to men's roles. Therefore, this study aims to examine the emergence and end

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<sup>3</sup>Barbara Hargrove, Jean Miller, Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Religion and the Changing Role of Women", *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Volume 480, Number 1 (1985), 117-131.

<sup>4</sup>Hannelie J. Wood, "Gender Inequality: The Problem of Harmful, Patriarchal, Traditional, and Cultural Gender Practices in the Church", *HTS Theological Studies*, Volume 75, Number 1 (2019), 1-8

<sup>5</sup>Mansoor Moaddel, "Religion and Women: Islamic Modernism versus Fundamentalism", *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 37 Number 1 (1998), 108-130.

<sup>6</sup>Busyro, "Female Imam and khatib: The progressive tradition of gender-responsive practices in Balingka, West Sumatera," *Journal of Indonesian Islam*, Volume 11, Number 2 (2017), 531-550.

of the female *imam-khatib* tradition and relates it to the fiqh understanding dynamics in Balingka.

### **Gender inequality and religious understanding**

Mansour Fakih stated that gender differences have resulted in unfair treatments against women, such as marginalization, subordination, negative stereotypes, violence, and double burdens. They are subordinated because they are considered inferior to men. This view has become the basis for the division of roles, where women are only given limited and unimportant positions.<sup>7</sup> According to Ch. Mufidah, marginalization of women's roles and rights projects the effect of hierarchical dialectical relations between men and women.<sup>8</sup>

The injustice towards women is motivated by social construction. Irwan Abdullah stated that women are always considered the second sex that determines the model representing the social position regarding their status and role. In its development, women's marginalization describes them as the second sex and regards them as others. Based on the dichotomy of nature and nurture, environmental culture results in the separation and stratification between the two sexes.<sup>9</sup> Catherine Wessinger asserted that gender roles result from a complex process where religious worldviews and gender conceptions interact. Religious traditions have some resources that support women's equality, while others promote their subordination.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Mansour Faqih stated that religious tradition is one determining aspect that creates gender inequality.<sup>11</sup> Religious teachings have dominant potential in applying a biased gender ideology. The potential for injustice

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<sup>7</sup>Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1997.

<sup>8</sup>Ch. Mufidah, *Paradigma Gender*, edisi ke-2, Malang: Bayumedia Publishing, 2004.

<sup>9</sup>Irwan Abdullah, "Dari Domestik ke Publik: Jalan Panjang Pencarian Identitas Perempuan", in Irwan Abdullah (ed.), *Sankan Paran Gender*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2006.

<sup>10</sup>Catherine Wessinger, *Theory of Women in Religions...*

<sup>11</sup>Mansour Fakih, *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial...*

does not come from religious principles but religious development dominated by patriarchal culture.<sup>12</sup> In the hegemony of interpretation and patriarchal culture, women's experiences and contributions are not recognized in religious discourse. They seem marginalized from religious doctrines and beliefs.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, gender-based philosophical and linguistic biases degrade women's religious status.<sup>14</sup>

Religious traditions legalize gender inequality, as confirmed by studies.<sup>15</sup> According to Ida Rasyidah and Noeryamin Aini, cultural and religious-based distinctions significantly impact women's lives, especially in fiqh discourse.<sup>16</sup> Anne Marie Schimmel quoted Moriz Winternits that women are friends of religion, but religion is not a friend of women.<sup>17</sup>

### **Various fiqh about female *Imam-Khatib***

The practice of women as prayer priests has empirical evidence since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. A well-known narration and the main argument in this matter is a hadith transferred by Umm Waraqah, which reads: "*The Messenger of Allah (Saw.) once visited her at her house and appointed a muezzin to call to prayer for her and ordered her to lead the inhabitants of her*

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<sup>12</sup>Janu Arbain, Nur Azizah, & Ika Novita Sari, "Pemikiran Gender Menurut Para Ahli: Telaah atas Pemikiran Amina Wadud Muhsin, Asghar Ali Engineer, dan Mansour Fakih", *Sawwa: Jurnal Studi Gender*, Volume 11, Nomor 1 (2015), 75-94.

<sup>13</sup>Inayah Rohmaniyah, *Konstruksi Patriarki dalam Tafsir Agama Sebuah Jalan Panjang*, Yogyakarta: Diandra Pustaka Indonesia, 2014.

<sup>14</sup>Baharieh Rouhani Ma'ani, "The Effect of Philosophical and Linguistic Gender Biases on the Degradation of Women's Status in Religion", *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, Volume 8, Number 1 (1997), 1-15.

<sup>15</sup>Andreia Carpes Dani, Jaime Dagostim Picolo, Roberto Carlos Klann, "Gender influence social responsibility and governance in performance", *RAUSP Management Journal*, Volume 54, Number 2 (2019), 154-177.

<sup>16</sup>Ida Rasyidah & Noeryamin Aini, "Perempuan dan Ketidakadilan: Review atas Beberapa Isu Gender Menyangkut Dunia Kerja", *Studia Islamika*, Volume 16, Number 1 (2009), 151-186.

<sup>17</sup>Anne Marie Schimmel, "Foreword" in Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Source Book on Gender Relationship in Islamic Thought*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992.

residence. 'Abd al-Raḥman said: 'I saw his muezzin an old man.'<sup>18</sup> Another Hadith with a different editorial from Umm Waraqah reads: "The Messenger of Allah (SAW) ordered him to lead the people where he lived. He has a muezzin and he leads the people in his residence."<sup>19</sup> The existence of female imams is supported by the practice of the Prophet's wives. A narration from Rai'ah al-Ḥanafiyah states: "Aishah once led the women and she stood with them when she performed the obligatory prayers."<sup>20</sup> Another narration from Hujayrah, Umm Salamah, reads that "She once led the women and She stood in their midst."<sup>21</sup>

Some narrations reject the role of women as prayer priests. For instance, a hadith from Jabir bin Abdillah that the Prophet said: "Do not be a woman to be a priest for men."<sup>22</sup> This hadith is supported by narration about the saying of Ibn Mas'ud: "Put women behind as Allah put them behind."<sup>23</sup>

The fiqh scholars have different opinions in determining the law of women as prayer priests. This is motivated by differences in assessing the history's quality, understanding its contents, and compromising conflicting arguments, resulting in four opinion categories.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Abū Dāwud Sulaimān bin al-Ash'ath al-Sijistānī al-Azadī, *Sunan Abī Dāūd*, Vol. II, Taḥqīq by Muḥammad Muhyī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d., 300.

<sup>19</sup>Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal*, Vol. VI, Egypt: Muassasah Qurṭubah, n.d., 405.

<sup>20</sup>Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī bin 'Umar bin Aḥmad bin Mahdī bin Mas'ūd bin al-Nu'mān bin Dīnār al-Baghdādī, *Sunan al-Dāruqūṭnī*, Vol. IV, Beirut: Dār Ibnu Hazm, 2011, 186; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Musnad 'Abd al-Razzāq*, Taḥqīq oleh Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A'zamī, Vol. III, Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islāmī, 1403 H, 141.

<sup>21</sup>Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusain ibn 'Alī ibn Mūsā al-Baihaqī, *Sunan al-Baihaqī al-Kubrā*, Vol. II, Taḥqīq oleh Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qadīr 'Aṭā', Makkah: Maktabah Dār al-Bāz, 1414 H/1994 M, 136.

<sup>22</sup>Ibnu Mājah Muḥammad bin Yazīd Abū 'Abdillāh, *Sunan Ibni Mājah*, Vol. I, Taḥqīq Muḥammad Fu'ād 'Abd al-Bāqī, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d., 343.

<sup>23</sup>Al-Ṭabrānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr li al-Ṭabrānī*, Vol. VIII, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d, 234; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Musnaf 'Abd al-Razzāq...*, 149.

<sup>24</sup>Ali Trigiyan, "Kontroversi Perempuan Menjadi Imam Salat Di Kalangan Fukaha", *Jurnal Hukum Islam*, Volume 12, Nomor 1 (2014), 49-61.



First, the Maliki school of thought believes that women are not allowed to become priests (imam) in obligatory and circumcision prayers.<sup>25</sup> They consider the argument that forbids women from becoming priests as being of strong quality. The hadith that allows female priests is considered weak because of defects in the two narrators.<sup>26</sup> This opinion is radical because it only considers the arguments prohibiting women from being prayer priests and ignores the permitting arguments.<sup>27</sup>

The second opinion comes from most fiqh experts, including the Shafi'i, Hanbali, Hanafi, and Zahiri schools. According to the Shafi'i school, women may become priests for women, but not for men, during obligatory prayers and circumcision,<sup>28</sup> an opinion agreed upon by the Hanbali<sup>29</sup> and the Zahiri schools.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the Hanafi school believes that women could become priests for women, even though the law is makruh (inadvisable). When there is a man, a woman cannot become a priest.<sup>31</sup> Al-Sha'bi, al-Nakha'i, and Qatadah limit women's ability to

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<sup>25</sup> Hasan Sulaimān al-Nūrī & Alwi 'Abbās al-Mālikī, *Ibānāt al-Aḥkām Sharah Bulūgh al-Marām*, Beirut: Dār al-Ṭāqafah al-Islāmiyyah, 1969, 41; Ibnu Rushd, Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad bin Aḥmad bin Muḥammad bin Aḥmad, *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyah al-Muqtaṣid*, Vol. I, Kairo: Maṭba'ah al-Istiḳāmah, 1952, 105.

<sup>26</sup> Ibnu Rushd, *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid...*; Syamsurijal, "Kontroversi Imam Perempuan: Study Maudhu'iy Terhadap Hadits-Hadits Imam Perempuan dalam Shalat", *Jurnal Ushuluddin: Media Dialog Pemikiran Islam*, Volume 20, Nomor 2 (2017), 234-255.

<sup>27</sup> Radical religious paradigms are characterized by monolithic, textual, and rigid interpretations of sacred texts. Ade Dedi Rohayana and Muhammad Jauhari Sofi, "Critique of radical religious paradigm: an epistemological analysis from principles of Islamic thought", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Volume 11, Number 1 (2021), 163-184; Ade Dedi Rohayana, *Melacak Radikalisme dalam Fiqih (Benarkah Fiqih Radikal)*, Pekalongan: IAIN Pekalongan, 2009.

<sup>28</sup> Syams al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Ṣirbīnī, *Al-Iqnā' fi Halli Alfāz Abi Shuja'*, Kairo: Maktabah Muṣṭafa al-Halabī, 1940/1359 H, 153.

<sup>29</sup> Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jazīrī, *Kitāb al-Fiqh 'alā Madhāhib al-Arba'ah*, Vol. I, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1997/1418 H, 372; Ibnu Rushd, *Bidāyah al-Mujtahid...*

<sup>30</sup> Ibnu Ḥazm, *Al-Muhalla*, Vol. IV, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d., 219.

<sup>31</sup> Aḥmad al-Ḥusri, *Min al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, Beirut: Dār al-Jail, 1988/1408 H, 322.

become imams in circumcision only.<sup>32</sup> This second opinion compromises all the arguments about the priesthood of women. They are allowed to become imams (priests) based on the hadith about Umm Waraqah, but not for men. These arguments show no authentic history of the practice of women as imams for men. Furthermore, special movements in prayer are unethical for women before men because they could arouse lust and interfere with solemnity.<sup>33</sup> This second opinion is moderate because it considers all the arguments, compromises those contradictory, and places them in the context and situation, creating a comprehensive and fair legal conclusion.<sup>34</sup>

Third, the opinion of some Hanbali scholars, including Imam Ahmad, allows women to become priests (imam) for women and men limited to Taraweeh prayers. The condition is that the men are in a state of ummi (when their Quranic recitation is not good), and women are reciters (their Quranic recitation is good). Another condition is a mahram relationship between a female priest and a male congregation. The argument used is the hadith conveyed by Umm Waraqah, wherein the Prophet allowed her to lead the family members where she lived, including the man that became her muezzin. Also, they used the atsar about 'Aisyah and Umm Salamah

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<sup>32</sup>Syams al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad al-Ṣirbīnī, *Mughni al-Muhtaj ilā Ma'rifati Alfāzi al-Minhaj*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.

<sup>33</sup>Misbahuddin As'ad, "Kontroversi Perempuan Menjadi Imam Shalat", *Jurnal Al-Asas*, Volume 2, Nomor 1 (2019), 92-110.

<sup>34</sup>The characteristics of moderate fiqh include believing in the wisdom behind the Shari'a, the interconnection between texts (comprehensive understanding), being an intermediate, correlation between texts and reality, prioritizing convenience, being open and tolerant. Yūsuf al-Qaradhawī, *Dirāsah fi Fiqh al-Maqāṣid al-Ṣarī'ah*, Kairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2006, 147-152; Muh. Nashiruddin, "Fikih Moderat dan Visi Keilmuan Syariah di Era Global (Konsep dan Implementasinya pada Fakultas Syariah IAIN Surakarta)", *Jurnal Hukum Diktum*, Volume 14, number 1 (2016), 30-43; Muhammad Irfan Helmy, "The Understanding of Islamic Moderation (Wasatiyah al-Islam) and Hadiths on Inter-religious relations in the Javanese Pesantrens", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Volume 11, Number 2 (2021), 377-401.

that led the women.<sup>35</sup> This third opinion is still in the moderate category.

Fourth, the opinion of Imam Abu Thaur, al-Muzani, and Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabari allows women to become priests (imam) absolutely for men and women. The argument used is the hadith conveyed by Umm Waraqah in its various versions. These hadiths show that Umm Waraqah is permitted to lead the occupants of her house, including men (muezzin) and children or slaves.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, this opinion is liberal because it interprets the arguments freely, only considers the permissible ones, and ignores those limiting women as prayer imams.<sup>37</sup>

The opinion held in Indonesia is moderate, as seen in the Fatwa of the Indonesian Ulema Council Number: 9/MUNAS VII/MUI/13/2005 concerning Women Being Imam of Prayer. This fatwa contains two dictums: First, women become imams of congregational prayers involving men and women, and the law is haraam and invalid. Second, women are imams (priests) of congregational prayers involving mostly women, and the law is permissible (mubah).<sup>38</sup>

Regarding khatib (preachers), scholars do not mention the gender issue.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibnu Qudamah Al-Maqdisī, *al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr li Ibnī Qudamah*, Vol. II, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.d., 52.

<sup>36</sup>Muḥammad bin Ismāʿīl al-Kahlānī al-Ṣanʿānī, *Subul al-Salām*, Vol. II, Kairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987/1406, 34-35.

<sup>37</sup>Liberal understanding is characterized by: First, it does not recognize absolute truth and deconstructs the text and its interpretation. Second, to challenge orthodoxy, be critical of the salaf's opinion, and try to deconstruct it. Third, promote secularization. Fourth, reject all forms of oppression of human freedom. See: Muhaki, "Pembaharuan Epistemologi Fiqih Islam Liberal", *Pancawahana Jurnal Studi Islam*, Volume 12, Number 1 (2017), 39-56; Zulkarnain Sulaiman, "Dinamika Pemikiran Hukum Islam: Corak Dan Karakteristik", *Al-Mizan*, Volume 12, Number 1 (2016), 99-116. Another characteristic of liberal fiqh is that it is not bound by the sound of sharia texts, trying to find the text's true meaning and the spirit of the teachings. See: Musahadi, "Elemen Liberal dalam Kajian Fikih Pesantren: Studi atas Ma'had Aly Salafiyah Syafi'iyah Sukorejo Situbondo", *Asy-Syir'ah Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah dan Hukum*, Volume 47, Number 1 (2013), 49-82.

<sup>38</sup>Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI), Fatwa Majelis Ulama Indonesia Nomor: 9/MUNAS VII/MUI/13/2005 tentang Wanita Menjadi Imam Shalat, <https://mui.or.id/wp-content/uploads/files/fatwa/28.-Wanita-Menjadi-Imam-Shalat.pdf>

In discussing the conditions for Friday preachers, only the Shafi'i school of thought explicitly requires that it be male.<sup>39</sup> Scholars associate the khatib with the imam status in obligatory and circumcision prayers. The khatib's eligibility criteria follow those of the priest, and some scholars require the imam also to be a khatib. According to Imam Hanafi and Imam Malik, a khatib should also be an imam unless there is an 'obstacle.' Imam Shafi'i allows non-khatib to become an imam, while Imam Ahmad permitted and prohibited this possibility.<sup>40</sup> The scholars' opinion regarding the law of female khatib in the Eid prayer is in line with their opinion about the legal status of female imams.

### **The emergence of the female *Imam-Khatib* tradition in Balingka**

Balingka is a village (*nagari*) in IV Koto Sub-District, Agam Regency, West Sumatra, Indonesia. It is bordered by Nagari Koto Gadang in the north, Koto Panjang in the south, Koto Tuo in the east, and Sungai Landia in the west. Nagari Balingka comprises Subarang, Koto Hilalang, and Pahambatan jorongs. The village covers 18.2 km<sup>2</sup> and is inhabited by 6,736 people, consisting of 3,401 men and 3,335 women. Most people work as farmers, traders, planters, and a few work as civil servants in other formal sectors. Nagari Balingka is 56 km from Lubuk Basung, the regencial capital and 95 km from Padang, the provincial capital. It is located at the waist of Mount Singgalang, 1000-1300 meters above sea level.<sup>41</sup> The contours of the Balingka area are dominated by hills, with valleys at the bottom. Residential areas are located in hilly areas, while the valley is used for agriculture. Residential settlements in the hills line up on the left and

<sup>39</sup>Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jazīrī, *Kitāb al-Fiqh 'Alā Madhāhib al-Arba'ah...*, 322.

<sup>40</sup>Muḥammad bin Abī al-'Abbās Al-Manufī Al-Miṣrī, *Nihāyah al-Muhtaj Ilā Sharh al-Minhāj*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003, 327; Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Raḥmān Al-Dimashiqī, *Rahmat al-Ummah fī Ikhtilāf al-Aimmah*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, n.d., 50.

<sup>41</sup>Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of Agam Regency, *IV Koto Subdistrict in Figures 2021*, Agam: BPS of Agam Regency, 2021.

right of the narrow road. Also, each jorong has a mosque usually used for worship, including the Eid prayer. The mosque is not big enough to accommodate all Balingka residents.

The emergence of the female *imam-khatib* tradition in Balingka is closely related to the region's contours and began around 1928, when the unity spirit surged in Indonesia. There was a strong desire to unite all Balingka residents, especially during the Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha prayers. Therefore, the idea was born to unite Eid prayers previously held separately in each jorong. However, this idea encountered a complicated obstacle because no place was large enough to accommodate all residents for Eid prayers. Therefore, the prayer for men is combined and rotated between the three jorongs in Balingka. In contrast, prayers for women are carried out separately in each jorong.<sup>42</sup>

This policy raises a problem of the *imam-khatib* for women's Eid prayer congregations, while men congregate in one place. As a result, the idea emerged of appointing women *imam-khatib* of Eid prayers for female congregations. The idea was proposed by two female figures Rangkayo Rosma Syoe'ib and Umami Minsam from Balingka, currently studying at Diniyah Putri Padang Panjang, the first all-girls school in Indonesia.<sup>43</sup> The women acted as the first historical perpetrators of female *imam-khatib* in Balingka, with Rangkayo Rosma Syoe'ib as the *khatib* and Umami Minsam as the *imam*. Initially, this practice was conducted in Jorong Koto Hilalang only, then spread to other jorongs.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Tasnim Rasyid, interview on 15 July 2021 and 13 February 2022. Tasnim Rasyid (71 years old) has served as a female imam and khatib in Balingka dozens of times, from 1973 to 2015. Retired madrasa teachers, religious lecturers, and Balingka Nagari Ulema Council; Sulfa Malin, interview 16 & 17 July 2021. Sulfa Malin is the Chairman of the Majelis Ulama Nagari Balingka. Harmen, interview on 16 July 2021. Harmen is the Wali Nagari Balingka.

<sup>43</sup>Nafilah Abdullah, "Rahmah El-Yunusiyah Kartini Padang Panjang (1900-1969)", *Jurnal Sosiologi Agama: Jurnal Ilmiah Sosiologi Agama dan Perubahan Sosial*, Volume 10, Number 2 (2016), 51-82.

<sup>44</sup>Sulfa Malin, interview on ...; Tasnim Rasyid, interviews on ...

This unique idea was well received by women, scholars, traditional leaders, and the people of Balingka. The practice of female *imam-khatib* continued to be a tradition for almost a century, from 1928 to 2017. There was no rejection from the people, including the ulama, as many scholars participated in Balingka,<sup>45</sup> including Sheikh Abdul Lathif Rasyidi, Sheikh Daud Rasyidi (1880-1948) and Haji Idris Maruhun Kayo (1882-1964).<sup>46</sup> They are known as the triad of preachers broadcasting straight and true Islam.<sup>47</sup> Other figures were Haji Mansur Daud Datuak Palimo Kayo (1902-1985), Haji Bukhari Tamam (1822-1984), Inyik Abbas Kari Sutan (1883-1956), Haji Abdul Malik Salik Kari Bandaro (1914-2002), and Rangkayo Rosma Syoe'ib (1912-2005).<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Muchtar Yahya (1907-1996) was an Egyptian graduate scholar, the first professor of interpretation in Indonesia, and the founder and head of the Islamic Religious College (UIN Sunan Kalijaga) Yogyakarta.<sup>49</sup> Balingka also has a national hero, Mukhtar Luthfi, and a national press figure, Karni Ilyas.<sup>50</sup> The long-standing practice of female *imam-khatib* among these figures and scholars shows that this tradition is legal and acceptable or tolerable; the scholars would otherwise have criticized it.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Leli Yerni, interview 16 July 2021. Leli Yerni (60 years old) often serves as a khatib (preacher) but has never been an imam (priest); Sulfa Malin, interview on ....; Tasnim Rasyid, interviews on ...

<sup>46</sup>Arfendie Arif, *Mengenang Tokoh Balingka*, Ciputat Timur: Pustakapedia Indonesia, 2021, 1-70; Arfendie Arif, "Mengenang Jasa Tokoh Balingka", pinisi.co.id, 2020, *Mengenang Jasa Tokoh Balingka - Pinisi.co.id*

<sup>47</sup>Edwar (Ed.), *Riwayat Hidup dan Perjuangan 20 Ulama Besar Sumatera Barat*, Padang: Islamic Center Sumatera Barat, 1981.

<sup>48</sup>Arfendie Arif, *Mengenang Tokoh Balingka...*, 131-316.

<sup>49</sup>Umar Asasuddin Sokah, "Prof. Dr. Mukhtar Yahya," in *Lima Tokoh IAIN Yogyakarta*, Yogyakarta: IAIN Yogyakarta, 2000, 107-146; Arfendie Arif, *Mengenang Tokoh Balingka...*, 51-70.

<sup>50</sup>Arfendie Arif, *Mengenang Tokoh Balingka...*; Anisa Br. Sitepu, *Biografi dan Profil Lengkap Karni Ilyas*, *Jurnal Senior Presiden ILC*, <https://correcto.id/beranda/read/38559/biografi-dan-profil-lengkap-karni-ilyas-jurnal-senior-presiden-ilc>

<sup>51</sup>Abrar, interview on 16 July 2021 and 14 February 2022. Abrar (48 years old) is a lecturer, ulama, and traditional figure in Balingka; Leli Yerni, interviewed on ...

### **The end of the female *Imam-Khatib* tradition in Balingka**

After surviving for almost a century, this tradition in Balingka ended in 2017, and women no longer played the role of *imam-khatib*. Although Eid prayers for female and male congregations are separate, the *imam* and *khatib* are played by men. Therefore, Balingka women lose their symbolic and unique role in this religious practice.

The end of this tradition coincided with the development of a new fiqh understanding that the imam and khatib must be male. This understanding has been obtained by scholars and the people of Balingka from sources such as Islamic studies through television and internet media.<sup>52</sup> The most frequently accessible and influential change in the fiqh understanding of the Balingka community is the Islamic study “SUNNAH TV,” the term used by the public for various television channels of Salafists. They make it as a guide in religious practice.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the new fiqh in Balingka was influenced by understanding the textual and radical Salafis.<sup>54</sup>

In the beginning, the moderate and tolerant understanding of fiqh towards female *imam-khatib* survived. However, radical fiqh is getting stronger among the Balingka scholars.<sup>55</sup> Opinion differences prompted the Nagari Balingka Ulema Council to deliberate around the ulema, including women. The deliberation ended the practice of female *imam-khatib* because women as prayer *imam* and *khatib* in the pulpit are part of the khilafiyah problem. It is better to leave the khilafiyah and switch to the generally accepted male *imam* and *khatib practice*. Female figures were among those

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<sup>52</sup>Tasnim Rasyid, interview on...

<sup>53</sup>Rahmi Adnan, interview on... ; Rahmi Adnan (66 years old) often plays a female imam-khatib, a Nagari Balingka Ulema Council; Irsal, interview on 13 February 2022. Irsal (68) is a Balingka community figure.

<sup>54</sup>Abrar, interviews on...; Irsal, interview on...

<sup>55</sup>Muhammad Thoha, interview on 13 February 2022. Muhammad Thoha is a religious teacher and member of the Nagari Balingka Ulema Council; Abrar interviews on...

that initiated and proposed the change.<sup>56</sup>

Other factors driving this change are technical reasons, where some older men in Balingka could not join the male Eid prayer congregation because of the long-distance and road conditions with many inclines. Therefore, they joined the female prayer congregation. This causes the *imam* and *khatib* males because women are prohibited from becoming priests (*imam*) for men. Informants stated that some men were deliberately ordered to join the women's congregation to accompany the male *imam-khatib*.<sup>57</sup>

These two factors seem to have played a concurrent role in ending the female *imam-khatib* tradition in Balingka. The difficulty of older men joining male congregations is understandable given the hilly contours and the long distance between jorongs. However, this difficulty is experienced by older men today and in the past. This reason should be responded to when a shift in fiqh understanding occurs in Balingka.

### **The influence of fiqh understanding**

The female *imam-khatib* tradition is related to the fiqh understanding dynamics in Balingka. The fiqh understanding was moderate when the tradition emerged around 1928. Yūsuf al-Qaradhawī stated that moderate fiqh is characterized by a comprehensive understanding of legal issues, taking a middle path, seeing the correlation between texts (*nash*) and reality, prioritizing convenience, and being open and tolerant.<sup>58</sup> Moderate fiqh understanding accommodates all opinions, provided they have acceptable arguments. It becomes a conducive habitat for the emergence

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<sup>56</sup>Sulfa Malin, interview on ... ; Tasnim Rasyid, interviews on...; Ermawati, interview on 13 February 2022. Ermawati is a Balingka female figure and a member of the Nagari Balingka Ulama Council.

<sup>57</sup>Harmen, interview on... ; Sulfa Malin, interview on... ; Leli Yerni, interview on...

<sup>58</sup>Yūsuf al-Qaradhawī, *Dirāsah fi Fiqh al-Maqāṣid al-Ṣarī'ah...*, 147-152.



and persistence of female *imam-khatib* practice in Balingka.

Moderate fiqh development is inseparable from moderate ulema, provided the female imam-khatib tradition occurs in Balingka. At the beginning of this tradition, Sheikh Daud Rasyidi (1880-1948) was a central religious figure and a role model for the Balingka people. His extensive knowledge, experience, and association fostered a moderate understanding of Sheikh Daud Rasyidi and wisely addressed the issue of *khilafiyah* and opinion differences. Although Sheikh Daud Rasyidi adhered to the Shafi'i school, he never blamed other schools. His tolerant attitude made him friends with all the ulema that often had strong polemics. Sheikh Daud Rasyidi opposed the rampant differences in understanding between the young (modernist) and old (traditionalist) ulema and sought common ground between the two groups.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the emergence of the female *imam-khatib* tradition was approved by Sheikh Daud Rasyidi as a reference ulema in Balingka.

The moderate understanding and attitude were continued by the next prominent figure of the Balingka ulema, Haji Mansur Daud Datuak Palimo Kayo (1905-1985), the biological son of Sheikh Daud Rasyidi. He is an ulema and traditional leader with the title "*datuak*," and served as Chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council in West Sumatra Province (1975-1985). Similarly to his father, Haji Mansur Daud Datuak Palimo Kayo had good knowledge and experience. His study trips to Mecca, India, the Middle East, Europe, and China, and his experiences as an ambassador in Iraq (1956-1960) and a politician gave him broad insight and fostered a moderate attitude. Datuak Palimo Kayo was tolerant and compromising in dealing with social opinion differences. Furthermore, he

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<sup>59</sup>Edwar (Ed.), *Riwayat Hidup dan Perjuangan...*; Mas'od Abidin (ed.), *Ensiklopedi Minangkabau*, Padang: Pusat Pengkajian Islam dan Minangkabau, 2005; Redaksi Langgam.id, Syekh Daud Rasyidi, Ulama Pemersatu dari Balingka, Padang: Langgam.id, 2020, assessed: 5-2-2022, Syekh Daud Rasyidi, Ulama Pemersatu dari Balingka (langgam.id)

was accommodative to the government's program to develop the tourism industry in West Sumatra with strong criticism from some ulema.<sup>60</sup> The moderate and tolerant attitude of Haji Mansur Daud Datuak Palimo Kayo guarantees the sustainability of the female *imam-khatib* tradition in Balingka.

A moderate understanding and attitude continued to be maintained by later figures of Balingka ulema, such as Haji A. Malik Salik Kari Bandaro and Hassan Nasaruddin. Haji A. Malik Salik Kari Bandaro (1914-2002) was an accommodative ulema that accepted family and social opinion differences.<sup>61</sup> The female *imam-khatib* tradition continued and gained recognition during his work as the central figure of the Balingka ulema. The last ulema figure and the guardian of the female *imam-khatib* tradition were Hasan Nasaruddin (1945-2018). He was knowledgeable from studying in Bangil, under the guidance of the modernist religious figure A. Hassan. Furthermore, Hasan Nasaruddin studied at the Ibn Sa'ud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and received a master's degree. He was a friendly, humble, and honest man but firm and strict in his principles.<sup>62</sup> However, Hasan Nasaruddin still showed a moderate and tolerant attitude towards the female *imam-khatib* practice in Balingka. This was proven by approving the continuation of the tradition as the Chairman of the Nagari Balingka Ulema Council from the 1990s to 2017.<sup>63</sup>

After the death of these figures, Balingka experienced a dearth of great ulema. The ulema members of the Nagari Balingka Ulema Council are leading the religious life in Balingka. However, there are no ulema with

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<sup>60</sup>Research Team of the Faculty of Adab IAIN IB Padang, *Ulama Minangkabau: Datuk Palimo Kayo (1905-1985)*, Padang: Pusat Kajian Budaya Islam Fakultas Adab IAIN Imam Bonjol Padang, (2009); Mas'oeed Abidin (ed.), *Ensiklopedi Minangkabau...*

<sup>61</sup>Arfendie Arif, *Mengenang Tokoh Balingka...*, 186.

<sup>62</sup>Arfendie Arif, *Mengenang Tokoh Balingka...*, 313.

<sup>63</sup>Arfendie Arif, *Mengenang Tokoh Balingka...*, 311.

the same quality and caliber as the previous ulema, and no central figure could be a reference and give a respected decision. Simultaneously, Islamic da'wah penetrated the Balingka community through mass media and filled the private and public spaces. The Islamic da'wah occupied the position formerly held by the central figure of the Balingka ulema as a religious guide. Salafi shows dominance and superiority, owning about 90% of the dozens of da'wah television channels accessible in Balingka. The Balingka people like the Salafi TV Sunnah da'wah program because the material is simple, relevant, and argumentative. Moreover, the presenters graduated from the Middle East or other competent Islamic education centers.<sup>64</sup>

Salafi's radical understanding, including fiqh, affects the religious understanding of the Balingka community. The fiqh opinion of the Salafi that forbids women as priests and preachers changed the attitudes of the Balingka ulema towards the female *imam-khatib* tradition. This change of opinion and attitude ended the female *imam-khatib* tradition in Balingka.

The emergence and end of the female *imam-khatib* tradition in Balingka proves the relationship between religious understanding and women's religious roles, as emphasized by Catherine Wessinger. The role of women results from a complex process where the religious perspectives interact with the gender conception. Religious traditions have resources that support women's equality and others that promote their subordination.<sup>65</sup> In the case of Balingka, the moderate fiqh understanding is a supporting resource for women to enjoy prestigious religious roles as *imam-khatib* of the 'id prayer. According to Busyro, this tradition is considered an application of the gender equality idea promoted by progressive Islamic groups.<sup>66</sup> Conversely, radical fiqh understanding causes the loss of this role and places women

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<sup>64</sup>Rahmi Adnan, interview on...; Irsal, interview on...; Tasnim Rasyid, interviews on...

<sup>65</sup>Catherine Wessinger, *Theory of Women in Religions...*

<sup>66</sup>Busyro, "Female Imam and khatib"...

under men's subordination. This fact also strengthens Mansour Fakhir's theory that one cause of gender inequality is religious traditions.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Inayah Rohmaniyah stated that religious understanding causes the marginalization of women's roles. Women's experiences, contributions, and interests are often marginalized in formulating religious doctrines and beliefs, making their role to be lost from religious history.<sup>68</sup>

The marginalization of Balingka women's roles does not come from Islamic teachings but is caused by interpretive factors and the community's fiqh understanding dynamics. The sources of Islamic law recognize and apply the tradition of female *imam-khatib*. This supports Arbain et al., which stated that injustice experienced against women does not originate from religious principles. Conversely, the injustice is caused by the religious development and understanding dominated by patriarchal culture.<sup>69</sup> Under interpretation hegemony and patriarchal religious culture, women's experiences and contributions are not recognized in religious discourse. They are marginalized from religious doctrines and beliefs.<sup>70</sup> According to Ida Rasyidah and Noeryamin Aini, religious interpretation in fiqh impacts women's lives and roles, as happened in Balingka.<sup>71</sup> This is because fiqh is the foundation and basic guideline in building the empirical behavior of Muslims.

The end of the female *imam-khatib* tradition in Balingka also shows the strong role of mass media in socializing and internalizing religious understanding and authority. In line with this, Jajat Burhanuddin stated that the mass media created a dialectical relationship with religious

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<sup>67</sup>Mansour Fakhir, *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial...*

<sup>68</sup>Inayah Rohmaniyah, "Gender dan Konstruksi Perempuan dalam Agama", *Jurnal Studi Ilmu-Ilmu al-Quran dan Hadis*, Volume 10, Number 2 (2009), 207-230; Inayah Rohmaniyah, *Konstruksi Patriarki dalam Tafsir Agama...*

<sup>69</sup>Janu Arbain, Nur Azizah, & Ika Novita Sari, "Pemikiran Gender..."

<sup>70</sup>Inayah Rohmaniyah, *Konstruksi Patriarki dalam Tafsir Agama...*

<sup>71</sup>Ida Rasyidah & Noeryamin Aini, "Perempuan dan Ketidakadilan..."

authorities in Indonesia.<sup>72</sup> Through the internet and television, Da'wah has significantly changed the religious authority of Balingka ulema into Salafi fatwas delivered through the mass media. The decision to end the female *imam-khatib* tradition was taken through the deliberations of the Nagari Balingka Ulema Council. However, it was influenced by Salafi's Islamic study material, which became a new reference for religious life in Balingka.<sup>73</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This study found a relationship between fiqh and women's religious role as imam-khatib (priest) at the 'id prayer in Balingka. As the mode of understanding moderate fiqh develops, the practice of female imams is recognized, accepted, and persisted. However, these women's traditional roles as priests are criticized and rejected with the development of radical fiqh understanding. The emergence, persistence, and end of the female priesthood tradition in Balingka are due to the dynamics of developing fiqh understanding. Subsequently, the radical fiqh styles' dominance ended the tradition, and women were marginalized from their unique religious positions, becoming subordinated to men's roles.

The findings strengthen the theory that religious understanding causes women's marginalization and subordination. This study has implications for the urgency of developing a fiqh understanding as a guide in behaving. The moderate understanding development could support a tolerant attitude that accepts and respects various fiqh thoughts. In contrast, a

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<sup>72</sup>Jajat Burhanuddin, *Ulama & Kekuasaan: Pengumpulan Elite Muslim dalam Sejarah Indonesia*, Jakarta: Mizan Publika, 2012.

<sup>73</sup>Masduki, Akh. Muzakki, Imron Rosidi, & Toni Hartono, "Islam on the Air: the Struggle for Salafism throuht Radio in Indonesia", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies*, Volume 12, Number 1 (2022): 59-84; Nafi' Muthohirin, "Radikalisme Islam dan Pergerakannya di Media Sosial", *Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman AFKARUNA*, Volume 11, Number 2 (2015), 240-259.

radical understanding could result in an intolerant attitude that threatens the diversity of opinions, specifically regarding weak parties such as women.

This study showed the process of ending the female priesthood tradition quickly and without turmoil, even when the tradition has been going on for almost a century. It is necessary to examine how women's responses and cultural backgrounds made these changes smooth and peaceful. The findings indicated that changes in fiqh understanding occurred due to the da'wah through mass media influence, such as television and the internet. Therefore, future studies should discuss da'wah's effectiveness in shaping fiqh understanding through mass media.

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**Interview List**

Abrar, *interviews on 16 July 2021 and 14 February 2022.*

Ermawati, *interview on 13 February 2022.*

Harmen, *interview on 16 July 2021.*

Irsal, *interview on 13 February 2022.*

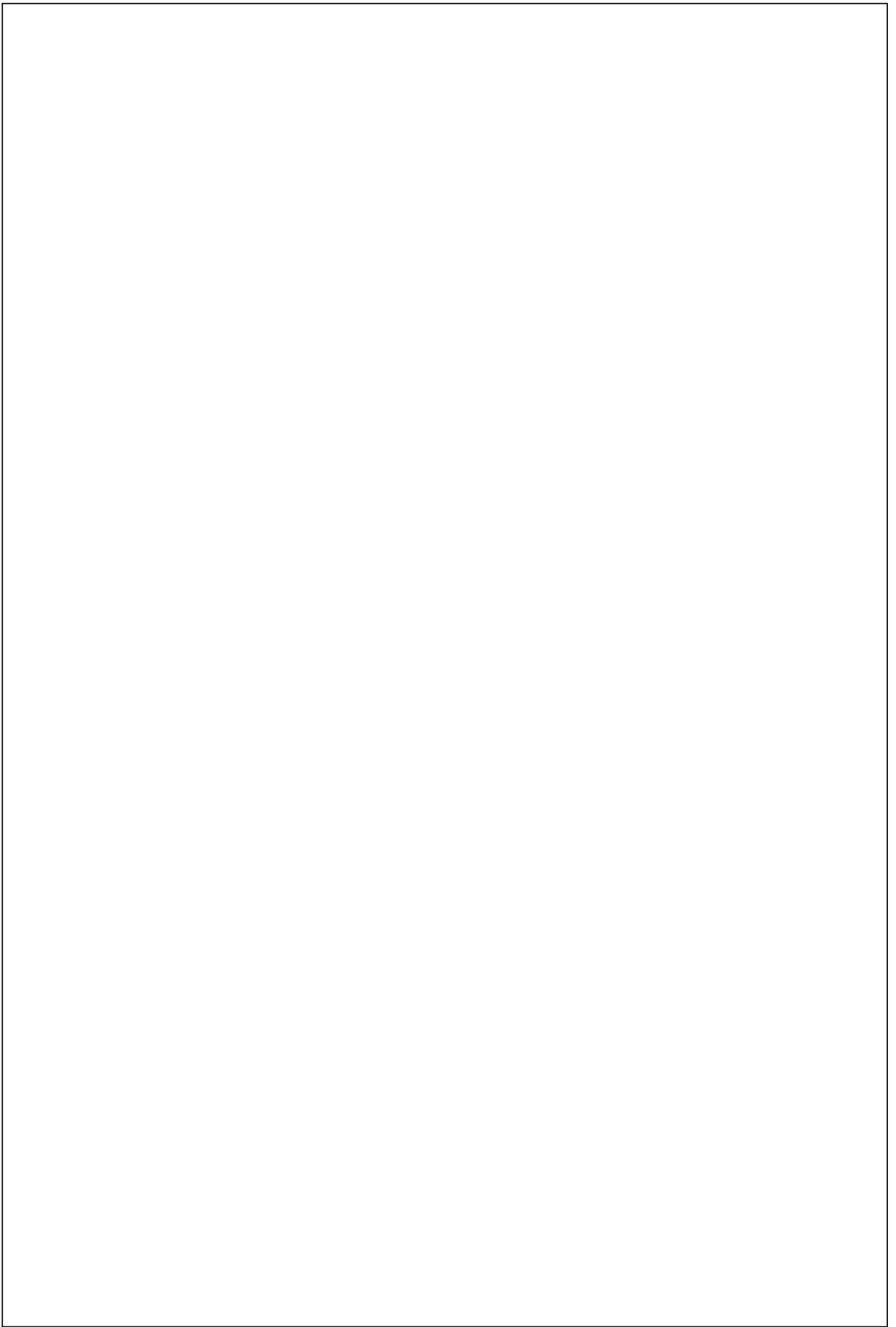
Leli Yerni, *interview on 16 July 2021.*

Muhammad Thoha, *interview on 13 February 2022.*

Rahmi Adnan, *interview on 13 February 2022.*

Sulfa Malin, *interview on 16 and 17 July 2021.*

Tasnim Rasyid, *interviews on 15 July 2021 and 13 February 2022.*



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