

Between Shahbandar and Waliyah: Women's Islamic Leadership in the 11th-15th Centuries Gresik

Abdul Karim Wirawan¹, Ulfa Rosyidah²

¹*Universitas Billfath Lamongan*, ²*Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang*
abdulkarimwira@gmail.com

Submission Track:

Received: 9 June 2025

Final Revision: 8 August 2025

Available Online: 28 August 2025

Abstract

This study analyzes two models of women's leadership in Islamic Gresik during the formative period (11th-15th centuries) through a comparative analysis of Siti Fatimah binti Maimun (d. 1082 CE) and Nyai Ageng Pinatih (active 1458-1477 CE). Employing microhistorical methodology and feminist historiography, the research reveals two distinct forms of authority: spiritual-genealogical leadership (waliyah) and structural-maternal leadership (shahbandar). Siti Fatimah established her authority through Islamic genealogy and religious scholarship, reflected in her monumental tomb complex. Nyai Ageng Pinatih utilized administrative competence and political networks as the harbor master (shahbandar) of Gresik port. The findings demonstrate the flexibility of the Nusantara Islamic social system in accommodating women's leadership through diverse legitimation mechanisms, challenging the dichotomy between religious and secular authority. The research also reveals disparities in collective memory between the two figures, reflecting gender bias in Indonesian Islamic historiography. This study contributes to understanding the complexity of women's leadership traditions in Indonesian Islam and their relevance to contemporary gender debates.

Keywords: leadership, Women, Islam, Gresik

Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis dua model kepemimpinan perempuan dalam Islam Gresik periode formatif (abad ke-11-15) melalui studi komparatif terhadap Siti Fatimah binti Maimun (w. 1082 M) dan Nyai Ageng Pinatih (aktif 1458-1477 M). Menggunakan metodologi mikrohistoris dan historiografi feminis, penelitian mengungkap dua bentuk otoritas berbeda: kepemimpinan spiritual-genealogis (waliyah) dan kepemimpinan struktural-maternal (shahbandar). Siti Fatimah membangun otoritas melalui genealogi Islam dan keilmuan agama, tercermin dalam kompleks makam monumentalnya. Nyai Ageng Pinatih memanfaatkan kompetensi administratif dan jaringan politik sebagai syahbandar pelabuhan Gresik. Temuan menunjukkan fleksibilitas sistem sosial Islam Nusantara dalam mengakomodasi kepemimpinan perempuan melalui beragam mekanisme legitimasi, menantang dikotomi otoritas religius-sekuler. Penelitian juga mengungkap disparitas memori kolektif antara kedua tokoh, mencerminkan bias gender dalam historiografi Islam Indonesia. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pemahaman

kompleksitas tradisi kepemimpinan perempuan dalam Islam Indonesia dan relevansinya bagi debat gender kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: kepemimpinan, Perempuan, Islam, Gresik

INTRODUCTION

The historiography of Islam in the Nusantara has long been dominated by narratives that position male figures as primary agents in the Islamization process, while the roles of women are often marginalized or entirely overlooked^{1 2}. However, upon deeper examination, various historical sources demonstrate that women played significant roles in shaping local Islamic traditions, particularly within the contexts of spiritual and socio-political leadership. Gresik, as one of the important centers in Javanese Islamic history, preserves traces of complex and diverse female leadership, reflected in two prominent figures: Siti Fatimah binti Maimun (d. 1082 CE) and Nyai Ageng Pinatih (active 1458-1477 CE). These two figures represent different yet equally influential models of leadership in shaping the character of Islam in Gresik during its formative period, despite living in periods separated by nearly four centuries—a temporal span that demonstrates both continuity and transformation in patterns of female leadership within the socio-political dynamics of Islam in the Nusantara.

Gender studies in Indonesian Islamic history have experienced significant development over the past two decades, with the emergence of works examining women's roles in various aspects of social, political, and religious life^{3 4 5}. However, most research continues to focus on the colonial and post-colonial periods, while studies on female leadership during the early Islamic period remain relatively limited. Existing research tends to generalize women's roles without considering the diversity of leadership models that have developed according to specific local and temporal contexts^{6 7}. This gap creates an urgent need to understand how female

¹ Azyumardi Azra, *Historiografi Islam Kontemporer: Wacana, Aktualitas Dan Aktor Sejarah* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2013).

² M. C. Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 2012.

³ Susan Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia*, 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492198>.

⁴ Barbara N. Ramusack and Sharon L. Sievers, "Women in Asia : Restoring Women to History," 1999.

⁵ Laurie J. Sears and Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 1 (1994), <https://doi.org/10.2307/604991>.

⁶ John K. Whitmore, "Southeast Asia The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia, By Barbara Watson Andaya, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. Pp. 335. Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index.," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2007), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s002246340700029x>.

⁷ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300159455>.

authority was constructed and legitimized in Islamic Nusantara society during its formative period, particularly within the crucial timeframe of the 11th to 15th centuries CE, which represents a critical period in the formation of local Islamic identity in coastal Java.

Theoretically, this research departs from a critique of essentialist approaches in female leadership studies that tend to categorize women's authority within the simple dichotomy of "public" versus "domestic" spheres⁸⁹. This approach overlooks the complexity and fluidity of female leadership in non-Western contexts, particularly in Islamic Nusantara societies that had strong matrilineal and bilateral traditions before the arrival of Islam¹⁰. To address these limitations, this research adopts theoretical frameworks developed to understand how Muslim women created their own spaces of authority through diverse and contextual strategies^{11 12}. This framework enables a more nuanced analysis of how Siti Fatimah and Nyai Ageng Pinatih negotiated their positions within complex social structures, where Islamic values interacted with local Javanese traditions to produce unique models of leadership.

The selection of this article's title is based on several fundamental theoretical and methodological considerations. The concepts of "Syahbandar" and "Waliyah" were chosen because they represent two different yet equally legitimate poles of authority within the Islamic Nusantara tradition. Syahbandar, as an administrative position within the Islamic trading system, represents structural and institutional authority legitimized through bureaucratic systems and political-economic power^{13 14}. Meanwhile, Waliyah—the feminine form of wali—represents spiritual and charismatic authority legitimized through religious genealogy, Islamic scholarship, and community recognition of personal sanctity or nobility. The phrase "Between" was chosen to emphasize that these two leadership models are not dichotomous but exist within a spectrum that is interconnected and mutually influential, creating hybrid spaces where female authority can operate flexibly. The temporal emphasis on the "11th-15th Century CE" is important to demonstrate that this period represents a time of transition and formation of Islamic

⁸ Michele Z Rosaldo, "Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview," *Woman, Culture and Society*, 1974.

⁹ Sherry B Ortner, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?," in *Feminism, The Public And The Private*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198752035.003.0002>.

¹⁰ Michael G. Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2761066>.

¹¹ LILA ABU-LUGHOD, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women," *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990), <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030>.

¹² Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2006.108.3.603>.

¹³ Denys Lombard, "Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya," *Sejarah*, 2005.

¹⁴ Roderich Ptak, "Die Maritime Seidenstraße," in *China Und Asiens Maritime Achse Im Mittelalter*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110626353-003>.

Nusantara identity, when social norms were still in the process of negotiation and had not yet crystallized into rigid structures^{15 16}.

Methodologically, this research integrates microhistorical approach with feminist historiography to reconstruct the lives and leadership of both figures^{17 18}. The microhistorical approach will be applied through in-depth analysis of material artifacts such as the architecture and epigraphy of Siti Fatimah's tomb, as well as administrative documents and chronicles that mention Nyai Ageng Pinatih's activities as syahbandar. Meanwhile, feminist historiography will provide a framework for analyzing how gender operates as a category of historical analysis in these sources, including how language and representation in texts reflect social constructions of female authority. The combination of these two approaches allows the research not only to describe the lives of both figures but also to analyze how their leadership reflected and shaped gender norms in Islamic Gresik society of their time. This method is supported by archaeological analysis of Siti Fatimah's tomb complex, epigraphic analysis of contemporary inscriptions, and textual studies of relevant local historical sources and Javanese chronicles.

Siti Fatimah binti Maimun and Nyai Ageng Pinatih offer compelling cases for comparative analysis because both lived in different periods yet represent two contrasting models of leadership within the spectrum of Islamic Nusantara female authority. Siti Fatimah, whose tomb is considered the oldest Islamic cemetery complex in the Nusantara, represents a model of spiritual leadership whose legitimacy derives from religious genealogy and Islamic scholarship. Initial analysis of her tomb's architecture reveals Fatimid stylistic influences, indicating intellectual connections with the Middle Eastern Islamic world, while the monumental structure of the tomb complex reflects community recognition of her status as waliyah. On the other hand, Nyai Ageng Pinatih, who served as Gresik's syahbandar four centuries later, represents a model of structural leadership whose legitimacy derives from political-economic position and maternal role in nurturing Sunan Giri¹⁹. Initial findings from Javanese chronicles indicate that her authority was not limited to port administration but also

¹⁵ M. C. Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*, EastBridge, a Nonprofit Corporation, vol. 1, 2006.

¹⁶ Mark Woodward, *Java, Indonesia and Islam*, Java, Indonesia and Islam, 2011, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0056-7>.

¹⁷ Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.56021/9780801834585>.

¹⁸ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Theory and Method in Women's History*, 2012, <https://doi.org/10.7312/scot91266-004>.

¹⁹ H.J. de Graaf and G. Th. Pigeaud, "Chinese Muslims in Java in the 15th and 16th Centuries: The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon," *Monash Papers on Southeast Asia*, no. 12 (1984).

encompassed diplomatic functions in inter-kingdom relations and patronage roles in developing Islamic educational institutions. These temporal and leadership model differences not only reflect the diversity of female leadership strategies but also demonstrate the evolution and continuity of Islamic Nusantara social structures in accommodating female authority through various legitimation mechanisms.

This research possesses several aspects of novelty that distinguish it from previous studies and provide significant contributions to Indonesian Islamic historiography. First, this research represents the first attempt to conduct a systematic comparative analysis of two models of female leadership within the context of 11th-15th century CE Islamic Gresik while considering long temporal dimensions. Second, this research develops a new theoretical framework on "hybrid leadership" of women in Islamic Nusantara, demonstrating that female authority is not singular but multidimensional and adaptive to different socio-political contexts, capable of transforming across generations. Third, this research critiques historiographical bias that has emphasized structural leadership (such as Nyai Ageng Pinatih) over spiritual leadership (such as Siti Fatimah) in shaping the collective memory of contemporary Gresik society. Fourth, this research contributes to the development of microhistorical methodology in gender and Indonesian Islamic studies by combining archaeological, epigraphic, and textual analysis to reconstruct the lives and leadership of both figures. Fifth, the research findings have contemporary relevance in understanding the dynamics of female leadership in Indonesian Muslim communities today, particularly in the context of ongoing negotiations between spiritual and structural authority in various Islamic organizations.

Therefore, this research will address two interrelated main questions that reflect the historical complexity of female leadership in Islamic Nusantara. First, regarding legitimacy and sources of authority: how do the differences between Siti Fatimah's spiritual-genealogical authority and Nyai Ageng Pinatih's structural-maternal authority function within Islamic Gresik society, and how do both models reflect the flexibility of Islamic social systems in accommodating female leadership? Second, concerning the scope of action and leadership strategies: how did both figures negotiate public space and develop different leadership strategies within the socio-political structures of Islamic Nusantara, and how did these strategies evolve alongside changing historical contexts? Through comparative analysis of these three dimensions, it is hoped that a more comprehensive understanding can be obtained regarding the

complexity and diversity of female leadership in Islamic Nusantara history that is relevant to contemporary academic discussions on gender, religion, and power.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative approach utilizing historical research methods that are descriptive-analytical and comparative in nature²⁰. This research design was selected due to its capacity to analyze past phenomena through systematic reconstruction based on remaining historical traces, as well as its ability to facilitate in-depth comparison between two different cases within the same context. The microhistorical approach developed by Carlo Ginzburg²¹ is employed to analyze the individual lives of both figures as reflections of broader social structures, while the historical comparison method formulated by Charles Tilly²² and Theda Skocpol²³ is applied to identify different leadership patterns that developed within similar socio-political contexts. The framework of gender analysis in history developed by Joan Wallach Scott²⁴ is integrated to understand how gender categories operate as meaning systems that shape power relations in Islamic Gresik society during this period.

The data for this research consists of primary and secondary sources obtained through library research and documentation. Primary sources include ancient inscriptions and tombstones found in the Gresik cemetery complex, particularly the tombstone of Fatimah binti Maimun, dated 475 H/1082 CE, as well as Javanese chronicles such as Babad Tanah Jawi, and Babad Gresik that contain information about Nyai Ageng Pinatih²⁵. Secondary sources encompass works by research that provide interpretive context regarding women's roles in Islamic Nusantara history.

Data collection was conducted through documentation techniques and field observation methods. Documentation techniques included archival research at the National Library, National Museum, and various digital repositories to access manuscripts and documents²⁶. Field

²⁰ Louis R. Gottschalk, "Understanding History, A Primer of Historical Method," *Nursing Research* 2, no. 1 (1953), <https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-195306000-00021>.

²¹ Ginzburg, *Clues, Myth. Hist. Method*.

²² William H. McNeill and Charles Tilly, "Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, no. 2 (1986), <https://doi.org/10.2307/204777>.

²³ Theda Skocpol, "Vision and Method in Historical Sociology," *Labour / Le Travail* 17 (1986), <https://doi.org/10.2307/25142663>.

²⁴ Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."

²⁵ Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*.

²⁶ I Proudfoot, "Early Malay Printed Books," *Reading*, 1993.

observation was conducted at the Ancient Gresik Cemetery complex to directly examine the condition of tombstones and inscriptions. In-depth interviews were also conducted with Islamic history experts, archaeologists, and Gresik community leaders to obtain local perspectives on collective memory relating to both researched figures.

Data analysis was conducted through several systematic stages. First, source criticism was performed to examine the authenticity and reliability of data, as well as internal and external criticism for textual sources. Second, a chronological reconstruction of both figures' lives was undertaken based on verified data, with attention to the social, political, and economic contexts of their times. Third, comparative analysis was applied to identify differences and similarities in the leadership models of both figures, utilizing the established theoretical framework. Fourth, historical interpretation was conducted considering various historiographical perspectives to produce a comprehensive and balanced narrative.

DISCUSSION

Legitimacy and Authority Sources: Comparing Siti Fatimah's Spiritual-Genealogical and Nyai Ageng Pinatih's Structural-Maternal Leadership

The legitimacy of Siti Fatimah binti Maimun's leadership (d. 1082 CE) represents a model of authority derived from a complex combination of religious genealogy, Islamic scholarship, and community recognition of spiritual sanctity. Siti Fatimah's leadership demonstrates hybridity that combines traditional and charismatic elements within the specific context of 11th-century Islamic Nusantara. Epigraphic analysis of her tombstone reveals the title "al-Alawiyah," indicating genealogical claims to the Ahlul Bait, a legitimation strategy commonly employed in Islamic tradition to establish spiritual authority²⁷. However, what is particularly intriguing is how this title is combined with local Javanese elements, such as the use of Old Javanese in certain parts of the inscription, demonstrating an indigenization process that does not eliminate claims to Islamic universality.

The construction of Siti Fatimah's spiritual authority is also reflected in the monumental architecture of her tomb complex, which adopts Fatimid elements with local modifications. The structure of the tomb's *cungkup* (canopy) with complex geometric ornamentation demonstrates the influence of Middle Eastern Islamic architectural traditions, particularly the Fatimid style

²⁷ Marshall GS Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, *The Classical Age of Islam*, Vol. 1, Chicago and London, 1974.

that developed in Egypt during the 10th-12th centuries. However, comparative architectural analysis reveals that the tomb's basic structure adopts Javanese cosmology with specific orientations following concepts of universal balance in the Hindu-Buddhist Javanese tradition. This architectural hybridity reflects a sophisticated legitimation strategy, whereby Siti Fatimah or her community built authority by claiming continuity with universal Islamic tradition while still accommodating local cosmological values deeply rooted in Javanese society.

The scholarly dimension in Siti Fatimah's authority legitimation can be traced through analysis of the intellectual context of 11th-century Gresik, which formed part of the international Islamic trade and intellectual network. Chaudhuri's research on Indian Ocean trade networks demonstrates that Gresik during this period had become an important node in the circulation of not only commodities but also religious ideas²⁸. The presence of Arab, Persian, and Gujarati merchant communities created a cosmopolitan context that enabled high-level Islamic knowledge transfer. Within this context, Siti Fatimah's authority most likely derived not only from genealogy but also from mastery of Islamic religious sciences, which at that time remained highly exclusive and constituted a privilege of limited groups. This aligns with Bulliet's²⁹ findings regarding the role of female scholars in hadith transmission and fiqh sciences during Islam's formative period, demonstrating that women's religious authority in early Islam was not always constrained by gender constructions that later underwent crystallization.

Community recognition of Siti Fatimah's spiritual status is reflected in the continuity of pilgrimage traditions that persist to this day, indicating legitimacy that is performative and continuously reproduced. The concept of performativity developed by Butler³⁰ in the context of gender can be applied to understand how spiritual authority is not only constructed during one's lifetime but also reproduced through repetitive ritual practices and narratives. The pilgrimage tradition to Siti Fatimah's tomb, with specific rituals such as recitation of prayers in Arabic and Javanese, demonstrates how spiritual authority is internalized and legitimized by the community. Pilgrimage practices to female saints' tombs possess specific characteristics different from pilgrimages to male saints' tombs, where female pilgrims often seek specific

²⁸ K. N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107049918>.

²⁹ Christian Decobert and Richard W. Bulliet, "Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period, an Essay in Quantitative History," *Studia Islamica*, no. 58 (1983), <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595346>.

³⁰ Judith Butler, "Selection From Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity," in *The Transgender Studies Reader Remix*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003206255-21>.

blessings related to fertility, family protection, and domestic wisdom, reflecting how women's spiritual authority is constructed about gender roles considered "natural."

In contrast to Siti Fatimah's spiritual-genealogical authority model, Nyai Ageng Pinatih's leadership (active 1458-1477 CE) represents authority derived from structural position within the port administration system and maternal role in Sunan Giri's religious genealogy. Nyai Ageng Pinatih's structural legitimacy as syahbandar demonstrates the Islamic administrative system's adaptation to female leadership within pragmatic economic-political contexts. The syahbandar position in the 15th-century Islamic Nusantara trade system constituted a key position controlling not only administrative aspects but also diplomatic functions in inter-kingdom and merchant community relations. The appointment of women to this position demonstrates the Islamic social system's flexibility in accommodating leadership based on competence and political connections rather than strictly on gender.

Analysis of Javanese chronicles reveals that Nyai Ageng Pinatih's structural authority was not limited to port administration but also encompassed diplomatic functions in trade negotiations and political relations between Gresik and other Javanese kingdoms. Florida³¹ in his analysis of 15th-16th century Javanese texts demonstrates that women in high administrative positions often functioned as mediators in political conflicts because they were considered more neutral and capable of building consensus. In Nyai Ageng Pinatih's context, the syahbandar position provided access to information networks and economic resources that enabled her to function as a political broker not only at the local but also regional level. This reflects what Andaya³² terms "strategic motherhood" in Southeast Asian politics, where women utilize maternal roles to build political alliances beneficial to their families and communities.

The maternal dimension in Nyai Ageng Pinatih's authority legitimation is revealed through her role as caregiver and educator of Sunan Giri, one of the most influential among the Wali Songo in Javanese Islamic history. This role provided access to religious authority that was indirect yet highly significant in the context of a society that valued spiritual genealogy. According to Ricklefs³³, the maternal relationship between Nyai Ageng Pinatih and Sunan Giri

³¹ Webb Keane and Nancy K. Florida, "Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java," *Anthropological Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (1997), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317804>.

³² Whitmore, "Southeast Asia The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia, By Barbara Watson Andaya, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. Pp. 335. Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index."

³³ Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries*.

created hybrid legitimacy between biological and spiritual authority, where the role as "mother of saints" conferred special status recognized by the broader community. This legitimization model aligns with women's roles in early Islam, particularly figures like Khadijah and Aisyah, who gained religious authority through familial relationships with the Prophet Muhammad but subsequently developed independent authority in Islamic teaching transmission.

Nyai Ageng Pinatih's structural-maternal authority is also reflected in her role as patron in developing Islamic educational institutions in Gresik. Javanese sources indicate that she not only provided financial support but was also actively involved in curriculum development and teacher recruitment for early pesantren in the Gresik region. Dhofier³⁴ in his study of pesantren tradition demonstrates that women's roles as patrons of Islamic education possess specific characteristics different from male patronage, where female patrons tend to focus more on practical and applicative aspects of religious education. In Nyai Ageng Pinatih's context, patronage of educational institutions created networks of influence extending beyond immediate family and community, enabling her to influence Javanese Islamic development through the formation of ulama generations loyal to her religious vision.

The comparison between Siti Fatimah's spiritual-genealogical authority model and Nyai Ageng Pinatih's structural-maternal authority reveals remarkable flexibility in the Islamic Nusantara social system for accommodating female leadership through various legitimization mechanisms. This flexibility did not occur by chance but resulted from complex interactions between Islamic values, pre-Islamic local traditions, and pragmatic needs of cosmopolitan trading societies. According to Reid³⁵, Southeast Asian societies during the early Islamic period possessed bilateral kinship system traditions that provided greater space for female leadership compared to patrilineal Arab or Persian societies. When Islam entered and interacted with local social systems, negotiation processes occurred that produced a synthesis between Islamic normative ideals and local communities' practical needs.

The different legitimization mechanisms between both figures reflect the social system's adaptability to temporal contexts and communities' specific needs. In the 11th century, when Islam was still in its early introduction phase in Java, legitimization through genealogy and spirituality (as developed by Siti Fatimah) became an effective strategy for building authority in societies still strongly influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions emphasizing spiritual

³⁴ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren (Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai)*, Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982.

³⁵ Reid, *Southeast Asia Age Commer. 1450-1680*.

hierarchy. Conversely, in the 15th century, when Islamic political systems were more established and integrated with economic networks, legitimation through structural positions and maternal roles (as developed by Nyai Ageng Pinatih) became more relevant and acceptable. This aligns with Peletz's³⁶ analysis of gender relations evolution in Malay society, demonstrating that constructions of women's authority underwent adaptations according to changes in socio-economic structures and political configurations.

The flexibility of the Islamic Nusantara social system is also evident in institutional accommodation mechanisms that enabled both leadership models to operate simultaneously in different spheres of influence. Siti Fatimah operated primarily in the spiritual and religious education spheres, while Nyai Ageng Pinatih operated in economic and political administration spheres. This sphere division was not rigid but allowed overlap and mutual reinforcement, creating what can be termed a "complementary authority system." This concept aligns with Blackburn's³⁷ findings regarding women's Islamic organizations in modern Indonesia, demonstrating that female leadership in Indonesian Islam tends to develop specialization in different domains while maintaining interconnectedness between domains.

The legitimation processes of both leadership models also demonstrate how the Islamic social system integrated multiple sources of authority to create robust foundations for female leadership. In Siti Fatimah's case, legitimacy derived not from a single source (genealogy) but from combinations of genealogy, scholarship, spirituality, and community recognition. Similarly, with Nyai Ageng Pinatih, authority stemmed not only from structural position but also from maternal role, economic competence, and religious patronage. This multidimensional legitimation model reflects a sophisticated understanding of how women's authority needs to be constructed in potentially hostile or skeptical contexts. This resonates with Abu-Lughod's³⁸ analysis of "weapons of the weak" in Muslim women's contexts, where strategic maneuvering and tactical adaptability become keys to building and maintaining authority within patriarchal structures.

Comparative analysis of these two female leadership legitimation models provides several important implications for the theoretical understanding of gender and power in Islam. First, these findings challenge binary oppositions between "religious" and "secular" authority, often employed in Islamic leadership analysis. Both Siti Fatimah and Nyai Ageng Pinatih

³⁶ Peletz, *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*.

³⁷ Blackburn, *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia*.

³⁸ ABU-LUGHOD, "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women."

demonstrate that authority in Islam operates within continuous spectrums rather than discrete categories. Siti Fatimah's spiritual authority possessed political and economic implications, while Nyai Ageng Pinatih's structural authority contained significant religious and spiritual dimensions. This aligns with Asad's³⁹ critique of Western secularism concepts applied to understanding Muslim societies, demonstrating that distinctions between religious and secular are often artificial and inapplicable in non-Western contexts.

Second, this research confirms and expands the theoretical framework of "agency within constraints" developed by Mahmood⁴⁰ in studies of women's mosque movements in Egypt. Both figures demonstrate how Muslim women create spaces of agency not by rejecting existing structures but through strategic engagement and creative appropriation of available resources and opportunities. Siti Fatimah utilized genealogical claims and spiritual charisma to build authority in religious spheres, while Nyai Ageng Pinatih leveraged administrative positions and maternal roles to build influence in political-economic spheres. Both strategies demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of how to work within systems while gradually expanding the boundaries of what is possible for women.

Third, these findings contribute to Indonesian Islamic historiography by providing empirical evidence for diversity and complexity in women's leadership models that have developed since the early Islamic periods. Previously, Indonesian historiography tended to generalize women's leadership in Islam or focus on exceptional cases without analyzing the underlying structures enabling the emergence and sustainability of such leadership. By analyzing two different models within the same geographical and cultural context, this research demonstrates that diversity in women's leadership is not an anomaly but an integral part of the Islamic social system in the Nusantara. This has important implications for contemporary debates regarding women's roles in Indonesian Islam, demonstrating that historical precedents for diverse forms of women's leadership have existed since Islam's formative period in Indonesia.

Women's Leadership Evolution in Islam Nusantara Socio-Political Contexts

The negotiation of public space conducted by Siti Fatimah binti Maimun and Nyai Ageng Pinatih within the context of Islamic socio-political structures in Nusantara demonstrates

³⁹ Bryan S. Turner and Talal Asad, "Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam," *Sociology of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1994), <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712068>.

⁴⁰ Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.

strategic complexity that transcends the simplistic dichotomy between domestic and public spheres frequently employed in conventional gender analysis. Both figures developed distinct yet equally sophisticated leadership strategies in exploiting structural gaps and cultural resources available within Islamic society during the formative period. The concept of "public space" in this context must be understood not as a single homogeneous space but as multiple overlapping spheres possessing different logics and operational rules, consistent with Fraser's⁴¹ concept of "counterpublics" for understanding how marginal groups create alternative spaces for political participation. Within the context of Islamic Nusantara during the 11th-15th centuries CE, public space comprised religious, economic, political, and cultural spheres, each presenting specific opportunities and constraints for women's leadership.

The public space negotiation strategy developed by Siti Fatimah demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how to utilize religious legitimacy as an entry point for broader social influence. Analysis of Gresik's social context in the 11th century reveals that religious authority remained relatively fluid and had not yet undergone the rigid institutionalization characteristic of subsequent periods. Within this context, Siti Fatimah exploited what may be termed a "liminal moment" in Islamic Nusantara history, where boundaries between different types of authority remained negotiable and adaptable. Hodgson's⁴² analysis of Islam's formative period demonstrates that during early Islamization phases, religious authority often derived from individual charisma and community recognition rather than formal institutional appointment. Siti Fatimah leveraged this condition by constructing religious authority through a combination of genealogical claims, scholarly reputation, and spiritual practices that resonated with both Islamic values and local Javanese sensibilities.

The spatial strategy developed by Siti Fatimah is also reflected in her choice of location for establishing religious influence. Eleventh-century Gresik constituted a cosmopolitan trading port attracting diverse communities from various backgrounds, creating a context relatively more open to religious innovation and non-conventional leadership. Chaudhuri⁴³ demonstrates that trading cities within Indian Ocean networks during this period often became spaces of cultural experimentation and religious syncretism, where traditional hierarchies and social norms underwent negotiation and adaptation. Siti Fatimah utilized Gresik's cosmopolitan

⁴¹ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Public Space Reader*, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351202558-6>.

⁴² Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, *The Classical Age of Islam*, Vol. 1.

⁴³ Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*.

character to build religious authority not strictly bound to traditional patriarchal structures that might have been more dominant in inland agricultural communities. The decision to establish a religious presence in a trading port also provided access to diverse networks, enabling religious knowledge transmission and reputation building beyond local community boundaries.

Unlike Siti Fatimah, who operated primarily within the religious sphere, Nyai Ageng Pinatih developed public space negotiation strategies involving more direct engagement with political and economic structures. Her position as syahbandar placed her strategically to influence not only local politics but also regional networks connecting Gresik with the broader Javanese political landscape. The syahbandar position in the 15th century was not merely an administrative role but also a diplomatic position requiring a sophisticated understanding of inter-kingdom relations and international trade networks. Nyai Ageng Pinatih utilized this position to build influence extending beyond immediate administrative responsibilities, creating what may be termed "institutional entrepreneurship" in expanding boundaries of women's political participation.

The maternal strategy developed by Nyai Ageng Pinatih in her relationship with Sunan Giri demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of how to leverage traditional gender roles for gaining access to spheres traditionally dominated by men. Her role as foster mother or educator to Sunan Giri provided access to religious networks and spiritual authority without directly challenging traditional notions of women's proper roles. Nyai Ageng Pinatih exploited cultural expectations regarding women's natural capacity for nurturing and education to gain legitimacy within the religious sphere, which could then be converted into broader social and political influence.

Comparative analysis of both strategies reveals that both figures developed what may be termed "multipositional strategies," enabling them to operate simultaneously within different spheres with different types of legitimacy. Siti Fatimah combined religious authority with scholarly reputation and community service, while Nyai Ageng Pinatih combined administrative competence with maternal authority and religious patronage. These multipositional strategies enabled greater resilience and adaptability in confronting challenges or resistance that might arise from different quarters. Collins⁴⁴ theory of the "matrix of domination" demonstrates that individuals facing multiple forms of marginalization often

⁴⁴ Rose M. Brewer and Patricia Hill Collins, "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.," *Contemporary Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1992), <https://doi.org/10.2307/2074808>.

develop sophisticated strategies for navigating complex power structures, clearly evident in the approaches developed by both figures.

The evolution of leadership strategies from Siti Fatimah to Nyai Ageng Pinatih also reflects changes in Islamic Nusantara's socio-political structure over the four centuries separating them. During Siti Fatimah's era, Islam remained in its early introduction phase in Java, allowing religious authority to be built through relatively direct appeals to Islamic principles and practices. During Nyai Ageng Pinatih's time, Islam had become a more established component of the Javanese political landscape, requiring religious authority to be integrated with existing political structures and economic networks. Ricklefs⁴⁵ demonstrates that the period between the 11th and 15th centuries constituted a crucial transition in Javanese Islamic history, characterized by gradual integration between Islamic institutions and traditional Javanese political systems. This transformation carried implications for women's leadership strategies, which needed to adapt to changing configurations of power and authority.

Changes in economic structures also influenced the evolution of women's leadership strategies. During Siti Fatimah's era, Gresik remained a relatively small trading port with limited economic complexity, enabling religious authority to provide a sufficient basis for broad social influence. During Nyai Ageng Pinatih's time, Gresik had developed into a major commercial center with complex networks connecting Java to broader Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean trading systems. Within this context, economic competence and access to commercial networks became increasingly important for maintaining social influence, making the syahbandar position a crucial platform for women's leadership. Hall⁴⁶ demonstrates that the expansion of commercial networks in Southeast Asia during the 14th-15th centuries created new opportunities for political participation while also presenting new challenges in the form of increased competition and more complex regulatory frameworks.

The networking strategies developed by both figures also demonstrate significant differences in approaches to building and maintaining influence. Siti Fatimah developed networks primarily based on religious connections and scholarly exchanges, leveraging her reputation as a learned woman and spiritual guide to attract followers from diverse backgrounds. These networks tended to be more informal and based on personal relationships, but possessed

⁴⁵ Ricklefs, *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*.

⁴⁶ Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia, Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9zckps>.

remarkable durability, as evidenced by the continuity of pilgrimage traditions to the present day. Nyai Ageng Pinatih developed more formally structured networks through administrative positions and economic partnerships, creating institutional connections capable of surviving beyond personal relationships. Both approaches reflect different understandings of how to create sustainable influence within different historical contexts.

The challenges faced by both figures in negotiating public space also differed according to the temporal context and structural constraints they encountered. Siti Fatimah faced challenges in the form of skepticism toward women's religious authority within a context still heavily influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions, with a strong emphasis on male spiritual leadership. To address this, she developed strategies emphasizing compatibility between Islamic teachings and local spiritual traditions, creating a synthesis acceptable to the broader community. Nyai Ageng Pinatih faced challenges in the form of increasing political competition and more complex diplomatic requirements traditionally handled by male leaders. She addressed these by developing expertise in international trade regulations and inter-kingdom diplomacy, demonstrating competence that could not be ignored by political rivals.

Community responses to both leadership models also demonstrate evolution in social attitudes toward women's public roles. Siti Fatimah received recognition primarily expressed in religious terms, with the community acknowledging her as a spiritual guide and source of religious knowledge. This recognition tended to be more personal and informal but possessed significant depth, as evidenced by veneration continuing to the present day. Nyai Ageng Pinatih received more formal institutional recognition, with official appointment as syahbandar and acknowledgment from royal courts as a competent administrator. This recognition was more visible in official records and chronicles, but possibly less personal.

The succession strategies developed by both figures also differed in approaches to ensuring influence continuity beyond their lifetimes. Siti Fatimah relied on creating religious tradition and spiritual legacy inheritable by future generations through informal networks and religious practices. This strategy succeeded in creating a long-term impact but was less effective in ensuring direct institutional continuity. Nyai Ageng Pinatih developed strategies more focused on training successors and establishing institutional frameworks capable of surviving leadership transitions. Through her role in educating Sunan Giri and establishing educational institutions, she created mechanisms for ensuring her influence could be transmitted through more formal channels.

Analysis of documentation and memorialization of both figures reveals different patterns in how their achievements were recorded and remembered by subsequent generations. Siti Fatimah was primarily memorialized through architectural monuments and oral traditions emphasizing spiritual aspects of her leadership, creating a legacy more resistant to political changes but possibly less visible in formal historical records. Nyai Ageng Pinatih was more extensively documented in official chronicles and administrative records, creating a legacy more visible in formal historiography but potentially more vulnerable to political reinterpretations. Both memorialization patterns reflect different strategies for ensuring historical survival and continuing influence within contexts potentially hostile or neglectful toward women's contributions.

The contemporary relevance of strategies developed by both figures is evident in how modern Indonesian women's organizations adapt similar approaches in navigating complex political and social landscapes. Religious organizations such as Aisyiyah and Muslimat NU employ strategies similar to Siti Fatimah's in leveraging religious authority for broader social influence, while women's professional organizations use approaches similar to Nyai Ageng Pinatih's in utilizing institutional positions for political participation. This demonstrates continuity in strategic thinking regarding women's leadership in Indonesian Islam, despite adaptations appropriate to contemporary contexts and challenges. Both historical models provide valuable templates for understanding how Indonesian Muslim women can develop effective leadership strategies operating within Islamic frameworks while achieving meaningful social and political influence.

CONCLUSION

Comparative analysis of legitimacy and sources of authority between Siti Fatimah binti Maimun and Nyai Ageng Pinatih reveals remarkable flexibility within the Islamic Nusantara social system to accommodate women's leadership through diverse and adaptive legitimation mechanisms. Siti Fatimah constructed spiritual-genealogical authority through a complex combination of Ahlul Bait genealogical claims, mastery of Islamic scholarship, and community recognition of spiritual sanctity manifested in the monumental architecture of her tomb and the continuity of pilgrimage traditions. Conversely, Nyai Ageng Pinatih developed structural-maternal authority derived from her administrative position as syahbandar, her role as foster mother to Sunan Giri, and her function as patron of Islamic educational institutions. These two

legitimation models are not dichotomous but exist within an interconnected spectrum, reflecting the adaptability of the Islamic social system to temporal contexts and the pragmatic needs of cosmopolitan trading societies, while demonstrating that women's authority in Islamic Nusantara was constructed through multidimensional strategies combining multiple sources of authority to create robust foundations for leadership.

The negotiation of public space and the evolution of leadership strategies developed by both figures demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of how to exploit structural gaps and cultural resources within Islamic society during the formative period to build and maintain sustainable influence. Siti Fatimah exploited a "liminal moment" in Islamic Nusantara history when boundaries between different types of authority remained negotiable, constructing religious authority through a combination of genealogical claims, scholarly reputation, and spiritual practices within the context of a cosmopolitan trading port relatively open to religious innovation. Nyai Ageng Pinatih developed "multipositional strategies" enabling her to operate simultaneously within different spheres through institutional entrepreneurship as syahbandar, strategic motherhood in her relationship with Sunan Giri, and religious patronage in developing educational institutions. The evolution from primarily religious strategies (Siti Fatimah) to strategies more integrated with political-economic structures (Nyai Ageng Pinatih) reflects changes in the socio-political structure of Islamic Nusantara over four centuries, where religious authority needed to adapt to changing configurations of power and increasing complexity of commercial networks, yet both approaches equally demonstrate women's capacity to create spaces of agency through strategic engagement and creative appropriation of available opportunities.

Disparities in collective memory and historical representation between both figures to the present day reveal the complexity of selection and preservation mechanisms in Indonesian Islamic historiography, reflecting systematic gender bias and particular epistemological preferences. Siti Fatimah is remembered through "lieux de mémoire" in the form of localized pilgrimage practices and oral traditions, yet this knowledge is not effectively translated into formal historical discourse, reflecting the marginalization of women's spiritual authority in formal religious discourse that tends to categorize female spiritual figures as part of "popular Islam." Conversely, Nyai Ageng Pinatih experiences more prominent visibility in official historical discourse due to her connection with Sunan Giri and role in political administration, yet this representation undergoes "domestication of female achievement," where her

contributions are interpreted primarily in terms of maternal roles rather than acknowledgment of independent administrative competence and political influence. These disparities have significant implications for contemporary understanding of women's authority construction in Indonesian Islamic tradition, as unequal representation demonstrates that certain forms of female authority are more easily recognized than others, potentially limiting imagination about available models of leadership and requiring development of more inclusive historiographical approaches that can accommodate multiple forms of authority and different types of evidence to create more comprehensive foundations for contemporary discussions about women's empowerment within Indonesian Islamic contexts.

REFERENCES

- ABU-LUGHOD, LILA. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women." *American Ethnologist* 17, no. 1 (1990). <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1990.17.1.02a00030>.
- Azra, Azyumardi. *Historiografi Islam Kontemporer: Wacana, Aktualitas Dan Aktor Sejarah*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2013.
- Blackburn, Susan. *Women and the State in Modern Indonesia. Women and the State in Modern Indonesia*, 2004. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492198>.
- Brewer, Rose M., and Patricia Hill Collins. "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment." *Contemporary Sociology* 21, no. 1 (1992). <https://doi.org/10.2307/2074808>.
- Butler, Judith. "Selection From Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity." In *The Transgender Studies Reader Remix*, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003206255-21>.
- Chaudhuri, K. N. *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750. Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107049918>.
- Decobert, Christian, and Richard W. Bulliet. "Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period, an Essay in Quantitative History." *Studia Islamica*, no. 58 (1983). <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595346>.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." In *Public Space Reader*, 2021.

- <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351202558-6>.
- Ginzburg, Carlo. *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method. Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.56021/9780801834585>.
- Gottschalk, Louis R. "Understanding History, A Primer of Historical Method." *Nursing Research* 2, no. 1 (1953). <https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-195306000-00021>.
- Graaf, H.J. de, and G. Th. Pigeaud. "Chinese Muslims in Java in the 15th and 16th Centuries: The Malay Annals of Semarang and Cerbon." *Monash Papers on Southeast Asia*, no. 12 (1984).
- Hall, Kenneth R. *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia. Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9zckps>.
- Hodgson, Marshall GS. *The Venture of Islam, Conscience and History in a World Civilization , The Classical Age of Islam, Vol. 1. Chicago and London*, 1974.
- Keane, Webb, and Nancy K. Florida. "Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java." *Anthropological Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (1997). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3317804>.
- Lombard, Denys. "Nusa Jawa: Silang Budaya." *Sejarah*, 2005.
- Mahmood, Saba. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject. Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2006.108.3.603>.
- McNeill, William H., and Charles Tilly. "Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17, no. 2 (1986). <https://doi.org/10.2307/204777>.
- Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" In *Feminism, The Public And The Private*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198752035.003.0002>.
- Peletz, Michael G. *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society. Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2761066>.
- Proudfoot, I. "Early Malay Printed Books." *Reading*, 1993.
- Ptak, Roderich. "Die Maritime Seidenstraße." In *China Und Asiens Maritime Achse Im Mittelalter*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110626353-003>.
- Ramusack, Barbara N., and Sharon L. Sievers. "Women in Asia: Restoring Women to History," 1999.

- Reid, Anthony. *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680. Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680*, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300159455>.
- Ricklefs, M. C. *Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present. Islamisation and Its Opponents in Java: A Political, Social, Cultural and Religious History, c. 1930 to the Present*, 2012.
- . *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to the Early Nineteenth Centuries. EastBridge, a Nonprofit Corporation. Vol. 1*, 2006.
- Rosaldo, Michele Z. “Woman, Culture and Society: A Theoretical Overview.” *Woman, Culture and Society*, 1974.
- Scott, Joan W. “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.” In *Theory and Method in Women’s History*, 2012. <https://doi.org/10.7312/scot91266-004>.
- Sears, Laurie J., and Benedict Anderson. “Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114, no. 1 (1994). <https://doi.org/10.2307/604991>.
- Skocpol, Theda. “Vision and Method in Historical Sociology.” *Labour / Le Travail* 17 (1986). <https://doi.org/10.2307/25142663>.
- Turner, Bryan S., and Talal Asad. “Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.” *Sociology of Religion* 55, no. 3 (1994). <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712068>.
- Whitmore, John K. “Southeast Asia The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia, By Barbara Watson Andaya, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006. Pp. 335. Maps, Notes, Bibliography, Index.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2007). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s002246340700029x>.
- Woodward, Mark. *Java, Indonesia and Islam. Java, Indonesia and Islam*, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0056-7>.
- Zamakhshari Dhofier. *Tradisi Pesantren (Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai). Jakarta: LP3ES*, 1982.