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Distribution of Women's Ideology in Indonesian Islamic Novels: A Study Based on Erik Olin Wright's Class Theory

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the distribution of women's ideologies in Indonesian Islamic novels through four dimensions of Erik Olin Wright's class theory—class structure, class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle—strengthened by the perspectives of agency, intersectionality, and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital. The method employed is a qualitative approach with a content analysis design. The research data consist of narrative excerpts, dialogues, and events that represent class positions, forms of capital, and negotiation strategies of female characters. The data sources are four commercially published novels: *Hati Suhita*, *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, and *Dalam Mihrab Cinta*. The findings show that stratification is primarily shaped by religious-cultural capital and symbolic capital, placing women in contradictory class locations: they gain recognition of social status but are constrained in authority and decision-making. Class formation shifts through experiences of life in Islamic boarding schools, marriage, education, and diasporic contexts. Class consciousness develops from acceptance toward a critical reading of gendered religious authority, while class struggle appears in the form of negotiation, identity affirmation, education/writing, and cross-positional solidarity. In conclusion, Wright's framework is effective for comparatively mapping the dynamics of women's class positions and is relevant as a pedagogical tool in literature learning to foster critical literacy and gender awareness.

Keywords: Boarding school culture; class analysis; Indonesian Islamic novels; intersectionality; women's ideology.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis distribusi ideologi perempuan dalam novel Islam Indonesia melalui empat dimensi teori kelas Erik Olin Wright, yaitu struktur kelas, formasi kelas, kesadaran kelas, dan perjuangan kelas dengan penguatan perspektif agensi, interseksionalitas, dan konsep modal kultural Bourdieu. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain analisis isi. Data penelitian berupa kutipan narasi, dialog, dan peristiwa yang merepresentasikan posisi kelas, bentuk-bentuk modal, serta strategi negosiasi tokoh perempuan. Sumber data berasal dari empat novel yang diterbitkan secara komersial, yaitu *Hati Suhita*, *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, dan *Dalam*

Mihrab Cinta. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa stratifikasi terutama dibentuk oleh modal kultural-keagamaan dan modal simbolik, sehingga perempuan kerap berada pada lokasi kelas yang kontradiktif dengan memperoleh pengakuan status sosial tetapi dibatasi dalam otoritas dan pengambilan keputusan. Formasi kelas bergeser melalui pengalaman pesantren, perkawinan, pendidikan, serta konteks diaspora; kesadaran kelas berkembang dari penerimaan menuju pembacaan kritis atas otoritas keagamaan yang bergender; sedangkan perjuangan kelas tampak sebagai negosiasi, afirmasi identitas, pendidikan/penulisan, dan solidaritas lintas posisi. Simpulannya, kerangka Wright efektif untuk pemetaan komparatif dinamika kelas perempuan dan relevan sebagai perangkat pedagogis pembelajaran sastra guna menumbuhkan literasi kritis serta kesadaran gender.

Kata Kunci: Analisis kelas; budaya pesantren; ideologi perempuan; interseksionalitas; novel Islam Indonesia.

Introduction

Women's subordination to men is often described as one of the oldest and most persistent forms of discrimination in human history (Banarjee, 2020). Although global trends point to growing women's empowerment, gender inequality remains evident across many societies (Desai et al., 2022; Filho et al., 2022). In Muslim-majority contexts, Western stereotypes have frequently portrayed gender relations as uniformly traditional and patriarchal. However, this impression can reflect a somewhat one-dimensional reading of gender ideology (Kamal, 2025). Empirical work suggests a more varied picture: religiosity may operate in multifaceted and gendered ways, so its relationship with equality is not necessarily straightforward (Glas, 2025; Klinger & Spiering, 2020).

This complexity is also visible in cultural spaces such as *pesantren* and Muslim families in Indonesia. Here, patriarchal norms may constrain women's opportunities, but they can also be negotiated through particular strategies and "room for maneuver" (L. Cardozo & Srimulyani, 2023; Fatmawati et al., 2024). Contemporary Indonesian Islamic novels provide a productive arena for examining

these intersections of gender, class, and religion. In particular, women writers with *pesantren* backgrounds have been noted for offering alternative narratives that can complicate, and at times challenge, dominant patriarchal religious interpretations (Cardozo et al., 2022).

Although studies of Indonesian Islamic novels especially *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Hati Suhita* are relatively abundant, existing scholarship tends to show certain theoretical and analytical limitations. Several studies read these texts through perspectives such as liberal or radical feminism, domestic violence, or women's resistance in Islamic boarding school settings (Mukminin & Ghofur, 2025; Rofiah et al., 2025). Comparative research, meanwhile, has also discussed women's oppression as an effect of patriarchal interpretations of religious texts (Islam et al., 2024; Metin, 2024).

For *Hati Suhita*, postmodern feminist approaches have further developed a deconstructive analysis of femininity (Zaidi & Sahibzada, 2020). Despite these contributions, three key gaps can be identified. First, Erik Olin Wright's class framework is not widely applied in a

specific and comprehensive way to examine class structures and dynamics in Islamic novels. Second, women's agency is often framed through a dichotomy of subordination versus resistance, even though agency may also involve inhabiting norms and does not always take the form of overt opposition (Balint, 2024; Raghavan, 2024). Third, the integration of intersectionality (Crenshaw) and Bourdieu's cultural capital to explain Islamic boarding school hierarchies particularly those shaped by religious scholarly authority and symbolic or lineage-based capital remains underdeveloped in much of this scholarship (Giardiello & Capobianco, 2021; Young et al., 2025).

To address these gaps, this study proposes an integrated reading that combines class analysis, agency, and intersectionality in a mutually reinforcing framework. First, it applies Erik Olin Wright's framework in full, class structure, class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle, so that representations of inequality and social mobility in Islamic novels can be analyzed more systematically, rather than stopping at identifying oppression alone. Second, Saba Mahmood's perspective is incorporated to capture the range of Muslim women's agency that is not always resistance, but also includes strategies for living within and negotiating normative constraints (Kandiyoti, 2014). Third, intersectionality is used to map how gender, class, and religion operate simultaneously in shaping women characters' experiences (Bilge, 2010). Fourth, Wright's class analysis is combined with Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, because in *pesantren*

contexts social stratification depends not only on economic resources but also on religious knowledge authority, symbolic recognition, and proximity to a kiai's lineage. In design terms, this is a comparative study examining *Hati Suhita, Perempuan Berkalung Sorban, Assalamualaikum Beijing*, and *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* to capture both patterns and variations in representations of women's class positions across different *pesantren*-related settings.

This study also aligns with four previous studies in viewing texts whether novels or other readings as sites for producing meaning and ideology that are always intertwined with social structures, power relations, and institutional contexts. Within this broad orientation, Anugrah (2025) provides an important foundation for how class categories, capital, and differentiated social positions can be used to interpret ideological tendencies; meanwhile, Nurhadi et al. (2025) demonstrate that texts can be systematically mapped to trace how meaning is constructed through structure and internal coherence. In literary studies, Ferdinal et al. (2024) show that fictional narratives can be read as media of ideological representation operating through institutions and shaping subjects. Pianzola et al. (2020), in turn, emphasize that literature does not stand alone but exists within a social ecology that influences readers' meaning-making orientations, even though their focus and level of analysis differ from this study.

This focus is distinct from studies that examine cognitive labor and the neoliberalization of the research sector (Anugrah, 2025) or linguistic coherence for language learning purposes (Nurhadi et al.,

2025). It also differs from work that critiques capitalism and mental-health human rights issues through an Althusserian lens in an Irish context (Ferdinal et al., 2024), as well as research on large-scale reader behavior and comments on digital literary platforms (Pianzola et al., 2020).

Accordingly, the novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive use of Erik Olin Wright's class theory across four dimensions—class structure, class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle—to examine how women's ideology is distributed in Indonesian Islamic novels. This analysis is further strengthened by perspectives on agency, intersectionality, and cultural capital, which help explain forms of power distinctive to Islamic boarding school spaces, Muslim families, and diaspora contexts. In this way, the study does not merely inventory themes about women, but maps the class-institutional mechanisms that normalize and shift women's ideology within narrative worlds.

Within this framework, the study aims to: (1) analyze how class structures are formed in the four novels, especially through the operation of religious cultural capital and symbolic capital; (2) explore processes of women's class formation through *pesantren* institutions, marriage, and education; (3) trace the development of women characters' class consciousness from early acceptance toward the emergence of critical awareness without reducing agency to a simple obedience/resistance opposition; and (4) identify the forms of class struggle enacted by women in accordance with each novel's socio-religious context.

In terms of contribution, this research enriches the teaching of literature and gender studies in higher education by offering a more interdisciplinary analytical model: students learn not only to read texts as “stories,” but also as maps of power relations that concretely connect class, religion, and gender. The findings can be used as teaching materials to strengthen critical thinking skills, for instance through theory-based discussions (Wright–Mahmood–intersectionality–cultural capital), comparative readings across texts, and reflection on how religious-educational institutions shape identity and social opportunities. In short, this study not only expands the horizon of research on Indonesian Islamic literature, but also provides a pedagogical toolkit for understanding the diversity of Muslim women's agency within complex social structures.

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a qualitative content analysis design, situated within a feminist literary criticism perspective. This design is chosen because qualitative research enables an in-depth exploration of the meanings that social actors construct around human and social issues (Cresswell, 2009), including how literary texts produce, negotiate, or disrupt gender-based power relations. Within feminist research traditions, method is not treated merely as a technical procedure but as a standpoint that shapes every stage of the research process, from formulating questions to interpreting findings (Biber, 2012).

Substantively, the study examines representations of gender, class, and

religion in Indonesian Islamic novels by integrating four theoretical lenses: (1) Erik Olin Wright’s class analysis, which covers class structure, class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle (Wright, 1985); (2) the concept of Islamic feminist agency as inhabiting norms, which moves beyond the simple opposition between subordination and resistance (Mahmood, 2019); (3) intersectionality as a framework for reading the simultaneous interaction of gender, class, and religion (Crenshaw, 1997); and (4) Bourdieu’s notion of cultural

capital to explain how religious knowledge and lineage-based status operate as symbolic resources within Islamic boarding school hierarchies (Bourdieu, 1986).

Table 1 presents the theoretical lenses employed in this study. The key concepts examined in the texts are Wright’s four dimensions (structure, formation, consciousness, and struggle), read through an intersectional lens and further deepened by the concepts of agency and cultural capital.

Table 1 Theoretical Lenses Used in This Study

Wright (1985)	Mahmood (2005)	Crenshaw (1997)	Bourdieu (1986)
Class Analysis Structure, formation, consciousness, class struggle	Islamic Feminist Agency Inhabiting norms, beyond dichotomies	Intersectionality The interaction of gender, class, and religion	Cultural Capital Religious knowledge & hereditary status

The subject of this study is the text itself, represented by four contemporary Indonesian Islamic literary works: *Hati Suhita* (Anis, 2019), *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (Khalieqy, 2001), *Assalamualaikum Beijing* (Nadia, 2014), and *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (Shirazy, 2020). The texts were selected through purposive sampling (based on theoretical considerations and relevance), using the following criteria: (1) they represent Islamic/*pesantren* settings or Muslim family values; (2) they portray gender relations linked to social structures and hierarchies; (3) they enable class-based readings through the operation of different forms of capital (economic, religious cultural, and symbolic) as well as the dynamics of agency; and (4) they offer varied contexts suitable for a comparative design, allowing patterns and variations of representation to be examined across texts.

The primary instrument in this study is the researcher as a human instrument, working through close reading procedures and a note-taking/coding sheet to collect and organize textual data. As emphasized in feminist methodological traditions, content analysis is used to examine cultural artifacts and documents in order to reveal patterns of gender ideology, representation, and power relations (Reunharz, 1992).

Operationally, the coding instrument was developed around Wright’s four analytical foci: (1) class structure, (2) class formation, (3) class consciousness, and (4) class struggle, with additional markers for intersectional dimensions (gender–class–religion), agency (inhabiting norms), and cultural capital (religious knowledge, lineage-based status, and symbolic authority).

In the data reduction stage, relevant excerpts were selected and mapped into the core categories (class structure, class formation, class consciousness, and class struggle), and then coded with additional tags for intersectionality (gender–class–religion), agency, and cultural capital. In the data display stage, the data were organized into narrative descriptions and thematic tables to highlight patterns and comparisons across the novels.

Interpretation was carried out by applying Wright’s framework as the main analytical lens, and then enriching the reading with the perspectives of Mahmood, Crenshaw, and Bourdieu to capture the nuances of agency and the workings of capital within *pesantren* contexts. Finally, conclusions were drawn by formulating cross-text findings (shared patterns and key variations) and outlining their implications for class-based readings of women in Indonesian Islamic literature.

In line with feminist research standards, the analysis also incorporated reflexivity by clarifying the researcher’s positionality as a feminist literary scholar seeking to understand the complexity of Indonesian Muslim women’s representations without imposing reductive normative judgments (Shinozaki, 2021; Whitson, 2017). In this way, the analysis does not simply ask whether a character resists or submits, but examines how the texts may reinforce or challenge women’s economic, political, social, and psychological oppression (Tyson, 2006)

Result and Discussion

The novel further emphasizes how marital intimacy becomes another site

This section presents the research data in the form of excerpts from the four novels examined in this study. The data are organized systematically around four analytical foci: class structure, women’s class formation, the development of class consciousness, and women’s class struggle.

Class Structure in Contemporary Islamic Novels

Across the four novels, class structure reflects complex social relations that are not determined solely by economic factors, but also by religious cultural capital and symbolic capital. In Islamic boarding school settings, class hierarchies are shaped by lineage, religious knowledge, and the social status attached to positions such as *kiai*, *nyai*, or *santri*. The findings from each novel are presented below.

Hati Suhita portrays class structure through the position of Alina Suhita as the daughter-in-law of a *kiai*’s family. Her contradictory position is evident: she is socially recognized as part of a respected *pesantren* family through marriage, yet her authority and agency within that marriage are limited. This finding is illustrated in Excerpt 1:

“*Alina Suhita, known by everyone as Kiai Hannan’s prospective daughter-in-law...*” (p. 39)

Despite her high social status in the eyes of the community, Suhita experiences rejection from her own husband. This experience is illustrated in Excerpt 2:

“*...Mas Birru tortured me with his silence. With his hateful stare and rejection.*” (p. 29)

where Suhita's social recognition does not translate into power. This condition is shown in Excerpt 3:

"But in this room, nothing happened. A full moon or a crescent made no difference—it did not move his eyes to look at me, nor guide his hands to touch my body." (p. 10)

These excerpts show how women from *pesantren* circles can occupy an ambiguous position—granted social prestige, yet deprived of power. The novel also highlights arranged marriage as a *pesantren* family tradition, maintained through inter-family marital arrangements. This tradition is reflected in Excerpt 4:

"Actually, arranged marriages among pesantren families are common... But other women are clearly luckier than me..." (p. 69)

Perempuan Berkalung Sorban depicts Annisa as experiencing unequal treatment compared to her brothers within a *pesantren* family, through a gendered division of roles. This inequality is illustrated in Excerpt 5:

"That's right, Mbak... Rizal and Wildan can go back to sleep, while Nisa has to help Mother..." (p. 20)

The *pesantren* family places women in a subordinate position, and this becomes even more rigid in the context of marriage. Annisa experiences domestic violence as a consequence of inequality within the household. This male-centered decision-making is shown in Excerpt 6:

"All decisions are in his hands. I only carry them out." (p. 183)

This domestic violence is evidenced in Excerpt 7:

"He hit me because I argued with him..." (p. 55)

Restrictions on women's mobility also function as markers of a rigid class structure. Women are constructed as belonging to the domestic sphere, while men are granted freedom in public spaces. This restriction is reflected in Excerpt 8:

"I wanted to work, but he said a woman's place is at home." (p. 110)

Unlike the first two novels, which are set in *pesantren* environments, *Assalamualaikum Beijing* presents class structure in a diaspora context. Asma experiences marginalization as a Muslim minority in a workplace shaped by a predominantly Chinese cultural environment. Her religious identity becomes a marker that distinguishes her from the majority social structure. This marginalization is illustrated in Excerpt 9:

"Her coworkers often stared in surprise when she refused non-halal food." (p. 40)

Although she faces prejudice at first, Asma is able to navigate her position within a professional class structure. This process of acceptance suggests that class structure is not always fixed, but can be negotiated through competence and professionalism. This gradual acceptance is shown in Excerpt 10:

"Asma gradually began to be accepted in her workplace, even though it was full of prejudice at first." (p. 83)

A Muslim community also provides an alternative space where Asma finds solidarity. The Niujie Mosque functions as a meeting point that affirms collective

identity among Chinese Muslims. This solidarity is expressed in Excerpt 11:

“Praying at the Niujie Mosque made her feel that she was no longer alone.” (p. 65)

Dalam Mihrab Cinta depicts a *pesantren* class structure that operates through exclusion. Syamsul is expelled from the *pesantren* due to a false accusation made by Burhan. The metaphor of a “termite” used by the *pesantren* authorities reveals how the class structure protects its perceived purity by removing elements considered threatening. This exclusionary logic is illustrated in Excerpt 12:

“We remember the advice of our elders: if there is a single termite on a ship, it must be thrown out immediately. Otherwise, the termites will multiply, gnaw at the ship, and sink it, destroying all the passengers.”

That is what we are doing now. The termite must be thrown out...” (p. 77)

Although Syamsul tries to defend himself by swearing in the name of God, the *pesantren* structure continues to side with those who hold stronger positions. This shows how “truth” can be defeated by unequal power relations. This unequal power relation is shown in Excerpt 13:

“By Allah who created the heavens and the earth, Pak Kiai, I did not steal. Burhan asked me to take his money to buy clothes and to treat me. Let all of Allah’s curse fall upon me if I am lying!” (p. 75)

To summarize how class structure operates across the four novels, Table 2 maps the dominant and subordinate groups in each story and highlights women’s contradictory class position in each setting.

Tale 2 Class Structure in Four Contemporary Islamic Novels

Novel	Dominant Class	Subordinate Class	Women’s Contradictory Position
<i>Hati Suhita</i>	Kiai Hannan’s family; <i>pesantren</i> men	Santri; women within a patriarchal system	A kiai’s daughter-in-law with access to cultural capital, yet subordinated in her role as a wife
<i>Perempuan Berkalung Sorban</i>	Father (kiai); male siblings; husband	<i>Pesantren</i> women; daughters	A kiai’s daughter with access to education, yet constrained by patriarchal norms
<i>Assalamualaikum Beijing</i>	Established professionals; the majority society	Muslim minorities in a foreign environment	A professional with strong cultural capital, yet marginalized as a Muslim in the diaspora
<i>Dalam Mihrab Cinta</i>	<i>Pesantren</i> authorities; the kiai’s family	Marginalized santri; the falsely accused	Female figures (Nadia, Silvie) as mediators between the structure and agents of change

Women’s Class Formation in the Novels

Class formation refers to the process through which an organized collectivity is formed around shared class interests. In the four novels, women’s class formation is shaped through three main

institutions: the *pesantren* as a traditional educational institution, marriage as a social institution, and education as a pathway for mobility. The excerpts below illustrate how women’s class formation is constructed and reproduced.

In *Hati Suhita*, women's class formation develops through arranged marriage, a common tradition in *pesantren* families. This practice functions to maintain alliances between kiai families while also reproducing an established class structure. Suhita recognizes that this tradition does not always benefit women. This recognition is illustrated in Excerpt 14:

"Actually, arranged marriages among pesantren families are common... But other women are clearly luckier than me..." (p. 69)

At the same time, the novel shows that women play a significant role in sustaining and advancing the *pesantren*, even when their contribution is not formally acknowledged. Suhita's mother-in-law (*ummik*) is portrayed as the driving force behind the *pesantren*'s progress. This contribution is shown in Excerpt 15:

"My ummik is an extraordinary woman... our pesantren has grown rapidly not because of Abah, but because of ummik's capable hands." (p. 128)

In addition, class formation is reinforced through domestic expectations placed on women, including pressures related to reproduction. This reproductive expectation is reflected in Excerpt 16:

"...then she gave me devotional practices and recitations so that I would get pregnant soon." (p. 62)

Women's class formation is also reproduced through the normalization of gendered domestic competencies. This domestic expectation is shown in Excerpt 17:

"...I tried hard to learn how to cook this family's signature dishes..." (p. 66)

In this novel, women's class formation takes shape through the transmission of patriarchal values from mother to daughter. The messages Annisa receives from her mother help form a class habitus that positions women as subordinate. This patriarchal socialization is captured in Excerpt 18:

"Mother said that a woman must be obedient..." (p. 96)

Restricted educational aspirations also become part of women's internalized class formation. This restriction is illustrated in Excerpt 19:

"Mother said not to study too high—men will be afraid to come close." (p. 118)

These excerpts show how women's class formation is constructed early on through restricted access to education and the internalization of obedience. This formation is sustained through social norms that regulate women's behavior in everyday life and within marriage. This norm is reflected in Excerpt 20:

"Mother said women must be patient, even when the husband is harsh." (p. 187)

In *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, women's class formation is shaped through the transmission of religious values within the family. Unlike the first two novels, the values Asma receives from her mother are not primarily restrictive; instead, they provide moral grounding for facing challenges abroad. This moral grounding is illustrated in Excerpt 21:

"She remembered her mother's message: don't forget to pray, wherever you are." (p. 33)

Religious values also operate as protective guidance for navigating vulnerability in diaspora. This guidance is shown in Excerpt 22:

“Her mother’s words kept echoing: don’t forget to protect yourself, your faith, and your dignity.” (p. 86)

Asma’s experiences in Beijing also shape a new form of class formation, as she constructs her identity not only as a Muslim woman but also as an independent professional. This identity reconstruction is expressed in Excerpt 23:

“Asma wrote: Beijing is not just a workplace, but the place where I found myself again.” (p. 99)

In this novel, women’s class formation appears through the roles of Nadia and Silvie as agents of change. Nadia expresses solidarity with Syamsul after he is falsely accused, while Silvie develops feelings of love that reach beyond class boundaries. Nadia’s stance reflects a form of class formation grounded in humanitarian values and justice. This solidarity is illustrated in Excerpt 24:

“Enough, brother. Don’t talk about it anymore. What matters is that you recover first. Nadia will take care of you. Don’t lose heart—if Allah is with you, then don’t be afraid even if everyone turns against you.” (p. 79)

Silvie also illustrates how class formation can be negotiated through affective ties and moral aspiration. This negotiation is reflected in Excerpt 25:

“Silvie gasped when she heard it. Her heart blossomed. She said amen to her father’s prayer. In her heart, she hoped that in this sacred month of

Ramadan she would find her true love.” (p. 122)

The Development of Women’s Class Consciousness

Class consciousness refers to a person’s conscious understanding of the social mechanisms that shape their objective capacity within a societal structure. Across the four novels, the development of women’s class consciousness can be traced as a transformation from *false consciousness*—the internalization of dominant values as unquestioned truth—toward critical consciousness that can deconstruct power relations. The data below illustrate the stages of this development.

Suhita’s class consciousness develops gradually. At first, she accepts her position as a subordinated wife. Over time, however, she begins to recognize women’s contributions that have long remained invisible. This emerging awareness is illustrated in Excerpt 26:

“My ummik is an extraordinary woman... our pesantren has grown rapidly not because of Abah, but because of ummik’s capable hands.” (p. 128)

This awareness is also reflected in her understanding that power does not always appear in visible, overt forms. This idea is captured in Excerpt 27:

“...She blooms. She grows straight... but does not sink... calm in her beauty.” (p. 43)

Perempuan Berkalung Sorban offers the most explicit portrayal of class-consciousness transformation. Annisa undergoes a long journey from internalizing patriarchal norms to

distinguishing between authentic religious teachings and distorted interpretations. This critical distinction is articulated in Excerpt 28:

“Religion is not wrong. What is wrong is how we understand it.” (p. 75)

Annisa’s consciousness reaches a peak when she realizes the source of restriction is social, not divine. This realization is expressed in Excerpt 29:

“Now I know: God did not imprison me. People did.” (p. 285)

Annisa also develops an awareness of the importance of women’s voices and the courage to speak. This insistence on voice is shown in Excerpt 30:

“Women must dare to speak, because silence only prolongs the wound.” (p. 138)

Annisa’s critical consciousness culminates in an explicit claim over self-determination. This self-definition is stated in Excerpt 31:

“I am not only a woman from a pesantren. I am a woman who chooses her own path.” (p. 153)

Asma’s class consciousness develops through trauma and recovery. After experiencing betrayal by her former partner, she does not sink into bitterness; instead, she uses the experience as a stepping-stone to rebuild a new identity. This autonomy is illustrated in Excerpt 32:

“She promised herself that she would never again let her life be determined by someone else.” (p. 147)

Her reflective writing reframes pain as a source of strength. This reframing is expressed in Excerpt 33:

“Asma wrote: The wound that once drowned me has now become the reason I stand taller.” (p. 140)

Her consciousness also includes the ability to forgive without returning to a harmful relationship. She understands that forgiveness does not mean reopening the door to someone who has hurt her. This boundary-setting is shown in Excerpt 34:

“Asma answered briefly: I have forgiven you, but my life is No. longer yours.” (p. 322)

In this novel, class consciousness emerges through an awareness of systemic injustice. Nadia expresses the belief that as long as one is with Allah, there is No. need to fear even if everyone turns against them. This faith-grounded consciousness is illustrated in Excerpt 35:

“Enough, brother. Don’t talk about it anymore. What matters is that you recover first... if Allah is with you, then don’t be afraid even if everyone turns against you.” (p. 79)

Syamsul also develops a distinctive form of moral courage. He realizes that if criminals are bold enough to commit wrongdoing, then good people should be even bolder in doing what is right. This moral courage is expressed in Excerpt 36:

“He remembered that even pickpockets are daring enough to do evil—so how could he not be daring enough to do good?” (p. 111)

Women's Class Struggle

Class struggle is the transformative principle that links class structure, class formation, and class consciousness. Across the four novels, women's class struggle is expressed through various strategies: education and writing, negotiation within structures, the defense of identity, and the building of solidarity. The excerpts below demonstrate the range of these struggles.

Suhita's struggle does not take the form of direct confrontation with the structure. Instead, she chooses a strategy of negotiation—remaining within the system while gradually building her agency. Advice to focus on managing the *pesantren* and caring for her in-laws becomes a space where she claims an active role. This negotiation strategy is illustrated in Excerpt 37:

"...Just focus on taking care of the pesantren. Take care of your in-laws." (p. 52)

Suhita also shows the courage to fight for her marriage by confronting her "rival" directly. Her determination to meet Rengganis signals that she is not simply passive in accepting her circumstances. This determination is reflected in Excerpt 38:

"My resolve was firm—I had to meet Ratna Rengganis. She had to leave Mas Birru's life. I no longer wanted a wasted full moon. I longed to enjoy the full moon in his embrace." (p. 13)

This novel presents the most clearly articulated form of class struggle through education and writing. Annisa sees education as a path of liberation, enabling women to read the world—not merely read

recipes in the kitchen. This view of education is expressed in Excerpt 39:

"Women must be able to read the world, not just read recipes." (p. 123)

Writing becomes a powerful weapon in Annisa's struggle. She believes words can change the world and give voice to women's interests that have long been silenced. This commitment to writing is shown in Excerpt 40:

"I will keep writing, because writing can change the world." (p. 148)

Annisa frames writing as an unfinished struggle until women can recognize themselves. This goal is articulated in Excerpt 41:

"My writing will not be finished until all women can read themselves." (p. 258)

Her struggle also includes resistance against restrictions on women's mobility. Her desire to learn horseback riding, an activity traditionally dominated by men, symbolizes rebellion against gender norms. This resistance is symbolized in Excerpt 42:

"No matter what happens, I must be able to do it. I have to learn to ride a horse..." (p. 15)

Annisa also fights for equality for the next generation. Her struggle is not only for herself, but for her children and for women more broadly. This expansion is shown in Excerpt 43:

"Now I understand: my struggle is not only for me, but for my children, and for women." (p. 165)

She further asserts women's capacity for leadership. This assertion is stated in Excerpt 44:

“Women can be leaders too, not only followers.” (p. 303)

Asma’s struggle takes the form of defending her religious identity in a different social environment. She consistently refuses what conflicts with her religious values, even when facing social pressure from coworkers. This identity defense is illustrated in Excerpt 45:

“Asma refused invitations to parties filled with alcohol.” (p. 129)

She also rejects relationships that conflict with her values. This boundary is shown in Excerpt 46:

“Asma refused when her coworker offered a relationship without commitment.” (p. 237)

Notably, Asma’s struggle is not isolating but transformative. Her steadfastness in holding her principles sparks Zhongwen’s interest in learning Islam more deeply. Defending identity becomes a form of da‘wah. This impact is illustrated in Excerpt 47:

“Zhongwen began learning to recite Al-Fatihah because he was curious about Asma’s faith.” (p. 89)

The narrative then frames conversion as part of the relational transformation. This moment is shown in Excerpt 48:

“Zhongwen slowly recited the shahada in front of her.” (p. 275)

Asma also finds meaning in her diasporic experience. Beijing is not merely a workplace, but a witness to her life journey. This meaning-making is expressed in Excerpt 49:

“Beijing, with all its coldness, has now become a witness to my struggle for life.” (p. 197)

In *Dalam Mihrab Cinta*, class struggle is articulated through solidarity and alliance-building. Syamsul shows determination to rise after being brought down by slander. His resolve to stand on his own without begging for pity reflects a fighter’s mentality. This resilience is illustrated in Excerpt 50:

“So he rented a house... but after a month he still had not found work... Finally, he told himself: I must take a risk. Asking for people’s pity is the mentality of a coward!” (p. 90)

Silvie reflects another form of struggle through love that crosses class boundaries. Her hope of finding true love in the figure of an ustadz suggests how love can become a medium for cross-class alliance. This cross-class aspiration is reflected in Excerpt 51:

“Silvie... in her heart, she hoped that in this sacred month of Ramadan she would find her true love... She wanted to give her love to Ustadz Syamsul, the ideal ustadz who now filled her heart.” (p. 122)

To compare women’s trajectories across the four novels, Table 3 summarizes how class consciousness changes over time and how class struggle is expressed in each narrative.

Table 3 Women’s Class Consciousness and Class Struggle in Four Novels

Novel	Transformation of Class Consciousness	Forms of Class Struggle
Hati Suhita	Class consciousness shifts from passive acceptance to recognizing women’s contributions, and then develops into agency that operates within the structure.	Negotiation within the structure, managing the <i>pesantren</i> , and building alliances with women relatives (especially the mother-in-law).
Perempuan Berkalung Sorban	Class consciousness develops from false consciousness to deconstructing patriarchal interpretations, and ultimately reaches critical consciousness.	Education and writing, critical engagement with religious texts, and verbal as well as intellectual resistance.
Assalamualaikum Beijing	Class consciousness begins with trauma, moves toward identity reconstruction, and culminates in the integration of religious and professional identities.	Defending religious identity, professionalism, da‘wah through moral example, and cultural mediation.
Dalam Mihrab Cinta	Class consciousness moves from trust in the system to an awareness of injustice, and then grows into solidarity.	Solidarity with marginalized individuals, building cross-class alliances, and love as a form of struggle.

Based on the data presented above, the four novels portray complex class dynamics within Indonesian Muslim society. Each novel offers a distinct perspective on how women experience, develop awareness of, and negotiate their class position within surrounding social

structures. Figure 3 summarizes these patterns in a schema of the distribution of women’s ideology across the four texts. These findings are discussed further in the Discussion section using Wright’s class-theory framework.

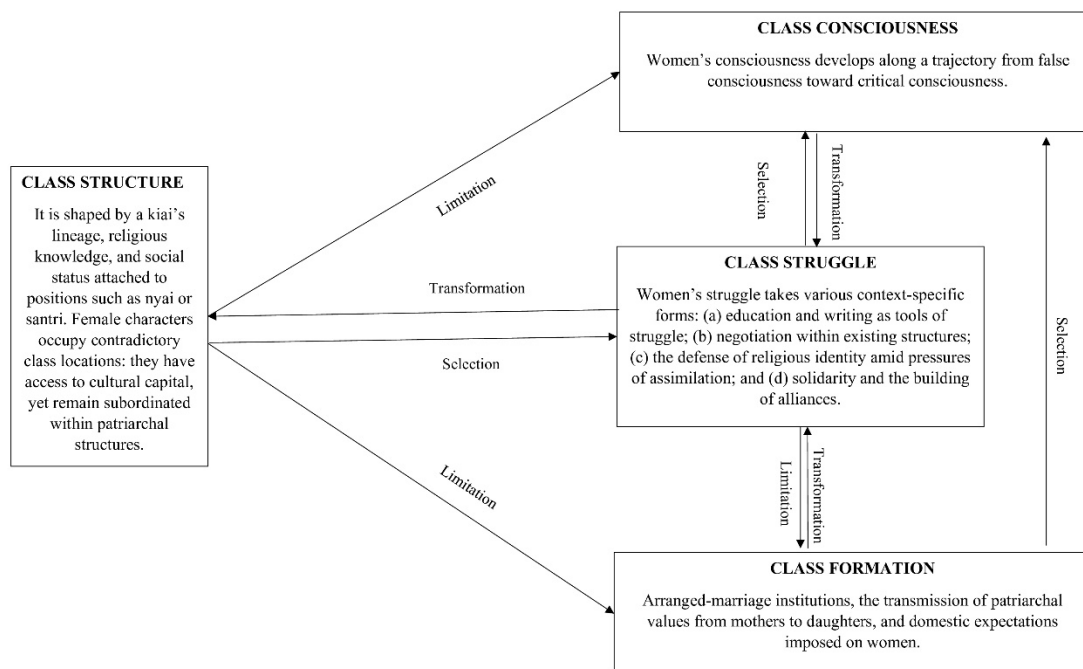


Figure 1 Schema of the Distribution of Women's Ideology in Indonesian Islamic Novel

Development of Women's Class Consciousness

A comparison of the development of class consciousness across the four novels

shows a broad spectrum. Table 4 summarizes the trajectory of consciousness in each novel.

Table 4 Development of Women's Class Consciousness and Theoretical Parallels in Four Novels

Novel	Type of Consciousness	Theoretical Parallel
<i>Hati Suhita</i>	Ambivalent consciousness that works through negotiation within the structure.	Mahmood: agency understood as <i>inhabiting norms</i> .
<i>Perempuan Berkalung Sorban</i>	Critical consciousness supported by deconstructing patriarchal interpretations.	Wright: a shift from false consciousness toward class consciousness.
<i>Assalamualaikum Beijing</i>	Diasporic consciousness that integrates identities.	Mirza: embodied intersectionality.
<i>Dalam Mihrab Cinta</i>	Solidarity-based consciousness oriented toward transcendent justice.	Crenshaw: intersectionality and coalition building.

Regarding the first research question on class structure, the four novels show that inequality is shaped by several kinds of capital, not only by economic resources. Here, "capital" refers to resources that bring advantage and recognition. In Islamic boarding schools,

two forms of capital are especially visible. Religious cultural capital refers to authority in Islamic knowledge, a reputation for piety, and shared standards of ethical propriety. Symbolic capital refers to widely recognized prestige, such as a kiai's (religious leader's) charisma, the

legitimacy of lineage, and the honor attached to Islamic boarding school families. These forms of capital shape who may set norms and who is expected to adjust.

This suggests that the kiai's family becomes a key site where symbolic capital accumulates. In *Hati Suhita* and *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, this concentration produces internal hierarchies within both the family and the school. Women therefore occupy a contradictory position: the community grants them status, yet they have limited influence over domestic decisions. Studies of *Hati Suhita* describe this as a habitus (learned dispositions) shaped by obedience, sharia-based norms, and cultural ethics that guide action without appearing as overt coercion (Shofiani & Asyári, 2022).

In contrast, *Assalamualaikum Beijing* shifts the class arena to professional workplaces and the cultural dominance of the majority. Yet religious identity still marks Muslim women as “the other.” As a result, professional forms of cultural capital must be negotiated alongside Islamic symbols. In this context, those symbols can support autonomy rather than simply burden women (Rasiah & Bilu, 2023).

Regarding the second research question on class formation, class formation refers to the process through which people build and reproduce class positions through institutions, networks, and life choices. Across the novels, women's class formation moves through three institutions. First, life in Islamic boarding schools shapes everyday dispositions and sets boundaries of propriety. Second, marriage creates alliances that reproduce family honor.

Third, education enables mobility by expanding networks and making shifts in social position possible. Sociological studies using Bourdieu similarly show that symbolic capital in Islamic boarding schools is reproduced through legitimacy, authority, and social recognition (Diana & Fikri, 2024; Hidayah et al., 2025).

Regarding the third research question on class consciousness, the women characters' awareness develops as a trajectory. It begins with accepting dominant norms, moves toward more reflective interpretations of their situation, and may culminate in critical articulation. However, agency should not be treated as a simple choice between submission and resistance. Many episodes show agency through working within norms—for example, by managing work within Islamic boarding schools, performing care work, or building moral reputations that the community values. This view of pious agency aligns with studies of piety and public life that emphasize the complexity of negotiating religious identity (Hidayah et al., 2025).

Regarding the fourth research question on class struggle, the novels present strategies that fit their settings. In Islamic boarding school contexts, struggle often takes the form of negotiation within the structure, strengthening women's roles in educational and family life, and reshaping legitimacy through moral reputation. In *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, struggle becomes more explicit through education and writing, as well as by challenging patriarchal interpretations in order to reclaim the authority to define what counts as legitimate religious knowledge about women (Botifar, 2025).

In *Assalamualaikum Beijing*, struggle centers on defending a religious identity that remains compatible with professionalism, alongside cultural mediation that reshapes social relations. Recent work reads this as “ideological negotiation,” where religious attributes are framed as sources of emancipation. Meanwhile, *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* highlights solidarity, cross-position alliances, and the restoration of dignity after exclusion. It shows that struggle can also be ethical work aimed at restoring socio-religious justice (Azis et al., 2023)

Overall, the findings indicate that women’s ideology in Indonesian Islamic novels is distributed through layered class relations. These relations depend not only on material resources but also on religious cultural capital and symbolic capital. They operate strongly through Islamic boarding schools, marriage, and professional or diasporic arenas. Therefore, women often occupy contradictory class positions: they may enjoy social prestige, yet still have limited power in domestic life and decision-making.

This result supports Anugrah (2025), who stresses that class, capital, and differentiated social positions matter for explaining ideological tendencies in texts. It also aligns with Nurhadi et al. (2025) by showing that texts can be mapped systematically to trace how meaning and ideology are built through structure—for instance, through patterns of subordination in Islamic boarding schools, mechanisms of exclusion, and trajectories of consciousness and struggle. Compared with Ferdinal et al. (2024), this study maintains a focus on institutions and subject formation, but it extends the context from critiques of

capitalism and specific social issues to a class-based reading of gender ideology in Indonesian Muslim society using Wright’s framework. The link to Pianzola et al. (2020) is complementary: they focus on digital reading and how reader practices shape meaning, while this study analyzes meaning production within the narratives. Their work nevertheless points to a future direction, namely examining how the ideologies identified here are negotiated in readers’ reception.

The findings also have educational implications, they can be translated into a teaching model that combines Wright-based class mapping with agency, intersectionality, and cultural capital. This model can support courses such as Prose Studies, Feminist Literary Criticism, Sociology of Literature, and Multicultural Education. In practice, students can work with excerpt-coding tasks, evidence-based discussions, and cross-novel comparisons to evaluate how Islamic boarding schools, marriage, education, and religious authority shape women’s opportunities. Because agency can operate as a way of living within norms, classroom discussion need not end in moral judgments of characters.

Instead, it can guide students toward fairer and more reflective readings of Muslim women. More broadly, this approach is relevant to character education and religious moderation. It may help learners distinguish religious values from hierarchical social practices, while also strengthening their capacity to discuss inequality without relying on a single stereotype about Islamic boarding schools or Muslim families.

Conclusion

This study shows that women's ideology in Indonesian Islamic novels is distributed through layered class relations. These relations are not based on economic factors alone, but are also sustained by religious cultural capital and symbolic capital that operate strongly through *pesantren* institutions, marriage, education, and professional, diasporic arenas. As a result, women frequently occupy contradictory class locations: they are recognized in terms of status and reputation, yet remain constrained in domestic authority, decision-making, and access to institutional power. At the same time, the trajectory of the female characters' class consciousness moves from initial acceptance toward more critical readings of their social worlds, while class struggle appears in context-specific forms, negotiation within existing structures, identity affirmation, education and writing, and cross-position solidarity.

The limitations of this study lie in the scope of its corpus, which includes only four novels; therefore, any generalization to Indonesian Islamic novels more broadly should be made with caution. In addition, the analysis focuses on meaning production at the textual level and does not yet examine how women's ideology is negotiated through readers' reception practices, media adaptations, or the historical contexts of publication and discourse circulation.

Future research is therefore recommended to expand the corpus across periods and subgenres, such as popular novels, Islamic boarding school novels, and diaspora novels. It would also be valuable to combine textual analysis with reception studies, for example by

examining reader comments, literacy communities, or classroom practices. Finally, future work should develop additional intersectional dimensions more explicitly—such as ethnicity, generation, and economic class—so that mapping the class and institutional mechanisms shaping women's ideology becomes more comprehensive.

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Informed Consent Statement

This study involved qualitative content analysis of published literary texts and did not recruit human participants or collect personal data. Therefore, informed consent was not required. All materials analyzed are publicly available and were used solely for academic research purposes in accordance with ethical standards for literature-based studies.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from publicly available sources, namely the four published novels analyzed. All relevant excerpts and interpretations are presented within the manuscript. No additional datasets were generated or analyzed beyond the textual materials, therefore no restricted data or participant-related data apply.

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