

## Equality Theology in Aceh: Revisiting Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Singkilī’s Thoughts on Gender Equality

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**Abstract:** This research aims to analyze the role of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Singkilī and Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin in fighting for gender equality and women’s leadership in the Sultanate of Aceh in the 17th century. The method used is library research with a historical approach, which involves documentation and folklore. Antonio Gramsci’s theory of domination was applied to understand how al-Singkilī, through his fatwas, and Sultanah Safiatuddin, as the first female leader, challenged the dominant patriarchal ideology. The research findings show that al-Singkilī played an important role in legalizing gender equality, particularly by supporting women to become leaders of the country. The research argument asserts that despite resistance to women’s leadership, al-Singkilī’s contribution in championing gender equality through law and education succeeded in providing the basis for social change in Aceh, which was also influenced by moderate Islamic values.

**Keywords:** gender, women, leadership, Aceh, ulama, domination

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## Introduction

Equality is always a hot issue that is discussed all the time.<sup>1</sup> Various equalization efforts continue to be carried out as a result of the human desire to be seen as equal.<sup>2</sup> Most recently, the government has implemented a policy regarding “paternity leave” for state civil servants whose wives give birth, again as an effort to equalize the needs of the family (husband and wife).<sup>3</sup> Apart from that, women’s participation in Indonesian politics<sup>4</sup> is also a prerequisite for political parties in holding legislative elections in early 2024, of course this is based on the aspect of equality.<sup>5</sup> Uniquely, equality has not yet been seen as being fully realized by society, especially women.

In the Islamic context, equality is innate to every human being from birth.<sup>6</sup> Where, men and women are seen as equal (egalitarian), the only difference is faith and piety. Equality is also demonstrated by the nobility and role of women in the Islamic struggle during the prophetic era (Prophet Mūsa a.s), starting from Siti Mashitah, Asiah (wife of Pharaoh), the mother of the Prophet Mūsa, the older sister of the Prophet

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<sup>1</sup> Xin-Yu Peng, et.al., “Gender Equality and Green Development: A Qualitative Survey,” *Innovation and Green Development* 3, no. 1 (March 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.igd.2023.100089>.

<sup>2</sup> Chen Luo, et.al., “The Knowledge Map of Gender Equality in Cross-Cultural Communication: A Bibliometric Approach,” *Heliyon* 9, no. 6 (June 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e16324>.

<sup>3</sup> Qiqi Asmara, “Mewujudkan Keadilan dan Keseimbangan dalam Reformasi Ketenagakerjaan di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Kependudukan dan Pembangunan Lingkungan* 4, no. 1 (2023): 95-108, <http://jkpl.ppj.unp.ac.id/index.php/JKPL/article/view/193>.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Shair-Rosenfield, “The Alternative Incumbency Effect: Electing Women Legislators in Indonesia,” *Electoral Studies* 31, no. 3 (September 2012): 576-587, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2012.05.002>.

<sup>5</sup> Titin Setiawati and Vilya Dwi Agustini, “Komunikasi dan Partisipasi Perempuan dalam Politik Elektoral,” *Jurnal Pustaka Komunikasi* 7, no. 1 (2024): 162-173, <https://journal.moestopo.ac.id/index.php/pustakom/article/view/3751>.

<sup>6</sup> Muhamad Akip, “Kesetaraan Gender dalam Pendidikan Islam,” *Edification Journal: Pendidikan Agama Islam* 3, no. 1 (2020): 73-83, <https://jurnal.staibslg.ac.id/index.php/ej/article/view/222>.

<sup>7</sup> Nur Azizah, “Figur Perempuan yang Berperan di Ruang Sosial dalam Al-Quran” (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, 2023), <http://repository.uin-suska.ac.id/75728/>.

Musa, and the two daughters of the Prophet Syu'aib.<sup>7</sup> In Indonesia, female figures were also present to "color" the nation's independence, including Raden Ajeng Kartini,<sup>8</sup> Tjut Nyak Dien,<sup>9</sup> Malahayati,<sup>10</sup> Cut Meutia,<sup>11</sup> Martha Christina Tiahahu,<sup>12</sup> Dewi Sartika,<sup>13</sup> Nyai Ahmad Dahlan,<sup>14</sup> and Rahmah El Yunussiyah.<sup>15</sup>

The struggle and role of women is a milestone for women's emancipation fighters in Indonesia to always uphold gender equality. Based on BPS data, the number of women working in Indonesia in 2022 will reach 52.74 million people, meaning it is equivalent to 38.98% of the total workers in Indonesia. The sectors covered include sales, agriculture, plantations, animal husbandry, fisheries and forestry. However, in the

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<sup>8</sup> Hudaidah Karlina, "Pemikiran Pendidikan dan Perjuangan Raden Ayu Kartini untuk Perempuan Indonesia," *Jurnal Humanitas* 7, no. 1 (2020): 35-44, [https://www.academia.edu/download/84389576/pdf\\_7.pdf](https://www.academia.edu/download/84389576/pdf_7.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Mhd. Ikhwan, "Analisis Karakter Semangat Kebangsaan Cut Nyak Dien sebagai Tokoh Pelopor Perjuangan Perempuan," *Nazharat: Jurnal Kebudayaan* 28, no. 1 (2022): 70-80, <https://nazharat.fah.uinjambi.ac.id/index.php/nazharat/article/view/41>.

<sup>10</sup> EkaNasha Putri Dewi Yani, Anny Wahyuni and Budi Purnomo, "Menganalisis Karakter Laksamana Malahayati dalam Novel Sang Perempuan Keumala," *Krinok: Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah dan Sejarah* 1, no. 1 (2022): 33-39, <https://online-journal.unja.ac.id/krinok/article/view/17774>.

<sup>11</sup> Nuraini A. Manan, "Makam Belanda di Pantan Labu: Refleksi Penyerangan Cut Meutia," *Buletin HABA*, (2023): 23-26, <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/28313/>.

<sup>12</sup> Leni Marpelina, "Perjuangan Martha Christina Tiahahu: Refleksi Kritis Terhadap Budaya Agraria," *Jurnal Penelitian Sejarah dan Budaya* 7, no. 1 (2021), <https://www.neliti.com/publications/479298/perjuangan-martha-christina-tiahahu-refleksi-kritis-terhadap-budaya-agraria>.

<sup>13</sup> Yeni Sulistiani and Lutfatulatifah, "Konsep Pendidikan Bagi Perempuan Menurut Dewi Sartika," *Equalita: Jurnal Studi Gender dan Anak* 2, no. 2 (2020): 118-129, <https://www.jurnal.syekhnuurjati.ac.id/index.php/equalita/article/view/7036/0>.

<sup>14</sup> Halimatussa'diyah Nasution, Syamsu Nahar, Ali Imran Sinaga, "Studi Analisis Pemikiran Siti Walidah (Nyai Ahmad Dahlan) dalam Pendidikan Perempuan," *Ihya al-Arabiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Arab* 5, no. 2 (2019): 130-139, <http://jurnal.uinsu.ac.id/index.php/ihya/article/view/5547>.

<sup>15</sup> Asni Furoidah, "Tokoh Pendidikan Islam Perempuan Rahmah El-Yunusiah," *FALASIFA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 10, no. 2 (2019): 20-28, <https://www.academia.edu/download/90442577/175.pdf>.

fields of politics, leadership or management, the number of participants is still small, namely only 6.2% of the female working population.<sup>16</sup> This shows that the level of women's work participation is not yet dominant in the field of politics or management of formal institutions in Indonesia.<sup>17</sup>

The reality above actually holds promise for the future of gender equality in Indonesia. This is due to the increasing crime against women and children. Based on information from the Ministry of Women and Child Protection, there were 15,120 cases of violence against children in the period January-November 2023, with details of violence against boys being 4,691 victims, while girls were 12,158 victims.<sup>18</sup> This shows that people's awareness of the harmonization of life, mutual cooperation, especially the view of equality between humans is not yet optimal.

The struggle for equality is usually associated with gender, namely men and women. Furthermore, equality will be clearly visible from the leadership aspect, where men and women are given the same opportunity to become leaders in an institution, agency, region, region or even country. In the context of leadership, there are differences between scholars, thinkers, or the ideology of an organization in assigning leadership to women. Where, there is still the view that men are leaders, both in domestic and bureaucratic environments, so that women are not given the opportunity to become the highest "top" leadership in an organization or institution.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Rudy Catur Rohman Kusmayadi, "Kontribusi Pekerja Wanita dalam Meningkatkan Kesejahteraan Keluarga dan Proses Pengambilan Keputusan dalam Keluarga," *Iqtishodia: Jurnal Ekonomi Syariah* 2, no. 1 (2017): 103-113, <https://ejournal.alqolam.ac.id/index.php/iqtishodia/article/view/80>.

<sup>17</sup> Yeni Nuraeni and Ivan Lilin Suryono, "Analisis Kesetaraan Gender dalam Bidang Ketenagakerjaan di Indonesia," *Nakhoda: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan* 20, no. 1 (2021): 68-79, <https://nakhoda.ejournal.unri.ac.id/index.php/njip/article/download/134/150>.

<sup>18</sup> Chazizah Gusnita, "Kekerasan Simbolik Berita Kriminal di Media Massa," *Deviance Jurnal Kriminologi* 1, no. 1 (2017): 71-81, <https://journal.budiluhur.ac.id/index.php/deviance/article/view/593/0>.

<sup>19</sup> Israpil, "Budaya Patriarki dan Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan (Sejarah dan Perkembangannya)," *Pusaka* 5, no. 2 (2017): 141-150, <https://blamakassar.ejournal.id/pusaka/article/view/176>.

Even so, the reality is visible in society that women have occupied important positions in Indonesia, from village heads to presidents.<sup>20</sup> In fact, in the Islamic religious higher education environment, the existence of women has shown in leading universities or institutes, namely as Chancellor, say Hj. Amany Lubis (UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta), Nyayu Khodijah (UIN Raden Fatah Palembang), Hj. Martin Kustati (UIN Imam Bonjol Padang), Nurhayati (UIN North Sumatra Medan), Faizah Binti Awad (IAIN Kendari), Enizar (IAIN Metro Lampung), Evi Muafiah (IAIN Ponorogo), and Inayatillah (STAIN Teungku Dirundeng Meulaboh).<sup>21</sup> This shows that gender equality has been visible in Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Glorifying the figure of women with all their privileges is a form of awareness among the Muslim community regarding the universal teachings of Islam or *rahmat li al-‘ālamīn*.<sup>22</sup> Gender equality as one of the principles studied in Islamic studies places women with equal rights and obligations in the bureaucratic, academic and socio-political fields. This attitude is familiar to the Indonesian Muslim community, even Islamic sultanates or kingdoms also adhere to the principle of equality.

This can be seen from the practice of women’s leadership in the Sultanate of Aceh during the leadership of Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin.<sup>23</sup> In connection with Sultanah Safiatuddin’s leadership in Aceh, the role of a Ulama named Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Singkili cannot be separated. As Mufti of the kingdom/sultanate, al-Singkili became the initial foundation

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<sup>20</sup> Hasto Kristiyanto, Satya Arinanto, and Hanief Saha Ghafur, “Institutionalization and Party Resilience in Indonesian Electoral Democracy,” *Heliyon* 9, no. 12 (December 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e22919>.

<sup>21</sup> Siti Nur Hidayah and Erni Munastiwi, “Pemimpin Akademik atau Manajerial? Aspirasi, Harapan dan Tantangan Perempuan untuk Menjadi Pemimpin di Lembaga Pendidikan Tinggi Islam,” *PALASTREN: Jurnal Studi Gender* 12, no. 2 (2019): 455-486, <http://journal.iainkudus.ac.id/index.php/Palastren/article/view/5628>.

<sup>22</sup> Nurcholish Rustam and Jubair Situmorang, “Memahami Perbedaan Gender dalam Perspektif Islam dan Socio-Kultural,” *AL-WARDAH: Jurnal Kajian Perempuan, Gender dan Agama* 14, no. 1 (2020): 29-43. <http://36.93.48.46/index.php/alwardah/article/view/243>.

<sup>23</sup> Maysarah and Hasan Basri M. Nur, “Kiprah Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin dalam Memajukan Pendidikan di Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam,” *WATHAN: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Humaniora* 1, no. 1 (November 2023-February 2024): 26-41, <https://jurnal.fanshurinstitute.org/index.php/wathan/article/view/26>.

for the legalization of the first female leader in the Sultanate of Aceh through his fatwa that women had the opportunity to become leaders or sultans.<sup>24</sup> Since the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin, there has been an era of the birth of women's leadership in the kingdom of Aceh, so that afterwards the figures of Sultanah Nur Alam Nakiatuddin Syah, Inayat Syah Zakiatuddin Syah, and Sri Ratu Kamalatuddin Syah were known.<sup>25</sup>

This study is relevant to the patriarchal cultural context inherent in Indonesian society.<sup>26</sup> The purification of women's position at the bureaucratic level is also examined from various ideological fatwas of Islamic organizations,<sup>27</sup> the phenomenon of female Rectors in Indonesia,<sup>28</sup> dialogic women's leadership,<sup>29</sup> as well as Islamic views regarding gender and women's leadership.<sup>30</sup> Relevant scientific work in this study was reviewed through credible websites.

It is urgent that al-Singkili's role be studied in depth, considering that during the next leadership period there were pro-contra Islamic scholars views in Aceh resulting in the impeachment of Sultanah Kamalatuddin

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<sup>24</sup> Hasanuddin Yusuf Adan, *Islam dan Sistem Pemerintahan di Aceh Masa Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam* (Banda Aceh: NASA Ar-Raniry Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Rosnida Sari, "Sovereign Women in a Muslim Kingdom: The Sultanahs of Aceh, 1641-1699 by Sher Banu Al Khan," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 34, no. 2 (2019): 460-462, <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/70/article/730398/summary>.

<sup>26</sup> Saifuddin Zuhri, "Ketidakadilan Gender dan Budaya Patriarki di Kehidupan Masyarakat Indonesia," *Murabbi* 5, no. 1 (2022). <https://www.ejournal.stitalhikmah-tt.ac.id/index.php/murabbi/article/view/100>.

<sup>27</sup> Ja'far Ja'far, *Ideologi Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah* (Yogyakarta: K-Media, September 2019): 112-119.

<sup>28</sup> Iswachyu Dhaniarti, Ani Wulandari, and M. Ikhsan Setiawan, "Kajian Gender Leadership and Inequality pada Perguruan Tinggi di Indonesia," *Jurnal Darussalam: Jurnal Pendidikan, Komunikasi dan Pemikiran Hukum Islam* 8, no. 2 (2017): 236-247, <http://ejournal.iaida.ac.id/index.php/darussalam/article/view/98>.

<sup>29</sup> Latifah Hanum, "Perempuan di Lembaga Pendidikan Al Jam'iyatul Washliyah," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 2, no. 1 (2018): 29-49, <http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v2i1.1755>.

<sup>30</sup> Tamer Koburtay, Ahmad Abualigah, Jawad Syed, Abbas J. Ali, "Misconceptions and Misunderstandings: An Exploration of the Interplay of Religion, Culture and Gender from Muslim Scholars and Clerics," *Career Development International* 28, no. 67 (October 2023): 649-665, <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-03-2023-0082>.

Syah's leadership after almost six decades of women's leadership in Aceh.<sup>31</sup> In fact, the patriarchal culture inherent in society has led to the understanding that men are the priority while women are in a "second class" position.<sup>32</sup> The urgency of this study also refers to al-Singkilī's personal tolerance towards women's leadership. This will be a basic review by referring to the book *Mir'at al-Tullāb* and other works. This aims to reveal the puritanization of egalitarian education in Aceh in the 17th century.

In this study, the theory of domination proposed by Antonio Gramsci<sup>33</sup> is used as a basis for thinking to analyze the role of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī and Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin in fighting for gender equality and women's leadership in the Sultanate of Aceh in the 17th century. Gramsci argues that ideological domination does not only occur through physical or political power, but also through cultural hegemony that shapes people's perspectives. In this context, al-Singkilī with his progressive interpretation of Islamic teachings and his fatwas on gender equality successfully challenged the prevailing patriarchal norms, while Sultanah Safiatuddin, as the first female leader, utilized her position and influence to challenge the existing patriarchal ideological structure. This theory helps to understand how both figures used religion, law and education to change the dominant social narrative, with the aim of creating a more egalitarian society, where women could occupy leadership positions equal to men.

## Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a historical study. The figure studied is Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkilī, a 17th Century

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<sup>31</sup> Subkhana Adzim Baqi, Muhammad Ilham Aziz, and Sri Windari "Pola Kepemimpinan Sultanah Aceh dalam Pengembangan Ilmu Pengetahuan 1641-1699 M," *Journal of Islamic History* 2, no. 1 (2022): 48-62, <https://journal.nurscienceinstitute.id/index.php/jih/article/view/211>.

<sup>32</sup> Iim Halimatusa'diyah, and Windy Triana, "Sexism and Women's Access to Justice: Feminist Judging in Indonesian Islamic Judiciary", *Women's Studies International Forum* 103 (March-April 2024). <https://doi.org/10.1108/CDI-03-2023-0082>.

<sup>33</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

Mufti of the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. In reviewing the findings, researchers presented various aspects related to the history of al-Singkili in its work to authenticate gender equality and become the beginning of women's leadership in the 17th century Aceh Darussalam sultanate, including political, cultural and local aspects of the implementation of the mufti's fatwa at that time. To collect data, observation, in-depth interviews, documentation and folklore were carried out. The steps include; heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography in the following ways or methods; diachronic, synchronic, and value system.<sup>34</sup>

## **Results and Discussion**

### **The Role of Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkili in the Puritanization of Egalitarian Education in XVII Century Aceh**

Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ûf al-Singkili was a great Indonesian scholar who became world famous in the 17th century.<sup>35</sup> His important role during his time as mufti of the Aceh Darussalam sultanate or Qāḍī Mālik al-'Adil laid the foundation for the puritanization of egalitarian education in Aceh. As an influential cleric at that time, he was of the view that women were equal creatures of Allah's creation and should be treated well, and that women needed guidance just as much as men.

In his translation of the monumental book of tafsir entitled *Tarjumān al-Mustafid*,<sup>36</sup> al-Singkili interpreted that Q.S. al-Nisā': 19 concerning the dignity of women who have the right to sue for divorce and impose fines on husbands who act evilly and commit adultery with other women, as "the legacy of the jahiliyah treats women very despicably who marry

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<sup>34</sup> Muhammad Shaleh Assingkily, *Pendekatan dalam Pengkajian Islam* (Yogyakarta: K-Media, 2021): 1-16.

<sup>35</sup> Ian Caldwell, "Transferring a Tradition: 'Abd Al-Ra'ûf Al-Singkili's Rendering into Malay of the Jalālayan Commentary by Peter Riddell," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25, no. 1 (1994): 209-10.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Riddell, "The Sources of Abd Al-Ra'ûf's Tarjumān Al-Mustafid," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 57, no. 2 (1984): 113-18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41492986%0A>.

without a dowry.”<sup>37</sup> In the next verse (Q.S. al-Nisā’: 20), al-Singkiḷī interprets “... and if you want to replace your wife and you have given her a large dowry, then don’t take anything back from her.”<sup>38</sup>

This shows how al-Singkiḷī upholds the dignity of women and pays special attention to the treatment of women (wives) from violence or crimes from their husbands (as was the treatment during the period of ignorance). In fact, the policy of the Sultanah Safiatuddin government, whose Qāḍī chairman was Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkiḷī, formed a law which was passed by the sultanate as Qanun Meukuta Alam, the contents of which were as follows:

... (1) Every parent must provide a house for their daughter, if the daughter marries, then the house automatically becomes the daughter’s right; (2) girls must be given a piece of rice field, a garden, and a piece of gold; (3) The husband must also bring a piece of rice field (among Peuneuwou) to his wife and become the property of the wife and just gold clothes; (4) The husband must live with his wife at home; (5) as long as they are still together (as husband and wife) then all assets are jointly owned, namely 50% belonging to the wife and 50% belonging to the husband; (6) in the event of a divorce, the husband must leave his wife’s house, and the assets he brought with him at the beginning of the marriage become the wife’s full rights, while the assets acquired during the marriage period are divided in half, namely 50% she can take; and (7) during the iddah period for divorce, all living expenses of the wife are the responsibility of the ex-husband.<sup>39</sup>

The sound of Qanun Meukuta Alam above is actually a form of confirmation of al-Singkiḷī’s interpretation of the Q.S. al-Nisā’: 19-20 which was ratified in the sultanate’s legislation. The main aim is

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<sup>37</sup> Maulana Razali, Muhammad Mansur, Hanif, Muhajir Al-Fairusy, “Konsep Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam Pandangan Abdur Rauf As-Singkili,” *Basha’ir: Jurnal Studi Al-Qur’an dan Tafsir* 1, no. 2 (Desember 2021): 85-94, <https://doi.org/10.47498/bashair.v1i2.867>.

<sup>38</sup> Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra’ūf al-Singkiḷī, *Tarjuman al-Mustafī*, vol. 1 (Beirut, 2011): 247.

<sup>39</sup> A. Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Acch Merdeka di Bawah Pemerintahan Ratu* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1977): 127-128.

to anticipate the negative impacts received by women (wives) from divorce or husband's violence and crimes in the household, as well as raising women's dignity in the context of social life. Apart from the fatwa above, al-Singkili together with Sheikh Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānirī issued a fatwa to refute the *Wujūdiyyah* group who wanted to overthrow the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin, that women should not be leaders.<sup>40</sup> The fatwa of the two scholars reads: "... Women in Islam are equal to men and have the right to be king".<sup>41</sup>

This fatwa issued by al-Singkili certainly had a big impact on the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin because he was the mufti of the sultanate or *Qāḍī Mālik al-‘Adil* and a charismatic cleric in Aceh. This is a reflection of the internalization of the egalitarian attitude instilled by al-Singkili in order to strengthen the purification of egalitarian education for the people of Aceh regarding equality and fairness of rights and obligations for men and women. Likewise, as mufti of the sultanate, this opinion was also seen by some figures as a form of al-Singkili's political stance in maintaining the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin.<sup>42</sup>

In the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's domination theory, the role of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf Al-Singkili in purifying egalitarian education in 17th century Aceh can be seen as an effort to build cultural hegemony based on progressive Islamic values. Gramsci understands hegemony as a way for dominant groups to maintain power through consensus, not just through violence or coercion. In this context, al-Singkili used Qur'anic interpretation, Islamic law (sharia), and Qanun Meukuta Alam as ideological tools to instill gender equality and social justice. Al-Singkili's interpretation of Q.S. al-Nisā': 19-20, which emphasizes

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<sup>40</sup> G.W.J. Drewes, "Nūr Al-Dīn Al-Rānirī's Hujjat al-Siddiq Li-Daf' Al-Zindiq Re-Examined," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 47, no. 2 (2014): 83–104; P. Voorhoeve, "Nuruddin Ar-Raniri," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde*, no. 1976 (1959): 467–71; Syed Naguib Al-Attas, "New Light on the Life of Hamzah Fansurī," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 40, no. 1 (1967): 42–51; Syed Muhammad Naguib Al-Attas, "Rānirī and the Wujūdiyyah of 17th Century Aceh," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 8, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>41</sup> Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh*, 177.

<sup>42</sup> Subhan, "Metode dan Corak Penafsiran Abdurrauf Al-Singkili," *Tesis*, UIN Sulthan Syarif Kasim Riau (2011).

the dignity of women and their rights, is a form of resistance to the legacy of *jāhiliyah* (ignorance) that oppresses women. By integrating these values into the formal policies of the Aceh Sultanate, he succeeded in building a new hegemonic structure that respected the dignity of women, making it part of the social order accepted by the people of Aceh.

In addition, al-Singkili also played an important role in countering the narrative of the *Wujūdiyyah* group that rejected women's leadership. The fatwa he issued, together with Sheikh Nūr al-Dīn al-Rānīrī, that women are equal to men and have the right to become leaders is a form of counter-hegemony against patriarchal ideology. In Gramsci's perspective, this action reflects an ideological class struggle that utilizes the superstructure realms of religion, education and law to reform society's views. By supporting Sultanah Safiatuddin's leadership and promoting egalitarian education, al-Singkili succeeded in expanding the influence of gender justice values in Acehnese society, while strengthening the Sultanate's position as an institution that implemented the principles of justice and equality in Islam.

## **Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin: Portrait of a Female Political Leader in the Sultanate of Aceh**

Patriarchal culture dominates the majority of Indonesian society's thinking paradigm. This is motivated by the ideology adhered to, the religion understood by individuals or groups, as well as putting women second in social life, resulting in endless debates regarding the concept and practice of women's leadership in the academic, bureaucratic and political worlds. In the Islamic context, the doctrine that men are leaders for women is often used as a postulate and is deeply rooted in society, resulting in the view that women have no right to lead men.

Wahid emphasized that the status and rank of women is the same as men, both in terms of rights and obligations, as well as equality

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<sup>43</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, *Islam Kosmopolitan: Nilai-nilai Indonesia & Transformasi Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: The Wahid Institut, 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Didin Saepudin and Nabila Himmatina Zahra, "Women in Islamic Historiography and History," *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 12, no. 2 (2022): 87-101, <https://journal.uinjkt.ac.id/index.php/indo-islamika/article/download/28976/pdf>.

of position, especially in the field of profession or work.<sup>43</sup> This opinion is proven by the history of women's leadership in Indonesia, especially the Aceh Darussalam region or known as the Aceh Sultanate which was led by four Sultanahs for 59 years, namely from 1050-1109 H.<sup>44</sup> The four Sultanahs are (1) Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah (1050-1086 H) leading since the age of 29 years,<sup>45</sup> (2) Sultanah Nur Alam Nakiatuddin Syah (1086–1088 H),<sup>46</sup> (3) Sultanah Inayat Syah Zakiatuddin Syah (1088-1098 H),<sup>47</sup> and (4) Sultanah Kamalatuddin Syah (1098-1109 H).<sup>48</sup>

It was during this fourth leadership of the Sultanah that impeachment occurred following the issuance of a letter from the Mufti of Makkah containing a fatwa disapproving of women becoming leaders or sultans. So, since 20 Rabiul Akhir 1109 Hijriyah or 1 October 1699 AD Sultanah Kamalatuddin Syah was replaced by Syarif Hasyim (her husband), at the same time that Sheikh 'Abd al-Ra'ūf al-Singkiḫī died at the age of 100 years.

Sri Tajul Alam Sultanah Safiatuddin Syah was the first female leader in the history of the kingdom of Aceh Darussalam. She was the daughter of Sultan Iskandar Selamat who was born around 1612-1613 or a quarter of the 17th century. Since elementary age, Sultanah Safiatuddin received learning from great scholars such as Sheikh Hamzah Fansuri, Sheikh Kamaluddin, Sheikh Alaidin Ahmad, Sheikh Muhiddin Ali, Sheikh Taqiuddin Hasan, Sheikh Saifuddin Abdul Kahar and other great scholars at Jami' Baiturrahman.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Khairul Nizam, "The Role and Authority of Queen of Aceh and Sultan of Perak to Deal with the Dutch in the Tin Trade Issues," *Jurnal Peurawi: Media Kajian Komunikasi Islam* 4, no. 1 (2021): 1-14, <https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/peurawi/article/view/9371>.

<sup>46</sup> Fachri Zulfikar, "Historical Perspective of Acehnese Women's Leadership Transformation as a Source of History Learning," *International Journal of Sustainable Development & Planning* 17, no. 8 (2022).

<sup>47</sup> Fitriah M. Suud, "Perempuan Islam dalam Sejarah Kerajaan Aceh Darussalam (1641-1699)," *Scrambi Tarbawi* 3, no. 1 (2015), <https://www.ojs.serambimekkah.ac.id/index.php/tarbawi/article/download/1238/1007>.

<sup>48</sup> Razali, *et. al.*, "Konsep Kepemimpinan Perempuan, 90.

<sup>49</sup> Zulfata, *Jejak Sultanah*, 30.

As a Queen or Sultanah, Safiatuddin has prepared three palace women as his future “successor candidates”, where these three women have been educated in the Kerato Darud Dunia with various scientific aspects, including law, history, philosophy, literature, Islamic religious knowledge, Arabic, Persian, Spanish and English. The three palace women are Nakiatuddin, Zakiatuddin and Kamalatuddin.<sup>50</sup>

In fact, the existence of Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah as the first female leader of the Aceh Darussalam Sultanate has drawn pros and cons. Because, a new patriarchal and polemic culture “seemed” to have emerged with his appointment as the “top” person in the Sultanate of Aceh, the wujudiyah ideology group was listed as a line of opponents of his leadership on the “religious pretext”, that men are leaders for women. In this context, al-Singkili played a role in dismissing various problems of religious pretexts that arose over the appointment of Sultanah Safiatuddin as leadership.

Furthermore, Azra stated that when al-Singkili returned to Aceh, he caught the attention of Sultanah Safiatuddin because of the religious knowledge he had deepened while in Arabia, thus appointing him as *Qāḍī Mālik al-‘Adil* or Mufti of the Sultanate. al-Singkili’s fatwa on women’s leadership also shows the tolerance efforts he displayed in his work, such as *Mir‘at al-Ṭullāb* who did not provide a Malay translation of the word *dhakar* which means man as a condition for being a judge or ruler.

In the perspective of Antonio Gramsci’s domination theory, the existence of Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah as the first female leader in the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam can be seen as a form of resistance to the hegemony of the dominant patriarchal culture. Gramsci explains that the domination of a group can take place not only through physical or legal force, but also through ideological hegemony that is accepted by society as “normal.” In this context, the patriarchal culture and religious doctrine that places men as leaders of women is one form of ideological hegemony that has been widely accepted by the people of Aceh at that time. However, the presence of Sultanah Safiatuddin as a leader showed the strength of resistance to this hegemony. By appointing women as leaders, the Sultanate of Aceh attempted to break

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<sup>50</sup> Hasjmy, *59 Tahun Aceh*, 199.

the patriarchal hegemony, although it faced various challenges from conservative ideological groups that opposed women's leadership.

Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah also reflected what Gramsci called "counter-hegemonic" which is an attempt to challenge and change the dominant ideological structure through concrete actions. Despite debates and opposition to women's leadership in the political sphere, as seen in the fatwa of the Mufti of Mecca against women as leaders, Sultanah Safiatuddin still managed to maintain her position as leader. Her success in grooming female successors in the palace also reflects a change in the dominant discourse, namely that women can lead effectively and are able to replace men's positions of power in this historical context. This shows that the ideology of patriarchal domination is not static, but can be influenced by social and political changes, which in this case, Sultanah Safiatuddin's leadership was part of the process.

## Conclusion

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that al-Singkili's contribution in encouraging the puritanization of egalitarian education in Aceh is proven through egalitarian thinking. Al-Singkili's role in issuing a legal fatwa regarding the puritanization of egalitarian education in Aceh increasingly "coloured" the lives of the people of Aceh, especially his fatwa that women may become state leaders (sultans), although towards the end of his life the mufti of the Kingdom of Makkah issued a fatwa regarding the disapproval of female leaders, having an impact in the fourth impeachment of the Sultanah in the history of the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam. Thus, the puritanization of equality enforced by al-Singkili in Aceh in the 17th century was considered successful through fatwas, position and charisma as mufti of the sultanate, to the *wasatiyyah* preaching approach.

Likewise, it should be acknowledged that the limited literature is the reason why researchers have not found the textual content of the moderate and equality preaching conveyed by al-Singkili in promoting egalitarian education for the people of Aceh under the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin in the seventeenth century. This is certainly useful for deepening the study. Why did al-Singkili issue a fatwa regarding egalitarian attitudes towards women? What is the content of his preaching and fatwa regarding women's leadership? Was the purpose of the da'wah

and fatwa used as a political effort to protect the leadership of Sultanah Safiatuddin or purely as a royal mufti who enforced Islamic sharia law in the Sultanate of Aceh Darussalam? Hopefully it will become material for analysis of studies as well as recommendations for future researchers.

The role of Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Singkili and Sultanah Tajul Alam Safiatuddin Syah in the context of 17th century Aceh can be understood through the perspective of Antonio Gramsci’s domination theory, which emphasizes efforts to build cultural hegemony to replace the dominant ideology. Al-Singkili, with his progressive interpretation of Islamic teachings, succeeded in instilling the values of gender equality and social justice, while Sultanah Safiatuddin, as the first female leader in the Sultanate of Aceh, changed the existing patriarchal narrative. Both figures played an important role in challenging the dominant patriarchal ideological structure, using religion, education and law as tools to promote social change, and in doing so, strengthened the position of the Sultanate of Aceh as an institution that supported gender equality and women’s leadership.

Among the limitations of this research is the limited scope of the study which only focuses on one figure, namely Sheikh ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf al-Singkili, and one historical period, namely the 17th century in the Sultanate of Aceh. This limits a broader understanding of the role of gender equality in a larger context, such as in other regions or historical periods in the Islamic world. For this reason, it is recommended that future research expand the scope of the study by comparing al-Singkili’s thoughts with other figures from different periods or regions, in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the struggle for gender equality in Islamic history. Researchers can also expand the focus on the interaction between religious teachings, politics and society in encouraging social change related to women’s leadership.

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