

Rahmah El Yunusiyah's Concept of Women's Education and the Formation of an Islamic Model of Emancipation in Minangkabau Society

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Abstract

Women's education constitutes one of the important issues in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia. Amid the limited access to education for women, Rahmah El Yunusiyah developed an Islamic educational model through Diniyyah Puteri that aimed to cultivate knowledgeable, morally upright, and empowered women. This study aims to analyze the philosophical foundations of women's education in the thought of Rahmah El Yunusiyah, reconstruct the concept of the Islamic Model of Women's Emancipation that she developed, and explain its contribution to the social transformation of Minangkabau women. The study employs the history of ideas method, consisting of the stages of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The data sources consist of historical documents of Diniyyah Puteri, archival records, and various relevant literature. The findings reveal that women's education according to Rahmah is founded upon tawhid, the integration of knowledge, adab, self-reliance, and social responsibility. Through Diniyyah Puteri, women were prepared to become agents of change capable of integrating Islamic identity, Minangkabau tradition, and the demands of modernity. This concept represents a model of Islamic emancipation that differs from both patriarchal paradigms and secular feminism. The study concludes that Rahmah El Yunusiyah's thought offers a paradigm of Islamic education that positions education as an instrument of empowerment, character formation, and the social transformation of women within Muslim society.

Keywords

Islamic Model of Women's Emancipation; Rahmah El Yunusiyah; Women's Education.



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INTRODUCTION

Women's education constitutes one of the important issues in the history of Islamic education in Indonesia. The discourse on women's education gained momentum in the early twentieth century. This development coincided with the emergence of reform movements that encouraged greater female participation in the public sphere. One of the figures who

played a central role in this process was Rahmah El Yunusiyah (1900-1969). She was the founder of Diniyyah Puteri Padang Panjang, an institution that developed a model of Islamic education for women. The establishment of this institution was a response to the social conditions of the time, when women's access to education remained highly limited. Through the establishment of a school specifically for women, Rahmah El Yunusiyah transformed the way Minangkabau society viewed women's education.

Rahmah El Yunusiyah's prominence emerged within the context of the modernization of Islamic education in Minangkabau. West Sumatra was one of the principal centers of Islamic educational reform in the Indonesian archipelago. In addition to being influenced by Middle Eastern intellectual networks, this reform movement arose from several factors, including Pan-Islamism and ulama networks. Within this intellectual environment, Rahmah El Yunusiyah developed an approach that differed from those of her contemporary reformers. She devoted particular attention to the issue of women's marginalization and educational backwardness.

Studies on Rahmah El Yunusiyah have been conducted by a number of scholars. Fatmawati highlights Rahmah's struggle in establishing Diniyyah Puteri and her success in transforming public perceptions regarding the importance of women's education (Fatmawati, 2020). Nafilah Abdullah examines Rahmah as the "Kartini of Padang Panjang," emphasizing her contribution to educational reform (Abdullah, 2017). Meanwhile, Syaifullah Chaidir examines the development of Diniyyah Puteri and demonstrates that its role in establishing a women-specific educational system, eradicating illiteracy, and providing vocational education was highly significant in the context of social transformation in the early twentieth century (Chaidir, 2012). These studies demonstrate that Rahmah El Yunusiyah was an important figure in the history of women's education.

However, several research gaps have received limited scholarly attention. First, most previous studies have focused more on biographical and institutional aspects than on a thorough examination of the philosophical foundations underlying Rahmah El Yunusiyah's educational thought. The fundamental concepts that formed the basis of her views regarding the nature of women, the aims of women's education, the relationship between religion and empowerment, and the position of women in society have not been systematically analyzed. Second, previous studies have tended to situate Rahmah within the frameworks of women's emancipation or educational modernization, while the dimension of the Islamization of women's empowerment, which constituted the core of her ideas, has not received adequate attention. As a result, Rahmah's thought is often understood merely as a struggle for women's education rather than as an epistemological construct that offers an alternative paradigm of emancipation.

This research gap becomes increasingly relevant in the contemporary context, where the concept of women's empowerment is generally dominated by secular paradigms that emphasize economic participation, individual freedom, and political representation. Such paradigms often separate empowerment from religious and moral foundations. In contrast,

Rahmah El Yunusiyah developed a model of empowerment rooted in Islamic values, moral formation, the acquisition of knowledge, practical skills, and social responsibility. The educational model she designed was not intended merely to make women formally equal to men, but to cultivate Muslim women who are knowledgeable, well-mannered, independent, and capable of contributing to their families, communities, and the nation. Thus, Rahmah's ideas may be understood as an effort to Islamize the concept of women's empowerment through education.

In this article, the Islamization of women's empowerment is understood as a process of reconstructing the concept of empowerment based on the Islamic worldview. Empowerment is not measured solely by the enhancement of social and economic capacities, but also by the strengthening of faith, morality, adab, and responsibility toward society. This perspective enables a new reading of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's thought as an educational project that seeks to integrate spiritual, intellectual, and social dimensions in the formation of Muslim women. Therefore, women's education in Rahmah's perspective is not merely an instrument of social mobility, but a means of forming Muslim subjects capable of fulfilling their role as khalifah to the fullest extent.

Based on this background, this article argues that Rahmah El Yunusiyah developed a concept of women's education that functioned as an instrument for the Islamization of women's empowerment in Minangkabau society. This concept was constructed through the integration of religious education, intellectual education, skills education, and character education, all directed toward the formation of Muslim women who are both empowered and civilized. Through this approach, Rahmah offered a model of empowerment that differed from both traditional patriarchal paradigms and modern secular feminist paradigms.

The novelty of this study lies in three aspects. First, this study systematically reconstructs the philosophical foundations of women's education in the thought of Rahmah El Yunusiyah, which have thus far been discussed primarily from biographical and institutional perspectives. Second, this study proposes the concept of the Islamic Model of Women's Emancipation as an analytical framework for understanding the women's education developed by Rahmah El Yunusiyah. This model demonstrates that women's emancipation from an Islamic perspective is built through the integration of religious education, scientific knowledge, character formation, and social responsibility. Third, this study explains how Islamic education functions as an instrument of social transformation that brings together Islamic identity, women's roles, and modernity within Minangkabau society. This article contributes theoretically to the study of Islamic educational philosophy, the history of women's education, and the development of the discourse on women's emancipation from an Islamic perspective.

Based on these arguments, this study seeks to answer three main questions: (1) What are the philosophical foundations of women's education developed by Rahmah El Yunusiyah? (2) How does this educational concept constitute an Islamic Model of Women's

Emancipation? and (3) How does this model of emancipation contribute to the social transformation of women in Minangkabau society? Through an analysis of these questions, this article seeks to enrich the understanding of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's intellectual legacy while offering a new perspective on the relationship between Islamic education, women's emancipation, and social change in Muslim societies.

METHODS

This study employs the historical method of thought (Kuntowijoyo, 2003). The object of this study is the concept of women's education developed by Rahmah El Yunusiyah and its contribution to the process of the Islamization of women's empowerment in Minangkabau. The history of thought approach was selected because the focus of this study is on the ideas and conceptual constructions that underpinned Rahmah El Yunusiyah's educational thought. Through this approach, Rahmah's thought is understood as a product of the interaction between Islamic tradition and the social context of Minangkabau. The analysis is directed toward identifying key concepts concerning women's education, educational objectives, women's social roles, and the relationship between education and empowerment from an Islamic perspective.

The research data consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include historical documents of Diniyyah Puteri Padang Panjang obtained from the West Sumatra Regional Library, including institutional archives and various manuscripts related to the educational activities pioneered by Rahmah El Yunusiyah. These primary sources are complemented by works documenting the development of women's education in Minangkabau. The secondary sources were obtained from books, journal articles, dissertations, and previous studies discussing Rahmah El Yunusiyah, Diniyyah Puteri, women's education, and the history of Islamic educational reform in Minangkabau.

Data analysis was conducted through four stages of historical research: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic stage involved collecting and classifying relevant primary and secondary sources. The source criticism stage included external criticism to assess the authenticity of documents and internal criticism to evaluate the credibility of the source content. Subsequently, the interpretation stage was employed to examine the conceptual meanings contained within these documents by situating them within the social, religious, and educational context of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's era. The final stage was historiography, namely the construction of an analytical narrative concerning Rahmah El Yunusiyah's concept of women's education and the formulation of the Islamization of women's empowerment as a theoretical framework for understanding the contribution of her thought to the transformation of Minangkabau society.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Philosophical Foundations of Women's Education in the Thought of Rahmah El Yunusiyah

Rahmah El Yunusiyah's thought on women's education emerged from the encounter between the Islamic intellectual tradition and the social structure of Minangkabau. In addition, her ideas were also influenced by the social conditions of West Sumatra in the early twentieth century. Rahmah viewed education as a process of holistic personality formation. According to her, women's education aims to cultivate women who possess moral, religious, and social responsibilities toward their families and society.

Rahmah was born into a family of Islamic scholars. She acquired a strong religious foundation from an early age. Her father, Syekh Muhammad Yunus, was a prominent Islamic scholar in Minangkabau. Meanwhile, her brother, Zainuddin Labay El-Yunusy, was known as a pioneer of the modernization of Islamic education through the establishment of Diniyah School (Hidayat & Rohman, 2024). In addition, Zainuddin Labay El-Yunusy was a student of Syaikh Ahmad Khatib Al-Minangkabawi, a prominent scholar from the Indonesian archipelago who served as a mufti at the Grand Mosque of Mecca. Nafilah Abdullah explains that this intellectual environment shaped Rahmah's awareness of the importance of education as a means of liberating the community from ignorance.

Rahmah's concern for women's education originated from the social realities she encountered in Minangkabau. Although Minangkabau society is known as a matrilineal society that accords women an important position within the kinship structure, women's access to education remained highly limited. Fatmawati explains that women at that time were often perceived solely as homemakers. Education was not considered particularly important for them. This situation prompted Rahmah to question the contradiction between the symbolic status of women within customary traditions and their limited access to knowledge (Fatmawati, 2020).

Within Rahmah's philosophical framework, women are subjects who possess intellectual and spiritual capacities equal to those of men. She rejected the view that women should naturally be confined to the domestic sphere. Women are also entitled to opportunities to develop their intellectual potential. Nevertheless, the equality envisioned by Rahmah was not founded upon the principle of absolute equality as developed in modern liberal feminism. For Rahmah, equality is rooted in the Islamic principle that both men and women share the obligation to seek knowledge and bear the responsibility of serving as khalifah on earth.

This perspective demonstrates that Rahmah's philosophy of education is grounded in the concept of tawhid as the ontological foundation of education. Tawhid serves as the guiding principle affirming the unity of knowledge, morality, and social action. Therefore, women's education must not be separated from the cultivation of faith. Women who possess knowledge but lack moral orientation will be unable to fulfill their social functions optimally. Conversely, piety without knowledge is also insufficient to confront the challenges of changing times.

From Rahmah's perspective, the primary objective of women's education is the formation of civilized human beings. This idea is reflected in the curriculum and educational

system of Diniyyah Puteri, which integrated religious education, general knowledge, practical skills, and character development. Syaifullah Chaidir shows that, in addition to teaching religion, Diniyyah Puteri also developed teacher education, life skills training, and various forms of professional education for women. This integration demonstrates that Rahmah understood education in a holistic manner (Chaidir, 2012).



Figure 1. Diniyyah Puteri of Padang Panjang, 1927

Source: Archives of the West Sumatra Provincial Library

Another important aspect of Rahmah's thought is the relationship between education and social responsibility. Education is directed toward developing women's capacity as agents of social change. Therefore, educated women should be able to contribute to their families, communities, and the nation. Fatmawati notes that Rahmah believed women bear responsibilities toward religion, society, and the homeland; consequently, education serves as a means of preparing them to fulfill these roles (Fatmawati, 2020).

This perspective has strong roots in the social tradition of Minangkabau. Carol Davis demonstrates that Minangkabau women have historically occupied an important position in family management, property inheritance, and decision-making within the matrilineal community (Davis, 1996). However, this role was often more dominant in the domestic sphere than in the public sphere. The women's education developed by Rahmah can be understood as an effort to expand women's social capacities while maintaining their Minangkabau cultural identity.

Rahmah also viewed women's education as a means of bridging the relationship between adat and Islam. In Minangkabau society, the relationship between adat and religion constitutes a very strong foundation of social identity. Franz von Benda-Beckmann and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann explain that Minangkabau identity has been shaped through the dynamic interaction of adat, Islam, and various social institutions that have evolved throughout history (Beckmann & Beckmann, 2012). Therefore, according to Rahmah, women's education also aims to Islamize and strengthen the values that have long been embedded within Minangkabau society.

This close relationship between education and local identity explains why Rahmah did not fully adopt Western educational models. She embraced various elements of educational modernity, such as the classroom system, a structured curriculum, and modern school

administration, while maintaining an Islamic orientation as the primary foundation of education. In other words, the educational modernization undertaken by Rahmah was selective and grounded in the values she upheld.

The social context of Minangkabau in the early twentieth century also reinforced the need for such an educational model. According to Zulfadli, Jamhari Makruf, Zulkifli, and Jajang Jahroni, Minangkabau was one of the principal centers of Islamic modernism in Indonesia. Various reform movements in the fields of education, society, and intellectual life emerged from Minangkabau. Rahmah was part of this tradition of Islamic modernism. She devoted particular attention to women's education, which had previously not received adequate attention (Zulfadli et al., 2024).

The Islamic modernism that developed in Minangkabau created space for the reinterpretation of women's roles in society. However, Rahmah did not understand modernity as a process of secularization. Rather, modernity should be directed toward strengthening the Islamic qualities of both individuals and society. Therefore, the women's education she developed was not intended to produce women detached from religious traditions, but rather women who were capable of engaging with modernity while maintaining a strong Islamic identity (Hidayat, 2021).

From an epistemological perspective, Rahmah rejected the separation between religious knowledge and secular knowledge. Knowledge was viewed as a unified whole originating from Allah and intended to be used for the benefit of humanity. This principle was reflected in the curriculum structure of Diniyyah Puteri, which integrated religious education with modern knowledge. Through this approach, women were prepared to become individuals capable of participating in modern life without losing their spiritual orientation.

Rahmah's philosophy of education also demonstrated a strong concern for character education. For her, the success of education should not be measured solely by the mastery of knowledge, but also by the formation of moral character. Therefore, education at Diniyyah Puteri emphasized the cultivation of religious practice, the development of responsibility, independence, and leadership. Such character education served as a means of shaping women with moral integrity.

In addition, the dimension of leadership constituted an important element in Rahmah's concept of women's education. She believed that women possess the potential to become leaders in various spheres of life (Ridla, 1997). However, the leadership she envisioned was not merely the ability to hold formal positions, but rather the capacity to guide the family, influence society, and direct social change based on Islamic values. This perspective explains why Diniyyah Puteri, from its inception, functioned not only as a religious educational institution but also as a center for the formation of Muslim women leaders. Syaifullah Chaidir demonstrates that the institution played a significant role in producing teachers, social activists, and various female figures who contributed to society (Chaidir, 2012).

Furthermore, according to Rahmah, women's education serves as a means of fostering independence. The various forms of skills education developed at Diniyyah Puteri should be understood as part of a strategy for women's empowerment grounded in Islamic values. When examined more deeply, Rahmah's ideas as a whole reveal an effort to reconstruct the meaning of women's empowerment from an Islamic perspective. Empowerment, in this sense, refers to the process of strengthening women's capacities so that they may fulfill their responsibilities more effectively. This concept differs from the traditional patriarchal paradigm that restricts women's access to education. At the same time, it also differs from the secular feminist paradigm, which often regards religion as an obstacle to empowerment. Rahmah, by contrast, viewed Islam as a source of legitimacy and moral energy for women's empowerment.

The philosophical foundations of women's education in the thought of Rahmah El Yunusiyah may be formulated as a synthesis of *tawhid*, adab, knowledge, social empowerment, and Islamic identity (Sururi et al., 2020). Women's education is positioned as a process of forming Muslim women who are knowledgeable, morally upright, independent, and responsible for the advancement of society (Ahmed, 2018). Through this framework, Rahmah El Yunusiyah effectively developed a paradigm of women's education that transcended the boundaries of educational reform in her time.

Islamic Model of Women's Emancipation: Reconstructing Female Agency through Diniyyah Puteri Education

Women's emancipation in the perspective of Rahmah El Yunusiyah did not emerge from a liberal paradigm that positions individual freedom as the ultimate goal of social life. Rather, emancipation is understood as a process of forming free and autonomous human beings through education. Within this framework, Diniyyah Puteri sought to reconstruct women as agents of social transformation. Rahmah's thought offers an Islamic model of women's emancipation that differs from both colonial and secular-modern paradigms.

Philosophically, the concept of emancipation developed by Rahmah is grounded in the Islamic anthropological assumption that human beings are created both as khalifah and as servants of Allah. Therefore, the emancipation of women is understood as the actualization of the human potential bestowed by God. This perspective is particularly relevant to the analysis of Nella van den Brandt, who argues that concepts of emancipation are always shaped by specific social, cultural, and religious contexts (Van Den Brandt, 2019). Van den Brandt critiques the assumption that secularism automatically leads to women's emancipation and demonstrates that different communities of women construct distinct forms of emancipation in accordance with their own horizons of meaning.

In the context of early twentieth-century Minangkabau, Rahmah confronted a unique social reality. On the one hand, women occupied an important position within the matrilineal system. On the other hand, access to higher education and intellectual authority remained highly limited. This condition demonstrates that symbolic status does not necessarily translate into actual capacity. Therefore, Rahmah's educational efforts may be

understood as an attempt to transform women's cultural position into tangible epistemological capacity.

Pim de Zwart demonstrates that Minangkabau society developed within a social structure that differed from that of many other colonial regions. The strength of local institutions and the customary-based system of property ownership gave the region distinctive characteristics. This structure produced a relatively lower level of social inequality compared to Java during the colonial period (De Zwart, 2021). However, economic transformation and colonial globalization continued to generate new challenges that required the emergence of a more educated human resource base. It was within this context that women's education became a historical necessity.

Rahmah understood that colonialism also operated through the production of knowledge. Women who lacked access to knowledge would remain objects of history. Therefore, education became an instrument of liberation from intellectual dependency. In this regard, Diniyyah Puteri may be interpreted as a form of epistemic resistance to colonialism. This perspective is consistent with the ideas of Jennifer S. Ponce de León and Gabriel Rockhill. They argue that genuine emancipation cannot be separated from the struggle against colonial and neocolonial structures of domination that limit a society's ability to determine its own future (Ponce De León & Rockhill, 2024).

Diniyyah Puteri sought to cultivate autonomous women. However, autonomy in Rahmah's thought differs from the concept of liberal individualism. The autonomy she envisioned refers to the capacity to make decisions based on knowledge, moral character, and religious consciousness. In other words, freedom is not understood as the absence of norms, but as the ability to direct oneself in accordance with the values of truth. This is where the uniqueness of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's Islamic model of emancipation lies. She did not construct a dichotomy between religion and women's freedom. On the contrary, religion itself became a source of liberation. This position indirectly challenges modern narratives that often portray religiosity as an obstacle to women's emancipation.

Islamic emancipation is understood as a process of decolonizing knowledge through the development of consciousness grounded in *ma'rifa*. This perspective is closely aligned with Rahmah's educational project, as both reject epistemic subordination to Western paradigms. Rahmah sought to develop a system of knowledge rooted in the Islamic tradition (R'boul & Barnawi, 2024). Diniyyah Puteri, in this context, may be understood as an early form of the decolonization of women's education in Indonesia.

Rahmah did not merely teach religious knowledge. Nafilah Abdullah explains that Rahmah studied and taught various disciplines, including health, midwifery, physical education, domestic skills, natural sciences, and other branches of general knowledge (Abdullah, 2017). She even undertook medical training and midwifery practice, which were subsequently incorporated into the curriculum of women's education. This approach demonstrates that emancipation, in Rahmah's view, was inherently modern. At the same time, this educational model challenges the stereotype that women's education is oriented

solely toward domestic roles. Rather, Rahmah sought to develop women's capacities to participate in the public sphere while maintaining their Islamic identity. Women's education was not intended to make women imitators of men, but to cultivate their distinctive potential as social and intellectual agents.

This emancipatory dimension is also evident in Rahmah's involvement in various socio-political movements. Nafilah Abdullah notes that Rahmah supported the Youth Pledge Congress, opposed Dutch colonial policies, participated in the struggle for independence, and built extensive social networks to advocate for women and society (Abdullah, 2017). When examined through the perspective of contemporary Indonesian women's history, as discussed by Nurfitri Swastiningsih, Mandy Morgan, Ann Rogerson, and Elli Nur Hayati, the struggles of Indonesian women have consistently been linked to efforts to secure safe spaces, social justice, and recognition of women's agency. Rahmah pursued these objectives long before the term "gender justice" became part of global academic discourse (Swastiningsih et al., 2024).

A comparison with modern women's organizations is also instructive. Saskia E. Wieringa demonstrates that many Indonesian women's organizations in the twentieth century were often caught in the tensions between state ideology, political interests, and struggles for power (Wieringa, 1993). In this context, Diniyyah Puteri emerged as a distinctive institution because the foundation of its struggle was not a practical political ideology, but rather education as a long-term strategy for social change.

From the perspective of Minangkabau anthropology, Rahmah's thought effectively reconstructed the relationship between adat and Islam. If adat provided women with social legitimacy through the matrilineal system, Islamic education provided them with intellectual and moral legitimacy. The two were not placed in opposition to one another; rather, they were integrated within a coherent civilizational framework.

The concept of women's agency that emerged from Diniyyah Puteri therefore differs from the liberal concept of agency, which emphasizes individualism. In Rahmah's perspective, agency is relational in nature. Women become agents of change through their roles within the family, society, and the Muslim community. Personal freedom remains important, but it is always linked to social and spiritual responsibility. Epistemologically, this model may be described as a reconstruction of agency based on tawhid. Tawhid is not merely a theological doctrine, but also a principle of liberation that frees human beings from dependence on any authority other than God.

Furthermore, Diniyyah Puteri may be interpreted as a project of Islamic emancipation that preceded many contemporary decolonial theories. While current global discourse speaks of the decolonization of knowledge and epistemic liberation, Rahmah had already put these principles into practice through the establishment of an independent women's educational institution rooted in the Islamic tradition while remaining open to modern knowledge. The intellectual significance of Rahmah El-Yunusiyah lies in the way she offered an alternative paradigm of emancipation that transcended the dichotomies of West versus

Islam, tradition versus modernity, and religion versus freedom. Within this paradigm, education becomes the path to liberation, knowledge becomes an instrument of transformation, and women become active historical subjects engaged in the construction of civilization. It is this model that makes Diniyyah Puteri not merely a women's school, but a philosophical laboratory for the emergence of an authentic concept of Islamic emancipation.

Social Transformation of Minangkabau Women and the Relevance of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's Thought

The social transformation of Minangkabau women is closely connected to the dynamics of the relationship between adat, Islam, colonialism, and modernity that have shaped West Sumatran society since the nineteenth century. As a society that adheres to a matrilineal system, Minangkabau grants women a relatively important position within the social structure. Women serve as custodians of lineage and guardians of clan ancestral property. However, this strong customary position was not always accompanied by equal access to formal education and intellectual authority. It was within this context that the social transformation of Minangkabau women gained momentum in the early twentieth century.

A number of studies have shown that Minangkabau society underwent complex social transformations as a result of the penetration of Dutch colonialism and integration into the global economy. De Zwart explains that changes in social and economic institutions in West Sumatra during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created new dynamics within society. These transformations were closely related to the division of social roles between men and women (De Zwart, 2021). These transformations generated a need for an educational system capable of preparing society to engage with modernity without losing its local identity.

At the same time, Minangkabau society became one of the major centers of Islamic modernism in Indonesia. Islamic modernism not only introduced theological renewal but also gave rise to reforms in education, publishing, social organizations, and a new awareness of the importance of knowledge. Minangkabau became known as a region that produced many influential reformist ulama and intellectuals in the history of Indonesian Islam. These conditions created an intellectual environment conducive to the emergence of new ideas concerning women's education.

These transformations took place amid a long-standing debate concerning the relationship between adat and Islam. Maretin shows that, in the early twentieth century, Minangkabau society faced various political and social struggles related to the position of adat and religion in public life. These debates gave rise to a process of negotiation that ultimately strengthened the synthesis between Islamic identity and Minangkabau identity (Maretin, 1966). At this juncture, education became an important arena for building a reconciliation between local traditions and the demands of modernity.

The studies of von Benda-Beckmann and von Benda-Beckmann demonstrate that Minangkabau identity has continuously undergone processes of construction and reconstruction through the interaction of adat, Islam, and the state. Women have been

among the key actors in this process, as their position lies at the intersection of the matrilineal kinship structure and the religious norms that have developed within society (Beckmann & Beckmann, 2012). Therefore, changes in the position of women have always been closely linked to transformations in Minangkabau social identity as a whole.

Within the cultural dimension, the concept of "*Alam Minangkabau*" indicates that Minangkabau identity is constructed through the close relationship between tradition, community, and social space. Bruhn explains that Minangkabau identity is continuously produced and reproduced through social networks that extend beyond geographical boundaries. This concept is important for understanding that women's education forms part of the process of cultural reproduction and the preservation of Minangkabau collective identity (Bruhn, 2020).

Although women occupied an important position within the matrilineal system, various studies indicate that their representation in the public sphere remained limited in the early twentieth century. Carol Davis explains that Minangkabau women were often regarded as central figures within the family and holders of domestic authority, yet their contributions to intellectual and public life had not received equal recognition (Davis, 1996). This condition reveals a gap between the symbolic status of women and their access to sources of knowledge.

This situation was further reinforced by the colonial educational system, which generally did not provide broad opportunities for indigenous women. Suryadi shows that colonial educational policies in West Sumatra were primarily directed toward meeting the administrative needs of the colonial government and strengthening social control. Women's education was not a priority; consequently, many Minangkabau women did not have the same educational opportunities as men (Suryadi, 2006).

It was within this social and intellectual context that Rahmah El Yunusiyah emerged as a reformer of women's education. Unlike much of the society of her time, Rahmah viewed women as subjects of education who possessed the same rights and responsibilities to acquire knowledge. For her, social progress could not be achieved without the participation of women in the educational process.

This awareness arose from her observations of the condition of Minangkabau women, who continued to face various barriers in accessing education. Rahmah observed that many women were prepared only to perform domestic functions without receiving adequate intellectual preparation. Consequently, she sought to develop an educational model capable of improving the quality of women while simultaneously preserving their Islamic identity.

The culmination of these ideas was realized through the establishment of Diniyyah Puteri Padang Panjang in 1923. This school was the first modern Islamic educational institution specifically dedicated to women. Its establishment marked an important turning point in the history of women's education in Indonesia because, for the first time, women were provided with an educational space designed according to their particular needs.

Rahmah did not merely establish a school for women. She also developed an educational paradigm that differed from both colonial and traditional models. According to Rahmah, education should integrate religious knowledge, general knowledge, practical skills, and character formation. In Rahmah's perspective, women's education possessed a broad social dimension. Women were regarded as the first educators within the family; therefore, the quality of future generations depended greatly upon the quality of women's education. This idea demonstrates that women's education was not merely a matter of gender equality.

The social transformation advocated by Rahmah is also evident in her efforts to develop teacher education for women. Syaifullah Chaidir's research shows that Diniyyah Puteri produced educators who subsequently played an important role in disseminating education to various regions. In addition to academic education, Rahmah placed great emphasis on skills education. The curriculum of Diniyyah Puteri was designed to equip women with practical competencies that could support their lives within society (Chaidir, 2012). This approach demonstrates that Rahmah understood education as a means of empowerment that was both holistic and contextually grounded.

Rahmah's contribution was not limited to the field of education alone. Nafilah Abdullah shows that Rahmah was also involved in various social and nationalist movements, ranging from resistance to colonial policies to her support for Indonesia's struggle for independence (Abdullah, 2017). These activities demonstrate that the education Rahmah advocated was intended to cultivate women with strong social awareness and a profound sense of nationalism. Rahmah's efforts succeeded in transforming societal perceptions of women's education. Fatmawati notes that one of Rahmah's greatest achievements was shifting public perceptions from viewing women's education as something unimportant to recognizing it as a fundamental necessity for the advancement of both the Muslim community and the nation (Fatmawati, 2020).

In the contemporary context, the relevance of Rahmah El Yunusiyah's thought has become even more pronounced. Globalization, digitalization, and rapid social change demand educational models capable of cultivating character, identity, and social responsibility. The concept of integral education developed by Rahmah offers a framework that remains highly relevant for addressing these challenges. Moreover, the increasing debates surrounding Islamic identity and modernity in West Sumatra have made Rahmah's intellectual legacy even more significant. Amid the growing tendency toward conservatism in recent decades, as noted by Zulfadli and his colleagues, Rahmah's thought demonstrates that modernity, women's education, and Islamic identity can be harmonized within a framework of constructive social reform (Zulfadli et al., 2024).

The social transformation of Minangkabau women was a historical process that unfolded through the interaction of adat, Islam, education, and modernity. Within this process, Rahmah El Yunusiyah played a central role as an agent of change who successfully transformed education into an instrument of women's empowerment. Her thought is not only relevant for understanding the history of women's education in Minangkabau, but also

provides a conceptual foundation for the development of Islamic education oriented toward empowerment, character formation, and social transformation in the contemporary era.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Rahmah El Yunusiyah's thought on women's education was built upon an Islamic philosophical foundation that positions women as central subjects. In Rahmah's perspective, women possess equal intellectual, spiritual, and social capacities in fulfilling their social responsibilities. Rahmah developed an educational model that integrated religious education, general knowledge, practical skills, and character formation.

Furthermore, this article concludes that Rahmah El Yunusiyah's concept of women's education represents an Islamic Model of Women's Emancipation that emerged from the dynamics of the modernization of Minangkabau tradition in the early twentieth century. Unlike models of emancipation grounded in secularization or liberal individualism, Rahmah constructed emancipation through education as a medium for integrating Islam, Minangkabau adat, and modernity. Diniyyah Puteri became an institutional space that transformed women from their cultural position within the matrilineal system into agents with broader intellectual and social capacities. Within this framework, education functioned as a mechanism for the reconstruction of tradition, enabling Islamic values and Minangkabau identity to adapt productively to social change. Therefore, Rahmah's thought may be understood as a form of the modernization of tradition that demonstrates how women's emancipation, Islamic education, and local identity can mutually reinforce one another in the process of building a modern society.

The findings of this article demonstrate that the Islamic model of emancipation developed by Rahmah made a significant contribution to the social transformation of women in Minangkabau society. Education became a medium that connected Islamic values, Minangkabau cultural identity, and the demands of modernity without placing them in an antagonistic relationship. In the contemporary context, Rahmah's thought offers an alternative paradigm for the development of Islamic education oriented toward empowerment, character formation, and social justice.

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