

The New Generation of Women Writers from the *Pesantren* Tradition in Indonesia

NOR ISMAH

University of Hawaii at Manoa

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty first century, a new phenomenon occurred in the literature of Indonesia with the emergence of the *chick lit* and *teen lit* genres. There are many young writers, mostly women, who have written novels based on their own experiences. Some of these young female writers are from the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) tradition. These women are following in the footsteps of the previous generation of *pesantren* writers such as Abidah El-Khaligy. *Chick lit* and *teen lit* writers explore urban lifestyles using daily conversation and ordinary language; in similar fashion young women writers from the *pesantren* tradition explore their stories and personal experiences while studying and living in *pesantren*.

However, some critics claim that *chick lit* and *teen lit*, as the style of the new generation, cannot be compared with the work of the previous generation. They say that this genre is just following a trend, and that it will change in time. In this paper, I will argue that the new generation of women writers from the *pesantren* has become a significant group because they have acted as a bridge between those who are from *pesantren* and those who are outside of tradition, and because in the past Muslim women have rarely achieved any prominence in the literary world.

This paper attempts to provide a brief description of *pesantren* literature and how it developed, and the influences of the *chick lit* and *teen lit* genres, particularly in the emergence of the new generation of *pesantren* women writers. In analyzing the work of the old and the new generation of women writers from the *pesantren*, I will try to explain their significance for the *pesantren* tradition and for Indonesian literature in general. The first section provides a background from which this

genre of writing developed. The essay then goes on to examine several writers in depth, both from the first generation and from the new generation, providing evidence of similarities and differences based on their works. The essay then moves on to assess the significance of the new generation of women writers from the *pesantren* tradition.

New Genres: *Chick Lit* and *Teen Lit*

Nowadays, Indonesian bookstores are stocked with thousands of copies of novels that fall in the categories of *chick lit* (chick literature) and *teen lit* (teen literature). These are genres of popular writing in the contemporary Indonesian literature scene. From 2003 the emergence of these genres has been influenced by the increase in translation and publication of Western *chick lit* and *teen lit* in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* published in Britain in 1999, was the first *chick lit* novel translated into Indonesian (Arimbi 2009, 83). In Bridget's diary the reader can see the thoughts and worries of a mature woman who is thirty-something years old. She worries about her love life, career, and bad habits such as smoking and drinking, and she struggles to keep her life on track (Webb 2009). This was followed in 2000 by the publication of Melissa Bank's book *The Girl's Guide to Hunting and Fishing* and *Being Single and Happy* which were part of a series and were translated into Indonesian as well (Arimbi 2009, 83).

The term *chick lit* refers to a genre, which uses a diary form as the pattern of writing. According to Whithelen (2002), "One of the attractions of the diary format is that it provides a natural structure which Fielding strengthens by having a classic romance plot thread its way through the novel." Like a diary, this genre is writ-

ten using daily conversation and ordinary language; it is therefore easily read and accepted by readers. Usually the main problems in the novel concern what is going on in the main character's daily life. They typically reflect urban culture, and resemble popular drama series on television.

One other important characteristic of this new genre is that it is mostly written and read by women. However, men write in these genres as well, usually using a pen name in order for their writing to be accepted as *chick lit*. The main character is usually a woman between 25-40 years of age. She is often single, or a young mother who is energized, independent, and hardworking, even though she spends time at cafes and night clubs, and goes on dates with handsome men. The theme of sex is discussed openly, and humor is used to deal with topics throughout the stories. Normally, the story is written in the first person, so that the readers feel they are enjoying the diary of a real woman, and that she is talking to them as they read. This pattern is seen by some critics as an interesting way to attract readers. The appearance of these books is also intended to attract readership, since the covers are colorful, with illustrations showing women in various activities and poses (Rusdiarti 2007, 3).

Teen lit shares the same structure as *chick lit*, both in terms of writing style and in its exploration of urban lifestyles. However, *chick lit* mostly describes characters who are mature single woman, living independent cosmopolitan lifestyles. These women face modern problems in love and work. *Lajang Kota* (Urban Single, 2003) written by Fira Basuki and *Jodoh Monika* (Monika's Soulmate, 2004) by Alberthine Endah are good examples of *chick lit*. *Teen lit*, on the other hand, explores teenage characters, high school lifestyle in urban areas, and the sweetness and bitterness of love (Kurnia 2007). The focus of these stories is often on falling in love, dating, and experiencing heartache. Such issues resonant with the teen experience. One example is Esti Kinasih's *Fairish*. It is a story about a female teenager named Fairish and her love life and friendship with two boys, Deva and Alfa. The plot revolves around Fairish who builds relationships and solves problems relating to her love life and friendships (Kinasih 2004).

With the growth of this genre, a number of new writers have emerged, publishing their first novels and sharing their own experiences. Younger writers often

(perhaps mistakenly) assume that writing novels or fiction is easier than writing nonfiction, because authors convey what they are feeling, thinking and doing using their own language, and no more than 250 pages double-spaced are necessary in order for the story to be published and sold. Therefore readers only need to spend between 10,000 and 30,000 rupiahs or \$1-\$3 USD for each novel they buy. These novels are sold as fast as fried peanuts. For instance, Esti Kinasih's novel *Fairish* published by Gagas Media sold 29,000 copies in 2005. By contrast, other books published by Lingkar Pena Publishing House only sold 3000 copies in a year. Another novel, *Cintapuccino* by Icha Rahmanti, was printed three times in a single month and 11,000 copies were sold, while normally a book is printed once a year with a run of 3000 and will sell only 50 exemplars in a month. (Kurnia 2007; Lingkar Pena Publishing House 2010).

A variety of publishers benefit from the emergence of this new literature market, because they attract a large number of readers. Therefore, publishers encourage and promote young writers to produce novels by determining a certain benefit for the writer. For example, *Gagas Media*, one of the biggest publishers of *chick lit* and *teen lit* in Indonesia, applies a "progressive royalty" by giving 11% of the 20,000 exemplar novels sold whereas the standard figure is 10%, and 12% for more than 20,000 copies of novels sold. Not only have publishers institutionalized this trend, but the movie industry also produces films based on these novels, as in the case of *Fairish* and *Cintapuccino*. A publisher can produce a novel based on a film by asking for the novel in advance, as in the cases of *Dealova* and *Garasi*. This kind of collaboration has served to promote *chick lit* and *teen lit* in Indonesia (Tempo Online 2005).

At the same time, a number of young writers educated in the *pesantren* tradition have also begun writing stories, which in some ways resemble *chick lit* and *teen lit* material. The major difference is that they address issues relating to the lives of young Muslims in *pesantren*. According to Azra et al. (2007):

The *Pesantren* is a residential school dedicated to the transmission of the classical Islamic sciences, including study of the *Qur'an* and *hadith*, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) Arabic grammar, mysticism (*tasawwuf*), and the Arabic sciences (*alat*) A typical *pesantren* complex consists of a mosque, study-rooms, dormitories, and *kyai's* [the Islamic scholar

who builds and leads the *pesantren* house) (p. 175).

On the one hand, *chick lit* and *teen lit* novels written by young urban writers talk about popular lifestyle issues such as dating, shopping at the mall, prom night, and the other ways to express feelings of love. They use urban slang words such as *gue* (I), *lo* (you), *tajir* (rich), *dodol* (stupid), and *pembokat* (housewife helper). On the other hand, young Muslim writers discuss living in a dormitory, sharing property with their dorm-mates, the challenge of Qur'anic recitation, and unique stories about the expression of love when individuals are faced with the limits placed on male-female interaction by *pesantren* regulations. They use not only urban slang words but also some terms that are generally used in the *pesantren* environment, such as *ta'zir* (punishment), *ro'an* (cleaning work) and *ghashab* (using other's property without permission). These kinds of works are known as *sastra pop pesantren* (pesantren pop literature).

Sastra pop pesantren is a new genre of *sastra pesantren* (*pesantren* literature) that is influenced by *chick lit* and *teen lit*. In general, *sastra pesantren* is regarded as literature dealing with the knowledge and traditions associated with the *pesantren* system, which contains themes concerning religious expression and feelings of love for God, esoteric religious experiences, concerns about human ethics, and praise for God's universe. In addition, Jamal D. Rahman offers three main definitions of *sastra pesantren*: first, it is a literature that lives and develops in *pesantren*, for example *syair* and *nazham* (poems in Arabic language); Second, *sastra pesantren* is literature written by people who are from the *pesantren* tradition, such as *kiai* and *santri* (the students of *pesantren*); third, it is a literature dealing with knowledge and traditions associated with the *pesantren* as mentioned above. In light of these three definitions, it seems there is a possibility of expanding *sastra pesantren* outside its original form and content (Rahman 2008).

According to Zawawi D. Imron, a well known Indonesian poet, the emergence of *sastra pesantren* started in the twentieth century, and was absorbed as a part of Indonesian literature. In the 1960s, Djamil Suherman, Syu'bah Asa, and Fudoli Zaini, representatives of *pesantren* alumni, wrote about the *pesantren* experience. For instance, the work *Umi Kulsum* written by Djamil

Suherman in 1963 was a compilation of short stories about daily life in *pesantren*. In the 1970s, Emha Ainun Nadjib, who studied in *Pesantren* Gontor gained some prominence through a volume of religious poems. Subsequent poets were K.H. Mustofa Bisri, Jamal D. Rahman, Acep Zamzam Noor, and Ahmad Syubbanuddin Alwy, who were acknowledged as part of the 1980s generation of *sastra pesantren* writers. Mathori A Elwa, Hamdi Salad, Nasruddin Anshory, Kuswaidi Syafi'ie, and Abidah El-Khaliq emerged in the 1990s (NU Online 2004). Their works always mention Islam and the worship of God. However, Abidah El-Khaliq was the only well-known women writer among these earlier generations.

Sastra pop pesantren emerged in 2005 when some *pesantren* alumni published their novels to become the new generation of writers from the *pesantren* tradition. However, they wrote about different themes and with a different style from the previous generation, as they were influenced by the new genres of *chick lit* and *teen lit*. Some names that represent this generation of writers are Mahbub Jamaluddin who wrote *Pangeran Bersarung* (A Prince Who wears a Sarong), Ma'rifatun Baroroh with a novel entitled *Santri Semelekete* (A Troublemaker), Pijer Sri Laswiji with *Kidung Cinta Puisi Pegon* (Love Song from Pegon Poem), and Zaki Zarung, who published a novel entitled *Santri Baru Gede* (Teen Student) (Munawar 2009).

Like *chick lit* and *teen lit* novels written by young urban writers, *sastra pop pesantren* novels have generated great appreciation among young readers to whom the novels are addressed. Some titles from the *pop pesantren* genre have been reprinted such as *Santri Semelekete* and *Coz Loving You Gus*, and the publisher has signed an agreement with a production house in order to adapt *Pangeran Bersarung* and *Santri Semelekete* for Film Television (FTV) (Maarif 2007). In other words, at the present time *sastra pop pesantren* has the potential to spread as widely as urban *chick lit* and *teen lit*.

Women Writers from the Pesantren Tradition

Following the *chick lit* and *teen lit* trend, many young women writers from the *pesantren* tradition have emerged in Indonesian literature, such as Rida Fitria, Pijer Sri Laswiji, Maia Rosyida, Azri Dzakiyah, Jazimah

al-Muhyi, Khilma Anis, Camilla Chisni. They published their first novels or short stories using the new genre and shared stories that dealt with female teenagers and their problems, but they used the *pesantren* as the background. Although there are young men from this generation who have written *sastra pop pesantren*, the genre is dominated by women.

One reason for this might be that young women started honing their writing talents by writing a diary, like Maia Rosyida, who kept a diary from childhood (Rosyida 2010). This is the same style that many *chick lit* and *teen lit* novels use. Additionally, the diary pattern usually uses the first person as the storyteller, which provides an opportunity for a writer to express her individuality (Marching 2007, 2). Mentioning “I” in a story represents a “will to be heard” (Marching 2007, 1) like a letter, and the diary pattern or self writing is therefore close to personal experience. Some of the feelings, which emerge during the teenage years, especially for females, are shared by female writers in ways that differ from male teen writers. Writing about feelings is usually associated with women writers; male writers avoid this pattern. Of course, some men do keep diaries; for example, Soe Hok Gie’s *Catatan Seorang Demonstran* (*Note of a Demonstrator*) and Tan Malaka’s *Dari Penjara Ke Penjara I-III*. However, there is a general assumption in Indonesia that diaries about ordinary daily life and love are not written by men (Ihsan 2010). Indeed, this attitude is similar to the current furor in the United States, “The When a Dude Writes It, It’s a Serious Phenomenon” (North 2010). According to the best-selling author, Jennifer Weiner (called by some the Queen of Chick Lit):

I think it's a very old and deep-seated double standard that holds that when a man writes about family and feelings, it's literature with a capital L, but when a woman considers the same topics, it's romance, or a beach book - in short, it's something unworthy of a serious critic's attention” (Pinter 2010).

The contemporary emergence of young female writers from the *pesantren* is an interesting phenomenon because of the previous lack of female writers in the *pesantren* tradition that has been dominated by a patriarchal culture. Discussions about women and *pesantren* focus on how *pesantren* participants interpret Islamic texts about women, and this is important in a tradition that is dominated by male perspectives

(Arimbi 2009, 11). Therefore, producing written texts is significant for women who live within the *pesantren* tradition, in order to share their own experiences, and in order to better understand and solve their own problems in regard to Islam and its interpretation. For example, these texts can address issues surrounding gender inequality because situations where women are positioned as subordinate can be criticized and new perspectives can be offered in the course of publishing and writing.

To illustrate these general points, I will look in detail at three women writers from the *pesantren* tradition. One, Abidah El-Khaliqy, represents the first stage of the development of the genre of *sastra pesantren*; the other two women, Maia Rosyida and Azri Dzakiyah, represent young women who have followed the example Abidah has set, while introducing their own specific concerns. Both Maia and Azri have published more than two books, and in my opinion although they are still young, they have been able to criticize common preconceptions that have negative effects on women.

I will analyze the similarities and the differences between the old generation of female writers and the new generation through their novels and through information that I obtained from personal interviews. My aim is to demonstrate that the role played by the new generation is just as important as that of the previous generation, and to show that the emergence of this new generation is significant for preserving women’s ideas within the *pesantren* tradition. Abidah El-Khaliqy has done this with novels entitled *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (*Woman in the Arab Scarf*) and *Geni Jora* (*Fire of Jora*). I would also stress, however, that *Tarian Cinta* (*Love Dancing*) by Maia Rosyida, and Azri Dzakiyah’s *Twin Ning* (*The Kiai’s Twin Daughters*) have also made important contributions.

The Old Generation

Abidah El-Khaliqy is the most famous female writer from the 1990s generation. She writes about and is herself a product of the *pesantren* tradition. She was known as a poet and prose writer in Indonesia in the mid-1990s. She was born on March 1, 1965 in Menturo Jombang East Java. Growing up in the big *santri* family in the capital of the *Pesantren* Jombang, she would have been exposed to religious lessons since her childhood, especially during her time in the Islamic elemen-

tary school. She studied in *Pesantren Putri* (pesantren for girls) administered by Persis (*Persatuan Islam/Unity of Islam*) in Bangil, East Java for six years, and she gained her bachelor's degree from the State Institute of Islamic Studies in Yogyakarta. During her college years, she was an active member in the *Eska* theatre community and *Lingkaran Penyair Yogyakarta* (The Yogyakarta Poet Circle). She was initially a feminist activist rather than a writer, stemming from her involvement with *Yayasan Kesejahteraan Fatayat* (The Fatayat Welfare Foundation, YKF), an NGO, which sought to empower women. During that time, she wrote *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, which was published under the auspices of YKF and the Ford Foundation (Arimbi 2009, 95).

Abidah set her prose work against a *pesantren* background, in a world that she understood well, and her novels have a close relationship to her personal experiences. Her works are different from the writers from the popular and urban-centered *sastra wangi* (literally, fragrant literature) generation such as Ayu Utami, Fira Basuki, and Mahesa Ayu Djenar (Janssen 2003). Their novels explore cosmopolitan life-styles, whereas Abidah writes about life-styles that are assumed to be marginal. The perspective of women in rural *pesantren* is rarely written about by other writers, and for this reason she became known as a female writer from the *pesantren* tradition. Most Indonesians consider *pesantren* to be closed worlds, very conventional and traditional. As a *santri*, Abidah therefore wants to create a link between the *pesantren* and the ordinary Indonesian world, and between the imaginings of the general Indonesian public and the factual elements of life in the *pesantren* world through her writing. In other words, her writing can be a bridge to connect *pesantren* with outsiders (Arimbi 2009, 98).

However, Abidah has been challenged by orthodox interpretations of women's role and position from the *ulama* (Islamic scholars) in Indonesian society, particularly those associated with *pesantren*. For example, some of the *ulama* who were invited to a discussion of *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* objected to her story line and argued that she should not discuss anything about *kiiai* nor write about women's reproductive issues, since this implies criticism of the *pesantren* tradition. *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* was a controversial novel when it was first published in 2001, especially for those who condemned Abidah's criticism of *Kitab*

Kuning, the text books used in *pesantren* schooling. She argued that *pesantren* participants mostly use *Kitab Kuning* as a primary reference, rather than using the Qur'an itself. This effects interpretations of how women should live, even though *Kitab Kuning* is a compilation of human ideas that are related to a particular social context. Therefore, *pesantren* culture tends to be repressive towards women, controlling their educational rights and freedom of choice in reproduction rights through arranged marriages and polygamy. For Abidah, her novels represent a crucial effort to promote a more balanced sociological analysis of the application of theological principles in society (Arimbi 2009, 98).

Abidah wrote several other novels, including *Ibuku Laut Berkobar* (My Mother, the Ocean of Fire) (1987), *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* (2000), *Menari di Atas Gunting* (Dancing on Scissors) (2001), *Atas Singgasana* (On the Throne) (2002), *Geni Jora* (Fire Jora) (2004), *Nirzona* (2007), and *Mahabbah Rindu* (Missing Love) (2010). In addition to *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, I will analyse *Geni Jora*, since both represent works influential in addressing women's issues and are set against a *pesantren* background. Women who rebel against their families and the unequal culture are the main characters in both novels.

Annisa is the name of the main character in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*. She has an elder brother, Rizal, who has greater opportunities to obtain what he wants, such as permission to ride horses, something that Annisa really wants to do. Unfortunately, her father does not allow her to ride horses, which he says is a man's activity. During her adolescence, Annisa learns to read the Qur'an but she also learns to ride horses secretly, with Lek Khudhori's assistance. After some time, Nisa falls in love with Lek Khudhori, but she has to follow her father who has arranged a marriage for her with Syamsuddin, whom she has never met. She is still under twenty years old and had only graduated from elementary school at the time of the marriage. In fact, Nisa experiences violence and sexual harassment in her marriage because her husband is a sexual deviant; he is only aroused after physically abusing his wife and his love-making is sexually perverted. He also takes a second wife. Nisa feels traumatized, but finally she divorces Syamsuddin and begins a new life, gaining her right to study, and eventually marrying Lek Khudhori (El-Khaliqy 2008).

Similarly, in *Geni Jora*, Abidah's main character is a woman. Kejora was born into a patriarchal family. Her father marries two women, and Kejora's mother is his first wife. Her grandmother is one of the agents by which the patriarchic system is maintained. She keeps Jora inside the house and never allows her to play with others. With one elder sister and a younger brother, Jora lives surrounded by Arabic people, such as her step mother, her neighbors, her boyfriend, her best friend, even the *kiai* who leads the *pesantren* she attends. Jora goes to study in Morocco and travels around the countries of the Middle East. She dreams that she can prove that she has the power to be herself, and can rebel against violence and the patriarchal culture (El-Khaliqy 2004).

The New Generation

At the same time, we see the emergence of Maia Rosyida and Azri Dzakiyah who are recognized as young writers from the *pesantren* tradition from which Abidah El-Khaliqy came. Maia was born on 29 November 1987 in Salatiga, Central Java. She published her first novel in 2007 entitled *Tarian Cinta* (Love Dancing), and she is recognized as a young writer from the *pesantren* tradition because she used the *pesantren* as a background for her story, as well as exploring *santri* lifestyles. Her interest in writing began when she was in her second year of elementary school, through reading the newspaper and children's magazines. "Reading and listening to music attracted me to writing," she said. In order to buy a diary which cost 250 rupiah (.25 USD), she saved her pocket money every day. Living in a *pesantren*, Maia became more skillful because she gained self-esteem from the many friends who appreciated her and gave her feedback on her writing. Moreover, when she became involved in *Qaryah Thayyibah*, an educational institution based on community participation, she improved not only her writing but also discovered talents for making movies and other multimedia presentations (Rosyida 2010).

Not only does Maia use the *pesantren* as a background in her work, but she also discusses rural areas. In another novel entitled *Sekolahku Bukan Sekolah* (My School is not a School), Maia wrote about how the community-schooling program known as *Qaryah Thayyibah* began and developed in her village. Even though she is a teenager, she does not prefer writing

about the urban teen lifestyles, which are popular with other young people. She has her own style, which she chooses to share her experiences. She explains:

I address my writing to young readers because I feel close to them and I hope Indonesian youth will become used to thinking and working since they are still young so that they will be a creative and productive generation instead of becoming simply consumers. (Rosyida 2010).

In terms of publication, Maia argues that writing and publishing is one way to deliver ideas to readers, and a way to interact with and influence them. She often writes stories based on current problems, which are occurring in her society and builds her own arguments supported by some knowledge she gained from the *pesantren*. *Tarian Cinta* is an example of this. "I wrote *Tarian Cinta* when the issue of erotic dancing (by *dangdut* Indonesian singers) was a hot topic in the national media," Maia said. She disagrees with some conservative Muslims who criticized her for her ideas, and who even claimed that women who take part in such activities are denizens of hell. She wrote the novel to challenge such conservative views, creating the characters of teenagers Dahlia and Mbah Jalaluddin Rumi, a wise Muslim preacher who dealt fairly with these issues. Even though she does not specifically focus on women's issues, she argues that "Islam recognizes and supports difference and freedom of choice." She makes this very clear in her novel (Wahid Institute 2007).

In *Tarian Cinta*, Dahlia is a teenager who has to dance with her friends to earn money for her family. She lives in a district where Mbah Jalaluddin Rumi heads his *pesantren*. He is a wise *kiai* who helps Dahlia when some conservative Muslims who live there condemn her. However, she does not study or become *santri* in his *pesantren*. The novel also introduces two young men, Bilal and Aiman, who both fall in love with Dahlia. Bilal is a gangster and street boy, whereas Aiman is Mbah Jalaludin's son. It is generally known in *pesantren* culture that the *kiai's* son is like a prince who will attract the attention of all the female *santris*. It is from the conflict facing the conservative Muslim characters and the necessity for Dahlia decide between Bilal and Aiman, that the plot of *Tarian Cinta* flows (Rosyida 2007).

Another young writer is Azri Dzakiyah who uses Dzakeeya Nist as her pen name. She was born on 19 March 1990 in Pasuruan East Java. Unlike Maia, Azri was born to a wealthy family. Her parents had sufficient wealth to provide her with books, magazines, and comics. “My father might teach me how to save money, but not for books,” she said. When she was in her fourth year of elementary school, a local newspaper published her story, and it made her father feel proud. As a gift, he bought Azri some electronic equipment, including a computer, a fax machine, and a printer. In order to sustain her writing, when she was studying in the *pesantren*, her father gave her a laptop, so she could finish writing her first novel which was entitled *Mawar Surga* (Rose of Heaven) and published in 2008 (Nist 2010). *Mawar Surga* was followed by *Alunan Vektor Allah* (Billowing Allah Vector) and *Twin Ning*.

Like Abidah, Azri mostly sets her prose work against a *pesantren* background. She said that *pesantren* contain a number of ideas, and she has experiences living and studying in the *pesantren* system. It made it easy for her to develop her ideas. Yet, in her novels she does critique some interpretations originating in *pesantren* that undermine women’s rights, such as support for polygamy and the tendency to overlook sexual harassment (Nist 2010). In this way, Azri and Maia write about different topics from other young writers, who are from urban cultures. They try to write not just *teen lit* novels but incorporate some issues of which young readers should be aware.

However, as a young writer who addresses her writing particularly towards young Muslims and *santri*, Azri takes themes of love and friendship as a primary consideration. Although she mentions women’s rights, she thinks that this topic should be subordinate to and combined with interesting ideas for the young reader. “In *Mawar Surga* I wrote about advice and ethics and how to build relationships between males and females, but I think it is not much more than entertainment,” she explains (Nist 2010).

Twin Ning, written by Azri Dzakiyah, tells the story of twins, Tazkirah Arfakhsyad and Tafkirah Arfakhsyad. Born as daughters of a *kiai*, Zikra and Fikra live in a wealthy and respected family. They have an elder brother named Fahad who makes their lives perfect. As usual, *ning* (the daughter of *kiai*) or *gus* (the son of a *kiai*) are like the prince and princess in a *pe-*

santrén community. Most people who live in *pesantren* would be curious about their lives. Similarly, Zikra and Fikra are well known among the *santri* and teachers. Physically, both of them look similar, but they have different characters. Zikra is known as tomboy and easy going, whereas Fikra is recognized as calm and cool (Nist 2009).

The story begins with an announcement from their father *Kiai* Arfakhsyad that Zikra and Fikra will be sent to another *pesantren* to study but with each twin going to a different *pesantren*. Zikra will study in traditional *pesantren*, while Fikra will learn in a modern *pesantren*. Following this story, each of them meets *Gus* in their own *pesantren*, and later they fall in love with him. During their studies, they face continuous problems, such as competition with new friends, sadness because Fahad (their elder brother) passes away, and an incident of sexual violence that happens to Hilal’s younger sister, as well as the drama of family bankruptcy, which impacts their financial security. However, Zikra and Fikra and their family are able to survive, and the story has a happy ending (Nist 2009).

The Older and Newer Generations: Similarities and Differences

I found some similarities in comparison between the older generation and the newer generation of women writers from the *pesantren* tradition. First, Abidah El-Khaliqy, Maia Rosyida, and Azri Dzakiyah have the same family background. They grew up in religious and educated families who supported their reading and writing habits, and sent them to study in *pesantren* to gain an Islamic education. This family background is significant because it introduced and built strong reading and writing habits from childhood for these female writers. Some people argue that talent is the most significant element in becoming a successful writer. However, the careers of these three women demonstrate that the milieu in which they obtained support and through which they began their hobbies in reading and writing are also important. In terms of her introduction to reading and writing, Maia said:

I could read before I went to elementary school. My mom taught me to read when I was in my early childhood. Therefore, I did not need to go to kindergarten. Then I liked reading such things as newspapers and children’s magazines. When I was in fourth year of

elementary school, I read novels and teen's magazines. Therefore, I used to write as well. I had a cute diary, which was colorful and decorated with flowers, and I started writing articles, daily notes, opinion, poem, and short stories in my diary (Rosyida 2010).

Similarly, Azri began her writing from childhood and was similarly encouraged by her habit of reading. Since childhood, she never ate without holding a book. "I can't eat without reading an entertaining book such as a comic or something humorous. If I was not reading, I was eating while watching television. I got used to do that because my parents also do that," she explained. In order to motivate her, Azri's parents often showed her the achievements of other people. "It meant that I should develop my attainments, not stagnate, and feel satisfied only with this step," she explained. Therefore, since elementary school Azri has been active in displaying her poetry and short stories on the school noticeboard. "And finally, writing does not take time anymore because I am used to it, and now writing has become an enjoyable activity in my life," she concluded (Nist 2010).

Not only educational support, but also equal access to information and opportunity were important values in their families. Abidah El-Khaliqy, Maia Rosyida, and Azri Dzakiyah had the same opportunity as their brothers to obtain an education and develop their talents. "In my family, daughters and sons are not significantly different. My parents never differ in the way they behave with us," Maia said. Along these lines, Azri has her own explanation:

Sometimes I found differences, because normally a daughter has more work than a son has in regard to the household. Moreover, I am the first child in my family. Therefore, I spent a lot of time helping my parents instead of writing. However, I am also the first owner of some facilities provided by my parents such as a computer, a laptop, and a hand phone. They also taught me to use the internet, so that my younger brother did not have more privileges (Nist 2010).

After completing elementary school, Abidah also had the opportunity to go to *pesantren* even though she had already received a religious education from childhood, because she grew up in a big *santri* family. In the same way, Maia and Azri also gained their religious education in *pesantren*. For some families, it is a privilege to send their children to *pesantren* because of the cost of

attending such an institution. Also, people expect more of the *santri* in terms of being Islamic experts, and feel they should be able to answer questions regarding religious problems (Dhofier 1999, 32). Additionally, the three women obtained two benefits unique to those who have studied in modern *pesantren*. On one hand, they learned Islamic knowledge; on the other hand, this was combined with secular knowledge (Dhofier 1999, 22), including creative writing. All three of these writers studied in modern *pesantren*, namely *Pesantren* Puteri Bangil, *Pesantren* Al-Qalam Malang, and *Pesantren* Krapyak Yogyakarta. All of these *pesantren* are located in Java.

Second, the fact that Abidah El-Khaliqy, Maia Rosyida, and Azri Dzakiyah were educated in *pesantren* is significant in forming their talent for writing. They preserved their talents in the *pesantren* through involvement in activities related to creative writing like theater, notice board activities and magazine activities. Abidah's experience is an example. She started her profession when she was studying in the *pesantren*. She published short stories and children's stories in newspapers and magazines using her pseudonyms: Ida Arek Ronopati, Idasmara Prameswari, or Ida Bani Kadir (Arimbi 2009, 95).

In the experience of these writers, the *pesantren* milieu was beneficial for developing their talent. However, male students often have access to information because they are able to use the internet whenever they wanted to, while female students have to obtain permission. As mentioned by Maia, "I found it difficult to access the internet because the *pesantren* does not allow us (female *santri*) to use it; therefore some of us went out and did it secretly. However, I dealt with this situation by asking permission from Ibu Nyai (the *kiai's* wife) directly, and she allowed me to go out." (Rosyida 2010). Unlike Maia's situation, *pesantren* Al-Qalam Malang where Azri studied provides twenty-four hour internet connection for the *santri*, including the females (Nist 2010).

Another challenge that these writers faced in *pesantren* is that they had to manage their time to study, because they were required to attend classes in *pengajian* (the teaching of classical Islamic texts) and also go to the *madrasah* to obtain formal education. They also had to take on extracurricular activities both in *pesantren* and *madrasah* and accept responsibility for them-

selves because they were so far away from their parents. Their activities started from early prayers, and continued through attendance at *pengajian* and other activities according to an exact schedule determined by *pesantren* board that often finished at mid night. "It was difficult if I was still in the mood to write, but I had to attend a class, for example. Therefore, I often kept writing while listening to my teacher. I put my laptop under the table, but my teacher would get angry if he knew what I was doing." (Nist 2010). Similarly, trying to sustain her writing time, Maia would sit in the corner of the class in order to avoid her teacher's attention so that she could continue writing (Rosyida 2010).

Due to their strong motivation and firm determination, Maia and Azri become more talented writers. Even Maia could attract esteem while in the *pesantren*, getting friends to support her hobby by asking them to be proofreaders. Azri obtained full support from her school when she published her novel. "They were impressed to know that one of their students had written a novel, because this is a first experience for them. They bought 100 copies of my first novel and they invited a critic to deliver his evaluation of my novel during the launching ceremony," Azri said (Nist 2010). From this it seems that *pesantren* can not only play an important role in motivating students and building their determination to become writers, but also introduce them to Islamic knowledge. Such experiences of *pesantren* culture influence what they write in their novels.

Third, through poems and novels, Abidah El-Khaliqy, Maia and Azri use their works to tell the readers about *pesantren* and their concerns about women's rights and equality. They create female characters in their writings, and characterize them as independent women and agents of the women's movement. For example, Abidah describes Annisa in *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and Kejora in *Geni Jora* as women who rebel and criticize male domination in their family. Even though each of these novels has its own distinct plot, Abidah wanted to emphasize, "There is some value in rebellion. There is nothing permanent about inequality. Rebels can be born in many types and forms." (El-Khaliqy 2004, 215).

Similarly, Maia also narrates her character's struggle as that of a woman, like the character Dahlia, who has to take care of her family because her father has passed away and her mother is suffering and in pain. She sometime describes women as housewives. "I think

being a housewife is an honorable job, because she is responsible for our next generation," she argues (Rosyida 2010). In *Tarian Cinta*, Maia describes Aiman's mother as a housewife who works in her store selling cookies. She has a close relationship with Aiman and his elder and younger sister. She is a patient caretaker, full of love, and a good listener:

"Eh eh eh, begitu ya kalau nggak ada ayah, pada berantem nggak karuan. Didenger dari luar itu nggak pantes," Ummi yang baru pulang dari toko kuenya sejak pagi bekerja itu tiba-tiba muncul dari pintu belakang. "Ayi' tu, Mi, cari masalah." "Abisnya Mi, udah ngerti malem-malem." "Ayi', Ayi', udah, ngalah sedikit. Faza sama Lila juga sama saja. Tambah gede kok pada makin pinter berantem ya? Ayo, sekarang jelasin ke Ummi, masalahnya tadi apa?"

Author's Translation:

"Eh eh eh, see if your father is gone, you fight each other. It is not good if people outside can hear," Ummi suddenly comes from the back door. She has just returned from her cake store. "Ayi' Mom, here is the trouble maker." "No, she does not realize, it's already night." "Ayi, Ayi, enough, be patient. Faza and Lila, both of you are the same. You are bigger and more of a fighter now, ya? Explain to Mom, what's going on?" (Rosyida 2007, 126)

This description shows the reader the way Maia is concerned about women, as in the following scene where she ponders the meaning of female beauty:

"Cantik itu bukan dari wajah seseorang. Perempuan cantik adalah perempuan yang selalu ingin belajar tentang pengetahuan yang tak terbatas. Dan, itu yang aku suka dari kamu. Aku nggak pernah minta sama Tuhan atas perempuan yang sempurna. Tetapi, aku selalu memohon untuk dipertemukan dengan perempuan yang semangat belajarnya tinggi."

Author's Translation:

"Beauty is not just because of the face. A beautiful woman is one who desires to learn unlimited knowledge. That is the way that I love you. I never asked God for a perfect woman, but I always asked that I could meet a woman who has a high motivation to learn." (Rosyida 2007, 192)

Azri, on the hand, explains her female characters in two different ways. Fikra and Zikra, their mother, and Hilal's mother represent these types. Zikra is a confi-

dent girl, rebellious, curious, smart, and a decision maker; whereas Fikra and the two other women are calm, mature, patient, and wise housewives. However, Azri characterizes all of them as women who love learning and studying. This is an example: “*Bu Nyai Kamalia sedang membaca buku biografi KH. Hasyim Asy’ari terbitan LKiS di ruang tengah ndalem yang terbelang mewah*”. (Bu Nyai Kamila is reading a biography of KH Hasyim Asyari published by LKiS in the luxurious family room) (Nist 2009, 43).

In discussing women’s issues, Azri repeatedly criticizes some classic interpretations regarding polygamy. According to her, in considering polygamy, the whole text of the Qur’an should be read and the *asbabun nuzul* (occasions of revelation) of the *ayat* (one sentence of the Qur’an) should be analyzed, in order to respect a woman who has feelings and rights. The purpose of *nikah* (marriage) is to build a family in peace, love, and a caring manner (*sakinah mawaddah warahmah*), and it is possible to ruin this through polygamy. She also uses the male character in her story to support her argument:

Gus Hilal yang kalem, tak menyela sedikit pun apa-apa yang dikatakan Zikra. Dia memang sejak dulu selalu mengibarkan bendera monogami, bendera antipoligami. Ia mengingat ibundanya tercinta dan juga adiknya, Bahira.

Author’s Translation:

Gus Hilal remains calm and does not interrupt anything that Zikra says. He has been raising the monogamy flag for long time. He always remembers his beloved mother and her young sister, Bahira (Nist 2009, 99)

In her novels, Azri often describes an ideal male character, in comparison with female characters, in order to create a model for men of how to behave and give respect to woman. One of these characters is Kiai Arfakhshad, who loves his wife very much; he even shows his feelings for her in front of his children. He is responsible for his family even though he has to be a bread vendor in order to deal with his bankruptcy. As a *kiai* he should not work by selling bread, but he does it anyway (Nist 2010).

In terms of stories about *pesantren*, Abidah, Maia, and Azri describe life in a *pesantren* in detail. Because every *pesantren* has its own characters that reflect the

personality and teachings of the *kiai* (Dhofier 1999: 17), their novels have different settings. Abidah describes a traditional *pesantren* in her book *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban*, where Annisa’s father is the leader and become a *kiai*. Annisa has not had the same opportunities as her brother. Abidah uses this description in order to show readers the culture of gender imbalance. Unlike Abidah, Maia and Azri tell their readers about modern *pesantren* where male and female students are described as having more equal positions; Zikra and Fikra, the twins in *Twin Ning*, even study outside their own *pesantren*.

The following is the comparison between *Perempuan Berkalung Sorban* and *Twin Ning*:

Jika saja, Lek Khudhori tidak membelaku mati-matian, bapak tidak pernah percaya bahwa kepergianku malam itu hanya ke pondok, ke kamar Mbak May. Rencana bapak akan menyekapku di kamar begitu menggebu merasuki semua prasangkanya terhadapku. Sedikit saja aku melakukan sesuatu yang membuatnya tidak berkenan, bapak akan menggeram dan memamerkan gemertak gigiginya di hadapanku.

Author’s Translation:

If Lek Khudhori had not defended me, my father would not have believed that on that night I only went to Mbak Maya’s room. My father planned to imprison me in my room because he did not believe me. Even if I only did the smallest thing that went against his decision; he would growl and bare his teeth in my presence (El-Khaliq 2008, 53).

Sebenarnya Abah juga berat. Tapi, sepertinya ini memang jalannya. Abah juga telah membicarakan hasil istikharah Abah dengan kiai-kiai teman. Abah juga Ummi. Kalian punya jalan sendiri-sendiri untuk mencari ilmu” ... “Kita coba ya, Nak,” Bu Nyai sudah tak bisa membendung lagi. Spontan, Zikra dan Fikra saling berpelukan. “Aku sayang kamu,” Zikra mengawali bicara ... Abahnya kembali bersikap santai. “Dan kalian harus bersiap-siap karena Abah akan mengirim kalian ke pesantren masing-masing minggu depan.

Author’s Translation:

Actually, it is not easy. But, this is the way you gain your dream. You have your own way in learning. I have talked to some of *kiai* who are my friends and to your mother.” ... “Let’s try, my dear,” mother

said sadly. Zikra and Dzikra spontaneously hugged each other. "I love you," Zikra said ... Her father looked relaxed.. "And, each of you should prepare immediately because I plan to send you to your new *pesantren* next week." (Nist, 2009, 78).

Through such comparisons, the readers realize that *pesantren* are categorized in different types and models, depending on the leadership of the *kiai*. However, Abidah tends to emphasize that *pesantren* are run by a patriarchal system that is against women's rights, whereas Maia and Azri describe *pesantren* life from the teen perspective as simple, fun, and enjoyable, and as authors they write from an informed position. Therefore, the reader can conclude that living in *pesantren* is not as difficult and serious as Abidah depicted in *Perempuan Berkabung Sorban* and *Geni Jora*.

Another important similarity between the older and the newer generation of female writers from the *pesantren* tradition is that Abidah, Maia and Azri use the same terms related to *pesantren* and local culture as their male predecessors did. In their novels, there are some Arabic terms such as *qiyamul-lail* (night praying), *akhir sanah* (end of the year), *bazaar akbar* (big sale), *takzir* (punishment), *thalabul ilmi* (searching knowledge), *i'dad* (beginner), *tsaniyah* (intermediate), *'ulya* (advance), *muhasabah* (introspection), *su'uzhan* (negative thinking), and *muthala'ah* (review) all of which are generally used in *pesantren*.

Not only are Arabic terms used, but the writers also include other culturally specific words related to the environment where the story takes place. In *Geni Jora*, which is set in Morocco, Abidah uses *Ganbri* (Imulchil girls), *harira* (the name of a soup), *jellaba* (a wide dress), and *khal* (aunty) related to Moroccan culture. While in *Perempuan Berkabung Sorban*, she writes Javanese words such as *mudheng* (understand), *mboten* (no), and *ngelunjak* (to despise). Maia and Azri do this as well, with terms like *ngalap* (to take), *ndalem* (*kiai*'s house), *mbeling* (rebel), *ngendiko* (to say), and *teklek* (sandal made from wood). In addition, they use some specific terms used only in the *pesantren* such as *roan* (cleaning work), *diniyah* (school of *pesantren*), *kiai* (*pesantren* leader), *santri* (student of *pesantren*), *gus* (*kiai*'s son), and *ning* (*kiai*'s daughter). All of those words are included with translation in the glossary in order to help the readers understanding their meanings.

Abidah, Maia, and Azri are all involved in a wider literary community after graduating from the *pesantren*, where they developed their self esteem and literary skills. This is similar to the earlier generation of *pesantren* writers. According to Acep Zam Zam Noor (2009, 5), a literary community plays an important role in fighting for the existence and identity of writers and poets, and in sustaining their creative existence as writers. There are some literary communities in Indonesia created among the *pesantren*, and these communities serve as a source of esteem and support for the writers. For example, *Komunitas Malaikat* (angel community) was established by Ahmad Faisal Imron, who graduated from *Pesantren Baitul Arqom*, Ciparay. The members of this community are *pesantren* alumni who write expressive poetry that differs from the traditional poem pattern. They also create paintings, sculptures, installation art, and music.

Abidah was an active member of the ESKA Theater (Sunan Kalijaga Theater) during her time in college. ESKA is a student community that engaged in and established several literary activities involving writers and poets in Yogyakarta continuously from 1970. They were known as the Kelompok Sastra IAIN (Literary Community of State Institute for Islamic Studies) (Teater ESKA 2007). Maia was active in the Qaryah Thayyibah community that assists teenage students in education and several community activities, such as writing and creating movies (Rosyida 2010). Similarly, Azri was involved in the Matapena Community in Yogyakarta, where she published her novel. She sustains writing by facilitating and assisting with writing training for Matapena's members (Nist 2010).

Finally, Abidah, Maia, and Azri are supported by the media and their publishers, which helps them gain recognition as women writers from the *pesantren* and which is especially important for the newer generation who are publishing their first novels. The current environment has provided them with good opportunities, because the promotion of *chick lit* and *teen lit* after 2003 meant that many publishers have sought out teen writers and *pesantren* novel scripts. Even though they have to fulfill some requirements from the publisher, a story about *santri* life and *pesantren* based on personal experiences is acknowledged as an appropriate and interesting topic. This is different from the earlier period when *santri* and *pesantren* were considered to be uninteresting topics and there were no publishers who

were interested in publishing novels about *pesantren*. Now the writers of the new generation can prove that their novels will be economically viable and attract young readers. For instance, Maia Rosyida has written twenty books since she was eighteen years old, but those books were printed for private use only (Umami Online 2010). Therefore, Maia was not recognized as a writer until 2007 when *Tarian Cinta* was published.

Several competitions, awards, and conferences have played an important role in promoting these young writers. Azri's *Alunan Vektor Allah* (Billowing Allah Vector) won a writing competition held by the Indonesian Ministry of Religion in 2008 (Nis 2010). She is often invited to present her novels and to facilitate creative writing training, which has allowed *pesantren* issues and traditions to be discussed by a broad range of people. Similarly, Abidah gave presentations as a representative of Indonesia in the ASEAN writer's conference in Manila in 1997. In 1998, she received a literary award from the regional government of Yogyakarta and her poem about women and abortion was translated into English and published by Australian poet Geoff Fox in a cyber album. She won second prize for the novel writing competition held by The Jakarta Arts Council in 2003 (Arimbi 2009, 95).

In addition to the similarities, I found differences between the old and new generation of women writers from the *pesantren* tradition. The way Abidah writes is different from Maia and Azri's writings. For example, the new generation uses everyday language in its writing, which is the language that is closest to their teenage readers. In contrast, Abidah uses more a sophisticated and serious form of language that is generally used in literature.

In this context, it is helpful to consider the comments by Welles (1977, 22), who notes that language is the material of literature created by the author and the surrounding culture, and literary language is different from scientific and everyday language. Furthermore, Welles points out: "Everyday language is not a uniform concept: it includes such wide variants as colloquial language, the language of commerce, official language, the language of religion, the slang of students" (1977, 23-24). Everyday language contains expressive functions in everyday verbal communication and it is filled by irrationalities and contextual changes.

Therefore, some critics argue that *chick lit* and *teen lit*, which uses popular language such as *sumpeh lho* (swear guys!), and *so what gitu lho* (so what?), is not literature, and even claim that such language will interrupt the pattern of Indonesian language development (Nurrohmat 2007). However, *chick lit* and *teen lit* addresses young people as readers. In order to connect the reader to the novel, *chick lit* and *teen lit* writers choose popular language that is generally used among young people. Nowadays it is not only spoken but also written. In *Geni Jora*, Abidah sometimes uses popular language as well as describing conversations between Kejora and her friend, and Kejora is a teenager. For instance, she uses *belagu* (boast), *ngomong-ngomong* (by the way), *ngacir* (run), *gopek* (one hundred), and *bejibun* (a lot), although she still preserves her writing style as serious literature by choosing a serious topic for conversation.

Following is a comparison between Abidah and Azri in the way they tell the reader about a light conversation in *pesantren*:

Bersama Elya aku membicarakan kebijaksanaan pesantren dalam hal penerimaan santri baru. Seharusnya pesantren lebih selektif dan hati-hati, terutama terhadap sampah busuk yang hendak mencari nama harum citranya ... Aku senang saat mengetahui mudirul ma'had berkeputusan mengembalikan para santri baru yang telah kronis penyakit moralnya ke orang tua masing-masing dengan pertimbangan bahwa pesantren ini dikhususkan untuk tempat thalabul ilmi dan bukan tempat rehabilitasi.

Author's Translation:

I am discussing the *pesantren* decision in regard to new student acceptance. The *pesantren* should be more selective in accepting a student who has social problems or just wants to get benefits from *pesantren*. It is happy to know that the *pesantren* board decided to send new students who are immoral back to their parents, considering that the *pesantren* is a place for searching for knowledge but it is not place for rehabilitation. (El-Khaliqy 2004, 57).

Dhea memegang bahu Fikra. "Kamu pernah melihat anak manja?" Fikra diam. "Anak yang ... em, pandai sih tapi agak sok begitu. Pernah?" Fikra makin penasaran. "Kalau orang keras kepala yang kata-katanya menyakitkan?" Fikra mengangkat bahunya. "Yup. Jika ketiganya digabung, diberi tubuh dan diberi nyawa, itulah Gus Syafiq." Dhea

melepaskan tangannya ketika Fikra menggeleng tak mengerti. Merinding juga. "Jangan memvonis gitu pada calon suamiku!" terdengar teriakan santri lain dari kejauhan. "Gantengnya itu loh ..." Para santri lain yang tak tahan, tanpa bicara lagi langsung melempari gadis jangkung yang sedang mencari-cari sandalnya itu dengan apa saja. Ada gelas aqua mereka lempar, kulit pisang bahkan sandal dan buku. Saking sebelnya sama anak ke-PD-an itu. "Canda! Kayak kalian nggak nge-fans aja sama dia."

Author's Translation:

Dhea touches Fikra's shoulder. "Have you seen mama's boy?" Fikra is silent. "Emm, he is smart, but boastful. Have you?" Fikra becomes more curious. "How about a stubborn guy who says something hurtful?" Fikra shrugs. "If you find those three characteristics in one body and it has a soul, he is Gus Syafiq." Dhea removes her hand when Fikra shakes her head, not understanding. She feels goosebumps. "Hai, don't say that. He is my fiancé," another voice shouts loudly from the distance. "He is handsome." Without further discussion, other *santri* cannot restrain themselves from throwing anything they have at that thin girl who is looking for her sandal. They throw a bottle, banana skin, even a sandal, and a book at her because of their resentment. "I am just kidding. Aren't you guys interested in him?" (Nist 2009, 90).

Abidah clearly shows that she wants to emphasize women's rebellion as the main idea, while the theme of love and friendship are supporting ideas. Therefore, her story, although about teenagers, is serious reading and rigidly follows accepted literary patterns. In contrast, Azri and Maia define the theme of love and friendship as the main idea, supported by themes of rebellion, pluralism, and criticism of *pesantren*. They address these themes through popular language in order to make their books easily readable, entertaining, enjoyable, and more natural for the young people who are the main audience. In terms of plot, Abidah exercises considerable talent in using the technique of flash back, but Maia and Azri use a simple narrative structure from the beginning of the story until the end. Finally, the book cover can represent differences between the old and the new generation. Abidah's books use elegant paintings for their covers, whereas *novel pop pesantren* are colorful representations of the dynamic life of young people.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed three women writers from the *pesantren*, and in analyzing their backgrounds and writings I have shown that they have become significant in the following features, first, their novels are bridges to connect and interact the *pesantren* culture with the people who live outside the *pesantren*. This interaction shows that the *pesantren* is becoming familiar to people because its tradition, knowledge, and even some criticisms are openly discussed through literature.

Moreover, the emergence of young women writers influenced by *chick lit* and *teen-lit* generation contributes a new genre for *pesantren* literature, which is *pesantren pop literature*. The *pesantren* has become popular amongst older and younger readers. This genre signifies the beginning transformation of *pesantren* culture and the end of the alienation of *pesantren* from a modern lifestyle. This echoes the view of Rahman, who analyzes the emergence of *sastra pop pesantren* from two different points of views: "as a modern form of Indonesian literature and as a development of *pesantren* culture." (The Wahid Institute 2007).

Second, the new generation of women writers responds to the lack of women writers from the *pesantren* tradition in Indonesian literature. As mentioned before, women writers were not prominent in the past, especially those from the *pesantren* tradition. From the 1960s to 1990s, men writers such as Djamil Suherman, Syu'bah Asa, and Fudoli Zaini were representatives of *pesantren* alumni who wrote about *pesantren*, but Abidah El-Khaliqy was the only woman recognized as a writer from *pesantren* tradition. Now women writers play an important role in expressing the views of women concerned about Islamic interpretations of women's position. This is important, since the connection between women, gender, and Islam will always be challenged because of women's problematic position in relation to Islam. A number of interpretations of Islam have managed to define, locate, and perhaps entrap women in certain fixed categories.

In comparing the old and new generations, I have examined six similarities, which concern family background and education, as well as the literary community. The main difference I have found is that on one hand the old generation addresses their writing to older and more mature readers, while the new genera-

tion addresses their novel to young readers. Therefore, they have different ways of writing, including word choice, plots, and themes. Based on this conclusion, I argue that the *pesantren pop novel* is an embryo for *sastra pesantren* in which the older generation of women writers will be followed by a new generation, while young women writers can develop and improve their talents expressing their experiences using their own language. Therefore, the *pesantren pop novel* can provide a training ground for young writers to develop their writing skills and help promote the introduction of women writers in Indonesian literature.

More broadly, the confidence and ambition encouraged by the *pesantren* environment appears to support a range of studies that consistently demonstrate that girls are more likely to succeed academically if they are educated in an all-female school (Curtis 2009). The reason is because they share the same needs and ideas, so that they can provide each other with mutual support, as experienced by Maia Rosyida. Though a discussion of this complex and much debated topic is beyond the realm of the current essay, the biographies of the women writers I describe suggest that the single-sex education environment of the *pesantren*, where female *santri* are not in competition with male *santri*, may give them greater freedom to pursue the goals they have set for themselves and thus to become their own person.

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