



Female Ulamā and Religious Moderation in Indonesia: A Study on the Agency and Authority of KUPI and JP3M

The term *ulamā* is not exclusively associated with men but also includes women. However, despite the recognition of female *ulamā*, male *ulamā* continue to dominate public perception in Indonesian Muslim society, particularly in the realm of *fatwās*. As a result, the significant contributions of female *ulamā* remain largely undocumented in the historical development of Islam in Indonesia. Given the extensive yet often overlooked role of female *ulamā*, the establishment of the Indonesian Congress of Female Ulamā (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, KUPI) and the Association of Female Islamic Boarding School Leaders and Preachers (*Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighah*, JP3M) marks a significant development. These two institutions serve as platforms for female *ulamā* to convene and assert their influence through various scholarly and social activities. This study uses a qualitative research approach, with data presented in a descriptive narrative format. A qualitative approach is chosen to enable an in-depth exploration of the role of KUPI and JP3M female *ulamā* in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia. This approach enables a contextual analysis of both the subjects and objects of study, preventing the risk of overgeneralization of the observed phenomena.

Keywords: Female *ulama*, religious moderation, KUPI, JP3M.

Istilah ulama tidak secara eksklusif dikaitkan dengan laki-laki, tetapi juga mencakup perempuan. Namun, meskipun keberadaan ulama perempuan telah diakui, ulama laki-laki tetap mendominasi persepsi publik dalam masyarakat Muslim Indonesia, terutama dalam bidang fatwa. Akibatnya, kontribusi signifikan ulama perempuan sebagian besar tetap tidak terdokumentasi dalam perkembangan historis Islam di Indonesia. Mengingat peran luas tetapi sering terabaikan dari ulama perempuan, pendirian Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) dan Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighoh (JP3M) menjadi perkembangan yang penting. Kedua institusi ini berfungsi sebagai wadah bagi ulama perempuan untuk berkumpul dan menegaskan pengaruh mereka melalui berbagai kegiatan ilmiah dan sosial. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, dengan data disajikan dalam format naratif deskriptif. Pendekatan kualitatif dipilih untuk memungkinkan eksplorasi mendalam terhadap peran ulama perempuan dalam KUPI dan JP3M dalam mempromosikan moderasi beragama di Indonesia. Pendekatan ini memungkinkan analisis kontekstual baik terhadap subjek maupun objek penelitian, sehingga dapat mencegah risiko generalisasi berlebihan terhadap fenomena yang diamati.

Kata kunci: Ulama perempuan, moderasi beragama, KUPI, JP3M.

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Introduction

Ulamā hold a crucial position in Indonesian society and governance. Since the founding of Indonesia, ulamā have played a significant role in resisting colonial forces. In recognition of their contributions to the nation, several ulamā have been officially designated as Indonesian national heroes. Etymologically, the term ulamā refers to individuals who possess knowledge. Over time, this definition has become more specific, primarily referring to those who specialize in religious sciences, particularly Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*). The concept of ulamā has further expanded with the recognition of their authority by religious communities or congregations (*jamā'ah*). Today, the term ulamā not only denotes scholars of Islamic teachings but also refers to individuals actively engaged in societal affairs, often maintaining strong grassroots connections.¹

The role of ulamā is often associated with men, particularly in issuing religious rulings (*fatwā*). While Indonesian Islamic history acknowledges several female ulamā who have made significant contributions to the transmission of Islamic knowledge, male ulamā have remained dominant. Consequently, many female ulamā have been overlooked and remain underrecognized. Over time, their presence has diminished, nearly vanishing from public discourse despite their historical contributions to Indonesia's Islamic civilization.²

The year 2017 marked a pivotal moment in Indonesia's Islamic intellectual and historical landscape with the gathering of female ulamā at a congress later known as KUPI (*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*). Alongside KUPI, another organization, JP3M (*Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighoh*), was established as a platform for female ulamā leading Islamic boarding

schools (*pesantren*). Both organizations were founded to unite female ulamā and affirm their presence through various scholarly and community-driven activities.

KUPI convenes a congress every five years, accompanied by a series of academic and social events, while JP3M holds annual programs across various pesantren throughout the country. These two institutions are particularly noteworthy for not only facilitating knowledge exchange and program implementation across Indonesia but also actively issuing religious *fatwā*. Through these platforms, female ulamā have strengthened their networks, asserted their influence, and made significant contributions to Indonesia's religious and social discourse.

Although both serve as platforms for female ulamā in Indonesia, KUPI and JP3M differ in terms of their membership composition and the nature of the knowledge they produce. JP3M is an organization for women who lead pesantren, meaning its members primarily consist of *bu nyai* or *ning* (titles for female scholars who are the daughters of *kyai*, or male Islamic scholars). In contrast, KUPI's membership extends beyond *bu nyai* and pesantren leaders to include *ustazah* (female Islamic teachers), activists, and academics concerned with women's issues. Both organizations issue religious *fatwā*, but their knowledge production processes differ. KUPI and JP3M also respond to societal issues and play a role in promoting religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) in Indonesia. Religious moderation is understood as maintaining a balanced stance, avoiding extremes at either end of the ideological spectrum. It extends beyond religious beliefs, encompassing broader humanitarian and social issues.

Several studies on female ulamā in Indonesia have been conducted, including

¹ Jajat Burhanuddin, ed., *Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (Jakarta: Gramedia and PPIM IAIN, 2002), xxviii–xxix.

² Tim KUPI, *Dokumen Resmi Proses Dan Hasil Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (Cirebon: KUPI, 2017), 13.





research in various regions such as Banten³, Temanggung⁴, Kalimantan⁵, and Central Sulawesi.⁶ These female scholars have played significant roles in driving social change within their communities while possessing deep religious knowledge that reinforces their authority as ulamā. Additionally, studies on the religious authority of female ulamā in issuing *fatwā* have been explored by Nor Ismah, who employs an anthropological approach and a gender perspective.⁷ Eva F. Nisa, in her article “Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia,” highlights the diverse and often conflicting narratives surrounding KUPI. While some perspectives within KUPI advocate for progressive interpretations of gender equality in Islam, others reflect more conservative views on women's roles. These contesting narratives continue to shape the pluralistic landscape of religious expression in both offline and online spaces within Indonesia's democratic framework.⁸

Unlike previous studies on female ulamā, this article examines their agency and authority within KUPI and JP3M in the process of knowledge production concerning religious moderation. It explores how they

disseminate this knowledge, respond to societal issues through the lens of religious moderation, and translate these efforts into various activities that reinforce their members' understanding. This study employs a qualitative research approach, presenting data in a descriptive narrative format. The qualitative method is chosen to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation—namely, the agency and authority of female ulamā in KUPI and JP3M in promoting religious moderation in Indonesia. This approach is particularly useful for examining context-specific subjects and objects of study, thereby preventing the overgeneralization of observed phenomena.

Religious Moderation in the Thought of Female Ulamā

Religious moderation refers to adopting a balanced and non-extremist approach in religious practice. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), moderation is defined as reducing violence and avoiding extremism. In Arabic, the equivalent term is *wasat* or *wasatiyyah*, meaning “being in the middle,” “fair,” or “the best choice.”⁹ From

³ Masykur Wahid and Umdatul Hasanah in their study, wrote about the roles and struggles of female ulama based on the historical period of the Indonesian nation from the eighteenth to the twentieth century. Masykur Wahid and Umdatul Hasanah, *Ulama Perempuan Banten: Dari Mekkah, Pesantren Dan Majelis Ta'lim Untuk Islam Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Bildung, 2017).

⁴ Based on the research conducted by Annisa, the scholarship of Nyai Hj. Nok Yam Suyami can be seen from several aspects, namely, her capacity in religious knowledge, academic progressiveness, high social humanitarian spirit, ability to adapt to the community, and leadership recognized by the general public. Annisa Annisa, “Kiprah Ulama Perempuan Nyai Hj. Nok Yam Suyami Di Temanggung Jawa Tengah,” *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam* 13, no. 2 (December 3, 2014): 141–150.

⁵ Saifuddin in his study on female ulama, wrote about Fatimah binti Abdul Wahab Bugis, a female ulama figure who was influential, especially in the field of

Islamic education in Kalimantan. What Fatimah did made a major contribution to educating Banjar women. Saifuddin, “Peran Fatimah Binti Abdul Wahab Bugis Dalam Sejarah Pendidikan Perempuan Di Kalimantan,” *Al Banjar: Jurnal Studi Islam Kalimantan* 8, no. 2 (2009).

⁶ La Mansi also studied Syarifah Sa'diyah, the female ulama from the city of Palu, Central Sulawesi. Her mastery of religious sciences made her charisma and ulama characteristics very inherent in her. La Mansi, “Ulama Perempuan Kota Palu Sulawesi Tengah: Biografi Syarifah Sa'diyah,” *Al-Qalam* 19, no. 1 (January 9, 2016): 75–84.

⁷ Nor Ismah, “Women Issuing Fatwas: Female Islamic Scholars and Community-Based Authority in Java, Indonesia” (Universiteit Leiden, 2023).

⁸ Eva F. Nisa, “Muslim Women in Contemporary Indonesia: Online Conflicting Narratives behind the Women Ulama Congress,” *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 434–454.

⁹ The phrase “*wa kadhalika ja'alnā kum ummatan wasatan*” in the Quran serves as a foundational reference





this definition, two fundamental principles of religious moderation emerge: justice and balance—maintaining harmony between reason and revelation, rights and obligations, the physical and the spiritual, as well as ideal concepts and real-world realities.¹⁰ Religious moderation has become increasingly relevant in addressing contemporary global challenges, particularly within diverse societies. It refers to an approach that avoids extremism and seeks a middle path in religious practice. This understanding is essential for fostering peaceful and harmonious communities that value diversity and unity.¹¹

The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs' concept of religious moderation outlines three pillars as its foundation.¹² The first is moderation in thought, characterized by the ability to integrate religious texts with contemporary contexts. A moderate religious thinker avoids strict adherence to a textualist approach while also refraining from interpreting religious texts too freely, which might risk neglecting their fundamental meanings. The second pillar is moderation in religious movements, referring to religious outreach efforts that promote virtue and prevent vice through ethical and peaceful means. This stands in contrast to extremist approaches that justify violence in the name of religious correction, where one form of wrongdoing is countered with another. The third pillar is moderation in tradition and

religious practices, which emphasizes strengthening the relationship between religion and local cultural traditions. Religion should not be seen as diametrically opposed to culture; rather, both should remain open to dialogue, allowing new cultural expressions to emerge in alignment with religious values.

In this context, female *ulamā* play a crucial role, as they not only advocate for moderate perspectives in religious discourse but also provide unique insights into the intersection of religion and social life. Female *ulamā* have long contributed to the dissemination of religious moderation, particularly through education, religious outreach (*da'wah*), and social activism, with a strong emphasis on women's rights and gender justice.

Hj. Badriyah Fayumi, the Chair of KUPI's Supreme Council, frequently highlights the importance of religious moderation. In one of her discussions, she outlines five key requirements for a society to uphold religious moderation.¹³ First, possessing extensive knowledge enables individuals to develop a broad perspective, counter extremism, and foster a moderate stance that avoids the hasty condemnation of differing viewpoints. Second, developing emotional openness is essential, as it fosters empathy and emotional sensitivity toward others. Without compassion, empathy, and a forgiving nature, people may be deterred from religious outreach efforts, as emphasized in the Qur'an, QS. Āli 'Imrān: 159.

for discussions on religious moderation from an Islamic perspective. This principle of moderation is also referred to as *wasatiyyah*. As M. Quraish Shihab explains, *wasatiyyah* embodies the essence of Islamic religious moderation. M. Quraish Shihab, *Wasathiyyah: Wawasan Islam Tentang Moderasi Beragama*. (Tangerang: Lentera Hati, 2019), 6.

¹⁰ Kementerian Agama RI, *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Badan Litbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2019), 1.

¹¹ The Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs recognized the necessity of establishing a religious moderation program, which was officially introduced by Minister Lukman Hakim Saifuddin in 2018. Since then, religious moderation has become a national

priority program. In 2019, it was formally incorporated into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) for 2020–2024, as stipulated in Presidential Regulation (PERPRES) No. 18 of 2020. With its designation as a priority program and the establishment of a legal framework, the implementation of this initiative has involved various institutions, ministries, regional governments, mass organizations, and the broader community.

¹² RI, *Moderasi Beragama*, 28–30.

¹³ Badriyah Fayumi, "Lima Syarat Menjadi Umat Moderat," *Harakah Majelis Taklim*, last modified 2022, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYlsoOZctUI>.





Third, exemplary conduct is necessary, with the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) serving as the ultimate model, as reflected in *Sīrah Nabawīyyah* and *Hadīth* traditions. Fourth, prioritizing rational thinking over emotional reactions is vital, as emotional approaches to religion often lead to adverse consequences. Emotional extremism contradicts the principles of *ummataṇ wasaṭan* (a balanced Muslim community), underscoring the need for rational and proportionate religious reasoning. Fifth, exercising caution and wisdom is imperative in today's digital landscape, where information spreads rapidly and often lacks credibility. Critically assessing and filtering information before dissemination is increasingly essential for maintaining religious moderation and social harmony.

Another prominent female ulamā who actively contributes to discussions on religious moderation is Nur Rofiah, a lecturer at the Perguruan Tinggi Ilmu Al-Qur'an (PTIQ) and a member of the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI). She frequently contextualizes religious moderation through the lens of gender equality in Islam. In her scholarly discussions, Nur Rofiah asserts that adopting a moderate stance in religious practice is essential for fostering a just and prosperous society that respects the rights of all individuals, including women. One of her key perspectives on religious moderation is grounded in the understanding that religious adherents are, fundamentally, human beings.¹⁴ Consequently, the foundation for achieving religious moderation lies in Islam's conception of humanity. It is well established

that humans possess a dual identity: they are both servants of Allah (QS. al-Dhāriyāt: 56) and caliphs on earth (QS. al-Baqarah: 30).

As servants of Allah, humans are strictly prohibited from worshipping anything or anyone other than Allah, whether directly or indirectly. Meanwhile, as caliphs on Earth, they are entrusted with the responsibility of advancing societal well-being and preserving the ecosystems in which they live. In this context, religious moderation involves upholding both aspects of human identity: avoiding servitude to anything or anyone besides Allah and continuously striving to promote the well-being of all, including marginalized groups, vulnerable individuals, women, and even the environment.

Second, building on the definition of religious moderation as a perspective, attitude, and behavior characterized by balance, justice, and the avoidance of extremism in religious practice¹⁵, Nur Rofiah asserts that, in the context of women, religious moderation must be reflected in efforts to fully uphold human dignity based on faith. Achieving this requires integrating the values of justice and balance in religious practice with women's unique lived experiences. These experiences include biological aspects—such as menstruation (occurring monthly), pregnancy (lasting approximately nine months), childbirth (lasting hours or days), postpartum recovery (lasting weeks to two months), and breast-feeding (extending up to two years)—as well as social challenges, such as stigmatization, marginalization, subordination, violence, and the dual burden of domestic and public

¹⁴ Nur Rofiah, "KUPI Sebagai Gerakan," *Mubadalah.Id*, last modified 2022, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://mubadalah.id/kupi-sebagai-gerakan/>.

¹⁵ RI, *Moderasi Beragama*, 7; According to M. Quraish Shihab, adopting a moderate stance does not mean remaining neutral between two extremes, rejecting both extremes, or demonstrating passivity or weakness. Moderation, instead, involves maintaining a balance to prevent one extreme from dominating and negating the other. A moderate approach harmoniously

integrates the positive elements of both extremes, selecting what is appropriate in proportion to the circumstances at hand. Consequently, moderation ensures that one does not adopt an excessive or deficient position. The elements drawn from these opposing extremes do not necessarily have to be equal; their proportions depend on the prevailing conditions and situation. Shihab, *Wasathīyyah: Wawasan Islam Tentang Moderasi Beragama*, 42.





responsibilities. This integration is essential to ensuring that women attain true justice, rather than a mere resemblance of fairness that remains superficial and fails to deliver substantive equality.

Ultimately, according to Nur Rofiah, religious moderation is not solely about determining one's position on a spectrum—whether on the far right, far left, or center, as defined by human perspectives. Rather, it is about practicing religion in a way that fully upholds human dignity, including that of women, based on faith.

Another key figure in the discourse on religious moderation is Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin, an expert and activist in Islamic studies, human rights, democracy, and gender equality. In her presentation during the webinar “Women Discuss Religious Moderation”, she emphasized *tasāmuḥ* (tolerance) as a foundational principle for achieving moderation. To reach this common ground, she highlighted three essential prerequisites. First, Indonesians must appreciate their shared values, including religious and cultural commonalities, as a source of strength. Second, they must respect differences, recognizing diversity as a form of social and cultural wealth. Third, they must ensure equality, which entails providing equal access, participation, control, and benefits across various social categories, including religion, ethnicity, class, gender, and other identity groups.¹⁶

¹⁶ Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin in the Webinar Series #ModerasiBeragama on Friday, August 14, 2020. “Perempuan Bicara Moderasi Beragama,” *CONVEY Indonesia*, last modified 2020, accessed December 15, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pn2N9nN1b2g&t=6855s>.

¹⁷ According to Alissa Wahid, women can engage in the religious moderation movement in at least four ways: first, by developing theological concepts and contributing to religious life, as seen in the development of concepts related to religious moderation and women's

The perspectives outlined above demonstrate the engagement of female *ulamā* in the movement for religious moderation, specifically in shaping theological concepts, enriching religious life, and promoting the practice of religious moderation.¹⁷ Religious moderation is beyond simply avoiding extremism; it also involves upholding universal values such as compassion, justice, and tolerance. Through their inclusive approach, female *ulamā* have significantly contributed to a more open and tolerant understanding of religion. Beside guiding other women, they play a vital role in building a peaceful and harmonious society.

The History of Female *Ulamā* in KUPI and JP3M

1. An Overview of the Indonesian Congress of Female *Ulamā* (KUPI)

The Indonesian Congress of Female *Ulamā* (KUPI) did not emerge suddenly but rather developed over time. The inaugural KUPI Congress in 2017 was initiated by three institutions: Rahima, Fahmina, and Alimat. While each organization shares a commitment to women's issues, their programs differ. Alimat and Rahima are based in Jakarta, while Fahmina operates from Cirebon. Each institution maintains its own networks and communities. Rahima, a non-governmental organization, focuses on women's empowerment from an Islamic perspective and serves as a center for education and information on women's reproductive rights

roles within it; second, through state administrative policies, which can be realized in the form of ideological and affirmative policies; third, through social movements for religious moderation, which can be carried out by facilitating women and diverse women's and religious groups; and fourth, through the practice of religious life, by involving women in mainstreaming religious moderation. Tim Penyusun Ditjen Bimas Islam Kementrian Agama, *Moderasi Beragama Perspektif Bimas Islam* (Jakarta: Sekretariat Ditjen Bimas Islam Kementrian Agama, 2022), 259.





within Islam. In this context, Rahima launched *Perkaderan Ulama Perempuan* (PUP), or the Training and Development of Female Ulamā program in 2005, which has since continued through its sixth cohort.¹⁸

Rahima's core belief is that women should lead advocacy for women's rights, as they are the ones who directly experience gender-related issues. This premise highlights the need for female ulamā who can develop religious discourse in line with scholarly standards while addressing societal challenges from a justice-oriented perspective. Through the PUP program, female ulamā are expected to adopt a gender-sensitive perspective, critically analyze injustices, and organize communities, thereby driving social change.

Like Rahima, Fahmina also implements several programs to train female ulamā. The first is *Pesantren Luhur Manhajiy Fahmina*, which serves as a training ground for female ulamā in Indonesia. This *pesantren* focuses on mastering the methodology of *al-Manāhij al-Islāmiyyah*, including *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, *Qawā'id Fiqhiyyah*, and research methodologies. The second program, *Sarjana-Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (SUPI), integrates formal education at the Fahmina Institute for Islamic Studies (Institut Studi Islam Fahmina, ISIF) with religious training at Pesantren Fahmina. The third program, *Dawrah Kader Ulama Perempuan* (DKUP), is another initiative organized by the Fahmina Institute to cultivate female religious scholars.

Unlike Rahima and Fahmina, Alimat does not establish a dedicated training program for female ulamā. However, it contributes to the

development of religious methodologies, particularly through the *mubādalāh* approach. Alimat also strengthens women's diverse knowledge systems and collaborates with international networks, serving as an advocacy platform for Musawah. The establishment of Alimat emerged from the participation of female ulamā in Musawah forums, where the need arose for advocates capable of engaging local communities. In response, figures such as Badriyah Fayumi, Nur Rofiah, Nana Kamala, and Husein Muhammad established a network focused on Islamic family law.

Alumni from the female ulamā training programs conducted by Rahima and Fahmina, as well as those involved with Alimat, played an active role in the establishment of KUPI. Participants in these programs include women from pesantren backgrounds, activists, and academics. They are expected not only to master the *turāth* (Islamic intellectual heritage) but also to contribute meaningfully to broader society by actively engaging in addressing social issues, particularly those concerning women, children, and humanity in general. In this way, female ulamā are envisioned as agents of social change.

KUPI does not seek to compete with or replace the role of male ulamā; rather, it aims to position women as equal partners and to ensure equal recognition. In doing so, it challenges the dominance of male ulamā as the primary sources of religious authority and leadership within social life and the pesantren system.¹⁹ Consequently, KUPI has redefined the meaning of *ulama perempuan* (female ulamā) and *perempuan ulama* (women scholars

¹⁸ The Women's Ulama Education Program (PUP) was inspired by the presence of a female figure who participated in the Bahtsul Masail forum in Lombok in 1997. During the event, a Fatayat woman from Kendal presented a religious argument concerning women's political leadership, which at the time was being debated and was nearly prohibited. Through her argument, the woman successfully shifted the perspectives of the male participants. This character sparked the idea of

establishing educational programs for future female ulama. Tim Rahima, *Modul Pengkaderan Ulama Perempuan Perspektif Kesetaraan* (Jakarta: Rahima, 2011), iii.

¹⁹ Ayu Usada Rengkaningias, "Wacana Keulamaan Perempuan Dalam Teks Ikrar Kebon Jambu," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam* 17, no. 1 (January 30, 2018): 32–50.





of Islam). Drawing from both etymological and terminological analyses of the words *ulamā* and *perempuan* (women), as well as references to the Qur'an, hadith, and scholarly opinions (*qawl ulamā*)²⁰, KUPI defines a *perempuan ulama* as any female individual with scholarly capacity, regardless of whether she adopts a gender justice perspective. Meanwhile, *ulama perempuan* refers to any scholar—whether male or female—who upholds and applies a gender justice perspective based on Islamic sources to address contemporary socio-religious challenges in pursuit of a just and dignified humanity.²¹

Under this conceptual framework, participation in KUPI is not exclusive to female scholars; male *ulamā* who uphold gender justice also take part. As a result, it is not uncommon for male *ulamā* such as KH. Husein Muhammad, KH. Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, and KH. Imam Nakhai to participate in KUPI's religious deliberations.

The establishment of KUPI was significantly influenced by earlier discursive movements, particularly those led by Rahima, Fahmina, and Alimat—organizations that operate as NGOs and intellectual discussion forums within Islamic scholarship. These initiatives culminated in the first KUPI

Congress in 2017 in Cirebon, followed by the second KUPI Congress in 2022 in Jepara, which also received support from AMAN Indonesia. The second KUPI Congress represented a significant step in strengthening networks among *ulamā*, particularly female *ulamā*, both within and beyond Indonesia, with a primary focus on the reform of Islamic law in a gender-sensitive context. Rooted in pesantren scholarship, KUPI's initiatives integrate classical Islamic literature with modern academic approaches.

One of the key aspects of KUPI's implementation is its religious deliberations, which result in the formulation of KUPI's religious perspectives, often referred to as *fatwās*. These deliberations serve as a response to pressing social issues within the community. During the first KUPI Congress in Cirebon, three religious perspectives were established, addressing child violence, child marriage, and environmental destruction. Meanwhile, the second KUPI Congress in Jepara produced five religious perspectives.²² The process of religious deliberation within KUPI is rigorous and multi-staged, beginning with a series of *halaqah* (study circles) that engage experts from various disciplines. Additionally, KUPI's deliberations follow a

²⁰ The term *ulamā* is mentioned in both the Qur'an and hadith. Etymologically, '*ulamā*' is the plural form of '*ālim*', meaning a person who possesses knowledge or is highly learned, without limitations regarding the field of study or gender. In the Qur'an, the word '*ālim*' appears 13 times. In the hadith, *ulama* are textually described as the heirs of the Prophets, who inherit knowledge rather than wealth. Its antonym is *jūhhāl*, referring to those who are ignorant, misguided, and mislead others. In both the Qur'an and hadith, the concept of *ulamā* is more closely associated with behavior reflecting scholarly integrity than with specific academic disciplines. Socially, the term *ulama* is attributed to religious figures who have a comprehensive understanding of Islamic sources, exhibit noble character, and provide guidance to the community in daily life. Meanwhile, the term women (*perempuan*), according to the Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama (KUPI), has both biological and ideological meanings. Biologically, it refers to

individuals with female sex characteristics. Ideologically, it represents the perspectives, awareness, and advocacy efforts of women in achieving equitable gender relations within family and societal contexts. KUPI, *Dokumen Resmi Proses Dan Hasil Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, 19.

²¹ KUPI, *Dokumen Resmi Proses Dan Hasil Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, 19.

²² The second congress of KUPI produced five religious perspectives addressing the following issues: (1) the marginalization of women in safeguarding the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) from violence committed in the name of religion; (2) waste management for environmental sustainability and women's safety; (3) protection of women from forced marriages; (4) safeguarding women's lives from pregnancy risks resulting from rape; and (5) protecting women from harmful female genital mutilation (FGM) without medical justification.





methodology formulated within the organization, which draws upon two primary legal sources—the Qur'an and hadith—alongside scholarly opinions (*aqwāl 'ulamā'*) and national constitutional principles.

2. The Establishment of *Jam'iyyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighah* (JP3M)

Jam'iyyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighah (JP3M) is a women's socio-religious organization dedicated to *da'wah*, religious education, and social advocacy. The organization was founded by *bu nyai* and *muballighah* (female Islamic preachers), including Nyai Afilana Uswatun Khasanah (Magelang), Nyai Hj. Hannik Maftukhah Afif (Temanggung), Nyai Hj. Umi Maesaroh Hasyim (Semarang), and Nyai Mutmainah (Kendal).²³ Structurally, JP3M operates at four administrative levels: the Central Leadership (Pimpinan Pusat/Pimpus), Provincial Leadership (Pimpinan Provinsi/Pimprov), Regency/Municipal Leadership (Pimpinan Kabupaten/Kota/Pimkab), and District Leadership (Pimpinan Kecamatan/Pimcam). This hierarchical structure facilitates effective coordination and implementation of programs. Over time, JP3M has gained significant support from various stakeholders, as demonstrated by its second-anniversary celebration at Pesantren Darussalam Timur Watucongol in Magelang, which brought together approximately 1,300 *bu nyai* and *muballighah* from Central Java, Yogyakarta, and 36 surrounding regencies.

JP3M aims to empower *bu nyai* and *muballighah* by strengthening their religious scholarship, professional expertise, and independence while actively upholding Islamic teachings rooted in *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah al-Nahdiyyah*. Its mission includes enhancing the capacity of *bu nyai* and *muballighah*, improving pesantren management, expanding internal and external networks, and preserving *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah al-Nahdiyyah* traditions²⁴—guided by the principles of *tawassuṭ* (moderation), *tawāzun* (balance), *i'tidāl* (justice), and *iqtisād* (equity).²⁵

The establishment of JP3M was driven by a deep sense of responsibility among *pesantren* leaders to sustain the *pesantren* way of life amid the challenges of globalization. Additionally, JP3M seeks to contribute to both moral and material development by promoting a dignified and equitable society.²⁶ The organization is committed to implementing traditional Islamic education (*salaf*) within *pesantren* and maximizing the role of *muballighah* in community engagement. JP3M's membership includes female *pesantren* leaders, women from *pesantren* lineages (*dhurriyah*), and *muballighah*.

Similar to how KUPI conducts *musyawarah keagamaan* (religious deliberations) to issue religious perspectives on societal issues, JP3M organizes *Bahtsul Masail Putri* to formulate its own *fatwas*. JP3M has held this annual deliberation five times, systematically addressing pressing issues. The *Bahtsul Masail Putri* generally begins with the collection of problem statements submitted by various *pesantren* affiliated with JP3M. A formulation

²³ Central Leadership of JPPPM, *Materi Rakornas JPPPM Di Pondok Pesantren An Nawawi Berjan Purworejo* (Purworejo: JPPPM, 2022), 7.

²⁴ M. Badruz Zaman and Nur Aeni, "Eksistensi *Jam'iyyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren Dan Muballighah* (JP3M) Pekalongan (Analisis Postfeminisme Simone de Beauvoir)," *Yinyang: Jurnal Studi Islam Gender dan Anak* 17, no. 2 (November 15, 2022): 255–272.

²⁵ The concept of *tawassuṭ* refers to harmonizing scriptural sources with rational reasoning. *Tawāzun* involves considering the truth from available sources, while *i'tidāl* signifies steadfastness, and *iqtisād* denotes simplicity or moderation. Tim Penulis PCLP, *Pendidikan ASWAJA & Ke-NU-An* (Lamongan: Lembaga Pendidikan Maarif NU Cabang Lamongan, 2011), 23.

²⁶ Said Aqil Siradj, *Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah: Sebuah Kritik Historis* (Tangerang: Pustaka Cendekiamuda, 2008), 5.





team then selects the most crucial issues for discussion.

In determining religious rulings, *Bahtsul Masail Putri* follows the methodology of *Bahtsul Masail* as practiced in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Rather than referring directly to the Qur'an and hadith, the process primarily relies on classical texts from scholars of the *madhhab*, particularly the *Shāfi'ī* school of thought, by directly referencing the textual sources. In other words, it adheres to established legal opinions (*qawl*).²⁷ If no definitive ruling is found through this method, an alternative approach known as *ilhāq* is employed—whereby an unresolved case is resolved through analogy with a similar case that has already been addressed in the classical texts, ensuring consistency within the *madhhabic* framework.²⁸

The *Bahtsul Masail Putri* sessions actively involve female students (*santri putri*), in addition to senior *bu nyai* and scholars. The deliberation is divided into commissions, with some consisting of senior *bu nyai* and others composed of female *santri*. Furthermore, *kyai* also participate, serving as *muṣaḥḥih* (reviewers) who provide input on the final rulings. This annual event is typically held in conjunction with JP3M's anniversary (*harlah*) and is accompanied by various other activities, including plenary meetings of the JP3M

central board, seminars, exhibitions, and other related events.

The Agency and Authority of KUPI and JP3M in Promoting Religious Moderation in Indonesia

The discourse on religious moderation is not a new phenomenon. It has evolved alongside Islamic studies, which have been shaped by global trends in religious scholarship. According to Prof. Dr. Amin Abdullah, Islamic studies have progressed from the *'ulūm al-dīn* (classical religious sciences) phase to the *al-fikr al-Islāmī* (Islamic thought) phase, which introduced modern Islamic intellectual discourse with a more comprehensive scientific structure and body of knowledge. This transformation further led to the *dirāsāt Islāmiyyah* (Islamic studies) phase, wherein contemporary issues such as human rights, gender, and religious pluralism became central topics of discussion.²⁹

Modern Islamic thought has had far-reaching influences across multiple domains. In Indonesia, prominent figures such as Nurcholish Madjid introduced ideas on Islam, Indonesian identity, and modernity; Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid) advanced the concept of *pribumisasi* Islam (Indigenization of Islam); and Islamic populism emerged as an intellectual movement that sought to establish a dialogue between Islam as a religious

²⁷ The *qawli* method of deriving legal rulings closely resembles the *qiyāsī* method, as both rely on analogy. However, there is a key difference: *qiyās* applies analogy using the Qur'an or hadith as reference points, while *ilhāq* uses authoritative scholarly texts (*kitāb mu'tabar*). Ahmad Zahro, *Tradisi Intelektual NU: Lajnah Bahtsul Masail 1926–1999* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004), 121–122.

²⁸ Zahro, *Tradisi Intelektual NU: Lajnah Bahtsul Masail 1926–1999*, 122.

²⁹ According to Amin Abdullah, the development of Islamic scholarship can be categorized into four phases, which can be further simplified into three: (1) *'ulūm al-dīn* (religious sciences), which includes fields such as *kalām* (theology), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), *tafsīr* (exegesis), hadith studies, *'aqidah* (creed), ethics, and

ritual practices, supported by Arabic language disciplines like *naḥw* (grammar) and *ṣarf* (morphology); (2) *al-fikr al-Islāmī* (Islamic thought), which comprehensively covers Qur'anic and hadith studies, legal theory, theology, mysticism, philosophy, politics, and modern Islamic discourse; and (3) *dirāsāt Islāmiyyah* (Islamic studies), which applies an interdisciplinary approach combining elements of religious thought with discussions on contemporary issues like human rights, gender equality, religious pluralism, and international relations. This ongoing evolution presents both opportunities and challenges for Islamic scholarship today. Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies Di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif Interkoneksi* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2012).





doctrine and both modern global contexts and local Indonesian realities.

However, the term “*moderasi beragama*” only gained prominence in Indonesia in recent years, primarily due to its promotion by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In the *post-reformasi* era, Indonesia’s diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural landscape saw the emergence of numerous religious organizations with varying ideological orientations. The rise of religious extremism, including terrorist incidents such as suicide bombings, underscored the urgent need for a government-led initiative on religious moderation. In response, then-Minister of Religious Affairs Lukman Hakim Saifuddin launched the *Moderasi Beragama* program in 2018. Since its institutionalization, religious moderation has been designated as a national policy priority. In 2019, it was integrated into Indonesia’s National Medium-Term Development Plan (*Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Menengah Nasional*, RPJMN) for 2020–2024, as outlined in Presidential Regulation No. 18 of 2020. With this legal framework in place, the *Moderasi Beragama* initiative has been implemented through collaborations between

various institutions, ministries, local governments, religious organizations, and the broader community.

1. KUPI as a Representation of Feminist Female Ulamā in Indonesia

The *Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (KUPI) serves as a platform to reaffirm the existence of female ulamā, whose intellectual and religious contributions have historically been marginalized within Islamic scholarship.³⁰ The limited scholarly attention given to female ulamā in both the global Muslim community and Indonesia has motivated KUPI to reclaim and amplify their roles in religious leadership. By doing so, KUPI aims to reshape historical narratives and establish female ulamā as integral actors in national and religious discourse.³¹

A key initiative of KUPI is the *Musyawarah Keagamaan Ulama Perempuan* (Religious Deliberation of Female Ulamā), which formulates religious verdicts (*fatwās*). Unlike conventional *fatwa* methodologies, KUPI has developed its own framework, which is based on nine fundamental values: monotheism (*tawhīd*)³², compassion (*rahmah*)³³, public welfare (*maṣlahah*)³⁴, equality (*musāwah*),

³⁰ As Azyumardi Azra stated, the absence of female scholars in historical narratives does not stem from a lack of existence but from the limited roles assigned to women, who were predominantly confined to domestic affairs with minimal involvement in public and societal matters. Additionally, the ambivalence of influential figures in society, particularly male scholars, toward women engaging in religious and intellectual pursuits contributed to this limitation. This phenomenon is closely related to the patriarchal nature of Middle Eastern societies, where attention and studies predominantly centered on men. Azyumardi Azra, “Biografi Sosial-Intelektual Ulama Perempuan: Pemberdayaan Historiografi,” in *Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, ed. Jajat Burhanuddin (Jakarta: Gramedia and PPIM IAIN, 2002).

³¹ Tim KUPI, *Diskursus Keulamaan Perempuan Indonesia: Kumpulan Tulisan Terkait Materi Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (Cirebon: KUPI, 2017).

³² Monotheism (*ketauhidan*) serves as the fundamental foundation, where Allah SWT is

recognized as the Creator, Regulator, and Sustainer of the universe, embodying His mercy and compassion (*Rahmān* and *Rahīm*). Both the revealed scriptures and the human intellect were created with the vision of universal mercy. Faqihuddin Abdul Kodir, *Metodologi Fatwa KUPI: Pokok-Pokok Pikiran Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia* (Cirebon: KUPI, 2022), 75.

³³ Humans, as stewards (*khalīfah*) of God on Earth, are entrusted with the responsibility to realize this vision of mercy by promoting goodness, ensuring prosperity, and safeguarding the well-being of humanity and the environment. Abdul Kodir, *Metodologi Fatwa KUPI: Pokok-Pokok Pikiran Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, 76.

³⁴ The vision of mercy is manifested through behaviors that promote public welfare, characterized by efforts to create tangible benefits for oneself, family, others, humanity as a whole, and the surrounding environment. Abdul Kodir, *Metodologi Fatwa KUPI:*





reciprocity (*mubāḍalah*), justice (*‘adl*)³⁵, nationalism (*muwāṭānah*), humanity (*insāniyyah*), and universalism (*kawniyyah*).³⁶ Furthermore, KUPI employs three key methodological approaches: *ma’rūf* (the promotion of good), *mubāḍalah* (reciprocal justice), and *keadilan hakiki* (substantive justice).³⁷

Through this methodological framework, KUPI issues religious perspectives (*fatwās*) on various contemporary social issues using a participatory, transparent, and dialectical approach.³⁸ Before formal religious deliberations take place, preliminary *ḥalaqah* (study circles) are conducted to examine relevant issues. These *ḥalaqah* are organized by community groups, institutions, or independent collectives that align with KUPI’s vision. Their purpose is to analyze pressing social issues by gathering empirical data and grassroots perspectives directly from affected communities.

From the perspective of Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs’ concept of religious moderation, KUPI’s activities align

with the three core pillars of *moderasi beragama* (religious moderation):

The first pillar, moderate thought, emphasizes the integration of religious texts with contemporary socio-cultural contexts. KUPI exemplifies this principle in its *fatwa* deliberations, which are deeply rooted in real-world societal issues. Instead of relying solely on doctrinal sources, KUPI incorporates empirical research and expert analysis from various disciplines to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand. In issuing a *fatwā* on protecting women from forced marriage, for example, KUPI employs a *taṣawwur* (problem description) approach. This process involves collecting data on women’s lived experiences, statistical reports from *Komnas Perempuan* (the National Commission on Violence Against Women) regarding the rise in child marriage cases, and anthropological insights into regions where forced marriage remains a cultural norm.³⁹ Additionally, KUPI consults with subject-matter experts, including academics, activists, and practitioners, ensuring that its *fatwā* is not

Pokok-Pokok Pikiran Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia, 76.

³⁵ To achieve such welfare, the principles of equality, reciprocity, and justice become essential. Equality ensures that individuals—regardless of race, ethnicity, language, religion, or gender—have equal rights to access the common good. After establishing this equal footing, individuals are encouraged to collaborate, support, and complement each other (*mubāḍalah* or reciprocity). This principle must be reinforced by justice, which requires empowering rather than dominating others. Abdul Kodir, *Metodologi Fatwa KUPI: Pokok-Pokok Pikiran Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, 77.

³⁶ These three principles of welfare necessitate consideration of contextual values, namely national, humanitarian, and universal values. National values ensure that the mission of welfare benefits all citizens. Humanitarian and universal values call for global cooperation while prioritizing environmental sustainability. Abdul Kodir, *Metodologi Fatwa KUPI: Pokok-Pokok Pikiran Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, 78.

³⁷ The epistemological foundation of KUPI’s methodology is notably comprehensive, as it draws from the Qur’an and hadith while also considering Islamic traditions, women’s experiences, and constitutional laws. This approach reflects a remarkable exercise of *ijtihād*, inspired by classical scholars like al-Gazālī and al-Shāṭibī, as well as contemporary Muslim scholars like Jasser Auda. Abdul Kodir, *Metodologi Fatwa KUPI: Pokok-Pokok Pikiran Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, 27.

³⁸ This methodology is participatory (involving stakeholders from diverse backgrounds), open (welcoming various perspectives and maintaining accountability), responsive (addressing real social injustices), and dialectical (engaging in dialogue between texts and context, universal principles and local wisdom, and short-term and long-term interests). Abdul Kodir, *Metodologi Fatwa KUPI: Pokok-Pokok Pikiran Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, 261–262.

³⁹ Tim KUPI, *Hasil Musyawarah Keagamaan Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI) Ke-2 No.06/MK-KUPI-2/XI/2022* (KUPI, 2022), 120–125.





only theologically sound but also socially responsive and contextually relevant.

KUPI's religious deliberations are grounded in primary legal sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, the opinions of classical ulamā (*aqwāl 'ulamā'*), and the Indonesian Constitution (UUD 1945). From these foundations, issues are analyzed, resulting in KUPI's *fatwās* and recommendations. The process concludes with the compilation of references (*marāji*), including the *aqwāl 'ulamā'* as supporting attachments. In this way, KUPI's religious perspectives are not solely based on textual interpretations but also incorporate women's lived experiences, scholarly opinions, and constitutional principles. KUPI actively engages in a dialogical process between the text (Qur'an, hadith, and *aqwāl 'ulamā'*), the author (KUPI members, who bring their own contextual backgrounds), and the audience/reader (women's experiences).⁴⁰ Through this hermeneutical approach, KUPI's *fatwās* reflect a moderate and contextualized interpretation of Islamic teachings, offering effective solutions to contemporary social challenges.

Beyond intellectual engagement, KUPI embodies moderation as a movement. It represents a social, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual movement dedicated to fostering a just civilization. Unlike formal institutions, KUPI operates as a fluid, decentralized network of female ulamā working within their respective communities.⁴¹ As a cultural movement, KUPI is non-structural, non-bureaucratic, and deeply rooted in both Indonesian traditions and Islamic intellectual heritage. Khatimatul Husna, a prominent

female ulamā and KUPI member, describes this unique characteristic:⁴²

"KUPI does not have a permanent organizational structure because it is not a formal institution. Instead, it functions as a movement with highly dynamic membership. This fluidity is what makes KUPI unique. Each member is responsible for disseminating KUPI's ideas and contributing to society according to their respective expertise."

KUPI's foundational values—including humanity, compassion, and universalism—demonstrate its commitment to promoting the *maṣlahah* for all people. This commitment is reflected in the diverse backgrounds of KUPI's members, who actively integrate KUPI's perspectives into their respective professional and organizational roles. For example, Khatimatul Husna, as the Chair of PW Fatayat NU DIY and a religious counselor, applies KUPI's perspectives in designing programs and activities within her institution. Similarly, Muyassaratul Hafidzah, a KUPI member who is both a novelist and a pesantren educator, incorporates gender justice and KUPI's principles into her literary works.⁴³ Lailatul Fithriyah, an activist affiliated with Nasyiatul Aisyiyah (a women's wing of Muhammadiyah), applies KUPI's perspectives in her studies and organizational activities. Likewise, KUPI members who are pesantren leaders, academics, and activists continue to advance the movement by implementing its principles within their respective communities.

As an intellectual movement, KUPI constructs an Islamic epistemological framework that recognizes both men and

⁴⁰ Referring to Khaled Abou Fadl, the meaning of a text is determined through a dynamic, interactive, and dialectical process involving the author, text, and audience. Meaning is never static or immune from error. Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *Atas Nama Tuhan: Dari Fikih Otoriter Ke Fikih Otoritatif*, trans. R. Cecep Lukman Yasin (Jakarta: Serambi, 2004), 183–185.

⁴¹ Rofiah, "KUPI Sebagai Gerakan."

⁴² Interview with Khatimatul Husna, November 1, 2024.

⁴³ Interview with Muyassaratul Hafidzah, November 1, 2024.





women as complete human beings and fully autonomous subjects. It also represents a manifestation of moderate Islam, as evidenced by its introduction of innovative methodologies for interpreting religious texts and contextualizing them within contemporary society. KUPI employs the *mubādalāh* approach, which emphasizes gender reciprocity; the *ma'rūf* approach, which considers Indonesia's specific socio-cultural context; and the *keadilan hakiki perempuan* (substantive justice for women) approach, which integrates women's lived experiences as a fundamental aspect of religious interpretation.⁴⁴

In addition to its intellectual contributions, KUPI fosters moderation by engaging with religious traditions and practices, thereby reinforcing the relationship between religion and local culture. In many contexts, tensions often arise between religious teachings and indigenous traditions. However, KUPI addresses such conflicts by integrating cultural and societal considerations into its religious discourse. This integrative approach is evident in its problem-identification process, its selection of scriptural references, and its emphasis on incorporating women's experiences alongside expert perspectives from diverse fields. Notably, KUPI is the only religious institution that explicitly incorporates the national constitution as a primary reference alongside the Qur'an, hadith, and *aqwāl 'ulamā'* in its religious deliberations. This practice reflects KUPI's deep respect for Indonesia's socio-cultural traditions, which shape the lived realities of female *ulamā* in the country.

Furthermore, KUPI serves as a platform to affirm the rightful participation of women in

religious leadership, demonstrating that women are equally qualified to contribute to the formulation of *fatwās* alongside their male counterparts. This represents a significant shift in the conceptualization of gender roles within religious authority, positioning men and women as equals in the domain of Islamic scholarship. Consequently, as a collective of female *ulamā*, KUPI exercises religious authority in two key dimensions: knowledge-based legitimacy, derived from scholarly expertise, and influence-based legitimacy, stemming from its ability to shape public discourse and policy, particularly among societal elites, including government institutions and academia. Additionally, some KUPI members derive their religious authority from genealogical lineage (*nasab*), as many are descendants (*dhurriyah*) of esteemed *kyai* and *bu nyai*, who serve as leaders of *pesantren*.

The scholarly expertise (*kealiman*) of KUPI's *ulamā* is evident in their ability to interpret religious texts in relation to contemporary realities. The *fatwās* issued by KUPI have gained significant public recognition in Indonesia, as reflected in numerous academic studies analyzing these *fatwās* and their influence on government policies. KUPI's incorporation of women's lived experiences as a crucial factor in religious deliberations has become a key reference for *Komnas Perempuan* (the National Commission on Violence Against Women) in its policy advocacy to eliminate violence against women. For instance, KUPI's 2017 *fatwā* prohibiting sexual violence contributed to the eventual enactment of *Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual—UU TPKS* (the Sexual Violence Crime Law).⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Interview with Muyassaratul Hafidzah, November 1, 2024.

⁴⁵ The Sexual Violence Crime Law (*Undang-Undang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual* or UU TPKS), which initially began as a draft bill (RUU TPKS), underwent a long and complex journey before its eventual enactment. The process took approximately ten

years. In 2012, *Komnas Perempuan* initiated the draft of a law to eliminate sexual violence, which later evolved into the Sexual Violence Crime Law (RUU TPKS). After a prolonged and challenging process, the bill was finally passed into law in 2022. Following the law's ratification, KUPI, along with its network and movement, actively participated in its socialization and implementation.





Additionally, the 2019 *fatwā* on female circumcision has influenced recent government policies on the practice, as reflected in a regulation issued by the Ministry of Health in 2024.⁴⁶ These developments underscore KUPI's significant impact in shaping state policies.

KUPI's female ulamā promote religious moderation by disseminating their *fatwās* and engaging in social initiatives to advance the public good (*kemaslahatan*). Their efforts span four primary social domains. First, pesantren and religious study groups (*majelis taklim*), where female ulamā—often *kyai* or *bu nyai*—teach *santri* to transmit religious knowledge across generations. Second, universities, where academically trained ulamā educate and engage with students, with a primary focus on intellectual development. Third, community-based organizations, where activist ulamā work closely with local communities to address social issues. Fourth, the political sphere, where female ulamā contribute to policymaking processes, ensuring that state regulations align with principles of religious moderation. Through these four arenas, female ulamā serve as key agents of social transformation, advocating for equitable gender relations that reflect the core teachings of Islam.

2. JP3M as a Representation of Female Pesantren Ulamā within NU

As previously mentioned, *Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighah* (JP3M) is a religious and social organization composed of women who lead pesantren and serve as *muballighah*. The organization operates independently while adhering to the

principles of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah al-Nahdiyyah*. JP3M members primarily include women who either manage pesantren or are descendants (*dhurriyah*) of *kyai* families. According to Fetra Nurhikmah, the national chair of Nawaning, JP3M's membership is relatively exclusive, consisting primarily of *bu nyai, ning* (a title for the daughters of *kyai*), and descendants of prominent pesantren families. In this context, JP3M membership is often associated with having “blue blood,” a term within the pesantren milieu that denotes genealogical ties to respected *kyai*.⁴⁷

As an organization composed of *bu nyai* and *muballighah*, JP3M primarily focuses on religious activities, particularly in commemorating significant Islamic events such as the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid nabī*) and the Isra' Mi'raj. Unlike KUPI, which operates more as a movement without a formal organizational structure, JP3M has a well-defined hierarchy extending from the national to the regional level. Currently, JP3M has established branches across nearly all provinces in Indonesia, enabling centralized, top-down directives. According to one member, Ibu Ayu, JP3M is a highly organized institution: all activities follow standardized instructions and are implemented simultaneously across all branches.⁴⁸ These regular gatherings predominantly involve religious rituals and traditions, including *tahlīl* (communal prayers for the deceased), *istigāṣah* (prayers for divine assistance), recitations of *ṣalawāt* (prayers upon the Prophet), and other devotional practices. Notably, these meetings rarely include discussions related to religious moderation. In the context of the three pillars of religious moderation—moderate thought,

⁴⁶ Another policy influenced by KUPI's fatwa concerns legislation and government regulations related to female circumcision. Government Regulation No. 28 of 2024, issued to implement Law No. 23 of 2023 on Health, includes a provision prohibiting the practice of female circumcision. This aligns with KUPI's second fatwa, which declares that any act of cutting or injuring

female genitalia (*Pemotongan dan Pelukaan Genetalia Perempuan* or P2GP) that poses harm without valid medical justification is haram (forbidden).

⁴⁷ Interview with Nyai Fetra Nurhikmah, September 10, 2024.

⁴⁸ Interview with Mustaghfiroh Rahayu, November 15, 2024.





moderation as a movement, and moderation in religious practices and traditions—JP3M predominantly embodies the third pillar, focusing on religious practices and traditions.

JP3M consists of *bbu nyai* and *muballigah* affiliated with pesantren that are connected to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization. Consequently, JP3M's religious practices and traditions align closely with those of NU. This alignment is explicitly articulated in the organization's vision and mission statements. The organization envisions itself as: "An association of female pesantren leaders and *muballigah* with superior religious knowledge, competence, and independence, dedicated to spreading the teachings of Islam *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah al-Nahdiyyah*." One of JP3M's core missions is the preservation of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah al-Nahdiyyah* traditions. Institutionally, JP3M adheres to the foundational principles established by KH Hasyim Asy'ari, as documented in *Qānūn Asāsī* (Basic Principles) and *I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* (The Creed of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah). These texts serve as ideological and practical references for both NU and JP3M, guiding their religious and social practices. The principles promote a moderate Islamic perspective that strikes a balance between the extremes of *'aqliyyūn* (rationalists) and *naqliyyūn* (textual literalists), ensuring a commitment to religious moderation in both thought and practice.

NU's approach to religious interpretation, which JP3M adopts, draws upon four primary sources: the Qur'an, the Sunnah, human reason, and empirical reality. This methodology employs a madhhab-based framework rooted in *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* principles. Thus, JP3M's religious moderation is primarily expressed through its traditional practices and ritual observances. According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious moderation can be measured using four key indicators:

1. National commitment
2. Tolerance
3. Rejection of violence
4. Accommodation of local culture

JP3M, as an organization of female pesantren leaders affiliated with NU, demonstrates these indicators in its activities and principles. Its national commitment is unquestionable, as reflected in its engagement with state-recognized religious practices. The organization also exhibits a high degree of tolerance and non-violence in its various *da'wah* initiatives. Additionally, JP3M remains culturally accommodative, respecting and integrating local traditions into its religious practices. This cultural inclusivity is explicitly stated in the organization's objectives and is visually represented in its official logo. Thus, based on the established indicators, JP3M can be classified as a moderate Islamic organization although JP3M and KUPI differ in certain characteristics—particularly regarding their structural organization and their focal approaches to religious engagement.

JP3M serves as an organization representing female ulamā from NU-affiliated pesantren. While these *bu nyai* occasionally address issues related to gender equality, they remain committed to preserving the pesantren tradition, which is widely recognized as patriarchal. The participation of these women in various JP3M activities—such as *bahtsul masail*, seminars, and other programs—demonstrates their agency within the traditionally patriarchal *pesantren* context. This agency is facilitated by the *ibu nyai*'s ability to negotiate their social environment. As Bu Nyai Aida explained, she always seeks her husband's permission before participating in JP3M activities. Notably, Bu Nyai Aida is one of the initiators of the women's *bahtsul masail* organized by JP3M. In these *bahtsul masail* sessions, a team of senior *kyai* is present to provide verification (*pentashih*). This practice stems from the assumption that *kyai* possess greater experience in these scholarly





discussions due to their more extensive engagement with such forums over the years. One of the *pentashih* team members for the women's *bahtsul masail* is Gus Fahmi Basya, the caretaker of Pesantren Falahiyah in Mlangi and the husband of Bu Nyai Aida. His involvement represents a strategic move to secure her husband's approval for her active participation in JP3M.⁴⁹

This case exemplifies the strategies and negotiations employed by the *bu nyai* to assert their roles and organize themselves as agents of change within the pesantren community—without disrupting its established traditions. As scholars, the *bu nyai* within JP3M hold religious authority based on three factors: (1) genealogy, (2) religious knowledge, and (3) social influence.

Genealogy serves as a primary source of authority within JP3M. Membership eligibility is largely determined by whether a woman is a *dhurriyah* of a *kyai*. This genealogical criterion distinguishes JP3M from KUPI. In JP3M, even if a woman possesses substantial religious knowledge, she cannot become a member unless she is descended from a *kyai* who leads a pesantren. By contrast, KUPI adopts a more inclusive membership approach, without imposing genealogical requirements. Most *bu nyai* in JP3M were once *santri*, ensuring that their religious knowledge is deeply rooted in the pesantren educational tradition. Additionally, they acquired religious insights from their parents, who were predominantly *kyai*. Their upbringing in these environments profoundly shaped their character and worldview. As Bu Nyai Aida remarked:

"JP3M is somewhat exclusive; it consists solely of female pesantren caretakers and their *dzurriyah*. All of us *bu nyai* were once *santri*. Back then, during our *santri* years, we were rigorously trained in *tafaqquh fī al-dīn*—to gain a deep

understanding of religion and become knowledgeable scholars (*'allāmah*). But when we entered real life, these female *'allāmah* found no institutional space, even though some of us became *ibu nyai* leading pesantren. This realization led us to establish JP3M, as we recognize the importance of empowering female pesantren scholars. We, as women, are better positioned to educate not only the next generation of girls but also the boys entrusted to us."

The *bu nyai* possess distinctive religious knowledge that sets them apart from other women in general. However, their expertise is often overlooked, as they typically operate behind the more publicly visible figure of the *kyai*. In reality, *bu nyai* play a pivotal role in managing pesantren, particularly in overseeing domestic affairs. Their responsibilities encompass various aspects, ranging from meeting the daily needs of the *santri* to providing emotional and educational care. While *kyai* primarily focus on delivering religious instruction, *bu nyai* assume a dominant role in the day-to-day operations of the institution. JP3M serves as a platform that highlights the significant contributions of *bu nyai* not only in managing domestic matters within the pesantren but also in demonstrating their scholarly competence through active participation in *bahtsul masail*. JP3M, therefore, functions not only as a forum for *bu nyai* to discuss and share their experiences in addressing challenges within the pesantren context but also as a space to showcase their intellectual capacity and public presence.

In addition to their genealogical background and religious knowledge, the third source of authority for these *bu nyai* is their social influence. Influence, in this context, refers to the ability to motivate and guide others toward compliance or support. Such

⁴⁹ Interview with Nyai Aida, November 30, 2024.





influence can be inherited across generations, although its potency may diminish if not actively maintained. Conversely, subsequent generations can enhance and expand this influence by preserving and strengthening the foundations laid by their predecessors. The extent of influence wielded by female Islamic scholars within JP3M varies from one individual to another. Several indicators can be used to measure this influence. One key indicator is the size and composition of their following, which may include active *santri*, their parents (*wali santri*), alumni, or participants of *pengajian* (religious study groups). Another indicator is the extent to which they are regarded as role models by the community. Finally, their influence becomes evident when their statements, advice, and guidance are consistently sought, valued, and followed by others.

The primary locus of authority for these *ibu nyai* remains the *pesantren*. From this institutional base, their influence extends to various *pengajian* (Islamic study session) circles dispersed across different regions. *Pesantren* serve as trusted educational spaces where families place their children under the tutelage of *kyai* and *bu nyai*, who are not only educators but also community leaders.

Furthermore, the *pesantren* functions as a social arena where *bu nyai* fulfill both maternal and managerial roles. They are actively involved in ensuring the well-being of their *santri*, overseeing logistical needs such as accommodation, food provision, and infrastructure development, while also managing the institution's broader administrative functions. It is within this social environment that the values of religious moderation are imparted, particularly to the *santri* and, more broadly, to the surrounding community, including members of the *majelis taklim* affiliated with the *pesantren*.

Conclusion

The concept of religious moderation, as understood by the female *ulamā* of KUPI and JP3M, reflects a shared commitment to promoting and practicing religious moderation. However, differences exist in the domains through which this moderation is realized. While KUPI implements religious moderation not only at the level of theological thought but also through social movements and religious practices, JP3M predominantly applies religious moderation within the domain of religious practice. Despite this distinction, both communities of female *ulamā* issue religious *fatwās* in response to various societal challenges.

In terms of their sources of authority, both groups share similarities but operate within distinct social arenas. The authority of KUPI and JP3M's female scholars is derived from three primary sources: religious knowledge (*kealiman*), social influence, and genealogical lineage. For KUPI scholars, genealogical lineage serves as one of several sources of authority, as not all KUPI members are either *pesantren* caretakers or descendants of *kyai*. In contrast, genealogical lineage constitutes the primary source of authority for JP3M members. Membership in JP3M is restricted to *bu nyai* who either manage *pesantren* or are *dhurriyah* of *pesantren* founders.

The social arenas in which KUPI and JP3M scholars exercise their agency in promoting religious moderation also differ. KUPI scholars operate across multiple social domains, including (1) *pesantren* as traditional Islamic educational institutions, (2) universities as centers of higher education, (3) community-based organizations where some members engage as activists working directly with grassroots communities, and (4) the political sphere. Conversely, the social arena for *bu nyai* within JP3M is primarily confined to the *pesantren* environment.

The study of KUPI and JP3M illustrates how female Islamic scholars in Indonesia have





established recognized authority and actively exercise agency in religious and social contexts—an occurrence rarely observed in other Muslim-majority countries. This phenomenon also reflects the dynamics of Indonesian Islam, characterized by its moderate stance, particularly regarding gender relations. Beyond KUPI and JP3M, other communities of female Islamic scholars, such as *Bu Nyai Nusantara*, *JMQH*, and *RMI Putri*, merit further scholarly investigation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the contributions made by female religious scholars to Indonesian society and statehood.

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