

# **PESANTREN WOMEN COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE TO THE INDONESIAN ULEMA COUNCIL (MUI) FATWA ON PALESTINE: A PORTRAIT OF URBAN MUSLIM RELIGIOUS LIFE IN METRO CITY**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the religious responses of *pesantren*-based Muslim women in urban Indonesia to the fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) supporting Palestine. The research focuses on the Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh *Pesantren* dan Muballighah (JP3M) in Metro City, employing a qualitative phenomenological approach through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings reveal three main dimensions in interpreting the fatwa: Islamic solidarity (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*), humanitarian solidarity (*ukhuwah insaniyah*), and contextual understanding. These dimensions manifest in community actions such as fundraising, digital campaigns, and public education, integrating religious values with modern practices. The study indicates that religious literacy, access to global information, and local social dynamics shape the religious expressions of urban Muslim women. However, the geographically limited context of Metro City may influence the findings due to regional cultural factors, community social structures, and institutional access, which may not reflect other urban settings. Therefore, comparative studies involving similar communities across diverse regions must capture a broader spectrum of religious responses. Moreover, a multidisciplinary approach combining perspectives from sociology, religious studies, and digital technology is essential to provide a more comprehensive and contextually relevant analysis of this complex global religious phenomenon.

**Keywords:** MUI fatwa; Palestinian solidarity; *Pesantren* women; & Urban muslim religiosity.

## A. Introduction

The religiosity of urban Muslim communities has undergone significant transformation amid the currents of information globalization, the intensification of identity politics, and increased engagement with transnational issues such as the Palestinian conflict. In the Indonesian context, religious solidarity with Palestine continues to emerge as a manifestation of both faith and humanitarian concern. Public demonstrations, fundraising activities, and disseminating religious messages via social media have become integral elements of contemporary urban Muslim religiosity (Kapinga & van Hoven, 2021; Mohamed, 2021; Pribadi, 2022). One catalyst for this wave of solidarity is the fatwa issued by the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), calling for support of the Palestinian cause—a directive imbued not only with religious significance but also with political and humanitarian dimensions (Anam & Sulaeman, 2024).

Metro City, with its diverse Muslim population, exhibits distinctive religious dynamics. Within this setting, the involvement of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) women in responding to the Palestinian issue presents a compelling area of inquiry. An active organization in this realm is the *Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighah* (JP3M), which plays a strategic role socially and spiritually in shaping religious attitudes within the community. However, how this community interprets and responds to the MUI's fatwa on Palestine has rarely been addressed in academic discourse.

Previous studies have explored the Palestinian issue from various angles, including political dimensions (Awad, 2021; Chome, 2019; Gaztambide-Fernández et al., 2022; Rickford, 2019), international law (Henry, 2019; Mason, 2020), and religious perspectives (Alatas, 2020; Bartal, 2023; Sari, 2019). Nevertheless, these studies primarily focus on formal institutions, male figures, or global activism, and seldom examine the religious interpretations of *pesantren* women within urban contexts.

Literature related to *pesantren* communities tends to position women in traditional roles, such as education and philanthropy (Al-Muttaqin & Sembodo, 2021; Hertriani, 2019). Even studies that highlight the contributions of *pesantren* women in strengthening local communities (Arifin et al., 2023) have not yet addressed their engagement in global religious issues like Palestine. On the other hand, the perspectives of *pesantren* women are crucial, as they are not merely transmitters of religious traditions but also active agents in transforming Islamic values within contemporary settings.

The novelty of this study lies in addressing a gap in the literature concerning how *pesantren* women in urban areas such as Metro City interpret and respond to transnational religious fatwas, particularly in the context of the Palestinian conflict. By amplifying the voices and lived experiences of women in JP3M, this research highlights forms of religiosity that are not only grounded in textual authority but also rooted in the social and spiritual experiences of Muslim women in urban spaces.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to answer the question: How do *pesantren* women in JP3M Metro City respond to the MUI fatwa supporting Palestine? The central argument of this research is that the religiosity of *pesantren* women in urban contexts is shaped through the interaction of religious authority, local social experience, and global narratives of justice and solidarity. Thus, the study aims to contribute to a new understanding of the relationship between religious fatwas, female actors in *pesantren* communities, and the evolving expressions of religiosity among contemporary urban Muslims.

## B. Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive-analytical approach, aiming to explore the religious meanings and interpretations of *pesantren*-affiliated women regarding the Indonesian Ulama Council (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) fatwa on support for Palestine, within the urban context of Metro City. This approach was chosen due to its capacity to uncover subjective dynamics, religious values, and the construction of meaning that cannot be quantified (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It also provides greater flexibility compared to ethnographic methods, which require long-term immersion, or case studies, which often have limited scope.

The interpretive theoretical framework developed by Mudjia Rahardjo (2020) designs a reflective methodology open to diverse participant experiences (Mudjia Rahardjo, 2020). Systematic descriptive principles from Arikunto (1993) emphasize the importance of detailed documentation of religious-social phenomena (Arikunto, 1993). The researcher engaged directly in several JP3M activities to support participant observation and attain contextual closeness in understanding the emerging symbols, interactions, and religious discourses.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) active membership in JP3M for at least two years; (2) roles as *muballighah* (female preacher), religious caretaker, or organizer of religious activities; and (3) prior experience in discussions or understanding of the MUI fatwa on Palestine. Participants were drawn from diverse age groups, educational backgrounds, and levels of involvement to avoid representation bias.

Data collection techniques included semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation in JP3M activities (such as *majelis taklim*, internal forums, and solidarity actions), and document study (including the MUI fatwa, sermon materials, pamphlets, and community publications). Data were analyzed through an integration of content analysis (for documents and publications) and narrative analysis (for interviews), following the stages of transcription, open coding, thematic grouping, and contextual interpretation of meaning (Saldaña, 2016). Data validity was ensured through triangulation of methods (interviews, observation, and documents), triangulation of sources (diverse participant profiles), and member checking to verify the accuracy of interpretations. Field notes and the researcher's reflective journal were utilized as control tools to minimize subjective bias.

## C. Findings and Discussion

### 1. Findings

#### Religiosity Among Urban Muslim Communities in Metro City

This study finds that the issue of religiosity among urban Muslim communities in Metro City (particularly among *pesantren*-affiliated women within JP3M) is reflected in their unique interpretations of the MUI fatwa concerning support for Palestine. Although fatwas are not legally binding due to their exclusion from Indonesia's constitutional hierarchy, which has led to debate among segments of the public (Renie, 2021), *pesantren* women generally exhibit a shared perspective derived from diverse yet complementary viewpoints. Further details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Perceptions of *Pesantren* Women on the Fatwa Supporting Palestine

Informant	Statement	Code
Informant SH	<i>In my opinion, this fatwa is appropriate; as fellow Muslims, we are like one body, when one part suffers, the others feel the pain.</i>	Islamic Solidarity (Ukhuwah

		Islamiyah)
Informant SH	<i>On a narrower scale, we must observe the condition of the local community. If there are still many in need around us, priority should be given locally.</i>	Priority Scale
Informant SM	<i>Yes, I agree. I believe that empathy should extend beyond Muslims. I am sure not all Palestinians are Muslims; there must be non-Muslims as well.</i>	Human Solidarity (Ukhuwah Insaniyah)
Informant EP	<i>I support the fatwa, especially since the arguments it uses as its foundation are appropriate. However, it should not be interpreted literally; it must be considered in the broader context.</i>	Comprehensive Understanding

Table 1 illustrates the perceptions of women from the Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh Pesantren dan Muballighah (JP3M) toward the fatwa supporting Palestine, reflecting diverse yet complementary viewpoints. Informant SH emphasized the importance of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), likening the Muslim community to a single body in which each part feels the pain of the other. She also stressed the importance of considering a priority scale, especially in addressing the needs of the immediate local community. Informant SM broadened the perspective by invoking *ukhuwah insaniyah* (human solidarity), asserting that empathy should also extend to non-Muslims, acknowledging the pluralistic reality in Palestine. Meanwhile, Informant EP expressed support for the fatwa based on the validity of the scriptural arguments used, while also highlighting the necessity of contextual rather than purely textual interpretation. These four perspectives reflect a nuanced yet interrelated understanding of Palestinian solidarity within the framework of religious edicts. Based on these interpretations, Table 2 presents the responses of *Pesantren* women to the boycott of pro-Israel products.

Table 2. Responses of *Pesantren* Women to the Boycott of Pro-Israel Products Israel

Informant	Statement	Code
Informant SK	<i>Regarding the product issue, our congregation doesn't pay much attention. There are no official instructions.</i>	Lack of Awareness
Informant DR	<i>I support the boycott, but I'm confused about which products are involved.</i>	Supportive but Uncertain
Informant SH	<i>We need to be cautious and consider the broader benefit (maslahah) for Indonesia.</i>	Considering Public Benefit
Informant SM	<i>I support the boycott and try to reduce consumption, but a total switch is difficult.</i>	Supportive
Informant EP	<i>I also support the boycott of Israeli products, as purchasing them contributes to their financial resources.</i>	Supporting Financial Disengagement

Table 2 illustrates the varying responses of *pesantren* women toward the boycott of pro-Israel products. Informant SK pointed to a general lack of awareness among her religious community, noting the absence of formal guidance regarding the boycott. In contrast, Informant DR expressed support but admitted confusion about identifying

the relevant products, highlighting the practical challenges faced at the individual level. Informant SH emphasized the importance of weighing the broader benefits (*masalah*) for Indonesia before endorsing such actions, underlining the need for impact analysis in decision-making. Informants SM and EP voiced firm support for the boycott; SM mentioned efforts to reduce consumption despite the difficulty of a complete transition, while EP supported the initiative as a means of cutting off financial contributions to Israel. These responses reflect a shared spirit of solidarity, albeit moderated by practical limitations and the need for contextual judgment.

These responses have translated into various localized activities, such as humanitarian fundraising campaigns, religious study sessions focused on Palestinian issues, and digital media-based social awareness campaigns. Participants also leverage their organizational networks to extend the fatwa's influence within the diverse urban communities.




Code	Description	Image
Humanitarian Fundraising	Handover of donations collected by <i>pesantren</i> women for Palestine to LAZISNU.	
Religious Study Session	Quarterly study circles addressing both everyday and global religious issues.	
Palestine Solidarity Campaign	Video campaign supporting Palestine, available on YouTube: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYpu4EljCp8&amp;t=8s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYpu4EljCp8&amp;t=8s</a>	

Figure 1. Support Activities for Palestine  
Source: Field observations/social media

## 2. Discussion

### Religious Issues among Urban Muslims from the Perspective of *Pesantren* Women

The research findings reveal that the issue of religiosity among urban Muslims in Metro City, particularly among *Pesantren* Women affiliated with JP3M (Jam'iyah Perempuan Pengasuh *Pesantren* dan Muballighah), reflects diverse interpretations of the MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) fatwa regarding support for Palestine. Although the fatwa is not legally binding, as it does not fall within the hierarchy of Indonesia's constitutional law (Renie, 2021), these female religious leaders provide a comprehensive and complementary perspective.

As shown in Table 1, the interpretations of the fatwa encompass three primary dimensions: *First*, *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), emphasized by informant SH, is viewed as a symbol of global Muslim solidarity. This perspective aligns with the concept of universal brotherhood in Islam (Jamil et al., 2023). *Second*, *Ukhuwah Insaniyah* (human fraternity), expressed by informant SM, extends solidarity to all human beings, regardless of religion, reflecting inclusive values as discussed in the research of Serhat Küçük (Küçük & Güngör, 2021). *Third*, *Contextual Understanding*, highlighted by informant EP, stresses the importance of interpreting fatwas within relevant social

contexts. This view corresponds to the findings of Mohammad Amirul Isma Md Yusuf and colleagues (2024), who emphasize the role of fatwas as instruments for religious unity in Malaysia, arguing that their implementation requires adaptation to local realities (Yusuf et al., 2024).

These findings are consistent with Mansur Ali's (2020) study in the UK, which demonstrates that various communities often interpret fatwas differently depending on their socio-economic and cultural contexts (Ali & Maravia, 2020). Similarly, research in Malaysia by Ali Al Ajmi Euchi (2020) indicates that Islamic legislation and its objectives form a foundational component of intellectual advancement in response to significant developments in human society (Euchi, 2022).

### **Responses of *Pesantren* Women to the Boycott of Pro-Israel Products**

As shown in Table 2, *Pesantren* Women's responses to the boycott of pro-Israel products reflect diverse attitudes influenced by levels of knowledge, implementation capacity, and impact assessment. Lack of Attention: Informant SK noted that congregants did not pay much attention to specific products due to the absence of official guidance. This highlights the critical role of religious authorities in providing more explicit instructions, as discussed by Ahmad Gad Makhoulf (2021), particularly regarding the role of scholars in collective decision-making (Gad Makhoulf, 2021).

Challenges in Product Identification: Informant DR supported the boycott movement but expressed uncertainty about identifying specific products. Kam and Deichert (2020) identified similar challenges. They found that the lack of transparent information hampers the effectiveness of boycott campaigns, concluding that negative information is more persuasive in encouraging boycotts than positive information in promoting purchases (Kam & Deichert, 2020).

Consideration of Public Interest (Maslahah): Informant SH emphasized the need to consider national interests (maslahah) in implementing boycotts—a perspective aligned with *maqasid al-shariah*, as elaborated by Sanawiah (Sanawiah et al., 2023). This response also aligns with Hoffmann's theory in *Anti-Consumption*, which identifies factors that hinder boycott actions, such as positive attitudes toward the targeted company (Hoffmann, 2022). Muslim communities often view boycotts as strategic efforts constrained by economic and accessibility issues regarding alternative products.

### **Local Activities as Expressions of Solidarity with Palestine**

Female Islamic leaders affiliated with JP3M have demonstrated substantial local engagement to support the Palestinian cause. One of the key activities is humanitarian fundraising, conducted internally within JP3M member institutions. Once funds are collected, JP3M collaborates with LAZIZNU to distribute the humanitarian aid to Palestine. This activity reflects not only socio-religious solidarity but also exemplifies the role of women in global charitable initiatives. The study by Muhammad Shulthoni and Saad (2022) affirms that humanitarian fundraising is a common practice among Muslim communities, representing *ukhuwah Islamiyah* and an act of ongoing charity (*sadaqah jariyah*) (Shulthoni & Saad, 2018). JP3M's fundraising is conducted collectively through regular meetings and significant events, indicating a synergy between spiritual values and global consciousness.

In addition to fundraising, JP3M members organize religious study sessions focusing on the Palestinian issue to raise collective awareness. These sessions discuss political and humanitarian issues in Palestine and integrate Islamic values such as religious brotherhood and social justice. Such initiatives are crucial in educating the public about the Palestine-Israel conflict, fostering a more profound understanding

among congregants. Fadli (2023) highlights that religious study forums serve as strategic platforms for disseminating global issues within local contexts (Fadli, 2023). Through this approach, JP3M fosters community-level empathy, positioning the Palestinian issue not only as an international concern but also as a matter of faith and humanity.

Another significant activity is using digital media to increase awareness about Palestine. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube are utilized to share information, promote campaigns, and mobilize broader community support. This digital campaign strategy effectively reaches a wider audience, particularly among youth active on digital platforms. In their study in Tehran, Iran, Atieh Dokhanchi et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of digital campaigns as modern tools for mobilizing public opinion and uniting Muslim voices globally (Dokhanchi et al., 2019). Through creative content such as posters, short videos, and infographics, JP3M expresses solidarity with Palestine and inspires other communities to engage in the cause. JP3M's female leaders have significantly influenced global issues by integrating traditional and modern strategies through well-organized local actions.

### **Global Implications and Research Contributions**

This study offers novel insights into the interpretation of fatwas among urban Muslim communities in Indonesia, particularly by *Pesantren* Women. At the global level, these findings enrich the discourse on how Muslim communities mobilize solidarity in transnational religious issues. The study aligns with research conducted in the Middle East (Isakhan & Akbar, 2022), Europe, Australia (Whyte, 2023), South Asia (Adel & Numan, 2023), and Southeast Asia (Hasyim, 2019), all of which highlight the importance of local context in understanding fatwa reception and implementation. The contributions of this research can be summarized as follows:

*First*, from a gender perspective, the role of female Islamic leaders in supporting global issues (such as the Palestinian cause) adds a new dimension to academic literature that remains underexplored. *Second*, the study underscores the relevance and flexibility of fatwas in modern contexts, offering a fresh perspective that views fatwas not as rigid normative texts but as documents requiring interpretation based on societal conditions.

*Third*, this research provides strategic recommendations, including the importance of developing official guidelines for fatwa implementation, enhancing public understanding of products related to boycott movements, and strengthening international solidarity networks to expand advocacy impact. Additionally, this study opens avenues for future research. Comparative studies on implementing fatwas concerning Palestine across different countries could reveal varying patterns of understanding and application in diverse social contexts. Longitudinal research may also assess the effectiveness of boycott movements in mobilizing global solidarity, particularly regarding their long-term economic and social impacts. Furthermore, exploring how the activities of female Islamic leaders influence urban community awareness can offer deeper insights into the dynamic role of Muslim women in religious and humanitarian advocacy.

This study contributes to the international literature on the role of Muslim women in global issues by providing a comprehensive analytical framework. It enriches discourse on the relevance of fatwas in contemporary society, making the research particularly valuable for policymakers, academics, and practitioners engaged in religious affairs and global solidarity efforts.



**D. Conclusion**

This study reveals that the JP3M *pesantren* women in Metro City responded to the MUI fatwa in support of Palestine through community-based social actions and digital campaigns that integrate religious values and modernity. This response is shaped by their religious literacy, access to global information, and the dynamics of urban society, reflecting the *pesantren* women's capacity to contextualize the fatwa locally and globally. This research contributes to the literature on urban Muslim religiosity by highlighting the role of women in integrating normative and practical approaches to international issues. Geographical limitations posed a challenge, as the social, cultural, and media access contexts vary across regions, potentially resulting in different patterns of religious response. Therefore, comparative studies across areas are necessary to capture a broader spectrum of religiosity, while a multidisciplinary approach (incorporating sociology, theology, and digital technology) is essential for a more holistic and transformative understanding of urban Muslim religiosity.

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**F. Author Contributions Statement**

The author is solely responsible for all aspects of this research, including the article's planning, data collection, analysis, and writing. The author also undertook the revision and finalization of the manuscript for publication.

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