

FAITH, CARE, AND RESISTANCE: THE ROLE OF FEMALE ULAMA IN SOCIAL HEALING AMONG WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN FORMER TERRORIST FAMILIES IN PACIRAN, LAMONGAN, INDONESIA

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Abstract

This study centers on the key question of how female ulama contribute to the social recovery of post-terrorism communities in Paciran, Lamongan, with particular attention to women and children in the families of former terrorism convicts (ex-napiter). It departs from a critique of state-led deradicalization policies that have been persistently gender-biased and have overlooked the religious work of women at the grassroots level. Employing a gender-sensitive qualitative approach, combining in-depth interviews with six female ulama and participant observation. This research examines forms of women's religious agency through the lenses of Islamic feminism, intersectionality, the politics of care, and postconflict feminism. The findings reveal that female ulama act as spiritual healers, negotiators of religious authority, faith-based affective caregivers, and mediators between ex-napiter families and the broader community. The study recommends integrating female ulama into community-based deradicalization policy design as a strategy for gender-just, inclusive, and sustainable post-terrorism recovery.

Keywords : *female ulama, post-terrorism, families of former terrorism convicts, feminism*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada pertanyaan utama bagaimana peran ulama perempuan dalam pemulihan sosial komunitas pascaterorisme di Paciran, Lamongan, terutama terhadap perempuan dan anak dalam keluarga mantan narapidana terorisme (ex-napiter). Penelitian ini berangkat dari kritik atas kebijakan deradikalisasi oleh negara yang selama ini bias gender dan mengabaikan kerja-kerja keagamaan perempuan di tingkat akar rumput. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berperspektif gender dengan wawancara mendalam terhadap enam ulama perempuan, serta observasi partisipan, penelitian ini menganalisis bentuk-bentuk agensi keagamaan perempuan melalui kerangka feminisme Islam, interseksionalitas, politik perawatan, dan feminisme pascakonflik. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa ulama perempuan menjalankan fungsi penyembuh spiritual, negosiator otoritas agama, agen perawatan afektif berbasis iman, serta mediator antara keluarga eks-napiter dan komunitas. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan integrasi ulama perempuan ke dalam desain kebijakan deradikalisasi berbasis komunitas sebagai strategi pemulihan yang berkeadilan gender, inklusif, dan berkelanjutan.

Kata Kunci: Ulama Perempuan, Pascaterorisme, Keluarga Eks-Napiter, Feminisme

Introduction

The legacy of terrorism has left profound impacts on the families of former terrorism convicts (ex-napiter), particularly women and children, who face social and spiritual marginalization in Blimbing and Kandangsemangkon villages, Paciran District, Lamongan Regency. Stigma against these families is deeply entrenched within the local population, with community members often labeling them as terrorists or associating them with extremist groups such as ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria). This has led to verbal harassment and threats of violence.¹ Such social discrimination significantly undermines their self-esteem and well-being, as they are frequently isolated and subjected to prejudice when interacting with communities beyond their immediate surroundings.² Existing deradicalization programs have been criticized for failing to adequately address the needs of women and children. Women, in particular, are often excluded from these initiatives, despite their potential to promote peace and moderate values within their families.³ Coping mechanisms adopted by these women include

ignoring the stigma, concealing their actual circumstances, or relocating to avoid negative perceptions.⁴ Addressing these issues requires comprehensive deradicalization efforts that explicitly include women and children, focusing on reducing gender inequality and empowering women to take leadership roles in promoting tolerance and peace..

Historically, deradicalization and reintegration programs have centered on male actors, frequently overlooking the contributions of women in this context. Previous research often frames women as victims or passive followers rather than active participants, a narrative deeply rooted in gender stereotypes. For example, both media and policymakers tend to portray women involved in political violence as victims or pawns, reinforcing stereotypes that diminish their agency.⁵ Programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) often fail to take into account how gender dynamics, including masculinity and femininity, influence the deradicalization process. This oversight results in deradicalization efforts that are based on flawed assumptions about gender roles,

¹ Any Rufaedah and Idhamsyah Eka Putra, "Coping with Stigma and Social Exclusion of Terror-Convicts' Wives in Indonesia: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," *The Qualitative Report* 23, no. 6 (2018): 1334–46, <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3118>.

² Siti Nur Asiyah et al., "THE SOCIAL DISCRIMINATION AGAINST FORMER TERRORIST CONVICTS AND THEIR FAMILIES Psychological Perspectives," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 8, no. 1 (2014): 71–90, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2014.8.1.71-90>.

³ Abdul Ghofur and Sulistiyono Susilo, "Perempuan Dan Narasi Kekerasan: Studi Kritis Peran Gender Dalam Deradikalisasi," *Teosofi* 5, no. 2 (2016): 431–54, <https://doi.org/10.15642/TEOSOFI.2015.5.2.431-454>.

⁴ Rufaedah and Putra, "Coping with Stigma and Social Exclusion of Terror-Convicts' Wives in Indonesia: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis."

⁵ Rachel Schmidt, "Duped: Examining Gender Stereotypes in Disengagement and Deradicalization Practices," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2020, 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1711586>.

wherein male radicalization is associated with excessive masculinity, and female radicalization is viewed as a passive rescue mission.⁶ Furthermore, despite recent attempts to incorporate masculinity into P/CVE programming, these approaches still reflect male supremacist ideology, perpetuating gender hierarchies and failing to address the root causes of male radicalization.⁷ Rehabilitation and reintegration programs for women, particularly those returning from associations with groups such as ISIS, are often shaped by gendered, racial, and religious assumptions. These programs tend to disregard women's experiences and agency, being influenced by stereotypes of women's peacefulness and lack of political voice, and are further complicated by the dynamics of Islamophobia.⁸

The contributions of female ulama in postcolonial and religious contexts are crucial yet often underrepresented, as they play a significant role in fostering social trust, healing, and community reintegration. In contemporary settings, Muslim women scholars such as Dr. Ingrid Mattson and Dr. Amina Wadud have been instrumental in promoting cross-cultural

understanding and dialogue, challenging stereotypes, and advancing inclusivity through their work in Islamic studies and public discourse. Subaltern narratives, as explored through a postcolonial feminist lens, highlight the struggles and voices of marginalized women, underscoring the necessity for their stories to be heard and acknowledged within the broader social narrative.^{9,10} Collectively, these conditions underscore the pivotal role of female ulama in challenging existing power structures and contributing to the healing and reintegration of communities.

An Islamic and intersectional approach to feminism is essential for understanding post-terrorism issues in Paciran, Lamongan, as it offers new perspectives on social recovery and reconciliation. Female ulama, unlike state-affiliated or male religious leaders, articulate reconciliation through a gendered lens and an ethics of care, emphasizing the significance of women's roles in post-terrorism recovery. This approach challenges traditional patriarchal interpretations of Islam, advocating for gender equality and the recognition of women's contributions in both public and private

⁶ Katherine E Brown, *Gender, Religion, Extremism: Finding Women in Anti-Radicalization*, 2020.

⁷ Ann-Kathrin Rothermel and Megan M Kelly, "Cut From the Same Cloth? The Problem of Male Supremacy and Deradicalization," *Men and Masculinities*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184x241264245>.

⁸ Helen Stenger, "Intersectionality and Rehabilitation: How Gendered, Racial and Religious Assumptions Structure the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women Returnees,"

Critical Studies on Terrorism, 2024, 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2024.2319718>.

⁹ Merlin Brenda Angeline Lumintang, "Suara Sang Subaltern: Sebuah Narasi Autobiografi Perempuan Tanpa Nama Dalam Hakim-Hakim 19" 5, no. 2 (2021): 261–77, <https://doi.org/10.30648/DUN.V5I2.364>.

¹⁰ Caterina Duraccio, "Voci Delle Intersezioni: Postcolonialismo e Femminismo," *Revista Internacional de Pensamiento Político* 16 (2022): 161–76, <https://doi.org/10.46661/revintpensampolit.6280>.

spheres.^{11 12} Women's involvement in acts of terrorism underscores the need for gender-responsive approaches to legal and social recovery processes, as traditional views often overlook the complexity of women's roles in such actions.¹³ Islamic feminism, as discussed in contemporary studies, critiques patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and seeks to reconstruct classical Islamic scholarship in alignment with gender mainstreaming.^{14 15}

This context thus necessitates the integration of Islamic feminist thought, focused on the reinterpretation of religious texts (the Qur'an and Hadith), with socialist feminist perspectives that address the dynamics of social power, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of gender equality in the post-terrorism context. Such an approach not only assists in addressing post-terrorism issues but also contributes to long-term social harmony by promoting a balanced view of gender roles within Islamic discourse. Consequently, research on Islamic feminism and intersectionality within post-terrorism studies remains underexplored.

Based on the above background, this article focuses on the central question of how female ulama contribute to building social and spiritual recovery for women and children in the families of former terrorism convicts in Paciran, Lamongan. Accordingly, the article aims to explain the forms of religious agency exercised by female ulama in post-terrorism spaces shaped by trauma, stigma, and masculine domination, as well as to underscore their contributions to community care work through an inclusive and transformative Islamic approach.

This research is significant because it foregrounds local actors (female ulama), who have long been marginalized from the grand narratives of security, recovery, and religious authority in the post-terrorism context. The study offers a new perspective that peacebuilding and peacemaking cannot be gender-neutral and must view spirituality as a site of resistance and recovery. This article also serves as an important contribution for policymakers, particularly the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and religious organizations such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Aisyiyah

¹¹ Nehru Millat Ahmad, "Feminisme Dalam Kacamata Hukum Islam: Kajian Tuntutan Dan Hak Kewajiban Perempuan Dalam Keluarga," *Jurnal Hawa* 6, no. 1 (2024): 14, <https://doi.org/10.29300/hawapsga.v6i1.4286>.

¹² D Juwita et al., "Fenomena Feminisme Menurut Perspektif Epistemologi Al-Jabiri," *Transformasi Manageria*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.47467/manageria.v4i1.4226>.

¹³ Achievinna Mirza Senathalia, Zaitunah Subhan, and Ida Rosyidah, "Gender Dan Fenomena Terorisme Perempuan" 9, no. 1 (2021): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.47574/KALAM.V9I1.101>.

¹⁴ Dzakiyyah Fauziyah Rif'at and Nurwahidin Nurwahidin, "Feminisme Dan Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Kajian Islam Kontemporer," *Syntax Literate : Jurnal Ilmiah Indonesia* 7, no. 1 (2022): 172, <https://doi.org/10.36418/syntax-literate.v7i1.6038>.

¹⁵ Arisy Abror Dzukroni and Subi Nur Isnaini, "Harmonizing Religious Discourse and Power In the Implementation of Gender Equality," *Musawa: Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 22, no. 1 (2023): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2023.221.1-13>.

Muhammadiyah, Muslimat NU, among others, in designing post-terrorism reintegration policies that engage female ulama as central actors in both social and religious work.

Discussion

The discourse on female ulama is increasingly compelling because it encompasses multiple perspectives. According to the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress (Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia, KUPI), the terms *ulama perempuan* and *perempuan ulama* carry distinct meanings. *Ulama perempuan* refers to ulama, whether male or female who view women's issues from a women's perspective, meaning they are pro-gender justice and integrate women's viewpoints into Islamic interpretation. In contrast, *perempuan ulama* refers to a woman who possesses the scholarly capacity of an ulama but, if her views are grounded in a male-centered perspective, she is still referred to as a *perempuan ulama* rather than an *ulama perempuan* (female ulama).¹⁶

In the context of this study, *ulama Perempuan* (female ulama) refers to local female religious leaders in Paciran who embody a social perspective of gender equality and justice, thereby distancing themselves from patriarchal interpretations. These ulama maintain networks of *majelis taklim* (religious

study circles), female-only Islamic boarding schools (*pondok pesantren putri*), and women's study groups across Paciran District, some even hold the position of rector at the Islamic Institute of Tarbiyatut Tholabah (IAI Tabah). They have undertaken a series of deradicalization initiatives for women and children in the families of former terrorism convicts.

This study identified six female ulama who meet these criteria, four from the Muslimat Nahdlatul Ulama network and two from Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah. The activities and movements of these six female ulama can be discussed further as follows.

Spiritual Healing and Silent Leadership

In the post-terrorism social context marked by wounds and mutual suspicion, female ulama in Paciran play an important role in spiritual recovery. However, their activities are carried out quietly and remain largely absent from the formal discourse of state deradicalization policy. Their leadership does not take structural forms such as political office or national prominence, rather, it is expressed through silent, behind-the-scenes work that engages the inner lives of communities, an arena rarely reached by masculinist approaches to deradicalization.

One central figure is Ummu Kholifah, an educator, social empowerment practitioner, and

¹⁶ Tim KUPI, *Dokumen Resmi Proses Dan Hasil Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, ed. Tim KUPI, pertama (Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia, 2017).

owner of an Islamic boarding school (pesantren) in Waru Lor, Paciran. With a Master's degree and active involvement in Aisyiyah Muhammadiyah, she regularly organizes study circles (pengajian) for women in the families of former terrorism convicts. These activities are not one-off events but are sustained and systematically organized.

Ummu Kholifah :

Islam is a religion that empowers its followers and must not demean other Muslims. The past should be left behind as a valuable lesson for the future. All Muslims, especially Muslim women, should have equal access to become better individuals. Muslim women everywhere must be empowered and obtain their rights. Families of former terrorism convicts must be empowered and supported to return to normal life in society. These women should be given the same rights as other citizens.

Her life principle is evident in her dakwah approach, which rejects stigma and prioritizes spiritual healing, reaching victims' emotions without relying on formal channels.

Another figure is Maria Ulfa, a religious teacher from Brondong Village affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), who focuses on accompanying girls from ex-*napiter* families. She treats the spiritual sphere as a safe space for marginalized adolescent girls. "Prioritize peace with fellow Muslims," she stated in an interview, emphasizing that her role is not merely to deliver sermons but to create a non-judgmental emotional atmosphere. She is regarded as a role model in the Paciran area.

Maria Ulfa :

Sometimes, as Muslims, we are too quick to judge other Muslims, which often leads to disparaging groups with different views—especially those who have been involved in violence and terrorism. What we fail to realize is that the ones most affected are their children, particularly their daughters. They suffer unfair treatment from society in the form of negative stigma as 'terrorists' children,' which disrupts their psychological development.

This form of leadership exemplified by female ulama constitutes silent leadership, a model based on trust rather than formal authority. They do not impose doctrine but guide through emotional care and moral strengthening. This is part of everyday politics in post-conflict spaces, where politics is not necessarily linked to formal power but emerges through healing practices. The case of Paciran demonstrates that leadership can thrive in non-formal settings.

In Paciran, Lamongan, female ulama utilize *dakwah* spaces to promote narratives of peace and spiritual healing, particularly targeting women and children from *ex-napiter* families. This approach is firmly rooted in a broader framework that employs Islamic teachings for trauma recovery and social justice. Their activities parallel those of female ulama in Aceh, as documented by Umi Hanisah, who emphasizes the effectiveness of religious approaches in trauma recovery for victims of violence, highlighting empowerment and

reintegration into communities through religious teachings and local wisdom.¹⁷

Similarly, religious sources, including ideas from the Qur'an and Hadith, have been shown to serve as protective factors against violence, aiding survivors in meaning-making and resilience-building.¹⁸ Such religious doctrines must be non-literalist and grounded in enlightenment. The integration of psychosocial healing and religion, as seen in trauma recovery for children of terrorists, involves creating safety, emotional stabilization, and social reintegration, crucial steps in overcoming trauma.¹⁹ Thus, the use of enlightening religious legitimacy by female ulama in Paciran is entirely appropriate.

Comparable efforts can be found in West Java, where female ulama combat radicalism through diverse roles that foster tolerance, dialogue, and psychological support, redefining jihad as a means to resist radicalism and promote the moderate Islamic teachings of *rahmatan lil-'alamin*.²⁰ These examples underscore the potential of religious approaches, particularly through female leadership and representation in dakwah to address social issues, promote

healing, and advance social justice, thereby creating more inclusive and dynamic religious communities.^{21,22}

The role of female ulama in Paciran thus demonstrates strong dedication to healing past social wounds. Here, the project of Islamic feminism emerges: women empower vulnerable groups, especially other women and their children, with religion as the primary foundation. They bring light into the darkness of victims' social lives. Their actions are not based on classical masculine religious interpretations, instead, they draw on Qur'anic and Hadith interpretations grounded in gender justice, directly challenging the male-dominated religious and social exegesis that has long prevailed.

Negotiating Authority in a Male-Dominated Religious Space

Despite possessing deep religious knowledge and broad influence within their communities, female ulama in Paciran must continually navigate male-dominated religious authority structures. In traditional pesantren society, the authority of female ulama is often overshadowed by the symbolic and structural

¹⁷ Fathayatul Husna and Ainal Fitri, "Gender-Based Dayah: The Role of Female Ulama in Trauma Recovery Strategies for Sexual Violence Victims in Aceh," *Sawwa*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.21580/sa.v18i2.17416>.

¹⁸ Guangrui Huang, "A Muslim Perspective," 2022, 117–36, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003169086-11>.

¹⁹ Miftahuddin Miftahuddin et al., "Religious Psychosocial Healing for the Trauma of the Children of the Terrorists," *Qudus International of Journal Islamic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2022): 319, <https://doi.org/10.21043/qjijis.v10i2.14661>.

²⁰ Chotijah Fanaqi et al., "Redefining Jihad in Da'wah Against Radicalism Among Female Ulama in West Java,"

Journal of Law and Sustainable Development, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.55908/sdgs.v11i11.1962>.

²¹ Suud Sarim Karimullah et al., "Da'wah for Social Justice: Creating Awareness of Social Issues Through a Religious Approach," *Jurnal Dakwah Risalah*, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jdr.v34i2.25373>.

²² Rouf Tamim, Ais Isti'Ana, and Suslina Suslina, "Komunikasi Perempuan Dalam Dakwah (Menciptakan Ruang Untuk Representasi Dan Kepemimpinan)," *Al Huwiyah: Journal of Woman and Children Studies* 4, no. 1 (2024): 44, <https://doi.org/10.24042/jwcs.v4i1.22496>.

dominance of male religious leaders, a fact that cannot be ignored. Yet rather than submitting or withdrawing, they choose the path of negotiation, building legitimacy through spiritual proximity, social engagement, and consistent accompaniment of vulnerable groups, especially women and children in *ex-napiter* families.

One of the most prominent examples is Dr. Alimul Muniro, Rector of the Islamic Institute of Tarbiyatut Tholabah (IAI Tabah) in Paciran, who holds a doctoral degree and formal authority within an Islamic higher education institution. Although embedded within a masculinized structure, she positions herself as both a spiritual and intellectual companion for mothers and children from former terrorist families. She asserts, “Islam as rahmatan lil ‘alamin must be realized by empowering marginalized communities, not by judging them.” Through various *tridharma* campus activities, she encourages the involvement of students and lecturers in social programs aimed at post-terrorism reintegration..

Alimul Muniro :

As the rector of an Islamic university, I strongly emphasize to the academic community the importance of actively empowering the surrounding society, especially victims and families of former terrorism convicts. I always strive to ensure that our campus programs accompany and support mothers and children in *ex-napiter* families—empowering them psychologically and economically so that they can be mentally healthy and financially stable. Praise be to God, these programs are still ongoing at our university to this day

Her thoughts and actions represent women as agents of change. A patriarchal social environment has not deterred her from finding strategies, and her ongoing work has proven highly beneficial for women and children in *ex-napiter* families.

Beyond the academic sphere, Luthfiyah Lujeng, a Bu Nyai (female NU leader) and owner of the foundation that oversees IAI Tabah, plays a vital role as an informal leader. She is also the owner of a large pesantren and foundation that wields significant influence in Paciran. With maternal firmness and moral authority, she builds bridges between formal religious structures and the everyday lives of women in the community. Female ulama have historically been seen as subordinate to male religious figures (*kyai*), with women’s roles overshadowed in deradicalization efforts. In this context, Luthfiyah Lujeng dares to challenge such conditions, albeit through a softer system.

Luthfiyah Lujeng :

Caring for the social environment is part of our religious responsibility. We cannot remain silent in the face of vulnerability around us. When we see mothers and children treated unjustly, we must change that. Destiny cannot be used as an excuse to oppress others. It is not fate or Islamic teachings that are wrong. It is the misinterpretation of them. For us as Muslims, the key is to care and take responsibility for social problems, especially those affecting vulnerable groups like mothers and children

Even with authority, Luthfiyah Lujeng and other female ulama do not always receive

unchallenged acceptance. As explained by Reni, Chair of Fatayat Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Banjarwati, Paciran, she often faces skepticism from male figures in religious forums. Yet she chooses a “blusukan” strategy directly visiting the homes of ex-napiter families and forming girls’ study groups, often outside formal mosque spaces or religious leader forums.

Reni :

We study the Qur’an while talking, while listening to their stories. That is our space—not a grand pulpit, but a real space. I go directly into the field to meet children in ex-napiter families, listen to their stories, and play with them, while discussing their dreams for a bright future

Within the frameworks of Islamic feminism and intersectional feminism, female ulama in Paciran exemplify strategic agency that is non-confrontational yet impactful, particularly in their efforts to heal the wounds of women and children in *ex-napiter* families. This agency operates tangibly within the lived realities of those families. The approach aligns with the broader Islamic feminist movement, which seeks to reinterpret religious texts and challenge patriarchal authority without directly confronting entrenched power structures. In doing so, female ulama occupy a vital position in religious enlightenment and social empowerment. For instance, the Indonesian Women Ulama Congress

(*Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia*, KUPI) expands the global Islamic feminist project into a locally resonant social movement, emphasizing the reinterpretation of religious sources to empower women within tradition.²³ This bottom-up method of influence, through repeated actions and spiritual intimacy reflects the broader aims of Islamic feminism: empowering women spiritually and morally while promoting gender equality in all spheres of life.²⁴

The agency demonstrated by Paciran’s female ulama is also informed by intersectional feminism, which considers the intersecting influences of gender, race, and religion, particularly in contexts such as rehabilitation and reintegration programs for women returning from conflict zones, where gendered and racialized assumptions often marginalize them.²⁵ Intersectional feminism rejecting Western-centric feminist narratives, can be seen in the practices of female ulama in Paciran, representing a local movement to illuminate and challenge gender injustice.

Furthermore, historical and theological analyses of women’s leadership in Islamic politics underscore the complexities of interpretation and the necessity of contemporary

²³ D Kloos and Nor Ismah, “Siting Islamic Feminism: The Indonesian Congress of Women Islamic Scholars and the Challenge of Challenging Patriarchal Authority,” *Historische Anthropologie* 34 (2023): 818–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2023.2249495>.

²⁴ Musdah Mulia, “Feminisme Islam Di Indonesia: Refleksi, Aksi, Dan Praxis,” *Jurnal Perempuan*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.34309/jp.v27i2.689>.

²⁵ Stenger, “Intersectionality and Rehabilitation: How Gendered, Racial and Religious Assumptions Structure the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women Returnees.”

perspectives to bridge gender gaps.²⁶ Such a nuanced understanding of women's agency and leadership is crucial in contexts where Muslim women are often marginalized in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, with their roles essentialized and overlooked.²⁷ By creating alternative spaces for interpretation and leadership, female ulama in Paciran contribute to a silent revolution in Islamic feminism, challenging both traditional Islamic discourse and dominant Western feminist narratives thereby fostering a more inclusive and diverse feminist movement. This strategic agency, rooted in patience and conviction, enables women to redefine their roles and assert their power within families and communities, ultimately contributing to more equitable gender relations.²⁸

Faith-Based Care as Resistance

In the post-terrorism context, laden with stigma, trauma, and social surveillance, the *dakwah* and accompaniment practices of female ulama in Paciran are not merely ordinary religious activities. They constitute a form of spiritual care work that is inherently resistive, a silent defiance against symbolic violence, social exclusion, and the masculine, technocratic nature of state policy. Muthmainah, head of the Al-Islah Islamic Boarding School (pesantren)

and Vice Chair of the Aisyiyah branch in Paciran, stated in an interview.

Muthmainah :

We accompany mothers and children not because they are from former napiter families, but because they are all servants of Allah. Islam is balanced between *habluminallah* and *habluminannas*. We want to uplift them, not judge them, because negative stigma always exists. Their children are labeled as terrorists' children, and their mothers find it difficult to be accepted in everyday social life. This is clearly an injustice that must be addressed

The pesantren she manages has become a safe space for women and children who feel excluded from society. Through regular *pengajian* and personal guidance, she treats spirituality as a space for healing rather than indoctrination. Children from former terrorism convicts' families are even allowed to attend school there free of charge. Here, faith becomes a force to resist social injustice.

Similarly, Maria Ulfa specifically targets girls from ex-napiter families, holding regular study sessions at her home and creating a gentle yet transformative atmosphere, far from the noise of one-way sermons, and prioritizing the affective dimension over textual imposition.

Maria Ulfa :

Girls need a safe space, not a space for indoctrination and coercion. They need support for their growth and development

²⁶ Mufti Wardani, "Kepemimpinan Perempuan Dalam Politik Islam: Analisis Historis, Teologis, Dan Sosio-Politik," 2024, <https://doi.org/10.62976/ijijel.v2i2.644>.

²⁷ Maha Akeel, "Challenging the Marginalization of Muslim Women in Peacebuilding: Agency, Culture, and Feminist Perspectives in Conflict-Resolution,"

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal 11 (2024): 60–72, <https://doi.org/10.47722/imrj.2001.30>.

²⁸ Elly Malihah et al., "The Woman's Involvement in Terrorism: The Phenomenology Study on The Woman in The Family of The Former Terrorist Prisoner," 2022, <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.30-8-2021.2316284>.

because their life journey is still very long. This accompaniment is not just about learning religion, but about learning to accept oneself and build hope for the future

Such practices can be read through the lens of the politics of care, where tending to bodies, souls, and social relationships is not merely private or domestic labor, but political work in the broadest sense. They challenge state neglect and build sustainable community cohesion. Care thus becomes a form of feminist resistance, non-confrontational yet highly effective in reconstructing post-terrorism social relations.²⁹

The concept of care as political work, particularly in the context of feminist resistance, is rooted in the idea that care extends beyond the private sphere to become a significant political act. As articulated in Joan Tronto's work, care is essential to democracy and social justice, requiring the participation of all citizens to achieve freedom, equality, and justice.³⁰ The political dimension of care is further emphasized in the idea of a "caring democracy," which challenges masculinist neoliberal and populist regimes by promoting inclusivity and collective responsibility, fostering social cohesion, and

resisting state neglect³¹. Feminist perspectives on care highlight its role in addressing human vulnerability and interdependence, framing it as a progressive political and ethical stance capable of reconstructing social relations particularly in post-crisis contexts such as post-terrorism.³² This framing fits closely with the context of Paciran, Lamongan.

Moreover, the dual nature of care in political culture, both as a tool for advancing social justice and as a potential instrument of oppression, underscores the need for a politically conscious "justice of care" that aligns compassion with transformative political movements. This multifaceted understanding of care as political work aligns with broader feminist discourse that seeks to integrate care into public and political domains, challenge traditional boundaries, and advocate for a fairer distribution of caregiving responsibilities.³³ Care thus emerges as a form of non-confrontational yet effective feminist resistance, capable of reshaping social relations and fostering sustainable community cohesion. This is a valuable lesson from the female ulama of Paciran, whose movement is distinctively shaped by local social conditions.

²⁹ Joan C Tronto, "Care Ethics," *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118474396.wbept0124>.

³⁰ Donna Baines, "Social Justice Politics: Care as Democracy and Resistance," 2019, 67–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26484-0_5.

³¹ Fabienne Brugère, "Caring Democracy as a Solution Against Neoliberalism and Populism," 2020, 137–59, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41437-5_7.

³² Victoria Carr, "Care, Austerity and the Politics of Everyday Lives," 2022, 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447353003.003.002>.

³³ Sarah Leonard and Deva R Woodly, "The Political Philosophy of Care," *Dissent* 69, no. 1 (2022): 28–35, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2022.0005>.

Another form of resistance is evident in the approach of Reni, a Fatayat NU leader in Paciran, who practices “blusukan”, personally visiting the homes of *ex-napiter* families without formal protocols or state accompaniment.

Reni :

If we wait for the state to act, it will take too long. So we come directly, talk, bring food supplies, and sit together. That alone is enough to make them feel that someone cares. We simply listen to their grievances, talk with the children, and hear their hopes and stories. This is tangible proof that they can survive in a post-terrorism social environment that is unjust toward them

Her statement reflects the philosophy that resistance can arise from care and the willingness to be present, a concept we might call presence as resistance. Simply being present in their lives constitutes a strategic form of intervention in post-terrorism recovery. The faith-based care practiced by female ulama is a manifestation of spiritual-feminist agency, a religious practice that strengthens not only the self but also the community through familiar, affective, and empathetic means. In the context of masculine-biased deradicalization policy, this approach offers an alternative form of recovery that cannot be ignored and one that would be difficult to find in any Western context.

From Margin to Mediator: Female Ulama and Community Social Healing

The position of female ulama in Paciran is not always at the center of formal religious structures, yet it is precisely from this marginal

position that they build their strength as social mediators. They stand between two worlds: on one side, *ex-napiter* families living with fear, trauma, and stigma; on the other, the wider society that often responds with suspicion and rejects the reintegration of former terrorism offenders. Within this narrow space, female ulama become a bridge of care and trust, a role the state, security apparatus, or even male religious leaders do not occupy. Their presence in this space is a concrete action with tangible impact.

Luthfiyah Lujeng, a Bu Nyai and owner of a large pesantren and foundation in Paciran, plays a strategic role in facilitating communication between *ex-napiter* families and other social actors. She explained in an interview.

Luthfiyah Lujeng :

We do not ask about their past. We ask where their children go to school, whether they have enough to eat, whether they study the Qur’an. From there, we build trust. We are present for them, not only to preach, but to be someone close to them and ready to listen to their struggles. General religious gatherings do not reach them.

Her emotional involvement and cultural proximity make her a point of reference, not because of formal office, but because of consistent presence. This has earned her recognition across Paciran as a figure of social and religious empowerment.

This mediator role is also performed by

Dr. Alimul Muniro, who, as rector of an Islamic university, actively promotes community service-based tridharma programs. She facilitates students and lecturers to provide accompaniment for ex-napiter families, integrating her role as an academic with her position as a public religious figure. She emphasizes that scholarship and religiosity must unite in serving the community, particularly those marginalized by stigma.

Meanwhile, Reni from Fatayat NU works at the micro level, forming girls' groups from ex-napiter families. She creates small forums in residents' homes to teach life skills and Qur'anic study, while also listening to the personal stories of these girls.

Reni :

I know they are afraid to join general religious study groups. So I visit them one by one. We talk slowly. Over time, they begin to trust me. We don't only accompany their children but also ensure they have skills they can use in everyday life. I serve as an intermediary who not only brings religious messages but also opens social access for a closed and excluded group

Within the framework of post-conflict feminism, female ulama in Paciran, such as Luthfiyah, Alimul, and Reni embody grassroots

peacebuilders who play a vital role in maintaining social cohesion in communities fractured by extremism. Even without official recognition from the state or security bodies, they engage in peacebuilding through interpersonal relationships, compassion, and trust key components of effective mediation.

This resonates with broader understandings of women's roles in peace processes. In various contexts, local women's religious groups have been instrumental in counter-radicalization efforts, demonstrating agency in building peace by strengthening community resilience through social and religious activities.³⁴ Similarly, in other conflict zones such as Syria, women have actively participated in peacebuilding, challenging traditional victim narratives and showing their capacity as mediators and community leaders.³⁵

The importance of women's participation in peace processes is further underscored by the need to address gender gaps in mediation, as their agency elevates community standing and promotes gender equality, particularly in conservative societies.³⁶ Collectively, these examples illustrate how women, through grassroots efforts, contribute significantly to peacebuilding often operating outside formal

³⁴ Nuriyeni Kartika Bintarsari, Ayusia Sabhita Kusuma, and Nurul Azizah Zayzda, "Localizing UNSCR 1325 in Indonesia: Study of Local Women Religious Groups in Peacebuilding and Counter Radicalization" 16, no. 1 (2022): 193–216, <https://doi.org/10.20473/jgs.16.1.2022.193-216>.

³⁵ Sintia Catur Sutantri, "Peran Perempuan Di Wilayah Konflik (Keterlibatan Perempuan Dalam Peacebuilding

Konflik Suriah)," *JIIP (Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan)* 6, no. 4 (2023): 2284–91, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v6i4.1942>.

³⁶ Ann Khurtsidze, "Women's Engagement in Mediation and Peacebuilding Process – An Instrument for Equality," 2023, <https://doi.org/10.60131/adr.1.2023.7084>.

recognition yet playing crucial roles in fostering lasting peace and social cohesion.

Thus, female ulama in Paciran are not merely preachers or religious leaders; they are social balancers in the post-terrorism landscape managing wounds, stitching trust, and rebuilding fractured bridges between citizens. Their supposedly marginal position becomes a source of strength, enabling them to enter sensitive spaces inaccessible to state formalities and male-dominated authority structures.

The findings discussed in the preceding sections demonstrate that female ulama in Paciran play a complex yet crucial role in post-terrorism social recovery, particularly for women and children in *ex-napiter* families. Through spiritual healing practices, silent leadership, negotiation of authority in male-dominated religious spaces, affective care work, and social mediation, they construct forms of agency rarely visible in the grand narrative of state-led deradicalization.

Within the framework of Islamic feminism, they articulate religious authority inclusively and transformatively through an intersectional lens navigating identities as ulama, women, local residents, and companions to the stigmatized. From the perspective of the politics of care, they demonstrate that caregiving is not merely domestic labor but also a strategy of resistance and community restoration. And within post-conflict feminism, they show that

peacebuilding need not be solely dependent on formal mechanisms, it can also grow from below, through presence, care, and unseen spiritual labor. This study affirms that gender-just post-terrorism social recovery can only be achieved if actors like these women are recognized, empowered, and included in the design of state policy.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that female ulama in Paciran, Lamongan, play a vital role in the social recovery of post-terrorism communities, particularly in accompanying women and children from the families of former terrorism convicts. Through spiritual leadership that is quiet yet transformative, they create spaces of healing that reject stigma and symbolic violence. Their leadership is not rooted in formal structures or institutional positions but in an ethics of presence, affective care work, and spiritual connection that touches the lives of marginalized citizens. From negotiating authority within male-dominated religious spaces to serving as social mediators between *ex-napiter* families and the broader community, these women articulate a distinctive form of religious agency, faith-based feminine agency. They enact resistance through care, build solidarity in silence, and stitch social cohesion through everyday spiritual practices, tasks that male authorities, operating within the formalities of the state, have not undertaken. Within the framework of Islamic feminism, their work represents a liberatory reinterpretation of religious

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praxis, deconstructing masculinist readings of sacred texts. From an intersectional perspective, their position lies at the intersection of overlapping power structures, where the state is absent in the lived realities of post-terrorism recovery. Through the lens of the politics of care, their work embodies a meaningful form of affective politics.

These findings indicate that post-terrorism recovery cannot rely solely on state-driven, legal-formal, and masculinist approaches that center on male leaders working with male ex-offenders. Recognition of the religious work carried out by grassroots women is essential—not as supplementary, but as central actors in recovery, operating through the logics of spirituality, care, and social proximity. In practical terms, this study recommends that policymakers such as the National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and religious organizations like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah integrate female ulama as key actors in community-based deradicalization and social reintegration programs. This is not merely a matter of representation, but of effectiveness, sustainability, and social justice in building a more peaceful, inclusive, and gender-responsive post-conflict society.

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