Women issuing fatwas: female Islamic sholars and community-based authority in Java, Indonesia

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Women Issuing Fatwas

In March 2017, while doing fieldwork in Indonesia, I attended a routine *pengajian* (religious lesson) held in the district office of the Islamic organization Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Demak, Central Java. I arrived there at 8:45, together with Annisse, my research assistant, Ara, my seven-month daughter, and Umi Hanik, the teacher of the group, who had invited me to participate. A room had been prepared by the organizer as a place for the *pengajian* with a green carpet on the floor. Small tables were arranged in a straight line in one part of the room for Umi Hanik to use during her lesson. We all sat on the floor waiting for the participants to arrive. They were all women and members of women's or young women's branches of Nahdlatul Ulama (respectively Fatayat and Muslimat NU) in several sub-districts of Demak Regency.[1] When they arrived, I noticed that they wore Fatayat light green and Muslimat *batik* uniforms with matching headscarves. Anticipating the *pengajian*, they greeted each other, chatting between smiles and laughter. There were around thirty to forty of them. Filling the room with their voices, they sounded like the hum of bees, boisterous and lively.

Umi Hanik started her lesson after a master of ceremonies opened the programme with a prayer and the recitation of *tahlil* (a compilation of verses from the Qur'an). She read a page from

1 Muslimat NU is the women's wing of Nahdlatul Ulama and Fatayat is the organization's female youth wing. They each have a national board and branches going down from provincial to village levels. The members of Muslimat are adult women. Fatayat membership is intended for young women ranging from twenty to forty-five years old.

a *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) book titled *Safinatun Najah* about the requirements for mandatory ablution (*furudhul wudhu*), giving an explanation of the Arabic text in Javanese.[2] Some of the participants wrote notes. Others simply listened, carefully taking in her words. In the section on how to wash each part of face as required for mandatory ablution, she pointed at a specific part of her face. "*Ati-ati* [Javanese], which is the downy hair that grows near the ear, is a part that must be washed during ablution. So if you are doing ablution but the hair doesn't get wet, the ablution is not valid," she explained. At the end of the lesson, she showed how to do a valid ablution as explained in the book. She then invited the attendees to ask questions. One of them raised her hand.

> Question: "What is the legal judgment on wiping off the ablution water after we finish?"
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> Umi Hanik: "It is *makruh* (reprehensible). There are *khilafiah* (different opinions). Still, it is fine although we don't get the reward of doing a recommended activity of ablution. If possible, let it dry by itself. Doing so means that we keep the water, which is recommended because the ablution water becomes medicine, a light that can protect us from hell."[3]

The story of Umi Hanik is one of countless examples of Indonesian women issuing fatwas. Knowledgeable women provide Islamic legal opinions as answers to questions about Islamic law related to issues such as *taharah* (purification), worship, marriage, and *muamalah* (social relations), in addition to answers in the form of suggestions or advice. The practice of issuing fatwas by women takes place in many *majelis taklim* (religious lessons) every day, every week, and every month in villages, cities, sub-districts, regencies, and provinces. Reflecting technological innovations, the practice of giving fatwas is also carried out through mass media such as radio, television, the

2 As van Bruinessen (1990, 248) wrote that *Safinatun Najah* is a short introductory text on *fiqh* by Salim b. Abdallah b. Samir, a Hadrami ulama who lived in Batavia in the mid-nineteenth century.
3 Personal recording, 12 April 2017.

internet, and printed publications or magazines.

Muslim women also, though less commonly, issue fatwas collectively. During my fieldwork, I attended the Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI, Indonesian Conference of Women Ulama), which was held on 25-27 April 2017 at Pesantren Kebon Jambu al-Islamy, Babakan, Ciwaringin, Cirebon, West Java. One of the main aims of this congress was to produce three fatwas on issues related to women and children, namely child marriage, sexual violence, and destruction of nature in the context of social justice. During the closing ceremony of the conference, Habibah Djunaidi, a Muslim woman leader from Banjarmasin, Kalimantan, read aloud the fatwa on child marriage:

> "The results of the religious deliberation of the Indonesian Conference of Women Islamic Scholars, number 1, 2017, on child marriage. Question one. What is the legal judgement on preventing child marriage that causes harm in the context of realizing the benefit of the *sakinah* (peaceful) family?[4] Two. Who are the parties that have the responsibility to prevent such child marriage? Three. What can be done as a form of protection for children who experience such marriages? The answers formulated in the *al-hiwar al-diniy* (religious deliberation) on *al-zawaj al-mubakkir* (child marriage), based on *adillah* (religious reasoning) as stated in the appendix, show that Indonesian women Islamic scholars have the following views and attitudes. One. Religion requires prevention of all forms of harm. The benefits of the *sakinah* family cannot be realized if there is a lot of harm in the marriage. Child marriage is proven to bring harm. Therefore, preventing child marriage is obligatory (*wajib*). Two. The parties that have the responsibility to prevent child marriage are the parents, family, community, government, and the state. Three. Victims of child marriage are still entitled to rights like other children, especially the rights to education, health, parental care, and protection from all forms of violence, exploitation, and discrimination."[5]

4 *Sakinah*, derived from the Arabic word *sakana*, means calm. *Sakinah* in the family context means peace of mind (*sakinah*) of the husband and wife as the purpose of marriage, which can be realized by the presence of love (*mawaddah wa rahmah*) from both parties (Kodir 2019, 24).

5 Personal recording, 27April 2017.

These two stories of women issuing fatwas in Indonesia exemplify two different ways of fatwa-giving. When we look at the example of Umi Hanik, the practice of issuing fatwas does not seem very remarkable, at least not from an Indonesian perspective. These study groups led by women are a very common occurrence and the topic of ablution is neither challenging nor controversial. The issue discussed pertains to the question of how to wash the face during ablution according to the rules of *fiqh*. Likewise, when we look at the general context—women participating in *majelis taklim*—the example is rather unremarkable. Indonesian women have done this for many years. Attending *majelis taklim*, asking questions, getting answers from female teachers, and implementing those religious opinions to become better Muslims are certainly not something special because it is part of their everyday lives. It is a very common kind of advice for and by women. The reason I begin this dissertation with such an example is because it shows, firstly, that a fatwa is a piece of advice as indicated by the practices—Umi Hanik reads and interprets the Arabic text written in the *fiqh* book or derives her answers from the Qurʾan and hadith—and, secondly, that this happens quite frequently. What is remarkable about this story, then, is precisely its ordinary occurrence, the everydayness of fatwa-giving by women.

The second example is different. It shows that the practice of fatwa-giving at the grassroots has become a breeding ground for something new: a more controversial and contested movement geared towards changing mainstream interpretations of sensitive social issues. When we look at this development from a Muslim feminist or secular feminist point of view, the practice of issuing fatwas on child marriage in a conference is, again, unremarkable. It is a common practice for at least some Indonesian women to publicly debate controversial religious issues and, on this basis, to challenge dominant conservative views. However, the point here is that we should not look at the practice from such a perspective only. Given the context, it makes much more sense

to look at it from a traditional religious point of view. In this perspective, the practice of fatwa-giving in the context of KUPI is highly significant. It is significant, firstly, because the issue of preventing child marriage is a subject of contentious debate in Indonesia with progressive and conservative views clashing, and it therefore requires deep understanding of the source of legal reasoning which those involved in this debate draw upon. And secondly, because the very site at which the fatwa was issued—KUPI—illustrates a new movement in Indonesian Islam that affirms and amplifies the juristic authority of women religious scholars, who up until now have not been ascribed the same position as men in this domain.

How, then, should we understand these two examples of fatwa-giving by women? On the one hand, there is the very everyday fatwa-giving at the local level, not particularly controversial, dealing with ritual matters, broadly accepted, and continuously happening in everyday life all around Indonesia. On the other hand, there is the practice of fatwa-giving in the public sphere, involving hundreds of women Islamic scholars from different social, educational, and professional backgrounds, on issues that are contextually controversial, and at a site that is politically contested. These practices and the ways in which they are interlinked require explanation. They raise urgent questions about the role of women in processes of religious interpretation and social change more broadly. How can we explain the proliferation of women leaders giving fatwas as a fact of life in Indonesia both at the local and the national levels? And how are these practices related to the fatwa-giving that has been carried out, so far in Indonesia, mostly by men and by male-dominated Islamic organizations?

These questions led me to formulate a set of more general research questions that this study will answer, namely: (1) Who are the women who are recognized as ulama. Where do they come from, and what is their authority based on? (2) Why and how can Muslim female leaders become ulama and issue fatwas? (3) Do

they wield religious authority as strong as that of male ulama in issuing fatwas? If so, why and how do they exercise such religious authority? (4) To what extent are female ulama (Islamic women scholars) able to issue—i.e. formulate and communicate—fatwas that are contested and controversial from a traditional Muslim point of view? (5) What are the forces (dominant norms, power structures, and powerful institutions, including the state) that enable women to exert authority and what are the forces that limit them in different social and institutional contexts? (6) What do both everyday practices and more contested interventions regarding fatwa-giving by female ulama reveal about the role and meaning of the fatwa in contemporary Indonesian society and beyond? (7) How do changes in the exercise of religious authority either reveal or feed in to reformulations, remakings, or reinterpretations of the notions of *keulamaan* (ulama-ness), fatwa, and fatwa-making in contemporary Indonesia?

The central argument of this dissertation is that, both at the grassroots and in the public sphere, Muslim women in Indonesia play an increasingly influential role as ulama, both sought by and responding to ordinary believers seeking opinions, and, as such, acting as agents and advocates of change. Although their role is not often recognized by men, once we privilege the perspective of women a completely different picture emerges, one in which women are granted religious authority that turns out to be as strong as that of male ulama in issuing fatwas. As the examples above nicely illustrate, their authority is, on the one hand, a community-based authority contingent on local concerns and networks of knowledge. Yet on the other hand these women also contribute to a larger effort, namely the creation of a national network of Indonesian female ulama. Although rooted in a decidedly traditionalist religious sphere—embodied by Nahdlatul Ulama, a traditionalist mass Muslim organization, and its traditional pedagogical institutions—they are building a progressive movement in Indonesian Islam which has influence that extends beyond the local audiences into the public sphere,

and which has become an influential element in the development of Indonesian Islamic feminism.

Muslim Women and Religious Authority in the Indonesian Context

The movement of female ulama at the centre of my dissertation is tied, organizationally and culturally, to Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest mass Muslim organization in Indonesia. Therefore, it is important to begin this section with the historical context of NU and its wing organizations for women, Muslimat (Nahdlatul Ulama's women's association) and Fatayat (Nahdlatul Ulama's association for young women). At the same time, any explanation of the history of NU cannot ignore the history of Muhammadiyah, the second-largest mass Muslim organization in Indonesia, and the rivalry between both these associations, based on an intense debate between religious "reformists" and "traditionalists" since the 1920s. This debate not only influenced the establishment of NU, it also became a part of NU and invigorated its organization. Therefore, I will start with the organization that was founded first, Muhammadiyah, and its women's wing organizations, Aisyiyah (Muhammadiyah's women's association) and Nasyiatul Aisyiyah (Muhammadiyah's young women's association).

In Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world with 274 million people, a large number of Muslims are affiliated with the country's two largest Muslim organizations, Muhammadiyah and NU.[6] Muhammadiyah was established in 1912 in the city of Yogyakarta by the Islamic reformer

6 The large number of NU and Muhammadiyah affiliates is shown by a survey conducted by Alvara Research Center in December 2016. This survey covered 1,626 Indonesian Muslims aged 17 years and over in 34 provinces in Indonesia. The aim of the survey was to see the "Portrait of Indonesian Muslim Religiosity". According to this survey, 50.3% of Indonesian Muslim populations show their affiliation to NU, and 14.9% of them are affiliated with Muhammadiyah. It means that 79.04 million Muslims are affiliated with NU and 22.46 million are Muhammadiyah affiliates. The rest is made up of affiliates of other mass organizations and those who are not affiliated with any mass organizations. Interestingly, of the 79.04 million NU affiliates, 79.8% were residents living in Java, while the rest are spread across other islands. However, the followers of Muhammadiyah are found not only in Java but also in Sumatra. Of the total surveyed, 59.8% live in Java and 27.1%, in Sumatra, and the rest are spread over other islands (Ali 2017).

Achmad Dachlan. This organization is an important proponent of a Modernist/Reformist stream, which "consists of a range of movements that strive to reform religious life by purging it of superstition, blind imitation of earlier generations, and beliefs and practices that are not supported by strong and authentic scriptural references" (van Bruinessen 2013, 22). Muhammadiyah has sought to purify Islam from what it has dubbed "illegal innovations", or *bidah*, returning to the original sources of Islam, both the Qur'an and the hadith. As such, the organization has distanced itself from the authority of the main schools of law in Islam (*madhhab*) (Feillard 1999, 11-2). For Muhammadiyah, returning to the Qur'an and the hadith has been a step of liberation from the confines of the primordialism of *madhhab* and *taqlid* (adhering to *madhhab*) that supposedly shackles the creativity of *ijtihad*, the process of independent legal reasoning based on the Islamic sources (Muhammadiyah 2020). Reformist Muslim teachings have contested traditional Muslim beliefs, including practices that were considered *furuʿ* (subsidiary) in worship and supposedly never taught by the Prophet. For example, traditionalist Muslims have recited the *niat* (intention) aloud before praying while reformers have maintained the *niat* silently in their hearts because they there is no hadith that supports recitation (van Bruinessen 1994, 13).[7]

The debate between traditionalist ulama, including Kiai Wahab Hasbulloh, and reformist religious scholars such as Achmad Soorkati, founder of the Al-Irshad reform movement, and the Muhammadiyah leader Achmad Dachlan culminated in 1922 in the Indonesian Al-Islam Congress in Cirebon. The debate even turned into accusations of *kufr* (unbelief) and *shirk* (belief in more than one God). In response, Kiai Wahab proposed to Hasyim Asyʿari, a traditionalist Muslim scholar from Jombang, East Java, to counter Muhammadiyah and establish a movement to

7 *Niat* is "a strong will to do something for the sake of Allah" (Ilham 2022). *Niat* is an important aspect of worship and it is mandatory to intend it either in the heart (as believed by Muhammadiyah) or literary state it (as practiced by NU).

accommodate traditionalist scholars. Initially, Hasyim Asyʿari did not agree. However, after 1924, two major global events changed his views. These were the abolition of the Caliphate by Turkey and the invasion of the Wahhabis in Mecca. The traditionalists worried because the puritan Wahhabis challenged the practices of their religious worship, such as building graves, pilgrimages to shrines, and the teachings of the Shafiʿi schools adopted by most Muslims in Indonesia. NU was therefore established in 1926 in Surabaya by Hasyim Asyʿari to counter these developments (Feillard 1999, 9-11).

Muhammadiyah and NU are characterized both by theological and sociological divides. One of the main theological differences between Muhammadiyah and NU concerns the continued importance attached by traditionalists to the ulama as authoritative figures whom it is mandatory to follow. Unlike Muhammadiyah, which carries the spirit of independence in Islamic legal reasoning, NU emphasizes respect for authority in tradition, which involves scholars who have closely studied questions in Islam and who cannot be simply supplanted by individuals practicing *ijtihad*. Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) in NU provides the guideline for Islamic traditionalists to practice *taqlid*, meaning adhering to a respected person or *madhhab* (Huda 2007).[8] This theological difference is tied to a sociological difference between Muhammadiyah and NU. Muhammadiyah is strong among the urban middle classes. NU, by contrast, is associated much more with rural Indonesia and to some extent with a lower-class segment of followers.[9] Thus, it is not surprising to see NU

8 Kiai Machfoezh Siddiq, NU chairman-general from 1937-1942, argues that *taqlid* in NU is not a blind *taqlid*, but still requires new interpretations and opinions, especially on matters which are not explained by the great Imam. This practice, at its nominal level, can be called *ijtihad* as intended by Muhammadiyah (van Bruinessen 1996, 11).

9 The spreading of traditionalist Islam is rooted in history because it existed as the primary practice of Islam in Indonesia, especially on the island of Java, long before the establishment of NU as an organization. The application of Islamic teachings that are integrated with pre-existing beliefs and culture is proven to produce a relatively peaceful penetration of Islam, and this flexibility seems to be the pluralist nature of traditional Islam (Bush 2009, 29). In the past, Muslims who lived in urban areas were the modernist Muslims, and they normally lived in a Javanese town quarter called *kauman*, where there was a big mosque nearby. Meanwhile, Muslims who lived in rural areas tended to represent a more traditionalist version of Islam. See also Ricklefs (1993, 166).

followers at the grassroots practicing *taqlid* by approaching local Islamic leaders with obedience and respect. For laypeople, following *mujtahid* ulama is mandatory because of the general view that not everyone has the ability and opportunity to fully fathom or advance religious knowledge (Huda 2007).

The sociological divide between Muhammadiyah and NU goes some way in explaining how these organizations maintain and disseminate their doctrines and teachings. Muhammadiyah built formal schools in the cities offering the combination of a non-religious and Islamic curriculum, while NU conducted advanced religious study and learning through its network of mostly rural, traditional Islamic boarding schools called *pesantren* (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 29). A *pesantren* is "a residential school dedicated to the transmission of the classical Islamic sciences, including the study of the Qur'an and hadith, jurisprudence or *fiqh*, Arabic grammar, mysticism or *tasawuf*…" (Azra et al. 2007, 174).[10] Most *pesantren* originated as *pengajian,* concentrated in villages as centres for Islamic scholarly studies, and were developed by *kiai*, the *pesantren* leaders.[11] The *pesantren* are often associated with the traditionalist stream because their curricula are aimed at teaching the classical Islamic traditions of knowledge. Therefore, the aims of the *pesantren* system are concerned with how to transfer religious knowledge, protect the Islamic tradition as a whole, and represent a centre for the education and social reproduction of the ulama (Azra et al. 2007, 174-5).

Despite these differences, both Muhammadiyah and NU stand for a moderate understanding of Islam that permits

10 There is insufficient evidence to determine the first establishment of *pesantren*. However, van Bruinessen (1994, 124) stated that the first *pesantren* established in Java was Pesantren Tegalsari, and it was built in 1742. Since the sixteenth century, small *pesantren* had been found in Java, particularly in coastal areas where Islam was first introduced, but *pesantren* education was not integrated and organized as well in the beginning as a modern system of education. See also Azra, Afrianty, and Hefner (2007, 174).

11 However, some of the incipient *pesantren* may have vanished if there is no leader to take over after the main *kiai* died. Pesantren Cempaka in Surabaya, Pesantren Maskumambang in Gresik, Pesantren Jamsaren in Surakarta and Pesantren Kademangan in Bangkalan Madura are examples of *pesantren* which became *pengajian* because of a lack of appropriate guidance from a recognized Islamic scholar (Dhofier 1999, xxix and 13).

women to play roles in public lives. They embody the unique characteristics of Indonesian Islam compared to other Islamic countries, especially in the Middle East, where Muslim women's roles are generally more restricted. Pieternella van Doorn-Harder has explained that Muhammadiyah and NU women act as leaders within the organizational circles. She calls these women "leaders because in many of their religious activities they lead, guide, are in charge, or exercise a degree of influence over those with whom they work" (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 5). They use their experience at the grassroots to negotiate with male leaders, for example, on the importance of generating religious opinions that are sensitive to gender equality. "Their leadership roles are embedded within the organizational structures of Muhammadiyah and NU. Thus, in some instances we will not be able to find comparable roles for women in the West or in other Muslim countries" (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 5). Aisyiyah, the Muhammadiyah organization for women, was established in 1917, while Nasyiatul Aisyiyah or Nasyiyah, the Muhammadiyah organization for young women who are under the age of forty, was set up as an autonomous organization in 1960 (Nasyiatul Aisyiyah 2016). For NU women, Muslimat, which was founded in 1946, is a wing organization for adult women, while Fatayat was established for young women in 1950 (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 3).

Muslim women have successfully claimed autonomy and a certain level of authority through their organizational and social-religious activism. Aisyiyah, Nasyiyah, Muslimat, and Fatayat work through education and economic empowerment programmes for women from the lower and middle classes. Many of them are preachers and activists who teach the Qur'an according to more or less progressive interpretations and improve women's literacy through formal and non-formal education, and as such acquire and teach managerial and leadership skills. These activities have created a basis for women to become leaders, scholars, and activists who advocate for women's rights within an Islamic

framework. Through the organizations, Muslim women leaders and scholars gain scholarly authority. They become agents of change and guidance in the religious, practical, philosophical, and strategic domains for women followers (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 6, 29 and 34). They are followed and listened to by organization members spread across the branches at the village, sub-district, district, and provincial levels.

Pieternella van Doorn-Harder studied women's leadership in Muhammadiyah and NU from these organizations' early history onward, and she reaches the conclusion that Muslim leadership is not fully male, because women leaders have been active for a long time in interpreting and reinterpreting Islamic sources related to the role and rights of women. "Since the 1920s, these leaders have provided guidance in how to interpret the Qur'an and how to apply the teachings of Islam. Even while male scholars of Islam promote archaic opinions, women preachers teach alternative ideas to the women in their audience".[12] For instance, Aisyiyah women started donning headscarves during the 1920s as a symbol of their Muslim identity, in contrast to other Indonesian women, who generally did not wear a headscarf. They presented their progressive Qur'anic interpretations to other women in religious gatherings, for example, on polygyny by referring to certain verses of the Qur'an. "They could not ban the practice, as the father organization of Muhammadiyah did not forbid it; but they did work to make it more difficult for men and more bearable for women" (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 6).

In their activism, these women benefited from technological innovations, such as the ongoing modernization of transport and the printing press, helping them to spread progressive thoughts throughout the country. They also benefited from the increased

12 To get a picture of the number of women who are actively engaged in interpreting Islamic sources, van Doorn-Harder (2006, 5-6) stated about the membership of Aisyiyah: "In 2004, Aisyiyah counted 5,130 women preachers who preached and taught in 6,959 of its study groups, which met at least once a month. These activities have evolved continuously; at the beginning of the twentieth century, they were limited to simple literacy classes for women, as they learned the basic Islamic prayers. Today their activities encompass the grassroots and academic levels, for some groups including advocacy for women's reproductive rights."

number of girls in education, especially after separate schools for girls were established (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 32). As a result, women had more possibilities to access education and knowledge, including Islamic education. As religious guides, the activist women gained in-depth understanding of Islamic classical knowledge and *fiqh* at special religious schools such as *pesantren*. "Because of the *pesantren* network connected to NU, Indonesia is one of the few countries where considerable numbers of women have this specific knowledge" (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 9). The first *pesantren* to provide housing for female pupils was Pesantren Denanyar in Jombang, which was established in 1917. Before that time, female *santri* only had a chance to learn about Islam through *pengajian* (Dhofier 1999).

The mastering of Islamic classical knowledge enabled women to exercise religious authority and improve their position in Islamic organizations and institutions such as the *pesantren*. There are some early examples of this achievement. As noted by Eka Srimulyani (2012, 15), "[d]ata from the 1930s reveal that a female leader of a *pesantren* in Jombang, Nyai Khoiriyah, was a learned ulama who was influential both in the pesantren leadership and the wider community. She and her [first] husband established a pesantren, and she was actively involved in its leadership."[13] However, the rise in women's leadership of pesantren—throughout the country—is a more recent phenomenon (see Srimulyani 2008, Kull 2009, Ismah 2014 and 2016, Takdir 2015, Chusniyah and Alimi 2015, Kloos 2016, Razak and Mundzir 2019, and Jannah 2020). Nyai Masriyah Amva, for instance, is the leader of Pesantren Kebon Jambu al-Islamy, Cirebon, West Java, which she established in 1993 together with Kiai Muhammad, her second husband. In

13 Nyai Khoiriyah Hasyim (1906-1983) was proficient in education and skills management. She led Pesantren Tebuireng from the age of twenty-seven (1933-1938). While living in Mecca, she founded the Lil Banaat Madrasa in 1942, and she became the teacher. Returning from Mecca (1938-1956), she founded Pondok Putri Seblak in Jombang. Her work and intellectual capability were recognized among NU circles, so she was placed on the national board of Syuriah NU (Supreme Council) and sat as a resource person in NU's Bahtsul Masail forums (Tim KUPI 2017a, 16-7).

2007 her husband passed away and left the *pesantren* without a successor. Up to 350 *santri* (*pesantren* students) also left the school, leaving the *pesantren* in crisis. Facing this hard situation, Nyai Masriyah decided not to give up and instead to assume leadership of the *pesantren*, successfully as it turned out (Kloos and Ismah, forthcoming).

Another factor that enables women to exercise authority is their involvement in social activism. In the 1990s, several new Islamic NGOs were established by people who had ideological ties to NU, although these institutions were not formally connected to NU. These young people were born and raised in a NU cultural environment. Some of them graduated from *pesantren* and were active in NU-affiliated organizations. A study conducted by Pusat Penelitian Islam dan Masyarakat (PPIM, Center for the Study of Islam and Community) in 2002 clearly revealed this connection. The research shows that respondents who identify themselves as affiliated with NU and Muhammadiyah had an active involvement in issues of public interest through various non-religious civil society activities, such as cultural groups, cooperatives, labour unions, and professional organizations. The correlation between organizational activism and concerns about social justice shows the importance of the role of community organizations such as NU and Muhammadiyah, as what van Bruinessen called "pillars of civil society", in cultivating citizenship values in their members (van Bruinessen 2013, 340-1).

However, the autonomy and authority of these women are limited when it comes to the organization of Muhammadiyah and NU as a whole, especially regarding Islamic legal authority. This juristic authority ultimately remains firmly in the hands of men as they control the main decision-making bodies and fatwa councils, the Majelis Tarjih of Muhammadiyah and the Bahtsul Masail of NU. Women are underrepresented and play subordinate roles in these councils. Majelis Tarjih was established at Muhammadiyah's sixteenth congress in 1927. The term *tarjih* has an identical meaning to *ijtihad,* which became the principal

basis of law as practiced by Muhammadiyah. *Tarjih* "conveyed the meaning of examining the various opinions of Muslim jurists on a certain question and evaluating them in order to determine which is most faithful to the original shari'a sources" (Anwar 2005, 33-4). The fatwa issued by Majelis Tarjih "has a function as an instrument of purifying faith and dynamizing social life" of its members (Anwar 2005, 28). Meanwhile, NU established a Bahtsul Masail (Arabic: *bahts al-masail*) soon after its founding, at the first NU conference held in Surabaya in October 1926, one year before the establishment of Majelis Tarjih. The Bahtsul Masail, which literally means "discussion of issues", is responsible for issuing fatwas at the central level of the NU organization (Laffan 2005, 95-6). The implementation of the principle of adhering to *madhhab* and *taqlid* can be seen in this NU fatwa forum (Ramdlan, 2018, 54).

Women are also underrepresented in Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI, the Indonesian Ulama Council). MUI is a state-funded but independently operating organization and an increasingly powerful institution politically in Indonesia. It was established in Jakarta in 1975.[14] MUI typically has included scholars from both NU and Muhammadiyah, and other Islamic organizations as well. As written in its statutes, cited by Nadirsyah Hosen, "the Council's role is defined as providing fatwas and advice, both to the government and to the Muslim community, on issues related to religion in particular, and to all problems facing the nation in general". Only a few women have been involved in MUI. During 1975-1998, no more than five female ulama became members of the Fatwa Committee (Hosen 2004, 152). Currently, there are five women on the Leadership Council of MUI, out of a total of thirty-eight members (MUI n.d.a). In the

14 The establishment of MUI was preceded by the establishment of regional councils of ulama in the province of Aceh in December 1965 and in West Sumatra province in 1966. See Mudzhar (1993). After the fall of Suharto, "MUI continues to use its fatwas and *tausiyahs* to affirm its claim to be the national institution with authority in Islamic affairs. It calls upon both the state and the people to heed its legal opinions and advice. Nevertheless, MUI's fatwas and *tausiyahs* are not legally binding on the government and society. Rather, the actual influence of each utterance is very much related to the prevailing social and political context" (Ikhwan 2005, 71).

Fatwa Commission, only seven of the seventy-two members are women (MUI n.d.b).

However, this male dominance is increasingly contested. As this dissertation documents, women are increasingly able to claim juristic authority. Muslim NGOs have been very significant in encouraging critical thinking among Indonesian women and mobilizing them in line with feminist thinking, critical social theory, ideas about women's agency, women's rights, and so forth, and they are now investing this energy in the religious field. In the social and cultural context of traditionalist Islam, they do this by strengthening and encouraging women's juristic authority. "Traditionalist Muslims connected to NU started to address problematic issues concerning women's status during the 1980s, but they always have included reference to the *fiqh* texts. Often this has led to clear answers, even to the problems of the most misogynist texts" (van Doorn-Harder 2006, 10). Therefore, in the study of female ulama, religious authority and juristic authority are two crucial approaches and frameworks to employ. I will elaborate on them in the next section.

Female Religious Authority

The research questions I seek to answer in this dissertation deal with the legitimacy of Muslim women as ulama and the right ascribed to them by society to interpret religious texts and issue fatwas in response both to the everyday concerns of their followers (*jamaah*) and to urgent social problems. This study is therefore primarily concerned with the concept of religious authority and how it is modulated through gender.

Following Max Weber (1984-1920), Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (2014, 1) defined religious authority as "the ability (or 'chance' as Weber put it) to have one's rules and rulings followed, or obeyed, without recourse to coercive power." Weber differentiated between two related concepts: authority (*Autorität*) and power (*Macht*). Indeed, authority and legitimacy

are close concepts. Authority is also linked to the concept of trust, and can be attributed to individuals, groups of people, or institutions. Authority does not depend on coercive power, but is rooted in specific qualities and/or requirements that are given to or gained by the leaders with authority, and generates willingness in the community to obey and follow because they recognize the legitimacy of the leaders (Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke 2014, 2).

Further explaining the forms and functions of religious authority, Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (2014, 1-2) find that religious authority in monotheistic religions, including Islam, is formed through the ability to constitute the principle of authoritative texts and to interpret the texts applying valid methods. In order to analyse different sources and modes of authority, Weber's classic framework distinguishes between three ideal types: charismatic, legal-rational, and traditional. Charismatic authority relies on personal enchantment, legal-rational authority arises from the institutionalization of rules and practices, while traditional authority emerges from common notions, structures, and practices, and is often inheritable (Kalmbach 2012, 6).

However, Weber's conceptualization of authority does not fully account for the basis of women's authority as observed in this research. In order to grasp this authority, it is necessary to also take into account the social field in which these women move and the various kinds of external factors impacting their ability to amass followings. It is not just their specific positions in the social field that may be charismatic, legal-rational, or traditional, it is also the alliances and social relationships they build and the social capital they acquire that must be assessed. For this, Weber does not offer sufficient analytical tools. Therefore, I combine Weberian theory with Pierre Bourdieu's (Bourdieu 2007) concept of capital to analyse the sources and basis of authority of the women leaders I have studied. As I will argue, combining these theories allows for a very appropriate theoretical basis

for understanding the grounds on which women ulama have authority.

Bourdieu (1930-2002) brings to the table key theoretical concepts of capital which determine an individual's role and legitimacy in any social field (Maton 2008, 53). Bourdieu classifies capital into: symbolic capital, such as beliefs, religion, and charisma; cultural capital, gained from education, training, and achievement; social capital, including social networks; and economic capital, including financial resources (Thohari and Harjo 2021, 73). These various forms of capitals constitute critical resources that women bring to the religious domain and enable them to become legitimate religious leaders and to issue authoritative fatwas.

These resources are significant because the more capital an individual brings to the field, the more legitimacy the individual likely holds. For example, a person who was born into a family of charismatic Islamic leaders and trained in the *pesantren* system is generally considered to be able to play a more legitimate role as an Islamic guide compared to another person who comes from an "ordinary" family and is trained in secular schools. The capital amassed by each individual is different and contributes to his or her habitus (Thohari and Harjo 2021, 74-5). Habitus is "a social subjectivity" and "the social embodied" that links the social and the individual. Habitus includes perceptions, appreciations, decisions, and actions that are inherent in human life as a result of a period of internalization, either with awareness or without. In a social field, a person's habitus then interacts with the habitus of other people, whereby this interaction is influenced by the capitals owned by the individuals involved (Maton 2008, 53).

In the scholarly literature on female Islamic authority, a key contribution has been a volume compiled by Masooda Bano and Hilary Kalmbach, which elaborates on women's Islamic authority comparatively within the contours of traditional Islamic institutions, that is, mosques and Islamic schools (*madrasah*). In her introduction to the volume, Hilary Kalmbach identifies three

key factors that enable women to exercise Islamic authority. The first factor is state action, that is, the "attempts by various states to increase their control over the instruction and employment of religious leaders" (Kalmbach 2012, 13). For example, a study of *murshidat* (women religious guides) in Morocco shows that religious authority among *murshidat* has been endorsed and legitimated by the state. Yet this endorsement alone cannot guarantee the legitimacy to speak for Islam due to the suspicion of being supporters of the decisive state power. Their authority depends on the initiative of the *murshidat* in performing their actual knowledge and behaviour (Rausch 2012; Hoover 2015). Another example concerns 350 women preachers in Turkey who are appointed by Turkey's Directorate of Religious Affairs as "well-trained and certified women to official positions of religious influence, whereby they are energetically engaged in (re)shaping the populace's understanding and interpretations of Islam" (Hassan 2012, 85).

The second factor is male invitation, meaning that male scholars are increasingly willing or interested in putting women in a position of authority or granting them authority. In China, Hui women utilize the space provided by male authorities to run women-only mosques, engaging with female followers through religious and ritual leadership (Jaschok 2012). Kalmbach (2012) points out that the authority of female religious leaders in many Muslim communities is still subservient and cannot be separated from male authority and the male-dominated tradition. However, she emphasizes that this does not necessarily mean that female leaders have less impact on the social and religious practices of their communities, as I also observed in my research. They are agentive and creative in dealing with the challenges they encounter. As the roles and achievements of female Islamic leaders account for a significant shift in structures of Islamic authority, their appearance, re-appearance, and cultivation of leadership roles in many different Muslim communities deserves a more elaborate scholarly treatment than this has received so far.

The third factor is women's initiatives in exercising Islamic authority. Formal Islamic education has been particularly important in this respect, as it has enabled some women to enter the career paths and public spaces that are normally associated with male scholars. A study by Künkler and Fazaeli (2012) of two Iranian female *mujtahidah*s is a good example. Firstly, Nusṛat Amin (1886–1983), one of the most authoritative Shiʿah female religious authorities of modern times, delivered *ijazah*s of *ijtihad* and *riwayat* to men in her own right. Secondly, Zuhrah Sịfati (1948–), another leading female religious authority in Iran, was a long-time member of the Women's Socio-Cultural Council (*shura-yi farhangi iʿjtima-i zanan*) and led the committee on jurisprudence and law. Künkler and Fazaeli's analysis of these two cases reveal the importance of women's initiative as a factor driving these women to pursue knowledge and generate scholarly works (Künkler and Fazaeli 2012, 128).

Besides state action, male invitation, and women's initiatives, the lives and experiences of the female ulama central to this study emphasize community ascription of authority as a very important factor, although it does not feature very prominently in Kalmbach's framework. When I look at the relationships between individual women leaders and their followers at the grassroots, I observe a strong community engagement that legitimizes women as juristic authorities in a way that is on a par with the factors of state sponsorship, male intervention, and women's agency. Female juristic authority cannot emerge solely from the ability of the women to choose, decide, and take action as Islamic leaders. Women's interactions with local communities and organizations constitute a significant factor in the making of their religious authority because of the the legitimacy ascribed through these interactions. Thus, the authority exerted by the women scholars at the centre of this study is essentially a community-based authority, by which I mean the authority ascribed by communities to individual women leaders and guides after long periods of interaction and

engagement. I consider advancing this aspect as a crucial yet overlooked factor of women's Islamic authority as one of the key contributions of this dissertation.

Studies of female Islamic authority have applied institutional and leadership approaches focused on leadership in mosques, madrasah, and *pesantren* (Bano and Kalmbach 2012; Srimulyani 2006; Smith and Woodward 2014) and top-down approaches that "have focused on questions of where and how these women are trained, what kind of *ijazat* (certificates of study) and academic degrees they have collected, and how they establish their expertise in *ifta'* (the granting of legal opinions)" (Kloos and Künkler 2016, 480). In contrast, my examination of community-based authority emerges from a focus on juristic authority that I identified as a key missing aspect in the emerging literature on female Islamic authority and "bottom-up certification", which is the certification of female Islamic authorities "through the reconfiguration of established forms of community, such as villages, religious schools, informal study groups and religious congregations" (Kloos and Künkler 2016, 485). Women's interaction with the community can be seen from their engagement with members of mass Muslim women's organizations (such as Muslimat and Fatayat of NU), village communities, the community of female ulama, NGOs or other activist networks, and readers of magazines and other media consumers. The last type of community can be included as "new forms of community" involving "online interactions, which provide female religious leaders with opportunities to engage in activities and religious debates in ways that are difficult or impossible within the (generally male-dominated) confines of physical religious spaces" (Kloos and Künkler 2016, 485).

In the field of juristic authority, particularly related to Islamic knowledge production and fatwa ruling, women Islamic scholars are struggling for acceptance and acknowledgement, not only from the state and male counterparts but also from patriarchal elements in society. This acceptance and acknowledgement

are, as said, partly determined by the various forms of capital possessed by women scholars. The women I observed in my study show that they bring to the field, firstly, symbolic capital, which they inherit from the charisma of their parents as religious leaders. Secondly, they possess advanced religious knowledge, which I categorize as a form of cultural capital, and thirdly, they have the social capital obtained through the long period of interaction and engagement with their communities. These three forms of capital combined ultimately form the basis of the authority of the women and are further strengthened by a fourth form, economic capital. That economic capital enables at least some of them to engage in economic empowerment such as employing people from their communities in the rice field, or to help people in need.

I am interested in juristic authority, community-based authority, and everyday interactions between women leaders and the communities in which they partake, partly as a counterpoint to the formal position. Religious authority is not only about Islamic knowledge per se, that is, degrees or *ijazah*s or formal roles; it is about the combination of Islamic knowledge as a form of cultural capital and social engagement as a form of social capital, and it is about the social fields in which this knowledge is put to practice. This, I argue, is how these women exert authority and why they are recognized as legitimate ulama. These are the key practices through which this juristic authority is exerted. No other practice, moreover, shows this better than the practice of issuing fatwas. It is for these reasons that I concentrate in this dissertation on the process and everyday practice of the women issuing fatwas for their communities.

In my research, I do not just use fatwas that exist on the paper; they are also something that exist in social relationships, and that is where the anthropology of fatwa comes in. But because the practice of issuing fatwas is still considered as men's work and a male area of expertise, I also use a gender perspective in my study of this practice through an anthropological approach.

Studying Fatwas by Women from Anthropological and Gender Perspectives

This study aims to contribute to the anthropology of the fatwa by specifying how Muslim women assert themselves as ulama with the authority to issue fatwas. In this section, I present a general review of the conceptualization of the terms ulama and fatwa and their usages in the literature. I explain both literal meanings and references, the criteria for people to become ulama and for utterances to become fatwa, and how these very processes are fundamentally gendered. Therefore, studying women issuing fatwas cannot be approached from an Islamic studies point of view only. I add to this an anthropological approach that will allow me to analyse the everyday practices, subjectivities, experiences, situations, and nuances that feed into the process of issuing fatwas. It is the anthropology of the fatwa and a gender perspective that provide a foundation for this study alongside a religious studies approach.

The word ulama is derived from the Arabic word ʿ*alima-yaʿlamu-*ʿ*ilm*, meaning "to know" something that is ʿ*ilm* (knowledge). ʿ*Ulama* is the plural form of ʿ*alim,* from *ism faʿil* (the subject form in Arabic) meaning "someone who knows" or "someone who has knowledge". In Indonesian, both ʿ*alim* and ʿ*ulama* are commonly used in reference to a single person. To refer to a number of ulama, the word ʿ*alim* is added to the word ʿ*ulama* to form the phrase *alim ulama*. The word ʿ*ulama* originally meant one who had general knowledge of a particular field. For example, ʿ*ulama al-handasah* was used to refer to experts in technology and ʿ*ulama al-fiziya* means physicians (Azra 2002, xxxii; Mansoornor 1990, xv; Rofiah 2014, xxxii). Influenced by the development of Islamic knowledge such as *shariʿa* and *fiqh* and religious studies that focus more on *fiqh,* the meaning of ulama has changed to become more specific and narrower than its original meaning. "They are plainly a crucial element in Islamic society—the one group which in fact makes it 'Islamic' rather than something else—and wherever

we turn we encounter them" (Humphreys 1991, 187). Recently, the word ulama has come to refer specifically to a person who has mastered *fiqh* (Rofiah, 2014, xxxiii). *Cendekiawan Muslim* (Muslim intellectuals) or *mubalig* (preachers), therefore, are not considered ulama as they have less expertise in *fiqh*. In other word, the key to calling someone an ulama is that that person is thought to possess juristic authority: a recognized ability to interpret and apply Islamic law.

Ulama can take up numerous political, social, and cultural roles in Muslim societies, including those of intellectuals, preachers, professors, counsellors, merchants, or bureaucrats. They may come from different social backgrounds. Yet the converse is not the case: not all professors and intellectuals are recognized as ulama. Azra (2002, xxix) has suggested some reasons for how and why certain individuals are recognized as ulama. First, ulama are recognized as having an excellent knowledge of *fiqh* and of classical Islamic knowledge based on the Qur'an, hadith, and classic theological literature. This familiarity is necessary to support ulama in making decisions regarding Islamic jurisprudence or practicing *ijtihad*. In other words, ulama must have a very good understanding of the sources and methodology of issuing fatwa. Second, ulama are individuals who have good character and moral integrity, both in behaviour and religious practice. Because according to a Prophetic tradition they are expected to be *warathat al-anbiya'* (the heirs of the prophets), ulama play an important role in guarding the morality of their religious congregation (*jamaah*). Third, ulama are leaders of their *jamaah* as well as leaders of the communities of which they are part. Ulama who take the role of *pesantren* leaders and direct an Islamic institution such as a *pesantren* or a *madrasah* are expected to lead *jamaah* in socio-religious activities, including preaching in *majelis taklim* and being responsible for offering prayers and blessings for the community. In my research, I use the term "female ulama" (*ulama perempuan*) to emphasize the role of Muslim women leaders as ulama in accordance with those

criteria, and throughout the dissertation I refer to the women as female ulama. This term is more commonly used among Indonesians compared to other terms, such as *ʿalimah*, although both these terms have the same meaning.

One of the primary means through which ulama exercise religious authority is the fatwa. "The terminology for fatwa is derived from the same root: *mufti*, the fatwa-giver; *mustafti*, the questioner; *futya* or *iftaʾ*, fatwa-giving; and *istiftaʾ*, request for a fatwa. A fatwa is an opinion that is neither a legally binding ruling (*hukm*) nor final" (Larsen 2015, 327), therefore there is no obligation for *mustafti* to follow the fatwa. In its conventional structure, a fatwa is formed by two parts: 1) a question about a certain topic put to the ulama; 2) the ulama's (fatwa-giver's) opinion as to the answer to the question, following standard jurisprudence guidelines (Kaptein 2004).

The method of issuing fatwas has undergone changes over time. It is not only based on the Qur'an and hadith as the source of authority called *ijtihad* (legal reasoning)—although this is the approach of modernist ulama—but it is also carried out on the basis of *taqlid,* which has been practiced by traditionalist ulama. *Taqlid* is "the acceptance of the authority of earlier traditional scholars from one of the four canonical interpretations of the schools of law (*madhhab*)" (Kaptein 2004, 118). The latest developments with regard to the source are evident in the fatwa-making conducted by KUPI, which I will discuss in Chapter 4. It combines the sources of the Qur'an and hadith, the opinions of earlier and later Muslim scholars, and Indonesian legislation. Another change is related to the fatwa-giver, which previously referred to individual muftis; later, groups of muftis gathered in a fatwa institution to issue fatwas. They also started to issue new forms of the fatwa, such as fatwa-like statements (Kaptein 2004, 114).

Examining the lives and experiences of female ulama and fatwas issued by female ulama, my research gives significant

insights into the dynamics of continuity and change of female ulama authority and tradition as well as the Islamic knowledge production of female ulama. In this process of questions and answers, a relatively clear mechanism of authority is in place. Ulama claim religious authority by issuing fatwas in a way that corresponds as precisely as possible with their knowledge of "God's judgement", while petitioners ascribe the authority by accepting or following the fatwa (Larsen 2015). A fatwa can indicate the holder, centre, source, language, and effectiveness of religious authority (Kaptein 2004). A fatwa can also guide the formation of Muslim piety because the question is often raised in order to find guidelines to practicing Islam in better ways (Larsen 2015). Finally, questions raised by *jamaah* also constitute "social data" that contain important information about the challenges faced by Muslims in particular places and times (Larsen 2015, 32).

Women's right activists and progressive voices in Islam have naturally been very interested in the fatwa, because of its authoritative status but also because it has been used to supress women or to advance misogynistic interpretations.[15] For instance, the education of female ulama run by Rahima, an Islamic women's NGO concerning women's right and Islam, equips its female ulama cadres with the knowledge and skills to issue fatwas. Rahima suggests four aspects of sources of fatwa ruling, which are, first, theological sources including the Qur'an and hadith, the thoughts of classical ulama described in *kitab mu'tabarah* (respected classical texts) and those of contemporary ulama as published in their books. The second and the third matters for consideration are national and international regulations, and the fourth relates to women's experiences (Ismah 2016). The practice of issuing fatwas has become a key battleground for

15 For example, Sheikha Naeema and two female colleagues have been appointed by the state to issue fatwas through the fatwa hotline on the eighth floor of the General Authority of Islamic Affairs and Endowments in Abu Dhabi or Awqaf. This is the only fatwa centre in the Middle East where the team is made up of women. "They help them navigate elaborate rules and restrictions governing all areas of an observant Muslim's life" (Ghafour 2016).

contesting gender relations in Islam. What is so crucial about this development is that rather than simply criticizing or dismissing fatwas that are unfriendly to women, women activists and scholars are now actively engaging in issuing fatwas themselves. They can do this because they have the capital to do so, gained through their education, social standing, social networks, and personal charismatic aspects. They use their "tradition" to push doctrinal changes that lead to social change.

Most of the literature on modern fatwa-giving focuses on (state) institutions, fatwa councils, and the fatwa forums of Muslim mass organizations. But fatwa-giving is not necessarily a top-down and institutional-based practice, as has been demonstrated by Umi Hanik and the collective movement, namely KUPI. Their fatwa-giving happens as a rather informal and community-based practice and takes place in a wide variety of contexts. It is very important from a gender and women's point of view that the practice of fatwa-giving is fundamentally dispersed, while at the same time institutionalized forms are usually heavily dominated by men. Therefore, I am interested in everyday practices to reveal women who are active in fatwa-making. The term "fatwa-giving" here is used simply to indicate a practice: the everyday practice of religious authorities disseminating religious opinions on the basis of scholarship, experiential knowledge, and social relations. Everyday formulations of opinions as responses to the burning questions within a community of believers are also fatwas. By shifting the point of view on fatwas, one can see women as fatwa-givers operating on a daily basis within their villages, in organizations and networks such as Rahima and KUPI, and also within the public sphere, in magazines, at conferences, and on other public stages.

In examining female ulama issuing fatwas, I employ an anthropology of the fatwa as complementary to an Islamic studies perspective. My theoretical framework is drawn by combining these two approaches. I use tools from the field of Islamic studies

as the fatwa is a mode of exercising female juristic authority based on textual exegesis, and tools from anthropology as this is the only way in which I can identify the role of women and the kind of authority they have in issuing fatwas within specific social, often informal contexts.

A significant contribution to the anthropology of the fatwa has been made by Hussein Ali Agrama (2010).[16] I am inspired by the way in which his work has completely opened up the field by approaching the fatwa as an everyday and ethical practice. Based on his largely ethnographic research on the fatwa council of Al-Azhar University in Egypt, Agrama states that the fatwa must be understood as an important instrument for pushing doctrinal change. Islamic law and practices are constantly changing in response to the demands of modernization, and the fatwa is a very important element in that process. However, focusing on the fatwa as a driver of doctrinal change can also lead to another crucial dimension of the fatwa being overlooked, namely the ethical component, which involves the relationship between the fatwa-giver and the fatwa seeker. Therefore, his suggestion is to study the fatwa ethnographically by looking at the everyday interactions between mufti and Muslim believers in the process of *istifta'* (seeking fatwas), and how that communication takes place in practice. That is all about the relationship between the fatwa-giver and *mustafti,* and giving Islamic opinions on a certain thing in a certain way and at a certain moment. Through this practice, a particular doctrinal position can look completely different from one day to the next because the mufti and ulama, when issuing fatwas, look closely at the situation and who is in front of them. Agrama argues that the study of the fatwa as ethical communication has been neglected. "With the ethical turn in anthropology, it may seem unremarkable, even uninspired, to cast the fatwa as an ethical practice, as a form of the care of the

16 After this article Agrama further elaborated his ideas in his book entitled *Questioning Secularism: Islam*, *Sovereignty and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

self. What is surprising, however, is how so evidently an ethical practice could have gone unacknowledged as such for so long." (Agrama 2010, 14).

My study attempts to take up that challenge of further developing an anthropology of the fatwa by looking at the everyday practices of fatwa-making by female ulama and taking into account the relationship and communication between the women and their *jamaah*. This is a topic that has not been considered very much. My study offers three main contributions to the study of the anthropology of the fatwa. Firstly, the study of the role of female ulama as fatwa-givers should in itself be seen as a significant contribution as there is almost no literature on women giving fatwas in the context of everyday life. Agrama identified five dimensions based on his observation of the everyday practices of fatwa-making in the Al-Azhar fatwa council. He suggested the fatwa-making as an ethical process by adopting the idea of "the care of the self", where several aspects emerge. They are: "its pedagogical dimension; its broad ranging discussions of proper conduct; its understood point as the facilitation of people's affairs; its conditions of good faith, and its sense of shared responsibility between muftis and fatwa seekers, especially the fact that the muftis bear a level of responsibility for the fatwas they dispense" (Agrama 2010, 13). In the process of *istifta',* women ulama offer a safe space and an empowering dimension to women seeking fatwas. It is different for women when they seek a fatwa from women compared to when they seek a fatwa from men; women's knowledge and experience can emerge from the interaction between the women *mustaftiyat* and women fatwa-giver and influence the process of building a situation and giving responses. My study enriches Agrama's five dimensions with two new dimensions, namely a safe space and empowerment, which are more specific to situations in which it is women who are issuing fatwas.

The second contribution is that the study of women practicing fatwa cannot rely only on the observation of a single

established institution or fatwa council, as Agrama has done. Rather, the women I studied automatically and necessarily led me to conduct a multi-sited study as the fatwa is, as said, a scattered phenomenon. A multi-sited study of the fatwa is crucial when we talk about women's everyday practices of fatwa-making, because if we go to the most well-known and arguably most authoritative Islamic institutions in the world, such as Al-Azhar's fatwa council, we will not find many women there. My approach, then, has been to follow the women rather than the established institutions as a way of paying heed to fatwa-giving as a practice that takes place in different spheres of life, different spheres of interaction, and at many different sites, ranging from villages to mosques to religious organizations, to social movements, and to mediascapes. In that sense, my study builds on Agrama's work but also offers a richer landscape and new approach that enables me to uncover women's everyday practices of requesting and issuing fatwas. The kind of interaction and communication between female ulama and fatwa seekers also vary depending on the problems, situations, and places where the female religious authority is being exercised through fatwa-making.

The third contribution pertains to the relationship between the process of doctrinal change and the process of the fatwa as an ethical practice. Agrama speaks of a shift in emphasis from the fatwa as a means of "doctrinal reform" to the fatwa as an ethical practice. He writes: "This image of the fatwa as facilitating a journey takes us far from the conventional view of it as primarily a doctrinal pronouncement and an instrument of doctrinal reform … And that capacity is found not in the pronouncement of doctrinal principles and rules for how to act nor in reforming them to fit modern times but, instead, in the skill of using them discerningly to 'say the right words at the right time' for the person who seeks guidance" (Agrama 2010, 14). My study suggests, however, that instead of separating these two dimensions, we should approach the fatwa as an ethical and everyday practice and the way of communicating the fatwa with

the fatwa seeker as something that feeds back into the process of doctrinal change. They are not distinct and separate processes. The female ulama I studied are not just interested in fatwas as an ethical practice. They are also interested in doctrinal change and the capacity enshrined in these daily interactions to challenge mainstream, gender-insensitive Islamic interpretations. They are not just performing their authority and guiding people, but also actively generating precedence, resources, texts, and arguments, and publishing these in books. They have magazines, build networks, and disseminate the material to society through paper and online records. The goal of these efforts is to change gender-insensitive doctrine, and the process of reinterpreting Islam and doctrinal change adapting Islam to modern times is inseparable from those everyday moments of fatwa-giving.

The two examples of fatwa-giving described at the beginning of this chapter show the connection and the continuity of fatwa-making by female ulama as an ethical practice and means of doctrinal change that takes place everywhere, in villages and at national conferences. The fatwa-giving is part of something bigger: a gradual change in which women assume authority and, on that basis, intervene in processes of doctrinal change. So I contend that it is very important that, as we shift the emphasis in studying fatwas by taking fatwas as an ethical practice into account, we should not forget about that other side of the coin, that of "doctrinal reform". This is especially important when studying fatwa-making from women's point of view. It seems quite convenient to focus primarily on the ethical dimensions of the fatwa in the context of Al-Azhar as this is one of the most established Islamic scholarly centres in the world. The muftis of Al-Azhar, one might say, *are* the doctrine. However, once we focus on female ulama, the perspective changes quite radically. They are very interested in doctrinal change because, firstly, women traditionally tend to be on the receiving end of a doctrine that is not very beneficial to their position as women. Secondly, while women ulama use the doctrine and tradition as sources of their

legitimacy as ulama in producing fatwa, they also seek to change the non-gender-sensitive doctrine into a more gender-sensitive doctrine for their community through fatwa-making. As such, the community-based authority practiced by female ulama supports them in the process of doctrinal change.

Fieldwork

For this dissertation, I combined two methods of data collection. Firstly, I conducted desk research by reviewing written primary and secondary sources to set the historical background of female religious leadership, ulama and fatwa ruling, and female Islamic authority in the global and Indonesian Muslim context. I also analysed a range of relevant documents including programme reports, monthly publications, magazines, and compilations of fatwas. I collected these sources from the libraries of organizations and institutions such as Rahima, the National Board of NU in Jakarta, and magazine offices such as the *AuleeA* office in Surabaya. Some documents were handed to me because I participated in the programmes as an observer or because the person whom I interviewed gave me the documents for further analysis. For instance, I received a series of *NooR* magazines from its editor-in-chief in Jakarta.

Secondly, I carried out extensive ethnographic fieldwork from February 2017 to February 2018 in Indonesia. I was based in Yogyakarta, but I regularly travelled to other cities in Java. I selected key interlocutors, as I will discuss below in more detail, through a snowballing technique that led me to others in turn. They are important people in this network of female ulama. They lived and were active in various places across Java. They invited me to events and programmes organized in cities and towns including Demak and Pati in Central Java, some cities in East Java—Bondowoso, Jombang, Surabaya, and Malang—and some cities in the West part of Java, including Cirebon and Jakarta. I also went to Mataram in West Nusa Tenggara to attend the 2017 National Meeting and Conference of NU. In those cities,

I visited the *pesantren* where most of my informants lived, Islamic schools, and the offices of mass Muslim organizations. I participated in Islamic gatherings, study groups (*majelis taklim*), fatwa forums including the Bahtsul Masail of NU, Forum Bahtsul Masail Pondok Pesantren Puteri (Women's Islamic Boarding School Deliberation Forum) in Jombang, and a fatwa forum conducted by Wahid Foundation in Jakarta. As mentioned above, I also participated in the Congress of Indonesian Female Ulama in Cirebon on 25-27 April 2017.

I selected my interlocutors in such a way that I spoke to both established authorities and to women in the process of being trained to become ulama. I did not observe all the institutions and programmes for training female religious leaders, however, since that would be impossible within the scope of this research. To narrow down my pool of possible respondents, I decided to focus on the network around Pengkaderan Ulama Perempuan (PUP), the educational programme conducted by Rahima, in which I was also personally involved. This programme is noteworthy because of its distinctly progressive nature and its ability, nonetheless, to empower a number of female religious leaders who were subsequently able to claim religious authority in their respective communities. Rahima introduced PUP in August 2005, and four different cohorts of female ulama cadres from all over Java have since graduated. Through PUP, Rahima provided them with knowledge and a kind of social capital needed to be able to claim religious authority. I discuss the founding and development of Rahima and PUP in more detail in Chapter 2.

My research is not, however, a study of Rahima and the PUP programme. It is rather a broad investigation and analysis of the emergence of a progressive, gender-sensitive movement in the context of Indonesian traditionalist Islam. Rahima and its female ulama network served as a crucial entry point, enabling me to both access and participate in this new, partly gender-based field of juristic authority. This dissertation is the result of a close ethnographic and text-based analysis of the everyday practices

of female ulama in issuing fatwas for their communities, as well as the community-based authority these leaders exercise, both at the grassroots level and at the national level, through what I argue is the emergence of a new social movement of female Islamic authorities.

Among the PUP graduates and female ulama who are connected to KUPI's network, I spoke to around thirty interlocutors and more intensively to four individual female ulama from different areas in Indonesia: Afwah Mumtazah from Cirebon, West Java; Khotimatul Husna from Yogyakarta; Umi Hanik from Demak, Central Java; and Siti Ruqayah from Bondowoso, East Java. I present their short biographies as interludes in the narrative of my dissertation. I chose to talk to and observe the everyday lives of the four female ulama because their biographies enable me to illustrate key trends and they already hold established authority in their communities. I also wanted to understand these women's choices and motivation, their abilities and constraints, social networks, the dilemmas they have to grapple with, the connections they create, and the social settings in which they participate. In other words, my interest lies in a certain level of ethnographic detail on how it is possible for women to exercise and claim juristic authority in religious institutions, the grassroots, social movements, and print media. This is possible only by observing these women and their everyday experiences intensively. This number of interlocutors appeared sufficient because it gave me the necessary ethnographic detail, yet at the same times it still allowed me to make meaningful comparisons with regard to their background, positioning, education, social status, and so forth.

I made a very conscious decision to study this particular women's group, location, and network of female ulama for scholarly reasons, because their stories need to be told and analysed, and urgently need to be added in the academic debate. The fact that they are Javanese and located in Java comes with particular advantages with regard to the local culture, norms,

and language, which I am familiar with as a Javanese. I graduated from a Javanese *pesantren,* namely Pesantren Al-Fathimiyyah in Jombang, East Java as well as from Rahima's PUP programme. My position as a female Muslim and Javanese who graduated from the *pesantren* and PUP has enabled me to gain access and build a rapport with the interlocutors, allowing me to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. For this study, I did not randomly choose the cities and towns I went to for my fieldwork. Java is full of places that are considered to be centres of religious learning, and I consciously chose places such as Cirebon, Demak, and Bondowoso, where many *pesantren* are located. In particular, Cirebon and Demak have longstanding connections with historical *kesultanan* (sultanates) that up until this day influence the form of local Muslim society socially, culturally, and politically. In addition, the Congress of Indonesian Female Ulama held on 25-27 April 2017 took place in Cirebon.

I studied those four female ulama most intensively; not only did I carry out interviews with those four individuals but I also observed their networks and the broader context of their social movement. Therefore, my research was not limited to those four cases alone. I simultaneously broadened my research to include: (1) female ulama who had been participating in the fatwa forum conducted by Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, MUI, and KUPI, as well as female ulama who become the resource persons for Question & Answer sections in magazines; (2) female ulama and male Islamic scholars who were actively involved with KUPI and the organization's network, including Rahima, Fahmina, and Alimat; (3) members of the *jamaah* of the four female ulama; (4) the participants in KUPI; (5) the editorial staff of magazines including *Swara Rahima*, *AuleeA*, and *NooR*; (6) male counterparts of the four key informants, and religious leaders who are in their circle; (5) male religious leaders from male-dominated religious institutions and organizations; (6) religious institutions for advancing Islamic knowledge such as Maʿhad Ali, *pesantren*, and their students.

My fieldwork consisted mostly of semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant observation in field sites and events and programmes such as *majelis taklim*, formal learning classes, seminars, fatwa forums, and KUPI. I transcribed and analysed the interviews using open and thematic-coding techniques to identify common themes within and across the groups of informants. I visited the places where my key informants live two or three times during my fieldwork and stayed there in one visit for around one week in their homes, except for Khotimatul Husna, whom I visited more often as we live in the same city. I usually contacted my key informants through WhatsApp to set a date or to ask what activities I might be able to join. It was not always easy to find a date that was suitable for them as they were generally very busy and had many responsibilities. I travelled to them from Yogyakarta by train or renting a car, and accompanied the key informants, attending their programmes with them. Sometimes I also conducted participant observation and stayed in friends' places that were located nearby, for example, when I observed the Forum Musyawarah Pondok Pesantren Puteri in Jombang, East Java.

When I was carrying out my fieldwork, I made use of research assistants. Two university graduates, Annise Sri Maftuchin and Nazhifatum Muthahharoh (Zifa), both graduates from Brawijaya University, Malang, majoring in Anthropology, joined me in the field. Annise helped me in the first round of fieldwork in February to March 2017. She assisted me in writing field notes, interviewing *jamaah*, and making additional observations. But she stopped her involvement in my research because she had to move to Jambi. Then Zifa helped in the second round of my research from April 2017 to February 2018, performing the same tasks as Annise had done. In April 2017, I recruited another research assistant—Halimah, a graduate from Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University majoring in Arabic Language and Literature—to assist in my fieldwork during KUPI. Halimah and Zifa helped me in interviewing KUPI's participants

using interview questionnaires that I developed. They also carried out participant observation as there were many parallel sessions at KUPI that took place at the same time. For example, Zifa joined the *musyawarah keagamaan* on the issue of natural degradation, Halimah joined the session on the issue of sexual violence, and I joined the fatwa forum on child marriage. They helped me in writing notes, taking pictures, and transcribing the recordings. We stayed in my friend's house, namely Yu Lia, who is also the sister of Bu Nyai Masriyah Amva, the *pesantren* leader where KUPI was held.

Naturally, I benefited from my position as a Muslim woman and a fellow alumnus of the Rahima programme. I did not find it difficult to make contact with the four resource persons. These female ulama were generally very pleased to help me even if they found it hard to make time. We were able to talk as woman to woman in a safe space. Sometimes they asked me not to include a certain story from our conversation, and I agreed. I could do interviews with them during breakfast, lunch or dinner, while on the way to an activity, in the morning, afternoon, or evening, adjusting to their free time, in the living room, classroom, or in the room where I stayed. Some of them even fell asleep in the living room before the interview was over. Had I been a man, my interviews would certainly not have yielded the same results; in any case, they would probably have been more fraught.

The fact that I got access to the interlocutors does not mean that there were no challenges in acquiring information. Some of these were general. They had to do with practical constraints such as the fact that those people were very busy, their memory was not always good, and they also had a particular interest in mentioning some things and not mentioning other things, etc. Other factors that led to "presence of absence" (Anderson and Jack 1991, 19), meaning something that was not or could not be spoken by interlocutors in the interview, were socio-cultural aspects. They were related, firstly, to Javanese ways of interacting. Javanese culture is traditionally a very hierarchical

culture and this social culture is also present in the Javanese language; this means that sometimes it is difficult to really get to someone's true feeling or ideas. Secondly, sometimes it was also difficult to ask and get stories related to unpleasant female experiences such as discrimination and violence. Thirdly, challenges sometimes emerged when an interlocutor turned out very reluctant to say anything about female religious authority. For instance, I carried out an interview with a charismatic *kiai* in Cirebon who was willing to meet me for only five minutes. In fact, at that time I was accompanied by his nephew and my friend who was close to the *kiai's* family. "I don't want to comment on the [Indonesian Women's Ulama] congress," he said. "*Kengeng nopo, Kiai* (Why, *Kiai*)?" I asked. "If I answered, it means I give comment. No, I will not." I smiled wryly and remained silent few moments. "What is a female ulama? How come they recognize the title for themselves [as ulama is normally ascribed by the community]!" he continued.

In dealing with such "presence of absence", I tried to listen to the "moral language", which refers to a self-judgment influenced by self-concept and cultural norms (Anderson and Jack 1991, 19). I was also aware of "meta statements", which mean "a discrepancy within the self—or between what is expected and what is being said" (Anderson and Jack 1991, 20) and the "logic of the narrative" by determining "the internal consistency or contradictions in the person's statements about recurring themes and the way these themes relate to each other" (Anderson and Jack 1991, 20). Gathering data through interviews may be limited by some narratives that are "unspeakable and unspoken" and "silence", which in a psychological anthropological approach can be viewed as a nonverbal element of communication (Samuels 2019, 10). It is "an *affective* action in people's efforts of navigating diverging emotion repertoires" that are "shaped during discursive, practice-based, and embodied processes of socialization and that they enable individuals and collective to decode and interpret felt experiences as discrete emotions" (Heyken 2019). Thus,

"silence" is also data. It contains information about the views, situations, and position of the interlocutors regarding the topic being asked about by a researcher.

I also dealt with emotional situations when I was confronted with negative responses from male interlocutors who were conservative in their views on gender equality, especially because our conversation was about female Islamic authority. "When we talk about *ushul fiqh* which uses reasoning, usually women are not capable (*nggak nyampai*).[17] That's why a *qadhi* can't be a woman, a judge can't be a woman, it must be a man," said one respondent, a young *kiai* from a *pesantren* in East Java. I sat in front of him and could only stare at him while looking for clues for asking the next question. "How can women not be able to think about *ushul fiqh*?" I asked. He replied, "Yes, that is *sunnatullah* (God's decision). One of the factors is because, sorry to say this, when women have their period or menstruation, they deal with pre-menstruation syndrome, so they can't control their emotions and so on." In this kind of situation, I felt ignited and wanted to retort with my arguments. But I was in the position of gathering their views and thoughts regarding female Islamic authority, whether they are supportive of the authority or not. So I dealt with my emotions by shifting my focus to listening to the "moral language" and "meta statements" and interpreting the responses I received.

There were also challenges with regard to my personal status and situation as a mother of a seven-month-old child. I had to deal with some incidents related to childcare such as handling child tantrums and breastfeeding while doing interviews and making observations. The challenges disturbed my focus at certain points and demanded more energy and ability to manage my emotions and motivations so that they did not affect my fieldwork. For example, when I was conducting an interview with

17 *Usul al-fiqh* are the general principles of Islamic jurisprudence (legal theory) and include maxims (*qawaʿid*), which are special methods of reasoning. "It is the area of the law where the validity and scope of application of legal methods are articulated" (Opwis 2010, 2).

Kang Wawan, the head (*mudir*) of Ma'had Aly Hikamus Salafiyah, Babakan, Cirebon, Zifa took care of my daughter for a while. But not long after, I heard my daughter starting to cry. I called Zifa and took my daughter from her hands. The baby wanted to sleep and asked to be breastfed. The only problem was how could I breastfeed her while doing an interview? So I moved to a chair that was slightly hidden beside the house pillar while listening to Kang Wawan's explanation. I said, "I am sorry, Kang, I moved here." Kang Wawan just nodded, and the interview continued while I breastfed my daughter discretely until she fell asleep.

Researching the everyday practices of women issuing fatwas by combining Islamic studies and anthropological approaches with a gender perspective has allowed me to see the overlooked practices of making fatwas, particularly by women. It is impossible for me to get the experiences of these women if I only use the Islamic studies approach. Reflecting from my experience, I think these approaches were vital in guiding me to answer doubts and questions as to whether these women meet the criteria of a mufti, or whether the religious opinions they issue have gone through the correct method of *ijtihad* so that the opinions can be called fatwas.

Structure of the Dissertation

My dissertation consists of six chapters, including the introduction and conclusion. Each main chapter is preceded by a short biography as an interlude between two chapters. They are biographies of the four main interlocutors in order to illustrate the trend discussed in a chapter. The stories also exemplify real people who stand for women ulama playing various roles as fatwa-givers in different sites and settings according to the topics discussed in the individual chapters.[18]

18 During my writing, I will give their names with the title I use when addressing them: Mbak Khotim, Bu Hanik, Bu Afwah, and Nyi Ruq. *Mbak* is used to address an older sister. *Bu* is the short form of Ibu. It means Mrs. *Nyi* is a short form of *nyai*.

Chapter 2 explores NU and its Bahtsul Masail as the first site of women issuing fatwas. This organization becomes my point of departure to examine women's roles and position in a male-dominated religious landscape in Indonesia. I consider religious authority and fatwa-giving, and its influence in giving rise to women's mobilization within NU, its women's wing organizations, Muslimat and Fatayat of NU, and Islamic women's NGOs such as Rahima.

Chapter 3 examines a second site of women issuing fatwa: local grassroots communities. This chapter demonstrates that women from a traditional Muslim background who become ulama derive their passion for teaching and working with communities partly from their parents, who were often also ulama and religious leaders. However, their family background is not the primary factor determining their achievements. Instead, in most cases they have taken a very conscious decision to take part in community empowerment and to create their own path to establish ulama-ness by cultivating a community-based authority.

Chapter 4 investigates women issuing fatwas within the setting of a social movement. The Kongres Ulama Perempuan Indonesia (KUPI, Indonesian Congress of Women Ulama) is my main case study here. In this chapter, I explain KUPI based on my observations and interviews during my fieldwork. I analyse the KUPI fatwas including its methodology, the formulation of the three questions on sexual violence, child marriage, and natural degradation impacting women, and the construction of the answers. I also identify KUPI's strategy in dealing with challenges, especially related to establishing juristic authority in a male-dominated arena.

Chapter 5 studies the public sphere as a site for women issuing fatwas. I start this chapter with a general overview of Muslim women in the public sphere of Indonesia and the history of the use of the Q&A format in Indonesian women's Islamic

lifestyle magazines. I focus on three women's magazines, namely *Swara Rahima, AuleeA,* and *NooR*, to observe the practice of female ulama in issuing fatwas. The chapter offers a detailed content analysis of Question & Answer sections in the magazines, as well as an analysis of the strategies of female ulama in dealing with the challenge of countering a dominant conservative Muslim discourse that has emerged in the public sphere of Indonesia.

The conclusion summarizes the main findings, answers the research questions, and comments on some of the wider implications of the social phenomena at the centre of this dissertation.

Interlude

Mbak Khotim: A Woman in the NU Circle

"She is a limited-edition leader," was how one member of the provincial board of Fatayat NU in Yogyakarta, Dewi Nur Khasanah, called Mbak Khotimatul Husna. Dewi described her as the head of Fatayat, who really shows her great loyalty to the organization and puts the interests of the organization above her own interests. In addition to Dewi, another Fatayat member, Muyassarotul Hafizhoh stated that one of Mbak Khotim's leadership qualities is her attention to the importance of nurturing cadres. She is able to bring out the potential of the cadres.

Born in Bojonegoro, on 27 March 1976, Khotimatul Husna is the sixth child of eight siblings in her family. She spent her childhood in Plesungan, Kapas, Bojonegoro, East Java. Her parents, Hajah Siti Maskanah and Anwar Dawud, were *nyai* and *kiai kampung* (Islamic teachers who do not have *pesantren*) who played important roles in building the religiosity of people in Plesungan. The people in her village were mostly *abangan* (non-religious). Among them were prostitutes and recidivists, and there was a high rate of criminality as well. Mbak Khotim's mother then took the initiative to teach the people. She sold the old house located nearby the highway of Bojonegoro-Surabaya and moved to a new house built in a private street. It was around 1984. Her mother also built a *mushala* (a small mosque) namely al-Hikmah next to the new house. Mbak Khotim's mother taught the women, while her father taught the children in the *mushala*.

In 1996, Mbak Khotim left her hometown to continue her studies, majoring in Ahwal al-Syakhshiyah (family law) at Institute Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN, the State Islamic Institute) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta. She took around five years to complete her Bachelor's degree at the institute. After the long journey of moving from one city to another, in 2008 Mbak Khotim moved back to Yogyakarta. She accompanied her husband, whom she married in 2002, who had gained a promotion at his office. Yogyakarta is an important place for Mbak Khotim's path of ulama-ness.

Firstly, during her Bachelor's study at the State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta, she not only developed her Islamic knowledge, but also experienced student activism by joining the student *da'wa* organization,

Kodiska, the student magazine *Advokasia*, Pergerakan Mahasiswa Islam Indonesia (PMII, the Indonesian Muslim Student Movement), and Ikatan Puteri-Puteri Nahdhatul Ulama (IPPNU, the Nahdlatul Ulama Female Youth Association). Secondly, she also had opportunities to advance her knowledge on gender and women's issues through workshops and group discussions organized by some NGOs in Yogyakarta, such as Lembaga Kajian Islam dan Sosial (LKiS, Institute for the Study of Islam and Social) and Women's Crisis Centre Rifka Annisa. Thirdly, following her mother's words, Mbak Khotim finally started to "roll out the mat and teach Islamic lessons" to her community in Yogyakarta, following in the footsteps of her mother, and she has continued to do this ever since.

Mbak Khotim participated in the PUP (Pengkaderan Ulama Perempuan) cohort IV organized by Rahima from 2013 to 2014. It was the moment when Mbak Khotim decided to teach in a *pengajian* (Islamic congregation). "I realized that many Islamist groups are aggressively approaching the people in the hamlets and villages with their teachings. [They are confident] although their Islamic knowledge is limited," Mbak Khotim told me, explaining what had moved her to teach. There is a regular female gathering in Kepanjen RT 1 (Rukun Tetangga, meaning neighbourhood) for *arisan* (rotating savings scheme). Mbak Khotim then proposed an initiative to incorporate Islamic teaching in the gathering, and the participants agreed. So, before *arisan*, Mbak Khotim reads a *kitab kuning* and explains the content to the *jamaah*. They like the programme; even other women from different RTs have asked Mbak Khotim to teach them as well.

Now she teaches in two *pengajian*. First, she teaches in the *pengajian* of RT 1 called Nurul Huda, which takes place every Sunday night. In this *pengajian*, the *jamaah* begins by reciting *surah yaasiin*, a part of the Qur'an. Then they recite *barzanji* (a story about the Prophet Muhammad), listen to Mbak Khotim's preaching, and have the *arisan*. Second, she also preaches in the *pengajian* attended by women from RT 2 and RT 3, namely Nurul Ulum (the Light of Knowledge), conducted every Thursday night. The activity is quite similar, but the *jamaah* do money saving instead of *arisan*. In addition to *pengajian* for female *jamaah*, sometimes Mbak Khotim is invited to deliver Islamic teaching in the male *pengajian* in her village where her husband is one of the attendees.

Mbak Khotim became involved with the district board of Fatayat NU in Kota Yogyakarta in 2010, and led the provincial board of Fatayat NU in Yogyakarta

as the head from 2017 to 2022. Her concern is to build a *jamʿiyyah* (Islamic group) at the local level, which is at the level of the village up to the district, as the basis of the bigger *jamʿiyyah* of Fatayat at the provincial level. She argued, "NU becomes a large organization because of the consisting number of the lay people who make up a *jamʿiyyah*. And my role is at the grassroots, which maintains the *tahlilan*, *kenduren*, and lay people." She invites young women from the villages to join Fatayat, and gives them the opportunity to be involved with the Fatayat programme. Linda is one of new Fatayat members invited by Mbak Khotim. She even gets the opportunity to take part in the organization of the 9th Regional Conference of Fatayat NU in Yogyakarta in 2022.

Under Mbak Khotim's leadership, Fatayat NU in Yogyakarta has been developing rapidly. For instance, Fatayat NU in Yogyakarta now consists of five district boards and seventy-eight sub-district boards. In 2019, Fatayat NU established Garda Fatayat/Garfa NU (the Fatayat NU Front Line), which has become a part of the cadre training programme related to the social and cultural contribution to the society. In 2021, Garfa was launched in the national consolidation of the national board of Fatayat attended by all the provincial boards of Fatayat all over Indonesia. Fatayat NU in Yogyakarta has created social media accounts including on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, a YouTube channel with 15,000 subscribers and a mini production house for media content creation. In 2021, Fatayat NU also established a Balai Latihan Kerja Komunitas (BLKK, Community-based Vocational Training Institution) funded by the Indonesian Ministry of Transmigration and Manpower to increase the capacity of Fatayat cadres and the community in fashion.

As the head of Fatayat, Mbak Khotim often liaises and communicates with other wing organizations under the auspices of NU in Yogyakarta, such as IPNU, IPPNU, Muslimat, Anshor, and the provincial board of NU itself. She has received appreciation and gained recognition from NU for the progress and success of the Fatayat NU she leads, and she is gradually gaining trust and a position as a person of consequence within NU. She admitted, "I really feel that now that we have contributed and shown that we are sincere and solemn, people are acknowledging Fatayat's authority or contribution, which was not seen before." Through her involvement with Fatayat, she also shows her leadership qualities and capabilities.

As a result, the provincial board of NU in Yogyakarta now recognizes Mbak Khotim's qualities. For examples, Mbak Khotim is one of the two NU women who are included in the board of the Khoirul Ummah (the best *umma*) Foundation, a male-dominated institution formed by the provincial board of NU in Yogyakarta. When the Covid-19 task force was formed, she was even the only woman who was included in the task force. Recently, she has been selected by the provincial board of NU as a member of the provincial board of Majelis Ulama Indonesia (MUI). She has also been requested to recommend other names from Fatayat. This means that she has a certain authority and it is acknowledged that she can contribute to MUI. "I think this is a struggle that is not easy for women to have equal roles and positions [with men] because women have to show their contribution first to be recognized," Mbak Khotim said, reflecting on her experience.

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