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MOSQUE IMAMS AS THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL PEACEMAKERS IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS URBAN COMMUNITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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ABSTRACT

Religious conflict remains a persistent challenge in multi-religious urban societies across the Global South, where religious diversity intersects with social, political, and regulatory complexities. In such contexts, mosque imams often emerge as key grassroots actors in mediating conflict and fostering social harmony. However, existing studies have largely focused on institutional frameworks or policy-driven interventions, leaving the lived experiences of imams as peacemakers underexplored, particularly from integrated theological and sociological perspectives. This study examines how mosque imams understand and enact their roles in mediating religious conflict within multi-religious urban communities. Employing an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), the research draws on in-depth interviews and participatory observations with 20 mosque imams serving in diverse urban neighborhoods in Palu, Indonesia. The findings reveal three interrelated mediation strategies: peacebuilding as a theological obligation grounded in Islamic moral teachings; negotiated engagement with legal and interfaith institutions to manage conflicts involving public regulation; and dialogical practices aimed at building trust and addressing misunderstandings at the community level. The study demonstrates that imams function as theological and social peacemakers whose authority is shaped by both religious meaning and sociological legitimacy. By integrating these dimensions, the article contributes to African Studies and broader Global South scholarship by offering comparative insights into community-based religious peacebuilding. The findings highlight the continued relevance of religious leadership in managing diversity and sustaining everyday peace in plural urban societies.

KEYWORDS: Mediation; Mosque Imams; Multi-Religious; Peace; Sociological; Theological Authority

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious conflict continues to pose significant challenges in urban societies marked by religious plurality, particularly across the Global South (Adua, 2019). Rapid urbanization, increasing demographic diversity, and intensified competition over public and symbolic religious spaces have heightened tensions among religious communities. In many postcolonial contexts, religion functions not only as a system of belief but also as a central social institution that shapes collective identity, moral authority, and patterns of social interaction (Alsaawi, 2022). Consequently, religious leaders often emerge as crucial actors in managing social tensions and mediating conflicts within everyday communal life.

In multi-religious urban environments, religious conflict is rarely driven solely by doctrinal disagreement (Boender, 2021). Instead, it is deeply embedded in broader sociological dynamics, including struggles over recognition, public visibility, access to land for worship, and the regulation of religious practices. Disputes surrounding places of worship, ritual expressions, and religious symbols frequently become focal points for latent social anxieties (Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, & Zulbaidah, 2025; Mukhlis, Arifin, Ridwan, Zulbaidah, et al., 2025). Such dynamics are evident in many Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority societies in Africa and other regions of the Global South, where religious pluralism intersects with historical grievances, state governance, and local power relations.

Within these complex settings, mosque imams occupy a distinctive and influential position (Al-Krenawi, 2016). As religious authorities, imams are entrusted with interpreting theological teachings, guiding moral conduct, and transmitting values related to peace, coexistence, and social responsibility. At the same time, they function as socially embedded actors whose authority is sustained through community trust, moral legitimacy, and sustained interpersonal engagement rather than formal political power. This dual positioning enables imams to navigate theological imperatives and sociological realities simultaneously, positioning them as key mediators in the management of religious conflict.

Existing scholarship has acknowledged the role of religious leaders in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, including within African and Global South contexts (Fodor, 2022). Prior studies have highlighted how imams and other faith leaders contribute to social stability by mobilizing religious

values, facilitating dialogue, and mediating disputes at the grassroots level (Nismawati, 2025). However, much of this literature has focused on institutional mechanisms, policy frameworks, or observable outcomes of mediation, often overlooking the subjective experiences of religious leaders themselves. As a result, limited attention has been paid to how imams understand, interpret, and negotiate their roles as peacemakers within everyday multi-religious encounters.

This gap is particularly evident in relation to the theological and sociological dimensions of religious leadership (Gertz, 2020). From a theological perspective, imams often conceptualize peace not merely as the absence of violence, but as a religious and moral obligation grounded in Islamic teachings on reconciliation (*sulh*), human fraternity (*ukhuwwah insāniyyah*), and social harmony. From a sociological perspective, the effectiveness of imams in conflict mediation is shaped by their social legitimacy, generational positioning, educational background, and relationships with state institutions and interfaith bodies. Despite their interdependence, these theological and sociological dimensions are rarely examined together through the lived experiences of imams.

Indonesia offers a particularly relevant comparative case for examining these dynamics (Bekkin, 2021). As a Muslim-majority society characterized by significant religious diversity, Indonesia shares important structural similarities with many African urban contexts, including plural religious landscapes, strong community-based religious institutions, and ongoing negotiations between religious authority and state regulation (Gabbert, 2023). In cities such as Palu, religious conflicts have emerged around issues of worship practices, land use, and interfaith relations, placing mosque imams at the forefront of everyday peacebuilding. Yet, despite their central role, the subjective experiences of imams in navigating these conflicts remain underexplored in academic scholarship.

This study addresses this gap by examining mosque imams as theological and social peacemakers in multi-religious urban communities (Ghafournia, 2022). Employing an interpretative phenomenological approach, the research explores how imams understand peace as a theological mandate, how they draw upon religious teachings in mediating conflict, and how their sociological positioning enables or constrains their effectiveness as mediators. Rather than treating imams as passive transmitters of doctrine or mere implementers of

policy, this study foregrounds their lived experiences as active agents who continuously negotiate religious meaning, social expectations, and communal tensions.

By integrating theological and sociological lenses, this article contributes to African Studies and broader Global South scholarship in three key ways (El-Yousfi, 2019). First, it provides a phenomenological account of grassroots religious peacebuilding grounded in the experiences of Muslim religious leaders. Second, it demonstrates how theological interpretations of peace are enacted within specific social structures and relations of authority (Godazgar, 2020). Third, it offers comparative insights relevant to understanding the role of Muslim religious leadership in managing religious diversity within African urban contexts and other plural societies of the Global South. The article proceeds by outlining the theoretical framework, followed by the research methodology, empirical findings, discussion, and conclusion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the role of mosque imams in mediating religious conflict requires an analytical framework that captures both the religious meaning of peace and the social conditions under which religious authority operates (Faiz, 2020). This study adopts an integrative theoretical framework that combines theological perspectives on peace within Islam with sociological theories of religious authority and community-based mediation (Mukhlis, Maryam, et al., 2023; Mukhlis et al., 2024). By bringing these perspectives together, the framework allows for a nuanced analysis of imams not merely as institutional actors, but as moral and social agents embedded in complex multi-religious urban contexts.

2.1 Theological Perspectives on Peace and Religious Leadership in Islam

Within Islamic thought, peace is not understood solely as the absence of conflict, but as a normative and ethical condition that reflects harmony between individuals, communities, and the divine order (Raufer, 1989). Classical and contemporary Islamic teachings emphasize reconciliation (*sulh*), compassion, and social justice as foundational principles guiding human interaction (Kherbache et al., 2023). Religious leaders, particularly imams, are entrusted with the responsibility of translating these theological principles into everyday social practice.

From a theological standpoint, the authority of an imam derives from religious knowledge, moral integrity, and the ability to interpret sacred texts in ways that address contemporary social realities (Sa'ad, 1995). Peacebuilding, therefore, is often conceptualized as a religious obligation rather than a purely pragmatic or political endeavor (Handayani, 2025). In multi-religious settings, imams are frequently required to draw upon inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings – such as *ukhuwwah insāniyyah* (human fraternity) – to foster coexistence and mutual respect among communities of different faiths. This theological orientation frames conflict mediation as part of the imam's broader moral duty to preserve social harmony and prevent harm (*mafsadah*) within society.

Theological approaches to peace also shape how imams perceive their own roles during conflict situations (Selboe, 2010). Rather than positioning themselves as neutral arbiters detached from religious commitments, imams often act as moral guides who seek to realign communal behavior with religious values that emphasize patience, dialogue, and restraint. This theological grounding informs not only the content of their mediation efforts, such as sermons and religious advice, but also the ethical limits within which they operate when engaging with conflicting parties.

2.2 Sociological Approaches to Religious Authority and Community Mediation

While theology provides the normative foundation for peacebuilding, the practical effectiveness of imams as mediators is deeply influenced by sociological factors (Wall et al., 2010). Sociological theories of religious authority highlight that religious leadership is sustained not simply through doctrinal legitimacy, but through social recognition, trust, and embeddedness within local communities. In urban multi-religious contexts, imams operate within intersecting networks of religious institutions, community organizations, and state regulatory frameworks.

From this perspective, the authority of imams can be understood as a form of moral and symbolic capital that enables them to influence behavior and negotiate conflict without recourse to coercive power (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Their proximity to community members, familiarity with local dynamics, and perceived impartiality often position them as credible intermediaries in disputes involving religious differences. At the same time, sociological factors such as generational differences, educational background, and

relationships with formal interfaith bodies or government institutions shape how imams exercise authority and select mediation strategies.

Urban religious pluralism further complicates this sociological positioning (Indrawan & Islami, 2023). In multi-religious cities, imams must continuously navigate intergroup boundaries, negotiate public perceptions of Islam, and respond to external pressures arising from political regulation or social polarization (Sadig & Petcu, 2021). As a result, conflict mediation becomes a relational process that depends on the imam's ability to balance religious commitment with social pragmatism. Dialogical engagement, informal negotiation, and collaboration with other religious leaders often emerge as key sociological strategies through which imams seek to de-escalate tensions and build sustainable peace.

2.3 Integrating Theological and Sociological Lenses

This study conceptualizes the role of mosque imams in conflict mediation as emerging at the intersection of theological meaning and sociological practice (Jaraba, 2020). Theological principles inform how imams define peace and understand their moral responsibilities, while sociological conditions shape how these principles are enacted within specific community contexts. Rather than treating theology and sociology as separate or competing explanations, this integrative framework recognizes their mutual interdependence in shaping religious leadership.

By employing this combined lens, the study is able to examine how imams interpret religious teachings in response to concrete social challenges (Mukhlis, 2025a; Mukhlis & Saidah, 2025), how their social legitimacy enables or constrains their mediation efforts, and how peacebuilding practices are adapted to the realities of multi-religious urban life (Khan, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant for understanding religious leadership in African and other Global South contexts, where religious authority remains closely intertwined with everyday social relations and community-based governance. The framework thus provides a coherent foundation for analyzing the lived experiences of mosque imams as theological and social peacemakers.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the lived experiences of mosque

imams in mediating religious conflicts within multi-religious urban communities (Hazaveh & Arabameri, 2020). IPA is particularly suitable for this research as it focuses on how individuals make sense of significant experiences involving moral judgment, belief systems, and social responsibility. Given the study's aim to examine peacebuilding through theological and sociological lenses, IPA provides an appropriate framework for capturing both subjective meaning-making processes and contextual influences.

Rather than seeking statistical generalization, this study aims to generate in-depth, interpretive insights into how mosque imams understand their roles as peacemakers (Halim et al., 2019). Central to IPA is the *double hermeneutic* process, in which the researcher interprets participants' interpretations of their own experiences. This approach is especially relevant for research on religious leadership, where personal belief, ethical reasoning, and social positioning are deeply interconnected.

3.2 Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted in the city of Palu, Indonesia, an urban environment characterized by religious diversity and ongoing interreligious interaction (Hurayra et al., 2024). Palu provides a relevant context for examining grassroots religious peacebuilding due to the presence of multiple religious communities and the active involvement of religious leaders in mediating social tensions related to worship practices, public space, and interfaith relations.

Participants consisted of 20 mosque imams serving in diverse urban neighborhoods. A purposive sampling strategy was employed based on the following criteria: (1) having direct experience in handling religious conflicts, either intra-religious or interfaith; (2) serving in communities with significant religious diversity; and (3) having a minimum of three years of experience as a mosque imam. The participants varied in age, educational background, and length of service, allowing for a broad range of lived experiences.

While IPA studies typically involve smaller samples to maintain idiographic depth, the inclusion of 20 participants in this study was intentionally designed to capture a wider spectrum of experiential variation across different urban contexts. This broader sample enabled the identification of shared experiential patterns while preserving the interpretive depth central to IPA analysis.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and participatory observation (Humphrey, 1987). Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to articulate their experiences in their own terms while ensuring coverage of key themes related to conflict mediation, theological interpretation, and social interaction. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, lasted approximately 45–90 minutes, and were audio-recorded with participants' informed consent.

In addition to interviews, participatory observation was undertaken to capture everyday interactions involving mosque imams, including religious gatherings, informal consultations, and mediation efforts within the community. Observational data provided contextual insight into how imams enacted their roles in practice and supported the interpretive analysis of interview narratives.

To enhance data credibility, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the findings.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the established stages of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Padela et al., 2011). First, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity of participants' narratives. The transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion and to identify significant statements, phrases, and expressions related to experiences of conflict mediation.

Emergent themes were developed by clustering meaning units that reflected shared experiential patterns across participants. These themes were subsequently interpreted through theological and sociological lenses to examine how religious meaning and social context shaped the imams' mediation practices. Throughout the analytical process, the researcher engaged in reflexive journaling to acknowledge and bracket personal assumptions related to religious leadership and conflict mediation, thereby enhancing analytical transparency.

To strengthen methodological rigor, source triangulation was employed by comparing interview data with observational notes and contextual insights from community interactions. This process enhanced the trustworthiness and coherence of the thematic interpretations, which are presented in the following Results section.

4. RESULTS

This section presents the findings derived from the interpretative phenomenological analysis of in-depth interviews and participatory observations with mosque imams in multi-religious urban communities. The analysis revealed three interrelated experiential themes that illustrate how imams understand and enact their roles as peacemakers: (1) peace as a theological obligation, (2) mediation through negotiated engagement with formal authority, and (3) dialogue as a sociological practice of trust-building. These themes reflect the imams' lived experiences of navigating religious meaning and social realities in contexts of religious diversity.

4.1 Peace as a Theological Obligation: Normative Foundations of Mediation

Across participants, peace was consistently understood not merely as a social necessity but as a theological mandate. Imams described conflict mediation as an extension of their religious duty to uphold Islamic teachings that emphasize reconciliation, patience, and social harmony. This understanding shaped how they approached conflicts within and beyond their congregations.

One participant explained:

"In Islam, peace is not optional. When there is conflict, we are responsible before God to guide people back to calmness and understanding. That is part of my duty as an imam."

This theological framing positioned imams as moral guides rather than neutral arbitrators. Mediation efforts were often embedded in religious practices such as sermons (*khutbah*), study circles, and informal religious counseling. Through these spaces, imams sought to realign communal behavior with religious values that prioritize coexistence and restraint.

From an experiential perspective, imams described feeling a moral burden when conflicts escalated. Several participants emphasized that failure to intervene was perceived as a neglect of religious responsibility. This sense of obligation motivated proactive engagement, even in situations involving sensitive interfaith tensions. The normative approach thus emerged as a foundational strategy through which imams legitimized their involvement in conflict mediation.

4.2 Navigating Authority and Regulation: Legal Mediation as Social Negotiation

A second theme highlights how imams engaged with formal regulations and state-affiliated institutions as part of their mediation practices.

Conflicts related to land use, places of worship, and public religious expression often required engagement with legal frameworks and interfaith bodies. Rather than perceiving legal mediation as external to their religious role, imams interpreted it as a pragmatic extension of their responsibility to prevent wider social disruption.

An imam involved in resolving a dispute over a place of worship stated:

"We cannot rely only on religious advice in some cases. When it concerns land or permits, we must follow regulations so that the solution is accepted by all sides."

This theme reflects a sociologically informed understanding of authority. Imams positioned themselves as intermediaries who translated religious concerns into legally acceptable terms while maintaining credibility within their communities. Engagement with interfaith forums and government mechanisms was described as a means of ensuring fairness and preventing accusations of bias.

Participants also noted that legal approaches were often employed selectively, particularly when dialogue alone proved insufficient. The decision to invoke formal mechanisms was shaped by the intensity of conflict and the perceived risk of escalation. Through this negotiated engagement with authority, imams balanced theological commitments with sociopolitical realities.

4.3 Dialogue and Trust-Building in Everyday Social Interaction

The third theme centers on dialogue as a sociological practice through which imams cultivated trust across religious boundaries. Informal meetings, interpersonal conversations, and facilitated discussions were frequently described as effective tools for de-escalating tensions rooted in misunderstanding rather than ideological opposition.

One participant reflected:

"Sometimes the problem is not belief, but misunderstanding. When people sit together and talk, the tension often disappears."

Dialogical mediation relied heavily on the imam's social legitimacy and relational proximity to community members. Younger imams, in particular, described adopting more open and conversational approaches, while senior imams emphasized caution and gradual engagement. These generational differences shaped how dialogue was initiated and sustained.

From a phenomenological standpoint, dialogue was experienced as a relational process rather than a formal technique. Imams emphasized listening,

empathy, and patience as essential elements of effective mediation. Trust-building emerged as a cumulative outcome of repeated interactions rather than a one-time intervention.

4.4 Interplay of Strategies and Contextual Adaptation

Although the three themes are presented separately for analytical clarity, participants' experiences revealed that these strategies were often applied in combination. Imams described adapting their approaches based on the nature of the conflict, the parties involved, and the broader social context. Normative guidance often served as an entry point, followed by dialogue or legal engagement as needed.

Participants acknowledged challenges that constrained their mediation efforts, including resistance to interfaith dialogue, political sensitivities, and internal divisions within religious communities. Nonetheless, the findings indicate that the flexibility and contextual sensitivity of imams' strategies played a crucial role in maintaining social harmony.

Overall, the results demonstrate that mosque imams function as theological and social peacemakers whose mediation practices are grounded in religious meaning while shaped by sociological realities. Their lived experiences highlight the importance of integrating moral authority, social legitimacy, and contextual awareness in community-based conflict resolution.

5. DISCUSSION (Final Version)

This study sought to understand how mosque imams perceive and enact their roles as peacemakers in multi-religious urban communities by integrating theological and sociological perspectives (Midilli, 2023). The findings demonstrate that imams' mediation practices are shaped by a continuous interplay between religious meaning and social positioning. Rather than functioning solely as religious functionaries or pragmatic mediators, imams emerge as moral and social agents whose peacebuilding efforts are embedded in lived religious experience and everyday social relations.

5.1 Peacebuilding as a Theological Mandate

The findings indicate that mosque imams consistently interpret peacebuilding as a theological obligation rather than an optional social intervention (Ongur, 2020). Peace is understood as an ethical imperative grounded in Islamic teachings that emphasize reconciliation (*sulh*), compassion, and the prevention of harm (*mafsadah*). This

theological framing shapes not only the motivation to intervene in conflicts but also the moral boundaries within which mediation is conducted.

By conceptualizing mediation as part of their religious responsibility, imams position themselves as moral guides rather than neutral arbiters (Mukhlis, 2025b; Mukhlis, Suradi, et al., 2023). This distinction is significant, as it helps explain why imams often feel compelled to intervene even in conflicts that extend beyond their immediate congregations. The internalization of peace as a religious duty reinforces their moral legitimacy and sustains community trust, particularly in contexts where religious authority continues to play a central role in shaping social norms.

From a broader perspective, this finding resonates with studies of religious leadership in African and other Global South contexts, where theology frequently serves as a key source of moral authority in social governance. In such settings, peacebuilding initiatives that align with religious values may carry greater social resonance than approaches perceived as externally imposed or purely administrative.

5.2 *Sociological Dimensions of Religious Authority and Mediation*

While theology provides the normative foundation for peacebuilding, the effectiveness of imams as mediators is profoundly influenced by sociological factors (Nurhidayah, 2025). The findings reveal that imams' authority operates as a form of moral and symbolic capital, sustained through social recognition, trust, and embeddedness within local communities (Gas-Aixendri, 2022). This supports sociological perspectives that view authority as relational and socially constructed rather than formally institutionalized.

Imams' proximity to community members enables them to navigate conflicts characterized by mistrust or misunderstanding (Ismail Hamdani, 2025). Their familiarity with local dynamics and interpersonal networks positions them as credible intermediaries capable of translating religious principles into socially acceptable solutions. At the same time, differences in age, education, and social exposure shape how imams exercise authority and select mediation strategies, highlighting the non-uniform nature of religious leadership.

These findings underscore that mediation is not a static role but a socially contingent practice (Bedigen, 2022). Imams must continuously negotiate their positions in relation to other religious leaders, community groups, and broader

societal expectations. Such negotiation reflects the adaptive nature of religious authority in urban plural settings, where legitimacy must be constantly maintained through interaction and responsiveness.

5.3 *Negotiating Theology, State Regulation, and Social Order*

An important contribution of this study lies in its analysis of how imams engage with formal legal frameworks and state-affiliated institutions as part of their peacebuilding practices (Zainul, 2025). Rather than viewing legal mediation as external to their religious role, imams frame engagement with regulations and interfaith bodies as a pragmatic extension of their theological commitment to maintaining social harmony.

This finding challenges rigid distinctions between religious and secular approaches to conflict resolution (Angin, 2021). Instead, it highlights the existence of hybrid spaces in which theological authority, legal norms, and sociopolitical realities intersect. Imams' selective use of formal mechanisms reflects a strategic awareness of the limitations of purely normative or dialogical approaches in conflicts involving high stakes or potential escalation.

Such dynamics are particularly relevant to African urban contexts, where religious leaders often serve as intermediaries between communities and the state (Dar, 2023). The ability to navigate regulatory frameworks while maintaining moral credibility within religious communities emerges as a critical component of effective peacebuilding in plural societies.

5.4 *Dialogue as a Sociological Practice of Trust-Building*

Dialogue emerged as a central sociological mechanism through which imams cultivate trust and mitigate tensions across religious boundaries (Rachman, 2025). Unlike formal mediation processes, dialogical engagement was experienced as relational, informal, and iterative. Imams emphasized listening, empathy, and patience as essential elements of dialogue, reinforcing the view that peacebuilding is an ongoing social process rather than a singular event.

The findings suggest that dialogical mediation is particularly effective in addressing conflicts rooted in misunderstanding or everyday social friction (Redding, 2021). Through dialogue, imams are able to reframe religious differences as manageable and non-threatening, thereby reducing the potential for escalation (Mukhlis, Janwari, et al., 2023; Mukhlis &

Abdullah, 2025). This relational approach aligns with conflict transformation perspectives that emphasize the importance of repairing social relationships alongside resolving immediate disputes.

At the same time, the study reveals the limitations of dialogue in contexts characterized by entrenched mistrust or political polarization. In such cases, imams often combine dialogical efforts with normative guidance or legal engagement, underscoring the need for flexible and context-sensitive mediation strategies.

5.5 Theoretical and Contextual Implications for African Studies and the Global South

Theoretically, this study contributes to African Studies and Global South scholarship by foregrounding religious peacebuilding as an experiential process shaped by the interaction between theological meaning and sociological positioning. By integrating these dimensions, the study moves beyond instrumental accounts of religious leadership and highlights the moral and relational foundations of grassroots mediation.

Contextually, the findings offer comparative insights relevant to African urban settings where religious leaders continue to play significant roles in managing diversity and mediating conflict. The experiences of mosque imams in this study illustrate how religious authority can function as a resource for social cohesion when grounded in moral credibility and adapted to local social realities. Recognizing the dual theological and sociological dimensions of religious leadership may enhance both scholarly understanding and practical approaches to community-based peacebuilding in plural societies.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that mosque imams play a critical role as both theological and social peacemakers in multi-religious urban communities. By examining their lived experiences through an interpretative phenomenological lens,

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the findings reveal that imams' peacebuilding practices are grounded in religious understandings of moral responsibility while being shaped by sociological conditions such as social legitimacy, community trust, and engagement with formal regulatory frameworks. The integration of theological meaning and sociological positioning enables imams to navigate complex religious and social boundaries, highlighting the importance of religious leadership in sustaining everyday peace in plural societies.

Beyond its empirical context, this study offers comparative insights relevant to African Studies and broader Global South scholarship. By foregrounding the experiential dimensions of religious peacebuilding, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how moral authority operates within community-based conflict mediation. Future research may extend this analysis through comparative studies across African and other Global South urban contexts, as well as through longitudinal approaches that examine the long-term implications of religious leadership for social cohesion and conflict transformation.

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