

# Santri in the Frame of Religious Harmony

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#### Abstract

In Indonesia's harmony context, the role of santri and pesantren is related to maintaining religious harmony. Pesantren is one form of religious education that has become a significant focus in Indonesia, especially after the emergence of several radical acts in the name of religion. This article will dig deeper into the role of Santri in maintaining religious harmony in Indonesia. We will explore how education in pesantren provides a strong foundation for the values of harmony, how Santri engages in interfaith activities, and how their contributions help maintain peace in the country. The results of this research show that first, in the context of religious harmony in Indonesia, santri in pesantren has a significant role in maintaining and strengthening inter-religious harmony. Second, they have a central role in internalizing the values of harmony, tolerance, and anti-radicalism.

Keywords: santri, pesantren, religious harmony.

#### Introduction

Religious harmony is one of the important aspects of maintaining harmony and peace in a society of diverse beliefs and faiths. Indonesia, as a country with diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religions, has long been an example of success in creating interfaith harmony (Abdillah, 2023). In the midst of this plurality, santri groups, or students in pesantren, has an important role that is able to internalize while maintaining the values of harmony and anti-radicalism (Rosyidah, 2021).

Santri, who comes from various religious and cultural backgrounds, came to the pesantren to explore the teachings of Islam (Faiz, 2023). However, they also receive an education that includes universal values such as tolerance, ukhuwwah, and respect for other religions. Thus, understanding, adopting, and applying Islamic values that are inclusive, harmonious, and tolerant aim to improve the ability to create peace among santri and community members, with the hope of eventually being able to build a sustainable foundation for peace (Wiantamiharja, 2019).

Peace and conflict do not arise from a space, it can be seen that several religious conflicts that occurred in Indonesia can be traced in outline (Aksa, 2018). Conflicts between religious adherents arise for several reasons, such as

insults to the religion and spiritual leaders of a particular religion, unfair actions by the authorities against adherents of a particular religion, economic tensions, and political motives (Yaqin, 2005).

In the frame of religious harmony, santri is not only recipients of messages of tolerance, but santri is also able to be called agents of change like students in society (Salamah, 2020). They understand that diversity is one of the nation's greatest assets and that tolerance is the key to maintaining harmony. Santri learn to be leaders with noble character and clear morality within themselves so as to instill positive leadership attitudes that promote interfaith dialogue and strive for peace in a diverse society (Suhendra et al., 2012).

The role of leadership in pesantren, whether held by the pesantren leader or kyai or by teachers or ustadz, has a very large role in the sustainability of the students and the pesantren institution itself. Both have a significant impact on conveying religious knowledge and tolerance to Santri; in fact, Santri is very dependent on both in the education process in Pesantren. The main focus on maintaining harmony in this pesantren community can be seen through several key indicators. The first is the use of the concept of tolerance (*tasamuh*). Second, the principles of justice (*al-'is*) and equality (*tawazun*). Third, the rejection of violence or an anti-radical attitude. Fourth, commitment to nationality, such as loyalty to the ideological principles of *Pancasila* (Rusmiati et al., 2022).

Pesantren is also not spared from being stereotyped as a place to spread radical ideology. Of course, this creates a negative image and adversely affects the image of pesantren. In addition, the growing strength of transnational Islamic ideologies circulating in Indonesia is also considered a potential that could affect interfaith harmony in the future (Huda et al., 2022). By using religious education, it is hoped to develop a value system that can have a role in dealing with potential religious-based conflicts and support the journey toward peace. Education is considered a significant tool in introducing the value of tolerance. As stated by Maragustam in Tobrani (2012), the creation of tolerance and peace stems from the spiritual dimension of religion that encourages individuals to accept the differences of others (Tobrani, 2012).

In the world of education, tolerance that should be taught and applied in education is actually tarnished by intolerant acts committed by unscrupulous teachers in a school in Central Java. Bullying cases regarding students who do not wear the hijab carried out by teachers occurred in 2022, the incident of forced use of the hijab occurred again at State Senior High School 1, Sumberlawang, Sragen Regency, Central Java. A similar incident was also

recorded two years earlier, in 2020, in Gemolong District, Sragen (Ceprudin et al., 2023). This is one of the significances of the author's seeing the tolerance that formal and traditional educational institutions should teach.

In the Indonesian context, the discussion of intolerance in Islam is related to traditional educational institutions, namely pesantren. Pesantren is one form of religious education that has become a major focus in Indonesia, especially after the emergence of several radical acts in the name of religion. However, this becomes inappropriate if it is linked to the history of the emergence of pesantren, which actually aim to produce scholars who understand religion deeply (tafaqquh fiddin). This is because pesantren not only teaches various aspects of religious knowledge and Islamic law but also has a major role in shaping human character in behavior and relationships with fellow humans, even with the natural environment.

The realization of peace and tolerance among religious adherents requires contributions from all parties, especially community leaders and religious leaders. The same applies in the pesantren environment, where the Kiai figure has a great influence on his students. Kiai is considered an example in various aspects, including behavior, words, and advice given in their lives. Therefore, the role of Kiai is very significant in educating and communicating the importance of religious tolerance as well as promoting an inclusive understanding, which in turn reflects the teachings of Islam, which is a mercy for the entire universe. In this paper, we will dig deeper into the role of Santri in maintaining religious harmony in Indonesia. We will explore how education in pesantren provides a strong foundation for the values of harmony, how Santri engages in interfaith activities, and how their contributions help maintain peace in the country. Hopefully, this paper can provide a deeper insight into the importance of Santri in building a harmonious and religiously diverse society.

### Result and Discussion

## The Existence of Santri

Santri is a Malay-derived term used to refer to individuals who are pursuing education under the guidance of a Kiai. More specifically, santri is students who are undergoing the educational process in a pesantren environment and receive care from a kiai, often known as members of the Pesantren Community (Said & Mutho, 2016). There is another view that states that the term santri actually comes from the Javanese language, namely from the word "cantrik," which indicates someone who always follows a teacher on his journey with the

intention of obtaining learning in the field of science (Muhakamurrohman, 2014).

Santri, as a group of students in pesantren, has a very important role in maintaining and strengthening religious harmony in Indonesia. Because Santri has good knowledge about religion, which Santri can apply in inter-religious life (Menag Minta Santri Jadi Agen Kerukunan Antar Umat Beragama, 2020). In the context of religious harmony, Santri has a significant impact through several aspects, such as education, participation in interfaith activities, and contributions to promoting peace and tolerance.

Santri is not only guided to become santri who have good morals in accordance with religious teachings. However, students can also apply social morality in the context of life in the state and nation, namely acting with kindness and empathy towards fellow humans, in accordance with the principle of hablu minannaas. All of this ultimately aims to create harmony in the lives of the community, state, and nation after the Santri complete their education (Jamaluddin et al., 2012).

## Education in Pesantren as a Foundation for Harmony Values

Pesantren, as part of the traditional education system that has existed for centuries, has an important role in shaping the personality and character of Muslims in Indonesia. Its potential is enormous to become one of the bases, both in terms of communication and in moral practice, for promoting peace values in Indonesia (Wiantamiharja, 2019). Pesantren as a sub-culture, has a characteristic that has been entrenched as well as living and thriving in the midst of community in carrying out the functions of education, the function of propaganda, and the function of community empowerment. Historically, the existence of pesantren become very important in the development efforts of community, especially as derived from the aspirations of community and reflect the needs of community (Hakim & Aksa, 2021, p. 203).

Pesantren is traditional Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia. Pesantren also have a role in spreading a moderate and tolerant understanding of Islam (Fudholi, 2023). Here, Santri not only learns about Islamic teachings but also gets a strong moral education. They are taught values such as tolerance, ukhuwwah, and respect for other religions. As a result, Santri grows into a tolerant individuals and has a deeper understanding of the importance of interfaith harmony.

Pesantren not only provides instruction in religion but also reinforces the principles of pluralism that underpin pluralism in Indonesia. Individuals living in pesantren ensure that students understand that diversity is something to be appreciated and safeguarded. They instruct the students to know, respect, and work together, even if they come from diverse backgrounds (Faiz, 2023).

As a place to gain a deep understanding of Islamic teachings as well as the formation of Islamic character, pesantren have distinctive characteristics. That is why life in pesantren is often considered special, and Abdurrahman Wahid described it as a subculture. This "subculture" labeling is due to the uniqueness of pesantren in various aspects, such as the lifestyle adopted, the worldview and values adopted, and also the internal hierarchy of power that is fully respected. One of the important research areas to be developed is research on harmony and conflict resolution in the context of education in pesantren that can be an example of world peace (Ash-Shiddiqy, 2020).

Pesantren, as the foundation of authentic education in Indonesia, has participated in its history to fight for Indonesia's independence and, therefore, must now play a role in carrying out the mission of peace to create harmonious relations between Indonesian citizens (Wiantamiharja, 2019). Pesantren, as the most historic Islamic religious education institution, has an important role in promoting peace and tolerance between adherents of different religions.

As the oldest institution, the doctrine that has always been practiced in pesantren, as in Islam, has taught human beings about their relationship with God (often referred to as *hablum minallah*) and also their relationship with fellow humans (*hablum minannaas*). In Islam, social relations in the community are considered an obligation for its followers in their daily lives. Harmony between man and God will become a reality in social life. In other words, social compliance or harmony in society is a way of expressing their commitment and dedication to individual obedience to God. Many verses in the Qur'an refer to faith and charity as being closely intertwined. This relationship is often referred to as *uhkhuwwah islamiyah* (Online, 2007).

Implementing the concept and understanding of *ukhuwwah*, it can be carried out through various methods, using various institutions and means, for example: Firstly, *ukhuwwah islamiyah* should start from the smallest environment (family), groups, or members in a particular *jam'iyah*, then be expanded to include a wider environment (between *jam'iyah* sects and nations); Secondly, the importance of having a good example (*uswah hasanah*) from the leaders of the ummah is that the organization's management must show an attitude of

ukhuwwah that can be an example for members and all Muslims, both in their personal lives and in their functional roles as members of society.

Third, broadening the horizons of thinking in terms of religion and society, with the aim of increasing understanding and tolerance of the views of others and developing an open attitude in dealing with social problems; Fourth, creating institutions or structures that can promote harmony, unity and solidarity among citizens and the ummah, such as cooperatives, contact organizations, consultations and others, in accordance with the development and needs of the ummah; Fifth, utilizing all available institutions and resources, whether established by the government or by the community itself, such as the MUI, pesantren, schools, and universities, as a means of promoting ukhuwwah islamiyyah and national unity.

Sixth, utilizing pesantren and other educational institutions to be more active in expanding the understanding of ukhuwah, both through the main education program, extracurricular programs, and activities outside the curriculum. Seventh, creating an efficient and effective mechanism in community life to participate in resolving conflicts or differences of opinion with other parties.

Thus, the role of pesantren as an embodiment of Indonesia's cultural diversity has a very important significance in maintaining the unity and diversity of the nation. Through an education system that emphasizes the values of diversity, Pesantren is a place where the younger generation is prepared to become individuals who have high tolerance, wisdom, and a strong awareness of the diversity that exists throughout Indonesia (Faiz, 2023). This young generation will be a strong foundation for facing various changes and challenges at the global level, as well as maintaining unity and harmony in a society that has a diverse cultural background. Pesantren, as a reflection of the nation's diversity, will continue to play an active role in exploring the potential stored in this diversity and ensuring that the values of diversity remain an integral part of the life of the Indonesian nation.

## Santri's Contribution in Promoting Peace and Tolerance

The concept of "figh al-ikhtilaf" is a concept inspired by almaghfurlah Kiai Sahal Mahfudh wants to place the religiousness of the people in the context of nationality. The concept of ikhtilaf is a concrete form of inclusive attitude in studying with rihlah from one pesantren to another (Redaksi@mui.or.id, 2022).

This is where the role of Santri must be open to their insights in studying, analyzing, and implementing the knowledge gained in Pesantren.

In understanding *fiqh al-ikhtilaf* (Admin, 2022), Kiai Sahal Mahfudh tries to place the diversity of the people in the context of nationality. These concepts involve a good attitude (*husnudzon*) towards others and, secondly, respecting other people's opinions as long as arguments still support them. Third, avoiding the imposition of will by stating that one's own opinion may be right but could be wrong, and vice versa. Fourth, recognizing differences in furuiyyah issues, studying scientifically objectively and argumentatively, and responding openly and not exaggerating them, which is contradictory to diversity. Finally, it is important to emphasize that someone who has said "*laa ilaaha illallah*" should not be easily disbelieved because the sentence is a creed of faith.

Santri is generally defined as someone who studies in a pesantren on religious sciences, tauhid, fiqh, tasawwuf, and morals Santri also has an important role in promoting peace and tolerance in society (Azizah, 2021). They often become moral leaders in their communities and encourage their peers and the wider community to maintain interfaith harmony. Santri is involved in various social activities that help the community, including those not from their community, and this strengthens the bonds of harmony.

In the context of Indonesia, which has a diverse population of religions and cultures, the role of Santri in maintaining religious harmony is very important. Santri as an identity attached to itself must certainly be a separate mandate in dispelling the pace of radicalism, which is still a challenge in nationality. A number of recent events, such as demonstrations against the burning of the HTI flag and demonstrations against the ban on the veil at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University Yogyakarta, indicate that in Indonesia, there are still issues relevant to religious aspects (Yusqi, 2018).

They are not only committed students of Islam but also ambassadors of peace and tolerance. Through the education they receive in pesantren, their participation in interfaith activities, and their contributions to promoting peace, santri help maintain and strengthen the foundations of harmony that have existed for many years. With the practice of tolerance, we can maintain national unity, support and promote development, and reduce inequality. Cooperation between religious adherents is based on the principle of positive friendship (Nisviliyah, 2013).

*Ukhuwah*, is one of the principles that is highly emphasized in Islam. It encompasses various aspects of commonality, including common descent,

family, community, nationality, and religious beliefs. At the heart of this ukhuwwah is an expression of affection that is reflected in the form of care, concern, close relationships, and awareness of sharing in hardships (Suryana, 2011). Pesantren education has an important role in shaping morals and moral values, which shows that society really needs the contribution of pesantren in an effort to build a civilized society and have a positive attitude that should be followed, so that pesantren must become a role model in the life of religious tolerance.

The importance of developing religious tolerance is found in the internalization process of Islamic values applied in pesantren. As a traditional Indonesian institution, pesantren must have the capability to teach their students about interacting with a diverse society, both in terms of culture and religion. Not only simply integrating with society, but also being able to provide benefits and reduce tensions in society. This is because some people, including both locals and Westerners, have started to associate the names Pondok Pesantren and Santri with some of the recent riots.

Humans are also known as social creatures because they need relationships, cooperation, and help from fellow humans in the context of goodness, in accordance with the teachings of their religion. Even in Islam, there is freedom to establish relationships with individuals from different backgrounds, regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion, in accordance with the principles of Islamic law. In addition, ukhuwwah has a central role in Islamic teachings and is specifically mentioned in the Qur'an 52 times with various meanings and contexts, which can be grouped into four types, namely *ukhuwah*, *ubudiyah*, *ukhuwah insaniyah*, *ukhuwah wathaniyah*, and *ukhuwah fid din al-Islam*, with the main core being love (Firdausiyah, 2021).

Islam is a "teaching of compassion", which is the basic concept in basing its teachings on humanity. Santri, as agents, must indeed be able to internalize these teachings for the wider community. However, although the role of Santri is very valuable, there are still several challenges that need to be overcome. One of them is the need to ensure that education in Pesantren continues to include the values of harmony and tolerance in its curriculum. Because santri was born as a global society that must be proud of also having global responsibilities (Nawawi, 2020). It can be seen that one of the values fostered in this pesantren is the value and attitude of tolerance in religious life. These values of politeness, openness, and humility shape the soul of the santri so that they become tolerant

and democratic figures. These values are very important to develop to build harmony in the lives of the nation and state in this country (Alamsyah, 2017).

The values that are trying to be applied by the Santri community, also known as AIS Nusantara, try to give their color in preaching the values they get from pesantren as well as against negative discourses containing provocations that are dangerous to the integrity of the nation and are continuously echoed. By creating Islamic preaching content through social media, AIS Nusantara is quite good at internalizing the discourse of religious moderation for Santri and millennials with its various contents disseminated on social media and several online media portals (Firdaus, 2023).

One form of santri contribution to stem the rate of radicalism as above is not without reason, because it is not uncommon for da'wah to be used as a means of conveying Islamic teachings, which unfortunately sometimes results in intolerant actions. This action is often shown through violence and chaos. This kind of incident is very unfortunate, especially if the perpetrators are Muslims, while Islam is actually a religion of peace. Therefore, to maintain the existence of Islam as a religion that brings mercy to the universe, it is necessary to constantly discuss the methods of da'wah used, which should remain relevant and interesting. This is because the duty to encourage the good and discourage the bad is an obligation for Muslims at all times. In applying the correct method of da'wah, the aim is to create a moderate Islam, one that does not contradict Pancasila and the motto of Unity in Diversity, which guides the state in Indonesia. More importantly, it should also ensure that religious life in Indonesia can take place peacefully in diversity (Fahrurrozi & Thohri, 2019). The strategy of da'wah can be interpreted as a planning process and decisions formulated to convey Islamic law or shari'ah, teach it, and apply it in everyday life. The da'wah approach can be carried out using a cultural approach or a structural approach (Asiyah & Hakim, 2022, p. 217). In conclusion, Santri has an important role in maintaining religious harmony in Indonesia. With the education they receive, their active participation in interfaith activities, and their contribution to promoting peace and tolerance.

#### Conclusion

In the context of religious harmony in Indonesia, santri or students in pesantren has a very important role in maintaining and strengthening interreligious harmony. They have a central role in internalizing the values of harmony, tolerance, and anti-radicalism. Here are some important points in this conclusion: First, Pesantren Education as a Foundation for Harmony Values: Pesantren, as a traditional Islamic educational institution, provides a strong foundation for the values of harmony. Santri not only learns about Islamic teachings, but also universal values such as tolerance and ukhuwwah. This helps them become individuals who are full of tolerance and understanding of the importance of harmony. Second, Santri's Contribution to Promoting Peace and Tolerance: Santris are not only recipients of messages of tolerance but also agents of change in society. They engage in social and interfaith activities, promote interfaith dialog, and help maintain peace. Their moral role is crucial to building a harmonious society. Third, Challenges and Stigmatization of Pesantren: Despite the valuable role of Santri, Pesantren is often stigmatized as centers of radical ideology. This suggests the need for more support from the government and society to support pesantren education in promoting harmony and overcoming negative stigmatization. Fourth, The Role of Kiai in Spreading the Value of Tolerance: Kiai figures as leaders and role models in pesantren is very influential in educating santri about the importance of religious tolerance. Kiai has an important role in shaping the character of Santri and socializing inclusive values. Fifth, The Importance of Continually Discussing Da'wah Methods: The correct and moderate method of *da'wah* needs to be continuously discussed and refined so that Islam remains a religion of rahmatan lil alamin and does not contradict the principles of Pancasila and Unity in Diversity. Appropriate da'wah can help maintain harmony in diversity.

Therefore, the role of Santri in maintaining religious harmony is very important in the context of Indonesia, which is diverse in religion and culture. They are valuable agents of change in building a harmonious and tolerant society. As long as education in pesantren continues to include the values of harmony and tolerance in its curriculum, the role of santri in society will be needed in maintaining the harmony and peace that characterize the Indonesian nation.

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