

PEACE EDUCATION
OF THE *SARUNG*-WEARING COMMUNITY:
NAHDLATUL ULAMA KIAI'S EFFORTS IN MANAGING
INTERFAITH DIVERSITY THROUGH ALTERNATIVE
EDUCATION

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Abstract: This article examines the pivotal role played by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an Islamic organisation in Indonesia, in embracing religious and cultural diversity through alternative education. The study concentrates on the efforts of NU Kiais (religious leaders) in the Kasembon House of Worship, Malang, in fostering harmony among religious communities and creating a peaceful environment through education. Adopting a specific approach, this peace education not only concentrates on academic learning but also on the formation of character based on humanitarian values, tolerance, and respect for religious

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differences. This article employs a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the strategies employed by NU Kiais to promote peaceful education. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, this research identifies specific actions undertaken by Kiais to foster inclusive perspectives and a deeper comprehension of religious values and human universality. The findings indicate that the alternative education provided by NU Kiais has effectively created an environment conducive to interfaith dialogue, enhanced mutual understanding, and facilitated cross-faith collaboration.

Keywords: Interfaith Diversity, Kiai, Nadhlatul Ulama, Peace Education.

Introduction

In the context of an increasingly complex and diverse social fabric, the preservation of harmony and peace among religious communities has become a crucial objective. In this context, religious leaders and community figures are of great importance in the construction and preservation of a peaceful environment. As Huston Smith has observed, the teachings of all religions are conducive to the promotion of peace. Consequently, religious leaders occupy a pivotal role in the advancement of the peace movement.

The insights put forth by Huston Smith are theoretically validated by David R. Smock's work, entitled "Religious Contributions to Peace Making," which underscores the significant contributions of all religions to peacebuilding. A substantial body of evidence, comprising numerous cases of mediation, reconciliation and peacebuilding initiatives led by religious actors worldwide, lends support to this perspective. In 1972, the World Council of Churches and the all Africa Conference of Churches facilitated the peace agreement in Sudan. The role of religion in peace and negotiation processes in Thailand, Colombia, and Uganda; the peaceful resolution of conflicts in Eastern Europe; human rights movements and liberation efforts in Latin America; the struggle for freedom in Tibet; and democracy campaigns in Myanmar, among others,¹ demonstrates that religion does not inherently fuel violence and social conflicts. This challenges the perception held by some, as articulated by Sam Harris in 2001.

¹ David R. Smock, *Religious Contributions to Peacemaking: When Religion Brings Peace, Not War* (Washington: United States of Peace, 2006).

In the context of Indonesia, the signing of the Peace Agreements in Poso, Sulawesi, in 2001, and Ambon, Maluku, in 2002, marked the conclusion of violent conflicts between Islamic and Christian communities in these regions. These outcomes were the result of the efforts of Muslim and Christian religious leaders, who, in collaboration with community members on these islands, made significant contributions to the transformation of conflict and the establishment of peace.²

Sumanto Al Qurtuby emphasises that efforts to achieve reconciliation and maintain peace are undertaken by individuals from all walks of life. In Indonesia, for instance, local religious leaders have made invaluable contributions to the process of healing divisions and promoting harmony between communities. It is important to acknowledge that the pursuit of peace is often inspired and driven by religious beliefs and practices. Bruce Lincoln, for example, has described this phenomenon as “religious peace,” which encompasses discourses, practices, communities, and institutions that are influenced, shaped, and redefined by religious beliefs and values.³

The phenomenon, described by Al Qurtuby as “grassroots peacebuilding,” is prevalent in various regions of Indonesia. In addition to Poso and Ambon, accounts of tolerance and interfaith harmony preserved by these “grassroots peace agents” can be found in districts such as Jepara, Solo, Kebumen, Purwokerto, Salatiga, Semarang, Kudus, Kendal, Blora, Wonosobo, and numerous others.⁴

Kasembon, a multicultural hub within Malang regency, provides a setting for the examination of the experiences of grassroots peace agents. Islamic leaders, particularly those affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), have effectively assumed the role of peace agents, thereby fostering a social environment characterised by tolerance and non-violence. They have reinterpreted religious narratives and discourses, thereby inspiring and upholding peace and social stability in their region. This phenomenon is particularly intriguing given that

² Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Peacebuilding in Indonesia: Christian–Muslim Alliances in Ambon Island,” *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 24, no. 3 (July 1, 2013): 349–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2013.785091>.

³ Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁴ Sumanto Al Qurtuby, “Reconciliation from Below: Indonesia’s Religious Conflict and Grassroots Agency for Peace,” *Peace Research The Canadian Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 45, no. 1 (2013), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24429463>.

multicultural regions in Malang Regency often possess significant conflict potential. Indeed, the majority of conflicts in these areas are triggered by conversion efforts⁵ and the establishment of places of worship.⁶ The terms ‘Christianisation’ and ‘Islamisation’ are closely associated with these multicultural regions. Furthermore, these grassroots peace agents endeavour to advance peace education by disseminating peace values among community members and leveraging places of worship (mosques) as instruments in the cultivation of these values.

The utilisation of mosques as instruments for peacebuilding represents a distinctive phenomenon, given that places of worship are more commonly associated with conflicts than peace. Statistical data and studies pertaining to conflicts instigated by places of worship can be found in various reports by organisations engaged in the monitoring of religious freedom in Indonesia, including the Wahid Foundation,⁷ Setara Institute,⁸ and Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies.⁹ The mapping results of these institutions indicate that conflicts related to places of worship have intensified over the past 15 years.

Despite the plethora of grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in Indonesia, Sumanto notes a paucity of research on this subject. In the post-Reformation era, international headlines, researchers, and international observers have predominantly concentrated on violent

⁵ Umi Sumbulah, “Konversi dan Kerukunan Umat Beragama: Kajian Makna bagi Pelaku dan Elite Agama-agama di Malang,” *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 13, no. 1 (2013): 79–110, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v13i1.643>.

⁶ Moh Anas Kholish and Siti Rohmah, “Menjembatani Antara Misi Proselitisasi Islam-Kristen Dan Keharusan Merawat Kerukunan:Konstruksi Teologis Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB) Kota Malang,” *Islamic Insights Journal* 2, no. 1 (September 19, 2020): 55–68, <https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.iiij.2020.002.01.4>.

⁷ Wahid Foundation, *Ringkasan Eksekutif Laporan Tahunan Kemerdekaan Beragama Berkeyakinan (KBB) Di Indonesia Tahun 2016* (Jakarta: Wahid Foundation, 2017).

⁸ Setara Institute, *Ringkasan Eksekutif Laporan Tengah Tahun Kondisi Kebebasan Beragama/ Berkeyakinan dan Minoritas Keagamaan di Indonesia 2018* (Jakarta: Setara Press, 2018).

⁹ Zainal Abidin Bagir, *Laporan Kehidupan Beragama di Indonesia 2017. “Kerukunan dan Penodaan Agama; Alternatif Penanganan Masalah”* (CRCS (Center for Religious and Cross-cultural Studies) Progam Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya Sekolah Pascasarjana, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2017).

forms in Indonesia, with a notable absence of attention to matters pertaining to peace.¹⁰

It is therefore recommended that further investigation be conducted into the phenomenon of peace education, carried out by the individuals attired in sarongs as grassroots agents and the utilisation of mosques as instruments of peace. This study is expected to enhance existing peace research in Indonesia. Furthermore, it aims to contribute to research on Islamic practices, values, and beliefs in the fields of peacebuilding, democracy, and community development. These areas, according to Mohammed Abu-Nimer, have been overlooked or deliberately ignored by Western researchers.¹¹

This study employs a qualitative approach, as the issues under investigation require narrative responses.¹² Data exploration was conducted through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The research data were obtained directly from individuals with a close relationship to the issues under investigation, namely NU figures (Kiai) involved in the peace education process in Kasembon. Additionally, data were acquired through in-depth observations regarding peace education activities in the mosque and the social conditions in Kasembon. Documentary data were also utilised to support information relevant to the research focus.

Peace Education as a Necessity in Multicultural Settings

Peace education, a subset of the broader field of peace and conflict studies, employs reflective education and community-based approaches to facilitate social transformation. In this context, education is regarded as a socio-cultural investment, extending beyond individual concerns about employment. Peace educators address a range of interconnected contemporary societal issues, including social, political, economic, ecological and ethical factors that underlie conflicts. They examine non-violent social strategies for managing social divisions. Consequently, this educational model

¹⁰ Al Qurtuby, "Reconciliation from Below: Indonesia's Religious Conflict and Grassroots Agency for Peace."

¹¹ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, *Nirkekerasan dan Bina-Damai Dalam Islam: Teori dan Praktik* (Jakarta: Pustaka Alvabet, 2010).

¹² Wahyudin Darmalaksana, "Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Studi Pustaka dan Studi Lapangan," *Pre-Print Digital Library UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung*, 2020, 1–6.

fosters intercultural and interreligious understanding within the framework of global citizenship.¹³

In its Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Democracy, UNESCO underscores that the fundamental objective of peace education, human rights, and democracy is the cultivation of individuals who internalise universal humanitarian values. It fosters the cultivation of attitudes that are conducive to the growth of a culture of peace. This emphasis is accompanied by directives to develop non-violent conflict resolution skills and implement peace pedagogy within societies to enhance tolerance, compassion, empathy, and mutual sharing. Furthermore, the goals of peace education involve confronting and countering violence. The programme's content includes diverse worldviews, non-violent methods in social transformation, socio-economic-political peacebuilding, case studies of peace activism, human rights and responsibilities, sustainable education, disarmament education, and global justice.¹⁴

Ian Harris and John Synott have conceptualised peace education as a series of "teaching encounters" that foster positive impressions and attitudes in others. Their approach to peace involves the utilisation of non-violent alternatives to manage conflicts and the cultivation of critical analytical skills to challenge structural arrangements that perpetuate and legitimise injustice and inequality.¹⁵

In the context of the learning process, the concept of anti-violence education is defined as an educational approach that explicitly rejects the use of violence as a teaching method. Assegaf posits that anti-violence education is created in a manner that is

¹³ Siti Rohmah et al., "The Recontextualization of Islamic Peace Education: A Study of the Theory of Mohammed Abu-Nimer in the Indonesian Context," *Fieldwork in Religion* 13, no. 2 (December 20, 2018): 183–202, <https://doi.org/10.1558/fin.37545>.

¹⁴ Hilary Cremin, Josefina Echavarría, and Kevin Kester, "Transnational Peacebuilding Education to Reduce Epistemic Violence," *Peace Review* 30, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 295–302, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2018.1495808>.

¹⁵ John Synott and Ian Harris, "Guest Editors' Introduction: Peace Education for a New Century [Paper in: Peace Education for a New Century, Harris, Ian and Synott, John (Eds.)]," *Social Alternatives* 21, no. 1 (December 24, 2020): 3–6, <https://doi.org/10.3316/ielapa.200203279>.

peaceful, secure, and safe, with the objective of protecting all individuals within its educational sphere.¹⁶

Anti-violence education is thus oriented towards the creation of a peaceful, safe, secure, and multicultural society. It employs a learning process that is safe, peaceful, and free from violence. In this context, religion plays a fundamental role as the basis and source of values in shaping this societal character. Therefore, religious education can be understood as the process or effort of internalising religious teachings that are oriented towards the creation of a peaceful communal life, the avoidance of conflict, and the prevention of destructive violence.

***Sarung*-Wearing Muslims and NU Kiai as Agents of Peaceful Education in Indonesia**

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) represents the largest independent Islamic organisation in the world. The NU Central Board asserts that it has 60 million members in Indonesia and approximately 30 million more worldwide. The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is a Sunni Muslim organisation. In the Indonesian context, the term 'Sunni' is equivalent to 'Ahlu Sunnah wal Jama'ah', which is commonly abbreviated as 'Aswaja'. Theologically, NU adheres to the concept of *wasatiyah* (moderation), which is the belief that there should be a balance between extreme rationalism and hardline scripturalism. Furthermore, NU's Islamic legal sources encompass not only the Quran and hadith, but also human reasoning to comprehend empirical reality. This moderate ideology is conceptualised by NU in a number of different theological and local contexts, including *kalam* and theology, *fiqh* (Islamic law), and *taṣawwuf* (Islamic mysticism). This is clearly demonstrated in the *Muqaddima Qanun Asasi Nahdhatul Ulama*, NU's principal constitutional document. NU's decisions in *kalam*, *fiqh*, and *taṣawwuf* reflect local and theological interpretations of faith, Islam, and *ihsan* as the triad of Muslims within the Indonesian context.¹⁷

¹⁶ Khoirul Nafi'ah, Noor Amirudin, and Man Arfa' Ladamay, "Pendidikan Tanpa Kekerasan Dalam Perspektif Pendidikan Islam Menurut Drs. Abd. Rahman Assegaf, M.A.," *Jurnal Mahasiswa Pendidikan* 1, no. 2 (September 26, 2022): 239–53, <https://doi.org/10.37286/jmp.v1i2.172>.

¹⁷ Ayu Sutarto, *Menjadi NU Menjadi Indonesia: Pemikiran K.H. Abdul Muchith Muzadi* (Surabaya: Khalista, 2008).

The NU tradition was established by a Kiai in Java and has traditionally comprised rural residents and pesantren students throughout Indonesia. The rural populations of Indonesia have traditionally and culturally aligned themselves with NU, due to their strong ties to Kiai in villages across the archipelago. They maintain and perpetuate Islamic practices in accordance with the guidance of local Kiai. The pivotal role played by Kiai also signifies that a considerable proportion of NU members adhere to traditional Islamic orientations. One of their distinctive features is the preservation of Islamic traditions based on robust ties to classical texts that are commonly studied in pesantren. They are characterised by a conservative outlook due to their continued practice of what was originally conceived by Javanese scholars centuries ago as the optimal synthesis of Islam and local culture.¹⁸

NU followers are identified as ‘*Sarungan*’ people, marked by the cloth or *Sarung* they commonly wear. *Sarungs* are worn in pesantren as well as for other religious social events outside the pesantren. *Sarungs*, batik shirts, or *koko* shirts with a black *peci* (cap) on the head are common attire for Indonesian men at important events. When Abdurrahman Wahid (‘Gus Dur’) became the President of Indonesia, he was frequently visited by Kiai from pesantren, who arrived at the presidential palace in Jakarta wearing this attire, a sight rarely seen in the capital, Jakarta.¹⁹

One of the primary tenets of the NU is the indigenization of Islam.²⁰ NU is opposed to Arabisation in numerous aspects of Muslim cultural life. The term “indigenization of Islam” is now being replaced by the term “Islam Nusantara.” It is possible that NU followers are more proficient in Arabic than other groups in Indonesia, given that Arabic is a core subject in NU pesantren across Indonesia. The ultimate objective of this approach is to assert that Muslims can reside in any geographical location and potentially adhere to Islamic teachings while still maintaining their cultural

¹⁸ Greg Barton, “Indonesia’s Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual Ulama: The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-Modernist Thought,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 8, no. 3 (1997).

¹⁹ Munim DZ, “Kaum Sarungan,” [nu.or.id](https://nu.or.id/nu.or.id/fragmen/kaum-sarungan-YfhjX), November 8, 2003, <https://nu.or.id/fragmen/kaum-sarungan-YfhjX>.

²⁰ Hisanori Kato, “Religion and Locality: The Case of the Islam Nusantara Movement in Indonesia,” *Fieldwork in Religion* 13, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1558/firn.37050>.

identity. In the context of nation-states, it can be argued that Muslims living in Indonesia have the potential to be authentic Muslims while simultaneously maintaining their Indonesian identity. This should not affect their loyalty as Muslims and as Indonesian citizens. Similarly, by applying this approach, Muslims living in Europe, America, Australia, and other minority Muslim countries can realistically be part of their nationality while living as authentic Muslims. They have an equal opportunity to practise Islam in accordance with the teachings of the Quran and the Sunnah as Muslims living in Saudi Arabia.²¹

The NU Kiai's Construction of the Urgency of Peace Education Amid Interfaith Diversity in Kasembon, Malang

Indonesia is celebrated for its profound religious, cultural, and ethnic diversity. However, if not managed wisely, this diversity can also be a source of conflict. It is therefore crucial to implement interfaith peace education in order to manage differences and build tolerance among the diverse populace.²² The approach of interfaith peace education plays a significant role in strengthening national unity. By teaching values of tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation among people of different faiths, this education can help reduce religious segregation and conflicts, uniting Indonesian society as one entity.²³

Indonesia has a history of interfaith conflict. The promotion of interfaith peace education is therefore a pertinent and valuable endeavour, as it facilitates a more profound comprehension of the tenets and practices of other religious traditions. This, in turn, can help to mitigate the formation of negative stereotypes and prejudices, which are often the root causes of interfaith tensions and disputes.

Concurrently, Indonesia's national identity is founded upon the principle of diversity (*kebhinekaan*) and the tenets of Pancasila.²⁴ The

²¹ Abdurrahman Wahid, "Pribumisasi Islam," nu.or.id, July 19, 2015, <https://nu.or.id/taushiyah/pribumisasi-islam-iQMNK>; Kato, "Religion and Locality: The Case of the Islam Nusantara Movement in Indonesia."

²² Vera Yuli Erviana, "Penanganan Dekadensi Moral Melalui Penerapan Karakter Cinta Damai Dan Nasionalisme," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan* 14, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

²³ Ardiatyas Pramesti and Henry Aditia Rigianti, "Pentingnya Upaya Menerapkan Pendidikan Karakter Cinta Damai Pada Siswa Sekolah Dasar," *Warta Pendidikan | E-Journal* 6, no. 12 (2022): 57–58.

²⁴ Ainul Mardhiah, "Pendidikan Damai di Daerah Rawan Konflik," 2021.

promotion of interfaith peace education serves to reinforce an inclusive national identity, whereby individuals recognise and appreciate differences as a cultural and spiritual asset. Consequently, interfaith peace education plays a pivotal role in the prevention of the proliferation of religious radicalism and extremism, which can result in the fragmentation of national identity. By fostering an understanding of peaceful religious teachings and respecting diversity, communities become more resilient against ideologies that can disrupt peace and social stability.

Furthermore, interfaith peace education fosters collaboration and the exchange of ideas among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds. This facilitates mutual learning, comprehension of alternative perspectives, and collective problem-solving. Conversely, a peaceful and harmonious environment is conducive to social and economic development. By working together in a spirit of unity, communities can advance their regions and create shared prosperity.

It is imperative that interfaith peace education be implemented at this juncture, with the involvement of religious leaders and community figures as promoters of peace and tolerance.²⁵ These individuals can serve as exemplars for their followers and convey messages of peace to the entire society. The construction of NU Kiai and *Sarung*-wearing individuals in weaving peace education in Kasembon exemplifies the importance of peace education for maintaining the implications of unity and harmony among people.

This construction provides a foundation for understanding the role of NU Kiai and *Sarung*-wearing individuals as pioneers of peace education in the context of multiculturalism and interfaith dialogue. In the social and cultural construction of peace education by NU Kiai, the mosque, with its religious pulpit, serves as both a social and cultural asset for the dissemination of interfaith peace education to the community. In line with the theoretical framework proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the social construction of NU Kiai in relation to interfaith peace education in a multicultural context cannot be dissociated from three key moments: externalisation, objectification and internalisation. In the words of Peter L. Berger, externalisation represents the phase during which an

²⁵ Shima Nahara and Ahmad Nurcholis, "Dakwah Multikultural, Kiai Lokal Konstruksi Dakwah Multikultural Kiai Lokal Era Modern," *Meyarsa: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi Dan Dakwah* 2, no. 2 (2021): 41–54.

individual establishes contact with their social environment, imparting their values to that environment through physical or mental activities. Meanwhile, the process of objectification arises from the interaction between objective and subjective realities. During this phase, individuals or societies will begin to abstract concepts in order to take relevant and appropriate actions. Simultaneously, the internalisation phase involves the absorption of externalisation and objectification into an individual's consciousness, whereby subjective and objective realities are integrated.²⁶

In the context of the construction of interfaith peace education on a multicultural basis, the NU Kiai and individuals wearing sarongs externalise the world and experiences beyond themselves. The landscape and portrait of interfaith diversity become a tangible reality, underlying the perspective of the NU Kiai on an inclusive form of Indonesian Islam. Consequently, the presence of these individuals can serve to safeguard this diversity. This moment is absorbed, adopted and objectively adapted into the cognitive system of the individual Kiai, and this perspective is then internalised into the personal character of a tolerant and inclusive Kiai.

The construction of NU Kiai's interfaith peace education in the multicultural context is based on three fundamental principles of human relations: These include *ukhuwah Islāmiyah* (Islamic brotherhood), *ukhuwah Wathaniyyah* (national brotherhood), and religious brotherhood as a Muslim (*ukhuwah Insāniyah*). In Cak Nur's view, universal human relations represent a shared foundation that serves as a unifying element across religious traditions.²⁷ The views expressed by Cak Nur are in alignment with those of Hasyim Muzadi. Muzadi posits that *ukhuwah Insāniyah* represents the concept of human brotherhood that prioritises universal relationships, transcending the boundaries of religion, culture, race, and ethnicity.²⁸ This concept refers to the understanding that all humans are siblings, sharing the same origin as creations of God. *Ukhuwah Insāniyyah* places humanitarian values at the central point in interpersonal and

²⁶ Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckman, *Tafsir Sosial Atas Kenyataan: Risalah Tentang Sosiologi Pengetahuan* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1990).

²⁷ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin & Peradaban*. (Gramedia pustaka utama, 2019).

²⁸ Muhamad Parhan et al., "Responding to Islamophobia by Internalizing the Value of Islam Rahmatan Lil Alamin through Using the Media," *Islam Realitas: Journal of Islamic and Social Studies* 6, no. 2 (2020): 139, https://doi.org/10.30983/islam_realitas.v6i2.3695.

societal relationships, regardless of differences in religious or cultural backgrounds.

In the context of multiculturalism, the promotion of interfaith peace education is contingent upon the recognition of several urgencies of *Ukhuwah Insāniyyah*. In Kiai Muhari's conceptualisation, *Ukhuwah Insāniyyah* facilitates the resolution of discrepancies and the mitigation of potential conflicts that may arise from religious, cultural, and background divergences. When the focus is on the common humanity, societies are more likely to bridge differences and seek peaceful solutions. Conversely, he also posited that *ukhuwah Insāniyyah* serves as a foundational principle for the establishment of harmonious and mutually respectful relationships among diverse individuals and groups. This contributes to the creation of a fairer and more inclusive social environment. Concurrently, *ukhuwah Insāniyyah* buttresses the tenets of tolerance and appreciation for cultural and religious diversity. Individuals and groups are more inclined to comprehend and honour these distinctions.

As posited by Kiai Muhari, the presence of *ukhuwah Insāniyyah* encourages interfaith dialogue and education. This helps to dispel misperceptions and misunderstandings about other religions, thereby promoting joint learning about universal religious values. Furthermore, it helps communities to avoid discrimination and prejudice against specific religious or cultural groups, which is crucial to ensuring equality and human rights for all individuals. Thus, the existence of *ukhuwah Insāniyyah* significantly contributes to the formation of a tolerant, open, and inclusive young generation. Young people who have been socialised in an environment where human brotherhood is understood tend to carry these values into their adult lives.

In addition to *Ukhuwah Insāniyyah*, there is also *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah*, which is regarded as an appropriate umbrella term for fellow Indonesian citizens. *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah* can be defined as the concept of national brotherhood and solidarity, which emphasises the importance of harmonious relationships and cooperation within a nation or state. This concept is related to the understanding that all citizens have a responsibility to maintain the unity and stability of the country, regardless of differences in ethnicity, religion, race, and culture.

The concept of *Ukhuwah Wathaniyah* plays an instrumental role in the formation of a robust and unified national identity. In a multicultural society, an understanding and respect for cultural and religious diversity serve to provide a robust foundation for national unity. In Kiai Muhari's conceptualisation, *Ukhuwah Wathaniyah* serves as a means of overcoming social divisions and conflicts that may arise due to ethnic, religious, or cultural differences. National solidarity places greater emphasis on unity than on differences. Concurrently, Kiai Muhari also posits that *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah* can motivate citizens to collaborate in order to foster collective prosperity. When society unites in cooperation, the potential for sustainable development and progress is significantly enhanced.

Conversely, the existence of *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah* can reinforce national solidarity, thereby contributing to the preservation of national security and stability. In an atmosphere of harmony and unity, the potential for internal or external conflicts is reduced. Consequently, Kiai Muhari is unequivocal in his assertion that *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah* fosters a greater inclination towards participation in the developmental process, encompassing economic, social, and political spheres. Additionally, the imperative for *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah* on a multicultural basis is underscored by its capacity to foster an inclusive environment for all citizens, irrespective of ethnic, religious, or cultural differences.

In addition to the aforementioned constructions of *Ukhuwah Insāniyyah* and *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah*, another equally significant construction is Kiai Muhari's redefinition of the term '*kafir*', which is often identified as non-Muslim. According to Kiai Muhari, the term "*kafir*" cannot be taken to signify "*kafir harbi*" in a general sense, as this would have significant implications. The term "*kafir harbi*" is used to describe non-Muslim groups that adopt an opposing stance to Muslim policies, thereby rendering their continued existence subject to conflict. In the context of Indonesia, the terminology "*kafir harbi*" is of no consequence, particularly in the context of "*kafir*" in Kasembon, Malang. This is where Kiai Said Aqil Siraj previously proposed a redefinition of "*kafir*" as non-Muslim.²⁹ This redefinition does not seek to eliminate the terminology and wording of "*kafir harbi*" in the Quran, as there is a possibility of Indonesia being

²⁹ Ahmad Faiz Ibnu Sani, "Said Aqil: di Madinah Nabi Muhammad Tidak Gunakan Istilah Kafir," *Tempo.Co: Bicara Fakta* (Jakarta, 2019).

colonised once more, as was the case during the colonial era. Consequently, the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia mandates the eradication of colonialism from the face of the earth.

The Role of NU Kiai in Managing Interfaith Diversity through Peaceful and Sustainable Education in Places of Worship

The role of Kiai (Islamic religious leaders) as agents of peace in multicultural and interfaith communities is of paramount importance in light of the challenges posed by religious and cultural diversity. As esteemed figures and acknowledged authorities, Kiai possess considerable influence, which they can leverage to shape attitudes and actions, thereby fostering harmony, tolerance, and peace among individuals from disparate religious backgrounds.³⁰

From one perspective, Kiai can facilitate constructive engagement and mutual understanding between adherents of disparate religious traditions.³¹ Such organisations can facilitate meetings between representatives of different religions, facilitate discussions between members of different religions, and organise interfaith events with the objective of strengthening relations between believers of different faiths. Conversely, as religious leaders, Kiai is in a position to reiterate the pacifistic tenets inherent to all religions on a regular basis. By citing teachings that espouse love, peace, and justice, Kiai can motivate individuals to embody these values in their daily lives.

In the context of multicultural and interfaith communities, Kiai plays a pivotal role in fostering peace and harmony among people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Through an inclusive approach anchored in religious values, Kiai can make a substantial contribution to building a more nuanced understanding, strengthening collaboration among believers of different faiths, and creating a peaceful and harmonious environment for the entire society.

³⁰ Hasan Baharun and Farah Nuril Badriyah, "Pendidikan Multikultural dalam Bingkai Islam Nusantara Perspektif KH. Said Aqil Siroj," *Tafaqquh: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Kajian Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (2020): 37–51.

³¹ Mohammad Saiful Rizal, Sri Suriana, and Nurfitri Hadi, "Ulama dan Perannya Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural di Desa Sumber Jaya Kecamatan Sumber Marga Telang Kabupaten Banyuwangi," *Tanjak: Sejarah Dan Peradaban Islam* 2, no. 3 (2022): 322–31.

In the context of Indonesian identity, the necessity of interfaith peace education is of paramount importance in maintaining the country's diversity and integrity. By pursuing inclusive education, fostering interfaith collaboration, and underscoring the significance of unity, Indonesia can maintain its role as a global exemplar of harmonious and peaceful coexistence. The implementation of interfaith peace education represents a fundamental pillar in the pursuit of a just and prosperous Indonesia for all its citizens.

In the context of Indonesian identity, the necessity of interfaith peace education is of paramount importance in preserving the nation's diversity and integrity. An inclusive educational approach, cooperation among religious communities, and awareness of the importance of unity will enable Indonesia to continue serving as an exemplar of harmony and peace for other countries worldwide. It can be argued that interfaith peace education represents a fundamental pillar in the realisation of Indonesia as a just and prosperous nation for all its citizens.

At the micro level, Kasembon in Malang provides an illustrative example of Indonesia, characterised by diversity and interfaith harmony. Based on the researcher's observations and documentation, Kasembon can be described as a multicultural hub comprising various religious beliefs. According to data from the Kasembon District, Malang Regency, the population from 2016 to 2019 was comprised of 126,889 Muslims, 3,277 Protestants, 296 Catholics, 1,797 Hindus, 996 Buddhists, and 75 Confucians.³²

The interfaith diversity is effectively managed by religious leaders, particularly those from the majority Muslim community, the majority of whom are members of Nahdlatul Ulama, commonly known as Nahdliyin. Kiai Muhari posits that the Muslim community, being the majority religion in Kasembon, should act as a protective shield for minority communities such as Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Conversely, the minority communities also demonstrate respect for the majority Muslim population. This harmonious relationship between majority and minority interfaith communities is inextricably linked to the role of peaceful education, promoted through religious pulpits in their respective places of worship.

³² Dinas Komunikasi dan Informatika Kabupaten Malang, "Kabupaten Malang Satu Data: Edisi 2020," *Satu Data*, vol. Juni (Malang, 2020).

The messages of compassion and the theology of benevolence continue to be disseminated among the congregations of different faiths in Kasembon. For Kiai Muhari, an understanding of the meaning of Islam and faith is of paramount importance in reducing the potential for conflicts to arise in the name of religion. For a Muslim, there is a responsibility to act as a guarantor of safety and peace for those around them. Conversely, a person who identifies as faithful must provide a sense of security for others, including minority groups such as Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Furthermore, the content of the theology of benevolence is configured within a universal prophetic spirit that emphasises the importance of sustained peace.

Muhari Kiai posits that every Muslim should serve as a universal catalyst for love and compassion throughout the universe. In the absence of this, religion is perpetuated as a source of human conflict. Hans Kung's assertion that world peace cannot be achieved without religious peace highlights the significant role that religion plays as a contributing factor in various conflicts around the globe.³³ A closer examination reveals that religion can be an effective vehicle for promoting messages of peace.

The alternative education provided by Kiai Muhari through religious institutions as a foundation for interfaith peace in Kasembon represents a pioneering initiative. The individuals, predominantly originating from the santri culture and wearing sarongs, serve as a social asset in unravelling potential conflicts associated with religion. In Kasembon, these individuals are continuously educated through alternative methods taught in mosques, emphasising the importance of tolerance. Kiai Muhari's alternative education emphasises the crucial strategy of finding common ground among religions rather than exacerbating religious differences.

The work of Kiai Muhari is in alignment with the ideas of Frithjof Schuon, who placed great emphasis on the role of ethics and morality in establishing common ground between different religious traditions.³⁴ Moral values such as love, honesty, humility, and compassion are found in many religions, indicating common ground at the ethical and moral levels. This perspective is aligned with the

³³ Hans Kung, *Jalan Dialog*, ed. Najiyah Martiam, I (Yogyakarta: Mizan, 2010).

³⁴ Frithjof Schuon, *Mencari Titik Temu Agama-Agama*, I (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1987).

views expressed by Huston Smith in his work, "The World's Religions," where he suggests that the convergence of religions can be attributed to the similarities in the search for meaning in life and the shared ethical values espoused by various traditions.

The strategic role played by Kiai Muhari in his alternative education initiatives within the mosque is theoretically legitimised by Abu Nimer's concept of Islamic Peace Education. Abu Nimer posits that the necessity of peaceful education is paramount in the context of the emergence of various conflict potentials propagated by radical and extremist groups.³⁵ The rise of these extremist groups is rooted in their perspective that emphasises the differences between religions, leading to an increasingly widening gap between Islam and other faiths, as noted by Kiai Muhari.

The ideas put forth by Abu Nimer are consistent with the concept of multicultural education as proposed by James A. Banks. Banks delineates four stages in the endeavour to construct a multicultural society. These are: the integration of knowledge about cultures, the reduction of biases against minority groups, and the encouragement of positivity within one's social environment in the face of injustice and discrimination.³⁶ At this juncture, Kiai Muhari endeavours to employ a cultural approach as a unifying force and adhesive for the diversity of faiths, in accordance with the thesis of James A. Banks. Kiai Muhari persists in promoting this cultural approach through the pulpit in the mosque, with the objective of acting as a catalyst for interfaith peace in Kasembon. For Kiai Muhari, the cultural traditions of the clean village and the celebration of Indonesia's Independence Day on 17 August serve as unifying elements for interfaith diversity. During the "bersih desa" initiative, members of the interfaith community unite and collaborate in cleaning rituals. Simultaneously, Kiai Muhari posits that the activities surrounding August 17th can act as a cohesive force for interfaith diversity. During Indonesia's Independence Day celebration, leaders from various faiths participate in flag ceremonies followed by prayers

³⁵ Mohammed Abu Nimer, *Nirkekerasan dan Bina-Damai dalam Teori dan Praktik*, ed. Ihsan Ali-Fauzi Samsu Rizal Panggabean, *Nirkekerasan dan Bina-Damai dalam Teori dan Praktik* (Jakarta: Pustaka Alvabet dan Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, 2010).

³⁶ James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Counselling*, ed. Laura Marengi Linda Bishop, *Mental Health Practice*, V, vol. 3 (Washington: Pearson, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.7748/mhp.3.5.37.s20>.

according to their respective beliefs, all of which contribute to the progress of the Republic of Indonesia.

Conclusion

The social construct of Kiai NU and the *Sarung*-clad community regarding peaceful education in the multicultural faith base is founded upon two fundamental principles: *ukhuwah insāniyyah* (human brotherhood) and *ukhuwah wathaniyyah* (national unity). It is considered that both of these pillars are relevant in addressing the various issues that arise in the multicultural Kasembon. The concept of *Ukhuwah Insāniyyah*, as espoused by Kiai NU and the *Sarung*-clad community, represents a universal brotherhood that unites people from diverse faith and belief backgrounds in the multicultural Kasembon. Meanwhile, *Ukhuwah Wathaniyyah* in the construct of Kiai NU and the *Sarung*-clad community serves as a unifying force among Kasembon's interfaith community within the framework of nationalism. In addition to these pillars, the social construct of Kiai NU and the *Sarung*-clad community attempts to redefine the meaning of “*kafir*” to non-Muslims.

This construction is based on the understanding that the interfaith community in Kasembon is not considered “*kafir harbi*” (non-believers at war) to be fought against but rather Muslim minorities who need protection. The role of Kiai NU and the *Sarung*-clad community in promoting peaceful education through religious pulpits is of great significance in a multicultural context. By virtue of their position within the mosque, Kiai NU and the *Sarung*-clad community occupy a pivotal role in the dissemination of knowledge and the fostering of understanding. They strive to elucidate the commonalities that exist across the diverse spectrum of beliefs and practices, whilst simultaneously endeavouring to minimise the differences that may otherwise serve to divide. The interfaith community in Kasembon is unified by a set of universal human values, including compassion, love, and peace, which are fundamental to all religious teachings. Furthermore, the role of Kiai NU and the *Sarung*-clad community is defined by their efforts to utilise culture as a unifying symbol of interfaith diversity. Events such as the clean village initiative and Indonesia's Independence Day celebrations provide opportunities for the entire interfaith community in

Kasembon to integrate diversity into a peaceful coexistence, fostering unity amidst differences.

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