

PEACE EDUCATION OF THE SARUNG-WEARING COMMUNITY: NU KYAI'S EFFORTS IN MANAGING INTERFAITH DIVERSITY THROUGH ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

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Abstract: This article analyzes the pivotal role played by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), an Islamic organization in Indonesia, in embracing religious and cultural diversity through alternative education. The study focuses on the efforts of NU kyais (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 character formation rooted in humanitarian values, tolerance, and respect for religious differences. This article utilizes a descriptive-analytical approach to explore the peaceful education strategies implemented by NU kyais. Through interviews, observations, and document analysis, this research identifies concrete steps taken by kyais to shape inclusive perspectives and a deeper understanding of religious values and human universality. The findings reveal that the alternative education conducted by NU kyais has successfully created a space for interfaith dialogue, promoted understanding, and built cross-faith cooperation.

Keywords: Interfaith Diversity, NU Kyais, Peace Education.

Introduction

In the increasingly complex and diverse social fabric, the preservation of harmony and peace among religious communities has become essential. Within this dynamic, religious leaders and community figures play a crucial role in building and maintaining a peaceful environment. According to Huston Smith, all religions teach the values of peace, making religious leaders instrumental in driving the peace movement.

The insights shared by Huston Smith find theoretical validation in David R. Smock's work titled "Religious Contributions to Peace Making," emphasizing the substantial contributions of all religions to peacebuilding. Numerous cases of mediation, reconciliation, and peacebuilding initiatives led by religious actors worldwide support this perspective. Organizations such as the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches mediated the 1972 peace agreement in Sudan. Peace and negotiation processes in Thailand, Colombia, and Uganda; peaceful resolutions in Eastern Europe; human rights movements and liberation efforts in Latin America; struggles for freedom in Tibet; and democracy campaigns in Myanmar, among others,¹ illustrate that religion does not inherently fuel violence and social conflicts, countering the perception held by some, as articulated by Sam Haris in 2001.

In the context of Indonesia, the signing of the Peace Agreements in Poso, Sulawesi, in 2001, and Ambon, Maluku, in 2002, marking the end of bloody conflicts between Islam and Christianity in these regions, were results of efforts by Muslim and Christian religious leaders. These leaders, along with community members in these islands, made constructive contributions to conflict transformation and peacebuilding after the eruption of violence.²

Sumanto Al Qurtuby highlights that reconciliation efforts and peacekeeping initiatives are carried out by "ordinary people." These lesser-known local religious figures in Indonesia have played exceptional roles in bridging gaps between conflicting groups and fostering peace. It is crucial to note that peacebuilding is inspired and driven by religion. Bruce Lincoln terms it "religious peace," signifying a peace process influenced, shaped, and

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

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>.

redefined by religion, encompassing discourses, practices, communities, and institutions.³

The phenomenon, termed “grassroots peacebuilding” by Al Qurtuby, is prevalent in various regions in Indonesia. Apart from Poso and Ambon, tales 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 many more.⁴

Kasembon, as one of the multicultural hubs in Malang regency, hosts stories of these grassroots peace agents. Islamic leaders, especially those affiliated with NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), have become peace agents successfully fostering a social environment characterized by tolerance and non-violence. They have reinterpreted religious narratives and discourses, inspiring and upholding peace and social stability in their region.

This phenomenon is intriguing considering that multicultural regions in Malang Regency often possess significant conflict potential. Most conflicts in these areas are triggered by conversion efforts⁵ and the establishment of places of worship.⁶ Terms like “Christianization” or “Islamization” are closely associated with these multicultural regions.

Moreover, these grassroots peace agents also strive to promote peace education by disseminating peace values among the community members and utilizing places of worship (mosques) as instruments in building these values.

The active use of mosques as peacebuilding instruments is a distinctive phenomenon since places of worship are more commonly linked to conflicts than peace. Statistics and studies related to conflicts triggered by

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>.

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.ijj.2020.002.01.4>.

places of worship can be found in various reports by organizations monitoring religious freedom in Indonesia, such as Wahid Foundation⁷ Setara Institute⁸ 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 numerous grassroots peacebuilding efforts in Indonesia, Sumanto al-Qurtubi observes that research on this issue is scarce. Post-Reformation, international headlines, researchers, and international observers have primarily focused on violence forms in Indonesia, neglecting or intentionally sidelining issues related to peace.¹⁰

Hence, further exploration of the phenomenon of peace education conducted by the sarung-clad individuals as grassroots agents and the use of mosques as instruments of peace is warranted. This study is expected to enrich existing peace research in Indonesia. Moreover, it aims to contribute to research on Islamic practices, values, and beliefs in the fields of peacebuilding, democracy, and community development, areas that, according to Mohammed Abu-Nimer, have been overlooked or deliberately ignored by Western researchers.¹¹

This study adopts a qualitative approach because the researched issues necessitate narrative responses.¹² Data exploration was conducted through interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The research data were obtained directly from individuals closely related to the researched issues, namely the 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

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) Program Studi Agama dan Lintas Budaya Sekolah Pascasarjana, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2017).

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.

in Kasembon. Documentary data were also utilized 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, offers reflective education and community-based approaches to social transformation. In this context, education is viewed as a socio-cultural investment, transcending personal concerns for employment. Peace educators address various interconnected contemporary societal issues such as social, political, economic, ecological, and ethical factors that underlie conflicts. They explore non-violent social strategies for managing social divisions. Consequently, this educational model promotes intercultural and interreligious understanding within the framework of global citizenship.¹³

UNESCO, in its Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights, and Democracy,¹⁴ emphasizes that the primary objective of peace education, human rights, and democracy is the development of individuals who internalize universal humanitarian values. It cultivates attitudes 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 program'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.¹⁵

Ian Harris and John Synott have conceptualized peace education as a series of "teaching encounters" that leave positive impressions on others. Their desire for peace involves employing non-violent alternatives to manage

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/firn.37545>.

¹⁴ UNESCO, "Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy," *Ohchr. Org.*, 1995.

¹⁵ Hilary Cremin, Josefina Echavarría, and Kevin Kester, "Transrational Peacebuilding Education to Reduce Epistemic Violence," *Peace Review* 30, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 295–302, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659.2018.1495808>.

conflicts and honing critical analytical skills to challenge structural arrangements that produce and legitimize injustice and inequality.¹⁶

In the context of the learning process, the concept of anti-violence education is interpreted as education that rejects violence in its teaching methods. Assegaf explains that anti-violence education is created peacefully, safely, and securely, protecting all individuals within its educational sphere.¹⁷

Thus, anti-violence education, in essence, is oriented toward shaping a peaceful, safe, secure, and multicultural society. It utilizes a learning process that is safe, peaceful and avoids 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 internalizing religious teachings that are oriented towards creating a peaceful communal life, avoiding conflict, and destructive violence.

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

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the world's largest independent Islamic organization. The NU Central Board claims to have 60 million members in Indonesia and around 30 million more worldwide. NU is a Sunni Muslim organization.¹⁸ In the Indonesian context, 'Sunni' is equivalent to Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah, commonly abbreviated as 'Aswaja'. Theologically, NU adheres to the concept of *wasatiyah* (moderation) between extreme rationalism and hardline scripturalism. Moreover, NU's Islamic legal sources include not only the Quran and hadith but also human reasoning to understand empirical reality. This moderate ideology is conceptualized by NU in theological and local contexts: in kalam and theology; in fiqh (Islamic law); and in *taṣawwuf* (Islamic mysticism). This is evident in the Muqaddima Qanun Asasi Nahdhatul Ulama, NU's main constitution. NU's choices in

¹⁶ 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>.

¹⁷ 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>.

¹⁸ Alexander R. Arifianto, "Practicing What It Preaches? Understanding the Contradictions between Pluralist Theology and Religious Intolerance within Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 2 (December 15, 2017): 241–64, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.241-264>.

kalam, fiqh, and taşawwuf represent local and theological interpretations of faith, Islam, and ihsan as the trilogy of Muslims, within the context of Indonesia.¹⁹

Established by kyai in Java, NU traditionally consists of rural residents and pesantren students throughout Indonesia. With strong ties to kyai in villages across the archipelago, rural populations traditionally and culturally align with NU. They preserve and continue Islamic practices as advised by local kyai. The key role played by kyai also means that a large portion of NU members are from traditional Islamic orientations. One of their characteristics is the preservation of Islamic traditions based on strong ties to classic texts commonly studied in pesantren. They are conservative because they continue to practice what was designed by Javanese scholars centuries ago as the best fusion of Islam and local culture.²⁰

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 kyai from pesantren, who arrived at the presidential palace in Jakarta wearing this attire, a sight rarely seen in the capital, Jakarta.²¹

One of NU's main ideas is the indigenization of Islam. NU rejects Arabization in many aspects of Muslim cultural life. The term indigenization of Islam has now begun to shift towards Islam Nusantara.²² NU followers might be more proficient in Arabic than other groups in Indonesia, as Arabic is a core subject in NU pesantren across Indonesia. The endpoint of this accommodation is to emphasize that Muslims can reside anywhere and potentially become authentic Muslims while still being part of their own culture. In the context of nation-states, it can be said that Muslims living in

¹⁹ Ayu Sutarto, *Menjadi NU Menjadi Indonesia: Pemikiran K.H. Abdul Muchith Muzadi* (Surabaya: Khalista, 2008).

²⁰ 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).

²¹ Munim DZ, "Kaum Sarungan," *nu.or.id*, November 8, 2003, <https://nu.or.id/fragmen/kaum-sarungan-YfhJX>.

²² 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>.

Indonesia can potentially be authentic Muslims while remaining indigenous Indonesians. This should not affect their loyalty as Muslims and as Indonesian citizens simultaneously. 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 share an equal opportunity to be true Muslims like Muslims living in Saudi Arabia.²³

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

Indonesia is renowned for its rich diversity in religion, culture, and ethnicity. However, if not managed wisely, this diversity can also be a source of conflict. Interfaith peace education becomes crucial in this context as it helps manage differences and build tolerance among the diverse populace.²⁴ 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.²⁵

Indonesia has experienced several interfaith conflicts in the past. Interfaith peace education is relevant as it encourages a deeper understanding of others' religions and beliefs, thus reducing stereotypes and negative prejudices that can trigger conflicts.

Simultaneously, Indonesia's national identity is based on the spirit of diversity (*kebhinekaan*) and Pancasila.²⁶ Interfaith peace education helps reinforce this inclusive national identity, where people recognize and appreciate differences as cultural and spiritual wealth. Thus, interfaith peace education plays a crucial role in preventing the spread of religious radicalism and extremism, which can lead to national identity divisions. By understanding peaceful religious teachings and respecting diversity,

²³ Abdurrahman Wahid, "Pribumisasi Islam," [nu.or.id](https://nu.or.id/taushiyah/pribumisasi-islam-iQMNK), July 19, 2015, <https://nu.or.id/taushiyah/pribumisasi-islam-iQMNK>; Kato, "Religion and Locality: The Case of the Islam Nusantara Movement in Indonesia."

²⁴ Vera Yuli Erviana, "Penanganan Dekadensi Moral Melalui Penerapan Karakter Cinta Damai Dan Nasionalisme," *Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu Pendidikan* 14, no. 1 (2021): 1–9.

²⁵ 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.

²⁶ Ainul Mardhiah, "Pendidikan Damai Di Daerah Rawan Konflik," 2021.

communities become more resilient against ideologies that can disrupt peace and social stability.

Interfaith peace education also promotes collaboration and the exchange of ideas among people of different faiths. This creates opportunities for individuals to learn from one another, understand different perspectives, and collectively find solutions to challenges. On the other hand, a peaceful and harmonious environment creates conditions conducive to social and economic development. By working together in a spirit of unity, communities can advance their regions and create shared prosperity.

At this juncture, interfaith peace education is crucial in involving the roles of religious leaders and community figures as promoters of peace and tolerance ²⁷. They can serve as examples for their followers and convey messages of peace to the entire society. Just like the construction of NU Kyai and sarung-wearing individuals in weaving peace education in Kasembon to maintain all the implications of the urgency of peace education for unity and harmony among people.

This construction underlies the NU Kyai and sarung-wearing individuals' role as pioneers of peace education in the multicultural and interfaith context. In the NU Kyai's social and cultural construction of peace education, the mosque with its religious pulpit serves as both a social and cultural asset for interfaith peace education disseminated to the community. Following Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman's readings, the social construction of NU Kyai regarding interfaith peace education in a multicultural context cannot be separated from three moments: externalization, objectification, and internalization. According to Peter L. Berger, externalization is the phase when an individual makes contact with their social environment and imparts their values to that environment, either in physical or mental activities. Meanwhile, objectification results from the interaction between objective and subjective realities. During this phase, individuals or societies will begin abstraction in their minds to attempt to take relevant and appropriate actions. Simultaneously, internalization is the result of extracting externalization and objectification phases, which involves

²⁷ 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.

the absorption of subjective and objective realities into an individual's consciousness.²⁸

In the context of the construction of interfaith peace education in the multicultural basis of NU Kyai and sarung-wearing individuals, through this externalization moment, the NU Kyai and sarung-wearing individuals absorb the world and experiences beyond themselves. The landscape and portrait of interfaith diversity become existing realities that underlie the NU Kyai's perspective on an inclusive Indonesian Islam. Thus, their presence can become a shield for this diversity; this moment is absorbed, adopted, and objectively adapted into the cognitive system of the individual Kyai, and this perspective is then internalized into the personal character of a tolerant and inclusive Kyai.

The construction of NU Kyai's interfaith peace education in the multicultural context is built upon three pillars of human relations: Ukhuwah al-Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood), Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah (national brotherhood), and religious brotherhood as a Muslim (*ukhuwah al-Insaniyah*). In Cak Nur's perspective, universal human relations constitute a common platform that is the meeting point of religions.²⁹ What Cak Nur expressed aligns with what Hasyim Muzadi expressed; according to him, *ukhuwah al-Insaniyah* is the concept of human brotherhood that prioritizes universal relationships, transcending the boundaries of religion, culture, race, and ethnicity.³⁰ This concept refers to the understanding that all humans are siblings, sharing the same origin as creations of God. Ukhuwah al-Insaniyah places humanitarian values at the central point in interpersonal and societal relationships, regardless of differences in religious or cultural backgrounds.

Several urgencies of Ukhuwah al-Insaniyah serve as the valves of interfaith peace education in the multicultural context. In Kyai Muhari's construction, Ukhuwah al-Insaniyah helps overcome differences and potential conflicts arising from religious, cultural, and background disparities. When the focus is on the common humanity, societies tend to bridge differences more easily and seek peaceful solutions. On the other hand, he also stated that *ukhuwah al-Insaniyah* creates the foundation for building

²⁸ Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckman, *Tafsir Sosial Atas Kenyataan: Risalah Tentang Sosiologi Pengetahuan* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1990).

²⁹ Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin & Peradaban*. (Gramedia pustaka utama, 2019).

³⁰ 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.

harmonious and mutually respectful relationships among different individuals and groups. This helps establish a fairer and more inclusive social environment. Simultaneously, *ukhuwah al-Insaniyah* supports the values of tolerance and appreciation for cultural and religious diversity. Individuals and groups tend to be more open to understanding and respecting these differences.

According to Kyai Muhari, the presence of *ukhuwah al-Insaniyah* encourages interfaith dialogue and education. This helps dispel misperceptions and misunderstandings about other religions, promoting joint learning about universal religious values. It also helps communities avoid discrimination and prejudice against specific religious or cultural groups. This is crucial to ensuring equality and human rights for all individuals. Thus, the existence of *ukhuwah al-Insaniyah* significantly contributes to shaping a tolerant, open, and inclusive young generation. Young people growing up with an understanding of human brotherhood tend to carry these values into their adult lives.

Besides *Ukhuwah al-Insaniyah*, there is also *Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah*, which is considered compatible to be the umbrella for fellow Indonesian citizens. *Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah* is the concept of national brotherhood and solidarity that emphasizes 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.

Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah helps shape a strong and united national identity. In a multicultural society, understanding and respecting cultural and religious diversity form a robust foundation for national unity. In Kyai Muhari's construction, *Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah* plays a role in overcoming social divisions and conflicts that may arise due to ethnic, religious, or cultural differences. National solidarity emphasizes unity as a more important foundation than differences. Simultaneously, Kyai Muhari also believes that *Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah* can encourage citizens to work together to enhance shared prosperity. When society unites in cooperation, the potential to achieve sustainable development and progress becomes more significant.

On the other hand, the presence of *Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah* can strengthen national solidarity, thus helping to maintain the security and stability of the country. In an atmosphere of harmony and unity, the potential for internal or external conflicts is minimized. Therefore, Kyai Muhari firmly emphasizes that *Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah* makes people more inclined to participate in the process of development, both economically, socially, and politically. At the same level, the urgency of *ukhuwah wathaniyah* on a

multicultural basis also lies in its ability to create an inclusive environment for all citizens, regardless of differences in ethnicity, religion, or culture.

In addition to the above constructions of Ukhuwah al-Insaniyah and Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah, another equally important construction is Kyai Muhari's redefinition of the meaning of "kafir," which is often identified as non-Muslim. According to Kyai Muhari, the terminology "kafir" cannot be generalized as "*kafir harbi*" since such interpretation would have extraordinary consequences. "*kafir harbi*" refers to non-Muslim groups that take an opposing stance against Muslim policies, thus making their existence subject to conflict. In the context of Indonesia, the terminology "*kafir harbi*" is irrelevant, especially in the context of "kafir" in Kasembon, Malang. This is where Kyai Said Aqil Siraj once offered a redefinition of "kafir" as non-Muslim.³¹ This redefinition does not intend to erase the wording and terminology of "*kafir harbi*" in the Quran because Indonesia might be colonized again as in the colonial era. Therefore, colonialism must be eradicated from the face of the earth, as mandated by the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.

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

The role of Kyai (Islamic religious leaders) as peace agents in multicultural and interfaith communities is crucial in the face of challenges arising from religious and cultural diversity. Being respected figures and recognized authorities, Kyai has significant potential to influence the attitudes and actions of people, fostering harmony, tolerance, and peace among individuals from different religious backgrounds.³²

On one side, Kyai can actively promote dialogue and collaboration among followers of different faiths.³³ They can organize meetings between religious representatives, religious discussions, and interfaith events to strengthen relations among believers of different faiths. On the other hand,

³¹ Ahmad Faiz Ibnu Sani, "Said Aqil: Di Madinah Nabi Muhammad Tidak Gunakan Istilah Kafir," *Tempo.Co: Bicara Fakta* (Jakarta, 2019).

³² Hasan Baharun and Farah Nuril Badriyah, "Pendidikan Multikultural Dalam Bingkai Islam Nusantara Perspektif KH. Said Aqil Siroj," *Tafaquh: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Kajian Keislaman* 8, no. 1 (2020): 37–51.

³³ Mohammad Saiful Rizal, Sri Suriana, and Nurfitri Hadi, "Ulama Dan Perannya Dalam Masyarakat Multikultural Di Desa Sumber Jaya Kecamatan Sumber Marga Telang Kabupaten Banyuwasin," *Tanjak: Sejarah Dan Peradaban Islam* 2, no. 3 (2022): 322–31.

as religious leaders, Kyai has the opportunity to consistently emphasize the peaceful teachings present in all religions. By quoting teachings that promote love, peace, and justice, Kyai can inspire people to practice these values in their daily lives.

In the context of multicultural and interfaith communities, Kyai plays a significant role in creating peace and harmony among people from diverse religious and cultural backgrounds. Through an inclusive approach based on religious values, Kyai can contribute significantly to building better understanding, strengthening cooperation among believers of different faiths, and creating a peaceful and harmonious environment for the entire society.

In the context of Indonesian identity, the urgency of interfaith peace education is highly relevant to maintaining diversity and the integrity of the nation. Through inclusive education, interfaith cooperation, and awareness of the importance of unity, Indonesia can continue to serve as an example of harmony and peace for other countries worldwide. Interfaith peace education stands as a cornerstone in realizing Indonesia as a just and prosperous nation for all its citizens.

In the context of Indonesian identity, the urgency of interfaith peace education is highly relevant in preserving the diversity and integrity of the nation. Through an inclusive educational approach, cooperation among religious communities, and awareness of the importance of unity, Indonesia can continue to serve as an example of harmony and peace for other countries worldwide. Interfaith peace education stands as a fundamental pillar in realizing Indonesia as a just and prosperous nation for all its citizens.

On a micro level, Kasembon in Malang serves as a miniature representation of Indonesia, embracing diversity and interfaith harmony within its boundaries. Based on the researcher's observations and documentation, Kasembon is a multicultural hub comprising various religious beliefs. According to data from the Kasembon District, Malang Regency, from 2016 to 2019, the population consisted of 126,889 Muslims, 3,277 Protestants, 296 Catholics, 1,797 Hindus, 996 Buddhists, and 75 Confucians.³⁴

This interfaith diversity is effectively managed by religious leaders, especially from the majority Muslim community, most of whom are members of Nahdlatul Ulama, commonly known as Nahdliyin. According to Kyai Muhari, the Muslim community, being the majority religion in Kasembon,

³⁴ Dinas Komunikasi dan Informatika Kabupaten Malang, "KABUPATEN MALANG SATU DATA: EDISI 2020," *Satu Data*, vol. Juni (Malang, 2020).

should act as a protective shield for minority communities such as Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Conversely, the minority communities also respect the majority Muslim population. This harmonious relationship between majority and minority interfaith communities is inseparable from the role of peaceful education promoted through religious pulpits in their respective places of worship.

The messages of compassion and the theology of benevolence continue to be produced and injected into the congregations of different faiths in Kasembon. For Kyai Muhari, the meaning of Islam and faith serves as a crucial foundation for reducing the potential conflicts arising in the name of religion. Being a Muslim implies the responsibility to be an agent of safety and peace for those around. Conversely, someone identifying as faithful must provide a sense of security for others, including minority groups like Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Additionally, the content of the theology of benevolence is configured within a universal prophetic spirit that emphasizes the importance of sustained peace.

Kyai Muhari asserts that every Muslim should be a universal catalyst for love and compassion throughout the universe. Without this, the existence of religion continues to be stamped as a generator of human conflicts. Hans Kung's statement that there can be no world peace without religious peace underscores the influence of religion as a variable in various conflicts worldwide.³⁵ Delving deeper, it becomes evident that through religion, messages of peace can be effectively promoted.

The alternative education offered by Kyai Muhari through religious pulpits as the foundation for interfaith peace in Kasembon represents a groundbreaking initiative. The sarung-clad individuals, predominantly originating from the santri culture, serve as a social asset in unraveling potential conflicts associated with religion. In Kasembon, these sarung-clad individuals are continuously educated through alternative methods taught in mosques, emphasizing the importance of tolerance. Kyai Muhari's alternative education emphasizes the crucial strategy of finding common ground among religions rather than exacerbating religious differences.

Kyai Muhari's efforts align with the thoughts of Frithjof Schuon, who emphasized the significance of ethics and morality in finding common ground among religions.³⁶ Moral values such as love, honesty, humility, and compassion are found in many religions, indicating common ground at the

³⁵ Hans Kung, *Jalan Dialog*, ed. Najiyah Martiam, I (Yogyakarta: Mizan, 2010).

³⁶ Frithjof Schuon, *Mencari Titik Temu Agama-Agama*, I (Jakarta: Pustaka Firdaus, 1987).

ethical and moral levels. This perspective resonates with Huston Smith's work, "The World's Religions," where he posits that the convergence of religions lies in the similarity of the search for meaning in life and shared ethical values.³⁷ Through these diverse perspectives, conflicts arising in the name of religion can be continuously eroded, dispelling concerns about religion becoming a source of disaster, as feared by Kimbal.

The strategic role offered by Kyai Muhari in his alternative education initiatives in the mosque gains theoretical legitimacy from Abu Nimer's concept of Islamic Peace Education. According to Abu Nimer, peaceful education is a necessity that must take precedence amid the emergence of various conflict potentials propagated by radical and extremist groups.³⁸ The rise of these extremist groups is rooted in their perspective that emphasizes the differences between religions, leading to an increasingly widening gap between Islam and other faiths, as noted by Kyai Muhari.

The ideas expressed by Abu Nimer align with the concept of multicultural education proposed by James A. Banks. Banks outlines four stages in the effort to weave a multicultural society: integrating knowledge about cultures, reducing biases against minority groups, and encouraging positivity within one's social environment in the face of injustice and discrimination.³⁹ It is at this juncture that Kyai Muhari attempts to utilize a cultural approach as a meeting point and adhesive for the diversity of faiths, following the thesis of James A. Banks. Kyai Muhari continues to promote this cultural approach through religious pulpits in the mosque, aiming to act as a turbine for interfaith peace in Kasembon. For Kyai Muhari, the cultural traditions of the clean village and the celebration of Indonesia's Independence Day on August 17th serve as unifying elements for interfaith diversity. During the "*bersih desa*" initiative, members of the interfaith community unite and collaborate in cleaning rituals. Simultaneously, Kyai Muhari believes 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

³⁷ Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1992).

³⁸ 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).

³⁹ 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>.

followed by prayers according to their respective beliefs, all contributing to the progress of the Republic of Indonesia.

Conclusion

The social construct of Kyai NU and the sarung-clad community regarding peaceful education in the multicultural faith base is built on two crucial pillars: *ukhuwah al-Insaniyah* (human brotherhood) and *Ukhuwah al-Wathaniyah* (national unity). Both pillars are deemed relevant in addressing various issues in the multicultural Kasembon. *Ukhuwah al-Insaniyah* in the construct of Kyai 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 al-Wathaniyah* in the construct of Kyai NU and the sarung-clad community acts as a unifying force among Kasembon's interfaith community within the framework of nationalism. In addition to these pillars, the social construct of Kyai 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 Kyai NU and the sarung-clad community in promoting peaceful education through religious pulpits is highly significant in the multicultural faith base. Through their mosque pulpits, Kyai NU and the sarung-clad community play a crucial role in educating the community by minimizing the differences and emphasizing the commonalities. The interfaith community in Kasembon is unified by universal human values such as compassion, love, and peace, which are the essence of all religious teachings. Moreover, the role of Kyai NU and the sarung-clad community is configured in their efforts to use culture as a symbol to bond interfaith diversity. Moments such as the clean village initiative and Indonesia's Independence Day celebration serve as opportunities for the entire interfaith community in Kasembon to weave diversity into peace, fostering unity amid differences.

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