

# Concept of Religious Tolerance among Ulama of Traditional Pesantren in Sukabumi, West Java

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**Abstract:** Pesantren nowadays has been accused by the West as a nest of radicalism and terrorism. Not without reason, in Indonesia, many intolerance and violence issues have involved several Muslim communities and alumni of pesantren. Therefore, in this study, the authors intimately will explore the views of traditional pesantren ulama, mainly in Sukabumi, on some issues of religious tolerance. In this study, the authors used a qualitative approach by using a semi-structured interview and analysis document as a data collection. After that, the data will be analyzed qualitatively. This study found that traditional pesantren ulama in Sukabumi understood the concept and discourse of religious tolerance. They have moderate views and attitudes towards non-Muslims. However, some traditional pesantren ulama in Sukabumi refused to tolerate several cases like sending greetings and attendance at Christmas celebration. These ulama also have a different opinion towards Ahmadiyyah minority group. One Kiai has a gruff view and attitude towards Ahmadiyyah groups. Meanwhile, two other ulama refused to commit violence against Ahmadiyyah and other groups.

**Keywords:** radicalism; religious tolerance; traditional pesantren; ulama.

**Abstrak:** Pesantren saat ini telah dituduh oleh Barat sebagai sarang radikalisme dan terorisme. Bukan tanpa alasan, di Indonesia, banyak masalah intoleransi dan kekerasan telah melibatkan beberapa komunitas Muslim dan pesantren. Dalam penelitian ini, penulis akan mengeksplorasi sudut pandang ulama dari pesantren tradisional, terutama yang berkaitan dengan isu-isu toleransi beragama. Dalam penelitian ini, penulis menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menggunakan wawancara *semi-terstruktur* dan dokumen analisis sebagai pengumpul data. Setelah itu, data akan dianalisis secara kualitatif. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa ulama dari pesantren tradisional di Sukabumi memahami konsep dan isu-isu toleransi beragama. Mereka memiliki pandangan dan sikap moderat terhadap non-Muslim meskipun dalam beberapa kasus seperti dalam perayaan Natal, beberapa ulama pesantren menolak memberikan ucapan selamat dan menghadirinya. Selain itu, ulama pesantren tradisional juga berbeda pandangan dalam isu *amar ma'ruf nahyi munkar*, dan sikap terhadap kelompok Ahmadiyyah. Seorang ulama memiliki pandangan dan sikap yang keras dalam melakukan *amar ma'ruf nahyi munkar* dan terhadap wacana toleransi kepada kelompok Ahmadiyyah. Sementara dua ulama lainnya menolak melakukan kekerasan terhadap Ahmadiyyah dan kelompok Islam minoritas lainnya.

**Kata Kunci:** pesantren tradisional; radikalisme; toleransi beragama; ulama.

## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is a multicultural country with a wide variety of cultures, customs, languages as well as religions. In terms of faith, for example, Indonesia has a lot of local believers. It includes several religions that were admitted by the State, such as Islam, Christian, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. Moreover, there are a lot of faiths and beliefs that developed and grew in this country.

They existed long before those divined religions came. Therefore, Indonesia gains a predicate as *The Meeting Place of World Religions* (Muhammad, 2013).

However, the consequence of heterogeneity is the tendency towards friction and conflict. The history has proved that religious conflict had occurred since the beginning of Indonesia as a nation. At that time, there were tensions in determining the form and basis of the State. Nationalist groups, for instance, want a secular state. In contrast, Islamist groups wish Indonesia to be a country based on Islam, and even debate based on the country becomes the most emotional debate. Responding to the tension between Islamist and nationalist groups, then Sukarno, according to Douglas, delivered a speech on June 1, 1945, which was known as the birth date of *Pancasila*. The statement was 'Sukarno's attempt to provide a middle ground between two groups that wanted a different country ideology (Ahmad A. Sopyan, 2003, p. 39).

Besides, many social and religious issues have emerged, particularly since the reform era. According to Robert W. Hefner, movements of radical Islamists had grown to the surface in number, especially since the collapse of the new order regime in 1998. Most of them reject Pancasila pluralism, and even the emergence of anti-Christian and anti-minority increased significantly (Hefner, 2017; Sirry, 2010).

The problem is mainly increasingly complex after the bombing blasting in the WTC and the Pentagon Tower in the United States, the issue around radicalism and terrorism again decorate the news and some media, both print and electronic. After the incident, the JW Hotel Marriot bombing happened. Bombing blasts in Bali and Legian by Amrozi, Imam Samudra and Ali Imron, all of them under the command of Abu Bakar 'Ba'asyir, categorized as head of the *pesantren* (Muhammad, 2013). Other events performed by a specific group by carrying religious symbols. This radical group is increasingly rampant in carrying out its movements by breaking down humanitarian values in the name of religion. Unfortunately, that violent behavior is simplistic with certain religious groups and Islamic educational institutions, one of which is the *Pesantren* (Farida, 2015).

The involvement of *pesantren's* alumni becoming radical and intolerant actors had emerged the assumption from the West that *pesantren* is the nest of terrorism. Although only a small number of *pesantren* was involved in extreme action, media have been accusing *pesantren* becoming fertile ground for radical Islam generally (Hamdi, Carnegie, & Smith, 2015; Raihani, 2012).

In 2016 and 2017, specifically, based on the survey result, Wahid Foundation and Setara Institute reported that West Java was the highest number of religious freedom violations. In 2016, according to Wahid Foundation, there were 28 incidents (Wahid foundation, 2016, p. 28), while in 2017, according to Djelantik (2013), 29 incidents were consisting of intimidation, persecution, hate speech, the accusation of deviation and prohibiting religious activities. Ironically, the religious tolerance in West Java based on an annual report from Wahid Foundation decrease gradually from year to year (Wahid foundation, 2016). Based on their analysis, the high level of violations of religious freedom in West Java has been influenced by the development of intolerant groups and organizations.

Furthermore, there was an involvement of Muslim societies in conducting intolerant and radical acts. Some incidents, for instance, occurred in Sukabumi, started by attacking the Islamic minority sect, such as *Ahmadiyyah* in Parakan Salak and Kampung Panjalu in 2008 and 2010, respectively (Hakim, 2011; Hasan & Mursalin, 2011).

There are many studies on *pesantren* conducted by Muslim scholars. Almost all Muslim scholars reject the western assumption about *Pesantren*. Ali Maksun tried to prove that *Pesantren* is not a hive of terrorism and radicalism. He conducted a comparative study of the education model of tolerance in modern *pesantren* and *salaf*. From his research, he found that both *Salaf* and *Khalaf* (modern) *pesantren*, despite have different curricula, had tolerant attitudes actualized in inclusive, friendly, not rigid, and moderate thought (Maksum, 2015).

Afterward, Nurrohman researched several *pesantren* in West Java. The result of his research is that the majority of *pesantren* leaders in West Java agree to democracy because it is following Islam. However, the lessons in *pesantren* still refuse to accept pluralism, and most of the *Pesantren* leaders support the *Khilafah* brought by radical groups. Therefore, Nurrohman concluded that the *pesantren*

leaders or Kiai in West Java did not fully accept the concept of democracy and pluralism, although they expressed support for tolerance (Nurrohman, 2014).

Raihani also rejected the negative stigma of the West about pesantren. Through a study in several pesantren in Yogyakarta, Raihani stated that despite negative portrayal by the Western media about increasing Islamic radicalism in some pesantren. Many pesantren are transforming into modern Islamic institutions, incorporating the teaching of democratic values and practices, endorsing civil society and community development, and inculcating religious diversity and tolerance (Raihani, 2012).

However, studies from previous authors have not studied more in-depth about tolerance that is understood directly by pesantren scholars (ulama). Therefore, in this study, the research will examine the thinking of traditional (*salaf*) pesantren ulama related to religious tolerance. How Traditional Pesantren ulama understand the religious tolerance of different religious people as well as towards Islam minorities such as Ahmadiyah?

In this study, the authors would focus on the traditional pesantren ulama. The term of traditional *pesantren*, in this study, followed the definition by Dhofier as a classical type (*Salafi*). It means an Islamic religious institution that keeps studying classical texts as the essence of education without including secular subjects (Solahudin, 2008, p. 5).

This research was conducted in three traditional pesantren in Sukabumi. In this study, the authors interviewed three ulama (scholars) of *Salaf* (Traditional) pesantren about the discourse of religious tolerance. The three traditional pesantren ulama represented the whole Kiai/ulama in Sukabumi because all pesantren have many *santri* (students) and influence in Sukabumi. One pesantren is in the Cisaat area of Sukabumi district, while two pesantren are in the Sukabumi city area.

In this study, the authors used the qualitative approach. Qualitative research appropriately seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 15). Besides, the authors also used semi-structured interviews and documents such as articles, books, and the internet as data collections.

Once the data is collected, then the authors presented data analysis with a qualitative approach. Moreover, the authors performed an analysis of documents relating to religious tolerance.

## 2. Meaning of Traditional pesantren

Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) is the oldest Islamic educational institution in Indonesia, and it has been established long before Indonesia's independence. Pesantren is etymologically derived from the word *pe-santri-an* which means the place of the student (*santri*), and functionally can be defined as an institution that has the function of education, *da'wah*, community and – even in the colonial period – also functions as a struggle (Farida, 2015). On this basis, pesantren has established itself as an independent and capable institution to assist the State. Many pesantren are classified into traditionalist Islamic groups. In Indonesia itself, as stated by Khamami Zada (2002) that Islam is divided into several groups, namely: traditionalist Islam, modernist Islam, *abangan* Islam, puritan Islam, Islamic scripturalism, substantive Islam, literal Islam, extreme Islam, militant Islam, and others.

As a traditionalist Islamic group, pesantren have their characteristics that are different from other educational institutions. This difference is not only in the learning system but also in the pattern of religious thought. However, the view of ulama from traditional pesantren is inseparable from the learning system it uses. Ulama of traditional pesantren has a significant role and influence on the Muslim community in Sukabumi and Indonesia in general. Therefore, everything that happens in the life of the Islamic community, both political, religion, and social conflict, is always closely related to the ulama as people who have authority in Islamic religious scholars.

Furthermore, pesantren developed in Indonesia, which was initiated by *Wali Songo*, followed Sunni ideology or *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* that has a moderate and tolerant hallmark. In the field of theology, they followed Ash'ariyyah and al-Maturidiyyah. They are not like *Mu'tazillah*, which prioritizes reasoning rather than *naql* or revelation. Besides, their ideology is not like the *Jabariyyah*, which prioritized revelation and deny reasoning or vice versa like *Qadariyyah* groups prioritized

reasoning (*aql*). Like the ulama of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, the ulama of traditional pesantren combined between reason and revelation.

### 3. Defining Religious Tolerance

In defining religious tolerance, all scholars of traditional Pesantren in Sukabumi always associate it with the concept of *tasāmuh* in the Arabic language. In their views, this term has been taught by the Prophet. Some ulama agreed that we must love each other human beings, regardless of their faith, tribe, and religion. We must love humans as the creation of Allah. The term of *tasāmuh*, in their opinion, is a characteristic of the ideology of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, which is followed by the majority of the pesantren community, especially the pesantren in Sukabumi. (Dede Rizki Fairuzabadi, personal communication, October 15, 2018).

A Kiai of other pesantren also expressed a similar opinion about the concept of religious tolerance. The respondent asserted that Muslims must respect and tolerate non-Muslim and do not intervene in their religious ritual or other religious ceremonies. According to him, every person has the right to practice the teaching of his religion (Kiai Fauzi, Personal Communication, October 28, 2018).

Moreover, other ulama stated that tolerance is an attitude of respect towards different people either in religion, language, and tribe. Nevertheless, tolerance understood by some pesantren ulama was limited in the scope of social life only. The respondent refused to mix tolerance with the concept of worship or creed, such as celebrating Christmas day. Kiai Ab (Personal Communication, September 24, 2018) stated: "I accept the discourses of tolerance because its term is similar to the concept of Islam. Besides, the Prophet Muhammad learned to respect and tolerate other religions."

The views of the pesantren leaders above explain that there is no doubt that the pesantren community has so far been trusted as an Islamic community that has inclusive thinking and has involved in the development of Islamic societies. This Phenomenon confirms what Robin Bush expressed, which is cited by Mun'im Sirry (Sirry, 2010):

Over several years of holding training workshops for boarding leaders, women's activists, and Muslim youth organizations, gradually a network of pesantren, of ulama, and of Muslim intellectuals becoming grounded in arguments in favor of civil society, democratic institutions, and pluralism that were deeply rooted in Islamic teachings and perspectives.

### 4. The Views of Ulama in Traditional Pesantren on Religious Tolerance

#### *Tolerance towards Diversity*

The Qur'an explains that plurality is one of the objective realities of the human community (Madjid, 2005). It is the *Sunna* or the law of God, and that only God knows and can explain, in the last day, why humans are different and have different religions as well.

The Qur'an states: "For each of you (humankind) we have established the law (*sharia*) and the way of Life (*Minhaj*). If God's wills, then he will make you a single believer (monolithic). However, he made you all concerning the things that have been given to you. So all ye shall be of virtue. To Allah your place is all back; Then he will explain to you all about the things you have disagreement" (Q.S 5:48).

The verse above is a fundamental principle related to the problem of pluralism and tolerance. At the very least, in conceptual scope, the Qur'an has been giving essential guidance for people to solve the universal humanitarian problem. It is the reality of human beings' plurality. It demands tolerance to the reality of peace in the world because Islam assesses that the requirement to make harmony is the recognition of the components that are naturally different (Maksum, 2015).

Religious tolerance is one key to maintain peace to live together. Even according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the future of the world in the future depends on how different kinds of civilizations will live together (Tyler, 2008). In the era of globalization, social interaction between various tribes and different religions is unavoidable. Therefore, every religion must review the concept of tolerance and

cooperation with other religious people. Likewise, in plural countries like Indonesia, there will always be interactions among citizens of various ethnicities, races, and religions.

One respondent understood Islamic teachings, especially related to respect for non-Muslims. He asserted that Muslims must respect and tolerate non-Muslim and not harm and disturb the peace of them, especially to non-Muslim Neighbors. According to him, as Muslims, we must practice the commands of the Prophet. He recited a *hadith*: “*man yu’minū billahī wal yaumul ākhiri fal yukrim jaarohu.*” In his view, anyone who claims to have faith in Allah and the last day must glorify his neighbor. In his opinion, the *hadith* has been explained, interpreted at length by the ulama in the classical book. The meaning is that the purpose of the *hadith* is a commandment that requires Muslims to appreciate their neighbors, not only Muslims but also respects the infidels (Kiai Dede, Personal Communication, October 15, 2018).

Furthermore, the ulama of pesantren 2 responded to tolerant attitudes towards other religions by giving a concrete example that he and his *santri* of pesantren have tolerance towards other faiths. Regarding this, he stated as follows:

A real case of our tolerance is when we, as an Islamic figure, have invited pastors and priests to attend the event together in the month of Ramadan. In this place, we do it almost every year. The goal is to strengthen religious tolerance, so tolerance is essential in our diverse country, if we say we are tolerant, we are very understanding toward non-Muslims (Kiai Fauzi, Personal Communication, October 28, 2018).

While the other ulama stated about the tolerance attitude towards other religious people as follows:

Indeed, indeed, tolerance is applied here, yes for religious people, for example, we are very welcome for non-Muslim who want to visit our pesantren. Nevertheless, please do not have any other interests related to creed or faith. If there are frills, we will not accept them. We also value non-Muslims and do not disturb them unless they interfere with our religious life, that is a different matter (Kiai Ab, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018).

### ***Tolerance towards Ahmadiyyah***

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad first founded the Ahmadiyyah group in 1889 in Qadian village, Punjab, India (Regus, 2019). In Indonesia, the Ahmadiyyah group has received various rejections and even acts of violence, especially since the fall of the New Order era in 1998. In Indonesian history, the Ahmadiyyah had initially arrived in Indonesia in 1924 (according to some sources in 1925) (Regus, 2019).

The majority of Muslims in Indonesia reject Ahmadiyyah. This refusal has triggered various violence and intolerance towards the followers of Ahmadiyyah. The persecution of Ahmadiyyah became increasingly intense, notably when the MUI (Majlis Ulama Indonesia/Indonesian Ulama Council) issued a fatwa stated that the Ahmadiyyah sect was a cult and deviated from the teachings of the Islamic religion (Menchik, 2011, p. 4). In various regions in Indonesia, the wave of rejection and violence against Ahmadiyyah is increasingly higher, including in Sukabumi, where the majority of the population is Sunni Muslims (*Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah*).

Muslim rejection and persecution towards Ahmadiyyah certainly do not happen by itself, and this occurs because there must be encouragement from religious leaders or perhaps Islamic organizations. Regarding the Ahmadiyyah issue, *Nahdhatul Ulama* (NU) issued a statement confirming the deviance of Ahmadiyyah from Islam (Mudzakkir, 2011). They called on the government to be firm with both Ahmadiyyah and the perpetrators of violence. Nasaruddin Umar, a member of NU executive board and one of Indonesia’s most renowned proponents of pluralism, led the government’s investigation of the beliefs of the Ahmadiyyah (Farkhan, 2012). Meanwhile, the chair of Muhammadiyah backed the government on slightly different grounds. Din Syamsuddin made a distinction between the Ahmadiyah Qadiani and the Ahmadiyyah Lahore and said the former should return to proper Islam belief or declare themselves to be a new religion. They could not be permitted to continue practicing

their faith. He upheld the government's right to forbid Ahmadiyyah and encouraged the State to dissolve the sect (Bush & Munawar-Rachman, 2014).

Regarding this, the authors try to explore the views of pesantren ulama who become religious leaders in Muslim society and have authority in theological understanding. An ulama from pesantren 2 admitted that he refused to tolerate the Ahmadiyyah. Respondent had even involved in the rejection of the Ahmadiyyah in Sukabumi. However, he declined to commit acts of violence, such as burning mosques or damaging facilities from Ahmadiyyah groups. He stated that the problem of Ahmadiyyah was apparent. They were a skeptical group and not part of Islam based on the agreement of the ulama. To solve the case of Ahmadiyyah, the respondent hoped the government should intervene before the horizontal conflict among Muslims. He further expressed his hope as follows:

The process is because ulama or religious institutions cannot take a direct policy on state problems. After all, indeed, it is a State problem, for example, in issuing the regulation agreed upon by three ministers. In other words, the involvement of the State must enter into cooperation between the *ulama* and *umara* to resolve religious disputes both within Islamic circles and, with other religions, the State must present to help (Kiai Fauzi, Personal Communication, October 28, 2018).

Besides, Kiai from pesantren 3 conveyed a hard view. He strongly rejected the Ahmadiyyah community, and he even stated that tolerance does not apply to Ahmadiyyah. In his view, the Ahmadiyyah must be expelled because it violates the rules of Islam. In his opinion, Ahmadiyyah is a heretical group that must be removed from Indonesia (Kiai Ab, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018). However, the other Kiai expressed a different view. Respondent did not directly reject tolerance against the Ahmadiyyah, but he expressed his opinion more openly. When asked about tolerance towards the Ahmadiyyah, respondent stated:

In his book, as-Syafi'i said: In my period, I have never accused Islamic groups of being heretical, the morality of as-Syafi'i has never charged the Qodiriyah sect, the Khawarij sect, the Mujasimah, the Syi'ah to be misled. As-Syafi'i is not saying anything wrong because those who have the right to judge the sin of a servant are not creatures, but who? God. *Wakafa bidunubi ibadihi khobiron basyiro*, it is enough to judge sin. Because in the Qur'an, which must be misled is not Ahmadiyyah. In the books of As-Syafi'i stated that we must be misled in the understanding and ideology of Ahmadiyyah, which is not following the ideology of the *Ahl al- Sunah wa al-Jama'ah*. We do not blame the person (Kiai Dede, Personal Communication, October 15, 2018).

### *Views of Interacting with an Adherent of other Religions*

Differences in beliefs sometimes become a trigger for discrimination and intolerance. It is a pride for Indonesia to be a multi-religious country. On the one hand, this difference can lead to conflict and disputes. Every religion has its claim truth, which sometimes, for some groups of religious followers, becomes a barrier to interaction because it assumes that people outside of their faith are heretics and infidels. Therefore, pesantren have a strategic position to overcome this problem. Pesantren cannot be separated from the diversity that exists in Indonesia, which always surrounds them (Harun, 2007, p. 56). Fortunately, ulama of pesantren have long been a safeguard of 'Indonesia's diversity. Regarding social interactions with non-Muslims, the pesantren ulama who have been interviewed agreed on their ability to do social dialogue with non-Islam based on the hadith and teachings of the Prophet.

All ulama from three pesantren in Sukabumi stated that interaction with non-Muslims is permissible, only in social life, especially in the plural Indonesian country. A Muslim may interact, for example, buying and selling with non-Muslims. In their views, prophets and ulama allow Muslims to associate with other religious people, provided they are not related to faith. If it threatens the Islamic faith, Muslims should not interact with non-Muslim (Kiai Ab, Personal Communication, September 24, 2018).

One of pesantren ulama stated that social interaction with non-Muslims is permissible, and then the respondent expresses his opinion as follows:

Conducting our social dialogue to do *muasyarah wa al-mu'ammalah*, association in the worldly context with non-Islam is allowable by the ulama. In the interpretation of *Munir*<sup>1</sup> or the original entitled *Marahul Labib*, one large volume, four juz the monumental works of the Syaikh an-Nawawi bin Umar al-Jawi, al-Bantani. In *Al-Fatawa al-kubro al-fiqhiyah*, the four major volumes of the monumental work of Syaikh Ibn Hajar al-Haitami as-Şo'di al-Misri, the city of Egypt, who compiled the book, *Tuhfatul Muhtan ala Syarhil Minhaj*, 12 volumes. The majority of ulama agreed that Muslims might engage with non-Muslim in social relations in the context of *al-Bay'u* (sale and purchase). Several conditions should be maintained; namely, it does not disturb and damage our Islamic faith (Kiai Dede, Personal Communication, October 15, 2018).

Furthermore, other Kiai also did not question the relationship between Islam and non-Islam. According to the respondent, in the social context, Muslims are free interacting and mingling with everyone regardless of religion, ethnicity, and tribe. Associating with non-Muslims in social life was exemplified by the Prophet when the Prophet lived in Medina. At that time, the Prophet carried out social relations and cooperated with all residents of Medina from Jews, Christians, and other religions. Indonesia, at present, like a Medina in the time of the Prophet. Medina at that time was very plural and diverse in religion and ethnicity, but the Prophet was able to embrace everything peacefully. The attitude of the Prophet must be emulated by Muslims today, especially by citizens who are plural and diverse (Kiai Fauzi, Personal Communication, October 28, 2018).

## 5. Indonesian Islam, Traditional Pesantren and Religious Tolerance: An Analytical Discussion

This study found that traditional pesantren ulama in Sukabumi understood the concept and discourse of religious tolerance. They have moderate views and attitudes towards non-Muslims. However, some traditional pesantren ulama in Sukabumi refused to tolerate towards Ahmadiyah minority group. A Kiai even has a gruff view and position towards Ahmadiyah minority groups. One of the Kiai rejected the existence of Ahmadiyah in Sukabumi. The respondent will expel the Ahmadiyah group if the government keeps the Ahmadiyah in Sukabumi. Respondent even supported hardline Islamic organizations such as Islamic Defender Front (FPI) and other Islamic organizations to fight off Ahmadiyah and people insulting Islam. However, two other ulama refused to commit violence against Ahmadiyah and other groups. The result of this study is in line with the research conducted by Nurrohman that several pesantren leaders in West Java, despite refusing violence, the ambivalent attitude support violent acts perpetrated by hardline groups such as Islamic Defender Front (FPI) (Nurrohman, 2014).

Furthermore, some Kiai excepted issues of tolerance towards non-Muslim. Kiai of pesantren also did not forbid interacting with non-Muslim. However, most of them refuse to give a Christmas greeting. At the same time, several Kiai allowed giving Christmas greeting to non-Muslim as long as Muslims do not follow the religious rituals of other religions. Although some pesantren ulama have thoughts that tend to be intolerant, it does not mean to be categorized as pesantren *salafi-haraki*. As stated by Mukhibat, pesantren *salafi-haraki* were pesantren, which is radical and rejects plurality. This pesantren model carried the ideals of purifying Islamic teachings in a more literal, textual, and normative manner (Mukhibat, 2016). Based on this fact, the Western media stigmatizes pesantren or madrasa as a nest of terrorism.

Based on historical facts, traditional pesantren have a tolerant attitude. This fact is inseparable from the history of the existence of traditional pesantren. From the beginning, pesantren appeared in Indonesia initiated by the Wali Songo, who had moderate religiosity because they were able to spread Islam peacefully and even fused with the existing culture.

Traditional pesantren in Indonesia emerged along with the spread of Islam. In history, there were several theories about the spread of Islam in Indonesia. The spread of Islam in Indonesia would significantly influence the thoughts and religious practices of Indonesian Muslims. In this case, for

<sup>1</sup> tafsir al-Munir, One of the Quranic commentaries is very popular among traditional pesantren ulama.

example, traditional pesantren is directly established by the spreaders of Islam. The spread of Islam in Indonesia, as stated by M. Solihin, was quoted by Syamsun Ni'am (2015) wrote:

*First*, the theory that the history of Islam in Indonesia through economics-business (trading). The argument is quite reasonable because Arab nations, Gujarat, and China has long-established trade with Indonesia. *Second*, the theory of marriage approaches, migrants, and Muslim traders from the Middle East established kinship with the locals. This marriage produced a new generation of Muslims in Indonesia. *The third* is the theory through political (power). The approach is political propaganda efforts undertaken by the merchants and Muslim immigrants, who managed to Islamize palaces of kings and princes, who had previously embraced Hinduism or Buddhism. This theory seems to hold after the formation of Islamic kingdoms in the archipelago, which managed to Islamize neighbor kingdoms.

*Fourth* is the theory Sufi approach. This theory is also quite argumentative because the founding fathers were Islamic scholars who had the knowledge and experience of Sufi. They appear as a scholar who practiced Sufis morals, even they often carry and practice specific congregation. The ulama appeared as charismatic Sufi figures, authoritative and wise, and being accommodating to the local culture, in addition to moderate, pluralist and inclusive, and always uphold the values of the noble ideals.

After observing the four theories of the spread of Islam in Indonesia, the fourth theory is more acceptable because the process of Islamization by Sufi ulama is more successful than others. The attitude of Sufi ulama was inclusive, flexible, and more moderate has received a better response from the natives, the majority of whom already have faith. The religious ideology brought by Sufi scholars is a Sunni ideology that has moderate attitudes.

When coming to the archipelago mainly to the island of Java, Sufi ulama highly appreciated the existence of indigenous cultures. They even acculturated some cultures that do not conflict with Islamic teaching. Sufi ulama are very close to the local community, and they show an attitude of compassion, care, and respect for differences. Based on this reason, Islam spread and developed rapidly throughout the archipelago peacefully without violence. History has noted that the method of propagating and preaching of these Sufi ulama has attracted sympathy from local people to accept Islam as their religion.

Regarding this fact, Abbas Mahmud al-Aqqad, as quoted by Syamsun Ni'am (Syamsun Ni'am, 2015), said that "perhaps the Indonesian archipelago is the most appropriate place to prove the fact that Islam is accepted and thrive amid people who adhere to other religions. In every corner of the country, there is evidence of how good an exemplary role in spreading non-violent means."

It proved that the carrier and disseminator of Islam have been aware of the prevailing socio-cultural and socio-psychological Indonesian society, so the approach and methods used were very suitable and preferred people of Indonesia. The most influential Sufi figure in the history of Islamization in Indonesia is *Wali Songo* (Nine Saints or Nine Friends of God) (Johns, 1961; Kasdi, 2017).

Since then, many pesantren have produced large ulama who have open thought. The thinking of pesantren ulama from the beginning continues to this day. Traditional pesantren are mainly those who maintain the knowledge and thought of tolerant Sufi scholars. According to Anthony Johns, as quoted by Ronald Lukens, Islam first came to Indonesia when Islam and Sufism were indivisible to a Muslim, it was to be a mystic or a Sufi. Likewise, the development of traditional pesantren in Indonesia cannot be separated from the role of Sufis, especially *Wali Songo*, who became the founder of the pesantren tradition (Lukens-Bull, 2008).

*Wali Songo* was aware of how it should be grounded in Indonesian Islam. They understood that Islam should be contextualized without losing the essence of the principles and teachings. Islam should be contextualized under the conditions of the region or the world in which Islam spread. It is what became known as the concept of the "indigenization of Islam." The idea means to melt the pattern and character of Islam as normative and religious practices into something contextual (Syamsun Ni'am, 2015).

It is interesting that the thought of pesantren ulama is certainly tolerant, open, moderate, and appreciates differences as long as the followers of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* have maintained and



developed principles such as *at-Tawāsut*, *al-I'tidal*, *at-tawazun*, and *at-tasāmuh*. *Tasāmuh* here is an attitude of tolerance in religion, social and culture.

Based on religious understanding followed by traditional pesantren, the author believes that pesantren rejects all forms of radicalism and violence that have been developing in modern Indonesia. The moderate attitude of the pesantren community at the same time rejects all forms of Western media opinion and Western Policymakers.

It is true what Mukhibat (Mukhibat, 2016) has said. Giving a lousy stigma towards traditional pesantren as a breeding ground of radicalism and terrorism is very contrary to the fundamental character of pesantren. From the early days of its establishment, Pesantren has characteristics: 1) *Tawassut*, means impartiality or moderation, 2) *Tawazun*, maintain balance and harmony, 3) *Tasāmuh*, tolerance, 4) *Tashawwur*, deliberation, 5) *Adl*, be fair in action or react (Mukhibat, 2016).

Moreover, the open and moderate attitude of the pesantren community can be seen from the curriculum, teaching system, and lifestyle. Pesantren education emphasizes morality and a simple lifestyle. Indeed, based on the recognition of several pesantren Kiai, the themes of tolerance, religious freedom is not explicitly taught. However, implicitly, the pesantren has shown it to all *santri*, especially about morality and living only.

According to historical records, the privilege has been achieved by Pesantren because the presence of many Pesantren curriculum supports it includes moderates and multiculturalism ideologies. It is often called the *kitab kuning* (classical references), which until now is still a fundamental element of the curriculum of Pesantren (Syamsun Ni'am, 2015).

Among the concrete example is the book of *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, written by al-Shahrastani (479-485 H). The book review about *firqah-firqah* (factions) both within Islam and outside of Islam are presented objectively without any purpose insult or praise; book *al-Fiqh al-Mazahib al-'Arba'ah* (book four schools), written by al-Jazairi, to review the opinion of comparative fiqh scholars in the four schools. Of the two books, quite clearly the attitude of tolerance, respect for differences, and instilled the spirit of multiculturalism (Hashim, 2006).

Furthermore, when interpreting the same verse, Ibn Kathir (d. 774 H/1373 M) in the *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim* stated, "(Hidayah) what is that, but the affair of Allah." al-Nawawi al-Bantani in *Tafsir al-Munir* said, "You do not have the power to change (belief) one. Faith cannot be present in a person's life unless the will of God (the will) and *qudrah* (power) of God" (Syamsun Ni'am, 2015).

Religious education, thus, is believed to reflect the problem of pluralism, by transmitting values that can foster a tolerant, open, and free attitude in the younger generation. Traditional pesantren, as a central part of Islamic religious education, have proven their loyalty and struggle to help fight all forms of religious radicalism. In the era of globalization, in contemporary Indonesian Islam, pesantren, according to Robert Hefner as quoted by Mun'im Sirry has become part of "civil Islam." They are Muslims who reject the Islamic State's discourse and claim that modern ideas such as freedom, democracy, equality are not western values but modern imperatives that are following Islam (Sirry, 2010).

Especially after the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, the pesantren, which were the opponents of those who wanted to establish an Islamic State, tried to protect the rights of minority groups (Sirry, 2010). Those who suffered discrimination and was subjected to acts of intolerance have gotten protection from several pesantren ulama and *Nahzatul ulama* (NU). Ulama, at that time, KH Afifuddin Muhajir, leader of the Sukorejo pesantren in East Java, stated about the importance of the principle of tolerance for religious people. According to him, differences, including diversity in religion, are a basic description of humanity (*fitrah*). Therefore, ignoring plurality is the same as ignoring God's design of *fitrah* or humankind (Sirry, 2010). It means that Muslims must respect the plurality of religion, cultures, and languages.

## 6. Conclusions

Since the incident of September 11, 2001, in America, pesantren became an object of alleged terrorism and radicalism from the West. This accusation is also not entirely wrong because there are

some acts of intolerance, violence, and suicide bombing carried out by the Islamic group, which related to Pesantren communities.

However, when examined more in-depth, the western accusation of the pesantren relating to the curriculum is not valid. The fact proves that basically, the science of pesantren contains multicultural education and moderation.

The community of pesantren in Sukabumi, in particular, still holds the concept *Tasamuh* towards non-Muslim. The majority of Kiai in Sukabumi support the issues of religious tolerance. However, there is one Kiai do not tolerate towards Ahmadiyah minority group. According to the respondent, Ahmadiyah is not part of Islam.

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