

The Role of *Pesantren* in Maintaining the Unity of the Nation

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the role of pesantren in building ethical harmony in religious communities to prevent radicalism and maintain national unity in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in South Lampung and Tangerang. This study employs a descriptive qualitative method and a field study. The obtained data of this study shows that the efforts taken by pesantren in building ethical harmony in religious communities to prevent radicalism and maintain national unity are as follows. 1) Socializing and fostering the understanding on radicalism, 2) learning basic sciences of religion (ulumuddin), 3) routine discussions and studies, 4) cross-cultural activities, 5) independence day commemoration, 6) inter-community meeting, 7) maintaining relationship with the government, and 8) social service activities. It can be concluded that pesantren or Islamic boarding schools have taken an active role in maintaining the unity of the nation through various activities.

Keywords: *The role of pesantren, religious harmony, Indonesia*

1. INTRODUCTION

Religious harmony in Islam is referred to as *Ukhuwah Islamiyah* (Islamic brotherhood). It is a conception of a relationship between Muslims as a brotherhood. Besides, the term *ukhuwah* also assumes friendly relations between fellow humans in ensuring brotherhood for a harmonious living in society, developed based on social solidarity. *Ukhuwah* in Islam is an obligation that is ordered by religion, in order to realize unity. The word unity, based on a sense of solidarity, is highly significant and has a deeper meaning since it describes the objective form of brotherhood.

Indonesia has faced many problems in all sectors of life, one of which is the so-called religious radicalism [1]. This is marked by the decline of moral values in life, especially with regard to giving respect to other religions. This is certainly our common concern. Insulting each other, mocking each other's beliefs, and disbelieving others, are some examples of the deviant behavior in religion, not only among adherents of the faith or religion but also different faiths or religions. If this is not taken seriously, it will become a constant and critical problem for the Indonesian people [2]. The problems should be immediately addressed and overcome. The problems and crises can lead to a shift of moral characters of the Indonesians, from positive to negative.

Moreover, Indonesia is a pluralistic country, where people of various backgrounds live in the same place. A pluralistic community consists of various ethnics, cultures, religions, and customs. Indonesia is not the only country

that consists of a diverse community. Even in the Prophet's era, diversity already existed. Medina, the country where prophet Muhammad lived consisted of various backgrounds. Maulana Muhammad Ali states that the Medina community was a community consisting of Muslims and Jews as well as others as a nation that lived mixed and mingled with others [3]. The diversity of the people of Medina can also be seen in the diversity of sexes, ethnics, races, and nations. The Medina community consisted of Muhajirins (migrants), Ansars (natives), non-believers, pagan tribes, and Jews [4].

The pluralistic community is prone to diversity-caused problems. One of the most recent, and biggest conflicts in Indonesia caused by diversity was the Balinuraga riot in Lampung. The riot evolved into a religious issue since the groups involved in the conflicts were Muslims and Hindus. As a result, 14 people was reported dead, as well as hundreds of homes and vehicles were damaged, and hundreds of people from Balinuraga who were minorities had to be relocated.

Therefore, we tolerance [5], [6] in order to ensure a sense freedom for members of a society to carry out their beliefs, manage their lives, and determine their destinies as long as it does not violate and does not conflict with the conditions of creating order and guidelines in society [7], [8]. It is expected that our nation today and in the future can produce people who can advance this nation and able to compete globally [9].

Of the educational institutions that are considered capable of anticipating the youth of the nation from being exposed radicalism activities and of guide them to religious values of peace, is *pondok pesantren*, or Islamic boarding schools. It is an Islamic educational institution that does

not only teach religious matters, but it also teaches the collaboration of different religions. The collaboration taught to the students (*santri*) is the culture of cooperation in the social, humanitarian, and state fields. This collaboration can be done by anyone and anywhere because this collaboration is a social demand that must be carried out in the community. *Pesantren* as an Islamic educational institution has a strategic role in fostering morals and to realize the unity and integrity of the nation [10].

Some *pesantren* that play a role in fostering morality in society are, firstly, *pesantren* Al-Mubtadi'in in Jati Agung, South Lampung. The concept of cooperation among religious communities taught is a concept set forth by each religion within the theological frame of religious harmony. It is a form of ethics of each religious figure to express thoughts that can be learned by others with different religions.

Another *pesantren*, is *Pesantren* Al-Ishlah in Sukadama, Natar, Jati Agung, South Lampung. It fosters the habit of praying together and conducting *tarekat* (Sufi ritual) activities. In that activity, many studies are discussed to get closer to Allah and respect others. Still another is *Pesantren* Ushuluddin in South Lampung, *Pesantren* Al-Mujtama 'Al-Islami in South Lampung, and *pesantren* Darus Salam Gontor Sembilan in South Lampung, which all play a role in integrating religious studies with other sciences, which are often referred to as general science. *Pesantren* Daar al-Qolam in Tangerang, Banten, has a vision of being an Islamic educational institution capable of creating faithful students, *muttaqin*, and *rasikh* ilmi (depth of knowledge) [11].

Research has been done to obtain information on the role of *pesantren* in society, one of which is a research by Akromuddin on *Pesantren* strategies in Guiding Santri Life Skills Through Extracurricular Activities in Tulung Agung Stage Boarding School. The results of his research discuss the efforts to foster the life skills of students by using a system of integration of general and religious knowledge, efforts to produce students who are professional in dealing with life, and fostering students in a multicultural society [12].

Another study states that *pesantren* education prepares students to live based on diversity in developing Islamic and social missions, transmits traditional Islam as contained in books written centuries ago, and *pesantren* organizes the teaching of classical Islamic books to be integrated or adapted to the times [13].

Pesantren hold a significant role in developing the youth of the nation. Thus, the researchers intend to gain a deeper understanding of the role of *pesantren* in building ethical harmony in religious communities to prevent radicalism and maintain national unity in *pesantren* in South Lampung and Tangerang Regency.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employs field research, namely the type of research carried out in a place or research on the object of

a particular activity that has a relationship with the problem under study.[13] Hadari Nawawi explained that field research is a research activity carried out in certain communities; institutions, social organizations, and government institutions [14]. Field research is a discrete approach in describing, analyzing, and presenting facts in the field systematically so that it can be easier to understand.

The *pesantren* observed by the researchers are *Pesantren* Al-Mubtadi'in in Jati Agung, South Lampung, *Pesantren* Al-Ishlah in South Lampung, *Pesantren* Ushuluddin in South Lampung, *Pesantren* Al-Mujtama 'Al-Islami in South Lampung, *Pesantren* Darus Salam Gontor Sembilan in South Lampung, Daar al-Qolam, in Tangerang, Banten. The data sources in this study are divided into two types, namely primary data sources, which are the administrators of Islamic boarding schools and the students of Islamic boarding schools. The secondary data sources are the village officials, religious leaders, and community leaders as well as documentation.

The sample was determined using the purposive snowball sampling technique to obtain the source of the data who are considered to master, have authority, and understand the problems in this study. The research data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Data that has been collected through several techniques are then described descriptively so that it can be understood easily.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The activities of *pesantren* in building ethics of religious harmony to prevent radicalism and maintain national unity are pursued through the following points.

3.1. Socializing and Fostering an Understanding on Radicalism

To anticipate the rise of new ideas that can lead to conflict, socialization of prevention of radicalism and terrorism is held for students in Islamic boarding schools. The students are educated to form characters and morals to love the nation, Pancasila, and the 1945 Constitution so that tolerance and mutual respect can be created.

In carrying out the socialization, the students are given religious knowledge so they cannot misinterpret religion as a shield to do something bad. The socialization of the understanding of radicalism in *pesantren* hopefully can be used as a basis or guidance in fortifying the students to avoid unlawful acts or acts of violence. Through the socialization that has been carried out by all elements, it is expected for dialogues or questions and answers to be conducted regularly to equate common thoughts to uphold humanity and togetherness in Indonesia based on Pancasila. Also, it is hoped that a tolerant life which has been practiced by the Indonesian people for a long time will be realized. The scholars and the students or the

young generation to be able to continuously prevent radical ideas that are very dangerous to people's lives. The subjects or discussed in *pesantren* might be misinterpreted and infiltrated by radical ideas. This is in line with the research conducted by Malik. He states that *pesantren* is prone to radicalism through the culture of jihad education developed in certain *pesantren* [15]. Thus, it is important to foster the understanding of radicalism through discussion and questions and answer session.

3.2. Religious Learning on Non-Muslim Leaders.

Islam revealed by Allah through the Prophet Muhammad PBUH is the religion of *Rahmatan Lil Aalamiin* (blessing for all). Islam has a rule or policy in all matters of human life, including choosing a leader. As long as Muslims are still able to lead, it is imperative to choose a Muslim leader.

The leadership of a Muslim has been exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad in the Medina Charter by laying the foundation of the state by the foundation of the Quran and al-Hadith which contain the values of tolerance, human rights, and respect for the beliefs of others. The Prophet, as a leader, must uphold the rights of humanity to all followers of the religion to create a harmonious and peaceful life. The leadership of the Prophet as the trustees of the *Ummah* in Medina has proven his ability in leadership by being recognized by the whole community. Various policies that have been carried out by the Prophet Muhammad have had a positive influence on people's lives.

Allah orders the Muslims through Surah Al-Maidah verse 51 not to choose a Non-Muslim to be a leader for Muslims. The prevailing events have illustrated that if Muslims are led by a non-Muslim, there will be fraud and policies that are not following Islamic teachings and not in accordance with the wishes of Muslims [16].

3.3. Routine Discussions and Studies

The boarding schools organize religious studies with quite high frequencies of routine activities. Each region has a difference regarding the frequency of activities. Even so, in general, the implementation of studies is held 2-3 times a week and some hold it once a week. To understand Islamic sharia, Islamic boarding schools have a training program for all members. Besides general discussions and studies, there is also a special activity where the students are given an understanding of the importance and reward of people who want to learn and practice the Qur'an and Hadith in their daily lives. The research conducted by Husna discovers that the routine discussion is necessary to be done in *pesantren* [17].

The routine studies are also conducted as an effort to instill the values of religious harmony. The figures (*kyai*) of Islamic boarding schools always teach that Islam is the

religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*. The teachings of Islam are about compassion for all, Muslims or non-Muslims. The discussions and studies are also focused on issues of emerging understanding that could divide Islamic unity, such as the existence of movements in the name of Islam, terrorism, radicalism, and intolerance.

The phenomenon of radicalism and terrorism movements is currently a serious threat to the nation and state. This threat also needs to be watched out not only by the older generation but also the younger generation, especially the students. All elements of this nation, especially boarding school families have the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia from irresponsible elements that want to damage the frame of brotherhood and national unity. According to one of the boarding school caretakers, several efforts can be taken to prevent radicalism in Indonesia. First is the inculcation of religious moderation values (*wasathiyah* Islam) among millennial students through social media-friendly campaigns. Second, by strengthening values and nationalism through education and economic equality. Third, organize cross-religious and ethnic dialectic forums (public spaces) for the younger generation. Lastly, master the academic and religious values with the narration of *wasathiyah* and nationality.

3.4. Cross-Cultural Activities

Cross-cultural activities are the realization of the boarding school agenda, namely: Exchange program for students to various boarding schools and other institutions, both domestically and internationally. Student exchanges take many forms, ranging from providing full scholarships to continue studying at the local institutions and abroad, granting scholarships to conduct comparative studies, or exchanging students in the context of seminars or scientific assemblies, or others. Many government institutions or through non-governmental institutions facilitate the students to participate in the exchange. Moreover, traveling abroad is not impossible for most people. This is certainly different from the situation in Indonesia a few years ago. Student exchanges can be categorized by the various missions they carry. Starting from cultural exchange, continuing studies, the performance of various nationalities, and mutual learning or comparative studies.

3.5. Independence Day Commemoration

August 17th for the Indonesians is a moment to commemorate the Independence Day of the Republic of Indonesia. Independence for the Indonesian people is free from the shackles of colonialism. This commemoration ceremony is attended by all residents of the boarding schools. The ceremony begins at 9 a.m. The Boarding School Board Leader usually becomes the leader of the ceremony.

After the ceremony procession has been completed, various competitions are held for the students for 2 days in August 17th-18th. The competitions usually in the form of wall climbing competitions, tug of war, singing competition, *Sholawat* competition, and many others. The series of activities on Independence day is not only for fun, but it is also the expression of gratitude for the independence that has been given by Allah to the Indonesian Nation.

The independence day ceremony contains messages for the students to make them aware that the freedom they have now is the result of a great struggle and sacrifice by the hero of the nation, whom the majority are Muslims. The students are reminded to always take part in all aspects of life and be ready to defend this country and have a great love for the country.

3.6. Inter-Community Meeting

Pesantren often invite the surrounding community to attend a gathering event. The event is attended by the pesantren's board of directors, religious figures, community leaders, traditional leaders, and community members in general. The opening of the gathering is always enlivened by marching bands, recitation of the Qur'an, and dialogues with several scholars and community members.

This event aims to strengthen the friendship and implement the vision and mission of the boarding schools to the community. The discussions at the event are mainly focused on the role of alumni in the community, the role of pesantren in improving the community's economy, environmental issues, as well as an effort to invite people to seek knowledge at the schools.

The role of pesantren alumni is generally very beneficial to the community. From this meeting, the alumni of the boarding school can be welcomed by the community. The alumni are also expected to take more roles in building the nation, at least, they could be role models in their respective fields of work.

3.7. Maintaining Relationship with the Government

The *pesantren* as a community service institution is demanded to convey the people's aspirations to the *umara*. The boarding school caretakers have bridged the interests of the people and state officials so that the presence of *pesantren* could bring benefits to all parties. The government is a beneficial ally in maintaining unity among the community. It is implied in several policies issued by the government. The most well-known policy issued by the government is Tri Religious Harmony which includes; (1) inter-religious harmony, (2) intra-religious harmony, and (3) harmony between religious communities and the government [18].

Maintaining a good relationship could be beneficial for both the government and the *pesantren*. The policies issued by the government could be the bridge for the pesantren to focus and develop its teaching.

3.8. Social Service Activities

Members of pesantren hold routine social services activity by cleaning up the environment. The Social Service activity is directly guided by the *ustadz* (teachers). Such activity is applied to shape the character of children or students as the nation's young generation who care for each other and love environmental cleanliness. Maintaining the cleanliness of the surrounding environment is a shared duty and responsibility in social life. It is expected for the students to maintain the cleanliness of the surrounding environment. Through social devotion to maintain environmental cleanliness, the students can be more concerned about the environment, as well as an effort in creating a healthy community.

Besides cleaning the environment, the boarding schools also conduct social services in the form of distributing basic food needs to the residents in need. The distributed food and necessities are obtained from the boarding schools' managements and donors. This activity is hoped to establish good relations between the residents of the pesantren and the surrounding community which ultimately will bring about harmonization, good cooperation, and mutual benefit.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion, it can be concluded that pesantren have taken an active role in maintaining the unity of the nation. The activities that have been conducted at Islamic boarding school are focused on promoting harmony among diversity. Pesantren have also introduced to their students (*santri*) some activities that can help to foster unity, for example through social service activities and cross-cultural activities.

Patriotism is also the focus of education at pesantren. To love and to maintain the unity of the nation is represented by not rejecting the ceremonious activities related to the national agenda. Pesantren always hold an independence day ceremony followed by various activities to foster and develop the love for the nation.

The efforts taken by pesantren in building ethical harmony in religious communities to prevent radicalism and maintain national unity are 1) socializing and fostering the understanding on radicalism, 2) Religious learning, 3) routine discussions and studies, 4) cross-cultural activities, 5) independence day commemoration, 6) inter-community meeting, 7) maintaining relationship with the government, and 8) social service activities.

It is expected for further researchers to dig deeper into the efforts done by the boarding school in maintaining the unity of the nation and the unity of the *ummah*.

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