Islamic Education for a Resilient Faith Communities: A Study of Religious Literacy Practices in *Pesantren*

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Abstract

This study addresses the lack of discussion on how religious literacy in a non-formal setting is practiced and utilized in a resilient-building framework. Taking the Indonesian traditional Islamic boarding schools known as *pesantren* as a case study, this study examines *pesantren*'s role in addressing socio-religious polarization issues in Indonesia. This study employs a phenomenology method with a sociology of religion approach to better explore socioreligious aspects of the topic. Data is collected through library research, field observations, and structured interviews involving *pesantren*'s leaders, teachers, and students at *pesantren a*l-Muayyad in Windan, Surakarta. The discussion results show that: fist, through dynamic power and network mobilization, *Kyai* plays the role of a strategic religious actor who translates religious pluralism to the public facilitating *pesantren* as a community development center where authentic and meaningful socio-religious interactions among students take place. Second, to build a resilient faith community member, Al- Muayyad Windan designed three integrative stages of religious literacy enhancement, i.e., religious literacy at the personal level, religious literacy at the intrareligious level, and religious literacy at the interreligious level.

Keywords: Religious Literacy, Pesantren, Resilient Faith Communities, Religious Polarization in Indonesia

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Introduction

More than a decade after the 9/11 tragedy, criticism over the exclusive worldview of religious institutions of learning is still often argued among specialists in religious studies.[1] Despite its long-standing history as one of the oldest forms of Islamic education in Southeast Asia, criticism over Islamic schools' exclusivist worldview has long been grounded among specialists in religious studies. In Indonesia, where Islamic radicalism is considered one of the fastest-growing religious trends in the post-New Order period, the debate over radicalization in Islamic schools resurfaced as religious polarization went more profound in the aftermath of the 2014 presidential election.[2] The 2014 presidential election, in which former general Prabowo Subiyanto was contesting against the now-president Joko Widodo, involved an intense horizontal polarization involving sensitive issues such as ethnicity and religion. During this crucial time, many argued that the minimum media literacy of lower-middle-class Indonesian contributed to the polarizing process. A study on the 2014 Indonesian presidential election by Madrah & Mubarok concluded that Indonesian citizens' political expressions channeled through social media in cyberspace created muscular horizontal tensions, especially in lower-middle-class communities.[3]

The 2016 Ahok incident was probably the escalating point of ethnic-religious polarization in Indonesia initiated by the presidential campaign rivalry between Joko Widodo vs. Prabowo Subianto where each gained strong support from pluralist and Islamist groups respectively. Jakarta Governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama or Ahok was sentenced to two years in prison for religious blasphemy following massive demonstrations at the capital in response to Ahok's campaign speech in which he asked his audience not to be 'deceived' by the Quranic prohibition to elect a non-Muslim leader. The verse quoted is Al- Maidah verse 51 which reads: *"O you*

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[1] Philip L. Barnes, "The commission on religious education, worldviews and the future of religious education." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 70, no. 1 (2022): 87-102. Najwan Saada and Haneen Magadlah. "The meanings and possible implications of critical Islamic religious education." *British Journal of Religious Education* 43, no. 2 (2021): 206-217. Muhammad Amin Abdullah, "Islamic studies in higher education in Indonesia: Challenges, impact and prospects for the world community." *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 2 (2017): 391-426.

[2] Masdar Hilmy, "Radikalisme agama dan politik demokrasi di Indonesia pasca-orde baru." *Miqat: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 39, no. 2 (2015): 407-425.

[3] Muna Yastuti Madrah and Mubarok, "Netizen In The 2014 Ri Election Campaign," *Interaction: Journal of Communication* 7, no. 1 (2018): 16–25.

who have believed, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies. They are [in fact] allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you – then indeed, he is [one] of them. Indeed, Allah guides not the wrongdoing people". The heated socio-political situation in Indonesia was back on the rise as once again, Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subiyanto, were contesting in the 2019 Presidential election in his study of normalization of intolerance in the election revealed that "the political leaders' intolerant rhetoric during the presidential election campaigning affected the intolerant tendencies of their constituents".[4] An ample body of research showed that Indonesian democracy and attitude towards religious tolerance have regressed significantly since then.

This study contends that religious illiteracy is responsible for the rise of religious populism in Indonesia. In principle, religious illiteracy signifies the lack of understanding about the ways that religion itself is an integral dimension of social, historical, and political experience coupled with ignorance about the specific tenets of the world's religious traditions.[5] Adds Moore, the inability to include complex thinking in religiously motivated phenomena, hinders one's capacity to function as an engaged, informed, and responsible citizen and the path to a dangerous socio-political climate in any plural society. On the other hand, populism considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté generale* (general will) of the people.[6] In this logic, religious populism utilizes religious narrative as a divisive tool to separate the pious from the non-pious, the honest from the corrupt, and ultimately, the believer from the non-believers,[7] and draws an important line between religion and populism in the sense that "it sacredizes the people and their will promises a believing community 'salvation' if they follow a particular leader" or belong to a particular political movement.[8] Democracy and religious harmony in Indonesia, post Ahok incident, in particular has

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[4] Risa J Toha, Dimitar D Gueorguiev, and Aim Sinpeng, "The Normalization of Intolerance: The 2019 Presidential Election in Indonesia," *Electoral Studies* 74 (2021): 102-391,

[5] Dianne L Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* , 2007.

[6] Cas Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541–63.

[7] Ihsan Yilmaz and Nicholas Moerison, "A Systematic Literature Review of Populism, Religion and Emotions," *Religion* 12, no. 4 (2021): 1–22.

[8] Jose Pedro Zúquete, "Populism and Religion," in *Oxford Handbooks of Populism,* 2021.

since left a wide cleavage. The fact that there has not been a serious intervention from political actors invites criticism globally. In such a situation, it is only natural to turn our attention to less formal, grassroot level religious literacy transformation efforts.

Generally speaking, literacy is often understood as the ability to read and write. Intensive study on literacy in social psychology made scholars agree that literacy is best understood as the ability to include critical consciousness of society's contradictions.[9] Religious literacy itself is a relatively new term. The most comprehensive elaboration of the concept is probably by the founding faculty director of Religion and Public Live at Harvard Divinity School, Diane L. Moore. This study defines religious literacy as a comprehensive approach to understanding the various concepts of religiosity in a plural society and adds to it the ability to critically discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social, political, and cultural life through multiple lenses.[10]

Moore further suggests three approaches to teaching religion to overcome religious illiteracy:[11] first, accompanying the teaching of religion with a basic understanding of the beliefs, symbols, literature, and practices related to the world's religious traditions, much of history, and culture. Second, challenging normative religious assumptions by developing alternative frameworks as a medium to reflect and criticize. Third, provide knowledge of all world religions' basic tenets and structures. In 2017, the Indonesian Consortium for Religious Studies (ICRS) in collaboration with the British Council (BC) and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) initiated the first nationwide religious literacy training. According to ICRS's official website, the main objective of the program is "to increase awareness, understanding, and interaction between religious communities, and to increase the capacity of local stakeholders to build a social justice agenda and advocate for policy reforms to ensure harmonious life and human well-being" (ICRS Website, 2021). This program was mainly a collaboration between university academics and MOFA targeting the Ministry's religious extension officers (*Religious Extension officers*), religion teachers, and

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[9] Léon Bataille, *A Turning Point for Literacy: The Spirit and Declaration of Persepolis: Proceedings of the International Symposium for Literacy, Persepolis, Iran 3 to 8 September 1975* (Pergamon, 1976).

[10] Moore, *Overcoming Religious Illiteracy: A Cultural Studies Approach to the Study of Religion in Secondary Education* .

[11] We find it noteworthy that Moore's suggestion was made in the context of a formal education classroom setting

representatives of various so-called "strategic groups" in six provinces in Indonesia.

In Islam, Islamic literacy is defined broadly as "the ability to read and understand the Qur'an and to know the basic Islamic principles and practices to facilitate practice of the faith is obligatory for Muslims regardless of their background".[12] Unfortunately, the current body of literature on Islamic education rested heavily on religious literacy practices in formal settings e.g., Bagir & Abdullah on the role of religious studies in the development of religious literacy in Indonesian Islamic higher education[13] and Lundeto on Islamic education literacy in Indonesian curriculum[14]. In light of the above rationale, this study aims to fill the lack of discussion on how religious literacy is practiced in a non-formal setting, specifically in *pesantren* as the oldest religious institution of learning in Indonesia. It further examines the religious literacy practices of *pesantren* are put in action to address the social-religious polarization issue in Indonesia.

Research Method

This study employs a phenomenology method with a sociology of religion approach emphasizing the religious literacy outlook. The emphasis is given on the good practice of non-formal educational settings, i.e., *pesantren* as we found that this focus is still largely missing from the important discourse of religious literacy enhancement in Indonesia. The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, sought to focus on the perception of things in their appearance, a focus on the way the world appears to people. In this framework, phenomenologists are primarily concerned with their subjects' authentic and subjective experience.[15]

Given the importance of subjective experience in the meaning-making process of subjects' religious experience, we share the same perspective as British psychologist Darren Langdridge on the importance of paying

[12] Omar Faruk Bajunid, "Islamic Education in Mainland Southeast Asia: The Dilemmas of Muslim Minorities," in *Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed. Patrick Bustamam Ahmad, Kamaruzzaman & Jory (Yayasan Ilmuwan, 2011), 159–178.

[13] Irwan Bagir, Zaenal & Abdullah, *"The Development and Role of Religious Studies: Some Indonesian Reflections," in Islamic Studies and Islamic Education in Contemporary Southeast Asia, ed. Patrick Bustam-Ahmad, Kamaruzzaman & Jory (Kuala Lumpur: Yayasan Ilmuwan, 2011), 57–73.*

[14] Adri Lundeto, "Islamic Religious Education Literacy as a Source of Multiculturalism Education in Indonesia," *Italienisch* 11, no. 2 (2021): 188–196.

[15] Edmund Husserl, *Ideas* (Routledge, 2014).

attention to the specific ways in which subjects can consciously reflect on and experience their life world.[16] In this regard, data in this study is not only collected through libraries research, but also through extensive field observations to capture subjects' lived experience in *pesantren*, and structured interviews involving *pesantren's* leaders, teachers, and students in *pesantren* al- Muayyad, Windan, Surakarta. The interview was structured in two different methods i.e., Focused Group Discussion and in-depth interview. Focused Group Discussion is particularly important to gain different perspectives on the religious literacy practices in *pesantren* Al-Muayyad while in-depth interviews are utilized to dig into philosophical and/or personal reasons underlying said practices at the conceptual level of the literacy program initiators. Given the diverse cultural practices of *pesantren* in Indonesia, this study takes the study case of *pesantren* al-Muayyad, Windan, Surakarta. Adding to this limitation is the time constraint to provide massive reports on a wider sample.

Islamic Schools and Socio-political Polarization in Multifaith Indonesia

From the period of early Islam to the present times, socio-political issues have been areas of *ijtihad* (the Islamic legal term referring to the process of making a legal decision through independent interpretation of legal sources. The opposing concept of *ijtihad* is *taqlid* or imitation[17]. assert that *ijtihad* and the strive to reason any sociopolitical phenomenon will always be present, hand in hand, as a mutually reinforcing relationship (*'alāqah indimajiya*). One of the influences of Islamic sociopolitical tradition, for example, is the teaching of ethics which should inspire all policy issues. The ethical configuration must inspire the most important elements in a democratic political system called political parties.

This study affirms that ethical reasoning in *ijtihad* is a starting point that opens the gate for a humane, flexible, and inclusive understanding of Islamic jurisprudence or *fiqh*. Etymologically, *ethics* is related to several Arabic terms such as *ma'ruf* (approved), *khayr* (goodness), *haqq* (truth and right), *birr* (righteousness), *qist* (equity), *'adl* (equilibrium and justice), and *taqwa* (piety). However, the term that is most closely related to ethics in the Quran is *morality* or morality. In the context of Indonesian religious

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[16] Darren Langdridge, *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, Research and Method* (Pearson Education, 2007).

[17] Sarjuni and Agus Irfan, "The Political Ethics of Khalil Bishri in Al-Durr Al-Rambani," *Proceedings of the 2nd Southeast Asian Academic Forum on Sustainable Development (SEA-AFSID 2018)* 168 (2021): 115–20.

institutions of learning, *pesantren* has proven to be a showcase of *akhlaq* cultivation through integrative pedagogical methodologies of *adab* (manners) in the development of students' humanistic and tolerant virtue in a plural society.

He who has never been a student in *pesantren* can scarcely realize how great the moral power of the scholar over the mass of the population is.[18] A great number of scholarships have discussed how *pesantren* contributes to the development of Indonesian society and Southeast Asia in general. However, not much of the literature explores religious literacy practices and how they contributions to neutralizing the socio-religious polarization issue in Indonesia. *Pesantren* is one of few other names for an Islamic boarding school providing an intensive system of learning where students gain studious training of Islamic knowledge from a religious scholar (*kyai*) who is the founder of *pesantren* or his descendants. In Aceh, *pesantren* is known as *pondok, paddle, frame,* or *meunasah* while the people of Minangkabau, West Sumatrans are more familiar with the term *surau*. To summarize *pesantren* at its essence, an encapsulating academic definition of pesantren would be: a traditional Islamic education institution established independently by local ulama, for students or students at *pesantren* to learn Islamic knowledge and practice what has been learned in everyday practices emphasizing Islamic values as a living guiding principles.[19]

Those who agreed that Islamic schools enhance religious exclusivism recognize that long before the issue of young Muslim radicalism arise, discontent over the Islamic education system in Muslim societies has been an underlying crisis. Islamic education, as well as other faith-based education in general, has been long criticized due to its exclusive enrollment. In a world that continues to grow more borderless, religious school is challenged with problems such as cultural-theological homogeneity and gender segregation. The religious school faces rising demands that need to be met: preparing students for life both as social and moral beings. *Pesantren* has doubtlessly been one of the most productive religious schools in many Muslim societies to date. Many graduates are ulama and Muslim thinkers of national and international standing. However, the latest developments indicated that Islamic university students and graduates are more prone

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[18] Prince Aria Achmad Djajadiningrat, *Memoirs of Prince Aria Achmad Djajadningrat* (Jakarta: Paguyuban Descendants of PA Achmad Djajadiningrat, 1996).

[19] Zamakhsyari Dhofier, "The Islamic Boarding School Tradition" (Australian National University, 1980).

than ever to advocating blunt conservative ideas by accepted radical understandings which invited serious attention to the curricula of Islamic education institutions.[20]

A number of state-sponsored efforts to revitalize the Islamic education curriculum have been done, however, the transition from a status quo has never been easy. Preference for a traditional, scriptural model of Islamic studies remains strong in the structure of formal Islamic education, particularly where teachers rest their learning methodology on memorization and repetitions. Without a doubt, overemphasis on formality and symbolism has drained Islam of vital elements; and Muslim societies need to move away from this obsession with formalism. In a study conducted to determine the relationship between educational background and the growth of radicalism among youth, find that there are three common cognitive features shared among respondents who showed a tendency towards exclusive and radical behavior ie, monism, simplism, and a mechanistic view of the ideal society.[21]

In defining the first two characteristics Gambetta and Hertog's view rest heavily on the study conducted on right-wing extremism.[22] Drawing a parallel line between religious extremism and right-wing extremism, monism in their study can be understood as the tendency to treat cleavage and ambivalence as illegitimate; the repression of difference and dissent, and the closing down of the marketplace of ideas. The second feature, simplism, is defined as the unambiguous ascription of single causes and remedies for multifactored phenomena. This feature is closely related to the tendency to see history as shaped by the ultimate clash between good and evil, and conspiratorially ascribing the forces of evil to one identifiable foe. The last feature, the mechanistic view of an ideal society, aims at preserving integrity through the control of social order. Central in this mechanistic thinking is the risk prevention mechanism manifested in the fear of 'foreign risk' such as modernism and pluralism. Despite Toha's findings that social acceptance of intolerance only worked in the political area and did not extend to everyday life outside of the contestation, this study argues that without serious intervention, divisive attitudes such as polarized opinions

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[20] Dina Afrianty, "Islamic Education and Youth Extremism in Indonesia," *Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism* 7, no. 2 (2012): 134–146.

[21] Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad : The Curious Connection between Violent Extremism and Education* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2016).

[22] SM Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* , Harper Torchbooks (Harper & Row, 1970).

and prejudice will continue to exist as the latent ability to divide our plural society whenever triggering factors such as political contestation occur.

Religious illiteracy, and as a result, the lack of a reflective and critical process in perceiving religion and religiosity as shared lived experiences lies at the heart of the abovementioned risk factors. This study shares beliefs with emerging literature on this topic eg. On the importance of more cognitively flexible, complex, and integrated thinking to address socio-political polarization and extremism. We further maintain that religious literacy practice, in our case is within the scope of *pesantren*, can act as a buffer against the risk factors.

Those who agree that Islamic schooling enhances resilience building to religious exclusivism emphasizes that Islamic education is a determinant in the construction of Muslim legal thinking. Scholars such as Greg Barton, Komaruddin Hidayat , Munawir Sjadzali , and Azyumardi Azra are those who subscribe to the hypothesis provides a summary of this belief saying that although sociological factors such as family background, engagement with the epistemic community, and social acquaintance play an important role in forming one's Islamic legal thinking, education is decisive in the sense that it plays the role as an intellectual bent.[23] Muzakki further highlights Azra's argumentation that Islamic education could contribute positively to "equip them (Muslim intellectuals) with a scientific methodology, including a broader perspective, which is needed for them to engage with these works (classical works of Islam)".[24] If formalistic thinking due to literalism lays the foundation for religious exclusivism, then "deformalization" seems to be a reliable counter-approach. Although there is no set definition of the term deformalization in the religious education realm, understanding deformalization can be done by grasping the common impulse behind i.e., the return to the pre-philosophical, the practical, or lived experience. Deformalization efforts in formal religious schools often take form in the promotion, and continuous pedagogical development, of general education subjects (MKDU), designed to nurture students rational thinking, scientific inquiry, and the foundation of evidence-based reasoning indicative of a

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[23] Akh Muzakki, "Is Education Determinant? The Formation of Liberal and Anti-Liberal Islamic Legal Thinking in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesia Islam* 01, no. 02 (2007): 280–322.

[24] It is important to emphasize here that Azra's point of view on the role of education as an intellectual bent is given in a context where Muslim intellectuals have previously been exposed to *pesantren* experience as a source for studying a classical work of Islam.

disciplined yet innovative min.[25] Deformalization in non-formal religious institutions, we argue, takes a more flexible and non-uniform approach.

Resilient Faith Community

Observing rising global unrest as well as the communal perplexity within Muslim communities in general, this study raises a strong proposition that understanding faith from a resilience framework is essential for sustainable development in a world risk society. Within this framework, Islamic education can grow towards resilience against exclusivism and at the same time aims to promote sustainable pedagogy and an inclusive academic environment.

Considering the abundant resource suggesting the significance of faith in resilience building (Ögtem -Young) and resilient reliance strategies for coping in the face of adversity (Howard-Snyder & McKaughan), we share the same belief that faith discussion in resilience building is crucial both at the personal and communal level. Literature on the etymology of faith community suggests that the term is best understood as a grouping of actors or individuals who are religious adherents who are bound through mutual loyalty to an institution, belief, history, or identity.[26] Faith communities often become the center of local identity and relationship processes that shape the social order of communities disrupted by disasters or conflicts. For the general purpose of this study, faith communities will be used interchangeably with religious communities and is simply defined as people of faith. This definition is exclusively used in reference to religious communities with exposure to *pesantren* in their everyday experience.

The concept of faith in community resilience discourse has been used in several disciplines such as psychology, ecology, public health, development, politics, and disaster management. In a simple sense, resilience can be understood as "the ability to cope with external stresses and disturbances that arise as a result of social, political, economic, and environmental change. So, what makes a resilient community? In understanding resilience, most literature suggests the analogy of the ability to bounce back or return to an equilibrium state after a great shock. Resilient

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[25]Nailil Muna, "The Liberal Arts in Islamic Higher Education: Problems and Prospects in Indonesia," *People: International Journal of Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2015): 724–36.

[26] Fiona Samuels, Rena Geibel, and Fiona Perry, *Collaboration between Faith-Based Communities and Humanitarian Actors When Responding to HIV in Emergencies* (Overseas Development Institute London, 2010).

thinking is attractive to the discourse of peacebuilding for its ability to discover the systematic self-help mechanism of local communities and institutions in facing unfavorable situations.

Contextualizing resilient thinking in a faith community setting is inevitable in a complex society especially those confronted by religiously motivated crises. Faith communities hold significant roles in developing social resilience during a crisis and social/political unrest. Faith communities are often more effective than the government in responding to and making quick decisions on social problems at the grassroots level because they are not occupied with complicated bureaucracy and are in direct contact with grassroots society. In addition to this, faith communities offer a greater capacity in safeguarding social resilience because of their ability to maintain a sense of identity, provide support for the family, connect members to a higher authority, and provide mental, emotional, and spiritual needs for the members.

This study investigates the role of *pesantren* as indigenous institutions of learning in building community resilience in Surakarta. We find *pesantren* al Windan to be a perfect match for this case study for two reasons. First, students attending *pesantren* al-Muayyad in Windan are mostly university students with adequate media literacy skills, hence making them prone to adopt intolerant behavior propagated by the media. this age group is also highly action-oriented and is often characterized by higher risk-taking behaviors. Second, *pesantren* al-Muayyad *in* Windan is located at a socio-political site where ethnoreligious conflicts among faith communities are deeply rooted.

Religious Literacy Practices in Indonesian *Islamic Boarding Schools*: A Study of Al-Muayyad Windan Surakarta

The city of Surakarta is important for the background of this research because of its long history of socio-religious violence and conflicts. In 1913, Surakarta was recorded as the first city in Indonesia that started the black sheet of the anti-Chinese indigenous conflict in the archipelago, followed by seven other large-scale riots, including the October 1965 riots, the November 1966 food crisis riots, the 1972 Gegeran riots, the 1980 Mesen riots, the Gray May 1999, which was followed by Gray November 1999, and the 2001 Massacre. Most of the sociopolitical conflicts that occurred in Surakarta were motivated by a complex combination of ideological issues, religious differences, and ethnocultural conflicts.

A study by Aijuddin & Hamidah (2017) specifically postulated some factors affecting the dynamics of conflict in Surakarta i.e., the decline of spirituality in society, social segregation based on ethnicity, the struggle for economic resources, and the disappearance of Javanese cultural values.[27] Soon after, Surakarta gained the title as the "breeding ground" for Muslim fundamentalists. some of the major *pesantrens* in Surakarta is even labeled as militant associated with terrorist activities carried out by its alumni. Sydney Jones, the Director of the International Crisis Group (ICG), labeled them as the Ngruki network in reference to militant Indonesian Muslim networks, suspected of links to al-Qaeda, using *Pesantren* Ngruki as its hub.[28] The stigmatization is further intensified by the media through the power of language which often leads public opinion in viewing *pesantren*.[29]

Bachtiar Effendy offers a comprehensive analysis of why Islamist movements are thriving in a conflict-prone society such as Surakarta. First, the political ideology that Islam is universal and therefore can guarantee universal solutions to all humankind. Second, the socio-political sentiment that the positive law in Indonesia is unjust and brings more harm than good to the Muslim community, hence the need to return to the first cause. Third, the urge to legitimize Islamic law as a national law in Indonesia as the world's largest populated Muslim country. Altogether, these situations give exclusivist religious organizations such as Laskar Jundullah, the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI), Hezbollah, and the Mosque Activist Communication Forum (FKAM), a chance to thrive in the city of Surakarta. The growth of these organizations, Hasan argues, corresponds to the birth of Islamist media who carry the characteristics of their parent organizations ie, exclusive, and conservative with a strong emphasis on monism, simplism, and a mechanistic view of the ideal society. In an environment where exclusivism and conservatism narrate a sociopolitical phenomenon, social fabrics are often rigid and inflexible even among Muslim communities putting *ukhuwwah* or social harmony at the stake.

Our discussion in the previous section reveals that there is a

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[27] Ida Hamidah and Anas Aijuddin, "Pesantren Dan Mediasi Konflik Keagamaan (Studi Kasus Pondok Pesantren Al Muayyad Windan Surakarta)," *Jurnal Penelitian* 11, no. 1 (2017): 91.

[28] Mahbub Hefdzil Akbar et al., "The Reaction of Pesantren Al Mukmin to Radicalism and Terrorism," in *2nd International Conference on Sociolgy Education*, vol. 1, 2017, 565–569.

[29] Mubarok & Muna Yastuti Madrah, *Media Stigma and Terrorism* (Banda Aceh: Bandar Publishing, 2012).

substantial uneasiness of Islamic schools, particularly the traditional ones, to serve as institutionalized religious authority despite the urgency. At the cognitive level, Islamic schools are struggling with the academic plague of literalism, mechanistic view, and simplism, hence the stigma of fundamentalist breeding ground. At the social level, Islamic schools are facing criticism for propagating religious exclusivism due to Muslim-only enrollment and gender segregation policies argued that interfaith youth groups need to provide specific subjects on the use of multiculturalism-based ideas and advocacy in practice and policies, and in helping to solve public problems, especially with regard to actual issues involving pluralism, inclusiveness, tolerance, tolerance, religious freedom, and discrimination[30]. Despite the overwhelming criticism, an observable number of Islamic educational institutions show resilience in the moment of adversity. Our focus henceforth is an exemplary one *pesantren* al-Muayyad in Windan, as one of the *pesantrens* that recognizes the importance of religious literacy as part of students ' life skills.

Led by the charismatic leader *kyai* Dian Nafi, Al Muayyad Windan is located in Windan, Makamhaji, Surakarta. This *pesantren* was established on 15 October 1996, serving as an extension branch of al-Muayyad Mangkuyudan which is located in Mangkuyudan, Purwosari, Laweyan, Surakarta. Numerous studies were dedicated in recognition of al-Muayyad's commitment to peace and civil society. Florian Pohl, for example, affirms that in terms of conflict resolution curriculum and interfaith understanding, Al-Muayyad Windan is quite exceptional, and it is widely considered by others as such.[31] Our study findings reaffirm this conclusive thought. At al-Muayyad Windan, teaching and learning process is oriented at community's development and demands. Pohl describes al-Muayyad Windan as self-consciously describes itself as an institution for community development,[32] and thus should always be responsible and responsive to the needs of the society.

During our filedwork, we learned that at al-Muayyad Windan, *kyai* plays the role of a strategic religious actor who translates religious pluralism to the public and their followers. In the *pesantren* tradition, the heart of a

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[30] Jamaludin Hadi Kusuma and Sulistiyono Susilo, "Intercultural and Religious Sensitivity Among Young Indonesian Interfaith Groups," *Religions* 11, no. 1 (2020): 22.

[31] Florian Pohl, Islamic Education and the Public Sphere (New York, NY: Waxmann, 2009), 144-145.

[32] Florian Pohl,…118.

pesantren is *kyai.* Historically speaking, *kyai* came to b one of the most important culture brokers in pre-war Java calls ulama a cultural intermediate among many elements in society.[33] *Kyai*, to his former students and families, was a spiritual advisor, magical cure, and social superior. In a famous anthropological study on *pesantren* and Sufism in the post-New Order Indonesia, Bruinessen (2015) even emphasized that respect and loyalty to *kyai are* far more important than the process of learning itself.

Throughout the data gathering process in Surakarta, we learned that *kyai* Dian Nafi 'is an exceptional leader, to say the least. With hundreds of *students* staying at the *pesantren,* ready to take his orders at any time, *kyai* Dian Nafi 'served us tea himself leaving us started by this unusual treatment. "Why that look? Have a drink while it is hot". As we were trying to form our response, *k*yai Dian seemed to understand our shock. "Never seen a *kyai* serving tea? We (*kyai)* are servants to the people, including people who seek knowledge (researchers) like you".[34] Our first impression was that al-Muayyad Windan is the extension of this philosophy. Moments later, after days of interactions and fieldwork, we were convinced that community service is one of the strongest reasons why Windan is dominated by university students. *kyai* Dian argues that the positioning *of pesantren* as a community service and development center could be carried out more effectively with a mature *santri* population as they are equipped with an awareness of their role as active citizens.[35]

In addressing the issue of religious illiteracy, *kyai* Dian argues that at Windan, religious texts are taught contextually and focusing on God's mercy instead of His wrath for at the very core of Islam is God's kindness and blessings for all humankind and living beings. As the world grows borderless and diversity is inevitable, *kyai* Dian believes that religious literacy in a context where a Muslim is a member of a multifaith society should go through three consecutive phases where the earlier phase is a prerequisite to the latter. The first phase is knowing his own religion (personal level). At this stage, a Muslim learns to know his own religious values and norms. The second stage of religiosity requires him to position himself, negotiate and defend his personal religious values and norms within the diversity of Islam itself (intrareligious level). In the last stage, a Muslim learns to navigate his personal religious values in the sea of the

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[33] Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, Anthropology : comparative religions (University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[34] *Kyai* Dian Nafi ', interview by authors, *Pesantren* al-Muayyad Windan, 2018)

[35] *Kyai* Dian Nafi', interview by authors, *Pesantren* Al- Muayyad Windan, 2018.

world's religious diversity (interreligious level).

Al-Muayyad Windan's approach to religious literacy development in Surakarta has been observably participatory and inclusive. In addition to studying the classic *yellow book* from the *kyai*, Windan students are participating in seminars, training, and discussions covering a wide range of themes such as peace-building development, environmentalism, to interfaith conflict. By using rich networking with NGOs and government organizations of various backgrounds such as RAHIMA (Center for Education & Information on Islam and Women's Rights Issues) and INTERFIDEI (Institute of Interreligious Dialogue), Windan stands firm in challenging normative assumptions through practical development of alternatives framework as *santri* 's medium to reflect and criticize. In this way, student religious knowledge aren't standing in isolation to the worldly practice where conflicts and diversity are inevitable. At the intra-religious level, dialogue and disagreements are the training grounds for *students* to avoid the trap of a binary mindset that sees religious issues as black and white, completely separated from sociocultural context, as framed by exclusive groups and media[36]. This philosophy finds its expression on *santri*'s day to day interactions. Children and Windan locals can interact with al-Muayyad's at any time of the day, either for community collaborative works or as simple as exchanging food and words as a friendly gesture.

At the interreligious level, *kyai* Dian and other interfaith leaders are committed to bridging differences in Surakarta and beyond since the aftermath of the May 1998 riots. Al-Muayyad Windan's role in producing peacekeepers can be seen from its active involvement in numerous interreligious-interethnic programs such as conflict resolution & reconciliation, conflict mediation, negotiation, and peace education. With al-Muayyad Windan serving the role as facilitator, the Kyai of al-Muayyad has initiated some peace-building programs such as the Regional Information Study Center (PATIRO) of Surakarta, Center for Women's Studies, Potlot's Community, Al-Muayyad Windan Emergency Response (AMWINER), and Windan Interfaith Community (WIC). Al-Muayyad Windan has consistently shown the ability to strike a balance between preserving their religious identity and building resilient faith community involving

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[36] Agus Irfan et al., "Transmitting the Turāth: A Portrait of Islamic Tradition in the North Coast of Java in Countering Radicalism," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 28, no. 1 (2020): 107–120.

ideologically different groups. All in all, with regard to Moore's proposed concept of religious literacy, we come to the conclusion that *kyai* Dian's dynamic power and network mobilization doesn't only lay the foundation for religious literacy to happen internally within the Muslim community, but also materialized externally with other faith communities.

Conclusion

Our study on religious literacy practices in *pesantren* shows that through dynamic power and network mobilization, *kyai* plays the role of a strategic religious actor who translates religious pluralism to the public facilitating *pesantren* as community development centers where authentic and meaningful socio-religious interactions among students take place. With regards to Moore's proposed concept of religious literacy, we come to the conclusion that *kyai* 's dynamic power and network mobilization doesn't only lay the foundation for religious literacy to happen internally within the Muslim community, but also materialized externally with other faith communities. In a context where a Muslim is a member of a multifaith society, al-Muayyad Windan proposes that religious literacy should go through three consecutive phases where the earlier phase is a prerequisite to the latter.

The first phase is knowing his own religion (personal level). At this stage, a Muslim learns to know his own religious values and norms. The second stage of religiosity requires him to position himself, negotiate and defend his personal religious values and norms within the diversity of Islam itself (intrareligious level). At the last stage, a Muslim learns to navigate his personal religious values in the sea of the world's religious diversity (interreligious level). Further discussion on religious literacy promotion in the context of non-formal religious education could include mitigative variables to address the hindrance of such a process i.e., and the energization of Islamic universalism in non-formal religious assemblies and institutions of learning.

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