Hermeneutics of Peace: Local Religious Elites and the Promotion of Interfaith Harmony in Central Java

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Abstract

Local religious elites play a strategic role in constructing interfaith peace in their respective regions. Local religious elites such as kiai, ustad and other figures are religious and social references that can build grassroots community awareness related to interfaith peace, but their existence has not yet received serious attention from scholars for study and introduction. This article aims to reveal two important aspects: the involvement of local religious elites and their understanding of peace. This paper employs a qualitative method with field studies, focusing on Pati, Kudus, and Blora as the locus of study, and utilising hermeneutics as an analytical framework to explore the role and meaning of peace within local religious elites. The findings of this article indicate that interfaith harmony is largely constructed within formal religious spaces and informal social settings through various arenas. The Quran and hadith serve as foundational texts believed to contain messages of eternal peace. This study contributes to understanding patterns in contemporary Islamic studies related to interfaith issues.

Keywords: Religious Elite, Hermeneutics, Meaning of Peace, Harmony

Abstract

Elit agama lokal mempunyai peran strategis dalam mengkonstruk perdamaian lintas iman di wilayah masing-masing. Elit agama lokal seperti kiai, ustad dan tokoh lainnya menjadi rujukan keagamaan dan juga sosial yang dapat membangun kesadaran masyarakat akar rumput terkait perdamian lintas iman, tetapi eksistensinya masih belum mendapatkan perhatian serius dari para sarjana untuk dikaji dan kenalkan. Artikel bertujuan untuk mengungkap dua hal penting yaitu keterlibatan elit lokal agama dan makna perdamaia yang diyakini. tulisan ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan studi lapangan yang meliputi Pati, Kudus dan Bloar sebagai lokus kajian menggunakan hermeneutika sebagai analisis untuk menemukan peran dan makna perdamaian di tubuh elit agama lokal. Temuan dari arikel ini bahwa konstruksi kerukunan lintas iman banyak dibangun dalam ruang formal keagamaan dan informal kemasyarakatan melalui banyak arena. Al Quran dan hadis menjadi modal dalam mengkonstruk yang diyakini mempunyai pesan perdamaian abadi. Tulisan ini berkontribusi dalam melihat pola atas kajian Islam kontemporer yang berkaitan dengan isu lintas iman

Kata Kunci: Elit Agama, Hermenutika, Makna Perdamaian, Kerukunan

INTRODUCTION

The religious characteristics of grassroots communities are largely learned from local religious elites. Local elites can be defined as individuals or groups of individuals who have influence that often determines the life and changes of a community.[1] Muhammad Kosim defines elites as people who have influence and enjoy a higher status and position in society.[2] In a religious context, local religious elites can be defined as individuals, institutions, and organisations with the authority to influence and regulate the masses in practicing religious teachings.

In rural areas, local religious elites hold strategic positions in educating and teaching religion to the surrounding community, such as *kiai, ustadz,* or people who have persuasive or coercive authority.[3] The religious character taught by local religious elites is inclusive and open. This religious character is due to the meaning of religion that has developed in the community, which is simple and closely related to tradition and social practices, such as *slametan*, *Maulid Nabi*, and other religious practices.[4] Religion is not always understood as a rigid and detailed doctrine for the community. Still, Islam, as a religion, is more meaningful in terms of peace and mercy, which are often taught by local religious elites in daily life.[5]

Several hypotheses about Islam as a religion of peace have emerged among religious communities in villages, stating that "Islamic teachings on peace are fundamental, as we already know, Islam is a religion that brings mercy to the universe (*rahmatan lil-'alamin*). Islam teaches us to live in peace, respect one another, and avoid violence. This is contained in the Qur'an and Hadith (Interview with M. IF *ustadz* in *pesantren* 20 October 2024).

In recent years, the face of religion has begun to shift in many places. Religion is known for the violence and discrimination that has emerged in Indonesian society. The results of the Tolerant City Index conducted by Setara Institute show that Indonesia, as a pluralistic country, has not yet demonstrated a comprehensive, inclusive attitude, as several cities that score low intolerance.[6] Similarly, a report by Fathiyah Wardah, citing data from the Setara Institute,

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[1] Suharni, *Pesta Demokrasi Di Pedesaan: Studi Kasus Pemilihan Kepala Desa di Jawa Tengah dan DIY* (Yogyakarta: Aditya Media Publishing, 1992), 131.

[2] Mohammad Kosim, "Kyai dan Blater (Elite Lokal Dalam Masyarakat Madura)," *Karsa,* XII, no. 2 (2007), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19105/karsa.v12i2.139.

[3] Khaled M. Abou Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women* (London: Oneworld Publication, 2001).

[4] Andrew Beatty, *Varian Agama di Jawa Suatu Pendekatan Antropologi (Varieties of Javanese Religion)*, ed. Tran Achmad Fedyani Saefuddin (Jakarta: Raja Grafindo Persada, 2001).

[5] Husein Muhammad, *Islam Agama Rahmah Perempuan Pembelaan Kiai Pesantren* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004).

[6] Ikhsan Yosarie et al., "Indeks Kota Tolernan Tahun 2023" (Jakarta, 2024).

highlights an 83% increase in intolerance among students and the potential for the replacement of Pancasila as the nation's foundational values.[7]

Rejection of Pancasila values also impacts issues related to rejecting religious traditions and culture, such as the case in Madura involving Wahhabi-Salafi group intolerance that has occurred since 2010–2023. This group rejects religious practices prevalent in Madura, such as *Tahlilan, Maulidan, Yasinan, Ziarah Kubur,* and *Sholawatan.*[8] A similar incident also occurred in Bantul, Yogyakarta, regarding the *Sedekah Laut* tradition, which was rejected and destroyed by some religious communities.[9]

Beyond these events, there is growing propaganda of takfiri and that Indonesia is an infidel country, which has led to mutual suspicion, hatred, and division among religious communities.[10] In this context, the position and role of local religious elites have become urgent in countering and providing a counter-narrative to the contemporary religious model that tends to be textualist and rigid.

Many articles examining local elites have been written by scholars using a variety of approaches. Three major themes can be identified: religious elites as agents of social change, religious elites as drivers of political movements in gaining votes, and religious elites as sources of religious knowledge. For example, there is a paper that explains religious elites as agents of social change within the religious organisation Jammiyyah Waqiah Permata Hati through its da'wah, socio-cultural and economic movements, so that the role of religious elites is to preserve local wisdom as a vital foundation for maintaining and preserving harmony.[11] Additionally, studies on religious elites in the realm of practical politics focus on women as actors in mobilising the

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[7] Fathiyah Wardah, "Setara Institute: Jumlah Pelajar yang Intoleran Aktif Meningkat, 83% Nilai Pancasila Bisa Diganti," VOA Indonesia, 2023, https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/setara-institute-jumlah-pelajar-yang-intoleran-aktif-meningkat-56-setuju-syariat-islam/7097499.html.

[8] Ali Topan, "Potret Kehidupan Umat Beragama (Studi Kasus Penolakan Wahabi-Salafi di Pamekasan Madura 2010—2023)," *Entita: Jurnal Pendidikan Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 6, no. 1 (2024).

[9] Dumaria Simanjuntak and Retno Saraswati Sukirno, "Hukum yang 'Berperasaan' dalam Penyelesaian Konflik Antara Budaya dan Agama: Penolakan Administratif terhadap Tradisi Sedekah Laut," *Administrative Law & Governance*, no. 2 (2029): 3.

[10] Widya Setiabudi, Caroline Paskarina, and Hery Wibowo, "Intoleransi di Tengah Toleransi Kehidupan Beragama Generasi Muda Indonesia," *Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Sosiologi* 7, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24198/jsg.v7i1.29368.

[11] Ahmad Shobiri Muslim and Saiful Mujab, "Kearifan Lokal dan Peran Elit Agama dalam Merawat Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama di Akar Rumput," *Empirisma: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Kebudayaan Islam* 28, no. 1 (2019), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30762/empirisma.v28i1.135; Ahmad Zamakhsyari et al., "Elit Agama dan Gerakan Sosial Pada Masyarakat Cirebon: Studi Kasus Jamiyah Waqiah Permata Hati," *Empower: Jurnal Pengembangan Masyarakat Islam* 5, no. 2 (2020), https://doi.org/10.24235/empower.v5i2.7244.

community for electoral votes.[12] This role is played by religious elites alongside local political elites in many general elections to secure voter support.[13] Studies indicate that religious elites can play their role as agents of social change and authoritative sources of religious knowledge. Religious elites play this role by paying attention to the competencies inherent in their personalities.[14]

Islam, which came down with a mission of peace, seems to have lost and no longer reflects the value of *rahmatan lil alamin*. The phenomena of conflict, mutual suspicion, and religious persecution dominate the social-religious sphere, such as the expulsion of Shia Muslims in Sampang, East Java[15] the persecution of Ahmadis in Kuningan and Purworejo, central Java[16] and state discrimination against ancestral religions in the *Sedulur Sikep* community in Kudus and Pati, Central Java.[17] These religious phenomena are a small part of the contemporary religious landscape in rural areas, thereby negating the role of local elites in fostering peace among and within religious communities. Therefore, a study of peace from the perspective of local elites is necessary, using a hermeneutical approach to uncover local religious elites' role and interpretation regarding peace issues.[18]

Local religious elites serve as the centre of religious exegesis, acting as the primary reference for communities in addressing modern religious challenges. The religious character that

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[12] Nurul Azizah, "Hegemoni Elit Agama Pada Perempuan Pesantren: Ejawantah Jabatan Kepala Daerah Jawa Timur," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender dan Islam* 21, no. 2 (2022), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2022.2102.145-155.

[13] Riyan Susanto, "Peran Tokoh Agama dan Elit Politik Lokal Desa dalam Pemilihan Kepala Desa Tanjung Raja Selatan Kecamatan Tanjung Raja Kabupaten Ogan Ili," *Ampera: A Research Journal on Politics and Islamic Civilization* 3, no. 1 (2020), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.19109/ampera.v1i3.6981.

[14] Khaerul Umam, "Legitimasi Kekuasaan Elit Agama di Kediri," *Religi: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 13, no. 2 (2017), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/rejusta.2017.1302-04.

[15] Rachmah Ida and Laurentius Dyson, "Sunni-Syia Conflict and Its Effects to Intra-Religious Community in Sampang, Madura," *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik* 28, no. 1 (2015); Masdar Hilmy, "The Political Economy of Sunni-Shi'ah Conflict in Sampang Madura," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 53, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2015.531.27-51.

[16] Nina Mariani, "Ahmadiyah, Conflicts, and Violence in Contemporary Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 1 (2013).

[17] Rohit Mahatir Manese, "Limitation the Religion and Belief Freedom in Indonesia and Their Implications," *Societas Dei: Jurnal Agama Dan Masyarakat* 8, no. 1 (2021): 98.

[18] Richad E. Palmer, *Hermeneutika Teori Baru Mengenai Interpretasi*, ed. terj. Mansur Hery dan Damanhuri (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2005). In its early development, the word hermeneutics came from Greek mythology which refers to *hermeios*, a wise priest of Delphic. The word *hermeios* and the more common verb *hermēneuein* and the noun *hermēneia* are associated with the God Hermes, a messenger (god) who acts as an intermediary for the gods on Mount Olympus and is tasked with bringing news to humanity as well as the fate that will be experienced. Hermes must convey the "language of heaven" into the "language of earth" to provide understanding to humans. As a medium, Hermes first translates, understands, and comprehends the message to be conveyed. These various words have one meaning, namely the process of understanding that is transformed so that it can be understood by the audience. The words *hermēneuein* and *hermēneia* contain three basic forms of meaning. First, expressing words. Second, explaining a situation. Third, translating a foreign language into a native language

has developed in Indonesia is centred on religious figures and elites, who are both the source and tool for producing knowledge for the local community. Therefore, the title of an agent of change is more appropriately given to local religious elites in shaping a tolerant and inclusive society through a simple epistemology of knowledgclosely linked to the community's need. According to Van Bruinessen, local religious elites such as *kiai* are called *gelehrten*, meaning experts in religion and sources of knowledge.[19]

METHODS

This paper is a field research study usingng qualitative research methods,including in-depth interviews with several informants, and open-ended questions. Participants include *Kiai Mushalla* and *Ustad*, 45-year-olds involved in peace and interfaith relations. This study uses a grounded theory approach by utilizing the experiences of religious elites with the belief that interfaith peace is natural through religious teachings. The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning and understanding of local religious elites regarding the issue of interfaith peace. An essential aspect of this study is the call for a peace campaign to construct a more comprehensive understanding of peace.

DISCUSSION

Reviewing Hans-Gadamer's Philosophical-Productive Hermeneutics as Religious Interpretation

Studies on Gadamer's thought have been widely discussed by thinkers, particularly in philosophy. However, in this study, Gadamer's thought is used to analyze religious issues related to the issue of local religious elites in the context of peace. The discourse and issues of peace that have developed among local religious elites are a form of text that must be understood hermeneutically in order to uncover the messages contained within, as expressed by Gadamer, as quoted by Sahiron "*Alles Schriftliche ist in der Tat in bevorzugter Weise Gegenstand der Hermeneutik*"[20]

Discourse as a living verbal text within society must be read carefully and attentively, as verbal texts are inherently dynamic. In this regard, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics finds its relevance in interpreting verbal texts—texts related to history and discourse connected to the

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[19] Martin Van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning Pesantren dan Tarekat* (Bandung: Mizan, 1999).

[20] Sahiron Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Pesantren Nawesea Press, 2009), 44.

perspectives and lives of previous societies. According to Michel Foucault, this is called the archaeology of knowledge.[21]

Gadamer identifies four aspects that must be considered in finding comprehensive meaning; first, historical logic, or historical consciousness, is an aspect that must be considered by a reader as it relates to tradition and the history of life that influences how one understands something. This life is a burden in the process of understanding something, and the reader will find it challenging to escape historical conditions, as Gadamer states:

> *wirkungsgeschichtliches bewustsein is primalrilly consciousness of the hermeneutical situation. To acquire an awareness of a situation is, however always a tsk of peculiar difficulty, this is also true of the hermeneutic situation, the situation in which we find ourselves with regard to the tradition that we are trying to understand.*[22]

This theory asserts that historical consciousness is not a conclusive truth, nor a subjective fantasy or nostalgia about the past that has been objectified. This idea gives new meaning to hermeneutics as an understanding of something that has happened and is happening. Closing the pages of historical consciousness means closing the truth.[23] Historically, humans have produced and consumed many things such as traditions, social norms, and religious beliefs. Therefore, when understanding or interpreting religious social phenomena, one must be aware that they are in a certain position that can colour their understanding.[24] Thus, each individual must pay attention to the internal aspects within themselves.

Second, pre-understanding. This concept emphasises the preconceptions that a person has formed to understand something, because using good reasoning in a methodological way can save a person from error, as expressed by Descartes and adapted by Gadamer.[25] In the process of understanding, pre-understanding always plays a role. This pre-understanding is coloured by the traditions and history of one's influential logic, so the reader will be coloured by prejudices.[26] Therefore, Gadamer argues that in understanding a text, one should not immediately delve into the meaning contained in the text, but rather examine the aspects related to pre-understanding and the meaning of the text, as expressed.

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[21] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowlegde* (London & New York: Routledge Classics, 2002).

[22] Hans-Geog Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 1989), 301.

[23] Martinho G. Da Silva Gusmao, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Penggagas Filsafat Hermeneutika Modern yang Mengagungkan Tradisi* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2013), 112.

[24] Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, 26.

[25] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 335. 335.

[26] Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, 47.

> *But understanding realizes its full potential only when the for-meaning that it begins with is not arbitrary, relying solely on the for-meaning already available to him, but rather explicitly to examine the legitimacy, the origin, and validity of the fore-meanings dwelling within him.*[27]

The necessity of prior understanding is implied in this theory, which is intended to enable readers to dialogue their initial understanding of the text. Without prior understanding, one will not be able to understand the text properly. In this case, prior understanding is an important element in understanding something, because the process of understanding must start from prior understanding and preconceptions.[28]   About this, Oliver R. Scholz's statement, quoted by Sahiron, is very relevant: prior understanding is an indispensable means of achieving true understanding.[29] However, this prior understanding must also be critiqued, rehabilitated, and corrected as a form of awareness in negotiating the meaning to be achieved.[30]

Third, fusion of horizons or discourse fusion is the meeting of two horizons born from history and the text to be read. These two things are different elements, namely the temporal horizon of the reader and the historical horizon of the text. Gadamer argues that one must always pay attention to both as realities and that to find the original meaning and avoid disruption, one must pay attention to the aspects of the text and the reader.

> *Insofar as we must imagine the other situation, we must bring ourselves into this other situation.*[31] *…the tension between the text's and the reader's horizons is dissolved.*[32]

In this case, a reader must be open to acknowledging the existence of another horizon, namely the text's horizon, which may differ from or even contradict the reader's horizon. Therefore, the concept of horizon in Martinho G. da Silva Gusmâo's view reveals a higher inspiration than the insight that a person is trying to understand. Readers must be aware that they are learning to see beyond what they currently hold—not to turn away, but to see more clearly, within a broader and more accurate context.[33] The reader's horizon is the starting point for understanding the text. In a different realm, the text is a medium for revealing meaning and message.

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[27] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.
[28] Silva Gusmao, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Penggagas Filsafat Hermeneutika Modern yang Mengagungkan Tradisi*, 120.
[29] Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, 47.
[30] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 334.
[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.303.
[32] Syamsuddin, *Hermeneutika dan Pengembangan Ulumul Qur'an*, 48.
[33] Silva Gusmao, *Hans-Georg Gadamer: Penggagas Filsafat Hermeneutika Modern yang Mengagungkan Tradisi*, 114.

Fourth, application is a mechanical process that must be used as a continuous method, along with natural talent. It is not a rule of the game, but a daily movement (of the soul). This is in line with Gadamer's statement,

> *the fact that hermeneutics originally belonged closely together depended on recognizing application as an integral elemen of all understanding. . . understanding here is always application.*[34]

This concept implies that the process of understanding alone is not sufficient to provide meaning within the hermeneutic circle. In this regard, Gadamer's ideas have transcended the romantic hermeneutics stage. Gadamer reveals that in the process of reflection, it must be understood that understanding always involves something, such as the application of the text to be understood by the reader's situation at that time.[35] But in this case, text is not only interpreted from the arrangement of letters that form words and become sentences. However, text is a social phenomenon that must be analyzed thoroughly. In the study of hermeneutics, phenomenology is part of the signs and symbols of human life as well as the text in sentences.[36]

Thus, in understanding a text, a reader should not only use the meaning of the text, but also consider the space surrounding the emergence of the text. In addition, the reader's perspective, which has been influenced by social, political, economic, and other conditions, also has an impact. In this area, the interaction between the text and the interpreter must be mutually negotiated, as both emerge in different spaces and times. The meeting of these two elements must uncover new meanings.

Peaceful Religious Discourse, Interfaith Local Religious Elites

The issue of religious peace has received serious attention from scholars in various fields, such as sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. The discourse on peace is a multi-layered concept, meaning that peace can be interpreted as individual peace (within a person), interpersonal peace (between individuals), peace between humans and their environment, intra-group peace (social peace), peace between nations and peoples, and global peace.[37]

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[34] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 309.

[35] Gadamer, 307.

[36] Jurgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

[37] Marcin Klimski, Simon Wilhelm Kolbe, and Katarzyna Uklańska, "Peace Education, Religious Discourse, and Scientific Enquiry," in *Shaping A Culture Of Peace As An Educational Challenge*, 1st ed. (English: Taylor & Francis, 2024).

In Southeast Asia, the discourse on religious peace is pioneered by three elements, namely the government, religious organisations, and religious elites, who influence to convey issues of peace. Although the contestation of religious peace in Southeast Asia differs depending on the traditions of each country, Indonesia's discourse on peace is more open. This situation differs from other countries that use a structural approach.[38]

In a more specific context, the discourse on peace that has developed among religious elites is largely drawn from authoritative sources, namely the Quran and the hadiths of the Prophet. This reality reflects the religious community's firm adherence to religious teachings, in terms of worship and social interactions. Arguments drawn from the Quran and Hadith are used to reinforce the religious behaviour of religious elites, a phenomenon mentioned by several informants. For example, Informant I (a *pesantren* teacher) stated that 'Islam teaches us to live in peace, respect one another, and avoid violence. All of this is enshrined in the Quran and Hadith.' People's belief in religious dogma cannot be separated from daily life, because religion is a non-negotiable belief and the source of religious knowledge is also part of religion that is the basis for people's actions. For Adrey Beauty, the life of the Indonesian people, especially in the village, religious life cannot be separated from daily life and traditions.[39]

The same thing was conveyed by informant II (imam/mosque leader) 'Islam teaches peace as its main principle. The Qur'an and Hadith emphasise the importance of living harmoniously.' Informant III (village leader) shared the same view, 'The teaching of peace is at the core of Islam. The Qur'an and Hadith emphasise the importance of living in harmony, respecting one another, and avoiding violence.' In the epistemological structure, the Quran and Hadith are sources of knowledge that contain a wide range of religious knowledge.[40] Both serve as references in forming new knowledge in Islam, such as *fiqh*, *tasawuf*, and others. Therefore, the public's belief in authoritative religious sources is not easily lost.

Strong belief in religious dogma is also accompanied by an inclusive social and cultural system, so each component reinforces the authority of the local religious elite. Thus, discourses on peaceful religion are often produced by the elite, as stated by informant I: "Islamic teachings on peace are very fundamental. We know that Islam is a religion that brings mercy to the universe

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[38] Moh Muhtador and Ulya, "Contesting the Inclusive Islam Discourse in the Public Sphere: Insights from Southeast Asia," *Tasawuf, Jurnal Volume, Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 2 (2024): 94–118, https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.2.94-118.

[39] Beatty, *Varian Agama di Jawa Suatu Pendekatan Antropologi (Varieties of Javanese Religion)*.

[40] Muhammad Ali al Shobuni, *Al Tiban Fi Ulum Al Quran* (Pakistan: Maktabah al Busyra, 2011).

(*rahmatan lil-'alamin*). This discourse was conveyed by a religious teacher at one of the Islamic boarding schools. The discourse on peace at the Islamic boarding school is not a taboo subject, even though culturally, the Islamic boarding school still strongly upholds patronage traditions.[41] However, the teachings of peace and the inclusive attitude of the religious elite are still firmly upheld, internally and externally, among religious communities.

Informant II also conveyed this argument: 'The importance of living harmoniously, respecting one another, and avoiding violence. The concept of "rahmatan lil-'alamin" (mercy for all creation) reflects Islam's goal of spreading goodness to all humanity.' Informant II, as a religious leader at one of the mosques, often delivers religious sermons as a discourse believed by his followers. This attitude indicates the substantive interpretation that religious elites have of Islamic teachings related to human relations. According to Fazlurrahman, this interpretation indicates an ideal-moral awareness in understanding religious teachings.[42] Islam is not only interpreted as pure religious dogma and ritual, but it is also a religion that upholds human civilization, which is derived from the moral ideas brought by religion as an egalitarian spirit.

The egalitarian view of the local religious elite is a long-established teaching from the epistemology of society, so that religion becomes the spirit of life for a peaceful life, as stated by informant III, 'the concept of "*rahmatan lil-'alamin*" (mercy for the universe) describes the goal of Islam to bring goodness to all of humanity.' The concept of rahmah in the science of interpretation is defined as goodness that is directed not only at people who share the same faith, but also at all levels of society and also the universe.[43] Thus, the presence of Islam as a religion not only teaches goodness to Muslims, but also goodness to non-Muslims because Islam is a religion of civilisation.[44]

As for strategies in addressing issues of religious peace, religious elites use many methods, such as respecting differences, establishing communication, and promoting justice for equality. Informant I explained that respecting differences means accepting and valuing diversity in society, including differences in opinions, beliefs, or backgrounds. A tolerant attitude towards

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[41] Asliah Zainal et al., "Relasi Kekerabatan Patronase Masyarakat Muna," *Al Izzah: Jurnal Hasil-Hasil Penelitian* 16, no. 1 (2021); Eko Setiawan, "Eksistensi Budaya Patron Klien dalam Pesantren: Studi Hubungan Antara Kyai dan Santri," *Ulul Albab Jurnal Studi Islam* 13, no. 2 (2012), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v0i0.2372.

[42] Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1982).

[43] Ahmad Musthafa Ibn Mustafa Ibn Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Qadi Al-Maraghi, *Tafsir Al Maraghi* (Surabaya: Maktabah al Hidayah, 2000).

[44] Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam: Doktrin dan Peradaban* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2000).

differences is the key to peaceful living, which can be achieved through communication, namely healthy and open communication.[45] This communication seeks to understand the perspectives of others who differ from our beliefs. Constructive dialogue can serve as a bridge to find common ground and resolve conflicts.[46] Meanwhile, justice and equality involve applying the principle of social justice, ensuring that everyone receives equal rights without discrimination.

According to Informant II, this discourse on peace serves as a medium for local religious elites to construct a simple understanding of religion. Four models can be proposed: 'as a way to construct peace, we can respect differences, engage in dialogue, uphold justice, and collaborate through mutual assistance.' Some of these strategies can be applied by respecting differences in presenting arguments as a form of healthy and open communication to understand differences and find common ground. This reality can pave the way for justice and equa, regardless of religion or ethnicity. Therefore, interfaith communities can engage in and build cooperation to achieve the common good.

The religious model that develops in the regions, especially in the Central Java region, is inclusive and tolerant of the role of the local religious elite in the center of religious life. The model of religion, which involves a strategy of recognition of different entities, is the hermeneutical consciousness of the local religious elite. In this context, the religious elite constitutes a comprehensive consciousness that does not emphasize the dogmatic, but also the historical, sociological and humanist aspects. This consciousness is an integral consciousness that does not strengthen any of the historical logic or pre-understanding as the basis of understanding.[47]

The Involvement of Local Religious Elites in Interfaith Peace Campaigns

Local religious elites, as sources of knowledge and authority in society, have many methods of spreading interfaith peace. This dissemination can take place through various media such as Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, mosques and other religious institutions.[48] Some media used are arenas played by local religious elites to gain trust and authority, making it easier to convey

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[45] Yudhi Dharma Santosa, "Toleransi Umat Beragama," in *Serumpun Bambu Jalan Menuju Kerukunan Sejati*, ed. Abu Amar Bustomi (Pasuruan: Yudharta Adversiting Design, 2006).

[46] Anang Lukman Afandi, "Negara dan Pluralisme Agama (Studi Pemikiran Hasyim Muzadi Tentang Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia Pasca Orde Baru)" (repository.uinjkt.ac.id, 2011).

[47] Gadamer, *Truth and Method.*

[48] Moh Muhtador, Muhammad Said, and Atika Ulfia Adlina, "Religion and Authority : The Role of Tuan Guru in Shaping the Islamic Discourse of Sasak Community in Lombok , West Nusa Tenggara , Indonesia" 31, no. 1 (2023): 25–42, https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.31.1.12725.

and campaign for peaceful religion in constructing interfaith peace. Pierre Bourdieu refers to this campaign pattern as an arena and capital, meaning that local religious elites have an arena in the form of media to capitalise on the authority or power they have acquired.[49]

This phenomenon was conveyed by informant I, who stated that 'clerics play an important role in promoting interfaith peace. They serve as guides and role models for the community in building harmonious relationships with followers of other religions.' Ustads, as one of the local religious elites, have the authority to campaign for interfaith peace. Although their scope and reach are smaller compared to other entities, in terms of education, ustads are people who can change the mindset and behaviour of their students. *Kiai* has broader authority and scope in promoting peaceful religion. As a source of knowledge for the community, *kiai* has full authority to explain religious issues, both social and religious. The meaning of religion obtained from *kiai* is a persuasive authority that can influence students with their abilities.[50] In many instances, the fatwas and campaigns for peaceful religion conducted by kiai are more open and non-coercive, as mentioned by informants II and II: "When there are religious issues, the community comes to the house for religious dialogue, seeking explanations, confirming understanding, and through regular religious study sessions at the mosque and *majlis ta'lim*."

The space for kiai to meet with *santri* is often in *majelis ilmu*, which is when we study the Quran. Still, the space for *kiai* to meet with the community can be found in many places, such as the *mushalla*, homes, mosques, and fields when there are religious events. In this context, the kiai is a religious figure who is the source believed by the Madurese people, that the kiai is the bearer and teaches Islamic sharia which is very important and needs to be applied in all aspects of their lives.[51] In addition, the kiai as the central figure is also an ordinary community whose life is attached to the needs and lives of the local community, so that the kiai becomes a role model in religious life and issues. The arena space provides an opportunity for the kiai to continue to serve the community as a whole.[52]

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[49] Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason on the Theory of Action* (California: Stanford University, 1998).

[50] Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*, 353.

[51] Yanwar Pribadi, "Religious Networks in Madura: Pesantren, Nahdlatul Ulama, and Kiai as the Core of Santri Culture," *Al-Jami'ah Journal of Islamic Studies* 31, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2013.511.1-32.

[52] Muhammad Ibnu Malik, "Peran Kiai Sebagai Tokoh Sentral dalam Masyarakat Desa Tieng Kejajar Wonosobo," *QuranicEdu: Journal of Islamic Education* 2, no. 2 (2023), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37252/quranicedu.v2i2.355.

Peace campaigns conducted by local elites can take the form of community visits to religious leaders, regular religious study sessions, and village government programmes such as religious and national holidays. Informants II and III stated that 'education, social cooperation, and religious events serve as spaces for mutual understanding and dialogue among people of different faiths.' While this pattern may seem simple, it has a profound impact. The presence of local religious elites can change the perspectives and behaviour of the community. The existence of local religious elites as actors in peacebuilding has a positive effect on society in building interfaith peace, as the religious beliefs of the community are largely shaped by the direct behaviour of local religious elites, not just formal events.

Religion and the Meaning of Peace: Local Religious Elites in Fostering Harmony between Faiths

Discourse and religious practices by local religious elites in educating the community to promote peace have been widely implemented in many regions, although the styles, characteristics, and approaches vary. For example, in Samarinda, the pattern of spreading da'wah (religious preaching) is used to foster harmony.[53] Similarly, in Kediri, local religious elites disseminate religion in both religious and social aspects.[54] Each peaceful religious dissemination effort by local religious elites is an attempt to revitalize religion in community life.

The discourse on peace promoted by local elites is based on authoritative religious sources. Religious teachings related to peace are used as justification for fostering peace, such as Q.S al Kafirun. The use of the Quran and the Prophet's hadith as sources of knowledge for local religious elites is inevitable, as the knowledge accumulated by local religious elites is simple and dialectically related to the complex problems of society. The history of religious knowledge as historical logic inherent in local religious elites is a product of the knowledge of previous generations, both local and national.[55]

This knowledge is an accumulation that cannot simply disappear, as knowledge that is intimate and produced over a long period is difficult to forget. For example, Islam as a religion of peace, local religious elites will cite verses from the Quran stating that Islam is a religion of mercy for all creation. The local religious elites' interpretation of the verse 'mercy for all creation' is a

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[53] Abzar Duraesa, *Diskurus Pluralisme Agama di Indonesia* (Yogyakarta: Ar Ruzz Media, 2019).
[54] Umam, "Legitimasi Kekuasaan Elit Agama di Kediri."
[55] Gadamer, *Truth and Method.*

form of pre-understanding.[56] This understanding provides a positive view of interfaith harmony, as local religious elites contribute and do not respond passively to the discourse on interfaith harmony by using an approach that respects differences, dialogue, justice, and cooperation in mutual assistance.

Regard dissemination, local religious elites use many media as arenas to campaign for peaceful religion among their followers. Media use in disseminating the discourse of peaceful religion makes it easier for local religious elites to coordinate and accommodate the community, such as through prayer rooms or mosques. Additionally, mosques and prayer rooms, as religious symbols, convey a strong message of expertise and obedience. Arenas and capital are urgent components in spreading discourse. The two cannot be separated in a religious context, each playing an important role in forming authority.[57]

The use of prayer rooms or mosques in peaceful religious campaigns is a consequence of the knowledge structure that has been built over time, beginning in the time of the Prophet.[58] This knowledge shapes behaviour and habits that are deeply ingrained, as prayer rooms and mosques are strategic places for local religious elites to spread peaceful religious discourse. The historical logic embedded in the knowledge of local religious elites indicates that musholla and mosques are easily accessible media and also signify religious authority. In hermeneutical studies, musholla and mosques have important meanings for the lives of local religious elites, as they are not only media but also symbols of power.[59]

As symbols of power, musallahs and mosques facilitate the coordination of followers by local religious elites, as religious leaders such as kiai, ustadz, or other figures play a crucial role in fostering interfaith peace, as evidenced by the view that ustadz have an important role in promoting interfaith peace (interview). The understanding of society generated by local religious elites is an accumulation of knowledge that is the responsibility of humanity. Interfaith peace is a moral responsibility for every Muslim as an effort to establish peaceful and harmonious relationships with followers of other religions, such as mosques and churches coexisting in Jepara and churches located in the midst of Muslim villages.[60]

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[56] Gadamer.

[57] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (California: Stanford University, 1980).

[58] Sidi Gazalba, *Mesjid Pusat Ibadat Dan Kebudayaan Islam* (Jakarta: Pustaka Antara, 1988).

[59] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

[60] Ozi Setiadi, Umi Qodarsasi, and Wahyu Khoiruzzaman, "Religious Tolerance Model of Society in Jepara: Principles Analysis of Freedom, Acceptance, and Trust," *Jurnal Penelitian* 20, no. 1 (2023); Robi'atul Maulidah,

The efforts of local religious elites to break free from the two horizons that have become entrenched in life as knowledge can be successfully resolved. These horizons are religious doctrine as one horizon that teaches peace, and religious history that contains violence and hostility, which does not contribute to preservingrving violence. Conversely, religious doctrine that teaches violence and a social context that unites human values can also be resolved.[61] These horizons can be resolved by choosing practices of peace that consider the benefits of religion and society, such as education, social cooperation, and religious events as spaces for mutual understanding and dialogue among religious communities. The interpretation of peace provided by religious elites is a substantive meaning that does not undermine religious teachings and or damage the social fabric established over time. Essentially, religion is not merely about adhering to religious teachings but also about considering equally important, human values.[62]

CONCLUSION

This study has several findings that show that basically local religious elites such as *ustadz*, *kiai* and people who have a period of followers can be called local religious elites who have an important position and role in the religious community in the village. The war of a kiai is constructed from the authority possessed as an expert in the field of religion so that it is believed by the community as a local religious elite. Kiai also contributed to the discourse of interfaith peace for religious people. The contribution of local religious elites with religious backgrounds has taken a deep religious discourse. In this case, the constructed discourse is largely taken from authoritative sources of religion (the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet) as the main knowledge. The knowledge that is a big issue is that Islam is a religion of Grace for the universe and not specific to the same religious community. As for realizing this discourse, a local religious elite needs a strategy that can be divided into four strategies, namely respecting differences, dialogue, justice and cooperation in mutual cooperation. The campaign carried out by religious elites through mosques, *mushallas*, *madrasah* and other places shows domination and authority. The discourse provides a very substantial meaning related to human values, such as the early Islamic mission that defends human values.

"Toleransi Umat Muslim terhadap Keberadaan Gereja Pantekosta Di Surabaya," *Religió: Jurnal Studi Agama-Agama* 4, no. 2 (2014).

[61] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

[62] Abdurrahman Wahid, *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita: Agama Masyarakat Negara Demokrasi* (Jakarta: The Wahid Institute, 2006).

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