Critical Analysis of Tolerance in the Contemporary Indonesian Pesantren

Moh. Asror Yusuf

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze the roots of tolerance and approaches implemented in pesantren (Islamic boarding school). It is interpretative qualitative by taking Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, particularly its Ma’had Aly, Paiton Probolinggo, East Java as the case study. The result proves that the pesantren performs a tolerant and open view, as shown by the tolerant attitude of kyai (pesantren leader) who reject radicalism and discrimination. Pesantren preserves kitab kuning (classical Islamic book) as the reference to study. However, the approaches used to study the references are not only textual, but also contextual and critical. The development on approaches is intended to facilitate santri (the student) to be able to answer the issues which are getting complex based on the text. That tolerant view and attitude will be well-preserved and keep developing if the study in pesantren conducted contextually and critically based on the principle of al-muhafadzah and al-akhdhu.

Key Words: Pesantren, tolerance, moderation, al-muhafadzah and al-akhdhu.
1. Introduction

Indonesian Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) has a strategic role in maintaining and developing tolerance in Indonesia and the world at large, since it is a foremost teaching institution of Islamic doctrines in this archipelago. It must, however, be recognized that beside a lot of Pesantren develop a tolerant attitude, few of it may teach radicalism. Raihani stated that while few Pesantren, such as the Ngruki, might teach a radical version of Islam, many studies have indicated that some Pesantren incorporate a moderate Islamic education\(^1\). Some pesantren are capable of promoting a public religious culture that is democratic and pluralist \(^{2,3}\).

Furthermore, tolerant view of pesantren is apparently not always in line with the teachings of kitab kuning (classical Islamic book) in pesantren. Some parts of kitab kuning can provide an understanding that lead to discrimination and intolerant attitudes\(^4\). If some parts of kitab kuning can provide this understanding, but, on the other hand, the view of pesantren community, particularly kyai (pesantren leader), is quite tolerant, it is possible that there are other sources or principles which enrich or "revise" the views of pesantren community. Under the above consideration, explaining the principles which become the basis of pesantren view is absolutely essential, for these principles have encouraged them to comprehend the text dynamically and contextually and provide the space for the acceptance of other understandings coming from out of pesantren. Therefore, the study endeavours to explain the roots of tolerance and approaches implemented in pesantren.

2. Method

The approach in the study is interpretative qualitative by taking Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, particularly its Ma’had Aly, in Paiton, Probolinggo, East Java as the case study. The rationales of choosing this pesantren are because it (a) teaches some kitab kunings; (b) has a great number of santri (students); (c) graduates the alumni who actively contribute the positive changes in society; (d) is considered to be affiliated to NU, one of the largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia. Data collection techniques used documentation, literature review, in-depth interview with informan, and observation. The data analysis used Miles and Huberman framework.

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3. Discussion
Theological Debate on Tolerance: Qur’anic Perspective

Tolerance is as important as other fundamental teachings such as compassion (rahmah), wisdom (hikmah), universal benefit (maslahah 'ammah), and justice ('adl). Tolerance is the key to peace, to equality, and to progressiveness. Tolerance is significant in society. UNESCO made the declaration on principles of tolerance on November, 16, 1995. Article 1 of that declaration says that Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human.

Islam states that humans are indeed created not in homogeneous conditions, but in heterogeneous conditions. Human heterogeneity is not only about physical-biological aspects, but also in race, ethnicity, as well as religion. In QS. Al-Hujurat 49:13, the Qur’an values differences, and most pious to God is the most honourable in the sight of Allah. God created a society not in a single, but diverse as stated in the QS As-Shura (42): 8.

The Qur’an as the main source of Islamic teachings which is intensively studied in pesantren is believed as the book teaching tolerance. In the Qur’an, other than QS. Al-Hujurat 49:13 and QS. As-Shura (42): 8, QS. Al-Baqarah (2): 62 can be the basis for tolerance. Qur’an 2:62 states that those who believe, and those who are Jews, Christians, and Sabians -those who believe in Allah and the Last Day and do righteous deed- will have their reward from their Lord, and no fear for them, and they do not grieve. Some commentaries do differ on this verse. Some contemporary Muslim scholars use a more open approach, and relate this verse with tolerance.

Syamsuddin stated that the Qur’an deals, on the one hand, with peace (and reconciliation) and, on the other, with “justified” conflict and violence. There are some verses that articulate the establishment of peace and reconciliation and other verses that speak about punishment for infidels and jihad in the sense of “justified” war. He further stated, based on the division of verses into muhkamat (clear) and mutashabihat (unclear), the verses whose “direct” meanings are in line with moral ideas and messages are called muhkamat verses, whereas those that seemingly contradict moral ideas are called mutashabihat verses. On this

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8 Kalin, Ibrahim, “Sources of Tolerance and Intolerance in Islam; the Case of the People of the Book”, in Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (ed), Religious Tolerance in World Religion, Templeton Foundation Press, 2008
9 ibid
basis, one can say that verses on peace and reconciliation are muhkamat, whereas verses on “punishment stories” and on “justified” war (jihad) are mutashabihat. The above explication shows that the verses which seem to justify the intolerant attitude are categorized into mutashabihat. Therefore, the massages contained in the verses are not stronger than the verses showing tolerance.

The teachings of God are connected starting from the Prophet Adam, Prophet Noah, Prophet Abraham, to Prophet Moses, Prophet Jesus and Prophet Muhammad in a chain of tradition. The continuity of this divine revelation links the different socio-religious communities, in the common tradition. The Prophets were sent down to people with a language that their own people could understand, while the essence of the message conveyed was the same. This same message can be seen in the figure of the Prophet Ibrahim, namely believing in the One God (tauhid) and being the most pious (taqwa).

The Qur'an strongly criticizes the Mushrik of Quraysh and called them as failing to understand the true God. Some Jews and Christians also often get criticism from the Qur'an. The main reason is for them to have high religious and moral standards. As Ahl Kitab, they are expected to uphold the monotheistic principle and accept the revelation revealed through the Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an invites them to recognize Islam as part of the Abraham tradition. This can be seen from the QS. Ali Imran (3): 64.

According to Ibn Hisham, as quoted by Kalin, there are two reasons why Islam is very hostile to the kafir of Mecca. First, it is no longer possible to reconcile the Meccan polytheists to the doctrine of monotheism. The infidels of Mecca are so arrogant. They do not value God and human dignity. Second, their total denial of the Messenger of Allah, and their attempts to destroy the Muslim community. The war verses are specifically addressed to those who declare war to Muslims, as stated in QS. Mumtahinah (60):8-9. Similarly, Adel Khoury, as quoted by Vroom, explains that Islam's harsh attitude against its opponents in Mecca is for two important reasons: (1) Maintaining and spreading the faith; (2) maintaining and building religious unity.

In general it should be understood that the verse about war in the way of Allah (jihad) should be put in the context of defending rather than attacking (QS. 2: 113).

12 Kalin, Ibrahim, “Sources of Tolerance and Intolerance in Islam; the Case of the People of the Book”, in Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton (ed), Religious Tolerance in World Religion, Templeton Foundation Press, 2008
13 ibid
14 ibid
190). If this verse is understood in the context of tolerance, it can be understood that Muslims also need to defend themselves against attacks. This does not mean that Muslims should attack non-Muslims because of different beliefs. The verses of QS. 2: 191-193 imply that Muslims should not attack other groups without cause, and if they stop attacking or surrender then Muslims should stop attacking.16

The Moderation of Pesantren

Pesantren mostly cannot be separated from, and are affiliated to, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). In its organizational structure, NU has institute for pesantren association, that is Rabi`ah Ma`ahid Islamiyyah Nahdlatul Ulama (RMI-NU). In addition, the children of NU members mostly start their education in pesantren or madrasah (Islamic school), in which they learn Islamic teaching and the Islamic classical text as well.

NU and pesantren are making Ahl al-Sunnah wa `l-Jama`ah as the base, following Ash`ar `ayyahand Maturidiyyah in theology (`aqidah), one of the four schools (madhahib) of law (namely Shafi`yyah, Malikiyyah, Hanafiyyah, and Hanbaliyyah), and Imam Abu Qasim al-Junaid and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in sufism. Ahl al-Sunnah wa `l-Jama`ah combines revelation and reason entailing the principle of moderation. It emerges as the result of dialectic process of thought and intensive movement by upholding the revelation as well as reason proportionally. It tries to not involve religion within political conflict and group fanaticism. By this principle, Ahl al-Sunnah wa `l-Jama`ah is widely accepted by people from any layer.17,18

NU is a moderate organization. The term commonly used in the NU tradition to describe moderatism is al-tawassuṭ wa-l`i`tidāl. This includes al-tawassuṭ (moderate), al-`i`tidāl (justice), al-tawāzun (balance), and (commonly added with) al-tasāmūh (tolerance). These characteristics actually have quite similar meanings. All of them describe that a Muslim community is a middle community that does not lean either to the right or to the left; it is a perfect balance.19

The moderation of pesantren is also influenced by teaching of sufism. Almost in all pesantren, Sufism has become the main material in the curriculum. Martin (cited Drewes, 1954 & 1969; Kraemer, 1921; and Yunus, 1979) said that Sufi classical books have been taught in pesantren since in the 16th century, such as Ihya `Ulum al-Din, and Bidayat al-Hidayah by al-Ghazali, Talkhis al-Minhaj

The Shift of Paradigm and Approaches in Pesantren

Indonesian Pesantren can be classified into two types, namely salafi (traditional) and khalafi (modern). Walbridge also stated that the types of pesantren vary, ranging from the most ‘traditional’ to the most ‘modern’. Pesantren can be categorized into four types, ranging from the first type that has no curriculum or even a formal classroom, to the fourth that combines the curricula of the Department of Religious Affairs and the Department of Education. In the fourth type, students spend much of their time studying standar seculer subjects like math and science.

As the huge wave of modernization splashed, the control over the teaching and learning process in pesantren is no longer traditionally and culturally conducted. Pesantren needs to be more sensitive to read nowadays and future tendencies of society, as well as the challenges. Therefore, the shift of values demands pesantren to restructure the orientation and organization of pesantren to be more relevant without losing its novel identity.

However, the majority of khalaf pesantren which have been developed still perpetuate the old tradition, such as the study on classical Islamic books. They also still maintain the fundamental mission to build good character and instil the faith and piety. It can be said that khalaf pesantren keep preserving the old tradition while the newness are absorbed. The decision to change is parallel to the condition of Muslims nowadays to face modernization.

In the context of reference, generally pesantren didn’t recognize well books other than kitab kuning as the reference for the teaching of religious knowledge. The unwritten law stated that the teaching of kitab kuning is an obligatory. The shift of paradigm, however, is somehow occurring now. Several santri and young kyai start to adapt to the atmosphere of scientific development. Somehow it undeniably has brought significant impact to make pesantren more open to the newness.

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20 Bruinessen, Martin Van, Kitab Kuning, Pesantren dan Tarekat, Mizan, Bandung, Indonesia, 1999.
24 Qomar, Mujamil, Pesantren, dari transformasi metodologi menuju demokratisasi institusi, Erlangga, Jakarta, Indonesia, 2005.
25 ibid
26 ibid
Pesantren does not necessarily leave the teaching of kitab kuning only to develop the study of modern sciences. Pesantren will lose its identity if the teaching of kitab kuning is omitted. Kyai Romzi, the leader of Ma’had ‘Aly of Nurul Jadid, highly supports the preservation of kitab kuning at pesantren within the modern curriculum. Pesantren Nurul Jadid provides a unit which concerns on the study of classical books that is Ma’had ‘Aly. Ma’had ‘Aly (the high level in pesantren educational system) is expected to be able to answer the current problems through its teaching on kitab kuning. Therefore, the system and methods implemented in this unit should be effective and actual. The analysis on the Islamic classical books in this Ma’had ‘Aly employs the three modern approaches; textual, contextual, and critical (naqdiyyah) approach.

Fostering the Attitude of Tolerance

Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid expects every santri (the student) to have “Lima Kesadaran” (five pillars of awareness) which becomes the basic principles for every santri. “Lima Kesadaran” must be remembered and implemented in their daily life. They are religious, scientific, nationalism, social, and organizational awareness. In religious awareness, santri are supposed to have broad religious knowledge, religious responsibility, and deep religious comprehension. By having scientific awareness, santri are expected to master religious knowledge and general knowledge. Implementing nationalism awareness to santri is a must so that they are responsible to the development of the country. In social awareness, Pesantren and santri should be down to earth and socialize, for Pesantren is a part of society. Having organizational awareness is also inevitable for santri and pesantren since it is pertinent to nowadays’ demand.27

Supporting the idea of tolerance, as in the study conducted by Syaifullah and Suyanto, Kyai Zuhri, one of the pesantren leader in Nurul Jadid, stated that Muslims who do not appreciate the differences do not fully practice religious teachings. He also added that even though people have different beliefs, they should help one another. The daily attitude of Prophet Muhammad should be implemented in Muslim daily life.28 In line with this view, Kyai Romzi promotes an open thought to any relation and cooperation with all parties, even non-Muslims, such as in social and economic field. However, he does not allow the relation in religious matters. Besides, santri of this pesantren commonly are inclusive and tolerant. The teaching in the pesantren tends to be moderate. The inclusiveness of santri is highly supported by the inclusive attitude performed by kyai. This fact can be used to counter the stigma that pesantren is the source of radicalism and terrorism.

Kyai and kitab kuning are completing each other. Kitab kuning is a compilation of value codification followed by Pesantren community while Kyai is

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27 Amin, M. Masyhur and M. Nasikh Ridlwan, KH. Zaini Mun’im, Pengabdian dan karya tulisnya, LKPSM, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 1996.
personification of the value system. Therefore, someone is called kyai when he truly comprehends and practices the teachings in kitab kuning. The understanding and practices on kitab kuning are the representative criteria to scale the advisability of someone to be called as ‘kyai’. The more insight on an issue and the higher level of kitab kuning a kyai teaches, the more admired.

**Contextualizing Texts by the Principle of al-Muhafadhah and al-akhdhu**

Kyai Romzi stated that Islamic laws should be ground society touching. The classical books studied in Pesantren should be contextualized into the condition of Indonesia. On the contrary, if the classical texts keep maintaining its textual meaning, it will be hard to implement in and irrelevant to Indonesian context.

Baso stated there are two manhaj (methods) followed by Islam Nusantara, namely al-muhafadhah ‘ala ‘l-qadim al-salih wa ‘l-akhdhu bi ‘l-jadid al-aslah, and Maqasid al-Shari’ah. The first method has been widely implemented by pesantren community and the followers of Nahdatul Ulama, and the second method substantially has been taught in pesantren, as it can be seen in the teaching of Usul al-Fiqh and Qawa’id al-Fiqh. Efforts to contextualize the teachings of Islam, particularly the teachings of kitab kuning, can be conducted by those methods. In terms of tolerance, for example, there are things that should be kept in order that tolerance is able to run well in this country. In understanding tolerance among culture, many symbols, expressions, and other local wisdoms must be maintained when the reader refers to the text or kitab kuning.

Al-Muhafadhah and al-akhdhu essentially means doing critical analysis to the historical and socio-political ideology in understanding the meaning of a text. According to al-Jabiri, there are three approaches in reviewing the text, namely structuralist, historical analysis and critique of ideology. In this meaning, the epistemology of al-Jabiri is actually inseparable from the principle of al-muhafadhah and al-akhdhu. Therefore, the steps formulated by al-Jabiri can be used in implementing the al-muhafadhah and al-akhdhu principle.

Related to this discussion of tolerance in Indonesian pesantren, al-muhafadhah is preserving the heritable legacy from walisongo (a group of saints who spread Islam in Java), kyai, Islamic scholars about tolerance, while al-akhdhu is the act of adapting views in the classical texts to be more relevant to recent condition and situation. The intellectual atmosphere in pesantren is structurally built by the text and culturally influenced by views, attitude, and behavior inherited from previous ulama or kyai. Through this way, pesantren becomes a tolerant

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31 Al-Jabiri, Muhammad Abed, (collected and translated by Ahmad Baso), Post-tradisionalisme Islam, LKIs, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2000.
religious institution.

The Ma’had ‘Alyof Pesantren Nurul Jadidis developing this approach in understanding text. It is holding the principle above, *al-muhafadzah’ala ‘l-qadim al-salih wa ‘l-akhdhu bi ‘l-jadid al-aslah*. In the method of learning, Ma’had ‘Aly used the contextual approach, rather than just reading text literally.

4. Conclusion

Pesantren performs a tolerant and open attitude. This tolerance is based on the main text in pesantren supported by using reason and experience in elaborating it. The approaches implemented are not only textual, but also contextual and critical approaches. These approaches are intended to facilitate santri to answer nowadays’ problems. In addition, the tolerance is also influenced by the heritable principle *al-muhafadzah’ala ‘l-qadim al-salih wa ‘l-akhdhu bi ‘l-jadid al-aslah*, which is implemented in the daily activities including in teaching and learning process.

The present study highlighted that *al-muhafadzah* and *al-akhdhu* as the principle of pesantren community, and contemporary approaches make the understanding on texts be relevant to the situation and condition. Therefore, this principle becomes the soul of intellectual atmosphere in pesantren. Contextual reading by involving contemporary approaches also should be perpetuated and developed in pesantren.

References


