

## TRANSLATING MULTICULTURALISM AT AN INDONESIAN PESANTREN A Case Study of the Pesantren Walisongo

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### Abstract:

*This paper discusses the concept and the practice of multicultural education at an Indonesian Islamic educational institution, the Pesantren Modern Walisongo. This paper employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological type of research, and the technique of purposive and snowball samplings in gaining the data. Spradley model was applied to analyze the data; whereas the triangulation strategy and member check were implemented to gain data validity. This study concludes, the formation of the multicultural characters of santri uses the approach of integrating philosophical, spiritual, psycho philosophical, and socio religious-philosophical values.*

*[Ada fenomena baru yang muncul di Pondok Pesantren modern Walisongo, yaitu proses integrasi nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam multikultural. Hal demikian menjadikannya lebih mapan dan memainkan peran lebih dalam konteks masyarakat global. Artikel ini berfokus pada konsep pendidikan multikultural yang dikembangkan dan diimplementasikan dalam proses pembelajaran pesantren modern Walisongo dengan menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologi, dan teknik sampling snowball dalam memperoleh data. Model Spradley diterapkan untuk menganalisis data, sedangkan triangulasi digunakan untuk mendapatkan validitas data. Hasilnya, pembentukan karakter santri multikultural haruslah mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai filosofis, spiritual, psiko dan sosio-religius-filosofis.]*

**Keywords:** *Pesantren Modern, Education, Multicultural Value*

## Introduction

*Pesantren* is the oldest Islamic educational institution that has played a major roles for being the pillar of Islamic education in Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> Transforming Muslim subjects based on Islamic principles is the core of *pesantren* educational system.<sup>2</sup> The main objective of *pesantren* education is to create pious Muslim subjects.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary *pesantren* educational system transfers not only religious subjects, but also general sciences.<sup>4</sup> Students of *pesantren* (*santri*) learn their religious tradition while adopting also elements of modernity through learning sciences.<sup>5</sup> They are projected as the prototype of Muslim with Intellectual Quotient (IQ), Emotional Quotient (EQ) and Spiritual Quotient (SQ).<sup>6</sup> In other words, they learn how to be a modern Muslim with spiritual principles.<sup>7</sup> The *pesantren* is projected for an educational institution for creating “*kaffah* Muslim” of spiritually comprehensive Muslim.<sup>8</sup> In Indonesian landscape, *pesantren*

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<sup>1</sup> Djohan Effendi, *Pembaruan Tanpa Membongkar Tradisi: Wacana Keagamaan di Kalangan Generasi Muda NU Masa Kepemimpinan Gus Dur* (Jakarta: Kompas, 2007), p. 40; Saidna Zulfiqar Bin-Tahir, “The Attitude of Santri and Ustadz Toward Multilingual Education at Pesantren,” *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 2015, p. 210; Syamsul Ma’arif, “The Revitalization of Pesantren: Philosophical Thinking to Direction Universalization of Islamic Values of Islamic Values,” *Global Research Journal of Education*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2015, p. 315.

<sup>2</sup> M. Bambang Pranowo, *Memahami Islam Jawa* (Jakarta: Pustaka Alvabet, 2009), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> Maimun Aqsha Lubis, et.al., “The Application of Multicultural Education and Applying ICT on Pesantren in South Sulawesi, Indonesia,” *WSEAS Transactions on Information Science and Applications*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 2009, p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Abdurrahman Assegaf, *Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Paradigma Baru Pendidikan Hadhari Berbasis Integratif-Interkonektif* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2011), p. 2; Abuddin Nata, *Ilmu Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2010), p. 36; Tobroni, *Pendidikan Islam: Paradigma Teologis, Filosofis dan Spiritualis* (Malang: UMM Press, 2008), p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> Ali Saefullah, “Gugus Kendali Mutu Suatu Upaya Meningkatkan Kualitas Output STAIN Jember,” *Fenomena: Jurnal Penelitian*, Vol. 3 No. 1, 2004, p. 25-37.

<sup>6</sup> Ridwan Nasir, *Mencari Tipologi Format Pendidikan Ideal: Pondok Pesantren di Tengah Arus Perubahan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> Umiarso & Nur Zazin, *Pesantren di Tengah Arus Mutu Pendidikan: Menjawab Problematika Kontemporer Manajemen Mutu Pesantren* (Semarang: RaSAIL, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Mastuhu, *Dinamika Sistem Pendidikan Pesantren* (Jakarta: INIS, 1994), p. 56.

are essential in creating good Muslim with comprehensive personality.<sup>9</sup> In order to realize this goal, *pesantren* needs to formulate strategies and develop plan, sustainable vision and mission, strategy, as well as a set of programs which reserve as the working-guidelines.<sup>10</sup> Importantly, the planned working-programs and strategies should support the maintenance and enhancement of *pesantren's* institutional performance.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the internal improvements of educational institution, *pesantren* should also contribute to the protection of cultural diversities of broader society. Institutionally speaking, *pesantren* itself is indeed a form of community, consisting of three crucial elements: *kiyai* (senior and leader of *pesantren*, *ustaz* (junior teacher), and *santri* (students of *pesantren*). They are living together in a particular area and develop a sub-culture within the society or famously known as “*tradisi pesantren* (*pesantren* tradition.)<sup>12</sup> The *tradisi pesantren* should also contribute to the social transformation and,<sup>13</sup> despite the fact the *pesantren* is a closed community, it is indeed part of a broader society. The leader of *pesantren*, *kiyai*, is important to transmission of *tradisi pesantren* and has a strategic role in developing Islamic values that respect diversities.

Throughout the Indonesian history, *pesantren* has reserved as a pillar of multicultural society.<sup>14</sup> The peculiarity of *pesantren* within Indonesian multicultural society has invited scholars to devote their studies on *tradisi pesantren*. The most important study on *tradisi pesantren* is of Zamakhsyari

<sup>9</sup> M. Khusnuridlo, “Global Challenges For STAIN Progress in Era of Autonomy: Searching for New Prospective Roles,” *Jurnal al-Adalah: Kajian Keislaman dan Kemasyarakatan*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2001, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> Zamroni, “Sistem Nilai dalam Kultur Organisasi Perguruan Tinggi: Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Islam Dalam Membangun Kultur Organisasi Studi Kasus pada Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Malang,” *Thesis* (Malang: Post-graduate Program of UIN Malang, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Mujamil Qomar, *Manajemen Pendidikan Islam: Strategi Baru Pengelolaan Lembaga Pendidikan Islam* (Jakarta: Erlangga, 2010), p. 107.

<sup>12</sup> Mastuhu, *Dinamika Sistem Pendidikan Pesantren* (Jakarta: INIS, 1994), p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Abdurrahman Wahid, *Pergulatan Negara, Agama, dan Kebudayaan* (Jakarta: Desantara, 2001), p. 133.

<sup>14</sup> Maimun Aqsha Lubis, et.al., *The Application...*, p. 1401.

Dhofier.<sup>15</sup> Dhofier argues that the traditionalist *pesantren* has been essential in the formation of Indonesian modernity which rooted at *tradisi pesantren*. Contemporary scholars, such as Ronal Lukens-Bull,<sup>16</sup> finds the translation of *jihad* -literally means ‘struggle’- as the adaptation tradition and modern practices. An Indonesian scholar Marzuki Wahid suggests the roles of *pesantren* in developing multicultural values,<sup>17</sup> whereas Ali Machsas Moesa argues that a *kiai* is the sole translator of Indonesian nationalism in the *pesantren* world.<sup>18</sup> Raihani further emphasizes the need for the translation of multiculturalism in Islamic concepts and idioms and argues that Indonesian *pesantren* do play essential roles to mainstream values of multiculturalism among Indonesian Muslim society.<sup>19</sup>

This article deals with the adaptation of Islamic values with principle of multiculturalism, focusing on the Pesantren Walisongo. The Pesantren Walisongo is one of modern *pesantren* signified by the adoption of secular curricula within the pesantren schooling system. This article argues that the leader of the Pesantren Walisongo does play a significant role in the translation of multiculturalism. The multicultural values are also reflected through the main of mission of the *pesantren* as “standing above and for all classes” and its mission for being “the center for peace-making”. As for the curriculum of the *pesantren*, it teaches not only *dirasah Islamiyah* (Islamic studies), but also comparative studies on religions (*muqaranat al-adyan*/comparative religions). This article applies a qualitative approach through phenomenological method to better comprehend the underlying meaning of multicultural education. To do

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<sup>15</sup> Zamaksyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi Tentang Pandangan Hidup Kiai* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1982), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, *A Peacefull Jihad: Javanese Islamic Education and Religious Identity Construction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 231.

<sup>17</sup> Marzuki Wahid, et. al., *Pesantren Masa Depan: Wacana Pemberdayaan dan Transformasi Pesantren* (Bandung: Pustaka Hidayah, 1999), p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Ali Machsas Moesa, *Nasionalisme Kiai: Konstruksi Sosial Berbasis Agama* (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2005), p. iii.

<sup>19</sup> Raihani, “Education For Tolerant and Multicultural In Pesantren,” *Report of Australia Research Council (ARC)*, 2012, p. 113.

so, I did in-depth interviews with *kiai*, *ustadz*, and *santri* of the *pesantren*, and conducted participant observation to the activities of the *pesantren*.

### **Multiculturalism at Indonesian *Pesantren***

The concept of diversities is essential in multicultural education. In the *pesantren* world, the notion of diversities is translated as knowing secular and Islamic subjects, thus demanding the integration of religion and secular or non-religious values. It means that Islam and secular subjects are should be integrated rather than separated. The principle of integration is reflected through the learning subjects which adopt Islamic studies and secular curricula, such as *al-Faraid*, *al-Mantiq*, *Ushul Fiqh*, *al-Tafsir*, *Musthalah al-Hadith* and *al-Fara'id* which combine learnings on mathematics and other secular sciences. Social sciences also introduces in lessons of *fiqh*, *Muqaranat al-Adyn*, *Tarikh al-Islam*, *al-Din al-Islam* and *al-Akhlak*. The integration among sciences and Islamic knowledge in contemporary *pesantren*' curricula is aimed at realizing a comprehensive Muslim (*kaffah*) who are capable of internalizing principles of tradition and modernity. This objective is crucial as preparing good Muslim amid the negative impacts of globalization and technological revolution.

Students of *pesantren* (*santri*) are projected as prototype of *kaffah* Muslim with strong understanding of Islamic doctrine, modern, and having noble characters. *Santri* are invited to master a secular sciences and Islamic knowledge. The more they master the scientific knowledge and explore various disciplines, the stronger their faith and their noble behavior. The higher the humanity, the wisdom of his behavior and his spiritual strength, the more they can provide the stock of information technology skills based on the value of Islamic teachings. Skilled students utilize technology for good and prosperity, equip entrepreneurial skills such as trade, corporation, agriculture, and livestock so that *santri* can live independently based on honesty, responsibility, and togetherness.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Abdullah Syukri Zarkasy, *Manajemen Pondok Pesantren Modern Darussalam* (Ponorogo: Gontor Press, 2005), p. 67.

On the one hand, *pesantren* education needs to be able to practice Islamic values essential to improve human life's by maximizing the balance of all potential and achievement of *santri*. The curriculum and types of educational activities should be able to facilitate *santri* to maximize their full potential and guarantee their achievement. It is necessary to balance the value of religious knowledge, general science, information technology and entrepreneurship in the integrality system of Islamic education based on human values, Islamic economic value of science and technology, believes and spiritual strengthening through the activities of *zikir* and *sunnah* prayer. Importantly, in *pesantren* educational system, the role of *kiai* is essential as facilitating the changes and being a role model of *pesantren* system. A *kiai* develops the principle of freedom in the learning process and to be open to differences. In the subject of Islamic law, *santri* learn different constructs of Islamic laws (*madhhab*).

The *Pesantren* Walisongo translates the freedom of thoughts in learning activities through its vision which says "to liberate student from fanaticism in terms of social, culture, ethnicity, race, social-class, and groupings." This vision is transmitted through the learning process which teaches diversities. The principle of learning diversities is the hidden curricula of all subjects of learning. When studying a subject on Islamic theology (*kealam*) for example, *santri* learn the theological debates through the lens of modern sciences. They also learn modern principles from the lights of Islam, such as the principles of *al-hurriyah* (freedom), of *musawwab* (equality) and of *ta'awun* (mutual-help). Importantly, they also learn to relate the lesson within national frameworks, such as through understanding the five principles of the Indonesian state, the Pancasila. *Santri* are invited to witness diversities of Indonesian cultures and religions and Islamic's responses to diversities, such as through the notion of *maslaha* (common good), *umma* (society), and *adliyya* (social justice).

Despite the fact that Indonesia is neither a secular nor an Islamic state, religion is essential in the creation of the state and social ethics

among Indonesians. Thus, the translation of civic values into religious idioms does play significant roles. Importantly, the Indonesian state is a state which bases its foundation on the recognition upon diversities. The state principle *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversities) is the repository of Indonesian multiculturalism in terms of ideologies, social backgrounds, ethnicities, tribes, cultures, and religions. Thus, religious educational activities should also reflect the principle of diversities. Religion have to locate its universal principle within a multicultural society, thus adopting principles of multiculturalism in a must. As Kymlicka argues, the foundation of a state lies on the national construction of three elements: ethnicities, religions and the idea of the common good.<sup>21</sup> In this light, the state's principles of *Pancasila* reserves five national principles that should be adopted different forms of diversities. These principles are the foundation of education, including religious education. Thus, religious teachers, as Fatih Yilmaz argues, should be able translate the principles of multiculturalism into the subjects they teach.<sup>22</sup>

Important to the Islamic notion with regards to multiculturalism is two Quranic verses (al-Hujurat: 13; ar-Ruum: 22) that tell Muslim to embrace differences. These two verses surely contrast the secular notion of multiculturalism that tend to negates religious discourses. As for the secular notion, the slogan that “return to cultural heritage” is often depicted as an expression of conservatism. In Islam, the past is essential as the foundation for the current and the future. Islam has provided principles as to how Muslim embrace differences. We can clearly see this principle is of paramount principle at Indonesian *pesantren*, including the Pesantren Walisongo. Looking closely to the lives of the *santri*, the principles of multiculturalism is embedded in their daily lives.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Pengantar Filsafat Politik Kontemporer: Kajian Khusus atas Teori-Teori Keadilan*, trans. Agus Wahyudi (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2004), p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> Fatih Yilmaz, “Multiculturalism and Multicultural Education: A Case Study of Teacher Candidates’ Perceptions,” *Cogent Education*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2016, p. 1-13.

<sup>23</sup> Law No. 20 of 2003 on NES.

## Characterising Multiculturalism at an Indonesian *Pesantren*

Religious education at Indonesian *pesantren* integrates elements of educational institutions in the society: schooling, family and community. These three are reflected through the practice of education within the *pesantren* environment. A *santri* in a closed community together with his/her fellow *santri* and senior teacher (*ustaz*) is responsible for supervising *santris*' daily activities.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, *santris* learn to balance their intellectual and spiritual competencies. These two should grow accordingly with a particular aim to develop a comprehensive Muslim or *kaffab*. *Santris* education are projected as a preparation step for them to face social complexities.<sup>25</sup> *Santris* experience a form of education which Maslow calls as "self-actualization"<sup>26</sup> in which students learn to transform themselves with the help of teachers and instructors.

As for multicultural aspects of education at the *Pesantren* Walisongo, the leader of *pesantren* or *kiai* plays a significant role to transfer civic values and multicultural ethics. A *kiai* strives to educate the *santris* to embrace differences and to leave religious fanaticism. The *pesantren* itself provides a conducive environment for *santri* to practice values of multiculturalism as they live with their fellow *santris* with different backgrounds. In a close community but with a high degree of differences, *santris* of the *Pesantren* Walisongo learn how to deal with differences and cultivate Islamic principles of Muslim brotherhood (*ukhwah Islamiyah*) amid differences.<sup>27</sup> In other words, the *pesantren* has shaped a multicultural community in which all elements of the community, mainly the *santris*, live with pluralities and diversities. These elements are indeed the living structure and practices of *Pesantren*. *Santris*, *kiai*, and *ustaz* are living

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<sup>24</sup> Abdullah Syukri Zarkasy, *Manajemen Pondok Pesantren Modern...*, p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> Nur Syam, *Filsafat Pancasila dan Filsafat Pendidikan Pancasila* (Jakarta: Rineka Cipta, 1992), p. 87-90.

<sup>26</sup> James A. Beane, (et.al.), *Curriculum Planning* (London: MacMillan Company, 2001), p. 106

<sup>27</sup> Abdullah Syukri Zarkasy, *Manajemen Pondok Pesantren Modern...*, p. 84.



with diversities and they are prepared to translate their educational activities with the *pesantren* into broader contexts of their societies. Thus, in line with the theory of education proposed by George S. Counts and Harold Rugg, the *pesantren* education has provided instruments for social transformation in pluralistic societies as the *santris*, *kiai*, and *ustaz* have applied and practiced principles of multiculturalism in the daily lives while in the Pesantren.<sup>28</sup>

Importantly, the translation of multiculturalism in the Pesantren is framed within the Islamic idioms and actors in Pesantren education expressed the idioms through their behaviors. The Islamic principle of Muslim brotherhood (*ukhuwah Islamiyah*), for example, is defined as the universal principle of Islam which encompasses differences, regardless diversities of ethnicities, social backgrounds, and religions. This principle aims to cultivate Muslim brotherhood that respect differences, embrace diversities and form a universal principle of humanities. To do so, the *kiai* applies educational strategies. *First*, he encourages pupils to strengthen the equality among the *santris* while living in their modest dormitories of the *pesantren*. Every *santri* have to stay a particular dormitory as long as six months and they have to move to another dormitory afterwards. A dormitory should accommodate *santris* from different backgrounds, thus initiating pluralism in a micro context of the Pesantren. As Kamshia,<sup>29</sup> Nur Hanani Hussin and Ab. Halim Tamuri argue, the modesty, equality and pluralism have transformed the *santri* selves as they are experiencing differences and diversities and facilitate mutual-helps among them.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Nur Syam, *Filsafat Pancasila*..., p. 101-105.

<sup>29</sup> Kamshia Childs, "Integrating Multiculturalism in Education for The 2020 Classroom: Moving Beyond The "Melting Pot" of Festivals and Recognition Months," *Journal for Multicultural Education*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2017, p. 31-36.

<sup>30</sup> Nur Hanani Hussin & Ab. Halim Tamuri, "Embedding Values in Teaching Islamic Education Among Excellent Teachers," *Journal for Multicultural Education*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2019, p. 2-18; Caroline Hodges Persell, "Social Class and Educational Equality," James A. Banks & Cherry A. McGee Banks, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2010), p. 4.

*Second*, *santris* are prohibited to speak in language which is assumed to facilitate disunity. The *pesantren* obliges the *santris* to speak in Arabic, Indonesian and English in their daily lives.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, regionalism is also prohibited, such as wearing local dresses exhibiting particular identities of the *santris*. This principle also applies to the language as the *santris* are prevented from using local languages in their daily conversation. Nevertheless, this is not to say the *santris* are prevented to express their particular identities altogether. The *pesantren* facilitates the *santris* to form their organisational affiliation in accordance to their regional belongings. Through regional organisation so-called “*Konsultasi Wilayah*”, the *santris* might to display their particular belongings in annual festival performed by the *pesantren*. The annual activity of *gebyar pelangi* for instance reserves as a performative sphere where the *santris* learn different cultural expressions. All *santris* of the *pesantren* have to contribute to the event, thus facilitating the acquittance of *santris*’ diversities.

*Third*, the *pesantren* also facilitates knowledge exchange and debates through the *halaqoh*. The *halaqoh* is a deliberative forum in which *santris* learn different opinions and perspectives in regards to issues related to Islam. The *halaqoh* is essential to cultivate critical thinking and to equip the *santris* with toleration ethics important in dealing with different opinions and views. The *halaqoh* is weekly activity conducted by all *santri* at their dormitory. Discussion on differences in Islamic laws (*madhab*) are of important topics of discussion and debates through which *santris* learn different opinions on Islamic law.

*Fourth*, the *pesantren* also insist the *santris* to practice modesty and equality in their daily lives. They live in their modest dormitories. Mutual-help and respect is essential in their daily activities. Social distinctions and hierarchies are absent from their daily lives as the *santris* experience the same treatment and facilities. All *santris* has equal rights and obligations

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<sup>31</sup> Iwan Kuswandi, “Synthesis of Multicultural Education and Care of District Culture in Pesantren: Education in TMI al-Amien Prenduan Sumenep Madura Indonesia,” *Jurnal Reflektika*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2016, p. 13-24.

to keep their dormitory clean and to participate in a weekly activity to maintain the *pesantren* environment. The *santris* learn how to cooperate each other and to cultivate mutual helps among their fellow *santris* for the sake of common good of the *pesantren* community.<sup>32</sup>

As far as the psycho-philosophical perspective, the aforementioned principles and practices surely contradict to secular notion of humanism, initiated mainly by Van Holbackh who argues that human dignity of self-awareness can only be nurtured through value-free logic, thus demanding the absence of religion. The Pesantren Walisongo on the other hand translates the values of humanism from the Islamic points of views.<sup>33</sup> The translation of multiculturalism in an Indonesian *pesantren* roots at religious tradition which forms as the basis of “*pesantren’s* rationality” in facing differences and diversities. The *pesantren* rationality surely derives from Islamic principles and contrast to the secular thesis of humanistic approach in education.

## Conclusions

The above discussion suggests that the translation of multiculturalism the *Pesantren* Walisongo derives primarily from the acts of reinterpreting the notion of singularity and uniformity into the concept of diversities and pluralism. While the secular notion on multiculturalism is based on the freedom and value-free, thus leaving religion at the margin of the society, the translation of multiculturalism at an Indonesian *pesantren* is particularly carried out through reinterpreting religious doctrines through daily practice. In so doing, multiculturalism at the *pesantren* educational system develops via daily activities of *santri*, *kiai*, and *ustaz* who exemplify and practices multiculturalism at their local contexts. Islamic doctrines and diversities in understanding the religion are essential the making of

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<sup>32</sup> UNESCO, *International Conference of Education*, in *Education for All for Learning to Live Together: Contents and Learning Strategies Problem and Solutions* (Geneva: IBE, 2001), p. 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

*kaffah* Muslim with multicultural insights. Through learning differences and bringing equality and modesty in their daily activities, *santris* learn and practice of fundamental principles of multiculturalism. Thus, unlike secular definition of multiculturalism, this article further argues that Islamic doctrine does play essential roles in the making of multicultural subjects. The Pesantren Walisongo case, as this article demonstrates, surely contests the secular notion of multiculturalism and indeed we could find the form of Islamic translation of multiculturalism at an Indonesian *pesantren*.

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