



## **Strengthening Aswaja An-Nahdliyah to Anticipate Radicalism for Islamic Education Teacher Candidates**

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### **Abstract**

*This article examined the strengthening of Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's understanding as an effort to anticipate radicalism for Islamic education teacher candidates at the Faculty of Tarbiyah, Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya. The type of this article was qualitative with a Participatory Action Research approach and the method of extracting initial condition data and coaching related to Aswaja An-Nahdliyah material as an effort to anticipate radicalism for Islamic education teacher candidates in the fifth semester of the Academic Year 2021-2022. The results demonstrated that strengthening Aswaja An-Nahdliyah provides an understanding of the map of radical groups and movements; Aswaja An-Nahdliyah teachings and attitudes teach religious moderation as a*

*basis for anticipating and avoiding radicalism teachings and attitudes; Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's teachings are full of religious tolerance, which helps to block radicalism. This issue is very important considering that even though Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya, as an Islamic university, is not free from radical infiltration, strengthening Aswaja is necessary to anticipate this, especially for Islamic education teacher candidates.*

*Keywords: Aswaja An-Nahdliyyah; Religious Radicalism; Islamic Education Teacher Candidates.*

## **A. Introduction**

This study described how Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's strengthening can anticipate radicalism for Islamic education teacher candidates at the Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty of Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya. Nowadays, the atmosphere of radicalism persists in Indonesia. To make it worse, radicalism has penetrated the thought of the preachers, which leads the ordinary people or their followers to be contaminated by radicalism. This phenomenon must be taken seriously by the government, Islamic organizations, and all Indonesian citizens to avoid the same suffering brought by radicalism that occurred in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Afghanistan, and other Middle Eastern countries. For this reason, the strengthening of Aswaja as a *manhaj al-fikr* (method of thinking) promoted by Nahdlatul Ulama should be reaffirmed as the basis for a moderate, inclusive, and *rahmatan lil 'alamin* religion.

In the last decade, radicalism has become a central topic for scholars and politicians in Indonesia. Some of the cases are the suicide bombing at Cathedral Church Makassar (28/03/2021) and the attack at the National Police Headquarters by a woman (31/03/2021) (CNN Indonesia, 2021). The list of bomb explosion cases in Indonesia in the last two decades is the *modus operandi* of silent radicalism. These two unsavory cases seem to recall a series of terrorist acts in the past, such as the First Bali Bombing (2002), JW Marriot Bombing (2003), Second Bali Bombing (2005), Ritz Carlton Bombing (2009), Az-Zikra Mosque Bombing Cirebon (2011), Sarinah Bombing (2016), Mapolresta Bombing Solo (2016), Kampung Melayu Bombing (2017), as well as Surabaya and Sidoarjo Bombings (2018) (KALEIDOSKOP 2019: *Sejumlah Teror Yang Guncang Indonesia, Bom Bunuh Diri Hingga Penusukan Wiranto*, 2019).

The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) released its latest report in 2020 that Indonesia was ranked 37th out of 135 countries

affected by terrorism on a global scale, with a score of 4,629. On the Asia Pacific level, Indonesia was ranked in fourth place. It is quite surprising for the government and Indonesian citizens that radicalism still haunts this nation. Indonesia, which is known as the most multicultural country, cannot be separated from the onslaught of radicalism.

This is an alarm for the government and society that the latent danger of radicalism will become a time bomb if it is not taken seriously from its roots. The phenomenon of radicalism in Indonesia has existed for a long time ago; for example, the Darul Islam organization (DI/TII) wanted to change the ideology of Pancasila into Islam at the beginning of Indonesia's independence. Radicalism and *harakah* (read: movement) – as stated by As'ad Said Ali in *Ideologi Gerakan Pasca-Reformasi* – were manifest after the collapse of the New Order regime, such as Ikhwanul Muslimin, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Jamaah Ansar al-Daulah (JAD), and others (Ali, 2012, p. 55). However, these movements did not just emerge.

Ahmad Najib Burhani explained that the genealogy of this movement is relatively complex due to a different theological point of view. Religious texts that are understood haphazardly and literally, as well as denying the historical and sociological contexts, are the main factors for the emergence of radicalism movements (Burhani, 2012, p. 567, 2017, p. 9-10). As a result, they enjoy – even if it becomes their favorite hobby – to legitimize and justify their violent actions. This problem does not only occur in Indonesia but also various other Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Palestine, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, India, Malaysia, and others.

According to Azyumardi Azra, radicalism responds to authoritarianism (Azra, 2005, p. 13). For instance, in the New Order era, the discourse of the Islamic movement as a national enemy continued to be “maintained or fostered” to perpetuate militaristic hegemony. The dualism of ABRI's function is proof of that radicalism (Tambunan & Mukmin, 1984, p. 73). Furthermore, this phenomenon exploded due to the emergence of a resistance wave from the local community against Westernization and modernization. Westernization and modernization are believed to keep them away from the welfare and culture of the Eastern nation, resulting in losses in the world arena, especially from Western domination.

Nevertheless, the framing of Islam as a radical religion is intensified by pro-foreign (read: Western) media to the world community, leading to the image of Islam as a messenger of peace (*al-samhah*) being tarnished, especially after the tragedy of the

WTC bombing (9/11). Another inevitable sad fact is the participation of millennials and women in suicide bombings at the Cathedral Church Makassar (28/03/2021), which involved a spouse who had only been married in a few months. Borrowing Akh Muzakki's term, gendering terrorism has targeted women (Muzakki, 2021). In line with that, Musdah Mulia in *Perempuan dalam Gerakan Terorisme* elucidated that many suicide bombings have involved women in recent years (Mulia, 2019, p. 80-95). Likewise, Gentry and Sjoberg in *Female Terrorism and Militancy* found that women's participation in these cases can be categorized as terrorism (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2016, p. 165; Phelan, 2020, p. 145).

Radical ideologues are also evidently targeting millennials. Masdar Hilmy stated that millennials are potential recruits easily persuaded by "slight narratives" of radicalism. According to Hilmy, young people are still vulnerable and innocent towards the spread of radical religious understanding. People in productive age, especially millennials, need to be taught the correct conception of religion as early as possible. Although young people are vulnerable to exposure to radical religious beliefs (Hilmy, 2015), Islamic education teachers are also exposed to radicalism. Based on the research results from the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) State Islamic University of Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, many Islamic education teachers in schools lacked religious insight. In addition, many religious textbooks in schools lack insight into diversity (PPIM UIN Jakarta, 2020).

In this context, Aswaja An-Nahdliyah becomes important to be strengthened again, especially for Islamic education teacher candidates. In this research, the Aswaja An-Nahdliyah refers to the teachings of Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah adopted by Nahdlatul Ulama. The teachings of Aswaja An-Nahdliyah always appreciate the local culture that aligns with Islamic teachings (Hilmy, 1998, pp. 14-32) and is against religious radicalism. No further explanation regarding Aswaja An-Nahdliyah is needed because many researchers have discussed it (Hilmy, 2013, pp. 24-48). This research focuses on strengthening the Islamic understanding of Islamic education teacher candidates at the Tarbiyah and Teacher Training Faculty of UIN Sunan Ampel by strengthening Aswaja An-Nahdliyah.

This study is of great magnitude since radicalism in state Islamic universities (PTKIN) has emerged in such a way that should be anticipated. One of which is strengthening the Aswaja An-Nahdliyah. Several recent studies have shown that Fiqh has been discussed in several themes, such as national, sharia, moderate, and others.

Hawassy reviewed the concept of Fiqh in the frame of Aswaja. Aswaja is referred to as Ahlussunnah Wal Jama'ah in a wider spectrum (Hawassy, 2019, p. 17). Therefore, Qomar discussed Aswaja at the implementation level and from the perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama. In line with Hawassy, Qomar also conducted his studies using a library approach by relating Fiqh to the community's social life (Qomar, 2014, p. 34). In addition, Nurridho and Salamah discussed how the actualization of Aswaja NU prevented radicalism. However, both limited their studies only to junior high schools or Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) NU Turen and did not yet examine the understanding of Aswaja for Islamic education teacher candidates (Nurridho & Salamah, 2021, p. 66).

Likewise, Sholihuddin discussed the construction of the national Fiqh of Nahdlatul Ulama from the perspective of Fiqh Siyasah. He captured Fiqh from a political perspective, including NU's role in addressing politics and the implementation of NU's national Fiqh. Sholihuddin also employed a literature approach and limited his study to theoretical, not practical, or field studies (Sholihuddin & Jazil, 2021, p. 85-121). A comprehensive study was also shown by Lajnah Ta'lif wa Nasyr, Lirboyo Alumni Association (HIMASAL), where the team thoroughly explored the concept of national Fiqh in the context of diversity and its relevance to Indonesia (Masail, 2019, p. 28; Nafis, 2015, p. 65).

Based on the literature review, no studies have been related to strengthening Aswaja Fiqh, specifically discussing Aswaja An-Nahdliyah Fiqh by conducting case studies on Islamic education teacher candidates at PTKIN. The PTKIN referred to is the Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya, which incidentally is the oldest Islamic campus in East Java and Indonesia. Therefore, the significance of this study is that strengthening Aswaja An-Nahdliyah is crucial amid the onslaught of radical ideology that is increasingly pervasive in all aspects.

In this case, it is necessary to equip Islamic education teacher candidates in schools, madrasas, or other institutions with Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's teachings as a fortress not easily exposed by radicalism. Islamic education teachers or their candidates need to be provided with inclusive religious materials by fostering the teachings of Aswaja An-Nahdliyah. Consequently, strengthening Aswaja An-Nahdliyah to anticipate radicalism in Islamic education teacher candidates is necessary.

## **B. Methods**

This research is a type of community service-based research with the Participatory Action Research (PAR) genre. The PAR method was selected based on the problem and research objectives that require action in the social situation of the community being assisted (Greenwood et al., 1993, p. 121). In this case, PAR is meant to integrate three aspects: participatory, action, and research. Participatory means providing space for participation in the community being assisted. Action denotes being involved in the real action taken. Research signifies that researchers with knowledge capital for initial planning plan the results of discussions with the research community (Chevalier & Buckles, 2019, p. 129).

The data collection of this research was carried out through several methods. First, focused discussion was used to collect initial data on the problems experienced by the assisted communities related to strengthening Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's Fiqh to counteract the radicalism. Second, an interview was employed to explore data on the assisted communities' initial capacity to understand Aswaja An-Nahdliyah and the radicalism movement. Third, a questionnaire was utilized to obtain data about the initial ability of the community in each cycle. Fourth, observation was intended to obtain data on community understanding regarding Aswaja An-Nahdliyah and efforts to counter radicalism, which were carried out during the implementation of the action. Fifth, field notes were to obtain data on field conditions during the mentoring process.

The participants in this study were fifth-semester students (academic year 2021-2022) of the Islamic Education Study Program at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya. They were Islamic education teacher candidates prepared to teach Islamic education materials in schools from primary to secondary levels. They are also likely to teach in madrasas and other institutions that require their services. Fifth-semester students and above had prepared themselves for teaching practice in schools through the Introduction of School Field Program -I (Pengenalan Lapangan Persekolahan-I).

Moreover, they completed Community Service (Kuliah Kerja Nyata), enrolled in Introduction to School Field II (PLP-2), compiled a thesis, and graduated. After graduation, they would teach in schools or madrasas. Therefore, before they teach in

schools or madrasas, they need to strengthen their understanding of Aswaja An-Nahdliyah as their provision in providing religious material to their students.

In this type of PAR research, two analytical techniques were used, namely quantitative and qualitative-descriptive analysis techniques. Qualitative data analysis was carried out by reflecting on the results of observations on the mentoring process. This analysis model refers to the interactive analysis model from Miles and Huberman, covering data condensation, presentation, and conclusion (Miles et al., 2014). Analysis of numerical data on community capacity in understanding Aswaja An-Nahdliyah’s Fiqh and radicalism movements before and during the action implementation were performed descriptively-quantitatively with an interval of three scales, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Category of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and Radicalism Understanding

Scale (%)	Category
< 50	Very Low
51-75	Low
76-100	High

## C. Result and Discussion

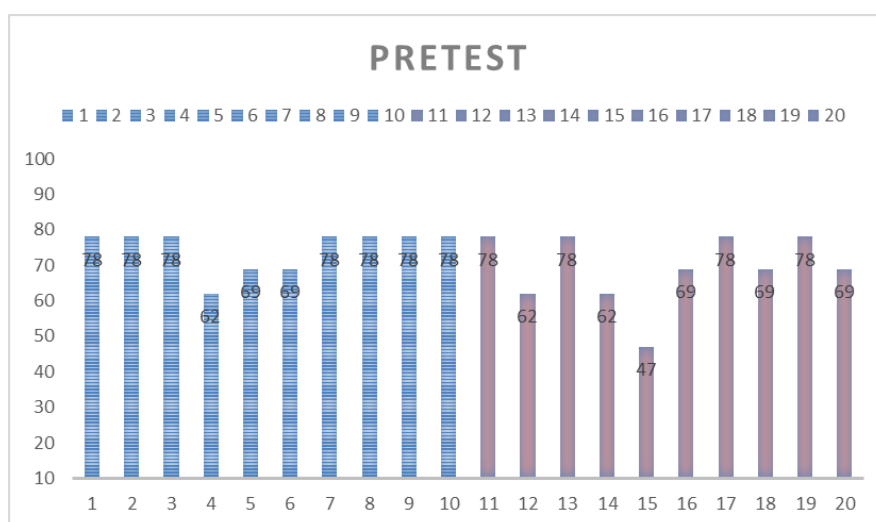
### 1. Preliminary Study

A preliminary study is an initial exploration of issues related to a proposed quality review or evaluation of explanatory context. Preliminary studies do not happen in all systems, but they may be used to identify key features to be addressed in a quality process. This study conducted a preliminary study to understand the initial conditions of the assisted communities and socialize the program to Islamic education teacher candidates. This activity aimed to map the religious understanding of Islamic education teacher candidates before mentoring was carried out. This activity was important for the facilitators to master religious conditions. The result was then used as a database to develop the mentoring concept in strengthening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*.

This activity was held on September 20, 2021, and attended by the research team, speakers, field assistants, and all assisted communities. This activity was

carried out through discussion forums, questions and answers, and open interviews focusing on the theme, namely the assistant's understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and radicalism.

From the survey activities, it can be concluded that the initial findings stated that the understanding of the assisted community (Islamic education teacher candidates at Faculty Tarbiyah and Teacher Training (FTK), Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya) about *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* required to be strengthened because the correct answers from the instruments given were 70% (classified low), as seen from Figure 1. A statement submitted by one of the assisted participants admitted that their understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* needed strengthening to have a high tolerance and anti-radical attitude.



**Figure 1.** Data from the Pre-test Survey on *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and Radicalism Understanding

The data denote that Islamic education teacher candidates' understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and radicalism was, on average, 70% (classified as low). This database proves that their understanding of *Aswaja* and anticipation of radicalism needed strengthening. One participant said their lack of understanding of self-reliance was caused by their diverse educational backgrounds before entering college. Many of them graduated from public schools and were not taught *Aswaja* materials.



Therefore, Islamic education teacher candidates need to be equipped with a tolerant attitude through *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* coaching or training to anticipate the threatening radicalism. Because the Islamic education teacher candidate will become an Islamic education teacher and provide religious material to students, they must be equipped with *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* materials comprising moderate, tolerant, inclusive, and *rahmatan lil alamin* religious teachings.

## **2. Action Workshop**

Action workshops are activities to formulate solutions for problems in the assisted communities and develop action plans to solve these problems. This activity was held on September 27, 2021, and attended by the research team, speakers, field assistants, and assisted communities. The later pattern of improvements was discussed to increase *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and radicalism understanding for Islamic education teacher candidates.

The action pattern was chosen based on several factors, including, first, the initial understanding of Islamic education teacher candidates about *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and radicalism. In this case, it can be said that their understanding was still limited and needed to be improved through training, although there were a small number of Islamic education teacher candidates with a good understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and radicalism. Second, the limited time for implementing this community service research made the training contain solid material for self-reliance and anticipation of radicalism.

Considering these two reasons, it is necessary to choose an effective and efficient solution to accommodate the needs of the assisted conditions. Based on the results of the discussion, there are some solutions, namely the implementation of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* training, with the following materials: Introduction to Non-Aswaja teachings (Mapping radicalism groups); Introduction to *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school; Deepening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school; Strengthening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school; Establishing *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school as the basis for counteracting radicalism (The result of discussion between researchers, speakers, and assisted communities on September 27, 2021).

The implementation of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* training is considered inevitably effective and efficient to increase the tolerance attitude of Islamic education teacher candidates and anticipate radicalism, which can threaten them at any time. *Aswaja*

*An-Nahdliyah* materials lead participants to be religiously tolerant and anti-radicalism.

### **3. The Aswaja AN-Nahdliyyah Training**

#### **1) Action Plan**

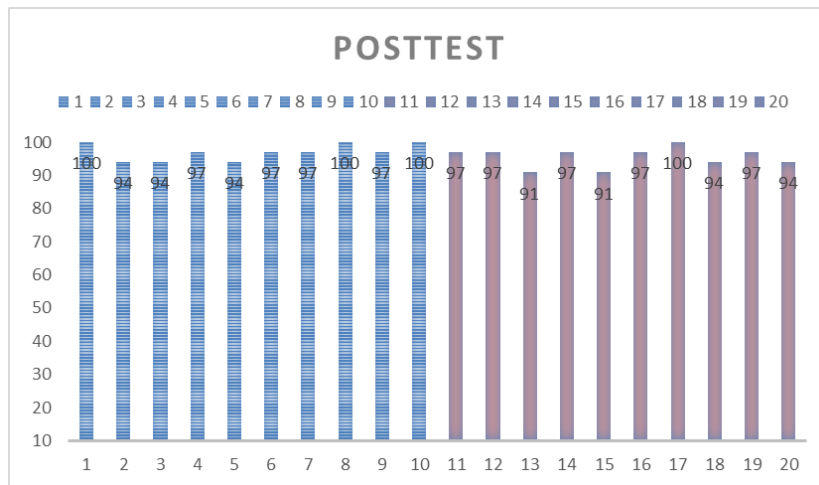
An action plan was designed to arrange the actions given and carried out by the research team, speakers, and field assistants. In this activity, the material was delivered, including Introduction to Non-Aswaja teachings (mapping of radicalism groups); Introduction to *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school; Deepening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school; Strengthening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school; Establishing *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school as the basis for counteracting radicalism.

Articles for the material to be delivered were made, and the maturation of the material was measured, which was useful for capturing data on the participants' knowledge and mastery of the training material before and after the action was taken. It also discussed matters relating to technical issues.

#### **2) Action Execution**

The action was carried out on Monday, October 4, 2021, and attended by 32 participants, three research teams/facilitators, three speakers, and field assistants. The materials delivered were Introduction to Non-Aswaja teachings (mapping radicalism groups); Introduction to *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* School; Deepening the *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* School; Strengthening the *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school; Establishing *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* school as the basis for countering radicalism guided by three speakers in turn.

After the training, participants were given an instrument as a form of post-test. The instrument results showed that the participants' understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and radicalism increased to an average of 90% (high category). This result can be observed in Figure 2. In conclusion, the *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* training could increase participants' understanding of the importance of having an Aswaja spirit and anti-radicalism.



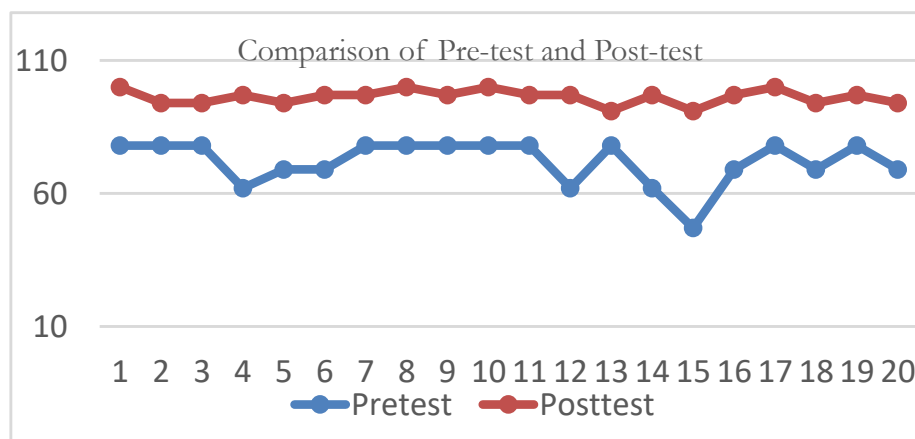
**Figure 2.** Data of Islamic Education Teacher Candidates’ Understanding After *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* Training

In addition, *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* training can strengthen participants' understanding of the importance of tolerance and anti-radicalism through *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* teaching. Therefore, this community service-based research is important to be carried out regularly.

### 3) Reflection

Reflection was performed a few minutes after the action implementation. This activity involved all training participants, the research team, speakers, and field assistants. The results of these reflections indicated that participants’ responses to these activities, which included enthusiasm and motivation, were very good. In addition, their joy was reflected in beaming faces and short expressions made by participants. Some of them were happy and pated the table when they successfully got a good and correct understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*.

This good response provided positive implications for improving the quality and capacity of participants to understand the material. It could be seen by comparing participants' capacities in pre-action and post-action, as depicted in Figure 3. Data revealed a significant increase in participants' understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* after the action.



**Figure 3.** The Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Results

The improvement in *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* understanding was proven by the average of the high category on all indicators. It can be said that the implementation of the training or mentoring action was successful. However, the success of this action was not enough to be a parameter for participants to behave tolerantly as expected if no further monitoring was carried out. In brief, this study program-based service research must be continued.

#### D. Result and Discussion

Strengthening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* understanding as an effort to anticipate radicalism for Islamic education teacher candidates is vital, considering they will teach Islamic education material. If they are exposed to radicalism, it can harm their students. By strengthening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* teachings, which are full of moderate and tolerant religious teachings, it is expected that Islamic education teacher candidates can teach tolerant religious materials.

*Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* teachings have four religious principles: *tawasuth*, *i'tidal*, *tawazun*, and *tasamuh*. Sukarja Salam stated that *tawasuth* is a middle way, *i'tidal* is an impartial attitude, *tawazun* is a balanced attitude, and *tasamuh* is a tolerant attitude. These four principles are contained in the Qur'an as follows. *Tawasuth* is explained in Al-Qur'an Surah al-Baqarah verse 143, "And thus we have made you a just community that you will be witnesses over the people, and the Messenger will be a witness over you."

*I'tidal* is explained in Surah al-Maidah verse 8, "O you who believed (who wish to reach Allah and submit to Him)! Be persistently standing firm for Allah, witness in justice, and do not let hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is Acquainted with what you do."

Furthermore, the principle of *tawazun* stated in Surah al-Hadid verse 25, "We have already sent Our Messengers with the clear proofs and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that they may rule with justice amongst the mankind." *Tasamuh* is also explained in Al-Qur'an Surah Thaha verse 44, "Then speak to him with gentle words that perhaps he may be deliberate (understand) or have reverence." (Asy'ari, 2021, p. 12).

Additionally, the term *Aswaja* is well-known among Muslims. This term originates from a hadith narrated by Abu Daud, At-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Majah from Abu Hurairah, who asserts that Jews will be divided into 71 groups, Christians will be 72 groups, and Muslims will be 73 groups. All these groups enter hell except for one group, namely *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (*Aswaja*). Al-Hasyiyah Asy-Syanwani emphasizes this opinion by defining *Aswaja* as a group of followers of Imam Abul Hasan Asy'ari's teachings and the four madhhabs (Azis, 2007, p. 45).

In this context, *Aswaja* can be interpreted as religious thought or understanding (of Islam) derived from traditions carried out by the Prophet, the companions, and the imams of four madhhabs. In other words, *Aswaja* is not always synonymous with certain groups in Islam. By referring to this terminology, *Aswaja* is not automatically indicated as the most righteous interpretation in Islam. The main pivotal thing of *Aswaja* is consistency (*istiqamah*), with religious traditions derived directly from the Messenger of Allah, his companions, and the scholars.

On that basis, *Aswaja* always refers to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad in all aspects concerning *ubudiyah* and *muamalah*. The three important foundations—Iman, Islam, and Ihsan- are pillars a Muslim must believe in and practice universally. They must be implemented in a balanced way; hence, there is no inequality as contained in the principle of *tawazun*. The dimension of faith is historically studied in the science of faith (*tawhid*), Islam is studied in the science of sharia (Fiqh or Islamic jurisprudence), and *ihsan* in Sufism (morals).

In the prophetic era, differences in opinion (*ikhtilaf*) among Muslims were quickly resolved by Prophet Muhammad himself as a religious leader and state leader. However, after the death of the Prophet, *ikhtilaf* among Muslims and the settlement process, as in the prophetic era, was nowhere to be found. Meanwhile, a lot of new problems were raised and grew to be more complicated. The implication is that conflict and hostility often occurred, and even killings had become commonplace.

In addition to the problems above, the emergence of various groups in Islam was also ineluctable. The emergence of *Qadariyyah* and *Jabariyyah* is considered as a proof. On that basis, two concepts of Aqidah emerged, namely *Asy'ariyah* and *Maturidiyah*, as the antithesis or reconciliation of the two groups. This is where the moderatism (*tawassuth*) of *Asy'ariyah* and *Maturidiyah* is located, which is the hallmark of the *Aswaja* in their faith.

In the field of sharia, *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* follows the method of thinking of four madhhabs (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali). The four founders of Madhhabs are guides for *Nahdliyyin* society because their method of thinking has gone through *ijtihadi* research and has been codified systematically. In addition, the process of transmitting knowledge, known as *sanad* in the Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) tradition, also runs by *muttasil* (adjoining) so that it does not allow deviations and changes to the law (Anwar, 2011, p. 40). *Aswaja An-Nahdliyyah* uses the Qur'an and Sunnah as religion's main references and foundations. The teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, as adopted by *Aswaja An-Nadhliyah*, strongly emphasize the principle of balance (*tawazun*), a principle to stay in the middle, neither the right extreme nor the left extreme.

Aside from the field of sharia, *Aswaja An-Nahdliyyah* also penetrates the moral aspect or *tasawwuf*. For them, *tasawwuf* cannot be separated from the sharia principle and the primary sources of Islamic teachings—the Qur'an and hadith (Syahrul, 2021, p. 5). In this context, it is not wrong if *Aswaja An-Nahdliyyah* emphasizes following the *mu'tabarah thariqah* (the order that continues until the Prophet). Furthermore, *Aswaja An-Nahdliyyah* does not adhere to a particular order or practice of Sufism, for instance, the Sufism of Imam al-Ghazali and Imam Junaid al-Baghdadi but may follow others as long as it is guided by Islamic law. The acceptance of the Sufism model, in turn, has opened a middle way (*tawassuth*) (PWNU, 2007).

In this study, these materials about *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* were given during Islamic education teachers' training. Apart from helping readers understand *Aswaja*, materials related to *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* culture were also presented. These cultures are related to the behaviors and habits of the *Nahdliyin* Muslim society in daily life practices (Ihsan et al., p. 155). One of the most basic characteristics of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* is moderate attitude and behavior (*tawasuth*). This attitude does not solely aim to keep *Aswaja* followers from falling into problematic religious behavior but to see and assess life phenomena proportionally (Burhani, 2012, p. 572; Hilmy, 2013, p. 35). In addition, culture is inseparable from society's life since it is part of human creation in fulfilling its needs and improving the quality of life. One should appreciate the goodness provided by the predecessors (in the form of existing traditions) and creatively bring a breakthrough to the tradition or create a new, better tradition. This attitude motivates them to keep moving forward and not to be uprooted from their traditions.

*Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* does not erode the culture or traditions in society, let alone justify it as a practice of *bid'ah*, *khurafat*, and *takhayyul*. However, *Aswaja* fills and colors the tradition with Islamic teachings to still view and treat culture proportionally. The *salametan* or *kenduri* tradition, for example, is carried out by the Javanese, Sundanese, and Madurese, which aims to express gratitude for God's grace given to them. This tradition is typically identified with serving *tumpeng* or farm produce. This kind of tradition is sometimes seen by extreme groups as heretical and forbidden. Meanwhile, the essence or purpose of this tradition is noble (Hilmy, 1998, p. 42). Therefore, for *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*, this tradition is preserved by adding Islamic values without intending to erase or eliminate them from society.

This attitude was established by Walisongo when spreading Islam in the Indonesian archipelago. As the heirs to the Prophet, Walisongo carried out Islamic da'wah politely (*qaulan layyina*), not violently. They tried to formulate various da'wah strategies so that the public could well receive Islam without having to completely erode the culture embedded in the recesses of people's hearts. This is precisely the same thing that *Aswaja An-Nahdliyyah* does. In *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* training in this research, materials related to the teachings of cultural strategy, understanding the essence of Islam, and how radicalism develops genealogically and transforms in such a way were also delivered (PWNU, 2007). It teaches how radical groups are and how they like to blame other groups who do not have the same opinion as them. This

radical group assumes themselves to be the most righteous in implementing religious teachings.

The emergence of Islamic extremism or radical Islam is believed by many to be a “product” of the 20th century in Muslim society, particularly in the Middle East—as a product of an identity crisis that led to reaction and resistance to the West that expanded colonialization to the Muslim society. The division of the Muslims into various nation-states and the modernization project launched by the new Western government resulted in the erosion of religious and moral ties among Muslims (Dekmejian, 1995, p. 159). The implication is the emergence of “radical” movements to call for a return to pure Islamic teachings as the best solution. It did not stop there, and this movement carried out resistance to the regime, which was considered secular and deviated from the path of religion.

In Islamic history, it is noted that the genealogy of violence and extremism often carried religious sentiments. It can be understood because religion has a strong power beyond political, socio-cultural, and economic power. Religion can be elevated to the supernatural level. Thus, radicalism and the like can be legitimized in various actions in the name of religion (Rijal, 2010, p. 215-220), starting from rejecting people who do not have the same opinions to revoking the right to life or destroying anyone who does not share the same ideology. Therefore, citing Prasetia, rational epistemology is essential in countering radicalism (Prasetia et al., 2021, p. 243).

Meanwhile, the term radicalism is not associated with Arabic terms since it is purely produced by the West to corner Islam, including linking it with Islamic fundamentalism (Kepel, 2003, p. 78). In Western traditions, the term fundamentalism is often linked to several terms such as “radical Islam” by Emmanuel Sivan, “integrity,” “revivalism” (Sivan, 1990, p. 130-152), and “Islamism” (Nasr, 1996, p. 32). These terms indicate the signs of “Islamic resurgence,” followed by militancy and extreme fanaticism (Abu-Rabi, 1995, p. 342; Lapidus, 1997, p. 126). Compared to the other terms, “radical Islam” is often associated with the term “fundamentalist Islam” since it exposes liberalism more in interpreting religious texts and leads to manipulative actions that will cause destructive and anarchic actions.

In addition to Islamic fundamentalism, several terms are also used by scholars to identify and narrate the phenomenon of Islamic resurgence, including revivalism, radicalism, militancy, Islamism, political Islam, scriptualism, and extremism (Rijal,



2010, p. 216). Another popular term is radical Islam or Islamic extremism. In addition, Jamhari and Jahroni define radical Islam as a group that has extreme and fanatical ideological beliefs to replace the current system of values (Jahroni, 2004, p. 43).

However, not all scholars agree on this term because it contains a pejorative meaning towards Islam. Esposito, a scientist, for example, elaborates that the term “fundamentalism” is associated with three things: (1) Those who encourage Muslims to return to the true teachings of Islam or puritanical Islam are called fundamentalists; (2) The understanding and perception of fundamentalism is greatly influenced by American Protestants—a 20th-century Protestant movement that focuses on literal and scripturalist interpretation of the Bible as the principle for Christian life and teachings; (3) The term fundamentalism is often associated with political activity, extremism, and anti-Americanism. Esposito also argues that fundamentalism contains Christian presuppositions and Western stereotypes and implies a nonexistent monolithic threat (Esposito, 1999, p. 57).

According to Crawford, the three-way struggle between the Christian Byzantine, Sassanid Persian, and Islamic empires was a period filled with fascinating characters, including Heraclius, Khusro II, and the Prophet Muhammad himself. Many epic battles and sieges are described in as much detail as possible, including Nineveh, Yarmouk, Qadisiyyah and Nihawand, Jerusalem, and Constantinople. The *War of the Three Gods* is a military history of the first half of the seventh century, focusing heavily on the reign of the Eastern Roman Emperor Heraclius (AD 610-641). This was a pivotal time in world history and a dramatic one. The Eastern Roman Empire was brought to the very brink of extinction by the Sassanid Persians before Heraclius managed to inflict a crushing defeat on the Sassanids with a desperate final gambit. His conquests were short-lived; however, for the newly converted adherents of Islam burst upon the region, administering the coup de grace to Sassanid power and laying siege to Constantinople itself to usher in a new era (Crawford, 2013, p. 190).

Therefore, Esposito tends to use the term “Islamic revivalism” or “Islamic activism,” which, according to him, is impartial and has roots in Islamic tradition. Furthermore, he argues, “Islam has a long tradition of revival (*tajdid*) and reformation (*islah*) which includes the notion of political and social activism, which began in the classical era of Islam to the present day” (Esposito, 1999, p. 89).

On the other hand, Al-Asymawi also found the problem of using fundamentalism to read the phenomenon of religious extremism in Islam. He describes himself as a fundamentalist in the sense that he and every other Muslim must accept and respect religious foundations such as the pillars of Islam, i.e., the Qur'an and hadith. In his terminology, the meaning of fundamentalist is not equivalent to extremist, radical, or militant, but it refers to someone who adheres to Islamic teachings. Therefore, Al-Asymawi prefers Islamic extremism rather than fundamentalism (Dutton, 1999, p. 54; Rijal, 2010, p. 218).

Meanwhile, Yusuf al-Qardhawi associates radicalism with the term *al-Tatharruf al-Din* or practicing religious teachings that are inappropriate or merely taking the easy side. Hence, it is very far from the substance of Islamic teachings, namely the teachings of *wasathiyah* (moderate). One of the hadiths stated, "The middle way is the best one" (*khairul-umuri ausathuha*). Conversely, extremist religious practice contains at least three weaknesses: (1) Disliked by human characters; (2) Unable to survive for a long time; (3) Likely to risk or harm the rights of others (Al-Qaradawi, 1994, p. 159). It implies that this religious model is strongly discouraged—not to mention forbidden—by Islam and the teachings of other religions besides Islam.

The term fundamentalism is quite complex, but Sidahmed views the term as a "comparative construct" covering movements from various religious traditions (Sidahmed, 2018). For example, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby describe fundamentalism as a "family resemblance" (Marty & Appleby, 1994, p. 783). They argue—as embodied in the first of their six-volume projects of fundamentalism—that all fundamentalists follow the same pattern that at least can be described as "fight" and "struggle." First, the fundamentalist group fought back reactively against the tyranny of the present in the name of the past. Second, fundamentalist groups fight for their religious conception of the world, which opposes secularism and relativism. Third, they fight with any weapon and justify any means, sometimes borrowed from the enemy, carefully chosen to secure their identity. Fourth, they fight against other groups that are considered agents of corruption and deviation from religion. Fifth, this is the most difficult to resist; they fight in God's name (Marty & Appleby, 1994, p. 567).

From this perspective, at least, it can be drawn that there are three general tendencies or typologies of radicalism. First, radicalism is a response to ongoing

conditions. Generally, the response comes in evaluation, rejection, or even resistance. Second, radicalism will continue to roll like a snowball to replace the established order with another order. Third, the radical group's solid belief in the correctness of their strategy makes it difficult to refute, let alone criticize it. At the same time, this attitude is accompanied by denying the truth of the other system that is about to be substituted (Effendy & Prasetyo, 1998, p. 23).

The terminology of Islamic radicalism cannot be separated from the conditioning of non-Muslim countries towards the Islamic world. This popular term was intentionally coined by Western scholars due to certain policies. For instance, the policies of the United States, Russia, and China towards the Islamic world are complex and diverse. The US had a friendly policy towards the Islamic world during the Obama administration, while the Trump administration did not (Bahari & Sahide, 2022, pp. 270-297; Cipto, 2018, p. 32). This led to tensions in relations between the US and the Islamic world.

On the other hand, China has been expanding its economic and political influence into the Middle East and Central Asia, building alliances, and seeking to maximize economic benefits while challenging American dominance. Meanwhile, Russia has interests in the Middle East, and its activities in the region intersect with those of the US and China. The balance of power within this America-China-Russia triangle will continue to shape their policies toward the Islamic world (Eder & Frank, 2022, pp. 321-330).

The policies of the United States, Russia, and China have had a significant impact on the Muslim world. The United States has influenced the region through its geopolitical policies, promoting liberalism and free-market competition while disrupting global military rivalries (Singh, 2021, pp. 369-395). In contrast, Russia has a complex relationship with Islam, initially driven by revenge and later evolving into active hostility under the Soviet regime. The Soviet Union viewed Islam as an entity whose teachings were incompatible with its materialistic ideology. Meanwhile, the relationship between Russia and China has the potential to significantly affect international relations, including trade, diplomacy, and military balance, drawing attention from Western countries, including the United States (Bianchi, 2015, pp. 160-174). Overall, these three countries' policies have shaped the Muslim world's political, cultural, and economic landscape.

Looking back to the classical Islamic era, it was found that radicalism is not a new phenomenon. The *Khawarij* group is proof of that. It is considered the most famous group with its radical, black-and-white, *jumud* (stagnant), rigid, uncompromising discussion. It is evidenced by criminal acts, either related to religion or war, including the murder of the Prophet's companions after the trial. The most obvious tragedy is the murder of Ali bin Abi Talib at the hands of Ahl al-Qur'an, Ibn Muljam. Islamic history also notes that violence in classical Islam was generally related to politics but ultimately also related to religion. Although murdering legitimate political leaders (caliphates) had occurred during the caliphate of Umar, a structured, systematic, and massive extremism movement emerged after the Shiffin War during the reign of Ali bin Abi Talib. This is a milestone in the history of "radical Islam."

*Khawarij*—as recounted in history—emerged as an antithetical attitude (read: disappointment) to the arbitration event between Ali and Muawiyah's side. They argued that the war could not be resolved by human judgment alone, so Allah must be involved. The decision to judge by Allah's law became the slogan of their ideology, "*la hukma illallah*" (there is no law other than Allah's law) or "*la hakama illallah*" (there is no mediator other than Allah). This slogan is based on the postulation of Al-Qur'an surah al-Maidah verse 44. They view all those involved as heathens, including Ali, Muawiyah, and others.

This *takfiri* problem begins the theological main issue in Islam, played by the *Khawarij*. Since the companions involved were considered heathens, they were stated as apostatized (turned back from Islam) and were lawful to be killed. For this reason, they decided to plot the murder of the four companions, but only Ali managed to get rid of it. This is where the discourse of mortal sin develops: If a person decides on things without referring to the Qur'an, does their status remain Muslim or considered heathen? In this regard, the *Khawarijs* hold to the belief that sinners are no longer Muslims but included as heathens (non-believers) (Alvi, 2014, p. 38; Badar et al., 2017, pp. 134-162; Hassan, 2017, pp. 9-11).

The *Khawarij* group then began their struggle for legitimate Islamic rule in both the Umayyad and Abbasid eras of Islamic rule to this day. The holders of power that existed at the time were considered heathens; hence, they chose their imam as their ideology and formed a *Khawarij* version of the government (Nasution, 1995, p. 89). As explained above, the *Khawarij* are very literal and minimal contextualization

of the teachings of Islam. *Al-Azariqah*, for example, one of the *Khawarij* groups, argues that the perpetrators of major sins are no longer called heathens but polytheists or kind of major sins that no longer can be forgiven according to Islamic rules (Al-Syahrastani, n.d., p. 211; Al-Asy'ari, 1950, p. 53; Zahrah, 1994, p. 67). The terms polytheists and disbelievers are addressed to all those who disagree with them, including their class. Thus, the problem of *takfiri* and major sins in their internal system is problematic, and there is no standard concept.

Excessive fanaticism in interpreting the Qur'an and easily justifying their crimes is an undeniable fact; for instance, considering their opponents as *Dar al-Harb*, and thus, it is lawful to kill or deprive another human being's rights (including children), rape women, and kill all residents or prisoners (Gholib, 2005, p. 27). Therefore, it is not surprising that the *Khawarij* group is known for its cruelty through brutal and anarchic actions. Azyumardi Azra labeled the act of murdering Ali bin Abi Talib as *isti'rad al-din* (religious execution) rather than *jihad* (Azra & Al-Jauhari, 1996, p. 112).

According to several scientists, in both classical, medieval, and contemporary eras, the strong characteristics of the *Khawarij* group were shaped and constructed by their background, which generally came from Baduwi people who lived in rural and desolate deserts, which made them characteristically think pragmatic and simplistic, tough, brave and do not depend on other people's life (Azra & Al-Jauhari, 1996, p. 93). This background then made the *Khawarij* group known as a Puritan group, extreme in religion, and had its idealism about equal rights in its movement; unfortunately, all of these are out of place and generalized (Ghazali, 2005, p. 138). In Harun Nasution's terms, this group has a strong faith but narrow-minded and blind faith. It implies that they cannot tolerate and respect differences, and eventually, the only way to engage is by violence (Nasution, 1995, p. 129).

Even though it is different from the context and gradation of extremities and fundamentalists, these two movements (*Khawarij* and contemporary radicalism) have a common ground that becomes the general pattern of radical Islam. The *Khawarij* group may have indirectly contributed to a prototype for the radical movement and strategies in the contemporary era. The contemporary radical Islam movement is not much different from the *Khawarij* in terms of fanaticism and anti-pluralism. However, the blind fanaticism of this group is neatly wrapped up by digital and social media, such as [hidayatullah.com](http://hidayatullah.com), [suaraislam.id](http://suaraislam.id), and others. These media

often spread their posts on social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, and more (Pohan, 2017, p. 78).

The mapping materials of radicalism groups, as described above, are also part of the strengthening material of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* (Ahmadi et al., p. 277). It aims to anticipate radicalism for Islamic education teacher candidates at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sunan Ampel State Islamic University Surabaya. Finally, Islamic education teacher candidates are encouraged to teach based on *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*, such as teaching religious moderation or tolerance, and encourages them not to be radical in implementing religious matters. The understanding of Islamic education teacher candidates related to religious matters and radicalism was at the level of 70%; then, after training and mentoring on strengthening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*, the result increased to 90%. Thus, service-based research in mentoring, coaching, and training to strengthen *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* has proven good and even excellent.

#### **E. Conclusion**

Based on the explanation above, this research obtained three important results. First, *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah's* teachings have four religious principles: *tawasuth*, *l'tidal*, *tawazun*, and *tasamuh*. Second, participants had an insufficient understanding of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* before training and mentoring, with an average of 70%. The educational background and lack of self-learning of participants were considered to be affecting this condition. However, after training and mentoring were implemented, the participants' level of understanding increased to an excellent level, with an average of 90%. The PAR method used, including action plans, implementation, and reflection, was the main factor that increased this result.

On top of that, the materials delivered during training and mentoring also had a good impact on the results. These materials encompassed (1) Introduction to non-*Aswaja* teachings (mapping radicalism groups); (2) Introduction to *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*; (3) Developing knowledge and comprehension of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah*; (4) Strengthening the comprehension of *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* and using the comprehension as foundations to fight against radicalism in Islam. It can, therefore, be said that *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* mentoring effectively and efficiently improves the participant's tolerance of differences and anticipates radical schools or groups that can threaten their existence. Teachers and candidates in Islamic education need to

be equipped with inclusive religious materials through this kind of mentoring. Therefore, strengthening *Aswaja An-Nahdliyah* as an effort to anticipate radicalism teachings for Islamic education teacher candidates is a necessity.

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