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THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION OF *KIAI* AUTHORITY AS CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN MADURA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of kiai *(Village cleric) as key actors in conflict mediation through cultural and spiritual approaches in Madura. Using a qualitative-descriptive method, the research collected data through interviews and participatory observation with* kiai*, and parties directly engaged in conflict. To analyze the findings, the study applies Johan Galtung's Conflict Transformation theory, with particular emphasis on peacebuilding, reconciliation, and cultural sensitivity as the main analytical framework. The results indicate that* kiai *hold a highly influential social position within the structure of local power, often surpassing the authority of formal state institutions in certain social contexts. They serve as respected and trusted mediators, not only due to their profound spirituality but also because of their historical roles in Madurese social structures. The communication strategies employed by* kiai *are symbolic, subtle, and grounded in religious values, enabling them to avoid direct confrontation and to foster spaces for peaceful dialogue. Moreover, their moral and spiritual legitimacy provides an effective form of social capital to prevent the escalation of violence and facilitate post-conflict reconciliation processes.* Kiai *can also build trust between disputing parties by prioritizing Islamic values and local wisdom. Based on these findings, the study recommends integrating cultural and spiritual approaches into conflict-resolution policies, particularly in regions with strong socio-religious structures, such as Madura.*

Keywords: *power communication, conflict resolution, Madura*

INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an integral part of social dynamics (Hartarto et al., 2024). From a sociological perspective, conflict is not always viewed as a threat or a negative symptom. On the contrary, conflict can be a catalyst for social change, the purification of norms, and even the formation of a new collective consciousness. Lewis A. Coser, as cited in Daffa (2025), argues that conflict strengthens group boundaries and revives internal solidarity. Thus, conflict has a constructive dimension which, if managed properly, can encourage positive social transformation. However, managing conflict in society is not easy, especially when the approach to resolution is overly focused on legal and formal mechanisms and fails to consider the underlying sociocultural context.

Madura, East Java, is often described as an area prone to horizontal conflicts, whether personal, communal, or political (Daulay et al., 2022). Social relations in Madura are often patron-client in nature and are based on highly respected local norms such as the concept of *malebbi* (honor), loyalty to leaders, and reciprocity (Muni & Munib, 2024). Conflicts that occur in this region cannot always be resolved through formal approaches such as litigation or state intervention because, in some cases, formal resolutions actually exacerbate the situation and prolong the cycle of violence. State institutions such as the police and the judiciary play a strategic role in law enforcement

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and conflict resolution (Pratama & Pangestika, 2024).

The functions of the police are regulated in Law No. 2 of 2002 on the Indonesian National Police, which stipulates that the police are tasked with maintaining public security and order, enforcing the law, and providing protection, guidance, and services to the community (Febriawan, 2024). Meanwhile, the Indonesian judicial system is governed by Law No. 48 of 2009 on Judicial Power, which guarantees every citizen the right to resolve disputes through a free and impartial court process. This means that the state has provided formal legal channels for conflict resolution (Halim, 2023). However, in practice, this mechanism often fails to create sustainable conflict resolution. Several studies indicate that legal conflict resolution in Madura is ineffective, primarily because the legal system is perceived as rigid and insensitive to local values (Hannan & Syarif, 2023; Holifah & Ikmal, 2024).

The resolution of cases of violence or land disputes in several villages in Madura shows that, even after court decisions have been handed down, the conflicting parties remain at odds and hostilities continue. The cause of this phenomenon indicates that the legal process is not considered to involve parties that have social legitimacy in the community, such as religious leaders (Alam, 2021). The social and spiritual position of a *kiai* in Madurese society is of tremendous significance. A *kiai* not only acts as a religious scholar or teacher but also as a moral figure, conflict mediator, guardian of social stability, and even a symbol of local authority (Fadillah et al., 2024).

The existence of *kiai* in Madurese society cannot be separated from the existence of pesantren as educational institutions and centers for character building (Sani, 2025). The community's trust in *kiai* stems from a combination of religious and moral authority that is exercised consistently (Anwar, 2021). A command or recommendation from a *kiai* often has a stronger binding force than instructions from state officials. Not all individuals with the title of kiai automatically have the capacity or legitimacy to serve as conflict resolution agents. The criteria typically include being the leader of a pesantren, having a wide social network, and maintaining a distance from practical political interests. In other words, a *kiai* considered credible by the Maduran community is one who not only masters religious knowledge but also upholds their dignity and integrity as a guardian of the community. However, with the passage of time, many Maduran traditions have begun to erode or disappear in the cultural landscape of Madura (Effendy, 2021).

The role of *kiai* as a conflict-resolution agent is not new. In classical Islamic literature, religious scholars did indeed serve as *ḥakam*, or mediators, in disputes between communities. However, in the local context of Madura, this function has been modified in accordance with the existing social structure. In various cases, the involvement of *kiai* in conflict resolution is more widely accepted because it emphasizes deliberation, reconciliation (peace), and strengthening social relations through social gatherings. This process is very different from formal approaches that are adjudicative and legalistic. *Kiai* rely more on persuasive, spiritual, and symbolic approaches to reconcile conflicting parties. Nevertheless, studies on the role of *kiai* in conflict resolution remain very limited. Most previous research only touches on the role of religious figures in general, without distinguishing between normative roles and the actual social practices of *kiai*, especially in the context of Madura, which has unique social characteristics.

Several anthropological studies, such as those conducted by Albaburrahim et al. (2025) and Mahardhani et al. (2023) have indeed touched on the authority of Islamic boarding schools and clerics in Javanese and Madurese society, but it has not explicitly discussed how the communication of power exercised by clerics becomes a strategy for conflict resolution. In fact, in the local context of Madura, conflict resolution cannot be separated from the dynamics of power communication between the community and its leaders. Power communication here is understood as the ability of social actors -in this case, clerics- to influence the behavior, choices, and decisions of the community without resorting to formal coercive mechanisms. With this approach, conflict resolution is seen as the outcome of complex social interactions, in which legitimacy, symbols, and religious narratives play central roles. This research is important and relevant because it fills a gap in the scientific literature regarding the role of *kiai* in conflict resolution in Madura.

Specifically, this study aims to answer three questions. First, what is the social position of *kiai* in the power structure and their influence on social dynamics in Madurese society? Second, how do *kiai* use communication strategies to resolve conflicts, given their role that goes beyond mere religious authority? Third, how do *kiai* use their moral and spiritual legitimacy as social capital to shape decisions that are considered valid and accepted by the community, which in turn plays a role in building sustainable social peace?

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach to understand the strategic role of *kiai* in resolving social conflicts in Madura. This approach was chosen because it can explore in depth the social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics that cannot be quantitatively explained. The main focus of the study is on the social position of *kiai*, the communication strategies used, and moral and spiritual legitimacy as social capital in the conflict mediation process. Data collection techniques included interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with village *kiai* and a number of academics to obtain a complete narrative of the role of *kiai*. Participatory observation was conducted by following the social and religious activities of *kiai* in their communities to understand the mediation practices they carried out directly. Meanwhile, documentation

included relevant studies.

A total of six participants were interviewed, all of whom were village clerics or lecturers who understood clerical communication in Madura, were directly involved in resolving community conflicts, and had social and religious influence in their communities. The research locations covered four districts on Madura Island, namely Sampang, Bangkalan, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. Observations lasted 2-3 days at each location, especially during religious activities and family meetings, to understand how kiai interact with the community and convey messages of peace symbolically and spiritually. Each participant was given a verbal explanation of the research and asked for their informed consent before the interview was conducted. Therefore, the identity of the Islamic boarding school and the participants' faces were deliberately concealed to maintain the confidentiality of sensitive information.

The data obtained was analyzed using Johan Galtung's Conflict Transformation theory, specifically in the dimensions of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and cultural sensitivity. The analysis examined patterns of social relations, mediation practices, and the cultural and spiritual values that underlie kiai's responses to conflict. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation techniques, as well as by re-examining the findings with the sources. With this methodology, the study is expected to capture the complexity of kiai's role in resolving social conflicts in Madura holistically and contextually.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The social position of *kiai* in Madurese society is highly respected, as they are recognized as religious leaders and community figures. *Kiai* act as mediators in conflicts, influence decision-making, and guide the community in matters of morality and social norms. For Johan Galtung, conflict is not merely a destructive phenomenon to be stopped, but an opportunity for profound social change, relational dialogue, and the reconstruction of cultural structures that enable active peace. (Galtung, 2012). Galtung introduced three main dimensions in conflict transformation, namely peacebuilding, reconciliation, and cultural sensitivity, which, when applied contextually, can reduce direct, structural, and symbolic violence towards positive peace or sustainable peace. (Galtung, 2012). In Madura, horizontal conflicts such as *carok* often erupt, triggered by violations of personal honor, land disputes, alleged infidelity, or feuds between village groups. Formal legal approaches, such as the police and the courts, despite being grounded in Law No. 2 of 2002 and Law No. 48 of 2009, often fail to foster sustainable social reconciliation.

The social position of *kiai* in Madura has become the center of local peacebuilding because their moral and spiritual legitimacy transcends formal legal structures. *Kiai*, who lead Islamic boarding schools, are not only seen as religious authorities but also as symbols of moral security and mediators who are able to defuse conflicts before they erupt or even restore relations after violence. Peacebuilding by *kiai* is manifested in the form of educating the next generation of religious leaders through pesantren based on the values of patience, trust in God, brotherhood, and reconciliation, which then build strong social capital in the community by promoting community dialogue, managing local disputes, and limiting the escalation of structural violence such as inequality in access to land and resources (Zamani et al., 2025). The legitimacy of religious leaders is often more effective than state institutions because they are seen as part of the local socio-cultural structure (Topan & Tianah, 2024). Meanwhile, formal institutions are often seen as foreign entities that lack an understanding of local honor symbolism (Syahputra et al., 2025).

For Galtung, reconciliation is not enough to simply end hostilities or impose sanctions; it requires the restoration of interpersonal and collective relationships damaged by conflict (Galtung, 2012). According to Ibrohimi, a village cleric in Pakong, Pamekasan, Madura, when *carok* (fighting using a sledgehammer/sharp weapon), land disputes arise, or adultery is alleged, the formal legal process does not provide space for emotional healing, acknowledgment of violated honor, or a shared narrative capable of restoring social relations (Ibrohimi, personal communication, July, 28, 2025). This is where the *kiai* acts as a mediator, offering reconciliation through social rituals such as inter-family gatherings, mutual acknowledgment of mistakes in religious and public forums, fostering communication between conflicting parties through symbolic Islamic language, and conducting deliberations or *sulh* (reconciliation) at Islamic boarding schools.

> The cleric emphasized the elements of repentance and cooperation, as well as a collective promise to prevent similar conflicts from recurring through various symbolic media such as sacred verses, stories of the Prophet, and Sufi advice, which were heard and respected by various parties as moral values whose reconciliation recommendations were more socially acceptable (Wafi, personal communication, July, 28, 2025).

Cultural sensitivity explains why the kiai approach is more successful than the state approach in resolving conflicts in Madura.

> The value structure of Madurese society is strongly influenced by the concepts of *malebbi* (self-respect), *taretan* (kinship ties), and the tradition of *carok*, which has aesthetic meanings of self-respect and symbolic legitimization of displeasure. The formal legal system, which enforces statutes, fines, and imprisonment, often overlooks these cultural foundations because it fails to understand how the community

> perceives honor and retribution, does not value the symbolic legitimacy of local actors, and does not provide rituals for the restoration of social identity (Ibrohimi, personal communication, July 28,2025)

The state's approach to conflict often triggers resistance and even escalation because it appears indifferent to local values (Putri, 2022). *Kiai* understand this culture deeply, so they tend to use relevant religious language, morally understood ritual symbols, and persuasive methods involving local symbols such as *congkop* pilgrimages (cemetery areas in Islamic boarding schools), communal prayers, *tahlilan*, and inter-village recitations. This process does not require the socialization of foreign values but rather builds peace through values already internalized by the community.

This interaction between formal and symbolic power truly reflects the model of peace from below promoted by Galtung (2012). According to Asy'ari, an academic from Sampang regency, the *kiai* work from the bottom up, gradually building peace based on trust, social relationships, and religious networks that will later position the *kiai* as actors in a parallel local security system that cuts directly to the root of social conflict rather than waiting for slow and often exclusive state intervention (Asy'ari, 2025). Traditional Madurese Islam provides a set of restorative justice symbols that allow for the release of vengeance through collective recognition, whereas the state relies on retributive and formal formulas.

> In many cases, informal mediation by religious leaders results in lasting reconciliation, with the disputing parties willing to sign a peace agreement at the Islamic boarding school, the village community accepting the agreement through religious legitimization, and joint rituals attended as evidence of public reconciliation. This win-win reconciliation restores social harmony and allows local social structures to remain strong (Asy'ari, 2025).

Fauzi, one of the village clerics in Tanjung Bumi District, Pamekasan regency, emphasized that the legitimacy of clerics is not automatic or universal but rather comes through a network of Islamic boarding schools, proof of moral integrity, a track record free of practical political affiliations, and a credible reputation for neutrality, enabling them to play a role in conflict resolution. Only clerics who meet these criteria can exert persuasive influence without monopolizing formal power or personal honor (Fauzi, personal communication, July 28, 2025). This type of *kiai* is seen as a symbol of moral authority (meta-legal) beyond the state's legal structure because of its ability to harmonize state legal norms with community moral norms and to present socially and emotionally acceptable alternatives for conflict resolution. By understanding the social position of *kiai* within the local power structure of Madura through Galtung's Conflict Transformation Theory, it becomes clear that sustainable peace requires actors who possess social legitimacy, cultural sensitivity, and the ability for personal reconciliation (Galtung, 2012).

The state has an important role, but it is not always able to reach the relational depth and moral aesthetics of the community as *kiai* (Zenrif et al., 2024). specially when the state fails or is slow to resolve conflicts, the Madurese community builds peace through moral advice, religious rituals, and strong social networks. All these processes reflect the integration of the three aspects of conflict transformation theory through peacebuilding at the community level through pesantren education and social networks, reconciliation initiated through symbolic recognition, emotional communication, and peace rituals, as well as cultural sensitivity that ensures that conflict intervention does not undermine local identity but rather strengthens cultural capital.

The *kiai's* communication strategy in resolving conflicts includes an empathetic approach, mediation, and religious teachings. Using soothing language and respecting differences, the kiai builds dialogue, creates compromise, and produces fair and peaceful solutions. The communication strategies used by religious leaders to resolve conflicts do not take place in formal settings such as courts or police stations. Instead, religious leaders tend to choose social and religious spaces such as religious gatherings, prayer gatherings (*tahlilan*), anniversary celebrations (*haul*), and family meetings, which are rich in emotional and cultural significance (Jamil, 2024). These spaces offer a subtle, indirect dialogue in which messages of peace can be conveyed without triggering feelings of shame, disgrace, or defeat in public. In the context of Maduran culture, which highly values self-respect (*malebbi*), such communication serves as an extremely effective, context-specific mediation strategy while preserving the dignity of all parties involved in the conflict.

The *Kiai* deliberately avoids confrontational approaches that tend to deepen social wounds and spark resentment. Instead, he uses symbolic communication rooted in local Islamic traditions, such as refined religious language, stories about the wisdom of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions, and verses from the Qur'an and hadiths that convey moral messages about forgiveness and reconciliation. This message is conveyed implicitly in open forums such as Friday night religious gatherings, Friday sermons, or family meetings. Through this method, the *kiai* conveys a narrative of peace without explicitly naming the conflicting parties or reopening old wounds, ensuring the message is received as a general moral reflection rather than a personal attack.

In addition to symbolic communication, spiritual communication is an integral part of the *kiai's* strategy. Spirituality, in this case, is not only about normative rituals but also about creating a calming inner atmosphere and reducing negative emotions. Before formal mediation takes place, clerics often

organize collective tahlilan (prayer recitations), istighotsah (supplications), communal prayers, or special community religious study sessions (Hidayah & Umar, 2025). These activities create a spiritual space that connects the parties in conflict with the transcendent awareness that all humans will return to God, that forgiveness is a virtue of faith, and that resentment only exacerbates inner turmoil. Thus, spiritual communication not only shapes the social narrative but also regulates emotions. This aligns with Galtung's concept of relational reconciliation, where collective inner healing is a crucial step toward true peace (Galtung, 2012).

The superiority of the *kiai's* communication strategy is also evident in the way he draws on flexible, non-threatening social forums. Forums such as Friday night religious gatherings, women's religious gatherings, commemorations of religious figures, and celebrations of major Islamic holidays are often used as platforms for conveying reconciliatory messages. This is where cultural mediation, as defined by Galtung, uses local symbols and rituals to mediate conflicts without introducing new confrontations (Galtung, 2012). In Madurese society, which is steeped in symbols and rituals, the telling of stories about the Prophet forgiving his enemies or other spiritual sayings, often conveyed publicly, often touches the emotions of those in conflict and opens the possibility of reconciliation, even without naming the disputing parties. This is a symbolic and spiritual communication strategy that is more powerful than a formal legal approach because it resonates in the hearts and culture of the community (Hidayah, T, personal communication, July 25, 2025).

Kiai can read the social terrain emotionally and culturally because they prioritize feelings and the heart over logic. In the mediation process, *Kiai* also always pays attention to the relationships between the parties, the historical background of the conflict, and the kinship structures that bind the community. *Kiai* often invites extended family members from both sides to a neutral forum called mandepa, a place within the pesantren environment where guests are received and where it is believed to thaw relational tensions. The mediation process is not conducted through formal debate but through a narrative process of carefully listening to stories, reconstructing the conflict narrative into a shared story, and then offering a peaceful interpretation framed by local religious and moral values. In this way, mediation is no longer merely a transaction to resolve problems but becomes a social ritual that carries the meaning that each individual feels part of a community that is balancing moral and collective responsibility (Kutsiyah & Tianah, 2025) and (Hidayah & Umar, 2025).

Personal communication is another equally important element, where the *kiai* first builds personal relationships with the parties involved in the dispute. It is not uncommon for religious leaders to visit each party privately at their homes, listen to their grievances directly, and encourage introspection subtly. Such approaches naturally position religious leaders as caring, moral figures rather than as authoritative ones. Through this approach, the conflicting parties feel valued and recognized as equals. In Madurese society, where interpersonal honor is central to identity, this method is highly effective in fostering an inclusive, ethical atmosphere of reconciliation. From Galtung's theoretical perspective, these communication strategies contribute to the development of peace infrastructure -social structures and communication systems that support sustainable conflict transformation. The formal, administrative, and rigid legal processes of the state often fail to respond contextually to local dynamics (Ansell et al., 2023).

Kiai builds peace infrastructure grounded in spirituality and local wisdom to create a widely accepted conflict-resolution system that avoids triggering resistance and provides a more substantive, internalized sense of justice within the community. This infrastructure allows local restorative justice to flourish without weakening the state legal system, which complements it with moral legitimacy. The *kiai's* communication strategy is also preventive, as they use public lectures to emphasize the importance of maintaining good relations between families, avoiding slander, prioritizing deliberation, and reminding people of the dangers of revenge and violence. Through this communication, peaceful values are disseminated before conflicts actually erupt (Purnamansyah, 2023). In the context of long-term peacebuilding, pesantren, as institutions led by *kiai*, function as centers of moral and social education, where young people learn ethics, patience, tolerance, and social responsibility (Rahmah, 2022). The effectiveness of the *kiai's* communication strategy is reinforced by the high level of social trust among the community.

> *Kiai* are considered to have no political or economic interests in conflicts, so their actions are seen as sincere efforts for the common good. Their legitimacy is moral and social, not administrative or bureaucratic. Therefore, peaceful decisions facilitated by kiai are often more widely obeyed than court rulings, because they are rooted in respect, not fear of punishment. In many cases, families involved in conflicts are willing to reconcile only through the mediation of kiai known to be credible and free of political affiliations. To maintain their legitimacy, kiai sometimes involve other religious leaders from outside the area to strengthen the neutrality and objectivity of the mediation (Hidayah, T, personal communication, July 25, 2025).

The communication strategy of the *Kiai* in Madura is generally in line with the main principles of Johan Galtung's Conflict Transformation theory. Through symbolic and spiritual communication, the *kiai* create a safe and culturally acceptable space for dialogue (Rohani, 2024). Through an emotional and personal approach, the clerics restored damaged relationships and facilitated reconciliation by ensuring

that conflict intervention strengthened local identity rather than undermining it. In a pluralistic and multicultural society such as Indonesia, this approach deserves to be a model for conflict resolution that is not only legal but also morally and socially relevant (Lonthor, 2020). *Kiai* in Madura are not merely religious leaders but key actors in building authentic, profound, and contextual social peace.

This strategy provides the state with a concrete example of how to collaborate with formal institutions and local moral structures to create restorative justice that not only adjudicates but also heals. When conflicts arise, the Madurese community does not wait for the state legal system to resolve them; instead, it relies on the symbolic, spiritual, and personal communication of the *kiai*, who have built a peace infrastructure from the bottom up. As a result, conflicts transform into opportunities to strengthen solidarity, regenerate community moral values, and achieve positive peace relevant to local social realities (Matakena et al., 2024). The moral legitimacy and spirituality of *kiai* are important social capital. As respected figures, *kiai* use religious values to build trust, influence social change, and strengthen relationships between citizens in order to reduce conflict in society.

The success of a *kiai* in resolving conflicts in Madura cannot be separated from the moral and spiritual legitimacy attached to him. Unlike state officials or formal officials, *kiai* are often regarded as figures with a special relationship with God, so that every piece of advice or decision made by a *kiai* is believed to originate not only from rational human considerations but also from divine guidance that is transcendent and universal. This legitimacy forms a very strong social capital, namely, capital based on symbols, morals, and spirituality that provides greater social cohesion than formal legal instruments, especially in the context of a highly religious and traditional society such as Madura. This social capital is not formal or administrative in nature, but rather takes the form of reputation and trust that has been built up over decades through Islamic boarding schools, religious lectures, and spiritual interactions between the *kiai* and his followers (Asy'ari, 2025).

The Madurese people, who highly value mutual respect and maintaining marwah (dignity or honor), understand that when a *kiai* speaks or acts, the message comes not only from human authority but reflects a higher source (Sartini, 2025). This significantly distorts the legitimacy of the *kiai* from that of the state, because the kiai's legitimacy is more difficult to question or suspect, as it is built on a foundation of deep spiritual belief. When conflicts arise, whether it be land disputes, allegations of infidelity, disputes over pride that can trigger carok, or divisions between villages, emotions and tensions are often very high. The state, through its formal apparatus and legal institutions, may impose solutions in accordance with legal provisions and procedures. However, the Madurese community often feels that such an approach does not address the deeper spiritual values.

This is where the moral legitimacy of the *kiai* plays a strategic role, because his presence calms emotions, as the disputing parties feel spiritually and emotionally bound to respect, listen to, and, in many cases, obey his decisions or advice. This type of social capital can be analyzed from two perspectives. First, as a form of symbolic social capital. Second, as spiritual capital that functions as social capital within a cultural-religious context. Pierre Bourdieu discusses symbolic capital that arises from reputation, prestige, and social legitimacy. Meanwhile, Maduran kiai add a spiritual dimension, namely, moral reputation strengthened by the belief that the *kiai* is close to God (Asy'ari, 2025). This capital is non-material in nature, but it has a concrete social effect, namely, it is able to unite communities in peaceful collective action and resolve conflicts without violence. In mediation practice, *Kiai* do not issue ultimatums or impose solutions authoritatively. This was emphasized by Salim, one of the village *kiai* in Kartagennah Daya village, Pamekasan regency, who said that *kiai* invite all parties to reflect on conflict as a spiritual test and an opportunity for inner transformation:

> They emphasize values such as sincerity, patience, repentance, and reconciliation, conveyed in language that motivates the heart and moral consciousness without resorting to threats or pressure, such as "all humans will return to God" or "forgiveness is a sign of strength of faith." These values serve as highly effective tools for conflict transformation in Madurese society (Salim,, personal communication, July 25, 2025).

This form of relational reconciliation evokes emotions and touches the psychology of the parties in conflict, in line with Galtung's emphasis that conflict transformation must include the dimension of reconciliation between individuals or groups so that relationships do not only end formally but are also strengthened emotionally and morally (Galtung, 2012). Therefore, the moral legitimacy of the *kiai* becomes the main instrument in transforming damaged social relations into a new network of solidarity. When conflicting parties sit together in a pesantren forum, accompanied by kiai as mediators, agreements can be reached that rebuild mutual trust and reduce latent resentment.

The narrative of reconciliation formed by kiai emphasizes their role as an extension of divine values rather than as superior figures who rule. This role expands the space for the community to engage in introspection and reconciliation in a way that feels natural and organic, perhaps even perceived as a collective decision born from the heart of each individual. Thus, when an agreement is reached, the conflicting parties do not feel coerced but rather feel at ease because they have chosen that path spiritually and morally, not out of fear of formal legal sanctions (Fadil et al., 2025). Similar ideas are also stated in:

> Building legitimacy is not an instant process, so clerics in Madura consistently cultivate their moral reputation by distancing themselves from practical politics and the interests of certain groups. As a result, clerics have no choice but to choose a simple lifestyle, consistently preaching and practicing religious values without scandal or collusion. The trust built over the years has become a strong moral foundation. If they recommend reconciliation, the community is certain that the decision is not due to political pressure or group interests, but purely based on shared spiritual ethics. This moral legitimacy also facilitates the kiai in building inclusivity in mediation, as the kiai, in carrying out their peace mission, often involve various parties such as other community leaders close to both conflicting sides (Asy'ari, 2025).

The presence of these figures drives the reconciliation process, thereby strengthening positive social pressure and a sense of responsibility. The spiritual legitimacy of the *kiai* serves as an invisible social bond, shaping new norms in which reconciliation becomes a public ritual that renews a sense of community. When measured in the context of the social capital possessed by the community, the moral and spiritual legitimacy of the *kiai* in Madura acts as a very strong form of social cohesion.

When intergroup relations become rigid or frozen, the *kiai* emerges as a facilitator of harmony. The state may impose legal sanctions; however, such sanctions cannot compel the heart. In contrast, an offer of peace extended by a religious leader resonates deeply within, as it carries a moral calling. Moral and spiritual legitimacy likewise shapes local moral consensus -such as sincerity (*ikhlas*), patience (*sabar*), and repentance (*taubat*) which are not merely normative statements but are internalized as collective values, living within the community's narrative.

When a *kiai* delivers a public speech imbued with moral wisdom, the community understands that it is not merely rhetorical discourse, but a summons to moral responsibility (Munib, et al., 2024). This gives rise to an implicit consensus that peace is a moral obligation, rather than merely a pragmatic option. Structurally, such legitimacy closes the gap for potential conflict escalation. In situations where tension could still trigger retaliatory actions such as *carok*, which occur when one's honor is perceived as tarnished, the presence of a *kiai* can serve as a primary deterrent. The *kiai* intervenes prior to escalation, offering spiritual and personal counsel to key actors in the conflict. This approach constitutes a form of preventive peacebuilding that does not wait for violence to occur but instead forestalls it through moral persuasion.

Once the *kiai* is recognized as a moral authority, the disputing parties tend to exercise restraint and reconsider their actions from religious and ethical perspectives. In the context of conflict transformation as articulated by Galtung, the kiai's moral legitimacy produces a minor yet crucial structural change namely, an alteration in patterns of social relations and cultural norms (Galtung, 2012). Rather than resolving conflicts solely through retributive legal mechanisms, the community has begun to develop restorative justice practices grounded in spiritual values, in which wrongdoing and victimhood are assessed not in terms of material loss but in terms of inner dimensions and moral identity.

The moral and spiritual legitimacy of the *kiai* can be understood as a multifunctional form of social capital serving as a trigger for social stability, a foundation for nonviolent dialogue, a catalyst for inner reconciliation, and a deterrent to conflict escalation. The kiai can create zones of peace within conflict-prone communities without oversimplifying complexity by building peace infrastructure grounded in the values and symbols of everyday life. This form of capital is irreplaceable by formal systems, as it is inherently human and immanent, residing in the hearts and habitual practices of the community.

Modern nations often focus on formal institutions to address conflict; however, the success of the *kiai* in Madura demonstrates that moral- and spiritual-based social capital is not only effective but also essential, particularly in religious and collectivist societies. This form of capital offers valuable lessons for the development of restorative justice systems rooted in local culture, in which the state and local moral leaders can work collaboratively. The moral and spiritual legitimacy of the *kiai* serves as a bridge between formal legal mechanisms and the inner needs of the community, shaping a model of peace that not only resolves disputes but also enriches communal identity.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing discussion, the social position, communication strategies, and moral–spiritual legitimacy of the *kiai* constitute an integrated and highly effective framework for fostering peaceful conflict transformation. In Madura, the *kiai* occupies a symbolic position as a religious leader while simultaneously playing a significant role within the informal structure of local power. The authority of the *kiai* is meta-legal, extending beyond the jurisdiction of formal law, owing to his legitimacy as a figure capable of uniting spirituality with moral authority. In many instances, the *kiai's* decisions are more readily obeyed than court rulings, underscoring that his legitimacy is rooted in deep-seated cultural and spiritual trust. The *kiai's* communication strategies in conflict resolution are highly contextual and deeply embedded in local culture. Rather than adopting confrontational or procedural approaches, the *kiai* favors symbolic, spiritual, and personal methods.

Religious forums such as *pengajian, tahlilan*, and family deliberations are utilized as mediation

spaces that do not cause loss of face for the disputing parties. This aligns with Madurese cultural values that uphold honor (*malebbi*), making the *kiai's* moral legitimacy and spirituality a highly potent form of social capital. The Madurese community believes that the *kiai's* decisions are based not only on rational considerations but also constitute part of divine guidance. Consequently, conflict transformation facilitated by the *kiai* addresses not only the external aspects of disputes but also engages the inner and emotional dimensions of the community. The combination of these three elements forms an effective and sustainable peace infrastructure. This research can be developed further by subsequent researchers by adapting the conflict resolution model to larger social situations and integrating local religious and cultural values.

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