



Aswaja Reconstruction as Social Ethics: The Roots of the Theology of the Nahdlatul Ulama Moderation

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Received: March 19, 2025	Revised: March 22, 2025	Accepted: March 25, 2025	Online: March 27, 2025
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ABSTRACT

Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) serves as the theological and social paradigm for Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Islamic organization, traditionally promoting moderation and tolerance. However, the rise of contemporary challenges, including radicalism, intolerance, and social disintegration, necessitates a re-evaluation of Aswaja beyond a mere theological doctrine to function as a relevant social ethic. This study aims to reconstruct the understanding of Aswaja as a comprehensive social ethic by analyzing the reactualization of its core values: tawassuth (moderation), tasamuh (tolerance), tawazun (balance), and i'tidal (justice) in response to modern societal problems. This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing a literature-based study to examine and reinterpret classical and contemporary texts related to the historical, theological, and social dimensions of Aswaja. The findings indicate that Aswaja is fundamentally a manhaj al-fikr (a method of thought) rather than a rigid doctrine, characterized by its flexibility and adaptability. Reconstructing Aswaja as a social ethic requires the internalization of its core values into the public sphere through a synergistic integration of its three dimensions: creed (aqidah), jurisprudence (shari'ah), and ethics (tasawwuf), which together form a robust foundation for public morality. The study concludes that reconstructing Aswaja as a social ethic is imperative for strengthening social cohesion and promoting an inclusive Islam. By functioning as a relevant ethical framework, Aswaja can effectively counter extremism and contribute to building a just, peaceful, and civilized society, thereby affirming its role as a source of rahmatan lil-'alamin (mercy for all creation).

Keywords: *Aswaja, Social Ethics, Islamic Moderation, Nahdlatul Ulama, Reconstruction*

Journal Homepage <https://ejournal.iainbatanghari.ac.id/index.php/attasyrih/index>

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How to cite: Ubaidillah, H. M., (2025). Aswaja Reconstruction as Social Ethics: The Roots of the Theology of the Nahdlatul Ulama Moderation. *At-Tasyrih: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Hukum Islam*, 11(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.55849/attasyrih.v1i1.335>

Published by: Pusat Penelitian dan Pengabdian Masyarakat, Institut Agama Islam Nusantara Batang Hari

INTRODUCTION

Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) represents one of the most significant theological and intellectual traditions within Sunni Islam, shaping the religious and social landscape for centuries across the Muslim world. In Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation, Aswaja serves as the foundational ideology for Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), its largest Islamic civil society organization (Azharghany, 2022). Historically, this tradition has been credited with fostering a form of Islam characterized by moderation (tawassuth), tolerance (tasamuh), and balance (tawazun), enabling a harmonious synthesis between

Islamic principles and local cultural practices (Fuad & Susilo, 2019). This framework has been instrumental in navigating the complexities of a pluralistic society, providing a theological bulwark against extremist interpretations and contributing to the relative social stability and religious coexistence that has defined much of modern Indonesian history (Saenong, 2021). The principles embedded within Aswaja have traditionally guided millions in their personal faith and communal interactions, establishing a legacy of inclusive and culturally adaptive Islam.

The contemporary global and local context, however, presents a series of unprecedented challenges that test the traditional applications of Aswaja. The forces of globalization, the rapid dissemination of information through digital media, and the rise of transnational religious movements have introduced new ideological currents into Indonesian society (Sebastian et al., 2021). These developments have fueled the emergence of religious radicalism, heightened social and political polarization, and created deep-seated social fissures that threaten the nation's long-standing tradition of pluralism (Marheni Muhammad, 2024). Issues such as social injustice, economic inequality, identity politics, and environmental crises demand more than just theological pronouncements; they require a robust and actionable ethical framework (Rahman, 2020). The established understanding of Aswaja, often confined to matters of ritual and creed, is now being called upon to provide meaningful guidance on these complex contemporary dilemmas.

This evolving landscape necessitates a critical re-evaluation and reconstruction of Aswaja, moving it beyond its classical formulation as a theological doctrine or a marker of religious identity (Azizah et al., 2022; Kanafi et al., 2021; Sahona et al., 2023). There is an urgent need to unlock its potential as a dynamic and comprehensive social ethic capable of addressing the multifaceted problems of the 21st century. Such a reconstruction does not imply a departure from its core principles but rather a re-articulation and re-application of them in a manner that is relevant and responsive to current realities (Ikhsan et al., 2024). The challenge lies in transforming Aswaja from a repository of historical tradition into a forward-looking ethical paradigm that can inspire and guide collective action towards a more just, equitable, and compassionate society (Hilmy, 2013). This study is predicated on the belief that the inherent flexibility and wisdom within the Aswaja tradition contain the necessary resources for this vital intellectual and social project.

The central problem this research addresses is the growing disjuncture between the classical, often doctrinal, understanding of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah and the pressing need for a sophisticated social ethic to navigate contemporary societal challenges (Amal & Saat, 2021). While Aswaja is widely revered as a bastion of moderation, its principles are frequently articulated in abstract terms, lacking a systematic translation into practical, actionable guidance for complex modern issues such as structural inequality, political corruption, inter-communal conflict, and digital disinformation. This gap leaves a vacuum where its adherents may struggle to apply its values effectively, and where alternative, more rigid and exclusivist ideologies can gain traction by offering seemingly clear-cut, albeit problematic, solutions. The core issue, therefore, is the under-realized potential of Aswaja as a comprehensive ethical system for the public sphere.

This disconnect manifests in several specific problems. First, the discourse on Aswaja within community and educational settings often remains confined to theological debates of the past or the defense of specific ritual practices (fiqh), rather than engaging with urgent social and political ethics. Second, the rise of identity politics has, in some instances, reduced Aswaja to a mere label for political mobilization, detaching it from its profound ethical commitments to justice (i'tidal) and compassion. Third, there is a palpable struggle to formulate a coherent Aswaja-based response to global challenges, from the climate crisis to the ethics of artificial intelligence, demonstrating a need for a more adaptive and forward-thinking interpretive framework. The consequence is a potential erosion of Aswaja's relevance, rendering it a symbol of a cherished past rather than a vital resource for shaping a better future.

Ultimately, the research confronts a critical question: How can the rich intellectual and spiritual heritage of Aswaja be systematically reconstructed into a coherent and compelling social ethic that provides clear, relevant, and effective guidance for addressing the multifaceted challenges of contemporary society? Without such a reconstruction, Aswaja risks being marginalized in public discourse, unable to effectively counter the allure of radical ideologies or to contribute meaningfully to the urgent project of building a just, pluralistic, and sustainable global community. This study contends that the failure to bridge the gap between theological principle and ethical practice represents a significant intellectual and social crisis that demands immediate and rigorous scholarly attention.

The primary objective of this research is to formulate and propose a systematic reconstruction of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah as a comprehensive and applicable social ethic. This study moves beyond a descriptive account of its historical or theological tenets to develop a normative framework that articulates its relevance and utility in the contemporary public sphere. The overarching goal is to demonstrate how Aswaja's core principles can be reinterpreted and operationalized to offer robust ethical guidance on a wide range of modern social, political, and economic issues. This involves constructing a conceptual model that is both faithful to the tradition's foundational values and responsive to the complexities of the 21st century.

To achieve this primary goal, the research pursues several specific objectives. First, it will critically analyze the foundational texts and historical evolution of Aswaja to distill its core ethical principles, particularly the concepts of tawassuth, tasamuh, tawazun, and i'tidal. Second, it aims to examine the limitations of existing interpretations that confine Aswaja to a purely theological or ritualistic domain. Third, the study will develop a systematic methodology for translating these core principles into a coherent ethical framework applicable to contemporary issues such as democratic governance, human rights, social justice, and environmental stewardship. Fourth, it will propose concrete pathways for integrating this reconstructed social ethic into key societal institutions, including education, community leadership, and public policy discourse.

The anticipated outcome of this research is a detailed and well-substantiated conceptual framework for "Aswaja as a Social Ethic." This framework will serve as a valuable intellectual resource for academics, religious leaders, educators, and

policymakers. It is expected to provide a compelling alternative to both secularist ideologies that dismiss the role of religion in public life and extremist religious movements that advocate for intolerance and violence. By achieving these objectives, this study aims to contribute to the revitalization of a progressive and socially engaged Islamic intellectual tradition, ultimately fostering the development of a more just, inclusive, and harmonious society in Indonesia and beyond.

The existing body of scholarly literature on Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah is extensive, yet it is concentrated in several specific areas, leaving a significant gap that this research intends to fill. A vast number of studies have focused on the historical origins and theological development of Aswaja, tracing its lineage through key classical scholars like Imam al-Ash'ari and al-Maturidi. Another substantial portion of the literature, particularly within Indonesian studies, examines Aswaja primarily through a sociological lens, analyzing its role as the cultural and religious identity of Nahdlatul Ulama members and its function in the political landscape of the nation. These works have provided invaluable insights into what Aswaja has been and what it represents for its community.

However, a critical review of the literature reveals a conspicuous absence of systematic, in-depth research focused on the normative reconstruction of Aswaja as a forward-looking social ethic. While many scholars and public intellectuals advocate for Aswaja's moderate values, these discussions often remain at a high level of abstraction, issuing general calls for tolerance and balance without delving into the rigorous work of building a comprehensive ethical framework. Descriptive historical accounts and sociological analyses, though important, do not provide the prescriptive and operational guidance needed to apply Aswaja's principles to novel and complex ethical dilemmas. There is a clear dearth of scholarship that moves beyond describing Aswaja as a static tradition and instead engages in the constructive project of articulating it as a dynamic, living ethical system.

This study is precisely positioned to address this critical gap. It shifts the scholarly focus from the historical-descriptive to the normative-reconstructive. Unlike previous research that has analyzed Aswaja as a phenomenon to be explained, this study treats it as a resource to be developed. It seeks to answer not only "What is Aswaja?" but the more pressing question, "What does Aswaja compel us to do in the face of contemporary social and ethical challenges?" By systematically developing a social-ethical framework grounded in Aswaja's core tenets, this research will provide a novel contribution that bridges theology and public policy, history and future-oriented ethics. It offers a new direction for Aswaja studies, one that emphasizes its practical relevance and transformative potential in the modern world.

The novelty of this research lies in its pioneering effort to systematically reconstruct Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah as a comprehensive social ethic (Wafa, 2022). While the idea of a moderate Islam is widely discussed, this study is the first of its kind to move beyond general assertions and develop a structured, theoretically grounded, and practically oriented ethical framework. Its originality stems from its integrative methodology, which synthesizes classical theological sources with contemporary social and political theory to

articulate a vision of Aswaja that is both deeply rooted in tradition and fully engaged with the challenges of the modern world. This approach provides a fresh perspective, recasting Aswaja not as a static identity marker but as a dynamic source of ethical reasoning and social action.

The innovative contribution of this work is further demonstrated in its focus on operationalization (Fithriyyah, 2018). The study does not stop at the theoretical formulation of ethical principles but proceeds to explore concrete mechanisms for their application. It proposes how the reconstructed ethic of Aswaja can inform curriculum development in educational institutions, guide the decision-making of community leaders, and shape the formulation of public policy in a pluralistic state (Hoir, 2019). This practical dimension distinguishes the research from purely philosophical or theological treatises, endowing it with a unique relevance for a wide range of stakeholders beyond academia. The proposed framework is designed to be a usable intellectual tool for fostering a more just, tolerant, and cohesive society.

The justification for this research is both urgent and profound. In an era where religious identity is increasingly manipulated to fuel conflict, polarization, and violence, the need for a robust, intellectually sound, and compassionate religious ethic has never been greater. This study is justified by its potential to provide a powerful counter-narrative to extremist ideologies by articulating an authentic, inclusive, and socially progressive vision of Islam from within one of its most significant mainstream traditions. For Indonesia and the wider Muslim world, the successful reconstruction of Aswaja as a social ethic is not merely an academic exercise; it is a vital project for strengthening the foundations of democratic citizenship, promoting interfaith harmony, and ensuring that religion serves as a force for human flourishing and global peace.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a comprehensive literature-based analysis to reconstruct Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) as a social ethic (Fadli & Sudrajat, 2020). The methodological approach is rooted in textual and conceptual analysis, which is appropriate for a study that seeks to interpret, synthesize, and develop a normative framework from a deep body of historical and theological sources. The research does not involve empirical data collection from human subjects but instead engages in a rigorous examination of written materials. A hermeneutic approach is central to this design, allowing for a deep interpretation of texts within their historical and socio-cultural contexts while also exploring their contemporary relevance. This design facilitates a critical engagement with the Aswaja tradition, moving beyond mere description to a constructive and systematic re-articulation of its core principles into a coherent ethical system for modern society.

Data Sources

The data for this research consists entirely of textual sources, carefully selected to provide a comprehensive and multi-layered understanding of the Aswaja tradition. The

primary sources include the classical Islamic texts (kitab kuning) that form the canonical foundation of Aswaja theology, jurisprudence, and ethics, with a particular focus on the works of key scholars such as Imam al-Ash'ari, Imam al-Ghazali, and the founders of the four Sunni schools of law. Secondary sources comprise the extensive writings and official documents of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) founders and leading intellectuals, including K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari, which articulate the application and interpretation of Aswaja within the specific context of Indonesia. Tertiary sources include contemporary academic publications, scholarly articles, books, and dissertations that analyze Aswaja from historical, sociological, and philosophical perspectives, providing a critical lens and situating this study within the existing scholarly discourse.

Data Analysis Technique

The primary instrument for this research is the analytical framework applied by the researcher to interpret the collected textual data. The data analysis process is systematic and multi-staged, employing several qualitative techniques to ensure rigor and depth. Initially, a thorough content analysis is conducted on the primary and secondary texts to identify and catalog the core concepts, recurring themes, and foundational principles related to ethics and social conduct within the Aswaja tradition. Following this, a critical discourse analysis is applied to understand how these concepts have been framed, debated, and utilized in different historical and political contexts, particularly within the institutional discourse of Nahdlatul Ulama. Finally, the findings from these analyses are synthesized thematically to construct a coherent and integrated framework, reconstructing the identified principles into a systematic social ethic that is both authentic to the tradition and responsive to contemporary challenges.

Procedures

The research procedure is executed in four distinct phases to ensure a logical and systematic progression from data collection to conclusion. The first phase involves a preliminary and expansive literature review to map the existing scholarly landscape, identify the research gap, and refine the research questions and objectives. The second phase consists of the systematic collection and organization of the primary, secondary, and tertiary textual sources according to their thematic relevance and historical significance. The third and most intensive phase is the data analysis, where the collected texts are meticulously read, interpreted, and analyzed using the techniques of content analysis and critical discourse analysis as described above. The final phase involves the synthesis of the analyzed data into a cohesive argument, culminating in the formulation of the reconstructed framework of Aswaja as a social ethic. This concluding step includes writing the research findings, discussing their implications, and articulating the novel contribution of the study to the field of Islamic thought and social ethics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The comprehensive analysis of primary and secondary literature reveals a consistent and interconnected set of core ethical principles that form the foundation of the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) tradition. These principles, while originating in

classical theological and jurisprudential texts, have been continuously interpreted and applied throughout history, most notably within the socio-religious context of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) in Indonesia. The findings from the textual analysis are synthesized and categorized to illustrate the conceptual architecture of Aswaja's ethical framework. This synthesis is not statistical in a numerical sense but represents a qualitative quantification of thematic prevalence and conceptual significance across the body of literature reviewed. The core principles identified are Tawassuth (Moderation/The Middle Path), Tasamuh (Tolerance), Tawazun (Balance/Equilibrium), and I'tidal (Justice/Fairness).

These principles were systematically coded based on their appearance, definition, and application in the analyzed texts. The following table provides a structured overview of these foundational ethical concepts, their primary textual basis in both classical and modern Indonesian scholarship, and their principal domains of application as identified in the literature. This thematic mapping serves as the foundational data for reconstructing Aswaja as a robust social ethic.

Table 1: Thematic Synthesis of Core Aswaja Ethical Principles

Core Principle	Definition in Literature	Primary Classical Sources	Key NU Articulation	Principal Domain of Application
Tawassuth	The middle path; avoiding extremism in belief and practice.	Qur'an (Al-Baqarah: 143), Works of al-Ghazali, al-Asy'ari.	K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's <i>Qanun Asasi</i> , NU official statutes.	Theology, Jurisprudence, Social Interaction, Politics.
Tasamuh	Tolerance and forgiveness towards religious and social differences.	Works of Imam al-Shafi'i on social contracts, al-Ghazali's ethics.	Abdurrahman Wahid's writings on pluralism, NU's public statements.	Inter-faith relations, Cultural Pluralism, Minority Rights.
Tawazun	Balance between spiritual and worldly obligations, reason and revelation.	Al-Ghazali's <i>Ihya' Ulum al-Din</i> , works on <i>maqasid al-shari'ah</i> .	NU's Khittah 1926, balancing religion and state.	Personal ethics, Governance, Economic Development, Education.
I'tidal	Justice, fairness, and acting uprightly in all matters.	Juristic works on <i>al-'adalah</i> , theological texts on divine justice.	NU's resolutions on social justice, advocacy for the rule of law.	Law, Public Policy, Social Justice, Conflict Resolution.

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrates a profound continuity of ethical thought from the classical Islamic period to contemporary Indonesian Islam. The principle of Tawassuth emerges as the central, organizing concept from which the other principles are derived. Classical texts, particularly the works of al-Ghazali, frame moderation not as a passive compromise but as an active intellectual and spiritual pursuit of a just middle ground between opposing extremes. In the context of NU, this principle was strategically employed by K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari to navigate the turbulent ideological landscape of the early 20th century, positioning the organization between religious puritanism and secular nationalism. This demonstrates a clear translation of a classical theological concept into a modern socio-political strategy.

Similarly, Tasamuh is not merely a modern notion of tolerance but is deeply rooted in classical jurisprudential discussions regarding interactions with non-Muslim communities (ahl al-dhimmah) and the ethical necessity of forgiveness. The analysis shows that NU intellectuals, particularly Abdurrahman Wahid, expanded this classical understanding to champion a more radical and inclusive vision of pluralism that affirms the equal rights and dignity of all citizens, regardless of their faith or background. This represents a significant evolution of the concept, adapting it to the realities of a modern, multi-religious nation-state. The consistent presence of these principles across diverse texts and eras underscores their centrality to the Aswaja worldview.

The analysis of the literature further reveals a distinct evolution in the application and emphasis of these core principles over time. In the classical period, the discourse surrounding these concepts was primarily theological and jurisprudential, aimed at resolving sectarian disputes (e.g., between Mu'tazilah and literalists) and establishing a stable legal framework for society. The emphasis was on doctrinal correctness and the preservation of communal identity. The texts from this era, while containing profound ethical insights, frame these principles largely within the context of intra-Muslim debates and the governance of an Islamic polity.

Within the Indonesian context, particularly through the intellectual labor of NU scholars, these principles underwent a significant recontextualization. The focus shifted from abstract theological debates to concrete social and national problems. Tawazun, for example, evolved from a concept of balancing reason and revelation in theology to a principle for balancing the roles of religion and the state (din wa dawla) in a modern republic. This shift reflects a conscious effort to make the Aswaja tradition relevant to the project of nation-building, demonstrating its inherent flexibility and capacity for adaptation. This descriptive finding highlights that the meaning of these principles is not fixed but is dynamically shaped by the historical and social challenges faced by the community.

The consistent yet evolving nature of these ethical principles allows for a critical inference: Aswaja functions less as a static, monolithic doctrine (madhhab) and more as an adaptive methodological framework (manhaj al-fikr). The data strongly suggests that the tradition's longevity and influence stem from its inherent capacity for reinterpretation and reapplication. The principles of moderation, tolerance, balance, and justice are not rigid rules but are better understood as guiding heuristics that allow for creative and contextually appropriate ethical reasoning. This interpretive flexibility is the key mechanism that has allowed Aswaja to remain a relevant moral force across vastly different historical epochs.

This inferential conclusion directly challenges interpretations that portray Aswaja as a rigid and unchanging traditionalism. The analysis implies that any attempt to "purify" Aswaja by returning to a single, supposedly pristine historical form would betray its fundamental character as an adaptive intellectual tradition. The vitality of Aswaja lies precisely in its ongoing dialogue between foundational texts (al-qadim al-shalih) and contemporary realities, enabling the generation of new and better solutions (al-akhdzu bi

al-jadid al-ashlah). Therefore, the project of reconstructing Aswaja as a social ethic is not an artificial imposition of modern values onto a traditional framework but is an authentic continuation of the tradition's own internal logic and historical trajectory.

The analysis reveals that the four core principles are not discrete, isolated concepts but exist in a deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing relationship. Tawassuth (moderation) serves as the foundational ethos, creating the necessary intellectual and psychological space for the other principles to flourish. It is the rejection of extremist certainty that makes tolerance and balance possible. Without a commitment to the middle path, the pursuit of justice can devolve into vigilantism, and the assertion of identity can lead to intolerance.

This foundational principle of moderation enables the practice of Tawazun (balance), which in turn operationalizes moderation in various life domains. For instance, the balance between textual fidelity and rational interpretation is a direct application of Tawassuth in the intellectual sphere. This balance is a prerequisite for achieving I'tidal (justice), as a just outcome requires a careful weighing of competing rights, responsibilities, and societal interests. Finally, Tasamuh (tolerance) emerges as the social expression of this entire ethical constellation, representing the application of moderation, balance, and justice in interactions with those who are different. The principles thus form a holistic and integrated ethical system, where each component supports and enriches the others.

A pivotal case study illustrating the application of this ethical framework is Nahdlatul Ulama's historic decision at its 1984 National Congress in Situbondo to formally accept the state ideology of Pancasila as its sole foundation (asas tunggal). At a time of significant political pressure from the New Order regime and intense debate within the Muslim community about the relationship between Islam and the state, this decision was a profound expression of Aswaja ethics in practice. The organization was faced with the extremist positions of either demanding an Islamic state, which would alienate non-Muslim citizens, or adopting a purely secular stance, which would betray its religious identity.

NU's leadership, drawing explicitly on the principles of Tawassuth and Tawazun, navigated a middle path. They argued that the values enshrined in Pancasila—belief in one God, humanitarianism, national unity, democracy, and social justice—were not contradictory to Islamic principles but were, in fact, compatible with the higher objectives of Islamic law (maqasid al-shari'ah). This decision was not a pragmatic political compromise but a deeply considered theological and ethical judgment. It represented a conscious choice to prioritize national cohesion and the welfare of the entire nation (maslahah 'ammah) over a narrow, textualist interpretation of political Islam, thereby providing a powerful case study of Aswaja's application to a complex national dilemma.

The NU case study on Pancasila serves as a clear demonstration of the reconstructed social ethic in action. The decision-making process directly reflected the principle of Tawazun by balancing the religious obligations of Muslims with their civic responsibilities as Indonesian citizens. It avoided the false dichotomy between being a

good Muslim and a good citizen. Furthermore, the final decision embodied I'tidal (justice) by affirming a political framework that ensures equal rights and protections for all citizens, regardless of their religious affiliation, thereby upholding the principle of fairness in a pluralistic society.

This case also powerfully illustrates the social expression of Tasamuh (tolerance). By accepting Pancasila, NU implicitly rejected the ideological basis for discriminating against religious minorities and affirmed its commitment to a shared national life built on mutual respect. This act provided a theological legitimation for pluralism and religious coexistence, directly countering the exclusivist narratives of radical groups. The case study thus explains how the abstract ethical principles identified in the textual analysis are not merely theoretical ideals but have been used as practical tools for conflict resolution, nation-building, and the promotion of a just and harmonious social order.

The collective results of this study strongly indicate that the intellectual and spiritual resources for reconstructing Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah as a comprehensive social ethic are not only present but are deeply embedded within the tradition itself. The analysis of classical and modern texts reveals a consistent, coherent, and interconnected set of ethical principles—moderation, tolerance, balance, and justice—that have historically demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation to changing social and political contexts. The tradition's inherent methodological flexibility (*manhaj al-fikr*) provides a solid foundation for this reconstructive project.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the reconstruction of Aswaja as a social ethic is not an act of invention but one of recovery and re-articulation. It involves systematically drawing out the ethical implications of its core tenets and applying them to the pressing challenges of the contemporary world. The case study of Nahdlatul Ulama's engagement with Indonesian nationalism provides compelling evidence that this process is already underway. The task for contemporary scholars and community leaders is to continue this intellectual labor, ensuring that Aswaja remains a vibrant and relevant source of ethical guidance for fostering a more just, compassionate, and peaceful global society.

The results of this study successfully identified a coherent and interconnected framework of core ethical principles foundational to the Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) tradition. The investigation into primary and secondary literature consistently revealed four central tenets: Tawassuth (moderation), Tasamuh (tolerance), Tawazun (balance), and I'tidal (justice). These principles are not merely abstract theological concepts but have been historically operationalized, particularly within the Indonesian socio-religious landscape by Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). The findings demonstrate that these values form a holistic ethical system, with moderation serving as the foundational ethos that enables the practice of balance, justice, and tolerance in various spheres of life.

A key finding is the dynamic and adaptive nature of this ethical framework. The research traced the conceptual evolution of these principles from their classical theological origins to their modern application in the context of a nation-state. This evolution signifies that Aswaja is not a static doctrine but an adaptive methodological framework (*manhaj al-fikr*). The capacity for reinterpretation and recontextualization is a defining characteristic

of the tradition, allowing it to address new social and political challenges as they arise. This inherent flexibility is a crucial element that underpins its enduring relevance.

The pivotal case study of Nahdlatul Ulama's acceptance of Pancasila provided concrete evidence of this ethical framework in action. The decision exemplified the practical application of Tawassuth, Tawazun, I'tidal, and Tasamuh to navigate a complex political dilemma. It showcased how these principles were used to balance religious identity with national responsibility, thereby providing a theological foundation for pluralism and civic nationalism. This case serves as a powerful illustration of how the abstract principles identified in the literature are translated into tangible socio-political outcomes that have shaped the course of Indonesian history.

Ultimately, the study concludes that the intellectual resources for reconstructing Aswaja as a comprehensive social ethic are deeply embedded within the tradition itself. The process is one of recovery and re-articulation rather than invention. The findings collectively point towards the potential of this reconstructed ethic to serve as a robust counter-narrative to religious extremism and as a positive framework for fostering a just, inclusive, and harmonious society. The research establishes a clear pathway from classical text to contemporary ethical practice, affirming the vitality of the Aswaja tradition.

The findings of this study align with and extend the work of prominent scholars on Indonesian Islam. Robert W. Hefner's research on "Civil Islam," for instance, highlights the role of organizations like NU in fostering a democratic and pluralistic public sphere. This study provides a deeper theological and ethical substance to Hefner's sociological observations by identifying the specific Aswaja principles (Tawassuth, Tasamuh) that form the normative foundation for the civil society engagement he describes. Where Hefner analyzes the external manifestations of moderate Islam, this research illuminates its internal intellectual architecture.

Conversely, this study offers a nuanced perspective that contrasts with earlier scholarship that sometimes portrayed NU and the Aswaja tradition as primarily static and traditionalist. Martin van Bruinessen's seminal work, while invaluable, focused heavily on the traditional structures and power relations within NU. The findings here, particularly the emphasis on Aswaja as an adaptive manhaj al-fikr, challenge any perception of rigidity. This research demonstrates that behind the facade of traditionalism lies a dynamic process of intellectual engagement and ethical reasoning that allows for significant adaptation and innovation, as seen in the Pancasila case.

The research also contributes to the broader academic conversation on Islamic modernism and moderation, as explored by scholars like Masdar Hilmy. While much of the literature focuses on the compatibility of Islam with modernity, this study provides a specific, tradition-internal framework for how that compatibility is achieved. It moves beyond a general assertion of moderation to detail the specific ethical heuristics (balance, justice) that guide the process of adaptation. It shows that moderation in the Aswaja tradition is not a simple dilution of principles but a principled method of ethical deliberation.

Finally, in relation to studies on global Islamic movements, this research provides a crucial counterpoint. Scholars analyzing the rise of transnational radicalism often focus on ideologies originating from the Middle East. This study highlights a robust, indigenous intellectual tradition within the world's largest Muslim country that offers a compelling and authentic alternative. It demonstrates that the resources to combat extremism are not external impositions but can be found within the rich heritage of mainstream Islamic thought, thereby adding a significant Southeast Asian perspective to a discourse often dominated by other regions.

The findings signify, most fundamentally, that Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah is best understood as a living and evolving ethical tradition rather than a fixed set of dogmas. The consistent recontextualization of its core principles across centuries is a testament to its intellectual vitality. This signifies that the tradition possesses a powerful internal mechanism for self-renewal, allowing it to remain relevant in the face of profound social and historical change. The essence of Aswaja, therefore, is not found in a specific set of historical rulings but in its enduring commitment to a balanced and just methodological approach to faith and life.

The interconnectedness of the four core principles signifies the holistic nature of the Aswaja worldview. It reflects an understanding that a just society cannot be built without tolerance, that tolerance requires a balanced perspective, and that such balance is only possible through a commitment to moderation and the avoidance of extremes. This integrated framework signifies a sophisticated ethical system that resists the simplistic, binary thinking that often characterizes extremist ideologies. It presents a vision of Islam where theological soundness is inseparable from social compassion and ethical integrity.

The successful application of this framework in the Indonesian context, particularly in navigating the relationship between Islam and the state, signifies its potential as a model for other Muslim-majority societies grappling with similar challenges of pluralism and modernity. It demonstrates that it is possible to construct a national identity that is both deeply religious and fully inclusive. The NU-Pancasila case signifies that religious tradition can be a primary resource for building, rather than undermining, a modern, democratic, and pluralistic nation-state.

Furthermore, the findings reflect the profound influence of context on the interpretation of religious tradition. The evolution of Aswaja in Indonesia was shaped by the archipelago's history of cultural accommodation and its post-colonial project of nation-building. This signifies that Islam is not a monolithic entity but is always expressed through the cultural and historical particularities of its adherents. The Indonesian experience with Aswaja is a powerful reminder that local wisdom and historical context play a crucial role in unlocking the most humane and progressive potentials of the Islamic faith.

The primary implication of this research is for the field of Islamic education and da'wah (preaching). The findings provide a clear mandate to shift the focus of teaching Aswaja from rote memorization of theological formulas to the cultivation of ethical reasoning based on its core principles. Curricula in Islamic schools (pesantren and

madrasah) and content for sermons should be redesigned to emphasize how Tawassuth, Tasamuh, Tawazun, and I'tidal can be applied to contemporary problems, from online hate speech to environmental degradation. This would transform Aswaja from a subject to be learned into a tool to be used for ethical living.

For public policy and governance, the implications are equally significant. This study presents the reconstructed Aswaja social ethic as a valuable indigenous resource for policymaking in a pluralistic democracy. It offers a faith-based framework for social justice, minority rights, and conflict resolution that resonates with the majority of the population. Policymakers and civil society leaders can draw upon this ethical language to build broader consensus for inclusive and equitable policies, effectively grounding principles of good governance within a widely respected cultural and religious tradition.

The findings also have profound implications for interfaith and intercultural dialogue. By articulating a vision of Islam that is doctrinally committed to tolerance and pluralism, this research provides a powerful tool for building bridges between communities. It offers non-Muslims a clear understanding of the theological foundations of moderation within mainstream Islam, helping to dispel stereotypes and foster mutual trust. This framework can serve as a shared platform for dialogue, enabling different faith communities to work together on common ethical challenges based on shared values of justice and compassion.

Finally, for the future of academic research on Islam, this study implies a need to move beyond purely descriptive or historical analyses of religious traditions. It calls for more constructive and reconstructive scholarship that actively engages with these traditions as living sources of ethical insight. The "so-what" of this research is a call for scholars to become active participants in the project of interpreting and articulating religious ethics for the contemporary world, thereby helping to shape a future where faith traditions contribute positively to human flourishing.

The findings of this study—namely, the existence of a flexible and socially-oriented ethical framework within Aswaja—can be explained by several key factors. First, the historical process of Islamization in the Indonesian archipelago played a crucial role. Islam did not arrive through conquest but through a gradual process of trade, sufi missionary work, and cultural acculturation. This history fostered an approach to religion that was inherently dialogical and accommodating of local traditions, embedding the principles of Tasamuh and Tawazun deep within the DNA of Indonesian Islam from its inception.

Second, the intellectual tradition of the ulama (scholars) in Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) is a significant explanatory factor. The curriculum in these institutions has always emphasized a mastery of diverse classical texts and a respect for scholarly differences of opinion (ikhtilaf). This training cultivates an intellectual humility and a methodological sophistication that resists simplistic, literalist interpretations of scripture. This scholarly culture is the fertile ground from which the adaptive manhaj al-fikr of Aswaja grew and continues to be sustained.

Third, the socio-political context of modern Indonesia provided a powerful impetus for the articulation of Aswaja as a social ethic. The challenge of building a unified nation out of a vast and diverse archipelago necessitated an ideology that could foster unity amidst diversity. The leaders of Nahdlatul Ulama consciously drew upon the resources of the Aswaja tradition to provide a theological response to this national challenge. The political reality of pluralism demanded an ethical framework that could justify and sustain it, and Aswaja provided the necessary resources.

Fourth, the inherent theological and jurisprudential structure of Aswaja itself helps explain these findings. The tradition's reliance on the four Sunni schools of law, its Ash'ari/Maturidi creed that balances reason and revelation, and its embrace of Sufi ethics created a multi-layered and internally diverse system. This built-in pluralism prevents the tradition from becoming monolithic or rigid. The principles of balance and moderation are not later additions but are woven into the very fabric of its foundational sources, providing a permanent basis for its adaptive and ethical orientation.

Based on these findings, the immediate next step is to translate this reconstructed ethical framework into practical educational materials. This involves developing new textbooks, teaching modules, and training programs for teachers and preachers that are explicitly designed around the application of the four core principles to contemporary issues. Collaborative workshops involving academics, ulama, and educators should be organized to create pedagogical content that is both intellectually rigorous and accessible to a broad audience, ensuring these ideas move from the academic sphere into the classroom and the community.

A further recommendation is to initiate targeted policy dialogues with governmental bodies and civil society organizations. The findings should be presented to institutions like the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the National Counter Terrorism Agency (BNPT), and major interfaith councils to explore how the Aswaja social ethic can inform national strategies for promoting social cohesion and countering radicalization. This involves creating policy briefs and engaging in strategic advocacy to integrate this tradition-based ethical framework into official state and civil society programs.

Future academic research should build upon this study by conducting comparative analyses. It would be highly valuable to investigate how similar mainstream Islamic traditions in other parts of the world (e.g., the Maliki tradition in North Africa or the Hanafi tradition in South Asia) have developed their own social ethics. Such comparative work would enrich our understanding of the diverse ways in which Islam engages with modernity and could identify transnational principles of moderation and justice that can be shared across different Muslim communities.

Finally, a broader public dissemination strategy is crucial. The insights from this research need to reach beyond academic and elite circles to the general public. This can be achieved through the creation of accessible content for digital media, including short videos, podcasts, and articles written for popular online platforms. Collaborating with influential religious figures and content creators can help amplify this message, fostering a

wider public conversation about the role of a compassionate and just Islam in shaping a better future for all.

CONCLUSION

The most significant finding of this research is the conceptualization of Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (Aswaja) not as a static doctrine but as a dynamic and adaptive methodological framework (manhaj al-fikr). This study uniquely demonstrates that the core principles of Tawassuth (moderation), Tasamuh (tolerance), Tawazun (balance), and I'tidal (justice) constitute a holistic and interconnected ethical system, rather than discrete values. The research reveals that the process of reconstructing Aswaja into a contemporary social ethic is an act of authentic re-articulation rooted in the tradition's own intellectual history, providing a robust, indigenous counter-narrative to transnational extremist ideologies by drawing from within its own rich heritage.

The primary contribution of this research is conceptual, offering a novel framework that systematically bridges classical Islamic theology with contemporary social ethics. While previous scholarship has sociologically described the moderate practices of communities like Nahdlatul Ulama or historically traced Aswaja's development, this study provides the underlying normative structure, articulating how these practices are theologically and ethically justified. It moves beyond description to a reconstructive model, providing a clear intellectual pathway for translating foundational religious principles into an actionable ethical guide for navigating the complexities of modern pluralistic societies.

This study is subject to certain limitations, as its scope is confined to a literature-based textual and conceptual analysis. It does not empirically investigate the reception or practical application of these ethical principles among the broader Muslim populace. Future research should therefore be directed towards empirical studies, such as ethnographic or survey-based research, to assess how this reconstructed social ethic is understood and implemented at the grassroots level. Further comparative analysis with other mainstream Islamic traditions in different global contexts would also be invaluable to identify shared or divergent approaches to developing a contemporary social ethic.

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