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Aswaja In Higher Education as A Former of Social Character in The Perspective of Islamic Education

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Abstrak

Mata kuliah ASWAJA di perguruan tinggi tidak hanya diajarkan di lingkungan PTNU, tetapi juga di berbagai perguruan tinggi yang beraliran Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh indikasi bahwa mata kuliah ASWAJA mulai terlepas dari akar sosial-historisnya. Jika kelahirannya dahulu dipengaruhi oleh isu politik kepentingan yang memicu konflik sosial-keagamaan, maka idealnya pengembangan ASWAJA di perguruan tinggi harus selaras dengan visi pendidikan tinggi dan kebutuhan masyarakat saat ini. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana ASWAJA diajarkan di perguruan tinggi serta relevansinya dalam menjawab persoalan sosial-keagamaan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah agar keberadaan mata kuliah ASWAJA tidak menjadi utopis, melainkan dapat memberikan pemahaman yang kontekstual kepada mahasiswa sesuai dengan dinamika masyarakat yang terus berkembang. Artikel ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan teknik dokumentasi dan wawancara. Sedang teori yang digunakan sosiologi pengetahuan milik Karl Mannheim. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa, pertama, keberadaan mata kuliah ASWAJA di lokus penelitian masih bersifat utopis dan belum sepenuhnya mampu mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai ASWAJA dengan realitas sosial. Kedua, agar pembelajaran ASWAJA dapat berkontribusi secara optimal dalam membentuk karakter mahasiswa di tengah masyarakat yang heterogen, diperlukan pendekatan yang mencakup tiga aspek utama, yaitu intelligence question, emotional question, dan spiritual question. Pendekatan ini diharapkan dapat memperkuat pemahaman mahasiswa mengenai ASWAJA secara lebih komprehensif, kontekstual, serta aplikatif dalam kehidupan sosial.

Kata Kunci: Aswaja, NU, Karater Sosial, Sosiologi, Mannheim

Abstract

ASWAJA courses in higher education are not only taught in the PTNU environment, but also in various other tertiary institutions belonging to the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah sect. This research is

motivated by indications that the ASWAJA course is starting to be separated from its social-historical roots. The objective of this research is to explore the extent to which the ASWAJA course in tertiary institutions aligns with the vision of higher education and the needs of contemporary society. To this end, a qualitative approach is employed to investigate how ASWAJA is taught in universities and its relevance in addressing socio-religious issues. The objective of this research is to ensure that the ASWAJA course does not become utopian but rather provides students with a contextual understanding of the evolving dynamics of society. This article employs a qualitative approach, utilizing documentation and interview techniques, and the theoretical framework is drawn from the sociology of knowledge as developed by Karl Mannheim. The research findings indicate that, firstly, the ASWAJA course at the research site remains utopian and is incapable of fully integrating ASWAJA values with social reality. Secondly, to optimize the contribution of ASWAJA learning to the shaping of student character in a heterogeneous society, an approach is required that incorporates three aspects: intelligence questions, emotional questions, and spiritual questions. This approach is expected to strengthen students' understanding of ASWAJA in a more comprehensive, contextual and applicable manner in social life: intelligence questions, emotional questions, and spiritual questions.

Keywords: Aswaja; NU; Social Character; Sociology Mannheim

Introduction

Higher education fundamentally serves three primary functions:

1. Developing capabilities and shaping the character and civilizations of the nation to promote intellectual advancement;
2. Cultivating an innovative, responsive, creative, skilled, competitive, and cooperative academic community through implementing the Tri Dharma principles;
3. Advancing science and technology while considering and applying humanistic values.¹

These functions are implemented through various courses, each playing a

Crucial role in achieving educational objectives. Among these, all universities are required to provide religion education adjusted to the student group.

Islamic Higher Education provides religious education as an essential framework for students, enabling Muslim students to develop abroad and in-depth understanding of Islam with the expectation that they will practice the religion holistically (*kaffah*). This breadth is reflected in the inclusion of courses such as Qur'anic and Hadits studies, Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), Islamic history (*Tarikh*), Islamic philosophy, theology (*Aqidah*), and others. Depth is achieved through specialized approaches adjusted to the characteristics each course focuses on. Among the various groups of Islamic courses is *Ablussunnah wal Jama'ah* (ASWAJA).

The structure of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (ASWAJA) in the context of scholarly discourse fundamentally encompasses the theological foundations (*Aqidah*) of the Muslim community that adheres to a moderate and dynamic Sunni Perspective.² However, Aswaja as an Islamic school of thought also has far-reaching implications for various dimensions of life. As Hasan pointed out, these dimensions include six key aspects: theology (*Aqidah*), Islamic law and worship (*sharia* and *ibadah*), Sufism and spiritual orders (*tasawuf* and *tariqah*), tradition and culture, leadership and community organization as well as nationalism and statehood.³

Understanding Aswaja within these six dimensions requires not only a doctrinal approach but also historical and cultural perspectives to ensure comprehensive understanding.⁴ Furthermore, integrating Aswaja into social life across these dimensions necessitates embodying key values characteristic of an Aswaja-oriented individual namely *tawassuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *tawazun* (balance).⁵ By internalizing these values, Aswaja can deeply influence all six dimensions. This internalization requires empirical studies to assess its impact, highlighting the importance of Aswaja as a course that contributes to shaping societal character.

In the *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian Dictionary), "character" is defined as psychological traits, morals, or ethical qualities that distinguish one person from another. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud), character refers to unique values embedded within an individual and manifested in behavior, coherently reflected through intellectual, emotional, ethical, and physical expressions. Lickona conceptualizes a person of character as someone who embodies three key aspects: *knowing the good* (understanding what is good), *desiring the good* (having a commitment to goodness), and *doing the good* (acting upon goodness). Knowledge of what is good fosters personal commitment, which in turn motivates that align with moral values.⁶

The social group tends not to remain static but continuously evolves and undergoes changes in both its activities and structure.⁷ Human have an inherent tendency to interact one another, and these continuous interactions create social relationship known as social interaction. Such interactions shape perceptions of good and bad, which eventually develop into human values.

The spiritual aspect of human life within social interaction contributes to the formation of personality.⁸ This process of personality development continuous throughout a person's lifetime and is

influenced by both internal factors and environmental conditions.⁹ According to Lickona, the ultimate expression of knowledge about goodness is the practice of good behavior. Consequently, knowledge of the fundamental values of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah* (ASWAJA) should ideally lead to religious attitude that reflects the core characteristics of *tawasuth* (moderation), *tasamuh* (tolerance), and *tawazun* (balance).

Empirical studies on the application of Aswaja values, such as the study in Badransari village, illustrate how the community embodies the principle of *tasamuh* (tolerance) by fostering mutual respect, engaging in social activities, and demonstrating a strong sense of empathy. The value of *tawazun* (balance) is reflected in their ability to harmonize worldly affairs with spiritual obligations.¹⁰ Similarly, a study on the Senduro community—where residents practice various religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Catholicism --- reveals how Aswaja values are instilled among Muslims to promote religious harmony within the diverse society.¹¹

In the field of sports, Aswaja principles can also be internalized to cultivate a spirit of healthy competition among athletes in the Olympics. The value of *tasamuh* is actualized through mutual respect

and the elimination of bullying in athlete development. *Tawasuth* (moderation) is demonstrated by fostering inclusivity and social cohesion among athletes, while *tawazun* is reflected in the willingness to share and interact with athletes from all disciplines. Additionally, the principle of *i'tidal* (justice) is embodied in a sense of responsibility to commitment to fulfilling one's duties.¹² Syaipullah, in a Aswaja seminar in Balangan, emphasized the importance of instilling *tawazun* and *tawasuth*, alongside of commitment to truth, as a fundamental necessary for maintaining harmony and peace within society.¹³

Studies on Aswaja in Higher education are quite extensive. Among them is an article by Siful Arifin and Ach Syaiful, which discusses the significance of Aswaja courses in universities. They argue that the rise of religious extremism in public spaces presents an ongoing challenge for the entire Indonesian nation. Various solutions have been proposed, one of which is integrating Aswaja as a University course for several reasons:

1. As a preventive measure to counter the emergence of extremist and radical ideologies.
2. To safeguard and strengthen students' *aqidah* (faith).

3. To instill and promote *fikrah an-Nahdliyah* (Nahdlatul Ulama's intellectual framework) and ASWAJA values as a way of life.¹⁴

Another study also highlights the prevalence of extremism and radicalism. One proposed approach to addressing this issue is fostering a moderate attitude among students by developing ASWAJA an-Nahdliyah reference books for use in higher education.¹⁵

In addition to countering radicalism and extremism, ASWAJA education in higher institutions also serves as a foundation for character education. This article is based on field research conducted at Nahdlatul Ulama University in Sidoarjo. The implementation of ASWAJA teachings—such as *tasamuh* (tolerance), *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), *tawasuth* (moderation), *i'tidal* (justice), and *tawazun* (balance)—aligns closely with national character development, including values such as religious devotion, discipline, and sociability.¹⁶ With these characteristics, ASWAJA is highly relevant and compatible for dissemination among students as a guiding principle for daily religious life.¹⁷ Beyond character building, ASWAJA also plays a role in shaping religious ideology.¹⁸ Given the significance of ASWAJA education from Islamic elementary schools (*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*) to higher education in the 21st century, appropriate teaching

methods are essential. One such approach is multiliteracy, which emphasizes the ability to comprehend and utilize various forms of texts. This method aims to enhance students' skills in reading, writing, speaking, and effectively using communication and information tools.¹⁹

These studies demonstrate that the implementation of ASWAJA values can shape societal behavior and ethics. ASWAJA education is still predominantly delivered using relatively simple methods, such as lectures and role modeling, alongside conceptual studies of ASWAJA itself. Referring to the objectives of higher education as outlined in Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education, four key targets are emphasized:

1. The development of students' potential for the benefit of the nation.
2. The production of graduates with strong national competitiveness.
3. The advancement of knowledge through research that contributes to national progress.
4. The application of reasoning and research findings to enhance national well-being and intellectual development.²⁰

This reveals a gap between the objectives of higher education research and existing studies. Current research has yet to demonstrate how societal conditions can shape new knowledge and ways of thinking. Ideally, ASWAJA studies should not only impart knowledge but also cultivate new perspectives among students, leading to the emergence of individuals with ASWAJA-based character. In the long run, this has the potential to foster a society that embodies ASWAJA values. Unlike previous studies, this research examines how the ASWAJA course is taught to university students. The goal is to ensure that ASWAJA education is not merely utopian but instead provides students with knowledge that aligns with contemporary socio-religious and community issues, considering the ever-evolving nature of society.

Method

This article is a qualitative study employing documentation and interview techniques. During the analysis phase, data relevant to the research theme is collected, classified, interpreted, and subsequently compared.²¹ This study utilizes Karl Mannheim's theory, which asserts that knowledge has a social context, meaning that individuals frame, understand, and interpret the world based on their knowledge.²² Mannheim presents three key ideas:

1. *Perspectivism*, Mannheim argues that knowledge is existentially determined. A person's way of acting influences their way of thinking. Just as actions are shaped by social and historical factors, so too is thought. Thus, thinking occurs within social and historical perspectives.
2. *Rationalism*, this method involves:
 - a) Linking statements to their socially determined interpretations, and
 - b) Validating them by referring to the social historical conditions in which they emerge.
3. *A comprehensive theory of knowledge*, Mannheim contends that a theory of knowledge is valid only to the extent that it can explain all forms of social thought, and is enriched through findings derived from the relationalist method.²³

Result and Discussions

Social Values in ASWAJA Teachings

The term Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah (ASWAJA) consists of three key components:

1. Ahlun (أهل) – meaning *family, followers, or inhabitants*, such as *Ahl al-Bayt* (family of the Prophet) or *Ahl al-Jannah* (inhabitants of paradise).

2. Al-Sunnah (السنة) – linguistically means *path* or *tradition*, while in religious terminology, it refers to practices that are approved by Allah and followed by the Prophet Muhammad and his righteous companions.
3. Al-Jama’ah (الجماعة) – denotes *unity*, *togetherness*, and *harmony*, emphasizing the importance of social cohesion and communal stability.

From the perspective of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), ASWAJA represents a religious methodology that integrates Islamic teachings with societal realities, guided by three fundamental values:

- Moderation (*Tawassuth*) – maintaining a balanced approach in religious interpretation and social conduct.
- Equilibrium (*Tawazun*) – harmonizing religious and worldly affairs, faith and reason, rights and responsibilities.
- Tolerance (*Tasamuh*) – fostering mutual respect among diverse communities while upholding Islamic principles.

ASWAJA, therefore, is not merely a theological identity but also a framework for ethical living, ensuring that religious beliefs remain inclusive, adaptable, and socially constructive.

ASWAJA (Ahlussunnah wal Jama’ah) emerged as a response to theological conflicts among Muslims, particularly arising from debates over the logical consequences of these conflicts. Abu Hasan al-Ash’ari, originally a critical thinker from the *Mu’tazilah* school, introduced a new framework that reaffirmed Sunni doctrines under the name *Ahlussunnah wal Jama’ah*.

Al-Ash’ari critiqued *Mu’tazilah* thought as utopian, arguing that the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was rooted in real societal contexts, while the *Mu’tazilah* sought to shape society based on rationalist principles alone. This perspective was also endorsed by Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, a prominent scholar of the Hanafi school. The approaches of both scholars came to be regarded as representative of the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, establishing them as central figures in ASWAJA thought.

Al-Ash’ari’s two major works, *Al-Ibanah* and *Al-Luma’*, focus primarily on theological doctrines rather than detailing explicit socio-religious principles. However, the integration of ASWAJA within the broader Islamic legal and spiritual traditions led to the development of key foundational values that shape the mindset and behavior of ASWAJA followers. These principles include:

1. *Tawassuth* (Moderation) – Upholding a balanced approach by avoiding extreme positions (*tatharruf*), whether excessive or neglectful.
2. *Tasammuh* (Tolerance) – Respecting other groups, acknowledging differences without imposing one's own beliefs as the sole truth, and fostering social harmony.
3. *Tawazun* (Balance) – Ensuring harmony in addressing various issues, and maintaining equilibrium in thought, behavior, and actions.

These principles were applied by Imam al-Ash'ari in various domains, including theology (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), Sufism (*tasawuf*), and socio-political engagement.²⁴ In essence, these characteristics serve as the foundational framework for ASWAJA followers in acquiring knowledge, shaping thought processes, engaging with society, and guiding personal conduct.

Islam is a religion that embodies the concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation). Its teachings incorporate fundamental principles and strong foundational elements, including faith (*aqidah*), law (*shari'ah*), and ethics (*akhlak*), which serve as guiding frameworks for human life. These principles aim to regulate

both worldly and spiritual journeys, encompassing various aspects of existence—ranging from individual conduct to family structures and broader social groups across multiple spheres of life.²⁵

وَأِنْ طَائِفَتَيْنِ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ افْتَضَلُوا فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا فَإِنْ بَغَتْ إِحْدَاهُمَا عَلَى الْأُخْرَىٰ فَقَاتِلُوا الَّتِي تَبْغِي حَتَّىٰ تَفِيءَ إِلَىٰ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ فَاءَ ت فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَهُمَا بِالْعَدْلِ وَأَقْسِطُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُقْسِطِينَ (٩) إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلَحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (١٠) يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَر قَوْمٌ مِّن قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِّنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِّن نِّسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَن يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِّنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَرُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْإِسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ لَّمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ (١١) يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا وَلَا يَغْتَب بَّعْضُكُم بَعْضًا أَيُحِبُّ أَحَدُكُمْ أَن يَأْكُلَ لَحْمَ أَخِيهِ مَيْتًا فَكَرِهْتُمُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ (١٢)

And if two groups of believers fight each other, then make peace between them. But if one of them transgresses against the other, then fight against the transgressing group until they 'are willing to' submit to the rule of Allah. If they do so, then make peace between both 'groups' in all fairness and act justly. Surely Allah loves those who uphold justice. (9) The believers are but one brotherhood, so make peace between your brothers. And be mindful of Allah so

you may be shown mercy. (10) O believers! Do not let some 'men' ridicule others, they may be better than them, nor let 'some' women ridicule other women, they may be better than them. Do not defame one another, nor call each other by offensive nicknames. How evil it is to act rebelliously after having faith! And whoever does not repent, it is they who are the 'true' wrongdoers. (11) O believers! Avoid any suspicions, 'for' indeed, some suspicions are sinful. And do not spy, nor backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of their dead brother? You would despise that!1 And fear Allah. Surely Allah is 'the' Acceptor of Repentance, Most Merciful. (12) [QS. Al-Hujurat: 9-12]

The verse explicitly guides how a Muslim individual should conduct themselves within their social environment. It prohibits conflict among fellow believers and mandates reconciliation when two Muslims are in dispute. Additionally, it forbids oppression among fellow Muslims and emphasizes the necessity of correcting or opposing those who refuse to accept the truth of Islam. The verse also commands believers to promote peace, act justly, and maintain harmony in relationships. Furthermore, it forbids mockery, mutual ridicule, suspicion, and backbiting, reinforcing the ethical and moral obligations of Muslims in their social interactions. Allah SWT says:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O humanity! Indeed, We created you from a male and a female and made you into peoples and tribes so that you may get to know one another. Surely the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous among you. Allah is truly All-Knowing, All-Aware. [QS. Al-Hujurat: 13]

Referring to the aforementioned verse, the diversity of ethnic groups—which encompasses individual characteristics, languages, traditions, and cultures—fosters the ability to recognize and understand one another. This, in turn, facilitates the realization of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, leading to the formation of a harmonious, united, tolerant, and compassionate society. A comprehensive and profound internalization of societal values contributes to the development of unity, cooperation, and mutual respect among individuals. Furthermore, Islam explicitly criticizes Muslims who lack social values, such as failing to show compassion to orphans, not encouraging others to provide for the poor, engaging in ostentatious displays of piety (*riya'*), and refusing to assist those in need, as stated in the Qur'an:

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ (١) فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ
(٢) وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمُسْكِينِ (٣) فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ (٤)
الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ (٥) الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ (٦)
وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ (٧)

Have you seen the one who denies the 'final' Judgment? (1) That is the one who repulses the orphan, (2) and does not encourage the feeding of the poor. (3) So woe to those 'hypocrites' who pray, (4) yet are unmindful of their prayers, (5) those who 'only' show off, (6) and refuse to give 'even the simplest' aid. (7) [QS. Al-Ma'un: 1-7]

Islam teaches the importance of harmony and tolerance in social life, emphasizing values such as compassion, equality, brotherhood, justice, and fairness.²⁶

ASWAJA, as a representation of the Islamic teachings brought by Prophet Muhammad, ultimately aims to achieve the vision of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* across various dimensions of life. Rooted in its socio-historical context, ASWAJA has evolved to encompass all aspects of societal life. Its theological foundation, derived from the Qur'an and Hadith, promotes moderation and dynamism.

Social and religious conflicts have shaped the cultural development of Islamic societies, fostering a tradition of intellectual inquiry that seeks to discover scientific truths

based on both textual (*naqli*) and rational (*aqli*) evidence, thereby generating new knowledge.

This aligns with Surah Al-Baqarah (2:143), which, in a social context, provides insight into the role of Muslims as a middle path amid religious conflicts. It emphasizes social equality and justice as fundamental principles for establishing a harmonious society.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَيَكُونَ الرُّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي
كُنْتَ عَلَمًا إِلَّا لِتَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ الرُّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى
عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ
اللَّهُ لِيُضِلَّ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَّءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ

And so We have made you 'believers' an upright community so that you may be witnesses over humanity and that the Messenger may be a witness over you. We assigned your former direction of prayer only to distinguish those who would remain faithful to the Messenger from those who would lose faith. It was certainly a difficult test except for those 'rightly' guided by Allah. And Allah would never discount your 'previous acts of' faith. Surely Allah is Ever Gracious and Most Merciful to humanity. [QS. Al-Baqarah: 143]

In ASWAJA's creed (*aqidah*), it is believed that holy scriptures contain divine teachings revealed by Allah for their

respective communities and eras, as stated in the Qur'an:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ
لِيُقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ
وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ

Indeed, We sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and with them, We sent down the Scripture and the balance 'of justice' so that people may administer justice. And We sent down iron with its great might, benefits for humanity, and means for Allah to prove who 'is willing to' stand up for Him and His messengers without seeing Him. Surely Allah is All-Powerful, Almighty. [QS. Al-Hadid: 25]

That verse teaches the concept of balance based on justice. Justice must be upheld by leaders toward their people, ensuring that all members of society are treated equally in terms of law, attitude, and treatment. Similarly, within governance, ASWAJA promotes the value of *tasammuh*, which emphasizes tolerance and open-mindedness in interacting with religious, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. This aligns with Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, which upholds unity in diversity.

In social communication and the dissemination of Islamic teachings, ASWAJA scholars follow the prophetic approach of

moderate, wise, and gentle discourse in da'wah, as outlined in the Qur'an:

لِيَحْمِلُوا أَوْزَارَهُمْ كَامِلَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَمِنْ أَوْزَارِ الَّذِينَ
يُضِلُّوهُمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ ۖ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَزُرُونَ

Let them bear their burdens in full on the Day of Judgment as well as some of the burdens of those they mislead without knowledge. Evil indeed is what they will bear! [QS. An-Nahl: 25]

Thus, it can be concluded that ASWAJA, in social life, promotes broad and impactful values, including:

1. Moderation (avoiding extreme behaviors)
2. Social equality
3. Social justice
4. Maintaining balance within society
5. Wise and courteous social communication

These ASWAJA values, which serve as the principles and characteristics of its followers, are further developed across various dimensions of life, particularly in the realm of social-religious interactions, where they coexist with religious pluralism, social pluralism, multiculturalism, and governance.

ASWAJA in Learning Portrait

The institutionalization of ASWAJA's teachings and values is primarily carried out

through educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), religious study circles (majlis ta'lim), and formal education systems.

- In pesantren, ASWAJA is studied through classical texts, including *Risalah Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, *Al-Ibanah*, *Al-Luma'*, and other works by Sunni scholars in various disciplines.
- In majlis ta'lim, ASWAJA is commonly conveyed through sermons covering history, Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), and Sufism (*tasawuf*).
- In formal education, ASWAJA is integrated into the curriculum:
 - In Ma'arif schools, it is taught as part of *Ke-NU-an* studies.
 - In state Islamic universities (PTKIN), it is incorporated into *Ilm Kalam* (Islamic Theology) courses.
 - In private Islamic universities affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama (PTNU) and pesantren-based higher education institutions, ASWAJA is often offered as a dedicated course under the title "ASWAJA".

Through these educational frameworks, ASWAJA continues to be

institutionalized and transmitted across generations, reinforcing its role as a guiding theological and intellectual tradition within Sunni Islam.

From an objective perspective, ASWAJA education is generally conducted with the aim of:

1. Countering radicalism²⁷
2. Providing character education²⁸
3. Preserving the unity of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI).²⁹

From the teaching staff aspect, ASWAJA instruction in Nahdlatul Ulama-affiliated private Islamic universities (PTNU) requires lecturers to:

- Adhere to the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah school of thought
- Be members of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU)
- Have undergone NU's cadre formation process

Meanwhile, in non-PTNU Islamic universities, the last two requirements are not mandatory.

From the learning aspect, ASWAJA education is examined through:

- Semester Learning Plan (RPS) content
- Teaching methods

These two factors are crucial in understanding the perspectives of higher education institutions in organizing ASWAJA courses.

This study focuses on Islamic higher education institutions under pesantren that follow the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah tradition and offer ASWAJA as a 2-credit institutional course. One such institution is STAI Sunan Pandanaran Yogyakarta, which has the mission to:

- Serve society by advancing the Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah doctrine
- Produce community leaders
- Promote social and humanitarian values.³⁰

In its ASWAJA implementation, STAI Sunan Pandanaran adheres to:

- *Theology*: Imam Abu Hasan al-Ash'ari and Abu Mansur al-Maturidi
- *Jurisprudence (Fiqh)*: Primarily follows Imam Shafi'i while recognizing the three other Sunni schools (Maliki, Hanbali, and Hanafi)
- *Sufism (Tasawuf)*: Follows the methodology of Imam al-Ghazali and Imam Junaid al-Baghdadi.³¹

This structured approach ensures that ASWAJA remains a central pillar in both academic and community-oriented religious education.

The ASWAJA course is offered across five study programs with three lecturers. Based on documentation analysis and interviews,³² the following insights were obtained:

1. Teaching Staff

- Lecturers are not required to be affiliated with NU or have undergone NU's cadre formation.
- However, they must have a social background rooted in Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah.

2. Semester Learning Plan (RPS) Content

- The institution does not have a standardized ASWAJA curriculum that includes learning outcomes (CP), course learning outcomes (CPMK), or sub-CPMK.
- Each lecturer develops their own RPS, resulting in different learning outcomes and materials.
- One lecturer does not document their RPS at all, which affects consistency in course delivery.

3. ASWAJA Course Content Across Study Programs

The variation in learning outcomes leads to differences in course content:

- Pendidikan Bahasa Arab (PBA):
 - 50% theory (ASWAJA teachings) and 50% practice.
 - Students write papers on controversial new religious movements and ASWAJA values in education and society.
- Ilmu Tasawuf (IT), Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (PGMI), and Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Tafsir (IAT):
 - Course content is theory-heavy with examples of ASWAJA religious practices.
- Komunikasi dan Penyiaran Islam (KPI):
 - Focuses on NU's five ASWAJA values (*tawassuth, tasammuh, tawazun, ta'adul, and amar ma'ruf nahi munkar*).
 - Also includes fiqh issues (*masailul fiqhiyah*) analyzed through these values.

4. Teaching Methods

- Lectures (teacher-centered approach) are the dominant method.
- Real-world social and religious issues are sometimes discussed, linking textual ASWAJA teachings to contextual realities.
- Impact of the method:
 - While students gain theoretical knowledge, their critical thinking and character development remain weak.
 - Student assignments (papers, discussions, midterm, and final exams) indicate the limited ability to engage with contemporary social-religious issues such as:
 - Interfaith conflicts
 - Radical religious behaviors
 - New religious movements that challenge ASWAJA doctrines

Higher education institutions are expected to cultivate systematic yet dynamic thinking. This means:

1. Systematic thinking must be applicable in solving real-world societal issues.

2. Social dynamics should drive the creation of new knowledge and thought processes.³³

ASWAJA's Role in Higher Education

The designation of ASWAJA as an institutional course signifies that its mission goes beyond knowledge transmission. It should also engage with societal conditions to develop new ways of thinking. This aligns with ASWAJA's social-historical roots, particularly the teachings of Imam al-Asy'ari and Imam al-Maturidi, which are embraced by NU through the Fikrah Nahdliyah (Nahdlatul Ulama's intellectual framework).

The Five Intellectual Frameworks of ASWAJA (Fikrah Nahdliyah)

1. *Fikrah Tamassuthiyah* (Moderate Thinking)
 - Encourages balance (tawazun) and fairness (tidal) in addressing issues.
 - Rejects both recklessness (tafrith) and extremism (ifrath).
2. *Fikrah Tasammubiyah* (Tolerant Thinking)
 - Promotes peaceful coexistence despite differences in beliefs, perspectives, and cultures.
3. *Fikrah Islahiyah* (Reformative Thinking)

- Focuses on continuous improvement (al-Islah ilā mā huwa al-aslah) toward a better society.

4. *Fikrah Tathammuriyah* (Dynamic Thinking)

- Encourages contextualization when addressing various contemporary issues.

5. *Fikrah Manhajiyah* (Methodological Thinking)

- Uses a structured and NU-based methodology in problem-solving.

By integrating these five intellectual principles, ASWAJA education in higher institutions can shape students into critical thinkers who are moderate, tolerant, reformative, dynamic, and methodological in their approach to religious and societal issues.

The four components of ASWAJA teaching in higher education demonstrate that it is designed to shape students' foundational thinking, which in turn guides their actions.

Alignment with Higher Education Goals (Law Article 5, Paragraph 2), according to the goals of higher education, ASWAJA courses should be structured based on:

1. Scientific reasoning – encouraging students to develop logical and systematic thinking.
2. Research-based learning – integrating academic studies and empirical findings into the curriculum.

Key Aspects of ASWAJA Course Design

- Learning outcomes should reflect critical and analytical skills in responding to contemporary issues.
- Course content must not only cover ASWAJA doctrines but also engage with modern societal challenges.
- Teaching approaches should incorporate discussion, problem-solving, and research-driven analysis, rather than relying solely on lectures.

By emphasizing scientific reasoning and research-based learning, ASWAJA education in higher institutions can enhance intellectual depth, critical engagement, and practical relevance for students.

Revitalization of ASWAJA in Social Character Formation

The Religious Harmony Index (KUB) in 2024 was recorded at 76.47, showing a positive increase of 0.45 points

compared to 2023. This result was published by the Research, Development, and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.³⁴ However, the challenge of maintaining religious harmony remains, as social dynamics are constantly evolving.

Expressions of violence continue to manifest in various forms, including:

1. Intra-religious violence occurs within the same religious community.
2. Inter-religious violence, including the destruction of houses of worship.
3. State violence justified by religious narratives.
4. Violence under the pretext of combating immorality.³⁵

One of the key factors contributing to the rise in the Religious Harmony Index (KUB) is the efforts made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in promoting and internalizing religious moderation through various programs and initiatives. However, this positive outcome does not imply the complete eradication of violence. As long as differences are not accepted as an inevitability and various forms of injustice persist, violence will continue to emerge.

A critical reflection on the various forms of violence that have occurred reveals an inconsistency in the religious identity of

the nation. The disharmony observed among religious communities or even within the same religious group is largely due to a weakened awareness of religious pluralism. This raises important questions:

- What is happening to religious life in Indonesia?
- Does this indicate that tolerance and religiosity are only superficial and have not yet penetrated deeper levels of consciousness?

Violence is often justified using religion, primarily due to a literal or rigid interpretation of religious teachings. These questions remain highly relevant as a critical reminder for fostering a peaceful, prosperous, and just society.

Various forms of violence, whether between individuals or groups, stem from a dualistic distinctive consciousness—a mindset that fosters racism, discrimination, hatred, conflict, war, terrorism, and mass killings. This type of consciousness cultivates antagonistic tendencies and a strong ambition for domination, posing a significant threat to human civilization. Addressing this destructive consciousness requires a transformation in awareness, yet several factors hinder this process: habitus, banality, lack of critical thinking, and the concept of Kaliyuga.

The first issue is habitus, which refers to both individual and collective habits. Collective habits shape the cultural identity of a society. Some cultural norms obstruct the transformation of consciousness, particularly those associated with corruption, closed-mindedness, fanaticism, and racism. A significant obstacle to transformation is the fear of change or differing opinions. Many communities cling rigidly to traditions, resisting change and viewing critical thinking as a threat to established authority.

A closed cultural mindset fosters fanaticism, which, in turn, leads to discriminatory attitudes. Racism is the most tangible manifestation of such discrimination, highlighting the deep-seated challenges in transforming societal consciousness.³⁶

Another major obstacle to the transformation of consciousness is banality, which refers to the normalization of repeated acts of injustice to the point that their immoral nature is no longer recognized. Various forms of violence against minority groups exemplify this phenomenon—though such acts constitute crimes, they are often perceived as justified because the dominant group considers the minority's beliefs to be deviant. This normalization of wrongdoing gradually erodes critical awareness and empathy, making society increasingly

indifferent to those with differing perspectives or beliefs.

This lack of critical thinking results in mindlessness, where individuals engage only in technical reasoning without deeper reflection on the ethical and moral dimensions of reality. Over time, this intellectual stagnation leads to the erosion of common sense, making it difficult to challenge existing injustices.

The final obstacle to transformation is Kali Yuga, a term derived from Indian tradition that describes an age of darkness, characterized by a widespread decline in morality and virtue. This concept symbolizes a societal condition in which ethical values deteriorate, making it increasingly challenging to foster conscious transformation.³⁷

To address these issues and seek viable solutions, a deeper understanding of theoretical frameworks is required. One promising approach is the sociology of knowledge, which examines how social structures and power dynamics shape human thought. This perspective can help deconstruct ingrained biases and develop new ways of thinking that promote a more just and inclusive society.

In the study of the sociology of knowledge, various factors contribute to the formation and development of knowledge.

These factors shape how individuals and societies construct, interpret, and disseminate knowledge. Among them are:

1. Social Context – This includes social structures, cultural norms, and traditions, all of which influence how knowledge is produced and maintained within a society.
2. Education – Both formal and non-formal education systems play a crucial role in shaping knowledge through structured learning experiences.
3. Media and Communication – With advancements in technology, mass media, and social media have become powerful tools in shaping public perceptions and individual knowledge.
4. Historical Experience – Collective history and social traumas significantly influence the way knowledge is framed and understood across generations.
5. Social Interaction – Interpersonal relationships and social networks contribute to the exchange and evolution of knowledge within communities.
6. Ideology and Critical Thinking – Political and religious ideologies, as well as the ability to think critically, shape the

way individuals and societies perceive and interpret reality.

7. Power and Control – Institutional dominance over knowledge production and distribution affects whose knowledge is legitimized and whose perspectives are marginalized.³⁸

These factors highlight the complex interplay between social structures, cultural influences, historical events, and power dynamics in shaping human knowledge. Understanding these elements can provide deeper insights into how knowledge is constructed, controlled, and transformed within societies.

According to Karl Mannheim, the sociology of knowledge is oriented toward understanding how humans think, how social production and transmission of knowledge enhance comprehension of social reality, and how this contributes to human freedom. For Mannheim, purpose is of utmost importance, as it directs what actions should be taken. The diverse forms of knowledge that develop in society are often difficult to trace, particularly due to the ambiguity of their origins. To uncover these origins, there is a need for social diagnostic tools.

One significant example within Islamic thought is the development of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja), which

emerged as a counter-movement to Mu'tazilah, a school of thought that prioritized reason (*aql*) over revelation (*wahyu*). The differences between these two schools are particularly evident in theological debates, especially concerning metaphysical issues that are speculative and relative. Some of the major questions debated include:

1. Can God be seen in the afterlife?
2. Does God have absolute power?
3. Is the Qur'an created (*hadith*) or eternal (*qadim*)?

The last issue, regarding the created or eternal nature of the Qur'an, led to the *mihnah* (inquisition), a form of judicial examination initiated by the Mu'tazilah under the Abbasid dynasty in 218 H. This event involved investigations and interrogations of judges and scholars to enforce the state's theological stance.

Initially, Aswaja emerged as a political response to the ruling state ideology but later evolved into a well-established theological school, developing its own doctrinal and intellectual traditions. This historical trajectory demonstrates how knowledge and religious thought are shaped by socio-political contexts and how they continue to evolve in response to intellectual and ideological challenges.

Islam, as a religion, provides guidance for all aspects of life, with its fundamental principles contained in the Qur'an and Hadith. However, the evolving complexities of human life necessitate creativity in seeking solutions to contemporary issues that were not explicitly addressed during the Prophet's time. This presents a unique challenge for Islamic scholarship.

Not all individuals possess the ability or expertise to engage in *ijtihad* (independent legal reasoning). As a result, the majority of Muslims adhere to *madhhab* (schools of thought) as a means of religious practice. Within the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) tradition, the concept of following a *madhhab* is categorized into two approaches:

1. *Madzhab Qauli* – following an existing legal ruling or verdict (*fatwa*) that has already been established.
2. *Madzhab Manhaji* – adhering to the methodological framework used to derive legal rulings, rather than simply following the rulings themselves.³⁹

This distinction reflects NU's intellectual approach, balancing traditional adherence with methodological reasoning, ensuring that Islamic law remains both rooted in tradition and adaptable to contemporary challenges.

Legal rulings (*fatwa*) are never independent of the social, political, cultural, and geographical contexts that shape them. As time progresses, rapid advancements in various fields lead to innovations that transform human behavior and lifestyles. This evolving reality necessitates continuous renewal and innovation in religious thought, ensuring that legal rulings remain relevant and applicable.

This principle applies not only to *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) but also to theological doctrines, which must be periodically reassessed. Certain theological teachings may require reconstruction to maintain their relevance in contemporary contexts. In this regard, ASWAJA (*Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*) should be understood not as a fixed and final theological doctrine, but as a dynamic methodological framework that allows for intellectual evolution and adaptation.

According to Hasan, there are three key principles in adhering to a *madhhab* (school of thought):

1. Following the truth of religious teachings;
2. Understanding the reality of contemporary issues;
3. Harmonizing tradition and modernity in a balanced manner.⁴⁰

By adopting this contextual approach, Islamic scholarship can respond effectively to contemporary challenges while remaining rooted in tradition.

A civilized society (*tamadun*) is characterized by mutual respect, tolerance, and cooperation, regardless of differences in religion, social status, nationality, or culture. This vision of an ideal society aligns with the fundamental principles of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (ASWAJA), which emphasize:

1. Moderation (*Tawasuth*) – avoiding extreme positions in religious and social matters.
2. Balance (*Tawazun*) – maintaining harmony between different perspectives and interests.
3. Tolerance (*Tasamuh*) – fostering acceptance and respect for diversity.

In pluralistic societies, these principles are essential for creating inclusive spaces where diverse groups and viewpoints are accommodated. This approach prevents rigid, absolute interpretations and instead encourages open-minded engagement with multiple perspectives. Beyond allowing room for differences, ASWAJA also emphasizes respecting diverse beliefs, traditions, and values upheld by various religious schools and communities.

Furthermore, Aswaja's open and inclusive nature must be continuously reexamined to nurture a strong intellectual tradition and prevent the dogmatization of religious thought. This ensures that Aswaja's teachings remain dynamic and relevant, rather than being counterproductive to the values it upholds.

The teaching of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja) at STAISPA aims to provide students with a comprehensive understanding of its history, doctrines, and values, while also fostering Aswaja's intellectual approach and its responses to contemporary societal challenges. This educational framework serves as a foundation for character development through knowledge acquisition. Character formation relies on habitual practice, yet the cognitive aspect cannot be overlooked, as it enables individuals to analyze reality critically. Beyond knowledge and analytical skills, sensitivity to religious, sectarian, and community diversity is crucial. Interacting with different groups allows individuals to acknowledge diverse perspectives, ultimately influencing their attitudes and behaviors toward others.

Within Aswaja's teachings, three key dimensions should be emphasized:

1. *Intellectual Quotient (IQ)* – Developing analytical skills to assess various societal issues through an Aswaja perspective.
2. *Spiritual Quotient (SQ)* – Grounding Aswaja's teachings in Islam's two primary sources (the Qur'an and Hadith).
3. *Emotional Quotient (EQ)* – Currently underdeveloped in STAISPA's Aswaja curriculum, this aspect focuses on fostering empathy, mutual respect, and tolerance through interpersonal engagement.

Integrating emotional intelligence into Aswaja education can strengthen students' ability to interact harmoniously with diverse communities, reinforcing Aswaja's inclusive and moderate values.

Conclusion

ASWAJA education plays a crucial role in shaping social character and religious tolerance. However, its current implementation in higher education remains inconsistent and theoretical.

To make ASWAJA more relevant and impactful, universities must:

1. Develop a standardized curriculum with clear learning outcomes.

2. Adopt interactive teaching methods beyond traditional lectures.
3. Encourage experiential learning through community engagement.

By integrating ASWAJA's values into education, society, and governance, it can foster a more tolerant and harmonious society.

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