

Transcending Proportional Boundaries: A Study on the Shifting Thoughts of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Muslims in Gorontalo, Indonesia

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Abstract

The dichotomy between the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama and the modernist Muhammadiyah has blurred and undergone a paradigmatic shift among local Muslims in Gorontalo, Indonesia. This study aims to examine the model of thought transformation among Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah Muslims that transcends proportional boundaries, to identify the driving factors behind the progressive tendencies of Nahdlatul Ulama and the cultural accommodation of Muhammadiyah, and to explore the implications of these ideological shifts. Using a qualitative approach, the research draws on both primary and secondary data. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews with informants from both organizations and a review of relevant literature. The data were systematically analysed to identify key patterns in the evolving thought of these two groups. The findings reveal three main points. First, the traditional-modernist dichotomy between Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah has undergone a significant transformation. Nahdlatul Ulama, long regarded as traditionalist, is increasingly adopting modern perspectives, while Muhammadiyah has begun to accommodate elements of local culture. Second, the progressive turn of Nahdlatul Ulama is driven mainly by the expansion of education, the influence of digital media, and discourses surrounding radicalism. Meanwhile, Muhammadiyah's cultural adaptation is encouraged by social interaction, the strength of tradition, and the need for flexibility in facing contemporary challenges. Third, despite this intellectual shift, the role of women in both organizations remains a contested issue. Although both Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah have opened spaces for female participation, structural and ideological barriers continue to limit their leadership roles, reflecting broader patterns of gender marginalization within religious institutions.

Keywords: Nahdlatul Ulama, Muhammadiyah, Intellectual shift, Socio-religious transformation

1 Introduction

The religious typology that distinguishes *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) as a traditionalist group and *Muhammadiyah* as a modernist group has long been part of academic discourse in Islamic studies in Indonesia. *Nahdlatul Ulama* is often associated with traditionalism and a strong rural support base, whereas *Muhammadiyah* is viewed as a modern Islamic organization with followers primarily from urban areas (Aminuddin, 2018; Noer, 1994). However, this study reveals that such typologies are not universally applicable, especially in the context of Gorontalo. This phenomenon is observable in the religious practices of the Gorontalo community. *Muhammadiyah* followers in this region of Sulawesi often participate in *mongaruwa* (prayers for the deceased), *molubingo* (female circumcision), and *beati* (bai'at), which are historically more aligned with *Nahdlatul Ulama* traditions (Lahaji & Nusi, 2023). Conversely, *Nahdlatul Ulama* followers in Gorontalo are also known to engage in religious practices typically associated with *Muhammadiyah*, such as performing *tarawih* prayers in eleven cycles and other Puritan-style worship practices (Lahaji & Nusi, 2023).

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Similar phenomena are found in other regions with complex social and cultural interactions. For example, in Yogyakarta, the closeness between *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* is evident among academics and the *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) communities, resulting in a synthesis of Islamic thought. In South Sulawesi, local Islamic influences have also led *Muhammadiyah* to accommodate certain traditional elements in its religious practices.

Thus far, studies on "*Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*" have generally focused on two areas. First, research has explored *Nahdlatul Ulama* as a traditionalist and *Muhammadiyah* as a modernist movement (As'ad, 2019; Biyanto, 2017; Burhani, 2018; Fauzi & Ayub, 2019; Feener, 2007; Imron, 2025; Niam, 2017; Rofiah, 2016; Shabir & Susilo, 2018; Van Bruinessen, 1994). As Bachtiar (2020) notes, *Muhammadiyah* is known for its modernist ideas in addressing contemporary challenges, especially in facing the rise of Islamism and various social issues (Menchik, 2016; Ricklefs, 2014). Meanwhile, Fealy (2003) points out that *Nahdlatul Ulama*'s traditionalist identity is embodied in the central role of *kiai* (Islamic scholars) in religious and even political dynamics (Woodward, 2001).

Second, studies have also focused on political struggles and conflicts involving *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* (Al-Ansi & Kartono, 2023; Harirah, 2021; Qodir et al., 2023; Ulfah, 2014; Wardana & Hidayat, 2019). These two dominant trends suggest that scholarly analysis of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* has been limited to themes of modernism, traditionalism, politics and conflict, while overlooking many other important aspects of their discourse.

The purpose of this paper is to address gaps in existing studies that have paid limited attention to the paradigm shifts occurring within the thought of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*. Specifically, this paper argues that these two organizations can no longer be strictly categorized as traditionalist or modernist. Instead, they exist within a shared spectrum—traditionalist-modernist and modernist-traditionalist. In line with this, the paper seeks to answer three key questions: (1) What is the model of thought transformation among *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* Muslims that transcends proportional boundaries? (2) What factors contribute to *Nahdlatul Ulama*'s progressive stance toward modernity and *Muhammadiyah*'s accommodation of local culture? (3) What are the implications of these ideological shifts?

This paper explores how the traditional thought of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and the modernist approach of *Muhammadiyah* interact in shaping the understanding of Islam and culture in Gorontalo. An interdisciplinary approach is employed to further investigate the intersection of religion, culture and social dynamics, including the roles of women and marginalized groups in these transformations. Both *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* acknowledge that Islam and culture are inseparable, particularly in the development of Gorontalo society. Islam flourishes through noble cultural values, while Gorontalo's culture thrives through its acculturation with Islamic teachings. Within this process, women and marginalized groups play active roles in both preserving traditions and fostering social innovations that strengthen harmony between religion and culture. Consequently, the interaction between these two organizations not only reinforces Islamic values in society but also opens space for historically marginalized groups to participate in social change.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Transcending the Boundaries of Proportion

Transcending the boundaries of proportion is defined as a conceptual framework that refers to an intellectual journey that goes beyond existing limits (Iqbal, 2013). This concept aligns with the idea of transdisciplinarity, which emphasizes the importance of cross-boundary intellectual movements as a strategy for addressing the complexity of knowledge (Nicolescu, 2014). Muhammad Iqbal (2013) explains that the term refers to a process in which an individual's thinking not only develops independently but also adopts the thoughts of other groups as part of a broader thinking methodology. This perspective is consistent with research suggesting that cross-disciplinary thinking can enrich analytical perspectives in the social sciences and humanities (Repko & Szostak, 2020). On the other hand, Affiah (2017) defines transcending the boundaries of proportion as an effort toward intellectual renewal, emphasizing the need for new approaches to understand reality. This is in line with the idea of conceptual innovation in philosophy, which underlines the importance

of moving beyond old boundaries to create a more contextual understanding (Frodeman & Klein & Pacheco, 2017).

2.2 *Shifting Paradigms*

Shifting paradigms can be understood as the emergence of new knowledge aimed at fostering openness of thought through interdisciplinary approaches. According to Kurniawan (2008), this concept arises from dynamic social interactions and the various social problems that evolve in their surroundings. Shifts in thinking often occur as an adaptive response by individuals to social changes and environmental challenges, enabling them to survive and play a more proportionate role in society (Voulvoulis et al., 2022). An interdisciplinary approach to understanding paradigm shifts allows for a more comprehensive analysis by incorporating various disciplinary perspectives. As described by Aryal (2023), such an approach can connect social, cultural, and technological aspects in responding to complex societal issues. Moreover, paradigm shifts serve as an intellectual refreshment effort, challenging rigid, normative, and textual patterns of thought, thus opening space for more critical and innovative thinking (Eloranta et al., 2024).

2.3 *Nahdlatul Ulama*

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is often understood as a response to Islamic reform movements. However, its immediate establishment was not solely rooted in resistance to the reformist propaganda of the time. Instead, *Nahdlatul Ulama*'s founding in 1926 was more influenced by international dynamics, such as the abolition of the caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the expansion of Wahhabi influence in Mecca, and the search for a new model of pan-Islamism (Feener, 2007; van Bruinessen, 1994). Beyond global factors, *Nahdlatul Ulama*'s founding also had strong national dimensions. Choirul Anam (2010) highlights that *Nahdlatul Ulama* emerged as part of the independence spirit, expressed through religious and educational activities to foster nationalism among Indonesian Muslims (Barton & Yilmaz & Morieson, 2021; Hosen, 2016).

Nahdlatul Ulama developed the teachings of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah* that adapt to the local social and cultural context. The model of Islam developed by *Nahdlatul Ulama* is not only recognized as "middle-path Islam", but also as a form of Islam deeply embedded in the identity of the Nusantara (Indonesian archipelago) society (Ulfah, 2014; van Bruinessen, 1994). From the perspective of the anthropology of religion, this flexibility illustrates how *Nahdlatul Ulama*'s version of Islam is not merely a theological doctrine but also a socio-political strategy to maintain harmony in multicultural societies (Sakai & Fauzia, 2016). Furthermore, *Nahdlatul Ulama* has transformed from a religious organization into a significant social and political force in Indonesia (Burhani, 2018). *Nahdlatul Ulama*'s role extends beyond strengthening traditional clerical networks; it also engages in national political dynamics, particularly through its involvement in political parties and social movements (Menchik, 2016; Mietzner, 2020).

2.4 *Muhammadiyah*

Muhammadiyah is understood as a religious organization oriented toward purification, namely a return to the pure essence of Islamic teachings while liberating the community from elements deemed as superstition, innovation (*bid'ah*), and heresy (Shihab, 1998). This movement emerged within a dual-patterned religious context — between syncretic Islam, which evolved in local cultures, and traditional Islam practiced in Islamic boarding schools (Tobroni & Arifin, 1994). In this context, *Muhammadiyah* acts as an agent of change, attempting to eliminate cultural elements considered incompatible with the principles of pure Islam. Purification in *Muhammadiyah* is not only a matter of religious reform but also part of a broader social rationalization that aligns with the societal transition from agrarian to industrial, or from traditional to modern (Fealy, 2003). As such, *Muhammadiyah* embodies not only a spiritual dimension but also an ideology that supports modernization through industrial theology and a rational ethos (Ropi, 2017). In line with this analysis, several studies show that the movement also aims to remove cultural elements perceived to hinder progress, replacing them with more scriptural and rational religious values (Burhani, 2006; Haq & Muhtadi & Kahmad & AS, 2022).

Muhammadiyah's efforts in its social transformation processes are evident through its systematic strategies in instilling a more puritanical Islamic doctrine, whether through education, preaching, or other social institutions (Azra, 2021; Sari & Saleh, 2020). *Muhammadiyah* pursues purification not only in

theological aspects but also within social and cultural domains by directing Muslims toward a more reason-based understanding grounded in authoritative religious texts (Al-Hamdi & Efendi & Kurniawan & Latief, 2019). Thus, *Muhammadiyah* plays the role of an agent of change that actively promotes societal transformation through the rationalization and modernization of Islamic values (Hamayotsu, 2011).

3 Method

This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, based on both primary and secondary data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Primary data were obtained through fieldwork, including direct observation and mapping of research aspects (Flick, 2018). The data collected include the forms of intellectual shift in *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* that transcend conventional boundaries (van Bruinessen, 1994), the factors driving *Nahdlatul Ulama* toward progressive thought and *Muhammadiyah* toward an accommodative stance (Azra, 2021), as well as the implications of these shifts in thought for both groups (Ricklefs, 2014).

In data collection, the study involved two main groups: (a) *Nahdlatul Ulama* intellectuals, and (b) *Muhammadiyah* scholars. These groups were selected to examine how shifts in thought occur among Gorontalo Muslims in their interpretive processes and to determine whether intellectual capacity influences their perspectives and attitudes (Hefner, 2019). Additionally, the study engaged prominent figures with the competence to evaluate the accuracy and validity of the findings (Moleong, 2017).

The research was conducted over a two-month period and included several phases: desk review, field observations, and in-depth interviews (Neuman, 2014). Prior to fieldwork, various secondary sources were collected, including online news, to map the thoughts of both Muslim groups (van Bruinessen, 1994). Observations were conducted on religious studies held in online media as well as open discussions involving *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* Muslims (Woodward, 2001).

Data analysis was carried out in two forms. First, the analysis followed the stages proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which remain relevant in qualitative research (Saldaña, 2021). These stages include data reduction from observations and interviews, data display in the form of summaries and synopses based on field themes, and data verification for conclusion drawing. Second, analysis was performed using interpretive techniques, including restatement of data obtained from observations and interviews, followed by description to identify patterns or trends in the data, and concluded with interpretation to uncover the meaning behind the collected data (Yin, 2018).

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study employed data validation through triangulation (Denzin, 2017). Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various sources, including interview results, observations, and literature reviews. Additionally, credibility testing was strengthened through expert discussions and rechecking interview findings with relevant informants to ensure consistency and accuracy of the obtained data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

4 Results

4.1 Models of Thought Transformation among *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* Muslims Transcending Proportional Boundaries

Social transformations in Gorontalo illustrate that religious structures are dynamic, continually evolving alongside developments in social, political, and educational spheres. The increasing interactions between *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* youth, both academically and within social movements, have fostered flexibility in interpreting and articulating Islamic values within the cultural context of Gorontalo.

For instance, Donal Tungkagi, a young *Nahdlatul Ulama* figure, was born and raised within *Nahdlatul Ulama* traditions, where religious practices inherited from previous scholars are integral to daily life. From an early age, he participated in religious rituals passed down through generations, regarded as forms of *ijtihad* by scholars in disseminating Islam in the archipelago. However, his exposure to higher education and broader social interactions has shaped his perspectives differently. While maintaining respect for his religious roots,

he has developed a more inclusive and progressive outlook, aligning with the post-traditionalist approach observed among *Nahdlatul Ulama* members in Gorontalo (Table 1).

Similarly, Dikson Yasin, a young *Nahdlatul Ulama* intellectual, was raised in a community that highly values local Islamic traditions. His early thinking was influenced by the strong cultural environment of Tilihuwa village, Gorontalo Regency, which instilled Islamic values based on long-standing traditions. Accustomed to religious practices handed down by local scholars, these became part of his religious identity. However, his academic journey, culminating in a doctoral degree at the State Islamic University of Walisongo Semarang, led to changes in his worldview. Engagement with diverse Islamic thoughts, intellectual discussions, and encounters with various religious traditions have contributed to this transformation.

In contrast, *Muhammadiyah's* thought model appears modernist-accommodative, reflected in the thinking of *Muhammadiyah* intellectuals in Gorontalo who emphasize openness over purist zeal. Their approach to studying Islam incorporates not only religious texts but also socio-cultural, historical, and anthropological aspects. Their studies on Islam and culture, jurisprudence of diversity, and Islam in the Indonesian context are regularly discussed in various *Muhammadiyah* forums.

In an interview conducted on February 4, 2022, Ilyas explained that openness to culture should not compromise Islamic principles. He observed that *Muhammadiyah* no longer focuses as intensely on combating issues such as heresy (*bid'ah*), superstition (*khurafat*), and religious innovation (*takhayyul*), which were central to its early reformist agenda. According to him, the paradigm of the *Muhammadiyah* movement has evolved from a primary emphasis on the purification of Islamic teachings toward a broader focus on social welfare and humanitarian concerns.

This perspective aligns with that of Munkizul Umam Kau, Chairman of the *Tarjih* Council of *Muhammadiyah* in Gorontalo, who emphasized that as long as a tradition does not contradict the core principles of Islamic law, its existence is acceptable. He believes that criticism is warranted when a cultural tradition is elevated to the status of an absolute religious obligation, thereby conflating local practices with universal Islamic tenets. Integrating tradition with Islamic teachings in religious organizations like *Muhammadiyah* does not always proceed without challenges. Such transformations can lead to internal tensions, particularly between members who lean toward more moderate interpretations and those who hold more conservative views.

Statements from Ilyas and Munkizul are echoed by Salahudin Pakaya, Secretary of the *Muhammadiyah* Regional Leadership in Gorontalo. He emphasized that as long as Gorontalo culture does not deviate from Islamic teachings and monotheistic values, it is acceptable. He asserted that *Muhammadiyah* has always oriented itself towards progressive Islam based on knowledge since its inception.

Despite Salahudin's moderate stance towards tradition, this transformation still poses potential internal challenges within the organization. Integrating tradition and modernity can also carry risks, such as the potential loss of organizational identity. As a movement known for its spirit of renewal (*tajdid*), *Muhammadiyah* faces the dilemma of maintaining the purity of Islamic teachings while adapting to the socio-cultural dynamics of society. If not managed properly, accommodating tradition can lead to ambiguity in the organization's ideological direction.

4.2 Driving Factors behind Progressive Nahdlatul Ulama and Accommodative Muhammadiyah

4.2.1 Driving Factors Behind Progressive Nahdlatul Ulama in Relation to Modernization

There are three main factors that drive *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) Muslims in Gorontalo to adopt a traditional-progressive mindset:

1. Educational factor

According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) of Gorontalo in 2022, the higher education participation rate in the province increased by 7.5 % over the past five years (Figure 1 BPS Provinsi Gorontalo, 2022). This reflects an improvement in human resources (HR) within *Nahdlatul Ulama*. According to *Nahdlatul Ulama* Gorontalo's internal report, the number of university students affiliated

Table 1: Thought transformation of NU and Muhammadiyah.

Aspect	NU	Muhammadiyah
Pattern of change	NU youth accessing higher education, especially outside Gorontalo, experience more inclusive and progressive thinking patterns while still adhering to Islamic traditions.	Muhammadiyah, initially known as a modernist movement based on Islamic rationalism, increasingly accommodates local culture in its social-religious practices.
Impact of social and academic interaction	Increased interaction between NU and Muhammadiyah youth in academic and social spheres leads to flexibility in understanding Islamic values within the cultural context of Gorontalo.	Muhammadiyah's thinking increasingly considers socio-cultural, historical, and anthropological aspects in studying Islam.
Thought model	Traditionalist-Progressive: 1. Islam develops within a historical context and adapts to local culture. 2. Islam not only stands on cultural practices but also gives meaning to the culture itself.	Modernist-Accommodative: 1. Based not only on religious texts but also considers social, historical, and cultural aspects. 2. Muhammadiyah's paradigm has shifted from purification to social and humanitarian issues.
Attitude towards tradition	Continues to respect tradition but is open to new perspectives in understanding Islam and culture.	Increasingly accepts local traditions as long as they do not contradict Islamic values, focusing on education and social progress.
Internal challenges	Implementing flexibility without losing NU's traditional identity.	Differences in views between moderate and conservative groups in accepting local traditions. Risk of ideological ambiguity if accommodation of tradition is not well managed.

with PMII (the student organization linked to *Nahdlatul Ulama*) rose from 1,200 members in 2010 to more than 3,500 members in 2022 (Laporan Internal NU Gorontalo, 2022).

This indicates that intellectual enlightenment is growing and becoming more adaptive to change. Several academic figures from the *Nahdlatul Ulama* community have contributed to building the organization's intellectual base. Among them are professor Usman Kaharu, as well as senior scholars such as Ani Hasan, Amir Khalid, and Novianty Djafri, who are actively involved in Islamic thought research and development. Additionally, a younger generation of academics has emerged, including Samsi Pomalingo, Dikson Yasin, Donal Tungkagi, and Eka Putra B. Santoso.

2. Digital technology factor

Advancements in information technology have provided opportunities for younger *Nahdlatul Ulama* cadres to actively participate in disseminating moderate Islamic teachings. According to internal data from *NUtizen TV*, a digital *da'wah* platform managed by *Nahdlatul Ulama* Gorontalo, the average viewership per broadcast reaches 20,000 views, with a 15 % increase in subscribers every six months (*NUtizen TV*, 2023). This shows that digital-based *da'wah* has successfully captured public attention and created a tangible impact in shaping moderate religious opinions. With two broadcasts per week, the content covers various topics on moderate Islam, tolerance, and responses to social-religious challenges in the digital era.

3. Radical Islam factor

Gerakan Pemuda (GP) Ansor, one of *Nahdlatul Ulama*'s autonomous bodies in Gorontalo, plays an

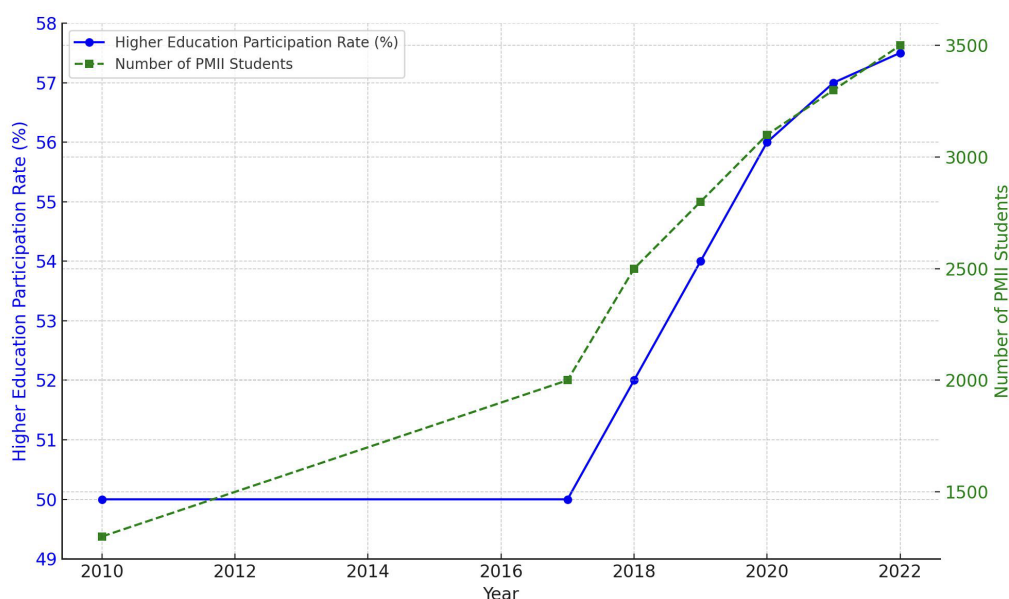


Figure 1: Increase in PMII students.

active role in safeguarding diversity and tolerance. According to GP Ansor Gorontalo's 2023 report, the organization has conducted more than 50 interfaith dialogue events and 30 cadre training sessions annually to strengthen the understanding of Islam as a blessing for all creation (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) (Laporan GP Ansor Gorontalo, 2023). Under the leadership of Muhtojim Boki, Fadliyanto Koem, Fadli Alamri, Risan Pakaya, and Dikson Yasin, GP Ansor remains consistent as a stronghold against intolerance and radicalism.

4.2.2 Factors Driving Muhammadiyah's Accommodative Approach to Culture

Muhammadiyah understands how to position itself within cultural diversity, as reflected in three main factors that have driven the shift in their mindset — from puritanism toward a more accommodative approach to culture (Table 2).

However, this transformation also presents potential weaknesses that need to be explored more deeply. One such concern is the possible emergence of internal conflict within *Muhammadiyah*, especially among more conservative members. The integration between tradition and modernity risks blurring the organization's identity. Without adequate analysis, this change could create tensions between groups striving to preserve the purity of religious teachings and those more accommodating toward local culture.

4.3 Implications of the Shift in Thought of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah

The shift in thought between *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* has contributed to the dismantling of "cultural barriers". This breakdown of civilizational divisions began around 1991, when figures from both organizations — Kiai Adam Zakaria representing *Nahdlatul Ulama* and Yusuf Polapa representing *Muhammadiyah* — jointly delivered a religious lecture at Baiturrahim Mosque in Gorontalo City during a *halal bi halal* event. Since then, *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* have concentrated their programs and movements on jointly addressing social, educational, cultural, and religious issues. There are four implications of the shift in thought of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* (Table 3).

4.4 Marginal Perspectives in the Study of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah

Figure 2 shows the estimated percentage of members from marginalized groups—women, indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities—within student organizations affiliated with *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU) and *Muhammadiyah*. These data reflect the proportion of inclusion reported by regional student wings of both organizations in 2022, highlighting a significant gap in inclusivity efforts. For example,

Table 2: Factors driving Muhammadiyah's accommodative approach to culture.

Factor	Description	Supporting data
Cultural contact	The interaction between Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama occurs not only in formal activities but also in informal settings. Through these interactions, Muhammadiyah Muslims recognize the importance of customs in religious life, which ultimately contributes to social harmony and the strengthening of humanistic values. Sociological studies can explain how these interactions create social changes within the organization.	A survey of 60 Muhammadiyah members in Gorontalo shows that 75 % of respondents acknowledge that involvement in custom-based activities enhances their social relationships with the local community.
Social adaptation	Villages serve as the base for culturally oriented Nahdlatul Ulama Muslims. When Muhammadiyah establishes educational institutions and expands its preaching efforts in rural areas, they must face norms and values different from those they previously upheld. Adaptation becomes necessary to build closer social relationships with the local community. From an anthropological perspective, this adaptation strategy can be analysed as a form of acculturation and identity negotiation.	Data shows that 60 % of Muhammadiyah members living in villages adopt certain Nahdlatul Ulama religious traditions in order to maintain social harmony.
Strength of customs	Gorontalo Muslims had a strong customary system before the arrival of Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah. The shift in Muhammadiyah's thinking is evident across generations of leaders who have increasingly shown openness toward Gorontalo identity. From a political science perspective, this can be seen as Muhammadiyah's strategy to maintain its existence within a custom-based social structure.	According to statistical data from the local Muhammadiyah organization, around 85 % of Muhammadiyah members in Gorontalo agree that respecting customs does not contradict the principles of Progressive Islam.

Muhammadiyah shows higher representation of indigenous groups (35 %) and persons with disabilities (10 %) than *Nahdlatul Ulama* (25 % and 8 %, respectively), while women's representation remains modest in both.

This figure underlines the underrepresentation of marginal voices in scholarly studies and organizational narratives of both *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*, suggesting the need for more inclusive and intersectional approaches in Islamic intellectual discourse.

This graph reveals the fact that the perspectives of marginalized groups — women, indigenous communities, and people with disabilities — are still side-lined in the discourse surrounding the transformation of thought in *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*. Despite both organizations continuing to grow and becoming more accommodating to social changes, attention to these groups remains minimal. Ironically,

Table 3: Implications of the shift in thought of NU and Muhammadiyah.

Indicator	Description	Implication
Joint focus on socio-religious issues	Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah now prioritize humanitarian services over emphasizing ideological differences. Both organizations actively engage in joint social action.	Resistance from more conservative members and the potential blurring of each organization's distinctive identity.
Educational exchange in rural and urban areas	Educational institutions of Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama are now open to students and educators from both sides. Many NU members study at Muhammadiyah institutions and vice versa.	The loss of unique educational identity for each organization and a paradigm shift in teaching and learning systems.
Shared commitment to nationalism	Both organizations are actively involved in defending national sovereignty, rejecting the caliphate system, and educating the public on the importance of Pancasila as the state ideology.	Potential differences in responding to broader political issues and resistance from more conservative internal groups.
Awareness of local cultural traditions	Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama both accept and participate in local social traditions such as ti'ayo, huyula, and bilohe.	More puritanical Muhammadiyah members may still perceive some traditions as conflicting with their principles, and there is a potential loss of the exclusive values that distinguish each organization.

both *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* often position themselves as pioneers of inclusive movements within Islam. However, when viewed from the data, their attention to women, indigenous communities, and people with disabilities is still below 40 %. *Muhammadiyah* is slightly more open in accommodating marginal perspectives than *Nahdlatul Ulama*, but this gap is not significant enough to be of real importance. The transformation of thought in both organizations is still dominated by elite male groups. Meanwhile, women, indigenous communities, and people with disabilities play important roles in shaping the socio-religious reality in Indonesia. If this inclusivity continues to be ignored, the modernization of thought in *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* will only be an elitist discourse rather than a movement that truly represents the diversity of the Muslim community in Indonesia.

5 Discussion

This paper shows a shift in the thinking of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*. The indicators are found in two forms: first, in ideas and thoughts; second, in the practice of religious activities. In terms of thinking, the younger generation of *Nahdlatul Ulama* in Gorontalo has done a significant leap. Their way of thinking has coloured the intellectual landscape of religious knowledge in Gorontalo. Their interest in religious, social, political, and cultural studies continues to grow and develop. They even bring new perspectives by making breakthroughs in thought through books, journal articles, and online articles. As a result, the mind-set of *Nahdlatul Ulama* today carries the modern label similar to *Muhammadiyah* (Aminuddin, 2018).

Some more conservative groups have shown resistance to these new ideas, fearing they may erode the identity of the organization. Internal conflicts may emerge as a consequence of these differing views. Furthermore, the process of integrating tradition and modernity also brings the risk of losing the organization's

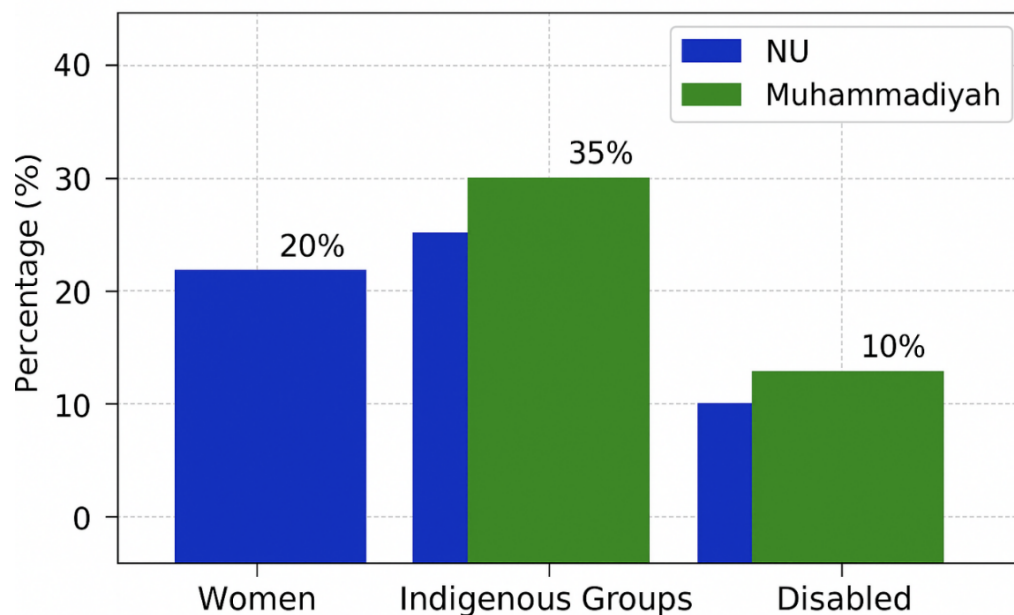


Figure 2: Estimated percentage of NU and Muhammadiyah student members from marginalized groups (women, indigenous communities, and persons with disabilities). Source: Internal survey conducted by PMII and IMM Regional Coordinating Boards, 2022 [unpublished data].

unique character. Therefore, it is important for *Nahdlatul Ulama* to maintain a balance between innovation and the preservation of the values that it has upheld for long (Biyanto, 2017).

Meanwhile, the younger generation of *Muhammadiyah* appears to be more accommodating of local culture. Although their ideas are inspired by modernist figures like Jamaluddin al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and Rasyid Ridha — and even further back, their ideological roots are linked to the ideas of Ibn Taymiyyah — the *Muhammadiyah* Muslim group in Gorontalo shows a form of Islam that aligns with local culture (Burhani, 2006). However, it is worth analysing further whether this integration of tradition and modernity might create an identity dilemma for *Muhammadiyah*, particularly in maintaining the purifying principles of Islam that have always been its hallmark (Harirah, 2021).

The above interviews with informants from both Muslim groups illustrate the identity of the thoughts of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*. The post-traditionalist and neo-modernist phases are found in the argumentative scientific discussions commonly encountered in religious discourse and movements, not in deconstructing the religious spirit that has become the identity of each group. *Nahdlatul Ulama* remains focused on preserving tradition while responding to globalization, whereas *Muhammadiyah* stays consistent with modernism while responding to tradition. For instance, the arguments of Donal and Dikson from the *Nahdlatul Ulama* group tend to be firm in localizing the *Islam Nusantara* concept championed by Abdurrahman Wahid (Shihab, 1998). Similarly, *Muhammadiyah*'s response to tradition does not mean accepting the tradition as a whole. Munkizul Umam and Salahuddin Pakaya are firm in rejecting traditions they view as deviating from the principles of monotheism (Fealy, 2003). Meanwhile, Ilyas Daud is more flexible, only noting that religious traditions should not appear excessive. Therefore, the correct terms to describe these two groups would be “traditional-progressive *Nahdlatul Ulama*” and “modernist-accommodative *Muhammadiyah*” (Niam, 2017).

6 Conclusion

This study shows that the younger generation of both organizations no longer views their Islamic identity as something exclusive and rigid, but rather as a spectrum that is more fluid and mutually influential. This

hybridization process is evident in religious practices and perspectives on contemporary issues. For instance, some *Muhammadiyah* youth communities have begun adopting practices of *dhikr* and communal prayers, which have traditionally been more associated with *Nahdlatul Ulama*, while still adhering to the principle of monotheism (*tauhid*) that is characteristic of *Muhammadiyah*. On the other hand, the younger generation of *Nahdlatul Ulama* in Gorontalo has started to show a tendency towards rationalization in their religious understanding, following *Muhammadiyah's tarjih* method, especially in responding to Islamic legal issues that intersect with modern life. This study also found that cross-organizational communities have formed organically, where *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* youth collaborate in various social and religious activities without being overly bound by their respective organizational doctrines. This phenomenon has generated a new, more inclusive Islamic discourse, one that not only lies on the traditionalist-modernist spectrum, but also forms a more dynamic and contextual way of thinking in relation to the social conditions in Gorontalo.

However, in the dynamics of transformative thought, the perspectives of marginalized groups, such as women, indigenous communities, and people with disabilities, are still largely side-lined. The new Islamic discourse that has developed among the youth of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah* is still primarily focused on changing the dominant mind set within the organizations, while the experiences and aspirations of these groups have not yet fully become part of the mainstream discussion. This indicates that although there is openness and hybridization in Islamic thought, the challenge of inclusivity still requires further attention. Additionally, this research reveals a transformation in how the younger cadres of both organizations understand the concept of Islam in the digital era. Social media has become not only a tool for *da'wah* but also an interactive space that encourages the reinterpretation of Islamic teachings beyond the classical boundaries of *Nahdlatul Ulama* and *Muhammadiyah*. The younger generation of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, who are more familiar with global thought, tend to reduce the exclusivity of their tradition, while *Muhammadiyah* youth are becoming increasingly open to cultural approaches they had previously overlooked.

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