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Considering Restorative Justice and Peacebuilding: A Challenge for Ahmadiyya Communities in Indonesia

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Abstract

Having endured a history of persecution, violent attacks, and discrimination, from civil rights violations to expulsions, the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia has pursued various strategies to promote peace and harmony. Using the Ahmadiyya settlement in Manislor, Kuningan, as a case study, this article examines how restorative justice might support peacebuilding between Ahmadiyya adherents and their offenders. We ask two questions: To what degree can restorative justice contribute to peacebuilding, and what factors either aid or hinder its practice in Manislor? Through a qualitative case study approach that combines observation, focus groups, interviews, and archival research, we identify restorative justice elements that reinforce peacebuilding efforts already initiated by Ahmadiyya leaders and the community. These elements include active dialogue and cultural bridge-building through visits to religious figures and local stakeholders, as well as expanded social engagement and charitable activities already underway in Manislor. This article develops a theoretical framework connecting restorative justice to peacebuilding in a context previously unexamined in the literature, and it provides a practical example that may inform restorative practices elsewhere, especially among other Ahmadiyya communities in Indonesia.

Keywords:
Ahmadiyya; Manislor; restorative justice; peacebuilding; Indonesia

Introduction

As a Muslim minority group in Indonesia, the Ahmadiyya community—specifically the Indonesian Ahmadiyya Group (JAI; Jemaat Ahmadiyah Indonesia), as distinct from the rarely victimised Indonesian Ahmadiyya Movement (GAI; Gerakan Ahmadiyah Indonesia)—has often suffered violence, injustice and discrimination at the hands of dominant Muslim communities (Burhani, 2021; A'an Suryana, 2019), mostly over accusations of heresy and infidelity (Merdeka.com, 2012; Sodik et al., 2022; A'an Suryana, 2017, 2018). Over the last decade, conflict and violence against Ahmadiyya have persisted across Indonesia, with incidents in Bangka (January 2016), Kendal (May 2016), East Lombok (May 2018), and Sintang, West Kalimantan (September 2021) (Cipta, 2021). The expulsion of Ahmadiyya followers (known as Ahmadi) from their former settlement in Lombok has posed a serious obstacle to Indonesia's pursuit of peace and justice for all citizens (BBC Indonesia, 2018; Gaffar, 2013; Nurhayati, 2020).

The first recorded violence against Ahmadis followed the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI; Majelis Ulama Indonesia) fatwa against the group in 1980, which triggered a succession of attacks and intimidation (Sodik & Sujibto, 2025). Under the New Order, the community faced mainly stigmatisation rather than direct physical assault. Between 1990 and

2000, violence took the form of institutional discrimination and social exclusion by vigilante groups, incited by religious edicts from the MUI (Budiwanti, 2009; Noor, 2017). By contrast, during Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's presidency, Ahmadis experienced widespread and severe conflict, which escalated sporadically after a Joint Ministerial Decree in 2008 (Burhani, 2021; Sodik et al., 2022; A'an Suryana, 2019). Physical attacks increased markedly, with 1,483 recorded cases between 2005 and 2012 – an average of 210 per year (Merdeka.com, 2012).

Intolerance and persecution have also continued under Joko Widodo's presidency (KomnasHAM, 2018). These incidents have included restrictions on religious activities, the closure of Ahmadiyya mosques, difficulties in obtaining civil and administrative rights, and ongoing social pressure from local authorities and vigilante groups in several regions. Under this administration, acts of intolerance declined, as the government appeared to offer better protection for minority rights through a more pluralist agenda (Suryana, 2018; 2020). Data from the National Commission on Human Rights, Setara Institute, and Wahid Institute show that local governments at both provincial and regency or municipal levels are the main perpetrators of violations against freedom of belief, specifically in the case of Ahmadiyya communities (Irawan, 2017).

Until recently, conflict and violence have predominantly haunted the narratives about Ahmadiyya in Indonesia, including persecution, hatred, blasphemy, and expulsion (Burhani, 2021; Dulwahab et al., 2021; Lukito, 2016; Noor, 2013; Soedirgo, 2018). Yet the evidence also shows that both Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis are able to produce narratives of peace, social integration and justice. This fact deserves attention from all stakeholders, especially researchers who produce credible information about the community. Furthermore, narratives of peacebuilding and social justice should be actively promoted to shift the focus away from conflict.

Several studies that address peace narratives within Indonesian Ahmadiyya communities can be grouped into themes: reconciliation as the dominant narrative (Aini & Mustaqim, 2017; Pamungkas, 2018; Qurtuby, 2012); peacebuilding (Farabi, 2025), the search for peace in general (Ahmad & Shah, 2016; Fadhillah, 2017; Noor, 2015; Sodik & Sujibto, 2025); tolerance (Wartini & Shulhan, 2016); and coexistence (Almujaddidy, 2017). Some authors discuss justice in terms of social justice (Lathifah, 2022), minority rights within the Indonesian nation-state (Mudzakkir, 2007), the government's role in fulfilling legal rights (Sodik et al., 2023), and the government's role in fulfilling legal rights (Panggabean & Ali-Fauzi, 2014). Internationally, several countries have addressed peace-related issues arising from the presence of Ahmadiyya communities (Kilonzo, 2011; Langewiesche, 2020), but none have considered restorative justice as a way to resolve the justice challenges.

To fill this gap in the literature, we present a new approach that uses restorative justice and contributes to peacebuilding within the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor. Since both restorative justice and peacebuilding have received little attention in studies of Indonesian Ahmadi, we clarify them through a case study that compiles events and specific examples practised by Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis in Manislor. A restorative justice framework is needed to examine the socio-legal problems in this context and to explore how it could provide a foundation for peacebuilding in society. Our investigation of the restorative process for Ahmadis in Indonesia revealed the notable roles of internal and external actors, the dialogue processes they run, and the reconciliation achieved among the parties involved. The aim is to present the restorative process as a peacebuilding mechanism by closely examining the conflict-resolution and reconciliation model in Manislor, which has been successfully implemented for decades.

The notion of restorative justice

Although restorative justice emerged in academic and practical settings during the 1970s and 1980s (Gude & Papic, 2020), and there is broad agreement on its basic principles, experts have yet to settle on a precise definition (Daly, 2002). The debate centres on whether restorative justice should be seen mainly as a set of procedures—such as victim–offender mediation, family group conferencing, or sentencing circles—or as a broader normative philosophy that aims to repair harm, restore relationships, strengthen community participation, and change conventional responses to wrongdoing. The first view is associated with scholars like Kathleen Daly (2002), who warns against treating restorative justice as a unified philosophy because its practices vary widely across contexts. By contrast, Howard Zehr (2014) and John Braithwaite (1989) regard restorative justice as a normative framework grounded in repairing harm, restoring social relationships, and encouraging reintegration rather than punishment alone.

Following Zehr (2014), we understand restorative justice as a process that involves, as far as possible, those affected by a particular offence in collectively identifying and addressing harms, needs and obligations, so as to promote healing and restore balance. It offers an inclusive approach by allowing community participation, with victims and offenders as the main actors in a collective, ideally face-to-face, process designed to discuss the offence and how to put things right (Gude & Papic, 2020). Internationally, the challenges of implementing restorative justice have been examined from various angles (Coates et al., 2003; Islam et al., 2018).

Restorative justice programmes also seek to empower those most affected by crime in decision-making, to promote a more healing approach to justice, and to reduce the likelihood of future offences (Zehr, 2014). In the Ahmadiyya context, restorative justice can support recovery from victimisation and trauma—as Suzuki (2023) notes—by aiding victim recovery. Another victim-focused study addressed forgiveness and reconciliation as integral parts of the restorative process (Armour & Umbreit, 2018). Applying restorative justice to victims' experiences is a suitable way to analyse the Ahmadiyya case in Manislor, and could produce an important strategy for advancing the peace process.

The restorative justice process aims to give greater voice to victims such as the Ahmadiyya, because victim recovery is central to the development of restorative justice (Suzuki, 2023). Victims should be heard and should participate in the pursuit of social justice, an approach that has encouraged forgiveness and reconciliation in the ongoing peace process and shapes future discussions (Boehle, 2021). The presence of external stakeholders in Kuningan who are committed to peacebuilding has strengthened the restorative process by improving dialogue and reconciliation.

We therefore define restorative justice as a relational process that creates social spaces in which victims, offenders, community leaders and other stakeholders engage in dialogue, acknowledge past harms, rebuild trust, and negotiate new forms of coexistence. Building on the understanding of restorative justice as a process of collectively addressing harms, needs and obligations (Zehr, 2014), we define it as a community-based social practice that continuously cultivates reconciliation, social inclusion and cooperative relationships among groups, beyond the resolution of specific conflicts. In the case of the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor, restorative justice is understood not as a one-off legal or mediation procedure, but as an ongoing social practice embedded in everyday interactions, which could sustain peaceful coexistence among religious communities.

This understanding provides the conceptual basis for linking restorative justice

with peacebuilding. Peacebuilding refers to the long-term process of addressing the structural, relational, and cultural conditions that generate conflict while strengthening the institutions, relationships, and social capacities needed for sustainable peace (Galtung, 1976; Lederach, 1999). From this perspective, restorative justice acts as a peacebuilding mechanism because it continually reinforces trust, social inclusion, dialogue and intergroup cooperation.

In Manislor, we observed that the involvement of external stakeholders—such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), religious leaders, and representatives from MUI, Forum Kerukunan Umat Beragama (FKUB), and various *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools)—has further reinforced the peacebuilding efforts initiated internally by Ahmadi. This, in turn, has a marked effect on individuals and society in promoting peace within their communities (Braithwaite, 2002). The concept is useful for our research because it places emphasis on the importance of stakeholder unity to address the aftermath of conflict with a view to the future.

Restorative justice and peacebuilding

When Martin Luther King Jr. declared, "There can be no justice without peace, and there can be no peace without justice," outside a California prison holding Vietnam War protesters in December 1967 (United Nations, 2021), he set off a widespread discussion about the relationship between these two ideals. A similar debate arose in the 1990s over the renewed use of international tribunals and the place of international justice (Conca, 1994; Marchadour & Neuhaus, 2007; Urlacher, 2016).

There is now growing agreement that justice concerns also arise during transitions to peace, which involve various stabilising measures to prevent conflict from recurring (Elster, 2012). An important connection between justice and peace lies in the practice of restorative justice, which contributes to peacebuilding in both theory and practice. Earlier work has shown how restorative justice can aid peacebuilding through forgiveness, reconciliation, and community involvement (Llewellyn & Philpott, 2014; Sawatsky, 2005). In the context of the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor, we argue that applying restorative justice alongside peacebuilding can improve both the theoretical and practical dimensions of peacebuilding by creating frameworks that address past harms and promote social integration.

Peacebuilding is a long-term effort that must proceed directly, actively and as part of everyday social life in communities with diverse backgrounds at all levels of society—from individuals and families to communities, organisations, businesses, governments, institutions (cultural, religious, economic, and political), and movements (Murithi, 2009; Schirch, 2014). As a pioneer in the field, Lederach (1995) observed that successful negotiations and mediation lead to a restructuring of relationships and address fundamental issues by suggesting possible paths towards change, such as education, advocacy, and mediation. This article highlights Schirch's (2014) observation that religious leaders have great potential in peacebuilding by encouraging their followers to make peace with neighbours. Community mediators and restorative justice practitioners, who facilitate dialogue between conflicting parties, have also played a fundamental part.

Recognised as a comprehensive approach to peace studies, peacebuilding is regarded as the latest global initiative to promote peace within society. It is also seen as a globalisation process that provides the fundamental raison d'être of the United Nations system (Goetze, 2017), a phenomenon often called the "age of peacebuilding" in global politics (Philpott & Powers, 2010). Given the escalating nature of conflicts and their potential to recur, there is a strong emphasis on preventing a relapse. This requires sustained effort and active

engagement in the peace process within the local or internal communities involved (Hatto, 2014). In Manislor, Ahmadiyya adherents place great importance on dialogue, engaging in social and cultural interactions, and actively working to reduce tensions.

By linking restorative justice and peacebuilding, we examine how the Ahmadiyya community and surrounding actors in Manislor transform strained social relations into more constructive and sustainable forms of coexistence. This study's novelty is in demonstrating that restorative justice is an ongoing peacebuilding practice, beyond merely responding to instances of religious intolerance.

Method

Building on the conception of restorative justice as an ongoing peacebuilding mechanism, a qualitative case study is used to examine how restorative justice is enacted in everyday community life and how these practices contribute to sustained peacebuilding within the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor, Kuningan Regency. The analysis focuses on the actors, social spaces, patterns of interaction, and dialogical processes to promote reconciliation, trust-building, social inclusion and intergroup cooperation. This allows us to investigate relational processes in depth within Manislor's social and cultural context (Maxwell, 2013), through a case study design to examine a bounded social setting and its complex processes (Byrne & Ragin, 2009; Yin, 2003). Accordingly, we treat the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor as an information-rich case for understanding restorative justice as an ongoing peacebuilding practice (Stretcher & Michael, 2019).

In the historical context of Ahmadiyya in Indonesia, Manislor stands out due to its majority Ahmadi population, totaling 4,551 in 2019 (Sodik et al., 2022). The organised-minority community arrived in the village in 1953. After the Manislor village head, Bening, swore allegiance to Ahmadiyya, the spread of the group became easier because village elites had been convinced by the Ahmadiyya preacher. Within a short time, the number of Ahmadis in the village grew (Prawira, 2012), accounting for roughly 70% of the village's population (Syukur, 2017). In 2019, there were 3,270 followers out of 4,551 residents, with some claims suggesting up to 75% (interview with AO, 09/05/2022, and confirmed through interview with AM, 09/05/2022), although more recent data on the exact number of Ahmadi residents is not available. Unlike other regions where Ahmadis are often marginalised minorities, Manislor provides an example of how a religious minority at the national level can exercise agency and resilience when situated as a local majority.

Data collection was carried out during fieldwork using a variety of methods, including observation, focus group discussions (FGDs), interviews, and documentation. Observation helped us to gain a better understanding of the topic by examining the general situation in the field. We closely observed how community members perceive the restorative process and peacebuilding, and how they practise a peaceful life in both internal and external communities while residing in Manislor.

Table 1.
Informants

Initials	Roles
AL	Ahmadiyya Leaders (2 persons): leaders and administrators in Manislor
AO	Administrative Officers (2 persons): Manislor Village Head and the head of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Kuningan
AM	Ahmadiyya *Mubaligh* (preacher) (1 person) from Manislor
AJ	Ahmadiyya *Jamaah* (adherents) (10 persons) from Manislor
RO	Religious Organisations (6 representatives/ leaders) in Kuningan, comprising: NU, Fatayat, Ansor, Muhammadiyah, MUI, FKUB
YR	Youth Representatives (2 persons)
AA	Anti-Ahmadiyya (2 persons)

Source: Authors

The primary data came from interviews conducted during three fieldwork visits: 15–18 October 2021, 9–10 July 2022, and 6–8 December 2024, in Manislor and Kuningan. The seven types of informants who served as living witnesses to the restorative process of building peace within Manislor. We used purposive sampling to choose informants based on observations of their characteristics and engagement with the topic (Dawson, 2009). We also employed snowball sampling, where key individuals referred other informants who could strengthen our field data.

Additionally, we collected data through documentation by examining mass media, printed newspapers, books, journals, articles, and supporting materials. This step incorporated references to historical contexts, allowing us to reassess efforts to establish peace in Manislor.

The data was analysed by firstly reducing the data to sort, simplify, and transform raw data; secondly presenting the classified and structured information; and thirdly concluding the information into detailed classifications and consistent codes. We refined these three steps through triangulation, which compared data sources in detail to strengthen confirmatory validity (Hyett et al., 2014).

Results

Internal initiative and commitment

Manislor Village in Kuningan, West Java, is widely known as a central settlement of the Ahmadiyya community in Indonesia. Since the MUI issued religious fatwas in the 1980s classifying Ahmadiyya as deviant, its members have faced repeated violence, marginalisation and various forms of social exclusion. These tensions intensified in the early 2000s, when broader sociopolitical changes gave more room for assertive religious groups, leading to periodic clashes and pressures on the community's daily life. This background is important for understanding how marginalisation has unfolded in Manislor and why Ahmadis have had to keep developing strategies of resilience in a challenging environment.

As a post-conflict society, not all parties in Manislor can smoothly engage in conflict resolution. Traumatic experiences and lingering fears persist in collective memory, often obstructing social integration and hindering the peace process. During our first fieldwork, we observed the careful internal approach of Ahmadis in building dialogue and social relationships with external groups. Ahmadiyya internal stakeholders personally initiated dialogue by visiting religious figures in Kuningan. In November 2021, an informant (AO) invited us to accompany them on a visit to a prominent figure who had strongly opposed Ahmadiyya during their participation at FKUB. To our surprise, the meeting was remarkably warm, with kind and heartfelt conversations shaping the dialogue.

The table presents an M-Actor analysis showing that each actor occupies a distinct power position and constructs different meanings of the conflict. The Ahmadiyya community, as a subordinate group, seeks security through adaptive, non-confrontational strategies, interpreting conflict as a spiritual test and promoting a discourse of peace. Non-Ahmadi villagers, holding dominant social power, prioritise social cohesion and religious orthodoxy by exerting social pressure while avoiding open violence. Local leaders act as bridging actors through informal mediation and narrative control, while local government actors approach the issue through administrative and security frameworks, viewing it as a matter of public order.

In doing so, internal Ahmadiyya actors play a key part in facilitating dialogue, as they can sustain ongoing communication and build friendships with all parties as far as possible. They have cultivated strong relationships and genuine friendships, for instance, by organising regular meetings with various religious figures

Table 2.
M-Actor analysis in mapping findings toward restorative justice and peacebuilding

Actors	Motives	Actions	Meanings	Power Position	Summary
Ahmadis	Seeking security; maintaining religious identity; living in peace	Limiting public religious expression; formal and informal dialogue; active participation in mediation mechanisms	Conflict is interpreted as a test of faith; peace for all, hatred for none	Subordinate	A minority actor using adaptive strategies and soft power to sustain community survival
Non-Ahmadis	Preserving harmony among villagers	Community pressure; avoiding involvement in direct conflict	Conflict as a defence of faith	Dominant	While the theological aspects remain strict, the social context is treated as negotiable to preserve social harmony
Local Leaders	Maintaining harmony; preserving social legitimacy	Informal mediation; village deliberations; control of public narratives	Peace as a social ideal; conflict as a threat to village reputation	Intermediate (bridging)	Bridging actors who shift the meaning of conflict toward social stability and harmony
Local Government	Political stability; conflict control; administrative and legal certainty	Administrative regulations; guidance/ monitoring; security-based approaches	Conflict as a disturbance of public order	Structural	A structurally embedded actor with an ambiguous role: mediator and mechanism of control

Source: Authors' observation data

in Kuningan. They have also visited Islamic boarding schools, both within Kuningan and outside the regency, especially schools affiliated with NU figures who had supported them from the beginning of the conflict (interview with AO, 16/10/2021).

The awareness of building good relations with non-Ahmadis has become a value that guides their dialogue with individuals and the society around Manislor. These initiatives were welcomed by many parties who had grown weary of living amid conflict, trauma, and hatred. In addition to building good relations with officials, the Ahmadiyya elites visited the Kuningan police station. The police officer advised them to maintain good relations, build dialogue and communicate with various groups, especially with leaders of social-religious organisations (interview with AL, 16/10/2021). The commitment from within has strengthened the legal aspect (Richardson, 1999) and equity (Buettner-Schmidt & Lobo, 2012). Careful negotiations and the consolidation of peace within society have made promising progress by promoting dialogue, positive relationships, and friendships with both formal and informal actors in Manislor and Kuningan more broadly. The role of the preacher, or *mubaligh*, is important in building relationships with others (interview with AM, 16/07/2022).

Embracing opposition

When conflict emerged during the Yudhoyono presidency in December 2007, many groups openly and sporadically attacked Ahmadis in Manislor. These included religious-affiliated organizations such as MUI, FPI (Islamic Defenders Front/ Islamic Defenders Front), FKUB, RUDAL (Remaja Masjid Al Huda/ Al Huda Mosque Youth), GERAH (Gerakan Anti Ahmadiyah/ Anti-Ahmadi Movement), and GARIS (Gerakan Reformasi Islam/ Islamic Reform Movement), as well as individuals influenced by mass provocation, both from around Manislor and other districts in Kuningan (Almujaddidy, 2017; Idris, 2015; S. R. Panggabean & Ali-Fauzi, 2015). In addition to MUI, FPI, and FKUB, internal Ahmadiyya figures were well aware that they had suddenly been grouped in a way that contributed to polarising the large-scale violence on the ground (interview with AO, 16/10/2021). It is widely recognised among Ahmadis that attackers were sporadically organised and had

distributed large numbers of flyers (Detik.com, 2010).

Learning from past violence, the leadership of the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor recognised the importance of initiating and strengthening restorative processes to promote peace within society. The proactive commitment of Ahmadis to promoting peace processes in Kuningan has garnered enthusiasm both in Manislor and the regency more generally (interview with AA, 17/10/2021). This optimism has naturally arisen among those who support the peace process in the area, as well as among residents of Manislor who aspire to a harmonious and tranquil life in their village. Our earlier research showed that efforts to eliminate conflict and local tensions in the Manislor community have been fundamental for both Ahmadis and other villagers who have consistently backed peace initiatives (Sodik et al., 2023).

The dedication to the restorative process faced significant challenges, particularly when confronting opponents who firmly rejected the presence of Ahmadiyya in Manislor during the conflict that erupted from 2003 to 2014. Through tireless efforts such as *rabtah* (strong friendship and networking) or *silaturahim* (regular visits) and the cultivation of good relationships and friendships, the Ahmadiyya community managed to reconcile with their opponents (Sodik, 2024). In practice, *rabtah* is carried out by Ahmadiyya leaders and members to establish communication and maintain good relations. The effectiveness of these efforts became evident when individuals who had previously opposed Ahmadiyya openly acknowledged that the leaders' dedication to the restorative process and their pursuit of a peaceful life caused them to reconsider their stance (interview with RO, 16/10/2021).

In Manislor, both victims and aggressors have begun to reconcile to build peace in society. They treat past conflict experiences as lessons, which builds confidence in the restorative justice process through the giving and receiving of forgiveness. Since most of the actual offenders who attacked Ahmadis were not local residents but came from outside areas, reconciliation initiatives were undertaken primarily by the Ahmadiyya community and directed towards stakeholders in Kuningan who could be effectively reached, such as leaders of the MUI, FKUB, and local *kiai* (religious figures, often heads of Islamic boarding schools). Meanwhile, state officials at the local and regional levels—including the police, judiciary, district head, and local officials under the Ministry of Religious Affairs—became the focus of *rabtah* initiatives conducted by Ahmadiyya leaders.

The process of embracing opponents has been a long journey, culminating in a leadership transition within both MUI and FKUB. This transition played a key part in opening dialogue between Ahmadiyya figures and the institutions' new leaders. As a result, peacebuilding and restorative justice efforts in Manislor gained momentum and made significant progress. The current chairman of MUI shows strong awareness of and dedication to resolving the conflicts and violence over the past decade. An effort to bridge dialogue and promote peaceful relations was expressed by the chairman of MUI Kuningan: "*When I was elected chairman of MUI, I had a slogan: [socially] connected even though they are different—differences do not sever their connection*" (interview with RO, 17/10/2021). This powerful message promotes optimism within the context of the Ahmadiyya's peacebuilding efforts in Kuningan, showing determination towards a restorative justice process.

Changes in leadership at the national level of MUI's elite members have influenced the composition of elites in several Indonesian provinces, particularly since the Joko Widodo presidency. In the previous administration, MUI was largely aligned with conservative religious groups. Shifts in national leadership

also affected MUI's institutional stance in reflecting broader political currents and the growing contestation between moderate and conservative Islamic voices in Indonesia. The following statement broadly expresses the fundamental message:

> *"So, right now, it's simply like this: the fatwa was in the past; that has already passed. Let's discuss the current situation—what is the reality at present? If it's socially connected, calm down; there's no more commotion, and that's good. The most important thing now is how we envision a promising future together. There is no commotion; respect each other; maintain harmony together; it's better. Regarding the different views on religion held by Ahmadiyya—yes, we can still have a good dialogue."* (interview with RO, 17/10/2021).

Instead of aligning with MUI officials who maintain a strict stance towards Ahmadiyya, the religious organisation representative explained that everyone has different abilities in terms of understanding Ahmadiyya, which is natural. The important thing is for these different understandings to be accepted as scholarly avenues, for instance, through exchanging ideas and building dialogue. An informant suggested that MUI should strive to eliminate tensions, particularly within Ahmadiyya (interview with RO, 17/10/2021).

The second actor, in direct opposition to Ahmadiyya, is FKUB. It acts as part of the religious authority alongside MUI. Facilitated by the state under the responsibility of the Minister of Religion, FKUB has representatives from officially recognised religions in Indonesia and is expected to play an important role as a mediator for resolving inter-religious issues. It also has a broader scope aimed at maintaining inter-religious harmony and ensuring that believers of any religion have equal rights and are treated justly under the law. However, FKUB has not been able to solve problems regarding Ahmadiyya in Manislor effectively. Its position is similar to that of MUI as an institution, with most recommendations based on MUI's fatwa (interview with RO, 18/10/2021). The evidence shows that MUI and FKUB are twin institutions concerning the case of Ahmadiyya, and their stances are indirectly related to the general attitude of MUI. However, one representative of FKUB has begun to initiate dialogue in an attempt to find common ground, definitively supporting the peace process. The chairman of FKUB Kuningan explained that:

> *"... the most important thing now is to maintain dialogue and friendship, and Ahmadiyya should not be too exclusive. It has been peaceful so far; therefore, the expressions and activities of Ahmadiyya adherents should not be too ostentatious. Their activities should not provoke other groups, for instance, by organising events with dozens of buses arriving from different regions to Manislor. The primary goal is to prevent potential anger from other groups. It is better to avoid such occurrences."* (interview with RO, 18/10/2021).

Ahmadiyya leaders embraced dialogue with both MUI and FKUB, which has garnered support for the commitment to the peace process. The ability to rebuild a positive relationship and partnership with actors who were previously resistant to Ahmadiyya can facilitate a restorative process, which holds promise for future peace in Manislor (interview with AA, 17/10/2021). To support the peace process, the Ahmadiyya community should not be as exclusive as it used to be. By now, they need to be open to everyone from outside their group to reciprocally build good relationships through sincere dialogue and intensive cultural meetings. An informant also explained that maintaining the intensity of meetings and staying in contact would help maintain peaceful relationships among actors and their members (interview with RO, 18/10/2021).



Figure 1. *Kiais* on the return visit to Manislor, 26/12/2021
Source: Ahmadiyya official document

The ability to embrace opposition and show forgiveness can gradually lead to restorative justice. Good relations among actors and stakeholders can spread to society as a whole, promoting tolerance as a means of peacebuilding in a multicultural community like Kuningan. The persistent efforts of Ahmadiyya leaders to build peace have been rewarded with return visits from *kiais* to Manislor, such as those on 18 November 2021 and 26 December 2021 (Ahmadiyah.id, 2021c). This momentum was also regarded as a peaceful process in building mutual understanding to facilitate restorative justice (interview with AM, 10/7/2022).

Active engagement

We observed that Ahmadis' internal commitment to helping others has been structurally regarded as a religious calling to serve society. Under the direct instruction of the Caliphate and organised within the framework of both national and international initiatives, Ahmadis have carried out social charity programmes in diverse locations within Kuningan, such as distributing basic necessities during Ramadan and *qurban* (sacrificial) meat during Eid al-Adha (Lukman A., 2023a; 2025), promoting environmental care (Pratiwi, 2019), and their most distinctive initiative, corneal donation programmes (Ahmadiyah.id, 2021a, 2021b). These social engagements have created opportunities to connect with others and build dialogue for mutual understanding as part of society (interview with AO, 07/12/2024).

Consistent with previous strategies, active engagement with a broader audience is an effective approach to enhance mutual understanding. Participating in various social and cultural events in Kuningan has helped Ahmadis connect with individuals outside their community (Noor, 2024)—with various actors and individuals regardless of their specific societal positions (Almutaqin, 2025). This genuine cultural approach results in sincere dialogue and mutual understanding, cultivating honest relationships among citizens (Lukman A., 2023b).

As part of the Ahmadiyya community's commitment, a form of participatory action has been implemented in their social services in line with their religious values (interview with AM, 09/07/2022). Apart from the internal unity established by the methodical and organised programmes, the Ahmadiyya community also regularly engages in external outreach through donations, charitable work and support for the medical field to strengthen social ties with the larger community.

The efforts undertaken by the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor have been acknowledged by representatives of religious organisations, including the chairman of FKUB. An informant appreciated Ahmadiyya's social service programs related to humanity, such as corneal donation, blood donation, and free medical treatments (interview with RO, 18/10/2021). Environmental issues addressed by Ahmadi initiatives include waste management technology, as acknowledged by a leader of Fatayat who expressed that the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor has actively transformed waste into reused products (interview with RO, 18/10/2022).

Ahmadiyya leaders regard social participation as a reflection of the religious values and socio-economic frameworks of Manislor. Being the majority in the village, Ahmadis are in a position to manage and develop businesses, including those in the textile, health, and agricultural industries (interview with AJ, 16/10/2021). The business world also allows for commercial and cultural cooperation, which are priority aspects for social cohesion within the broader community.

Discussion

The embodiment of religious values among Ahmadiyya adherents in Manislor can be seen in their commitment to strengthening internal capacities while recognising external circumstances that can promote societal peace and harmony. *Rabtah*, therefore, becomes important in building dialogue and mutual understanding. It also serves as a guide for handling post-conflict situations, offering a necessary step in peacebuilding through restorative justice, which brings together a wider range of actors and stakeholders (Braithwaite, 2002). The involvement of the community could be important, given the full support of society (Gude & Papic, 2020). By optimising the role of stakeholders, social and cultural capital, and other potential aspects within society, the pathway to peacebuilding remains open (Lederach, 1995; Schirch, 2014).

Furthermore, *rabtah* has facilitated intensive dialogue between Ahmadiyya leaders and other stakeholders, such as the local chapter of NU in Kuningan, MUI, and FKUB, all of which had previously opposed Ahmadiyya. The transition of leadership within MUI and FKUB marked a significant shift in relationships. Other parties that have shown support for the restorative justice process include researchers, academicians, and human rights activists. This change occurred as a result of positive relationships built by Ahmadiyya stakeholders that led to constructive dialogue (interview with AO, 09/07/2022). Aside from such constructive communication, internal Ahmadiyya commitments include initiating social projects for the public and participating in charity on both national and religious special days (interview with AJ, 16/10/2021). This has become a common understanding among the Ahmadiyya community (FGD and interview with AJ, 09/07/2022). In this context, the gradual process of social justice has been an attempt to distribute fairness in the allocation of power, resources, and processes as they exist locally (Buettner-Schmidt & Lobo, 2012).

Peacebuilding can be achieved through a restorative process that has been culturally initiated in search of living in harmony (Boehle, 2021). At first, it became an alternative way to avoid further conflict and trauma they had suffered for decades, and to offer

forgiveness at the same time (Armour & Umbreit, 2018). Ahmadiyya adherents initiated a continuous peace process with many means and methods that allow the people of Manislor and its surroundings to live in harmony. Hence, Ahmadis have opened their door to welcome anybody by promoting dialogue and good relationships based on common interests, as fellow citizens of a nation who uphold values of togetherness and harmony under state authority (Philpott & Powers, 2010). This stance is a noteworthy approach, supported by various internal Ahmadiyya elements, including the youth sector (interview with YR, 18/10/2021).

The first pillar in maintaining the peace process as an ongoing commitment is to embrace all parties: when the state has an uncertain presence in peacebuilding efforts, Ahmadiyya leaders conduct "peaceful force guerrillas" by paying regular visits to religious actors and stakeholders in Kuningan to seek cultural friendship and mutual understanding in order to build trust (interview with AJ, 16/10/2021). Apart from state officials, Ahmadiyya leaders visited socio-religious stakeholders within NU, MUI, FKUB and Muhammadiyah. These figures were culturally and socially embraced to demonstrate a continuous commitment to peacebuilding, with the dialogues resting on maintaining coexistence in social life (Parker, 2014; Rosenblith, 2008).

Ahmadiyya adherents practice *rabtah* as a form of *dawah* (preaching) strategy, carried out in general by Ahmadis. It is embedded as a religious tenet and valued as a calling to be fulfilled throughout a lifetime. This strategy later developed into a standard means of creating networks to accommodate the possibility of meeting in both formal and informal settings. The awareness of making friendships is a form of spreading religious teachings to the wider community (interview with AJ, 16/10/2021). In addition to religious motivation, *rabtah* is also closely related to social value through positively managed interpersonal relationships—not just preaching, but also sharing with others (interview with AM, 09/07/2022). Mutual listening and sharing allow more intensive meetings to take place. This tradition provides open avenues for various activities to build social integration in Manislor and, more generally, in Kuningan. The awareness of various actors, especially internally within Ahmadis, has led to a progressive peace process (interview with AJ on 16/10/2021).

Practicing *rabtah* allows for the previously prejudiced and stigmatised narrative about Ahmadiyya to change smoothly through friendships and dialogue. *Rabtah* becomes a habit of socially connecting with culture and tradition, as reflected in the socialisation process between Ahmadis and non-Ahmadis. Elements of society outside the Ahmadiyya adherents, such as NU, for example, express that they truly acknowledge the meaning and impact of friendship. For Ahmadis, paying a regular visit to build friendship may purely be a ritual of *rabtah,* but it follows cultural and social codes within society. *Rabtah* and relationships between internal and external actors emphasise how peace is built through peaceful means (Galtung, 1996; Murithi, 2009). All actors who participate in supporting the peace process consciously emphasise the importance of the Ahmadiyya relationship in order to build and maintain harmonious social relations. Meanwhile, internally, the friendship carried out by the *mubaligh* and the chairman of the Ahmadiyya was felt to have really helped the peace process in Manislor. Maintaining new habits of gathering, paying visits, actively engaging in social activities, and helping others is fundamental for the community to build social relations and create sustainable peace.

The second pillar is a struggle for social existence. The awareness of interacting with and establishing good relations with the community opens up possibilities for the public

participation of Ahmadiyya. As their existence has been shaped by relationships with others, the more they build good relationships, the faster they can achieve peace (interview with AO, 16/10/2021). Apart from regular visits to stakeholders to build close friendships, Ahmadis build social existence through charitable initiatives such as corneal and blood donations, free medical treatment, and distributing *qurban* meat for the community inside and outside Manislor. This service is a fundamental expression of Ahmadiyya social commitment. In this context, such an approach is carried out to practice solidarity, which is an important foundation for the Ahmadiyya community to manage its internal system and survive in the midst of discrimination and social segregation.

Business relationships built by Ahmadis further provide social connection by fulfilling basic welfare needs and a different way of relating without problematising their socio-religious background. By facilitating more social encounters between victims and their aggressors, the restorative process becomes fundamental for victim recovery (Suzuki, 2023). The emergence of businesses in various sectors, such as agriculture, health, and textiles, has opened up opportunities for collaboration and cooperation among business players as individuals and groups. Indeed, peace can be built in this way, where social relations among actors can join various segments of life, especially the economic aspect, which is a foundation of welfare.

An important aspect of the peacebuilding process in Manislor is the integrated use of restorative justice approaches, particularly the effort to consider both victims and offenders as subjects of reconciliation through multiple social and moral pathways. In this context, the Ahmadiyya case broadens conceptual debates on restorative justice and peacebuilding by consistently employing *rabtah* as a distinctive community-based practice that embraces both victims and offenders within a single relational framework. This practice challenges state-centred and legalistic models of restorative justice by placing moral dialogue, everyday social relations, and spiritually grounded reconciliation at the forefront. It also contributes to peacebuilding theory by showing how locally embedded religious practices can sustain coexistence beyond formal institutional mechanisms.

Conclusion

The internal commitment and awareness of the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor to initiate the peacebuilding process through a range of activities and programmes has led to support from many actors and stakeholders in Kuningan. Accordingly, forgiveness and reconciliation between victims and offenders, backed by multiple parties, have created the possibility of advancing the peacebuilding process. The methods of building dialogue, restorative processes, and good friendships among various parties have resulted in social trust and integration, which have spread optimism among the general community in Manislor. From these steps, restorative justice has been a fundamental aspect in strengthening the peacebuilding process.

This research article clarifies the conceptual contribution of the peaceful approach within the context of the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor, Kuningan, by proposing the process of restorative justice. Evidence shows that active dialogue, social engagement, charity, and *rabtah*—initiated by Ahmadiyya leaders in collaboration with external figures and institutions—serve as effective means of implementing restorative justice, contributing to the peacebuilding process. The role of stakeholders, particularly social and religious institutions, has been fundamental in supporting peace efforts. Leadership transitions played a key role in advancing peacebuilding frameworks, which warrants consideration within the body of knowledge.

The case of the Ahmadiyya community in Manislor can be a model for other religious minorities in Indonesia. Persistent initiatives shown throughout the peace process in strengthening peacebuilding, as maintained by Ahmadiyya adherents, have opened up the possibility of transforming restorative justice in other areas by sharing a commitment to peaceful coexistence. However, this study has limitations: within the geographical context, Ahmadiyya adherents are the majority population. In addition, the actors and stakeholders who support the peace process in Manislor cannot be directly compared with those of other regions, considering the different backgrounds of social and religious identities and organisations. In practice, applying restorative justice in complex conflicts that are rooted in exclusive religious identities may be challenging due to resistance from perpetrators, power imbalances between victims and offenders, and a lack of institutional support or regulatory frameworks to facilitate such informal reconciliation processes.

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