

# TRADITIONAL ISLAM IN JAVANESE SOCIETY

## The Roles of *Kyai* and *Pesantren* in Preserving Islamic Tradition and Negotiating Modernity

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**Abstract:** The debate on the notion of identity of the traditional Islam in the Javanese society is often related to *pesantren* and *kyai*. These are the sub-cultural entities that have contributed to the shaping and building the identity of the Javanese Muslims. This paper explores the following key issues: (1) In what ways the collective identity of the Javanese Muslims is constructed in such a multicultural society? (2) What are the roles of the *pesantren* and *kyais* in such a process. The paper argues that the *pesantren* communities perceive themselves as the defending power of traditional Islam, the fact that would imply logically that there is a sort of cultural confrontation between the traditionalists and the modernists. The paper will delve into this polarity in the context of the role of *pesantren* and *kyai* and how these sub-cultural entities negotiate both with the opposing sub-culture –the modernist that is- and with modernity.

**Keywords:** Traditional Islam, *pesantren*, *kyai*, modernity, traditionalists, modernists.

### Introduction

Constructing a collective identity in a multicultural society is not an easy task. Although various groups exist in Java, a struggle to define such an identity seems to be a must. There is always a need to create an identity at a trans-national, national, sub-national, or ethnical level. Identity, comprising of meaning and purpose -either personal or collective- demands both discursive and dialectical process in its construction. This means that the process of constructing identities

persistently involves claim and counterclaim, thesis-antithesis, which continues to the establishment of an agreed group identity.

In the national context, the debate of identity is usually linked to religion and philosophy and focuses on what Anderson calls “imagined communities.” At the practical level of Indonesian society, religious adherents, including Muslims, are taking part and position in such a debate. To take a more specific instance, among Indonesian Muslims, there are two major camps that are referred to in the Western scholarship as the “Traditionalists”, associated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and *pondok pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) and the “Modernists”, who are attached to Muhammadiyah.<sup>1</sup>

Though anthropologists have various ways in exploring traditional Islam in Javanese society, a large number of studies are devoted to attaching such an identity to *pesantren* and *kyai*. In fact, people of *pesantren* make similar claims themselves and use Islam as part of their oppositional claims differentiating them from the less pious ruling Javanese. *Pesantren* accordingly presents a choral voice in the discourse of what it is to be a Javanese and what it is to be an Indonesian generally. Bruinessen believes that the transmission of traditional Islam as prescribed in scripture, i.e., classical texts of the various Islamic disciplines, together with commentaries, glosses and super commentaries on these basic texts written over the ages, was the main reason for the establishment of this institution.<sup>2</sup>

Traditional Islam, according to Dhofier, is related to an entity bound up with established Islamic ideas created by scholars during the early centuries of Islamic theological and legal development. However, along with globalization and modernity, there are dynamics within this identity construction process. The latest development shows that social political changes affect the face of traditional Islam. Practices in Sufism, ideas and the acceptance of local cultures, and resistance on purifying Islamic teaching have shifted due to modernity challenges. *Kyai* not

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<sup>1</sup> Ronald Lukens-Bull, “A Peaceful Jihad: Javanese Islamic Education and Religious Identity Construction,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Arizona State University (1997), pp. 10-30. After the *reformasi* era (1998), this polarization seems to disappear as a number of radical Muslim groups promoting *jihad* against enemies of Islam and supporting the establishment of Islamic state emerges.

<sup>2</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, “Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Maintenance and Continuation of a Tradition of Religious Learning,” in Wolfgang Marschall (ed.), *Texts from the Islands: Oral and Written Traditions of Indonesia and the Malay World* [Ethnologica Bernica, 4] (Berne: University of Berne, 1994), p. 121.

only maintain their religious authorities through their scholarship and religious leadership, but also play social and political roles in societies.

An early study of *pesantren*<sup>3</sup> has showed that *kyai* as well as *santri* preserve the chain of traditional Islam within the structure of intellectual network. In maintaining the linkage, marriage and kinship play important roles. A study by Endang Turmudi in 1996 found that *kyai* (*kyaiship*), originally only maintaining traditional Islam, is polarized into three kinds; the *pesantren kyai*, the *tarekat kyai*, and the *kyai* involved in politics. Furthermore, this polarization implies that the authority of the *kyai* is dispersed. In connection with modernity and globalization, Lukens-Bull concludes that *jihād* in terms of *pesantren* is performed in education and societal reform. Therefore, Lukens-Bull calls 'a peaceful jihad' referring to the ways *kyai* and *pesantren* struggle for constructing an identity through preaching and education. This peaceful struggle is considered as the greater *jihād*.

It is interesting to discuss the varieties or changes within traditional Islam as a response to the challenge of modernity. This article deals with how anthropologists define traditional Islam in Javanese society by focusing specifically on the following questions: How do *pesantren*, including *kyai*, maintain traditional Islam? How do *kyai* negotiate their identity with modernity and the changing world? In what form do *kyai* manifest their ideas in responding to social changes? Without pretending to answer all questions, this article particularly examines three anthropological monographs on the role of *kyai* and *pesantren* in Java. They are Zamakhsyari Dhofier's *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java*, Ronald Alan Lukens-Bull's *A Peaceful Jihad: Javanese Islamic Education and Religious Identity Construction?*, and Endang Turmudi's *Struggling for the Umma: Changing Leadership Roles of Kiai in Jombang, East Java*.

In the first part I briefly describe the historical account of traditional Islam in Java from the fourteenth century up to modern Indonesia. The second part specifically concerns both nature as well as features of *pesantren*. The exploration of characters of *pesantren* is relied

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<sup>3</sup> There were definitely studies of *pesantren* prior to Dhofier's work, such as Brumun (1857), Van den Berg (1886), and Raden Ahmad Djajadiningrat (1908). However, they did not provide comprehensive account of what a *pesantren* is because of complexities included in the *pesantren* which make such study not-easy task. Zulkifli, *Sufism in Java: The Role of the Pesantren in the Maintenance of Sufism in Java* (Leiden-Jakarta: INIS, 2002), p. 2.

upon some relevant sources dealing with *pesantren*. Based on the three selected monographs, in the third part I examine the ways and the approaches anthropologists use to study *pesantren*. I will categorize their issues into two main points: *pesantren* and the maintenance of traditional Islam and *pesantren* and the negotiation with modernity. The article ends with a general remark on how *pesantren*, representative of Javanese traditional Islam, preserve its tradition and negotiates with modernity.

### **Traditional Islam in Java: Origin and History**

Very little is known about the emergence of Muslim community in Java. The obscurity of the history of Javanese Islam is because of the lack of reliable historical sources concerning the origins and spread of Islam in Southeast Asia. Woodward, referring to Damais and Robson, believes that in the late fourteenth century there was a Muslim presence in Java at the time of Majapahit court. Javanese were converted to Islam from Javanese Hinduism gradually.<sup>4</sup> In line with this statement, Ricklefs finds evidence of this convert community at the graveyard of Trawulan dated AD 1368-69.<sup>5</sup> Even though the first evidence comes from the interior, near the site of the court, it has to be taken into account that Islam would first have gained adherents along the north coast, the centre of merchants engaged in the Indian Ocean trade. It is unlikely to conclude that Islam came to dominate religious and political life in the heart of Java. Therefore, the first Islamic states in Java were located on the northern and eastern coasts, where communities of foreign Muslims established.

In addition to conversion, the establishment of Islam was a process that engaged the destruction of much of the existing Hindu-Buddhist religious culture and the subordination of the Muslim '*ulama*' to royal authority.<sup>6</sup> Complex historical process and sources compel some scholars to simply say that the fall of Majapahit court had made Islam as an instrument in the establishment of the new Islamic

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<sup>4</sup> Mark R. Woodward, *Islam in Java: Normative Piety and Mysticism in the Sultanate of Yogyakarta* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), pp. 53-4.

<sup>5</sup> M. C. Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society: Islamic and Other Visions (c. 1830-1930)* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2007), pp. 1-2.

<sup>6</sup> Woodward, *Islam in Java*, p. 54.

kingdom of Demak.<sup>7</sup> It seems safe to suggest that because of the emergence of a powerful Islamic principality, there occurred a further Islamization in Java. This success continued and was shifted from the *pasisir* states to the interior of Java where the court of Mataram became prominent in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the development of a more orthodox Islamic community went at a slower rate. The Mataram court was still imperfectly Islamized while literary traditions, rituals, and calendar were substantially Hindu-Buddhist in character. Here, a major reconciliation of Javanese royal and Islamic traditions took place.<sup>8</sup>

The reconciliation of both Islamic and Javanese tradition became a dominant mode of religiosity in Java mainly in the nineteenth century. Ricklefs tends to call it “mystic synthesis”. This mystic synthesis was the fruit of many years of conflicts and accommodations and never established orthodoxy that the courts could enforce. The synthesis is not only about how Islamic doctrine is locally interpreted but relates to the ways in which local Islam constitute religious and social system. These religious and social systems are based on the use of a restricted set of concepts to interpret components of the received tradition and of local cultural and religious knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

The consensus of both local and Islamic tradition was marked by three features: a strong sense of Islamic identity, fulfilment of the five pillars of Islamic ritual life and acceptance of an array of local spiritual forces. However, after 1830 the condition changed dramatically. The change was triggered by three factors. The first is the Dutch colonial rule which had made *priyayi* elite<sup>10</sup> and village landowners became prosperous or commercial middle classes, consisting of Chinese, Arabs,

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<sup>7</sup> Jajat Burhanudin, quoting de Graaf and Pigeaud (1985: 58-67), states Demak developed extensively during the reign of its third ruler, Trenggana (r. c. 1505-18 and c. 1521-46). He conquered the capital of Majapahit in Kediri in c. 1527. It signaled the replacement of the Hindu-Buddhist kingdom with by the establishment of Islamic political power in Java. Jajat Burhanudin, “Islamic Knowledge, Authority, and Political Power: The ‘Ulama in Colonial Indonesia,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Leiden University, (2007), p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Woodward, *Islam in Java*, p. 69.

<sup>10</sup> The Forced Cultivation System put the *priyayi* back into the administrative hierarchy in a form reminiscent of the East India Company days. See Robert van Neil, *The Emergence of the Modern Indonesian Elite* (Leiden: KITLV, 1984), p. 25.

Indians, and Javanese entrepreneurs, begin to grow. The second is big number increase of Javanese population. The third is Islamic reform and revivalism among the *putihan*.<sup>11</sup>

The last factor was significantly supported by Arab communities of Java's *peasisir* town who played a leading role as transmitters and many Javanese middle class who responded positively. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 facilitated pilgrim traffic and, as the number of Javanese *hajjis* grew, reform ideas spread rapidly from the Middle East to Java. This context was a big capital for the construction of the intellectual tradition of Javanese *pesantren* which were established as vehicles for transmitting purified and Sufism Islam as well as understanding of Islam. Even though through *pesantren* ulama' emphasized that traditional *santri* piety is relied on the *shari'ah*, there is no evidence that *pesantren* formed a force for puritanism, fundamentalism or revivalism. During this period, students from all over Java were attracted to study in *pesantren*. They were taught the Koran, Arabic prayers, and fundamental subjects of Islam, like *tawhīd*, *fiqh/ibādah/shari'ah*, and moral (*akhlāq*) as well as knowledge of Arabic. These matters of Islam were created by scholars in the early centuries of Islam, theological and legal development, sectarian conflicts, and the rise of Sufi movement and brotherhoods in the thirteenth century. "Traditional Islam" is used to label these characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

In the next development, *pesantren* did not limit themselves as traditional Islamic institutions. Instead, they had become part of both religious and socio-cultural institutions. According to KH Syaifudin Zuhri, as cited by Dhofier, *pesantren* also functioned as *benteng pertahanan umat Islam* (fortress for the defence of the Islamic community) and *pusat penyebaran Islam* (centres for the dissemination of Islam).<sup>13</sup> The progress reached by *pesantren* was strongly influenced by a number of Mecca-Medina trained *kyai*. Among them, two were most influential

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<sup>11</sup> The *putihan* were pious Muslims who looked down on their fellow Javanese whom they thought ignorant, impious and who were defined by their failure to behave as proper Muslims, the *abangan*. See Ricklefs, *Polarising Javanese Society*, pp. 84-9.

<sup>12</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition: The Role of the Kyai in the Maintenance of Traditional Islam in Java* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 1998), p. xix.

<sup>13</sup> Zulkifli, *Sufism in Java*, p. 1.

on Javanese *kyai*: Nawawi al-Jawi al-Bantani (1813-1897), popularly known as al-Nawawi and Mahfuz al-Tarmisi (1868-1919).<sup>14</sup>

In the early years of the twentieth century, *pesantren* experienced modernization. In this regard, three examples can be shown. First of all, an educational system called *madrasah*, was introduced by *kyai* in *pesantren*. *Madrasah* in this sense is a graded educational institution based upon the model of Western educational system. Second, dormitories for female student in the *pesantren* complex were introduced and built. Third, *pesantren* taught students not only religious subject but also secular subjects such as history, Indonesian and Dutch languages and mathematics. Dhofier believes that such changes were a response of *kyai* to the policy of the Dutch colonial government. It was Snouck Hurgronje who advised the Dutch to establish secular schools aiming at extending the influence of the colonial government and to restrain the overwhelming influence of the *pesantren*.<sup>15</sup>

In this regard, Deliar Noer in his work on the movement of modernist Indonesian Muslim in the first half of the twentieth century understands the nature of traditional Islam in a negative tone. Noer said that the traditionalists in Indonesia were following the established *fatwā* rather than the method of arriving at the fatwa and in Sufism they often fell into practices close to *shirk*.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly therefore, Dhofier attempted to provide an alternative point of view asserting that the real world of the *pesantren* tradition as well as of traditional Islam in Java is much more complicated and has been changing in various ways although an uncompromising dichotomy traced between traditionalist and modernist that leads to rival simplifications and gross characterizations is unavoidable. His findings in a major *pesantren*, *Pesantren Tebuireng*, and a minor *pesantren*, *Pesantren Tegalsari* had

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<sup>14</sup> Azra has proved that, in fact, the intellectual networks of the archipelago *'ulama* with the Middle East *'ulama* had been established since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Through the centuries, Malay *'ulama* like Hamzah al-Fansuri and Nur al-Din al-Raniri played an important role in the making of intellectuality of the Archipelago. Azyumardi Azra, "The Transmission of Islamic Reformism to Indonesia: Networks of Middle Eastern and Malay-Indonesia *'Ulama* in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, pp. 17-8.

<sup>16</sup> Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia, 1900-1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 300.

presented a picture of traditional Islam, undergone by *pesantren*, as religious, educational, and social institutions.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Pesantren: Nature and Features***

All that we have said implies that the establishment of *pesantren* is a considerable phase in the history of Javanese society. *Pesantren* cannot merely be meant as the emergence of Islamic revivalism but, more importantly, must be understood as a power which participated in forming social, cultural, political, and economic lives of Javanese villagers. In this regard, Geertz's view of *pesantren* seems not too satisfying. It is said that *pesantren* life is, on the one hand, marked by free enterprise of economic ethic in which graduates of *pesantren* make up a big percentage of the small Indonesian business class. However, on the other hand, he depicts *pesantren* as that of *kuburan* (grave) and *ganjaran* (award) since the *pesantren* is primarily concerned with life after death but is also concerned with life in this world.<sup>18</sup>

Literally, the word *pesantren* derives from the word *santri*, with the prefix *pe* and suffix *an*, which means "the place of *santri*." In the islands of Java and Madura, *pesantren* are commonly called *pondok* (bamboo hut, literally). The term *pondok* perhaps derives from the word for dormitories which in the past were built from bamboo or it can be also form the Arabic term *funduq* meaning hotel or dormitory. However, there are opinions concerning the origin of the word *santri*. The word *santri* is regarded as being adopted either from the Tamil word, *santiri* (the religious teacher), or from the Indian word, *sabstri* (the man who knows the (Hinduism) holy book).<sup>19</sup>

Lukens-Bull tends to call *pesantren*, associated with Traditionalists, *the pesantren* world. This world has three main components. The first is the *pesantren* itself. Data in 1982 shows that there are nearly 1800 *pesantren* in East Java<sup>20</sup> and the number of students in each range from a handful to several thousands. Although the curriculum is varied, they principally include the basic skills of reading and writing Arabic,

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<sup>17</sup> Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, pp. xxx-i.

<sup>18</sup> Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Cultural Broker," in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 2, 2 (1960), pp. 236-38.

<sup>19</sup> Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Based on the report of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, in 1997 there were 9,388 *pesantren* with a total number of students of 1,770,768. From 2003-4, the number of *pesantren* increased to 14,467. Burhanudin, "Islamic Knowledge," p. 2.

reciting the Koran, and learning Islamic law and ritual. In addition to the curriculum, character development and the life style of the students are specific identity to *pesantren*.<sup>21</sup>

The second important component is *kyai*. *Kyai* are religious scholars who have become teachers and leaders because of their advanced religious knowledge and mystical powers. According to Lukens-Bull, *kyai* and their followers are striving to construct an identity, faithful to traditional religious values and cognizant of the needs of a globalizing society, which is done in two ways. The first is through *pesantren* in which *kyai* are not only declaring what it means to be a Muslim in contemporary Indonesia, as well as what the nation needs in its human resource development programs, but they are taking action by educating students according to their visions for the future. The second way is by the doors of individual *pesantren* and the debates and differences of opinion among *kyai* about what is needed for Indonesian society.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the Javanese *kyai* live in rural areas. Yet, because they have been active in Indonesian politics and are wealthy landowners, they are part of the elite. Being at the high social status, they have an ample role, especially in the sphere of religious law. They are guardians of moral authority because their guidance and decisions on almost all matters of life such as property, marriage, divorce and inheritance are asked and obeyed by Javanese commoners.<sup>23</sup> However, since the early years of the twentieth century, role of *kyai* has begun to change. By their established religious knowledge, *kyai* not only direct their own school and occupy the focal position in the social structure, but are becoming a new kind of broker for a different sort of society and culture. This change is caused by the pressures of nationalism, Islamic modernism and the complexity of social transformations which have been at stake in modern Indonesia.<sup>24</sup>

The third component is students. Students of *pesantren* are called *santri*. They often owe obedience to their *kyai* throughout their life.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lukens-Bull, "A Peaceful Jihad," pp. 10-12.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> Zamakhsyari Dhofier, "Kinship and Marriage among the Javanese *Kyai*," in *Indonesia* 26 (1980), p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji," p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Lukens-Bull, "A Peaceful Jihad," pp. 10-2.

Geertz writes “the *pesantren* forms for the *santri* a bridge not simply to Islam, but to the world outside the family, to adult life in general.” Historically, there are four main problems, in Dhofier’s view, contributing to the emergence of the *santri* group. First of all, the spread of Islam in Java in the thirteenth century which includes two stages of conversion. The first is the conversion of the Javanese to *abangan* and the second is Islamic orthodoxy which moved in to replace the old religious patterns.

Second, an important role played by Islam as a social, cultural, and political force to struggle against the Dutch in cities of Java makes the centre of scholarly studies moved to the villages in which *pesantren* complexes are established. Third, because trading which was fundamental in Java has been destructed by the Dutch, Islamic teachers replaced the economic role. Fourth, the tendency of the Javanese to believe in persons has been given an outlet in *tarekat* practices and beliefs in Muslim saints. This means traditional institutions have been Islamized by means of *tarekat* which is essentially a part of Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>26</sup>

As discussed by Dhofier, *pesantren* use the traditional system of learning at large. There are various techniques of teaching, but the most commonly used are *bandongan* and *sorogan*. The former is a kind of religious instruction conducted by either *kyai* or senior *santri* in which *santri* attendance does not depend on either their level of knowledge or their age, while the latter is provided either for beginner *santri* or for those who want to have more explanation of the problems discussed in *kitab*s and is aimed at giving special training to *santri* to assist them in developing certain knowledge and skills. The system of *bandongan* provides *santri* with regular daily learning in which *kyai* or senior *santri* read certain Arabic works, translate them into local languages, and give explanation about them.

A modern conceptualization of *pesantren* argues that now *pesantren* have three functions: as an educational institution (*lembaga pendidikan*), as an institution of public service (*lembaga pengabdian masyarakat*), and as an institution of struggle (*lembaga perjuangan*).<sup>27</sup> In this regard, modern *pesantren* (*pesantren khalafî*) are different from traditional *pesantren* (*pesantren salafî*). In the traditional *pesantren* only Islamic subject is taught,

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<sup>26</sup> Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, pp. xxviii-xxix.

<sup>27</sup> Lukens-Bull, “A Peaceful Jihad,” p. 14.

but in the modern ones not only are secular subjects taught but the aim of education has changed slightly. This change also implicates the idea of *nyantri* or *mondok* (studying in *pesantren*). Before modernization, the principal aim of *nyantri* is obtaining knowledge to uphold Islam. However, in the contemporary era, *santri* are sent to *pesantren* because their parents hope their children can obtain Islamic knowledge in addition to secular knowledge. The children will be socialised in Islamic norms so that they are not too secularised.<sup>28</sup>

### Preserving Islamic Tradition

Generally speaking, *pesantren* has two main ways in preserving traditional Islam. The first is by being an Islamic educational institution in which *kyai*, as the leader, can train students in Islamic subjects. The second is by being a religious institution in which *kyai* serve as Sufis.. The first is related to the intellectual area, while the second is close to spiritual aspect. Dhofier's work which provides an anthropological report of Pesantren Tebuireng and Pesantren Tegalsari has shown this reality. Pesantren Tebuireng as a major *pesantren* plays double roles because it not only trains students who can later become *ulama intelektual* and *intelektuil ulama* but also has been the centre of the powerful *Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah* in East Java. Pesantren Tegalsari as a minor *pesantren* has been an agent for the further local diffusion of Islam in Javanese village. In this sense, this part deals with two roles played, intellectual and spiritual, by both *pesantren* and *kyai* in preserving traditional Islam.

### Intellectual relation

Being centre of excellence, a *pesantren* needs to maintain its intellectual linkage because of the central position of personal competence of *kyai* in a *pesantren*. The sustainability of a *pesantren* is dependent on the ability of the *pesantren* to obtain a new authoritative *kyai* upon the death of the previous *kyai*. The intellectual genealogy becomes a pivotal capital in the maintenance of the continuity of *pesantren* leadership. To keep the relation, a *kyai* trains his son to become his successor. He usually expects his oldest son to continue his leadership in the *pesantren*, while the younger sons are prepared to establish a new *pesantren*. It is also frequently found that a *kyai* take his

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<sup>28</sup> Endang Turmudi, *Struggling for the Umma: Changing Leadership Roles of Kiai in Jombang, East Java* (Australia: ANU E-Press, 2006), p. 33.

best student as his son-in-law especially when the student is a son or a relative of another *kyai*. In this regard, *kyai* are interrelated by a multiplicity of kinship ties. This kinship ties has become a powerful force in maintaining the running of *pesantren*, not only intellectual authority but also social religious authority.<sup>29</sup>

As Dhofier has asserted, the linkage of intellectuality is thus preserved by the extensive network of endogamous marriage alliances and the tradition of intellectual transmission of knowledge among *kyai* families. They have developed (1) a tradition that their immediate relatives should become their potential successors to *pesantren* leadership, (2) a network of endogamous marriage alliances among *kyai* families, and (3) a tradition of transmission of knowledge among *kyai* and their immediate families. The disappearance of an old *pesantren* can be compensated for by the appearance of a new one. The chain of cultural and religious heritage of previous *pesantren* is never lost and cut.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Spiritual relations***

In addition to the intellectual relation, spiritual relation plays a central role in the maintenance of traditional Islam. In this relation, there are two main concepts which are performed: *barakah* and *tarekat*.

#### ***Barakah***

In Sufism, it is believed that one can receive God's blessing through the intermediary of a holy man such as a saint or the *murshid*. Some Muslims believe that "a great saint's *karamah* is effective".<sup>31</sup> Because *kyai* and 'ulama' in general are close to God, they can reach the stage of *karamah*. As a result, a request by a *kyai* to God either for himself or for others may be more readily received. Those who have *karamah* can give *barakah*, which is the positive effect arising from interaction with a holy man.

Within the *pesantren* tradition, students must respect their teacher not only in the class but also in all aspects of life. If a student forgets his tie to his teacher, he/she will lose the *barakah* of his teacher. The loss of the *kyai's* *barakah* may cause his/her knowledge to become not

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<sup>29</sup> Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, p. 42.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, *Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan, 1992), p. 215.

useful. The respect is not because of surrender the teachers but because of the student's belief in the teacher's sanctity: the teacher is a channel of God's grace for students in the world and in the hereafter.

The source of the teacher's authority is mostly from *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* written by Burhān al-Dīn al-Zarnu'ī. This book consists of teachings (code of conduct) which are believed as Islamic ideals on the relationship between students and teachers. One of the teachings is: a student must always try to please his teacher, he must not walk in front of his teacher, nor take a seat on his chair, nor open the conversation before the teacher asks him to do so, nor talk much to the teacher, nor ask questions if his teacher is not in the mood to answer questions.<sup>32</sup>

A definition given by Turmudi helps to simply understand what *barakah* is:<sup>33</sup>

“*barakah* is a quality which is reflected through people, such as the *kiai*, who are endowed with *karamah*. The *kiai*'s followers believe that he can give *barakah*, especially if he himself says a prayer. In any *ziarah* (visit) to a *kiai*, the *tarekat* followers usually ask for his prayers for a secure life...

However, *barakah* can also be derived from the prayer of common people, who perform extremely good religious acts, such as those returning from *hajj*. Such a prayer is easily accepted by God. This is a tradition, of course, but it also relates to people's belief systems which underlay their actions”.

### *Tarekat*

The *pesantren* and the *tarekat* is the trademark of traditional Islam. The former is a place where *shari'ah* (the exoteric dimension of Islam) is transmitted to the next generation, while the latter, in the strictest sense, is a way or a spiritual path by which the esoteric dimension of Islam is established.<sup>34</sup> Hence, the *tarekat* is close to *taṣawwuf* (Sufism). Within the *pesantren* tradition, the *tarekat* is used by the *kyai* as their means of preserving Islamic orthodoxy on the one hand and insisting religious leadership among the older generation on the other hand.

<sup>32</sup> Dhofier, *The Pesantren Tradition*, pp. 61-2.

<sup>33</sup> Turmudi, *Struggling for the Umma*, p. 75.

<sup>34</sup> A.G. Muhaimin, *The Islamic Traditions of Cirebon: Ibadat and Adat among Javanese Muslims* (Australia: ANU Press, 2006), p. 247.

There are two kinds of *tarekat*: *tarekat* practiced within a Sufi order and *tarekat* practiced outside Sufi order. This distinction, however, is no longer established since most *kyai* are permanent *imām* of mosque and they lead their *ma'mūm* in *dzikir* in a single congregation. The first kind of *tarekat* gained strength and popular appeal in the latter part of the nineteenth century. People, called “Sufis” (even though they are not members of particular Sufi orders), would attend the *pesantren* to perform together both the obligatory prayers required of all Muslims and certain optional *dzikir* (the devotional exercise of remembrance) and *wirid* (meritorious prayers). Only a few exceptional students were given instructions in the sacred texts. Over time, however, the emphasis on textual instruction of youths increased until that came to be the primary activity in most of the *pesantren*.<sup>35</sup>

It is worth noting that *tarekat* in Indonesia is associated with NU society. The study of Turmudi asserts that in Jombang, despite the affiliation of most NU members to the *Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah*, there are some who practise *tarekat* which are not *mu'tabarab*. For example, *Tarekat Shiddiqiyah*, headed by an NU *kyai*, is regarded not *mu'tabarab* because it does not have an acceptable *silisila* of *murshidship*. There is also a *tarekat* like movement called *Wahidiyyah* or *Penyiar Sholawat Wahidiyyah*, which focuses its *wird* practice on reciting *shalawat* (prayer for the Prophet). These religious movements are assessed slightly negatively by some *kyai* due to their novelty. If the *pesantren* is an educational institution controlled by the *kyai* himself, the *tarekat* is a religious movement, with a large number of followers, led by a number of *kyai* with a *murshid* as their central leader.<sup>36</sup>

In the *aliran* (path) of the *Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah*, there are thirty to fifty members which are grouped in two organizations: the *Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah* coordinated by the *Jam'iyah Abli Thoriqoh al-Mu'tabarob Indonesia* and the *Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah* organized by the *Jam'iyah Abli Thoriqoh al-Mu'tabarob an-Nabdliyyah*. The first, commonly called the *Tarekat Rejoso*, is centred in eastern Jombang, Rejoso village precisely. The second, commonly known as the *Tarekat*

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<sup>35</sup> Julia Day Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 60, 3 (August 2001), p. 704.

<sup>36</sup> Turmudi, *Struggling for the Umma*, p. 48.

*Cukir* or *Tarekat an-Nabdliyah*, is located in Cukir, a village in southern Jombang.<sup>37</sup>

### **Pesantren, Modernity and the Changing World**

It is clear that *'ulama'* have been able to maintain their existence in the changing Indonesian Muslims. The *'ulama'* therefore can no longer be associated only with the Islam of the past and its old-fashioned clinging to tradition. Instead, the *'ulama'* serve the tradition by responding to the new demands of modernity. In a more general context, Turmudi asserts that due to development programs or modernisation, *kyai* are faced to three challenges. The challenges can raise a problem of legitimacy for the leadership role played by a *kyai*. The first challenge is the emergence of a younger *santri* generation in the *pesantren* who are modern in character. Here, modern is meant as having a greater capacity and a greater freedom to think critically about the *kyai's* attitude, at least in the domain of politics. This modernisation is a result from the increasing number of modern schools in its environment. The second challenge is the increasing number of educated middle class Muslims in Javanese society. This class consists of younger scholars of Nahdlatul Ulama' having had both secular and religious education. The modern thinking they had will possibly threaten the credibility and authority of a *kyai*. The third challenge is the enlargement of the sphere which the state undergoes to enhance the quality of Muslim life. The state interferes with inequality and matters which are previously under the *kyai's* concern. For instance, the birth control has involved the state in defining social knowledge about birth, which was traditionally subsumed under the religious authority of the *kyai*.<sup>38</sup>

Two monographs by Ronald Lukens-Bull and Endang Turmudi present us a picture of how *pesantren* as well as *kyai* preserve traditional Islam by adapting to -and negotiating with- contemporary social changes. In negotiating modernity, there are two ways: modernizing the system of education and being involved in political parties. This part therefore focuses on the two.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-3.

### ***Modernizing the system of education***

To meet the needs of globalizing society, the identity of the *pesantren* is being reconstructed. Traditionally, *pesantren* were generally religious in their curriculum. With development of secular education in Indonesia, many *pesantren* have added government-recognized curricula. In fact, many *pesantren* teach a government-approved curriculum consisting of 70 percent general subjects and 30 percent religious subjects and are similar to government-run religious schools known as *madrasah*. They even can give the same diplomas. The difference between a *pesantren* and a state *madrasah* is that the *pesantren* is a boarding school (although some of the students may live near enough to go home after classes), and that most *pesantren* now teach primarily secondary level students.<sup>39</sup>

By this modernization, the goal of *pesantren* has changed. In the past *pesantren* trained students to become religious specialist but today students are taught to be educated people, who are able to enter the workforce or the university, with strong religious morality. According to Lukens-Bull, both changing curricula and changing identity interact in a feedback loop, that is, a desire to relevant education means a shift in identity while a desire to be seen differently by those outside the *pesantren* community means a shift in curricula.<sup>40</sup>

Examining three cases of *pesantren* in East Java, Lukens-Bull avers that *pesantren* are educational institution whose curricula scatter around as some *pesantren* adopt secular education. It is aimed at dealing with the changing world and preparing their graduates for obtaining good career in the future. The first case, Pesantren Tebuireng, shows *pesantren* at the forefront of the dialogue about Islam, education, and modernity. It was one of the first *pesantren* to use Western educational techniques, co-education, secular subjects, and other innovations. The schools have been recognized as being equal with government schools. Nevertheless, this *pesantren* has fallen under criticism for letting religious and moral education slip.

The second case, Pesantren An Nur in Bululawang, Malang, shows how *pesantren* strive to maintain the high standard of traditional

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<sup>39</sup> Martin van Bruinessen, "Traditionalist' and 'Islamist' *Pesantrens* in Indonesia," paper presented at the workshop 'The *Madrasa* in Asia, Transnational Linkages and Alleged or Real Political Activities', ISIM, Leiden, 24-25 May 2004, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Lukens-Bull, "A Peaceful Jihad," p. 39.

religious education. Being unable to institutionalize *barakah* and charisma of its founder, An Nur provides better religious training than Tebuireng and is less able to execute the concurrent secular education.<sup>41</sup> The third case concerns a recent phenomenon in the *pesantren* world, *pesantren* for college students. The three *pesantren* observed have different claims about what the Indonesian Islamic community need for the future. However, they make a common claim: both traditional religious training and college education are needed. They still agree that *pesantren* should provide moral education and that at heart *pesantren* education is holistic education focused on moulding character and not just on imparting knowledge.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Involvement in political parties***

The relationship between the *kyai* and his community is tied by religious emotion which makes his legitimate power more influential. Since the *kyai* has become the avenue through which people in villages solve their problems, not just spiritual but also wider aspects of their lives, people also endorse the *kyai* as their leader and representative in the national system. Turmudi states that *kyai* can attract people to support a political party since *kyai* are believed to make use of power as they act for God. The big role *kyai* play makes them become a centre of power. Unfortunately, this condition can lead to a polarization of power because the existence of many *kyai* can create several centres of power.<sup>43</sup>

Each *kyai* has unrestrained rights to manage his *pesantren*. However, their autonomous authority leads to a situation where Muslims are socially fragmented. As discussed by Turmudi, the internal conflict of NU in the 1970s and in the second half of the 1980s encouraged the emergence of local authority and its strong influence among its followers. In Jombang for instance, since 1977 the Pesantren Darul Ulum has had a different political orientation from that of the Pesantren Bahrul Ulum, in spite of the fact that both have familial relationship. As a result, the phrase *kyai saya* (my *kyai*) is familiar to show fidelity toward certain *kyai* and impassiveness toward others. In

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 245-271.

<sup>43</sup> Turmudi, *Struggling for the Umma*, pp. 60-72.

this regard, NU is capable of organizing *pesantren* but is powerless of directing the *kyai* politics.

Turmudi demonstrates how *tarekat* is politicized and can be influential to the legitimacy of a *kyai*. The split of the *Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqsyabandiyah* in Jombang clearly denotes how a great *kyai* with a large number of followers was shaken and his legitimacy to lead the *tarekat* was questioned. It was when Kyai Musta'in, the head of the *Tarekat*, joined the government party, Golkar, preceding the 1977 general election. This situation was unfavourable for the other *tarekat* members and disturbed the harmonious situation in Jombang.<sup>44</sup>

This case presents a picture of the influence of social changes (politics) to the legitimacy of a *kyai*. Being actively involved in a non-Islamic political party has decreased the loyalty of people to certain *kyai*. The preference of 'wrong' political party can cause social conflict which is likely to give rise to a worse situation where mutual abuse occurred between *kyai* with each group accusing the other of being *kafir* (infidel). However, the decision to join political parties, not only Islamic, can be seen as the acknowledgment of the existence of another interpretation of Islamic politics. This means that modernity and social changes have lead traditional Islam, *pesantren* and *kyai*, to a condition where plurality and diversity are natural and hence should be respected.

## Conclusion

Traditional Islam in Javanese society represented by *pesantren* and *kyai*, still exists, and its existence even in the present day more develops. The above-mentioned examples show that both *pesantren* and *kyai* need a number of ways to maintain traditional aspects of Islam and to negotiate with modernity. In preserving traditional Islam, two ways are carried out: intellectual linkage and spiritual relation. For the intellectual linkage, the extensive network of endogamous marriage and the tradition of intellectual transmission of knowledge among *kyai* families are very essential. For the spiritual relation, the concept of *barakah* and the practice of Sufism organized in the *tarekat* play a significant role. To be able to adapt to modernity, contemporary changes, and the changing world, *pesantren* and *kyai* have endeavoured two ways. The first is by modernizing the system of education with still insisting on the importance of character and moral building. The

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 89-93.

second way is by being involved in political parties which can affect the legitimacy of *kyai's* authority and, more importantly, can be a capital to build an awareness of plurality.[]

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