

Values and Tradition Inheritance in the Pesantren

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Abstract

In Indonesia "*Pesantren*" ("Islamic Boarding School") is the oldest Islamic institution. Physically, the *Pesantren* have undergone changes; however, the tradition has not changed greatly since there is a more systematic effort to maintain it. To be able to understand the *Pesantren*, it is necessary to understand the history and traditions that shape it. This paper discusses the traditions that exist in *Pesantren*. The analysis used historical records confronted with empirical values of the current *Pesantren*. The historical analysis used a variety of literature and secondary data, while for the empirical analysis, observations and field participations in the two *Pesantren*, namely, *Pesantren Raudlatul Ulum*, Cidahu, Pandeglang Regency, Banten and *Pesantren Sidogiri*, in Pasuruan, East Java were conducted. Based on the assumption that the traditions in *Pesantren* are local reality which is specifically constructed, the analysis of this paper used a hermeneutical and dialectical constructivist paradigm. From the results of field observations and literature reviews, there are traditions that grew in the early birth of this type of *Pesantren*, and they have continued to influence the attitudes and perspectives of the actors running the *Pesantren* today. These traditions can be categorized into: acculturation as the tradition of cultural contacts, Sufism and the *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book) as the tradition of thought, and obedience as the social order tradition. These traditions have continued to be transferred from generation to generation, enabling it able to survive (resilience) up to the present time.

Keywords: tradition, *pesantren*, acculturation, sufism, *kitab kuning* (yellow book), obedience

1. Introduction

In Indonesia, "*Pesantren*" is the oldest Islamic institution. Karel Steenbrink (1986.133), Clifford Geertz (1976.201) agreed that *Pesantren* are the Indonesian traditional educational institutions. According to Pigeaud (1967.93) and Ashroah (2010, 89), the *Pesantren* emerged around the 16th century and developed in the 19th century AD; in addition, it was characterized by the presence of teachers and experts of Sufism who taught Islam in mosques and palaces in the 16th and 17th centuries. They stated that there was a possibility that the *Pesantren* started to develop from these periods. Up to now, the *Pesantren* have continued to grow and become a means of education for Islamic citizens in Indonesia, although the modern educational institutions, both in general and modern religious schools, have also emerged and developed. This is because the traditions of the *Pesantren* do not exist in modern institutions, and they are believed by some Indonesian Muslim communities as a way to get the highest scientific level in the field of religion, and they considered to be the most suitable values to the cultural diversity and social complexity in Indonesia.

This paper aimed to discuss and give an idea of the traditions that exist in *Pesantren*. Based on the assumption that the traditions in *Pesantren* are a local reality that is specifically constructed, the analysis of this paper used a hermeneutical and dialectical constructivist paradigm, where the social construction of individuals and groups are acquired and known through interactions between the researchers and the people being studied.

This study also emphasized empathy and dialectical interaction between the researchers and informants in order to reconstruct the social reality studies using the qualitative method (Guba and Lincoln. 2000.123). The analysis used historical records confronted with empirical values of the current *Pesantren*. Historical analysis utilized a variety of literature and secondary data related to the *Pesantren*, while the empirical condition was examined by field observations and participations in two *Pesantren*, namely *Pesantren Raudlatul Ulum*, Cidahu Banten Pandeglang district and Pondok *Pesantren Sidogiri*, in Pasuruan, East Java, Indonesia.

2. Pesantren

The origin of the word "*Pesantren*", as proposed by C. Berg (1932, 237-311), was derived from the Indian language, "shastri", which means people who know about Hinduism sacred books or a scholar of Hindu sacred scriptures. Meanwhile, according to Nurcholish Madjid (1999), *Pesantren* is taken from the word "Sastri", which means "literate", indicating that it is based on the orientation that *Santri* is a part of literary class seeking to explore the religion through the books (in this case, they are inscribed with Arabic letters). Secondly, the word *Santri* was derived from Javanese language, "cantrik" which means a person who always follows the teacher wherever the teacher goes to settle in. This opinion refers to the pattern of relationships between *Santri* (students) and *Kiai* (teacher) in *Pesantren* that is between a patron and a client and obedience from the client to the patron.

Nowdays, *Pesantren* is a traditional education in which the *Santri* live together and study under the guidance of teachers widely known as *Kiai*, and have a boarding place for them to stay. These *Santri* live in a complex that also provides mosques for worship, spaces to study, and other religious activities. The complex is typically surrounded by walls to allow surveillance of the entrance and exit of the *Santri* in accordance with applicable regulations (Dhofier, 1983). *Pesantren* can also be understood as an educational institution and religious teaching, generally in non-classical way, in which *Kiai* teaches Islamic sciences to the *Santri* in reference to the books written in Arabic by Middle Ages *Ulama* (schollars). Thus, the *Santri* typically stay in the boarding room inside the *Pesantren* (Sudjono, 1982, 108).

In the early development of Islamic education in Java, the teaching was conducted in the mosques established by *Kiai* (Haidar Putra Daulay, 2001, 93.) The teaching conducted in the mosque includes learning, reading, and writing as well as understanding the religious sciences (Marwan Saridjo. 1980.87). A mosque has two functions: as a *musholla* (place for performing prayers and worship practices) and as a *Majlis* (gathering place) i.e. a place to study. In further developments, teaching and learning activities conducted in the classrooms (classical) are called as *Madrasah* and supervised by teachers called as *ustadz*, while the mosque is particularly used for prayers, *tadarusan* (reading the Qur'an), *wiridan* and public lectures by *Kiai*. The materials being taught from the early beginning to today have included faith, laws and morality of Islam, as well as social-based matters.

3. Traditions in the Pesantren

Pesantren traditions are intrinsic peculiarities that distinguish them from other social institutions. Traditions or traditionalism of *Pesantren*, in this case, are defined as a practice that has been done for a long time and becomes part of community's way of living. The most fundamental thing of the tradition is the information that is passed from generation to generation, both in written and in a verbal way, because in the absence of it, a tradition can be eventually extinct. Thus, traditionalism of *Pesantren* is not intended as the signal of modernization, rather it is intended as an epistemology to keep its identity.

From the results of field observations and literature reviews, it can be identified that the traditions grew in the early period of *Pesantren* and have continued to influence the attitudes and perspectives of the actors running *Pesantren*. These traditions continue to be transmitted to generations, leading *Pesantren* to exist or to become resilient until now. These traditions can be categorized into **The Traditions of Cultural Contacts, Thoughts and Social Order** with the following explanation:

3.1 Acculturation: Tradition of Cultural Contacts of *Pesantren*

Pesantren, in addition to being the oldest Islamic institution, also has an important role in preserving Islamic culture in Indonesia. Since the beginning of its development, Islam in Indonesia has received a cultural accommodation which is required, for Islam as a religion provides a large number of norms of the rules of life compared with the other religions.

In the relation between Islam and culture, at least there are two things that need to be clarified: first, the conception of Islam as a socio-culture, and second, Islam as a cultural reality. Islam as a cultural conception is called **great tradition**, whereas Islam as a cultural reality is called little tradition, or the local tradition influenced by Islam. Great tradition (Islam) is the permanent original doctrines of Islam, or at least strict interpretations inherent in the basic teachings. In a smaller scope, this doctrine is included in the concept of faith and sharia-Islamic law that inspire the thinking and acting of Muslims. These traditions are often referred to the center contrasted with the periphery. The little tradition (local tradition) is real of influence i.e. areas that are under the influence of Islam (great tradition). The local tradition includes the elements contained in the sense of culture that includes concepts or norms, as well as activities of human actions, and material works produced by the communities (Azra, 2000, 211)

As a norm, rule, or all of the activities, the *Pesantren* has become a role model pattern for the society, in this context, the *Pesantren* as a part of Islam has become a cultural producer. Local cultures existing in the community do not automatically disappear with the presence of Islam; however, some of them continue to be developed by grasping the influence of Islam. This development results in an "acculturation", between the local culture and Islam (Ambary, 2001, 67). The Islamic dialogue process with the community traditions are realized in the mechanisms of cultural processes in facing the local negotiations. Islam and the community traditions are placed in a parallel position to conduct creative dialogues, therefore, neither of them is in subordinate position, which results in mutual debilitating (Zada, 2003, 118). Acculturation which shapes the image of *Pesantren* in Java was possible because the earlier *ulama* (scholars) as the founding fathers applied the principles of "*almuhafazhah 'ala al-qadim al-Salih al-akhdz wa bi al-jadid al-ashlah*" (maintaining good, classical cultural values, and grasping new, beneficial cultural values) accurately and appropriately as the Islam universalistic impulse (Siradj, 1999.4). Based on this, more moderate characteristics of Indonesia Muslim have emerged compared to those of the Muslims in the Middle East Region.

3.2 *Tasawuf* and *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book): Epistemology and Sources of the Thoughts of The *Pesantren*
Evidence that *Tasawuf* Sufism greatly influenced the history of *Pesantren* in Java can be seen from the books which have become the learning references in *Pesantren*. Bruenessen (1999, 203) argues that the classical Arabic books i.e. *Qasidah al Bardah* written by Al Bushiri in the 16th century, *Ihya ulum Al Din* by Al Ghazali and *Al Tamhid fi Bayan Al Tawhid* by Abu Syukur Al-kasyi show that the emphasis in the teaching of Islam in Java is on faith and Sufism. Complementing the works in Arabic language, there are two major works translated into Javanese i.e. *Wahdah al- Wujud* by Burhanpuri who was famous for his *Al -Tuhfah Al-mursalalah* expressing a strong tendency in pantheistic mysticism.

The books in *Pesantren* are both sources and means utilized to explore more on Sufism in *Pesantren*. They are known as *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book), for they are printed on yellow paper. From these books, the actors of *Pesantren* recognize the methods to synthesize the two encounters between Sufism versus *fiqih* (jurisprudence) movement. Sufism in the context of *Pesantren* is a living tradition and fulfilled with metaphysical doctrines, cosmologies, and religious therapy psycho which are expected to bring humans to perfection and peace of life, that is almost disappeared or never learned by modern human beings. Therefore, Sufism is practiced actively in every activity as an invaluable tool in alerting and making *Santri* to be aware of the moral values derived from the religion. Nevertheless, Sufism can only be practiced within the framework of Shari'ah Islamic law.

In *Pesantren*, the *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book) is an important factor in forming the scientific tradition of jurisprudence-sufistics, supported by the mastery of instrumental sciences, including its humanistic sciences. The *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book) has become one of the value systems of *Pesantren*. The contextualization of efforts to comprehend the *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book) is not limited to the literal meanings, yet it is able to touch deeper thoughts to the meaning of social morality (Abdurrahman Wahid, 1985, 72). By doing so, the contextualization will generate efforts to describe Islamic teachings, in accordance with the demands of the constantly changing conditions to gain community welfare (Ali Yafi, 1988, 41).

3.3 Obedience: Social Order Epistemology

The cultural practice of *Pesantren* is a part of Islamic social settings that recognize the difference of man's "destiny" revealed in the empirical world (Sirodj 2005, 56). Stratification of the world's most condensed in *Pesantren* is the level between Students and teachers, known as *Kiai* and *Santri* relationship. An attitude of respect and obedience to the teachers (*kiai*) are absolute and last a lifetime. The respectful attitude shown in all aspects of life e.g. religious, social, or personal lives (Ali Yafi, 1988, 60). This guidance is based on the book of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* which is used as the reference in the *Pesantren*:

"Those who seek knowledge should always remember that they will never gain the knowledge, or it would be useless, unless they are respectful to their knowledge and teachers who teach them. Respectful to teachers is not just being submissive.... but in the spirit, "I am the handmaid of those who teach me, although it is only one word".

Obedience of the *Santri* towards *Kiai* is a signature that distinguishes *Pesantren* with other educational institutions. *Kiai* and *Santri* relationship and learning of the *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book) can also be seen within the *Pesantren* setting. In *Pesantren*, both *kiai* and *Santri* play a game of "destiny" as proposed by Sirodj (2005, 89). Fate tradition is maintained by the constitution-positivism contained in the books taught in *Pesantren* requiring people to gain useful knowledge when doing two things that is respecting the teachers (*kiai*) and respecting the books (*Kitab*). An ideal illustration of *Santri* obedience to *kiai* is mentioned in the book of *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim*

"One way to honor the teacher is by not walking ahead of him, not sitting in his place, not starting conversation without his permission, and not talking a lot to him ..."

The *Santri* are urged to show respect and obedience to *Kiai*, not only as a manifestation of total submission to *Kiai* who are considered to have the authority, but also because the trust of *Santri* to a *Kiai* as someone who has a higher position in the field of knowledge. Respecting and values of obedience are not only expressed to *Kiai* as a human being but also to *Kiai*'s family (Nurcholish Madjid, 1997.5). For *Kiai* and his family, the destiny to be a *Kiai* means they have to preserve the noble values in their lives. Consequently, if a *kiai* becomes a deviant in leading the *Pesantren* directly or indirectly, the public trusts toward *Kiai* or *Pesantren* will potentially fade since the noble values of Islam becomes the spirit force believed to be the grace and mercy of Allah SWT.

4. Conclusion

Throughout their history of *Pesantren*, they are not a stagnant entity. They have undergone various intersections from their early history to the present. A constant challenge faced by the *Pesantren* is how to maintain their existence. Lessons grasped from the history show that the *Pesantren* are able to survive by cultural and structural adaptations with the environment. Being adaptive is the basic character of *Pesantren*, in which by having the characteristic, they can adapt to the dynamic changes around them.

Sufism in *Pesantren* has been structured naturally, spontaneously and instinctively on good of *Pesantren* actors, including *Kiai* and *Santri*. Sufism in *Pesantren* becomes the "structuration" in the perspective of Giddens (1990, 189) i.e. an external urge that encourages the goal of human action and has an internal characteristic towards an individual that is autonomous to be able to control the externalities. Sufism for *Pesantren* can be curb (constraining) and simultaneously liberate (enabling). Sufism as a structuration creates an agent (*Kiai*) acting by the influence of the existing belief structure to create the subsequent structures. Consequently, the acts of *Kiai* may affect the structure of *Pesantren* and wider social environment as a part of the influences of *Pesantren*.

The obedience of *Pesantren* community on *Kiai* can also be regarded as a form of conformity i.e. the behavior that follows a reference driven by the desire of the individuals, in which the group does not have a special right to direct the individual behavior except to the actions of a group or individual whom they believe as stated by Stanley Milgram (1974.169). Conformity results in harmony, behavior appropriateness of community members with their social expectations, in accordance with the tendency of humans in living in collective groups to establish social norms. In a positive sense, conformity existing within *Kiai* results in social order, particularly in the communities that embrace patron-client as in the rural. It becomes helpful to gain what is desired, create the appropriate behaviors to group norms, and thus, changing the individual perceptions, opinions, and behaviors that are consistent with the norms of the group.

The *Kitab Kuning* (yellow book) and *Kiai* are bondly attached making them as a centrum or disposition of an individual to perform the perceptions and responses in a particular way towards the surrounding environment, in which this disposition is social because it is believed by the environment. Seen from a rational action, *Kiai*'s sufistic acts are more than just action-oriented rationality, because at the same time, the acts of *Kiai* are also positive religious-oriented laws by taking into account the suitability of the means used to reach the aimed goals.

The three *Pesantren* traditions inherited from the past which are maintained and describe the present *Pesantren* include **Cultural Contact Tradition**, **Thinking Tradition** and **Social Order Tradition**. The tradition of cultural contacts is the way of the *Kiai* behave towards the existing social system surrounding them, including customs, cultural values, and all the norms that live and thrive in the community. The thinking tradition is the way the *kiai* develop ideas or decisions that become boundaries, validity, and truth in making the right decision, both for the sacred and the profane matters. The tradition of social order is the means used by the *Kiai* in the *Pesantren* to maintain moral system formed as a tool to transform it to the next generation. These traditions also become an indicator to determine whether an educational institution can be considered to be the *Pesantren* or not.

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