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Article

## Kiai Leadership in the Transformation of Pesantren's Educational Systems: Perspective Analysis of Transcendental Structuralism in East Java

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### Abstract

Leadership is a very important thing in an institution. Pesantren is an educational institution that makes the Kiai the center in almost everything. This research raises a research problem, how is *Kiai's* leadership in the transformation of *pesantren's* institutional and educational systems based on the perspective of transcendental structuralism? Consequently, this research used a qualitative approach of a phenomenology type and multi-site design. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interview techniques, participant observation, and documentation; while the data analysis used was an interactive analysis of the Miles et al. (2018). The results found that *Kiai* leadership as a structure in the *pesantren* was able to initiate the emergence of *pesantren* transformation, namely from an educational institution based on and oriented to theocentric to becoming the anthropocentric one. Therefore, the developing values of institutional management in *pesantren* have appeared based on the combination of human and divine values (divinity and humanity). It is the basis that has encouraged *Kiai* leadership to produce a kind of *pesantren* management from a belief entity or fidelity (faith) guided by the acumen of rational-empirical knowledge (science) and operationalized in the form of *pesantren's* institutional management. The researchers believe that, in this context, anthropocentric leadership can develop institutional management and integrative education systems.

### Keywords

*Kiai* Leadership, Institutional Transformation, and *Pesanten's* Education System

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Islamic boarding schools or so-called pesantren are the oldest educational institutions in Indonesia. In general, Islamic boarding schools are founded by a spiritualist who is trusted by the community (As'ad et al., 2020). A spiritual figure who is respected for his contribution is given a non-academic title by the Javanese people as Kiai. Pesantren, or in the global language, referred to as Islamic boarding school, is a place where a Kiai teaches religious knowledge to students (Muttaqin, 2020). Santri is a student or someone who studies at a boarding school. Pesantren is a place to learn, understand, and practice Islamic teachings with an emphasis on religious morals as a way of life. The number of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia is very large. In 2020, there were 28,194 Islamic boarding schools (IBSs) with the number of students reaching 5 million. The majority of pesantren grew up on the island of Java. There are 21,263 IBSs in Java that educate 1.5 million santri (Assa'idi, 2021). Thus, Islamic boarding schools are religious institutions which provide education, training, and community development and contribute to education as well as the spread of Islamic teachings.

Most of the activities in Islamic boarding schools are determined by the leadership of the Kiai as the central figure in the context of realizing cooperation, equality, deliberation, obeying the rules, and tolerance (Muttaqin, 2020). Kiai leadership in pesantren has traditionally applied the originality of its identity consistently as the essence of pesantren's institutional and educational transformation. It has a commitment to building a structured education system based on transcendental-theological values. The transformation of institutional and educational systems embodied by Kiai has stood still as a counter-hegemonic educational institution to secular ideology (i.e., the materialism or hedonism values). Those values are, in the social life of modern society, highly enchained, thereby leading the society's lives merely in the dimension of materialism; Marcus calls them *one-dimensional man* (Marcuse, 1964). For that reason, Kiai leadership binds themselves to sociological-prophetic values, as well as transcendental-theological values based on the foundation of divine consciousness.

The development of Islamic boarding schools in adjusting to the demands of the times is very important to observe. The reason is that there are millions of Indonesians who grow up to become a santri in pesantren. A good educational institution depends on the direction of leadership policies and the system that is built (Janu Arlinwibowo et al., 2020). Kiai leadership as the center of institutional sustainability occurs in the majority of Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Thus, tracing the leadership of Kiai becomes very important as a treasure for reflection that can be used as a discourse to imitate or introspect.

The world of education is very dynamic following the times (Janu Arlinwibowo, Yunus Mustaqim, et al., 2021; J Arlinwibowo et al., 2021; J Arlinwibowo et al., 2020) undergoing a transformation (Janu Arlinwibowo, Heri Retnawati, et al., 2021a, 2021b). This transformation of pesantren's institutional and educational systems is embodied in their transcendental spirit, and is an evidence of their effort to maintain the pesantren's primordial tradition. The transcendental spirit as a fundamental value for institutions and the pesantren education system is integrated into the Kiai leadership paradigm. This belief in Kiai's leadership in collaborating and elaborating the structure of society with spiritual values based on divinity. This construction has given birth to pesantren which are still standing and undergoing transformation with materialist-positivistic values tied to religious values. We can understand modern Islamic boarding schools that still adhere to this kind of religious principle through religious structures by using normative references (revelations of God) to interpret reality. Kuntowijoyo (1991) referred to this pattern as behavior that acknowledges transcendental structuralism.

The aforementioned description has positioned Kiai leadership as the motor of pesantren's institutional and educational systems. Accordingly, the basic framework of pesantren values develops from the Kiai himself to the normative spirit of pesantren transformation. The managerial creation of pesantren carried out by Kiai even has strengthened the pesantren's institution and system based on transcendental-theological values.

The current research focused on the Kiai leadership in carrying out the transformation of pesantren's institutional and educational systems. Analysis of the pesantren's transformation was conducted using the perspective of transcendental structuralism constructed by Kuntowijoyo (1991), resulting in the researcher critically decomposing transcendental-theological values in the construction of the transformation of the pesantren's educational and institutional systems.

## Literature Review

This research focuses on the *Kiai* leadership in the *pesantren* which is an academic entity constantly being researched to date. Even more, this entity has produced various researches, such as research by Rosyadi that decomposed the *Kiai* leadership patterns through a strategy of power mystification (politics) (Rosyadi, 2020); research by Afifuddin which analyzed the *Kiai* views on the meaning of *Jihad* (Nisa et al., 2021); or research by Pink which was more about the *Kiai* works in the process of translating the Holy Qur'an into Javanese (Pink, 2020). There was also research conducted by Yaqin that focused on the construction of *kiai*'s thoughts in implementing Islamic law (Yaqin et al., 2020). Moreover, many pieces of research on the role of *Kiai* in educational institutions, such as research by Anam, et al. which tried to analyze the role of *Kiai* in internalizing human values (Anam et al., 2019); research by Irawan (2020) focused on the *Kiai* leadership in internalizing nationalism values; or, research by Yusuf & Taufiq that tried to analyze *Kiai* attitude in responding to government regulations in managing and developing *pesantren* (Yusuf & Taufiq, 2020); and research by Rahmatullah which tried to understand the psychological aspects possessed by *Kiai* when he is establishing, nurturing, and developing *pesantren* (Rahmatullah, 2021).

The above-mentioned research's results have articulated the urgency dimension of *Kiai* leadership in the social sphere (Hannan et al., 2018), especially in many *pesantren* institutions. Research conducted by Solichin concluded that *Kiai* has the highest authority in *pesantren* as a symbol of the continuity of *Kiai* leadership (Muchlis Solichin, 2018). Therefore, as concluded by Umiarso (2018), *Kiai* has a highly urgent position in the transformation of *pesantren*; *pesantren*'s education system (El-Rumi, 2020); as well as social and academic activities in *pesantren* (Alam, 2020). This argument shows that the main pillar of *pesantren*'s institutional and educational system transformation is the *Kiai* leadership. In a macroscope, Sallis (1996) stated that the progress of the educational institution lies in its leadership aspect; therefore, it can be a significant differentiator between the educational institution and its graduates (Bush, 2008). Even in the tradition of *pesantren*, the position of *Kiai* is highly respected as a leader and founder; moreover, *Kiai* greatly affects the dynamics of *pesantren* culture (Falah, 2021; Wekke et al., 2018).

## Research Method

### Research design

This research used a qualitative approach to understand and interpret the dynamics of the *Kiai* leadership naturally according to the perspective of *Kiai* himself (EMIK). It was this element that made this research tend to fall into a qualitative phenomenology type which emphasizes its analysis of *the Kiai* leadership related to the transformation process of *pesantren*'s institutional and educational systems.

### Sampling

The research subjects were Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren (whose address is at Cendrawasih Street No 17 Suren Ledokombo Jember, Suren, Ledok Ombo District, Jember Regency, Prov. East Java), Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo (whose address is KH Syamsul Arifin 2 Street, Silo, Krajan, Karangharjo, Jember, Jember Regency, East Java 68173), and Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo (Pangandaran 48 Street, Antirogo Summersari Jember Regency, East Java 68125). These three *pesantren* are geographically located in Jember Regency, in the center of the Madura-cultured community; a society that has highly deep religious nuances and a strongly robust grip on upholding the principles of compliance and obedience to their *Kiai* (paternalistic).

### Research instrument and procedure

The data collection instrument comprised participatory observation techniques, leading to a very detailed and comprehensive understanding of the *Kiai leadership*. Through this technique, the researcher could observe and participate in various social-educational activities of the *pesantren*. Other techniques were documentation and in-depth interviews, conducted by adhering to interview guidelines. As a result, the researcher could obtain more comprehensive data, such as the transformation motives of the *pesantren*'s institutional and education systems. The interviewed informants were, among others, MMA as a teacher-caregiver of Pesantren Miftahul

Ulum Suren; AMA as a teacher-caregiver of Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo; and MA as a teacher-caregiver of Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo. Other respondents were nine (9) *ustadz*, six (6) *pesantren* administrators, and six (6) students, thereby there were twenty-four (24) research respondents in total.

### Data analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the analytical model developed by Miles et al. (2018). Qualitative research analysis was carried out to translate the collected data from preliminary to final research. Miles et al. (2018) stated that the qualitative data analysis step begins with data collection, data reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions. The process starts from data recapitulation so that a large amount of data is obtained from the interview, documentation, and observation processes. The data is then entered in the reduction process to select the required and unneeded data. The reduction process is carried out with the intention of simplifying the data to verify the relevant data. The data that has been reduced is classified according to the design of the analysis that has been designed. Then, everything will be displayed. Each data reduction that has been classified is verified by various facts in the field. Based on the classification obtained through the process that has been carried out, the final step is to draw various conclusions from the results of the research.

Figure 1 presents this analysis technique in the form of a graphic display:

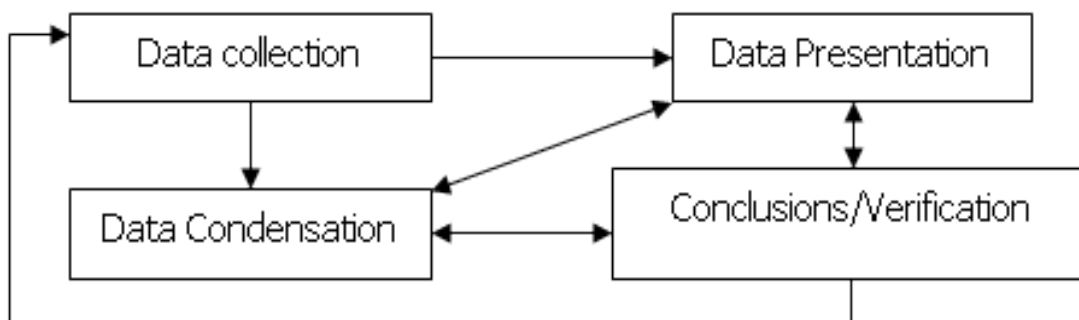


Figure 1 – Miles, Hubermann, and Saldana Interactive Model Data Analysis

## Results and Discussion

### Kiai Leadership in Pesantren

Today's what-so-called and known *pesantren* is essentially a religious education institution (Islam) that originally arose from the development processes of the Indonesian community education system (Madjid, 1997). Even more, it is believed that they have existed since the Hindu-Buddhist period (Hefner, 2009; Srimulyani, 2012), thence there is even a claim that *pesantren* is one of the legacies of Indonesian society (Munawar-Rachman, 2006). The emergence and developments of *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) cannot be separated from a figure who has the authority and high-level capacity of Islamic religious knowledge. This figure is called *kiai* (Java), *ajengan* (Sunda), *tengku* (Aceh), *sheikh* (North Sumatra), *buya* (Minangkabau), *tuan guru* (Nusa Tenggara, East Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, and Central Kalimantan) (Moesa, 1999). However, the *Kiai* designation in Java is used for three types of titles. First, as honorary titles for objects that are considered sacred, such as *Kiai Garuda Kencana* – the designation for the golden royal carriage in the Palace of Yogyakarta; second, honorary titles for the elders generally; and third, the title was given by the community to an Islamic religious expert who owns a *pesantren* and teaches classical Islamic books to his students (Dhofier, 1982).

The term *Kiai* in this research context refers to the founder and leader figure of a *pesantren* institution. This figure is known by the community as an “educated Muslim” or “Muslim intellectual” who has dedicated his life “for Allah” and disseminated, as well as deepened his understanding of the Islam teachings and views through Islamic education activities (Ziemek, 1986). From the Javanese and Madurese people's point of view, the position of *Kiai* is higher than the what-so-called *ulama'* (scholars or the learned of Islam); an *ulama'*, after passing all the necessary requirements, might eventually and successfully obtain the position of a *Kiai* (Horikoshi, 1987). A person can be called a *Kiai* when he possesses several criteria. Ronald Alan Lukens-Bull provided four criteria, among others, knowledge, spiritual power, heredity (both spiritual and biological), and morality (Lukens-Bull & Mas' ud, 2004). Meanwhile, Manfred Ziemek stated five criteria. First, coming from a *Kiai* family in his



neighborhood, thence he can use the loyalty of his relatives and community. *Second*, having socialization with and educational process in a particularly respected *pesantren*, accompanied by implanted experience and leadership backgrounds. *Third*, having a high-level personal readiness to serve, namely the willingness to devote his personal life to his duties in the *pesantren*. *Fourth*, serving as a religious and community leader to work voluntarily in building and funding the *pesantren*. *Fifth*, having the ability to raise funds and *waqf* land charity from the haves (the wealthy) (Ziemek, 1986).

Nonetheless, the most essential criteria lie in the aspect of his integrity and in-depth knowledge as the key factors for the sustainability of all the authorities Kiai exercises (Yasmadi, 2002); especially if he owns a *pesantren*. Still, even if he does not lead a *pesantren*, people call him a *Kiai* if he has excellence in mastering Islamic teachings and worship practices, and has a great influence on the society. The prominent examples are, among others, Kiai Ali Yafie, Kiai Abdul Muchith Muzadi, Kiai Yusuf Yusuf, and Kiai Zainuddin MZ (Qomar, 2002). Consequently, becoming a Kiai does not necessarily require formal criteria, such as study requirements, diplomas, and so on. However, there are non-formal requirements a person needs to meet to be "called a Kiai," just as the non-formal requirements for determining a person as a "big" or a "little" *Kiai* (Steenbrink Karel & Sekolah, 1986).

The extremely high-level trust the community put in *Kiai* and his potential in solving various societal and religious problems has caused *Kiai* to occupy a position in elite groups in our social structures. It is not surprising accordingly, in the culture of the Madura community, *Kiai* is highly respected beyond their respect for local officials. His admonitions have tremendous appeal, making it easier for him to gather mass, both in unplanned and organized ways. He has a large number of followers, coming from students (*santri*) of all kinds, ranging from children to the elderly groups (Qomar, 2002). In this framework, many researchers have appeared and tried to conduct studies with various perspectives. One of them is Imam Suprayogo who classified *Kiai* into four categories, including spiritual *kiai*, advocate *kiai*, adaptive political *kiai*, and critical partner political *kiai* (Suprayogo, 2009). Ali Maschan Moesa categorized *Kiai* into three typologies, namely fundamentalist *Kiai*, moderate *Kiai*, and pragmatic *Kiai* (Moesa, 1999). Mahpuddin Noor distinguished *Kiai* based on a charismatic perspective with seven types, namely *Kiai* as an *imam*, *kiai* as a *supreme teacher*, *kiai* as a king, *kiai* as a healer, *kiai* as a guardian, *kiai* as an *amil*, and *kiai* as a psychiatrist (Noor, 2006). The division was based on the domain of *kiai*'s gaits or actions in society which have incarnated into the forms of *kiai* behaviors with inherent typical characteristics and signatures.

*Kiai* occupies a very central position in the *pesantren*, starting the institutional movements, flows, and patterns, as well as scientific constructions within. It can be said that *kiai* is the gatherer (concocter) and the determinant of the *pesantren*'s movement direction itself. Therefore, it is natural that, in its growth, *pesantren* is highly dependent on the role of a *kiai* as a caregiver, leader, and manager, as well as a concocter, ranging from the form of education policy, whether regarding institutional formats including the levels, curriculum, teaching methods, and education applied, admission of new students, and globally to the education system they embrace and follow, all are the absolute authority of the *kiai*. Based on such construction of the *kiai* authority, a *pesantren* can be likened to a small kingdom where *kiai* is the absolute source of power and authority in the *pesantren*'s life and its environment. No student or other individuals can oppose the power of the *kiai* (within internal *pesantren*) unless there is another *kiai* who possesses greater influence (Dhofier, 1982). It is because the highest and the most absolute nature of authority lie in the *kiai* as the leader of the *pesantren*.

We cannot find the influence of the *kiai* only within *pesantren*'s institutional scope, rather we can also discover it in the society, especially the traditional communities. Soebahar explained that: "Traditional society holds the view that a person can obtain the title of "kiai" because people accept him as a *kiai*, which can be characterized by, among others, the number of people who ask him for advice or even allow their children to learn from him" (Soebahar, 2013). Following the above statement, it can be interpreted that the key factor to attaining a predicate as a "kiai" lies in the element of public trust in the figure himself and his knowledge. It is from this element that the *kiai* will have his influence (ranging from leadership patterns, piety, or knowledge) on society until he ultimately appears as a source of knowledge and piety in society. This factor has brought up the "patron spirit patron" possessed by the *kiai* himself; an analysis by Sukamto stated that the *kiai*'s charisma will gradually lead the community to support him since he has moral steadiness and scientific qualities, which eventually will produce a magnetic personality (full of attractiveness) to its followers (Sukamto, 1999).

It is typically common for *kiai* leadership to foster and uphold a type of high compliance in the *pesantren* or even in the society in general. He encourages the moving pace of *pesantren* and society developments following the high normative ideality and reference to the Qur'an and al-Hadith as ultimate sources. The transformation he brought cannot be separated from the framework of ideality, accordingly, *kiai*'s leadership style is strongly tied to transcendental values. Therefore, *kiai* leadership and the dynamics in the *pesantren*, which consistently transmit the Islamic doctrines, are said as *a great tradition* – a term coined by Martin van Bruinessen.

### Kiai Leadership in Pesantren as a Structure

The *kiai* leadership in three pesantren, namely Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren, Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo, and Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo, does have an entity that forms a system of its own, thereby we can say that the *kiai* leadership has a structure. The entities that make up the structure are, among others, *kiai* (the leader), *pesantren* community ranging from the students, the *ustadz*, administrators (led by), mosques, dormitories or *pondok*, the Yellow Books (the sources of Islamic studies), leadership style, and the attainable and viable goals. Therefore, the entities that form the *kiai*'s leadership structure are interconnected to each other in a single entity and oriented towards the devotion to transcendental reality. One of the *ustadz*s of Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren stated: “*Kiai* leads a *pesantren* based on behaviors that people can take as examples at present and future times. He emphasizes all aspects to accomplish the purposes of a *pesantren* and Islamic religiosity. It is no surprise that *kiai* coordinates the education performance so that it can attain the greatness of knowledge (science) reflected in the daily actions of the *ustadz* and students within the *pesantren* and its surrounding community.” (The results of the interview with the Islamic boarding school cleric Miftahul Ulum Suren, n.d.).

As a structure, *kiai* leadership in those three *pesantren* can run effectively through a combination of elements interrelated to each other in one system. However, such elements that make up the structure are autonomous, each of which has a value, and bound by a normative value, namely, the transcendental theological value. It is this construction that regulates the entire forming elements of *kiai*'s leadership structure, leading to bound elements and forming the structure into a single entity. Subsequently, *kiai*'s leadership structure is the coherence of elements oriented to the religious science (Islam) and the perfection of human values (as *Khalifah* and *Abdullah*). The correlational foundation lies in the resulting spirit of religious beliefs held by the *pesantren* members in the form of obedience and compliance towards *kiai* as an institutional patron.

It is this position that has fostered the dynamism of *kiai* leadership, which is derived from the social reality of the *pesantren* system being integrated with the religious doctrine (Islam). The form of these dynamics is evolutionary and temporal, adjusted to the social psychology of *pesantren*, consequently, there is a space for the transformation of leadership style performed by *kiai*. As occurred in Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo, AMA, during his initial leadership, he implemented a paternalistic leadership that transformed into a democratic leadership style and even shifted to transformational leadership. It was also true with the leadership applied by MA in Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo. He also implemented the same pattern, namely the shift from democratic to transformational leadership.

The transformation of *kiai* leadership is essentially a form of alteration of *kiai*'s actions based on ideology to the objectification phase of action (i.e., actions based on rationalization of religious understanding). Of course, the dynamics of *kiai* leadership arises based on *kiai*'s self-*ijtihad* and by sticking to the normative values of *pesantren* institutions. On one hand, some implications arise in the *pesantren*'s social environment, especially in the form of the flexibility of *pesantren* education systems to be open to the developments of science and technology. Even more, the *pesantren* education system becomes accommodating and adaptive to the socio-cultural transformations in society, as well as being moderate to differences in religious thoughts.

*Pesantren*, which has been synonymously identical to shabby educational institutions and traditional education systems, has unexpectedly made a big leap. Moreover, Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren, Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo, and Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo have actually modernized their institutions and education systems. Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren and Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo departed (or were founded) from *salaf* (traditional) institutions; meanwhile, since its initial establishment, Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo indeed has proclaimed itself as a *khalaf* (modern) *pesantren*. The modernization of these three *pesantren* was accomplished without transforming the basic structure of *pesantren* as an institutional education system based on transcendental theological values.

The members of those three *pesantren* have their awareness that if the establishment of their *pesantren* was sourced from religious motives, integrated with local wisdom thus they are considered to have harmony with the traditional communities. As societies go through many developments and growths of social structures, the *pesantren* responds or follows by transforming into educational institutions that integrate anthropocentric (divine) and anthropocentric (humanitarian) principles. This footing has positioned those three *pesantren* not only as educational and *da'wah* institutions but also as solid front guards of social institutions oriented towards community empowerment. Consequently, *pesantren* has a dual role, not only as an institution transforming the theological values (strengthening *aqidah*) but also strengthening the value of science and technology that have significant impacts on society empowerment economically, politically, culturally, and religiously.

The caregiver of Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren asserted that: “*Pesantren*’s perfection lies in the *kiai*’s perfection in mastering Islamic religious sciences and disseminating them to all levels of society. However, today’s *pesantren* can no longer rely merely on adequate provisions of Islamic religious science (knowledge), it also needs to have other know-hows, such as natural or social sciences instead. Pesantren will always rely on *kiai* as the top leader and caregiver to deliver these two sciences; or even vocational skills” (The results of the interview with the Islamic boarding school cleric Miftahul Ulum Suren, n.d.).

*Kiai* leadership in that three *pesantren* is a structure consisting of the fundamental forming system. The system has a formative theological value and binds all institutional entities in *pesantren*. It is this value that made the members of Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo and Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo form and adds a structural system with an adaptive orientation to the social transformation of society. Therefore, one form of the addition is the creation of *kiai*’s leadership base that is oriented towards integrating the institutional sciences in *pesantren* (namely, religious science, non-religious science, and vocational). Of course, the *pesantren* education system experienced a transformation from a theocentric-based and -oriented education into a theoanthropocentric education.

Mr. AMA, as the caregiver of Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo further indicated that: “At present, *pesantren* cannot only stand as a religious socio-educational institution. Moreover, *pesantren* tends to overlook the development pace of the modern *kiai* society. *Pesantren* inevitably has to adjust itself by making fundamental changes. I am here, as a caregiver, have to start it, thereby *pesantren* will not miss the developments in society. Still, *pesantren* needs to be essentially a *pesantren*...” (Results of Interviews with Ulemas of Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School Karangharjo, n.d.).

The three *pesantren* in this research organize their own institutions through institutional and educational development and transformation to adjust to the social transformation of society. The *pesantren* ultimately not only has positioned itself as an educational institution and a guard of morality based on religious values but also as an institution that strengthens knowledge (non-religious sciences) and technology.

In this context, Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo and Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo have double standards to measure the realization of educational ideals. *First*, the qualitative-religious standard, namely measuring the success of *pesantren* education based on the internalization of theological values manifested in the form of attitudes and behaviors of *pesantren* members. Subsequently, the management of *pesantren*’s institutional and education systems is applied through the basis of religious values resulting from scholars’ (ulama’) interpretation of the revelation texts. And *second*, the quantitative-materialistic standard, namely measurement on the basis of prestatative indicators of *pesantren* management that are essentially manifest, such as the number of formal institutions (MI, MTs, MA, or even Universities) or vocational institutions.

Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren tends to use partial standards, namely qualitative-religious standards. This single standard is employed by emphasizing the theological value of Islamic religion that is firmly embedded and held by every *pesantren* member, accordingly the form of *pesantren* success lies in the manifestation of the religious behavior shown by the members. As a result, this *pesantren* relatively emphasizes its education system in religious science with a humanitarian axiological orientation – in the form of *al-akhlaq al-karimah*. General science and technology are still considered supplementary entities to perfect the scientific insights had by the *pesantren* members. On the one hand, some individuals within a *pesantren* themselves actually cultivate and develop an integralistic paradigm between religious science (Islam) and general science. This contrarily has resulted in the awareness emergence of the minority members in the *pesantren* over the urgency of integrating general science with religious science.



In general, the three pesantren continuously reconstruct *pesantren's* institutional and education systems by adding *pesantren* elements, such as vocational education institutions. The addition of those elements is aimed at maintaining the continuity of the *kiai* leadership structure, thereby the existence of *pesantren* tends to be dyed in colors by *kiai* ideas and policies that arise from his religious beliefs and intellectuality. One example, the religious scientific colors of the three *pesantren* have different characteristics that respectively follow the pattern of their *kiai* intellectuality. Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren emphasizes the science of *fiq'h* – the science related to *akhlaq*;<sup>12</sup> while Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo and Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo are more likely to decompose their knowledge of macro Islamic thinking, including Islamic philosophy, gender, and Arabic grammatical sciences (Nahwu and Sharraf).

### Kiai Leadership in Pesantren Perspectives of Transcendental Structuralism

The *Kiai* in the three *pesantren* holds a highly urgent existence to the sustainability of *pesantren's* institutional and education systems. Accordingly, those *pesantren* are transformed according to the *kiai's* creation, innovation, and self-faith over the institutional dynamics of *pesantren*, namely governance (managerial), educational value (philosophical-spiritual), and institutional (theological) basis. Mr. MA explained that the centrality of the *kiai* position is very dominant in the *pesantren* life which encourages growth and development, or even collapses of the *pesantren*.<sup>10</sup> (Results of interviews with the caregivers of the Nurul Islam Antirogo Islamic boarding school, n.d.). It means that, through his beliefs and intellectuality, *kiai* actually drives the *pesantren* institutions through his leadership with all the resources to embody the ideality of Islamic education, namely *insan kamil* (*al-insan al-kamil* – “the person who has reached perfection”, or literally “the complete person”). Meanwhile, in Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo and Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren, they position the *kiai* more as the “pillar” and “patron” for *pesantren* continuity.

*Kiai* himself is more open and accommodating to the education dynamics that continually undergo transformations based on the development of science and technology. This position initiates *kiai* to build the forming elements of his leadership structures (especially the *pesantren* communities, ranging from the students, *ustadz*, administrators (led by), mosques, dormitories or *pondok*, the Yellow Books (the sources of Islamic studies), and the goals to attain) that are more adaptive to social transformation of society.

On the one hand, *kiai* relates these elements into one Islamic religious ontological line (Qur'an and al-Hadith), so it moves correlatively between interconnected elements (or, cannot stand independently). For instance, Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo has moved the element of *kiai* leadership based on the concept of *ulul abab* (QS. Al-Maidah: 190), namely a leadership that emerges based on the dialectic between sociological consciousness and theological consciousness.

This reality actually strengthens the basic theological values of *pesantren* institutional and education systems, as a result, we could identify other forming elements of *kiai* leadership in the three pesantren. These elements include religious ethical or moral values, humanist learning methods, and transcendental educational goals such as the perfect faith, broad knowledge, and true *akhlaq*.<sup>48</sup> The emergence of *kiai* leadership was born from theological awareness that was manifested in the form of *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* (da'wah) motive above the socio-historical circles of *pesantren* institutions. In this context, the climate of *pesantren* institutional and education systems in the three pesantren is formed based on the *kiai* leadership structure on the basis of universal values. These values are the driving force of all elements in the *pesantren* and the frameworks of the institutional management in Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo, Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo, and Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren.<sup>12</sup>

The ontological inspiration of *kiai* leadership lies in the normative values contained in the texts of revelation (al-Qur'an and al-Hadith) which are structurally interpreted. The construction of this leadership base also orient the empirical reality of *pesantren* institutional and education systems as the land of *jihad fi sabilillah*.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo and Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo have emphasized the elements of *ustadz/teacher* and positioned them as the main figures of ethical-moral role models whose behaviors are integrated with *kiai's* self-philosophical ideals. In the eyes of the *pesantren* members (such as the students) or the public in general, the *ustadz / teachers* depict the figure of scholars' (ulama') with the ultimate level of sincerity to transfer their knowledge. This reality has created an emotional-paternalistic relationship between the *kiai* himself and the pesantren members, accordingly, the humanist education climate grows and develops coloring religious and non-religious learning activities.<sup>21</sup>

Other elements like mosques, dormitories or *pondok*, the Yellow Books (i.e., the sources of Islamic studies) have supported the sustainability of the *pesantren* management and *kiai* leadership. Automatically, the relation between all these elements is inseparable from the ethical-moral base and even it tends to bind the axiological system of *pesantren* education. In the context of the three pesantren, ethical morals, along with the values surrounding the *kiai* leadership structure serve as a strengthening element of the inter-connectedness in the *pesantren* institutional management. Commonly, the base (ontological) and the orientation (axiological) of *pesantren* institutional management tends to be transcendental while remaining firmly based on the sociological empirical reality of the *pesantren* itself. It is this side that has framed the governance of Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo, Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo, and Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren, applied with a revelation-based management.

The three pesantren, through their *kiai* leaderships, have focused on realizing a religious society that is economically prosperous and culturally superior at the same time. One of the ustadzs in Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo provided a statement to the researcher that: "Religious science and other sciences are said to be successful if they can provide benefits to oneself, others, and society. It is also true with *pesantren*. We can say that it is successful if it can deliver his students to take part in the community with his knowledge and *akhlaq*." (Results of Interviews with Ulemas of Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School Karangharjo, n.d.).

From the above statement, we can visibly see the ultimate estuary of *kiai* leadership; in which the problems of morality have become the modus operandi of pesantren institutions. The three pesantren have unexpectedly put the problematics of human existence (especially the aspects of morality), thereby all dimensions of the student's lives, both personally and communally (society), are covered by the prophetic mission of the *pesantren*. Ultimately, the relationship patterns among pesantren members with sociological reality (humanity), or even their relationship with transcendental reality (God) are strongly bound to the ontological values of the *kiai* leadership. The practice of ethical science and morals in every act of leading pesantren also can be derived from the ability of the *kiai* himself to express (to dialogue) his religious ideals with the institutional reality of *pesantren*. The caregiver of Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo pesantren claimed this condition as a form of discovering the essence of spirituality (Results of interviews with the caregivers of the Nurul Islam Antirogo Islamic boarding school, n.d.).

The ethical morality of the three pesantren is believed to be universal and absolute truth by all the *pesantren* members since it comes from the understanding and interpreting of the revelation texts written in the Qur'an and al-Hadith. In this dimension, theological values translated in the form of ethical morality are seen as permanent and are sought to be in dialogues with aspect ratios and empirical realities. The *Kiai* also have tried to preserve it through the *pesantren* management system, therefore, his leadership ideals and aspirations greatly splash colors to the whole construction of pesantren education. It includes learning activities – education – which are not only oriented to develop the intellectuality of *pesantren* members with religious or non-religious sciences. Rather, they also develop spirituality and the potential of the *pesantren* members to be *al-akhlaq al-karim*.

An *ustadz* of Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren stated that: "*Pesantren* educates its members to be human beings who keep on developing their knowledge and religion. It is undeniable that *pesantren* does have unique advantages and characteristics in educating. It is through the *kiai* leadership, *pesantren* has been able in creating students to be 'abdullah caliph' or 'abdullah who is caliph'." (The results of the interview with the Islamic boarding school cleric Miftahul Ulum Suren, n.d.).

The success of institutional and education systems in Pesantren Miftahul Ulum Suren, Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo, and Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo in producing the aforementioned "abdullah caliph" or "abdullah who is caliph" lies in the education process which not only transmits scientific materials. Rather, the three pesantren also try to surpass the science materials by decomposing or interpreting the meaning behind those materials. They believe, if the institutional axiology of education is only oriented toward the construction of rationality understanding, then they cannot come up with the solutions to the problems of humanity. Therefore, *kiai*, through the *pesantren* management system, continuously seeks to integrate the understanding of rationality and spirituality in the form of the axiological aspiring ideals of *pesantren* institutional and education systems. Although, on the one hand, they have emphasized the articulation of the empirical form of the aspiring ideals in the form of concrete actions by the *pesantren* members in society as the operationalization of their self-religiousness.

From the above framework, it is clear that the genealogical education management of the three *pesantren* in East Java has emerged from the belief or faith (*iman*) entities, guided by rational-empirical science acumen (science), and operationalized in the *pesantren* institutional management. This pattern also has shifted the *pesantren*'s sacred theocentric values into theoanthropocentric ones, subsequently, *kiai* leadership tends to be dynamic in building basic values for *pesantren* institutional and education systems.

As stated by one of the *ustadz* of Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo: "The values embraced by this pesantren are a combination of human and divine values. The human values come from the basic potential of our humanity, such as creation, intention, and taste with all of their dynamistic nature. However, this value is highly limited and more susceptible to changes. Meanwhile, the divine values come from the Revelation (*kalamullah*) and also become the signs of His creation (*kauni*), which means that these values are eternal and applicable across all time and places (*shalih fi kulli zaman wa makan*). (Results of Interviews with Ulemas of Al-Falah Islamic Boarding School Karangharjo, n.d.)".

On the other hand, the members of the three *pesantren* have participated in implementing basic institutional values based on their self-awareness in realizing their *pesantren* purposes – the institutional goals. This situation has encouraged the pesantren members to imitate the way of thinking and the actions of the *kiai* leadership. It is in this context they can find the spirit possessed by the *kiai* in managing the *pesantren* institutional and education systems as the "opening key" to the imitation process. They can find that starting from the spirit of *kiai* leadership then comes the acts of professionally managing *pesantren* based on humanity-theological (theoanthropocentric) values. Also, based on the spirit of *kiai* leadership, the members of the three *pesantren* are more likely to gain space to actualize their potential. One of the senior *ustadz* of Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo believes that without the spirit of *kiai* leadership will only lead to confusion or concern about educational visions and goals (Results of interviews with the caregivers of the Nurul Islam Antirogo Islamic boarding school, n.d.).

The spirit lies within the *kiai* himself, becoming the basis of the power to form the *kiai* leadership structure in the three pesantren. The spirit in question includes the spirit of sincerity, simplicity, independence, brotherhood based on religious unity or democracy in the management of pesantren. Therefore, the spirit of *kiai* leadership does not appear on the surface of *pesantren* institutional and education systems, rather it lies behind the empirical reality as an innate structuring capacity force of the *kiai* leadership actions. The *Kiai* in the three pesantren believes that God will guide us with instructions as long as we are in the faith – having divine consciousness (*ihsan*) (QS. al-Baqarah verse 194).

However, in the three pesantren, there is still a conflict between two extreme thoughts, namely the traditional (salaf) and modern (khalaf) thinking. These two poles of thought have arisen from the perspective used by each pesantren member, as a result, the transformation of *pesantren* institutional and education tend to be dyed with pros and cons. Religious understanding, as in the field of *fiq'h*, is also full of differences in views (or opinions) among the *ustadz*. The dialectical dynamics of these religious thoughts even have affected the scope of religious scientific insights of the pesantren members. For example, as taken place in Pesantren al-Falah Karangharjo or Pesantren Nurul Islam Antirogo, the wrestling of contemporary Islamic religious thoughts has grown rapidly. Subsequently, the cutting-edge literature, such as books on Islamic philosophy or Islamic thoughts (gender in Islam, environmental *fiq'h*, methodology of Islamic studies, etc.) are easy to find on the shelves of *pesantren* libraries.

The success of *kiai* leadership in implementing the transformations of *pesantren* institutional and education systems has firmly established them as religious, piety, and managerial patrons. Even, *kiai* in the three pesantren in East Java has been able to show their personal authority through prestige transformation, accordingly the sense of trust in *kiai* and proactive attitude of the pesantren members can develop rapidly. This integrative (theoanthropocentric) *kiai* leadership has emerged from the sociological base of the *pesantren* and society members. They believe that *kiai* is the figure of God's extended hand that transmits His doctrines; in which, this belief is articulated in the form of a *taklid* attitude (The results of the interview with the Islamic boarding school cleric Miftahul Ulum Suren, n.d.).

### The Transcendental Base of Kiai's Leadership in Pesantren

From the above description, it appears that *kiai* leadership structure has a transcendental nature which can provide strength in maintaining the existence of *kiai* positions in *pesantren*. The transcendental nature has

risen from *kiai*'s self-awareness of sociological (humanitarian) and theological (divinity) realities. We can see the example of this construction, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, in which *kiai* needs to adjust pesantren's learning system into *blended learning* (Hanafi et al., 2021). That is, *kiai* leadership is closely related to the socio-institutional reality of *pesantren* – read, the society. On one hand, in education policymaking, *kiai* keeps referring to the normative texts of the Holy Qur'an as an ontological source of *pesantren* institutions (Latif & Hafid, 2021). Therefore, the balanced ratio of sociological and theological realities in the *kiai* leadership becomes the normative basis of the transformations of *pesantren* institutional and education systems.

The transcendental nature of *kiai* leadership structure will appear when the leader himself – the *kiai* – has an awareness of his ontological reality. It is because this *kiai* awareness will encourage actions, such as leadership behavior in *pesantren*, thereby between those two (i.e., consciousness and action), there is coherence and there is no conflict of orientation. That is, the leader's (the *kiai*'s) self-action in the *pesantren* is closely related to his self-consciousness as the foundation of the ethical orientation of *pesantren* management. Various implicative variants of *kiai* leadership are inseparable from *kiai* consciousness, accordingly, the normative basis of *pesantren* institutions starts from philosophical motives and foundations, institutional goals, and institutional culture which refers to the basic values of such consciousness.

It is naturally common that the type of *pesantren* institution and also its scientific colors are inseparable from the influence of *kiai*. He has the awareness to determine the history of *pesantren*, thence *kiai* leadership is characteristically active and does not wait for external forces to drive it. This reality indicates that *kiai* has historical awareness (Kuntowijoyo, 2007); where he positions himself as a subject, rather than an object of history. This awareness has basically existed within the *kiai* himself, to make the *pesantren* reality run dynamically, as such *kiai*'s self-awareness can affect the *pesantren* collective reality.

One of the very fundamental awareness as the basis of *kiai* leadership structure is divine awareness. This consciousness will frame any act or behavior of *kiai* leadership through spiritual values – the values of the Qur'an and al-Hadith. The ideals of behavior, words, and the inherent attributes attached to themselves can finally be interpreted by *pesantren* members as an ontological basis, as a result, the members have normative references they can imitate themselves. In this context, these values will metamorphose into philosophical-ideological values of institutional and educational systems, internalizing into the *pesantren* members. Interestingly, this pattern is very effective in internalizing and reinforcing theological or ideological values; as revealed by their research results, Ihsan & Fatah found that ideological values (moderation) can be internalized through the religious introduction inserted in Islamic religious education (Ihsan & Fatah).

Subsequently, *kiai* leadership, which has a basis on divine awareness, has a strong influence on the *pesantren* dynamics. It is due to *kiai* is a part of the *muhsin* figure that has an in-depth comprehension of God's presence in the *pesantren* life and it is translated in the form of altruistic actions. One form of his actions is devoting all his resources to accomplish the *pesantren* institutional. It is common that *kiai* leadership functions are focused on professional institutional formation by improving the quality of the education system. Also, on the one hand, *kiai* leadership or *kiai* himself empowers the potential of *pesantren* members through an attitude of enlightening faith and conscience that is oriented towards the perfection of the humanity of all the members.

This phenomenon can be accomplished due to the movement of *kiai* leadership structures that are latent and exceed the reality manifested in the *pesantren* reality. Kuntowijoyo asserted that: "The assumption is that although this life movement seems as if it is irregular but on the deepest side it runs according to a neatly arranged structure, does not easily change, and runs mechanically according to general values." (I. S. I. Kuntowijoyo, 2001). The *kiai* leadership has led to his leadership behavior through his self-awareness as a spiritual person, namely people who have divine awareness to spread kindness through pious deeds. We can say that if any person has reached this degree, it means that he has achieved individual spiritual greatness.

Therefore, if a *kiai* has reached the point of *ihsan*, he is at the level of a pleasant life full of willingness to comply or sacrifice (*fi isyat radhiyah*). *Ihsan* allows people – the *pesantren* members – to be in love, affection, brotherhood, and friendship (Taufiq, 2016). That is, individual spiritual greatness is a form of actualization of the realization of *ihsan* in their daily behaviors in the *pesantren*. This is what Kuntowijoyo referred to as awareness to be able to do objectification (to objectivize), accordingly those theological values (Islam) can be a blessing for all (*rahmatan lil ' alamin*) (Kuntowijoyo, 2007).



The substance of *kiai leadership* based on divine awareness is to carry out the process of transforming the system in a better direction by playing a role in increasing the resource potential of the *pesantren* members (liberation) through altruistic attitudes (humanization). These two behaviors are essentially oriented to achieve worldly and *ukhrawi* goals based on divine awareness (transcendence). The accomplished transformation process is not only rational (worldly dimension (prophetic)) but also oriented to build *pesantren* institutions through the resources of the *pesantren* members who possess divine awareness (transcendentalistic) so they can achieve world and afterlife perfection. This *kiai* leadership style in *pesantren* is a *kiai*'s bi-dimensional figure who continuously wants to embody the aspiring ideals of *pesantren* institutional and education systems integralistically.

This *kiai* leadership structure, it does not know the dichotomy between the profane and transcendental domains. *Kiai*'s own self-faith is not solely a theological domain, thereby the *kiai* leadership pattern is not oriented towards complete theological thoughts and actions. However, it embraces all domains of the sociological reality of *pesantren* institutional and education systems; this is what Kuntowijoyo described as theocentric humanism (Kuntowijoyo, 1991). The task of *kiai* leadership in this context is to transform *pesantren* through human (sociological) and divine (theological) values.

## 1 Conclusion

Based on the above description, it can be said that the *kiai* leadership in East Java *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) has a strong influence on the transformation of the institutional and education system. The potential integrated by *kiai* in creating such transformations is sociological values and theological values; which are triggered by *kiai*'s awareness of transcendental reality (divine consciousness). Therefore, the forming elements of *kiai* leadership structure in *pesantren*, such as the *kiai* himself (the leader), *pesantren* community ranging from the students (*santri*), *ustadz*, administrators (led by), mosques, dormitories (*pondok*), the Yellow Book (the sources of Islamic studies), leadership styles, and attainable, viable goals, are inter-correlated with each other based on those values.

The dynamics of *pesantren* transformation occur in East Java's *pesantren* are very dynamic as they are influenced by the basic character of flexible *kiai* leadership in addressing *pesantren* institutional realities and education systems. Even, *kiai* leadership also has shifted following the *pesantren* social psychology; and this shift is a form of alteration of *kiai*'s ideology-based actions into the phase of action objectification. Subsequently, *kiai* self-awareness (sociological and theological) even precisely becomes the driving force of all elements in *pesantren* and which also accelerates *pesantren* institutional management to ultimately transform.

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