

Cultural Transformation of Kiai Leadership in Madura: From Religious Educators to Political Leaders

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the transformation of kiai leadership in Madura, shifting from religious roles to political authority. This change reflects broader socio-political dynamics in Indonesia, where religious figures increasingly engage in politics. Madura, with its strong Islamic traditions, provides a vital case study to understand the factors driving this transformation and its impacts on local society and politics. Data was collected through field observations and interviews with nine informants, including three cultural figures, three academics, and three *Kiai*. Key findings reveal that *Kiai* leadership has evolved from a focus on education and social preaching to active involvement in nationalist political dynamics. *Kiai* now serves not only as spiritual leaders but also as an influential political actor. This transformation is driven by socio-political changes in Indonesia, offering greater opportunities for religious figures in the political arena. Consequently, there has been a shift in the leadership structure and function within the Madurese community, with *Kiai* assuming more complex and strategic roles. The significance of these findings lies in their contribution to academic literature and practical applications. For the academic community, this research provides new insights into the dynamics of kiai leadership in Madura, enriching the discourse on the intersection of religion and politics in Indonesia. Practically, understanding the transformation of kiai roles aids policymakers and community leaders in developing strategies to manage the relationship between religious institutions and politics. Additionally, these insights assist *Kiai* and other religious leaders in navigating their evolving roles amidst ongoing socio-political changes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is an important element for religious practitioners (*kiai*), religious communities, and religious educational institutions (Foppen and van Saane, 2023). In Madura, the community has high fanaticism towards religious values, as reflected in the respect for Islamic boarding schools, madrasas and Islamic educational institutions (Susanto and Kunci, 2017), including the figures and figures of *Kiai* who are the rule model of leadership in Madura. Islamic boarding schools, especially in Madura, have a strategic role in the social and cultural structure of society (Dirdjosanjoto, 1997). Madura Island, which Kuntowijoyo calls the "Island of a Thousand Islamic Boarding Schools," has many *kiai* from various

backgrounds, ranging from langgar kiai, Islamic boarding school kiai, tarekat kiai (murshid), to shaman "kiai" (Kuntowijoyo, 1985). Madurese society has distinctive characteristics such as Madurawi, Indonesian, Islamic and Humane, which are the main glue in the culture and leadership spirit of kiai in Madura (Alim, 2016). Thus, leadership in Madura does not only include religious aspects, but also involves social, cultural and traditional aspects which are an integral part of the identity of the Madurese people.

In Madura, *Kiai* as part of society whose existence cannot be denied, have power and influence in various sectors of society's social life, such as education, economics, social, cultural and religious. It is absolutely impossible to eliminate kiai leadership, in Madurese structure and culture (2017 Budget). *Kiai* among Madurese people is known as a positive construct, namely people who are pious and intelligent in Islamic religious knowledge. Since the beginning, *Kiai*, with their religious authority, have had an important role in society, focusing on guiding the ummah (Sila 2019). Currently, there are kiai who hold dual authority, namely as religious figures (*kiai*) and as practical politicians or bureaucrats (*rato*). This gives rise to different nuances for ordinary people in understanding the characteristics of kiai as religious authorities, thereby causing a slight shift in assumptions among society. (Syamsuddin 2019, 231).

Kiai in Madurese society have a very important and respected role as spiritual leaders who have great influence in religious and social aspects. They are known for their deep religious knowledge and are considered moral figures of high integrity, whose traditions have long been rooted in Madurese culture. Research (Muali et al. 2021) emphasizes that Sufistic leadership, often embodied by kiai, facilitates the formation of public obedience because of their charisma and teachings which are based on Sufi values. However, when kiai began to be active in politics, significant changes occurred in social dynamics. Involvement in politics, which requires being involved in political decisions and actions, causes a loss of some charisma and respect. People who used to really respect kiai, are now starting to lose their sense of *tawaddhu'* and do not hesitate to criticize using impolite language. The public's view of kiai as political figures tends to be considered the same as other politicians, making kiai vulnerable to criticism and evaluation. Research (Sharif 2016) shows that kiai who enter politics experience a slight decrease in significant influence, causing people to become more independent and pay less attention to the kiai's orders or advice. This creates a shift in the relationship between kiai and society, from one based on respect and obedience to one that is more critical and independent. The involvement of kiai in politics not only changes people's perception of kiai, but also influences the social structure and leadership in Madura, where only spiritual and political authority exists. This transformation has had a complex and significant impact on the social and cultural dynamics of Madurese society.

Kiai leadership as Islamic boarding school leaders is unique and interesting to study, because it is seen from various aspects (Ajan, Mahrudin, and Mulyana 2018). The figure of a kiai is not just about compiling the curriculum, compiling activity schedules, implementing evaluations of Islamic boarding school rules and regulations, but is the highest leader in managing the lives of the entire Islamic boarding school stakeholder community, as well as building the community and ummah. (Pribadi 2015) *Kiai* is not only a boarding school leader but also a major elite among the Madurese community, because of his knowledge and services in developing the ummah (Iswahyudi 2022) In Madurese culture, the figure of the kiai occupies a central position, not only in religious aspects such as in Islamic boarding schools but in almost all aspects of life. Madurese citizens must obey and respect their parents, teachers (*kiai*) and leaders, in accordance with the expression of Madurese cultural philosophy, *buppa'-babu'-guruh-rato*h (Syamsuddin 2019).

Examining the evaluation of Madurese cultural leadership in relation to kiai in Islamic boarding schools. A different perspective is needed from other research related to Madura. There have been many previous studies that have tried to look at Madurese culture, such as the work of Kunto Wijoyo (Kuntowijoyo 1985) Muhammad Syamsuddin (Syamsuddin 2019) hasanatul jannah (Jannah 2020) Yanwar Private (Pribadi 2015) Abd A'la (A'la et al. 2018) Masdar Hilmy (Hilmy 2015) This article focuses on evaluating Madurese cultural leadership from the perspective and behavior of kiai in Islamic

boarding schools (Muhibbuddin 2018). Most cultural leadership research has been conducted and is based on various cultural dimensions (Deng and Gibson 2008). There are also those who have researched the evaluation of Javanese cultural leadership. (Supeni 2013) Java and Madura are basically one, because in the Nagarakertagama book, especially in song 15, it is stated that socially and politically Madura was initially integral to the island of Java. This historical fact also shows that in 1365 the Madurese and Javanese people were actually part of the same cultural community.

Starting from the explanation above, this research wants to examine the cultural transformation of kiai leadership in Madura. The urgency of this research is shown by the increasing number of kiai who play a dual role in society, between becoming kiai with religious power and using the kiai's identity as social capital to become politicians. Some people consider the effectiveness of "kiai" religious leadership to be untraceable because of its spiritual or transcendental dimensions (Malony 1984). Thus, this research position's main focus is to explore and obtain an in-depth understanding of the cultural evaluation of kiai leadership in Madura. Especially in the ever-changing social reality of social, political, and economic dynamics, it is important for us to understand how Madurese cultural leadership adapts to the changing times. It is hoped that this paper can contribute to complementing previous literature which has not fully explored the transformation and evaluation of Madurese cultural leadership in a comprehensive manner, and this research seeks to explore the dual role of kiai in Madura, understand their impact on society, and evaluate how Madurese cultural leadership adapts to contemporary social, political and economic changes.

2. METHOD

In this research, the author uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a naturalistic phenomenological method (Lincoln, 2005) to evaluate the transformation of *Kiai* leadership in Madura. This approach allows researchers to explore experiences and an in-depth understanding of changes in kiai leadership in Madura. The aim of this research is to understand the phenomena that occur, especially regarding changes and transformation of leadership in Madura (Wijaya, 2019). The naturalistic phenomenological approach is a qualitative research method that aims to understand subjective experiences and the meaning that individuals give to their experiences. This approach seeks to gain a deep understanding from the perspective of the people involved in the phenomenon under study, without disturbing or changing the natural context in which the phenomenon occurs. This approach emphasizes direct observation and interaction with research subjects in their real environment.

Determine the criteria for selecting sources and the number of times interviews are conducted. Data collection techniques are carried out by conducting direct observations through observation, interviews with related parties, and documentation studies. Observations include in-depth observations of the research object to discover the Madurese leadership culture from the perspective of the kiai at the Islamic boarding school. Observations are carried out by looking at activities that occur or involving researchers as participants in these activities. Interviews by asking questions directly to respondents (kyai and Madurese cultural figures). Interviews are conducted by meeting in person or virtually. Document studies in the form of books about Madurese culture can provide secondary data to researchers, in the form of data sourced from written sources. The author interviews with cultural figures, academics and *Kiai* figures (Majid, 2017).

After the data was collected, analysis steps using descriptive techniques (Miles and Huberman 1994) began with data reduction. This process involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data obtained from field notes or interview transcripts. Data reduction aims to focus data on things that are relevant to the research objectives, including making summaries, coding data, and separating important information from that which is not relevant. The next step is data presentation, where the reduced data is arranged systematically in the form of graphs, tables, matrices

or diagrams. Good presentation makes it easier for researchers to see patterns and relationships in the data, making understanding and analysis easier.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Existence of Kiai Leadership in Madurese Society

The figure of the kiai is always an inseparable part. Kiai and society's social life are like two inseparable sides of a coin. Kiai have become a force in their own right in the socio-cultural structure of society, and kiai even play an important role in changing the map of social life in their society. This happened because kiai had become social elites in society (Faisal et al. 2022) in the socio-cultural structure of society are considered as local kings who can move people's lives, so it is not an exaggeration if kiai are positioned like kings who are admired and respected. Every move and word of a kiai is a word that demands that society practice and obey it, especially as kiai are believed to be the extension of the Prophets and Guardians who have insight into the religious field (Rozaki 2021).

Among Madurese society, kiai occupy the highest social strata. There is no other way for society, apart from making kiai a social elite who are "absolutely" obeyed and respected, especially kiai who have Islamic boarding schools with quite a large number of students. Automatically, the kiai has a stronger level of influence and a larger network of followers. (Ibnu Hajar 2024)

Findings in the field Madurese people have no other choice but to make kiai their leaders. Kiai are respected for their deep religious knowledge, their wisdom, and their ability to lead society. Kiai are also considered moral and spiritual role models for the Madurese people. Primarily kiai who have Islamic boarding schools, the charisma and obedience of the students and the community (Observations in the field of the Madurese community).

The existence of Islamic boarding schools can hardly be completely separated from discussions about the role of kiai. Because kiai are leaders where Islamic boarding schools use dialectics and initiate important roles in the history of Islam in the archipelago. Apart from that, the existence of a kiai is one of the conditions for an institution to be called an Islamic boarding school (Dhofier 1982).

Islamic boarding schools are part of Indonesian educational institutions that have a traditional style, where the role of kiai dominates. Kiai are present in every policy, teaching and problem related to Islamic boarding school education and social issues, acting as problem solvers, mediators and wise teachers. (Raditya 2023) The existence of kiai is very significant in the Islamic boarding school environment. The thoughts, actions and behavior of kiai are always considered correct and serve as role models for students. Kiai has high authority and charisma, so the students' obedience to him is inevitable (Sila 2019).

Kiai in the eyes of santri is more than just a teacher in the modern sense known today. Kiai is a figure that students learn from and imitate all their behavior. As is the case with ustadz or sheikhs, students surrender their obedience in order to gain knowledge and reap blessings. Even in the context of Islamic boarding schools, kiai are small kings who have full authority over Islamic boarding schools and students. The kiai's voice is a command that is 'obligatory' to be obeyed, because in the Islamic boarding school tradition, the kiai is not only a spiritual figure who has the incarnation of "heir of the prophets", but is also a symbol of a small ruler who is very authoritative towards the Islamic boarding school community. Obedience and submission to the kiai in all matters, including qaulan, fi'lan and taqriran, is a fact of submission in the life of the Islamic boarding school community. (Ibnu Hajar 2024)

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schools use dialectics and initiate important roles in the wheel of Islamic boarding school activities. Apart from that, the existence of a kiai is one of the conditions for an institution to be called an Islamic boarding school. According to Greg Fealy, the central figure in an Islamic boarding school is the kiai. His role contains many. He is a scholar, teacher, and spiritual guide (Fealy 2012).

The charisma of a kiai is obtained from partners. Religious charisma begins with the character of a kiai and originates from the height of his knowledge, expertise in understanding religious knowledge, and *istiqomah* in educating and protecting the community. The implications of his *istiqomah* and depth of knowledge radiate the charisma and authority of a kiai in the midst of society. (Zainuddin Syari 2024)

The hierarchical system of Madurese society is clearly reflected, especially through their local proverb, "bhuppa' bhabbu' ghuru rato." This proverb not only reflects the standard meaning of obedience, but also shows the social hierarchy system that applies, both in domestic life and in the public sphere. In terms of religiosity, Madurese people show total respect for religious aspects, which is reflected in their appreciation and glorification of Islamic values and institutions, such as kiai and Islamic boarding schools. Both kiai and Islamic boarding schools are symbols of the greatness of religion in the lives of Madurese people. They are not only places where religion is studied, but also sources of examples in everyday life. The high position of kiai and Islamic boarding schools in Madurese culture means that they are considered miniature kings and small kingdoms in Madura (Syarif and Hannan 2020).

Kiai among Madurese people if you look at the theory put forward by Tom R. Tyler including the legitimization of charismatic authority based on religious elites. (Tyler 2011) This is the same as what was expressed by Weber and Beetham (Beetham and Lord 2014). Kiai is at the top of three social stratification groups; firstly, the *oreng kene'* or *dume'* people are the lowest level of society, secondly, the middle level of society is usually called *pangghaba'*, the highest class is occupied by the *parjaji* (kiai). Based on culture, kiai are at the top of the list between two sections, *santri* and *non-santri*. (Syamsuddin 2019)

3.2 Kiai Leadership Transformation Implication to social and Madura Culture

As described above, kiai are basically not just leaders, but also more than that. Kiai for society are the main role models, where all the actions and words of the kiai are like words that must be obeyed and respected. *Ta'dzim* and respect for kiai is a form of positioning kiai at a very high level in the eyes of society. In fact, in the eyes of society, kiai are sacred and mystical figures, so that their position is always associated with issues of blessings and guidance.

*In Madurese cultural philosophy Buppha' Babbu' Ghuruh Ratoh. Babbu' Buppha This is no longer negotiable, the Ghuruh (kiai) for Madurese people is everything, the kiai before the reform became a service to the community, the kiai became the central point of various problems and interests of society, the community depended everything on the kiai and relied on the kiai, this happened because there is civilization among the people, because al-*ulama'* warasatul *anbiya*. Madurese people, upland communities, tend to accept without reserve when it comes to religiosity. This is one of the reasons why the kiai became *Ansih's* support. Some even trust their kiai more than their parents. This is a portrait of the kiai's charisma, which is believed to have blessings. (Ibn Hajar 2024)*

This is a unique form of kiai leadership that has become deeply rooted in people's lives. According to Abdurrahman Mas'ud, in the nineteenth century AD, witnessing kiai leadership in Islamic boarding schools was unique, in the sense of maintaining modern traditional characteristics, such as the teacher-student relationship which was based more on a belief system than the patron-client relationship that developed widely in society. The students use the theme of kiai leadership because they believe in the concept in Javanese society, namely blessing or *barakah*, which is based on the doctrine of the special status of a person as an *alim* and guardian (Mas' ud 2004).

However, the sacred characteristics of the kiai have slowly begun to fade along with the transformation of kiai leadership: from cultural leadership to pragmatic leadership (power). This position has caused the loss of public trust in the kiai as well as the erosion of the sacredness of the kiai in the eyes of society. As a result, kiai no longer receive special treatment, in fact their rank has been lowered to that of ordinary members of society.

The involvement of kiai in the political realm causes cultural distortions, eliminates the charisma of a kiai, especially since so far there have been several who have failed in the political realm, thus losing their charismatic spirit, coupled with the kiai's lack of knowledge regarding political science, so they easily become complacent with political life. (Ibn Hajar 2024)

Kiai are no longer considered figures and role models worthy of respect and respect. In the eyes of the public, kiai who enter politics and succeed in achieving political positions, both in the executive and legislative branches, are considered to have begun to abandon the interests of society, and are distant from the life of society, so they are considered to have abandoned their khittah kekiai.

The findings in the field were that people did not hesitate to criticize and even demonstrate against kiai who were involved in the world of politics, including the regent of Bangkalan, the regent of Pamekasan, a critical attitude that had never occurred before kiai became involved in the political stage. The charisma of a kiai begins to fade when he becomes involved in the political stage. (Field observations of various findings)

In the eyes of the public, the kiai's involvement in power politics tends to be interpreted as a form of the kiai's love of power, thus denying his own image of holiness. The community, which initially greatly admired and respected the kiai, changed direction and distanced itself from the kiai in question, apart from being deemed to no longer reflect the image of protecting society, he was also considered to be trapped by worldly interests. Society no longer regards him as an authoritative figure, so that every word he says is no longer considered sacred advice, because it has been mixed with worldly desires. Practical politics basically backfires on the existence of kiai in society, because politics is synonymous with position and wealth.

This is in line with the Madurese philosophy which states *Maskah angenah landay the waves are calm peraonah tiles interpreter mudinah cube' or puduh pantang nuro' penompangah*. Even though the wind and waves are calm, the boat is good, but the captain is not an expert, so I don't want to be a passenger. The community is more trusting and obedient if the kiai remains in his position, assisting, protecting, educating, and guiding the students and the community (Ibn Hajar 2024).

According to Mohammad Suhaidi, a kiai for Madurese people is an everything figure, or even a mecca for Madurese people's life activities, whether in matters that have the intention of *mahdlah* or *ghiru mahdlah*. Kiai is considered a figure who has high authority to solve all the problems of people's lives (Mohammad Suhaidi, 2020)

3.3 Kiai Leadership Transformation in Madura: An Evaluative Review

There are at least several main reasons why the leadership culture of Madura Islamic boarding school kiai needs to be evaluated. Looking at the dynamics of social change that is occurring, there is a shift in the leadership pattern of kiai in Madura, in their position as the highest leaders in Islamic boarding schools and community structures, kiai who initially focused on protecting the community as educators and preachers. In the recent post-reformation period there were a number of kiai who also took part and were involved in the world of practical politics, with this there were several evaluations of the leadership culture of kiai in Islamic boarding schools, so that the leadership position of charismatic kyai would return to its original state, according to Clifford Geertz's perspective (Syamsuddin 2019).

First, The kiai's activeness in the political realm has resulted in cultural distortion among Madurese society. The involvement of kiai in the practical political arena is actually a hasty and seemingly forced

choice, without considering many things, especially the position of kiai as the cultural mecca of society. Many people really regret the choice of involving kiai in practical politics, because getting involved in practical politics is the same as leading kiai into an arena that is not suitable for the figure of kiai. The world of politics is a world of fierce battles and stakes of interests, so it can force kiai to use various means to win the battle. It is not surprising that society hopes that kiai will remain in their original position as community cultural referees in Islamic boarding schools and other educational institutions. If we refer to Van Bruinessen's theory, - cultural breakdown culture builder). (Raditya 2023) As defenders of various problems, these facts are of course very well understood by the kiai themselves. Maintaining the hearts and trust of the community is because it is so important for the kiai. Therefore, all views, actions and behavior of kiai must always be based on the principle of independence and impartiality in order to maintain harmony between various different groups in society. Kiai must position themselves above all the different interests of society and appear as wise protectors.

Second, The main task of a kiai is to give birth to a generation of tafaquhu fiddin and produce students who are ibadillahi as-sholohin, because the position of a kiai is not separated from that of an Islamic boarding school, as an institution and educational institution that continues to focus on its work. Islamic boarding school kiai must return to their maqom in accordance with the Madurese philosophy which is usually instilled in their students. Kiai is actually better off returning to a noble place in society. Because, people actually also need and miss the figure of a kiai like before who patiently and diligently accompanies them in their daily lives. This step will certainly be able to maintain the kiai's bargaining position as stated by Roger Fisher and William Ury. This will restore the kiai's charisma at the grassroots level of society. In this context, the community's great hope for the kiai to return to the basics, namely as the social and cultural leadership of the community, is a dream that the community longs for. For several years, kiai have been lulled into the cradle of politics and power, often even becoming objects of politicization by politicians, which has made kiai lose their identity as role models for society. This is in line with Abd's theory. A'la that one of the successes of a kiai and Islamic boarding school is when he is able to contribute to spiritual (mental) development by providing sufficient space for the emotionalization of religious feelings which are expressed intellectually. Apart from that, it is also based on the Islamic boarding school's sincerity in integrating with society while becoming a transformation agent that can enlighten society.

The involvement of kiai in the realm of practical politics can be said to be a 'historical accident'. Because, such a decision suggests a shift in the kiai's nature as explained above. The phenomenon of the rise of kiai becoming politicians, as is currently happening, actually erodes the charisma of kiai and blunts the bargaining value of kiai in the eyes of the public. In turn, if it continues, the assumption of kiai syndrome may become a reality.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this research underline the important role of kiai in the social and cultural structure of Madurese society. Kiai are not only seen as spiritual leaders, but also as symbols of religious greatness and role models in everyday life. However, shifts in kiai leadership patterns, especially after the reform period, have resulted in cultural distortions and reduced public trust in kiai. The involvement of kiai in practical politics also changes their focus from spiritual leaders to pragmatic leaders in politics, this threatens the existence and legitimacy of kiai authority in Madurese society. To overcome this, it is important for kiai to return to their basic role as the social and cultural direction of society, refocus as the role of educators and spiritual guides, and regain the trust and respect of society. In this way, kiai can maintain their new position in society. The broader implications of these findings for Madurese society include restoring cultural and moral integrity, strengthening ties to religious values, and reducing cultural distortions caused by the politicization of religion. Suggestions for further research are to expand the geographical and temporal scope for a more comprehensive understanding of changes in the role of kiai in Madura, as well as exploring the long-term implications of these changes for social, political and cultural dynamics in Madura

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