Beyond The Sacred Walls:
Reimagining Pesantren's Architecture of Islamic Moderation

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Abstract: This study examines the epistemological transformation of traditional Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) in fostering Islamic moderation within contemporary Indonesian society. Through a qualitative approach combining phenomenological and critical-hermeneutical analysis, this research investigates how pesantren reimagines its educational and social roles beyond conventional boundaries. The study reveals that pesantren's adaptive strategies in promoting moderate Islam operate through three interconnected dimensions: epistemological reconstruction, institutional transformation, and social engagement. Drawing from extensive fieldwork in East Java's prominent pesantren, the findings demonstrate how these institutions effectively integrate traditional Islamic wisdom with modern educational approaches while maintaining their distinctive cultural identity. The research highlights pesantren's unique capability in developing a contemporary framework for Islamic moderation that successfully counters religious radicalism while preserving indigenous Islamic traditions. This study contributes to the broader discourse on religious moderation by presenting Pesantren's innovative approach to bridging traditional Islamic values with modern societal demands.

Keywords: Islamic moderation, pesantren transformation, religious education, cultural integration, epistemological design, Aswaja NU Indigenous Wisdom.

Introduction

PESANTREN, or Islamic boarding schools, have long been cornerstones of Indonesia's religious and educational landscape. As institutions rooted in tradition, pesantren serve not only as centers for Islamic learning but also as incubators of moral and

social values.[1] Their historical evolution reflects their resilience and adaptability to shifting societal dynamics, enabling them to maintain relevance across centuries.[2] Today, pesantren face the dual challenge of preserving their religious heritage while responding to contemporary demands for inclusivity, moderation, and global engagement.[3]

Historically, pesantren have been associated with the propagation of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah (Aswaja)*[4], a theological framework emphasizing moderation (*wasaṭiyyah*), tolerance, and coexistence.[5] These values have underpinned the pesantren's educational philosophy, which seeks to instill spiritual and intellectual growth in its students.[6] However, the increasing pressures of globalization and the rise of exclusivist ideologies have necessitated a reimagining of their role. The need for

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[1] Suwendi Suwendi et al., "Roles and Challenges of Pesantren Intellectual Networks," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 24, no. 2 (August 3, 2024): 453, https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v24i2.23134.

[2] Irfan Abubakar and Idris Hemay, "Pesantren Resilience: The Path to Prevent Radicalism and Violent Extremism," *Studia Islamika* 27, no. 2 (August 3, 2020): 397–404, https://doi.org/10.36712/sdi.v27i2.16766. See also for the study on the pesantren promoting harmony, Sabarudin Sabarudin et al., "Navigating Existence and Community Harmony: A Case Study of Pondok Pesantren in Muslim Minority Ende, Nusa Tenggara Timur," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 3 (September 30, 2024): 1335, https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i3.1152.

[3] Mursyid Mursyid, "Pluralitas Agama dan Faham Keagamaan: Pelajaran Dari Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid," *At-Turas: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 4, no. 1 (June 1, 2018): 80–96, https://doi.org/10.33650/at-turas.v4i1.201.

[4] Abdul Hadi, Ishak Syairozi, and Marliza Oktapiani, "Transformation of Pesantren Education as a Starting Point for Religious Moderation in Indonesia," *At-Ta'dib* 19, no. 2 (December 1, 2024): 241–350, https://doi.org/10.21111/attadib.v19i2.12858.

[5] Alexander R. Arifianto, "Practicing What It Preaches? Understanding the Contradictions between Pluralist Theology and Religious Intolerance within Indonesia's Nahdlatul Ulama," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 55, no. 2 (December 1, 2017): 241–64, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.241-264.

[6] Ahmad Habiburrohman Aksa and Muh Luthfi Hakim, "Santri in the Frame of Religious Harmony," *Santri* 4, no. 2 (December 1, 2023): 131–42, https://doi.org/10.35878/santri.v4i2.958.

pesantren to navigate this complex terrain has never been more urgent.[7]

Previous studies have explored pesantren's historical role and contributions to Indonesia's socio-religious fabric. Scholars such as Azyumardi Azra have highlighted their capacity to blend traditional Islamic teachings with modern educational approaches[8]. Meanwhile, research by Greg Barton emphasizes their role in countering radicalism by promoting Islamic moderation. While these studies provide valuable insights, a gap remains in understanding how pesantren adapt their structures, strategies, and curricula to meet the multifaceted challenges of the 21st century.[9]

Several scholars have examined the evolving role of pesantren in Indonesia's Islamic educational landscape. Azyumardi Azra,[10] for instance, explores how pesantren have historically served as centers of Islamic reformism, capable of assimilating local cultural values with Middle Eastern religious thought. While his work provides a strong foundation for understanding pesantren's ideological openness, it tends to focus more on transregional scholarly networks than on institutional transformations within pesantren themselves.

Greg Barton[11] emphasizes pesantren's strategic role in promoting Islamic moderation and resisting radicalism. However, his analysis is primarily normative, lacking empirical grounding in

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[7] Abdul Ghoni, "Fikih Toleransi di Pesantren Dalam Perspektif Sosiologi Hukum Islam," *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 5, no. 2 (July 1, 2019): 212–40, https://doi.org/10.15408/idi.v5i2.11748.

[8] 15/06/2025 18:04:00

[9] Greg Barton, Ihsan Yilmaz, and Nicholas Morieson, "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080641.

[10] Azyumardi Azra, Dina Afrianty, and Robert W. Hefner, "Pesantren and Madrasa: Muslim Schools and National Ideals in Indonesia," in *Schooling Islam*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education (Princeton University Press, 2007), 172–98, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7rqjj.13.

[11] Greg Barton, "Indonesia's Nurcholish Madjid and Abdurrahman Wahid as Intellectual 'Ulama': The Meeting of Islamic Traditionalism and Modernism in Neo-Modernist Thought," *Studia Islamika* 4, no. 1 (1997): 29–81, https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v4i1.786.

the day-to-day practices or structural innovations of pesantren. This study addresses that gap by empirically investigating how pesantren operationalizes moderation through institutional design and social engagement.

Martin van Bruinessen[12] draws attention to the diversity within pesantren traditions, particularly between traditionalist (salafiyah) and reformist tendencies. His typology is valuable, yet it does not sufficiently address how these variations translate into different models of civic engagement or responses to extremism. By comparing salafiyah, khalafiyah, and hybrid pesantren, this study extends its framework through a grounded analysis of institutional diversity and adaptive strategies.

Robert Hefner[13] underlines the role of pesantren in cultivating civil Islam and democratic citizenship. While insightful, his work is primarily limited to elite pesantren in urban Java. It does not account for more localized or peripheral institutions that also play key roles in religious moderation. This research seeks to fill that empirical void by examining pesantren in East Java's rural and semi-urban settings.

Overall, while the existing literature establishes the potential of pesantren in fostering moderation, few studies provide a multidimensional, grounded analysis that connects epistemological, institutional, and societal dimensions. This study contributes to that effort by offering an integrated framework and field-based evidence of how pesantren mediate between tradition and modernity to sustain their moral and civic influence.

This study addresses that gap by examining how pesantren reimagine their educational and social roles to promote Islamic moderation. Specifically, it investigates three critical dimensions of this transformation: epistemological reconstruction, institutional

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[12] Martin van Bruinessen, "Traditionalist and Islamist Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia," in *The Madrasa in Asia*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen, Farish A. Noor, and Yoginder Sikand, Political Activism and Transnational Linkages (Amsterdam University Press, 2008), 217–46, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n10w.12.

[13] Robert W. Hefner, "Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class," *Indonesia*, no. 56 (1993): 1–35, https://doi.org/10.2307/3351197.

transformation, and community engagement. By focusing on pesantren in East Java—renowned for their innovation and cultural integration—this research provides a nuanced understanding of their strategies for fostering moderation in increasingly polarized social landscapes.[14]

A pressing challenge for pesantren is the growing influence of radical ideologies, which threaten their role as bastions of moderation. Radical groups such as Jamaah Islamiyah and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia pose a threat to pesantren by targeting students and alumni through online platforms, ideological literature, and informal religious study groups. Although these groups operate outside the formal pesantren structure, they exploit gaps in digital literacy and religious understanding to disseminate exclusivist interpretations of Islam, aiming to delegitimize moderate institutions.[15] Pesantren, however, possesses the unique ability to counter these narratives through their holistic approach, which integrates spiritual, intellectual, and social development. This capacity positions pesantren as key players in promoting tolerance and pluralism within Indonesia's diverse society.[16]

To address these challenges, pesantren have embraced innovative strategies. These include integrating technology into their curricula, offering vocational training, and engaging students in community-based initiatives. Such practices reflect pesantren's ability to blend traditional Islamic wisdom with contemporary pedagogical techniques, thereby equipping their students to navigate modern complexities while staying rooted in Islamic values.[17]

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[14] Hatim Gazali and Abd Malik, "PESANTREN AND THE FREEDOM OF THINKING: Study of Ma'had Aly Pesantren Sukorejo Situbondo, East Java, Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 47, no. 2 (August 1, 2009): 295–316, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2009.472.295-316.

[15] Muhammad Fauzinuddin Faiz, "Metamorfosis Digital HTI," Kompas.id, 02 2025, https://www.kompas.id/artikel/metamorfosis-digital-hti.

[16] Muhammad Alqadri Burga and Muljono Damopolii, "Reinforcing Religious Moderation through Local Culture-Based Pesantren," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (December 1, 2022): 145–62, https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i2.19879.

[17] Mustari Bosra and Umiarso Umiarso, "Theological Moderation in the Islamic Boarding School (Pesantren): Phenomenological Prophetic Social Study in

This research highlights pesantren's unique position as both preservers of tradition and agents of change. By reimagining their "architecture of Islamic moderation," pesantren demonstrates how traditional institutions can evolve without compromising their core principles. This dual role enables them to contribute not only to religious education but also to broader societal objectives, such as fostering social harmony and countering radicalism.[18]

Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on religious moderation by showcasing pesantren as models of resilience and adaptability. Their ability to integrate tradition with modernity offers valuable lessons for other Islamic educational institutions worldwide. By examining the innovative practices of pesantren, this research provides policymakers, educators, and community leaders with actionable insights for promoting inclusive and moderate Islamic values.[19]

In addition, the evolution of pesantren underscores its potential to bridge the gap between tradition and modernity. As they continue to adapt, they reaffirm their relevance in shaping Indonesia's religious and social identity. This study not only deepens our understanding of pesantren but also highlights their critical role in building a society grounded in moderation, inclusivity, and peace.

The study draws on neo-institutional theory to analyze how pesantren, as traditional Islamic institutions, adapt structurally and symbolically in response to socio-political pressures without losing their religious authority. This approach enables a deeper understanding of institutional resilience and transformation, extending beyond descriptive accounts. In doing so, this research contributes not only to academic discourse but also to real-world

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Pesantren in East Java," *Akademika : Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 1 (August 28, 2020): 117, https://doi.org/10.32332/akademika.v25i1.2369.

[18] Muhammad Asif et al., "Countering Radicalism, Promoting Peace: Insights from Pesantren Al-Anwar 3 Sarang Rembang, Central Java," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 29, no. 1 (May 1, 2021): 141–76, https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.29.1.5145.

[19] Ihsan Ihsan and A. Umar, "Kiai As Al-Qudwah Al-Khasanah: The Role Of Kiai In Shaping Religious Culture In Islamic Education Institution" 17, no. 2 (December 23, 2020): 329–46, https://doi.org/10.22515/ajpif.v17i2.2995.

strategies for strengthening pluralism and combating religious extremism through community-based Islamic education.

The Historical Foundations of Pesantren: Guardians of Tradition and Moderation

Pesantren, as one of Indonesia's most enduring educational institutions, has played a pivotal role in shaping the nation's Islamic identity.[20] Emerging as early as the 15th century, pesantren were established to preserve Islamic teachings while addressing the socio-cultural needs of local communities. Their development paralleled the spread of Islam in the archipelago, blending Islamic doctrines with indigenous traditions to foster a uniquely Indonesian form of religious education. This synthesis of local and Islamic values underpins pesantren's enduring role as custodians of moderation and tradition.[21]

While many pesantren have historically upheld principles of religious moderation and pluralism, it is important to acknowledge that their responses to socio-political change have not been uniform. Some pesantren, particularly in moments of ideological contestation or national crisis, have aligned with more conservative or exclusivist currents of Islamic thought.[22] For instance, certain pesantren have resisted curriculum modernization or interfaith collaboration, citing theological purity and institutional autonomy. Recognizing this diversity challenges romanticized portrayals and allows for a more grounded analysis of pesantren as evolving and contested institutions.

The philosophical foundation of pesantren lies in the teachings of *Aswaja*, which emphasize the principles of balance (*tawāzun*),

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[20] Wahyudi Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam: New Media, Contestation, and Reclaiming Religious Authorities," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 10, no. 1 (May 29, 2020): 1–24, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v10i1.1-24.

[21] Mohamad Iwan Fitriani, "Islamic Religious Education and Interreligious Tolerance in a Multi-Religious Country: Challenges, Typological Implications, and the Proposed Strategy," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 1 (October 16, 2023): 416–48, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v27i1.765.

[22] van Bruinessen, "Traditionalist and Islamist Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia."

tolerance (*tasāmuh*), and social harmony (*ukhuwah*).[23] These principles have shaped the pedagogical approach of pesantren, focusing on cultivating students (*santri*) who are not only knowledgeable in religious sciences but also equipped with the moral and ethical framework necessary to contribute positively to society. This focus on moderation has enabled pesantren to act as a bulwark against radical ideologies throughout their history.[24]

One of the defining characteristics of pesantren is their adaptability in addressing the needs of their communities. Unlike other traditional educational institutions, pesantren have historically operated as holistic ecosystems that integrate education, spirituality, and social services.[25] This adaptability allowed pesantren to remain relevant even during periods of colonial rule, where they served as hubs of anti-colonial resistance and guardians of indigenous Islamic traditions. By doing so, pesantren established themselves as more than religious schools; they became symbols of cultural resilience.[26]

The role of *kyai* (Islamic scholars) in pesantren cannot be overstated. As central figures, *kyai* not only imparts religious knowledge but also embodies the values of Aswaja. Their leadership ensures that pesantren maintain their commitment to moderation and community welfare. Historically, *kyai* have navigated complex socio-political landscapes to mediate conflicts

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[23] Muhammad Fauzinuddin Faiz, "Tasawuf Kebinekaan KH. Achmad Shiddiq: Menjembatani Tradisi Sufistik Dan Pancasila Untuk Inklusi Dan Keragaman Di Indonesia," *Times Indonesia: Rubrik Opini*, 2023, https://timesindonesia.co.id/kopi-times/449395/tasawuf-kebinekaan-kh-achmad-shiddiq-menjembatani-tradisi-sufistik-dan-pancasila-untuk-inklusi-dan-keragaman-di-indonesia.

[24] Fawaizul Umam and Mohamad Barmawi, "Indigenous Islamic Multiculturalism: Interreligious Relations in Rural East Java, Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 27, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 649–91, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v27i2.752.

[25] Greg Fealy, "Indonesian Politics in 2012 Graft, Intolerance, and Hope of Change in the Late Yudhoyono Period," *Southeast Asian Affairs 2013*, 2013, 103–20, https://doi.org/10.1355/aa13-1h.

[26] Evi Muafiah, Neng Eri Sofiana, and Uswatul Khasanah, "Pesantren Education in Indonesia: Efforts to Create Child-Friendly Pesantren," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 447–71, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v26i2.558.

and promote harmony.[27] For instance, during Indonesia's struggle for independence, *kyai* and pesantren collaborated with nationalist movements to advocate for unity across ethnic and religious lines. This involvement illustrates their broader societal impact.

In their early years, pesantren emphasized the study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), which provided a comprehensive understanding of Islamic jurisprudence, theology, and ethics. The choice of texts reflected the pesantren's commitment to Aswaja principles, ensuring that students were grounded in the values of inclusivity and tolerance. These texts also served as a medium through which pesantren cultivated critical thinking skills, enabling students to address contemporary challenges while staying rooted in their faith.[28]

While pesantren education is traditionally known for its reliance on memorization and transmission of classical texts (*taqlid*), some institutions have developed pedagogical strategies that promote critical engagement with the kitab kuning. For instance, pesantren such as Nurul Jadid (Probolinggo) and Al-Kamal (Blitar) incorporate structured bahsul masail sessions, encouraging students to analyze contemporary issues through the lens of classical jurisprudence. These sessions are not merely textual exercises but involve dialectical reasoning, peer critique, and contextual interpretation—practices that cultivate analytical thinking within the traditional framework. As such, while rote-based learning remains prevalent, these emerging pedagogies indicate a growing effort to synthesize tradition with intellectual rigor.

The communal structure of pesantren further reinforced their role as centers of moderation. Students lived together in dormitories, fostering a sense of brotherhood that transcended

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[27] Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "The Myth of Pluralism: Nahdlatul Ulama and the Politics of Religious Tolerance in Indonesia," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 42, no. 1 (2020): 58–84.

[28] Badarussyamsi Badarussyamsi et al., "Tolerant Worldview and Deradicalism in Pesantren," *Esensia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 22, no. 2 (December 1, 2021), https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v22i2.3021.

ethnic and socio-economic divides.[29] This living arrangement, combined with the *kyai's* guidance, created an environment where values such as mutual respect and empathy were deeply ingrained. Such practices exemplify pesantren's contribution to social cohesion and their ability to produce leaders who embody these values.[30]

Throughout history, pesantren have demonstrated resilience in the face of external pressures. During the colonial era, they resisted attempts to marginalize indigenous educational systems. In the post-independence period, pesantren expanded their curricula to include modern subjects, responding to the needs of a rapidly changing society. This evolution underscores their ability to balance tradition with innovation, ensuring that they remain relevant while preserving their core values.

The pesantren's alignment with Aswaja principles also positioned them as counterforces to radicalism. Unlike extremist ideologies that promote exclusivism and division, pesantren advocates for a middle path that respects diversity and upholds social harmony. By emphasizing dialogue and understanding, pesantren have contributed significantly to Indonesia's reputation as a model of moderate Islam.[31]

For instance, Radical groups such as Jamaah Islamiyah (JI), Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), and Majelis Mujahidin Indonesia (MMI) are widely documented as promoting exclusivist religious ideologies. These include the rejection of democratic governance, opposition to interfaith coexistence, and the application of takfiri doctrines that delegitimize Muslims who do not share their ideological stance. Such groups often operate outside pesantren

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[29] Nur Agus Salim et al., "Fostering Moderate Character of Santri: Effective Hidden Curriculum Strategy in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Nazhruna* 7, no. 2 (June 1, 2024), https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v7i2.4676.

[30] Shofiyana Nadia Fairuz, "Integrative Values of Sufism and Nationalism Within Santri Communities at Pondok Pesantren Daarul Ulum Wal Ḥikam Yogyakarta (Leadership and Character Building Analysis)," *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 7, no. 2 (December 1, 2018): 151–69, https://doi.org/10.21580/tos.v7i2.4402.

[31] van Bruinessen, "Traditionalist and Islamist Pesantrens in Contemporary Indonesia."

but attempt to infiltrate them by spreading their narratives through online platforms, informal study groups (halaqah), and ideological literature. Their influence particularly targets young people, including pesantren alumni, who may lack critical religious literacy in responding to ideological provocations.[32] Therefore, the threat lies not in institutional control but in ideological influence from outside that exploits gaps in religious understanding within pesantren communities.

In response, many pesantren have actively fostered Islamic moderation through structured programs, such as bahsul masail forums, which address issues of interreligious tolerance using classical fiqh and digital dakwah initiatives that promote inclusive Islamic teachings to counteract extremist content on social media.[33] Although pesantren are often perceived as hierarchical or feudal due to the central authority of the *kyai*, recent developments show that many pesantren—particularly those affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama—have embraced more dialogical practices, including participatory leadership, open discussion forums, and santri-led community outreach. These efforts illustrate that pesantren are not static traditional institutions but dynamic educational communities capable of negotiating tradition with democratic and pluralist values.[34]

In summary, the historical foundations of pesantren are deeply intertwined with their mission to promote moderation and preserve tradition. Through their commitment to Aswaja principles, their adaptability, and their role as community hubs, pesantren have become indispensable to Indonesia's socio-religious fabric. Their enduring relevance serves as a testament to

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[32] Akmaliah, "The Demise of Moderate Islam." See anymore! Barton, Yilmaz, and Morieson, "Authoritarianism, Democracy, Islamic Movements and Contestations of Islamic Religious Ideas in Indonesia."

[33] Mochammad Zaka Ardiansyah, "Pesantren Hybrid Worldview: Moderatisasi Paradigma Penalaran Keislaman Dan Pemenangan Kontestasi Wacana Daring," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)* 7, no. 1 (July 1, 2019): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2019.7.1.1-18.

[34] Ahmad Faisal et al., "Strengthening Religious Moderatism through the Traditional Authority of Kiai in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (December 31, 2022): 2150450, https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2150450.

their foundational values and their ability to address the evolving needs of society without compromising their core mission. This historical legacy positions pesantren as vital players in fostering a moderate, inclusive, and harmonious Islamic identity in Indonesia.

Pesantren and the Push for Modern Relevance

This section examines the adaptability of pesantren to modernity, focusing on how these traditional Islamic institutions respond to the complex demands of contemporary Indonesian society. Far from being static or resistant to change, pesantren have demonstrated remarkable flexibility in negotiating the intersection between religious orthodoxy and modern socio-cultural realities. This adaptability is reflected in various domains, including curriculum reform, technological integration, vocational education, gender inclusivity, and community engagement. By retaining their theological foundations while embracing innovation, pesantren exemplify a model of dynamic continuity—maintaining core values while adjusting institutional strategies to remain relevant in an era marked by globalization, digital transformation, and ideological contestation.

The evolution of pesantren in Indonesia exemplifies their remarkable ability to adapt to changing socio-political landscapes while remaining rooted in their Islamic traditions.[35] However, the pressures of globalization, rising radicalism, and demands for educational innovation have presented pesantren with unprecedented challenges. Addressing these challenges requires not only preserving their historical identity but also reimagining their role in fostering a moderate and inclusive society.[36]

It is essential to recognize that pesantren are not a homogeneous entity; their responses to modern challenges vary significantly depending on their ideological orientation,

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[35] Ali Nasith, "The Role of Kyai's Charismatic Leadership in Mitigating Religious Intolerance and Radicalism in Pesantren," *International Journal of Social Science and Religion*, June 1, 2024, 203–30, https://doi.org/10.53639/ijssr.v5i2.238.

[36] Andy Hadiyanto et al., "Moderation Patterns of Pesantren in Indonesia: A Study on the Perceptions and Responses of Kyai, Teachers and Santri," *Hayula: Indonesian Journal of Multidisciplinary Islamic Studies* 6, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 81–100, https://doi.org/10.21009/hayula.006.01.05.

geographical location, and institutional affiliation. Salafiyah pesantren, such as those in rural East Java, often retain strong traditionalist orientations, focusing exclusively on classical Islamic texts and resisting integration with national education curricula or digital technology. In contrast, khalafiyah pesantren, such as Darussalam Gontor in Ponorogo, have adopted a modern educational framework, incorporating leadership training, foreign languages, and global civic values into their programs. Pondok Pesantren Al-Kamal in Blitar, which represents a hybrid model, demonstrates how pesantren can balance textual tradition with vocational training, IT literacy, and environmental education. Meanwhile, state-supported pesantren often benefit from government grants that facilitate innovation, whereas independent pesantren may face financial or ideological constraints that limit their capacity for institutional reform. Recognizing this institutional diversity helps avoid essentializing the pesantren experience and reveals the differentiated pathways through which these institutions negotiate relevance in the modern era.

One of the most pressing challenges faced by pesantren is globalization, which has introduced both opportunities and threats. On the one hand, globalization offers access to modern knowledge, technological advancements, and cross-cultural interactions. On the other, it exposes pesantren students to external ideologies and practices that may clash with traditional Islamic teachings. Balancing these influences while preserving core values has become a critical concern for pesantren leaders.[37]

While pesantren are often celebrated as bastions of religious moderation, it is important to recognize that their relationship with radicalism is not monolithic. Research and government reports have revealed that a small number of pesantren in Indonesia have been linked to Salafi-jihadi networks or have disseminated exclusivist ideologies under the guise of Islamic

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[37] Firmanda Taufiq, "From Traditionality to Modernity: How the Ma'had Aly Contributes to Muslim Society in Indonesia," *Muslim Education Review* 3, no. 2 (December 31, 2024): 386–403, https://doi.org/10.56529/mer.v3i2.320.

purification.[38] In response, the Indonesian government—through institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and BNPT—has implemented deradicalization programs targeting educational institutions, including pesantren, that show signs of ideological extremism. These include curriculum reform, teacher certification, and the promotion of national values through a Pancasila-based moderation framework. Acknowledging this complexity allows for a more honest and nuanced understanding of pesantren, highlighting not only their capacity for moderation but also their vulnerability to politicized or hardline appropriations of Islam.

Radicalism, fueled by extremist ideologies, poses another significant challenge to pesantren. While pesantren have historically served as bastions of moderation, the proliferation of radical narratives in online and offline spaces has put their students at risk of indoctrination.[39] Radical groups often target young minds by exploiting gaps in religious education, emphasizing exclusivist interpretations of Islam that contradict pesantren's commitment to inclusivity and tolerance.[40]

To counter radicalism, pesantren must strengthen their curriculum and pedagogy to emphasize the principles of wasatiyyah (moderation), rahmatan lil alamin (mercy for all creation), and tasamuh (tolerance). Educational programs that instill critical thinking and promote interfaith dialogue are essential. These efforts not only safeguard students from radical influences but also empower them to become ambassadors of moderation within their communities.[41]

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[38] Alinea, "Pesantren radikal versi BNPT," https://www.alinea.id, accessed April 8, 2025, https://www.alinea.id/infografis/pesantren-radikal-versi-bnpt-b2feP9BiO.

[39] Noorhaidi Hasan, "The Failure of the Wahhabi Campaign: Transnational Islam and the Salafi Madrasa in Post-9/11 Indonesia," *South East Asia Research* 18, no. 4 (2010): 675–705.

[40] Tedi Rohadi, "Deradicalization Through Multicultural and Local Wisdom Literacies Based Teaching Model at Salaf and Kholaf Pesantren in West Java," *Ijtimā'iyya* 2, no. 1 (March 1, 2017), https://ejournal.uinsaizu.ac.id/index.php/ijtimaiyya/article/view/1050.

[41] Ahmad Najib Burhani, "Al-Tawassuṭ Wa-l I'tidāl: The NU and Moderatism in Indonesian Islam," *Asian Journal of Social Science* 40, no. 5/6 (2012): 564–81.

The need for educational innovation is another area where pesantren must adapt to maintain their relevance. Traditional learning methods, such as rote memorization of classical texts, though valuable, may not fully equip students with the skills needed to thrive in a modern, knowledge-driven economy. Incorporating modern pedagogical methods, including experiential learning and digital literacy, is imperative to bridge this gap.[42]

Digital technology has become a transformative tool for pesantren in addressing these challenges. Many pesantren are integrating online platforms, e-learning modules, and digital resources into their educational frameworks. By embracing technology,[43] pesantren can provide students with access to diverse knowledge sources while maintaining control over the content to ensure alignment with Islamic values.

Another innovative approach involves vocational training programs. Recognizing the need to equip students with practical skills, pesantren has introduced courses in areas such as entrepreneurship, information technology, and sustainable agriculture.[44] These programs not only enhance students' employability but also promote self-reliance and contribute to the development of their community.

Community engagement also plays a pivotal role in navigating contemporary challenges. Pesantren are increasingly positioning themselves as centers of social and cultural activity, fostering connections with local communities through initiatives such as interfaith dialogues, charity programs, and disaster relief

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[42] Mohammad Thoha and Abd Hannan, "Modernization of Education Governance Based on Accelerative Paradigm Among Pesantren Communities in Madura, Indonesia," *Ulumuna* 26, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 417–46, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v26i2.515.

[43] Hendri Hermawan Adinugraha, Maaz Ud Din, and Ali Muhtarom, "The Spirituality of Rural Muslim Communities through Jam'iyyah Nahdlatul Ulama Routine Activities," *Prosperity* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 2021): 1–14, https://doi.org/10.21580/prosperity.2021.1.1.7896.

[44] Azra, Afrianty, and Hefner, "Pesantren and Madrasa."

efforts. These activities reinforce pesantren's role as agents of social harmony and resilience.[45]

Moreover, pesantren are addressing gender inclusivity by promoting equal opportunities for female students. Initiatives that encourage women's participation in leadership roles and provide access to education tailored to their needs reflect pesantren's commitment to inclusivity. This shift challenges traditional gender norms and demonstrates pesantren's adaptability in a rapidly evolving society.[46]

Government support and partnerships with civil society organizations further bolster pesantren's capacity to address contemporary challenges. Policies that provide funding for infrastructure development, teacher training, and curriculum modernization are crucial. Collaborative efforts between pesantren and organizations specializing in counter-radicalism and educational reform amplify their impact.[47]

Despite these efforts, challenges remain. Financial constraints, resistance to change within traditionalist circles, and disparities in resource allocation across pesantren hinder their progress. Addressing these systemic issues requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders to ensure that pesantren continue to thrive as centers of Islamic moderation and modern education.[48]

In conclusion, pesantren's response to contemporary challenges reflects their resilience and adaptability. By embracing

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[45] Faried F. Saenong, "Nahdlatul Ulama (NU): A Grassroots Movement Advocating Moderate Islam," in *Handbook of Islamic Sects and Movements*, ed. Muhammad Afzal Upal and Carole M. Cusack (Brill, 2021), 129–50, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv1v7zbv8.11.

[46] Yanwar Pribadi, "RELIGIOUS NETWORKS IN MADURA Pesantren, Nahdlatul Ulama and Kiai as the Core of Santri Culture," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 51, no. 1 (July 1, 2013): 1–32, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2013.511.1-32.

[47] Rendy Wadipalapa, "Countering the Communist Imaginary: The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Indonesia's 2014 and 2019 Presidential Elections," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 43, no. 3 (2021): 557–84.

[48] Eka Srimulyani, "Santriwati's Life: Religious Femininity in Pesantren Education," in *Women from Traditional Islamic Educational Institutions in Indonesia*, Negotiating Public Spaces (Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 115–34, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n2fm.10.

educational innovation, countering radicalism, and leveraging globalization constructively, pesantren are reaffirming their role as pillars of Islamic moderation. These transformative efforts underscore their potential to contribute significantly to Indonesia's socio-religious harmony and the global discourse on moderate Islam.

Bridging Tradition and Modernity

Pesantren, as bastions of Islamic education in Indonesia, have demonstrated remarkable adaptability in bridging their traditional foundations with the demands of modernity. This adaptability is essential for their continued relevance in an era marked by rapid societal and technological changes. By modernizing their curricula, integrating technology, and fostering community initiatives, pesantren are ensuring that their students are well-equipped to navigate contemporary challenges while remaining grounded in Islamic values.[49]

One of the most prominent strategies for bridging tradition and modernity in pesantren is the modernization of their curriculum. Historically focused on classical Islamic texts such as *Kitab Kuning*, many pesantren have expanded their syllabi to include subjects like science, technology, and foreign languages.[50] This integration of modern disciplines enables pesantren graduates to contribute to diverse fields beyond religious scholarship, fostering a generation of students who are both spiritually grounded and professionally competent.[51]

Another critical dimension of curriculum modernization is the inclusion of critical thinking and problem-solving skills in the learning process. Traditionally, rote memorization was the

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[49] Florian Pohl, "Islamic Education and Civil Society: Reflections on the Pesantren Tradition in Contemporary Indonesia," *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 389–409, https://doi.org/10.1086/503882.

[50] Martin Van Bruinessen, "Kitab Kuning; Books in Arabic Script Used in the Pesantren Milieu," *Kitlv-Journals.Nl* 146 (1990): 226–69.

[51] Muhamad Arif, Makmur Harun, and Mohd Kasturi Nor bin Abd Aziz, "A Systematic Review Trend of Learning Methods for Reading the Kitab Kuning at Pesantren (2000-2022)," *Journal of Islamic Civilization* 4, no. 2 (January 1, 2023), https://doi.org/10.33086/jic.v4i2.3578.

hallmark of pesantren education. While this method ensured deep engagement with classical texts, it often did not emphasize analytical and practical applications. Modern pesantren have shifted towards interactive pedagogies, encouraging students to question, analyze, and apply Islamic principles to contemporary issues such as environmental sustainability, human rights, and technological ethics.[52]

The integration of technology has also become a cornerstone of pesantren's innovative strategies. Digital tools are now used to facilitate teaching and learning, with online platforms providing access to a wide range of global resources. Some pesantren have adopted e-learning platforms, allowing students to engage with educational content beyond the physical classroom.[53] This approach not only broadens their horizons but also ensures continuity in learning during disruptions, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic.[54]

Moreover, technology integration in pesantren extends beyond education. Many institutions have implemented digital administration systems to streamline operations such as enrollment, attendance, and communication with parents. By adopting such systems, pesantren are enhancing their operational efficiency while presenting themselves as modern educational institutions capable of competing with secular schools.[55]

Community engagement initiatives are another area where pesantren have made significant innovations. These programs serve as a bridge between the pesantren and the broader

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[52] Didin Nurul Rosidin, "PESANTREN AND MODERNITY IN INDONESIA: MA'HAD ALY OF KUNINGAN," *Hunafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 9, no. 2 (December 1, 2012): 219–44.

[53] Martin Van Bruinessen, "KITAB KUNING: BOOKS IN ARABIC SCRIPT USED IN THE PESANTREN MILIEU: Comments on a New Collection in the KITLV Library," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 146, no. 2/3 (1990): 226–69.

[54] Rosidin Rosidin et al., "PESANTREN TANGGUH AS MODERATE ISLAMIC EDUCATION INSTITUTION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC," *Analisa* 7, no. 1 (July 1, 2022): 55–72, https://doi.org/10.18784/analisa.v7i1.1639.

[55] Ronald A. Lukens-Bull, "Two Sides of the Same Coin: Modernity and Tradition in Islamic Education in Indonesia," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (2001): 350–72.

community, emphasizing the importance of social responsibility. For instance, pesantren often organize charity drives, health campaigns, and disaster relief efforts, positioning themselves as pivotal community centers that address societal needs.[56]

Vocational training is another innovative approach employed by pesantren to prepare their students for real-world challenges. Many pesantren now offer skills training in areas such as agriculture, entrepreneurship, and information technology. These programs align with pesantren's holistic philosophy of education, which emphasizes not just intellectual growth but also practical and economic self-sufficiency.[57]

In addition, pesantren have actively fostered interfaith and intercommunity dialogues as part of their community engagement efforts. Such initiatives highlight their commitment to Islamic moderation and inclusivity.[58] By hosting workshops, seminars, and cultural exchange programs, pesantren creates spaces for mutual understanding and collaboration between diverse groups, countering the narratives of exclusivity and radicalism.[59]

The integration of arts and culture into pesantren activities is another strategy that bridges the gap between tradition and modernity. Many pesantren encourage students to explore Islamic art forms such as calligraphy, nasheed (Islamic songs), and theater performances.[60] These activities provide creative outlets for

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[56] Imam Mujahid, "Islamic Orthodoxy-Based Character Education: Creating Moderate Muslim in a Modern Pesantren in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 185–212, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.185-212.

[57] Mahmud Yunus Mustofa, Abdurrahman Mas'ud, and Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth, "Hybrid Pesantren in Indonesia; Analyzing the Transformation of Islamic Religious Education in the Digital Age," *Al-Tadzkiyyah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 14, no. 1 (June 1, 2023): 79–104, https://doi.org/10.24042/atjpi.v14i1.16928.

[58] Ahmad Suradi et al., "Designing the Pesantren Curriculum to Counter Radicalism: Study on Pondok Pesantren Wali Songo Ngabar Ponorogo," *Ulul Albab* 22, no. 1 (July 1, 2021): 49–68, https://doi.org/10.18860/ua.v22i1.11212.

[59] Hanun Asrohah, "THE DYNAMICS OF PESANTREN: Responses toward Modernity and Mechanism in Organizing Transformation," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 5, no. 1 (June 1, 2011): 66–90, https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2011.5.1.66-90.

[60] Muhammad Nasir and Muhammad Khairul Rijal, "Keeping the Middle Path: Mainstreaming Religious Moderation through Islamic Higher Education

students while reinforcing their cultural identity and Islamic values.

Finally, pesantren's strategic partnerships with external organizations, including government bodies, NGOs, and international educational institutions, demonstrate their openness to collaboration. These partnerships facilitate the sharing of resources, capacity building, and exposure to global best practices. Through such collaborations, pesantren not only strengthen their institutional capacities but also contribute to broader educational and societal goals.[61]

In conclusion, the innovative strategies adopted by pesantren underscore their commitment to remaining relevant and impactful in a rapidly changing world. By modernizing curricula, integrating technology, and engaging with communities, pesantren exemplify how traditional institutions can evolve to meet contemporary challenges. These efforts not only enhance the quality of education but also solidify pesantren's role as pivotal agents of moderation, inclusivity, and social harmony in Indonesia.

Pesantren as Agents of Social Harmony: Countering Radicalism and Building Resilience

Pesantren, as integral pillars of Indonesia's Islamic education system, has played a crucial role in fostering social harmony by promoting tolerance and inclusivity.[62] Rooted in the values of *Aswaja*, pesantren provides a unique platform for shaping a balanced and moderate Islamic identity. Through their teachings, these institutions counter radical ideologies and build resilience among students and communities, ensuring that Islam remains a force for unity rather than division.[63]

Institutions in Indonesia," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 213–41, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.213-241.

[61] Lukens-Bull, "Two Sides of the Same Coin."

[62] Fahrurrazi, "To Be Ecological Is to Become Pluralist: Inclusive Religious Education at the Eco-Pesantren Ath-Thaariq, West Java," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 9, no. 1 (2019): 23–42, https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.29.1.3286453.

[63] Muhammad Fauzinuddin Faiz, "Nahdlatul Ulama's Rejection of the Islamic Caliphate and Emphasis on Synergy between Religion and State for a Just and Harmonious World Order," *Qureta*, 2023, http://digilib.uinkhas.ac.id/22839/.

One of the defining features of pesantren is their emphasis on communal living, which nurtures mutual respect and understanding among diverse individuals. Students in pesantren, or santri, come from various socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, creating a microcosm of Indonesia's plural society. This environment fosters interpersonal bonds that transcend differences, promoting an ethos of tolerance and mutual support that extends beyond the immediate community.[64]

The curriculum of pesantren further reinforces their role in countering radicalism. By focusing on classical Islamic texts and their contextual interpretation, pesantren instill a deep understanding of Islamic values that emphasize peace and coexistence. These teachings are juxtaposed with critical engagement with contemporary issues, enabling students to address modern challenges without succumbing to ideological extremism. This balanced approach equips santri with intellectual tools to resist radical narratives.[65]

In addition to their internal educational processes, pesantren actively engage with their surrounding communities to promote social harmony. Many pesantren organize outreach programs, such as community dialogues, interfaith forums, and public discussions, to address potential sources of conflict and misunderstanding. These initiatives position pesantren as mediators in bridging divides, ensuring that diverse communities coexist peacefully.[66]

Pesantren also plays a proactive role in addressing the root causes of radicalization, including economic disparities and inadequate education. Many pesantren provide vocational training

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[64] Magdalena Magdalena, Asnah Asnah, and Bestari Endayana, "Actualization of Religious Moderation Values In Islamic Religious Education Teachers In Madrasah," *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 001 (February 1, 2024), https://doi.org/10.30868/ei.v12i001.5419.

[65] Nadia Fairuza Azzahra and Felippa Amanta, "Promoting Digital Literacy Skill for Students through Improved School Curriculum" (Center for Indonesian Policy Studies, 2021), https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep62369.

[66] Ronald Lukens-Bull, "A Peaceful Jihad in a Globalizing World," in *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java*, ed. Ronald Lukens-Bull (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), 119–32, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403980298_6.

and economic empowerment programs for underprivileged communities. By offering skills training and entrepreneurial opportunities, pesantren reduces the vulnerability of marginalized groups to radical recruitment, contributing to societal resilience against extremism.[67]

A significant aspect of pesantren's contribution lies in their emphasis on the principle of *wasatiyyah*, or moderation. This principle is embedded in their pedagogy, which stresses a middle-path approach in religious interpretation and practice. By rejecting both rigid literalism and excessive liberalism, pesantren cultivates a nuanced understanding of Islam that respects diversity and encourages dialogue. This approach strengthens the community's ability to counter divisive narratives.[68]

In tackling radicalism, pesantren have also embraced technological advancements to broaden their reach and influence. Many pesantren use digital platforms to disseminate moderate Islamic teachings, counter extremist propaganda, and engage with younger audiences. This digital engagement enables pesantren to extend their impact beyond their physical boundaries, influencing broader societal discourses on religious tolerance and moderation.[69]

Leadership within pesantren is another vital factor in their role as agents of social harmony. *Kyai* (religious leaders) and *ustadh* (teachers) serve as moral exemplars, demonstrating the values of humility, patience, and inclusivity. Their influence often extends beyond the pesantren, shaping community attitudes and fostering a culture of respect and coexistence. Their credibility and moral

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[67] Ronald Lukens-Bull, "'Politics' by Other Means: Using Education to Negotiate Change," in *A Peaceful Jihad: Negotiating Identity and Modernity in Muslim Java*, ed. Ronald Lukens-Bull (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2005), 47–70, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403980298_3.

[68] Taufiq bin Radja Nurul Bahri, "Understanding Islamic Moderation: The Wasatiyya Imperative," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 4, no. 9 (2012): 18–20.

[69] Muhammad Irfan Helmy, Ahmad Darojat Jumadil Kubro, and Muhamad Ali, "The Understanding of Islamic Moderation (Wasatiyyah al-Islam) and the Hadiths on Inter-Religious Relations in the Javanese Pesantrens," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 2 (December 1, 2021): 377–401, https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i2.351-376.

authority make them effective agents in countering extremist ideologies.[70]

The pesantren system also facilitates collaborations with government and civil society organizations to amplify their efforts in countering radicalism. Joint initiatives, such as anti-radicalization campaigns, interfaith activities, and peace-building programs, highlight the synergistic potential of pesantren in addressing complex societal challenges. These collaborations underscore pesantren's strategic role in fostering resilience and social cohesion.[71]

Fieldwork observations in East Java highlight the transformative impact of pesantren in communities marked by historical tensions. For instance, pesantren-led initiatives, such as communal prayers and cultural events, have been instrumental in diffusing inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts. By positioning themselves as neutral grounds for dialogue, pesantren create safe spaces for reconciliation and trust-building among diverse groups.[72]

This reconciliatory function of pesantren becomes even more evident when viewed through the diversity of institutional models observed during fieldwork. The study was conducted across three pesantren in East Java, each representing a distinct typology within Indonesia's Islamic education system and reflecting different modalities of engagement with issues of harmony and nationhood. Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid in Probolinggo exemplifies the *salafiyah* (traditionalist) model, characterized by a strong emphasis on classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), a *kyai*-centered authority structure, and a pedagogical orientation rooted in the *Aswaja* tradition. Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor in Ponorogo represents the *khalafiyah* (modernist) model, integrating Islamic and general education while promoting linguistic

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[70] Ahmad Faisal et al., "Strengthening Religious Moderatism through the Traditional Authority of Kiai in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (December 1, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2150450.

[71] Hadiyanto et al., "Moderation Patterns of Pesantren in Indonesia."

[72] M. Nurul Ikhsan Saleh et al., "Islamic Boarding School and the Deradicalization Efforts of Islamic Education in Madura," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (May 1, 2020): 259–86, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2019.82.259-286.

proficiency, discipline, leadership, and a global outlook. Meanwhile, Pondok Pesantren Terpadu Al-Kamal in Blitar illustrates a hybrid or integrative model that combines traditional Islamic learning with modern curricula, vocational training, and active civic engagement. These three pesantren, through their respective institutional cultures, offer a representative spectrum of how Islamic moderation is promoted through both traditional and progressive educational pathways, contributing significantly to social cohesion and the cultivation of inclusive religious identity.

Each pesantren embodies a distinctive approach to promoting harmony (*ukhuwah*) and Indonesian national identity, shaped by their educational philosophy and socio-religious orientation. At Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, religious moderation is fostered through bahsul masail diniyah, which addresses contemporary national issues, as well as civic education grounded in Pancasila and NU's Khittah 1926. Darussalam Gontor, while institutionally modern and independent, instills values of tolerance, patriotism, and leadership through its emphasis on Islamic universalism and structured student governance that transcends ethnic and regional boundaries. Meanwhile, Al-Kamal Blitar, as a hybrid pesantren, integrates multicultural dialogue, community service, and interfaith collaboration into its formal curriculum and extracurricular programs. Across these institutions, national unity and Islamic ethical pluralism are not merely taught as abstract principles. However, they are internalized through participatory rituals, community outreach, and institutional culture that align Islam with the ideals of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and a peaceful, inclusive Indonesian society.

Moreover, pesantren contributes to the prevention of extremism by promoting a sense of national identity rooted in Islamic values and Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational philosophy. This integration of religious and national values ensures that santri grows up with a strong sense of civic responsibility, viewing

diversity as a strength rather than a threat. Such an orientation reinforces societal resilience against divisive ideologies.[73]

Critically, pesantren's approach to fostering harmony is not limited to religious instruction but extends to practical, everyday interactions. By nurturing values of empathy, cooperation, and shared responsibility, pesantren instill a way of life that prioritizes collective well-being. This holistic approach ensures that pesantren's impact is not confined to their alumni but radiates across generations and communities.[74]

Reimagining the Future: The Role of Pesantren in Shaping a Moderate Islamic Society

Pesantren, as longstanding institutions in Indonesia's educational and spiritual landscape, hold a critical role in shaping a moderate Islamic society. This role extends beyond their traditional function as centers of religious learning, positioning them as catalysts for social harmony and inclusivity. By adapting to contemporary challenges while preserving their foundational values, pesantren can ensure their relevance and impact in fostering moderation within a rapidly changing world.[75]

The first step in this transformation is revisiting the curriculum. Pesantren must strike a balance between traditional Islamic teachings and modern educational frameworks. This integration ensures that students are equipped not only with religious knowledge but also with the critical thinking skills needed to engage with contemporary societal issues. For instance, embedding topics such as human rights, environmental ethics, and

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[73] Fani Farida, "The Modernization Practices of Pesantrens in Salatiga," *Attarbiyah: Journal of Islamic Culture and Education* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 2018): 153–73.

[74] Abdullah Saeed, "Living in a Religiously Plural Society: A Muslim Perspective on Being Inclusive Today" (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2019), https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep40161.

[75] Fairuz, "Integrative Values of Sufism and Nationalism Within Santri Communities at Pondok Pesantren Daarul Ulum Wal Ḥikam Yogyakarta (Leadership and Character Building Analysis)."

digital literacy within the curriculum allows students to contextualize their religious values within the modern world.[76]

Technology plays a crucial role in enabling this transformation. Digital tools and platforms can enhance learning experiences, making Islamic studies accessible and engaging for younger generations. Online classes, virtual libraries, and digital storytelling methods can help bridge the gap between traditional pesantren teaching methods and the expectations of digitally native students. This adoption of technology also enables pesantren to reach broader audiences, promoting moderation beyond their physical campuses.[77]

Another critical factor is fostering intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Pesantren can serve as hubs for building understanding between diverse communities. By organizing workshops, forums, and exchanges with other religious or cultural groups, pesantren students can develop a deeper appreciation for pluralism. Such initiatives prepare students to navigate and contribute positively to Indonesia's multicultural society while countering narratives of exclusivity and intolerance.[78]

The leadership model in pesantren also requires reimagining. Modern pesantren leaders need to act as visionaries, bridging the gap between tradition and progress. Training programs for *kyai* (religious leaders) and *ustadh* (teachers) can focus on enhancing leadership skills, equipping them with tools to guide their institutions effectively in the face of modern challenges. A progressive leadership style can inspire confidence and attract support from diverse stakeholders.[79]

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[76] S. Mahmudah Noorhayati, "REDESAIN PARADIGMA PENDIDIKAN ISLAM TOLERAN DAN PLURALIS DI PONDOK PESANTREN (Studi Konstruktivisme Sikap Kiai Dan Sistem Nilai Di Pondok Pesantren Nurul Jadid, Paiton, Probolinggo)," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam (Journal of Islamic Education Studies)* 5, no. 1 (May 1, 2017): 1–20, https://doi.org/10.15642/jpai.2017.5.1.1-20.

[77] Ardiansyah, "Pesantren Hybrid Worldview."

[78] Maulana Mukhlis, Ahmad Robi Ulzikri, and Angger Widianto, "The Implementation of Nahdlatul Ulama's Moderation Philosophy in Treating Islamic Fundamentalism in Bandar Lampung," *Al-Tahrir* 21, no. 1 (April 1, 2021): 1–34, https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v21i1.2679.

[79] Robert Mason, "Indonesia and Malaysia: Transnationalism and Islamic Leadership," in *Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates*, Foreign Policy and

Social engagement is another dimension where pesantren can contribute to societal harmony. Initiatives such as community service projects, disaster relief programs, and social entrepreneurship can demonstrate Islamic values in action. These efforts not only foster goodwill but also showcase the tangible benefits of moderate Islam to wider communities, strengthening pesantren's reputation as pillars of societal progress. These initiatives align closely with the values of harmony and ethical living emphasized in the works of Al-Ghazali, a prominent Islamic scholar whose teachings are widely implemented in many pesantren.[80] Al-Ghazali's emphasis on virtues such as compassion, justice, and mutual support resonates with the ethos of pesantren in promoting societal cohesion. His conceptualization of *tawazun* (balance) and *tasamuh* (tolerance) provides a robust framework for nurturing peaceful coexistence and community welfare. By operationalizing these values through practical engagements, pesantren not only uphold their spiritual and intellectual legacy but also affirm their role as agents of social harmony and transformative action in contemporary society.[81]

Significantly, pesantren must strengthen their internal capacity to combat radicalism. A comprehensive strategy involving early detection of extremist tendencies, robust ideological education, and effective pastoral care can safeguard pesantren environments from becoming breeding grounds for intolerance. This proactive approach ensures that students are not only knowledgeable but also resilient against radical influences.[82]

In the broader context, pesantren should actively participate in shaping public policy. Collaborating with government bodies,

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Strategic Alliances in an Uncertain World (Manchester University Press, 2023), 265–85, https://www.jstor.org/stable/jj.21995902.19.

[80] 15/06/2025 18:*04:00*

[81] Pahri Siregar et al., "Imam Al-Ghazali's Concept of Religious Counseling in Forming Moderate Attitudes," *Jurnal Madania* 28, no. 1 (July 1, 2024): 103–12, https://doi.org/10.29300/madania.v28i1.4440.

[82] Shuhadak Shuhadak et al., "Development of Gus Dur's Perspective Religious Moderation Education Module at Ma'had Al-Jami'ah UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang," *JPPI (Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Indonesia)* 10, no. 1 (February 1, 2024): 44–51, https://doi.org/10.29210/020242306.

educational organizations, and civil society, pesantren can contribute to the creation of policies that promote religious moderation. Their grassroots connections and credibility make them valuable partners in initiatives addressing issues such as extremism, inequality, and social cohesion.[83]

Furthermore, pesantren needs to focus on gender inclusivity. While many pesantren already provide education for both male and female students, enhancing programs that promote gender equality within Islamic frameworks is crucial. By empowering female students and fostering their leadership potential, pesantren can make a significant contribution to building a more equitable society.

Global engagement also offers a promising pathway for pesantren to amplify their influence. Establishing partnerships with international Islamic organizations and educational institutions can foster an exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices. This global connectivity allows pesantren to learn from and contribute to worldwide efforts in promoting Islamic moderation.

The economic dimension of pesantren also holds untapped potential. Through initiatives like vocational training and small business incubation, pesantren can support economic development in their surrounding communities. These activities not only address poverty but also reinforce pesantren's role as drivers of social and economic empowerment.

Moreover, pesantren's approach to environmental sustainability can serve as a model for other institutions. By incorporating Islamic environmental ethics into their practices, pesantren can promote sustainable living while underscoring the relevance of Islamic teachings to contemporary global challenges, such as climate change.

While pesantren adapt and innovate, they must remain rooted in their unique identity. The values of *Aswaja*, which emphasize balance, tolerance, and inclusivity, provide a robust foundation for

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[83] Hasse Jubba et al., "The Contestation between Conservative and Moderate Muslims in Promoting Islamic Moderatism in Indonesia," *Cogent Social Sciences* 8, no. 1 (December 1, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2116162.

pesantren to engage with modernity without losing their essence. By staying true to these values, pesantren can maintain their authenticity and moral authority.[84]

The future of pesantren also depends on their ability to attract and retain talented educators. Offering competitive benefits, professional development opportunities, and a supportive work environment can help pesantren sustain high teaching standards. This focus on human resources ensures that students receive a quality education that reflects both traditional wisdom and modern insights.[85]

Lastly, the narrative surrounding pesantren must be reimagined to appeal to younger generations. Through storytelling, social media campaigns, and community outreach, pesantren can showcase their transformative impact on individuals and society. These efforts can inspire pride and attract support from both local and global audiences.

Conclusion

This study has explored the transformative role of pesantren in shaping a moderate Islamic society within Indonesia's pluralistic and dynamic socio-religious context. By integrating epistemological reconstruction, institutional innovation, and social engagement, pesantren demonstrate their adaptability to the demands of modernity while maintaining fidelity to Islamic tradition. The findings affirm that pesantren not only preserves core religious values but also cultivates inclusive worldviews through critical pedagogy, environmental ethics, interfaith dialogue, and civic initiatives. These efforts position pesantren as strategic institutions for countering radical ideologies and promoting harmony across diverse social and religious groups.

The leadership of progressive *kyai* has proven instrumental in guiding pesantren toward greater societal relevance, particularly through initiatives that support gender equity, vocational training,

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[84] Habib Maulana Maslahul Adi, "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Toleransi Dalam Kegiatan Bahs Al-Masāil Di Pesantren Tradisional," *Asatiza* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 20–32, https://doi.org/10.46963/asatiza.v3i1.438.

[85] Azra, Afrianty, and Hefner, "Pesantren and Madrasa."

and social entrepreneurship. In light of these findings, it is recommended that policymakers and stakeholders actively support pesantren as partners in fostering national resilience and religious moderation. Enhancing digital infrastructure, strengthening collaboration with civil society, and embedding pluralist values into formal curricula are essential next steps for maximizing the transformative potential of pesantren. Rather than isolating tradition from modernity, pesantren offers a working model of how both can be synthesized to serve national and global peace-building efforts.

Further research should explore the specific mechanisms through which pesantren implement and measure the impact of their moderation strategies, including the use of digital media and interfaith initiatives. Comparative studies across regions and institutional types would also enrich our understanding of best practices. At the same time, longitudinal research on alumni trajectories could illuminate pesantren's long-term contributions to socioeconomic and ideological resilience.

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Adi, Habib Maulana Maslahul. "Nilai-Nilai Pendidikan Toleransi Dalam Kegiatan Bahs Al-Masāil Di Pesantren Tradisional." *Asatiza* 3, no. 1 (January 1, 2022): 20–32. https://doi.org/10.46963/asatiza.v3i1.438.

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