



The Centrality of Kyai in Establishing Moderate Understandings in *Salafiyah Pesantren*

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Received: 22-02-2024

Revised: 20-08-2024

Accepted: 26-10-2024

Abstract

The yellow book (*kitab kuning*) as a compulsory curriculum in Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools also includes intolerant teachings, especially in the chapters on *jihad* and *hudud*. However, the students at this *Pesantren* showed extraordinary tolerance and avoided cases of religious violence. This sketch shows that the students did not just learn and explicitly follow the teachings of centuries-old religious texts. This article reveals the guidance of kyai (Islamic religious leaders) in shaping students' tolerance attitude by interpreting the yellow book. With a qualitative approach in the form of a case study, this study interviews the kyai who act as supervisors and teachers at the Sabilurrosyad Islamic Boarding School in Malang. The study's findings revealed that the kyai consistently guided their students in understanding classical texts based on their socio-cultural background by emphasizing obedience to the Government, respecting local wisdom, considering social conditions, and maintaining tolerance of other religions. In conclusion, kyai plays an important role as an interpreter of the yellow book so that students have a moderate understanding.

Keywords: Intolerance, Yellow Book, Pesantren, Moderation

Abstrak

Kitab kuning sebagai kurikulum wajib di pesantren Salafiyah juga mencakup ajaran-ajaran yang intoleran, terutama dalam bab jihad dan hudud. Namun, para santri di pesantren ini menunjukkan toleransi yang luar biasa dan menghindari kasus kekerasan agama. Sketsa ini menunjukkan bahwa para santri tidak sekadar mempelajari dan secara eksplisit mengikuti ajaran-ajaran teks keagamaan yang berusia berabad-abad. Artikel ini mengungkap bimbingan kyai (pemimpin agama Islam) dalam membentuk sikap toleransi para santri melalui interpretasi kitab kuning. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif berjenis studi kasus, penelitian ini mewawancarai para kyai yang berperan sebagai pembimbing dan guru di pesantren Sabilurrosyad Malang. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa para kyai secara konsisten membimbing para santri mereka dalam memahami teks klasik berdasarkan latar belakang sosial-budaya mereka, dengan menekankan ketaatan kepada pemerintah, menghormati kearifan lokal, mempertimbangkan kondisi sosial, dan menjaga toleransi terhadap agama lain. Sebagai kesimpulan, kyai memainkan peran penting sebagai penafsir kitab kuning sehingga santri memiliki pemahaman yang moderat.

Kata kunci: Intoleransi, Kitab Kuning, Pesantren, Moderasi

INTRODUCTION

Salafiyah, or traditional Islamic boarding schools, were initially established as centers for Islamic propagation. These boarding schools are also termed traditional because *they* have been integrated into Indonesian community life for centuries. Initially, the typology of Islamic boarding schools was limited to *Salafiyah* boarding schools. However, over time, various typologies have emerged, including *Salafiyah*, modern, Islamist, entrepreneurial, integrated, and many others. Presently, *Salafiyah* boarding schools are recognized as institutions within the national education system.¹ *Santri* from *Salafiyah* Islamic boarding schools demonstrate high levels of tolerance. They are rarely associated with violence or the imposition of teachings on other religions or groups. When religious violence is blamed on Islamic boarding schools, it is almost certain that the institution is not a *Salafiyah* Islamic boarding school.²

It is suspected that *pesantren* is one of the breeding grounds for radicalism.³ In 2016, BNPT (National Counterterrorism Agency) mentioned 19 *pesantren* with indications of radicalism⁴. In 2022, BNPT reported an alarming increase, stating that 119 *pesantren* were suspected to be linked to the ISIS network.⁵ Regardless of the debates surrounding these findings, it is crucial to contemplate why radicalization occurs in *pesantren*. There must be triggers that can be traced, such as the curriculum taught, doctrines from the caretakers, rigid interpretations of religious texts, or other contributing factors. In studies on radicalism, there is often an assumption that religious texts are the primary factor contributing to the growth of radicalism.⁶ Hardline Islamic movements interpret Islam strictly based on textual sources. They typically focus solely on the texts without considering past religious doctrines' social, historical, political, and rational contexts. They idealize the past glory of Islam without any interpretation.⁷

Salafiyah Islamic boarding schools' main curriculum revolves around yellow books.⁸ The term refers to classic texts taught in Islamic boarding schools covering various scholarly

¹ H. Indra et al., "Salafiyah Pesantren and Management Prophecy in Digital 4.0 Era," *Journal of Advanced Research in Dynamical and Control Systems* 12, no. 2 (2020): 2595, <https://doi.org/10.5373/JARDCS/V12I2/S20201308>.

² Muhammad Alqadri Burga and Muljono Damopolii, "Reinforcing Religious Moderation through Local Culture-Based Pesantren," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 145–62, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i2.19879>; Muhammad Rizqi Kader, Muhammad Husnur Rofiq, and Muhammad Anas Ma'arif, "Religious Moderation Education Strategy at the Mualaf Assembly," *At-Tadzkir: Islamic Education Journal* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 2024): 35–46, <https://doi.org/10.59373/attadzkir.v3i1.46>.

³ Marzuki, Miftahuddin, and M. Murdiono, "Multicultural Education in Salaf Pesantren and Prevention of Religious Radicalism in Indonesia," *Cakrawala Pendidikan* 39, no. 1 (2020): 12, <https://doi.org/10.21831/cp.v39i1.22900>.

⁴ Pruwanto, "BNPT Umumkan 19 Pesantren Yang Digolongkan Radikal," *Tempo*, February 2, 2016, <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/741541/bnpt-umumkan-19-pesantren-yang-digolongkan-radikal>.

⁵ Matus Alfons, "BNPT Ungkap Ada 119 Ponpes Terafiliasi Jaringan ISIS, 68 Jaringan JI," *detiknews*, accessed January 24, 2024, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5915813/bnpt-ungkap-ada-119-ponpes-terafiliasi-jaringan-isis-68-jaringan-ji>.

⁶ Khalid Kamal Saim and Ahmad El-Muhammady, "Confronting Extremism and Radicalisation in Afghanistan: Educative Approach," *At-Tadzkir: Islamic Education Journal* 4, no. 1 (2025): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.59373/attadzkir.v4i1.80>; Siti Amaroh, Ari Kristin Prasetyoningrum, and Husna Husain, "Women and Investment Decision in Sharia Instruments: Moderating Effect of Financial Spirituality Orientation," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 2 (May 30, 2024): 877–98, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i2.1332>.

⁷ Jamhari, "Mapping Radical Islam in Indonesia," *Studia Islamika* 10, no. 3 (2003): 9, <https://doi.org/10.15408/sdi.v10i3.622>.

⁸ Munir and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, "Characteristics of Preserving Salafiyah Islamic Boarding School Traditions: Lessons from Indonesia and Malaysia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 1 (August 30, 2021): 70, <https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2021.101.67-88>.

disciplines. Martin van Bruinessen notes that the yellow book is widely recognized in the Islamic boarding school environment in the Nusantara region, characterized by yellow-colored paper.⁹ These books typically have explanations or commentaries (*syarah*) in the middle and are known as *matan* on the edges. The yellow book represents an intellectual heritage with distinct characteristics, playing a role in preserving human history, especially in the context of Islamic education within boarding schools that continue to exist today.¹⁰

According to Martin van Bruinessen, one of the main causes of the establishment of Islamic boarding schools is the dissemination of traditional Islam, as it is portrayed in the “kitab kuning.”¹¹ The teaching methods in *Salafiyah* Islamic boarding schools include “sorogan” and “bandongan”. The “*sorogan*” method involves private learning, where a student visits a kyai (teacher) to recite several verses from the Qur'an or a few lines from an Arabic-language book, followed by a translation into Javanese. The student then repeats the words as recited by the kyai or teacher¹².

Researcher before Martin, W.C Van den Berg, as quoted by Karel A. Steenbrink in 1886, stated that the yellow book studied in boarding schools during that time encompassed subjects such as Islamic jurisprudence (*fikih*), Arabic language, religious principles (*ushuluddin*), Sufism, and exegesis (*tafsir*)¹³. Zamakhsyari Dhofier asserted that the yellow book is one of the mandatory elements of an institution known as a *pesantren*.¹⁴ Thus, a boarding school is not considered a *pesantren* if it does not teach the yellow book. Additionally, this book in the *pesantren* curriculum covers exegesis, Qur'anic sciences (*Ulumul Qur'an*), hadith studies, creed (*Aqidah*), Islamic jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), Sufism, history (*tarikh*), Arabic Syntax, and various other teachings.¹⁵ Most of the yellow books taught in *pesantren* are the works of classical medieval scholars.¹⁶

The Yellow Book has been written for hundreds of years; for instance, the author of the *Taqrib* is Abu Suja Ahmad ibn Husen al-Ashfahani.¹⁷ This book was composed around 800

⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, *Kitab Kuning, Pesantren Dan Tarekat: Tradisi-Tradisi Islam Di Indonesia*, vol. 17 (Bandung: Mizan, 1995).

¹⁰ Martin Bruinessen, “Pesantren and Kitab Kuning: Continuity and Change in a Tradition of Religious Learning,” 1994.

¹¹ Martin 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 / Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences of Southeast Asia* 146, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 226–69, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003218>.

¹² Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi pesantren: studi pandangan hidup kyai dan visinya mengenai masa depan Indonesia*, Cet. 8 rev (Jakarta: LP3ES, 2011), 28.

¹³ Karel A. Steenbrink, *Beberapa Aspek Tentang Islam di Indonesia Abad Ke-19* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1984), 155-158.

¹⁴ Siti Aisyah et al., “Kiai Leadership Concept in The Scope of Pesantren Organizational Culture,” *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 3, no. 1 (2022): 40–59, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v3i1.106>.

¹⁵ Mursal Aziz et al., “Tahfidzul Qur'an Curriculum Media Innovation in Islamic Boarding Schools,” *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 2 (April 2, 2024): 235–49, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v5i2.970>; Abdul Aziz et al., “Learning Arabic Pegon for Non-Javanese Santri at Pesantren,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 113–26, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i2.19581>.

¹⁶ Zamakhsyari Dhofier, *Tradisi Pesantren: Studi tentang Pandangan Hidup Kyai* (Jakarta: LP3ES1982)

¹⁷ Mujahid Ansori, “Pengembangan Kurikulum Madrasah Di Pesantren,” *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 1 (2020): 41–50, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v1i1.32>.

years ago.¹⁸ The considerable time gap between the writing of these texts and the present has significant consequences for the produced content. Scholars, in writing the Yellow Book, could not detach themselves from their time's social, political, and cultural situations. Therefore, their writings may contain teachings that sometimes appear tolerant and sometimes intolerant.¹⁹

Their writings depict this condition, which may persuade readers to understand the written text. For example, the Taqrib explains that the punishment for apostasy is death and that those who disregard prayers are not prayed for, among other things. Similarly, the section on jihad against non-believers in the fiqh text carries a harsh and intolerant tone.²⁰

It is truly astonishing that the yellow book, which is mandatory material in *pesantren* and sometimes contains intolerant teachings, does not lead the santri (students) exposed to it towards religious radicalism. In the context of *pesantren*, this phenomenon is inseparable from the role of kyai as a guide for the *santri* in understanding religious texts. Kyai is also one of the essential components of an institution known as *pesantren*.²¹

In the *pesantren*, the kyai plays a central role as an educator, caregiver, and manager. As an educator, the kyai daily teaches the *santri*. In the role of a caregiver, the kyai oversees the *santri*, essentially replacing the role of their parents around the clock. As a manager, the kyai has full authority to manage the *pesantren*, from selecting teachers to designing buildings and curriculum. The kyai not only imparts lessons but also sets an example in the life of the *santri*.²² In *pesantren*, the kyai holds full authority, including the selection of the books studied and explaining their contents based on their own interpretations to the *santri*.²³ The leadership of *kyai* and culture in *pesantren* are two interrelated aspects. Thus, the *kyai* are a key figure who maintain the sustainability of *pesantren*.²⁴ It is widely recognized that *kyai* have internally powerful traditional authorities in *pesantren* realm,²⁵ and in society externally.²⁶

¹⁸ Andi Purwono, "Perbudakan dan Pembunuhan terhadap Tawanan Perang: Membandingkan Pemikiran Imam Abu Suja Dalam Kitab Taqrib dan Hukum Humaniter Internasional," *Iqtisad: Reconstruction of justice and welfare for Indonesia* 7, no. 2 (2020): 202.

¹⁹ Musdah Mulia, "Hukum Islam dan Dinamika Feminisme dalam Organisasi Nahdlatul Ulama," *Al-Ahkam* 23, no. 1 (April 21, 2013): 37–56, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ahkam.2013.23.1.48>.

²⁰ Fahmi Siti Fatimah et al., "Learning Fiqh Based on the TAPPS (Think Aloud Pair Problem Solving) Method in Improving Student Learning Outcomes," *At-Tadzkiir: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 1 (January 21, 2023): 1–15; Abdul Helim et al., "Fiqh Reference Patterns of the Majelis Taklim in Central Kalimantan," *El-Mashlahah* 14, no. 1 (June 30, 2024): 169–88, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v14i1.7872>.

²¹ Zulmuqim et al., "The Characteristics of Pesantren in the Development of Islamic Education in West Sumatra," *Ulumuna* 24, no. 1 (2020): 134, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujs.v24i1.382>.

²² Mohammad Muchlis Solichin, "Interrelation Kiai Authorities, Curriculum and Learning Culture in Pesantren Indonesia," *TARBIYA: Journal of Education in Muslim Society* 5, no. 1 (2018): 86–100, <https://doi.org/10.15408/tjems.v5i1.7781>.

²³ Naufal Ahmad Rijalul Alam, "Strengthening Leadership Culture (The Role of Kyai in Indonesian Pesantren)," *At-Ta'dib* 13, no. 1 (June 20, 2018): 5, <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v13i1.1986>.

²⁴ Siti Aisyah et al., "Kiai Leadership Concept in The Scope of Pesantren Organizational Culture," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 3, no. 1 (January 29, 2022): 40–59, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v3i1.106>.

²⁵ 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>.

²⁶ 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 (June 15, 2013): 1–32, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2013.51.1-32>; Farid Wajdi et al., "The Pattern of Leadership of Kiai in Managing Learning Pesantren," *Nidhomul Haq: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (March 20, 2022): 15–30, <https://doi.org/10.31538/ndh.v7i1.1832>; Muhammad Turhan Yani et al., "Advancing the Discourse of Muslim

Therefore, what Clifford Geertz stated, that kyai functions as a culture broker connecting *pesantren* with other important parts.²⁷ The important role of kyai is also highlighted by Hiroko Horikosi, who emphasizes the kyai's creativity in social change.²⁸ As a culture broker, kyai can be understood as filtering the teachings to promote broader social benefits adjusted to its context. Most of previous research have investigated *kitab kuning* as a mandatory curriculum in *Salafiyah pesantren*. Furthermore, the research on the role of *kyai* in *pesantren* widely highlighted managerial aspect within the institutional scope. Thus, this article is intended to reveal how the *kyai* transform moderate understandings through the teachings of the classical texts in *Salafiyah pesantren*.

METHOD

This article employed a qualitative method. The data is in the form of (non) verbal words and observable behaviors. The data collection involves interviews, following Burgess's approach, specifically using unstructured or in-depth interviews.²⁹ Through unstructured interviews, it is expected to unveil various aspects related to deradicalization in *pesantren*.

The research design is a case study, conducted at Islamic boarding school (*Pondok Pesantren*) Sabilurrosyad Malang. The selection of Sabilurrosyad is based on its consistent teaching of *Salafiyah* books, yet its students exhibit highly moderate thinking. This phenomenon is attributed to the role of its founder, Kyai Haji (KH) Marzuki Mustamar. He is a prominent figure in *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), having served as the chairman of NU Malang-East Java for two terms (2006-2011 and 2011-2016) and as the chairman of Tanfidiyah East Java Region for the period 2018-2023. He is also a lecturer at State Islamic University (UIN) Malang and a fervent advocate for moderate Islam, actively countering radical groups that oppose *Nahdliyyin*. One of Kyai Marzuki's notable works is the book "al-Muqathofat li ahl al-Bidayat". In this writing, KH. Marzuki serves as the primary informant, supplemented by insights from KH. Warsito, another important figure at *pesantren* Sabilurrosyad, and several students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Views of the Kyai on Religious Moderation and the Teaching of Yellow Books at the Salafiyah Pesantren

When the author inquired about his perspective on religious moderation, Kyai Marzuki Mustamar stated: "*The primary purpose of Allah's descent of religion on Earth is for the well-being of humanity. Radicalism will result in humanitarian casualties; therefore, in practicing religion, one should not be extreme or radical to avoid blaming each other and causing humanitarian casualties.*"³⁰

The writer then argues that intolerant teachings are found in the Qur'an, hadith, and yellow books. Kyai Marzuki responds:

Politics in Indonesia: A Study on Political Orientation of Kiai as Religious Elites in Nahdlatul Ulama," *Heliyon* 8, no. 12 (December 1, 2022): e12218, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e12218>.

²⁷ Abd Hannan dan Kudrat Abdillah, "Hegemoni Religio-Kekuasaan Dan Transformasi Sosial Mobilisasi Jaringan Kekuasaan Dan Keagamaan Kyai Dalam Dinamika Sosio-Kultural Masyarakat," *Sosial Budaya* 16, no. 1 (31 Juli 2019): 9–24, <https://doi.org/10.24014/sb.v16i1.7037>.

²⁸ Pradjarta Dirdjosanjoto, *Memelihara Umat ; Kiai Pesantren-Kiai Langgar di Jawa* (Lkis Pelangi Aksara, 1997), 23.

²⁹ R.G. Burgess *Strategi of Educational Rsearch: Qualitative Methods* (Philadelphia: The Falmer Press, 1985), 55

³⁰ Interview with KH. Marzuki Mustamar, January 1, 2024.

“The most important thing in understanding religious teachings to avoid falling into radicalism is contextualization. Therefore, the clerics and teachers of Islamic boarding schools must be adept at doing this. Religious texts must be studied carefully. If intolerant teachings are found, whether in the Quran, hadith, or yellow books, they should be reviewed and adjusted to their context. This is what our clerics, especially those in Salafiyah pesantren, have been doing. Similarly, I have done the same in this pesantren.”³¹

From KH. Marzuki’s statement can be inferred that he holds a very moderate view and emphasizes contextualization. This response also implies that the thoughts of clerics in Salafiyah pesantren are generally moderate. Furthermore, Kyai Marzuki explains, “we must realize that we do not live in an Islamic state. Therefore, we cannot be too idealistic in our religious practices, as it will be counterproductive.” From this, it can be understood that the well-being of society must be the primary consideration in understanding religious texts.

In general, the contents of the yellow books contain lofty teachings that are highly tolerant. In Islamic boarding schools, the yellow books constitute a teaching system that shapes the understanding and religious practices of students and the community. The yellow books serve as a reference to uphold a moderate and tolerant interpretation of Islam.³² With the yellow books as a dynamic source of understanding, Islamic boarding schools can represent a friendly face of Islam.³³ The yellow books comprise tolerant values and a few of intolerant teachings. Discussions on hudud and jihad are found in the *fiqh* books.³⁴ Almost all *fiqh* books in the yellow books address these topics, with content that is largely the same due to referencing the same source of teachings.

Hudud chapters explain various punishments, with many *fiqh* books detailing severe penalties for offenders. For example, according to the *Taqrib* book, the punishment for apostasy, where someone leaves Islam, is to be urged to repent three times. If they refuse to repent, they are to be killed without being washed, prayed for, or buried in a Muslim cemetery.³⁵

Regarding the punishment for those who neglect prayers, Abu Syujak outlines two categories: 1. Those who abandon prayers due to doubts about their obligation are considered akin to apostates, and their punishment is similar. 2. Those who neglect prayers out of laziness are required to repent. If they refuse to repent and perform prayers, they are subject to execution as a penalty and legal ruling³⁶. As for the punishment for an adulterer who is *mukhsan* (known to be married), the prescribed penalty is death for defying Allah's commandments. For non-*mukhsan* adulterers, the punishment is one hundred lashes, while drinkers of intoxicants receive

³¹ Interview with KH. Marzuki Mustamar, January 1, 2024.

³² Ali Nurdin and Maulidatus Syahrotin Naqqiyah, “Model moderasi beragama berbasis pesantren salaf,” *ISLAMICA: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 14, no. 1 (September 1, 2019): 82–102; Heriyono Heriyono et al., “Gaya Kepemimpinan Prof. Dr. Kh. Asep Saifuddin Chalim Dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Kerja Karyawan Di Pesantren,” *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 1 (August 3, 2021): 21–30, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v2i1.64>.

³³ Hisny Fajrussalam, “Core Moderation Values Dalam Tradisi Kitab Kuning Di Pondok Pesantren,” *Attulab Islamic Religion Teaching and Learning Journal* 5 (November 2, 2020): 210–24, <https://doi.org/10.15575/ath.v5i2.8371>.

³⁴ Fiqh is a collection of rules in al-Qur’an dan hadith of the prophet Muhammad which were made into a consensus by the ulama’ to become a law. Harald Motzki, *The Origins of Islamic Jurisprudence: Meccan Fiqh Before the Classical Schools* (BRILL, 2002), 51.

³⁵ Syihabuddin Abu Syujak Al-Ashfahani, *Matnul Ghayah wat Taqrib* :1996

³⁶ Ibid

seventy lashes. Thieves whose theft reaches the prescribed amount have their hands amputated.³⁷

The chapter on jihad explains the commandments regarding jihad. In al-Bigha's book *Tadzhib*, a commentary on the *Taqrib* book, it is explained that Jihad, in the sense of warfare, is one of the obligations in Islam and a significant symbol³⁸. Jihad, in this context, refers to war against those who do not obey Islamic teachings and beliefs. The commandment for jihad is based on the Quranic verse that states, "Fighting has been enjoined upon you while it is hateful to you. But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you, and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah knows, while you know not."

Furthermore, these instructions are also grounded in the hadith of the Prophet, stating that he was ordered to fight against people until they testify that there is no god but Allah.³⁹ This represents a facet of the *kitab kuning* that is seldom exposed, but thanks to the role of kyai in *pesantren*, this teaching has become moderate and acceptable in Indonesia. The teachings about jihad written by medieval scholars are irrelevant for application in the 21st century. Therefore, in understanding these texts, a literal interpretation should be avoided, and they should be considered in their context.⁴⁰

Ahmad Bisri, a student of *Salafiyah pesantren*, Sabilurrosyad, when asked by researchers about his opinion regarding the texts in the *Taqrib* book concerning the harsh and seemingly intolerant chapters on jihad and hudud, explained that the implementation is not as explicit as stated in the texts. Living in Java, according to *Mbah Yai* (an honorific for a respected teacher), requires adaptation to its context.⁴¹ The texts from the yellow book used as study materials in *pesantren* do not stand alone. However, some actors, particularly the kyai, turn intolerant religious texts into moderate teachings. Kyai serves as a role model for their students beyond the written curriculum. What kyai sees, hears, and teaches is followed by the students.⁴² In *pesantren*, students generally obey their kyai, including practicing the books' content.⁴³ In conclusion, the influence of texts taught in *pesantren* cannot compete with the influence of kyai who teaches them. What the kyai does is something very positive and deserves appreciation.

Husein, one of the students of Sabilurrosyad, when asked about his opinion on the content of the *Taqrib* book regarding the chapters on jihad and hudud, and whether the law

³⁷ Mirzon Daheri et al., "Pengaruh Reward Dan Punishment Terhadap Profesionalisme Guru," *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 4 (2022): 388–97, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v3i4.304>; Murharyana Murharyana et al., "Behavior Change of Darul Falah Senior High School Students After Attending Tabligh Akbar," *Dirasab International Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 2 (October 17, 2023): 68–77, <https://doi.org/10.59373/drs.v1i2.17>.

³⁸ Musthafa Al Bugha, "At-Tadzhib Fi Adillati Matan al-Ghayah Wat Taqrib" (Haramain, 1978).

³⁹ Bugha.

⁴⁰ Mahfuh Bin Haji Halimi dan Muhammad Saiful Alam Shah Bin Sudiman, "Religious Extremism: Challenging Extremist and Jihadist Propaganda," *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 13, no. 1 (2021): 116, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26979991>.

⁴¹ Interview with Ahmad Bisri, April 8, 2023. Java is one of regions in Indonesia.

⁴² Adhe Kusuma Pertiwi et al., "The Leadership of Kyai: A Descriptive Study" (Atlantis Press, 2018), 121–26, <https://doi.org/10.2991/coema-18.2018.32>.

⁴³ Zainal Abidin and Akhmad Sirojuddin, "Developing Spiritual Intelligence Through The Internalization of Sufistic Values: Learning From Pesantren Education," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 2 (May 3, 2024): 331–43, <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v5i2.783>; Sri Suyanta, Saifuddin Saifuddin, and Syamsul Bahri, "Tolerance Development Model for Students of Dayah Salafiyah in Aceh," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 12, no. 2 (May 30, 2024): 809–30, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v12i2.1308>.

should be enforced as stated in the texts, he answered. *“I follow the explanation of Mbab Yai that we cannot take the content of the book without considering the situation and conditions. Here in Indonesia, most people are laypeople, so if the law is implemented, many people will become victims, and Islam will be abandoned, certainly not beneficial.”*⁴⁴

Not everything in the yellow book can be taken and applied immediately, but not everything is discarded either. There are still many teachings in the yellow book that can be used today, and even the intolerant ones are very few. This condition shows how the kyai enact the role of as a mentor for the students in understanding religious texts, especially the highly needed yellow book. However, the contextual attitude of kyai is considered liberal by textualists. Abdullah Said believes that people who think contextually will face attacks from textualists, but they gradually can accomplish support from the Muslim community.⁴⁵

Referring to Clifford Geertz’s opinion that kyai is a cultural broker, in *pesantren* Sabilurrosyad, this really happens. It means the kyai filters texts written by Middle Eastern scholars in the Middle Ages, then concocts an understanding of the book so that it is acceptable to the conditions of Islam and Indonesia.

Kyai Authority in Building Moderate Understanding for the Santri at the *Salafiyah* Pesantren

During the interview, the participant KH. Marzuki explained the texts in the yellow book about *hudud* and *jihad* to the students, where the content of the texts contradicts the positive laws of the Government. He said,

“Yes, read the text and then provide an understanding that the students must always obey the government whether we live in a country based on Islamic law or not. Therefore, if we find teachings in the yellow book that contradict with the government rules, we cannot force ourselves to apply the Sharia texts. If we insist, it is like committing suicide.”

Then the researcher asked about the integrity of the teachings in Islam if the laws in the book are not implemented as stated in the texts. He explained that issues of *furū'* (branches of Islamic law) must still uphold the principle of *maslahah* (public interest) where religion can share social and state benefits. When the teachings cannot bring benefits when applied to an area, they can be replaced with acceptable rules.

From the interview, it can be concluded that as Muslims, we are required to obey religion, but at the same time, we must comply with Government regulations. The symbiosis theory between the State and religion is necessary for a situation as depicted above. Religion is not made the basis of the state but only serves as justification. The state has its own authority, and religion acts only if the state deviates from the fundamental norms of religion⁴⁶. On one hand, the state must encourage the efforts of religious authorities for the greater worthy. According to Abdullah Said, in the context of religious moderation, to maintain state stability,

⁴⁴ Interview with Husein, May 15, 2023.

⁴⁵ Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (Routledge, New York, 2014), 182-183.

⁴⁶ Cecep Supriadi, “Relasi Islam dan Negara: Wacana Keislaman dan Keindonesiaan,” *Kalimah: Jurnal Studi Agama dan Pemikiran Islam* 13, no. 2 (September 30, 2015): 212, <https://doi.org/10.21111/klm.v13i2.285>.

the Government should assist religious authorities (kyai) in promoting *wasatiyah* Islam. The Government should support moderate values taught by the kyai to their students.⁴⁷

Regarding the practice of Sharia in Indonesia, Maskuri Abdillah explains that there is a formal enactment of Sharia, such as family law, zakat, and hajj, for which there are already laws. The second is substantive implementation of Sharia, such as the death penalty, which is equivalent to *Qishash* law.⁴⁸ The third is the essential implementation of Sharia, which is sought through integrating or absorbing Islamic legal principles into national law or public policy in general. The effort to incorporate religious teachings into the national system is the right of all religions in Indonesia. This needs attention because, in principle, good legal regulations in a country can be accepted by all parties.⁴⁹ As for Sharia rules that are not accommodated by these three points, such as the law for apostates, there is nothing much we can do, but the key is not to violate government rules to avoid chaos.

The result of interview with KH. Marzuki regarding how to provide understanding about texts that contain intolerant teachings to the students showed that

“The Islam of the Indonesian cannot be equated with the Islam of the Arab people. Moreover, in the time when the texts were created. Thus, the texts interpretations were never final. It is still open to other understandings. If the texts are forced, there will be too many detriments because many Indonesian people have not implemented Islamic Sharia. What would we do, especially to the point of killing them? Therefore, there is no need to enforce it. As for the laws regarding those who abandon prayers, apostates, thieves who have not reached the specified limit, the laws of cutting hands, as well as Qishas and rajam, cannot be applied at this point.”

Kyai from *salafiyah pesantren* always associates the understanding of texts with the context, especially with Indonesian circumstance. Some previous scholars have done this kind of approach by using methodological awareness and historical consciousness in reading texts. They even used hadiths because the words and actions of the Prophet did not emerge from a vacuum. Backgrounds, whether macro or micro, have a relation to what the Prophet did.⁵⁰

Exactly, the texts created by scholars in the Middle Ages were a product of their thoughts, inseparable from the social and cultural context of that time. Success in finding the connection between texts and context is synonymous with finding the moral message of a text. Conversely, failure to discover the link between text and context is a misunderstanding on the core teachings.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Abdullah said, *Reading the Qur'an in the Twenty-First Century*, 182

⁴⁸ Qodariah Barkah et al., “Abandonment of Women’s Rights in Child Marriage; An Islamic Law Perspective,” *AL-IHKAM: Jurnal Hukum & Pranata Sosial* 17, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 383–411, <https://doi.org/10.19105/al-lhkam.v17i2.6725>; Muhammad Dare Garba and Yusuf Olawale Owa-Onire Uthman, “The Covid 19 And The Likes Of Possible Pandemic: An Islamic Way To Earnest Prophylaxis,” *Dirasah: International Journal of Islamic Studies* 1, no. 1 (April 11, 2023): 1–9.

⁴⁹ Ahmad Kamaludin and Iskandar Iskandar, “Islamic Fanatism and Terrorism Cases in Indonesia the Perspective of Islamic Criminal Law,” *El-Mashlahah* 12, no. 2 (December 31, 2022): 153–63, <https://doi.org/10.23971/el-mashlahah.v12i2.4397>; Ani Aryati and A. Suradi, “The Implementation of Religious Tolerance: Study on Pesantren Bali Bina Insani with Bali Hindus Communities,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 10, no. 2 (May 30, 2022): 471–90, <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v10i2.646>.

⁵⁰ Muhammad Yusuf, *Relasi Teks dan Konteks* (Indie Book Corner, 2020), 11.

⁵¹ Hasan Basri et al., “Modern Education Management: Challenges, Strategies Towards a Future of Continuing Education,” *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 3 (July 2, 2024): 260–69, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v5i3.875>; Rifngatus Saadah and Hasyim Asy’ari, “Manajemen Sekolah

When the researcher asked about the text stating the punishment for apostates (those who leave Islam) and Muslims who abandon prayers, not needing their funeral to be taken care of, to KH. Warsito. He responded, “*Yes, but not excessively harsh (do not be too cruel). The kyai told that this interpretation is miscellaneous. Therefore, we (the kyai) who better understand the conditions of our society employ adequate arguments.*” (Interview with KH. Warsito)

The researcher then continued the question: Is the punishment not mentioned in the yellow book that *kyai* and students will read and contemplate? *Kyai* Warsito replied: The students will obey my explanation, and I will guide them to a relevant understanding of our society's conditions here. We must recognize the diverse community who never know Islamic boarding schools; we also build relationships with non-Muslim communities. My *kyai* in the past explained that a *kyai* has an intellectual lineage from previous *kyai*.⁵²

In my understanding, *Kyai* Warsito emphasized the importance of contextualization and understanding the community's diversity. He mentioned that interpretations may vary, and it's the role of the *Kyai* to guide the students toward relevant understandings based on the local context. *Kyai* Warsito sees the community as diverse, including people from outside the *pesantren*, and his approach involves considering the conditions of this diverse society. The transmission of knowledge from one *Kyai* to another contributes to the filtering of intolerant beliefs, and many *pesantren*, under the guidance of *Kyai*, prioritize religious moderation and acknowledge diversity.⁵³ The practices and teachings of *Kyai* serve as examples for new generations, fostering a culture of moderation and inclusivity among the students.⁵⁴

During the researcher's visit to *Salafiyah* Islamic boarding school, Sabilurrosyad, Musyafa', one of the students, was asked about a Muslim neighbor who did not perform prayers. The researcher inquired if Musyafa participated in the funeral when the neighbor passed away. Musyafa replied,

“Yes, as a student, I was involved in handling the funeral procedures, including doing Islamic funeral. Although this action contradicts the teachings in the yellow book as stated in Fathul Qarib, which mentions that those who abandon prayer do not need their funeral to be attended, I follow the guidance of Mbah Yai. He is willing to perform prayers for the neighbor, even if they did not observe regular prayers, as long as they are identified as Muslim, at least on their ID card.”

It indicates that Musyafa's response reflects the influence of his *Kyai* (spiritual teacher) on his beliefs and actions. Despite the text in *Fathul Qarib* stating that those who abandon prayer do not need to be taken care of after death, Musyafa follows the guidance of his *Kyai*, who prioritizes praying for and burying a Muslim neighbor, even if they are not practicing

Berbasis Pesantren Dalam Membentuk Karakter Peserta Didik,” *Kharisma: Jurnal Administrasi Dan Manajemen Pendidikan* 1, no. 1 (September 30, 2022): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.59373/kharisma.v1i1.1>.

⁵² Abdul Malik Ghozali, “Transmisi Hadits Syaikh Mahfuz Dalam Kitab Kifayat Al-Mustafid,” *Jurnal Islamia* 10, no. 2 (2016): 51.

⁵³ Ahmad Saefudin et al., “The Socio-Cultural Resilience of Islamic Boarding School: Supporting and Inhibiting Factors” (Atlantis Press, 2022), 209, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.220104.031>.

⁵⁴ Akhmad Sirojuddin, Ashlahuddin Ashlahuddin, and Andika Aprilianto, “Manajemen Kurikulum Terpadu Berbasis Multiple Intellegences Di Pondok Pesantren,” *Munaddhomah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 3, no. 1 (April 23, 2022): 35–42, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v3i1.143>; Muhammad Anas Ma'arif, Muhammad Husnur Rofiq, and Akhmad Sirojuddin, “Implementing Learning Strategies for Moderate Islamic Religious Education in Islamic Higher Education,” *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (June 6, 2022): 75–86, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v8i1.19037>.

regular prayers. This example illustrates the impact of the Kyai-student relationship in shaping the attitudes and practices of the students. The students' actions mirror the teachings and interpretations provided by their Kyai.

The position of the kyai is not only as providers of religious teaching materials to the students but also as informal figures whose words and behavior are emulated by the people around the *pesantren*. Unquestionably, a kyai plays a good role model, known as *uswatun hasanah*. Sociologist Clifford Geertz suggests that kyai not only serve as community figures providing social services but also act as mediators for the flow of information entering the environment of the *santri* community. These kyai are the ones who transmit values that they consider good and beneficial to the *santri*.⁵⁵ They actively shape the values within the *pesantren* community and reject or discard values considered less favorable.

When the researcher asked about the responsibility of a Muslim to engage in jihad, Kyai Marzuki explained, "We must be aware that we do not live in the time of the Prophet and the war era has passed. In this current era, forcing the implementation of Sharia will not bring goodness but rather harm" (Interview with KH. Marzuki Mustamar, 14 April 2023). This implies that an understanding on the difference between now and past events would lead to a better condition of religious moderation.

CONCLUSION

The efforts of kyai in elucidating the content of religious texts in *Salafiyah* Islamic boarding schools eventually produce tolerant students who tend to have moderate views until they dedicate themselves in society. The result of this current research theoretically confirms Geertz' findings that *kyai* are culture broker. Additionally, this research has strengthened the Solichin's result of the study regarding the interrelation of *kyai* authority on Islamic education in *pesantren* and Alam's research on the cultural leadership of *kyai* at *pesantren* which figure out that kyai play a decisive role in shaping the students understanding on the classical texts. Anyone studying the *kitab kuning* should have an insightful and nationally knowledgeable teacher, similar to the kyai in *Salafiyah* Islamic boarding schools. Selecting the wrong teacher might lead to the *kitab kuning* being used as a justification for intolerant actions.

However, this study has a limitation to a case that occurred in one of *Salafiyah* pesantren with a strong social background. For this reason, further research should accommodate other cases in a wider *salafiyah* pesantren scope. Thus, the evidences on the high authority of *kyai* in instilling moderate understandings by teaching classical texts to the students can be more obvious and provide a breadth of comprehensive understandings. The deeper investigations can initiate comprehensive policies on the teachings of the *kitab kuning*.

⁵⁵ Solichin Salam and Hasyim Asy'ari, *K.H. Hasjim Asj'ari, ulama besar Indonesia* (Djakarta: Djaja Murni, 1963); Sartono Kartodirdjo, *The Peasants' Revolt of Banten in 1888: Its Conditions, Course and Sequel: A Case Study of Social Movements in Indonesia* (Brill, 1966), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctt1w76vfh>; Faisal Ismail, *Paradigma Kebudayaan Islam: Studi Kritis Dan Refleksi Histor*, ed. Mathori Alwustho (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 1998), <https://inlisite.uin-suska.ac.id/opac/detail-opac?id=1358>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research is supported by Ministry of Religious Affair through scheme of Research Excellence grant year 2017 number PUIK-2017-123.

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